

## Seeing Islamophobia in Black: contesting imperial logics in the anti-racist moment

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Motivated by Kundnani's (2015:10) commentary that racialisation within counterterrorism politics reflects "an imperialist political culture", this article theoretically engages with and expands from the political moment that was Muslim counterterrorism policymaker Baroness Sayeeda Warsi speaking at the launch of Runnymede's *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* report in 2017. Noting Warsi's appeal to political blackness made during her speech contesting state-sponsored Islamophobia, it is argued that embedding Warsi's rhetoric in a wider analytical framework organised around black centric traditions prompts a wider conversation about the intricacies of racism within Britain and its international underpinnings. Inspired by the arguments of Aydin (2017) and Narayan (2019) this article examines what it means for both immediate and conceptual resistance to Islamophobia if it and its racialisation are considered as part of a wider global history of Muslims engaging in 'black' as a mode of imperial resistance. By examining the relationship between anti-imperial blackness and Muslimness this article offers a unique angle to understanding the presence of the international, as several groups across the world endeavour to resist the racism of national security regimes.

### Introduction

On November 14, 2017, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, a former member of the Cameron Cabinet and its Extremism Task Force, sat before an audience in the Smeaton Room of Great George Street. This audience was meeting to celebrate the launch of the race-equality think tank, Runnymede's, *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All* report. Here, Warsi (2017b) stated the following on the topic of Islamophobia in the United Kingdom:

*As I often say, what radicalised me was the colour of my skin. When I grew up, we were all black. It didn't matter what shade of black you were, we were all black. Because what united us was this need to fight against what we saw as the increasing and prevalent racism within society. And when the issue of Islamophobia came up, I always figured, I did shrug my shoulders at that point and say, really...this is gonna be an issue?*

Later, during the Q and A, when asked to clarify her previous comments on being black and its relationship to ongoing efforts to address intracommunal tensions existent within the British Muslim community, Warsi added the following remarks:

*I think going back to the phrase that I used...do we need to unite across communities to be able to fight this [Islamophobia]? Yes! But I'd like those communities to be stood alongside me. It was much easier for fighting racism where if you were Black, you were Black, you were Asian you were Black, if you were Chinese, you were Black, if you were female, you were Black, if you were gay, you were Black, if you were Jewish you were Black, we were all Black! What I'd like is people standing alongside me—saying I'm gay and I'm Muslim. I'm actually Jewish but I'm Muslim. I'm a woman but I'm fighting issues around Islamophobia. I want that whole coalition of people to line up [with] me.*

On the face of it, Warsi's invocation of blackness seems peculiar and out of place. After all, in the parliamentary event where Warsi spoke, the stated impetus was the provision of clarity over Islamophobia's definition. This Runnymede event was one part of the beginnings of efforts by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims, an entity to which Warsi remains an executive member, to lobby the Conservative Government to adopt an institutionalised definition of Islamophobia. This event in addition to a series of public consultations later held by the APPG on British Muslims across Britain in 2019, led to the creation of the policy document titled *Islamophobia Defined*. Despite the report's aim being to provide a working definition of Islamophobia created by British Muslims for future consultation by the British government, *Islamophobia Defined* was quickly rejected by former Prime Minister Theresa May. This rejection was because the document's definition of Islamophobia was seen as being a detriment for British counterterrorism officers and their operations. This outcome led to a public outcry throughout the UK, serving for several anti-Islamophobia lobbyists as proof that British counterterrorism was inherently Islamophobic. Warsi, a leading figure of this outcry, used this public finding to further calls for a government inquiry into Islamophobia within the Conservative party.

Warsi's invocation of blackness complicates a reading of Islamophobia as a singular-identity issue in two ways. One, Warsi's comments invite British Muslims to remember their previous self-identification with a mode of anti-imperial solidarity based on political blackness, a popular movement developed by the post-war generation of migrants from the Caribbean and Southern Asia in response to their experience of white racism in Britain (Wild, 2015; Narayan, 2019). And two, Warsi's comments unintentionally highlight the tension of her speaking to the politically black movement, due to her own political ties to Britain's counterterrorism politics. In the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings, national British counterterrorism strategies aimed not only to protect the UK and its citizens but also to enforce an alleged British way of life as part of a security agenda. These policies and their discourse proceeded in a manner that numerous scholars have argued at best, encouraged a "civilising process" of British Muslims, and at worst, encouraged a security apparatus that legitimised white fear of perceived to be non-white members of British society (Bartolucci and Skoczyliis, 2017:346; Ware, 2007). Racial logic guides interventions where governments intervene, monitor, and regulate their subjects on the basis of what they are thought to inherently possess by virtue of who they are. With her career in the Conservative Party, in particular, her involvement with David Cameron's Extremism Task Force, where Warsi sat as the Minister for Faith and Communities, which called for the legal enactment of Prevent across England and Wales, Warsi participated in an "an imperialist political culture" (Kundnani, 2015:10). By imperialist, I am referring to how in her role as Senior Minister of State for Faith and Communities, Warsi supported a policy of British civilians and public institutions using ethnocultural signifiers to pre-determine those were possibly "susceptible to violent extremism" so that they could be subjected to appropriate counterterrorism interventions (May 2011:108). More recently, Warsi has come to reflect on her role in the British security apparatus, discussing her conflicting sentiments towards Britain's counterterrorism agenda, in her autobiography, titled *The enemy within*. However, Warsi and her career are not the focus of this paper. Warsi's speech is argued to be one, albeit prolific, example, of a structural problem that exists regarding how Islamophobia is contested and conceptualised in liberal democracies – even when British Muslims are involved. This structural problem reflects global concerns with how to effectively challenge a racializing world order.

How might concepts of blackness, and Islamophobia be implicated together amidst efforts to resist racism in times of national security? And in what ways might these connections have an irreducibly international dimension? This article is a theory-orientated empirical study observing how logics of imperialism structure counterterrorism responses including efforts of Muslim policymakers to contest their racialisation. It is built upon document analysis and discoveries from participant observation performed at the Palace of Westminster. Here, I argue that contestations over racism in national security exhibit international dimensions in so far as they illuminate imperially induced norms of anti-blackness, and importantly, imperially induced potentials for anti-imperial response. As critics argue that Britain's national counterterrorism framework is discriminatory towards British Muslims, scholars such as Kundnani (2015) have widened the analysis beyond such a framing to call attention to how some Muslim polities have attempted to avoid racial discrimination by supporting imperial frameworks. By

considering the disconnect evident in presence of a counterterrorism actor in an anti-racist space, in a wider analytical framework organised around black centric traditions, this article prompts a wider conversation about the repercussions of not thinking about imperialism amidst anti-racism and the possibilities for realising authentic ‘black’ solidarity in the anti-racist moment.

The dynamic of racially othering the British Muslim, emerges amidst a range of apparatuses which “varyingly subject non-white immigrants to whitening and blackening processes that indicate the degree of their closeness to or distance from the ideal white standards” (Mohamed, 2017:10). Key to this article’s argument are the concepts of ‘blackening’ and ‘blackened’. Blackening refers to the positioning of the non-white body on a racial scale of human value in which the Black body represents “the archetype of the lowest values”, as “the Negro is the symbol of sin” (Fanon, 1952:146). Meanwhile, to be blackened means to share an affinity amongst the marginalised peoples who are subject to this racialising process. Shilliam’s (2018) discussion of blackening, where the international enslavement of Africans serves as a trope for being racialised as having undeserving characteristics– inspires this article. As does the fact that the history of European empires provides multiple examples of the “blackening” of Muslims. Scholars such as Aydin (2017), Vial (2016), and Dyer (1997) historicize contemporary racism as coinciding with “the religious othering of Muslims and Jews during the Spanish Inquisition” and other attempts to fortify European hegemony and Christendom (Rahman, 2021:8). Research also demonstrates that “one in four of those brought to the Americas with the Atlantic slave trade originated from Muslim-majority parts of West Africa” (Kundnani, 2015:105).

In this current scholastic turn in International Relations, where studies of black radical traditions are now enjoying growing disciplinary attention, noting the connection between anti-blackness and Islamophobia is particularly apt because this connection has immense potential for organising considerations of how to resist the well-resourced imperialist culture which upholds counterterror regimes. This article finds its home in the field of international politics of race and racism, where scholars like Razack (2008), Wekker (2016), and El-Enany (2020), observe the international properties of national practices of Islamophobia and their genealogy in the legacies of former colonial powers and white settler nations. Each of these authors observes how in the twenty-first-century racist discourse in national settings not only demonstrates backlashes against the supposed gains of people of colour in liberal democracies, but continued violences that are inherently international in origin (Meer, 2019). As Thompson (2015:49) argues, “racial impulses are simultaneously local and global, taking on a “characteristic specificity in the context of local, national, and state conditions”, yet also being “globally influenced and textured”. This means that national case studies examining specific elements of race may be used as a window into political “connections that cut across national boundaries” without ignoring the specificities about what state actors do and say (Thompson, 2015:51). It is on this basis that I posit that applying an anti-imperial lens to the circumstances of the British Muslim who is blackened by counterterrorism, offers an innovative perspective for evaluating the global links between blackness and Islamophobia and their collective potential for sustaining an anti-racism that gathers blackened communities. It is hoped that examining this transhistorical relationship between anti-blackness and Muslimness creates a pathway for encouraging anti-imperial and international solidarity against the oppressive structures that continue to define postcolonial institutions. To the extent that “numerous diverse populations in the North often hail from past colonies”, today, reflecting upon blackness is expected to offer immense potential for postulating how to more effectually respond when global configurations of race return home (Shilliam and Rutazibwa, 2018:1).

This paper proceeds to examine a peculiar scenario – an imperial actor referencing an anti-imperial movement to contest imperial violence – in the context of contestations of race and racism, in the following steps. Firstly, I discuss the challenge of locating international politics in what I argue is the ongoing imperial and ‘white’ effort to counterterrorism. Secondly, I explain how this endeavour is evident in domestic contestations of anti-Muslim racism in Britain by giving context to the history in which Warsi’s statements were made, exploring how the British Muslim came to be blackened as part of global configurations of imperialism. I also discuss how Warsi’s verbiage is cognisant of the international history of Muslims resisting the blackness of European Imperialism and the globalised nature of the British Black power-orientated resistance. I conclude with final thoughts, regarding the

co-option of anti-racism by imperial agents, and what drawing attention to anti-imperialism does for addressing the black circumstance of anti-Muslim racism.

### **Locating global order in the imperial effort to counter terrorism**

In this section, I analyse the “historic interconnections between imperial practices and the production of racialised categories” in the case of the blackened Muslim (Anievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam 2015:3). I discuss how international forces persist in the national institution of counterterrorism via its white constitution as a contemporary manifestation of empire. While the current British government offers a variety of explanations for Muslim-focused counterterrorism, this section discusses how “even when slinging racial invectives” against the Muslims, British politicians contextualize their Islamophobic misgivings in a political setting where Muslims have previously been seen as threats to Britishness because of whiteness. By whiteness, I am referring to the social positioning of having or aspiring to have socio-economic privilege, belonging and access to an inequitable “distribution of material wealth and opportunities” on the basis of a social contract determined by those who have either explicitly or implicitly designated themselves as white (Mills, 1997:3). When using the language of colour to describe the politics of subordination, the quality of being white comes to indicate a location of both imperial and racial domination.

#### *Imperialism and (national) counterterrorism*

Citing Khalili (2008:113), “to imagine that international norms are the overarching basis of international politics, is to ignore the extraordinary sophistication that can be employed by dominant powers in placing the law at the service of the sovereign”. Counterterrorism is expected to offer accountability provisions that hold between policing authorities, “the political leaders who oversee and direct” these authorities, and the “citizens in whose name they act” (Ruggiero, 2016:67). Yet, terrorism studies experts continue to observe how counterterrorism regimes also exist as part of a wider trend of police, government officials, and security experts framing international politics so that it suits their empirical interests (see Stampnitzky, 2013). Counterterrorism is never just a response to the international threat of terrorism. It is also a reflection of domestic desires and wants, including the historic aim of alleviating threats to cherished values, societies, and systems (Crenshaw, 2001; Abu-Bakare, 2022). Imperialism, a formal or informal, relationship in which a state exercises control of another or its own political sovereignty, is such a system (Doyle, 1986). Imperialism is the logic of the relationships among and within states. It is a powerful core that conditions state-centric assumptions about how authority, politics, and security, are legitimised, challenged, and defined (Charbonneau and Cox, 2010). Goals of imperial longevity combine with security and come to encourage continued distinctions between threatening and non-threatening entities. This not only means that imperialism conditions or revokes basic human rights on this basis. It also means that it constructs security on these imperatives as well.

Over two decades after 9/11, as the global effort to counter terror continues across Western and non-Western societies, it is noticeable how national “public and institutional discourses and anti-terrorism practices continue to be infused with strikingly dated “motifs of a threat to nation and civilisation” (Carr and Haynes, 2013:1). The ‘ism’ attached to counterterrorism is misleading because counterterrorism “is not an end in itself” nor is it a set of policies existent in a vacuum (Parashar, 2018:111). In the case of the US and its allies in the aftermath of 9/11, understandings of counterterrorism have historically been subject to “logics of governance” which structure the ways problems of terrorism and the international are allowed to become knowable (Stampnitzky, 2013:83–84). Although instigated by international events, these logics organise significant shifts in political dialogue in domestic and regional contexts. The complex journey “from al-Qaida, through 9/11, to the war in Iraq, to al-Qaida in Iraq and its transformation into ISIS”, has generated a non-trivial recasting of national and international politics where counterterrorism now normally exists as the “total of a set of historically conditioned interrelationships” between and “within local communities, states, and the international sphere” (English 2018:3; Charbonneau and Cox, 2010:11; Abu-Bakare, 2022:8). Counterterrorism depends on the execution of the “triumvirate”, the amalgamation of civil society, “military and police, as a joint

and integrated organisation from the highest to the lowest level of policymaking, planning and administration” (McCulloch, 2016:260).

While it is true that the US is still a powerful actor in international security, assertions of its world dominance misrepresent the multifaceted nature of imperialism in two ways. Firstly, as Charbonneau and Cox (2010:14) concur, it dismisses the fact that “there are countless others within the US” and “other Western liberal societies...who use whatever means are available to identify, politicize, and coordinate challenges to American power and its influence”. Such groups include Muslims within and outside the US who are sympathetic to Western understandings of fundamentalism and the use of counterterrorism, but who also contest how it and its allies abrogate basic human rights in the name of security. This also includes non-Muslim groups (e.g., Latino, Indigenous, and phenotypically black peoples), who continuously “find themselves on the outside of the Western ‘we’” based on law-and-order reasoning (ibid). Secondly, being fixated on American power alone makes it difficult to observe other national “contributions to the constructions of global order itself”, and the effects that changes in global order have on” national communities (Charbonneau and Cox, 2010:15).

When we choose to observe, for instance, a British policy moment, we are realising how contemporary studies of counterterrorism and race heighten the presence of a transnational and racialised “circulation of emotions”, ideas, knowledge and technologies that extend beyond 9/11 back to historic strategies of “exclusion, deportation and segregation”, conducted in the name of European imperialism (Lake and Reynolds, 2008:4). As Lake and Reynolds (2008:109) further, “just as British statesmen looked to the United States as a future ally, so Americans looked to British imperialism as a model for a re-invigorated United States manhood”. Here, Lake and Reynolds are discussing their archival research of dynamics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century project to defend the existence of white man’s countries, undertaken by governments of North America, Oceania, Europe, and Africa, and how these states worked in unison to exclude those they defined as not white using state technologies. However, Lake and Reynolds also emphasise, how their study of self-styled white man’s countries also captures the past-present connections between previous projects of political whiteness, and today’s renewed, “talk about national values, social cohesion and the necessity of border protection” (Lake and Reynolds, 2008:12). Reading their scholarship, enabled me to realise how the British-American alliance in the effort to counter Daesh-Inspired extremism “recapitulates the Anglo-Saxon solidarity of earlier times”, a solidarity which had “devastating consequences” for people of colour (ibid).

The similarity between imperialist projects of the post-war period and those of today is that certain bodies are presumed to require domination in order to safeguard political order. The internationality of empire remains evident in the continued structure of feeling, “the need to and the right to dominate others for their own good”, racial Others who are expected to be compliant (Razack, 2004:10). Yet then and now, those who have these bodies continue to resist and contest such inferences. To examine British counterterrorism as imperialism is, therefore, to draw attention to its consequences for people of colour and to how in the present, counterterrorism is “a domestic peace time adaptation of strategies to deal with the essentially wartime exigencies of a colonial power” (Sentas 2006:6). It has double origins within a broad state policy concerned with the eradication of threats to sovereignty, and in the international raced structures legitimised by their relationship with Western or Euro-American states and the belief that some acts of violence are ‘legitimate’, ‘normal’ and ‘good’. As Gentry (2020:5) continues, because of counterterrorism, “particular bodies and societies” are therefore implicated in the binary between the legitimate political violence of liberal states against the illegitimate political violence of non-state actors. Here, “racialised bodies” are not “exclusively biological” (Sayyid 2013:13) They are marked with the purpose of grouping “socially fabricated distinctions between Europeaness and non-Europeaness” (ibid). Examining the eviction of these bodies from the realm of what is common, normal, and European and or British, in the name of counterterrorism, enables a better understanding of how counterterrorism conditions social and economic relations as a power dynamic guided by imperial logics. Counterterrorism becomes tied to imperialism in how its practice is supported by structures that depend upon, even as they contribute to, the persistence of “a racially ordered world” (Razack, 2004:145). In the following section, I discuss how counterterrorism’s national investment in whiteness affirms this.

*How counterterrorism became white*

Today, counterterrorism's productive function is that both a national (e.g., the UK), and international (e.g., the Global North) community simultaneously become organised into a fortress, being both securitized and consolidated into a racially ordered world. In both instances, imperialism remains active, generating practices, institutions, borders, and inequities based on race; entities that combine with state bureaucracy to form a judicial formation in the name of sovereignty. State power maintains "social peace" by giving state actors the necessary force to not only conduct "just wars at the borders against barbarians" but also old traditions of containing the possibly "rebellious" (Razack, 2008:29). Present-day counterterrorism thus "looks backwards to colonialism as a source while reproducing colonial relations of power in the present" (McCulloch, 2016:259). But what makes counterterrorism exclusively white?

Scholars who analyse the challenges that transnational terrorism previously posed to imperial powers in the nineteenth century, like Gantt (2010), observe how racial attitudes towards political terror were conceived through elite policies and ideas that likened an empire's existence to a struggle amongst groups of peoples and dominions. Historically, "anti-imperial violence against the United Kingdom reconfigured how Americans conceptualized non-conventional political violence in relation to nationalism and imperialism" (Gantt, 2010:8; Abu-Bakare, 2022). In the Atlantic, racialised caricatures of terrorist and counterterrorist actors emerged and spread throughout the former British empire and the transatlantic communities attached to it because of imperialism. These caricatures depicted how the "bloody contest of racial violence" in the former American Confederacy and a continuously occupied Ireland, both pitted a white establishment against black African American and Irish demands for societal inclusion and self-determination (Gantt, 2010:4). This led transatlantic communities to cast Irish peoples who resisted British occupation as though they were evidence of the "missing link" in eugenics between the American Negro and the European man (Dyer, 1997:52). Irish nationalists were frequently characterized as dark-skinned "rebel-natives", despite also being part of a distinct community of Britishness which ranked higher on the imperial scale than subjects of colour (Paul, 1997:107). It is their anti-imperial activity that caused the British state to revoke their whiteness and institute their blackening. A condemnation of blackness was crucial for justifying the myriad of wrongs committed by imperial officers, slave owners, traders, and settlers, in colonizing societies. This not only legitimised the means to criminalize the counterviolence of a dominated people. It was also essential to the eventual institutionalisation of these same willing suppressing agents.

Academics such as McCulloch (2016), comment on how the founding of counterterrorism institutions by white settler nations amidst empire and past counter-insurgency doctrines became the basis for modern counterterrorism doctrines. Counter-insurgency-based modes of knowing the third world initially served as a buffer "for the incorporation of imperial strategies" and understandings into the peacetime security operations of liberal democracies" (McCulloch, 2016:260). British and French colonial powers, "first developed counter-insurgency military strategy" aiming to *prevent* "threats by targeting associations, identities, and ideologies that were understood to represent propensity towards crime or violence (ibid). For instance, at the end of the 1960s, when the UK imposed a range of security measures on the marginalised Catholics in the face of social unrest, their tactics included the use of military force against protesters, detention without trial or charge, "networks of informers, torture, and courts that eschewed the normal due processes protections" (ibid:261). The post-9/11 era has seen these same tactics be further integrated into the UK, with British Muslims filling the role of the 'new Irish' and the police-military tactics used in Northern Ireland imported into the UK from the 1970s onwards.

It is with the aforementioned in mind, that the past two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have seen an explosion of scholastic interest in counterterrorism and its neo-colonial investment in Muslim communities. Security analysts, sociologists, and political scientists alike each assess the postcolonial state's concern with the Muslim in the metropolis as a domestic continuation of a global racialising dichotomy, transcending time and space (Poynting et al., 2004). As Alexander, Redclift, and Hussain (2013:3) further, "migration and demographic change have contributed to a growing Muslim presence"

throughout Europe, “while the context of the global War on Terror and the resurgence of mainstream right-wing and Far Right political parties across Europe has fed heated discussions around the so-called ‘clash of civilisations’, the borders and identity of ‘Fortress Europe’”. It is in this same context that whiteness comes to organise governmental rationalities for assessing racial inequality, and validating the persistence of a “threat governmentality... which fixates on racialised bodies in its ostensible concern with security and the management of risk” (Oka and Ayers, 2010:28). Counterterrorism actors, like Warsi are members of a social elite with a key role to play in the institutional assurance of a system where positions of power are predominantly occupied by white men of Western European ancestry. This community of counterterrorism enforcers and players has the power to define and give credibility to other forms of knowing violence, including acknowledging racism as a systemic and political form of violence, yet regularly stand in the way of marginalised people of colour advancing their knowledge and experience (Mohamed, 2017). For these actors, surveillance and information gathering almost always “starts with a swarthy group of strangers—American blacks, Italian immigrants, Jews, Arabs”—but a specific imperial history of racism informs the national securitisation of the British Muslim (Kumar 2012:400). In the following section, I offer a necessary examination of the blackened Muslim condition to map how the politics of counterterrorism (whiteness) intersects with anti-blackness.

### **When acknowledging British Islamophobia becomes an issue of Blackness**

There has been a long-established Muslim community in Britain, consisting of North African and South Asian migrants, but a major portion of today’s approximately three million Muslim presence is the outcome of post-war commonwealth immigration from India, East Africa, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Meer and Noorani, 2008:202). At issue in this article, is the British state making these Muslims a “colonial ethnicisation” and “imperial conscription” through *blackening* – a term discussed in detail below (Sayyid, 2013:27). Continued relations “between Muslims and the wider British society and British state” can be seen “in terms of the developing agendas of racial equality and multiculturalism”, and integrationism, as other authors such as Kundnani (2007a) have demonstrated, but they can also be seen as an issue emanating from the British response to “coloured immigration” (Modood, 2003:103). In the following section, I will discuss how the situation of anti-Muslim racism in the UK came to be the latter, providing a brief overview of how Muslimness came to be blackened by the British state.

#### *How Muslims came to be blackened in Britain*

As Gilliat-Ray (2010:28) writes, from “the mid-nineteenth century onwards” diverse resources were made available “for understanding the place of Islam in British society and evolving perceptions of Muslims in Britain and abroad”. During this time, British Muslims were notably independently producing their own accounts of their identity via journals and newsletters as they arrived in great numbers “as traders, teachers, and university students” (ibid). Nonetheless, how Muslims were perceived by wider British society was still heavily influenced by class tensions and by international and diplomatic forces. This includes Britain’s relations with Ottoman’s Turks and colonial India (Aydin, 2017). The way Muslims were framed by British society was not an issue limited to the existence of Muslims as a unique religious group in Britain. Muslims were outsiders not just because of their religious difference, “but also because they were regarded as being part of “a migratory labouring underclass” (Gilliat-Ray, 2010:31). Because of this perceived belonging, and their circumstances, and lifestyles, the “Muslimness” regulated and upheld by British state institutions was a Muslimness that intertwined British Muslim subjects to a path were they, alongside other British people who then seemed to “threaten the social order”, were cast as existing beyond the true “English nation” (ibid). The authoritative construction of norms that defined the English nation included not only the traits associated with ‘whiteness’ but also the cultural racism and pervasive disparagement of phenotypical attributes and ethnocultural traditions coded as ‘brown’, ‘yellow’, and ‘black’ (Fraser, 1995:81).

There is a solid historical reason for this article to devote conceptual attention to the last code, ‘black’. As Meer and Noorani (2008:195) observe, “until the late nineteen eighties, the predominant paradigm for the study of ethnic minorities in Britain tended to enlist a white/black dualist conception of race”.

This is because the enslavement of Africans was a fundamental reference point for the historic racialisation of deserving and undeserving characteristics upheld by the British empire (Shilliam, 2018). This mode of racialisation emerged amidst a range of legal, policy, and discursive mechanisms that diversely subjected non-white immigrants and members of Empire to political standards of Commonwealth belonging. These standards indicated their degree of closeness to or distance from the normative standard which then defined Englishness. Britishness was a social category by which non-white colonial subjects could connect to the ideals of whiteness implied in Englishness (Webster, 2005). As Paul (1997: xiii) writes, post-World War Two, British policymakers periodically manipulated notions of identity and definitions of citizenship to preserve an imagined national identity as well as a demographically and politically strong empire with an unbroken labour supply. Examples of such mechanisms included the 1962 and 1968 *Commonwealth Immigrants Acts* which introduced official control of colonial migration into Britain. Another included the 2002 *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with diversity in modern Britain*, a 2002 White Paper that “blurred the separation between race and immigration”, and that again allowed the British government to separate immigrants into categories of wanted and unwanted, according to their “perceived assimilation to British values” (Kundnani, 2007a:32). Rather than being the creation of popular forces, both policy mechanisms were notably the creation of a policymaking elite. In both instances, Muslims were blackened by the “fully-fledged racial division of labour” which “placed Asian and African-Caribbean workers in jobs at the bottom of the economy in mills, foundries and factories” (Kundnani, 2007b:58). This was “a division that reflected a global racial hierarchy entrenched by colonialism” (ibid).

In post-war Britain, British Muslims became blackened in part because of the need to control cheap labour, with Britain’s racial divide being the necessary cord “that held capitalism together” by quelling labour troubles at home (Kundnani, 2015:32) When manpower was needed to work in the industrial sectors because employment conditions were no longer desirable to the existing labour force – “people from the former New Commonwealth nations, having fought alongside British troops... elected to make a life in Britain” (Abbas, 2005:9). South Asian Muslims settled in inner areas of older industrial towns and cities, living near the white working class (Kundnani, 2007b). The reception to these Muslims was limited and conditionally accepted because of a belief that both non-Muslims ethnic minorities and Muslim workers would eventually return to their regions of origin when their employment was terminated (Abbas, 2005). Rarely was it imagined or wished for that Muslims like other ethnic minorities would put down their roots over time. Muslims were seen as being part of a pattern familiar to Western Europe, assemblages of immigrant labour originating in once colonised lands, now filling the “lower-echelon gaps in the society” (Abbas, 2005:9). However, in the 1960s, the British governing elite took note of the public anxiety directed towards Muslims on British Soil, all the while “looking anxiously across the Atlantic” at the civil rights movement occurring in the US (Kundnani 2015:32).

Fears of similar uprisings to that of the United States caused both British liberals and conservatives to attempt to pass immigration policies that closed the “colonial ‘open door’ to those who were not white” (ibid). The 1962 and 1968 *Commonwealth Immigrants Act(s)* restricted the mobility of this now lower class, making South Asian Muslim settlement more “permanent and family-oriented” (Abbas, 2005:10). South Asian Muslims eventually became more likely to “underachieve in education”, live in sub-standard housing, have the “poorest health”, and to be “underemployed” (ibid). These acts and continuous public debates about the civic nature of the Commonwealth politicised the presence of these peoples. By the 1970s many black and Asian residents in towns and cities in England had grown used to being victims of racist attacks (e.g., Paki-bashing) in which their attackers often expressed the sentiments of nationalists requesting that their Muslim and coloured neighbours alike ‘return home’ (Lambert, 2013:39). With the architecture of immigration now being built on the need to obstruct the migration of workers from outside the European Union, British Muslims, like other migrants, were often forced to migrate and make ends meet through clandestine measures (e.g., over-staying on visas, forged documents). Employers often exploited their labour, noticing that British Muslims were more likely to take on irregular or hard labour in dismal conditions and were willing to offer up their labour wherever and whenever it was demanded (Kundnani, 2007b). Because, of this, akin to the black slave trope, politicians criminalised working-class British Muslims because of their socioeconomic disenfranchisement as unwanted immigrants.



The historic slogan “If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Liberal or Labour” which defined the Smethwick election of 1964 and that served as a watershed moment for the rise of Powellism in the UK, infamously targeted South Asian subjects and not Afro-Caribbeans as the expletive might otherwise suggest (Buettner, 2014:710). A further example also includes former Conservative MP Enoch Powell’s *Rivers of Blood* speech and its appellation about a black man holding the whip over the white man. When read in context, this verse is notably underpinned by an analogy where South Asian immigration into Britain is likened to the disturbances of the civil rights movement in the US, being foreshadowed to bring about a Britain “not be worth living in for his children” (Powell, 1968:13). These politicians were setting British Asianness against a standard of whiteness in a manner that Bonnett titles as popularist imperialism (Bonnett, 1998:327). Popularist imperialism refers to the practice of imperial actors, specifically politicians, bringing “racial categories into ever closer proximity with working class lives”, for the sake of restructuring British support for capitalism (Bonnett, 1998:328). The idea is to put whiteness to work to cohere a racialised community that “enjoyed the material and psychological benefits of empire” (Bonnett, 1998; Narayan, 2019:956).

In the case of counterterrorism policies, in the immediate period after the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, terrorist attacks, anti-Blackness emanating from state impulses to again racialise British Muslims indicated the continuity of this “imperial hinterland” (Shilliam, 2018). Post 9/11, externally, British policymakers worked hard to showcase “a super-nation” and “a chosen people on a mission to liberate” Afghanistan and Iraq (Sivanandan, 2006:2). But internally, the British state continued to contribute to tensions amongst its constituents concerning the contention that cultural diversity posed a threat to national cohesion and security (Kundnani, 2007b). It did not help that in the summer of 2001, a series of violent clashes sparked by racial tensions erupted throughout northern England when a far-Right march attempted to trek through the economically disenfranchised localities of Oldham Burnley and Bradford. These areas heavily populated by British Muslims and other labouring classes were represented in Blair cabinet policies, particularly the infamous Cantle Report, as zones of ethnic polarisation. In this context, the category of “immigrant” previously ascribed to Muslims took on “an expansiveness that surpassed its prior racialisation as Black” (Shilliam, 2018:159). Muslims were labelled self-segregators, somehow guilty of creating their own conditions of ghettoisation. The ideologues of the 1960s who previously criticised Muslimness as a non-white immigrant presence in Britain, with the events of 9/11 re-emphasised their point with a new purpose, calling on the British government to tear into Muslim ghettos and to “acculturate” Muslims for the sake of societal security (Kundnani, 2007b: 26). Blacks and Asians were now categorised as terrorists still “wearing their passports on their faces” (Sivanandan, 2006:2).

A stance of national cohesion predicated on the government policy of upholding British values, after 9/11 “added extremism to the perception, if not charge, of self-segregation in Muslim communities” (Khan 2010:86). It became the norm for those who were recognisably or believed to be Muslim to be subjected to “official stops and searches by the police”, causing them to be driven into a siege mentality, and buttressing the very segregation that the government condemned as anti-British and feared due to extremism (Sivanandan, 2006:3). The British government originally upheld a counterterrorism agenda focused on enabling interfaith activity. However, the 7/7 bombings served as the impetus for a harsher direction that narrowed in on British Muslims, with the Prevent Violent Extremism Agenda, emerging from the Preventing Extremism Together (PET) task force which was set up in response to this attack (HM, Government 2009). The PET task force picked up where the Blair government initially left off, and in examining the Northern town riots, put forward an assessment which attributed political violence to the existence of religious segregated communities. It argued that a plan centring community cohesion merited further government consideration and security incorporation (ibid). The query of ‘what must be done about these peoples, their institutions, and their participation in our institutions?’ became foundational to counterterrorism. Policies of enforcing community, and eventually what became national cohesion, by focusing on British Muslim integration were heavily racial in how they relied on the adoption of a self-referential set of attitudes which upheld white implications for thinking about Britishness versus terrorists.

The social connotations of having a counter-extremism agenda centring “values, morals, and civilisational attributes” are highly indicative of a moral symbolism, where perceived to be black attributes= bad and perceived to be white attributes= good (Dyer, 1997:58). Upholding a state policy of ensuring British Muslims have British values doesn’t disrupt a ‘fear or hatred of strangers’ or the desire to defend an ‘our’ that first marked the Muslim community as a Commonwealth community. It instead offers evidence of a controlled generalisation, a subtext is that “one of us” could not commit terrorism because an “authentic” British person is averse to such inclinations (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2012:13). It is the upholding of cultural standards of behaviour which the extremist/terrorist/ and blackened Other is thought to lack and in turn, the real white British citizen is thought to have, which blends British counterterrorism with anti-blackness. It is the same discourse in the Prevent policy which gives indicators of those who appear not to possess British values – those who are blackened – and that lays the foundations in public opinion for the acceptance of “Islamophobic strategies employed in the Prevent agenda” (Khan, 2010:85). In the year Prevent went from policy to law in England in Wales, around 7,631 individuals had referred to the Channel programme (HM Government, 2017: 4). Of the 7,631 individuals, 4,997 individuals were referred for concerns related to Islamist extremism. Even as the UK’s former terrorism watchdog, went on to describe Prevent as “clearly suffering from a widespread problem of perception” where it is possible “aspects of the programme are ineffective or being applied in an insensitive or discriminatory manner”, the Cameron government continued to stand by its decision to make [the] delivery of Prevent a legal requirement (Anderson, 2016 CEX0041 paragraph 7).

To summarise, the blackening of the British Muslim was born out of the economic and political uncertainties of late capitalism and international security interventions which structured late twentieth and early twenty-first-century developments in European, American, and British imperialism. White institutions blackened the Muslim imperial subject so that it could remain as “a displaced figure of collective anxieties and fears and as such, an arbitrary scapegoat embodying” convictions which maintained that only ethnocultural purity could ‘prevent’ the collapse of the nation (Werbner 2005:6). In both trajectories of blackening the instrumentalization of race offers “meaningful compensation” to white and white adjacent citizens who are also exploited by the workings of oppressive structures, in the form of socioeconomic capital (Myers, 2017:7). Whiteness consequently becomes an “actual legal status, an aspect of identity converted into an external object of property, moving whiteness from a privileged identity to a vested interest” (Diangelo, 2018:24). The blackening of the Muslim serves as a payoff by those in power to the everyday white constituents, granting them a social status that helps secure acquiescence towards imperialism (Myers, 2017).

Political attention to the alleged consequences of Muslim failures to conform, such as crime, illegal migration, terrorism, sexual violence against white women, works as an “institutional form of warfare that affirms the ‘virtue’ and legitimacy of the...colonial state and the Crown possession that underpins it” (Randell-Moon, 2016:44). The powerful connection between material security, be it labour orientated or counterterrorist, and whiteness has legitimized the servitude of blackened bodies in the construction of the capitalist nation-state and its more desirable citizens. In both instances, Muslims are forced to abide by policies that retained “a singular”, imperial, “racialised affiliation to the English genus” (Worley, 2005:485). The state system regulates and disciplines people in a way that facilitates not only their financial exploitation. It also enables corporeal transgressions, particularly the devaluation of blackened Muslim’s existence in society, doing so with real ramifications for a sense of belonging and safety. When applied to the circumstances of the British Muslim, anti-blackness does not just rhetorically describe the effect of nullifying the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in public life (Elahi and Khan, 2017). It also describes all racist murders, police brutality, and wrongful detainments that occur in Britain because of perceived Muslimness and terrorist-ness. It is the collective expression of white supremacy, an expression which institutions of counterterrorism and sustain and are sustained by, that implicitly enables “the action of a few violent men” by supporting the socialisation that makes them unafraid to be Islamophobic (Razack, 2008:121). Yet, returning to the subject of Warsi speaking of blackness, it is also important to note that racialised subjects are not passive victims of this socialisation and racist governmentality. British Muslims have the agency to either resist or embody imperialism as “the governing imaginary that takes white hegemony as its implicit premise”

(Oka and Ayers, 2010:30). This choice, to resist or embody imperialism in the name of anti-Muslim racism, is the topic of the following section.

*How not to respond to being blackened, a global intellectual history*

If we are to conceive this issue of anti-Muslim racism and blackening as a matter of imperial structuring and not just an event, it is necessary to consider the ramifications of Warsi's juxtaposition as a moment larger than a single event, attached to something bigger. One ramification Rahman (2021:2) offers, is the significance of acknowledging how "global anti-Muslim racism" has created and continues to condition pressures for "Muslims around the world but particularly within the Global North, to align with hegemonic global whiteness".

Whilst observing Warsi speak, I couldn't help but consider how analogies could be made between Warsi's response to anti-Muslim racialisation in the UK, and the historic responses of Muslim intellectuals located in the Global South in the nineteenth century. As is outlined in detail by Aydin in his book *The Idea of the Muslim world*, each of these actors reacted to the anti-Muslim racism enacted by their European imperialist counterparts by self-racialising. Aydin (2017) observes how the racialisation of Muslimness we associate with securitisation today, historically unfolded alongside the racialisation of blackness and Asianness between the 1820s and 1880s on a global scale. During this time, the futures of Muslims and black-skinned people all over the world were seen as being collectively distinct from those of the white Christian race, and the imposed racial supremacy associated with this Christendom. As part of this Eurocentric standard, during this period, white supremacy entailed the status of accomplished modernity, civilisation, and morality, all of which were restricted to European culture, the white race, and Christian faith (Dyer, 1997). As Shilliam (2013:148) continues, "the black epidermis marked the limit of Christian providence, between those who could be counted as god's children and those who could be counted as god's animals". By not being able to meet this standard, by the end of the early twentieth century, "the categorisation of Muslims as an inferior, coloured race prone to rebellion against global white hegemony, had provoked paranoia in colonial metropolises" (Aydin, 2017:8). This led not only to anti-Muslim oppression and but also to Muslims themselves pursuing intellectual and material projects of resistance to their victimisation and racialisation by European powers (Aydin, 2017:8).

Historic political figures like Syed Ahmad Khan<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Abduh<sup>2</sup>, and Muhammad Asad<sup>3</sup>, and others refuted the inequities of anti-blackness with multiple tactics. Some of these tactics included: the call for a pan-Islamism; calling for *fatwas* demanding that the Muslim world revolt against Christian imperialism; and the re-articulation of the Muslim civilisation. The purpose of this last idea was to elevate the regard in which Muslims, as a faith community engaging in politics, were held and to dispute European assertions of Muslim racial inferiority by reinventing the Muslim identity. As Aydin (2017:69) argues "to contest European claims of Muslim inferiority", Muslim intellectuals tried to re-define themselves, the history, and achievements of Muslims within the boundaries of the specific "global discourses in which Europeans engaged", thickening "the racial discourse by proudly talking back to an imagined European imperial centre". Nonetheless, this practice of contesting inferiority by upholding a programme uplifting an imagined Muslim world and a better-than-the-black archetype,

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<sup>1</sup> An Indian Muslim reformist committed to the upholding of British-Indian-Muslim relations who was knighted 1888. An influential Indian leader, Khan advocated for a modernist Muslim identity that embraced a British imperial rule. Though critical of the anti-Muslim discourses of British colonial officers, Khan upheld the project of imperial universalism and endeavoured to make the British Empire more inclusive under the Christian monarch, Queen Victoria (see Aydin, 2017: 48–64).

<sup>2</sup> Co- editor and creator of the first pan-Islamic magazine, *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa*, first published in Paris in 1884. Abduh is identified as a Muslim modernist who furthered the idea of scientific progress and universal civilisation through a reinterpretation of Islamic texts (see Aydin, 2017: 61, 216).

<sup>3</sup> A former Austrian Jewish journalist who converted to Islam in 1926. Asad is the author of the 1934 publication, *Islam at the Crossroads*. This anticolonial text rejected Western imperialism and categorised it and its Orientalist tendencies as continuations of Crusader hostility (see Aydin, 2017: 150–151).

only further reinforced a “European racial discourse in which Muslims were united — and [again] divided from others — by their religion and heritage” (Aydin, 2017:8–9).

It appears that outside of Britain, what has globally distinguished the pan-Islamic Muslim world is the actions of Muslim political actors appealing for their racial equality with Europeans, whilst tending not to advocate for an end to empire. According to Aydin’s (2017) research, while some Muslim intellectuals desired the better treatment of the colonial oppressed, others consistently left the institutions of colonial oppression in place or sought to establish their own imperialism complete with racial hierarchies of their own. There is an opportunity here for what Gopal (2020:8) terms “reverse tutelage”. A tutelage where present anti-racists must interpret the corrective lesson that comes out of this global intellectual history. Unique from Warsi, the Muslim intellectuals discussed by Aydin (2017) were aiming to thicken the racial discourse in order to compete with European imperialism and to resist its blackening effects whilst vying arguably for an equivalent hegemonic, yet oppressive, status. Meanwhile, in the British policy moment offered at the beginning of this paper, Warsi is thickening the racial discourse in an attempt to re-align the plight of British Muslims with that of the politically black cause, while remaining avoidant of the fact that it was the systemic effects of British imperialism that those who “were all black” were opposing (Warsi, 2017b).

There is a difference between projects responding to imperialism and resisting it and there are examples of global projects of Muslims situated in blackness wrestling with both. Above, with Warsi and the numerous intellectuals discussed by Aydin (2017), there is a shared feature of Muslim political actors critiquing imperialism without dismantling it – refuting its Islamophobic effects, but not questioning imperialism. This was not an attribute shared by the British Black Power movement (BBP) movement that Warsi refers to at the opening of this paper. This movement regularly connected notions of “racial hierarchy and whiteness with the emergence of the idea of a ‘white working class’ that had enjoyed the material and psychological benefits of empire and now a neo-imperial form of social democracy” (Narayan, 2019:956). Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, BBP groups highlighted the link between an exploitative state, the UK, and an exploitative global capitalist system abroad. Their endeavours merged around ideas of how race and class intersected in divisions between Black and white communities and between different Black communities (both within and beyond the UK). BBP activists even acknowledged that racialisation and exploitation were apparent issues for different white communities as well. However, a key aim of the BBP’s blackness was to circumvent a nationalism that would interpret “racism and antiracism within singular ethnic categories or national boundaries” (Narayan, 2019:959). What was desired was a movement “mimetic” of an American Black Power movement, a movement that would provide “a blueprint for rebellion” throughout “the urban industrial centres of the West” (Wild, 2015:25).

It is on this basis that Warsi’s memory of her past affiliation with blackness demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of blackness. A misunderstanding that could at least be partially caused by an inability to understand how US conceptions of black self-determination were analytically diffused in the British society in the late 1960s. By challenging the boundaries of the nation-state, the BBP movement actively incorporated different framings of societal inequality which in turn globalised their interpretation of anti-racism. Indeed, there are local specifications that mattered and which made the BBP unique. A prominent example is of course, the phenomenon of Muslim South Asians self-adopting a black political identity. Nevertheless, as has been discussed, British policymakers blackened British Muslims first and created the socio-economic circumstances which led to British Muslims responding to this racialisation with a politically black proclamation. It is in response to state imperialism that British postcolonials of different generations came together to take up a bottom-up and internationally inspired politics of recognition and syncretic identity. A blackness, that today, would conflict with the statistical identities that now officially divide them (Gilmore, 2008).

In agreement with Aydin (2017:237), “Muslims of all kinds have every right to be concerned about the current conditions and future of their coreligionists and to resist their racialised treatment, and they have the right to act on their internationalist visions to create a more just world”. Nevertheless, if authentically returning to anti-imperial political blackness in the name of anti-Muslim racism is truly

part of the goal, their “faith will matter in seeking fairness or resisting oppression, exploitation, and racism” (ibid). Just perhaps not in the conventional manner that state conformity dictates. The route to resistance may be beyond Warsi’s stated vision. Viewing the marginalisation of Muslims in Britain as part of an empire’s history of anti-black racism necessitates acknowledging her’s and her associates’ parts in structurally upholding British counterterrorism. A racial project still powered by “popular views and state policy seeking to safeguard white domestic progeny” (McCormack and Legal-Miller, 2019:269).

### **Final thoughts: On the co-option of anti-racism and its international core**

The global effort to counter extremism continues to shine a light on the intersubjective processes that constitute the West, its forms of governance, and its many identities. What remains constant, however, is that liberal institutions continue to fear being undone from within, as institutions of security are contested internally and internationally because of the continuously emerging complexities of the never-ending war on terror. In the case of counterterrorism, the anti-racist struggle of security is not separate from the class struggle, both being remnants of the same nation-state system the British Empire had helped to engender. This system was the “context for the 9/11 attacks on US foreign policy”, and for the USA and its allies framing these attacks as an assault on western civilisation (Thobani, 2018:163). This was also the context for whiteness coming to emulate as western identity and counterterrorism coming to institutionalise the embodiment of western values as the condition for “the right to have rights” (Thobani, 2018:163). As part of the post 7/7 era, interestingly British Muslim actors again find themselves in a predicament like what Aydin writes of the past, where they are blackened because of culturalist arguments dictating that Muslims again do not meet a desired European standard of accomplished modernity and civilisation. And although members of the neoliberal state like Warsi may continue to position themselves as sympathetic allies or may even self-identify with progressive movements by reminding her audiences that Muslims too were blackened – the severe limitations of this politicking should not be missed.

Significantly, “imperial formations thrive on the capacity to assign to their systems of demarcation innocuous intentions and appellations (Stoler, 2011:155; Abu-Bakare, 2022:15). When those once actively resistant to state imposition and the definition of the political and socioeconomic arrangements, enter the policy realm “there is something about the state apparatus, about its definition and functions, that delimits... the disposition and outlook of even the best intentioned” (see Davis, 1998 in Goldberg, 2002:252; Abu-Bakare, 2022:12). Anti-racism becomes constrained by state agents not just because of their party alignment but also because of “the institutional logic of state formation, agency, and incorporation into the modern world system” (ibid). In observing a Muslim politician responsible for an imperial policy of counterterrorism attempt to speak to the blackness of an anti-imperial movement, here, I have disputed the possibility of having an anti-racism movement begin in the hands of Warsi and other anti-Islamophobia actors like her, using global reasoning. The argument this article puts forward refutes the transformational possibilities of such an imperial anti-racism. As Sayyid and Vakil (2017) reiterate, those resisting racism must realise that:

*Reading racism from the prism of bigotry and its cognates renders racism as a “boo word” rather than an analytical tool. It evacuates the dimension of power, empties out the category of racism, and opens the door for charges and counter-charges of racism to circulate between and within Muslims, Muslim communities, and ethnic minorities, with little sense of the structural over-determination of unequal social relations.*

The aptness of Sayyid and Vakil’s words is already evident in cases of other anti-racist lobbies in Britain unspecific to Islamophobia. In 2021, Boris Johnson’s government continued to co-opt the sentiments of the Black Lives Matter movement. Johnson’s 2020 promise to set up a cross-government commission to tackle racial inequality resulted in a Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report which denied the existence of systemic racism in the UK. This same commission argued that Britain should be considered a “model for other white-majority countries”; and refuted “that Black and South Asian

groups were suffering from systemic racism throughout their lives” in a manner that adversely affected their health, education, income, housing, and employment (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities 2021:9;30). Akin to the 2017 case study of this article, Johnson’s commission also consisted of a phenotypically black and brown caucus engaging in questionable discourses of race and racism. Some such as Lord Woolley, founder, and director of Operation Black Vote, have maintained that the 2021 Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities is the latest example of the Conservative Party weaponizing black politicians to deny people’s lived experiences of racism (Hazell, 2021). Depending on what Woolley means by black, this comment may also include criticisms of former Home Secretary Sajid Javid, Priti Patel, and other politicians of colour who continue to uphold Prevent despite Islamophobic tendencies. His critique may even include Sayeeda Warsi herself. His critique does include Tony Sewell, Aftab Chughtai, Naureen Khalid and other members of the aforementioned Commission.

In conclusion, this individual case study has shown how the rhetoric of blackness at a British parliamentary event sparks a reminder of the relevance of imperialism to the global circumstances of anti-Muslim racism, and the blackened circumstances that British Muslims still find themselves in today. As I discuss, this is in part because of the imperial nature of counterterrorism, with it being an institution innately designed to protect cherished systems and to encompass those agents tasked with managing threats to racial ordering. However, I go to great lengths to show how the failure to account for the innate whiteness of counterterrorism as well as how anti-blackness incorporates anti-Muslimness, is in part a matter of international configurations. Two of which being, the history of and white fear-orientated reaction to Commonwealth migration and incidents of international terrorism in the US and the UK. A continuous theme throughout this paper is the importance of observing the symbiotic relationship between national and international events. I maintain that the amnesia around the relevance of global histories of anti-imperialism to national circumstances of imperialism can be mediated using blackness as analytical tool. This term is unspecific to but representative of the UK’s anti-colonial activism of the late twentieth century and its broader situation in the politics of blackened diaspora. A diaspora with politics that are arguably being co-opted within liberal democracies that are now enraptured with the desire to demonstrate their anti-racist commitments. This article perhaps serves as another reminder for those aiming to situate political activism on the floor of Parliament about the relevance of structural dynamics for achieving an anti-racism that genuinely holds state officials and the systems they perpetuate to account. My article’s message: that a language of rights, offered by the mainstream to the minority can contribute to further injustice – speaks to a variety of political circumstances. In the case of international politics, drawing attention to the imperialism in the room, particularly an imperialism with a blackened face, encourages the continuous and necessary questioning of the capacity of imperial logic to undo the historic forces of colonialism and slavery. Illuminating the transnational and black potential of anti-racist responses to counterterrorism regimes provokes a necessary confrontation with imperial framings of societal strife that disconnect it from global configurations of power. Paraphrasing Edward Said (1994), we are at a point in our anti-racism work where we can no longer ignore the imperial context in our policy engagement, and the empires which state officials claiming an affinity to anti-racist struggles stand behind.

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