Experiences of Islamophobia

Living with racism in the neoliberal era

James Carr

James Carr offers a much-needed foray into the lives of Muslims in Ireland as they attempt to negotiate their place in the face of popular Islamophobic racism and the simultaneous state denial of its existence. As Carr himself declares, anti-Muslim racism is both un-researched and un-theorised in the Irish context. Thus, he leads the way in illuminating how Islamophobia plays out at the level of a quintessential neo-liberal state. Far from simply a critique, the book also offers an empirical and theoretical foundation from which to challenge exclusionary sentiments, practices and policies.

Professor Barbara Perry, *University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Canada*

Drawing upon results from his own extensive fieldwork, James Carr provides fascinating new insights into the forms and impacts of anti-Muslim racism in contemporary societies. Utilising international perspectives coupled with a case study of Ireland, his excellent and perceptive analysis of this damaging social phenomenon will be of immense value to students, academics and practitioners alike.

Mr Jon Garland, *University of Surrey, UK*

This text is as timely as it is unique. Deconstructing with clarity the sometimes dichotomous relationship between Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism, Carr's study offers a number of new critical insights into a still embryonic field of inquiry. While focusing on the Irish context – a geographical area that to date has been somewhat overlooked in existing studies – the analyses underpinning and informing this book have a much wider relevance especially those framed by theories of neoliberalism. Without doubt, this book deserves to be widely read.

Dr Chris Allen, *University of Birmingham, UK*

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Since 9/11 interest in Islamophobia has steadily increased – as have the number of academic publications discussing the phenomenon. However, theoretical expositions have dominated the field. Lived experiences of Islamophobia, by contrast, have received little attention. In recognition of the importance of addressing this imbalance, this book provides theoretically-informed analyses alongside everyday testimonies of anti-Muslim racism, set comparatively in an international context.

Carr argues that the failure of the neoliberal state to collect data on anti-Muslim racism highlights the perpetuation of 'race' blindness within governance. Not only does this mean that the salience of racism is denied in the lives of those who experience it, but this also enables the state to absolve itself from challenging the issue and providing the necessary supports to Muslim communities.

Offering original empirical research and theoretical engagement with the concept of 'race'-blind neoliberal governance, this book will appeal to students and scholars across the social sciences, in addition to policymakers and activists working in this topical area.

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For my four shining stars – let's light up the darkness!

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1   Introduction

Introduction

Before I started the research upon which this book is based I knew very little about Islam and of Muslim communities in Ireland; less still about their experiences of Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim racism as I prefer to call it for reasons that will become clear later. However, as a student of sociology, I was keenly aware of the discourses surrounding the so-called 'global war on terror'. I also understood that these discourses would have a profound effect on Muslim communities the world over but was unsure how. I set about searching for evidence of anti-Muslim racism in the Irish context only to discover that very little information was available at the level of the state. I subsequently studied the international horizon to find a pattern emerging wherein very little official data were available on this phenomenon, an incredibly relevant phenomenon given the ongoing discourses of terror.

The limited, qualitative insight that was available, then provided by the now defunct National Consultative Committee on Interculturalism (2013) evidenced various incidents of anti-Muslim hostility in Ireland. These ranged from instances of verbal abuse and jibes of 'Osama Bin Laden' and 'London bomber', to reports of physical assault. However, as a sociologist I wanted to discover how prevalent anti-Muslim racism is in Ireland; to understand at a deeper level how it manifests; and how it is lived by Muslim men and women in their daily lives. Given the lack of data on this phenomenon it was also necessary to understand why this lacuna in evidence existed: whether it was due to a 'blindness' on the part of the state toward this phenomenon; because people were not reporting it, if so why not; or was anti-Muslim racism really a problem at all. If the problem lay with the practices of the state what were its underpinnings; were they ideologically informed or just an oversight on the part of an Irish State perceived as homogenous? This book addresses these questions and is based on original empirical research on the issue of anti-Muslim racism in Ireland and the state's approach to this phenomenon. The arguments made below derive from extensive fieldwork with Muslim communities in Ireland; representatives of non-governmental organisations and retired police officers; and an evaluation of international best practice in the area of recording racism. The fieldwork here

was conducted in Ireland but, as will be demonstrated, the findings resonate far beyond into the broader international context both in terms of the experiences of anti-Muslim racism and their resonance, and also in the responses of nation states in the neoliberal era.

Anti-Muslim racism in the neoliberal era

Consistently and repeatedly throughout the last decade, international research has demonstrated inadequate data collection vis-à-vis anti-Muslim racism. This paucity of data has resulted in consistent and repeated calls for better data collection on this phenomenon (Allen and Nielsen 2002; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2012; European Union Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia 2006; Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe 2011; 2012). Such calls for improved data collection are set in a context wherein anti-Muslim racism continues to affect Muslim communities across the globe and as Muslim communities continue to grow in societies where Muslims have historically been in the minority (see for example Ameli *et al.* 2012; Pew Research 2011; Poynting and Noble 2004; Zempi and Chakraborti 2014).

The past three decades have witnessed strong growth amongst Muslim communities across Europe. Accounting for about 30,000,000 people in 1990, the figure reached 44,000,000 in 2010 and is projected to rise to just shy of 60,000,000 by the year 2030, almost 10 per cent of the population. Notably, Ireland's Muslim population is expected to increase threefold between 2010 and 2030, the largest increase in any European state (Pew Research 2011). Despite their number and myriad diversity, Muslim communities are frequently presented in popular Western discourses as alien and incompatible with a presumed homogenous West (Gest 2010). Almost 20 years ago, the Runnymede Trust, a UK based non-governmental organisation, published a seminal report entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for us all* (Runnymede Trust 1997). As the date of publication indicates, this report was compiled in an era far removed from the events of September 2001, demonstrating that anti-Muslim sentiment is not just a recent phenomenon. Indeed, there is a history of constructing Muslims as 'other' in the Western public perception that spans centuries. Events such as the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and the Salman Rushdie fatwa affair in the UK have added to these historic 'truths' to colour the image of all Muslim communities as the outgroup in the West (Abbas 2011; Said 2003).

Today, notions of idealised culture fill the space where 'race' could once reside unimpeded but is today taboo (Lentin and Titley 2011). Political groups of various hues call for a return to mythicised 'cultural purity' and for the protection of national values (Fekete 2009, p. 3; Vakil 2014). 'Re-imagined European national identities – pristine cultural paragons like 'Britishness, *fraternité* and *hispanidad*' are invoked in the face of an alleged 'failed' multiculturalism and failures of integration (Gest 2010, p. 7). Muslim communities are frequently cast collectively as a group who 'fail' to meet the standards of belonging in liberal societies. Markers of Muslimness, visual signifiers of identity, particularly the

hijab and niqab, are utilised to demonstrate the alleged failure of Muslim communities to integrate (as if no Muslim person was ever born and raised in the West) as a group that want to live apart (Brown and Saeed 2014; Lentin and Titley 2011).

Across Europe, policies have been enacted that impact directly upon Muslim communities and their ability to manifest their faith. Prohibitions on the wearing of the hijab, niqab and/or burqa are in place in France and Belgium as well as certain German Lander and parts of Spain (BBC News 2014; Mock and Lichfield 2010). Switzerland has imposed a ban on the building of minarets as the result of a referendum called by right-wing groups who proclaimed they were saving their 'occidental Christian heritage' (Baumann 2009). Far-right groups the length and breadth of Europe have called for stringent measures to be taken against Muslim communities including the closure of mosques and curbs on immigration. These calls invoke racialised discourses of Muslims as 'other', not only a threat to our values but our security (Hafez 2014; Hellyer 2009; Human Rights First 2014; Saul 2014).

In addition to these discourses of cultural incompatibility, Muslim communities are also in the cross-hairs of international discourses of security, radicalisation and the fear of home-grown terrorism, heightened again in the era of ISIS (Neumann 2014; Kundnani 2014). In the contemporary context, Muslim has almost become synonymous with 'suspect'. Hickman *et al.* (2011) detail the manner in which Muslim communities are today a prime 'suspect community', subjected to securitisation practices that operate on Muslimness as a marker of threat. Evidence of increased security towards Muslim communities is rich across the West (Fekete 2009; Human Rights First 2014; Kundnani 2014). More recently the figure of the 'foreign fighter', the 'radical', has taken centre stage in these discourses (Brown and Saeed 2014; International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation 2014; Kundnani 2014). 'Bearded men, veiled women, converts' are presented to us as fitting the profile of 'suspect' subject (Brown and Saeed 2014, p. 2). This despite the seeming impossibility of nation state security bodies successfully profiling 'terrorist' behaviour (Human Rights Watch 2014). Nonetheless, as Fekete (2009, p. 103) argues: 'European intelligence services have promoted the view that young Muslims are increasingly receptive to radicalisation' (see also Human Rights First 2014). While it cannot be denied that a small minority of those who have engaged in terrorist acts have been 'home grown', Muslim communities are presented as an enemy within and this has real effects on the lives of ordinary Muslim men, women and children (Fekete 2009).

Despite the aforementioned paucity of official data on anti-Muslim racism, research from across the West clearly demonstrates the effect of racialised discourses, policies and practices on Muslim communities. Allen and Nielsen (2002) note the manner in which anti-Muslim racism manifests across Europe in the post 9–11 climate with Muslim women singled out due to their religious identifiability. Poynting and Noble (2004) evidence the presence of anti-Muslim racism in Australia and the manner in which it intersects with 'traditional' racisms and xenophobia. Ameli *et al.* (2011) illustrate anti-Muslim racism in

France while the Open Society Institute (2011) elucidates the manner in which French Muslim women negotiate their lives and racism while wearing the veil; all in an era where in France 'popular and radical anti-Muslim rhetoric, supported by inflammatory discourse in segments of the media but also by public figures, has started to become normal' (Open Society Institute 2012, p. 85). Discourses of an alleged incompatibility between Islam and the West proliferated in the aftermath of the attacks on the offices of Charlie Hebdo and a kosher supermarket in Paris. These discourses were simplistic to say the least, lacking in nuance and any recognition of the diversity of Muslim communities in France and indeed worldwide (Allen 2010; Fekete 2015; Hassan 2015; Ramadan 2015; Younge 2015). Evidence indicates that these discourses were accompanied by a rise in anti-Muslim hostility on Muslim communities in France (Tell MAMA 2015a). In addition to the research findings below, members of Muslim communities in the Irish context have reported increased experiences of anti-Muslim racism with direct reference being made to the rise of ISIS and the brutal murders of Western hostages (Meagher 2014). In the UK, Muslim communities have had to live with the increased levels of anti-Muslim racism in the aftermath of the brutal murder of Fusilier Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London, and revelations of child sex abuse in the North of England, associated with South-Asian men but generalised to all Muslims (Feldman and Littler 2014; Tell MAMA 2015b).

The evidence of anti-Muslim racism presented here and later in this book is very clear: Muslim communities are living with a distinct form of racism that targets them on the basis of their Muslimness. This evidence behoves a state response; that is, of course, if the state sees itself responsible for 'caring' for racism in an era that espouses 'self-governance and self-reliance' (Thompson 2007). To understand the role of the state in the neoliberal era, and indeed some of the broader findings that emerged in this research, I draw on the work of Michel Foucault among others.

'Truth' and rational government

At this point I want to emphasise that although I came to this study from a predominantly Foucauldian perspective, I was always intent on remaining true to the voices of participants as shared through their narratives, their knowledges (Foucault 1980a). The theoretical framework deployed in this study is underpinned by the work of Michel Foucault and those who have developed his insights in the period since his untimely death in 1984. I must state at the outset that my use of Foucault's work presents what may be perceived as an optimistic reading of his work. This is understandable and I acknowledge the tensions between my reading of Foucault's work openly. After all, Foucault (1998) clearly presents the calculative, manipulative manner in which society can be organised by those in authority. Foucault (1998) argues of the regulation of the social body in the interests of government, with society increasingly at the centre of efforts of state administration and regulation. In the era of neoliberal

hegemony these process of governmental regulation take on a marketised lens evidenced through discourses of efficiencies, performance indicators and self-reliance (Gray 2013; Thompson 2007). In the contemporary context, governmental intervention in the social is delimited by its perceived utility to the advancement of neoliberal ends (Donzelot 2008; Foucault 2010; Giroux 2008).

A range of Foucauldian concepts are utilised during this study: the work of Michel Foucault allows for rich theoretical insight to be gained on the relationship between power and dominant discourses; the manner in which these discursive formations are formed and deployed as 'truth'; how these 'truths' are utilised to legitimise rationalities of government of the state and the government of the self, at the expense of competing discourses. Foucault (1980) argued that 'truth' is contingent and related to power; in every society there is a 'regime of truth'. Dean (2010a) argues that neoliberalism is the dominant regime of 'truth', or as he puts it, a 'regime of double truths' of our time (see also Harvey 2005). Adopting a Foucauldian lens can reveal the role that power can play in discursive constructions of 'truth'. Thus I utilise a Foucauldian approach here to understand how global constructions of 'truth' position Muslims as 'other' in the public perception. At a more local level I also apply a Foucauldian discursive perspective to understand the character of historic and contemporary constructions of national belonging, using Ireland as an example, which can easily translate to other contexts albeit with obvious localised dimensions. The interrogation of given 'truths' and their relationship to power enables the analysis conducted in this study to move from the purely empirical to allow for a more theoretical understanding of anti-Muslim racism to emerge.

Foucauldian thought on government reveals the manner in which governmental rationalities inform the conduct of the state and that of personal behaviour (Foucault 1991). Combining Foucauldian insights on the dominant regime of 'truth' (or double 'truths') with those derived from the field of governmentality studies allows for a deeper theorisation of anti-Muslim racism and state responses to this phenomenon. In particular, this alignment of Foucauldian thought makes it possible to reveal the relationship between the dominant legitimising discourses ('truths') and the rationalities of government. The application of a Foucauldian perspective reveals the connection between dominant regimes of 'truth', their impact on governmental rationalities, but also the manner in which conduct is conducted, with dominant 'truths' becoming imbibed as popular mentalities or common sense (Dean 2010).

Foucault's theoretical insights provided a platform for this study to theorise anti-Muslim racism and state responses to this phenomenon. However, one of the reasons that I was attracted to the work of Foucault (hence my positive reading of his work), lies in the manner in which he stresses the possibility for resistance; in particular, his concepts of 'counter conduct[s]' (Foucault 1998, p. 95); and *'insurrections of subjugated knowledges'* (Foucault 1980a, p. 81; emphasis his). Thus, while this book refers to the role of dominant regimes of 'truth' and presents the lived realities of anti-Muslim racism, Foucault's work also offers the possibility for change, for resistance. This is vital in the context of

a study such as this which endeavours to identify opportunities for change in the manner in which anti-Muslim racism can be challenged by the state. Overall, the Foucauldian perspective adopted in this study allows for a sensitive theorisation of anti-Muslim racism, drawing on the Irish experience, and state responses to this phenomenon and their ideological underpinnings; all the while remaining true to the overarching aim of this research – to challenge anti-Muslim racism.

Theorising 'race' and *racism*-lessness

The originality of this study means that it breaks ground not only empirically but also theoretically. At a general level, the first theoretical contribution of this book is the theorisation of anti-Muslim racism qua anti-Muslim racism within the Irish context; Ireland as discussed below is presented here as an exemplar neoliberal state. Despite previous empirical research conducted in relation to Muslim communities, anti-Muslim racism is under-researched empirically and theoretically. The theoretical contributions of this research are grounded in rich primary data, remaining close to the voices and experiences of participants but also endeavouring to move beyond the empirical in order to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. In addition to Foucault, various distinct and intersecting theoretical perspectives also inform this study and shed light on anti-Muslim racism in the contemporary context. These include perspectives on the concept of Islamophobia; neoliberalism and its relationship with racism; racialisation and the role of the nation state; and the field of governmentality studies.

Multifarious valuable contributions have been made on the subject of Islamophobia from a range of perspectives (Allen 2010; Bunzl 2005; Cesari 2011; Dunn *et al.* 2007; Fekete 2009; Halliday 2003; Kumar 2012; Modood and Meer 2010; Riley-Smith 2010; Schiffer and Wagner 2011; Sheehi 2011; Vakil 2010; inter alia). For example Allen's (2010) interrogation of the term Islamophobia provides deep processual insights on this phenomenon and the manner in which ideas of Muslimness inform exclusionary practices. Likewise, Kumar (2012) relates the role neoliberalism can play in constructing Muslims as 'other'. Pertinent theorisations for this study on the topic of neoliberalism and its role in contemporary racism also derive from a broad range of contributors (Davis 2007; Donzelot 2008; Foucault 2010; Giroux 2008; Goldberg 2002, 2009; Lentin and Lentin 2006; Lentin and Titley 2012; inter alia). These studies demonstrate the manner in which neoliberalism denies the salience of 'race' and racism in the contemporary context and the impact this has on whether or not racism qua racism is recognised as a specific phenomenon. These insights are particularly pertinent to and indeed frame the argument being made in this book vis-à-vis the neoliberal state. Various insights also enable a theorisation of the nation state and the role it plays in the maintenance of nation, defining who belongs or who is 'othered' (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Essed 2001; Fanning 2012; Foucault 2003; Garner 2009; Goldberg 2002, 2009; Omi and Winant 2001). Finally, the dominant theoretical strand that informs this research, as noted above, derives

from the work of Michel Foucault and also what Dean (2010a) refers to as the field of governmentality studies (Dean 2010, 2010a; Foucault 1991; Gray 2011; Lemke 2001; Miller and Rose 2008; Rose *et al.* 2006).

The utility of the aforementioned perspectives in isolation is undeniable. For example, theories of racialisation, belonging and the creation of nation such as those provided by Fanning (2012) and Garner (2009) are vital if exclusionary practices that delimit national belonging are to be understood in Ireland and beyond (see also Goldstone 2002; Guerin 2002; Lentin 2002; Lentin and McVeigh 2006; Ní Chathain 2011; Ní Shuinéar 2002). Research in Greece (Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2009), the Netherlands (van Nieuwkerk 2004) and in Australia (Poynting and Noble 2004) for example demonstrates the manner in which Muslimness can be juxtaposed with historic imaginings of belonging. These studies provide a historically informed and nationally contingent lens to understand anti-Muslim racism in Ireland which also applies to other contexts. Indeed, the fact that anti-Muslim racism is an international phenomenon implies the presence of global racialised constructions of Muslim as 'other' (see for example Allen and Nielsen 2002; Giroux 2008; Goldberg 2009; Kumar 2012; Poynting and Noble 2004). Thus, framed in this light, it is clear that Muslim communities in Ireland, and other nation states, may face exclusion for not fitting within nationally imagined 'norms' of belonging, and/or on the basis of being perceived as a member of a globalised, negatively racialised grouping. In other words, and by way of example, a Muslim person in Ireland may face racism on the basis of their global racialised identity and/or for being perceived as outside of traditional conceptions of who belongs in Ireland. This denotes a relationship between racialising discourses at the global and national levels which impact upon individual experiences of anti-Muslim racism. Theoretically then, I argue that to understand the 'othering' of Muslim communities, and indeed how contemporary notions of national belonging are constructed, requires a theoretical synthesis and sensitivity that is cognisant of multiple processes of racialisation and 'truths' of belonging.

In the chapters that follow I will also theorise the underlying processes that inform governmental rationalities in the recognition, or lack thereof, of anti-Muslim racism in the neoliberal state, with a particular focus on the role of the police. There is some literature on the recording and reporting of racism in the Irish context. However, this literature is predominantly empirical and lacks a theorisation beyond the immediate experience (Clarke 2013; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2009; Lynch 2011; Taylor 2010). Indeed, there is a complete absence of theoretical insight and knowledge in relation to the related issues of reporting (by victims) and recording (by the state) of anti-Muslim racism as a distinct manifestation of racist practice. I argue that to fully understand the stance of the Irish State towards anti-Muslim racism, it is necessary to draw on a number of theoretical perspectives that emphasise the connection between hegemonic global discourses and local practices of government. The work of Foucault (1991) and Goldberg (2002, 2009; see also Lentin and Titley 2012; Roberts and Mahtani 2010; Thompson 2007) is particularly

insightful in this regard; as are the contributions of those scholars within the field of governmentality studies (Dean 2010, 2010a; Miller and Rose 2008; Rose *et al.* 2006). Goldberg (2002, 2009) and Lentin and Titley (2012) theorise the manner in which states deny the salience of 'race' in an era of post-racialism. This blindness towards 'race' denies the lived experiences of racism, allowing the state to absent itself from any responsibility towards caring for those who are targeted through racist exclusionary practices. It is argued here that this blindness has neoliberal rationalities at its core which direct the attitude of government and 'conduct the conduct' of neoliberalised individuals.

Anti-Muslim racism and the neoliberal state

Ireland, as will be argued throughout this study is held here as an exemplar neoliberal state; a state wherein neoliberalism has become core to the rationalities of government, at the level of the state and permeating into governance of the self. That is not to say that everyone in Ireland is neoliberal but that in Ireland as abroad, as Harvey argues:

> Neoliberalism … has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.
>
> (2005, p. 3)

I do of course recognise and indeed evidence below the distinctness in terms of contexts, politics and histories of different states. The influences of colonialism and counter colonialism in the Irish context and its influence on historically based notions of belonging in Ireland; or the manner in which the murder of Stephen Lawrence catalysed the UK Government to challenge 'race' hate (this is not to say that arguably racist state practices persist; see, for example, Peachy 2014). Like Harvey (2005) and Thompson (2007), I do contend that neoliberalism is the dominant source of discourses and 'truths' of how to be in our time. Neoliberalism informs how nation states recognise and react (or not) to 'race' and broader forms of hate and exclusion. As will be demonstrated below, internalised neoliberal ideals also direct the manner in which those who have been subjected to anti-Muslim racism feel they should react when they experience hostility. After all, in the neoliberal ''society of individuals' all the messes into which one can get are assumed to be self-made' (Zygmunt Bauman, cited in Giroux 2008, p. 591). As such, in this era of neoliberal 'responsibilisation' (Thompson 2007), it is up to each of us to manage our own experiences of racism.

According to the most recent census conducted in 2011 (Central Statistics Office 2012), there are just under 50,000 Muslim men and women in Ireland. These communities are incredibly diverse and derive from over 40 different nationalities. Existing research conducted with Muslim communities to date also reveals that various religious traditions or aspects of Islam are also represented