

Moving beyond the Islamophobic Discourse to Mutual Collaboration: The Case Study of Humanists and Muslims in the United Kingdom, 2012-2019



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Abstract

This study reconsiders the controversial relationship between the so-called 'Humanists' and 'Muslims' in the UK, by suggesting that it is characterized by a mutual collaboration rather than hostility. The terms 'Humanist' and 'Secularist' are used interchangeably to refer to the same school of thought, that of atheism. While it is true that some contemporary scholars have attempted to associate the rising Islamophobic discourse with the secularists, this article, however, offers two hypotheses to prove the opposite. The Humanist movement UK is like a melting pot that encompasses individuals from a variety of denominational and ethnic backgrounds, including Muslims. The other argument is the openness of Humanists and Muslims to foster dialogue and exchange of views on inclusive education and interfaith dialogue. The analysis showed that the religion of Islam represented an important current in humanist culture. Additionally, Humanists and Muslims fully committed themselves to fighting both Islamic and secular extremism by promoting a moderate perspective, through which they created a more inclusive, tolerant, and cohesive social fabric.

Keywords

Humanists;
Inclusive education;
Interfaith dialogue;
Muslims;
Mutual collaboration.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الإنسانيون؛
التعليم الشامل؛
الحوار بين الأديان؛
المسلمون؛
التعاون المتبادل.

من الخطاب المعادي للإسلام إلى التعاون المتبادل: دراسة حالة الإنسانيين والمسلمين في المملكة المتحدة، 2012-2019

ملخص

تعيد هذه الدراسة النظر في العلاقة المثيرة للجدل بين ما يسمى بـ "الإنسانيين" و "المسلمين" في المملكة المتحدة، من خلال الإشارة إلى أنها تتسم بالتعاون المتبادل بدلاً من العداء. يتم استخدام مصطلحي "إنساني" و "علماني" بالتبادل للإشارة إلى نفس المدرسة الفكرية، مدرسة الإلحاد. في حين أنه من الصحيح أن بعض العلماء المعاصرين حاولوا ربط الخطاب المعادي للإسلام بالعلمانيين، إلا أن هذه المقالة تقدم فرضيتين لإثبات العكس. إن الحركة الإنسانية في المملكة المتحدة هي بمثابة موطن لأفراد من خلفيات طائفية وعرقية متنوعة، بما في ذلك المسلمون. الحجة الأخرى هي انفتاح الإنسانيين والمسلمين على تعزيز الحوار وتبادل الآراء حول التعليم الشامل والحوار بين الأديان. أظهر التحليل أن دين الإسلام يمثل تياراً مهماً في الثقافة الإنسانية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، التزم الإنسانيون والمسلمون تماماً بمحاربة التطرف الإسلامي والعلماني من خلال تعزيز منظور معتدل، من خلاله خلقوا نسيجاً اجتماعياً أكثر شمولاً وتسامحاً وتماسكاً.

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I- Introduction

Hatred and hostility towards Muslims in the UK did not happen by chance; rather, they stemmed from secularist ideologies. Following the 7/7 attacks on the London transport network in 2005, harsh criticism of Islam was poured from the pens of secularists, who associated these acts of terrorism with Muslim extremists (Falahi, 2007, p. 10). They created a stereotypical image of Islam as a religion of terror and barbarianism, from which emerged all oppressive attitudes discriminating against the Muslim communities in the UK. Furthermore, they used the media and the publishing industry to display their overtly antagonistic tone against the convictions and traditions of Muslims. As such, they called for the closure of the Mosques and the prevention of Muslims from practising prayer in public spaces. Besides, they mocked the wearing of the veil by Muslim women, further believing it was a symbol of backwardness. In a few exceptional cases, some Western governments, Canada and France in particular, did lobby for the prevention of the wearing of the veil or 'hijab' in public venues. All these extremist views contributed to the rise of what we refer to as the discourse of 'Islamophobia'.

Nevertheless, the claim that secularism and Islam have always had an antagonistic relationship gives misinterpretation to the recently established collaboration between Humanists and Muslims in the UK. This article attempts to recover the link between 'secularism' and 'Islam' by bringing to the fore the interchange of differing opinions and experiments shared between 'Humanists' and 'Muslims' within the Humanist movement. When we look at the humanists' activities, including events and open debates, on their official website (Humanist Heritage UK), it is easy to observe the pacifist atmosphere created by the leadership of the movement to remove any difference based on ethnicity. Even though humanists did not abandon their 'irreligious' tone, they provided openings for Muslims to champion their cause and openly express their views on several topics. Between 2012 and 2019, both groups were involved in collaborative effort to address critical topics such as education, human rights, and interfaith dialogue. Such cooperation has revealed the fact that respect for religious diversity and Islamic culture was a key component for the advancement of humanist values.

The study adopts the descriptive and analytical approach to explore the collaboration between the humanists and Muslims in the UK. This approach involved a systematic exploration and documentation of how these two groups interacted, cooperated, and engaged in shared activities. It focused on detailing the nature, extent, and outcomes of their collaboration, as well as the factors that facilitated it. Also, it allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Muslims and humanists in the UK, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of intergroup relations in a diverse society.

The article is divided into three main sections. The first offers a brief historical background to the secularist hostility towards the religion of Islam and Muslims in the UK. The second brings to light Muslims' involvement in the British Humanists Association (BHA). The third analyses the mutual collaboration between the humanists and Muslims on education and interfaith dialogue.

I.1. Secularism and the Islamophobic Discourse in the UK

This section begins by introducing the scholarly arguments that attribute hate speech or Islamophobic sentiment to secularism. It then moves on to explore how Muslims in the UK encountered discrimination and prejudice in several facets of life. The purpose, of course, is to demonstrate that antagonism towards Islam and Muslims in the UK did indeed originate from secularist ideologies.

Since the establishment of the secularist movement in 1851 by George Jacob Holyoake, secularists were extremely hostile to organised religions, Christianity in particular, and they viewed certain religious practices and institutions as oppressive or discriminatory, further fuelling their opposition. Instead, they promoted the idea that the political, cultural, and intellectual life of humans should entirely be separated from the influence of the Church (Nash, 1992). This view gave rise to an ever-increasing recognition that governmental institutions should maintain impartiality when it comes to religious affairs.

To have a fuller understanding of the rhetoric of 'Islamophobia' in Western societies such as England, it is necessary to shed some light on secularist views, mechanisms, and practices pertaining to this subject. The term 'Islamophobia' is examined in relation to the far more repressive secular perspectives and actions directed at Muslims. The enmity of secularists towards this ethnic group may have originated from several concerns, many of which were similar to general criticisms of religion but specifically targeted certain aspects of Islamic traditions and values. Following this line of reasoning, researcher Rula Issa (2017) has examined the historical roots of Islamophobia in Western Europe and found that it was deeply rooted in secularism. Issa argued that the secularists played a crucial role in the widespread of hatred and discrimination against the Muslim communities, particularly in France, England, and the United States (pp. 2-3).

In spite of the fact that some scholars have agreed that the secularist movement was fertile ground for cultural and religious diversity, the situation of Muslims hardly improved under the shadow of secularism. A trustee historian, Edward Said, an acclaimed writer and author of *Orientalism*, proposed that the real mission of 'secularism' or 'humanism' was to emancipate the oppressed groups from slavery and protect them from those persons who advocated for religious

extremism. According to him, secularists should have the moral obligation to promote peaceful coexistence among different religions and support efforts to realising universal human liberation (Colleen, 2014).

Based on Said's articulation of secularism, the secularist prejudice against the religion of Islam might, then, be viewed as extremism. Many research projects, written by non-secular authors, were conducted, aiming to investigate or comprehend the underlying causes of the secularist animosity towards the Muslim communities. Recently, researcher Frisina Annalisa (2010) made a basic claim that secularists enhanced the Islamophobic discourse in western societies to eradicate the Muslim identity. The author delineated two important frameworks: the orientalist and security frame. The orientalist framework refers to the cultural misrepresentation of Islam in Western Europe. In a clear context, Islam was always regarded as inferior compared to other religions or cultures. While the security framework is associated with terrorism and the serious threat that Muslims could pose to the national security of the Western nations (p. 560).

In the same vein, Sharmin Sadequee, an anthropologist who was interested in the study of religion and Secularism, has dedicated the past 15 years to documenting the persecution of Muslims by individuals claiming themselves to be 'agnostics'. Sadequee posited that the secularists' influence in the government and public institutions did facilitate the authorisation of discrimination and bigotry against the Muslim groups (Sadequee, 2024).

Some researchers have emphasised the domination of the media and journals by the secularists to give an extremely misleading portrayal of Muslims. For example, Pervaiz Nazir (2007) has pointed out that over the last ten years the publications of Muslim writers on 'political Islam' were overlooked by the Western press to create a marginalised version of Islam in western culture. The author fervently believed that the British press and media were powerfully dominated by the secularists, whose writings and ideologies embodied prejudices and discrimination against the Muslims (p. 21).

In the last two decades, secularists did much to fuel the hate sentiment towards the Muslim population in the UK. This unwarranted animosity did stem from various interconnected factors, including misunderstandings, cultural stereotypes, and ideological differences. When examining Islamophobia from a secular perspective, it is crucial to approach the topic from various angles, like the public perception of Islamic beliefs, how Islam and Muslims were depicted in media outlets, and the challenges related to terrorism and extremism.

Interestingly, secularists in the UK advocated for the complete separation of Islam from public and state affairs. They actively campaigned for legislation that guaranteed religious impartiality in government institutions and public services. This involved opposing state-funded faith-based schools and advocating for a curriculum that remained unbiased towards any specific religion (Evans, 2024).

Also, the negative portrayal of Muslims in the British media perpetuated misconceptions and fed into Islamophobic discourse. According to scholar Fleur Allen (2014), people's negative opinions about Islam and Muslims were generally influenced by the media. After the 11th of September attacks, she argued that the most prevalent Islamic stereotype in the media was the radical Muslim extremists (p. 15).

In effect, the media generated more negative perceptions of Muslims based on their physical appearances. For example, the beard, which served as a physical and spiritual marker of Muslim identity, was viewed by secularists as a symbol of extreme fear and dread. The British media has associated beards with extremism and saw them as entirely antithetical to the English way of life. As a consequence, false stereotypic views were formed against all persons who have beards, not only Muslims, but also the native citizens (Osborne, 2017). It must be said that the portrayal of Muslim beards as a menace has notable social and psychological effects on Muslim immigrants. It caused a sense of estrangement, stigmatisation, and terror.

Additionally, Muslim women, especially those who openly displayed their religious beliefs through the wearing of the veil, frequently encountered instances of maltreatment and prejudice. This often took place in open spaces, working environments, and educational establishments (Naaz, 2016). Media narratives have the potential to either romanticise or vilify Muslim women, thereby perpetuating detrimental prejudices.

What were the main procedures issued by the British statesmen to criminalise the wearing of the veil or 'hijab' in public spaces? Actually, there is no legislation in the United Kingdom that prohibits Muslim women from wearing the veil. Nevertheless, talks over the implementation of such bans have taken place in Parliament, with some Members of Parliament (MPs) primarily centring their arguments on the banning of full-face veils such as the burqa. In 2013, MP Phillip Hollobone introduced a bill to Parliament suggesting a prohibition on wearing 'hijab'. In 2014, some Members of Parliament reached a consensus that the ban bill was unjustified and chose to oppose it by voting (Idriss, 2016, p. 128). Any attempts to ban religious attire in Britain would face significant legal and social pressures because of the country's strong commitment to religious freedom and anti-discrimination laws.

The study of secularist perspectives on Islam in the UK cannot be viewed in isolation from the issues of terrorism and extremism. On 7 July 2005, a group of four terrorists bombed the London transport network. This terrorist activity resulted in 770 casualties and 52 killed persons (Falk & Morgenstern, 2009, p. 19). Following this tragic event, the British media swiftly put the blame on Muslims. Researchers Osborne and Jones have documented instances of physical violence against the Muslim minorities in London and other counties. The authors concluded that the media played a key role in inciting public hostility towards the British Muslim immigrants (Allen, 2014, p. 13).

In summing up the previous arguments, the secularists in the UK powerfully contributed to the dissemination of the Islamophobic discourse through the negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the British media. In some cases, calls to prohibit religious symbols, such as beards or the veil, in public spaces were presented as advocating for secularism. However, these actions could potentially have a greater negative impact on Muslims compared to other religious groups.

Furthermore, the secularist media presented Muslims in a negative image, often associating them with violent extremism and cultural stagnation. This perpetuated detrimental preconceptions and fostered public apprehension and distrust towards Muslim communities across the UK.

I. 2. Muslims in the British Humanist Association (BHA)

The word humanism has the same meaning of secularism, and both of which do belong the same school of thought, that of atheism. By definition, the term 'humanist' is used to refer to individuals who promoted scientific knowledge, secular doctrines, and rationality at the expense of religious dogma or established thought. Moreover, humanists often advocated for atheism in public discourse and made significant contributions to social and political reform.

The historical roots of the humanist movement are traced back to the late Victorian period that witnessed in 1896 the establishment of an organization known as the Union of Ethical Societies. Because of some financial and technical problems, the Ethical Union was replaced in 1967 by the British Humanist Association (BHA) (Flynn, 2007, p.154). The BHA was home to individuals from a variety of denominational backgrounds. Among them were the atheists, Christians, Jews, and Muslims, reflecting its inclusive and diverse nature (Longden, p. 88, 2015). This cultural diversity allowed these individuals to engage with humanist values and principles.

Already at the beginning of the twentieth century -in 1912- humanists were involved in a series of social and educational reforms. An instance of this was when they supported the movement to overturn the blasphemy laws. These laws were instrumental in promoting secular education in public schools.

As a matter of fact, the Muslim community in the Humanist movement was characterized by its diversity, with individuals from various ethnic backgrounds. The Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (CEMB) introduced first evidence concerning the backgrounds of Muslims who joined the BHA, despite the limited available sources on this matter. It documented the following: The Muslims did generally come from the Middle East, Asia, North Africa, and even more (Pooya, 2008).

Muslim humanists are divided into two separate groups: Those who have entirely denounced their former religion, and those to be identified as rational. Ironically, the Westerners have always regarded the individuals springing from Arabic countries as Muslims, regardless of whether they continued to practice Islam or adopted atheism. In a clear context, Muslims' conversion to 'unbelief' did not necessarily mean that they abandoned their Islamic identity; rather, they became skeptical to certain Islamic doctrines and ideologies.

Some Muslims have joined the humanist movement for personal motives, while a few others have done so out of political reasons or as a response to religious extremism. Ex-Muslims have shared their personal experiences growing up as Muslims with their humanist counterparts to offer a skeptical view on Islam and Muslims. These narratives often emphasised the complex nature of identity and beliefs, which enhanced our understanding of the many experiences within the Muslim community. Farid Ali, an Egyptian living in London, mentioned that he converted to atheism, for he did not accept the state affairs to be intersected with religion. Also, Noshina Fawad, an Egyptian living in Leeds, noted that those who dominated the Islamic discourse did not literately convey a good image about Islam (Pooya, 2008).

Taking into consideration the serious threat that Islamophobia posed to the Muslim communities in Western Europe, some Muslims found a safe refuge in the Humanist movement to escape severe religious or political persecution. The humanists have always emphasised the inherent dignity and justice of all individuals. Further, they stressed the importance of communal work, social responsibility, and contributing to the welfare of the oppressed groups around the world. These characteristics made the Humanist movement at the heart of compassion, social justice, and ethical conduct (Davies, 2001).

A key feature of the BHA was the intellectually stimulating atmosphere it provided for Muslim members. It is important to note that the humanists encouraged dialogue and exchange of ideas with Muslims, who found this intellectually enriching. On many occasions, both parties organised events to discuss the future plans of their movement and the major issues to be addressed. These included the promotion of inclusive secular education, the abolition of racism and extremism, and the fostering of interfaith dialogue.

There is a number of Muslim individuals who gained fame under the shadow of humanism. An example of this is the British chemist, Saiful Islam. This researcher was born in Crouch End, North London, and was raised by Muslim parents. Energy, and more specifically the use of lemons to charge batteries, was Saiful's academic sphere of interest. In 2016, he broke the world record by using more than 3000 lemons to achieve 2,307.8 volts. He was asked by reporters on whether he thought it was important for the Humanist Climate Action to exist as a part of Humanists UK. Saiful pointed out that the humanist approach did help him to be more rational and optimistic, believing it was key to grasp the complex chemical nature of the universe ("Fuelling the Future," 2024).

Furthermore, Arzoo Ahmed, a director at the Centre for Islam and Medicine, and a prominent advocate for the Islamic cause within the Humanist movement, had a professional experience which allowed her to work as a Research Associate at the Office for Public Management where she conducted research and evaluation projects for esteemed organizations such as the NHS, Macmillan Cancer Support, and London Creative Labs. In addition, she collaborated with the government on policy matters in her role as Chair of Young Muslim Advisory Group (YMAG). In 2013, Arzoo obtained a degree in Islamic Studies from Al-Salam Institute, after eight years of studying the Islamic Sciences under the supervision of Shaykh Akram Nadwi. In addition, she was overseeing the development of Al-Muhaddithat, a comprehensive encyclopedia spanning 40 volumes that delved into the history of Muslim female research. Arzoo's research interests included the study of the soul and the human being, epistemological theory methodology, morality, and gender theory ("Humanists UK Convention," 2018). Arzoo actively engaged in open debates with Humanists over topics such as Islam, atheism, and extremism. She consistently advocated for Islam and highlighted the possibility of Muslims and Humanists coexisting and working together to create a more enlightened and inclusive society.

As the previous arguments clearly show, Muslims' involvement in the BHA was a social necessity. Many Muslims in the UK were subject to religious persecution as a result of the terrorist attacks on the London transport network in 2005. Thus, they regarded the humanist movement as a safe place where they could combat extremism and express openly their religious convictions.

I. 3. The Mutual Collaboration between Humanists and Muslims on Education and Interfaith Dialogue

This section delves into the mutual collaboration between Muslims and humanists in the UK. Despite their differing worldviews, both groups have found common ground on various fronts, especially on education and interfaith dialogue. The hope is to identify the areas of conflict where the two groups intersected.

In relation to schooling, Muslims in the UK have generally argued that state schools were not suitable for maintaining the inherently Islamic identity of their children. In 2018, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) highlighted some educational policies and procedures which were incompatible with Islamic principles and traditions. Among these were the following: Allowing children to break their fast early in Ramadan; facilitating mixed gatherings; hosting social school events like parents' meetings and other gatherings during Ramadan; providing alcohol at celebrations; and encouraging children to draw images or act out scenes involving God or the prophets (Dupont, p.33).

As a matter of fact, they have called for the establishment of faith schools where their children could freely practice their convictions. They wanted to ensure both the transmission and preservation of the Islamic culture among the young Muslim children. Along with the regular national curriculum, these state-funded schools also taught Arabic language and religious subjects. In the words of Abdullah Trevathan, head teacher of north London's Islamia School, the suggestion that faith schools were important to preserve the Islamic identity and teach the younger generations how to contribute positively to the nation's progress (Miah, 2015, p. 104).

Muslims have regarded faith schools as crucial in fostering tolerance, variety, and multiculturalism. According to scholar Chris Hewer (2001), the Muslim support for religious schools in Britain can be attributed to four primary factors. Muslims powerfully believed that faith schools were a secure environment for the religious upbringings of their daughters at the stage before puberty. In addition, they called for an inclusive education system that takes into consideration students' religious beliefs and practices. On the other hand, these schools could offer a combination of general education and specialized teaching in Islamic religious subjects to train young boys to become religious leaders in their communities. Last, Muslims have emphasised the importance of academic achievement and skill development in schools to equip their children for future careers (p. 518).

Nevertheless, critics of faith schools drew upon the potential danger they could pose to the cultural identity and educational system of Britain. Some inspectors have documented instances of 'religious interference' on the part of Muslim parents in schools attended by their children. An example of this was when some Muslim parents forbade their children from attending music classes, based on the premise that music was illicit in Islam. Furthermore, it was a common practice for Muslim students to set aside a specific time during lessons for prayer, which was against the internal regulations of schools (Dupont, 2018, pp.33-34).

So, in response to the faith-based tendencies in education, a group of humanists and Muslims reached a consensus that the influence of religion, whether Islam, Christianity, or Judaism, should remain aloof from education. An article published in their official website "Humanists UK Convention" entitled "six facts about faith schools you need to know," opposed these schools for several key reasons, grounded in the principles of secularism and inclusivity. It contained the following key points: that children who were not of the same faith of the school were not allowed to subscribe in the school; that the faith school policy obliged the parents to attend the manifestations and make donations to the school (which was against the law); that faith schools divided communities; and that the practice of collective worship in schools contributed to the indoctrination of the young children ("six facts about faith schools," 2023).

In practice, humanists and Muslims have engaged in a campaign to reform religious education (RE) and advocated for a more inclusive Religious Education curriculum reflecting the diversity of beliefs in the United Kingdom. They shared common concerns about the role of religious instruction in schools, especially when it comes to promoting single faith at the expense of others. Further, they emphasised that schools should provide a balanced view of different beliefs, including non-religious perspectives, and respect the rights of all students to learn in an environment free from faith-based education (Clayton, 2018). Instead, they proposed a curriculum consisting of lessons on humanist heritage of humanity, history, English literature, Art, Music and Geography. In addition, they insisted that (RE) should be taught in a way that is balanced, rather than doctrinal (“Religious Education,” n.d.).

Some reasons are put forward to explain why some Muslims were actively involved in the campaign to reform religious education alongside the humanists. Muslim individuals involved in this collaboration often emphasised the importance of teaching about different religions and worldviews, including Islam, in a way that promoted understanding and respect. In addition, they sought to ensure that Islamic teachings were presented fairly, avoiding stereotypes that could lead to misunderstanding or prejudice. Last but not least, many Muslim parents have placed great emphasis on the preservation of their children’s religious identity within a predominantly secular education. By supporting the humanists in their endeavour to reform religious education, they aimed to ensure that their children’s faith was respected and understood within the broader educational context.

The Muslim-Humanist support for secular and inclusive education found a great deal of support among the majority of Muslim families in Britain. Recently, the think tank Policy Exchange published a report in which it stated that 60% of Muslims preferred to send their children to secular schools. Andrew Copson, Education Officer at the British Humanist Association (BHA), claimed that the report’s findings endorsed the Humanist Association’s belief that most individuals, no matter their religious affiliation, favored mixed state schools over faith-based schools (“New Report,” 2007).

While it is true that some Muslims appreciated secular education for its inclusiveness and objectivity, others were, however, cautious of it for fears that it could compromise their Islamic principles. In this regard, it could be inferred that the relationship between humanists and Muslims on secular education was complex and varied across different communities and individuals.

Along with working together on educational campaigns, Humanists and Muslims have worked together to foster interfaith dialogue as a means of bridging the gap between the religious and non-religious communities in the United Kingdom. They have highlighted common values such as rejecting Islamophobic discourse, promoting social justice, equality, and human rights, while also addressing areas of disagreement in a respectful and constructive manner. Besides, they arranged community events to address religious extremism and Islamophobia, foster unity, and support freedom of belief and expression.

Between 2012 and 2014, the Humanists and Muslims have made more organisational initiatives to help address the prevalent issues, more particularly Islamophobia and Muslims’ rights. On 25 November 2014, for example, the Humanists have organised an event at Conway Hall Ethical Society, and its avowed object was to foster tolerance and coexistence between both groups. The event was attended by 144 members, of whom were some Muslim panellists. These individuals were Mamadou Bocoum, the Public Relations Officer for the Sharia Council; Huda Jawad, an advisor at the Centre for Academic Shi’a Studies and research Coordinator for Solace Women’s Aid; Sara Khan, the Co-founder and Director of the human rights charity Inspire; and Yasmin Rehman, a researcher on polygamy and the law from the Centre for Secular Space (Rodell, 2015).

The major issues to be addressed were Islamophobia, women’s rights, and freedom of speech. The Muslim panellists were given the floor to speak about their own experiences, while the Humanists listened heartedly to the arguments of the Muslim speakers. In response to all forms of religious hatred, particularly Islamophobia, the Muslim panelist, Mamadou Bocoum, stated that the Islamophobic discourse was the result of the misleading portrayal of Muslims in the British media. In addition, Sara Khan has called attention to the fact that Islam was highly supportive to women’s rights, thereby refuting the western claim that women’s situation hardly improved under the shadow of Islam. Finally, Huda Jawad stressed that everyone has the freedom to express their own opinions on religion, as long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others (Rodell, 2015).

At the end of the discussion, both parties have agreed that Islam and Muslims were integral parts of humanist culture, and their future relationship should be strengthened through more cooperation. For example, Sara Khan expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to take part in the event and praised the humanists for their efforts to combat both religious and secular extremism. Similarly, Mamadou Bocoum also urged secularists to show humility in acknowledging the perspectives and faith of Muslim individuals (Rodell, 2015).

In January 2019, the Humanists have issued joint statements condemning Islamophobia and other forms of religious persecution. These statements highlighted shared humanist principles, such as the respect for human dignity and opposition to prejudice. At first, they called attention to the difference between criticizing religious beliefs and

discriminatory acts against the Muslims. Following this line of thought, they believed that every person has the right to criticise religious or non-religious beliefs. Nevertheless, a person is not eligible to use ‘threatening words or behaviour’ against some of the ethnic groups, including Muslims, under the UK Racial and Religious Hatred Act of 2006. In addition, they criminalised the use of ‘expressions of Muslimness’ in the public life. For instance, they supported the right of Muslim women to wear the veil as a symbol of their Islamic faith, and they condemned any type of bias against their choice. Besides, they pointed out that any form of discriminatory conduct against the Muslims was the biggest barrier to realising the ethical principles of human rights. As a matter of fact, they have had an agreement that the failure to distinguish between critiquing Islam and discriminating against Muslims has a harmful impact on global religious freedom. Finally, they have agreed that Islamophobia was a form of racial discrimination, and it is the humanists' duty to protect the Muslims from such prejudices (“Home Affairs Select Committee,” 2019).

It is important to stress upon the fact that the collaboration between humanists and Muslims against Islamophobia was a powerful demonstration of how diverse communities became united for a common cause. Their efforts reflected the importance of solidarity in the face of religious and secular extremism.

II- Conclusion

This article tried to examine in some details the mutual collaboration between Humanists and Muslims in the United Kingdom. It refuted the claim that the relationship between humanism or secularism and Islam was always characterized by hostility. The religion of Islam represented an important current in humanist culture, demonstrating that the humanist values of tolerance, reason, and the pursuit of knowledge could transcend religious boundaries. The Humanists have welcomed the Muslims in the BHA and fostered a more inclusive and diverse cultural landscape. This enriched the broader humanist movement with Islamic perspectives that emphasised the shared human experience.

Besides, Humanists have engaged in dialogue with Muslims to challenge misconceptions about each other, and contribute to a more inclusive society. While there were fundamental differences in belief systems, the emphasis on shared humanity and ethical principles often provided a solid foundation for these interactions. This collaborative effort helped to sideline both Islamic and secular extremism, and showed the power of unity in addressing complex educational and religious issues, thus contributing to a more enlightened and cohesive society.

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