

The Long View



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Whose Home and Whose Rights?

The Battle for the Politics of the Future

Faisal Bodi

The Making of Britain's First Anti-Muslim Riots

Sukant Chandan

Harehills & The Roma-led Uprising in England

Saeed Khan

Islamophobia and the Vanishing Public Muslim

Imam Muhammad al-Asi

Makkah, the Anti-diaspora – the Home for the Homeless

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

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This latest issue of the Long View is focused very heavily on recent events in the United Kingdom, the role of Islamophobia in those events and the geopolitical networks and systems that have been exposed as a result. For the benefit of future readers and those not based in Western Europe, the United Kingdom experienced extreme unprecedented racist mobilisations against Muslims, migrants and asylum seekers in early August 2024. This included arson attacks on hotels housing refugees, physical attacks on mosques and violence against individuals perceived to be in any of these groups.

In our first piece, **Faisal Bodi** dissects the events with a long background into how we have ended up in the current situation. Drawing on battles between anti-racist and both the state and street level thuggery over the decades, Bodi outlines the developing environment of hate that has led to the recent riots. En route he unpacks the narratives that have become the 'truths' that those incited to riot have internalised: the idea that minoritized and racialised communities have been in receipt of state support and help above and beyond that received by their counterparts; that Muslims in particular have been targeting young white girls and children for sexual exploitation; that the social fabric and nature of the UK is under threat and imminent danger from illegal immigrants travelling by boat from continental Europe, Muslim entryists at every level of the social and political system, and pro-Palestinian activists and protestors. These narratives have not sprung up organically from the streets or been promulgated by fringe far-right groups (only), they have found succour and have been, in the main, (re)produced by mainstream actors.

Looking at the reality on the ground, Bodi finds minoritized communities hitherto politically under siege, now literally so, as pogrom style violence found expression on the streets this summer. Referencing his previous work on previous riots that gripped northern English towns in the summer of 2001, he argues that the demonisation of those rioters by the state and a failure to take their grievances seriously (they were largely South Asian heritage Muslims protesting social and police racism) is a key moment in the journey to where we are today. That demonisation is very much part of the discourse of international Islamophobia networks, aligned often with Zionist and white supremacist groups, and increasingly mainstreamed across Westernised settings.

This demonisation, whilst highly ap-

parent against Muslims affects other minoritized groups too. Towards the end of July, a so-called riot also occurred in the Harehills area of Leeds. This time however, it related to the grievances of the Roma community who erupted in protest at the continued removal (with what appears to have been unwarranted police force) of Roma children from their families into the care of the state. **Sukant Chandan**, in our second essay, argues that this incident has not been recognised by other marginalised groups and the wider white working-class as it should have been: a case which required support and solidarity from other oppressed groups. Both Chandan and Bodi's prognosis is bleak – British society and state are captured by narratives, policies and laws which are nativist, brutal and with terrifying precedent.

The erasure of Muslims from civil society and political spaces is the theme of this year's IHRC and SACC Islamophobia conference. **Saeed A. Khan's** essay covers the talking points for the event. With every passing year, and in acceleration since October 2023, Westernised spaces but also countries such as India have introduced laws and policies that shrink political spaces and target Muslims. A combination of poor strategy and an environment of fear and hatred has kept Muslim civil society at a permanent disadvantage. Nevertheless, whatever pushback that has come from these sectors has found the state in these contexts scurrying in disarray – a pointer to the (albeit painful in consequences) possibilities of challenges to racist and oppressive structures and governments. Khan's piece looks at the US, UK, Germany, Australia and India and provides an overview of how Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian networks have thrived.

Our last essay is based on one of **Imam Muhammad al-Asi's** presentations at the Decolonial Muslim Studies Summer School, held in Granada in June 2024. In it, he propounds the idea that from a Qur'anic perspective Makkah has been decreed a home for the homeless. At a time when religious and cultural difference, as well as migration, have become markers of inferiority and or threat, this type of dynamic thinking can get Muslims and those with a view to a future of different possibilities to reimagine 'homelessness' and 'belonging'. If the holiest land in the Islamic faith is meant to be a home for all those needing a home and a place to belong, what does that mean for our everyday practices of faith and politics? The possibilities are enormous and the prognosis possibly spectacular. Let's start reimagining the future this way.

Join the conversation by emailing us on info@ihrc.org, tweeting [@ihrc](https://twitter.com/ihrc) or find us on Facebook. We now also record podcasts and videos called The Long View Conversations looking into the deeper issues raised by multiple essays with some of our authors. You can find these at www.ihrc.org.uk/video-multimedia/ We are now also recording some of our essays so you can listen to them on the go. Find them in the same section.

The Making of Britain's First Anti-Muslim Riots

Faisal Bodi argues that the current disorder on the UK's streets are the result of relentless Islamophobic discourse from successive governments, and resurgent (global) racist politics. Without a serious culture change, starting at the highest echelons of political circles, the future bodes ill for social order.

As sentences are passed and cell doors slammed shut, a nervous calm hangs over Britain in the wake of far-right inspired riots that brought racist terror back onto our streets. In the short term at least, the fast-tracked, zero-tolerance justice being meted out looks likely to deter repeat performances, thereby re-establishing some semblance of social order. However, looking forward, it would be complacent to allow ourselves anything more than momentary breathing space, for the political, social and economic conditions that have given rise to the current outbreak are too firmly embedded to believe that the appeal of far-right narratives will dissipate any time soon.

Lest I be accused of suggesting otherwise, allow me say that my view that short, sharp justice should restore peace to our streets in no way represents an endorsement of the patently two-tier prosecution regime by which mainly white non-Muslim rioters are being convicted. The established pattern of public order charges is a far cry from the regime imposed in the 2001 social unrest when the majority of Muslims involved were [booked for riot](#), an offence that carries stiffer custodial penalties. That has led some commentators to recommend the implementation of the same or even more serious, anti-terrorism legislation, for which a prima facie case can certainly be made. This in turn has set off a debate about utilising punitive securitisation laws designed primarily to otherise Muslims, the deployment of which in the current context could reinforce the case for their increased targeting in the future. This argument has some merit. An establishment that has unashamedly set out its stall on the toxic foundation of Islamophobia, and already demonstrated that it does not need a legal pretext to enforce it, will persecute Muslims regardless. And while it might be tempting to expect it to apply the same legal yardstick to everyone, this is a morally indefensible position. If we disapprove of the misuse of anti-terror laws, we must disapprove of it for everyone, not just for our community.

In fact, consistency in application of standards must inform any analysis of the riots and their drivers. For that reason, explanations that focus on criminality alone are insufficient and likely to attract criticisms of hypocrisy. In the past when our cities have ex-

ploded, usually under the weight of racist policing or threats, we have searched for reasons in structures and processes that give rise to violent outpourings of public dissatisfaction. That is not to validate or give any legitimacy to the far-right. What I am concerned with here is identifying why and how its Islamophobic hate and exclusion narratives have found such a receptive ear in large swathes of white society. While there is no reason to reach for the panic button just yet, the reach of these narratives and the ground they have gained is worrying. Any rearguard action to arrest this momentum must accurately identify the reasons behind their growing appeal.

There is no doubt that this summer's riots and disturbances were incited by figures with far-right orientations seeking to promote xenophobic agendas. Unlike the 2001 and 2011 disorder, they cannot be viewed as spontaneous or unplanned. This nativist revolt has been many years in the making

There is no doubt that this summer's riots and disturbances were incited by figures with far-right orientations seeking to promote xenophobic agendas. Unlike the 2001 and 2011 disorder, they cannot be viewed as spontaneous or unplanned. This nativist revolt has been many years in the making at the hands of high-profile social media and political personalities such as Stephen Yaxley Lennon (popularly known as Tommy Robinson), Nigel Farage, Douglas Murray, Melanie Phillips, Katie Hopkins, David Atherton, just to name a few. With the ultimate aim of stoking a race war, they have tapped into primal fears about loss of identity, culture and exploited Oriental tropes about black crime and sexuality, engineering a climate in which the white majority is cast as neglected, discriminated against and preyed on. Their messag-

ing is consistently inflammatory and apocalyptic: Muslims and/or migrants are taking over and unless it rises up, the white race is doomed to subjugation in its own lands. To varying degrees, they are all proponents of the far-right Great Replacement theory propounded by the French author Renaud Camus, according to which political elites are hatching a conspiracy to replace the majority 'white' population in Europe with Muslims from outside.

The extent to which this baseless notion of an Europe overrun by Muslims (Eurabia as it is called) has taken hold in the white imaginary cannot be overstated. It is now a mainstay of mainstream media. Political discourse is infected with its talking points and narratives, to the extent that politicians of all stripes have found themselves adopting it in order to stay popular and relevant. On social media, enabled by platform owners like Meta's Mark Zuckerberg and X's Elon Musk, it is reproduced on an industrial scale for public consumption.

Immigration is the most prominent of the far-right narratives. Seeking to use the momentum generated by their success in helping secure Britain's withdrawal from the European Union in 2016, the far-right has latched onto the problem of migrants crossing the channel from mainland Europe and continued immigration in general to raise a moral panic around these alleged concerns, couching their xenophobia in the language of social cohesion and national security. Their slogan "Stop the Boats", chanted commonly at rallies, is pulled directly from the playbook of former Australian PM Tony Abbott, whose offshore migrant processing policy not only inspired the British Conservative Party's much derided Rwanda Plan but also formed the central plank of their recent re-election campaign. So febrile is the climate that has been whipped up around these confected threats that in the latest riots, far-right supporters besieged and attempted to burn down two hotels housing asylum seekers in Rotherham and Tamworth.

But the far-right are not the only villains in this piece. Their fearmongering has merged with a more long-running, state-led Project Fear to create today's [environment of hate](#) in which racialised minorities are fair game. From shortly before the turn of the millennium, politicians of all stripes have

sought to vilify Islam/Muslims as a necessary tool for manufacturing public consent to maintain global western hegemony by way of the euphemistic War on Terror. Helped by incidents of domestic blowback, they used “terrorism” as a pretext to craft a new enemy to replace the old Red Menace. A frightful panoply of legislation, including the Orwellian pre-crime intervention epitomised by Prevent, was deployed to manage dissent and support for any entity that challenged western militarism. The erosion of civil liberties that this entailed could not be done without instilling the requisite fear of Muslims into the British public. For a glaring recent example of this, we need look no further the former Home Secretary Suella Braverman’s crusade to present anti-genocide protests in the UK, in which Muslims participated in large numbers, as “hate marches”.

Since it is difficult to unjustly target a minority community without attracting charges of racism, it was also necessary to dismantle the architecture of racial equality that had been erected over the preceding couple of decades. And so began the attack on multiculturalism. Previously celebrated as a source of social enrichment it was now presented as divisive and conflictual. The riots that engulfed some northern cities in 2001, involving mainly Muslim youths reacting to racist attacks and threats, were now adduced as proof of the centrifugal impact of multiculturalism. Not only were those who took part in the horrific violence read the riot act (draconian sentences were handed down) but the unrest as a whole was viewed through a lens of social breakdown, leading to the rise of social cohesion as a political concept and priority. The official government report into the social unrest, led by Professor Ted Cante, continued the otherisation and scapegoating of Muslims by placing the roots of the violence in the failure of Muslims to adequately buy into some amorphous set of overarching, common British values. It was a far cry from the Scarman report, which 20 years earlier, had identified racism against black communities and socio-economic exclusion as the principal causes of the 1981 inner city riots. “Scarman located the riots in the social, economic and political complex of acute deprivation and discrimination, and the regeneration funds that flowed as a result ensured there was no repetition of the 80s unrest. Cante meanwhile only acknowledged in passing that Islamophobia and a desert of opportunity contributed to the riots. It was a classic case of putting the cart before the horse, since perhaps the principal cause of communities living separate lives lies in the socioeconomic immobility produced by poverty,” I wrote in a 2002 article for *The Guardian*. Where Cante left off, right-wing think tanks followed, each one further problematising the Muslim community as anti-integrationist and attacking its civil society organisations if they dared to challenge the new orthodoxy. The decision to prosecute Muslims for using the word “coconut” is the latest and possibly most ludicrous manifestation of the state’s offensive against multi-

culturalism, a message to minoritised communities that even the communalised language they have developed to explain their own oppression must, in the end, submit to white control.

No hate narrative is capable of taking hold in a population without an effective delivery mechanism. Enter social media. Since digital media has undoubtedly been the dominant mode of dissemination for far-right hate narratives it is useful to briefly reflect on its role as an incubator and purveyor of xenophobia. Research shows that social media is a radicalising agent for many, if not most, people who commit racially motivated hate crimes. The manifesto of far-right terrorist, Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway in 2011, was composed almost entirely

No sooner did news break of a murderous attack on young girls attending a dance class in the Southport on 29 July, than large far-right accounts were injecting online platforms with their xenophobic poison, speculating without any evidence that the perpetrator was Muslim

from online sources. White supremacist Dylann Roof, who killed nine African-American churchgoers in Charleston, USA, in 2015 was said to rely almost entirely on extreme right wing websites for his political learning. Even in cases where the original impetus does not seem to be internet related, far-right websites act as an accelerant, goading the perpetrator to continue with their hate crimes, as appears to have happened to Peter Mangs, the Swedish serial killer who brought a reign of terror to the Swedish city of Malmo in 2009-2010 by targeting mainly people of colour (*Mechanisms of online radicalisation: how the internet affects the radicalisation of extreme-right lone actor terrorists: Guri Nordtorp Mølmen & Jacob Aasland Ravndal, 2021*). Closer to home, Darren Osborne, who killed an elderly man after driving a van into a crowd of Muslim pedestrians near a mosque in London in 2017, was radicalised by far-right material he had accessed online.

The reproduction of hate narratives circulating online by some of those who participated in the recent unrest supports the “online radicalisation” thesis. With most of the far-right movers and shakers denied platforms in mainstream media, they have found in social media a potentially more potent landscape where they enjoy access to an audience that is receptive to their messaging. Their work is made easier by the way that AI algorithms operate, directing new content to users on the basis of their previous choices.

This lends itself to the creation of echo chambers which act to reinforce existing prejudices. More nefarious forces are at work too. Bots, trolls and a hidden army of far-right activists also publish and propagate the narratives, extending their reach. In its latest adversarial threat report, Meta, the umbrella company that owns Facebook and Instagram (among others), reveals that in the three months to June this year, [the UK was one of the principal targets](#) of “coordinated inauthentic behaviour” on its platforms. “Coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) is a manipulative communication tactic that uses fake, authentic, and duplicated social media accounts to influence public debate and spread misinformation. CIB can take two forms: domestic non-government campaigns or foreign or government interference (FGI). The goal of CIB is to manipulate public opinion, coerce users, and push users towards political and social extremes”. One company alone, operating out of Vietnam as LT Media but with untraceable owners, spent \$1.2m churning out targeted anti-Muslim content. Although much of it was directed at Qatar, [Sohan Dsouza, a computational social scientist who has analysed the report](#), says that “a good deal of the messaging rode atop anti-immigrant/Muslim fear-mongering and catastrophizing content. This rebranded far-right propaganda was targeted as Facebook ads to at least tens of millions in the UK and tens of millions in France leading up to respective elections, and not long before the Southport-spinoff riots...” Dsouza goes on to say that the \$1.2m spent on the advertising campaign by unknown persons ranks in the top 5 biggest influencer operations in Meta’s history. Meta’s failure to control the production and promulgation of hate has been mirrored and perhaps even exceeded by ‘X’ (the online platform formerly known as Twitter), where in the name of free speech, racist and Islamophobic content is allowed to circulate. Its owner, the maverick megalomaniac Elon Musk, has been accused of harbouring xenophobic views including that Arabic is “the language of the enemy” and that “civil war is inevitable” as a consequence of population flows from the global South to the global North. Musk even used his platform to spring to the defence of Tommy Robinson, questioning his arrest on the grounds of his right to free speech and also reposting his recent film.

In fact, the way that digital media was weaponised in order to trigger the recent unrest highlights its role as the chief enabler of far-right violence. No sooner did news break of a murderous attack on young girls attending a dance class in the Southport on 29 July, than large far-right accounts were injecting online platforms with their xenophobic poison, speculating without any evidence that the perpetrator was Muslim. The first post to posit a Muslim connection originated from a Cheshire-based businesswoman, named in the media as a Bernie Spofforth (there appears to be some uncertainty around her first name). She posted on X: “Ali Al-Shakati was the suspect, he was an asylum seeker who

came to the UK by boat last year and was on an MI6 watch list. If this is true, then all hell is about to break loose.” Although later deleted, the post was quickly picked up by Russian media and the controversial social media personality Andrew Tate and regurgitated by far-right accounts. Spofforth was later arrested on suspicion of publishing written material to stir up racial hatred and false information.

Since the case is *sub judice* it would not be right to comment on its details, but as a general point of discussion, it is illustrative of the manner and scale on which supporters of far-right narratives routinely deploy false information in order to advance white supremacist narratives. Whenever there is a violent crime, legions of keyboard warriors on the right immediately swing into action, seeking to implicate or incriminate Muslims. This is the typical modus operandi: flood the internet with posts speculating Muslim involvement in the hope that enough anti-Muslim sentiment is whipped up to demonise the community even if the eventual facts suggest otherwise. Southport was no exception. In just one hour before Spofforth’s tweet was picked up by a shady Pakistani online news outlet and diffused worldwide, it had already generated 15 million impressions. And by the time the suspected attacker was named as Axel Muganwa Rudakubana, a British born teenager of Rwandan descent who came from a churchgoing family, far-right agitators such as Robinson’s right hand man Daniel Thomas were openly inciting people to revolt. A few hours later, Southport’s only mosque, would come under attack from a mob hurling petrol bombs and bricks as terrified Muslims took cover inside.

The second dominant narrative that the far-right has successfully adopted is that of Muslim/immigrant sexual deviancy. They have done this primarily by hijacking one aspect of the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE) to cultivate a perceived threat associated with a particular ethno/religious group. This particular narrative, neologised as “Muslim grooming gangs” and “Asian grooming gangs”, has risen to the top of public concerns around CSE, irrespective of the absence

of any conclusive evidence to support its central claim that organised sexual abuse of minors is predominantly the preserve of British Muslims of Pakistani descent. Never one to miss an opportunity to incite Islamophobia, in April 2023, then home secretary Suella Braverman stated in an article in the Daily Mail that almost all child-grooming gangs were made up of this demographic, even though her own department had previously warned three years earlier that it was “difficult to draw conclusions about the ethnicity of offenders as existing research is limited and data collection is poor”. The origins of this racialisation of CSE, which rests on the trope of dark-skinned savages with uncontrollable libidos preying on white girls, has been traced by J. Spooner & J. Stubbs to The Times, a newspaper that is known to be one of the establishment’s preferred platforms for conditioning public debate. In other words, the hate narrative appears to have come from the very top. Other media outlets happily parroted The Times’ talking points. Spooner and Stubbs write:

“The legacy spawned by this manufactured ‘Asian model’ of investigation and its subsequent response, is that the modern, colloquial term for ‘on-street’ grooming — ‘Grooming Gangs’ — is not only commonplace, but applies solely to Asian/Muslim offenders. Examination of media reporting by ourselves confirmed our suspicions that all usage of this racially-loaded label applies only to groups of primarily Asian/Muslim offenders.”

As the establishment helped to implant the racial stereotype of the Muslim/Asian grooming-gang into the national psyche (the tail does not always wag the dog), also furnishing it with a veneer of empirical rigour and respectability, the far-right, represented by the likes of Tommy Robinson and Britain First leader Paul Golding filtered it down to the white working class via social media in cruder, more accessible format. Muslims, and latterly migrants as well, are not only a threat to the integrity of our nation but also a clear and present danger to all white children. Under the pretext that the government was covering up the alleged enormity of Mus-

lim/Asian grooming gangs, they mobilised their base to organise protests outside migrant centres and harass innocent migrants as they go about their daily business. This narrative was very conspicuous in the recent disturbances where rioters routinely chanted “Save our Kids”, even if the irony of it was lost on those among them who tried to burn down hotels housing asylum seekers and their children and attacked what they thought were Muslim homes in Middlesbrough.

The third narrative is one that runs like an unbroken thread through all recent serious white working class disturbances: economic exclusion. Even where this professed grievance doesn’t burst out into open violence, it is never far from the surface in communities that have disproportionately borne the brunt of deindustrialisation and political neglect. It isn’t a coincidence that the worst violence after the Southport riot (which by all accounts was manufactured by far-right thugs who came from outside) erupted in areas suffering from high levels of deprivation such as Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Rotherham and Tamworth. One of my lasting impressions from covering the Oldham riots in 2001 was the misplaced beef that local whites had with Asians about the causes of their hardship. Even though all the data pointed to Asians in the town being markedly more worse off and the victims of some quite disgraceful discrimination in public resource allocation, there was a palpable resentment towards them stemming from the perception that they receive preferential treatment. Our 2001 report found that the:

“influx of money has mostly benefited members of the white community, particularly the town centre. In one specific case, around £5.6 million was allocated to the South Asian area of Glodwick, while the majority of the SRB (Single Regeneration Budget) aid package was spent on white areas. In effect only around 10-15 per cent was spent on regeneration and development in Glodwick. On the contrary, when resources are officially allocated to predominantly white areas, this influx of money does not make the headlines. This disparity in coverage manu-

Counter-Islamophobia Toolkit (CIK)

This project has produced documentation targeted at policy makers, lawmakers, academics and activists in order to tackle Islamophobia.

IHRC alongside 5 academic partners across Europe was part of the Counter-Islamophobia Toolkit team that looked at narratives and counternarratives to Islamophobia in 8 European countries: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Czech Republic, Hungary and Greece.



Find out more at www.ihrc.org.uk/islamophobia



factures widespread misunderstanding of the clearly selective allocation of resources. Members of deprived white areas are consequently vulnerable to feeling that Muslim Asian communities are being favoured by the policies of the local authority, particularly as a result of slanted press coverage.”

The scapegoating of ethnic/religious minorities for white economic woes has always been a reliable recruiting tool for the British far-right (as we saw with Brexit where deprived white regions were among the biggest backers of leaving) and in keeping with character, it has sought to exploit the situation by perpetuating myths that have now become commonplace, such as migrants receiving luxury hotel accommodation and being lavished with welfare benefits while British armed forces veterans are left homeless and destitute. These views were frequently echoed by many rioters in the recent violence. But saying that the far-right is responsible for spreading unfounded fears about relative deprivation should not blind us to the fact that real poverty does exist in white working class communities (aggravated in recent times by austerity - the huge cutbacks to public services that had mainly benefitted the poor) which needs to be addressed by the state if they are to become less fertile radicalising grounds for the far-right.

It would also be an injustice not to acknowledge the social upheavals that have ravaged these communities and which make them easy prey for racist demagogues. Prominent among these are family breakdown and secularisation (the two are not mutually exclusive, even if I am treating them separately). The connection between single parenthood and delinquency is well recognised as is the fact that children born into single-parent families are themselves much more likely than children of intact families to fall into poverty and welfare dependence in later years. Bearing this in mind and without wishing to draw any conclusions about causality in the absence of reliable research, it is at least interesting to note that [the overlap between areas with the highest proportions of parents not living together at the time of birth \(2018\) with the location of](#)

[this summer's riot outbreaks](#). Statistics show that “these authorities are not randomly distributed across the country but are largely confined to five broad regions. Eight are found in the North East, eight in the North West, six in London, five in South Wales and three in the Black Country.” Given that many of the rioters have been reported by the media as having multiple previous convictions, the possible relationship between family breakdown and delinquency to vulnerability to far-right grooming certainly appears to be an area worthy of future research.

The accelerating secularisation of western societies is a routinely overlooked variable in analyses of white rioting, largely as a result of the areligious, left-wing bent of most researchers

The accelerating secularisation of western societies is a routinely overlooked variable in analyses of white rioting, largely as a result of the areligious, left-wing bent of most researchers. But the decline of Christianity, in as much as it deprives people of a purpose in life beyond hedonistic materialism, is also a contributory factor to far-right success. Unable to achieve the material progress that capitalist society prioritises as a goal above everything else, they present a captive audience to those who claim that whites are failing because Muslims and other minorities are succeeding. Of course, the perception of Muslim success is relative and doesn't always accord with reality. But it is fair to say that when they look at working class minority communities they see a version of the com-

munities they have lost, but which Muslims have built, despite state neglect, discrimination and deprivation. [As I wrote elsewhere recently:](#)

“Their churches are boarded up, our mosques are multiplying; their families are broken, ours are relatively intact and thriving; their businesses are dead, ours are prospering; their neighbourhoods are deserted, ours are full of youth and life; their elderly are abandoned to die in care, ours are pampered by their children.”

No analysis of the recent riots would be complete without a mention of the geo-politics that increasingly drives global Islamophobia. Indeed, it is the source of much of the money that funds the activities of right-wing demagogues and groups and allows their ideas to flourish. This seems to originate in two separate ideological streams. The first, exemplified by the rise of the likes of Tommy Robinson, can be traced back to Zionist “think tanks” who see in the British far-right a convenient vehicle to promote Islamophobia as a means for justifying Israel's occupation of Palestine and western support for it. [Hilary Aked](#) cites MJ Rosenberg, formerly of the pro-Israel lobby group the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), summing up this motivation in 2010 when he sought to explain why some pro-Israel actors joined protests against the so-called ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ in New York: “It is not because they are instinctive bigots. It is that they believe that the more acceptance there is of Muslims here at home, the less reflexive hatred there will be for Muslims abroad. And that, in their view, reduces America's sympathy for Israel.” This convergence of interests with the far-right impelled The Middle East Forum, a US based propaganda outfit headed by notorious anti-Muslim activist Daniel Pipes, to pay for the organisation of violent far-right rallies in London in support of Robinson after he was jailed for contempt of court in 2018, and also to fund his legal defence. Robert Shillman, a notorious US financier of pro-Israel causes, [financed a fellowship that helped pay for Robinson](#) to be employed in 2017 by a right wing Canadian media website, Rebel Media, on a salary

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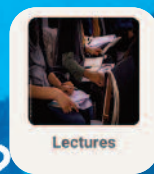
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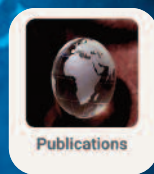
Decolonial Dialogues

You will find links to the Decolonial International Network Foundation's work as well as IHRC's contribution to the field.

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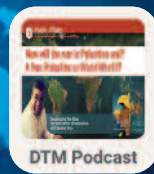
Decolonising History



Decolonising the Social Sciences



Decolonising Ecology



DTM Podcast

of about £5,000 a month. Rebel Media also organised a Canadian speaking tour earlier this year and arranged his legal defence after he was arrested on an immigration charge.

Prof. David Miller, arguably the world's leading expert on Zionist influence in western politics, attributes the founding of the English Defence League, an anti-Islam far-right group founded by Robinson, formerly a member of the far-right British National party in 2012, to a conscious attempt by US-based pro-Israel organisations to steer the European right away from xenophobia and Judeophobia to Islamophobia. This argument has considerable merit and has gained traction, especially when you consider that the main rump of the far-right in Europe is now firmly pro-Israel, whether that is the National Front in France or the Freedom Party in Holland or the AfD in Germany. We at the Islamic Human Rights Commission have noted on many occasions the far-right dalliance with Zionism, evident at pro-Israel demonstrations and also at far-right rallies where participants now routinely drape themselves with the flag of the Zionist state. Indeed, our 2018 Islamophobia conference zoomed in on this theme (some of the panelists' contributions are available to view [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).

The geo-political nature of the new far-right threat is also borne out by reported attempts by Tommy Robinson to draft other British ethnic and religious minorities into a broader anti-Muslim alliance. The "i" newspaper claims to have been shown details of efforts by Robinson to woo Hindus, Sikhs and Jews into an anti-Islam alliance that would also rely on known football hooligan "firms" with which he is reputed to enjoy strong links. "During private meetings about future rallies, Robinson insisted that any promotional video would not mention Muslims specifically, but rather call people to march in support of British values stating that the UK is under attack," reports the "i". There are no details about how much headway, if any, has been made but with the spread of far-right inspired Hindutva ideology and violence in the UK, the British Hindutva leaning community would appear to offer a fertile recruit-

ing ground alongside Zionist British Jewry. According to the article, another aim of the alliance was to counter the pro-Palestine protests that have become a feature of British towns and cities since Israel unleashed its genocidal onslaught on Gaza last October.

The second channel of funding is the alt-right. The documented links are characterised by its rejection of mainstream politics and racial equality, and the funding of many European far-right activists and politicians, including Tommy Robinson and Nigel Farage. Some elements of the alt-right are trenchantly pro-Israel (the popular website, Breitbart, being one of them) but there are others who are non-committal or opposed to the West's staunch support for Israel. What unites them, however, is a shared antipathy towards Islam and Muslims.

In this author's view, it is no coincidence that the far-right disturbances have erupted at a time when the Gaza genocide has generated widespread international revulsion and criticism of Israel. The far-right has openly agitated for a mass uprising against Muslims and ethnic minorities for many years but the demoralisation by British politicians of pro-Palestine activists has given them succour and extended the political space in which to disseminate their views. When Suella Braverman called demonstrations hate marches and advocated the deportation of immigrants who participated, it was a dog whistle and a tacit endorsement of far-right demagogues.

Paradoxically however, the extent to which racist hate narratives have penetrated public and political discourse may have contributed to the failure of the far-right project, in the short term at least. The mass revolt that the far-right craves didn't materialise, mainly because not enough people have bought into their warped vision of a dystopian non-white dominated society. Inhabiting echo chambers and gorging on puff pieces published by friendly media, they have developed an inflated sense of their own popularity and success. So, when Tommy and his sidekicks pushed the riot button, they quickly realised that the assumed silent majority of sympathisers and supporters they claimed to

speak for just didn't exist. Put simply, they overplayed their hand.

That being said, we cannot afford to be complacent. While these weren't the first far-right riots in Britain, it is fair to say that they were the first anti-Muslim riots. They were also the first riots to be incited over social media. Interestingly, both these facets were picked up by the 80 Muslim organisations who wrote an open letter to the government on 28 August, demanding among other things an "independent investigation into far-right activities in the UK. This review would focus on the role of social and mainstream media, and political narratives in perpetuating hate and Islamophobia." The authors also request a renewed engagement by government with Muslim organisations which it has chosen to blackball and in doing so amplified the Islamophobia that fuels the far-right. I assume that the call was made more in hope than in expectation. It would be bordering on deluded to expect a Labour government in hock to Islamophobic white supremacy and Zionist interests to suddenly slam the gearbox into reverse. But in the absence of any action, we are consigning ourselves to a headlong rush into the kind of pogroms that far-sighted thinkers were warning of over three decades ago. "The next time there are gas chambers in Europe, there is no doubt concerning who'll be inside them," wrote the late British Muslim philosopher and author, Shabbir Akhtar, in 1989. The latest riots are another reminder that such an eventuality is more than just journalistic hyperbole.

Faisal Bodi

is a commentator and former journalist. He has written extensively for the Guardian and Independent as a specialist on Muslim affairs and has also worked for Aljazeera. Faisal has covered many riots over the years including the 2001 unrest in our northern cities and the riots that gripped French cities in 2005. He currently works for the Islamic Human Rights Commission, the longest standing Muslim rights advocacy group in the UK, and is co-editor of The Long View.

CIVIL RIGHTS

<https://www.ihr.org.uk/civil-rights/>

IHRC has focused on civil rights in various contexts from its outset in 1997. This area of interest in civil rights and liberties, political, social and minority rights has been realised in various countries, but particularly in the UK. Our areas of focus include: anti-terrorism laws; counter-extremism policy; institutional racism (including Islamophobia) and discrimination; immigration and asylum; policing; shrinking civil society space and the concentration of power.

- Anti Terrorism Laws
- Prevent and other Counter-Extremism Policies
- Institutional Racism (Islamophobic and Discrimination)
- Immigration & Asylum
- Policing
- SHRINKING CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE & Concentration of Power
- Know Your Rights
- Guantanamo
- Minority rights
- Extradition & Deportation
- Stop & Search
- Schedule 7

Harehills & The Roma-led Uprising in England

Mischaracterisation and misrepresentation of the Roma community by the state has crept into the thinking of all marginalised groups argues **Sukant Chandan**. As a result, the July unrest and protests in Leeds have been misunderstood and a chance for unity against the racist state lost.

Introduction

After 14 years of intensifying far-right Tory government attacks on the poor and rising racism by the government and state, on the 18th of July the Roma community of Harehills area of Leeds conducted a protest and uprising against the police and authorities over the forced removal of four Roma children between the ages of 7 and 14 from their family home. Police forcibly dragged the children resisting and crying into a marked police van in front of many of the children's family and Roma residents. The depth of anger was clear on the streets as police struggled to deal with hundreds of very angry people who attacked the police using stones and bottles etc and burned down a local bus and set-up burning barricades. Police several times had to retreat from the resistance, indicating that it was one of the most intense outbreaks of resistance against the state seen in years.

Instances of non-white people in Leeds rising-up against police brutality and racism has happened at least five times since 1981. However, the root causes that trigger these social reactions from the poor and oppressed have not gone away but continue to intensify as we see the continuing rise of the far-right linked to the growing global crises of colonial-capitalism which seeks growing fascist measures to ensure its monopoly of power and pursuit of super-profits by means of increasing immiseration and division of working-class people.

The Roma are one of the most oppressed racialised groups of people in Europe and beyond. The Roma in Harehills are mostly from Romania (the terms 'Roma' and 'Romania' are not interchangeable and denote different identities, but one can be a Roma from Romania), but Roma are a dispersed oppressed group scattered across mostly West Asia, Europe and North America, especially the USA. Ignorance or wilful ignorance towards the Roma in Harehills has meant right-wing and far-right forces (but also some in the Muslim community inadvertently or deliberately platforming far-right figures) have been able to exacerbate the instrumentalisation of the Roma community to advance their narrow agendas.

The Roma uprising in Harehills came about less than two weeks into a Labour government led by the new Prime Minister Kier Starmer, after 14 years of growing far-right politics and culture by Tory governments, not least the formalisation of far-right politics into the British state with the Brexit victory in June 2016 which launched new offensives on oppressed working class people including the 'hostile environment policy' push that saw the targeting of different migrant communities including the Windrush scandal, the Rwanda expulsion policy, the Bibby Stockholm barge, the scapegoating of migrants in temporary accommodation including hotels and the weaponisation of crossings over of migrants on small boats in the English Channel.

The Roma uprising in Harehills pointed towards a potential strength of united oppressed working-class struggle for collective rights and demands, but the impact of growing far-right culture in Britain has meant that oppressed communities have divided and demobilised. At the same time this is a constructed situation in relation to an organised and insurgent racist community seeking to 'get Brexit done', a challenge that was presented to them by the Tories and other far-right leaders such as Nigel Farage that 'getting Brexit done' meant basically the total expulsion of those deemed to be non-white in Britain. Instead, British mass racism saw more Africans and Asians arriving as some East European people left, with organised and British-state and media feeding this racist scapegoating and division.

By the end of July the mass racist British mob had been whipped-up in its hysteria to such an extent that a five-day race-riot of racist mobs broke out across mostly northern England: targeting families in their homes; attacking mosques; storming or attempting to burn down at least two hotels housing asylum seekers¹; and attacking non-white people as they travelled in their cars. The Roma-led Harehills uprising was central to the most recent incidents that were then manipulated by racists that culminated in the pogrom-style racist attacks at the end of July.

Histories of Uprisings in Leeds

Leeds is a major town in north England in the county of Yorkshire. Like many other similar places of former industrial production and factories, it saw the decline of the industrial base which was speeded up as new and larger numbers of people from the global south diaspora were invited here by the British state to service the post-war economy from the late 1950s onwards. Migrants from the former British colonies were brought here to do the jobs that British workers were reluctant to do. Experiencing institutional racism at all levels of society - in education, policing, local authorities and so on - Caribbean and Asian heritage and other African and Asian working class youth became radicalised and conducted their first uprising against their conditions on November 5th 1975 in Chapeltown, a working class area most known for its residents of Caribbean heritage. The resistance was targeted intensely at police, with Caribbean youth being mobilised and inspired by the global surge against racism and colonialism and in its specific inspiration towards resistance and justice by anti-colonial Rastafarianism (a form of Pan-Africanism) and related Reggae.

Again, in July 1981 Caribbean working class youth led another bout of resistance in Chapeltown, which was at a similar time between 1979-1981 when African, Caribbean and South Asian youth were rising up in a dozen urban centres across England and resisting their conditions of growing poverty and racism. There was another clash in Chapeltown in June 1987 after 17 year-old Marcus Skellington suffered racist police brutality, followed by days of resistance. Then on 10th of July 1995, after several heavy-handed police raids on homes, the deprived, mixed Caribbean and South Asian area of Hyde Park saw another uprising by local youth. On 5 June 2001, South Asian, mostly Muslim youth rose up against the police and with violent protests against, once again, police brutality. On this occasion, South Asian Muslim youth felt that the time to

stand-up for themselves had arrived, as similar resistance was being conducted by their counterparts in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley that summer. In addition to racist police brutality, poor housing and poverty they also faced the added pressure of rising racism amongst the white English community who in the period of 1993 until 2018, voted in scores of councillors from the far-right racist and Neo-Nazi British Nationalist Party. For the next near quarter of a century, all these problems of growing fragmentation and alienation of non-white people, increasing racist hostility from the British state and population and rising poverty, continued apace. The Roma community in Harehills are subjected to the same racist oppression that Caribbean, African and Asian communities suffer, but with perhaps even more institutional and mass prejudice against this little understood community.

Who are the Roma?

The Roma, sometimes referred to as 'Romany'/'Romani', are widely understood to be a people who originate from present-day North India and Pakistan (Pakistan is a state formed in 1947). They are said to be possibly from the regions of Rajasthan, Kashmir and Sindh provinces. Research suggests they migrated out of India westwards from around the 10th century, with perhaps this migration starting earlier. They retain a considerable amount of the Indic influence in Romany languages (particularly Gujarati, Punjabi and Rajasthani) and the cultural beliefs of many retain elements of Hinduism. In European settings, they are often either Christian or Muslim by confession and have been for many centuries. Since their arrival in European countries they have been treated as outsiders, sometimes their experiences are compared to the oppression of Jews historically in Europe. Roma often look visibly as outsiders in whiteness as they are non-white, although in the UK census of 2011 the category of 'Roma' was added for the first time but in a sub-category under the "white" ethnic group.

The fact that the British state decided to give the only option to Roma respondents to identify themselves under a "white" category is typically manipulative of the British state's colonial approach. Many Roma are clearly not visibly 'white', and also they are treated as a non-white group, i.e., outside of whiteness in their overwhelmingly racist treatment. The British state has for a long time, and especially since the Second World War tried to co-opt sections of the Roma community. Obliging Roma to put themselves down as 'white' in the census will add to the British colonial divide and rule policy, in part to prevent the Roma from identifying with other non-white oppressed communities.

Looking back at their histories in Britain, it was in 1530 that the first laws expelling Roma from England were intro-

duced under King Henry VIII. Often Roma people are termed as 'gypsies', something that is generally not accepted by Roma. In 1554 during the rule of Queen Mary, the English Parliament passed the first Egyptians Act which made meant anyone found to be a 'gypsy' could be punished by death. This legislation was not repealed until 1780. Other similar laws with a similarly genocidal framework also occurred in other European countries from the 16th century until 1945. In 1783 Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb

20% of Roma people live in the most deprived 10% of England (higher than the national average). One in three work in 'elementary' jobs, and nearly two in five adults report no educational qualifications at all.

Grellmann developed so-called 'scientific racism' in relation to the Roma people. The 1800s saw a million East European Roma migrate to the USA. In 1899, the Bavarian police (now in present-day Germany) established the "Central Office for Fighting the Gypsy Plague" in Munich, which was a way of monitoring and oppressing the movements of the Roma people. The period of Nazi persecution and genocide saw somewhere between 500,000 and 1.5 million Roma lives being lost. From 1956 attempts were made by different states to forcibly settle the few remaining nomadic Roma.

With the 2004 enlargement of the European Union (EU), countries with sizeable Roma communities saw some of them migrate to Britain. These countries included: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU, a move which saw some Roma migrate from these two states to Britain.

In Leeds more than one in five residents live in poverty (176,376 people), while 31.3 percent of the city's children and young people (55,780 youngsters) live in poverty (above the national average of 29 percent). 38 percent of residents of Harehills and neighbouring Gipton described themselves in the most recent Census as being from Asian backgrounds, 36 percent white and 17 percent black. Roma people live 10 years less on average than non-Roma, and experience more of the risk factors in and around mental health challenges. There are estimated to be over 5000 Roma people in Leeds, but there has been little information on the conditions of health and other life experiences. According to census analysis, al-

most 20% of Roma people live in the most deprived 10% of England (higher than the national average). One in three work in 'elementary' jobs, and nearly two in five adults report no educational qualifications at all. According to one study conducted in 2023 by Lancaster University, Anglia Ruskin University and Law for Life, Roma residents in Leeds struggle to understand government and other services due to the language barrier. The study found insufficient translators being available and Roma needing to use their children to translate for them. Some had difficulties accessing translators, and had been put under pressure to use family members to interpret. These were extra barriers to the support they needed.

As the Roma uprising in Harehills was triggered by racist behaviour of social services and police, the report from 2023 also focused on this aspect as data shows an increasing number of Roma children in the care system. While in 2009, there were around 30 Gypsy/Roma children who were 'looked after', by 2015 this had risen to 250. The figure stood at around 600 in 2023. The report stated that:

"a lack of trust, based on historic discrimination, has damaged the relationship between Roma families and children's services in England ... The research found that Roma communities tend to mistrust and fear authorities due to their experiences of historic persecution across Europe. It also found that social workers, when dealing with Roma children, frequently conflate the impacts of poverty with neglect. The challenges faced by Roma families in their interactions with children's services are deeply rooted in experiences of historical discrimination, societal biases, and systemic failures in processes."

Co-author of the report Professor Margaret Greenfields, of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said:

"The trajectory of Roma history in Europe has included centuries of marginalisation and discrimination, including attempts at cultural annihilation involving the forced sterilisation of women and removal of children to the care of non-Roma families and placing of children in 'special schools'. For many Roma people, both in the UK and internationally, these experiences create an often well-grounded fear of authority."

Another report suggests addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach, including cultural sensitivity and competence training for professionals, "addressing discriminatory practices and combating wide-spread negative stereotypes, supporting the legal empowerment of

Roma families, and conducting further research to understand and respond to the specific needs of the Roma community in the British context.”

Can the System Cater to the interests of the Roma and Other Oppressed? Reform or Rebellion under Growing Racism?

For those who are seeking empowerment for the Roma and other oppressed communities by colonial states; for those who are seeking a society that is actually reorganised to serve the interests of the oppressed rather than the oppressors, it is important to primarily focus our minds and conversations around the challenges or even possibilities of reforming a white supremacist colonial system and state. The debate over reforming the colonial system or smashing it and replacing it with an anti-colonial society is an old one that is most graphically illustrated in the popular mind between the reformist civil rights approach in the USA context in the 1960s of Dr Martin Luther King Jr and the more revolutionary approach of Malcolm X / Malik El-Hajj Shabazz and the ‘daughters and sons of Malcolm X’, the Black Panther Party/Black Liberation Army. A nuance here is that Dr King himself came over more to the position that the USA racist system could not be reformed. If we look rationally at the situation whereby working class oppressed people are being increasingly stripped of their political, cultural, social and economic rights and conditions, we can understand that the colonial-capitalist system is unable to provide for the oppressed, that its existence is predicated on the growing exploitation, oppression and monopolisation of power away from and against oppressed communities.

Both wings of the colonial system. - Democrat/Republican, Labour/Tory, liberal/right-wingers - are wings of the same system, and both wings feed the same system and the same global white supremacist ruling classes. We have to be honest with our communities that there has been nothing but general deterioration on every level for them/us globally and in the ‘colonial centre’ in places like England for many decades, and more pressure and injury and death is being imposed by the system as we go forward.

In certain moments when the contradiction between the oppressed and the oppressor is magnified and results in a larger social reaction, we can see that the oppressed do act in these moments as if they understand this perfectly, and that is what happened in the different uprisings in Leeds including the one led by the Roma in Harehills on 18th July this year. The intensity of the resistance against the police in the uprising showed in direct action that the oppressed reject their treatment by this racist state, that there is no negotiation with the colonial state on the latter's terms but in this

moment on the independent terms of the oppressed.

The state is directly and indirectly employing the far-right and extreme racist forces and frameworks to keep oppressed communities insecure, anxious and divided, and as such they are unable to really attempt to come together around what they have in common. A central part of this in the wake of the Roma uprising in Harehills was to state that the violent protest is just born out of some innate cultural or biological propensity to senseless violence. The racists and politics in general has for years tended towards a place where there is no ‘seeking truth from facts’ but the near total construction of all manner of lies and fabrications, untruths, manipulations and racist

The colonial-capitalist system is unable to provide for the oppressed, that its existence is predicated on the growing exploitation, oppression and monopolisation of power away from and against oppressed communities

conspiracies which are believed by massive sections of society. This racist and far-right industry of lies and false conspiracies has also recruited a considerable section of non-white people, which is also one of the aims of these racist projects, especially if they are far-right racist in a ‘civic nationalist’ sense and not a racialist neo-Nazi type.

Nigel Farage is a leading politician in Britain, perhaps the most popular politician amongst Brits. He is also a leading racist. In response to the Harehills uprising Mr Farage asserted that “the politics of the sub-continent are currently playing out on the streets of Leeds”. The Roma haven't resided in the Indian subcontinent for at least 1000 years. It was Nigel Farage who literally defined the mass meaning of Brexit as a mass influx of non-white immigrants to Britain in the [now infamous Brexit poster](#). The point of this racism is to squeeze all non-white people into one category of the dehumanised other and outsider who needs to be expelled to ‘save’ Britishness and Britain. Another leading racist and former far-right Tory MP, now far-right Reform Party MP Lee Anderson, conjured up yet more ‘invasion to the land of milk and honey’ fantasies stating:

“import[ing] a third world culture and you get third world behaviour ... I want my country back.”
The former Tory minister for immi-

gration Robert Jenrick, victim-blamed the Roma for ‘their’ failure to integrate into a system that doesn't and can't ‘integrate’ them.”

The Roma were framed by the far-right as Asians and especially as Asian Muslims, in line with their fear-mongering racist lies about Muslims and Islam that has been a mainstay of their messaging for decades if not generations. Roma have different religious beliefs. Some are Muslims, some are Christians. The Roma in Leeds tend to be mostly Christians. The potential and actual strengths of the oppressed has always been unity based on being oppressed under the white supremacist colonial system and not solely and narrowly around factions of tribe, region, religion and nationality. Some voices in the Muslim community, reacted to the far-right lies that the Roma involved in what was happening in Harehills were Muslims, by saying that actually the Roma are ‘European and Christian’. Whilst this was obviously done to expose the inconsistency of far-right narratives, it also had the unintended consequence of implying ‘Roma are actually part of your problematic camp of European Christians.’ This perpetuates the exact colonially divisive framework that the racists use.

Local resident in Harehills and Green Party councillor Mothin Ali caught the attention of another leading far-right racist figure Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, better known as Tommy Robinson, when at the conclusion of the election count for local council elections in May earlier this year, Ali stated that his victory was dedicated to the Palestinians and proclaimed ‘Allahu Akbar’ in his victory speech. The protests for Palestine have been used centrally by the state and the wider British racist community to heighten racist pressure on communities, especially Muslim communities. Ali's comments on Palestine and his open Islamic affiliation were piled on by Yaxley-Lennon and his supporters on social media. The Daily Mail, which has promoted all manner of British colonial filth for more than a century, chimed in, accusing Ali of “causing outrage” with his comments, when the real cause of outrage is racism being internalised across the British population. Ali [explained his experience](#) around this:

“It got really, really threatening after that. My phone started going off every few minutes, it was ‘die [P-word], die’ and ‘I'm gonna kill you’. They started posting pictures of my kids and all that sort of thing. I shut my social media down. I deleted Twitter, I came off Facebook. I wasn't expecting it, I thought probably I'd get some criticism afterwards but I never thought it would be as crazy as it was. It was relentless, day after day. There was an incident where someone turned up at my house, someone let my tyres down, someone phoned the police

and made a death threat and was asking about my security. It's just horrible, absolutely horrible. But people here know what I'm about."

When the Roma uprising occurred, videos of Ali walking amongst the protestors were twisted into a lie by this far-right community wrongly claiming that Ali was engaged in stoking the violent protests. In fact, Ali was not inciting or rioting, but was trying to protect the police, and stop people throwing bins and crates on the blazing barricades. He himself gathered water from nearby homes and was filmed hand-cupping water to throw onto the burning barricades. The metaphor here is very apt speaking to James Baldwin's 'The Fire Next Time' which spoke of the righteous violent resistance and uprisings of Black people. However, ironically it is Ali in this metaphor who is the one who wants to put out all the righteous fires of the oppressed that are beacons toward liberation and freedom.

Ali argued: "some of the police officers over the last few years I've got to know and I didn't want them to get hurt. I thought, this is what a councillor is supposed to do." Isn't protecting police officers that you like and are friendly with - from an institution that is proven to be institutionally racist, racist and homophobic - something that a councillor is supposed to do? According to the colonialists and its system: yes. In the liberal and the reformist position borne out by the colonial state, advocating for the protection of the police and trying to make a racist system work for victims of racism is the only thing available to oppressed people.

Ali argues further:

"We need to be able to reach out to the communities, people who are quite isolated, bring them into the system, and say 'Look, this is the value of voting, this is the value of education, the schools aren't your enemies, the teachers are trying to help you.' Build that level of trust, because there is a massive level of distrust. And we've got to make sure they're welcomed into the system, not forced into the system."

Who is the pronoun 'we' in these regards? It seems to be those who are trying to make the system 'work' alongside the system itself, but isn't a capitalist, white supremacist racist and colonial system doing what it is supposed to do in oppressing and exploiting? People have been voting, but every government, councillor and MP does not and cannot do anything for the poorest and most oppressed because the system makes it impossible, because the system is functioning as it is designed to function. With the growing insurgency of racist Britons, with the state and government folding into every rise in the level of fascism, everyone is being targeted for greater dehumanisation.

Whatever the best intentions of those trying to engage with the state, recent events have made clear in quick succession that the state and its institutions are the issue that requires change. Conformity from oppressed communities can no longer be seen as a solution to their problems. As Malcolm X explains, only total separation away from the colonial system is the means by which oppressed communities can achieve anything for themselves collectively. The oppressed who have relatively little to lose 'in the fields' have to contend with the colonial buffer class 'in the house' that is in many ways the first line of protection of the oppressors. So what are the situations around the challenges of oppressed communities asserting their own rights in such a struggle for dignity and liberation as it relates to the situation of the Roma oppressed community and others?

Conclusion: Challenges of Unity & Struggle in Growing Coloniality

As is often the case in community uprisings of the colonised, and similar to the Roma-led uprising in Harehills what we see are other demographics of the colonised joining in the uprising and resistance in many ways. People from other colonised backgrounds who were not Roma joined in the uprising on 18th July. In Britain before the Brexit victory and especially after it, Brexit (or "Empire 2.0" as it was known in the British civil service) was and is employed by the British state to ensure the division and taming of oppressed communities. This new Brexit order is meant to keep and has kept pushing racist divisions so colonised people don't reach out and find the actual truth of their condition that uniting and struggling together against the entire racist system is in their immediate interests. In this context, are there any political realities and forces that exist in Britain that seek to unite and develop a political struggle in a united anti-colonial manner? The tragic but honest answer to this is no.

The examples of successful struggles that unite colonised communities in the context of a state in the 'West' are arguably those led in the late 1960s by the Black Panther Party such as the Chicago-based 'Rainbow Coalition' and the BPP's initiative of things like the United Front Against Fascism conference organised by the Black Panther Party and held in Oakland, California, from July 18th to 21st 1969. The BPP had hundreds of African ('-American') people organised into an efficient community and self-defence struggle drawing in hundreds of thousands of others and people from other racialised communities including Native Americans, Asians, and those in the white community who rejected white supremacy and colonialism. The challenge is to develop a program of engagement on council estates and high streets (as Leila Khaled has argued in her *bi-*

ography) to serve the people, love the people, and become a part of them in a framework of radical anti-colonial grassroots self-organising. The uprising in Harehills and then community resistance (mostly by street organisations of young people or 'crews' etc) against the mob attacks a few weeks later showed that openings for uniting the oppressed come out regularly around once or twice a year. The problem is that there are people few and far between attempting to increase capacity at the grassroots towards developing the relationship-building required to articulate a new social movement of solidarity and resistance.

Going forward we still have a growing racist mass mob in Britain that seeks nothing but the mass expulsion of non-white people, something which the Tories directly stoked and fed with their Rwanda removal policy, Bibby Stockholm barge and attack on Windrush migrants from the Caribbean, as well as their demonising narratives around Muslims and migrants more generally. Calls for mass expulsion of our communities are growing in Britain. British PM Kier Starmer has insisted that sharp draconian sentences are passed on some of the racist mob which has slowed down some of the bigger organised racist attacks although smaller level racist attacks continue. At the same time the new Labour government has to be on the defensive as most Britons are demanding more racist policies and accusing Starmer of being 'two tier Kier' which is a popular far-right slogan that asserts that there is one standard of policing for non-white people and another more repressive one for white Britons. This is of course a totally fabricated nonsense, but what it means is that non-white communities will be seeing (even more) harsher policing.

This entire situation clearly indicates the growing exposure of the contradictions of the system. Thus far, the colonial state is effectively managing communities in a way that is resulting in further social depression and fragmentation as the state and its non-state racists close in ever further around the proverbial neck of our communities. Examples of unity and resistance exist in the world today, not least in Palestine which sees a Palestinian people made up of people from different backgrounds united in a struggle against a white supremacist colonial settler entity. In the colonial centre we have also seen examples of this framework. Will we see new generations and forces pick up the challenges that lie in front of us?

Sukant Chandan

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¹ Protests outside such hotels by far-right groups have become frequent and normalised in recent years: according to [The Guardian](#) newspaper, in 2022 there 253 such 'visits' by the far-right to hotels accommodating asylum seekers, twice as many as the year before.

Islamophobia and the Vanishing Public Muslim

Saeed Khan presents the background paper for the 2024 IHRC and SACC Islamophobia conference. With civil and political spaces shrinking world-wide, Muslims as political agents find themselves pushed to the margins and disappeared from all forms of social engagement.

The onslaught and genocide on Gaza has brought into specific relief the forces that have mobilized in many Western countries to stifle and squash any expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians as well as any appeals to humanitarian measures and adherence to international law. Such forces have manifested themselves through political and legal/judicial means but have also occurred in social/cultural and academic spaces. While not always explicitly singling out or targeting Muslim voices, the objective appears to be focused on Muslims. In countries like the US, UK, France and Germany, pre-existing sentiments of Islamophobia have gained new and bolder currency, with suppressions of free speech, press and the right to assemble and protest coming from both the public and private sectors. Selective outrage accompanies selective enforcement of laws and regulations under the guise of maintaining order, security and protecting allegedly unsafe communities. The net result is the chilling effect on Muslims being full and equal participants in the public sphere, restricted not only for what they profess and practice, but also for their mere presence in society.

The Constitution of the United States is the supreme legal authority of American society. It assumes a near sacrosanct position in the nation's civil life. Paramount in the interests and focus of the citizenry are the protections embodied in the Bill of Rights, the first ten of twenty-seven Amendments to the Constitution. Of these, the First Amendment holds a special place in the rights that it confers upon the people; these are the right to free speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of the press and the right to the free exercise of religion.

It is an important proviso that these rights are protections from governmental interference in these areas. Many Americans erroneously think that their freedom of speech is protected from private sector limitations. Corporations and other such entities are, by and large, free to impinge upon the free speech rights of individuals, but at the same time, could offer greater protections of speech than might be afforded by government action.

Since October 7, 2023, there have been several examples of the impingement of

speech and expression that is critical of Israeli policy and action in Gaza, as well as pronouncements that are viewed as unacceptably pro-Palestinian. The United States Department of State, the key, outward facing American agency for foreign policy and diplomacy, has dispensed with any pretense of impartiality or balance vis-à-vis the Gaza conflict. Secretary Antony Blinken has echoed the Biden Administration's position time and again that the conflict is the fault of Hamas, with little to no criticism of the Israeli government, despite world opinion, officially and otherwise, stating to the contrary. Blinken has preemptively attempted to discredit and delegitimize international institutions, many created and controlled by the United States itself, as he did when the Republic of South Africa lodged its complaint in December 2023 with the International Court of Justice (ICJ), alleging Israeli genocide in its prosecution of the Gaza conflict. But Blinken's public pronouncements were merely reflective of what appears to be official policy within the State Department that suggests a conspiracy of silence. Censorship of any actions by Israel that would be regarded as criminal appears to be pervasive within the agency. [Allegations from current and former](#) State Department officials suggest that official reports documenting Israeli crimes have been doctored and/or redacted prior to publication as a way to shield Israel from criticism as well as protect the US government from having to enforce existing laws against Israel as it would be obliged to do and has done with other countries committing similarly egregious acts. In addition, these allegations describe recriminations for those who would dare to disclose such improprieties.

The American executive branch of government has proven to be willing to suppress speech, in violation of its own commitment to defend the Constitution, including the First Amendment freedom of speech, to shield Israel from scrutiny, often with the flimsy excuse, if given at all, of national security. But the legislative branch has shown itself to be just as dismissive of free speech, in fact, seeking to publish those who would dare exercise their right to use it. When the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minis-

ter Binyamin Netanyahu and other Israeli officials for perpetrating alleged war crimes, Republican members of Congress threatened to defund the United Nations, *en masse*, in a punitive measure. In fact, Netanyahu excoriated the Biden Administration for declining to support such congressional action.

The US Congress also showed its lack of commitment to free speech when congressional committees subpoenaed and summoned several university presidents to testify about allegations that they were permissive in allowing antisemitism to fester on their respective campuses. Presidents from some of the leading American universities like the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard University were harangued by hostile, inquisition-like and loaded questions as to whether they felt that certain statements made by pro-Palestinian protesters were antisemitic; these included the prominent chant, "From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free." When these presidents fumbled through their responses that these were not necessarily antisemitic, not to mention, legally protected forms of speech, they were demonized by politicians and media figures alike, leading some to resign their appointments.

Suppression of speech, particularly speech critical of Israel, is not confined to the US federal government; state legislatures have joined the defense of Israel even at the expense of stated American values and principles. States like Texas have enacted laws requiring entities seeking to do business with the State of Texas to sign pledges that they do not and will not participate in the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement that calls for shunning Israeli entities due to their complicity in furthering the occupation of Palestinian land and the suppression of Palestinian people. That one can boycott any other country in the world and ostensibly even US companies but is restricted from doing so if it is Israel highlights a bizarre and warped sense of the parameters of acceptable expression in the minds of a good number of American politicians.

While the First Amendment of the US Constitution is quite explicit in its declaration that "Congress Shall Make No Law" that would restrict free speech, thus curbing gov-

What's Going on Here?

US Experiences of Islamophobia between Obama and Trump

By Saied R. Ameli and Saeed A. Khan

Part of the Muslim Experiences of Hatred and Hostility series, **What's Going on Here** looks at the continued rise of anti-Muslim hatred in the USA. It follows on from Ameli et al's first US volume that conducted fieldwork in California. This

time the authors look at Chicagoland, providing original statistical analysis of people's experiences based on extensive survey work. Further they analyze and chart Islamophobia through the Obama administration to the current Trump era, providing

a clear chart of how the latter's more obvious views on Islam are not such an aberration from longstanding US policy as is often thought. Saied R. Ameli is Professor of Communications and North American Studies, University of Tehran.

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ernment efforts of suppression, the notion of free speech, expression and association are considered to be hallowed rights that extend well beyond preventing limits by the public sector. Private entities, though within their rights to place certain boundaries on expression, do so in a measured way for fear of being branded as unduly oppressive and, ironically, “un-American.” Yet, the Gaza conflict has unleashed a series of efforts, by institutions and individuals alike, to restrict and punish those who would dare to exercise their right to speak out against injustice. Brandeis University, a Jewish-sponsored private university, with an undergraduate student population that is 35% Jewish, was established in 1948 in Massachusetts, and named, with some irony, after the great Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. It was Brandeis who believed that “more speech, not established silence,” was critical to a functional democracy. But his eponymous institution apparently had other ideas. In November 2023, Brandeis banned the campus chapter of Students for Justice for Palestine (SJP), claiming the organization engaged in hate speech and alleging that it openly supported HAMAS. There has been no evidence that SJP supports HAMAS, and hate speech, no matter how odious it might be, is protected speech if it does not encourage violence.

Other Jewish organizations have targeted the speech rights of SJP members, as well as their right to assembly and association. In October 2023, the Anti-Defamation League, an organization founded in 1913, with the stated mission to combat antisemitism, bigotry and discrimination, but also known for its pro-Israel advocacy, has sought to suspend SJP chapters at universities across the United States under the pretense that SJP supports HAMAS, and thus is lending material support to a terrorist organization, as the US government has designated HAMAS. SJP is not subject to any government scrutiny or indictment based on such a claim, but it has not deterred the ADL from disparaging SJP in an effort to suppress its giving visibility to Israeli atrocities and crimes, including bringing attention to the ICJ determinations and ICC actions against Israel and Israeli officials, on the various college campuses where it is present.

In May 2024, the ADL also filed a Title VI civil rights complaint, along with the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law against the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, claiming the university had “failed to address the severe discrimination and harassment of Jewish and Israeli students, which fostered a hostile antisemitic environment.” One of the ADL’s complaints included their outrage that the university had issued a statement condemning both antisemitism and Islamophobia on campus, this from an organization whose name gives the impression that it fights against bigotry of all types.

The assertive push, by organizations like ADL and others, to have the International Holocaust Remembrance Association

(IHRA) definition of antisemitism adopted as official policy at both private and public sector entities poses one of the most serious threats to free speech. While the deployment of such regulation does serve an important purpose in helping prevent anti-Jewish bigotry, the definition is far broader in its scope of suppressing speech, to include any criticism of Israel and Israeli policy. This chilling effect on expression has been suspected as intentional, to prevent otherwise legitimate critique and condemnation of Israel in any capacity by branding the speaker with the stigma of being accused of antisemitism.

One of the latest terms to enter the lexicon is “doxing,” which is to provide revealing, identifying information about someone to the public, often by way of the internet and/or social media. While not technically illegal, doxing can be highly intrusive and damaging to one’s reputation and career. Since October 2023, doxing has become a weapon of choice of those seeking to suppress any criticism of Israel. On several university campuses across the United States, pro-Palestinian students have found their names, addresses and faces plastered on the side of vans that have been driven around their campuses, as a way to expose and ostensibly shame them as antisemites. Many of these students are Arab and Muslim. This form of harassment has in many cases led to the intended goal of chilling otherwise protected and legal speech by causing people to have second thoughts about whether it is wise to risk such unfair attention, exposure and even potential threats to their life and livelihood.

The doxing does not remain confined to a single campus, as these images, suggesting a concerted, coordinated national effort, are posted virally on social media. Several prominent and influential voices, including powerful alumni of universities went so far as to demand that anyone who had lodged any form of opposition to Israeli actions, including simply signing a letter condemning Israel and calling for a ceasefire, should have lucrative job offers rescinded or be denied employment altogether. This included frequent and vociferous calls by Harvard alum and billionaire hedge fund manager, Bill Ackman, who was also quick to take credit for the resignation of Harvard’s first black female president, Claudine Gay. Hundreds of students who had been exercising their rights to speak out against Israeli atrocities found themselves paralyzed by the fear of recrimination that could affect their lives after graduation, as their social media accounts were being meticulously vetted for any possible, incriminating statements or associations. Again, in the vast majority of cases, none of the statements approached anything close to proscribed, illegal or even threatening speech; it was sufficient that they questioned Israel at all.

Academic journals have long been held to be the bastions of academic freedom, allowing scholars to present ideas that may be provocative, even polemical. Apparently, even such assumptions are being subjected

to reconsideration of late, especially at some of academe’s most prestigious publications. In November 2023, the board of the Harvard Law Review voted not to publish “The Ongoing Nakba: Towards a Legal Framework for Palestine,” written by Harvard Law School doctoral student and human rights attorney, Rabea Eghbariah, a human rights attorney. The article was a well-researched, peer-reviewed article that assessed a legal framework in examining the ongoing Gaza conflict and beyond. Due to a barrage of criticism and allegations of allegedly promoting antisemitism, the Harvard Law Review relented and decided to use prior restraint to prevent the article from being published. When the Columbia Law Review decided to take Eghbariah’s article and publish it in their own journal, its Board of Directors took the unprecedented step of shutting down the journal’s website, solely to prevent readers from gaining access to it. This naked censorship was finally reversed only when the Board responded to the outrage shown by the journal’s student editors who were angered by both the Board’s actions as well as its decision to override the editors’ decision-making authority.

Such suppression of any voices considered dangerous, i.e. speaking truth to power on Israel, gains the opprobrium and venom of groups and individuals bent on destroying careers and reputations. At Columbia University, noted scholar Joseph Massad has faced a sustained campaign of demonization and calls for termination and even criminal prosecution simply for challenging the mainstream narrative of Israel. Across the United States, such efforts target academics, including Palestinian scholars like Hatem Bazian at the University of California, Berkeley and even others, like Anne Norton at the University of Pennsylvania.

Police action is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of state authority, which sometimes descends into authoritarian action. Under the often-false flag of maintaining public order, law enforcement officials have taken to selectively enforcing speech based demonstrations, irrespective of whether they are peaceful. More recently and disturbingly, police forces have been summoned by institutions not only to crack down on peaceful protesters and demonstrations, but have stood idly by as counter protesters have used violence against pro-Palestinian activists. Such an incident occurred in the spring of 2024 on the campus of the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Dispatched upon the request of university administration, the police forces did nothing to protect peaceful protesters from the onslaught of a well-organized, well-funded pro-Zionist mob assaulting the demonstrators and destroying their encampment. The police made no arrests of the counter protesters, who had conveniently left the scene before the police intervened in any capacity. Violent use of force by police authorities was also used on campuses including Columbia, the University of Michigan to violently suppress peaceful exercise of

speech, assembly and association. These universities saw over 3,100 arrests of pro-Palestinian protesters, a number far larger than the arrests made during the anti-war protests in the Vietnam era, a far longer and larger conflict.

Private entities may have within their purview the right and ability to restrict speech otherwise deemed legal and permissible by the state, but when their reach and dominance is expansive, such restrictions become problematic. Such is the current situation with several significant social media outlets. Meta, formerly Facebook, and founded by Marc Zuckerberg, has diversified beyond its original platform to also include such widely subscribed applications like WhatsApp and Instagram. Many users complain that their posts are being censored and restricted as to who can view and engage with them, in a practice called shadow-banning, or even having their accounts suspended for varying periods of time. It has long been suspected, and now confirmed by company statements, that Meta will remove posts that seemingly “attack” Zionists if, in its own determination, such messages appear to be veiled attacks on Jews as a whole. Of course, this includes any criticism, well founded or not, and serves to only impact one community, whereas other forms of blatant hate speech, especially that which is Islamophobic in nature and content, is allowed to be broadcast freely over Meta’s various apps. Similar restrictive measures are also underway at X, formerly Twitter, where current owner and self-declared advocate of free expression Elon Musk has warned of punitive action against anyone that impugns Israel.

The United States is hardly the only country that has demonstrated, both by state action and by civil society, an ambivalence or disdain for upholding its own stated values of free expression. France has a particularly long history of exposing its hypocrisy at the expense of its Muslim community, with its long established Islamophobic policies under the guise of *laïcité*. Muslims are adversely affected everyday through the denial of their religious freedom, in the classroom and in

employment situations. The hijab is prohibited to the extent that even the French national team at the 2024 Summer Olympics, hosted in Paris, was banned from wearing it, despite other teams being allowed that right. Since October 2023, pro-Palestinian street demonstrations have been criminalized, though intrepid protesters have risked arrest and punishment, defying the authorities to stage them.

Ironically, France claims its rationale to suppress Muslim expression, be it religious or political, is because French “traditional values” are under threat. It is incredulous but unsurprising to assess the French explanation of suppressing “traditional values” like free speech and assembly, hallmark principles that spawned a revolution 250 years ago, when its Muslim citizens are asserting them, as a means to apparently save French society in the process from some other perceived affront to it. This, despite one of the high priests of the Enlightenment, the French critic Voltaire having stated, “I hate what you have to say but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” That dispensation has not applied to the Muslim community of France for several decades, and the current conflict in Gaza has exposed this contradiction even further.

Elsewhere in the European continent, similar restrictions on expression have emerged, in some cases, in countries that have had a rather troubled recent history with oppression and authoritarianism. Like France, Germany has criminalized pro-Palestinian demonstrations and gone even further by designating any criticism of Israel as being illegal.

Germany has also taken to suppress speech through its private sector entities. On February 2024, the prestigious Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology announced it was severing ties with world renowned Lebanese-Australian scholar Ghassan Hage allegedly for statements he made regarding Israeli violence in both the current Gaza conflict and over a broader historical arc. The Institute’s actions were seen as a craven capitulation to pressure groups and negative media that had been manufactured initially

by a right-wing media outlet. Apparently, research institutions, even ones with the reputation of Max Planck, have been willing to damage their credibility as bastions of academic freedom to protect Israel from criticism that aligns with determinations made by international law.

Great Britain may no longer be part of the European Union, but its policies to restrict free expression show considerable similarity to its continental counterparts. Under the prior Conservative administration of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, the government undertook a policy of criminalization and securitization of protests based upon who were the participants and what was the subject of the demonstrations. Home Secretary Suella Braverman affirmed that any pro-Palestinian march was by its nature violent and antisemitic, despite no evidence to support her claims. She authorized the use of force against demonstrators who were merely exercising their right to protest war crimes and genocide. Braverman also threatened those she deemed in violation of her assessments with deportation, irrespective of being British nationals. Interestingly, criticism of her own government would not necessarily subject the speaker to such potential punitive measures.

False charges of antisemitism are not confined to just one British political party. The current Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, has a long record of hostility toward expression that supports and defends the Palestinian people and cause. Vehemently opposed, until fairly recently, to a ceasefire or any curbs on Israeli aggression in Gaza, Starmer engaged in an internal putsch within his party when he became opposition leader to purge it of those deemed to be antisemitic, including former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn. Starmer’s vendetta against pro-Palestinian MPs demonstrates yet another, pernicious and anti-democratic measure to suppress the will of the people who overwhelmingly assert their pro-Palestinian sympathies, yet such overtures seeking legislative and policy change are blocked by the party leadership.

As in the United States, academics are

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hounded and harangued into silence if they dare to speak out in support of Palestine and Palestinians or offer a counternarrative to the Israeli norm. Sociologist David Miller was sacked in 2021 by the University of Bristol

after a disciplinary hearing that determined he “did not meet the standards of behaviour” expected by university staff. Miller was falsely accused of antisemitism for arguing in a lecture that Zionism was a major driver of Islamophobia in the UK. In 2024, Miller was vindicated by an employment tribunal that concluded that he was unfairly and wrongly dismissed by the university, and that his philosophical anti-Zionist beliefs had been improperly suppressed.

So-called democracies across the world face the specter of speech being chilled if it doesn't align with acceptable narratives. In Australia, the field of diversity, equality and inclusion is facing a threat from those who object to criticism of Israel. Cross-cultural consultant Tasneem Chopra has been the target of a blistering campaign by Zionist activists who are seeking to have her struck off various boards and making her into a pariah for organizations and governmental entities that seek and benefit from her diversity expertise and experience. The self-appointed policemen of social media simply monitor for what they deem to be a questionable posting and then follow a familiar formula of demonization and false charges of antisemitism to render the targeted individual too toxic to all but the most resolute of organizations to defend and support. This form of “Citizen McCarthyism” is practiced in many countries, with an eerie similarity in messaging and tactics: bullying people to impugn them and drain their financial resources fighting the accusations, essentially forcing to them to yield and withdraw from public life.

Western democracies are not alone in the suppression of expression; the world's largest so-called democracy is actively suppressing the Muslim presence, in the public sphere and beyond. The government of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has worn its Islamophobia as a badge of honour to garner support and votes. It has proven to be successful as Modi was recently reelected to a third term as leader of the most populous nation on earth, in part by trafficking a highly xenophobic narrative of Muslims as inauthentic Indians and colonizers who were worse than the British. Modi's political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with its close affiliations to Hindutva and Hindu extremist organizations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), appear to work in coordination to merge government policy and civil society elements to demonize and discriminate against Muslims, while ignoring or encouraging pogroms that target Islamic sites and communities. These efforts have caused Muslims to fear appearing demonstrably and visibly Muslim for fear of reprisal or even death, affirming the Hindutva objective of removing Muslims from the public sphere.

The erasure of Indian Muslims has been

codified by legislation, including the notorious CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) Laws, which allow for Indian citizenship to be conferred on Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, but specifically not Muslims. In addition, laws have been passed to erase Muslim contributions from history texts and school curricula. Such measures, along with draconian practices including the bulldozing of Muslim homes, businesses and buildings, follow parallel and similar practices and tactics employed by Israel, a country with which India has developed close ties, especially during the Modi era. Indian persecution and securitization of Muslims in Kashmir has been proven to be coordinated with assistance from Israel security and intelligence entities. India's posture toward its Muslim population, the largest religious community in the country, has evoked a rare criticism from the US State Department, which expressed concern for religious freedom and the treatment of Muslims within India, due to “the increase in anti-conversion laws, hate speech, demolitions of homes and places of worship of members.” Similar criticism was not leveled against Israel in the report, despite substantial evidence of those conditions occurring there as well.

A primary excuse offered by western democracies for their categorical defense of Israel is that it is an outlier, model democracy in a region of despotism and authoritarian regimes. Such a categorization, notwithstanding in specious probity, is untenable given recent and explicit evidence to show that Israel hardly adheres to supposedly commonly shared values of free expression. On the other hand, perhaps it is precisely the flouting of such values that maintains the affinities of such governments for Israel and its matching policies. On the issue of expression, the Israeli Knesset voted overwhelmingly in 2024 to ban the Qatari news outlet Al Jazeera from operating within Israel of Palestine. Al Jazeera has been internationally recognized for its objective coverage of the Gaza conflict. In addition, more than 100 journalists have been killed covering the conflict in Gaza, including several working for Al Jazeera. Despite Israel's formula of denial and then self-investigation that yields no accountability, independent analysis suggests Israel intentionally targets journalists to suppress coverage of its atrocities in the area. In addition, Israel prohibits international media outlets to operate in Gaza without its permission, usually accompanied by a perfunctory statement about purportedly protecting the safety of reporters in an active combat zone. The Israeli government allows CNN to report from Gaza but the American news agency must first submit all footage to Israeli military censors to approve what can be broadcast, the very definition of press censorship.

Israel is equally oppressive towards its own citizenry for daring to speak the truth on issues regarding Gaza. Former Israeli captive Agam Goldstein-Almog received an av-

alanche of hate mail and comments from fellow Israelis after acknowledging in interviews that she had received “decent treatment while in captivity.” With few exceptions like the Israeli daily newspaper Ha'aretz, criticism of the government and the military is rare in the Israeli media, with ostracization a likely possibility for Jewish citizens, whereas Arab Israelis are afforded even less space for criticism.

The defining, or self-defining feature of democracies, especially in the West, have been their commitment to the protection and preservation of basic rights of expression, including speech, press, assembly, association and religious freedom. Whether embodied in the US Constitution or codified in the laws and traditions of western societies, these values and rights have long been principles that the West has invoked to distinguish itself from others, even if it did not necessarily encourage or implement them during colonial and imperialist ventures historically. But today, these same stated values are under threat either due to neglect and ambivalence, or through the process of mortgaging them as a way to defend and protect Israel and Israeli policy in Gaza and beyond. In order to staunch even basic criticism of Israeli action, several democracies have criminalized those who dare to speak out and have bullied them into silence, even if it means a retreat from their right to occupy the public sphere.

But Gaza will not be the last issue on which expression will be suppressed, nor will Muslims be the only targets for their efforts to speak truth to power and to call out injustice. The current McCarthyism is in some ways no different to the old McCarthyism that imposed its own reign of terror during part of the Cold War. The new restriction on voices and attempts to erase narratives from public discourse will feel emboldened to train its focus on any group or individual that challenges the status quo of power and authority, be it the state or the increasing dominance of the private, corporate sector. Muslims today happen to represent the most obvious, arguably the most egregious application of the ambivalence toward or willful dismissiveness of protecting expression. In the process, they may also be required to remind the same regimes that seek to erase their visibility and voice that doing so imperils their own societies and makes them indistinguishable from the authoritarian states they purport to despise.

Saeed Khan

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Makkah, the Anti-diaspora – the Home for the Homeless

This excerpt from **Imam al-Asi's** course at the Decolonial Muslim Studies course in Granada in 2024 rewires Muslim thought in an age when migration has become the foremost political battleground

We are all familiar with Prophet Abraham (Nabi Ibrahim) *alay-his salam*. And we call him whichever religious background we come from, the Patriarch of Prophets, Abu al-Anbiya, correct? We believe that he is a very important prophetic figure.

So let us take a look at his life, because his life is going to explain a lot about what is happening today. My reference is the Quran. Those who have studied the history of Ibrahim and the history of Bani Isra'il - the children of Israel - and the history of biblical prophets, may agree with some or most of what I'm going to say. They may disagree with most or some of it. That doesn't concern me at this point, because I'm trying to explain what we have here, the information that comes to us from the one and only God.

We are trying to decolonialize ourselves, but some of the words that we are using in our attempt to decolonialize ourselves are colonializing words. Granted, the best way to get out of this trap is to get out of the colonial language, but that's not an easy task. Maybe if we were five or six years old, we could acquire another language very easily, or in our pre-teen years. But at an ad-

vanced age in our life, it's not very simple to learn the language of the poor and/or to learn any other language.

Let's look at Prophet Ibrahim. His name is mentioned in 63 verses of the Quran. It occurs 69 times because some verses have his name mentioned more than once. I would like to begin with an ayah from the third chapter of the Quran (verse 33 - 34) in which Allah Subhanahu wa ta'ala says:

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ آدَمَ وَنُوحًا وَآلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَآلَ عِمْرَانَ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ۝۳۳ ذُرِّيَّةً بَعْضُهَا مِن بَعْضٍ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ۝۳۴ ﴾

“(33) Behold, the One and Only God raised [the status] of Adam, and Noah, and the kindred spirits of Abraham, and the house of ‘Imran above all mankind: (34) In one line of descent [they all came] one after another – and the One and Only God is all hearing all knowing –“

The gist of this as far as the subject matter, is that Allah has given a preference of selection concerning Adam and Nuh and concerning Ibrahim and Imran, as far as their *aal* is concerned. There's a word, *aal*, that's used in the Qur'an. It's a Qur'anic word and is also used in the hadiths of the Prophet, the statements of the last Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him and the rest of the Prophets). This word is one that exemplifies why I say we still use the language that is not accurate in conveying the meanings of the words in the Qur'an. The word *aal*, when you look at this word, you will find it is translated either as offspring, or descendants, or family, or progeny. It is translated in that group of synonyms. That's not an accurate translation of the word *aal*.

I am not trying to open up a linguistic class, but this relates to the issue of racism that we're going to encounter in the establishment of the Zionist regime in the Holy Land. It goes all the way back to this. So if *aal* doesn't mean – as almost everyone thinks because of the alien thinking that has set in the Muslim mind and Muslim context – children, progeny etc., what does it mean? The best that I could bring out as

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a translation into English is 'kindred spirits' or 'soulmates'. That's what that means.

I think you will not find (and I hope I'm wrong) someone who has translated the word and to mean something along the line of 'kindred spirits', or 'soulmates'. If you are convinced that *aal* has to do with a family, then it's easy to extend that to become a form of favouritism that can be also extended to become a special race which also can become racism.

So be cautious when you use this word and please re-educate your mind to understand that *aal* means kindred spirits and or soulmates – that is what *aal* means. When we say Aal-e-Ibrahim, we don't specifically mean (although it could include) his family, his children, his offspring or his progeny. It does not specifically mean that, even though it may include that.

This is demonstrated by another area in the Qur'an. In Surah al-Baqarah, the second chapter of the Quran (verse 124). The verse says:

﴿ وَإِذْ أَبْلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبَّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَاتَمَمَّنَّ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ۗ قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ۗ قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ ۗ ۱۲۴﴾

“And [bring to mind] when his Sustainer tried Abraham by his commandments and the latter fulfilled them. He the One and Only God said, “Behold I shall make you a leader for the people.” Abraham asked, “And [will you make leaders] of my offspring as well?” The One and Only God answered, “My covenant does not extend to include the evil doers (the violators of justice).”

What this *ayah* is saying is, Allah has put Ibrahim to test, on two occasions, and Ibrahim passed those tests. So Allah said to

him, I shall render you to become an imam of the people, or peoples. Ibrahim said, Ibrahim, “*wa min dhurriyati?*” The word *dhurriya* means descendants. It means offspring. He didn't say *wa min Aali*. That he said *min Aali*, it's finished, it's known. His soulmates. his kindred spirits qualifying to become leaders, to become Imams. But he didn't say that, he said, “*wa min dhurriyati*” And the response of Allah was,

“ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ ”:

“My pledge to you now is not to be extended to those who are wrongdoers, who are oppressors, who are justice violators.” It doesn't include them.

And that's why we have three words in the Quran, and because of the interference of colonial power and wealth, into our internal minds and selves, we don't distinguish, we don't make a difference between these three words: *aal*, *dhurriya* and *as-baat*. When you come across these *ayaat* in the Quran or the statements, the authentic statements attributed to our beloved prophet, take your time. Don't rush and create some type of discriminatory definition that goes along with the word, which is being done even in the Muslim context.

We know that prophet Ibrahim or Abraham, was born in a family that was not conforming to Allah's will. So he was born in a family and in a society that was not conforming to its creator. He took issue with his father or uncle, and he took issue with his own society because he wanted to conform to Allah, he wanted to yield to the authority of Allah, and they did not want that.

So there was a back and forth that went on, and what did that result in? It resulted in his own people, Ibrahim's own society, deciding that they're going to incinerate him. They were going to burn him alive. And so whatever there was: fuel, logs, wood, lumber, they made a pile out of it, and then they torched it, it began flaming. They wanted to throw him in it, and they actually went through the motions of

doing everything, but he did not burn.

From here on is where the issue of belonging to your land and belonging to your people begins in this common history. Because of that, he no longer could live with his own people, with his own family, so he left. He was forced to leave. So Prophet Ibrahim was, as far as we know, the first person who suffered what will later on become known as a diaspora. Prophet Ibrahim was the first person to enter into the status of statelessness. He didn't have a place to go. Prophets are commissioned by the Almighty to guide their own people, but what happens here when there's been a separation between the people and the prophet?

They tell us Ibrahim and his people were in what is geographically known today as Northern Iraq. So, he left that area and obviously he went southwards, which would mean he travelled from Northern Iraq to the area now generally referred to as the Holy Land or the Levant or *Bilad us-Shaam*. That's where he finally settles.

He got married. There's no information that tells us his first wife's 'nationality' was (I am going back to Columbus' language here with the term 'nationality'). We have to also remember that when, in the geo-linguistic make-up of that area, Ibrahim may have been speaking one language with his people and then relocating to another society, he may have had to learn another language. So, he may have been bilingual or trilingual and we don't know that. But from the fact that we know is that he no longer lives with his own people and now he's living with other people. So, bring in again that colonial idiom, he was a 'foreigner'. Ibrahim was a foreigner.

How did societies in those days treat foreigners? Could we extend our logic and say, well, probably the same way societies today treat foreigners? Obviously, we have maybe a little more technology here, and we can register foreigners very easily, and keep an eye on them, etc. In those days, that process was not there, but still human



NIGERIA APPEAL

Currently there are thousands of children, women and men suffering as the result of the violence of the Nigerian police and army. Members of the Islamic Movement have been routinely targeted, with more than 2000 killed over the last six years. They have left behind dependents who are often destitute and shunned. Families are left without enough income for basic necessities like food and clothing, children loose out on education.

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relations are a thing. It's still a human-to-human contact and interaction. But still, Ibrahim was in diaspora.

Ibrahim, after he gets married, he doesn't have any children. It is complicated, because you are living in a strange land, and you think if you have a family, it is a little relief here. You can go home, and you have children, you have a wife, and you are going to have grandchildren, but that wasn't the case. So not only was he a social foreigner, but he was also a psychological foreigner.

Eventually he wants a family and his wife wants a family. So he gets married again, and he marries Hajra. Hajra is the mother of his new born, his firstborn, Ismail (in English Ishmael). Ismail is Ibrahim's eldest son. After he has Ismail, Ibrahim takes the only society that he has, his wife and his son, to a specific area in the Arabian Peninsula. He didn't just take them somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula. This was not a random place that he decided upon, he was divinely guided to place them in that area that is called Makkah today. As evidenced by another ayah in the Qur'an (Chapter 22 (Hajj), verse 26):

وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَنْ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِى شَيْئًا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِىَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ٢٦

“And call to mind [the fact] that We located the place of the [Sacred] Sanctuary for Abraham, [saying to him purposefully], “[O Abraham] do not correlate anything [or anyone] with Me,” and furthermore, “Purge My Sanctuary [of all noxious notions] for those who go there and revolve around it, and those who reside in its vicinity, and those who bow and genuflect in devotion to me.

“And bear in mind that we had Ibrahim locate the place of the inviolable house of Allah...”
So that place there, Makkah was al-

ready designated by Allah. It wasn't Ibrahim who founded Makkah, or al-Bayt, al-Bayt was already there as a piece of land. The location was there as a piece of land. Ibrahim now finds a place that he can call home, which means that Makkah itself is the anti-diaspora. It was meant for people who don't have a state and who don't have a home.

Of course, this meaning has been lost. This has just become a place of pilgrimage. Muslims go there once a year for Hajj and then on the other times of the year that we can go there it's called the Umrah. This meaning itself, that when we go to Makkah, whoever goes, do you / they carry with you the idea that I'm going to a place that offers a home to the homeless? This is a very significant thought, not least for the times we live in. It applies when we talk about Palestine today, about Gaza, the West Bank, Palestine proper, etc, are we thinking that we're talking about some people who don't have a home, who want a home? Some people who don't have a homeland, who want a homeland? Some people who have a homeland, they don't have a homeland anymore. Some people who are in a diaspora and are not in it now, some people who are not in a diaspora and are in it right now. These types of ideas circulate.

What has happened to this very significant idea? Incidentally there are other details to Al-Bayt Al-Haram and Makkah and the Kaaba that are very meaningful and they have to do also with survival, not just accommodation, but also with survival itself.

Ibrahim said, and this is a verse in the Quran (Chapter 14 (Abraham), verse 37):

رَبَّنَا إِنِّى أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَقْدَمَهُمْ مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوَى إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ ٣٧

This statement by Ibrahim says something like this: “Oh my Sustainer, I have settled of my offspring in a barren valley that has no agriculture, in the vicinity of your sanctified residence. Oh my Sustainer, have them actualize their relationship with you and have the passions of people gravitate towards them, and grant them flourishing sustenance, so that they may have cause to be grateful.”

فَاجْعَلْ أَقْدَمَهُمْ مِنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوَى إِلَيْهِمْ

“have the passions of people gravitate towards them”

Ibrahim is saying, I finally found my home and my homeland, so, Oh my Sustainer, even though this is an arid area, there are no plants, there are no shrubs, there is no greenery, nothing. Still at the end he says, وَأَرْزُقْهُمْ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ , but before that he says: have the hearts of people flock towards them.

But there are barriers now: you think any person that wants to go to Makkah can go to Makkah? Why can't we just follow the meanings of these ayaat in the Quran and open up Makkah for people who are homeless, for people who are stateless, for people who think they are or actually are living in a diaspora? Why can't that happen? It can't happen because the Muslims themselves have been infected with alien understanding: an alien understanding of their own religious text, this Qur'an. That's why we have what is happening today.

So, this is our approach, and our approach meaning those of us who read and try to understand the Quran in the context of this segment of history.

Imam Muhammad al-Asi

is currently working on the first-ever English Tafseer of the Qur'an titled: *The Ascendant Qur'an: Realigning Man to the Divine Power Culture*. Imam Asi has also published a translation of the Qur'an. Both the tafseer volumes and translation are published by ICIT. Imam is based in Washington D.C.



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