

Article

Political Approaches to Tackling Islamophobia: An Analytical Review of the British Coalition Government 2010-5

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Abstract

Soon after the Conservative-led Coalition government came to power in 2010, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi announced that Islamophobia had passed the 'dinner-table test' in contemporary Britain. Resultantly, the need to address Islamophobia was identified as a priority for the Coalition. This article critically analyses how the Coalition sought to achieve this and the extent to which it was successful. Focusing on the period 2010-5, this article initially frames what is meant by Islamophobia before briefly setting out how it had been responded to by previous British governments. As regards the Coalition, a threefold approach is adopted that considers the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia, the Cross-Government Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hate and the political discourses used by the Coalition about Muslims and Islam more generally. Concluding that the Coalition failed to meet the high expectations set by Warsi's speech, this article considers why this might have been so.

Keywords

Islamophobia; British politics; Coalition Government; Conservative Party; discrimination; Muslims; minority communities

1. Introduction

“It seems to me that Islamophobia has now crossed the threshold...For far too many people, Islamophobia is seen as a legitimate – even commendable – thing...Islamophobia should be seen as totally abhorrent – just like homophobia or Judeophobia...we need political leadership. Government has got to show that it gets it” (Warsi, 2011)

Almost a decade and a half after Islamophobia first entered the British political spaces via the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia’s (CBMI) ground-breaking report, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all* (Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 1997), Baroness Sayeeda Warsi’s 2011 speech was a welcome development for those that had been lobbying subsequent British governments for political interventions to address the phenomenon. Popularly referred to as the ‘dinner-table test’ speech, Warsi’s speech was seen as a watershed moment, affording Islamophobia the political recognition that had been missing for too long (Allen, 2010b; Allen, 2013c). As co-chair of the Conservative Party at the time, Warsi’s speech was also catalytic, prompting the establishment of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Islamophobia followed by the Cross-Government Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hate shortly after. Also catalysing high expectations, many believed that the Conservative-led Coalition Government was, as Warsi put it, going to be a government that did indeed ‘get it’.

Whilst acknowledging the unprecedented political recognition afforded to Islamophobia following Warsi’s speech, this article seeks to argue that the Coalition offered little more credence and credibility in responding to Islamophobia than preceding British governments. In essence, this article argues that governmental approaches to tackling Islamophobia in the British political spaces continue to be ineffectual thereby rendering policy approaches necessarily meaningless. In doing so, this article will critically reflect on the Coalition government’s approach to addressing Islamophobia during its term of government from 2010 to 2015. Having initially framed what is meant by Islamophobia, this article will briefly set out the approaches to addressing the phenomenon preferred by previous British governments. From here, a threefold approach will be adopted. First, a consideration of the establishment, function and subsequent outputs from the APPG on Islamophobia; second, a similar consideration of the Cross-Government Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hate (Working Group); thirdly, a brief analysis of the political discourses of the Coalition about Muslims and Islam more generally. In conclusion, this article will consider the extent to which the Coalition met the expectations prompted by Warsi’s speech albeit while contextualising this within the broader British political landscape where Islamophobia continued to be responded to ineffectually if indeed at all. In doing so, it is hoped this article will make a timely contribution to the relatively embryonic body of scholarly studies relating to governmental and policy approaches to tackling Islamophobia.

2. Methodology

The methodological approach underpinning this article has three distinct strands. The first is the analysis of various policy and scholarly resources as also other publicly available sources including the media and online spaces. The second is somewhat more unique and is the analysis of various unpublished documents and associated resources only made available to those involved in the Coalition’s APPG and Working Group. This was possible through the author having participated in both the APPG and Working Group from November 2010 through to

October 2014 in an independent 'expert' capacity. It is necessary to stress that this participation was non-partisan and received no remuneration whatsoever. It did however afford a number of opportunities to engage with British governmental ministers, members of Parliament and other appropriate political actors as also Muslim and non-Muslim actors who had been co-opted to represent a range of civil society and community organisations and groups. This took the form of face-to-face meetings, workshops, and both formal and informal conversations as also via electronic means including emails, online forums and the sharing of documents. Throughout the process of participation, research notes were kept by the author via which observations, reflections and thinking were recorded and which form the third strand of this article's methodological approach.

Given the methodological approach preferred, the significance of one's positionality is crucially important not least because the author was both a participant and participatory within the political mechanisms that provide the primary focus of this article. It is therefore likely that some blurring of the boundaries between insider and outsider perspectives will have occurred. While this particular form of participation fell short of the activist research type identified by Huisman (2008), it did nonetheless allow unprecedented access to the political spaces, actors and mechanisms that indeterminably shaped the way in which Islamophobia was being addressed in the British political setting. Noting that knowledge about these spaces, actors and mechanisms can be as invisible as they are inaccessible to most, embedded participation meant that access to discussions and debates that had the potential for new and unique insights and understandings were made available. An oft-cited criticism of such an approach is that it jeopardises objectivity (Spano 2005 & 2006). Albeit acknowledged, such criticisms can be countered by questioning the extent to which true objectivity can ever be achieved. Likewise also those who argue the need to 'decontaminate' research findings not least because they have been shown to be quite incoherent (Monahan & Fisher, 2010). This article is premised therefore on the basis that the embodied knowledge inherited undoubtedly outweighs any concerns about any lack of objectivity (Sherif 2001; Heidegger, 2002).

Lastly, the limitations of political mechanisms and policy interventions seeking to address discriminatory phenomena must be acknowledged. For Blakemore & Drake (1996) as also Daniels & MacDonald (2005), this is because political mechanisms and policy interventions typically seek to curb certain behaviours as opposed to changing public attitudes. According to Bhavani et al (2005), irrespective of the political mechanisms and policy interventions put in place to address discriminatory phenomena, they will only ever address the effects rather than causes. They refer to this as the micro rather than the macro. Applying this to contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia, any political mechanisms or policy interventions are likely to have greater impact on curbing the activities of those perpetrating street-level Islamophobic attacks (Allen, 2014) than on what Allen (2010b; 2013a) terms 'Islamophobia thinking', what people 'think' and 'know' about Muslims and Islam. This is because Islamophobia thinking (macro Islamophobia) is – in line with other discriminatory phenomena – extremely complex not least because it has typically evolved out of centuries of asymmetric power relations (Allen, 2010b; Sheehi, 2011).

As regards addressing discriminatory phenomena in the British political spaces, Afridi (2015) identifies a range of political mechanisms and policy interventions that have been historically deployed. These variously include: education and training; legal sanctions and enforcement; counselling and mentoring; changing procedures within institutions; increased monitoring;

target-setting; and cross-community interaction. Bhavani et al (2005) suggest two categories within which all can be placed; those that formal and those that are informal. For them, formal interventions typically refer to new policies or legislation. Informal interventions are far more fluid however and incorporate projects, initiatives and targeted as also certain discourses and narratives. Here, this formal and informal categorisation will be used as a means of not only improving understanding but so too positioning the political mechanisms and policy interventions implemented to address Islamophobia within the broader focus of how other similar discriminatory phenomena have been addressed in the British setting.

3. Context and Findings

3.1 Framing Islamophobia

As noted previously, Islamophobia was first afforded political recognition in the British political spaces following the publication of the CBMI's 1997 report. The first time Islamophobia had been defined, the CBMI simplistically described Islamophobia as a shorthand way of referring to "the dread or hatred of Islam...and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims" (Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia 1997, p.1). It added that Islamophobia was evident through certain "recurring characteristic[s] of closed views" (1997, p.1). It illustrated the 'closed views' as being when Muslims and Islam were presented as being an enemy, as violent, aggressive, unchanging, threatening, separate, or 'Other' among others (Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 1997). For Allen (2010b), this was too simplistic because if the 'closed views' were equitable to Islamophobia, then any corresponding 'open views' – also set out in the CBMI to illustrate a more balanced and 'rational' approach to presenting Muslims and Islam – must be equitable to 'Islamophilia'. As he concludes, not only is widespread Islamophilia as unwelcome and unwarranted as Islamophobia but the focus on a starkly binary approach had the potential for everything about Muslims, Islam and Islamophobia to be simplistically seen to be black or white, good or bad and so on. As Allen (2010b) therefore rightly notes, the black or white has the potential to negate the 'grey', exactly where the greatest complexity and challenges relating to all discriminatory phenomena clearly resides.

Allen (2010b) cites the CBMI's overly-simplistic approach as one of the main reasons why Islamophobia had failed to be taken seriously – and subsequently addressed – in the British political spaces. To explain this, he refers to Hall's (1979) 'race relations problematic' and the challenge to convince those with political influence and power of the importance and subsequent need to address discriminatory phenomena. As Hall goes on, if they remain unconvinced then it is likely that the only political interventions that will emerge will be phoney and patronising and at the expense of those most likely to experience and encounter the harsher and more tangible realities of discrimination, hate and so on. As Hall (1976) notes, this detrimentally impacts on those lobbying for interventions to address discriminatory phenomena in that they typically resort to naïve arguments about just 'how bad' discriminatory phenomena are thereby overlooking themselves the harsh realities and impacts. Some point to the CBMI in this respect, highlighting how it not only failed to effectively communicate the reality and seriousness of Islamophobia but so too provide appropriate supporting evidence (Halliday, 2002).

Recent scholarly studies have begun to shift away from similarly overly-simplistic approaches to understanding Islamophobia. While some contestation remains, this is acknowledged by

those such as Klug (2012) who states that Islamophobia has 'come of age'. As Moosavi (2014a) later elaborated, scholarly studies now need to be at the forefront of bettering understanding about Islamophobia: about what it is, how it is expressed and manifested, and how these subsequently impact. For him, there is no need to continue contesting whether or not Islamophobia exists. Evidence of this shift can be seen in studies by Allen (2010b), Esposito and Kalin (2011), Sheehi (2011), Lean (2012) and Taras (2012) each of which seeks to develop understanding about Islamophobia beyond the simplistic and literalist, thereby providing a more critical approach. Allen (2010b) and Sheehi (2011) for instance argue that Islamophobia must be understood as functioning ideologically whereby it becomes embedded in a vast array of different individual, communal, social and global patterns of thought and meaning that come to inform what is known about Muslims and Islam: akin to the macro forms of discriminatory phenomena referred to previously. Allen (2010b) refers to these as the 'normative truths' of Islamophobia. This can be best illustrated by considering manifestations of Islamophobia that involve threat or the subjection to violence. Noting that Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) and Moosavi (2014) rightly stress that such manifestations are relatively rare, when such manifestations do occur Allen (2010b) argues that it is likely the perpetrator will deploy the normative truths to motivate, rationalise or justify. In this respect, the macro (cause) can be seen to act as the catalyst for the micro (effect): the normative truths thereby not only informing thinking but so more importantly catalysing and subsequently rationalising real manifestations of Islamophobia.

Such understandings are however somewhat far removed from how Islamophobia is typically understood in the political and public spaces where it continues to be simplistically defined, vaguely conceived and routinely contested. Because of this, Vakil (2010) has put forward an argument for suspending engagement with Islamophobia. Doing so does however miscast the issue. Despite Islamophobia continuing to be simplistically understood and having failed to be afforded appropriate political recognition, it has nonetheless been established in the contemporary lexicon what with having had considerable investment from both critics and advocates alike. While problematic, it was within this context that the Coalition government both understood and subsequently sought to address Islamophobia. From the outset therefore, the Coalition's approach to addressing Islamophobia had no clear definition or conception upon which it was founded. At best, Islamophobia was unquestionably vague and unclear. A similar approach is preferred here whereby no preference is shown towards any one definition or conception. This necessarily prompts three points of clarifications. First, that Islamophobia is understood to be akin to other discriminatory phenomena such as racism and Antisemitism. Second, all discriminatory phenomena – as indeed Islamophobia – are rarely if indeed ever singularly or universally defined. Third, while the focus here is on the political and the policy, scholarly studies are employed where appropriate to frame and inform.

3.2 Religious Discrimination, Islamophobia and New Labour

Prior to the CBMI's 1997 report, there was scant recognition of religiously motivated discrimination let alone Islamophobia specifically (Allen, 2013b). As McLoughlin (2010) notes, political recognition of religious discrimination first emerged in the mid-1980s. Although as Cooper (2004) notes, recognition was far from widespread having been largely confined to Britain's urban conurbations. Political recognition at the national level first emerged following the Satanic Verses affair in 1989 when certain Muslim organisations began to call for legislation to make religious discrimination unlawful (Weller, 2006). Supported by the Commission for

Racial Equality (CRE), the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) was the first to propose specific interventions via its 1993 report, *Muslims and the Law in Multi-Faith Britain: the Need for Reform*. Citing Britain's 1975 White Paper on racial discrimination, UKACIA suggested it provided a suitable template for similar legislation to protect religious communities and individuals (Allen, 2013b). Islamophobia however was still to be named, changing the following year with the publication of a report by the Runnymede Commission on Anti-Semitism (1994). Setting out evidence to suggest that religiously-motivated hate was undergoing a transformation, the report not only expressed concern about how Muslims and Islam were being increasingly targeted but so too went on to name it Islamophobia.

Resultantly, the CBMI was established and its report was published by the Runnymede Trust to coincide with the election of the New Labour government in 1997. As Weller put it, this "moved the terms of the debate quite significantly...[introducing] into public discourse the notion that, alongside shared dynamics of discriminatory experience, there may also be particularities of Muslim experience signalled by the word 'Islamophobia'" (2006, p.306). Calling for 'decisive action', the CBMI proposed 60 wide-reaching interventions. As Allen (2010b) notes however, as few were adopted the decisive action demanded failed to materialise. Nonetheless, New Labour was quick to acknowledge religion and markers of religiosity. Quickly introducing the Human Rights Act 1998 – formally establishing the right to freedom of religion or belief in the British constitution for the first time – New Labour also commissioned research into religious discrimination soon after coming to power. In the ensuing report, *Religious Discrimination in England and Wales* (Weller et al, 2001) it was shown that the majority of Muslims engaged believed that discrimination against them was increasing. The report was however criticised for failing to name this as Islamophobia (Weller, 2006). Recommending that existing race relations legislation be extended, further research was commissioned which explored the legal aspects of doing so (Hepple & Choudhary, 2001). While acquiring suitable evidence, New Labour from the outset appeared reluctant to recognise Islamophobia as a particularistic phenomenon. This was apparent than in the wake of 9/11 when despite a significant discriminatory backlash against Muslims being posited as a distinct possibility (Allen & Nielsen, 2002), it still chose not to attribute it with a name. It was somewhat anomalous then when John Denham, a prominent New Labour politician at the time, spoke of Islamophobia being a cancer-like phenomenon (Allen, 2013c).

In fact New Labour rarely referred to Islamophobia during its three terms of government spanning 13 years from 1997 to 2010. One of the few times it did does however provide a useful illustration of how wider discourses about Muslims and Islam typically framed understanding. In 2010 the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown said during an interview for the *Muslim News* that if New Labour were to win the forthcoming general election it was committed to doing more to address Islamophobia (*Muslim News*, 2010). Rather than being about the experience of British Muslims and the discrimination they encounter, the interview was about the need to strengthen counter-terror legislation. In fact many of New Labour's political discourses about Muslims or Islam were overwhelmingly framed within notions of security, counter-terror and Islamist extremism. The same was also true when introducing political and policy interventions. For example, when legislation was introduced to protect against assault or abuse on the basis of religion it was included as part of the *Anti-Terrorism, Crime & Security Act 2001*. Across its 13 years of government, New Labour's discourses routinely and repeatedly co-joined the discrimination faced by Muslims with counter-terror, security and extremism. As numerous

studies state, this was problematic given that it reinforced many of the public's fears and anxieties about Muslims and Islam (Briggs et al. 2006; Khan 2009; Spalek & McDonald, 2009; Allen, 2013c; Kundnani, 2015). Consequently the 'normative truths' were potentially reinforced rather than refuted.

It must be noted that New Labour did also introduce formal equality-type interventions that extended existing protections against discrimination on the basis of 'race', ethnicity, gender and disability to age, sexual orientation and religion or belief also. Incorporated within the Equality Act 2006 and further strengthened by the Equality Act 2010, Riddell and Watson argue that this brought about "radical change" (2011, p.191). In addition, the 2006 Act also necessitated the creation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), a public body required to promote and enforce equality and non-discrimination laws in England, Scotland and Wales. As with Weller's (2001) research previously, the EHRC was also criticised for failing to recognise a particularistic Islamophobia (Allen, 2013c). In the ensuing years, little has changed with Islamophobia continuing to receive scant attention (Woodhead, 2010). An example of this can be seen in the EHRC's reluctance to disaggregate cases of discrimination reported to it on the basis of religion or belief in the same way it does in relation to 'race' and ethnicity. Not only does this contribute towards a general lack of clarity about the true scale and prevalence of Islamophobia in the contemporary British setting (Hargreaves, 2014) but so too does it suggest that not all discriminatory phenomena are similarly responded to.

3.3 The Coalition's Approaches to Addressing Islamophobia

If Islamophobia – especially a particularistic Islamophobia – failed to be recognised by New Labour, the same cannot be said of the Coalition government that succeeded it. Soon after coming to power following the 2010 general election, having declared itself to be a government that 'did god' (Watt, 2010) - a statement demarcating it from New Labour's 'we don't do god' approach (Allen, 2011c) – Warsi's 'dinner-table test' speech was seen as a signal of intent. Stating that ordinary British people were increasingly comfortable saying things about Muslims and Islam they would feel uncomfortable saying about other religions and their communities, Warsi's Islamophobia was undoubtedly particularistic. Targeting the middle classes – hence the 'dinner-table' reference - she lambasted them for having historically been the type of people that would have championed anti-racism. Nowadays, for her at least, they were the ones normalising Islamophobia. Maybe unsurprisingly, Warsi's speech was however widely criticised (ENGAGE, 2011). Rod Liddle in the Spectator for example, described Warsi's speech as "the most intellectually muddled and facile speech I think I have ever read from a senior politician" (Liddle, 2011). Possibly aggrieved that he was singled out by Warsi in her speech, Liddle reaffirmed why he believed that being Islamophobic made sense: "There are gradations of spite, violence, persecution and insecurity within Islam: but what there always is, beyond all doubt, is spite, violence, persecution and insecurity" (Liddle, 2011).

Despite the criticism, Warsi's prioritising of Islamophobia garnered immediate traction; the Coalition backing the creation of the APPG on Islamophobia and creating the Cross-Government Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hatred. This approach was not without precedent however as these same dual political mechanisms had been successfully used by New Labour to investigate and subsequently address Antisemitism (Allen, 2013c). In some ways, the use of different descriptors – Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate – for each of the political mechanisms offer an insight into the ongoing contestation of Islamophobia in the public and political spaces as also

the lack of clarity upon which the Coalition's approaches to addressing Islamophobia were founded. From speaking to key political actors involved with both (Research Notes, 2012), the decision to use 'Anti-Muslim Hate' rather than 'Islamophobia' for the Working Group was a direct response to a report by the Quilliam Foundation. A Muslim-led counter-extremism organisation, it claimed in the report that as Islamophobia had been exploited by 'Islamists and Wahhabis', if politicians and others continued to use it so it would hand a "propaganda coup" to them (Readings et al 2011, p.14). While lacking evidence to support such claims, it is interesting that various political actors did begin to openly state that Islamophobia was a term they could not endorse around the same time as the report's publication (Research Notes, 2012). By the end of the Coalition's five years in government however, political actors were again using the term Islamophobia seemingly rendering Quilliam's claims invalid.

3.3.1 The APPG on Islamophobia

Despite being launched once the Coalition was in government, it is likely the APPG would have emerged irrespective of who was in power as the necessary political support had been agreed at a closed parliamentary meeting in March earlier that year (Allen, 2013c). As informal cross-party groups, APPGs have neither official status within Parliament nor any formal endorsement from the government at the time (Parliament UK, 2010). Consequently, the APPG's association with the Coalition was rather more consequential than anything else. Nonetheless, the Coalition supported the APPG and had one of its politicians - Conservative Member of Parliament (MP), Kris Hopkins - appointed as Chair. Subsequently launched in November 2010, its remit was to: investigate the forms, manifestations and extent of discrimination against Muslims in today's Britain; review the effectiveness of relevant legislation; review existing mechanisms for recording anti-Muslim hate crimes; and, investigate the role of the media in fostering intolerance towards Muslims (APPG 2010, unpublished). Investigative rather than implementative, it was necessary for a concurrent mechanism - namely the Working Group - to be created through which recommendations could be considered and eventually implemented.

Despite being described by as 'a momentous occasion' by Hopkins at the APPG's launch (Allen, 2011a) the APPG was soon dogged by controversy. Having appointed iENGAGE - a London-based Muslim organisation sometimes referred to as ENGAGE and more recently, MEND - as Secretariat, a number of the APPG's members resigned in protest including both the Chair and Vice-Chair, Lord Janner of Braunstone (Gilligan, 2011). These were prompted by allegations in the media that individuals associated to iENGAGE were known to be 'Islamist sympathisers'. From the subsequent investigation into the controversy commissioned by the APPG (Allen, 2011a), the situation prompted the remaining members to argue that if iENGAGE did not resign then it should be forced to do so, neither of which happened. Instead, what ensued was a highly polemical and damaging series of 'tit-for-tat' exchanges involving various individuals associated with iENGAGE and its critics in the media. Aside from the polemics, some questions about iENGAGE's suitability in terms of its expertise and capacity were indeed justified. However, there is little doubt that these tangible concerns became subsumed in what became an increasingly acrimonious and public 'trial by blog', damaging the credibility of the APPG as indeed the need to address Islamophobia (Allen, 2011a). Culminating in a vote by the APPG's members, iENGAGE were eventually removed as Secretariat almost a year after the controversy first began.

Subsequently relaunched in November 2011, the APPG again mustered tentative cross-party support (Bright, 2011). This time however, little leadership or strategy was apparent. From discussions with two political actors involved in the APPG, both attribute this to the decision not to appoint an external Secretariat. Instead, Secretariat responsibilities were given to the private staff of APPG Co-Chair, who at the time was Simon Hughes (former Deputy Leader of the Liberal-Democrats and MP for Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Research Notes, 2012). Why and who made this decision remains unclear and so prompts some points for further consideration. The first concerns the extent to which the Co-Chairs felt that there were no suitable candidates for the Secretariat role. It is unlikely however that this would have been the case. At the closed Parliamentary meeting in March 2010, a broad coalition of partners came together to lobby for the APPG including organisations such as the Runnymede Trust, representatives from academic institutions including the universities of Birmingham and Exeter, and various Muslim organisations that had greater reach, longer histories, and more appropriate expertise than iENGAGE especially the Muslim Council of Britain. Interestingly, iENGAGE were not represented at the meeting in March 2010. From documents seen, iENGAGE seem to have begun to lobby individual political actors sometime after the initial meeting the precise justification for this however remaining unknown (Research Notes, 2011). Nonetheless, as the March 2010 meeting illustrates, there were various options available to the Co-Chairs as regards Secretariat.

Maybe other factors are worthy of further consideration not least the problems that might have been attributed to 'Muslim-ness' or Muslim identity. As Allen (2010b) notes, there is a tendency for Islamophobia to be seen to be both the problem and preserve of Muslims. Might this have been why it was Warsi – someone who identifies as Muslim – that was left to raise the issue of the need to address Islamophobia in the first place? As Allen explains however, while Islamophobia directly and discriminatorily targets Muslims for being 'Muslim' so too is Islamophobia seen to be the fault of Muslims because of their actions, beliefs and so on. This results in many suggesting that only Muslims can provide a solution to the problem of Islamophobia, at times reduced to discourses that infer the need to be 'less Muslim' (Allen, 2010b). If so, then might the Co-Chairs have believed that only Muslims or a Muslim organisation could have been realistically appointed as Secretariat? Albeit speculative, if Muslim-ness was also seen to be inherently problematic and therefore likely to attract similarly adverse levels of scrutiny and criticism as iENGAGE did previously, might this have been what one political actor candidly meant when suggesting that the decision not to appoint a Muslim organisation as Secretariat was the "safer option" (Research Notes, 2012)?

Having become stagnant, the APPG was again relaunched in May 2013 (Allen, 2013b). As before however, it again lacked leadership and strategy, its activities becoming increasingly sporadic and incoherent. On reflection, it is difficult to find any evidence that the APPG was able to overcome the obstacles it encountered with the initial controversy surrounding iENGAGE. This would seem to have been further compounded by the subsequent decision to appoint private secretaries as Secretariat who – like iENGAGE before them – neither had the expertise or capacity being demanded of them. This can be illustrated by a conversation with one of the private secretaries afforded Secretariat responsibilities. When asked why the APPG had failed to produce any briefings or minutes from its different meetings as per other APPGs, they explained that this was because the private secretaries had completely overlooked the need to record the oral evidence being presented as also collect the written equivalent (Research Notes, 2013). The

lack of outputs then is unsurprising as there are no known transcripts of the APPGs various meetings.

3.3.2 The Cross-Government Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hate

The Working Group was launched in January 2012 and as before, would work in collaboration with the APPG. Comprising independent members that included representatives of Muslim organisations, similar from non-Muslim civil society organisations, imams and academics, all were deemed to have been identified on the basis of having relevant expertise and knowledge. Housed in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Working Group also included representatives from all governmental departments, the Association of Chief Police Officers, and the private secretaries of individual politicians with particular interest. While never being formally ratified, the terms of reference initially circulated stated that the Working Group would: work with key partners and government departments to make recommendations for government and others to reduce Islamophobia; respond to local or international events; review trends in anti-Muslim sentiment and hatred; increase and improve the reporting and recording of Islamophobia; and report progress to Parliament (Working Group, unpublished). In contrast to the APPG, the Working Group appeared well structured and soon established a work programme that included various sub-groups that reflected the expertise of the independent members for example, the media, data, and research among others. While each were active, as illustrated by the media sub-group quickly meeting with the Office of Communications (the UK's communications regulator, OFCOM), the Press Complaints Commission, and the Society of Editors, there was also a lack of any clear remit about what the sub-groups were ultimately working towards, whether briefings, recommendations or something else.

This also illustrates the general lack of clarity about the precise function of the Working Group among the independent members. While some understood it to be a mechanism through which the Coalition could be held to account over certain issues this was contested by others. Consequently, the lack of any agreed terms of reference was problematic in that it detrimentally impacted on both internal dynamics as also external activities. An example of this became evident when only three independent members deemed it appropriate to put their names to a letter to the then Education Minister, Michael Gove criticising his response to the Operation Trojan Horse hoax allegations about an 'Islamist takeover' of Birmingham schools (Clarke, 2014). Those doing so believed Gove should have been met with and duly questioned, the remaining members preferring instead to monitor developments (Research Notes, 2014). Similar disagreements also emerged as regards the extent to which the Working Group needed a public profile. Discussed at length, advocates of a public profile maintained that among others, this would help raise awareness of Islamophobia, attribute the Working Group with greater political influence, and offer a more informed and objective voice to the media. The arguments of those who disagreed can be captured in the comments of one member who stated that there was no good argument to convince him of "putting my head above the parapet" (Research Notes, 2013). Resultantly, the Working Group not only continued to question the precise function it served but so too remained largely invisible both inside and out of government.

Questions also arose about how and by whom decisions were made in relation to the Working Group. An example of this can be seen in relation to the decision-making process about a piece of research requested by the Working Group. Culminating in submitting a formal research

proposal to the DCLG in 2013, the independent members identified the need to establish a comprehensive evidence base relating to Islamophobia in the contemporary British setting. Agreed by the DCLG, a decision was subsequently taken to have an intern from the University of Warwick with no known relevant expertise or knowledge undertake the research, overlooking the Working Group's academic members as also the opportunity to tender (Research Notes, 2014). Nonetheless, the research was duly completed and the findings were presented to the Working Group in May 2014. Despite unanimous agreement that the findings should be made publicly available in the form of a report, a further decision to the contrary was made some weeks later. To date, the research remains unpublished as also the reasons why.

The Working Group encountered other problems also, one of which can be illustrated by focusing on the need to review trends in terms of Islamophobia as also improve its recording. Much of this depended on the data that was to be provided by the recently launched Tell MAMA (an acronym for 'measuring anti-Muslim attacks'). Funded by the Coalition, MAMA was established to provide a third-party reporting service for victims and witnesses of Islamophobia to record details and obtain further advice and support where appropriate. Similar to the service provided by the Community Safety Trust (CST) for victims of Antisemitism, the data collected was to be published annually from which trends and developments would be duly responded to (CST, 2015). The CST has also used this data to lobby politicians, the police and media among others. Unlike the CST however, MAMA was publicly scrutinised and subsequently attacked shortly after its launch seemingly giving credence to Warsi's observation that Muslims and Islam are treated quite differently from other religions and their communities. Indeed, one might question the underlying motivations given that those attacking MAMA were the same few individuals that had previously attacked iENGAGE. Noting the APPG's investigation, it observed that these same individuals had historically had an "uneasy relationship with some Muslims, their communities and organisations" (Allen 2011a, p.42). As regards the journalist Andrew Gilligan for instance, the report noted how he routinely used the term 'Islamist' as "others might use an insult. Branding an individual, organisation or institution an 'Islamist' or an 'Islamist ally' carries with it a slur on the recipient" (Allen 2011a, p.44).

MAMA continued to attract criticism. Following the killing of the British serviceman Lee Rigby by two Islamists on the streets of London in May 2013, Fiyaz Mughal - MAMA's CEO and original independent member of the Working Group - released data to the media in support of claims he made that there had been a dramatic rise in retaliatory Islamophobic attacks since. Reported widely, MAMA's critics questioned the validity of the data and lodged a formal complaint with the Press Complaints Commission. Subsequently investigated, it ruled that MAMA had indeed exaggerated its claims (Gilligan, 2014). While the investigation was ongoing however, the Coalition announced that it was to cease funding to MAMA (Gilligan, 2013). While outside the remit of the Working Group, the decision had ramifications. Not only did Mughal resign from the Working Group but so too was a decision made that MAMA's data should no longer be used in any official capacity (Research Notes, 2014). Given that MAMA's data has since been independently verified by the University of Teeside (Copsey et al, 2013; Feldman & Littler, 2014) the decision would appear to have been somewhat prematurely given the detrimental impact it had as regards working towards the better recording and monitoring of Islamophobia. It also prompts questions about the political influence certain external actors appear to be able to exert as regards Islamophobia, Muslims and Islam.

In terms of successes, one might consider the sub-group that sought to work towards establishing Srebrenica Genocide Memorial Day the first of which was held in 2013 and have continued since. Unlike other sub-groups however, this was largely driven by one independent member who appeared to have been working towards before having been appointed to the Working Group (Research Notes, 2012). Similar 'positive image' initiatives were also endorsed by the Working Group, including the Big Iftar (Department for Communities & Local Government, 2014) and We Remember Too (We Remember Too, 2013) which sought to invite non-Muslims to participate in iftar (the ending of the fast during the month of Ramadan) and raising awareness about Muslims who had fought as part of the Allied Forces in World War II respectively. While neither initiative was an outcome of the Working Group's activities, they were publicised as tangible 'successes' in later cross-governmental communications (2014 DCLG email, unpublished). While contestable, it is the nature of the initiatives that can be seen to be problematic as illustrated by Hall's (1978) study of anti-racism initiatives in the 1970s. For him, similar initiatives tended to be premised on the basis the substitution of positive for negative images or representations would have a beneficial outcome. The outcome however is somewhat different. For Hall, because these initiatives are overly simplistic and lack any intrinsic value those receiving the positive images typically dismiss them as being phoney and patronising. The extent to which these might have impact in addressing Islamophobia must therefore be questioned especially when no other outputs, recommendations or indeed any other form of intervention emerged out of the Working Group.

3.4 Coalition Discourses About Muslims and Islam

As studies have shown, political discourses can be utilised as conduits through which unwritten and unofficial policies and policy-thinking are aired, affirmed, reiterated and reinforced (Fischer & Forester, 1993; Becker & Bryman, 2004). Given the marked shift in the focus of the Coalition's discourses about Muslims and Islam over its five years in government, so it might be necessary to consider the extent to which this was relevant as regards addressing Islamophobia. As before, the Coalition's political discourses were overwhelmingly positive soon forming the government, most notably in recognising a particularistic Islamophobia. This changed however, to the extent that its discourses became increasingly similar to its New Labour predecessor. This is illustrated by the Coalition's 2013 report into extremism (Extremism Task Force, 2013) and recent speeches by Home Secretary, Theresa May. In both, while Islamophobia was referred to it was however framed within wider discourses about counter-terrorism and extremism: "extremism of all kinds, including the Islamophobia and neo-Nazism espoused by the murderer of Mohammed Saleem to justify his terrorist attacks against mosques in the West Midlands" (Extremism Task Force 2013, p.1). The similarities between May's and Gordon Brown's speeches are however striking, both occurring towards the end of their respective governments. While the primary focus of their speeches was about the need for additional counter-terrorism legislation, both included statements about the need to incorporate formal interventions within that legislation to simultaneously address Islamophobia. According to May, the Coalition would require the police to record Islamophobic hate crime in line with Antisemitism (McIntyre, 2015). As with New Labour beforehand, so the Coalition's discourses moved from recognising Islamophobia to something that appeared to be rather more symptomatic and consequential of terrorism and extremism.

Further similarities between the Coalition and New Labour are evident elsewhere also. Aside from terrorism and extremism, both government's discourses disproportionately focused on

what Parekh (2006) refers to as the 'problems' attributed to Muslims and Islam. As regards the Coalition, this included: Jeremy Browne questioning whether the state should protect young Muslim women from having the veil 'imposed' on them in schools (Swinford, 2013); Jeremy Hunt suggesting similar in the health sector and the right of patients to 'see the face' of clinical staff (Cooper, 2013); and Michael Gove appointing Peter Clarke - the former head of Scotland Yard's counter-terrorism command - to investigate the Operation Trojan Horse hoax (Peachey, 2014). Interesting that the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police condemned the latter as a 'desperately unfortunate appointment' given the message it sent to Muslim communities (Pidd & Dodd, 2014). Similar too with New Labour and the numerous examples cited by Allen (2010b) including: John Reid's call for Muslim parents to look out for the 'tell-tale signs' of extremism; ministers at the Department of Education issuing guidelines to universities urging them to 'spy' on Muslim and 'Muslim-looking' students; Ruth Kelly announcing that Muslim organisations needed to do more to defend core British values; and Jack Straw's comments that the niqab was a barrier to integration. For both governments, Muslims and Islam were repeatedly referred to as being problematic.

As with New Labour, there was also resonance between the discourses of the Coalition and some within the far-right milieu (Allen, 2013a). A good illustration of this is Prime Minister David Cameron's 2011 speech in Munich. Declaring the end of British state multiculturalism, Cameron blamed this on the threat posed by Islamist extremism (New Statesman, 2011). While Cameron was saying this, a rally was taking place in Luton to celebrate the second anniversary of the English Defence League (EDL), a far-right, counter-jihadi street movement (Allen, 2011b). At the rally, the EDL's leaders delivered speeches that also focused on the perceived threat to Britain being posed by Islamist extremism. In the media's reporting of the speeches, not only did the latter gain publicity for clearly resonating with that of Cameron but so too did acquire legitimacy also. Reiterating Allen, "the messages taken...categorically reinforced the idea that Muslims and Islam were something that was causing 'us' problems: a problem that was threatening 'our' culture, 'our' values, 'our' way of life" (2010a, p.230). As was shown previously, such discourses not only reinforce pre-existing fears and anxieties about Muslims and Islam but so too do they place Muslims and their communities under increased pressure, potentially increasing feelings of anger, alienation and mistrust while also giving credence to extremist ideologies (Briggs et al, 2006; Spalek & Lambert, 2008; Khan, 2009).

4. Analysis

Both commendable and promising, Warsi's speech was undoubtedly unprecedented in the British political spaces. Creating exceedingly high expectations that the Coalition would be the first government in British political history to 'get it' as regards addressing Islamophobia, quite the opposite was true in that it comprehensively failed to make any significant impact as regards political interventions, whether formal or informal. Putting in place political mechanisms that were both resonant and replicate of the blueprint that had previously been successful in addressing Antisemitism, the same was not true for Islamophobia. In terms of formal interventions, it could be argued that the Coalition achieved even less than its New Labour predecessor, a government that Allen (2013c) roundly criticised for its failure to adequately respond and subsequently address Islamophobia also. While so, New Labour did however oversee the introduction of a number of formal interventions that at least had the potential to indirectly address Islamophobia including extending the equalities framework to

include protection against discrimination on the basis of religion or belief and the introduction of legislation that made incitement to religious hatred unlawful.

As regards informal interventions, despite the criticisms posited here some of the Working Group's independent members were confident that the likes of Srebrenica Genocide Memorial Day, the Big Iftar and We Remember Too would have a positive impact as regards addressing Islamophobia (Research Notes, 2014). This however remains open to debate. At the micro level, the impact of these initiatives is likely to have been negligible given informal interventions have been shown to have the greatest impact in addressing discriminatory phenomena at the macro level (Bhavani et al, 2005). Even at the macro, the impact of these initiatives has to be questionable given the lack of reach each had. Factor in that they were also never formally endorsed by the Coalition and the potential would appear to be lessened even further, lacking the authority and credibility that would likely to be necessary. To recall Hall (1976), it is also unknown the extent to which those who did engage and participate in the initiatives saw them as being positive and authentic or as he put it, phoney and patronising.

Having publicly prioritised the need to address Islamophobia, why then did the fail in this respect? From monitoring and analysing the Coalition's approaches, three broad considerations would appear to be relevant. The first relates to different aspects that might be described as the political. Given the Coalition's early discourses, so it would seem that the political will to address Islamophobia was indeed evident; publicly at least. From participating in both the APPG and Working Group however, a pertinent observation is how few politicians appeared were keenly supportive. For the APPG, the driving force was Simon Hughes and to a lesser degree Jack Straw, who incidentally was not a member of the Coalition government. For the Working Group, the same could be said of Warsi. It must be noted however that almost all governmental departments were represented at the Working Group's meetings and so a cross-governmental awareness at least was apparent. The question however is the extent to which this awareness was ever transformed into the necessary political leadership that Warsi stated was so desperately needed. Little evidence exists to suggest that it did.

Instead, it is worth considering the Coalition's public (and political) discourses and the extent to which these rather more fed into - if not necessarily reinforced - than addressed Islamophobia especially in its ideological form. Bhavani et al (2005) offer a useful illustration. Having monitored British political discourses about 'race' and racism, they noted that many political actors routinely deployed discourses that focused on the perceived 'problems of race' as a means of negating or deflecting attention from political discourses that were focusing on the need to address racism and its causes. Given the shift in the Coalition's political discourses from the need to address Islamophobia to focusing on the perceived 'problems' of Muslims and Islam towards the end of its term of government, some evidence with the findings of Bhavani et al would seem to exist. If so, then might it be necessary to question the authenticity of the Coalition's discourses and seeming commitment to addressing Islamophobia? Political theory relating to functionalism might offer an insight. In this respect, religion is reduced to the political function the religion itself, its institutions, communities and individual actors are able to perform. Consequently, function is determined and managed within the political spaces by political actors and institutions and not by the religions, their institutions, communities or individual actors. Resultantly, religion and the religious are not only negated but so too become secondary to politics and the political. As such, was it possible that the discourses and political mechanisms put in place to address Islamophobia might have had an alternative function?

Might that function have been one that sought to bring Muslims 'on-side' as a means of supporting the political process of addressing the 'problems' of Muslims and Islam that were seen to be rather more pressing and important to those within the political spaces?

The second broad consideration centres on those co-opted to support the Coalition's approaches to addressing Islamophobia. While the blueprint for addressing Islamophobia was the one employed to address Antisemitism, informal discussions with different Muslim actors highlight a number of factors that not only highlight the inherent differences between Britain's Jewish and Muslim communities but so too have a determinative impact as regards political process and participation. These variously included socio-economic status, educational attainment, demography and size, diversity of ethnicities, sectarian and theological tensions, migration and settlement histories, and geopolitics among others (Research Notes, 2014). There were somewhat more observable differences also, illustrated by a meeting between the Antisemitism and Islamophobia Working Groups in 2013. Attending on behalf of the Antisemitism Working Group were three independent members each of whom had specific expertise: about Britain's Jewish communities, the British legal system, and Jewish theology. In contrast, twelve independent members attended on behalf of the Islamophobia Working Group for whom it would have been difficult to identify specific expertise (Research Notes, 2013). To what extent might the means by which British Muslims engage with government – process, identification, representation and so on – not only be different to other religious minority communities but so too rather more problematic? What about how the Working Group was constructed: was membership determined by political actors, by expertise (as the original intimations suggested), or was it by Muslims, their organisations and individual actors themselves? While unknown, it is maybe pertinent to reiterate that a number of the original Working Group members were affiliated to the Muslim Leadership Panel (What Do They Know, 2012). What impact might this have had?

Another observable difference was evident in a comment made by one of the Antisemitism Working Group's independent members who said that most important when engaging with politicians was the need for a unified front (Research Notes, 2013). As he explained, the Antisemitism Working Group never allowed personal, community or theological differences to become something for politicians to exploit. This was not observable among the Islamophobia Working Group. On the contrary, some independent members routinely criticised certain Muslim organisations, 'types' of Muslim, and numerous named individual Muslims also (Research Notes, 2012 & 2014). These also run counter to Jones et al's (2014) study which claims that British Muslims who are politically engaged neither want to 'compete' against each other nor appear to be 'self-appointed'. Given the disproportionate number of independent members affiliated to the Muslim Leadership Panel, the claims made in a letter to Eric Pickles (What Do They Know, 2012) – the ministerial lead for the DCLG where the Working Group was housed – also run counter to both the approach of the Antisemitism Working Group and Jones et al's study. There were also observable incidents when independent members who were known to identify as being Muslim seemingly internalised the perceived 'problems' of Muslims and Islam. An example of note included an independent member who identified as being Muslim seemingly arguing against the need for political interventions to address Islamophobia on the basis that the need to address the widespread homophobia and sexism he claimed existed within Britain's Muslims communities was more pressing (Research Notes, 2014). Other similar examples were observed.

The final consideration relates to the influence of external actors, in particular the handful of journalists and media commentators previously referred to. While the focus on them here has been necessarily brief, it is suggested that a more detailed investigation which analyses their respective articles and comment pieces might be as salient as it would be informative not least given the seemingly undue influence they appear to have had as regards shaping and determining various decisions and functions relating to the political mechanisms and processes as also certain Muslim organisations and individuals. In this respect, an observation made in the APPG's investigation into the Secretariat furore appears relevant:

“questions [need] to be asked about some of the issues they pursue, some of the criticisms they posit, some of the language and terminologies they employ also...it is also right to highlight and consider the use and attribution of value-loaded terminologies and language, to ask whether the criticisms and accusations that were made within such value-loaded frames were employed deliberately to bring down iENGAGE, the APPG or both” (Allen 2011a, p.47).

This final point is especially important. While it might be argued that as an investigative journalist, Andrew Gilligan for example is right to focus on ‘Muslim’ issues, organisations and actors it cannot be overlooked how he does so while routinely and repeatedly deploying certain terminologies and descriptors that function as mere slurs and insults (Allen, 2011a). Given this is the case, why then – when it is known that he is seemingly insulting to those he is investigating – does he continue to have such an unwieldy influence? Maybe the premise for any further investigation might be Warsi's observation that Muslims and Islam are spoken about and referred to somewhat differently from other religions and their respective communities.

5. Conclusions

When the Coalition government came to power in May 2010, it did appear to be a government that had indeed ‘got it’ as regards addressing Islamophobia. Hindsight however suggests something quite different, no more seemingly ‘getting it’ than any previous British government. In this respect, the Coalition categorically failed. As the preceding considerations suggest, there would appear to be no single factor that was wholly causal or verifiable. Instead, a far more complex and contested picture emerges, one that is at times as subjective as indeed it is speculative and which has too many unknowns. The ‘momentous occasion’ spoken about at the APPG's 2011 launch now appears as overblown as the opportunity to address Islamophobia appears to have been lost. With the change of government in 2015 – from a Conservative-led Coalition to a Conservative majority government – and an even weaker version of that in 2017, one can only speculate on whether addressing Islamophobia will remain a priority. The prospects do not look good however. While the APPG has – at best – an uncertain future, the Working Group would appear to be no more. Whether other mechanisms will be developed to fill the void left by them looks increasingly doubtful. Worryingly, the demise of the APPG and Working Group is occurring at a time when micro-level Islamophobia appears to be on the rise. According London's Metropolitan Police, street-level Islamophobic crimes have increased by 65 per cent in the past year (BBC News, 2016). Without the political leadership referred to in Warsi's ‘dinner table test’ speech, it is unlikely that Islamophobia will be addressed in the British political spaces and by default, in the British public spaces also. It is right to question therefore, despite discourses and statements to the contrary, whether the Coalition government

did indeed ever 'get it' as regards addressing Islamophobia and maybe, any British government in the foreseeable future ever will.

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