Let's not confuse anti-Muslim hate with Islamophobia

Fiyaz Mughal

The [recent article](#) by Melanie Phillips on Islamophobia led some to suggest that she was minimising the impact of prejudice on Muslim communities. Anti-Muslim hatred seriously affects the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of those targeted. Of that there is no doubt.

The term "Islamophobia", which is so readily accepted by some to describe anti-Muslim hatred, was coined in the Runnymede Report of 1997. It used the word to encompass hatred of both Islam, the religion, and Muslims, the people.

Much has changed in the 20 years since then and today anyone can criticise or even hate any religion, including Islam. It is not illegal to do so and some Muslims also criticise elements of the faith. Are they Islamophobic?

We are therefore no longer in the "Islamophobia" space where hatred of Islam can be rolled in with real-world attacks on Muslims. All of our criminal and civil laws are based on the protection of people, and rightly so. Which means that anti-Muslim hatred is measurable and recordable, unlike the nebulous term "Islamophobia".

As the former director of Tell Mama, which records and measures anti-Muslim incidents, I have spoken with many people who believe that "Islamophobia" was a term coined to create a form of blasphemy, giving the impression that people cannot question faith. It is a word that is increasingly becoming ridiculed and maligned as faith becomes irrelevant for many, while others simply want the right to question anything in life. For the latter, it is the principle they defend, and which pits them against those casually throwing around the term "Islamophobia" when what is being referred to is anti-Muslim hatred or prejudice.

At a time when hate attacks against Muslims are having a serious impact on many people, let us try to ensure that obfuscation through the use of the term "Islamophobia" does not take away from the real-world problems facing Muslims.

We need to have less politics around the use of the term "Islamophobia" and more of a focus on supporting the victims of anti-Muslim hatred, and reducing the hate directed towards any group of people. I care less about the defence of a religion and far more about people — the very source of where religion has come from.

Fiyaz Mughal is a founder and director of Faith Matters, and former director of Tell Mama

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