

Words matter: denying Islamophobia enables it

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Tory MPs have a lot to say about racism at present. According to them, no one in their party is racist. But then, they also deny that there is any such thing as Islamophobia.

They accept that there might be anti-Muslim hate. But simultaneously they imply that this is a response to what they describe as a Muslim takeover of cities like London or Birmingham, for which there is not the slightest shred of evidence.

And through all this diversionary narrative they will quietly suggest whilst anti-Semitism is real because there is a state of Israel, Islamophobia cannot be because there is no equivalent state. So, whilst they will imply it is anti-Semitic to oppose the policies of the Israeli government, or to be opposed to Zionism, which cannot be true because many Jews are opposed to both in their existing forms and to be anti-Semitic is to be prejudiced against Jews precisely because of their Jewishness and not their politics, they say it is not possible to be Islamophobic because they seem to think that there is no single state to which this term might be applied.

This is a fundamental category error. Not only is anti-Semitism not capable of being confused with attitudes towards the state of Israel, unless the attitude in question involves the denial of the rights of Jews as Jews when Israel was always expected to be and actually is a multicultural state, but it is to also confuse ethnicity with which beliefs are associated with statehood and citizenship when they are clearly not the same thing.

As example, Sadiq Khan is British. As British as I am. Maybe more so, as I have two passports. Anyone suggesting otherwise misrepresents what it is to be British. Doing so they commit a hate crime, which the government has defined as:

Hate crimes and incidents are taken to mean any crime or incident where the perpetrator's hostility or prejudice against an identifiable group of people is a factor in determining who is victimised.

That is what I think Lee Anderson is guilty of. Others may disagree. I think that.

I also think some people are very clearly guilty of such crimes against Jews. I do not for

a moment deny that. Anti-Semitism is real, and is a hate crime against an identifiable group of people. The term is used to identify a particular form of hate-crime that is necessarily racist in nature. I condemn it.

So too is Islamophobia a hate crime against a particular and identifiable group of people that is necessarily racist in nature. The words describe the same crime perpetrated against different groups. I also condemn Islamophobia.

But, some Tories, from the prime minister downwards appear refuse to recognise one of these crimes. Why is that?

Rehman Chishti MP, a Tory MP of Pakistani heritage, suggested on Sky in an interview with Sophie Ridge last night that Sunak has written off the Muslim community. The implication was that they do not matter to him. He was clearly angry, whilst managing it well given he has every reason to be very angry indeed.

Baroness Warsi, another Tory, for whom I have much time on this and some other issues, does not try to hide her anger, and why should she? She is the subject of prejudice by many in her own party, which seeks to deny that the description of that prejudice exists, as well as to claim it is not racist.

There are hate crimes happening right now and some Tories are facilitating them by even denying that the language to describe them exists. The prime minister would seem to be in that number.

How did we reach this point where the existence of blatant racism is denied?