

Impact case study (REF3)

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| Institution: Edge Hill University | | |
| Unit of Assessment: D28 - History | | |
| Title of case study: Enhancing public understanding and policy debates on antisemitism and Islamophobia by promoting new argumentation and evidence | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008-2018 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): James Renton | Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: August 2007-present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Renton used his research on antisemitism and Islamophobia to make a major contribution to the enhancement of international public understanding and policy debates by promoting new paradigms, argumentation and evidence on a high-profile subject in civil society. This was achieved through policy briefings and debate in the UK and continental Europe, collaborations with media producers and editors, journalism, and the launch of a major international magazine, MONITOR, which has attracted just over 105,000 page-views in four continents since February 2018, bringing academic expertise on racism to global public debate with partners in civil society and policy communities. During the current REF period Renton's media contributions in print and broadcast media have reached a global audience of millions.</p> | | |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since his arrival at Edge Hill in 2007, Renton's research on Europe and the Middle East has included a particular focus on antisemitism and Islamophobia. The underpinning research, undertaken since 2008, has addressed two key areas: the relationship between these two racisms in European history, and their impact on British and French imperial policy in the Middle East and postcolonial global politics.</p> <p>Renton published two major essays on the historical relationship between antisemitism and Islamophobia, as part of a new framework for this subject that is relational and across the <i>longue durée</i>. The first piece put forward an entirely new history of the Western European idea of the fanatic/extremist from the 16th to the 20th century, which demonstrates how Europe's wars of religion led to a new "Abrahamic episteme" for thinking about potential threats to Christian sovereignty (Ref 2). The second essay (Ref 1) presents a new argument concerning the rise and fall of the concept of the 'Semites'—the idea of a racial bond between Jews and Arabs—from the late 18th to the early 20th century. It contends that this notion was shaped by aspects of pre-modern Christian theology, which explains its influence in Western Europe but also its end, due to the underlying differences between Christian figures of the Jew and the Muslim.</p> <p>Renton analysed the impact of these racisms on colonial policies and postcolonial global politics in two further articles. In his essay on the origins of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict published in <i>The International History Review</i>, he argued that mistaken notions of Jews and Muslim Arabs led the British empire to promote both Arab and Jewish nationalisms in Palestine during the First World War, which, he argues, sparked a war for national sovereignty over the land (Ref 3). Finally, in his essay on the contemporary history of global surveillance (Ref 4), Renton examines the recent evolution of Islamophobia since its divergence with antisemitism. Using an entirely different archive to his previous interventions in the field— contemporary international institutions and EU Member States— he shows how the rise of Islamic State exacerbated Islamophobia in the international political system to produce a global surveillance order.</p> | | |
| <p>3. References to the research</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'The End of the Semites', in James Renton and Ben Gidley, <i>Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe: A Shared Story?</i> (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 99-140. 2. 'The Figure of the Fanatic: A Rebel Against Christian Sovereignty', <i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>, Vol. 41, No. 12 (2018), pp. 2161-2178. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1391403 | | |

3. 'The Age of Nationality and the Origins of the Zionist-Palestinian Conflict', *The International History Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2013), pp. 576-599.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2013.795495>
4. 'The global order of Muslim surveillance and its thought architecture', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 12 (2018), pp. 2125-2143.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1456670>

International History Review and *Ethnic Racial Studies* are internationally recognised peer-review journals, and Palgrave Macmillan is an internationally recognised peer-review publisher.

4. Details of the impact

Background and Context

Renton's impact activity enhanced international public understanding and policy debate on antisemitism and Islamophobia. This was achieved by promoting new paradigms, argumentation and evidence on the history of the two racisms, especially their relationship, and their influence on historical and contemporary political thought in Europe and global politics. He drew upon collaborations that he developed in international media before 2014 and built new collaborations based on this international reputation and activity in areas that tied directly to the international news cycle. During the census period for REF2021, he experienced a significant increase in direct approaches from media professionals. In addition, Renton established new collaborations to enable him to participate in policy debates in the UK and the European Union, greatly aided by his Jean Monnet and Visiting fellowships at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute, which specialises in bridging academic research and policy. The beneficiaries of the impact consisted of media producers and editors, in radio, television, and online press, who commissioned and were advised by Renton; UK and EU policymakers, including a Shadow Home Secretary and the EU's first Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life; organisers of public policy debates; and those who consumed and whose understanding were affected by these collaborations.

Enhancing public understanding of antisemitism and islamophobia

The major focus of Renton's public engagement via media was the centenary of the Balfour Declaration on 2 November 2017 (**Ref 3**). An Executive Producer with whom he had collaborated previously at Al Jazeera invited Renton to contribute to a documentary and flew especially to Florence to interview him. The Executive Producer had several discussions and "corresponded extensively" with Renton in the research for the film, which was entitled 'Balfour Declaration at 100: Seeds of Discord', and broadcast on all Al Jazeera channels on 31 October 2017. According to the Executive Producer, Renton 'was integral to the research for the film, the writing of the script, and its production, especially his scholarship on the ideas that led to the Balfour Declaration and their consequences in Palestine.' 'Without his contribution', they continue, 'the documentary would not have been able to address the ways in which racism (antisemitism and Orientalism) affected the story that we documented.' The programme was viewed by approximately 750,000 on Al Jazeera YouTube channels alone, which the executive producer states "is more successful than the average for our films". Via television broadcasts, Al Jazeera reaches more than 270 million homes in 140 countries. Feedback received at Al Jazeera, included the audience comment that 'The film helps to understand the history without propaganda.' (**Source 3**)

Renton also featured in a high-profile documentary produced by BBC Radio 4, 'Balfour's Promised Land', which was broadcast on 5 December 2017. He advised the producer at BBC Worldwide on the subject, including a substantial telephone discussion, email correspondence, and a lengthy walking interview in London. The producer writes that Renton's 'original research on British understandings of Zionism and Arab nationalism helped us to address that important dimension that otherwise would not have been addressed, along with the way in which those conceptions contributed to the start of the conflict in Palestine.' (**Source 2**)

Based on his research reputation in this area, Renton's research on the Balfour Declaration was profiled for an article in Germany's leading Jewish newspaper, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, on 10 August 2017. This article was read by a producer at the German-language Swiss public radio

broadcaster, *Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen*, who interviewed Renton as a result for a news item on the Balfour centenary. The author of the original profile piece published another article with Renton—an interview for the German daily newspaper, *taz. die tageszeitung*, on the day of the centenary.

Other follow-on impact activity stemmed from the BBC Radio 4 documentary. The Opinion Editor at the high-profile Israeli newspaper, *Ha'aretz.com*, saw that he was going to appear in the programme, and invited him to write an article. That piece, which was focused on the role of racial ideas about Jews and Palestinian Arabs, generated a significant amount of interest, with a response op-ed by another writer. The *Ha'aretz.com* Editor remarked that the article did 'very well traffic wise' and 'pushed a lot of interaction on social media, as well as triggering Victor Kattan's response op-ed, which I always think is a great sign that a piece is provocative and substantial.' In all of Renton's activity to mark the Balfour centenary, he focused on the insights published in **Ref 3**. Renton built further on the relationship with *Ha'aretz* to publish a piece on the relationship between antisemitism and Islamophobia, focused on the European far right and Donald Trump's re-tweeting of 'Britain First' videos in December 2017. The two articles attracted between 17 and 21,000 international readers. (**Source 8**)

Reflecting the rise in Renton's public stature as a result of his media activity on his research on antisemitism and Islamophobia (**Ref 1 & 2**), he was then invited to contribute to an article on the increase of antisemitism in Europe for *The Sydney Morning Herald* (September 2018), alongside, among others, the EU Commission's Coordinator on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life. This activity followed other journalism by Renton, focused on his research into Islamophobia and surveillance. (**Ref 4**) He penned articles for *openDemocracy* (September 2015), for which he began writing in 2010, and also *Middle East Monitor*, to which he was invited to be the writer of the month in March 2016 by a researcher with whom he previously collaborated at the London-based NGO, the Palestinian Return Centre (see REF2014).

On antisemitism, the BBC Worldwide producer with whom he worked on the Balfour documentary approached Renton, as 'a result' of the 'positive experience of working with' him, to support the planning of a major new series. 'James was the perfect sounding board in the planning of the series', he writes. 'We had a number of preliminary discussions, including a face-to-face meeting in London, that helped me to clarify a number of questions, along with a briefing note that he wrote for me on the history of the Jewish conspiracy myth.' Renton's research, the producer explains, 'on the ideas at the heart of history of antisemitism over the centuries in Europe, and its relationship with other racisms, provided dimensions that would otherwise have been absent from the series.' The producer continues that the 'outcome... was the inclusion of a range of critical issues in the scope of the series based on James' research, which will enable us to attend to the particularities of antisemitism, but also its connections with other racisms.' (**Ref 1 and 2**)

Informing international policy debates on racism

In addition to this media work, Renton's impact activity since 2014 has focused on interventions in policy debates on antisemitism and Islamophobia. His growing reputation in the field led to citations of his scholarship in policy reports: the Runnymede Trust's, *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All* in 2017 (**Ref 1 & 4**), and the Trades Union Congress' *Racism Ruins Lives*, which recommended his *Ha'aretz* piece on the Balfour Declaration (**Sources 9 & 10**). Rather than focus on such reports, however, Renton aimed to maximise his policy impact by developing a pro-active strategy of identifying and engaging with targeted policymakers and environments.

This policy work began with a one-to-one research briefing for the then Shadow Home Secretary in December 2015, concerning Islamophobia and surveillance (**Ref 4**). Specifically, the briefing dealt with the ideas behind, and problems with, the UK government's proposed Investigatory Powers Bill and Extremism Bill, based on the findings of Renton's research in this area. The Shadow Home Secretary wrote that the meeting 'was extremely valuable and helped shape my thinking'. In particular, it was 'helpful in placing issues in a global context'. Buoyed by the success of briefing such a senior politician, Renton aimed to impact more directly on the policy

process by securing a position in an institution at the heart of European policymaking. He successfully attained this goal by winning an extremely competitive Jean Monnet Fellowship (2016-2017) at the European University Institute's Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS), which is focused on bridging academic research and policy practice. Every year, the RSCAS hosts a fellow from the European Commission, as well as a range of other figures from policy communities in and beyond Europe.

Renton developed a range of lasting relationships at the RSCAS, which led to significant impacts following his appointment by the Director as a Visiting Fellow (2017-). In 2017/2018, the EU Commission's senior policymaker on antisemitism, the Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life, was a Fellow at the RSCAS. Following discussions with Renton on his antisemitism research and a public debate about antisemitism and Islamophobia, the Coordinator invited him to be part of an EU antisemitism policy workshop in 2018.

Through this policy forum, Renton succeeded in using his research on antisemitism and Islamophobia (**Refs 1 & 2**) to influence the development of the EU's new policy platform for combating antisemitism from the end of 2018. The Coordinator writes that 'Renton's arguments [at the workshop] about public education on the history of conspiratorial antisemitism and the relationship with other racisms contributed to my thinking on these issues.' And, they continue, '[i]n turn, the landmark EU Council declaration on antisemitism in December 2018 ... was influenced by my conviction that Member States should be invited to adopt a "holistic strategy to prevent and fight ... antisemitism as part of their strategies on preventing racism, xenophobia ... and point 11's call to introduce training about all forms of intolerance, racism, and hate crime...'. Along with the Council's 2020 declaration on mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism, the official principles set out in the 2018 declaration continue to be 'the basis', the Coordinator explains, 'for the Commission's work on antisemitism, and its collaboration with all Member States in this field, with a panoply of national initiatives and educational programmes.'

Establishing and launching *MONITOR* online magazine

Combined with this engagement with individual policymakers, Renton's impact work at the RSCAS has concentrated on his role as the Academic Advisor for the first online magazine dedicated to bringing academic expertise on racism to global public debate with partners in civil society and policy communities: *MONITOR Global Intelligence on Racism*. Together with the Editor, Renton secured 14,400 euros from the RSCAS Director to launch the magazine in 2017/2018, which was renewed in 2018/2019, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. The Director writes, "There is nothing quite like the Monitor available", and as "the central scientific advisor to the project... He [Renton] brings his vast knowledge of the history of racism ... to the project [which] guarantees consistent quality."

By the end of 2020, *MONITOR* had published 38 articles, 19 podcasts (on Soundcloud, Spotify, and Apple Music, among others), and 36 videos. (**Source 11**) The pre-launch event for the magazine took place at the UK Houses of Parliament in January 2018, featuring a presentation of the findings from Renton's scholarship. (**Ref 1 & 2**) In less than two years, from being a start-up with no networks or audience, the magazine attracted 105,000 page views from 80,939 readers, along with almost 20,000 additional engagements with additional media in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. (**Source 12**) Moreover, the magazine has, according to a member of its international Editorial Board, 'made a significant impact on public discussions about race and racism among key stakeholder communities internationally: civil society organisations, policymakers, and engaged citizens.' (**Source 7**)

In September- December 2018, Renton was resident at *MONITOR*, funded by a £10,000 grant from Edge Hill's Impact and Knowledge Exchange Fund, with which he supported the expansion of the magazine's global network of contributors, the work of the Editor, recorded podcast interviews, and developed planning for events to bring research insights to civil society organisations, policy communities and the public in 2019/2020. Events included a (pre-Covid-19) research briefing webinar and conference on social media and antisemitism in November 2019, funded by the European Association for Jewish Studies, attended by researchers from the UK's

Community Security Trust, and a three-day conference on race in history in November 2020 that was broadcast via the *MONITOR* YouTube channel. (Source 11) In February 2020, Renton also co-authored with the Editor a policy-paper based on the social media and antisemitism event. In 2020, Renton supported the Editor's production of the *MONITOR* video series on race and Covid-19, 'The Cuomo Files', and Black Lives Matter. (Source 11) Using his growing media networks based on his various research impacts, detailed above, Renton promoted the magazine project through a range of media interventions, including an article in *Ha'aretz*, an interview with the UK 'Voice of Islam' radio station, and an article for *The Big Issue North*.

The Editor-at-Large for ARD German television states that *MONITOR* 'is affecting public understanding around the globe in new and stimulating ways as to how these racisms connect with each other, and, importantly, how civil society and governments can fight against them.' Renton's contribution 'based on his research into antisemitism and Islamophobia has an ongoing impact on this significant global project.' (Source 6) A member of *MONITOR*'s Editorial Board explains, 'His scholarship in this area, especially the relational analytical framework that he has developed [Ref 1 & 2], informs his collaborations with, and support for, the Editor.' (Source 7) The EC Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish life writes further that 'an important outcome of Renton's research [on antisemitism and other racisms over the *longue durée*- Ref 1 & 2] lies in his key role as academic advisor at *MONITOR*..., which has addressed these themes in in a range of multimedia publications for the public. These publications have brought the fruits of previously unknown research insights on the history of antisemitism to thousands extending public understanding of antisemitism's history, and its relationship with other racisms.' (Source 5)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Letter from former Shadow Home Secretary
2. Testimonial statement from BBC Worldwide producer
3. Testimonial statement from Executive Producer of Al Jazeera documentary
4. Testimonial statement from RSCAS Director
5. Testimonial statement from European Commission Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life
6. Testimonial statement from Editor at Large ARD (waiting on this)
7. Testimonial statement from Editorial Board Member, *MONITOR*
8. Testimonial statement from Opinion Editor at *Ha'aretz.com*
9. Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: Still A Challenge for Us All* (London, 2017)
<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf>
10. Stephen D. Ashe, Magda Borkowska & James Nazroo, *Racism Ruins Lives: An Analysis of the 2016-2017 Trade Union Congress Racism at Work Survey* (Manchester, 2019):
<http://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/code/research/projects/racism-at-work/tuc-full-report.pdf>
11. *MONITOR Global Intelligence on Racism* magazine (<http://monitorracism.eu>).
12. Analytics for *MONITOR Global Intelligence on Racism* magazine.