

Institution: De Montfort University		
Unit of Assessment: 17		
Title of case study: Creating a Definition of Islamophobia for the UK		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2017–2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Ben Whitham	Senior Lecturer in International Politics	2016–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018–present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Working closely with MPs, our research directly shaped the findings of a cross-party parliamentary inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (APPGBM) into defining Islamophobia. The APPGBM definition – the first of its kind in the UK, and directly shaped by our research findings – was subsequently adopted by a wide range of local authorities, major political parties and other organisations, and was endorsed by most of the major Muslim civil society organisations in the UK.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>The research underpinning this impact case is the result of a collaboration with Dr Nadya Ali of the University of Sussex.</p> <p>In 2016 and 2017 we carried out desk-based research using discourse analytic methods to explore policies and three ‘media scandals’ regarding British Muslims, in relation to Halal meat, ‘grooming gangs’ and the ‘Trojan Horse’ hoax in Birmingham schools. The central original finding and contribution of this research was that contemporary Islamophobia far exceeds the post-9/11 ‘security’ framing and must instead be understood as a pervasive cultural phenomenon in the UK that conjures a ‘conceptual Muslim’ as the answer to an ever-wider range of social anxieties, tensions and crises. In 2018 these findings were published as a peer-reviewed article in a prestigious security studies journal, which has since been widely cited [R1]. The article outlined the increasingly multifaceted nature of UK Islamophobia, and pointed to the need for further research into its interconnections with wider political-economic trends including austerity and Brexit.</p> <p>Shortly after submitting this first output for publication, we successfully bid for funding to extend our collaborative work, through primary research into the intersectional politics of austerity and Islamophobia, this time with a particular focus on lived experiences of Islamophobia rather than political and media discourse. We carried out interviews and focus groups with British Muslims in East London, exploring their experiences of Islamophobia under austerity, and aimed at better understanding the intersections between these two trends. Our original findings included that UK Islamophobia is expressed and experienced as a form of racism, rather than simply ‘religious discrimination’, since it is tied to markers of ‘race’, including skin colour and clothing, and that is embedded in a British imperial history of racialising the ‘undeserving poor’, which prefigures the practices and policies of ‘austerity’ that accompanied the acceleration of Islamophobic abuse and discrimination in the 2010s [R2]. We subsequently wrote up the findings from this primary research into a second article for peer-review, which was published in online early view by the foremost journal in the field of international political sociology in October 2020 and will be allocated to an issue in 2021 [R2]. Our project was the first to explore the connections between racial capitalism, Islamophobia and austerity, and the article highlights [R2: 9] how the underpinning primary research influenced the APPGBM’s inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia (the pathway to impact outlined in this case study – see below). The anonymous reviewers for the journal article called the research ‘an important and timely project’, ‘an original</p>		

and urgent project that promises to move forward scholarship on Islamophobia and produce important insights', and 'a very commendable examination of the political economy of Islamophobia [...] such research should be much more widely debated'.

Together, these two research projects and their respective, peer-reviewed published outputs thus constituted an original account of Islamophobia, which underpinned the impact described in this case study.

3. References to the research

- [R1] Ali, N. and Whitham, B. (2018) 'The unbearable anxiety of being: ideological fantasies of British Muslims beyond the politics of security', *Security Dialogue*, 49(5): 400–417; <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010618794050>
- [R2] Ali, N. and Whitham, B. (2020) 'Racial capitalism, Islamophobia, and austerity', *International Political Sociology*, [ahead of print]; <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olaa023>

4. Details of the impact

In 2018 and 2019, we articulated together the conceptualisation of Islamophobia that emerged from the two underpinning research projects and their respective outputs, in our written and oral submissions to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia, and in our focus-group meeting with MPs to agree the wording of the definition the APPGBM finally adopted. Prior to this inquiry, there had been no widely available definition of Islamophobia in the UK public sphere. During and after the inquiry, MPs described our research findings, submitted as evidence, as 'hugely valuable' and 'robust', and as having a direct 'impact' on the inquiry [C6].

Our evidence to the APPGBM detailed the working definition and cognate concepts we had found through the underpinning research detailed in section 2, defining Islamophobia as:

Hateful, abusive or discriminatory attitudes, practices or behaviours that target people on the basis of their perceived racial-religious identity as Muslims.

We emphasised in particular that 'Islamophobia is a specifically racial *and* religious form of discrimination' and that 'crucially, such actions and behaviours are predicated on *perception* of the victims' "Muslim-ness". We were then among 'a select number of individuals and organisations' invited to give oral evidence [C1]. On 20 June 2018 we presented our oral evidence in the House of Commons, and faced questions from MPs. We were also invited by the APPGBM to add to our submitted written evidence, based on further issues we had raised during questioning by Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, and in response received an email from the APPGBM stating that 'this will really make a huge difference to our inquiry' [C2]. In October 2018 we were invited back to Parliament for a small, closed focus group, consisting of five academics (ourselves included) and six MPs, to debate and agree upon a final wording on the definition of Islamophobia that the APPGBM would endorse [C3]. We engaged in robust debate with the cross-party committee of MPs and insisted, citing our research findings, both that Islamophobia must be defined as a form of racism and that the concept of 'perceived Muslimness' was appropriate to defining Islamophobia. The definition the APPGBM adopted used the wording we negotiated and agreed at that meeting, shaped by our research findings. In its final report, published on 27 November 2018, *Islamophobia Defined*, the committee defined Islamophobia as 'a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness'. Our written and oral evidence was cited and quoted verbatim throughout the report, and our contribution acknowledged (see, for example, our definition of 'perceived Muslimness' used by MPs [C4: 46]).

MPs Wes Streeting and Anna Soubry wrote to us in 2019, explicitly identifying the impact of our research on the adopted definition:

We would like to thank you for your involvement in our inquiry. Your contribution has been hugely valuable to the rigour of our deliberations [...] thanks to the breadth of and robust evidence presented in your submission. The final report of the APPG has cited your submission, and the primary research on which it is based, in numerous places throughout the report. We hope you will appreciate this as indicative of the high regard in

which your contribution was held and demonstrative of its impact on the APPG on British Muslims' inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia [C6]

The definition (and a set of examples, in common with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance antisemitism definition) has since been voted on and formally adopted by major local authorities across the country (e.g. London and Greater Manchester), was formally adopted by most major political parties by spring 2019 (Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and all parties in the Scottish Parliament), and endorsed by dozens of MPs and members of the House of Lords, and all major British Muslim civil society and advocacy organisations [C7], in addition to being adopted by a number of UK universities. The Muslim Council of Britain invited Dr Ali and Dr Whitham to write a blog explaining the definition's importance [C5], while it also garnered extensive national media coverage (*Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Independent*, *Spectator* and online). The wider significance of the definition was recognised; as Akeela Ahmed MBE put it in a *Metro* article, the real social impact at stake here is that this 'definition of Islamophobia will save the lives of British Muslims' (30 November 2018; <https://metro.co.uk/2018/11/30/a-definition-of-islamophobia-will-save-the-lives-of-british-muslims-8188403/>). While the definition will remain politically contested, its impact has thus been to force widespread (and growing) public recognition – evidenced in the institutional adoptions of the definition described above – that Islamophobia is indeed a form of *racism*, rooted in racialised conceptions of 'Muslimness', rather than simply a form of 'religious discrimination' or even 'legitimate' theological critique, and that it underpins racist street violence and political discourse, as our research and evidence showed in compelling detail.

In 2019 we submitted further written evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee's (HASC) inquiry into Islamophobia, and part of our evidence to the APPGBM was quoted verbatim in the first HASC oral evidence session, in May 2019. Since the publication of the APPGBM report, we have continued to engage in media work to raise further awareness of the importance of this definition being adopted by so many institutions – including live BBC television and radio interviews in 2019. As organisations and institutions continued to debate, vote on, adopt and implement the definition, through 2020 and into 2021, the impact from this research remains ongoing.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [C1] Invitation to give oral evidence (email from APPGBM Secretary, 12 June 2018).
- [C2] Comment on usefulness of written and oral evidence (email from APPGBM Secretary, 2 July 2018).
- [C3] Invitation to closed final definition wording session (email from APPGBM Secretary, 16 October 2018).
- [C4] *Islamophobia Defined* (Final report of the APPGBM inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia, 27 November 2018); <https://appgbritishmuslims.org/publications>
- [C5] Invited Islamophobia Definition blog (blog post, 14 December 2018); <https://www.islamophobia-definition.com/islamophobia-is-racism/>.
- [C6] MPs' letter acknowledging impact (letter from MP co-chairs of APPGBM, to Dr Ben Whitham and Dr Nadya Ali, 5 February 2019).
- [C7] Islamophobia-Definition.com endorsements page; <https://www.islamophobia-definition.com/endorsements/academics/>