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Victims of Anti-Muslim Hate

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About the Author

Imran Awan is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology in the Centre for Applied Criminology, at Birmingham City University.

He is an expert in the areas of Policing Muslim communities, the impact of counter-terrorism policies upon Muslim communities and the emergence of online anti-Muslim hate. His work has made a significant contribution towards criminological, social policy and socio-legal discourse with regards Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate.

He has published widely in the area of online Muslim hate, counter-terrorism related issues and the impact of Policing Muslim communities. He recently co-edited the book *'Policing Cyber Hate, Cyber Threats and Cyber Terrorism'* published by Ashgate (2012) which is a ground breaking text that provides a comprehensive and detailed understanding of cyber related crimes including cyber hate.

Imran's innovative and cutting edge research has led to an international profile where his work has been showcased across the world including in Europe and Asia where he has been invited to deliver guest lectures and present his research findings to a wider audience. In March 2010, Imran was invited, by the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism to London to discuss best practice and policy methods in tackling extremism and in 2011, he was invited by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to take part in a review of UK Government counter-terrorism legislation which examined the impact it was having upon Muslim communities.

He has just completed a research project that examined the impact of counter-terrorism legislation upon Muslim families in Cardiff.

As well as being a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, he is an ambassador for the Make Justice Work Campaign, and is the Director of the Ethnic Minority Research Network in Criminology.

Imran's latest co-edited book *'Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing'* was published by Ashgate in August 2013.

Imran sits on the editorial board of a number of high impact refereed journals and is a Member of a number of Criminological, Political and Socio-Legal societies. He has commentated on major terrorism related cases affecting the Muslim community for both Radio and TV. He is also a regular contributor for the Guardian, the New Statesman, the Independent, the Huffington Post, Al-Jazeera, The Tribune and the Conversation.

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SUMMARY

The Woolwich attack in May (2013) has led to a spate of hate crimes committed against Muslim communities. These include Muslim women being targeted for wearing the headscarf (Hijab) and mosques being vandalized[1]. These types of hate crimes include more specifically graffiti being scrawled against mosque walls and in some cases petrol bombs being left outside mosques and community centre's being set ablaze[2]. All these incidents have led to a heightened atmosphere for British Muslims, fearful of reprisal attacks against them because of the Woolwich incident. However, whilst street level Islamophobia, remains an important area of investigation, a more equally disturbing picture is emerging with the rise in online anti-Muslim abuse. Indeed, statistics from the non-profit organisation, Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) has shown that the majority of anti-Muslim hate crimes reported to them have occurred online. Similarly, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has revealed that they too have seen a rise in complaints of online anti-Muslim incidents since the death of Drummer, Lee Rigby.

This report argues that online Islamophobia must be given the same level of attention and resources as street level Islamophobia. The danger is that this type of cyber hate committed against Muslim communities could lead to actual incidents offline and therefore it should be one of the key priorities for our government and indeed the APPG on Islamophobia to develop a strong knowledge-base in this area.

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[1] BBC News (2013a). *Al-Rahma Islamic Centre destroyed in 'hate crime' fire* [Online] Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-22785074 Accessed 5 September 2013.
[2] Saul, H. (2013). Police call home-made bomb outside Walsall's Ashia Mosque a 'hate crime' and draft in counter-terror police, *The Independent*, [Online] Available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/police-call-homemade-bomb-outside-walsalls-ashia-mosque-a-hate-crime-and-draft-in-counterterror-police-8670548.html Accessed 4 September 2013.

Both online and offline incidents are intertwined and it is this synergy which the author of this report argues needs to be addressed. Victims of anti-Muslim hate do not simply consist of offline reported incidents where people or buildings are targeted by 'lone wolfs' or 'hate groups' that are committed by the far right as a means to antagonize Muslim communities. The victims of online anti-Muslim abuse remain less visible yet they must also endure anti-Muslim abuse which is having an impact upon them both emotionally and psychologically. It is crucial that we recognize this now and provide those victims with support-led mechanisms and look to challenge this type of online behaviour.

As the literature on offline incidents both at an academic and political level remains rich, a further robust examination of online Islamophobia is required. A detailed analysis not just of the quantitative data (which is important) but a qualitative exploration that has ethnographic research embedded within it would provide real substance in helping us together have a better understanding of the impact of online anti-Muslim hate against its victims. Finally, this report does not wish to downplay the serious question of free speech which is vital for any democratic society as is ours. However it merely wishes to point out that whilst free speech is a fundamental human right we all must enjoy, where online abuse is either threatening or becomes a racially/religiously motivated crime then we must try and deal with this in a strong yet proportionate manner. Indeed, we must also examine the impact of online anti-Muslim hate and try and understand the nature of cyber hate and how we can help the victims report it by offering them support, reassurance and trust.

"Global networks of cyber crimes are creating new challenges for attorneys, judges, law enforcement agents, forensic examiners and corporate security professionals who are trying to find 'the balance between the need to maintain order online and the need to enforce the law'. It can be appreciated that one piece of technology cannot be expected to be the 'silver bullet' of any specific form of cyber crime. ***Cyber hate*** is a phenomenon exhibiting multiple dimensions with hate-groups achieving their goals in four main ways: promoting ideology, promoting hatred of other racial or religious groups, exerting control over others and targeting opponents."

Imran Awan and Brian Blakemore

Policing Cyber Hate, Cyber Threats and Cyber Terrorism

(London: Ashgate 2012:2)

1. Introduction

1.1 In 2012, Liam Stacy was convicted of racial hatred for his comments, which he posted on Twitter. The racist comments were directed at the football player, Fabrice Muamba, which included the remarks: 'LOL**** Muamba. He's Dead!!! Haha.' Stacy was convicted after his comments were reported to the police[3]. Indeed the recent online threats made against the former Respect Leader, Salma Yaqoob has again reinforced why we should be tackling the problem of online anti-Muslim abuse.   After appearing on BBC Question Time, Salma Yaqoob tweeted the following comments to her followers: "Apart from this threat to cut my throat by #EDL supporter (!) overwhelmed by warm response to what I said on #bbcqt." The person arrested, in connection with the comments, Steve Littlejohn added: "if that salma yaqueb's there, cut her f### throat, rip weyman bennets teeth out with pliers and carve edl across all the asian scum who try and attack us" (See full comments below)[4].

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[3] BBC News (2012). *Muamba tweet: Jailed Liam Stacey sorry for racist comments,* [Online] Available at:: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-18149852 Accessed 25 August 2013.
[4] Birmingham Mail (2013). *Death threats made to Salma Yaqoob after Question Time appearance*, [Online] Available at: http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/death-threats-made-muslim-politician-4219595 Accessed 1 September 2013.

1.2 The overwhelming evidence does suggest that words, visual images, tweets, Facebook comments and online videos of hate not only cause offence but can have a huge impact on the victims they target[5].   Both of the above cases show how online behavior can be normalized by some offenders which allow a perpetrator to use in many cases anonymity, manipulation and social control to target their victims[6].   However, whilst this form of cyber hate often remains invisible because the perpetrator can hide their identity, the threat remains very real for the victims it targets[7].

1.3 It also causes a major policing problem when trying to combat offenders who are using cyber space to perpetuate the prejudices they hold against an individual or group of person(s).   Moreover, politically, the problem of how far

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[5] Waddington, P.A.J. (2010). An examination of hate crime. *Police Review,* 23 April, Vol.118, No. 6077, 14-15.

[6] Douglas, K. M., McGarty, C., Bliuc, A. M., and Lala, G. (2005). Understanding Cyberhate: Social Competition and Social Creativity in Online White Supremacist Groups. *Social Science Computer Review, 23*(1), 68-76.

[7] Hall, N. (2005). *Hate Crime.* Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

someone has a right to express their opinions without causing offence remains problematic. Indeed, the Internet itself as acknowledged by the Leveson Inquiry would be very difficult to regulate, however this report, argues that if we do not do anything then the problem of online anti-Muslim hate will continue to spread like a pandemic and online attacks will continue[8].

1.4 Many of the comments posted online through social networking sites, like Twitter or Facebook consist of an 'extremist' and incendiary undertone which attacks the whole of ethos of our government's social cohesion strategy and risks as we shall see stoking up more hatred in particular in the case of online Islamophobia.

1.5 Despite, the overwhelming evidence that online anti-Muslim bigotry and abuse is rife, the academic literature as regards online Islamophobia remains under researched. Furthermore, the recent report conducted by Feldman *et al.* (2013) regarding the far right for the organisation, Tell MAMA has highlighted how: "The online domain remains under-researched" (p.10) and "much less attention has been paid to online hate crime, which can be the precursor to more physically threatening offline incidents" (p.11)[9].

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[8] The Leveson Inquiry (2012) Full Report [Online] Available at: http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/about/the-report/ Accessed 1 September 2013.
[9] Feldman, M., Littler, M., Dack, J., and Copsey, N. (2013). *Anti-Muslim Hate Crime and the Far Right*, Teeside University, [Online] Available at: http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/antimuslim2.pdf Accessed 4 September 2013.

1.6 It appears that research both at an academic and policy level has focused

mainly around tackling the issue of online radicalisation and therefore the

literature regarding online Islamophobia as a result remains less developed[10].

This report intends to provide a snapshot of why cyber hate issues against

Muslim communities must be taken seriously and why further investment of

resources in this area would help shape a more robust and cogent policy

which would help the victims of online Islamophobia.

1.7 As noted above, the debate about Islamophobia is often centred on street

level incidents, from pulling the headscarf (Hijab) to attacks against mosques

as examples[11]. However, whilst studying these attacks is important, the

online domain of Islamophobia, is often either downplayed or not taken

seriously both at a policy and grass roots level. Indeed, recent evidence from

Tell MAMA showed they had received (74%) of reported online anti-Muslim

abuse[12]. Some of the cases reported to Tell MAMA included online anti-

Muslim abuse against high profile Muslim figures such as Baroness Warsi and

Jemima Khan both of whom were subjected to online threats which were

reported to the police by Tell MAMA[13]. Mehdi Hasan, the Huffington Post,

UK political director recalls the impact of these online hate comments on his

family. He states that: "To say that I find the relentlessly hostile coverage of

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[10] Neumann (2009). Countering Online Radicalization A strategy for action, *ICSR, Kings College London*, [Online] Available at: http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/1236768491ICSROnlineRadicalisationReport.pdf Accessed 1 September 2013.

[11] Allen, C. (2010). *Islamophobia*, Ashgate, London.

[12] Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks), (2013) *Anti-Muslim Hate Crime*, [Online] Available at: http://tellmamauk.org/ Accessed 2 September 2013.

[13] Sinha, K. (2013). Anti-Muslim sentiments on rise in UK: British minister, The Times of India [Online] Available at: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-05-22/uk/39444735_1_muslim-women-hate-crime-sayeeda-warsi Accessed 4 September 2013.

Islam, coupled with the personal abuse that I receive online, depressing is an understatement. There have been times – for instance, when I found my wife curled up on our couch, in tears, after having discovered some of the more monstrous and threatening comments on my New Statesman blog – when I've wondered whether it's all worth it."[14]

1.8 These comments are not isolated and other Muslim's in public life such as Inayat Bunglawala, Huma Qureshi and Nadiya Takolia have all described the online abuse they have suffered.   Below is a short extract of comments they suffered online and the impact it has had upon them:

> *"…the true face of pakiland is the cleansing of Hindu and Sikh minorities since 1948, and the on going deceptions practiced by pakistanis, not some fluff peice about an honest man. Exception to the rule...There is a lamppost and noose waiting for every jihadi that comes back to Britain and their scum enablers and sympathizers…"* (Inayat Bunglawala 2012).[15]

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[14] Hasan, M. (2012). 'We mustn't allow Muslims in public life to be silenced', *The Guardian*, [Online] Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/08/muslims-public-life-abuse Accessed 7 September 2013

[15] Bunglawala, I. (2012) 'Online Racist Abuse: we've all suffered it', *The Guardian*, [Online] Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/11/online-racist-abuse-writers-face Accessed September 8th 2013

> *"I misguidedly read it while on honeymoon and it left me shaking. It was vile. Part of me is worried that this post might be an invitation to another email from whoever it was"* (Huma Qureshi 2012).[16]

> *"Nothing attracts more attention than a woman wearing a hijab, you keep wondering when will it go bang…I hate to think that I would self-censor in future, but the fact is that, wary of the torrent of abuse that will come, I will think twice now before I write about any topic"* (Nadiya Takolia 2012).[17]

1.9 Equally ordinary Muslims have also experienced this online hate which has had an impact upon them and their families as shown by the research which I have conducted with Muslim families[18]. The 'hate' comments made online can have a negative impact on the victims who are targeted and can be very upsetting and unsettling for them. Post Woolwich the Internet and social networking sites have been used to by groups like the far right to attack Muslim communities. This type of prejudice follows a 'drip drip' effect and whilst it has intensified following Woolwich, the level of online anti-Muslim prejudice remains on a steady increase.

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[16] Qureshi, H. (2012) 'Online Racist Abuse: we've all suffered it', *The Guardian*, [Online] Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/11/online-racist-abuse-writers-face Accessed September 8th 2013

[17] Takolia, N. (2012) 'Online Racist Abuse: we've all suffered it', *The Guardian*, [Online] Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/11/online-racist-abuse-writers-face Accessed September 8th 2013

[18] Awan, I. (2013) 'What is Extremism?' In Awan, I. and Blakemore, B. 'Extremism, Counter-Terrorism and Policing', Ashgate: London.

1.10 Unfortunately, the importance of online anti-Muslim abuse does not always get the media and political attention it merits. It is often disregarded as 'less valuable data' or people are more concerned with the visible threats Muslims face. This is the problem when trying to ascertain what constitutes as 'high' level and 'low' level incidents. For example, the use of targeted 'Trolling' can constitute online harassment and has a huge impact on the victims. Sadly, as a society the way we deal with online anti-Muslim hate is with a laissez-faire attitude at best and at worst leads to us simply asking the victim either to Block someone via Twitter or Facebook or simply close our account. This is where we need to try and build a new culture towards understanding the victim first and foremost. Below is a direct quote from an article by Fiyaz Mughal, the Director for Tell MAMA with regards the impact of online Islamophobia:

> *"Tell MAMA were contacted about four months ago by a young 15-year-old who explained that her picture had been placed on a website without her approval and it transpired that the young girl had then received targeted hate tweets and comments because of her faith. Her avatar showed a young girl with a Hijab on, looking rather innocent. Having received anti-Muslim tweets, she responded back with some confidence and then extracted herself from the conversation. What she subsequently found out was that a range of strangers and far right supporters began to make explicit comments about her and they posted statements that humiliated her faith, her sexuality and aggressively abused her privacy[19]."*

1.11   Clearly this case which lasted over nine weeks must have had a huge impact on this girl. Both the emotional and psychological stress caused to her must not be underestimated.   Furthermore, the fact she was reluctant to report this incident to her family because of the social taboo attached would have also exacerbated the internal pain she was suffering. Cyber space can be a lonely place and when you are suffering online abuse the need for someone to support you or a mechanism for support must be given consideration.   Similarly, the study conducted by Feldman *et al.* (2013) found that under-reporting of incidents remains a problem.

1.12   Feldman *et al.* (2013: 21) study into the far right found that: "The majority of the incidents of Muslim hate crime reported to Tell MAMA are online incidents and 300-69 per cent - of these online cases reported a link to the far right."   These facts are not isolated, as the Association of Chief Police Officers, also revealed a similar trend that has seen them receive over 136 complaints of online anti-Muslim abuse reported through its 'True Vision site' which deals with hate crimes since the death of Lee Rigby[19].   True Vision is the police's main cyber tool in tackling online hate and is used as a means of helping the police create a safer online environment.   The website states that it will examine illegal content that threatens or harasses a person or group of persons because of hostility towards their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender.   It adds that: "Most hateful or violent website content is not illegal" and gives victims of online hate three options in dealing

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[19] ACPO (2013) *True Vision Records* [Online] Available at: http://www.report-it.org.uk/true_vision_records_a_significant_weekly_reduct Accessed 2 September 2013.

with the hate incident from reporting the material to the police, the hosting

company or the website administrator[20].

1.13   Clearly, the above statistics show that online anti-Muslim abuse is a

growing area of concern for policy makers[21]. It does appear that the

Woolwich incident has had an impact on the number of reported online

crimes.   However it does also mean a wider debate on what is cyber hate?

And how online Islamophobia should be combated, is long overdue[22]. The

above data also shows that a number of the cyber hate incidents have

occurred online via social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook. They

include broadly the issues of 'cyber harassment', 'cyber bullying', 'cyber

abuse', 'cyber incitement', 'cyber threats' and 'cyber hate'.   They are not

confined, however to social networking sites and include sites dedicated to

blogging, online chat rooms and other virtual platforms that promote online

cyber hate and online Islamophobia.   The Internet therefore has become a

place where hate crimes can be exacerbated and whilst total regulation of the

Internet remains problematic, the APPG could usher in a new era that

recognizes the threat posed by online anti-Muslim hate.

1.14   A number of sites such as the http://anti--islam.blogspot.co.uk/[23] and

http://www.jihadwatch.org/ (the latter being run by a prominent anti-Muslim

activist Robert Spencer), all aim tackle what they call the 'anti-civilization of

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[20] True Vision (2013) Internet Hate Crime [Online] Available at: http://www.report-it.org.uk/reporting_internet_hate_crime Accessed 28 August 2013.
[21] Wall, D. (2001) (Ed.) '*Crime and the internet'*, NY, Routledge.
[22] Yar. M (2006) *Cybercrime and Society,* London, Sage Publications.
[23] Anti-Islam Blog (2013) [Online] Available at: http://anti--islam.blogspot.co.uk/ Accessed 10 June 2013.

Islam.'[24]   Whilst many of these blogs and websites use the cloak of freedom of expression to perpetuate an anti-Muslim rhetoric, it does inevitably attract users who are quick to post comments on pieces which have a deeply embedded anti-Muslim narrative.   I am of the opinion based on my research that banning blogs and websites does not necessarily work.   Instead this report argues that online anti-Muslim hate requires a multi-faceted approach from different agencies including the police, social networking sites and a government-led approach which tackles online Islamophobia as a separate phenomenon and uses long-term goals alongside short-term goals to deal with the threat.

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[24] JihadWatch (2013) [Online] Available at: http://www.jihadwatch.org/ Accessed 5 September 2013.

2. Cyber Hate and Online Islamophobia: Issues and Problems

2.1 There is no universal definition of a hate crime instead we have a myriad of interpretations, that include statements or terms which are aimed at targeting a person or person(s) because of their particular religion, gender, race, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability and ethnicity. Cyber hate therefore is the nexus of communications and concepts where a perpetrator utilises electronic data, and the convergence of space, movement and behaviour in a 'safe' virtual environment to 'control' and target 'opponents' considered to be a threat. This type of control allows the perpetrator to act in a dominant way against groups they deem to be subordinate often in the case of anti-Muslim abuse attacking Muslims because of their faith and ethnicity[25].

2.2 It also allows offenders to use the online world and other social networking platforms to target individuals they deem to be 'different' from them both in an ideological, political and religious sense. This is evident following the recent case when a Member of Parliament, Stella Creasy, and the feminist campaigner and freelance journalist Caroline Criado-Perez, were subjected to abusive threats which included rape (via Twitter). Some of the comments posted to Caroline Criado-Perez included: "Everyone jump on the rape train, @CCriadoPerez is the conductor." And: "Hey sweetheart, give me a call

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[25] Perry, B (2001). In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes. London: Routledge.

when you're ready to be put in your place"[26].   Indeed, the author of this

report made a recommendation in an article published in the Independent that

Twitter needed a button that would report abusive and threatening tweets. [27]

Since those cases, Twitter has announced, that it would have a button that

would report abuse and flag up tweets considered to be in breach of their

code of conduct[28].   For the purposes of this report the above example is

highlighted so as to demonstrate that a consensus of public opinion believe

that online abuse should be tackled. This can happen with strong

commitment and resources to help tackle online anti-Muslim abuse.

2.3 As noted above, cyber hate is a complex phenomenon and is used to

transcend an ideology that promotes racial hatred, religious intolerance and

allows 'lone wolfs' and 'hate groups' to exert cyber power and social control in

a systematic and targeted manner that has no respect for a victim's rights.

Academics looking at the psychology of online offenders have argued that

such people form an 'identity crises' which allows them to use and exploit

social and political beliefs as an ideology which has no respect for the

individuals or groups it targets. This therefore can result in them trying to use

online methods as a means of self protectionism and false patriotism like

[26] The Huffington Post (2013). Twitter Rape Abuse Of Caroline Criado-Perez Leads To Boycott Threat [Online] Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/07/27/twitter-rape-abuse_n_3663904.html Accessed 1 September 2013

[27] Awan, I. (2013) *Blocking Accounts isn't enough-Twitter needs a button to allow users to report online hate*, The Independent, Available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/blocking-accounts-isnt-enough--twitter-needs-a-button-to-allow-users-to-report-online-hate-8736912.html

[28] Waldrum, H. (2013) Twitter rolls out 'report abuse' button for individual tweets: will you use it? [Online] Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/technology/blog/2013/aug/30/twitter-report-abuse-button Accessed 5 September 2013

groups such as the far right which are apt at fuelling anti-Muslim hate and abuse[29].

2.4 Often this is played out by abusive, threatening and co-ordinated tweets or through the use of sites like Facebook to send messages of hate which include the use of visual images to target particular individuals and communities[30].   Clearly, it should be noted that cyber space can also be an extremely valuable tool in helping detect and tackle online cyber crime and increasingly is being used by the police to help engage with the local communities they serve.   Blakemore (2012), for example, argue that the use of social networking sites by the police can have an important impact on people's level of 'fear of cyber crime' and also can help assist them report such incidents to the police.   However it is the phenomenon of online Islamophobia and trying to categorise how to deal with this issue that has caused most problems[31].

2.5 The main definitions associated with Islamophobia are limited to interpretations that confine Islamophobia to physical attacks such as abuse and targeted violence against Muslim communities, mosques, cemeteries and discrimination in places of education.   However the definitions remain limited when it comes to defining the online dimension.   The author argues that we

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[29] Cole, J. and Cole, B. (2009). *Martyrdom: Radicalisation and Terrorist Violence Among British Muslims.* London: Pennant Books.

[30] Whine, M. (2003). Far right extremists on the Internet, in *Cyber Crime: law enforcement, security and surveillance in the information age,* Edited by D. Thomas and B.D. Loader. London: Routledge.
[31] Awan, I and Blakemore, B. (2012) *Policing Cyber Hate, Cyber Threats and Cyber Terrorism*, Ashgate, London.

need a separate definition of online Islamophobia which is recognizable both at a policy level and an academic level. For example, a clearer working definition which includes: 'Anti-Muslim hate attacks that occur online designed to provoke and cause hostility by means of harassment, threatening behaviour, bullying and intimidating a person or person(s) via all platforms of social media' could constitute an offence under British Law and thus may assist the police.

2.6 The Home Office has used the 'Challenge it', 'Report it' and 'Stop it' method as a means to tackle hates incidents more generally[32]. Indeed, the Home Office in (2011-12) for example, found that 43,748 hate crimes were recorded by the police, of which 82% were related to race hate crimes and 4% were religious based hate crimes[33]. However many of the hate incidents reported to the police have often been categorized as either 'low' level which can range from 'verbal and racist abuse' to actual 'high' level and actual physical violence[34].

2.7 However, both 'low' level and ' high' level incidents can have a dedimental effect on the victims of these crimes. For example, the US Government's Cyber Crime Strategy has acknowledged that hate crimes however do

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[32] Her Majesty's Government (HMG) 2012. *Challenge it, Stop it, report it: The Governments Plan to Tackle Hate Crime* [Online]. Available at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97849/action-plan.pdf
Accessed 29 June 2013.

[33] BBC News (2013b). *632 anti-Muslim hate incidents recorded by Tell Mama* [Online] Available at:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21712826 Accessed 2 September 2013.

[34] Chakraborti, N. and Garland, J. (2009) *Hate Crime: Impact, Causes and Responses.* London: Sage Publications.

have an impact on the victim[35]. T[reover, Feldman *et al.* (2013) found that from the 74% of online hate incidents reported to Tell MAMA, that the majority of online incidents, did also include threats made about offline action.   They also found that most of the online hate was committed by Males and 70% of online incidents had a link to the far right (specifically to the EDL).

2.8 Therefore when discussing the issue of cyber hate, online behavior, which is deemed to be boo@ã timidating and o@eatening can haç^ the same i{] act upon o@e çãctim asÁtreet |^vel @te clãme.   Indeed, in s[{ e cæes these threats which are made online could have resulted in actual violence offline. As Tell MAMA (2013) notes that: "The { ajority of |^ported online &æses did include o@eats of o~line action a}d o@erefore s@uld not à^ ãdsmissed or underestimated."[36]   At o@e { [ment, { [st of o@e &æses where]^[]|^ @æç^ à^^}Áæd|^•c^åÁæ} å&@æd*^åÁ[|Á&{{ ^}o•Á æå^ÁçãædÁ[ãdÁ^ç[|\ã*Áã•Á æå^Á@•^@æo&æ}Áã^Á|[•^&ç^åÁã^Áçæ̆c^ÊÁ̈Á}å^|Á̇a&ãd|^Á[ãçæe^åoÁ|¦Á ±^|ãã̆•|^Á[ãçæe^åo&ãã ^•Á@[̆*Á&@ã@Á̂Ôã ^Áæ}åÁÖãã[[å^|Á̇&̇FJÌÊÁ Tæ̇&ãã̆•Á̂Ô[{{ ̆}ã&æã}•Á̇&̇FJÌÊÁ@Ô̂Ô[{{ ̆}ã&æã}•Á̇&̇G€€HÁæ}åÁ Ú̆à|&̇Á̇J̃å^|Á̇&̇FJÌÎ̃Ê̇̇

2.9 Ø[|Á¢æ{]|^ÊÁ[||ㄴ ã̃*Áӳ[[|ㄴ &@ãåÁ̆{ à^|ㄴÁ̃æå|^•c^Á^|^Áㄴ æå^Á̃@|^Á people had posted comments on Twitter and Facebook which were deemed to incite racial hatred or violence.   In one case a person was convicted under

[35] Home Office. (2010). *Cyber Crime Strategy.* Cm. 7842. London: TSO.
[36] Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks), (2013) *Anti-Muslim Hate Crime*, [Online] Available at: http://tellmamauk.org/ Accessed 2 September 2013.

[...] posted on Facebook[37].   However whilst there are few cases of people being

[...]

2.10 [...]

hate issues and educate people of the dangers[38].

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[37] Urquhart, C. (2013). Attacks on Muslims soar in wake of Woolwich murder, *The Guardian* [Online] Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/may/25/woolwich-murder-attacks-on-muslims Accessed 2 September 2013**.**

[38] Chan, J.B.L. (2007). Police and new technologies, In *Handbook of Policing,* edited by Tim Newburn. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

3. Further Considerations: Policing Online Islamophobia and Victimization

3.1 As noted previously, this area has often been under researched both at a policy level and an academic level and this paper argues that a new cyber hate policy is much needed both at government level and policing level which would be timely considering the recent spike of online anti-Muslim abuse following Woolwich[39].   Interestingly, cyber hate has been used historically, by the far right and White supremacists who have used it to inflame religious and racial tensions.   A study for the think-tank group Demos (2011) found that far right populist movements are gaining in support across Europe and playing upon a small perception of public disenfranchisement within society to promote an agenda of protecting national identity as a method to whip up online anti-Muslim hate[40].

3.2 The Demos study (2011) is interesting because their findings would seem to suggest that the EDL have become a web based far right group that is using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter where it has gained a large group of online sympathizers to target Muslim communities[41].   The Demos study found that on a national scale 72% of supporters for the EDL were under the age of 30 and 36% of people were aged between 16 and 20.

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[39] ACPO (2005). *Hate Crime: Delivering a Quality Service (Good Practice Guide and Tactical Guidance)*. Association of Chief Police Officers. London: ACPO.
[40] DEMOS Report (2011). *The Rise of Populism in Europe can be traced through Online Behaviour*, [Online] Available at: http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Demos_OSIPOP_Book-web_03.pdf?1320601634 Accessed 20 July 2013.
[41] Awan, I and Blakemore, B. (2012) *Policing Cyber Hate, Cyber Threats and Cyber Terrorism*, Ashgate, London.

Thus, reflecting the movements, desire to attract a more 'younger' audience on social networking sites such as Facebook. Interestingly, Feldman *et al.* (2013) data set from Tell MAMA showed that US anti-Islamist activists Pamela Geller, Robert Spencer and Tommy Robinson had all been reported to Tell MAMA for online abusive comments against Muslim communities.

3.3 As discussed previously, a number of these cases reported to the police include examples where people have made malicious comments via social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Many of the cases have led to people being arrested, detained and charged for offences relating to religious hatred and inciting racial hatred which is an offence under the Public Order Act. These comments made online are extremely damaging and have the ability to ignite further racial divisions and can be divisive for issues of multiculturalism and diversity.

3.4 The problem for the police therefore is helping root out online far right groups and lone wolf extremists who are using social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook to post malicious statements. This realm of cyber activism used by groups like the EDL and others who are promoting online hate means the police require more people to report what they see and what they read so that they can take the necessary actions required to either remove the online hate material or in some cases arrest and charge people. At the moment those who use online hate to disguise themselves in a cloak of anonymity remain at large because they understand that unless someone reports them they can remain anonymous.

3.5 Feldman *et al.* (2013: 23) found that women who were responsible for 18% of online incidents also had links with the EDL. They found that a number of the incidents reported included direct threats from burning down mosques to killing Muslim babies. They state that: "Racist remarks were, in turn, mainly anti-Pakistani comments and references to dirt and filth. More generally there were comments accusing Muslims of rape; paedophilia; incest; interbreeding; being terrorists; and killing Jews."[42]

3.6 Accordingly cyber hate can take many forms. These range from; online material which can lead to actual offline abuse and violence; secondly cyber violence; thirdly, cyber stalking & finally online harassment with the use of visual images, videos and text which are intended to cause harm.
The report by Feldman *et al.* (2013) highlights these representations of 'cyber violence'. Below is a direct set of quotes taken from the Feldman *et al.* (2013: 25-26) report regarding online anti-Muslim abuse:

> *"Just pour pigs blood in every reservoir in Britain, the whole land will be tainted, good bye muzzrats!" EDL Yorkshire Ref. 308.*

> *'Have you seen the price of meat? And Muslim babies are so plentiful! Sharia allows sodomising babies! #EDL' Ref. 370.*

> *'There is no such thing as a moderate Muslim. They are all*

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[42] Ibid 23.

> ***nutjobs because they are animals.' 'Tommy Robinson' Ref. 313***

> ***'Hope your mosque has fire insurance Muslim immigrant cunt.***
>
> ***Fried halal.' 'You raped British women and children. Now you can***
>
> ***pay.' EDL Ref. 293[43]***

3.7 The examples are just the tip of the iceberg and show that online comment's such as the above are contributing towards the stigmatisation of Muslim communities. However both offline and online incidents have a similar pattern and a trend which is based primarily on the perpetrator using abusive language to pose real offline threats against Muslim communities.   Therefore the above incident's clearly show that online hate crime committed against Muslim communities in this instance can have a detrimental impact upon the governments social and community cohesion strategy as well as a more personal impact on the victims and the families affected by such measures.

3.8 The online prejudice and discrimination[44] paradigm is used by perpetrators who will involve swearing and racist language as a means to target a particular group.   This online element is also used by perpetrators where statements and messages which are prejudicial are used to target a particular group or person. This is often personified by racist jokes and stereotypical 'banter.'   If these incidents go unchecked physical attacks can also take place and could culminate from extreme online prejudice and discrimination which are

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[43] Ibid 25 and 26.
[44] Allport, G.W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

intertwined together. Indeed, this type of negativity can also lead to an escalation of online abuse and the normalization of such behavior.   Below the report will examine the issue of reporting online abuse from Muslim communities and why issues of a lack of trust with the police and Muslim community may also have an impact on reporting online cyber hate.

4. **Muslim Communities, Reporting Online Hate and Issues of Trust with the Police**

4.1 One of the major issues of cyber hate is the role of the police in dealing with an increasing complex arena that allows many people to remain anonymous and is based in many cases on a person's personal fortitude and courage to come forward and report such incidents. Tell MAMA (2013) for example actively encourages people to report these incidents in particular from the Muslim community who at many times may feel stigmatised from reporting such incidents because of fear of what the community might think.   Apart from these problems, the role of the police in dealing with hate incidents offline will also have an impact on how incidents are reported online.   For example, public perception of the police in tackling offline hate crime has had a significant impact upon police and Muslim community relations.

4.2 Historically, the policing of ethnic minorities have often been tainted by allegations of policing by stereotypes that include racial prejudice and racial discrimination of Black and Asian men[45].   Following the 9/11 attacks the risk is that those stereotypes have re-emerged with 'over policing' of Muslim communities, who are increasingly viewed with suspicion.   This intensified with cases such as Rizwaan Sabir.   Sabir, a student at the University of Nottingham, was arrested by the police for downloading an al-Qaeda training

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[45] Bowling, B. (1999). Revised Edition. *Violent Racism: Victimisation, Policing and Social Context.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

manual but released without charge.   After winning damages of £20,000 from

Nottinghamshire police, Sabir said:

"I was very, very lucky in the sense that I was released without charge

because I was innocent in the first place..."[46]

4.3 The Sabir case highlights how, post-9/11, the police need to be very careful

about how they deal with counter-terrorism cases because old stereotypes

may re-emerge and may have a wider impact upon how Muslim communities

report online abuse.   Indeed, in a joint study I conducted (Awan *et al.* 2013)

regarding policing and Muslim community relations we found that often

participants would describe the police as either being 'racist', 'heavy-handed',

'unprofessional' and having a 'lack of communication and community skills'.

This in turn resulted in the Muslim community not reporting crime to the police

because they felt a sense of mistrust.[47]

4.4 Indeed, core issues such as a lack of trust of the police service were also

discussed by participants which does suggest that individual experiences with

the police may be a reason why the community lost trust in the police and why

some communities may not feel comfortable in reporting online abuse to the

police.   Counter-terrorism policing operations also appeared to have a

significant impact on the Muslim community's perception of the police service.

For example, in Birmingham, the local community and area had been making

headline news in the wake of controversial counter-terrorism arrests.   Project

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[46] Jones, S. (2011) *Student in Al Qaida raid paid £20,000 by police,* The Guardian, [Online] Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/sep/14/police-pay-student-damages-al-qaida Accessed 22 August 2013.
[47] Awan, I., Blakemore, B. and Simpson, K. (2013) In Progress-Muslim communities attitudes towards and recruitment into the British police service, *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 1-17

Champion and the installation of secret CCTV cameras to effectively ring-fence the Muslim community in predominately Muslim areas in Birmingham and monitor their movements was an additional reason why the community were distrustful of the police[48].

4.5 As previously discussed prioritising hate crimes with how the police deal with 'low level' and 'high level' priority incidents remains a core problem.   Indeed, evidence shows that because cyber hate incidents are not reported regularly to the police, there remains a problem in the actual data and its reliability when examining online anti-Muslim abuse.   By this what I mean is that I suspect the actual number of online incidents is much higher but because of under-reporting we do not have the exact true figures.   This is intensified because at times people are not aware when an online offence has been committed or in some cases decide to report the online abuse to a different company and not the police.   For example, Noel Edmonds who had received death threats via Facebook decided he would call the company 'Web Sheriff' which helps track people reporting abusive online messages and not the police[49].

4.6 Moreover, even if such cases are reported to the police, it is acknowledged that they do have limited resources, and in many cases tracking this crime can have many problems from both a jurisdictional point of view with Internet Service Providers, to the role of free speech and the issue of online

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[48] Awan, I., (2012). The impact of policing British Muslims: a qualitative exploration. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism,* 7 (1), 22-35.
[49] MailOnline (2012) *Cyber-sleuth Noel traces 'he needs to die' Facebook troll... and offers to pay for his studies*, [Online] Available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2123384/Cyber-sleuth-Noel-traces-needs-die-Facebook-troll-offers-pay-studies.html Accessed 22 June 2013.

anonymity.   Thus, for the police it can be like 'finding a needle in a virtual haystack[50] .   The police therefore must look to adopt a range of policing models as a means of dealing with such online incidents.

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[50] Awan and Blakemore (2012) Policing Cyber Hate, Cyber Threats and Cyber Terrorism, Ashgate, London.

5. **Recommendations to the APPG on Islamophobia (Including a Pilot Study)**

5.1 **Exploration of issues around victim support**

There is an urgent need to provide cyber hate related advice for those who are suffering online anti-Muslim abuse. This type of cyber counseling project could help empower the victim of abuse and offer them internal and external support. Perhaps a project called 'Cyber Counseling' for victims of online anti-Muslim hate may be a way forward for victims who have suffered online abuse via social networking sites.

5.2 **Further Qualitative Research**

There must be a continued effort to monitor online anti-Muslim hate and this should include resources for further research development. I would suggest survey analysis, questionnaire design, focus groups and interviews with victims of online anti-Muslim abuse which allows us to understand the impact of this crime from the victim themselves could be the way forward. We know that the substantive quantitative data shows that online anti-Muslim abuse does exist. The next step is to now work with victims and ascertain what level of harm they have experienced and the impact on them.

5.3 Monitoring Online Hate

It is important to keep monitoring where the online hate is appearing and the interconnected links as this can help inform not only policy but also help us get a better understanding of the relationships forming online. This would require in detail an examination of the various websites, blogs and social networking sites by monitoring the various URL's of those sites regarded as having links to anti-Muslim hate.

5.4 Long-Term Educational Programmes

The evidence does suggest that what young people see online will have an impact upon their understanding of key issues. An initiative which uses a programme that works with the perpetrators who have formed racial prejudice online could also have benefits. Having an educational toolkit and a specific programme might help us examine the culture that permeates this type of hate and ensure that we look at the root causes of such problems within our society. This shift in culture will take time however the fruits can be reaped early on if we invest in this type of cyber hate programme. Being innovative and flexible and getting young people involved is crucial. This could be done with gaming and getting youngsters to look at cyber hate in a more nuanced approach that can reach people at the earliest stages and can help us promote and publicize the dangers of online Islamophobia.

5.5 Local and Global Conference on online anti-Muslim abuse/Free Speech

A series of discussions, focus groups and round the table meetings with a range of stakeholders, academics, online users and community groups could

help facilitate a wider discussion of online anti-Muslim abuse. Bringing together a range of experts such as lawyers, academics, teachers, young adults and victims of online hate crime for a local and global conference could have many benefits.   Firstly, it would be an ideal way to share and disseminate best practice. Furthermore, because of the many jurisdictional issues with online hate and ISP's this would be an ideal way to form joint collaborative links with other countries. Moreover, this would also lead to more joint work with ISP's.

5.6 Website designed by victims of online anti-Muslim abuse

This would be a great way of empowering those victims of online anti-Muslim abuse. It could also encourage others to report incidents to them not as a policing agency but as a collaborative hub for people who have suffered this form of abuse. It also could have a lead from the people affected and provide a platform which helps tackle the online anti-Muslim bigotry that exists. The victims of this form of cyber bullying will have the most important stories to share and therefore could provide real expertise in this area.

5.7 Defining Cyber Hate and online anti-Muslim abuse

A clearer and stronger strategy that examines' online Islamophobia is vital. Despite the excellent work of Tell MAMA in measuring online Muslim abuse, this area remains one that gets little attention. This is because there are issues around free speech and how best to deal with jurisdictional problems. However a commitment made by the APPG to look at online anti-Muslim

abuse with a real working definition would be much needed at this important time post Woolwich.

5.8 Examine Online threats with actual Offline Violence

One of the reasons many critics dismiss online anti-Muslim abuse is trying to prove actual physical violence offline with online abuse. All the empirical examples discussed above have shown that online abuse does have an impact upon families. Therefore research which can help examine the link between online abuse with actual offline physical violence would be poignant and critical for the APPG.

5.9 Consultation with Young people, Offenders and Victims

It is important that we begin a process of consultation with victims of online anti-Muslim abuse and indeed reformed offenders who could work together on publishing a detailed report that highlights the issues they think are important when examining online Islamophobia. Perhaps closer collaborative work with the Cross Working Party on anti-Muslim Hate would also provide some key links to this report which I would be happy to assist the APPG with.

5.10 Methods at improving reporting online anti-Muslim abuse

Clearly, the Internet offers an easy and accessible way of reporting online abuse. However the problematic relationship with the police and Muslim community in some areas means much more could be done with improving Muslim relations with the police and therefore this could have an impact on the overall reporting of online abuse. An improved rate of prosecutions which

might culminate as a result could also help identify the issues around online anti-Muslim abuse.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Cyber hate crime remains a complex problem and with the emerging rise of online anti-Muslim hate, prejudice, discrimination and threats there is an urgent need to look at this area in more depth. This report is only intended to provide a brief snapshot of the problem of online anti-Muslim abuse and suggests that positive ways of dealing with such problems will require a multi-faceted partnership approach.   As a result a new international and national strategy should be adopted that highlights online anti-Muslim abuse and ways in which the police can deal with such incidents.

6.2 Perhaps a further strengthening of cyber hate regulation and protocols could be used to tackle online threats made against people of all backgrounds including anti-Muslim abuse and at the same time ensuring free speech is protected. This report makes the case that cyber hate and online anti-Muslim abuse must be considered as a key priority for the APPG when tackling anti-Muslim hate crime.

6.3 Accordingly, the UK Government and police service must examine all online threats and the links with actual offline violence as this could help agencies have a better understanding of what they are dealing with.   The reporting of online anti-Muslim abuse must also be taken seriously and improved relations with the police and Muslim community may help to achieve that.   A more

robust and clearer definition of what is online Islamophobia could help provide a more nuanced approach to this problem.

6.4 Ultimately a hate crime committed against someone will have a detrimental impact upon the victims and much more needs to be done to also recognize the rights of victims. Too often the issue of online anti-Muslim hate is used as a stick to beat the victim with as opposed to helping them. All the data suggests that Muslims are suffering online anti-Muslim abuse and I would strongly recommend that the APPG looks at speaking to victims of online abuse and begin a process of evidence-based research that helps us work together in making the online world a safer place for Muslims and other people who are victims of this type of offence.