

against great odds within existing trade unions. The racialization experience plays, according to Virdee, a triggering role in the commitment of the ‘racialized outsiders’ to a more inclusive society. The author reiterates this thesis in the course of the nine chapters and many vignettes in his work illustrate this argument, for instance the formation of the CPGB to mention only one. Pointing to the significant involvement of Irish Catholics and Jews, the author argues that this commitment stemmed from a ‘memory and experience of exclusion’ (p. 88). He extends his analysis to the mobilization of Irish, Jewish, Indian, Caribbean and African minorities (p. 164). Though well founded in relation to the author’s research, this analytical framework leads him to an overoptimistic conclusion. The author’s suggestion that those oppressed in the past shall play an active role in ‘emancipatory projects that seek to transform our existing social relations and free us from exploitation and oppression’ (p. 166), lacks, it could be argued, a reflection as to the extent to which this analysis is embedded in the specific time-frame of the construction of the British nation-state in the 19th and early 20th century. In this period, given the centrality of class struggle and the influence of internationalist socialism, there existed a window of opportunity to question the ‘nation-state’ as a model of political organization. While racialized minorities in today’s Britain probably possess a ‘unique perspective on society’ (p. 164) that originates in a ‘memory and experience of exclusion’ (p. 88), to use Virdee’s words, we would argue that it is highly complex to predict if this engenders agency and how it would do so. Racialized minorities in Britain are both exposed to and contribute to shaping economic, political, societal and religious discourses that critically examine forces at work behind their past and present oppression. Amongst this diversity, emancipation might well be understood in differentiated terms, and give rise to a wide, and most probably contradictory, range of activist commitments.

## References

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## Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohamed

*Islamophobia. Comment les élites françaises fabriquent le « problème musulman »* (‘Islamophobia: how the French elites manufacture the “Muslim problem”’) La Découverte: Paris, 2013, 302 pp.: 97827076806

**Reviewed by:** Adelina Miranda, Dipartimento di Scienze Sociali, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II/ CRH-LAVUE, Paris

In this book Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohamed pursue the complex goal of simultaneously defining Islamophobia and contributing to the creation in France of a recognized field of studies in this area such as already exists in the English-speaking world. The book opens with an introduction, ‘For a sociology of Islamophobia’, followed by five sections dealing with ‘I. Realities of Islamophobia’; ‘II. A history of the concept of Islamophobia’; ‘III. The construction of the “Muslim problem”’; ‘IV. Setting up an anti-Muslim archive’; ‘V. Islamophobia between denial and recognition’ (*Réalités de l’islamophobie, Histoire du concept de l’islamophobie, La construction du « problème musulman », La formation d’une archive antimusulmane, L’islamophobie entre déni et reconnaissance*). In the introduction, after

reconstructing the story of Sirine, a 15-year-old girl expelled in 2012 from her school in the Paris suburbs for wearing a headband and a long skirt, the authors refer to the emotionally charged tones, sometimes filled with hatred, commonly associated with reports of ‘incidents involving Muslims’. Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohamed point out that this emotionalism tends to make any proposed definition, and study, of Islamophobia all the more difficult. The phenomenon is encountered at three levels: ideology, prejudices, and practices; it is a reflection of a heterogeneous and diversified world; it displays elements of overt racism, sexism and class-based racism; it finds expression in everyday instances of discrimination; it can be associated with several political groups, individuals and subjects; and it has come to form a fully fledged category of organizationally legitimized public action. Effects deriving from Islamophobia are apparent across the whole spectrum of the economy, politics, media, government, academia and associative life; the notion of Islamophobia is an imperfect one that lends itself, above all, to instrumentalization. Yet it is essential, according to the authors, to ‘recognize its legitimacy’ as ‘a problematic and as a concept’ because ‘to name’ this phenomenon – measured and explored by the social sciences, combated by militant action, and taken seriously by most international organizations and Western governments – is to allow it to be better grasped and understood as a ‘total social fact’. Its institutionalization is hindered, however, on the one hand by a lack of large-scale historical and social investigation and, on the other, by the wide-ranging nature of the efforts deployed to underpin its meaning and manifestations.

Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohamed take up a position in this debate by adopting a constructive and historicized perspective. They consider that ‘Islamophobia corresponds to the complex social process of basing racial identity and constructing Otherness on signs indicative of adherence – whether real or supposed – to the Muslim religion, in accordance with processes that vary in accordance with national context and historical period’ (p. 98). Taking this definition as their point of departure, the authors focus on the question of how ‘the Muslims’ have been constructed by Western theological and political thought as ‘the figure of the enemy’. Islamophobia points up and problematizes the religious value contained in the projections of essential Otherness associated with the ‘main reproaches addressed to Islam: holy war, slavery, polygamy, fatalism and fanaticism’ (p. 75). Since the Middle Ages, via the Enlightenment and Orientalism, we have witnessed a hierarchical construction of the monotheistic religions. This discursive legacy lies, in conjunction with colonialism, at the basis of the anachronistic and ahistorical vision which has served to build up a homogenous image of the Arab-Muslim world. In more recent times, this image, as employed by a form of neo-orientalism, has converged with the issue of immigration. The construction of the ‘problem’ represented by the children of immigrants and, in particular, by ‘women wearing the veil’, amounts to a questioning of integration and of the legitimacy of the presence in the majority society of immigrants and their children.

Adoption of a historical focus leads to a deconstruction of two representations that have acquired common currency. The first of these is the assertion that the ‘Muslim question’ is a recent creation of the political right wing; the second relates to the belief that the term Islamophobia was forged by Iranian fundamentalists in the 1970s. The thesis supported by Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohamed is that use of the concept goes back further to a group of ethnologists and administrators who had specialized in the study of Islam in Western Africa. Islamophobia then comes to be understood under two headings – the government variant and the scholarly variant – and is ‘defined as a mode of government, a form of differential treatment based on a criterion of religion, the value of which, disconnected from all ethical considerations, comes to be determined by, on the contrary, a pragmatic policy of domination’ (p. 74). After a parenthesis in the 1950s, the term came back into use in the 1980s and became more widespread in the 1990s. With this revival, the concept of Islamophobia began to take on new shades of meaning. On the one hand, it served to reveal the existence of a new form of racism attributable to the conjunction of two phenomena: the

construction of a one supposed 'Muslim identity' and the transition from a biological to a cultural form of racism. In the English-speaking world, meanwhile, Islamophobia became constituted as an autonomous field of studies: 'in the space of ten years, it went from being a phenomenon pertaining to the social experience of Muslims living in North London to becoming a global, historical and racial phenomenon, reinterpreted and redefined by Muslims and non-Muslims, and by academics, public actors and militants' (p. 82).

In the context of the globalization of the phenomenon since 2001, the politicization of the 'Muslim question' in the French public arena is specifically marked by the history of immigration in France. Contemporary Islamophobic discourse appeared in France in the context of strikes in the early 1980s when foreign workers were stigmatized as 'Muslim fundamentalists'; it continued after 1989 with public debate and the ensuing controversial government ban on wearing of the veil, taking on a new dimension with recent criminal and terrorist attacks in which young jihadi of immigrant origin were involved. New chapters in the Arab-Israeli conflict represented a further ingredient of polarization. Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohamed go back over many of the aspects and incidents that contributed to the build-up and spread of the phenomenon in France. Instances of Islamophobic behaviour – aimed at Muslim men or women as individuals or at Islam *qua* religion – are still on the increase, displaying a clear overrepresentation of women (77 per cent in 2012) as victims of discriminatory acts. Opinion polls show that perceptions of Islam are increasingly negative, and a generalization of the phenomenon of Islamophobia can be witnessed in the various spheres of society. The 'tenets of Islam' – particularly polygamy and relations between the sexes – are increasingly regarded as incompatible with the French Republican values of secularism and equality. Accordingly, it is not simply a question of measuring Islamophobia in terms of statistics – especially as the authors are well aware of the limits of opinion polls – but of coming to grips with its complex articulations. What is particularly important is to realize that its overall construction is the product of a sifting and build-up of knowledge that is reliant on the mobilization of numerous collective and individual private and state actors.

As such, Islamophobia raises the question of elites' roles in the production and dissemination of knowledge. According to Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohamed, the French and also European governmental, political, media and scientific elites indeed play a fundamental role in the construction of Islamophobia, striving as they do to produce a dominant ideology that fosters the construction of alliances among differing interests and amalgamation of otherwise segmented groups. Rationales to justify stigmatization are produced in particular by the media (both press and television), as well as by academics, intellectuals, sociologists, security experts and popular media pundits. Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohamed stress a twofold aspect of the question, namely, the existence of a form of 'Islamophobia in writing' (which finds a growing media audience and contributes to construction of the 'Muslim problem') and, since the end of the 1980s, a proliferation of 'neutral spaces' for solving the 'Muslim question'. However, this ostensible neutrality of the institutional actors is questioned by the authors who point out that the already well-known and influential figures who participate in such official bodies – for example those who sit as individual members of the HCI (Haut conseil à l'intégration – 'High council for integration') – occupy a strategic position in areas characterized by 'an intense symbolic struggle'. Meanwhile, the struggle for the recognition of Islamophobia, as it is conducted in numerous movements, associations and parties, is waged particularly by young Frenchmen and women who are the children or grandchildren of immigrants, by associations like *Mamans toutes Egales* ('all mothers equal'), and by feminist groups which have come out against the law of 15 March 2004 that prohibits wearing of the veil. A similar engagement characterizes the intellectual position of Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan

Mohamed whose action is aimed at promoting recognition of Islamophobia as a field of study and intended at the same time to combat racism.

In our own view, the scope of this work extends well beyond the debate on Islamophobia. It demonstrates, for one thing, the relevance of opening up – or renewing – reflection on the role and place of religion within the Muslim world, but also within French and Western society in general. In this respect, an enlightening aspect of the authors' presentation of their subject matter is the juxtaposition and comparison of Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia; they show that, in spite of similar symbolic representations, the Arab-Palestinian conflict has given rise to a discursive disjunction between Jews and Muslims that has led to a repositioning of two religions within the majority society. The book illustrates also the gendered nature of Islamophobia, thereby enabling us to observe that the adoption of an approach focused on the intersection of social relations could contribute to better grasping how forms of religious affiliation (which, we should remember, are always in a process of becoming) cross over, are superposed upon, define, or subvert other forms of social relations. It is in this way that studies of Islamophobia could contribute to construction of a form of knowledge that is non-hegemonic, decentred and multi-sited.

*Translation from the French by Kathleen Llanwarne*