

## **Social Geography II**

### **Islamophobia, transphobia, sizism**

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#### **Abstract**

Different forms of discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion have been central concerns for social geography for over fifty years now. Some forms of prejudice are historically resistant, long-lasting and have featured in social geography for many decades (such as racism and sexism); others have emerged more recently within social geography debates as well as in wider society and are less well understood. In this second progress report on social geography, I explore recent research about Islamophobia, transphobia and sizism that demonstrates that each of these forms of prejudice is worthy of further study and analysis in their own right by social geographers and scholars in related fields. I argue that it would be productive to investigate areas of connection and solidarity across and within these different prejudices and others in order to be able to resist multiple forms of discrimination, intolerance and hate.

Keywords: discrimination, prejudice, equality and diversity, power, relationality

#### **Introduction**

The spatial manifestations of different forms of discrimination have been central to social geography for over fifty years now with attention to the mapping, measuring and monitoring of specific forms of discrimination such as those associated with sexism and racism (Jackson, 1987; Kobayashi and Peake, 1994; Smith, 1990). In this paper, I review research about prejudices and intolerances that have only emerged explicitly in recent years in social geography and so lack a sustained history within the discipline. In particular, I focus upon Islamophobia, transphobia and sizism. Whilst these three forms of discrimination may appear to be distinct, each is partly underpinned by a form of medical/biological essentialism, by exclusionary readings of the body and by aggressive policing in online environments. Part of the intention of this paper is to explore some of the overlaps and connections – as well as differences – between these forms of marginalisation. I present two main arguments in this paper.

First, social geographers are ideally placed to give in-depth attention to various forms of discrimination in their own right, including traditional forms of prejudice such as racism and sexism, as well as forms of bigotry that have emerged more recently in the sub-field such as Islamophobia, transphobia and sizism. This critical and in-depth work has started to address important questions about specific forms of prejudice including: how they operate, who they affect, where and when they happen, what their impacts are, what enables them and how they can be challenged and reported. Being able to address these questions for specific forms of discrimination will enable social geographers to have a comprehensive understanding of how particular prejudices operate. Specificity of understanding will enable social geographers to challenge inequality and injustice as without this detailed understanding, strategies of resistance may be misplaced due to misinterpretation. My main point here is that it is crucial for social geographers to focus on specific forms of discrimination and not to lose sight of the importance of this as a political project; this is not simply an exercise in academic theorising but also about the need to resist, challenge and overcome specific forms of prejudice. After all, doing so is often seen to be one of the key underlying principles and motivations of the field of social geography.

Second, I conclude by contending that whilst there is an urgent need to continue to pay attention to diverse forms of social exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination in their own right, social geographers could also usefully establish solidarities, connections and associations between these prejudices in order to help challenge, resist and overcome social and spatial inequalities and injustices. Intersectionality offers a useful way of understanding the complex overlap and interplay between these different forms of oppression (Hopkins, 2017) as they are experienced in everyday socio-spatial contexts; however, more work is needed to explore the connections between and within different forms of discrimination so that we can ensure conceptual and methodological rigour but also to inform our tactics with regards to activist strategies for resisting oppressions. This is especially pertinent at present given the current political climate in many Western nations (e.g. Burrell et al 2018) where challenges to equality, diversity and inclusion come not only from the election of right-wing politicians but also from diverse interest groups including those associated with the alt-right and those operating persistently through diverse forms of online and social media.

### **Islamophobia**

Geographical studies of Islam and Muslim identities emerged largely from studies of race and racism with its focus upon: the measuring and monitoring of residential segregation (see for example, Gale, 2013; Phillips 2006); processes of racial categorisation and otherness (see for example, Bonnett 2000; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000); and processes of identification (see for example, Dwyer 1999;

Mohammad 1999) which interconnect with geographies of religion (e.g. Gale, 2007; Kong, 2009; Mills and Gökariksel, 2014). Although some of the earlier work about the geographies of Muslim identities and communities focused upon everyday racism (for example, Dwyer 1999; Hopkins 2004) including resistance to mosque development (Dunn, 2001; Gale 2005), it was only in the late 2000s when we started to see explicit references to Islamophobia in the geographical literature. Islamophobia can be complex to measure and monitor because it is often intertwined with debates about immigration and asylum, citizenship and belonging, and security and borders. In 2016 in the US, the number of anti-Muslim assaults exceeded the 2001 total for the first time (Kishi, 2017). In the UK, TellMAMA (2018) reported a year on year increase in verified anti-Muslim incidents between 2015-2017 and in countries such as Hungary, Italy, Poland and Greece, more than 65% of the population have unfavourable views of Muslims living in their country (Lipka, 2017). This all suggests an increasing hostility being shown towards Muslim communities; there is an urgent need to consolidate and extend social geographies of Islamophobia given the increasingly strident and persistently negative nature of this specific form of socio-spatial discrimination (Dunn and Hopkins, 2016).

The current use of the term Islamophobia is often associated with the Runnymede Trust (1997: 1) report on *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all* which defines it as the 'dread or hatred of Islam – and therefore, the fear or dislike of all or most Muslims'. In an recent update to this, Elahi and Khan (2017: 1) clarify that Islamophobia 'is anti-Muslim racism'. Massoumi et al (2017) observe the diverse social actors that reproduce the ideas and practices that exclude Muslims and refer to these as the five pillars of Islamophobia. The All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (2018) in the UK Parliament conducted an inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia and proposed the following: '*Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness*'. Although a relative newcomer to social geography, Islamophobia can be seen as an extension of earlier work about the spatialities of racial and ethnic inequalities and the complex geographies of racism.

Dunn et al (2007) revealed the extent of racism and Islamophobia in Australia pointing to the ways in which they are reproduced through problematic stereotypes of Islam, ideas about threat and fantasies of the other (see also Itaoui, 2016; Morgan and Poynting, 2012). Relatedly, Ehrkamp (2007) demonstrates that Islamophobia is related to the transnational connections of migrant groups such as those of the Turkish community in Germany. Building on these earlier contributions, geographers have made important interventions into the social and spatial complexities of Islamophobia, particularly in relation to its global and national formations and its expression in urban spaces and in embodied experiences.

Global political issues and events as well as national political and policy frameworks are a regular focus of concern for geographers working on Islamophobia. Many such debates centre around concerns about immigration and citizenship (Ehrkamp, 2017; Ehrkamp and Leitner, 2006) including refugee resettlement (Nagel, 2016). Gökariksel (2017: 469) discusses Trump's controversial "Muslim ban" pointing to the troubling reliance on and reproduction of gendered stereotypes (see also Gökariksel and Smith, 2017), 'depicting all Muslim men as potential terrorists, Muslim women as helpless victims of oppression, and Islam as inherently tyrannical, violent and patriarchal'. McGinty (2012) notes that a challenge for Muslim Americans is about how global events and issues intertwine with national and local civil rights concerns (see also McGinty et al 2013). The ethnic and religious diversity of this group also suggests that they require specific citizenship strategies related to self-representation that link them in with local communities. Many countries have developed problematic policies that aim to minimise terrorist threats and prevent violent extremism in the name of Islam (e.g. Isakjee, 2016). Such policies tend to be framed in such a way that results in the securitisation of Muslim communities. Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking (2010) observe that discourses about terror and nationalism in Europe and Canada as well as the institutionalisation of counter-terrorism measures means that the desecuritising of religion necessitates careful consideration in relation to Muslim communities.

Islamophobia often arises in the context of debates about the construction, location, politics and presence of mosques or religious buildings (e.g. Dunn, 2001, Es, 2016; Gale, 2005). Ruez (2012) examined this issue in relation to the public debate about Park 51, an Islamic community center close to the World Trade Center in Manhattan, NYC, pointing to the multiple Islamophobic discourses drawn upon to oppose its development. Likewise, Simonsen, Neergaard and Koefoed (2017) critically explored the opening of a purpose-built mosque in Copenhagen through ideas about encounter, visibility and the event. They demonstrate the tenacity of Islamophobia in Denmark which is supported by 'welfare nationalism' which is based on a form of solidarity that promotes ethnic homogeneity through an 'egalitarian-liberal nationalism tied to the welfare state' (p. 15). Linked with debates about institutional contexts (e.g. Olson and Reddy, 2016) and national policy, geographers have also drawn attention to the issue of Islamophobia on university campuses in different contexts such as Australia (Possamai et al 2016), England (Hopkins, 2010) and Wales (Jones, 2014).

McGinty (2018) focuses on the embodied Islamophobia negotiated by young Muslims in Wisconsin, USA and differentiates between embodied and systematic Islamophobia; the former is about lived and emotional experiences and the latter is about discursive and institutional frameworks. Similarly, Itaoui (2016) explores the spatial imaginaries of young Muslims in Sydney, Australia in response to Islamophobia. Connected to this, Mohammad (2013: 1802) uses the term 'gendered,

Muslim, public spatialities' to explore Muslim women's spatial and personal practices relating to the body and urban space in the context of racism and Islamophobia in Birmingham, UK. Relatedly, Botterill et al (2017a) discuss how young people forge pre-emptive and proactive strategies of self-securisation in Scotland in an attempt to achieve and maintain ontological security. Political changes, or the possibility of such changes happening, can lead to increased experiences of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred due to concerns about citizenship and belonging, and anxieties associated with immigration status (Botterill et al, 2017b; Burrell et al, 2018). The presence of Islamophobia in young people's lives has been seen to either motivate them to engage in political and public life or to silence and exclude them from mainstream society (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019).

So, work in social geography about Islamophobia has started to chart the complex ways that this form of racialized prejudice operates and the specific forms it takes whether this be about its racialized embodiment, its connection with the religious built environment, its manifestation across nations or its global circulation. However, further work is needed in social geography to map, measure and monitor Islamophobia in order to fully appreciate who it affects, where and when it happens, what its impacts are, what enables it and how it can be challenged; social geographers could play diverse roles in such work whether this be about undertaking the mapping and data collection themselves, playing an active role in local or national activists groups that challenge Islamophobia, or in collaborating with external organisations to assist them with such work (e.g. Najib and Hopkins, 2019, Tell MAMA, 2018).

### **Transphobia**

A small group of geographers have been demonstrating the complex ways in which trans, gender non-conforming and gender variant people are often stigmatised, regularly excluded and frequently marginalised in a diverse range of social and spatial contexts (Doan, 2007, 2016, 2017, Johnston, 2018a, Nash, 2010, 2011). Johnston (2015: 673) provides a useful overview of work on trans and gender variant bodies and spaces calling for more research about 'transgender people's embodied geographies' given that geographers are only just starting to work on this topic. Given the attention to discriminatory practices and socio-spatial exclusion in social geography, coupled with the focus on queer theory particularly from geographers interested in gender and sexuality (Johnston, 2018a), social geographers are ideally placed to explore the complexity of transphobia, the actors involved in its operation and the impacts it has on people's lives and everyday negotiations. Transphobia is a cause for serious concern. For example, Bachman and Gooch (2018) found 41% and 30% of trans and non-binary people respectively experienced a hate crime or incident because of their gender identity in the UK in the last 12 months.

A number of significant interventions in this area have been made by Doan (2010, 2017) who was invited to speak at the Women's March in Tallahassee, Florida on 21 January 2017. In a moving speech, she reflected on her own struggles with her trans identity and the importance that activism can have in helping people to come to terms with the transphobia they experience in their daily lives (Doan, 2017). Pointing to concerns about discriminatory practices in academia, Johnston (2018a: 560) refers to 'institutionalised homophobia and transphobia' and observes that there 'is still a great deal of homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism within academic spaces'. There is a clear need to focus on the specifics of transphobia in different geographical, scalar and institutional contexts (e.g. issues of the intersections of transphobia and indigeneity as demonstrated by Johnston, 2018a) in order that social geographers can better understand and explain the complex operation of transphobia in different socio-spatial contexts. Referring to one such context, Hawkins and Gieseeking (2017) make the point that trans experiences are often subsumed within LGBT health-related information despite the unique health challenges often faced by the trans community.

The sexism and transphobia experienced by gender non-conforming people had led some to suggest that alternative spaces and support networks are needed (Rooke, 2010). Related to this, Yip with Khalid (2010) found that queer Muslims who participated in Imaan, one of the most organised and high-profile LGBT Muslim organisations in the UK found it to be transphobic. Jenzen's (2017: 1626) ethnographic work in Brighton, UK about trans youth's engagements with social media highlights the 'rampant transphobia' they experience and points to the lifeline offered by being connected to the internet. Moreover, it is common for trans youth to be victimised due to their regular contravention of gender norms (Jenzen 2017) and many explain self-harm as being due to transphobia (McDermott, Roen and Piela, 2015). Furthermore, queer young people's experiences of coming out are often more complex than imagined (Schroeder, 2015) and require different ways of thinking about success and failure in terms of identity formation (Roen, 2018).

Lubitow et al (2017) investigated trans experiences of public transit in Portland, Oregon and found that many regularly experienced harassment and intimidation; trans women, trans-feminine and those who were visibly gender non-conforming reported numerous incidents, with disabled users and people of color being especially vulnerable. Not only is this about transphobia *per se* but about the transmisogyny regularly encountered by trans women (Lubitow et al, 2017). Moreover, the assumption that trans people fare better in gender diverse urban locales is challenged by Abelson's (2016) research about rural trans men the Southeast and Midwest US; in such contexts, whiteness and the performance of appropriate rural working-class masculinities were often used to determine whether or not someone was 'included' within the rural community.

In one of the most sophisticated treatments of issues of gender variance in geography to date, Johnston (2018b) sets out how transphobia is experienced, lived and embodied noting that 'while it is clear that transphobia exists, it is far less evident what transphobia does to people and places'. Further research on this issue is to be welcomed. Transphobia can occur not only when people do not conform in terms of traditional gender binaries but also when their body is deemed to be the 'wrong size and shape' (Johnston, 2018b: 104).

Focusing specifically upon the home (see also Schroeder, 2015), Andrucki and Kaplan (2018) undertook interviews and home tours with transmasculine participants focusing on their everyday lives and experiences. They refer to the 'social context of transphobia that trans people exist in and navigate routinely' (p. 787) and found that their participants often mentioned feeling empowered to take part in research on their own terms. They also observed that trans bodies tend to be seen to be 'spectacular' and are often subject to violence in the public sphere (Andrucki and Kaplan, 2018: 782)

In a body of research on trans people's negotiations of natural disasters, the specific vulnerabilities of LGBT people include: discrimination on religious grounds when disasters are seen as 'divine'; loss of significant communal spaces; abuse in emergency shelters or temporary accommodation; and problematic assumptions made by government or NGOs that exclude or marginalise LGBT people (Dominey-Howes et al, 2014; Gorman-Murray et al 2016, 2018). They point out that trans people 'face additional censure – control, containment and exclusion' in the context of disasters (Gorman-Murray et al, 2018: 120). Concerns were expressed about potential experiences of transphobia from emergency services with trans people often drawing on existing networks of queer people in order to avoid transphobia. Interrelated to this were worries about 'home' and displacements alongside medical and emotional needs (Gorman-Murray et al, 2018).

There is, therefore, a small but significant body of scholarship within social geography about transphobia; although transphobia provides a strong motivation for much research about gender non-conformity and gender variance, relatively little tends to be said about the specific operation of transphobia and the work it does in terms of people's everyday lives and negotiations of specific places. Whilst we know about some of the affects of transphobia and some of the places in which it happens, it would be useful to understand more about how it operates, what its impacts are and how it is enabled and sustained. Understanding these specific issues about transphobia will provide a rich and in-depth appreciation of it; this means social geographers will be strongly positioned when it comes to challenging transphobia and working to overcome it. This will raise important questions for social geographers - including feminist geographers and gender studies scholars - about: how transphobia intersects with other forms of prejudice such as those associated with race, socio-economic status, disability, health and age; how solidarity with other anti-discrimination movements

may assist in challenging and overcoming transphobia; as well as where and how transphobia arises in the discipline of geography and how we come together to oppose it within academic, teaching and community spaces.

### **Sizism and fat-phobia**

An additional form of embodied discrimination that is often gendered is found in geographical research concerning the sized body (for example, Evans and Colls 2009; Longhurst, 2005, 2011; Hopkins 2012). This work largely emanated from research about bodies and embodiment (Longhurst and Johnston 2014) and a concern about the ways in which specific bodies and particular body sizes and shapes are more or less valorised in different spaces and times compared to others. Some early work demonstrated the discriminatory ways in which the fat body is stigmatised and excluded in different contexts. For example, Longhurst (2000) explored the normative assumptions about the pregnant body and McDowell (2005: 24-25) reflected upon her research about the board rooms of corporate finance where concerns about 'weight, accent and clothes', coupled with the production of a 'highly valorized masculinity characterized by a tight, trim, white, middle-class body' is required by employers.

Aside from these earlier interventions made in the 2000s, it would appear that a concern about the fat body and about fat-phobia has fallen off the agenda of social geographers in comparison to work about transphobia and Islamophobia in particular. This may be due to the power that medical discourse has in stigmatising the obese body. Exceptions to this include Lloyd (2014) who proposes 'trans-sizing' to help geographers think through what happens to the sized body as it moves over and across different social, cultural and national borderlands. In doing so, she argues for greater consideration of cross-cultural and global issues in relation to body size and fatphobia (see also Lloyd, 2017). Windram-Geddes (2013) discusses the institutionalisation of fat-phobia in relation to how fears about the potential presence of fat on the body was used by both PE (physical education) teachers and young women to motivate participation in sport, and Besio and Marusek (2015) have explored Hawaiians engagement with Weight Watchers.

Bombak et al (2016: 94) focus on what they call the 'obesity stigma' for women in Canada who self-identified as obese or overweight; they found that the women's experiences in reproductive care were strongly shaped by a moralistic 'rhetoric of risk and mother-blame that circulate within clinical setting'. There have also been methodological reflections on embodied encounters and the ethical issues that arise in research about fat bodies (Lloyd and Hopkins, 2016, Throsby and Evans 2013). Concerns about regulating and controlling body size are also evident in work that is not specifically

about fatness or fat-phobia. For example, Little's (2017) study of women runners found that a desire to lose or control weight were a key motivation for participation.

In an impressive overview of research about fat bodies, Lupton (2018:2) notes that 'in contemporary western societies, the fat body has become a focus of stigmatizing discourses and practices aimed at disciplining, normalizing and containing it'. The systematic exclusion, marginalisation and stigmatisation of fat bodies is motivated by fat-phobia which is the hatred or fear of fat people (Cooper, 2016). Much of the critical work about fatness and obesity seeks to challenge common-sense discourses – often found in policy – about body size and shape. For example, Brown (2014) invites scholars to show care about the use of problematic metaphors such as contagion for describing the spread of the 'obesity epidemic' and Evans et al (2012: 104) challenge attempts to 'design out fatness' when it comes to urban design.

Focusing upon the rural context in Canada for teenagers, McPhail et al (2013) challenge the stereotype that rural obesity is simply a problem associated with food access and local socio-economic status. They argue that the category of the rural in obesity debates is much like race, class and gender as it gets utilised as a problematically fixed category to be addressed through policy intervention. Related, Dean's (2018) study of 31 young people in Southern Ontario, Canada, explores the ways in which young people use space and why they do so in relation to their perceptions about their body size. Focusing on lived experiences, Kirkland (2008) outlines the different responses that fat acceptance activists had to experiences of fat-phobia; these includes moral instruction, redirecting shame, scanning, positive self-representation and ignoring mistreatment.

Colls and Evans (2014) provide a powerful and important critique of the discourse of the obesogenic environment; this refers to contexts where the specific social, economic and physical qualities are seen to increase the likelihood of bodied being or becoming overweight. They propose that this needs to be reworked in three ways: first, they suggest that obesogenic environments need to be seen not as contexts that make bodies fat but as environments that 'make fat bodies problematic' (p. 733); second, they recommend engaging with the diversity of experiences of fat bodies; and third, they call for consideration of different conceptual frameworks so as to avoid environmental determinism.

When it comes to lived experiences of sizism or fat-phobia, then—in contrast to work about Islamophobia and transphobia—social geographers have made important contributions in terms of challenging policy and related dominant discourses and in critically considering where such discriminations take place. However, future work could usefully place more emphasis on how sizism operates, who it affects and in what ways. Likewise, attention could usefully be given to the impacts of fat-phobia on people's everyday lives and the factors that enable this. A fuller

understanding of sizism and fatphobia should be accompanied by an appreciation of how it is shaped by diverse markers of social difference such as class, gender, race and age. Addressing sizism will require difficult conversations with those who uphold a medically fixed understanding of the sized body as well as continuing challenges to problematic policy formation that stigmatises the fat body.

### **Conclusions – moving forward**

In this second progress report on social geography, I have reviewed recent work about Islamophobia, transphobia and sizism in social geography and pointed out that further work is needed to have a critical and sophisticated understanding of how these specific forms of discrimination and prejudice operate and the damage they do to specific bodies and in particular places. Working to resist such discriminations present methodological challenges (Doan, 2016) not least associated with the politics, power and utility of categories. We need to be sensitive to new and changing forms of categorisation, critical about how we apply these and sensitive to their diverse meanings. This includes being aware of the continuation of older forms of discrimination as well as the emergence of new contexts for hate (particularly those that present themselves online and in digital environments). Paying attention to different forms of discrimination, prejudice and intolerance also draws attention to the need to challenge powerful stereotypes and to think through discrimination cases with care so as to be sensitive to the complex and diverse ways in which such injustices operate. Furthermore, it is important to be critical and sensitive to our multiple positionalities in such work, who is included and welcomed into the academy, and to consider how such work is being done, by who and for what purposes.

Johnston (2017: 654) refers to the the need for ‘scholar-activist agility’ in response to ‘heterosexism/homophobia, genderism/transphobia, and sexism/misogyny’. I contend that scholar-activist agility is needed in order to show solidarity so that we can challenge social and spatial inequalities in their diverse forms. Scholars working to challenge specific forms of prejudice and discrimination may learn much from others working on what may initially appear to be very different issues. For example, social geographers working to challenge Islamophobia and transphobia may find it useful to engage with debates about sizism and fat-phobia in relation to resisting problematic policy discourses. Likewise, those working to challenge sizism and transphobia may find it useful to engage with literature about Islamophobia given its sensitivity to national and local political debates. Furthermore, those working on the issues of Islamophobia and sizism could usefully consider learning from the activist approaches of scholars working on trans issues as well as the power of people narrating their own stories of particular forms of prejudice. A richer and more in-depth understanding of Islamophobia, transphobia and sizism, accompanied by an appreciation of how they are shaped by

diverse markers of social difference, will mean we will be better placed to challenge them and overcome them. Moreover, knowing as much as possible about how these forms of prejudice work will enable solidarities to be drawn as we collaborate to challenge them, whether this be about shared challenges to shortfalls in public policy, concerted efforts across difference to challenge exclusionary institutional practices, or combined efforts to stand up to online forms of hatred. As Doan (2017: 745) notes 'we must show the world that hatred and intolerance including misogyny, racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia and transphobia have no place in our hearts or in our country'.

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