



Burmese State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi's recent partnering with Hungarian PM Viktor Orban appears at first blush to be the ambitious crossover nobody asked for. Suu Kyi is very much a darling of Western liberals who in recent years has let her biggest fans down. Orban, meanwhile, is seen as a pariah in the West due to his fondness for authoritarian government, firm anti-migrant stance, Euroscepticism, stifling of the free press and judiciary and the imposition of a 'slave labour law.' Such an alliance would have been baffling even three years ago—before the escalation of the Rohingya Crisis in 2017 and Suu Kyi downplaying the military violence and emphasising the role of Muslims in creating a climate of tension in Rakhine State.

Suu Kyi's mealy-mouthed response to the Rohingya Crisis could have been defended as her hands being tied by the military government. However, her finding common ground with Orban on "the emergence of the issue of coexistence with continuously growing Muslim pop-

thought is becoming increasingly mainstream and electable; and immigration, security and the place of Muslim minorities in cultures that are not their 'own' have become questions every party—no matter how liberal—must have 'tough' answers to. Mainstream politics is increasingly doing away with the polite veneer of liberalism.

Aung San Suu Kyi's seeming transformation reflects this change. Where once she could court international support through the liberal playbook, she is now putting her money on a new horse. Right wing authoritarianism is the new black. Xenophobia and the crushing of minorities are the vectors through which this trending political paradigm operate. And there is no better scapegoat for authoritarian leaders across the world to cut their teeth on than Muslims, whose persecution is the glue that holds these leaders together in an alliance and global movement strong enough to challenge liberalism's hegemony. It is not about hatred or bigotry for their own end; this is a mutually sanctioned hate project that makes everyone engaging in it stronger domestically.

The architecture for Islamophobia is country-specific, but like with most modern global movements the ingredients for the universal Islamophobic-authoritarian alliance emerged from the West. The West's relationship with Islam is long and complex, but frequently reduced to Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis (which is what it says on the tin.) The *Clash of Civilizations* is insidious because the Us vs. Them binary can be reproduced anywhere and with any definition of 'us'. So non-white, non-Christians become 'them' in Europe; Spanish speakers are 'them' in the US; ethnic minorities can be 'them' anywhere. The exclusion is justified because 'they' are not just different and inferior, but they pose an existential threat to 'us'. They breed faster than 'us', they are more violent than 'us', they are all in cahoots against 'us' (how often has your dad complained about Hindus sending money across the border?)

Take this idea and put in the context of India, which has a ready-made narrative of Muslims as non-indigenous, foreign conquerors (never mind that they've been there for centuries.) Put it in the context of China, where the Uighurs suddenly become an aberration whose culture threatens China's needed homogeneity (never mind that the Xinjiang Autonomous Region is an area half as big as the rest of the country.) To be sure, China's crackdown on difference as an existential threat to the majority was primarily embodied by Tibet until recently—for anyone can be the dangerous Other. The *Clash of Civilisations* did not coalesce into a global redefinition of Muslims as the ultimate Them until 9/11. All the previous history of violence, mistrust and bigotry between Muslims and non-Muslims across the world found vindication on that day.

Since 9/11, a long slew of UN Security Council resolutions, spearheaded by the United States, has aimed to encourage and require state executive bodies tackle the issue terrorism. These security requirements, invoking Chapter 7 of the UN charter, supersede all other agreements—including domestic constitutional limitations and legislative bodies, and international agreements such as on hu-

man rights. UN member states' executive bodies thus may use these resolutions to construct increasingly powerful security states built on combating what they may individually define as a terrorist threat. The nature of America's War on Terror has legitimised the identification and targeting of Muslim populations as these threats, particularly once UNSC resolutions were enacted that mandated countries fight 'radicalisation'—which is even more nebulous than terrorism but in practice encourages treating Muslims as suspect communities who may *become* the sources of violence.

In this architecture states are encouraged to become increasingly authoritarian by treating Muslims as a security threat. Security measures designed to protect 'native' populations from the suspect community of Muslim outsiders (even if they and their great-grandparents were born there) make states' executive bodies more powerful, enabled by UNSC resolutions that weaken the power of legislative bodies and other checks and balances. Domestic populations rally around bigotry and exclusion, fear being a fine motivator. The dispersed and homegrown nature of 'Islamist' terrorism lends credence to a portrayal of domestic Muslim communities as potentially deadly (we may recall how mistrustful of devout Muslims many *Bangladeshis*—a population almost totally Muslim, at least nominally—became after the Holey attack.) It stops becoming bigotry to police Muslim communities; it stops becoming racist to wonder if Muslim populations can safely integrate into the wider polity, if the 'us' group is really safe having a 'them' whose values and beliefs are not only incompatible but are tied with a global network of terror. Random Muslims who go on knife rampages in London, screaming about ISIS, who've never even spoken to an ISIS member, just serve to illustrate the point—such violence arises out of the Muslim community itself.

It's not Islamophobia. It's *security*. It's *common sense*. Security apparatuses built around Islamophobia engage in a globally sanctioned 'War on Terror' endorsed by the United Nations and the United States most of all, victimise already politically marginalised minorities who can be displeased with little domestic repercussion, make the wider domestic polity feel that the state is strong and keeping them safe (detached from the persecuted Muslim minority, so that what happens to them does not displease the majority), and helps install increasingly authoritarian measures that give the state general power over everyone's lives.

It's happening in China. It's happening in India. The United States, of course. Britain, increasingly so. The European Union is following, being led by the likes of Salvini and Orban and those who wish to retain their own power by appeasing right wing factions. Suu Kyi and Orban represent a rare, public acknowledgement that authoritarianism via Islamophobia is a global project. Leaders in the West and East all alike may reap the benefits of bigotry.

Zohab Mashiur is an artist and an MA candidate in International Migration at the University of Kent. Read more of this sort of thing in Disconnect: Collected Short Fiction.



PHOTO: AFP

Islamophobia is the New Black

ulations" (as a Hungarian government press statement put it) is a bridge too far, confirming Suu Kyi's fall from grace in the West. Like Orban, she has transformed herself into an authoritarian outsider. There is no doubt that she is no longer on the side of the good guys.

Yet the only repercussions for Suu Kyi from throwing in her lot with Orban will be op-eds in *The Guardian* and *Al-Jazeera*, stern statements from Amnesty International, and the expressed disappointment of the liberal components of the European Union—who are no friends of Orban. Suu Kyi and Orban aren't just hate-fueled monsters, though they may well be. They are both consummate political survivors. Orban may be a pariah among his peers in the European Union, but to dismiss him as some outsider both ignores how long he has stuck to the reins of power in Hungary as well as how the face of the EU itself is changing to look more like him with the election of demagogues like Salvini in Italy and the greater presence of right wing parties in parliaments. Fascist