Counter-Islamophobia Kit

Workstream 2: Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia – Comparative Report

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Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States.

CIK Project (Counter Islamophobia Kit)

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Counter-Islamophobia Kit

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About the CIK Project

The *Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States* (Counter Islamophobia Kit, CIK) project addresses the need for a deeper understanding and awareness of the range and operation of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred across the EU, and the extent to which these counter-narratives impact and engage with those hostile narratives. It is led by Professor Ian Law and a research team based at the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, UK. This international project also includes research teams from the Islamic Human Rights Commission, based in London, and universities in Leeds, Athens, Liège, Budapest, Prague and Lisbon/Coimbra. This project runs from January 2017 - December 2018.

About the Paper

This paper is an output from the second workstream of the project which was concerned to describe and explain the discursive contents and forms that Muslim hatred takes in the eight states considered in the framework of this project: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and United Kingdom. This output comprises eight papers on conditions in individual member states and a comparative overview paper containing Key Messages. In addition this phase also includes assessment of various legal and policy interventions through which the European human rights law apparatus has attempted to conceptually analyse and legally address the multi-faceted phenomenon of Islamophobia. The second workstream examines the operation of identified counter-narratives in a selected range of discursive environments and their impact and influence on public opinion and specific audiences including media and local decision-makers. The third workstream will be producing a transferable EU toolkit of best practice in the use of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred. Finally, the key messages, findings and toolkits will be disseminated to policy makers, professionals and practitioners both across the EU and to member/regional audiences using a range of mediums and activities.

Contents

1. Introduction

This paper aims to provide a comparative meta-analysis of the country reports completed by each project partner to describe and explain the discursive content and forms that counter-narratives to Islamophobia take in the eight EU member states which provide the context for this project including Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and the United Kingdom[1]. The first workstream of this project identified ten dominant, hegemonic Islamophobic narratives across these contexts (Mescoli 2017a.) These narratives were found to fix Muslims collectively as, in descending order of prevalence, a threat to security, unassimilable, a demographic threat, an Islamisation threat, a threat to local, national and European identity, as responsible for the oppression of women, as essentially different and violent, as incomplete citizens and as a risk to the majority, and essentially homophobic. A worsening environment of Islamophobia was identified with respect to media content, political discourse and experiences of discrimination, indicating the new and increasingly acceptable hostility against Muslims in many spheres of everyday life. In response, most studies of Islamophobia in Europe recommend the development of counter-narratives. Knowledge about the categories and content of both hostile narratives and counter-narratives by governments, news media and NGOs in terms of their impact on Islamophobia lags well behind the development of positive interventions. This report provides one of the first in-depth comparative evaluations of such narratives.

Counter-narratives are oppositional to dominant narratives, and they have a long tradition within critical race theory (Picower and Kohli 2017, Soloranzo and Yosso 2002). They can be used to expose, critically analyse and reject dominant narratives and they can be used to give voice to marginalised and silenced groups. But, they do not always need to be a direct response to dominant narratives, as responding and reacting to a dominant account or set of opinions allows that account to frame and contain the discourse. Listening to and sharing views and experiences from, in this case Muslim groups, can be the beginning of creating a new narrative.

2. Methodology

This report provides a meta-analysis of the data and findings generated from the project's eight country team reports. The total data set for this Workstream comprises primarily of fieldwork carried out with 278 respondents between April and November 2017[2] to ascertain the nature and form of counter-narratives and their content, deployment and significance. These respondents included politicians and policy-makers, lawyers, NGOs and activists, and media, arts and academic professionals from a wide-range of organizational and geographical locations across the chosen EU member states. Respondents were chosen to ensure coverage of the diversity of practices and different perspectives and experiences of work in this field. In addition, in order to document counter-narratives textual data was collated from political, policy, media and NGO discourse, and digital data from social media platforms. Details of national fieldwork and textual data collection are given in the respective reports for each

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[1] Full reports for each of these cases can be found here: www.cik.leeds.ac.uk/publications

[2] These interactions primarily include qualitative one-to-one interviews, but also comprise group interviews and seminar attendance.

country context. The Hungarian report for example used frame analysis of 92 items from news portals and political party publications in addition to respondent interviews. This multi-method approach to data collection was then followed by discourse analysis and triangulation of data sets to produce a categorical specification and ranking of these narratives based on evaluation of strength, significance and impact. Distilling the key messages, this report then examines the extent to which these narratives do or do not effectively engage with the key narratives of Islamophobia previously identified. This report presents, in table 1, a new conceptualisation of counter-narratives which categorises and synthesises the case study data, reflecting, through a quantitative and qualitative assessment, the most significant narratives which have been identified and which are discussed in detail in the next section. This synthesis derives from a multi-method analysis of the frequency, international spread, quantitative ranking and qualitative significance of counter-narratives founded on project data generated in this workstream.

Table 1. Dominant Counter-Narratives to Islamophobia

1	Challenging constructions of Muslim 'threat'
2	Building inclusive nations: challenging exclusive and discriminatory national projects
3	Cultural compatibility and conviviality: challenging the narrative separation of cultural and ethnic groups
4	Elaborating plurality: challenging narratives of Muslim singularity
5	Challenging narratives of sexism
6	Building inclusive futures
7	Deracialising the state: challenging institutional narratives
8	Emphasising humanity and Muslim normalisation: challenging narratives of division
9	Creating Muslim space(s)
10	Challenging distorted representation: verity and voice

3. Counter-Narratives

This section of this report provides a detailed account of the main themes, arguments and selected examples produced by fieldwork investigation, across the eight EU member states, organized in relation to the overarching ten categories of dominant counter-narratives identified above. The fieldwork on which this report is based provides a wealth of rich critical analysis, qualitative comment and exemplars which show the strength, creativity and innovation evident across Europe in the operation of counter-narratives to Islamophobia which cannot be fully elaborated here. This report provides both a synthesis and a set of selected exemplars to highlight the key messages arising from this research.

The production and usage of a range of innovative, creative and highly valuable counter-narratives to Islamophobia across East, Southern and Western Europe is a key finding of this research. In Eastern Europe, despite the relatively recent upsurge in Islamophobia similar patterns of counter-narratives were in evidence, emphasising for example, the challenge to notions of the Muslim 'threat, challenges to exclusionary national projects and cultural compatibility and conviviality. All the case studies effectively identified the value of counter-narratives. For example, in Greece, Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos (2017, p. 25 highlighted their value because they challenge myths and misinformation, they promote critical reflection

on social phenomena, they enrich open dialogue about intersecting multiple identities and they mobilize a community of care.

Prior to engagement with the content of counter-narratives, a series of key messages were identified which are of fundamental importance in thinking through the nature of the challenges that we face in addressing Islamophobia across Europe. The depth, dynamics and wide impact of Islamophobia undermine 'the very egalitarian claims that form the basis of democratic identity and call into question the self-perception of the state as liberal' (Merali 2017, p.7). The UK report identified four overarching meta-narratives that emerged as necessary to elaborate in challenging of narratives of anti-Islamophobia, these include the normalisation of Islamophobia, the need for spaces where Muslims can reclaim control of their narrative(s), countering the obsession of law and policy with markers of 'Muslimness' and accountability for state and institutional racism (Merali 2017, p. 8). A cautionary note was sounded in the operation of current counter-narratives, here the dangers of 'reproducing the cycle of demonisation by trying to respond to Islamophobic tropes by 'proving' otherwise' were emphasised, for example in responding actively to demands for condemnation of acts of political violence.

The major issue overall was identified as the failure of the state to act, hence counter-narratives were primarily located in civil society, and often identified as being too small-scale. For example, the lack of a 'clear and univocal state positioning' was highlighted in Belgium (Mescoli 2017b, p.49). Many counter-narratives were 'conventional' in the sense of seeking to correct biased, inaccurate representation of Muslims to demystify perceptions and knowledge about Islam and Muslims (Maeso 2017, p.5). The Portuguese report in noting this also identified that there were more powerful political strategies at work in counter-narratives that sought to challenge Islamophobia as a 'relationship of domination' (Sayyid 2014, p.22), for example in education and history teaching, reconstructing the Portuguese nation-state and *Reconquista* narratives that construct Muslims as the 'historical enemy'. Significant, mainstream and wide-ranging state action to promote counter-narratives, pursue deracialisation and decolonial strategies and build an inclusive future was therefore unquestionably necessary as the actor generating counter-narratives is key in determining their effectiveness, as the Greek report confirmed (Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos 2017, p. 24).

This challenge was starkly shown in the Hungarian case where government narratives are uniformly Islamophobic and anti-immigrant, and all counter-narrative activity is being enacted elsewhere; in opposition political parties, the media and by humans rights NGOs and other civil society organisations and groups. The increasingly deep embedding of Islamophobia in populist rhetoric was highlighted in the Czech case (Čada and Frantová 2017, p.9) resonating with Euroscepticism, anti-elitist discourses and discourses on the migration crisis, and operationalising counter-narratives was often a defensive political project in this deteriorating social climate. The slippery interconnected nature of debates over the Muslim presence and other groups, for example Jews and Catholics, and other issues such as migration and national belonging together with the emerging, often state-driven, regime of truth problematising these communities provided immense barriers to successful counter narrative implementation. The French report (Bila 2017, p.26) identified that the counter-narratives that had most impact were those that 'fostered dialogue, appealed to emotions and humanised the abstract principle of equality', together with a balance between focusing on

empowering Muslim communities and influencing the general public. In Belgium, the tension between messages about normalising the Muslim presence and those concerned with making claims for rights and visibility was noted but combinations of these messages were seen as effective and operable (Mescoli 2017b, p.48).

Pre-condition to counter-narratives: calling out Islamophobia: challenging narratives of denial

A vital first step identified here, in the face of the normalisation of Islamophobia across Europe, is the task of securing a position that makes this and all forms of racism unacceptable (Merali 2017). This has also been a first key objective for this project in documenting the contemporary trends, evidence and debates across our eight EU member state contexts and providing an account of the unjustifiable forms it takes and how it is to be understood, which is not rehearsed in this report. Making Islamophobia visible was seen as a necessary pre-condition to 'telling a different story and offering a different view of Muslim life', and the report on Germany explored this in particular detail (Aguilar 2017).

The work required 'to make Islamophobia visible' was identified in this case as involving three forms of discourse; academic work to produce knowledge regarding the nature and extent of Islamophobia, Muslim activists utilising social media as a channel to raise awareness regarding the realities of living under Islamophobia and lastly, data collection including new German federal systems of hate crime recording and NGO activity collecting and publishing statistics about the extent of Islamophobic incidents in the country.

The German report highlights the significance of academic research conducted by Yasemin Shooman and Iman Attia on anti-Muslim racism on blogs and websites (e.g. Attia and Shooman 2010, Shooman 2014), and also Anna Esther Younes' work (2016) bringing the realities of Islamophobia into focus. This type of work is essential in providing a set of conceptual tools and evidences about the operation and deployment of Islamophobia. Many other examples are provided across other national contexts and the work of, the non-academic partner on this project, the Islamic Human Rights Commission is highly commended see for example Ameli and Merali 2015.

Social media, in particular Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and Instagram, have increasingly become highly useful instruments to make the realities and experiences of Islamophobia visible, as well as operating to promote dominant Islamophobic narratives as discussed in previous country reports. The Twitter hash tag campaign, *#Campusrassismus*, (campus racism) was one such example. Emine Aslan, a scholar and activist explained its purpose as 'using your own voice to create your own narrative'. This, when the campaign quickly became a national trending topic which was picked up in national media, such as the weekly nationwide *Die Zeit* (Gertslauer 2015). Aslan attributes the success of the campaign to the networking and alliances behind it, with organizations such as Initiative Black People in Germany (*Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland Bund* e.V.), Copwatch Frankfurt, and SchauHin. SchauHin started in 2013 as a collective of Black and People of Colour, Muslims and Jews, to share their experiences of everyday racism. As a member of the collective explained: "by showing

thousands of experiences of daily racism you show that there is a structural problem, you can't talk about this on an individual level unless you highlight that there is structural racism behind this that enables it. So that's exactly what happened by having thousands of people tweeting about this, sharing their experiences, no one could say that thousands of people are hypersensitive, but it was obvious it was just screaming into your face". Further to this, Emine Aslan commented that "SchauHin was a good tool for non-Muslim communities to get in touch with the realities of Muslims, as well as non-black Muslims to get in touch with lived experiences of black people in Germany" In addition SchauHin organized storytelling salons about racism and belonging in different cities These examples, in building networks of solidarity and making racism visible have contributed to the objective of making linkages between Islamophobia and other forms of racism and making these discourses collectively unacceptable.

In relation to data, the category of 'hostility towards Islam' has only very recently, since 2017, been included in the system of hate crime recording in Germany. In the absence of state action, Inssan and its Network against discrimination and Islamophobia have been, since 2002 and 2010 respectively, collecting this data and publicizing it. Public use of this data is vitally important due to constant allegations of denial that this form of racism does not exist or that it is highly exaggerated.

Building a core political, media and populist value that Islamophobia is to be exposed, denigrated, dismantled and de-normalised is essential.

Counter-narrative 1. Challenging and contextualizing constructions of Muslim 'threat'.

This issue is the most significant challenge facing those wishing to de-normalise Islamophobia, as Merali argues 'securitisation haunts every discourse regarding Muslims (2017, p.30), and this was uniformly confirmed by respondents across all the case study contexts.

As regards the response of Muslim communities to terrorist attacks and the reactive narrative of Muslim condemnation, the French report clearly identified the ambiguities at work here (Bila 2017, p.13-14). One the one hand, many faith-based organisations and imams[3] would systematically condemn all terrorist attacks and on many occasions appeal to Muslims to "distance themselves from the terrorist ideology" (Les Monde 2015, in Bila 2017, p.14) by taking part in protest marches and gatherings, online petitions and campaigns. On the other hand, organisations like the CCIF[4] refused to be coerced into denouncing acts of terrorism for which they did not feel any responsibility: "Muslims must not play the Islamophobic game which involves identifying them as culprits and ideal suspects, pushing them constantly to justify themselves for actions of third parties" (CCIF 2014). Calling for unity and promotion of narratives of solidarity and social cohesion, for example after the Paris attacks, was also strongly made by French respondents.

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[3] Muslim faith leaders
[4] *Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France* -CCIF (French Counter-Islamophobia Collective)

Rejecting the sweeping associations of Islam and Muslims with violence and terrorism were consistently demonstrated and elaborated by many respondents, for example in Greece (Chatzipanagiotou and Zarikos 2017). Whereas in Hungary, the use of such an 'anti-terrorism frame', differentiating between radical and non-radical Islam and emphasising that the majority of Muslims are not terrorists and that many of them are victims of that terrorism, was strongly in evidence amongst opposition political parties, and in the media but not amongst respondents from Muslim and community organisations who emphasised narratives of peaceful cohabitation of cultures and religions; a 'tolerance frame' (Vidra 2017, p.15).

The counter-narrative that 'Muslims are not dangerous for local society' was made in many different ways across our case study contexts. For example, through 'shedding light on Islamic belonging and on Muslims' different ways of living their faith, ways that change over one's lifetime' (Mescoli 2017b, p.34). Many of the other forms of counter-narratives discussed below are intimately interconnected with responding to this dominant narrative of Muslim dangerousness. Here there is a key tension between counter-narratives that emphasise moral and ethical values, such as humanity, plurality and cultural compatibility, and those which emphasise state action and fundamental changes to law and policy. The former were more prevalent across our case study contexts, but they can be both be clearly linked where recognition of the 'Muslim *ummah's*[5] humanity' can lead to challenging the dehumanising institutional discursive construction of Muslims as dangerous, barbarian and violent (Merali 2017, p.9).

Counter-narratives were also seen as necessarily involving a challenge to the ways in which counter-terrorism measures criminalise Muslims and thereby participate in the construction of a 'society of suspicion', the ways in which the use of exceptional policing powers, contributed to erosion of civil liberties of all citizens and the ways in which heavy-handed policing of Muslim populations plays into the hands of those who promote the victim-agenda to drive Muslims further towards extremism and terrorism (Bila 2017). In the UK, oppositional narratives calling for at the very least a review of the Prevent policy and its introduction into law since early 2016, to a call for the repealing of all anti-terrorism laws, driven by the persistence of civil society actors and NGOS, academics, dissenting politicians and lawyers and students' groups e.g. Students Not Suspects campaign (NUS, 2015 onwards), the wider operation of anti-racist campaigns by the National Union of Students Black Students Campaign (NUS 2017), which includes shared work on Prevent related matters (see e.g. the Preventing Prevent Handbook, NUS Black Students, 2017) particularly during the academic years 2015 – 2017, the operation of organisations like PreventWatch, IHRC, CAMPACC, SACC, Cage and MEND (Merali 2017 p.31). A key objective here, as Max Hill QC put it, is breaking the cycle of literal, legal and conceptual expulsion of Muslims from the nation.

Counter-narrative 2: Building inclusive nations: challenging exclusive and discriminatory national projects

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[5] *Ummah* stems from the Prophetic teachings and denotes a unified Muslim body.

This counter-narrative includes arguments with three specific threads covering broader reconstruction of narratives of the nation, exposing and challenging forms of racial and religious discrimination in substantive contexts and actions to improve the safety and security of Muslim communities.

Firstly, it was identified that a cultural shift in understanding who is part of the nation, and how national histories have been intimately intertwined with Muslims and Islamic cultures over centuries was seen as vital in challenging the political construction of exclusive national projects. For example, in Portugal challenging the narratives about Portuguese national identity, the centrality of the *Reconquista* narrative that constructs a boundary between barbarism (Islam, 'Muslimness') and civilisation (Christianity) e.g. through education and history teaching was noted. Here, challenging the historical account of the relationship between Portuguese colonialism, the process of nation-making and Islam, that is, the ideology of 'benign colonialism' and 'integration'. Making broader connections between colonialism and Islamophobia was necessary as countering Islamophobia could be usefully tied to anti-colonial struggle and the fight against contemporary imperialistic wars. Further, narratives that involved acknowledging Islamophobia as a form of violence that is relational to both recent and colonial history and current events in various Westernised settings was highlighted. Lastly, challenging claims about the Islamisation of Europe was identified and this point is dealt with in more detail below in the context of the counter-narrative arguing for cultural compatibility and the operation of conviviality.

Secondly, there were many examples of ways in which exclusionary and discriminatory policies and practices were being documented and refuted. For example, documenting cases and evidence e.g. work of European Parliament Socialist and Democrats Working Group on Extremism, Populism, Nationalism and Xenophobia, and 'mapping Islamophobia' e.g. CCIB, Belgium and making the realities of Islamophobia visible using academic research, social media and data collection as noted above. Uncovering institutionalised forms of Islamophobia and its relation to institutional racism (e.g. Muslims' everyday interactions with social servants, practitioners or social assistants, which show a pattern of interpreting situations and Muslim families that are dehumanising), and the complicity and responsibility of political parties, from the right and the left in its silencing was identified as a general strategy. Mores specific responses included opposing the excesses of counter-terrorism legislation as counter-terrorism measures adopted by the state criminalise Muslims and thereby participate in the construction of a 'society of suspicion', challenging the government's use of exceptional policing powers on the pretext of the fight against terrorism prevention which contributed to the erosion of civil liberties for all citizens. Desecuritisation of the refugee crisis was called for in the Hungarian and Czech cases. The use of law and strategic litigation was discussed in detail e.g. in the UK report and also in France (example of CCIF) as legal action strengthens Muslim voices in the face of Islamophobia fed by political populism, hate speech and media hype, and also mediatisation of relevant court cases was seen as helpful overall, dependant on dominant media frames of meaning.

Thirdly, as regards improving the safety and security of Muslim communities' narratives included arguing for mobilization of support for Muslim communities e.g. *Lallab* activities and *Stop au cyberharcèlement Islamophobe* online site, tackling the immediate threat to Muslim

women in street and other public spaces and challenging the excessive investigation and differential treatment of Muslim charities.

Counter-narrative 3: Cultural compatibility and conviviality: challenging the narrative separation of cultural and ethnic groups

Laying out arguments which challenge the essentialised separation of Muslim groups and narratives of the threatening Islamisation of Europe involve assertions of the cultural compatibility of Islam with European democracy and citizenship and acknowledgment of the contribution of Islam to European civilization e.g. Expo-Islam (Belgium), the Annual Meeting of French Muslims (France) or the Living Islam event (UK), and demonstrable arguments about the mixed nature of Muslim and non-Muslim everyday lives. Our case studies identified many ways in which this counter-narrative could be elaborated, through, for example, emphasizing conviviality and the importance and depth of Muslim and non-Muslim relaxed friendships, pleasantries and interactions e.g. Salaam-Shalom (Germany) and in general emphasising the heterogeneity of Muslim communities[6], and promoting visibility and recognition of their everyday lives as showing conviviality and tolerance. Empirical sources could be used, including data on education and labour market activity to challenge construction of Muslims as 'Gypsies' (Czech Republic, Hungary) and assertions that they are irrefutably culturally distinct and unadaptable. In Germany the work of *Religionsmonitor* was noted which challenges construction of Islam as an obstacle to inclusion in German society and in Greece promotion of the awareness of positive interactions in housing and education and peaceful flourishing of multi-culture were detailed.

Counter-narrative 4: Elaborating plurality: challenging narratives of Muslim singularity

The power of arguments which emphasis Muslim plurality and heterogeneity were highly effective in challenging simplistic monolithic narratives of anti-Islamophobia. This involves diversifying the understanding of what, who and how is a Muslim, and the acceptance of plurality within a plural understanding of the nation, challenging the myth of Muslim communalism and homogeneity, and in particular monolithic accounts of Muslim women's lives. Here, counter-speech was elaborated through for example the use of personal journeys and career paths and other life course narratives. Unlocking the potential for and sharing experience of Muslim women as entrepreneurs e.g. *Akhawate* Business was one example given from the Belgian case. This overlaps with counter-narratives of Islamicate feminisms discussed in the next section.

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[6] Recognising the heterogeneity of the Muslim community does not contradict notions of *ummah* discussed on p. 12. Rather, whilst there may be a broad understanding of a wider Muslim community *(ummah)* we emphasise this is diverse in nature – as with any other faith community globally.

Counter-narrative 5: Challenging narratives of sexism

Narratives of sexism amongst Muslim communities can be countered by articulating that Muslim women's lives show a plurality of positionings and experiences and by establishing that patriarchy and excessive sexism is not specific to Islam. This involves breaking the chain of meaning between the projection of the self-image of the West/Europe as the land of women's rights and the construction of notions of a civilized West versus a barbarian Muslim Other. Contrary to the dominant representation of Muslim women as the paradigmatic example of gender oppression ('the *hijab* issue' is recurrent), instead of merely emphasizing that there is an emergent "Arab feminism", it is crucial to show that there is a long history of Muslim women in political and cultural spheres. It is also important to promote knowledge of Muslim feminists and how issues regarding women, gender, and Islam are discussed and narrated by women themselves. Here asserting that Muslim women are in control of their own lives and that we should stop speaking on their behalf and rather amplify their voices so others can hear and understand them was key. Developing positive and diverse narratives on and by Muslim women in safe spaces was exemplified by the work of *Lallab* and *Vie feminine/CCIB* workshops.

The idea that there is not a debate about gender roles or about the leading role of women in religious, social and political affairs in Muslim communities can then be challenged. Demonstrating that feminism can be Islamic was highlighted e.g. in feminist re-reading of sacred texts (Djelloui and Hamidi) and the work of the Centre for Women's Studies in Islam (CERFI, ULB). Articulating intersectional Islamicate feminism and including queer Muslims as partners in this process were also discussed as important parts of this counter-narrative. Also building linkages with the wider fight against sexism and patriarchy was seen as vital e.g. European Network Against Racism (ENAR) Forgotten Women project, Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA.be), Women's March in Frankfurt (January 2017).

Counter-narrative 6: Building inclusive futures

The construction of new political horizons and political projects, and forward-looking, future-orientated narratives which go beyond the constraints of oppositional countering interventions was a strong narrative theme. This involves building a national, international and global vision of open, inclusive multiple modernities society based on trust and cooperation. In doing so the task of provide complex, valid explanations for key issues including radicalization, terrorism, the migrant crisis, the refugee crisis, and other national crises which were powerful enough to be able to be practically adequate in shaping individual world views were seen as intrinsic to mobilize popular support for such a goal. Emphasising the location of Muslims as citizens with equal rights and associated narratives of solidarity and unity were articulated, for example *Nous sommes (aussi) la nation* – We are (also) the nation (CCIF, France) and the use of humour and story-telling techniques (CCIF, *Les indivisibles*). Promotion of active political engagement and mobilization of Muslims was also associated

with this goal e.g. PIR[7], CRI[8], and increasing Muslim participation in the academy, and other institutions, services and professions. Giving greater public visibility to Muslim contributions to society was also articulated. This was exemplified in the *Muslims in Europe- Untold Success Stories* project (European Parliament Socialists and Democrats Working Group on Extremism, Populism, Nationalism and Xenophobia), and also the professional expertise and contribution of Muslims was shown in the work of *ABPM* (Belgian association of Muslim professionals). Muslims were narrated as resources for socio-economic and cultural development e.g. in the Couscous and Falafel Stories (ABPM[9], Belgium). Inter-faith and outreach work, awareness raising events e.g. IHRC were noted and also the wider pubic engagement work of the *Hate Free Culture* campaign in the Czech Republic and also *Alfiradus* and *InBáze* promotion of Muslim and non-Muslim dialogue. Build alliances was another key strategy here in moving forward, here the work of the *Young Muslims as partners, for dialogue and cooperation against discrimination* (Germany) was highlighted and more generally moves to engage anti-racist movements and the anti-racist political agenda with the struggle against Islamophobia were seen as an integral part of the process of building inclusive futures.

Counter-narrative 7: Deracialising the state: challenging institutional narratives

Deracialisation is understood here as the act of dissolving the categories of 'race' and their mobilisations. This is a process whereby the focus of action is on facilitating the recession of racial categorisation and practices. This connects counter-narratives to Islamophobia with a wider political project of dismantling other forms of racialised discourse, racialised institutions and racialised political projects. More specifically here this work involves decentring conversations on Islam and Muslims from current institutionalised narratives, and the humanisation of the Muslim subject in political and media discourse and also in policy and even law, together with an understanding of the way race is invoked, for example in the positionality of lawmakers (UK). For governments and state institutions, acknowledgement of Islamophobia as a symptom of deeper, national, structural issues and inadequate state responses to racism then necessitates serious revision of epistemologies of anti-racism and equalities. This was also seen to necessitate removing hierarchies of racism and acknowledging Islamophobia as a form of racism. Globalising the challenge to Islamophobia was imperative here given the relational, cross-national character of anti-Muslim narratives. New state acknowledgement of institutional Islamophobia and associated programmes of action was argued for (see UK report for detailed agenda). Through active engagement and political action Muslims can collectively and effectively pressure governments to challenge Islamophobia, although frequently the experience of interaction with state agencies is one of marginalisation. Challenging misinterpretations of secularism and *laïcité* was articulated e.g. in the work of *Contra-attaque(s)* as the notion of *laïcité*, which ensures the freedom of conscience and guarantees the free exercise of worship, is constantly 'hijacked' to exclude Muslims. Countering how the self-image of the Portuguese state as a secular state silences the unequal power relations between the state and different religious institutions and, more

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[7] *Parti des indigènes de la République* – PIR (Party of the Republic's Indigenous)
[8] *Coordination contre le Racisme et l'Islamophobie* – CRI (Coordination Against Racism and Islamophobia)

[9] *Association Belge des Professionnels Musulmans* – ABPM (Association of Belgian Muslim Professionals)

specifically, the privileges granted to the Catholic Church was also elaborated. The principle of secularism and religious freedom is mobilised to make an apology for Western modernity as the only political horizon and hence challenging political rhetoric of benign state administration was narrated. In response claims for parity between minoritised and /or religious communities were made. In the Greek case, promoting Conservative anti-nationalist narratives and Christian ecumenical ideals such as peace, hospitality and care towards the vulnerable, especially towards refugees was also utilised. Challenging respective government stances and rhetoric on the refugee crisis, and associated anti-Islam campaigns, and associated violations of international law and critique of the state's incapacity of implementing substantive anti-terrorism measures and its controversial deed of accusing asylum seekers of terrorist acts was articulated in Hungary. Promoting narratives of institutional security and increasing trust were deployed to counter narratives of insecurity.

Counter-narrative 8: Emphasising humanity and Muslim normalisation: challenging narratives of division

The call for the recognition of the common humanity of Muslims and the normalization of the Muslim presence in European societies was reputedly voiced by our respondents. The simple call for common human unity was seen as an essential challenge to narratives of division, stigmatisation and racialised domination. Dilemmas of humanising Muslims and celebrity 'Muslimness' were posed in the UK report with the challenge that, 'if you need me to prove my humanity, I'm not the one who's not human'.

Our fieldwork identified a multiplicity of creative ways in which this objective could be narrated, represented and promoted and some selected examples are given below. Promoting narratives and learning about the ordinariness of Muslim lives e.g. *Human Library* (Czech Republic) was one good example. The Czech report emphasised the value of narrating ordinariness, hence talking about Muslims as ordinary people with their multiple roles and identities and this then connects directly with the notion of Muslim plurality discussed above In France, examples included the collective *Nous Sommes Unis* (We stand together) and the eponymous social media campaign and the work of *Etudiants musulmans de France* (EMF) and *Coexister*, a youth organisation promoting interfaith understanding, in media-savvy awareness-raising campaigns to promote a message of solidarity and social cohesion. Bechrouri (2017) stated, "we must continue to develop narratives based on statistics and rational arguments… but the narrative should also emphasise that we are not divided, that we live and work together on a daily basis. It has to speak directly to people, to non-Muslims". In Greece, empathy-evoking stories, particularly of refugees, that prompt the identification of the target audience with Muslims experiencing discrimination, exclusion, and hatred, and sometimes even inspire active intervention and advocacy on the part of citizens were discussed and here the aim of this counter-narrative is, in the words of one respondent, for "people […] to understand that they [the refugees, Muslims] are human as well. Human like us". Promoting a 'patriotism of solidarity' towards refugees (Archbishop Ieronymos, Greece) and promoting notions of shared humanity e.g. #*Stop Mind Borders* were key elements also in this counter-narrative. This required acknowledgement of the sensibilities of fellow human beings living away from their homeland, and Muslim citizens generally. The Hungarian case

study highlighted the significance of a humanitarian frame (HF) of meaning, which was identified as the most dominant frame in media coverage. This 'emphasizes that refugees or migrants are human beings, individuals with a human face and that many of the asylum seekers are actually fleeing from civil war and more specifically, the ISIS. HF also puts emphasis on how asylum seekers are received in Hungary, what difficulties they encounter upon arriving in the country and how badly they are treated by the authorities' (Vidra 2017, p.10). Countering de-humanisation of Muslims also ties in closely with strategies of empowerment and creation of space for Muslim voices and narratives discussed in the next section.

Counter-narrative 9: Building Muslim space(s) and autonomy

To row back against the all-encroaching and dominating power of Islamophobia movement-building, building spaces for Muslims to take narrative control and developing and asserting Muslim autonomy and subjectivity in all its diversity was seen as an essential counter-strategy. This involves in building political space through alliances and solidarities, as well as the creation of arts spaces, alternative media and alternative forms of narration and representation across a wide range of spheres. Examples in the UK include *The Muslim Vibe*, in the UK, (a media hub that straddles news and cultural stories for Muslims), the Saqi gallery and publishing house, with Kube publishing, IHRC Gallery and Bookshop, Algorithm, Amrit publishers, Turath, Islamic Texts Society and other publishing houses and galleries. The use of arts and creative expression e.g. *Um'artist* was also highlighted in the German report. Creating physical and conceptual spaces as a retreat from unsafe, hostile environments to facilitate Muslim narratives of being was also exemplified in empowerment workshops e.g. *Muslimische Jugend in Deustchland*, *LesMigras* and *JugendtheaterBüro Berlin,* empowering through legal knowledge e.g. *Hear Me Out! For Democracy and Diversity!*, the use of online platforms and social media e.g. *Melting Book, W(e) Talk.* Lastly, the Greek report provide a detailed account of the case of the struggle for a Mosque in Athens and the creation of religious spaces for Muslims in the capital of Greece. A warning note was also sounded that Muslim spaces are under severe pressure and subject to security praxis (UK).

Counter-narrative 10: Challenging distorted representation: verism and voice

Challenging racialised negative attribution and negative representation of Muslims may be made in relation to the 'real' through examination of mimetic, or imitative, accuracy. The value of such verism or 'progressive realism', which can be used effectively to 'unmask and combat hegemonic representations' was a key theme here. There are many examples of passionate protest over distorted representation, based on these claims for progressive realism, e.g. Pakistanis in Bradford over their portrayal as the emerging 'Muslim underclass' in a sensationalist BBC *Panorama* documentary and wider criticism from Muslim groups over Islamophobia in the British media. But an 'obsession with realism' which assumes that the 'real' and the 'truth' about a community are easily accessible, unproblematic and pre-existing is problematic and may clash with the narration of plurality. Professionals in the media, in

education and state institutions, lack knowledge and culture about Islam so address this lack was important. Educational tools and promotion of public knowledge of Islam were also used to refute framing of Islam as a religion of violence. One such initiative, *Parle-moi d'Islam* (Talk to me about Islam) produced educational videos and articles broadcast on YouTube and other social media networks. Accuracy in, agitation for, and sanction for failure in, delivering accurate representation, was not solely media representation. The UK report detailed a set of key claims: 'expanding coverage of Muslim community affairs and of race and Islamophobia problems through permanent assignment of reporters familiar with the issues around these affairs, and through establishment of more and better links with the Muslim community. The Muslim community is a diverse one, and the media needs to engage with that diversity and not promote or rely on sensationalist or apologetic voices that simply help propagate deeply held negative ideas. Integrating Muslims and Muslim activities into all aspects of coverage and content, including newspaper articles and television programming was a central mainstreaming goal. The news media must publish newspapers and produce programmes that recognise the existence and activities of Muslims as a group within the community and as a part of the larger community and also recruit more Muslims into journalism and broadcasting and promote those who are qualified to positions of significant responsibility. Accelerating efforts to ensure accurate and responsible reporting of news concerning Muslims and all minorities through adoption by all news gathering organisations of stringent internal staff guidelines, but also as part of a more accurate representation of so-called 'foreign affairs'. Lastly, cooperating in the establishment of and promotion of any existing privately organised and funded independent institute(s) to train and educate journalists in Muslim affairs, recruit and train more Muslim journalists, develop methods for improving police-press relations, review coverage of Muslim related issues, and support continuing research in these fields were all relevant here (Merali 2017) Our case studies documented claims for extending the range of Muslim figures, intellectuals, experts and particularly women in these categories in the commentariat. Promoting debate and public awareness was also noted e.g. *CRI* (*Coordination contre le Racisme et l'Islamophobie)* (France, *Respekt, Člověk v tísni* (Czech Republic), *Destination: Germany* journalism project. Various examples of media interventions included AWSA.be photo exhibitions e.g. on Belgian Arab feminist, *"Verviers: Terre d'eau au-delà du terreau"* film depicting multi-culture as opposed to radicalization in Verviers. Use new representations of Muslim fashion was noted as a valuable narrative. Telling a different story; creative resistance e.g. through comics was exemplified in the work by Tuffix (Soufeina Hamed) and 'reversing the stereotype' in photo work by Feriel Bendjama, also publicizing photo contests e.g. *Islam in Germany*. Exposing how hate campaigns impact widely on the lives of Muslim individuals, families and communities was also discussed. The work of the European Federation of Journalists in 'deontology', monitoring and promoting avoidance of discrimination in media coverage, and the *Media Against Hate Campaign* was highly valued. The call to de-religionise media discourse was noted here (Daniel Bax, Germany). Also, the Twitter hash tag campaign, *#Campusrassismus*, (campus racism) and networking and alliances with organizations such as Initiative Black People in Germany (*Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland Bund* e.V.), Copwatch Frankfurt, and SchauHin were also recommended as examples of good practice. Other interventions included developing community media e.g. Arabel.fm and working as a 'trusted flagger' of anti-Muslim hate on social media platforms e.g. UNIA, Belgium and INACH (International Network Against Cyber Hate).

4. Conclusion

This report documents the strength, vitality and innovative nature of the many diverse ways in which Islamophobia is currently being challenged across Europe, in the face of a highly constraining set of racialised conditions which are producing and reproducing narratives of hate. These findings are based on new data sets of fieldwork with 278 respondents and textual data collated from political, policy, media and NGO discourse, and digital data from social media platforms.

The most important message of this report is the conceptual specification of ten counter-narratives to Islamophobia, which have been identified here and which are currently active and operating across Europe. Each brings together a cluster of arguments and chains of meaning to refute the multi-dimensional forms of Islamophobic discourse identified by the CIK project in Workstream 1 (Mescoli 2017a). They also collectively avoid being trapped in a cycle of reaction to demonisation by envisioning and narrating paths to the building of inclusive societies. This emerging set of creative resistances provide a sound basis for building, reiterating and pressing home the forensic refutation of Islamophobia and for turning the tide of a deteriorating European climate of anti-Muslim hate. But, without declaratory and effective state action this will be impossible, with it there is some significant chance of success. In Hungary, for example, 'Islamophobia is generated by the populist, self-declared illiberal national conservative government' and in the UK 'little or no progress' over twenty years is noted in the response of state and associated institutions in tackling this issue. The production of counter-narratives occurs primarily in civil society contexts, and their absence and lack in state contexts requires an honest appraisal of the relationship between state rhetoric, policies and practices and an 'obsession with Muslimness' (Merali 2017, p.74).

There is a complex and intricate relationship between these counter-narratives with the potential for misrecognition and contradiction, for example emphasising plurality may be seen to undermine calls for recognition of common humanity, or calling for creation of Muslim space(s) may be seen to undermine a challenge to narrative separation of groups, or challenging distorted representation may lead to emphasising simplistic narratives of Muslim singularity. These counter-narratives may all be subject to subversion and rejection in many ways. They are however an integrated package of key arguments which are inter-dependant and inter-linked. For example, challenging discrimination and institutional narratives, together with building a plural vision of an inclusive state and an inclusive future are complimentary and intertwined and cannot be disconnected. The effectiveness of counter-narratives has not been measured in this project, what we have been able to identify is what counter-narratives are most widely in use across Europe, how they work and how they are deployed. The collective experience of actors and agencies across these member states is drawn together here and these counter-narratives, in our view, effectively counter, address and engage with current formations of Islamophobia and provide a pathway towards a declining environment of hate.

In the widely differing eight national contexts examined in this case study there is convergence in the elucidation of counter-narratives, and their discursive power is intimately interconnected, as counter-narratives in one country relate closely to and rely on counter-narratives elsewhere. This relational character of counter-narratives confirms the importance of robust consolidation, iteration and reiteration of these arguments which is the purpose of this project. This report on Key Workstream 2 Messages together with the eighteen reports

produced by the project so far on the role of law, sixteen country case studies and the report on Key Messages from Workstream 1 will inform the next stage of the project, Workstream 3 which will develop an EU Counter-Narrative toolkit which will document and specify tools, arguments, positions and accounts which will be able to directly engage and challenge Islamophobia and provide guidance on best practice in their utilization.

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