

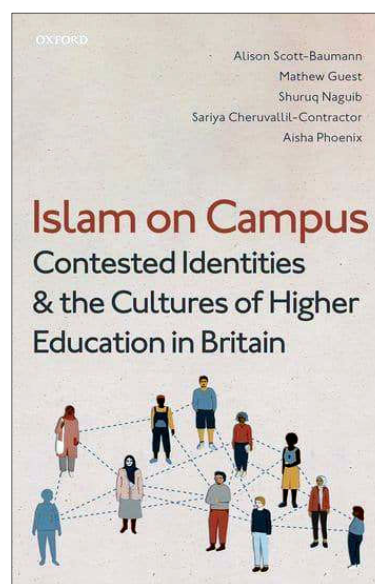
# A Study in Delusion and Irrelevance

by Sam Westrop

**Islam on Campus: Contested Identities and the Cultures of Higher Education in Britain.** By Alison Scott-Baumann, Mathew Guest, Shuruq Naguib, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, and Aisha Phoenix. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. 288 pp. \$100 (\$99.99, ebook).

*Islam on Campus* is a book of opinions, devoid of facts but presented as a serious academic analysis. The authors—all university faculty except for Phoenix—devote hundreds of pages fueling fears of “Islamophobia” while denying the very existence of Islamism. Anecdotal accounts, highly-engineered surveys dressed as quantitative studies, blanket statements about anti-Muslim agendas, and the denial of all but the most shocking acts of Islamist violence are dressed with nonsensical illogic.

The book deals with Muslims at universities and their experiences through the narrow prism of radicalization and “Islamophobia” while the actual politics of British Islam—a complex array of many different sects and movements—is completely ignored. As the government itself declared under Prime Minister David Cameron, understanding the influence of the lawful extremist movements within diverse British Muslim communities is key to tackling the



radicalization crisis.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the authors ignore this issue completely, despite it driving much of government policy towards counter-extremism efforts on university campuses.

Some of the book’s topics could be interesting in more capable hands. For instance, the British system in which the public and university faculty are asked to report on people showing signs of extremism can undoubtedly lead to unreasonable suspicion and grievances. Likewise, understanding the exact relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Dilly Hussain, “David Cameron’s extremism quagmire: A struggle for definitions,” *Middle East Eye* (London), May 19, 2016.

between violence and its underpinning ideas is important, given that universities are accused of serving as breeding grounds for those ideas.

But the authors do not address these questions honestly or even comprehensibly. Instead, social science buzzwords and dogma about the putative pervasiveness of “Islamophobia” drive the book. This leads the authors to utter frequent, tangential declarations. At one point, the authors inform the reader, without evidence, that “Islamophobia” in the U.K. “spiked” because of Brexit.

Almost every chapter offers new deceptions. For instance, the authors proffer “structural Islamophobia” to explain the furor surrounding a 2013 gender-segregated event on campus organized by a leading Salafi group and then use this event to exemplify the supposed hysteria of “right wing” media. The authors neglect to mention that, shortly before the event, an [entire](#) branch of the organization’s youth group in Portsmouth joined ISIS.<sup>2</sup>

On radicalization, the authors look for obscure minutiae, such as claiming that only a tiny number of radicalized Muslim students have emerged from British universities while completely ignoring the hundreds more students convicted of related offenses, plus those who fled to Syria to become jihadists,<sup>3</sup> the many more over the past decade who have been actively monitored by law enforcement

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and security services,<sup>4</sup> and tens of thousands who have been exposed to Islamist preachers, activists, lectures, and sermons—all on university campuses. The idea of a sizeable, radicalized

section of society is never presented as a problem. Non-violent Islamism, it seems, does not exist.

Not once do the authors examine the dozens of Islamist movements operating on British campuses today.<sup>5</sup> They dismiss Islamist clerics invited to campuses who call for the killing of homosexuals, non-Muslims, and minority Muslim sects, among others,<sup>6</sup> as “controversial speakers” who occasionally espouse views that only appear hostile to a Western audience. Even the Islamist response to the Muhammad cartoons or the Salman Rushdie affair—in which dozens were killed and hundreds injured across the world<sup>7</sup>—is described as a matter of Muslims being merely “offended” and simply “call[ing] for religious sensitivities to be respected.”

Inconsistencies abound throughout. While higher education must ensure “free speech” for Muslim students, the researchers censor the “Islamophobia” in comments from respondents to the authors’ surveys. And while the authors demand that higher education embrace various “modes” of diversity, homogeneous Islamic

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel Westrop, “[UK Salafist Group Linked to British ISIS Fighters](#),” Gatestone Institute, New York, Nov. 19, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Mary Anne Weaver, “[Her Majesty’s Jihadists](#),” *The New York Times*, Apr. 14, 2015.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Sunday Times* (London), [Apr. 12, 2020](#).

<sup>5</sup> Innes Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Emma Fox, “[Extreme Speakers and Events: In the 2017-18 Academic Year](#),” Henry Jackson Society, London, Jan. 21, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Rauch, “[The chilling legacy of the Rushdie affair](#),” *Spiked* (spiked-online.com), Feb. 14, 2019.

institutions have apparently achieved some ideal state—coined “incumbent diversity”—by being “almost completely Muslim.”

Several quantitative-based chapters offer an array of bland anecdotes in support of the authors’ specious insistence that British Islam is a uniform, oppressed minority, untainted by Islamist ideas. It is particularly ironic that the authors repeatedly warn that “Muslims are often homogenized by non-Muslims” while they themselves refer to a single Muslim identity throughout.

The authors reveal that they are “inspired” by “Islamic traditions ... epitomized in Prophet Muhammad’s final sermon.” For

these academics, it seems that the search for truth derives not from even-handed analysis of the facts, but from 1,400-year-old religious dogma drawn through a social justice lens.

This book is an excellent primer for anyone wishing to understand the stunning extent of delusion and irrelevance on the part of social science academics regarding Islam and Islamism but of little use to anyone interested in studying Muslims on British campuses.

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