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International Journal of Safety
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Islamophobia, Racism and Critical Race Theory

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Islamophobia, Racism and Critical Race Theory

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Abstract

Critical race theory (CRT) in today's multi-cultural society seems somewhat of a difficult concept to appreciate. The notion that racism and inequality exists regardless of any group formation advocating racism in the 21st century illustrates race and inequality play a significant role in western society. Many critical race theorists in the field suggest that racism transcends across white elites and working class white individuals, regardless of any motivations proposed at government policy level and local level to eradicate racism becomes inept and difficult to implement. Studies by critical race theorists such as Saeed (2007) have argued that the fundamental assumptions made about an unjust and unequal society are dominated by White Eurocentric's.

Colour blindness within a multicultural society where Black Minority Ethnic (BME) individuals are targeted for their religious ethical and moral beliefs, with the growing tensions of Islamaphobia. Today the general impression of Islam in the West is one that of a sectarian and fundamentalist religion. A religion which oppresses women, advocates values which are outdated and medieval and supports violence. However, on the contrary, in Islam, there is no concept of 'Fundamentalism' BME individuals struggle to be accepted throughout life and are undermined in every aspect of their life. Critical race theorists believe that race should occupy the focal positioning within legal, educational or social policy, Gilborn (2006). This paper will begin with the concept that critical race theorist purport with the view that macro and micro aggressions exist within society are ignored regardless of the macro and micro level policy implementation at government and local level. The paper will explore, the belief that Black Minority Ethnic individuals are discriminated against regardless of a white individuals desire not to be racist unconsciously in essence signifies the understanding that critical race theory constructs are embedded in society and racism is at the heart of western society and culture. Finally, the paper will demonstrate how to build good relationships between people in society in general and develop a better understanding of the Islamic society in the west.

Key words: Critical race theory (CRT), Islamophobia, culture, society, discrimination

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Introduction

Critical race theory is a term which is far from a new concept, and not something that has materialised recently. The concept of Islamophobia is something that has become a key term which has been coined from recent events starting with the events of 9/11. Today there is the notion that 'Islam' is seen by the 'West' as being at war and the two are not prepared to be seen as willing to work with or understand one another's view point. Gilborn, (2006) states that there is a clear case of alarmism amongst those in positions of authority within the western governments. Islam is seen as the aggressor towards western civilisation, Gilborn (2006). It seems that being a Muslim on the one hand and living in the West are considered as unworkable by some individuals. Gilborn (2006) further argues that there are fundamental concerns of the impact Islam is concerned with the oppression of political and social interaction. In terms of 'Islam' there is a notion that it empowers a myriad of ethnicities and varying social groups. The West is far from the aggressor by any stretch of the imagination – however, the perception seems to be that the West is against Islam and therefore should not be deemed as being fundamentally the root cause of Islamophobia, Saeed (2007).

However, it is imperative for the West to consider that majority of Muslims would want to live in a peaceful environment – harmoniously within a multicultural environment. It is important to also highlight here that Muslims are faced with the dilemma of dealing with on a certain level the racial element to their existence and additionally being attacked for being Muslim. There have been and to some extent still are significant level of relations between the Christian and Muslims. Therefore addition to this Islam should be viewed as the religion which should be appreciated and accepted as the fundamental religion of understanding and above all a religion which is not only tolerant but respectful of others regardless of their faith or gender. Regardless of this notion Islam is seen as a threat to civilisation and is connected to terrorism through all channels of society. Feldman, (2012) additionally to this the notion of Eurocentrism and the view that fundamentalism is associated with Islam and is now Islam is becoming known for not the positive notions of the religion but in-fact is seen as an aggressive and negative impact on society as a whole, Ali (2007). Therefore, considering Islam as the threat to humanity and civilisation as an entirety is something that has become the norm for all Muslims to have to focus on, Carr (2006).

The notion that Islam is a repressive and rejecting religion has become the norm. Critical race theory is significantly evident as it is viewed that the West rejects Islamism and that Islam is seen as a construct which rejects the West, Yilmaz (2012). There is a clear perception now that Islam is no more than a terrorist institution for which the mass media add fuel to the fire in terms of coverage of the Muslim world. Again from the critical race theory perspective Islam is seen as less than a single abstraction and becomes something very symbolic, Werbner (2005). Multiculturalism has created variety in the western society where many varying different cultures and religions aim to live together harmoniously, Klung (2012).

Critical race theory looks at the multicultural construct and has identified that Muslims and Non-Muslims are inevitably at conflict with each other which is something that is engrained

with human beings. There is ingrained hostility towards Muslims and that of contention towards Muslims. Feldman, (2012) critical race theory illustrates how Islamophobia has shown a clear return of the repressed within the UK. From the critical race theory perspective the notion that the West needs always to have an enemy therefore Islam seems to be the enemy which according to critical race theorists is illustrates clearly how modern society within the West has used Islam as an escapist route for Islamophobia to exist, Carr (2006). From the critical race theory perspective the prejudice that Muslims are now facing are prejudices that in general the sociological construct established by the West has created an ideology for Islamophobia.

The view of Muslims in the media has further illustrated that Muslims are politically and socially inept within society. In response to political and educational constructs the situation that Muslims are faced with now simply shows Islamophobia reconsidered but in a more dysfunctional manner, Klung (2012). There are significant concerns in terms of the issues Muslims are now facing. In context with what is going on in terms of the Arab Spring and recent events with ISIS there has been a significant degree of prejudice depending on historical constructs which have become well established in the immigrant community, Feldman (2012). The critical race theory construct has in many ways become somewhat of a reality within Europe. For example France no longer tolerates the wearing of the headscarf, there is significant anti-Arab racism within America, Klung (2012). It is important to stress here that the Muslim societies have too much of an extent that Muslims and Islam has been used as a tool for Western countries.

An example stated by Gilborn (2006) argues that Russia lead Muslims in World War 1, Russia supported Jihad and national liberation from the 1920s to the 1970s, America financially aided the Afghan Mujahidin during the 1980s. Those individuals who are Muslims value and support their identity of following Islam. This diversity of history have in many ways created an identity for Muslims.

Islam provides a positivist value for all Muslims. Muslims see Islam as an identity which allows them to be at peace with themselves and with others. Muslims in light of the notion critical race theory experience a significant degree of common identity with Muslims who are oppressed elsewhere for example within Palestine. Within Islam there is no difference between gender and classes, between those with power and wealth and those without.

The notion of fundamentalism whether national or religious advocates the construct that Islam is not a peaceful religion, this is further emphasised by the critical race theory view that being a Muslim and having an identity associated with Islam is something which the west now considers as fundamentalist and tarnishes all Muslims with the same view as the terrorists. Therefore the West is implying that there is a commonality between the terrorist groups and Islam. Most challenging of all is the interaction between the Arabs, Pakistani and Bengali communities where there is a marked commonality.

In the main terms of critical race theory this commonality is questioned by the west. The critical race theory notion questions the analytic challenge the identity, tradition and religion

associated with ethnicity and class. Islam is the sole identity for many Muslims in the Western world. Critical race theory advocates that Islamophobia or anti-Muslimism is considered as a disaggregation in terms of prejudice against Muslims, as argued by Saeed (2007). Critical race theory also clearly outlines the notion that Islam is not threatening to win large segments of Western European society to its faith. However, the West believes that Muslims are trying to conquer the West.

The West needs to appreciate that Islam and Muslims are not a religion which is the enemy of the West. The West is as critical race theorists believe miss the point and do not understand that Islam is not a religion who is the enemy of the state. Critical race theorists also believe that Muslims do have grievances which should be addressed by the West. Critical race theorists also state that Islamic critique of the West has very little done with religion. Within the Western society, immigration, employment, racial prejudice, anti-immigration violence should not be associated towards Islam. The West should not overlook the connotations associated towards Muslims. Islamophobia like imperialism is used by the west to silence critics of national states and elites. The West has argued continuously that Islamism is a form of protest, political and discursive which is external domination, it is further argued that Western social and political power advocates Islam should be less vocal in a Western society.

Figure 1: own elaboration

Figure one is an own elaboration of the way critical race theorists see Islam through the eyes of Western society. There are a number of associations with Islam which are perceived as negative experiences by Muslims. Continuous victimisation has been an ongoing negative experience for all Muslims ranging from Muslim women wearing the hijab to Muslim men keeping beards. The Arab Spring has allowed the West to support the context as stated above that Islam is a violent and aggressive religion and should not be tolerated, thus associating Islam with war and intolerance. This has fuelled the aggression and persecution of Muslims throughout Western society. Additional to this the 9/11 attacks have created an increased level of hatred, lack of understanding amongst the West. With additional concepts of fundamentalism being advertised in the media have signified a level of hatred amongst Western societies towards Muslims, Werner (2005). Many Muslims now are fearful of further persecution and in many instances have had to endure abuse and attacks even within places of worship, Carr (2006). Islamophobia has increased within Europe. This is worrying and daunting as we are in an age of what was deemed to be past the ethos of racism, Feldman (2012).

The most worrying and difficult view to grasp is that those individuals who are Islamophobic actually believe that it is a positive belief to encapsulate. Carr (2006) states that those who consider themselves as Islamophobic actually do not view their beliefs as either having a racist connotation or a xenophobic attachment. Islamophobics view themselves as individuals who are defending democracy and valuing human rights with the view that Islam is a religion which is incompatible with society.

Interestingly enough over the previous years the increase of Islamophobia can be seen more clearly and transparently, Ali (2011). Anti-Islamic websites have increased and at the same time become more aggressive and in particular relating all negative media to Islam and stating quite clearly that Muslims are the perpetrators which then reinforces their belief that Islam is a negative religious construct and should not be associated with religion, Ali (2011). Within European countries like Germany there is a very definitive view that Muslim immigrants are dumbing down Germany.

Additionally to this German stance Muslims are seen as wanting to take over the Western values and impose Islamic views on all. Neo-Nazis views and values have increased significantly throughout Europe. The recent protests in Dresden have shown significance in terms of how German feeling is that Muslims are creating an “Islamisation” of Germany, Klung (2012). This march was far from a neo-Nazi construct or radical right-wing individuals it is important to emphasise here that many of the protestors were normal citizens. Interestingly it is important to stipulate here that there only a handful of Muslims living in Dresden. Again Islamophobia does not end in Germany. There are similar views within other European countries like the Netherlands; Western Europe including the UK has seen an increased rise of Islamophobia which does not seem to be dwindling in growth on the contrary this growth is spreading its wings throughout the western society Klung (2012). Individuals who have Arabic or Muslim names have seen an increase in the level of hate

crime against them. Islamophobia cannot and should not be ignored, Klung (2012). Those traditional views associated with racism are now more focused on religion. The view that Muslims want to takeover is therefore isolating Islam and creating an increased view that if you are against Muslims you are in fact a freedom fighter, Yilmaz (2012).

It is now essential to consider what is causing this Islamophobic view? Negative events such as the 9/11 and other terrorist activities have not helped situations and understandings amongst Muslims, Feldman (2012). Muslims are considered as scapegoats. There is a considerable difficulty where living in a society which is in the view of globalisation and where there is an increased anger and hatred about the increased level of immigrants within society. The Dresden demonstrations were viewed as a direct response to the phenomenon of Islamisation. It is essential that now this concept of Islamisation is taken seriously. Government bodies are now beginning to realise that there is some issue related to Islam and being a Muslim. Prior to marches directed against Muslims government bodies were quick to relate negative concepts to general complaints rather than criticising the racist sentiments related to the negative complaints, Klung (2012).

Further to this Islamophobia in Germany should not be considered as an expression of anger but really nothing more than racism, Kung (2012). The Danish cartoon shows the latest form of Islamophobia again produced in Europe, essentially and importantly this has not developed or come from America. There have since been a significant number of protests against the offensive cartoon publications. The offensive cartoons were not just an adhoc artist drawing images of the Prophet but an neo-conservative newspaper who actually commissioned artists to draw such images. Further to this these cartoons were far from a mistake created by an ignorant individual. The aim of the cartoons were to insult and inflame Muslims at a global level. The cartoons were aimed at creating incitement.

A number of significant events have occurred since the cartoon drawings, the Danish embassy in Lebanon was set on fire, the country's flags were burned and a number of deaths have resulted because of the cartoons. Muslims again around the globe have launched peaceful and lawful protests. Boycotts of Danish products were launched in the Middle East. Regardless of the fact that Muslims carried out peaceful protests Norway, Germany and France became Islamophobic frenzy where the cartoons were republished. Yimaz (2012) has stated that apart from the negative construct created by the cartoons which it was very clear were deeply offensive for Muslims these cartoons became cartoons which the west was stating were a "freedom of expression". Equally absolute condemnation should have been seen from all western government bodies. The world media ensured that any negativity concerned with Islam and violent protests by Muslims enraged by cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) was seen as a negative light.

Regardless of governments around the world having laws which are against anti-Semitic caricatures, speech and writing which really does mean that the cartoons and those creating the cartoons should have been punished through the judiciary. One can clearly argue here that the cartoon caricatures are not a freedom of expression but a direct attack on Muslims and in particular a fuel for those you are Islamophobic as argued by Yimaz (2012).

It is evident that the fear and hatred relating to Islam and Muslims is now considered by many individuals living in the west as an acceptable form of racism. Muslims who clearly are being victimised and clearly victimised through Islamophobia are not being appropriate support by authorities and any attempt to bring Islamopobic individuals to court are dismissed. 9/11 attacks saw a significant increase in the level of public opinion against Muslims. Numerous Muslims have been arrested since the tragedy. Within the Council of American-Islamic Relations have reported a significant level of problems associated with anti-Muslim discrimination within the work situation, schools, restaurants and within everyday life.

Government policies and media frenzy has created a global negative opinion of Islam and Muslims. Coupled with this terrorist actions by individuals who are bent on creating a negative and detrimental impact on Islam and Muslims has created an additional and increased negative impact on all Muslims and Islam. Islamophobia is based on ignorance by individuals. There is a view by western individuals that Muslims are bloodthirsty misogynist and violent savages. The closing and isolation of Muslims within society has created a closing to Islam and opening the views to Islamophobia. With additional terrorist attacks the west is closing their minds to Islam.

In conclusion like racism and anti-Semitism, Islamophobia is detrimental to all concerned. It is in fact eroding society to a detrimental level and eroding each individual civil liberties globally. Within Europe the minority community is being isolated even further and inflaming xenophobia. Islamophobia is responsible for a number of significant concerns, Islamophobia has created misunderstandings that had added fuel and hatred. Islamophobia is today's clear and accepted method of racism. Muslims are now expected to defend all aspects of being Muslim and defend their religion. This is the very challenge that Muslims are faced with. Muslims were not the main cause of Islamophobia nor can they fight such a growing negative impact on society. Fighting Islamophobia is and should be the responsibility of all, bridges should be built around the world and this is no small feat.

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