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# Anti-Muslim tribalism: a new framework for analysing Islamophobia in contemporary times

PROMISE FRANK EJIOFOR

**ABSTRACT** One of the leading interpretations of Islamophobia in Europe is anti-Muslim racism. Scholars who conceptualize Islamophobia as a form of racism typically draw on the theoretical framework of cultural racism to contend that Muslims in Europe are discriminated against not only on the basis of religion and culture, but also on the basis of physical features or ancestry. This strand of contention is based on the fact that most Muslims in Europe are non-white immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East and, as a consequence, generally appear phenotypically different from the white majority in European societies. In this article, Ejiofor argues that, even though the theoretical cultural racism framework utilized by some European and other western scholars to analyse Islamophobia in Europe is quite pertinent to some forms of Islamophobia in European or western societies, it does not apprehend the lived experiences of discrimination against Muslims in many non-European societies. Ejiofor contends that the cultural racism framework tends to sidestep the fact that Islamophobia is a global phenomenon that occurs in some non-European societies where colour racism is non-existent, where race—or racial identity—is not a relevant social category, and where discrimination against Muslims hardly has anything to do with whiteness or non-whiteness. What, then, does Islamophobia look like in some non-European contexts where racism—as the term is ordinarily used in Europe to refer to discrimination of peoples based on physical traits or ancestry—does not make sense? Drawing on the Nigerian context, in which discrimination against Muslims reflects ethnoreligious and ethnoregional conflicts arising from the complex political history of the Nigerian state, Ejiofor posits that Islamophobia in some non-European societies is about tribalism, as it involves the grouping of Muslims into a single tribe and associating Muslimness with terrorism despite the absence of racial identity. He proposes the novel framework of anti-Muslim tribalism so as to capture Islamophobia beyond the West.

**KEYWORDS** anti-Muslim racism, anti-Muslim tribalism, cultural racism, Eurocentrism, Europe, Fulaniphobia, Islam, Islamophobia, Nigeria, tribalism

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*O Reader, how many an evil that you see in others is  
but your own nature reflected in them!*

*In them appears all that you are—your hypocrisy,  
iniquity, and insolence.*

*You do not see clearly the evil in yourself; else you  
would hate yourself with all your soul.*

—Rūmī, 'The Evil in Ourselves', ll. 5–7<sup>1</sup>

## Prolegomenon to a critique of European Islamophobia

In *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* published by Bloomsbury in May 2017, Douglas Murray—a British political commentator—posits that 'Europe is committing suicide' because white Europeans tolerate Islam and permit the mass immigration of non-Europeans—Arabs, Asians and Africans—with distinct religious *and* cultural values into the European continent, with dire consequences for the survival of European culture and identity.<sup>2</sup> Murray further contends that 'Europe was never [. . .] a continent of Islam',<sup>3</sup> and that the acceptance of Muslim immigrants into Europe is a symptom of the continent's imminent demise, as Muslims—in his peculiar delusional imagination—are socially conservative, intolerant of European cultural values and with a tendency to commit a battery of heinous crimes, such as terrorism, sex trafficking, mass rape, grooming and indiscriminate murder. In other words, 'Europe will not be Europe and the peoples of Europe will have lost the only place in the world we had to call home',<sup>4</sup> precisely because of the mass immigration of Muslims into the European continent. Murray's lamentation for the cultural changes in European societies, which he blames on Muslim immigration and the concomitant 'super-diversity' of European towns and cities,<sup>5</sup> is axiomatic from the following remarks:

In all Western European countries this process [the mass immigration of Muslims into Europe] began after the Second World War due to labour shortages. Soon Europe got hooked on the migration and could not stop the flow even if it had wanted to. The result was that what had been Europe—the home of the European peoples—gradually became a home for the entire

- 1 Jal-ālu'l-Dīn Rūmī, *Rūmī, Poet and Mystic (1207–1273)*, ed. and trans. from the Persian by Reginald A. Nicholson (London: George Allen and Unwin 1950), 76.
- 2 Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury 2017), 1.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 5 Steven Vertovec, 'Super-diversity and its implications', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 30, no. 6, 2007, 1024–54.

world. The places that had been European gradually became somewhere else. So places dominated by Pakistani immigrants resembled Pakistan in everything but their location, with the recent arrivals and their children eating the food of their place of origin, speaking the language of their place of origin and worshipping the religion of their place of origin. Streets in the cold and rainy northern towns of Europe filled with people dressed for the foothills of Pakistan or the sandstorms of Arabia.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas the book was lauded by some like the Canadian political scientist Eric Kaufmann who states that '[o]n the whole, Murray's combination of collective psychoanalysis and reportage is powerful and engaging',<sup>7</sup> the book is equally derided by others who contend that it is symptomatic of 'gentrified xenophobia',<sup>8</sup> as it promulgates conspiracy theories against Muslims that are antithetical to convivial cohabitation in multicultural Europe. Ian Almond argues that the arguments packed in the book are fundamentally flawed because of the 'one-sided flow of information', 'slack grasp of history' and neglect of the wider economic context that underlines neoliberalism rather than Islam—or Muslims—as largely responsible for the cultural changes in Europe.<sup>9</sup> As he puts it:

The book has many flaws—flaws in structure, methodology, background preparation, choice of premise—which make it difficult to know where to begin with a critique. Perhaps the most obvious weakness is the staggeringly one-sided flow of statistics and examples, reflecting a clear decision to make the book a rhetorical, not an argumentative text: the reader is met head-on with an endless stream of Somali rapists, British Asian sex-traffickers, Pakistani terrorists, murderous Nigerians, homophobic Dutch imams, as example piles upon example in an Ann Coulter-like cascade of Islamic horror, clearly intended to culminate in the perfect synonymy of 'Muslim' and 'Evil'. [. . .] The author of *The Strange Death of Europe* has clearly considered his options, and seems to have settled for a strategy of semantic bombardment, rather than any engagment [*sic*] with counter-arguments and opposing narratives.<sup>10</sup>

6 Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe*, 2. See also Ian Almond, 'Misrecognising the problem: Douglas Murray's *The Strange Death of Europe*', *Middle East Eye* (online), 11 August 2017, available at [www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/misrecognising-problem-douglas-murrays-strange-death-europe](http://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/misrecognising-problem-douglas-murrays-strange-death-europe) (viewed 13 February 2024).

7 Eric Kaufmann, 'Guilt-edged bonds', *Literary Review*, June 2017, available at <https://literaryreview.co.uk/guilt-edged-bonds> (viewed 13 February 2024).

8 Gaby Hinsliff, 'The Strange Death of Europe by Douglas Murray review—gentrified xenophobia', *Guardian* (online), 6 May 2017, available at [www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/06/strange-death-europe-immigration-xenophobia](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/06/strange-death-europe-immigration-xenophobia) (viewed 13 February 2023).

9 Almond, 'Misrecognising the problem'.

10 Ibid.

Based on Almond's observations—with all of which I agree—what I can categorically say about Murray's contention is that it is racist *and* Islamophobic. For it demonizes non-white ethnic minorities who—because of their Islamic faith and distinct cultures—are considered existentially threatening to white Europeans and European cultures. The nature of discrimination that non-white Muslims suffer in Europe is central to one of the leading interpretations of Islamophobia that equates the phenomenon with anti-Muslim racism, even though this is not the only interpretation of Islamophobia in Europe.<sup>11</sup> Precisely because anti-Muslim sentiments intersect with colour racism in Europe—what I shall call, *faute de mieux*, 'European Islamophobia'—the dominant interpretation of Islamophobia in Europe conceptualizes it as anti-Muslim racism.<sup>12</sup> While this interpretation is quite pertinent to European societies, it hardly travels beyond Europe to apprehend the lived experiences of many non-European societies where Islamophobia occurs. Indeed, it sidesteps the experiences of some Muslims outside Europe who suffer discrimination from their co-nationals because of ethnicity and religion even in the absence of colour racism. It is this particular conception of Islamophobia that I address in this research article. I contend that, while Islamophobia could be coterminous with racism in Europe, such conceptualization is devoid of meaning in some non-European contexts where racialization based on non-whiteness is socially irrelevant.

The interpretation of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism has made scholars sidestep crucial non-European cases from the African continent, as is axiomatic from the dominance of cases of European Islamophobia and the relative absence of significant cases in parts of the non-European world like Nigeria, the state with the largest Muslim population in Africa.<sup>13</sup> This has also led some

11 Hafez, for example, identifies three 'schools of thought' that are generally used in Islamophobia Studies—namely (1) prejudice, (2) racism and (3) decoloniality. However, he maintains that the racism approach—and this encompasses the cultural racism theory—is 'perhaps the most widespread current approach within academic literature, finding especially large—although not exclusive—acceptance among the sections of that academic community that prefer to employ the notion of anti-Muslim racism rather than Islamophobia.' See Farid Hafez, 'Schools of thought in Islamophobia Studies: prejudice, racism, and decoloniality', *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2018, 210-25 (221). It seems to me that the fact that the racism approach dominates the literature on Islamophobia is not necessarily evidence that it applies to all contexts within and beyond Europe. The eccentric German cultural critic Friedrich Nietzsche admonishes us to be wary of what he calls *consensus sapientium*—the agreement of the wise—not least because scholarly agreement is not necessarily evidence of truth. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with the Hammer* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company 1997), 12. Thus, there is the necessity, I think, to problematize widely accepted presuppositions to decipher whether they can travel beyond the context in which they were generated.

12 While this article concentrates on European societies as a counter to Nigerian society, other non-European states that are historically white will share with Europe a large helping of colour racism in their attitudes towards Muslim immigrants.

13 For example, the *Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia* is dominated by European case studies and, notably, features no case from the African continent. See Irene

African scholars to assume that Islamophobia does not yet exist in places like Nigeria.<sup>14</sup> I argue that the absence of racialized identification—that is, colour racism—in some non-European contexts does not imply the absence of Islamophobia. Rather, it means we must investigate the myriad ways that Islamophobia functions in various local contexts outside Europe. I propose that Islamophobia be interpreted as anti-Muslim tribalism, since it is invariably about in-group versus out-group fear of, or discrimination against, Muslims regardless of context, geographic location and racial identity. For our purposes, I shall examine one form of Islamophobia in Nigeria that sometimes intersects with what I shall dub, for want of a better term, ‘Fulaniphobia’. Fulaniphobia is the fear or hatred of the Fulani ethnic group; it is a negative sentiment that portrays the Fulani, the majority of whom are Muslim, as Islamic extremists with an expansionist agenda to Islamize non-Muslim and non-Fulani ethnoreligious groups. This tribalism—that typically draws on historical myths of nineteenth-century jihads waged against corrupt political regimes by Fulani revolutionaries such as Usman dan Fodio—breeds discrimination against the Fulani, with consequences such as social exclusion and physical assault including murder. Fulaniphobia is, by and large, Islamophobia in the Nigerian context, even though it is devoid of the colour racism embedded in European Islamophobia. Consequently, in this article, I foreground an African example of Islamophobia to counteract the interpretation of the phenomenon as anti-Muslim racism that has seemingly become a dogma despite its provincialism, nay ‘provincial universalism’.<sup>15</sup>

This article is divided into three sections. First, I shall assess the interpretation of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism by exploring the relevant scholarly works that have proposed or used the definition. I shall contend that this particular way of conceptualising Islamophobia is scarcely universal, but Eurocentric and sidesteps non-European experiences of the same phenomenon. Second, I shall discuss the historical context of one form of Islamophobia in Nigeria that manifests in anti-Fulani sentiments. I will examine anti-Fulani discourses and explicate how Islamophobia is embedded in them, as the Fulani are vilified not only because of their perceived Muslimness but also because of the fear that they potentially nurture a veiled agenda to Islamize other ethnoreligious and ethnoregional groups. Finally, I shall reiterate my thesis on re-examining the discourse of Islamophobia beyond Europe with the view to incorporate non-European experiences into the global discourse

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Zempi and Imran Awan (eds), *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia* (London and New York: Routledge 2019). So much for an ‘international’ handbook on Islamophobia that appears parochial.

14 For example, Wariboko contends just this although he allows that Islamophobia may become salient with the emergence of Boko Haram jihadists. Onyinyechi P. C. Wariboko, ‘Prospects of Islamophobia in Nigeria and its dangers’, *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2015, 42–57 (47). I disagree with this statement because Islamophobia has existed in Nigeria since at least the colonial era.

15 Zaheer Baber, ‘Provincial universalism: the landscape of knowledge production in an era of globalization’, *Current Sociology*, vol. 51, no. 6, 2003, 615–23.

of Islamophobia. I will argue that my novel framework of anti-Muslim tribalism derived from Nigerian experiences provides us with possibilities for transcending the provincialism of European understandings of Islamophobia.

## The provincialism of European Islamophobia

The term 'Islamophobia' has a long history. In the early 1900s, it was used in different ways by scholars such as Alain Quellien, Maurice Delafosse, Slimane ben Ibrahim and Étienne Dinet to describe the fear and hatred of Islam and of Muslims.<sup>16</sup> However, the term became popular from 1997, when the Runnymede Trust's Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia made it relevant for public policy by publishing the flagship report entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*.<sup>17</sup> With the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, the Global War on Terrorism, the 7/7 terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom, the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy in Denmark in 2005, Pope Benedict XVI's controversial address delivered at the University of Regensburg in Germany in 2006 that engendered violent demonstrations around the world, and the Lars Vilks Muhammad drawings controversy in Sweden in 2007, Islamophobia took on a life of its own and made a frequent appearance in news broadcasts, opinion pieces and scholarly publications. Indeed, due in large measure to ubiquitous public suspicions that portray Islam as a violent religion and Muslims as the emblematic incarnation of the apparent evil embedded in Islam, Muslims became a 'suspect community' in European countries.<sup>18</sup> Such negative characterization engendered anti-Muslim hostilities in Europe ranging from profiling and targeting by intelligence agencies to government surveillance and discrimination in employment.<sup>19</sup>

16 For a comprehensive overview of the history of the term 'Islamophobia', see Fernando Bravo López, 'Towards a definition of Islamophobia: approximations of the early twentieth century', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2011, 556–73; and Junaid Rana, 'The story of Islamophobia', *Souls*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2007, 148–61.

17 Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (London: Runnymede Trust 1997), 4–12.

18 Pantazis and Pemberton define the term as a 'sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being "problematic." Specifically in terms of policing, individuals may be targeted, not necessarily as a result of suspected wrong doing, but simply because of their presumed membership to that sub-group. Race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, language, accent, dress, political ideology or any combination of these factors may serve to delineate the sub-group.' Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton, 'From the "old" to the "new" suspect community: examining the impacts of recent UK counter-terrorist legislation', *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 49, no. 5, 2009, 646–66 (649).

19 See *ibid.*; and Madeline-Sophie Abbas, 'Producing "internal suspect bodies": divisive effects of UK counter-terrorism measures on Muslim communities in Leeds and Bradford', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2019, 261–82.

Regardless of Islamophobia's 'coming of age' beginning in the late 1990s,<sup>20</sup> there is scarcely any consensus as to whether it refers to fear and hatred of Islam (and thus anti-Islam) or to fear and hatred of Muslims (and thus anti-Muslim).<sup>21</sup> Put differently, Islamophobia is an 'essentially contested concept'.<sup>22</sup> The French political scientist Jocelyn Cesari posits that Islamophobia is a contested concept

because it is often imprecisely applied to very diverse phenomena, ranging from xenophobia to anti-terrorism. It groups together all kinds of different forms of discourse, speech and acts by suggesting that they all emanate from an identical ideological core, which is an irrational fear (a phobia) of Islam.<sup>23</sup>

Despite these contestations over definitional precision and utility of the term, something of a consensus has emerged in European and western academia—a consensus that interprets Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism drawing on a cultural racism framework. Tariq Modood argues:

Cultural racism in contemporary Britain is a two-step racism (or alternatively, is a second step, with colour racism being the first step), by which I mean that most of the victims of cultural racism, most notably Muslims and Asians, also suffer colour racism and that the cultural racism is built on—embedded within—that.<sup>24</sup>

The justification for this interpretation lies, I am inclined to think, in the fact that Muslims in Europe—most of whom are immigrants—are targeted not only on the basis of religion but also on the basis of culture, ethnicity and race. Based on the British Muslim experiences of Islamophobia, for instance, Modood contends that

Islamophobia is a form of cultural racism because while the perception and treatment of Muslims clearly has a religious *and* cultural dimension, it, equally clearly, bears a physical appearance or ancestral component. For

20 Brian Klug, 'Islamophobia: a concept comes of age', *Ethnicities*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2012, 665–81.

21 In his seminal article on Islamophobia, Fred Halliday explains that 'anti-Muslimism' is a better term than Islamophobia because Muslims rather than Islam are the targets of discrimination in the West. Fred Halliday, "'Islamophobia' reconsidered', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, no. 5, 1999, 892–902 (898).

22 W. B. Gallie, 'Essentially contested concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 56, no. 1, 1956, 167–98.

23 Jocelyn Cesari, 'Islamophobia in the West: a comparison between Europe and the United States', in John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (eds), *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 21–43 (21).

24 Tariq Modood, *Essays on Secularism and Multiculturalism* (London: ECPR Press/Rowman & Littlefield International 2019), Chap. 1, 34–5.

while it is true that 'Muslim' is not a (putative) biological category in the way that 'black' or 'south Asian' (aka 'Paki'), or Chinese is, neither was 'Jew'. In that instance it took a long, non-linear history of racialisation to turn an ethno-religious group into a race.<sup>25</sup>

To elucidate the 'anti-Muslim racism' framework, Modood distinguishes between biological racism and cultural racism where the former is 'the anti-pathology, exclusion and unequal treatment of people on the basis of their physical appearance or other imputed physical differences—saliently, in Britain their non-“whiteness”' and the latter 'builds on biological racism a further discourse which evokes cultural differences from an alleged British, “civilised” norm to vilify, marginalise or demand cultural assimilation from groups who may also suffer from biological racism'.<sup>26</sup> For Modood, British Muslims are vilified in consequence of their racial *and* cultural difference regardless of whether they abide by the core beliefs and principles of Islam. Islamophobia is cultural racism, so he further argues, because it involves the biological *and* cultural discrimination of Muslims. British Muslims therefore suffer a 'double'—alternatively, 'compound racism' or 'two-step'—racism based on colour and culture.<sup>27</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that although Muslims are stereotypically imagined as non-white in Europe, there is a significant number of white Muslims—mostly white converts—who suffer from Islamophobia despite their whiteness so that Modood's double racism framework does not capture all forms of Islamophobia even within Europe.<sup>28</sup>

This interpretation of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim cultural racism derives from two intricately entwined assumptions about Muslims in Europe: first, most Muslims in Europe are either immigrants or have an immigrant or 'non-white' background; second, most European Muslims are socioeconomically marginalized.<sup>29</sup> This combination of factors means that 'Islamophobia overlaps with other forms of discrimination, such as xenophobia, anti-immigration policies, political discourses, and rejection of cultural differences'.<sup>30</sup> The discrimination against Muslims is—as Modood claims—thus

more a form of racism than a form of religious intolerance, though it may perhaps be best described as a form of cultural racism, in recognition of the fact that the

25 Ibid., Chap. 4, 76.

26 Ibid., Chap. 4, 77.

27 Ibid., Chap. 1, 34.

28 See, for example, Esra Özyürek, *Being German, Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion, and Conversion in the New Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2015); Mikaela H. Rogozen-Soltar, *Spain Unmoored: Migration, Conversion, and the Politics of Islam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2017); and Amina Amer and Caroline Howarth, 'Constructing and contesting threat: representations of white British Muslims across British national and Muslim newspapers', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2018, 614–28.

29 Cesari, 'Islamophobia in the West', 24.

30 Ibid.

target group, the Muslims, are identified in terms of their non-European descent, in terms of their not being white, and in terms of their perceived culture.<sup>31</sup>

The point about the immigrant background of Muslims in Europe is supported by Junaid Rana who underlines that the term ‘Islamophobia’

came out of a growing need to address the place of Muslim migrants in Northern countries, and the supposed divide between the Western and Islamic worlds. Indeed, in the latter half of the twentieth century large populations from Muslim countries migrated to Europe and North America, signalling economic shifts that required large pools of new labor reserves.<sup>32</sup>

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims offered the following working definition of Islamophobia: ‘Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.’<sup>33</sup> Several scholars, books and organizations have come to adopt this definition as dogma with many associating the term with racism and the politics of empire.<sup>34</sup> Ibrahim Kalin asserts that ‘it is impossible to separate Islamophobia from the ethnic and racial hatred of Arabs, Asians, and blacks’.<sup>35</sup> Erik Love contends that ‘there are a set of physical traits and characteristics that can mark someone as “Muslim,” regardless of their actual religion, ethnicity, or nationality. Race is the only way to explain how this is so.’<sup>36</sup> The cultural anthropologist Andrew Shryock concludes

31 Tariq Modood, ‘Introduction: the politics of multiculturalism in the new Europe’, in Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (eds), *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community* (London: Zed Books 1997), 1–26 (4).

32 Rana, ‘The story of Islamophobia’, 148.

33 All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, *Islamophobia Defined: Report on the Inquiry into a Working Definition of Islamophobia/Anti-Muslim Hatred*, 27 November 2018, available on [squarespace.com](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bffd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf) at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bffd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf> (viewed 14 February 2024).

34 I list a few notable ones here: Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso 2014); Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills and David Miller (eds), *What Is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State* (London: Pluto Press 2017); David Tyrer, *The Politics of Islamophobia: Race, Power and Fantasy* (London: Pluto Press 2013); Nathan Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims*, 2nd edn (London: Pluto Press 2017); Nazia Kazi, *Islamophobia, Race, and Global Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 2019); Jim Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia: The Rise of Respectable Racism in France* (London: C. Hurst 2018); Stephen Sheehi, *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press 2011); and Nicole Nguyen, *Suspect Communities: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Domestic War on Terror* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2019).

35 Ibrahim Kalin, ‘Islamophobia and the limits of multiculturalism’, in Esposito and Kalin (eds), *Islamophobia*, 3–20 (11).

36 Erik Love, *Islamophobia and Racism in America* (New York: New York University Press 2017), 2.

that Islamophobia 'has its richest connotations, when it is used to describe a sentiment that flourishes in contemporary Europe and North America'.<sup>37</sup> Based on this contention, the cultural racism framework founded on European—and, of course, American—experiences is portrayed as the ideal yardstick to analyse cases of Islamophobia around the world because it is the 'paradigmatic context' in which this form of discrimination is best conceived, lived and experienced.

One might assume that the ideological hegemony of interpretations based on the cultural racism framework is limited to Europe, but that would be mistaken in large part because some scholars analysing Islamophobia in non-European societies—and even in Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan, for example—have equally appropriated it. Consider, for instance, the relatively recent compendium on Islamophobia in Muslim-majority countries edited by Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez. The editors state the book's working definition of Islamophobia in Muslim-majority countries as

anti-Muslim racism. It is about a dominant group of people aspiring to seize, stabilize and widen their power by means of defining a scapegoat—real or invented—and excluding this scapegoat from the resources, rights and definition of a 'we'.<sup>38</sup>

While the above interpretation appears persuasive, I do not think it captures the lived experiences of Islamophobia in most Muslim-majority polities. Indeed, it is hard to comprehend how Islamophobia in a Muslim-majority polity such as Azerbaijan is about anti-Muslim racism because the majority of Azeris are Muslim, seemingly share analogous phenotypic and cultural roots, and do not experience discrimination on the bases of biological *and* cultural difference. Further, it hardly makes any sense to transport Modoodian schematism to the Azerbaijani context in which Islamophobia hardly has anything to do with non-white Muslim immigration. I suspect that Islamophobia in Azerbaijan—as in most Muslim-majority countries—is not so much about anti-Muslim racism, but about particular ways of being Muslim in a post-9/11 world where certain expressions of Islamic piety are associated with terrorism, anti-modernity and national insecurity. Mamdani's framework of 'good Muslim, bad Muslim' is noteworthy here:<sup>39</sup> on the one hand, in some Muslim-majority societies like Azerbaijan, certain

37 Andrew Shryock, 'Introduction: Islam as an object of fear and affection', in Shryock (ed.), *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2010), 1–25 (2).

38 Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, 'Introduction', in Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (eds), *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies* (London and New York: Routledge 2019), 1–4 (2).

39 Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon 2004).

behaviours or expressions of the Islamic faith are stereotypically associated with the 'bad Muslim', who is so puritan as to harbour extremist proclivities sufficient to destabilize state and society;<sup>40</sup> on the other hand, the 'good Muslim' is any Muslim who believes in, and practises, the principles of Islam devoid of certain behaviours that portend religious fundamentalism. In such Muslim-majority contexts as Azerbaijan, it is not biological or colour difference that is problematic *per se*, but particular interpretations, expressions and externalizations of Islamic piety. It is the fear or phobia of the supposedly 'immoderate' forms of the Islamic faith.<sup>41</sup> It is not so much that theorizing Islamophobia as double racism is misguided, but that such a framework is not generalizable within and beyond Europe. While there is no attempt to deny that post-9/11 European epistemologies have had significant impacts on local world-views in non-European societies—as I have shown, scholars of Muslim-majority polities have also appropriated the European epistemology—what is quite evident, I think, is the embedded European ethnocentrism in the conceptualization of a global phenomenon like Islamophobia that assumes different local forms in diverse contexts. Indeed, it is ethnocentric to universalize a particular form of European experience of Islamophobia for three fundamental reasons:

1. Some non-European societies do not utilize 'race' as a social category in the white/non-white binary to describe their fellow citizens. It would be reckless to transpose the 'race concept'<sup>42</sup> from Europe to non-European societies that do not ordinarily use it in everyday life. For example, most Nigerians hardly use 'race' in common parlance and official documentation to distinguish between one ethnic group and another. Rather, they tend to use other identitarian markers, such as ethnicity, clan, religion, tribe, indigene, region and so on. These social identities usually intersect in political discourses. Further, the relative absence of 'race' as an identitarian marker in

40 In the Azerbaijani context, a 'good Azeri Muslim' is posited as one who follows 'traditional Islam' derived from the local Azerbaijani context devoid of Islamist radicalism or fundamentalism that can challenge political power. Any Muslim who does not conform to the principles of 'traditional Islam' as constructed and construed by the Azerbaijani state is deemed a non-traditional, 'bad Azeri Muslim' influenced by foreign forces and thereby securitized or subjected to state surveillance and discrimination. See Sofie Bedford, Ceyhun Mahmudlu and Shamkhal Abilov, 'Protecting nation, state and government: "traditional Islam" in Azerbaijan', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 73, no. 4, 2021, 691–712 (698–9). Islamophobia in this context, it seems to me, is embedded in the securitization of any Muslim whose version of Islam—non-traditional Islam—is incongruous with the traditional Islam dictated by the state.

41 See Shryock, 'Introduction', 9–10.

42 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007).

some non-European societies does not entail the absence of Islamophobia.

2. Most Muslims in Europe are non-white immigrants of Arab, Asian and African descent. In Britain, for example, most Muslims are South Asian and usually of Bangladeshi or Pakistani descent.<sup>43</sup> This means that race and religion often interact in the discrimination of most Muslims in Europe. The main concern for European Islamophobes in such contexts is whether non-white Muslims can integrate in European societies and embrace liberal, secular, values and multiculturalism or interculturalism.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, in some non-European societies—particularly in some parts of Africa—Muslims are not immigrants and do not have non-white immigrant backgrounds; rather, they are indigenous to the places where they are discriminated against by non-Muslims.
3. Islamophobia—and, by extension, religious discrimination—is not about racialization of non-white immigrants in some non-European societies. In Europe, Islamophobia involves racialization—that is, assigning groups to ‘a hierarchy with white Europeans [. . .] at its summit, and other groups in their wake’.<sup>45</sup> In several places outside Europe—in Nigeria, for instance, as I shall soon demonstrate—religious animus is almost always intertwined with ethnic, religious and regional divides without the burdens of colour racism as it is used in Europe. Indeed, Islamophobia is usually perpetrated by Christians and indigenous groups in Nigeria without racialization based on phenotypic differences, not least because it does not involve assigning groups to a hierarchy based on whiteness.

Based on the presuppositions of cultural racism theorists of Islamophobia like Tariq Modood, who claims that he ‘pioneered the idea of anti-Muslim racism in the 1990s, which has now become the leading interpretation of Islamophobia’,<sup>46</sup> it seems to me that cultural racism is inseparable from biological—or colour—racism, as the former is embedded in the latter. This implies, I suspect, that cultural racism is a mere addendum to, or extension of, biological racism; cultural racism is, in other words, biological racism by other means. Indeed, from its genealogy, cultural racism is a concept that derives from the historical experiences of racial discrimination against non-white ethnic minorities in Europe and became the more dominant

43 Steve Garner and Saher Selod, ‘The racialization of Muslims: empirical studies of Islamophobia’, *Critical Sociology*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2015, 9–19 (7).

44 For an insight into the meaning of—and distinction between—interculturalism and multiculturalism, see Tariq Modood and Nasar Meer, ‘Interculturalism, multiculturalism or both?’, *Political Insight*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2012, 30–3.

45 Garner and Selod, ‘The racialization of Muslims’, 12.

46 Tariq Modood, ‘Islamophobia and normative sociology’, *Journal of the British Academy*, vol. 8, 2020, 29–49 (‘Note on the author’, 29).

form of racism, as scientific justifications for treating national minorities unfairly were discredited and receded to the background. In this sense, the distinction between biological racism (the so-called 'old racism') and cultural racism (the so-called 'new racism') is somewhat redundant. For cultural racism presupposes that racially different, non-white, groups—whose members can be picked out identified by physical features that are publicly visible—are purportedly inferior, morally evil, conservative, illiberal, unintelligent or dangerous because they inhabit cultural—and, sometimes, religious—worlds that are antithetical to European identity. The Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist Frantz Fanon argues that cultural racism has supplemented biological racism without entirely displacing the 'morphological equation',<sup>47</sup> so that biological racism 'has had to renew itself, to adapt itself, to change its appearance. It has had to undergo the fate of the cultural whole that informed it.'<sup>48</sup> The mutual interactions between biological and cultural racism are evident, I think, in the racist presuppositions of Douglas Murray whereby non-white Muslim immigrants are regarded as existential threats to European identity. Because cultural racism *anthropologizes* biological racism by reducing the problems of non-white ethnic minorities to issues of cultural differences, it is invariably linked to contentious debates in Europe around immigration, integration and multiculturalism.<sup>49</sup> This is specifically why Ali Rattansi underlines that the bifurcation of racism into cultural and biological forms is foolhardy as both mutually interpenetrate in Europe:

That the 'new racism' co-exists with and can so easily slip into hard biological conceptions of stock and even species should alert us to the fact that it is easy to exaggerate the divide between an 'old' biological racism and a 'new' cultural racism. While taboos against biologically based conceptions have become stronger and classical racial arguments have lost scientific credibility, they both continue an underground existence and are always available as resources to be drawn upon in arguments over immigration, national belonging and citizenship.<sup>50</sup>

The cultural racism framework used in conceptualizing European Islamophobia entails, I think, that both biological *and* cultural racism are part and parcel of Islamophobia. This is precisely why Modood calls Islamophobia a 'compound racism'. I do not completely agree with this interpretation of

47 Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, trans. from the French by Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press 1967), 33.

48 *Ibid.*, 32.

49 See Étienne Balibar, 'Is there a "neo-racism"?', trans. from the French by Chris Turner, in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso 1991), 17–28 (26).

50 Ali Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2007), 100–1.

Islamophobia because Islamophobia can occur without colour racism. In some non-European contexts, Islamophobia is not racist in the sense of discriminating against Muslims on the basis of non-whiteness. In the next section, I shall discuss a non-European context—Nigeria—in which Islamophobia is not so much about colour racism in the European sense, but about the unsavoury image of Islam as a violent religion and of Muslims as an incarnation of Islam. In many non-European contexts, then, Islamophobia interacts with other local social, political and economic conundrums that cannot be comprehended via the prism of compound racism.

### **Islamophobia beyond European epistemology**

Nigeria has a population of over 200 million people, around 300 ethnic groups and over 500 languages, making it Africa's most populous and diverse state. The major ethnic groups in Nigeria are (1) the Igbo in the south-east; (2) the Hausa and Fulani in the north; and (3) the Yoruba in the south-west. According to Daniel Agbiboa: 'The northern Hausa-Fulani consist of 30% of the country's total population, the western Yoruba make up 20% of the total, and the eastern Igbo constitute 17%, with the rest being the so-called minorities.'<sup>51</sup> In terms of religious inclination, the Hausa and Fulani are mostly Muslim; the Igbo are predominantly Christian; and the Yoruba are religiously mixed. Regionally, the south is predominantly Christian, the north is largely Muslim and the Middle Belt is religiously mixed. In Nigeria, ethnicity, religion and region tend to go hand-in-hand. Indeed, in an Afrobarometer survey in which Nigerians were asked how they would describe themselves apart from 'being Nigerian', it is quite unsurprising that a 'solid plurality of Nigerians identify in ethnic or regional terms, while nearly two-thirds (64 percent) choose communal identities of ethnicity, region, or religion'.<sup>52</sup> These tripartite identitarian configurations are embedded in episodes of Islamophobia in Nigeria.

One form Islamophobia takes in Nigeria, as mentioned previously, is what I call, for want of a better term, 'Fulaniphobia', the fear and hatred of the Fulani ethnic group. The Fulani are the largest nomadic group that inhabit West Africa and the Sahel although there are sedentary Fulani as well. They are predominantly Muslim, and members of the group were partly instrumental in the diffusion of Islam in West Africa and the Sahel. Fulaniphobia is a prejudice founded on three negative sentiments about the Fulani in Nigeria, namely that they: (1) display a 'natural' penchant for

51 Daniel Egiegba Agbiboa, 'Ethno-religious conflicts and the elusive quest for national identity in Nigeria', *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2013, 3–30 (10).

52 Peter Lewis, *Identity, Institutions and Democracy in Nigeria*, Afrobarometer Working Paper no. 68 (Cape Town: Institute for Democracy in South Africa/ Accra: Ghana Centre for Democratic Development/ East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University 2007), 5.

aggression and violent behaviour (specifically, terrorism); (2) are religious fundamentalists and jihadists; and (3) are a geopolitical force with a veiled agenda to Islamize other ethnoreligious and ethnoregional groups. These anti-Fulani sentiments could be summed up in one word that is employed to vilify the Fulani: Islamization. Michael Nwankpa makes clear that—in the Nigerian state—Islamization refers to the ‘aggressive expansion of Islamic social and political systems or the imposition of *shari’a* rule on a non-Muslim society and non-practicing [*sic*] Muslims. It is a form of forced conversion or assimilation into an Islamic society, different from proselytization and voluntary conversion.’<sup>53</sup> If Islamophobia denotes discrimination against Muslims, then Fulaniphobia qualifies as one of its many modes because of the negative characterization of the Fulani as Islamizers. With widespread conflicts over resources between mainly Fulani pastoralists and predominantly Christian farmers in the Middle Belt and southern regions of Nigeria, these three negative sentiments have triggered anti-Fulani hostilities. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall trace the genesis of Fulaniphobia in the political history of Nigeria.

The origin of the Fulani is quite obscure, and there are numerous theories put forward by scholars.<sup>54</sup> However, genetic evidence suggests that the Fulani are largely of West African origin.<sup>55</sup> That said, I shall commence my analysis of Fulaniphobia from the early nineteenth century, when the Sokoto Caliphate was founded on Hausaland, because it is the period relevant to this research article. For this reason, I divide the history of Fulaniphobia into three phases in the political history of Nigeria that correspond to the three negative perceptions of the Fulani. The first phase is the precolonial phase (1804–85). This phase produced narratives of the Fulani as jihadists with the agenda of Islamizing other ethnoreligious groups. The second is the colonial phase (1886–1959), which generated narratives of the Fulani as allies of the British Empire who make use of their political privileges to Islamize other ethnoreligious groups. The third is the postcolonial phase (1960–present), characterized by narratives of the Fulani as a politically dominant ethnic group using their political power to Islamize other ethnoreligious groups. These three phases are intimately tied to questions of

53 Michael Nwankpa, ‘The north–south divide: Nigerian discourses on Boko Haram, the Fulani, and Islamization’ (commentary), 26 October 2021, available on the *Hudson Institute* website at [www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/the-north-south-divide-nigerian-discourses-on-boko-haram-the-fulani-and-islamization](http://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/the-north-south-divide-nigerian-discourses-on-boko-haram-the-fulani-and-islamization) (viewed 15 February 2024).

54 See Frank L. Lambrecht, ‘The pastoral nomads of Nigeria’, *Expedition Magazine*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1976, 26–31 (26–7).

55 Mário Vicente, Edita Priehodová, Issa Diallo, Eliška Podgorná, Estella S. Poloni, Viktor Černý and Carina M. Schlebusch, ‘Population history and genetic adaptation of the Fulani nomads: inferences from genome-wide data and the lactase persistence trait’, *BMC Genomics* (online), vol. 20, no. 915, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12864-019-6296-7>.

power: the principal reason for vilifying the Fulani is not just to disparage them but to dominate them.

Prior to colonial rule in the 1880s the Fulani had already settled in Hausaland: some lived as cattle nomads while others—the literate ones—took up key roles in the capitals of Hausa royals as advisors, tax collectors and secretaries. But some did not live in the urban areas and instead chose to construct their own religious settlements; ‘from these religious enclaves, the rebellion against the “godless” rulers started’.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the greatest transformation in Hausaland in the early 1800s was the conquest of Hausaland orchestrated by a devout Fulani Muslim: Usman dan Fodio. Criticizing what he saw as the endemic corruption and paganism of the Hausa aristocrats, Usman waged a series of wars (1804–1808), the so-called ‘Fulani Jihad’,<sup>57</sup> that led to the foundation of the Sokoto Caliphate—one of the largest states in precolonial Africa—and the consequent dominance of the Fulani political elites in northern Nigeria. The Sokoto Caliphate expanded beyond the northern region as

the Sokoto Jihad of 1804–1808 transformed not only the Hausa city-states, but also shaped the geopolitics of their neighbors to the south, especially the diverse communities in contemporary central and north-eastern Nigeria (modern Nigeria’s Middle Belt region) as well as the Yoruba region in the southwest.<sup>58</sup>

Christian missionaries penetrated large parts of the Middle Belt and southern regions, which explains why, until today, ethnic groups in those regions of Nigeria are predominantly Christian. Islam was imposed on ethnic groups living in the territories of the Sokoto Caliphate, and most ethnic communities that rejected Islamic governance were either plundered by jihadi troops or enslaved.<sup>59</sup> Precisely because of the unpleasant living conditions of the non-Muslim ethnic groups under Islamic rule in the Sokoto Caliphate, Fulani ethnicity became associated with jihadism so that local communities

56 Johannes Harnischfeger, ‘Islamisation and ethnic conversion in Nigeria’, *Anthropos*, vol. 101, no. 1, 2006, 37–53 (41).

57 A much better term, I think, is ‘Sokoto jihad’ because the ethnic colouration of ‘Fulani jihad’ presupposes that it was specifically waged by the Fulani against other ethnicities which is one of the sources of anti-Fulani sentiments in Nigeria. This is wrong not least because of the diversity of ethnic membership in the jihad. See Marilyn Robinson Waldman, ‘The Fulani *Jihād*: a reassessment’, *Journal of African History*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1965, 333–55 (355).

58 Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2016), 1.

59 Harnischfeger, ‘Islamisation and ethnic conversion in Nigeria’. For more on slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate, see Paul E. Lovejoy, ‘*Murgu*: the wages of slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate’, *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1993, 168–85; Mohammed Bashir Salau, *Plantation Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate: A Historical and Comparative Study* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press 2018); Sean Stilwell, ‘Power, honour and shame: the ideology of royal slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate’, *Africa*, vol. 70, no. 3, 2000, 394–421.

in contemporary Nigeria consider conflicts with the Fulani as a struggle against global jihad.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the precolonial phase set the tone for the narrative of the Fulani as Islamizers.

The Sokoto Caliphate did not halt European conquest and colonization of Africa. In the colonial phase (1886–1959), the Fulani were disparaged as allies of the British Empire employing political privileges given them to Islamize other ethnicities. The early colonial phase that commenced immediately after the Berlin Conference (1884–85)—at which European powers scrambled for African territories—was characterized by resistance to colonialism. The emirs and sultans of the Sokoto Caliphate resisted but were ultimately neutralized by the British colonists in 1903 after a series of wars.

Despite abolishing the Sokoto Caliphate, the British colonists did not discard the religious positions of the emir and sultan but instead retained them, entrusting the Fulani aristocracy, as ‘native authorities’,<sup>61</sup> to govern other ethnic groups. The British colonists looked on the Fulani as favourites to administer the territories in northern Nigeria because they saw them as identical to the British in terms of possessing aptitudes for governance. As Lieutenant Colonel Beddington once remarked in 1934: ‘We feel that the Fulani and English races have much in common. Both have had a long experience and special aptitude for administering their own and other people’s affairs.’<sup>62</sup> At the behest of Lord Lugard, the territories of the Sokoto Caliphate were

60 This point has been highlighted—though in a cursory manner—by Adam Higazi: ‘Some political narratives of Plateau indigenes claim that there is an Islamic agenda to dominate Plateau State and that Muslims instigated violence on the Jos Plateau in their struggle for power. This viewpoint has also been framed historically, arguing that the current conflicts are a continuation of the nineteenth century jihad that swept across northern Nigeria, establishing the Sokoto Caliphate, but which the people of the high Plateau, aided by the rugged terrain and their decentralised pattern of social organisation, successfully resisted. [ . . . ] The politicisation of religion in Plateau State draws on the view that it is under attack because it is an island of resistance to Muslim domination. This perspective is reinforced by the contemporary global prominence of jihadism. The Plateau narrative of the Jos conflicts appropriates global discourses from the “War on Terror” with local experiences of communal violence. The extreme violence of Boko Haram, the jihadist group originating in north-east Nigeria, has also affected the lexicon of the Plateau conflicts. Boko Haram appear to have a minimal presence in Plateau State and the conflicts around Jos pre-date Boko Haram, but such distinctions are not necessarily made in local discourse, which conflate any Muslims involved in armed conflict with Boko Haram. In this totalising narrative, all conflicts in northern Nigeria are viewed as being part of a wider jihad, not as separate disputes with locally specific roots. Even in rural areas, this political and historical context frames the way that conflicts between predominantly Christian Berom farmers and Muslim Fulani pastoralists are expressed.’ Adam Higazi, ‘Farmer–pastoralist conflicts on the Jos Plateau, central Nigeria: security responses of local vigilantes and the Nigerian state’, *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2016, 365–85 (370–71).

61 Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1996).

62 Quoted in Harnischfeger, ‘Islamisation and ethnic conversion in Nigeria’, 43.

transformed into the Northern Nigeria Protectorate, while territories in the southern region that had been under the administration of the Royal Niger Company became the Southern Nigeria Protectorate. The early colonial phase ended in 1914 when the Northern Nigeria Protectorate and Southern Nigeria Protectorate were amalgamated in 1914 to form the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. This was mostly for economic reasons: the Northern Nigeria Protectorate suffered from a budget deficit, hence the colonial administration thought it best to employ the budget surplus of the Southern Nigeria Protectorate to make up for the deficit of the northern region.<sup>63</sup> Despite the amalgamation of these protectorates into one British colony, which ushered in the late colonial phase, they were governed differently, with Fulani political elites collaborating with the British colonists to govern northern territories. Paradoxically, the British colonists institutionalized Islamic rule in the northern states as they gave the emirs and sultans the power to subjugate ethnic minorities and to adjudicate religious and judicial disputes in the northern region.<sup>64</sup> Indeed: 'Because this governance design ostensibly privileged Islamic institutions, Muslim rulers, and Muslim populations to the detriment of non-Muslim religious populations, critics of the colonial state, especially European Christian missionaries, labelled it "Muslim sub-imperialism".'<sup>65</sup> In the colonial phase, the narrative of the Fulani as Islamizers backed by the British Empire was an attempt by other ethnicities to preserve their own identities that they regarded as incompatible with the Islamic identity of Fulani—and Hausa—political elites.<sup>66</sup> This is specifically why Andrew Barnes regards the Middle Belt Movement—a regional group that was created by Middle Belt peoples to represent their interests during the colonial era prior to Nigerian independence—as both a political and cultural movement that essentially sought to make a case for novel administrative regions for northern Christians outside Muslim political control.<sup>67</sup>

63 There were other ideological and political reasons for amalgamating the Northern Nigeria Protectorate and the Southern Nigeria Protectorate even though the economic rationale trumped other reasons. See Richard Bourne, *Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century* (London: Zed Books 2015), 10–12.

64 See Rabiya Akande, 'Secularizing Islam: the colonial encounter and the making of a British Islamic criminal law in northern Nigeria, 1903–58', *Law and History Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2020, 459–93; Jonathan Reynolds, 'Good and bad Muslims: Islam and indirect rule in northern Nigeria', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2001, 601–18.

65 Akande, 'Secularizing Islam', 461.

66 Because of the religious/cultural integration between the Fulani and the Hausa in northern Nigeria, both groups are considered together as Hausa-Fulani by other ethnoreligious groups in Nigeria. This is obviously a stereotype. Although the Hausa and Fulani are, predominantly, Muslim—and this is what indeed makes both ethnicities similar in the eyes of other ethnicities in Nigeria—they are distinct groups with distinct cultures.

67 Andrew E. Barnes, 'The Middle Belt Movement and the formation of Christian consciousness in colonial northern Nigeria', *Church History*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2007, 591–610.

In the postcolonial phase—the current phase that began during the 1960s when Nigeria gained independence from Britain—the narrative has been that the Fulani are a politically dominant group using their power to Islamize others. Eghosa Osaghae writes: ‘Past wrongs, injustices and conflicts in particular, provide the memory backdrop against which members of ethnic groups relate with the state or members of other groups.’<sup>68</sup> The demonizing narratives concerning the Fulani in the postcolonial phase draw on the pre-colonial and colonial phases. The postcolonial phase is characterized by resistance to perceived Fulani hegemony in political life. For instance, ethnic groups from the Middle Belt states formed political parties such as the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) to contest the hegemony of the northern-dominated Northern People’s Congress (NPC) which they felt excluded the voices of ethnic minorities. The result of this contestation of northern political hegemony was both the creation, after independence in 1960, of new states in the Middle Belt—Benue and Plateau states, for example—for ethnic minorities in the northern region, as well as the concomitant invention of the legal category of ‘indigeneity’,<sup>69</sup> which excluded supposed ‘non-indigenes’, that is, the Fulani, Hausa and other ethnicities not considered ‘indigenous’ to the Middle Belt, a practice that has diffused to other parts of Nigeria. It is not surprising that the series of ethnoreligious conflicts that followed independence derive from the historical interactions of various groupings in the precolonial and colonial eras: the anti-Igbo pogrom by the Hausa and Fulani in Kano in 1966; the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70); the Tiv riots against the Hausa and the Fulani (1962–64); the Kafanchan–Kaduna ethnoreligious conflicts between Muslim Hausa and Fulani and non-Muslim communities in 1987 and 1999; the Zangon Kataf murderous wars between Muslim Hausa and Fulani and the Christian ethnic groups in 1992; the Tafewa Balewa clashes between the Hausa and Fulani and other non-Muslim ethnic minorities in Bauchi; and the Jos riots of 2001 and 2010 between Muslim Hausa and Fulani and predominantly Christian ethnic groups and, more recently, the increasingly deadly farmer–herder conflicts that pit mainly Muslim Fulani pastoralists against mainly Christian peasants in the Middle Belt and southern regions of Nigeria.

In the postcolonial phase, claims of ‘indigeneity’, coupled with the ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis,<sup>70</sup> and the Global War on Terrorism, have further stoked anti-Fulani sentiments with the belief that, as Muslims, they represent nothing but terrorism and religious conquest. Consider, by way of example, the anti-Fulani sentiments of Femi Fani-Kayode—a Christian

68 Eghosa E. Osaghae, ‘Explaining the changing patterns of ethnic politics in Nigeria’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2003, 54–73 (58).

69 Wale Adebani, ‘Terror, territoriality and the struggle for indigeneity and citizenship in northern Nigeria’, *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2009, 349–63 (350).

70 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1996).

politician from southwest Nigeria—who drew on the history of the nineteenth-century jihads waged by Usman dan Fodio to admonish his fellow Nigerians to resist the supposed Islamization of Nigeria:

It is left for the Nigerian people to either resist the attempt to Fulanise their entire nation by learning from the lessons of history, increasing their depth of knowledge, creating awareness about the formidable challenges with which they are faced and rise to the occasion [*sic*] or they can sit back, act as if there is no danger or threat and be indoctrinated, stripped of all they have and all they are, conquered, dehumanised, enslaved and overwhelmed. The choice is ours.<sup>71</sup>

The above negative characterization of the Fulani as Islamizers who intend to indoctrinate, conquer and enslave other ethnoreligious and ethnoregional groups is not uncommon among Christians in the Middle Belt and southern regions of Nigeria. With the farmer–herder conflicts, Nigerian Christians perceive reprisal attacks, sometimes perpetrated by Fulani pastoralists, ‘as a continuation of jihad, seeking an Islamic state throughout Nigeria’.<sup>72</sup> As one Christian pundit argued, based on his negative perception of the Fulani as jihadists akin to Boko Haram and various other extremist groups in East Africa and the Middle East:

The activities of the so-called Fulani herdsmen, especially in the Middle Belt and the southern parts of the country so far resemble those of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Al Shabab in East Africa, Boko Haram in North Eastern Nigeria and Taliban in Afghanistan. The areas when the so-called herdsmen carry out their heinous activities in Nigeria are the areas the jihadists will normally classify as the territories of the infidels and therefore, natural targets of jihadists. Therefore, if the Fulani killers call themselves herdsmen, the rest of us must disagree with them. [ . . . ] We must stop referring to them as herdsmen because they are not. They are either terrorists or jihadists and possibly both. [ . . . ] It is possible that their veiled aim is to carry on the unfinished task of the jihadists of 1804–1830. This will be extremely dangerous or even calamitous. The disaster unleashed and the ruins on the trails of Boko Haram; ISIS, Taliban and Alshabab [*sic*] activities should provide enough evidence of a misadventure of such jihadists at this time in the country.<sup>73</sup>

71 Femi Fani-Kayode, ‘The Fulanisation of Nigeria and the perfidy of the British (part 2)’, *Vanguard* (online), 20 February 2018, available at [www.vanguardngr.com/2018/02/giving-colonies-settlements-fulani-guise-land-grazing-dangerous](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/02/giving-colonies-settlements-fulani-guise-land-grazing-dangerous) (viewed 15 February 2024).

72 Editorial, ‘5 things to know about violence in Nigeria’s Middle Belt’, *World Watch Monitor* (online), 11 September 2017, available at [www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/5-things-to-know-about-the-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt](http://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/5-things-to-know-about-the-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt) (viewed 15 February 2024).

73 Sam Adesua, ‘Fulani herdsmen and the rest of us’, *Nigerian Tribune* (online), 14 January 2018, available at <https://tribuneonlineng.com/fulani-herdsmen-rest-us> (viewed 15 February 2024).

The Catholic Bishops of Kaduna in the Middle Belt region released a statement claiming: ‘The Fulani want to subjugate Christians, disintegrate the country, weaken the Gospel and destroy the social and economic life of the people. There is a hidden agenda targeted at the Christian majority of southern Kaduna. This jihad is well-funded, well-planned and executed by agents of destabilisation.’<sup>74</sup> Open Doors—a Dutch-based Christian organization supporting persecuted Christians worldwide—hold the following view of the Fulani:

‘The Fulanis’ actions are also shaped by concept of *Darul Islam* [House of Islam], where everything belongs to Allah directly and to his followers indirectly—including the land where they want to let their cattle graze [*sic*]. They believe it is right for them to take those resources by force from infidels and apostates.’<sup>75</sup>

This peculiar Christian interpretation of the conflicts over resources is undoubtedly Islamophobic even though it does not point to race as the driver of the attacks against Christian farmers of various ethnicities in the Middle Belt and southern regions.

Federal policy proposals geared towards curbing these conflicts by establishing grazing reserves for Muslim Fulani pastoralists throughout Nigeria have been rejected by Christians in large part because of fear that members of the ethnic group harbour a hidden agenda to Islamize others. A good case in point is the Rural Grazing Areas (RUGA) settlement policy proposed in 2019 by the federal government to make Fulani pastoralists sedentary so as to curb conflicts with mainly Christian farmers that arise from open grazing of cattle. This was rejected by stakeholders in the predominantly Christian Middle Belt and southern regions of Nigeria due to fear of Islamization by Fulani pastoralists. Rejecting the proposal, Yinka Odumakin—the former publicity secretary of Afenifere, a pan-Yoruba sociocultural group—made the following argument:

No matter how it is dressed, Ruga connotes no other thing than a measure in ethnic domination and conquest as it seeks to create territories for Fulani people all over the country. This is not about cattle in any way. [ . . . ] The rest of Nigeria is aware of how the Fulani used subtlety to corner Hausa land under the guise of introducing pure Islam to them. The Hausas [*sic*] bought this and some communities killed their own kings to have Fulani emirs. That was how Fulani became domineering in all Hausa territories, even when they did not build a single town or city in the land. It was after they finished with Hausa that they faced the Kanuri who resisted them, asserting that they knew Islam before them. It was after they hit the wall with the

74 Ibid.

75 Arne Mulders, quoted in ‘Who are the Fulani?’, *World Watch Monitor* (online), available at [www.worldwatchmonitor.org/who-are-the-fulani](http://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/who-are-the-fulani) (viewed 15 February 2024).

Kanuri that they faced Ilorin and [were] marching towards the heart of Yoruba land when its warriors stopped them in their tracks. Cattle are now seen as the guise to penetrate the rest of Nigeria in the manner religion was used to take over Hausa territories.<sup>76</sup>

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)—an Igbo separatist group established by Nnamdi Kanu to restore the defunct secessionist Biafran state in southeast Nigeria, the ancestral homeland of the Igbo—frequently espouse anti-Fulani sentiments by claiming that the Fulani are Islamizers waging jihad to Islamize Igbos and Igboland. In their radio broadcasts and opinion pieces, IPOB separatists usually call for defence of Igboland from Muslim invasion that the Fulani purportedly symbolize. Consider, for example, the anti-Fulani sentiments of an IPOB separatist published in *The Biafra Times*:

With scattered Fulani settlements in the south, they will bring their clerics and launch a new phase of Jihads from our base. [. . .] Cattle colonies is a plan to conquer the South. Herdsmen are foot soldiers of Fulani empire and the demand for lands in the South is a first step in future to take over the ancestral lands of the Southern people.<sup>77</sup>

IPOB stated that they would not accept the federal government's RUGA proposal because of suspicions that the then current administration led by a Muslim Fulani president, Muhammadu Buhari, supposedly had a hidden agenda to Islamize Igbos. As IPOB separatists put it: 'We are not in support of this their evil agenda, [we] are totally against Islamization of Igboland. We are Biafrans, we are not Fulanis. [. . .] No matter what they call this their evil plan, we reject every Islamic agenda.'<sup>78</sup> For many Christian pundits from southern Nigeria, RUGA was an attempt to authorize the Fulani to Islamize others:

One may argue that it is possible to have a symbiotic relationship with Fulani settlers such that both parties mutually benefit from their stay on our land. Yes, that would be a valid argument except that in this situation we are dealing with a people who have an ulterior motive, a hidden agenda [. . .] If we forget the history of the invasion and occupation of the Fulani Empire

76 Yinka Odumakin, 'The true meaning of Ruga', *Vanguard* (online), 2 July 2019, available at [www.vanguardngr.com/2019/07/the-true-meaning-of-ruga](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/07/the-true-meaning-of-ruga) (viewed 15 February 2024).

77 Gbonka Ebiri, 'Biafra: Why do you think they stopped history lessons in schools?', *Biafra Times*, 22 January 2018, available at [www.thebiafratimes.co/2018/01/why-do-you-think-they-stopped-history.html](http://www.thebiafratimes.co/2018/01/why-do-you-think-they-stopped-history.html) (viewed 16 February 2024).

78 Godwin Aliuna, 'IPOB vows to resist President Buhari's alleged plan to establish Ruga, Islamization of southeast region', *Daily Post* (online), 29 July 2019, available at <https://dailypost.ng/2019/07/29/ipob-vows-resist-president-buharis-alleged-plan-establish-ruga-islamization-southeast-region> (viewed 16 February 2024).

and the Jihad campaigns/wars of the 17th/18th centuries, we will painfully and regrettably re-live these sad experiences to our own demise and those of generations to come. [. . .] The relationship can never be positively symbiotic. Invasion (by peace or conquest), occupation and eventual Islamisation of our land are always at the back of the minds of Fulani people.<sup>79</sup>

To address the supposed Islamization of the southern region by the Fulani, governors of seventeen states in southern Nigeria banned open grazing of cattle in May 2021.<sup>80</sup> Moreover: ‘Southerners have reacted to perceived Islamization and “Fulanization” by forming regional vigilante outfits such as Operation Amotekun, which is supported by governors in the Yoruba-majority southwest, and IPOB’s Eastern Security Network in the southeast.’<sup>81</sup> The consequences of categorizing the Fulani as a ‘suspect community’ with an intent to Islamize other ethnoreligious groups are dire for Fulani communities. Indeed, Christians’ narratives about the Fulani as an ethnoreligious group with a covert agenda to Islamize others have fanned anti-Fulani hostilities in the Middle Belt and southern regions of Nigeria.<sup>82</sup> However, these anti-Fulani sentiments are not backed by empirical evidence; the Fulani

have not captured the Nigerian state for the purposes of Islamization. Whether it be farmer–herder clashes or banditry, violence involving Fulani is almost always driven by local conditions and competitions—often over scarce land or material resources—rather than a grand ideological and religious project.<sup>83</sup>

This is axiomatic from the statements of a Northerner who plies his trade in the southeast region:

The main reasons why we and others are still here is lack of sufficient opportunities in the North and some of us are used to living in the South East. Many were born and brought up here, many don’t have any other thing to do in the North. Some will prefer to stay here due to the level of the poverty in the North [. . .]<sup>84</sup>

79 Ameh A. Ejeh, ‘RUGA vs our traditional chiefs and leaders’, *The Sun* (online), 4 July 2019, available at <https://sunnewsonline.com/ruga-vs-our-traditional-chiefs-and-leaders> (viewed 16 February 2024).

80 Editorial, ‘Southern governors’ Asaba Declaration’, *Daily Trust* (online), 16 May 2021, available at <https://dailytrust.com/southern-governors-asaba-declaration/> (viewed 16 February 2024).

81 Nwankpa, ‘The north–south divide’.

82 See Promise Frank Ejiofor, ‘“Fulanis are foreign terrorists”: the social construction of a suspect community in the Sahel’, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2022, 333–55.

83 Nwankpa, ‘The north–south divide’.

84 Malam Badamasi Muhammad, quoted in Abbas Dalibi, ‘IPOB: food traders boycott s/east as northerners flee’, *Daily Trust* (online), 16 December 2022, available at <https://>

This claim is also buttressed by the assertions of another Fulani herdsman in Enugu state: 'In Abuja, in the north, you cannot have the grass to feed your cattle except you buy corn chaff to feed 30 or more of them; so, it is not by choice that we are here, but a matter of compulsion and the environment.'<sup>85</sup>

In the next section, I shall underline what the case of anti-Fulani sentiments in the Nigerian context contributes to the literature on Islamophobia, and suggest anti-Muslim tribalism as an apposite analytical framework to interpret the phenomenon beyond European experiences.

### **Islamophobia as anti-Muslim tribalism**

What does the case of anti-Fulani sentiments reveal about Islamophobia beyond the cultural racism framework of European Islamophobia? Although anti-Fulani discourses constitute Islamophobia in the strictest sense, they do not involve racialization in the sense of discriminating against an ethnoreligious group because of its members' non-whiteness, as the term is commonly deployed in European scholarship to make sense of the racialization of Arabs, Asians and Africans. Again, the Fulani are black and African as are other ethnic groups, so ascribing racial characteristics to them would be foolhardy, especially in the Nigerian context where 'race' is socially irrelevant as a term for classifying ethnic groups. The fear and hatred of the Fulani is not so much due to phenotypic differences, but because of the religion associated with the group: Islam. Given the history of jihads perpetrated by Fulani revolutionaries such as Usman dan Fodio, the predominantly Christian ethnic groups in the Middle Belt and southern regions of Nigeria interpret their conflicts over resources with the Muslim Fulani in postcolonial Nigeria as a continuation of jihadism and Muslim imperialism geared towards ridding Christians of their cherished ancestral lands and ethnoreligious identities. Fulaniphobia is just one among the myriad forms of discrimination that Muslims suffer at the hands of Christians, for Nigerian Christians are wary not just of the Fulani, but of Muslims in general because of the terrorism and geographical conquest that they associate with Islam and Muslims.<sup>86</sup> Hence, in the Nigerian context, *Islamophobia is devoid of the colour racism*

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[dailytrust.com/ipob-food-traders-boycott-s-east-as-northerners-flee](https://dailytrust.com/ipob-food-traders-boycott-s-east-as-northerners-flee) (viewed 16 February 2024).

85 Ardo Saidu Baso interview with El-Ameen Ibrahim, 'Most south-east Fulani settlements wiped out—leader', *Punch* (online), 20 January 2023, available at <https://punchng.com/most-south-east-fulani-settlements-wiped-out-leader> (viewed 16 February 2024).

86 See Tarela Juliet Ike, "'Its' [sic] like being a Christian is tantamount to victimisation": a qualitative study of Christian experiences and perceptions of insecurity and terrorism in Nigeria', *Cogent Social Sciences* (online), vol. 8, no. 1, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2071032>.

in which the cultural racism framework is embedded, such that it is not necessarily racist as appears to be the case in some forms of Islamophobia in Europe: Muslims are the targets of Islamophobes in Nigeria because of the negative image of Islam as a geopolitical force.

The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that theories are idealizations that simplify the world and may not correspond to empirical reality.<sup>87</sup> Another way of putting this is to say: 'Theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose.'<sup>88</sup> Given that European Islamophobia does not capture the lived experiences of Islamophobia in some non-European contexts, I propose 'anti-Muslim tribalism' as an alternative interpretation of Islamophobia. I should like to say that I am conscious of the fact that the concept of 'tribe'—from which the abstract 'tribalism' is generated—is considered derogatory by western-trained anthropologists.<sup>89</sup> However, I use 'tribalism' in a broader sense to signify the fact of humans—like other primates—being clannish creatures. This clannishness means that people tend to be loyal to their own social group and to exclude others. We tend to see the good in our own groups and the evil in other groups.<sup>90</sup> Tribalism is synonymous with 'other anxiety',<sup>91</sup> that is, the anxiety pervasive in human communities that the presence of the Other could threaten group survival. However, as social psychologists have empirically demonstrated,<sup>92</sup> tribalism—which presupposes group solidarity—does not lead inevitably to conflict if group norms embrace tolerance and inclusion.

Tribalization, however, is a process that involves the creation of enemies by grouping people into one tribe and associating them with negative characteristics. As the Robbers Cave experiment in social psychology reveals,<sup>93</sup>

87 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *As If: Idealization and Ideals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2017).

88 Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: beyond international relations theory', *Millennium*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1981, 126–55 (128).

89 See David Sneath, 'Tribe' [1 September 2016], in *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, ed. Felix Stein, available at [www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/tribe](http://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/tribe) (viewed 16 February 2024).

90 See Amy Chua, 'Tribal world: group identity is all', *Foreign Affairs* (online), 14 June 2018, available at [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/tribal-world](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/tribal-world) (viewed 30 November 2023).

91 George Makari, *Of Fear and Strangers: A History of Xenophobia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2021), 239–45.

92 Dominic Packer and Jay Van Bavel, 'The myth of tribalism', *The Atlantic* (online), 3 January 2022, available at [www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/tribalism-myth-group-solidarity-prejudice-conflict/621008](http://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/tribalism-myth-group-solidarity-prejudice-conflict/621008) (viewed 16 February 2024).

93 The Robbers Cave Experiment is a study on intergroup conflict and cooperation conducted in the 1950s by the Turkish-American social psychologist Muzafer Sherif and his research team. The study separated 22 eleven-year-old boys of roughly similar backgrounds—middle-class, white, Protestant, with two-parent backgrounds—into two groups. The study demonstrates that the introduction of competitive tasks for the two groups of boys engendered identities and conflicts while cooperative tasks reduced intergroup hostilities. As Sherif and his team put it: 'When the groups

tribalization is characteristically salient in circumstances of fierce competition over scarce resources. Islamophobia is anti-Muslim tribalism. Or—to put it more bluntly—it is the tribalization of Muslims in consequence of the negative image of Islam as a vicious religion. For it involves the grouping of real or perceived Muslims into a single tribe, and the association of the tribe—Muslim—with extremely negative characteristics such as aggression and religious expansionism. In the cognitive universe of the Islamophobe, Muslims are a single tribe with an agenda to Islamize the world and to rid others of their ethnoreligious identities. This negative sentiment results in the discrimination of Muslims. And, in the context of contestations over scarce resources, religious—Islamic—identity becomes the archetypal frame of reference not only for rallying against Islam, but also for the demonization of Muslims.

Anti-Muslim tribalism could assume many forms in different contexts and could have various local sources that have little or nothing to do with non-white immigration as European scholars tend to assume. In the European context, for example, tribalism intersects—as Tariq Modood's double racism theoretical framework and the anti-Muslim discourses of Douglas Murray demonstrate—with biological racism so that people who appear 'Muslim' by virtue of their non-white immigrant background—phenotype/ancestry *and* culture—are subject to racial discrimination. This *is* anti-Muslim tribalism. Similarly, when white Muslim converts are discriminated against by their fellow Whites because of conversion to Islam, this is also anti-Muslim tribalism.

In the Indian context, however, Indian Muslims are not non-white immigrants, for Indian Muslims are discriminated against by Hindu nationalists because of existential anxieties that Muslims would dominate India—which Hindu nationalists consider a Hindu civilization since time

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competed for goals that could be attained by only one group, to the dismay and disappointment of the other, hostile deeds and unflattering labels developed in relation to the outgroup. In time, derogatory stereotypes and negative attitudes towards the outgroup crystallized. These conclusions are based on observations made independently by observers of both groups and other staff members. Sociometric indices pointed to the overwhelming preponderance of ingroup members as friendship choices. Experimental assessment of intergroup attitudes showed unmistakable attribution of derogatory stereotypes to the villainous outgroup and of favorable qualities to the ingroup. Laboratory-type judgments of performance showed the tendency to overestimate the performance attributed to fellow group members and to minimize the performance of members of the outgroup.' See Muzafer Sherif, O. J. Harvey, B. Jack White, William R. Hood and Carolyn W. Sherif, *The Robbers Cave Experiment: Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press 1988), 210. The Robbers Cave Experiment—which has incontrovertibly made a seminal contribution to the social sciences—provides empirical evidence that intergroup conflicts emanate from competition for limited resources. Additionally, the experiment showed that 'identity allegiances can be easily conjured into being; and that (if we needed reminding) the Other may not be very other at all. We also know that identity as a social form is no less powerful for all that.' See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2005), 64.

immemorial—through ‘love jihad’ if Muslims are not eliminated from, or suppressed in, the Indian state.<sup>94</sup> Islamophobia in India stretches back to the Middle Ages when Muslims conquered territories in the Indian subcontinent. This *is* anti-Muslim tribalism.

Likewise, in the Nigerian context, Islamophobia manifests not so much as racism but as ethnicism—that is, Fulaniphobia—as the Muslim Fulani are regarded as Islamizers. The Fulani are not non-white immigrants but Nigerians and indeed share common ancestry, phenotype and culture with various other dark-skinned Africans that inhabit Nigeria. Like the Indian case, Fulaniphobia in Nigeria has a long history stretching back to the 1800s when some Fulani revolutionaries waged jihads to convert much of West Africa and the Sahel to Islam. This *is* anti-Muslim tribalism. As I say, wherever and whenever Islamophobia occurs outside Europe, it is not so much because Muslims are non-white immigrants but because ‘Muslimness’ has been grouped into a single ‘suspect tribe’ that must be systematically subdued in order to ‘preserve’ a particular social world. The fear or hatred is about Muslims as adherents of Islam, a religion that many non-Muslims around the world associate with ethnopolitical domination.

In my epigraph, the Persian poet Rūmi hints at what tribalization does: it makes one see the evil in others but not in oneself, in other groups save one’s own group. Tribalization makes the Other the enemy. This is equally the case of Islamophobia: it makes Islam and Muslims the enemy wherever they are, no matter the race, ethnicity, gender, class or nationality. In my view, conceptualizing Islamophobia as anti-Muslim tribalism relieves us of the ethnocentrism embedded in the cultural racism framework: it evades the problematic of imposing European categories on non-European societies not least because Islamophobia assumes many different forms in diverse local contexts. The notion of Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism ‘flatten[s]’<sup>95</sup> discrimination against Muslims by assuming that it is reducible to European interactions with non-white Muslim immigrants after 9/11 when, in fact, Islamophobia has existed in so many different societies prior to European colonialism and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Generalizing the cultural racism paradigm would therefore be a typical case of ‘Europe and the people without history’.<sup>96</sup> Although European epistemologies impact on local ethnoreligious violence around the world, different forms of Islamophobia in non-European societies are not simply the aggregate of European experiences of racism and anti-racism; they have their own unique sources and history. This is why I propose anti-Muslim tribalism as an analytical

94 See Andrea Malji and Syed Tahseen Raza, ‘The securitization of love jihad’, *Religions* (online), vol. 12, no. 12, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12121074>.

95 Melani McAlister, ‘Islamophobia is not racism’ (blog), *Contending Modernities*, 2 October 2018, available at <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/theorizing-modernities/islamophobia-racism> (viewed 19 February 2024).

96 Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 1997).

framework to think through the various expressions of Islamophobia beyond Europe.

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