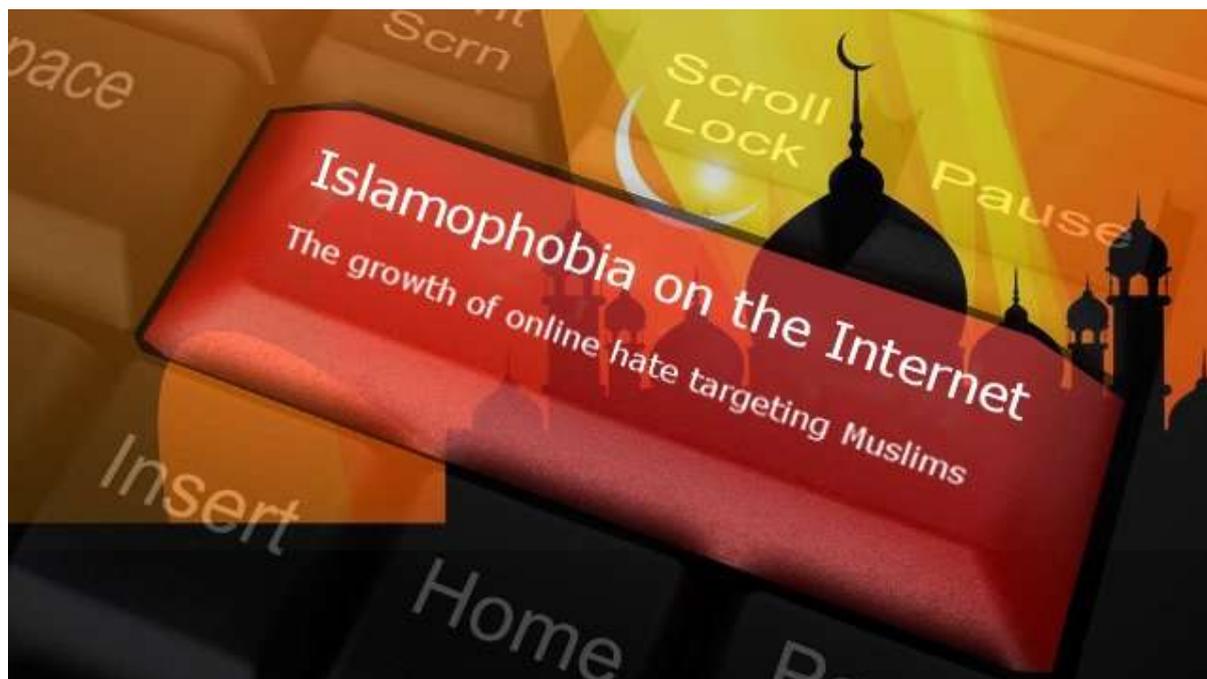


The Nature of Anti-Muslim Hate Speech



The following is an extract from pages 8—9 of the report “Islamophobia on the Internet: The growth of online hate targeting Muslim”. More information about this report can be seen at <http://ohpi.org.au/islamophobia-on-the-internet-the-growth-of-online-hate-targeting-muslims/> the full report will be available from that location from December 10th 2013.

As traditionally defined, hate speech is speech that vilifies a protected group, or that vilifies a member of a protected group on the basis of their group identity. What constitutes a ‘protected group’ may vary with context, but religion is usually included as a protected group. This rule based approach to hate speech is useful, but avoids the need to consider the nature of hate speech itself. In differentiating hate speech against Muslims from what is sometimes called the ‘defamation of Islam’,¹ or indeed from theological debate, a deeper understanding of hate speech is needed.

Jeremy Waldron opens his book, *The Harm in Hate Speech*,² with the story of a man out walking with his two young children. They encounter a sign, “Muslims and 9/11! Don’t serve them, don’t speak to them, and don’t let them in.” The family in this fictional story is Muslim, and the father doesn’t know how to respond when his daughter asks about the sign, so he rushes them home. Waldron uses this example to highlight nature and purpose of hate speech. In his analysis, racism is certain hate speech, but hate speech need not be so narrowly defined. On Waldron’s analysis hate speech clearly encompasses religious vilification.

The inclusion of religious vilification against Muslims as a form of hate speech is particularly significant when it comes to the online world as most platforms prohibit ‘hate speech’ rather more

¹ Jerome Socolovsky, ‘Islamic Nations Relinquish Demand for Defamation Laws’, *Voice of America News*, 24 October 2012 online at <http://www.voanews.com/content/islam-un-defamation/1532871.html>

² Jeremy Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech* (Harvard University Press, 2012).

specific forms of hate such as racism. Under the terms of service of a platform provider, hate speech targeting Muslims should be treated no different to antisemitic content, racist content, or homophobia. In all cases it should be promptly removed from the platform.

The danger of hate speech is that the messages it spreads aim to undermine the public good of an inclusive society.³ These messages aim to remove members of the targeted group's 'assurance that there will be no need to face hostility, violence, discrimination, or exclusion by others' in their daily life.⁴ The messages take two forms. The first is directed to the targeted group and says, '[d]on't be fooled into thinking you are welcome here'.⁵ The second message is to rest of society and says, '[w]e know some of you agree that these people are not wanted here... known that you are not alone... there are enough of us around to make sure these people are not welcome... [and] to draw attention to what these people are really like'.⁶ The messages are the same regardless of the group in society being targeted.

Hate speech is an attack on a person, or group of people, and must be distinguished from 'defamation of religion' or 'theological debate' which are attacks on ideas (Figure 1 shows both). An attack on an idea can turn into an attack on a person when a disagreement over religious practise, acceptable as a matter of speech, morphs into action aimed at preventing the lawful religious practise of another. This report includes some coverage of this form of religious vilification in the context of campaigns against Halal certification.



Figure 1 Example E18

We include a significant volume and variety of hate speech in this report. Both the message to Muslims and the message sent to society at large can be readily observed in the examples provided. We don't aim to further the objectives of the haters, but rather to expose them. The messages are out there, and a response is needed.

While some of the hate shown in this report is specifically related to those who follow the Islamic religion, in other cases the anti-Muslim hate could more accurately be described as racism with 'Muslim' serving as a short hand for 'foreign looking people' of Middle Eastern or East Asian appearance. Examples of this can be seen in Figure 2.

We note the positive work of Australia's Acting Racial Discrimination Commissioner in the national consultation on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians in 2004. In particular we endorse the Commissioner's recommendation that federal law be introduced making unlawful

³ Ibid 4.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid 2.

⁶ Ibid 2-3.

vilification on the grounds of religion or belief.⁷ This position was also previously expressed by the commission in 1998.⁸ We recommend adding 'or practise' to this recommendation.



Figure 2 Images of anti-Muslim hate which may also be classified as racism

This report focuses on anti-Muslim hate, but past work by the Online Hate Prevention Institute has exposed similar attacks on Indigenous Australians, the Jewish Community, military veterans, and other groups. While the volume of content attacking Muslims is particularly significant, the Muslim community is by no means alone in facing such attacks.

The Muslim community has an important role to play in responding to this hate, but this is not a Muslim community problem. An attack on the inclusiveness of our society, and on multiculturalism, is an attack on all of us. Governments and community groups must unite to better tackle the problem of anti-Muslim hate speech and of hate speech more generally.

Recommendation 1: Government agencies, researchers and others dealing with Racism should extend their work to include vilification of Muslims where this may be a proxy for racism or xenophobia against people of Middle Eastern and East Asian ethnicity

Recommendation 2: The Australian Government should pass laws to make vilification on the grounds of religious belief or practise unlawful and expand the remit of the Australian Human Rights Commission accordingly.

Recommendation 6: Social media platforms should interpret hate speech as including messages expressing hostility, violence, discrimination, or exclusion against a protected group.

⁷ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Ismae – Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians* (2003) 6.

⁸ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Article 18: Freedom of Religion and Belief* (1998) iii, ix, ch 5.