



# ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL

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### About the Cover

Artist: Kyung Chyun is an illustrator working in Oakland, California. She attended California College of the Arts in San Francisco for BFA in Illustration. Kyung was born and raised in Seoul until the age of twelve when she immigrated to the states. She considers illustration and art to be her American dream as much as that sounds corny. Honors include 2015 New York's Society of Illustrators scholarship. Her portfolio can be found on [kyungchyun.com](http://kyungchyun.com).

The cover illustration uses the well known feminist analysis of the gaze as the foundation for its concept. The gaze is powerful, judging and oppressive. Extending from the analysis, the gaze represented by the group of multiple eyes in the illustration represents surveillance and fear of the Muslim population. The eyes are an important element in this illustration also because of what is not shown--the American public's habit of overlooking the violence against the Muslim people while insisting on their view point of status quo.

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**About the *ISJ***

The *Islamophobia Studies Journal* is a bi-annual publication that focuses on the critical analysis of Islamophobia and its multiple manifestations in our contemporary moment.

*ISJ* is an interdisciplinary and multi-lingual academic journal that encourages submissions that theorizes the historical, political, economic, and cultural phenomenon of Islamophobia in relation to the construction, representation, and articulation of “Otherness.” The *ISJ* is an open scholarly exchange, exploring new approaches, methodologies, and contemporary issues.

The *ISJ* encourages submissions that closely interrogate the ideological, discursive, and epistemological frameworks employed in processes of “Otherness” – the complex social, political, economic, gender, sexual, and religious forces that are intimately linked in the historical production of the modern world from the dominance of the colonial/imperial north to the post-colonial south. At the heart of *ISJ* is an intellectual and collaborative project between scholars, researchers, and community agencies to recast the production of knowledge about Islamophobia away from a dehumanizing and subordinating framework to an emancipatory and liberatory one for all peoples in this far-reaching and unfolding domestic and global process.

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**Editorial Statement****Muslims are civil society's prisoners!**

Prisons are institutions structured and built to maximize control and exercise absolute domination over the incarcerated population. Society's primary and professed approach to prisoners is centered on a rehabilitation model in which the individual is locked up for a period of time before being allowed back into cities and towns to mix with the "normal" population. The other and more pernicious approach practiced often at the same time and toward targeted ethnic, racial, and political groups is constructed punitively, so as to teach the individual involved or the group a lesson on "proper" conduct and establish social, political, economic, linguistic, and religious boundaries.

In both approaches above, and within the confines of the prison, the prisoners are placed on a highly controlled regiment with every minute of the day accounted for and intensely regulated. The system is managed by the guards and the prison's administration with the involvement of psychologists to guide and analyze the societal rehab program at every turn. What the prisoners eat, drink, and do inside the prison is controlled with a system of privileges and punishments used to elicit cooperation from the incarcerated population.

The prison is an apt metaphor and analogy that describes the American Muslim predicament in the current period. In more than one way, the similarities between the regulated and controlled daily life of a prisoner resembles the contours of the American Muslim's experience in civil society. What can be said by an American Muslim is already prescribed. The scope of engagement is highly regulated and departure from it is subject to punishment or withholding privileges. Despite the fact that prisoners inhabit and control 95-98% of the space in the prison, nevertheless, the guards and the warden control and regulate every aspect of daily life of the incarcerated population.

Consequently, the way to evaluate and approach the American Muslim community in the current period should be approached within a prison-prisoner lens. Here, the ability to move around and enjoy privileges should not be confused with freedom, equality, constitutional rights, and dignity in the full sense of the word. Let us be honest for a moment and detail the Muslim predicament in today's America: a community subject to structured governmental control, surveillance, entrapment schemes, guilt by association, and punitive measures instituted to elicit "correct" conduct and proper political and religious speech.

Take for example, the levels of intrusion into Muslim religious space, whereby the government admits to deploying informants and monitoring leaders within these institutions. Religious freedom becomes vacuous if government intrusion is constant and presumption of guilt without evidence is how the Muslim community is regulated and controlled. The introduction in the US of CVE programs and Prevent in England are symptoms of the prisoner-prison relationship. The key question: What other community in the US has such programs to prevent and counter extremism?

Just like the prisoner needing to adhere to prison's regulations as far as clothing are concerned, Muslims distinctive attire is a suspicious act that requires intervention by civil society guards. The subject must be induced by institutional intervention, so as to rehab it away from such clothing since they imply individuality, distinctiveness, and rejection of established cell block rules. In this sense, the clothing run contrary to civil society's constructed "norms" and change must be undertaken, and if need be, enforced to remedy.

The more critical civil society control structures are those that operate at the level of ideas and shaping consciousness. Muslim bodies are marked and controlled in civil society, so as to discipline and produce a prisoner mental state of mind that begins to regulate on the inside, that which was placed by the institution on the outside. The constant demand on Muslims to condemn every terrorist act, problematizing Muslim critique of foreign policy, and the constant insinuation of double talk or taqiah with the only speech magnified and permitted is the one affirming empire and interventionist policies. Muslims are to be spoken for, and not to speak on their own terms. Could Muslims speak in civil society? And if they do, are we ready to listen?

A more insidious aspect of this civil society prison construct, is the ongoing criminalization on the one hand, as the punitive measure and the intensive rehab program directed at the youth to shape their worldview and identity. Muslim youth are the site of a civilizational rehab program with the intended goal of birthing a new breed content with subjugation and ready to celebrate on the one hand his/her cultural inclusion at the expense of political agency, dignity, and freedom on the other. Culture and identity divorced of religious and political content is a mere commodity sold and bought by the highest bidders.

Muslims, as a class of people, are prisoners of civil society in the west and are subject to hyper structures of control that negate the basis on which membership in society is founded upon. In

more than one way, the Muslim today is an unequal citizen, and the citizenship even when it is allowed to be exercised, is probationary and subject to limitations. Just like released prisoners wear a bracelet to monitor their whereabouts and check regularly with their probation officers, so are Muslims in civil society made to wear an imaginary bracelet and check with security institutions, so as to ascertain if the rehab program was successful and no more 'inducing' is needed.

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# ***Repeating Fundamentalism and the Politics of the Commons: The Charlie Hebdo Tragedy and the Contradictions of Global Capitalism***

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## ***Repeating Fundamentalism and the Politics of the Commons: The Charlie Hebdo Tragedy and the Contradictions of Global Capitalism***

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**ABSTRACT:** I argue that the Charlie Hebdo massacre, and the issue of fundamentalist terrorism in general, should be examined in relation to the contradictions of living in a neoliberal global capitalist system. These contradictions are played out at the political, cultural, and ideological levels in a way that obscures the fundamental antagonism, making any radical solution to the problem of fundamentalist terrorism beyond our reach. I examine these contradictions in four different themes around which the issue of fundamentalist terrorism is staged within the hegemonic neoliberal global capitalist order: the clash of civilizations; colonial and postcolonial politics; leftist solidarity; and the failure of all practical solutions in the fight against fundamentalist terrorism. I end the piece with a call for rethinking the issue of fundamentalist terrorism within the *politics of the commons*.

When the tragic news of the most recent terrorist attack in Paris broke out, the Western media coverage of the massacre sounded all too familiar. From the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the Charlie Hebdo massacre, the signs of the Islamophobic narrative about Islamist (not Islamic) terrorism have become too easily recognizable. Nonetheless, the issue of Islamist terrorism in mainstream media is still framed within a neoliberal ideology that fails to look into the root causes of fundamentalist terrorism, Islamist, or otherwise, around the world in relation to the intensification of predatory forms of capitalist development and its corollary apartheid politics and practices of enclosure. Similarly, any analysis of the coverage of fundamentalist terrorism as symptomatic of the racist, Islamophobic public and official discourses in the US get it half right. Politically speaking, global capitalism is turning larger segments of people in the global South into an uncounted and discardable excess who exist outside state power, the market, and the international political order, making them easily vulnerable to reactionary, extremist movements. However, the neoliberal framework makes the struggle, today, between groups that are anchored in their exclusivist, identitarian thinking, rather than between the global capitalist system itself and the “radical universality” of the dispossessed and disposable surplus of the world population.

In this paper, I argue that the issue of fundamentalist terrorism, as it has been framed in the media representation of the Charlie Hebdo massacre, should be understood in the context of the contradictions of living in the shadow of the neoliberal global capitalist system. These contradictions are played out in four different themes that obscure the fundamental antagonism within the hegemonic neoliberal global capitalist order: the clash of civilizations master-narrative; colonial/postcolonial politics in the new age of empire; leftist solidarity politics; and the failure of all practical solutions in the fight against fundamentalist terrorism. Any radical solution to the problem of fundamentalist terrorism, it is suggested, can be reconfigured only within the *politics of the commons*.

## THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AS POST-IDEOLOGICAL WAR

The first contradiction that is staged in the terrorist attack in Paris is the myth of the post-ideological age as embodied in the anachronistic “clash of civilizations” master-narrative. Some politicians still fall back on this master-narrative to interpret international politics; others are redefining its terms. While French Prime Minister Manuel Valls and some Muslim leaders in France described the massacre as a “deafening declaration of war,”<sup>1</sup> French President Francois Hollande was more cautious in his choice of words, describing the terrorist act as a case of “exceptional barbarism,” without resorting to a Manichean view of the world.<sup>2</sup> No matter how liberal and progressive their comments sound, however, the policies and laws they are passing now in France, as will be discussed below, betray this democratic veneer.

Interestingly enough, US Secretary of State John Kerry broadly redefined the key terms of this master-narrative. He portrayed the massacre as a “part of a larger confrontation, not between civilisations -- no -- but between civilisation itself and those who are opposed to a civilised world.”<sup>3</sup> EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini went even further, rejecting the claim that this is “an issue between Europe or the West and Islam,” since “terrorism and terrorist attacks are targeting most of all Muslims in the world so we need an alliance; we need a dialogue there to face the issue together.”<sup>4</sup>

The Muslim scholar, Dr. Tariq Ramadan, however, was unequivocal in his subversion of this narrative, arguing that throwing the idea of religion-based clash of civilization into the mix merely feeds into these violent extremists’ main outlook of the world.<sup>5</sup> Ramadan thus insists that this is a war against “violent extremists, wherever they are coming from.”

This shift in master-narrative is also accompanied by calls for departing from the American policy on the war on terror and the “shoot first and ask questions later” philosophy. Ramadan pointed out that President George W. Bush fell into the trap of the rhetoric of religious war, even though his campaign was called the War on Terror. Indeed, the *Guardian*’s Simon Jenkins has been warning France and other European countries not to walk down the US path in the global fight against terrorism.<sup>6</sup>

Diverging from the path of American foreign policy is quite sensible in light of the clear differences between 9/11 and the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks. Although both attacks were launched against symbolic cultural and political center of Western power, 9/11 struck the United States empire, in particular, and the Western world in general, in an unprecedented and deeply profound way, because it tapped into their unconscious fears and fantasies that have been conjured up all along in Hollywood disaster movies.

These atrocities would not have been imaginable, as Director Robert Altman remarked, unless they were “seen [ . . . ] in a movie.”<sup>7</sup> It is not that, as the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek said on 9/11 “the unimaginable impossible happened,” but that “the unthinkable which happened was the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, *America got what it fantasized about*, and this was the greatest surprise.”<sup>8</sup> As he succinctly puts it, 9/11 constituted the traumatic intrusion of a “screen fantasmatic apparition” into our reality.

It is important that journalists like Jenkins also urged not to call this anti-terrorism campaign a war, in order not to compromise even more of what is left of the civil liberties in the already fragile modern democracies that have become more like surveillance-terrorist states. He thus writes:

*Today's French terrorists want a similarly hysterical response. They want another twist in the thumbscrew of the surveillance state. They want the media to be told to back off. They want new laws, new controls, new additions to the agenda of illiberalism. They know that in most western nations, including Britain, there exists a burgeoning industry of illiberal bureaucrats with empires to build.*

Indeed, as Žižek maintains, the rhetoric of global war on terror ushered a global state of emergency in which the rule of law is potentially suspended and state sovereignty can be asserted without any transparency or accountability in the name of protecting civil liberties.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, the truth behind this twist in discourse is the attempt to move beyond ideological struggle, to usher a new “post-ideological” age, where ideology does not only become superfluous but also serves a reason to shirk any responsibility for the unimaginable death and destruction waged in the name of this clash of civilizations.

As Chalmers Johnson wrote in the aftermath of 9/11, “This attempt to define difficult-to-grasp events as only a conflict over abstract values - as a 'clash of civilizations,' in current post-cold war American jargon - is not only disingenuous, but also a way of evading responsibility for the ['blowback'](#) that America's [the United States'] imperial projects have generated.”<sup>10</sup> What this does is simply serve as a subterfuge for war on the economic egalitarian demands of the Arab revolutionary movements, mystifying and displacing the fundamental antagonism, increasing the global gap between the haves and have-nots, and propelling global capitalism so that every struggle is presented as a war between two groups, thereby remaining wrapped in the language of religious, racial, or national, struggles.

### *The War On Terror In The Age Of Democratic Empire*

The Charlie Hebdo massacre also plays out the contradictions between the democratic and republican ideals and the resurgence of global empires in this new stage of the metastasis of neoliberal global capitalism. Indeed, these terrorist attacks cannot be addressed without taking into account the colonial and post/neo-colonial contexts in which they have unfolded.

In so far as this contextualization is carried out in the name of liberal subjectivization of the *Other's* monstrosity, Žižek is correct to dismiss it.<sup>11</sup> This is not simply about giving a platform for sharing the voice and perspective of those whom we consider to be radically different. Rather, the intention here is to acknowledge that every historical configuration is incomplete, and that there is a surplus excess that results from the obfuscation of a cause at the center of the social field. Hence, as Žižek maintains, context is important only in so far as it reveals the extent to which a subject is ideologically constructed in relation to the fundamental antagonism that lurks beneath and behind the system.

Writing for Aljazeera, Victoria Fontan links one of the Algerian culprits' motives to the torture scandal in the American-run Abu Ghraib prison.<sup>12</sup> Cherif Kouachi, Fontan writes, was outraged by the violations of the human rights of Iraqi prisoners and the torture practices, euphemistically referred to as “enhanced interrogation techniques,” that sadistic and psychopathic US military personnel administered at Abu Ghraib.

The scandalous photographs that these prison personnel took as trophies and souvenirs seem to have left their indelible mark on Kouachi and played a significant role in shaping his vengeful vendetta. Indeed, what drew the ire of Kouachi were not Hebdo's caricatures of the prophet Mohammad, but these obscene images from the US-run

interrogation center that reduced Muslim suspects to sub-human entities. [As the story unfolds](#), it has become clear that this terrorist operation was either hatched or inspired by Al Qaeda in Yemen over three years ago.

Fontan also explains that Kouachi's terrorist act must be understood in relation to France's war on terror, especially its most recent military campaign in Mali. Circa November 2014, France launched a bombing campaign and land assault of the northern part of their former colony to ferret out suspected Al-Qaeda fighters and destroy the infrastructure of the area that was under Islamist domination, to prevent them from coordinating any terrorist attacks against the West from Africa. The campaign failed, but for these fundamentalist-terrorists France was now Islam's public enemy number one, and they sought to strike back at the French State.

Other commentators go even further back in history, placing these events within a no less sinister history of French colonization in Africa. Writing for the *Independent*, for example, Robert Fisk summed the brutal 132-year history of French colonialism in Algeria, by saying, "Algeria is the postcolonial wound that still bleeds in France."<sup>13</sup> The Algerian war of liberation, the "battle of the million martyrs" still serves, according to Fisk, as the foundation of the relations between France and its Arab population.

The French domestic context and the way the republic deals with its Arab citizens is no less significant for understanding these terrorist attacks. These "lumpen-citizens," (to use the words of Houria Bouteldja, the spokesperson of the anti-racist *Mouvement des indigènes de la République*) of Arab descent, Algerians in particular, are alienated from the French national imaginary as colonial subjects, and shamelessly pauperized through its republican-colonial ideals.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the *banlieues*, where these, in President Sarkozy's words, *racaille* live, are considered "zones without rights," and the banlieues, as A. L. Stoler writes, are still administered by "colonial mechanisms of control."<sup>15</sup> As Bouteldja clearly states, "This imaginary link to colonization and the history of slavery continues to determine how they perceive us . . . and as long as this imaginary is alive, we remain native."<sup>16</sup>

Mark LeVine, thus, notes that the "structural racism against France's large Arab/Muslim and African communities, which has included mass murder in the streets of Paris and remains "[rampant](#)" not merely in the [poor suburbs](#) of major cities, where concentrated poverty and marginalisation lead so many to crime, drugs, prison, and, not uncommonly, to radicalisation."<sup>17</sup> Consequently, what these Muslim youth experience in the banlieues is, as the philosopher Alain Badiou mentions, "daily humiliation" and dehumanization.<sup>18</sup>

To add insult to injury, the French surveillance-terror State has been selective in its application of freedom of expression laws as well as their double standards in dealing with Muslims, vis-à-vis people of other faiths. French authorities can de-veil Muslim women and hunt down any public signs of Islamic identity, without blinking twice about launching hysterical campaigns that censor and criminalize: Holocaust denial, the *quenelle* salute, pro-Palestinian rallies, an anti-Jihadist Mauritania Muslim film, comments that are allegedly defending terrorism ("l'apologie du terrorisme"), and absurdly persecuting social justice activists like Bouteldja, for allegedly calling white French "sub-dogs."<sup>19</sup>

In the last two weeks, Prime Minister Valls has also announced raft counter-terrorism measures, including beefing up security and surveillance to curb radicalization by monitoring 3,000 people suspected of links to Jihadist groups. The civil liberties of French Arab and Muslim minorities will only deteriorate even further if a French version of the *American Patriot Act* [italics added] is considered for adoption in their counter-terrorism

endeavors, leading eventually to the compromise of the democratic rights enshrined in the law.<sup>20</sup> As Žižek points out, “The terrorist attacks achieved the impossible: to reconcile the generation of ’68 with its arch enemy in something like a French popular version of the *Patriot Act* [italics added], with people offering themselves up to surveillance.”<sup>21</sup>

The proliferating signs of fascism in the republic are hard to miss, revealing the cruel joke underlying the claim that the consolidation of the security-surveillance-terrorist state reflects the European resistance, as EU Vice President Frans Timmermans said, “to change the nature of our open societies as a reaction to this threat.”<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, linking racism and religious radicalization does not go far enough in explaining the deeper causes of the pauperization of larger segments of the world population that force them to immigrate to former colonial metropolitan centers. Ultimately, this analysis can merely displace the true source of disaffection among European Muslim youth, by identifying it as, in the words of Myriam Francois-Cerrah, “a politico-religious narrative of vengeance against the “west.”<sup>23</sup>

### RETHINKING LEFTIST SOLIDARITY

The Charlie Hebdo tragedy also plays out the contradictions surrounding leftist solidarity politics that center around multiculturalist issues, racism, and political correctness in the West today. Although many people in the West have expressed their solidarity with Muslim minorities in France in particular, and Europe in general, this solidarity politics has been compromised by oppressive and offensive demands placed on Muslim communities.

Although leading Muslim scholars and representative councils in Europe and around the world condemned the massacre, and although those global condemnations were immediately and widely shared in the [media](#), Muslims have had to work harder at proving their collective disapproval and repudiation of such heinous acts.<sup>24</sup> In the past, such denunciations always arrived belatedly to the scene. Moreover, these denunciations were deliberately ignored and under-reported, in order to create the impression that, by their silence, the majority of the Muslim world secretly condoned and relished such horrific acts.

These condemnations make it clear that such barbaric acts do not speak for all Muslims. Rather, they reiterate *ad nauseam* the point that a bunch of Islamist terrorists cannot and should not be conflated with Islam or Muslims, as self-described New Atheist and avowed Islamophobe Richard Dawkins tweeted.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the self-righteous Islamophobe Bill Maher unequivocally stated on the Jimmy Kimmel Show that “Hundreds of millions of [Muslims] support an attack like this. They applaud an attack like this. What they say is, we don’t approve of violence, but you know what, when you make fun of the prophet, all bets are off.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, these ideologues and propagandists share two main ideological strands common in US popular discourses: 1) neo-conservative beliefs, and 2) Zionist Christian evangelism. That is, they are united by an irrational hatred for, and fear of, Islam and Muslims, and they are united by an unwavering support for the Israeli apartheid state and its colonial-settler campaign and genocidal policies in Palestine.

Nonetheless, an increasing number of commentators reject outright these demagogic Islamophobic tactics. Kimmel himself is reported to have pushed back gently, by questioning Maher’s unfounded claims, and Maher is said to have lost the studio’s audience by insisting on these sweeping overgeneralizations. Similarly, many “whites,” including internationally renowned author JK Rowling, came out in scores to condemn Rupert Murdoch’s suggestion that Muslims all over the world should be held responsible for the Charlie Hebdo massacre, until they “recognize and destroy their jihadist cancer.”<sup>27</sup>

Others are not merely questioning these sweeping generalizations, but are also pointing out the unfairness of these demands and their offensive nature. As Homa Khaleeli correctly notes in *The Guardian*, these “seemingly reasonable” calls for Muslim to condemn these barbaric acts imply that unless stated otherwise, “all Muslims, not just extremists, are implicated or secretly agree with all attacks undertaken by people in the name of religion anywhere in the world.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Alex Massie, from *The Spectator*, warned that such demands imply that Muslims all over the world “bear some inchoate communal responsibility for the barbarous actions of their co-religionists.”<sup>29</sup>

No expression of solidarity politics, however, has managed to stage the contradictions about Western leftist politics more than the “#JeSuisCharlie” campaign. On the face of it, this campaign of symbolic identification seems like a harmless invocation of universal solidarity with the victims themselves. However, the gesture itself elevates victimization onto an ontological condition in the name of collective institutional signature. In part, the magazine itself, as a cultural institution, cannot be reduced to the lives of its employees—as an institution the magazine has its own logic, which has been recently revealed to be a logic invested in right-wing sympathies, racism, and outright Islamophobic sentiments in particular.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, under the sign of the name Charlie, a staged spectacle and photo opportunity presented itself in the so-called “unity march.” This spectacle brought under its umbrella not only extremist right-wing French politicians and activists, but also international leaders who are responsible for waging genocidal war against largely unarmed civilian populations and for the deliberate targeting and assassination of journalists and cartoonists.<sup>31</sup> The presence of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the march, and later at a synagogue in Paris where he exhorted French Jews to return to their “ancestral homeland,” gave legitimacy to Islamophobic sentiments, while at the same time manufacturing the invocation of the spectre of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust to silence any critique of the Israeli apartheid policies and Zionist settler-colonialism in Palestine.

It is no surprise that various commentators brought up the double standard in the media’s coverage of terrorist acts committed by non-Muslim suspects. For example, in an interview with CNN’s infamous Don Lemon, Arsalan Iftikhar, human rights attorney, and *The Muslim Guy* website founder, correctly commented that “When Christians commit acts of terror, we don’t ask priests and pastors to go on national television to condemn these acts, but, sadly, Muslim public intellectuals, thinkers, leaders, and Islamic scholars have that double standard that we have to deal with.”<sup>32</sup> Iftikhar failed to mention that Christian terrorists are immediately declared mentally unstable, paranoid, or psychotic individuals in need of psychiatric care rather than arrest, torture, or drone attacks. Indeed, as Žižek has recently argued, this is not simply a matter of Western hypocrisy, but the re-packaging of Western “exploitation and violent domination . . . in the guise of its opposite: freedom, equality, democracy.”<sup>33</sup>

The political cartoonist Khaled Albaih gave a different twist to this impasse confronting Muslims in these situations.<sup>34</sup> He wrote that Muslims “are constantly asked to apologise [sic] for crimes they neither committed, nor supported, and, although “they, too, are victims of the violence of extremists, still, they are asked to apologise [sic] and somehow atone for these crimes that were committed in the name of their religion.” Consequently, Muslims have to work double shifts to prove their innocence and loyalty to the values of modern civilization, by launching media campaigns declaring that such acts were committed “not in the name of Islam” The other hashtag campaign, “#JeSuisAhmed” (“I am Ahmed”),

created in response to the murder of French police officer, Ahmed Merabet, seemed to hold more promise in sending a strong message of solidarity with Muslims. This campaign gives immediate recognition of the names of Muslim victims of these terrorist acts and drives home the important point that the majority of the victims of these terrorist acts are Muslim themselves. More importantly, the name of the campaign itself guarantees that the French surveillance terrorist State cannot appropriate it to further advance its hegemonic power. Nonetheless, as long as such campaigns remain wrapped in religious discourse, the fundamental antagonism will continue to be obscured. No genuine politics of solidarity can come out of such a campaign.

Dr. Tariq Ramadan believes that such acts of solidarity can universalize the value of human life everywhere without exception.<sup>35</sup> Ramadan states that “the divergent responses to the deaths of Westerners and those of other individuals around the globe may be partly to blame for the growing appeal of extremist ideology.” Ramadan also appealed to world citizens to “ask our governments for consistency, and then to come to social policy when it comes to equal citizenship to act against racism and anti-Semitism and anti-Islam... I think there is a lack of consistency even in our emotional reactions to the death of people.”

It is doubtful whether such solidarity campaigns can generate a sense of identification with the humanity and the plight of dispossessed and disposable *Other*. For one, the struggle against racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia are different sides of the same struggle for economic justice and liberty. Moreover, the problem with such claims to the humanity of the *Other* can only be articulated through the international human rights regime. The problem here is, as Žižek states, “human rights [for example, the right to privacy] do not directly condone the violation of the Commandments [adultery], but they keep open a marginal grey zone that is supposed to be out of the reach of (religious or secular) power.” The point, as he writes, is that “it is structurally impossible, for the power, to draw a clear line of separation and prevent, only the misuse of a human right without infringing on its proper use, i.e. the use that does not violate the Commandments.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally, it did not escape some commentators that the attention to the Charlie Hebdo massacre came at the expense of some victims who are simply not considered, in Teju Cole’s words, “mournable bodies.”<sup>37</sup> Although this erasure has something to do with the racial, religious, and national backgrounds of the White victims, which overshadowed other genocides whose victims are Palestinians, Africans, or Mexicans, the issue is not simply a function of collusion with Western Islamophobic forces. Rather, it is a function of obfuscating the overall picture and the systematic violence that these imperial states unleash in the world.

Indeed, in these cases, the media serves as an alibi for hegemonic imperial powers in their destruction of human life as they pursue their global capitalist and “democidal” expansion agendas that intensify the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in the Middle East and around the world through drones, surveillance technologies, and apartheid walls. As Glenn Greenwald wrote for *Intercept*, “Indeed, concealing stories about the victims of American militarism is a critical part of the US government’s strategy for maintaining support for its sustained aggression. That is why, in general, the U.S. media has [a policy of systematically excluding and ignoring such victims](#) (although disappearing them this way does not actually render them nonexistent).”<sup>38</sup>

*Did Anyone Say Fundamentalism? Fundamentalism in/and Modernity*

The last contradiction that is played out in the Paris massacre pertains to the failure of all practical solutions in the fight against fundamentalist terrorism within the hegemony of the global capitalist world order. Although commentators on the recent Parisian tragedy acknowledge that terrorism has no easy solutions, most of them end on a high note of “forlorn hope” and despair about the possibility of bringing an end to the problem of global terrorism. For Massie, there is “little room for hope, little reason to expect that this story will change. It is a war, of sorts, in which we trust that reason can somehow – eventually – conquer a rejection of reason. This seems a forlorn hope today.”<sup>39</sup>

Within the hegemony of neoliberal global capitalism, the only solutions that these commentators can conjure up reiterate earlier pleas to, as Massie stated, “stand for liberalism and reason” or to, as Jenkins put it, “meet terrorism on its own terms” and to “refuse to be terrified . . . not to show fear, not to overreact, not to over-publicise [sic] the aftermath” . This is no way to defeat terrorism.

As long as the problem of fundamentalist terrorism is framed within the neoliberal ideology as a religious or ideological, rather than a social, issue that mystifies the fundamental antagonism, there will never be a real breakthrough in understanding the issue, let alone solving it. The problem here is that most commentators hold largely anachronistic views of Islamist terror. For example, Massie unequivocally calls it a “direct *repudiation* of modernity.” Consequently, pundits like Massie put the blame squarely on the pathological nature of Islam and its followers, whitewashing and absolving Western politicians such as President George W. Bush, Prime Minister Tony Blair, and neocons from any responsibility for the instability and destruction that are wreaking havoc in the Middle East. As Massie writes, “The motivation for this barbarism long pre-dates their time in office.”

Indeed, the origins of all forms of religious fundamentalism today go back more than a decade or two, but they do not precede the advent of modernity and the rise of global capitalism. As Žižek made clear in his writings, religious fundamentalism, including Islamist terrorism, are nothing but “a pure product of the contradictions” of the global capitalist system.<sup>40</sup> In relation to Islamic fundamentalism, in particular, Žižek insists that “it is something entirely conditioned by Western policy,” adding that it is “purely postmodern.”

Religious fanatics these days are helplessly dependent on modern technology and consumerist global capitalist culture. This can explain the recent Western fascination with ISIL terrorists-brand wrist watches, or ISIL’s “shockingly” slick magazine *Dabiq*—its professional content and graphic design betray the alleged medieval mind-set it is supposed to represent.<sup>41</sup> This can also shed light on the transformation of Muslim sacred sites into “a steel and concrete metropolis,” with “a glittering array of skyscrapers, shopping malls and luxury hotels.”<sup>42</sup> Mecca, for example, was once the embodiment of a utopian, egalitarian dream. Under the custodianship of the Saudi royal family and with the approval of hardline Wahhabi clerics, however, this desert city has become “a playground for the rich . . . where naked capitalism has usurped spirituality as the city’s *raison d’être*.” One has to wonder whether the 600-mile Great Wall around these holy sites being constructed by the Kingdom (with the help of companies building the Zionist apartheid separation wall in Palestine), is meant to keep out ISIS or those who cannot afford this luxurious lifestyle.<sup>43</sup>

Žižek, thus, states that Islamic fundamentalism “has nothing to do with a tradition supposedly restored,” and consequently, it becomes imperative to stop projecting one’s own fantasies on Islam and Muslims and “concern yourself with the dramatic impasses of

capitalist modernity.” Islamic Fundamentalism, as he says about the Balkans in the Western imagination, is abhorrent to Westerners because “they themselves introduced [it] there; what they combat is their own historical legacy run amok.”<sup>44</sup>

Although his statements are usually taken as a not-so-thinly-veiled condemnation of Islam, Salman Rushdie’s comments on the Parisian massacre made this link clear. He writes that, “Religion, a mediaeval form of unreason, when combined with modern weaponry becomes a real threat to our freedoms.”<sup>45</sup> The antiquated forms of supernatural beliefs and fundamentalism sustained a thriving multicultural scene in the Islamic world to the extent that European visitors to Turkey in the age of Enlightenment deemed the Turks backward due to the religious cosmopolitanism of their big cities. In Chris Hedges’ words, “the evil of predatory global capital and empire has spawned the evil of terrorism.”<sup>46</sup>

Žižek also links the rise of fundamentalism in the Arabo-Islamic world with the traumatic impact of modernization on Muslim cultures. In contrast to Europe, where the impact of modernization was absorbed over centuries through *Kulturarbeit*, or the “formation of new social narratives and myths,” Muslim cultures experienced the shock of modernization directly, without mediation, a “protective screen or temporal delay,” in a way that shattered their “symbolic universe . . . even more brutally.”<sup>47</sup> As such, fundamentalism emerged as a “psychotic-delirious-incestuous” expression of a religious experience that has direct access to the “divine Real” in all its terrifying ramifications, including “the vengeful return of the obscene superego divinity who demands sacrifice.”

### *Repeating Fundamentalism*

Drawing on this reinterpretation of religious fundamentalism, two solutions can be proffered to curb the global threat of fundamentalist terrorism. The first is a culturally radical solution, which is, nonetheless, developed within a religious framework that calls for reclaiming the positive and authentic meaning of fundamentalism, and disassociating it from the destructive history of fundamentalist terrorism.

In his book *Violence*, Žižek maintains that true fundamentalists do not harbor any feelings of envy or resentment towards other people. Indeed, they are so confident about their worldview and convictions that they are completely indifferent toward, and unthreatened by, other people’s beliefs or way of life, however perverted or obscene they may look to them. Žižek thus notes, “The terrorist pseudo-fundamentalists are deeply bothered, intrigued, fascinated by the sinful life of non-believers,” because they are merely projecting on other people their own temptations and desires. He concludes by saying, “Fundamentalists are a disgrace to true fundamentalism.”<sup>48</sup>

A “strong ideological response,” as the Palestinian writer and journalist Daoud Kuttab writes, is urgent today. However, it is very difficult to expect Arab and Muslim intellectuals to offer “alternative role models and alternative ideas that they can adopt in this struggle of ideas,” as he suggest, without dismissing or offending the beliefs of these so-called “fundamentalists.”<sup>49</sup> The fundamentalists themselves need to internalize this difference between a fundamentalist and a fundamentalist-terrorist in order to traverse the fantasy of fundamentalism.

In so far as fundamentalist terrorism is a global issue, the international community can be well served not by criminalizing faith or banning this or that religion, but by helping spread the true of message and meaning of fundamentalism and separating it from any associations with violence and terrorism. The message to fundamentalists is: Knock yourself

out, if you wish, but live and let live. This solution, however, will remain incomplete, since it still disconnects the problem from its structural causes and roots, --global capitalism and its imperial designs.

### *THE POLITICS OF THE COMMONS*

The more radical solution, and the only solution, today, however, is tackling the root causes of fundamentalist terrorism and linking those causes back to the fundamental antagonism. Since fundamentalism is the product of the contradictions of global capitalism, what is needed is the restructuring of the totality of social relations or the mode of production today, i.e., global capitalism through collective emancipatory and egalitarian projects that guarantee the equitable distribution of wealth and reverse the global trend toward more apartheid politics, exclusion, surveillance, torture, and extermination politics.

To keep things in perspective, it is important to remember that the global capitalist system that pushes these men to religious radicalization is the same system that pushes increasing numbers of young men and women from families with lower income to join the US military. Studies have shown that racial minorities are overrepresented in armed service, compared to economic elites in the US.<sup>50</sup> This number is expected to increase, because the US military is recruiting immigrants by using service in the military as a major path to citizenship and naturalization.

To this extent, [Kuttab's call](#) for reforming autocratic Arab regimes, as well as Western racist and Islamophobic institutions, does not go far enough.<sup>51</sup> Reforms are not going to undo the increasing global polarization of wealth between the 1% and the 99%; reforms are leaving, untouched, the causes of alienation and pauperization of the thousands of young men who are marked as excess in this global capitalist system.

What we need to keep in mind is that, at its core, fundamentalism is an opportunistic ideology that intervenes in contingent (revolutionary) contexts only to displace the anti-capitalist revolutionary spark underpinning this socio-political unrest, and ideologically mystifies it through religious rhetoric and theological sophistry. In the absence of a formidable radical or revolutionary left in the Arabo-Islamic world, and, as a result of the "red scare" during the Cold War, fundamentalist terrorism has easily slipped in to fill the gap, and did not have to do much to attract these men.

Žižek discusses, after a report in *The New York Times*, the story of the Taliban in Pakistan, who, in 2009, exploited the grievances of landless tenants against wealthy landlords in order to stage "a class revolt."<sup>52</sup> Quoting Walter Benjamin's correlation between the rise of Fascism and revolutionary debacle, "every rise of Fascism bears witness to a failed revolution." Žižek notes that fundamentalist ideology merely covers up a botched revolutionary movement.

Similarly, the re-emergence of the religious Shas party in the Israeli apartheid state can be directly correlated with the increasing number of the "rejected and excluded" from the Ashkenazi establishment. This bottom 20 percent "has a color," said the editor of radical cultural magazine [Café Gibraltar](#), Ophir Toubul, including "the Mizrahis, the Russians, the Ethiopians, the Druze, the Bedouin, [and] the Arabs" in his list of the lower disenfranchised class.<sup>53</sup>

These fundamentalist-terrorist groups, as Žižek maintains in a different context, become "the mirror image of state terror, for a murderous fundamentalist sect taking over and ruling by terror, not for the overcoming of state terror through popular self-organization."<sup>54</sup> Rather than making these young men more vulnerable to the ideological lure

of fundamentalist terrorism, these young men can be integrated into society through a radical political project that can re-imagine alternative utopian modes of social relations. In the words of Martin Luther King, "Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism."<sup>55</sup>

In so far as they occupy a shadowy and spectral existence outside the hegemony of the neoliberal capitalist regime, these youth can be considered a part of the world's increasing number of surplus and uncounted communities. There is some truth, therefore, to the sarcastic comments on the French government's new infographic signs that can allegedly help in identifying a jihadist—no friends, no family, no athletic activity, and no baguettes (the sign the infographic used to allude to the changing eating habits of the would-be jihadists).<sup>56</sup> As one of the retweets quips, "In fact, the campaign to #StopDjihadism isn't about identifying potential jihadists, it's about describing unemployed people."

In Žižek's political theory, unemployable people constitute a point of inherent exclusion or exception, or the "very site of political universality." In their lack of a determinate place in the system, these surplus and disposable populations "stand directly for universality."<sup>57</sup>

Universality, for Žižek, is not about abstract neutrality, because the abstract universal fails to include its particular content, thereby becoming, itself, something particular over and against the particulars it cannot include. In this sense, universality is a "process or a sequence of particular attempts that do not simply exemplify the neutral universal notion but struggle with it, give a specific twist to it – the universal is thus fully engaged in the process of its particular exemplification; that is to say, these particular cases, in a way, decide the fate of the universal notion itself."<sup>58</sup>

As such, universality is reconsidered in terms of its constitutive exception—the particular cases of the excluded determine what the universal is. Hence, universality is hegemonized by including the exception under it, and hence "it is only through the exception that it becomes the rule, that is, a universalized function." In this sense, they stand out as a singular or concrete form of universality in the sense that they stand "alone among the other particulars, not as a particular kind over and against them (which would make it only particular) but as an exception to the very idea that it is a 'kind' at all."

Needless to say, these excluded in the increasingly expanding modalities of apartheid are not the classical Marxist subjects of the proletariat. As Žižek notes, one is lucky to be an exploited worker today; the real issue is that more and more people are not simply unemployed, but *unemployable* and discardable refugees, slum dwellers, surplus populations, bedoons, and homo sacers (to use Giorgio Agamben's phrase). Jacques Ranciere put it in a nutshell: they are the "part of no part," and "the object of disciplinary measures and/ or even humanitarian help, but not 'full citizens,' who have no determinate place" in the system and who are kept at a proper distance through technologies of surveillance, torture, and death.

As Žižek makes clear, it is only by identifying with the uncounted and discardable that the moment of the truth of the global capitalist system can be reached. Žižek explains: " . . . when you have in a certain social totality those who are 'below us' – the negated or outcast – then precisely insofar as they are the abject, they stand for universality."<sup>59</sup>

Although their cheap, disposable labor sustains the global capitalist profit machinery, there is no recognition of their rights within the law, and their humanity is denied in the system itself. In other words, these surplus groups are constitutive of the global capitalist system, while they stand outside its notion of the good in relation to the market (they cannot

indulge in the absolute enjoyment of consumption), the nation (they are consigned to spaces of abjection outside the purview of citizenship), and the republic (they are denied the democratic rights that are enshrined in the law).

Angela Davis recently made the same observation, when she related that “the increasing shift of capital from human services, from housing, jobs, education, to profitable arenas [such as the prison industrial complex] has meant there are huge numbers of people everywhere in the world who are not able to sustain themselves.” These populations “are made surplus, and as a result they are often forced to engage in practices that are deemed criminal.”<sup>60</sup>

Žižek, thus, maintains that the “part of no part” embodies the failure of universality, and stands for the lie of the existing universal system and “what is wrong with society.” He, thus, writes that their “abject position stands for the lie of the existing universality and it doesn't necessarily have a direct positive dimension. In this sense the universality here is not fake, because it only embodies what is false in the existing universality. It gives body to the failure of universality and does not have any positive content.”<sup>61</sup>

Any sense of radical universality that can oppose global capitalism must be theorized from the perspective of the larger segments of the world population who are kept at a distance from the ideological construction of itself as an excess that is relegated to a position of abjection. What is needed, then, is to rethink the inequality and injustice of the global capitalist system from the perspective of this “part of no part,” who are kept at a distance from the system by virtue of these technologies of apartheid and enclosures (such as prisons, separation walls, and gated communities), which embody the proliferating forms of capitalist privatization.

For Žižek, the “progressing ‘enclosure’ of the commons” is the correlative of the “proletarianization of those who are excluded from their own substance,” and, as such, can operate as the grounds for a new configuration of solidarity based on the politics of the commons.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the *politics of the commons*, as postulated by contemporary continental philosophers, calls for liberating the commons of our shared existence, inaugurating an alternative radical revolutionary project that can mobilize people outside the market and outside state control.

*Politics of the commons* links diverse global struggles in anti-globalization and anti-capitalist practices that aim to reverse the oppressive technologies of apartheid, and bring an end to the horrible policies of enclosure. *Politics of the commons*, to be brief, addresses the “antagonistic struggle, which, rather than taking place between particular communities, splits each community from within, so that the ‘trans-cultural’ link between communities is one of a shared struggle.”<sup>63</sup> Although demanding such a revolutionary change might, within the current taboo political codes, be easily dismissed as too impractical and utopian (i.e., Marxist or communist), it is the only way to defeat fundamentalist terrorism by restoring the commons to collective humanity.

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***A Hidden Ideological Scheme  
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Explaining a Peak of  
Islamophobia in Quebec  
(2013-2014)***

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## ***A Hidden Ideological Scheme under New Secularism: Explaining a Peak of Islamophobia in Quebec (2013-2014)*<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper offers a description of the context of the recent growth of Islamophobia in Quebec, and it submits a hypothesis on the process responsible for it. In the first part, we use the concept of “mute zone” from the social representation theory to advance a theoretical hypothesis based on a first sight analysis. We argue that some elements from an ideological victory of far right narratives invested the social representation of secularism, that they reveal themselves as a “mute zone” acting in periphery of the theme of secularism, and, accordingly, that they act as a sleeping ideological scheme, here, favoring Islamophobia. In the second part, we pursue the analysis further to show how this peripheral scheme appeared within the narrative of different actors and groups supporting a ban on religious conspicuous signs, from the right side to the left side of the political spectrum.

### *INTRODUCTION*

This paper offers a description of the context of the recent growth of Islamophobia in Quebec<sup>2</sup>, and submit a hypothesis on the process responsible for it. During 2013-14, a political debate raged over the Parti Québécois’ (PQ) legislative project to ban conspicuous religious signs for all State related employees, including those of private enterprises contracting with public institutions.<sup>3</sup> Since its announcement, we began to see Islamophobic acts, starting with a vandalized mosque in August 2013.<sup>4</sup> Shortly thereafter, Muslim women started to report being insulted in public space as never before. We do not mean that Islamophobia did not exist before, or that we could not see any sign of it especially since 2001. But how could such a blatant shift happen to be so brutal?

In the first part of this paper, we use the concept of “mute zone” from the social representation theory to advance a theoretical hypothesis based on a first sight analysis. We argue that some elements from an ideological victory of far right narratives invested in the social representation of secularism, that they reveal themselves as a “mute zone” acting in periphery of the theme of secularism, and, accordingly, that they act as a sleeping ideological scheme, here, favoring Islamophobia. In the second part, we pursue the analysis to show how this peripheral scheme appeared within the narrative of different actors and groups supporting the ban on religious conspicuous signs, from the right side to the left side of the political spectrum.

### *PART 1: TOWARDS A FIRST SIGHT HYPOTHESIS*

The peak of Islamophobia in Quebec, resulting in proposal of rights denial and in verbal and physical violence towards Muslims and Muslims’ institutions, can be seen as the

social product of a media and political build up process active since 2005. Our global analysis is the following: Some ideas incidental from European and globalized far-right movements were imported under the theme of “secularism”. The first ideological trend in this importation is neoconservative. It stresses on national identity and national values. Values from which Islam is later depicted as foreign. The neoconservatives did set their agenda at the Parti Québécois (PQ) during future Prime Minister Pauline Marois’s campaign for leadership. Then, a so-called “native informant” helped to increase suspicion on Muslims and to shift the agenda from right to left. Thereafter, a second ideological trend, on the left side, promoted a neocolonial imposition of modern values – values that are also opposed on Islam. To complete the picture, we did observe some far-right narratives and iconography spreading in back-ground, on the internet, and as comments under press articles related to the theme of secularism. Subsequently, various Islamophobic statements from public figures followed, and other acts of Islamophobia were reported, from vandalized mosques to Muslim women insulted on the street.

### *The Growth of Populism*

Since 2005, we observe a populist tone in the media that contaminated politics. In 2005, the neighbor province of Ontario held a debate over the opportunity to set religious court of “arbitrage” over family rights.<sup>5</sup> The same year, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that, under some conditions that renders it harmless, a student could wear a *kirpan* (the Sikh’s religious dagger) at school.<sup>6</sup> From thereon, media started a continuous scrutiny over religious accommodation.

Not long after, newspapers started to report numerous cases of what they saw as unreasonable accommodations. Most of the cases were not juridical in nature, but were goodwill accommodations or contracts: A YMCA tinted its windows to accommodate a Jewish community. A sugar shack authorized a Muslim group to pray on a dancefloor after dinner. People were scandalized to discover that Muslims were authorized to vote with their face veiled, as IDs in Canada do not necessarily show a picture. And we learned that, administratively, Montreal’s police and Quebec’s driving licence board accommodated people refusing to be served by women.

During the summer of 2007, the small town of Herouxville adopted a “code of conduct” spreading stereotypes upon the Muslim population. For instance, it banned public stoning.<sup>7</sup> This event amid others provoked a Public consultation on religious accommodation during 2007 and 2008. During this period, a lot of negative views about Islam and Muslims were naïvely expressed and reported week after week. They were interpreted in the media as revealing an identity “faintness,” begging for a reinforcement of national values.

### *The setting of a neoconservative context*

During this “accommodation crisis,” a neoconservative trend emerged and started reshaping the political landscape through many orchestrated debates, and through which it placed its favored themes and orientations within the media and the public opinion.

First, Mathieu Bock-Côté’s *The Quiet De-Nationalisation*<sup>8</sup> (our translation for all quoted French titles) rehabilitated the theme of identity. It blamed the elites for having resigned national identity in profit of an abstract view of citizenship. This criticism was directed against the so-called “civic nationalism” (or constitutional patriotism) within Quebec’s

movement for State independence, as it aimed to boost it. Released during the accommodation crisis, this book was well-received by the media.

Second, since 2005, a Cultural and Religious Education class had replaced the religion class in schooling. Since 2009, neoconservatives criticize it because its pedagogy replaces counter-terrorism by competences acquisition.<sup>9</sup> But, above all, do we understand learning to be tolerant toward other cultures as a competence is assumed by this group to be in opposition to the transmission of historical content regarding nationalism and national identity?

Third, the ongoing debate upon accommodations suggested that both *Quebec's Bill of Rights* and the *Canadian Bill of Rights*, as well as immigration and diversity management policies, were too permissive on religious rights. As a reminder, Quebec responded to the 1971 Canadian politics of multiculturalism by advancing an alternative view of diversity management called *interculturalism*. This viewpoint recognizes the historical role of French culture and language. However, this model also recognizes the contribution of diverse cultural backgrounds to Quebec's historical frame. Moreover, Quebec's tradition is to accommodate secondary collective rights to primary individual rights, such as religious freedom.

Since 2005, this model of *interculturalism* has been criticized publicly as a form of "multiculturalism" for inverting the idea that minorities and migrants "must adapt" to the cultural of the majority. Another background idea is that Quebec's elites have capitulated over Canadian multiculturalism. A policy that, for many, hides a project of marginalizing the historical contribution of the French people, and their political weight in Canada. Which is the very reason why the Canadian policy of multiculturalism has never been accepted by any major political party in Quebec; and, it may also be the root of a confusion explaining why, in the Canadian context, this type accusation of accepting the terms of multiculturalism silenced Quebec's political class as a whole.

Fourth, Benoît Dubreuil and Philippe Marois's *The Imaginary Medicine*<sup>10</sup> contested the positive economic value of immigration on sceptical theoretical grounds. In fact, Dubreuil's arguments were expressed since 2007.<sup>11</sup> That was also during the accommodation crisis, while Bock-Coté's idea of a de-nationalisation of Quebec by its elites was enjoying success.

Two days after Dubreuil submitted his views on immigration, the group that first submitted the idea of a secularist ban over conspicuous signs announced, "His reflection is among of the most relevant in the context of the whole debate upon Quebec's capacity to welcome immigrants, upon reasonable accommodations, and regarding the next text of our collective "Breaking off with identity resignation."<sup>12</sup>

Since then all political parties have adopted more restrictive, or less ambitious, views on immigration, as the number of immigrants was under a more critical scrutiny from the public and the media.

Yet, this is the context in which the idea of a ban on conspicuous signs within the "State apparatus" was first proposed. It was first proposed in the open editorial just announced by the same group of young people: "Breaking off with identity resignation."<sup>13</sup> We will soon get back to it.

### *Secularism or "New-Secularism?"*

To clarify our theoretical hypothesis, let us recall that since the beginning of the new century, Europe improved an influence of far-right narratives upon mainstream politics. This fact was observed by Jean-Yves Camus who named it an "ideological victory."<sup>14</sup> It consisted in placing two characteristic features within mainstream political narratives: 1) a stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, and 2) an impression or idea of incompatibility of both with

Western societies. *Secularism* is one of the themes that favors an expression of these two features, and, also, of the far right ideological victory.

This has been peculiarly the case in France with the *nouvelle laïcité* (or “new-secularism”) proposed by François Baroin at French UMP center right party in 2003. This idea of a new secularism was presented as a “battlement” against Islam. It was also admitted by Baroin himself that this idea was opposed to fundamental human rights; so it could become the new value of the political right, as the left won’t follow; did he thought, and the Front National (FN) will never support secularism against Christian values<sup>15</sup>. We now know that history decided otherwise.

For the sake of French secularism, we must observe with Jean Baubérot<sup>16</sup> that the means of secularism (separation and neutrality) have turned back against its aims (freedom of religion and equality of treatment). It became a “falsified secularism”. Today, it is only hiding Islamophobia under a “thin wine leaf.”<sup>17</sup>

### *A Theoretical Hypothesis*

Our theoretical hypothesis regarding the spreading of Islamophobia in Quebec is the following: The features of a far-right’s influence on mainstream politics, which Camus<sup>18</sup> identified as 1) a stereotyped negative view of Islam combined with 2) an idea of its incompatibility with the West, constitute what psychosociologists such as Abric call a “mute zone” of the Social Representation (SR), here, of secularism.<sup>19</sup>

A *mute zone* expresses a peripheral scheme of thought part of the SR, but which is sensible to the social normative context. It first reveals when a subgroup of answers positive in the identification of the social representation’s kernel shows slight differences with the average positive answers. In such cases, further method of identification are to be deployed by putting the agents at distance of the normative context, or in situation where they can substitute their identity, or both, so they will more easily express their thoughts. A mute zone could reveal both 1) an unsaid on behalf of the group holding the SR and/or 2) the presence of a particular sub-group. As a peripheral scheme, the mute zone is active on conducts in a way comparable to a “sleeping ideological scheme.”

### *Our (Empirical) Pretention*

Accordingly, our pretention is that this *mute zone* has been banalized through debates over secularism so it became a common place. This could reveal that the features of far-right incidence are now less sensitive to the social normative context. And/Or that a subgroup holding these features did increase.

We must also note that if this peripheral scheme did graft to secularism, changing it into a “new secularism,” it could possibly graft to other themes such as: anti-terrorists law enforcement, immigration policies, or others.

Furthermore, if one thinks that Islamophobia and racism, or even gender biases, are usually sensible to social norms in a way that they tend to express most of the time under certain conditions of distancing or substitution, and in periphery of other themes; then the *mute-zone* identification method could be generalized in Islamophobia studies and race and gender studies. Such a method would help to identify a racialization process, or a process of a gender bias, before it spread and becomes a common place.

Of course, this is only a pretention coherent with our hypothesis and our first sight analysis. An empirical and sociological survey using the methods of SR theory would be needed to confirm or not, or to infirm this pretention.

In the remaining part of this paper, we will nonetheless detail our analysis to see how this hypothesis match the situation observed in Quebec.

## PART 2: DETAILING THE ANALYSIS

Let us now detail our analysis in order to show how our general hypothesis could, at least at first sight, explain Quebec's particular case.

### *Importing new secularism in Quebec (1): the neoconservative side*

The idea of a Charter of Secularism that will ban conspicuous religious signs within the "State apparatus" have been launched at the end of November 2007 with the editorial from a group led by young neoconservatives: *Breaking off with Identity Resignation*.<sup>20</sup>

While promoting secularism, this group reinterpreted the presence of a crucifix over the legislative chamber as having a patrimonial value. This, notwithstanding the fact that it was installed as recently as 1936 in order to symbolize the close alliance between the State and the Catholic Church. Following this "catho-secularist" view, it was to become the secular symbol of an official recognition of a Christian contribution to national identity.

These young people shortly gained a valuable influence on PQ's new leader Pauline Marois. PQ later won the 2012 elections, but with only a relative majority of seats. They developed the idea that social cohesion is, and must be, supported by a commitment to national values and a strong sense of identity. Of course, once this has been established, the idea that some cultural or religious practices are incompatible with national values and identity shows up rapidly. And, some further asked migrants to respect "cultural codes." As activist and former PQ's candidate Tania Longpré suggested, some categories of migrants are more receptive than others to these codes<sup>21</sup>.

### *Importing new secularism in Quebec (2): a native informant*

On the center of the picture must figure what is usually called a "native informant". Namely Djemila Benhabib, an author which became a media icon since her first book: *My Life Against Coran* (a wordplay with "against the tide"<sup>22</sup>). A book followed shortly by her second: *Allah's Soldiers Assaulting the West*<sup>23</sup>. The last title being quite explicit on the content.

Ms. Benhabib fled Algeria and presented herself as a secular feminist opposing Islamist fundamentalism. Through her testimony and her generalisations from the Iranian and Algerian cases, she spread the idea of a fifth column of Islam threatening Western democracies. For her, the wearing of a headscarf is a political message and shows an objective sign of a growing political opposition to modern values. Following, new religious practises from second generation Muslims are taken to be political statements in favor of totalitarian theocracy.

Ms Benhabib was candidate for the PQ in 2012 and 2014.

*Importing new secularism in Quebec (3): neoconservatism in a progressive phrasing*

On the left side of the political spectrum, a small group promoting secularism for decades, named the *Mouvement Laïque du Québec* (Quebec's Secular Movement), suddenly gained in importance. They capitalized on the accommodation debate to ask for a legislation on secularism.

Around 2010, this group extended in the *Intellectuals for Secularism*<sup>24</sup>, with the participation of the prominent sociologist Guy Rocher – a former student of Talcott Parsons and an actor of the State's modernisation during Quebec's "Quiet Revolution" of the '60s. The group immediately supported the idea to ban religious signs for State employees.

These "intellectuals" advanced what they saw as progressive motives. Namely, the promotion of equality between genders; the protection of the freedom of consciousness of those exposed to religious signs (although this is a very strange acceptance of freedom of consciousness); the protection of the secular appearance of public space; and, ultimately, the safeguarding of Quebec's social cohesion and national unity. In documents deposited to National Assembly<sup>25</sup>, this movement argued that the values of people wearing religious signs are incompatible with Quebec's national values. Such an incompatibility now being presented as a threat to social cohesion and national unity.

This group of "leftist" intellectuals also debated with the neoconservatives on the presence of the crucifix over the legislative chamber. So the projected image was that the political left could also be in favor of the ban itself. And that the only question remaining in debate was whether the crucifix was to be kept over the National Assembly. If the PQ wanted to manufacture consent, this would have been its best try.

*(Pre-)Campaigning on new secularism*

As the debate was raging between "pluralists" and "neoconservatives" on multiculturalism and the new cursus of cultural and religious education, the idea of a ban on religious signs came back on the front scene. Two neoconservatives, Rousseau and Courtois<sup>26</sup>, actualised the idea of banning conspicuous signs. Two weeks later, Beauchemin and Beaudoin,<sup>27</sup> respectively a Member of Parliament for PQ, and a political adviser to become future vice-minister in Marois' government (2012-2014), supported this same idea. One month later, followed the *Intellectuals for Secularism*.<sup>28</sup> From thereon, PQ's project of a ban could hope to gain support from right to left.

*The "Charter of Secularism" as a wedge-issue*

The PQ was elected on April the 7<sup>th</sup> 2012. The "Charter of Secularism," as it was commonly called, was supposed to be released at spring, but was postponed to the fall. Some elements flood in the press on August 2013. It was officially presented on October 13<sup>th</sup>. A week later, pollsters showed support from "close minded secularists" (21 %) and "native Catholics" (29%) versus the opposition of "open secularists" (21%) and "tolerant believers" (29%).<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, the ban was widely opposed as discriminatory in the academic and juridical circles. Some marches against and others in favor of the project were organized during the fall. A public audition started in January 2014. It was dismiss as the "Charter of Secularism" did serve as a wedge issue for the March 2014 elections – in which Quebec's Liberals Party (PLQ) won a majority of seats.

*Campaigning on new secularism*

During the elections, the campaign on New Secularism showed stereotyped views of Muslims. For instance, among politicians, the Prime Minister Pauline Marois asserted that wearing a headscarf is an unequivocal symbol of women's patriarchal submission to men.<sup>30</sup> The Minister responsible for democratic institutions Bernard Drainville credited the idea of an Islamisation of Quebec during a radio interview.<sup>31</sup> He repeatedly said that his project of a ban was a necessary battlement against integrism.<sup>32</sup>

Among public figures, the former TV animator Janette Bertrand, in support of the ban, asserted that women wearing headscarf were being manipulated. And that she was not sure to trust a nurse wearing one.<sup>33</sup> She came back later saying that when she sees Muslim people in her building's swimming pool, she is afraid that she will soon be prevented from perform her Aqua-gym.<sup>34</sup> The realizator Denise Filiatrault declared that women wearing headscarf are insane.<sup>35</sup> The former president of *Quebec's Women Federation* declared to change line in order to avoid being served by a women wearing a headscarf.<sup>36</sup>

Amid lesser political figures, we heard that Islam was a "religion of violence,"<sup>37</sup> that "elites promote islamisation of the West"<sup>38</sup>, and that "people not agreeing can go back in their country."<sup>39</sup>

Among PQ candidates, we have to mention Louise Mailloux who did spread racist rumors about allal/cosher taxes financing wars around the Globe;<sup>40</sup> and Jean Carrière, a self-declared fan of the Front National's leader Marine Le Pen, who resigned after a post was found on his social media that showed a photograph of a naked woman from behind with the caption saying F\*\*\* Islam was found on his social media.<sup>41</sup> Note that this also illustrates the presence and pregnancy of cyber-hate acting in background of the political debate.

*The Islamophobic Incidence of banalized far-right narratives*

Such a set of declaration shows stereotypes favoring the idea of an incompatibility between Muslim population and the West. We see this as characteristic of a long-distance incidence of far-right narratives grafted to secularism before its importation to Quebec. *We have theorised the path leading to such a situation as a process of "banalisation" of a peripheral scheme grafted to the SR of secularism.* This is certainly also a process of 'racialization' of Muslim people. A process defined by the fact that it leads to Islamophobia; namely, to identifying acts of rejections towards people or institutions for the motive of their allege belonging to Islam.

Such a banalisation brings an atmosphere, an *Umwelt*, which seems to us a consistent development participating in the same trend. During the political debate over the PQ's Charter of Secularism, a rise of verbal and physical violence was noticed by the Grouping of Quebec's Women Centers, talking about tens of cases.<sup>42</sup> According to a Markethnik survey of October 2013, 18% of Muslims declared that a family member have been victim of Islamophobia; 18.5% that they have been direct witnesses of such an act; and 25.6% declared that they have been victims themselves.<sup>43</sup> In 2014, fourteen mosques or institutions related to Muslims have been vandalized. In Saguenay the perpetrators left a Map of France with presumed Islamised zones.<sup>44</sup> This suggests an emulation of French identity movements such as the *Bloc Identitaire*. In an Allal shop attacked in Sherbrooke in February 2014, "Yes to Charter" leaflets were found. Here, the link with the PQ's political project is obvious.<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

What to conclude from Quebec's case? Without being too reductive, Quebec could be seen as a microcosm that offered a repetition of the French debates on a smaller scale. This is not because language offers a similarity of "minds," but because it offers some opportunities of communication. Unsurprisingly, we observed in Quebec some rationales similar to those already advanced in France. From Finkelkraut's criticism of a multicultural society,<sup>46</sup> to Peña-Ruiz's<sup>47</sup> fear of a "war of gods", the last fear being rephrased by Rocher<sup>48</sup> in one of a rupture of "religious peace".

Besides, we could observe the typical role of a so-called "native informant" to convey stereotypes. We could see how solicitation of modern values helps to convey them on its left side. We saw politics gradually align themselves to the media's populist tone. And, we saw that acts of vandalism and verbal offense peaked at the time of the political debate. This sadly corroborates what has already been observed elsewhere in the literature. As our hypothesis may also serve to explain some Islamophobic processes occurred in France or in Belgium around the same theme of enforcing secularism.

Nonetheless, the repetition of these patterns intimated us to systematize the ongoing process of Muslims' racialization. The psychosocial theory of SR and its notion of *mute zone* were ancillary in this systematization. The racialization process we observed was one by which some stereotypes – coming from the far right's narratives and conveying the idea of an incompatibility between Muslims' practices, and western society – act as a "sleeping ideological scheme," active in periphery of the debate over secularism. An ideological scheme which led to a rise of measurable acts of Islamophobia.

We did not have space to show how further considerations from SR theory could help to detail the phases of the stereotypes' "anchoring" process in a society. Nor to insist on how the appeal to known themes, such as the national or the modern values, is crucial to the peripheral scheme's banalization within different groups. However, if our analysis is right, further empirical research may confirm not only the relevance of our general hypothesis, but also confirm the ongoing relevance of the method of *mute zone* identification for the study of racialization processes. If not, also for the study of gender bias processes.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This paper follows the 6<sup>th</sup> *Annual Conference on Islamophobia Studies*, held by the Center for Race and Gender on April 21-23 2015 at the University of California, Berkeley. We would like to thank Pr. Josiane Boulad-Ayoub for having encouraged us to pursue our work on Islamophobia at the Chaire UNESCO-UQAM sur les fondements philosophiques de la justice et de la démocratie, as well as UQAM's Philosophy department for its financial support.

<sup>2</sup> As a reminder: Quebec is a Province of Canada of 8,1 million of population and of 1 356 547,02 km<sup>2</sup>. The official language is French, with an English speaking minority (8-10%). The legislative Chamber is now formed by Parti Liberal du Québec (PLQ), 70 seats; Parti Québécois, 32 seats; Coalition Avenir Quebec, 20 seats; Québec Solidaire, 3 seats.

<sup>3</sup> Drainville, B. (2013). *Projet de loi n°60 : Charte affirmant les valeurs de laïcité et de neutralité religieuse de l'État ainsi que d'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes et encadrant les demandes d'accommodement*. Québec: Ministre responsable des Institutions démocratiques et de la Participation citoyenne. Accessed at <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/travaux-parlementaires/projets-loi/projet-loi-60-40-1.html>

<sup>4</sup> Presse Canadienne. (2013a, Septembre 1<sup>st</sup> 2013). Actes de vandalisme sur une mosquée de Saguenay, *La Presse*. Accessed at <http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/201309/01/01-4685248-actes-de-vandalisme-sur-une-mosquee-de-saguenay.php>

<sup>5</sup> Jézéquel, M. (2005). Le tribunal d'arbitrage islamique devrait être autorisé. *Journal du Bâton*, 37(3)

<sup>6</sup> Canada, Supreme Court (2006, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006), *Mullani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*. 2006 CSC 6

<sup>7</sup> Hérouxville (2007, August 14<sup>th</sup> 2007) *Normes de vie*. City of Hérouxville

<sup>8</sup> Bock-Côté, M. (2007). *La dénationalisation tranquille*. Montreal: Boréal

<sup>9</sup> Quéirin, J. (2009). Le cours Éthique et culture religieuse : transmission des connaissances ou endoctrinement ? (pp. 29): Institut de recherche du Québec

<sup>10</sup> Dubreuil, B., & Marois, G. (2011). *Le remède imaginaire. Pourquoi l'immigration ne sauvera pas le Québec*. Montréal: Boréal

<sup>11</sup> Dubreuil, B. (2007, August 17<sup>th</sup> 2007). Impact économique de l'immigration. Pour un débat éclairé, *Le Devoir*. Accessed at : <http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/153614/impact-economique-de-l-immigration-pour-un-debat-eclairé>

<sup>12</sup> Les 3 travaux. (2007, August 19<sup>th</sup> 2007). Impact économique de l'immigration. Pour un débat éclairé. *Les trois travaux*. Accessed at : <http://les3travaux.blogspot.ca/2007/08/impact-economique-de-l-immigration-pour.html>. Our translation of : « Sa réflexion est des plus pertinents, dans le cadre de tous le débat sur la capacité d'accueil du Québec, des accommodements raisonnables et en vue du prochain texte qui sera publié par notre collectif "Rompre avec la démission identitaire". »

<sup>13</sup> Aguire et alii. (2007, Septembre 27<sup>th</sup> 2007). Rompre avec la démission identitaire, *Le Devoir*. Accessed at <http://www.ledevoir.com/non-classe/158401/rompre-avec-la-demission-identitaire>

<sup>14</sup> Camus, J.-Y. (2005). Étude sur l'utilisation d'éléments racistes, antisémites et xénophobes dans le discours politique. (pp. 19-52). In : *L'utilisation d'éléments racistes, antisémites et xénophobes dans le discours politique. Réunion de haut niveau à l'occasion de la Journée internationale pour l'élimination de la discrimination raciale. Paris, le 21 mars 2005*. Paris: ECRI (Commission européenne contre le racisme et l'intolérance). (English : Camus, J.-Y. (2005). Study on the use of racist, antisemitic and xenophobic elements in political discourse. (pp. 17-48). In: *The use of racist, antisemitic and xenophobic elements in political discourse. High-level panel meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Paris, March 21<sup>st</sup> 2005*. Paris : ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance)

<sup>15</sup> See Baubérot, J. (2012). *La laïcité falsifiée*. Paris: La découverte; also Baubérot, J. (2013b). La porte et la laïcité. *Médiapart.fr*. [Blog]. Accessed at <http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/jean-bauberot/210313/la-porte-et-la-laicite>

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*, 2012

<sup>17</sup> Our free translation of Baubérot quoted in Gabriel, O. (2013). Jean Baubérot: «La laïcité devient un cache-sexe pour dissimuler l'islamophobie». *20mn.fr*. Accessed at <http://www.20minutes.fr/societe/1207497-20130806-jean-bauberot-la-laicite-devient-cache-sexe-dissimuler-lislamophobie>

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 31, 51

<sup>19</sup> Abric, J.-C. (2003). La recherche du noyau central et de la zone muette des représentations sociales. In J.-C. Abric (Ed.), *Méthode d'étude des représentations sociales* (pp. 59-80). Ramonville-Saint-Agne: Érès.

<sup>20</sup> Aguire et alii, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> For instance: ... « it is not because we share the same language that we are alike. Many French speaking that we are welcoming here are from culture totally different than our own. Of course, we share the same language, but our mores and our traditions may be quite different. There are reasons to question ourselves about the integration to our society of migrants already speaking our language. » (Our free translation.) In : Longpré, T. (2013, April 17<sup>th</sup> 2013). Québec cherche Québécois. Entretien avec Tania Longpré. *Génération Nationale* (Blog). Accessed at <http://generation-nationale.org/2013/04/quebec-cherche-quebecois-entretien-avec-tania-longpre/>

<sup>22</sup> Benhabib, D. (2010). *Ma vie à contre-coran*. Montreal: VLB

<sup>23</sup> Benhabib, D. (2011). *Les soldats d'Allah à l'assaut de l'Occident*. Montreal: VLB

<sup>24</sup> Intellectuels pour la laïcité. (2010, March 16<sup>th</sup> 2010). Pour un Québec laïque et pluraliste, *Le Devoir*. Accessed at <http://www.ledevoir.com/societe/actualites-en-societe/285021/declaration-des-intellectuels-pour-la-laicite-pour-un-quebec-laïque-et-pluraliste>

<sup>25</sup> Intellectuels pour la laïcité. (2010b). *La laïcité: Une valeur fondatrice essentielle de la société québécoise*. Mémoire présenté à la Commission des institutions. Consultation générale. Projet de loi no 94. Loi modifiant la Charte des droits et libertés de la personne du Québec. Loi établissant les balises encadrant les demandes d'accommodement dans l'Administration gouvernementale et dans certains établissements, pp. 20; Rocher, G. (2013). *Mémoire présenté à la Commission Parlementaire sur le projet de loi 60 par Guy Rocher Professeur émérite de sociologie Université de Montréal*. Décembre 2013, pp. 6, 8

<sup>26</sup> Rousseau, G., & Courtois, C.-P. (2010, January 25<sup>th</sup> 2010). Intégration et laïcité. D'autres voies sont possibles, *Le Devoir*. Accessed at <http://www.ledevoir.com/societe/ethique-et-religion/281722/integration-et-laicite-d-autres-voies-sont-possibles>

<sup>27</sup> Beauchemin, J., & Beaudoin, L. (2010, February 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 2010). Le pluralisme comme incantation, *Le Devoir*, p. C5. Accessed at <http://www.ledevoir.com/societe/actualites-en-societe/283016/le-pluralisme-comme-incantation>

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.*, 2010

<sup>29</sup> Dubuc, A. (2013, Septembre 20<sup>th</sup> 2013). Les nouveaux amis de Mme Marois, *La Presse*. Accessed at <http://www.lapresse.ca/debats/chroniques/alain-dubuc/201309/19/01-4691187-les-nouveaux-amis-de-mme-marois.php>

<sup>30</sup> Dutrisac, R. (2013, Septembre 6<sup>th</sup> 2013). Pauline Marois au Devoir - L'étapisme pour la Charte des valeurs, *Le Devoir*. Accessed at <http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/386822/pauline-marois-au-devoir-l-etapisme-pour-la-charte-des-valeurs>

<sup>31</sup> Brazeau, P. (Animator) & J. Beauchamp (Réalisateur). (2013, Septembre 12<sup>th</sup> 2013). Pas de midi sans info. In Ici Radio-Canada (Producer). Montréal: Radio-Canada. Accessed at [http://ici.radio-canada.ca/emissions/pas\\_de\\_midi\\_sans\\_info/2013-2014/archives.asp?date=2013-09-12](http://ici.radio-canada.ca/emissions/pas_de_midi_sans_info/2013-2014/archives.asp?date=2013-09-12)

<sup>32</sup> Journet, P. (2014, January 11<sup>th</sup> 2014). Charte de la laïcité: «Indispensable» contre l'intégrisme, *La Presse*. Accessed at <http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/politique/politique-quebecoise/201401/10/01-4727669-charte-de-la-laicite-indispensable-contre-lintegrisme.php>

<sup>33</sup> Gagnon, K. (2013, Octobre 15<sup>th</sup> 2013). Les femmes voilées sont «manipulées», dit Janette Bertrand, *La Presse*. Accessed at <http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/201310/15/01-4699931-les-femmes-voilees-sont-manipulees-dit-janette-bertrand.php>

- <sup>34</sup> Chouinard, T. (2014, March 30<sup>th</sup> 2014). Charte : « Il y a un danger », dit Janette Bertrand. *La presse*. Accessed at <http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/elections-quebec-2014/201403/30/01-4752740-charte-il-y-a-un-danger-dit-janette-bertrand.php>
- <sup>35</sup> Gagnon, *op. cit.*, 2013
- <sup>36</sup> Buzzetti, H. (2013, Septembre 28<sup>th</sup> 2013). Voile islamique - Vivian Barbot se dissocie de la FFQ, qu'elle a dirigée, *Le Devoir*. Accessed at <http://www.ledevoir.com/politique/canada/388686/vivian-barbot-se-dissocie-de-la-ffq-qu-elle-a-dirigee>
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- <sup>38</sup> Ravary, L. (2014, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2014). Islamisée à mon insu ?, *Journal de Montréal*. Accessed at [http://blogs.journaldemontreal.com/liseravary/societe/islamisee-a-mon-insu/#.Us6\\_28b1j9s.facebook](http://blogs.journaldemontreal.com/liseravary/societe/islamisee-a-mon-insu/#.Us6_28b1j9s.facebook)
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- <sup>46</sup> For instance, see Finkelkraut (1989). *La défaite de la pensée*. Paris : Gallimard, Collection Blanche
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- <sup>48</sup> *Op. cit.*, 2013, p. 8

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# ***Muslims in Canada: Collective Identities, Attitudes of Otherment and Canadian Muslim Perspectives on Radicalism***

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## ***Muslims in Canada: Collective Identities, Attitudes of Otherment and Canadian Muslim Perspectives on Radicalism***

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper is based on a larger Master of Arts thesis that explores the collective identity of Muslims in Canada, and how their experiences as part of a religious minority have shaped their collective identity. It also explores attitudes of *otherment*, out-group suspicion, and how disenfranchisement among certain individuals may result in a distortion of the Islamic religion. For the purposes of this paper the following will be explored: perceptions of the efforts of the Canadian state to integrate Muslims, the existence of Islamophobia among Canadians in general, and the potential disenfranchisement and vulnerability of Muslim youth to radicalization. The collaborative role that Muslims must take alongside agents of the Canadian state (i.e., Canadian police forces) in order to prevent radicalism is also examined. The research relies primarily on in-depth interviews with five individual Muslims of various ages and backgrounds who were born in Canada as second-generation immigrants and have become Canadian citizens. Their opinions on the role of the Muslim community in preventing radicalism in the Canadian context are explored and contextualized.

### **CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TERMS**

Within interdisciplinary research, it is important to conceptualize and define terms early on so that the readership can have a full understanding of the overall analysis and the arguments being made.

The following phrases and words are briefly defined to provide context, and an understanding of the main terms used in this study.

**Islamism-** (*Islamists* being those espousing Islamism) will be defined as a set of radical, extreme, and violent beliefs resulting from a distortion of the mainstream Islamic religion, not to be confused with Islam; Islam and Islamism are regarded as two different entities, which are absolutely *not* to be confused with each other. It is assumed for the purposes of this research that *Islam* and *Islamism* are distinct entities from which the latter must emerge from among the former (there is a process through which an individual becomes radicalized).

**Islamic-**An adjective used to describe those individuals who identify with, or practice a mainstream and normative version of any sect (Sunni, Shii, Druze, Ismaili, etc.) of the religion commonly known as Islam.

## INTRODUCTION

*Islamophobia* as an academic discourse is in its infancy, and has largely sprouted as a result of attitudes that have emerged in the post 9/11 context. Although its prevalence is difficult to measure, Islamophobia seems most widespread in Europe and the United States.<sup>1</sup> Thus far, Islamophobia does not appear to be as prevalent in Canada as in other Western countries. For example, Dr. Kymlicka, recruited by the Government of Canada in 2010 to compile a report on the successes and failures of Canadian Multiculturalism, stated that “Compared to most other countries, (Europe in this case) the mainstream media in Canada have largely avoided engaging in minority or immigrant bashing.”<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon of Islamophobia appears to be (in the views of the informants interviewed in the pursuit of this research) particularly salient in the United States, but due to the profound and far-reaching effects of the US media in other countries, and because of terrorist attacks that have occurred in Europe and Australia, Islamophobia exists to varying degrees in other countries outside of the US.<sup>3</sup> This includes its close ally and neighbor to the north with whom it shares deep economic and cultural ties and remarkable similarities, Canada. Canada and the US share a long, undefended border, a similar history, as well as close economic, political, and cultural similarities<sup>4</sup>. They benefit mutually from a relationship unique between any two countries on earth, and thus, Canadians are profoundly influenced by events unfolding in the United States. There are, however, nuanced differences between Canadians and people in the US in their worldviews, their national identity, their approach to the potent issues of national security, and their reactions to crises.<sup>5</sup>

The research revealed the reality that Islamophobia is present in Canada, yet there may be differences in its prevalence and manifestations when it is compared to the US context. This research explores: the phenomenon of Islamophobia, how it has shaped the perceptions of Muslims in Canada toward their non-Islamic counterparts, its impact in disenfranchising Muslims, the factors that may make a disenfranchised individual susceptible to radicalism, and finally, how Muslims in Canada perceive their own role in preventing radicalism.

*Context: Collective Identities And Attitudes Of Otherment In Canada*

Canada, being near the US, has been influenced by the post 9/11 hysteria,<sup>6</sup> as well as by being an extremely diverse country, with Muslims being the fastest growing religious minority in the nation.<sup>7</sup> Although an open and multi-cultural society,<sup>8</sup> Canada has faced issues regarding the integration of Muslims into Society, and Muslims are often a focal point<sup>9</sup> for those who contest the intake of new immigrants to Canada and the failure of those immigrants to integrate.<sup>10</sup> This research took place at a time when Canada was recovering from its first terrorist attack of an Islamist motivation, and resulted in the murder of Corporal Nathan Cirillo in October 2014 on Parliament Hill, as he stood guard over a national monument.<sup>11</sup>

Canada’s national security laws have been strengthened since this attack,<sup>12</sup> and due to its foreign policies being influenced primarily by its alliance with the United States, many fear that Canada may be increasingly targeted by those inspired by the Islamist narrative,<sup>13</sup> and those who are inspired by anti-Western sentiment that is directed at the United States and its allies, including Canada.

This is partially what has inspired the implementation of new anti-terrorist legislation (which includes the right of elected officials to strip an individual of his/her Canadian

citizenship exogenous of the judicial system)<sup>14</sup> which has been criticized by the Canadian Bar association<sup>15</sup> as well as the UN office of the High Commission of Human rights as being unconstitutional and a threat to the Human Rights<sup>4</sup> of Canadians. This occurred in the aftermath of this attack and is indicative of the effect of this terrorist attack on Muslim and non-Muslim relations in Canada, as well as the growing prevalence of Islamophobia in a country so well regarded for its openness and success in multiculturalism.<sup>2</sup>

Within the context of Multiculturalism, Islamophobia and out-group suspicion, one must examine the current state of affairs with an awareness of the<sup>16</sup> presence of collective identities in Canada, and how these relate to perceptions of the *other*.<sup>17</sup> Identity conflict is also often characterized by group identification against an *other*, a phenomenon of “otherment.”<sup>18</sup> Buber identifies *otherment* as the progression of objectification and dehumanizing that enables the other to be viewed as an “it” rather than as a “thou.”<sup>19</sup> *Otherment* as understood by Buber is also echoed in the discourse of Orientalism, and so this research aligns with the paradigm of *otherment* and objectification existent in the discourse of Orientalism (and simultaneously Occidentalism), within the framework defined by Edward Said.<sup>20</sup>

This phenomenon of *othering*, if further exacerbated by other circumstances, such as religious differences, economic inequality, territorial disputes, and, if it is accompanied by non-compromising identities, collective victim identity, exclusivity, and adversarial identities, can result in the manifestation of identity conflicts.<sup>21</sup> Group identities can be triggers in identity conflicts when people view one group identity as more important, and as incompatible with another identity they espouse. Identity conflict seems a prevalent issue in defining the collective identity with which one aligns oneself, particularly when one collective identity being espoused (i.e., being a Canadian) is seen as incompatible with another identity, (i.e., being a Muslim). Such conflicts related to collective identities seem particularly relevant when considering the changes that have been made by Canada’s Government under the Conservative leadership of the past ten years, which many view to be “Americanizing” Canada.<sup>22</sup> This is also relevant, as Canada, despite all of its efforts to integrate multiculturalism, is in the very infancy stage of defining religious freedoms within a society that aims to be secular. Kymlicka asserts, “The place of religious diversity within multiculturalism has not yet been adequately debated or explored.”<sup>23</sup> This is an issue more likely to rise to the surface as Canada’s religious minorities continue to grow.<sup>24</sup>

### INFORMANTS AND SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Within the context of a terrorist attack on Parliament Hill, the passing of new legislation granting increased powers to Canada’s intelligence service in surveillance, as well as the empowering of the minister of immigration to strip an individual of their Canadian citizenship<sup>7</sup>, five interviews on the subject were conducted. More than 100 persons were invited to participate in this study, of which only five agreed. This, combined with the fact that the researcher has a name that is unlikely to be assumed as being the name of a Muslim, reveals something significant about collective identity and out-group suspicion among Muslims in Canada. Their experiences with Islamophobia, and a feeling of being *othered* has perhaps resulted in a similar, reactive phenomenon of out-group suspicion and a perception of *otherment*, to some degree.

The informants consisted of two Shii Muslims and three Sunni Muslims, of which two were males and three were females ranging in age from 21-47 years of age. Among the five informants, four reside in the lower Mainland Vancouver area, and one resides in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). All subjects are Canadian citizens. Illustrated within the

paragraphs below is the demographic data of the informants in as much detail as confidentiality will allow according to the arrangement made between the researcher and the University ethics protocols regarding research on humans, and also based on conversations with informants. The informants described in the following paragraphs will henceforth be referred to as they appear in the section below: *Informant, A, B, C, D, E*. These were in-depth interviews, and informants were each interviewed for at least one hour. Their ethnic backgrounds ranged from being of Pakistani, Ethiopian, and Fijian origins, as well as two participants being of Indian/Ugandan origin (there was a large Indian community in East Africa, but those residing in Uganda were expelled by the dictator, Idi Amin, in the 1970s).

*Informant A:*

Informant A was 38 years old at the time that he was interviewed. He grew up in Canada. He showed very strong political interests and is of the Sunni Islamic sect.

*Informant B:*

Informant B is a Shii male who was 47 years old at the time that he was interviewed. He has lived in Canada since mid-childhood.

*Informant C:*

Informant C is a Sunni female who was 21 years old at the time she was interviewed. She grew up in Canada.

*Informant D:*

Informant D is a Sunni female who was 33 years old at the time she was interviewed. She grew up in Canada.

*Informant E:*

Informant E is a Shii female who was 25 years old at the time she was interviewed. She has resided in Canada since mid-childhood.

Although there were only five informants, they showed sufficient diversity to make at least some general, baseline conclusions about Muslims and their experience as a minority group in Canada. There were similarities and differences among informants, and there appeared to be differences in their level of engagement with their own community and with Canadian society at large (i.e., whether they appeared to be politically inclined). Thus, they approached the subject from five very distinct and unique perspectives and each offered a valuable insight.

Perhaps the starkest difference of opinion was between Informant A and Informant E. Besides the age difference and being of different sects, (Sunni and Shii respectively) Informant A felt strongly that all Muslim women were obligated to practice the tradition of hijab and Informant E felt otherwise. Informants A and E showed the starkest differences of opinions among all informants, but there were varying levels of agreement among all informants. Nonetheless, despite these vast differences, both informants considered themselves to be, nonetheless, practicing Muslims. There were very different levels of political awareness expressed among informants about how politics in Canada had an impact on Muslims. For example informants A and C displayed a much higher level of engagement with Canadian politics than the other informants, yet they disagreed on the extent to which politics influenced the lives of Muslims. It should also be noted that all informants showed a

basic cognizance of politics in Canada; where they vastly differed was how much they initiated bringing this element into the conversation.

Informants shared their experiences of living in the Vancouver and Toronto areas, and one informant, who grew up in Edmonton after having lived in Quebec for several years, was able to comment on living in those areas. They all had different understandings of their religion, yet all displayed an interpretation that is normative and not of an Islamist nature.

When considering the conclusions taken from the interviews, it is important to remember that this study is not definitive, and is only an exploratory probe into a complex subject. This research is not intended to be, and should not be, interpreted as, explanatory.

### *Unanimous Opinions Among Informants*

Respondents were unanimous in their largely positive sentiments about Canada, and expressed gratitude for the advantages afforded to them by being Canadian. There were vast differences among informants in their perceptions of the level to which Islamophobia is a concern, but it was their unanimous opinion that it does exist, and that it has regional implications (some areas are more welcoming than others, and Quebec was perceived to be the most unwelcoming). A very significant finding was that, even when the question was not directly presented, *all* informants felt that the media played a very strong role in propagating Islamophobic stereotypes. One informant actually opened the interview by expressing concern about the impact of 9/11 on Muslims' experience in Canada. Informants were similarly unanimous in their opinions that women who wear the hijab have a more difficult time living in Canada, being more likely to experience Islamophobia. There was a unanimous opinion among informants that fear of losing their Muslim identity (to widely varying degrees) is an existing concern among many of Canada's Muslims, but that this has generational and inter-cultural dimensions. An interesting unanimous opinion among informants was their extremely positive perception of Canada's police force. It is significant that informants viewed a distinction between Canada's police force and its spying agency.

### *Differences Of Opinion*

Informants all agreed that Canada was more welcoming than not, but widely disagreed on the extent to which Canada is welcoming. There was disagreement on whether or not being a Canadian can be incompatible with being a Muslim. This had largely to do with Canada's foreign policies, which were seen to be harmful to the global Muslim community, or perceived as too "Americanized." Informants did not all agree that education would prevent Islamophobia and out-group suspicion. The informants also did not all agree that Islamophobia would be more likely to exist in rural rather than urban areas.

### *Anomalies*

Informant C was the only informant to bring up issues of class in relation to being welcomed in Canada. Informant A is the only person who gave a prescriptive answer to the Question "Do Muslims feel more solidarity with Muslim Canadians or non-Muslim Canadians?" in stating that they "should" feel solidarity with Muslims. Informant A also did not believe that education about Islam would be universally effective in combatting Islamophobia, as he believed that some individuals had fixed their opinions before considering the facts. He stated that:

*There are a lot of people that are very educated, but they're extremely biased when it comes to certain things. Everyone has their (sic) own biases, and for some people that bias is something to do with a race, ethnicity, or a religion. And at no point are they willing to back off on that. So, even though they are aware, even with all the education, there is a certain kind of an ignorance that blankets in certain minds.*

### THEMES

Media perpetuating Islamophobia, especially after 9/11, was a significant theme. Canada blindly following US foreign policies and not taking its own stance, was thematic. Praise for the heroic efforts of Canada's Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) force was a strong theme. Canada's openness to alcohol consumption, dating, and "the hyper-sexualization" of Canadian society was commonly seen as being an issue that contributed to identity conflict among Muslim youth. The opinion that fearing a loss of religious identity is more common among immigrants and the older generation was similarly thematic. Unfavorable attitudes about the current (Conservative) government were a theme, as well as appreciation for Canada's democratic and peaceful values.

Sadness and disappointment regarding Canada's lack of assistance to Muslim civilians in Syria and Palestine, whose suffering is due to the protracted conflict in those areas, was very salient. Disdain for extremist elements of Islam and insistence that this is not the real interpretation of the religion was very strongly emphasized. The idea that misinformation about Islam was a contributing factor to Islamophobia was thematic among informants. The idea that Muslims needed to be involved in combating extremist elements within Islam was similarly discussed. The opinion that identity conflict can seriously impact youth, especially if they are experiencing mental health issues, was a theme. The opinion that most Canadians are welcoming, open-minded, and not prejudiced against Muslims was normative. There was a strong perception among informants that Islamophobia is much more of a concern in the United States than Canada, and several expressed gratitude about living in Canada rather than the US; they felt they were safer and much more accepted in Canada than they would be in the US.

### *Canada And Islamophobia: Prevalence And Perceived Causes*

Informants strongly felt that the media, as well as the extremist actions of certain misguided individuals, was to blame for the existence of Islamophobia. They felt that misinformation about Islam was a factor in influencing people to develop Islamophobic views, and also that the media created a perception that radicalism in Islam is the norm rather than the exception.

The older informants discussed the shift they felt in people's perceptions of them after 9/11 in more detail than their younger counterparts, and reported a substantial difference in how they felt others responded to them after 9/11. When asked how they thought the terrorist attack in Ottawa would influence Islamophobic attitudes, they expressed concern, and they felt it was a strong possibility that Islamophobia would become more prevalent. Informants perceived, in a general sense that Islamophobia seems to be becoming even more widespread.

This perception is confirmed according to an Angus Reid Poll revealing that 46% of Canadians held a negative view of Muslims in 2009, rising to 54% in 2013.<sup>25</sup> This is even

more prevalent in Quebec (corresponding to the views of informants that Quebec is a more intolerant region), where 69% of people have a negative view of Islam. In 2013, 32% of Canadian respondents to a study (outside of Quebec) stated that it would be unacceptable for their sons or daughters to marry a Muslim, and this number had risen since 2009. “Rejection of the idea of a child marrying into any of the other religions (Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or Sikhism) was considerably lower.”<sup>26</sup> Views about the other religions surveyed (Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Sikhism) have remained more or less constant between 2009-2013. It is also reported that online hate speech is being used to propagate Islamophobia in Canada by far-right extremist groups. This is despite<sup>27</sup> Section 319 of the Criminal Code of Canada<sup>28</sup> which “forbids the incitement of hatred against ‘any section of the public distinguished by color, race, religion, ethnic origin or sexual orientation.’”<sup>29</sup> There are thousands of Canadian members of the “Anti-Islam Alliance” according to the group’s Facebook page, which, as of February 2015, indicates nearly 30,000 members worldwide.

Interestingly, a Gallup poll discovered that Canadians were more likely to have negative views of Muslims (agreeing with the statement “they do not respect our society”) than Europeans, but less likely to have negative views of Muslims than people in the United States.<sup>30</sup> However, informants felt largely welcomed, and some had not directly experienced instances of Islamophobia. This suggests that Islamophobia in Canada may be much more salient in Canadian society than it actually appears to be, and that just because Canadians are not explicitly acting on Islamophobic attitudes, does not mean that they do not harbor them privately. Acceptance of diversity, pluralism, and multiculturalism are values that are emphasized as being pillars of Canadian society,<sup>31</sup> and, as such, Canadians may find themselves very hesitant to express views that could be perceived as contrary to those values because of a fear of social judgement. This may contrast with US discourse, as rather than a cultural mosaic, the US, conversely, is often described as a “melting pot.”<sup>32</sup> The United States’ tumultuous history, with its civil war, civil rights movement, its experiences of being attacked in the Second World War<sup>33</sup> as well as during 9/11<sup>34</sup> have also shaped the US national identity in distinct ways. The tremendous military spending of the United States and its allowance of individuals to purchase firearms are also indicative of a desire to protect and defend an individual’s own, as well as the collective, “American”<sup>35</sup> identity. Conversely, Canadians, living in a different context and with a less challenging history may not feel the same level of freedom in openly expressing their nationalist views, especially if they involve a threat of being perceived as intolerant. An implication of this finding may be that, although people in the US may be more likely to express Islamophobic attitudes (based on the perceptions of informants that people in the US are more openly hostile and less welcoming), Canadians may be just as much, or even more, Islamophobic than their US counterparts. The next election, and whether Canadians vote favorably toward bills that may increase scrutiny<sup>36</sup> of certain groups, may be an indication of just how accepting (of Muslims) Canadians *truly* are.<sup>37</sup>

Informants’ perceptions of the state of Islamophobia in Canada compared to the United States further indicate that, within Canada, there could be a *perception* that Canadians are more welcoming to Muslims than their counterparts in the US:

Informant E:

*"We choose to live in this country, I don't see why to keep doing that if we don't feel like we're being treated fairly, I don't think that ...hmm following along the lines of the Ferguson trial, no I don't think it's like that, I think we have been treated fairly. I don't see any association like that...."*

Informant A, when asked about what was an ideal environment for Muslims migrating to the West as refugees, remarked that:

*...They need to be in a peaceful environment; they need to be in an environment that's more or less fair. And I tell people this is about as good as it gets for the time being. Go look around the world. Go south of the border, you'll see a different spectrum of extremes. And it's not very easy to survive there, we are much better off than people in the states to be quite honest. Muslims down there have not just been marginalized, but they have been targeted. They have been stigmatized and insulted openly. On the major media outlets and through things like Hollywood and through mainstream politicians. It's harder there to maintain your Islamic identity than it is over here. We're still better off because Canada is generally a peaceful place, it's probably the nicest place for these people to come to [sic].*

Informant C, remarking on how she had not experienced problems in Canada while wearing hijab (i.e., expressing her Islamic identity) mentioned others in her family who had been influenced by attacks on Muslims in the US:

*"...who took off their headscarves because they were afraid, they'd heard of attacks that happened in the States, where some Muslims had been killed..."*

Informants perceived Islamophobia to be less prevalent in Canada than the US, but still viewed it as an issue. For example Informant A gave an example of Islamophobia, and perceived how he believed the current media coverage of attacks being carried out by ISIS may impact Muslims:

*...a perfect example of that is an email we received just this morning, from a group who is threatening to attack all mosques... they already vandalized one, the site of a new mosque... They vandalized that site and they threatened us, they said we're coming after all the other mosques... I wouldn't be surprised if already there are kids that [sic] are being taunted, women that are being taunted. Before it was like Al Qaeda; it was the hot button. It was like a swear word type of thing. If you want to really insult someone, or really, you know, put them down, 'you know-you're probably Al Qaeda' And now it's ISIS is the new Al Qaeda. Yes, first it was the Taliban, and Al Qaeda became the new Taliban, and now ISIS became the new Al Qaeda. And who knows where it's going to go next, so these types of incidents do not make life easier for us, living in the West. That's for sure.*

Informant B, when asked how much of a concern Islamophobia is in Canada, stated that:

*I think it's pretty real. Again, when we see [sic] the prime minister of Canada making statements a couple of years ago, I think it was CBC an interview, saying 'The biggest threat in the country now is Islam,' it's like wow, coming from the leader, the prime*

*minister. Things like that, and events that happen, and if you don't do the necessary to disassociate the event by an individual or a group of individuals, (and sometimes they support statements or allow statements that, that cycle), can certainly fuel Islamophobia, so it's definitely a concern.*

Informants discussed concern about Islamophobia and believed that the media plays a central role in fueling it. For example, Informant E stated:

*If you're inundated with all of this, and you hear Muslims did this and this bad thing and you don't know any better, then yes, you get [a] bad idea [negative impression] and if you don't know any Muslims you just think 'Ok, they're all bad.' But if you know any Muslims, you realize you can't judge a whole community based on one person. And then, you would stay away from that stereotype. I think it's the same with any culture: if someone else, say, gets arrested, you wouldn't think the whole culture is bad, but with Muslims, because it keeps happening in the media, you kind of think, 'Ok it's [they're] all bad.' But if you know Muslims, and you have normal interactions, then you know better. So, I can see why general people, because of the media, would think all Muslims are bad, but people who are more open-minded and meet Muslims and talk to them won't think that they're all bad.*

The informants believed that a lack of awareness and understanding about Islam, as well as the media propagating stereotypes (and ignorance in general), served to intensify Islamophobia. Informants largely felt that the Canadian-Muslim community must be more active in increasing awareness about Islam in order to combat the presence of Islamophobia. Most felt that Muslims had to: exemplify that they are law-abiding citizens, be more vocal in their communities and in the media, and be open to answering questions when others show curiosity about their religion.

#### COMBATTING ISLAMOPHOBIA: A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

The informants perceived that Muslims in Canada have a strong role to play in dispelling stereotypes and combatting Islamophobia. They expressed sadness and frustration over the actions of radicalized Muslims who have engaged in criminal activity. Informants remarked on efforts they themselves are embarking on, (as is also the Muslim community of Canada) in order to inform the non-Muslim Canadian population about the Muslim religion. They have held information sessions in mosques, on college campuses, and during community events. Some mentioned how members of their local Muslim community had spoken publicly to the media in order to condemn terrorist activities and to show their support for Canadian law enforcement agencies who have brought such criminals to justice.

Informants also remarked on how they perceived Muslims should further integrate themselves into society, become contributing citizens, model to others that Muslims are not a burden on society, and that they are law-abiding and peaceful people. They believed that the Muslim community must: refrain from insularity, embrace Canada as their chosen country, and contribute to its society and development. They felt Muslims should be open to responding to questions from non-Muslims about their identity. They largely perceived that these actions would promote a more positive image of Muslims and help to dispel Islamophobia.

Informants largely viewed an opportunity for Muslim Canadians to be involved in combating the issue of radicalism. They felt that they must promote the message within their own community that such actions are not in line with the faith and that they are misguided. They also perceived an opportunity for Muslims to be involved in steering Muslims who were on the path to becoming radicalized in a more positive direction. The informants perceived that such an individual may be more likely to be positively influenced by a member of his/her own religious community, with whom they may identify and in whom they would place more trust than they would in an outside influence.

*RADICALISM AND OTHERMENT: RISK FACTORS INFLUENCING AN  
INDIVIDUAL'S SUSCEPTIBILITY TO RADICALISM, AND THE ROLE OF THE  
MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN PREVENTING THESE RISK FACTORS*

This research seeks to understand Muslim youth in the Canadian context, while situating the research in its globally relevant context. As indicated by informant A “the world has gotten very small.” As the world becomes increasingly globalized, and Canada, as a diverse nation, draws immigrants with attachments to a multitude of different countries,<sup>38</sup> it is important to realize that nothing exists in isolation. Informants remarked on how they feel more connection to those sharing their religious views and collective identity. When situating this research in the context of the globalized world, it is important to realize that Muslims may feel very strongly, emotionally impacted by the harm inflicted on Muslims throughout the world. The tremendous suffering experienced by Muslims throughout the world at the hands of the US and its allies must not be ignored.<sup>39</sup>

There are many examples of indignities committed against Muslim civilian populations and their suffering (including but by no means limited to the examples about to follow). In 1993, Canadian peacekeepers photographed themselves with the corpse of a 16 year-old civilian Somali boy, Shidane Arone, who died after being tortured by nine Canadian soldiers for several hours. Out of all nine soldiers involved, four were acquitted and the harshest reprimand was a five-year prison sentence.<sup>40</sup> According to the cultural information/travel advisories issued by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Development Canada (DFATD), this incident is still extremely relevant in shaping global Somali perceptions of Canadians.<sup>41</sup> In 1988, US troops in the Persian Gulf shot down an Iranian passenger plane, killing all 290 civilians on board.<sup>42</sup> Within a three-week period in July, 2014, United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) Gaza Office reported that 230 children were killed by Israeli Defense Forces.<sup>43</sup> Chief of the Gaza UNICEF Office, Ms. Pernille Ironside, stated that, “We see children killed, injured, mutilated and burnt, in addition to being terrified to their core. The consequences run much deeper than previous flare-ups.”<sup>44</sup> Famous British journalist and Middle East correspondent, Robert Fisk,<sup>45</sup> remarked on the Iraq war in 2006, “I can't help wondering today how many of the innocents slaughtered in Haditha took the opportunity to vote in the Iraqi elections -- before their ‘liberators’ murdered them.”<sup>46</sup> It is difficult to find definitive numbers on the number of civilian deaths in Iraq since 2003. One widely used source, the *Iraq Body Count Project*, reports more than 100,000.<sup>47</sup>

It seems at least possible that Muslims living in Canada who connect strongly to their collective Muslim identity may be impacted by such events. For example, when asked about how she and her community were emotionally impacted by the civilian deaths in Syria, Informant D (who does not share an ethnic or linguistic background with Syrians, only a religious identity) stated that:

*I am a little disappointed in what's going on there and that Canada isn't really contributing in any sort of way. We do, or I do, wish that Canada would help more. But I do understand that there's [sic] various reasons why they're not. You do have to know all the details before you can make a statement like that. You know, and it does affect us. You see Muslims dying for no real reason; they're all innocent, and you do get angry about it. And it's very unfortunate, so the whole situation, like all the countries, the whole Middle East it's going through a lot of difficult times right now. And it's really sad to see it's got [sic] to this state; when you look at the history of why they are this way, it's just unfortunate. And I think there are a lot of extremists there, and they're making it a lot worse. We try to help in various ways, like sending clothes, sending money, that type of thing. But other than that, we kind of feel a little helpless.*

An excerpt of the interview with informant A is also worth considering here:

*Researcher: Do you think, because I'm mostly looking at youth, so youth in any context sort of have a conflict of identity, whether it's religious or ethnic, or what kind of music they want to ascribe [sic] to, it's common. So I'm wondering, [if] Muslim youth that [sic] are in Canada, may strongly identify with their religion, they may not, but do you think that when they see these things, (like Canada siding so much with the United States in peacekeeping operations, that give such vilifying perspectives of Islam in the media, or Stephen Harper's [Canada's Prime Minister] recent visit to Israel, where he gave not much recognition to Palestine), do you think a Muslim youth who is more politically minded, because, of course, I'm sure there's [sic] a lot of people who aren't political at all and don't pay attention to these things, but do you think that a youth who is more politically minded might, I don't know, I guess I'm kind of wondering, might anybody develop some feelings of incompatibility between being a Canadian and being a Muslim?*

*Informant A: Absolutely, yes. Whenever a country will take a stance that conflicts with one's belief system, a sort of dichotomy is created in the mind. 'Ok, who am I supposed to side with,' and that creates, it creates an inner conflict, it creates confusion, and a person starts weighing their [sic] interests; what does my interest lie in [sic]? And, it also leads to a lot of frustration, especially when it happens over and over again. People do get frustrated.*

*Researcher: Can you talk anecdotally about any time you've seen a person have this sort of inner conflict? Or how they've [sic] sort of tried to cope with that sort of stress?*

*Informant A: I think I've gone through many such firsthand experiences. Or dealt with many youth who've gone through such experiences. Simple example, like what you have mentioned, for some people, and they don't even have to be Muslim, [they] are very emotional about the Israel/Palestine issue. I have non-Muslim friends who are very emotional about the Israel/Palestine issue. They, when they see that you're constantly and sort of without any reservations, [and who are] just supporting one side, and you're treating the other side as wrong, or as baseless, or they don't deserve any respect, they don't deserve any importance, when you see that, the first thing is that it hurts because you're connected to those people, either because you're from that part of the world or you share the same beliefs as them, and so on and so forth. So a conflict is definitely created and a struggle begins inside. And you think 'Do I suppress this; am I supposed to voice my opinion; am I*

*supposed to, you know, what am I supposed to do?’ And, yes, where is my place in this society, if this is what leaders are saying, is that representative of the country? Is that their own statements? Who else are they speaking on behalf of [sic]? And yes, am I compatible [sic] to this...absolutely the question arises.*

When considering identity conflict among Muslim youth in Canada, the effect of the global situation for Muslims must be taken into account, as it seems this has the potential (according to informants) to substantially impact identity conflict and to mobilize those who share a collective identity group. Notice that, according to Informant D (and this was echoed in other interviews, including that of Informant A) this happened in a positive way, such as seeking further knowledge, becoming more politically engaged, or sending clothes and supplies to Syrian civilians impacted by the country’s conflict. Googling “Muslims in Canada sending supplies to Syrian refugees” produces several results of instructions provided by Muslim communities across Canada on how to make clothing or food donations to be shipped to Syria (i.e., the Um Anas clothing drive in Toronto, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1427691150800381/>).

This finding suggests that Muslims in Canada can be mobilized based on their collective identity as Muslims and based on conflicts that are international rather than domestic that involve members of their shared identity group. This shows that Muslims in Canada relate to their collective identity group, not just domestically, but internationally, across linguistic, cultural and ethnic lines and that they may take action to assist those of their identity group. It also appears, that this mobilization among those espousing Islam (in its normative, mainstream and moderate forms) is most likely to manifest within positive, legal, and non-violent parameters.

For the purposes of this research, with its intention to improve relations between Canada and Muslim youth, the small potential for the plight of Muslims abroad to mobilize individuals espousing Islamism (abnormal, extremist and violent interpretation of Islam) to take illegal and violent actions (e.g., as was the case of Saad Khalid, convicted terrorist, and Damian Clairmont,<sup>48</sup> who died in Syria after fighting with ISIS) is also recognized and seen as an area that must be addressed. It is noteworthy that Saad Khalid (convicted Toronto terrorist, sentenced at age 23) cited the plight of Muslims abroad as partially what inspired his movement from Islam, into Radicalization and Islamism and eventually the activities that led to his incarceration.<sup>49</sup> Showing the plight of Muslims and imploring Western Muslims to take violent action is a tactic used by those seeking to radicalize others over the internet (such as the late US-born Anwar Al-Awlaki,<sup>50</sup> whose online influence has been attributed to the radicalization of hundreds of individuals worldwide, including at least one 9/11 hijacker, and Nigerian national [Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab](#), who attempted to bomb a passenger flight on Christmas Day, 2009.<sup>51</sup> Among Awlaki’s inflammatory statements are:

*With the American [United States] invasion of Iraq and continued U.S. aggression against Muslims, I could not reconcile between living in the U.S. and being a Muslim, and I eventually came to the conclusion that jihad against America [United States] is binding upon myself just as it is binding on every other Muslim....*

*To the Muslims in America [the United States], I have this to say: How can your conscience allow you to live in peaceful coexistence with a nation that is responsible for the tyranny and crimes committed against your own brothers and sisters.<sup>52</sup>*

Saad Khalid, who has publicly apologized to Canada at large as well as the Canadian Muslim community for contributing to their stigmatization, explicitly attributes his radicalization to the late Awlaki. It appears that he played directly to the identity conflict that many Canadian Muslims experience, and appealed to their sense of collective identity. In the case of those espousing Islamism, rather than Islam (as in the case of Saad Khalid),<sup>53</sup> identity conflict, if paired with extreme isolation and mental instability (Saad Khalid cited the sudden and traumatic death of his mother and the subsequent extreme isolation and depression he experienced as being root causes of his radicalization),<sup>54</sup> may have potential to mobilize Islamists based on their collective identity to take negative actions. This furthers the necessity to successfully integrate Muslim youth into society, and to provide them with effective services (especially in the area of mental health, in the opinions of informants) in order to protect them from those who seek to exploit their vulnerabilities and to radicalize them.

Informants believed that combating radicalism was not the sole responsibility of Canadian authorities, but perceived a responsibility among themselves, in collaboration with law enforcement, in combating and preventing radicalism:

*I think it's both. Actually, there is a man in Alberta trying to do this effort, their line [slogan] is "Stop the crisis and it's a play on ISIS." It is Muslims trying to prevent young Muslims from going to extremism. So, that is something that can be done; these extremists may be more likely to listen if the message is coming from other Muslims. If a moderate Muslim sits down with them and says, "You know, are you actually reading the Qur'an? That isn't what it says," and maybe they would listen. I don't know what their psyche[s] is [are] like, but it may be easier coming from another Muslim. But I also think it could be policymakers that could get involved. I think lots of sides can help prevent this, and we can all work together to prevent this (Informant E).*

Informants perceived Muslims as playing a vital role in preventing radicalism, not only for the public good, but in order to help with efforts to dispel Islamophobic beliefs. They also perceived a strong likelihood that radicalized individuals may need mental health support. They also strongly expressed their opinions that there is a need for the media to exercise discretion when reporting on the criminal activity of radicalized Muslims, in order to portray them as misguided individuals, rather than as representatives of the collective Muslim identity in its heterogeneous entirety.

### CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

From this research and the sample size, there is no way to make definitive conclusions about the state of collective identities, Islamophobia, and out-group suspicion in Canada. What can be taken from the research is a baseline understanding of how collective identities may shape out-group suspicion and the process of *otherment* between Muslims and non-Muslims in Canada, in some cases, manifesting as Islamophobia. It would also appear that, based on the information provided by informants, Muslims in Canada may harbor negative opinions about Canada on a political level, because of their perception that Canada's foreign policies are closely aligned with the US.

There appears to be some level (and in varying levels of severity) of out-group suspicion between Muslims as well as non-Muslims in Canada that comes from both groups, as indicated by the opinions of informants, as well as by the fact that so few people agreed to

participate in this study. There also seems to be some lack of understanding and awareness regarding Islam in Canada among non-Muslim Canadians, as well as negative stereotypes that are propagated by the media, that may potentially serve as barriers to improving understanding, tolerance, and awareness about the religion.

It would appear, based on the interviews, that there are collective identities present in Canada, as Muslims do feel some level of solidarity with members of their own group. It is also clear that many Muslims residing in Canada feel a strong sense of collective identity with their fellow Canadians. Mutually exclusive identities seem to be rare in Canada, and Muslims seem to understand themselves (most of the time) as being just as much Muslim as they are Canadian, and generally feel strongly connected to Canada (their chosen home). They feel connected to Canada based on Canada's tolerant and open values, which is what inspired many informants (or their parents) to make Canada their new home.

It seems that, although there does exist out-group suspicion among Muslims in Canada, this has more to do with age, or with being recent immigrants to Canada, as well as with individual experiences (whether or not someone has experienced several instances of Islamophobia). Alienation and marginalization (in the views of informants) are real experiences for some Muslim youth, and this seems to be based on ignorance and racism. It is a significant finding, however, that all informants spoke of the complexity of the topic being studied, and recognized that there is a wide range when it comes to Canadians and their awareness levels and their tolerance of Muslims in Canada. None of the informants made generalizations regarding Canadians being racist or Islamophobic.

It seems that class (according to informants) is not a significant indicator of how a person would experience identity conflict in Canada. It seems that the most salient factors in a youth having a negative experience of identity are cultural background, the influence of parents, negative experiences of Islamophobia, viewing Canada's political policies as synonymous with US policies, and mental instability.

According to the informants, Muslim youth are generally happy with Canada and want to become contributing citizens. Yet, Canada could improve its efforts to integrate and include Muslim youth, and to increase awareness and understanding among Canadians about the Muslim religion. Muslim youth seem to feel that their religion is frequently misunderstood by their non-Muslim peers, even if those peers are outwardly accepting.

It is promising to see that the informants have such a positive opinion of Canada's law enforcement agencies and believe that Muslims are generally respected and treated fairly. In order to keep the true spirit of Canada alive, it would appear that Muslims need to be just as engaged in promoting better relations as Canada's non-Muslims. The hope is that works similar to this one will continue in the future and will encourage efforts between Canadian Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, to foster more understanding, tolerance, and unity. Efforts such as these may be vital to preserving Canada's multicultural and democratic values.

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# ***The Way They Treat their Daughters and Wives: Racialisation of Muslims in Norway***

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## ***The Way They Treat Their Daughters and Wives: Racialisation of Muslims in Norway***

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**ABSTRACT:** “What do you think might be the reasons for existing negative attitudes toward Muslims?” This was one of the open-ended questions asked in a broad quantitative survey on attitudes toward minorities in Norway. The responses make up the theme of this article. Through a qualitative analysis of the respondents’ own assessments of the reasons for negative attitudes toward Muslims, this article presents the most common stereotypes of, and prejudices toward, Islam and Muslims in Norwegian society. Although several researchers have pointed to conspiracy myths and terrorism as the core reasons for prejudice against Muslims, this material shows that references to cultural and religious values dominate as the reasons for the prejudice, especially depictions of how Muslims treat women. The ‘Muslim way’ contrasts with a central claim in a national narrative depicting Norway as a liberal, gender-egalitarian and peace-loving society. This article argues that most of the responses not only are prejudicial in the matter of constructing an ‘us’ and a ‘them,’ but that they also constitute examples of racialisation of Muslims. The fact that the data comes from a representative population survey, and not from established arenas for anti-Muslim discourse, provides a unique insight into how Islamophobic and racist ideas about Muslims are disguised behind references to hegemonic values in discussions on gender issues.

### INTRODUCTION

This article explores perceptions of Muslims in Norway through analysis of a data set taken from a population survey on attitudes toward Jews and other minorities published by the Center of Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in 2012.<sup>1</sup> The data collection was undertaken in 2011, and a total of 1,522 individuals took part in the survey. The survey question of interest is: *What do you think might be the reasons for existing negative attitudes toward Muslims?* In other words, the data consist of the respondents’ own assessments of the reasons for negative attitudes toward Muslims. The questionnaire contained open responses where respondents could write freely; the material analyzed here thus constitutes a qualitative component in a quantitative survey. The following questions are central to the analysis: What sorts of images of Muslims are expressed? To what extent do they correlate with well-known stereotypes from Islamophobic/anti-jihadist discourses? Can the responses tell us something about religious prejudices and to what extent these prejudices mirror a Norwegian national narrative of ‘good’ and ‘bad?’ Are the semantic features in the responses examples of racialization of Muslims in Norway?

The empirical data presented below requires a brief contextualization. The first Muslims came to Norway as labor migrants during the 1970s. There are approximately 180,000 people with Muslim backgrounds living in Norway. Most Muslims still have an immigrant background; (i.e., either they, or both of their parents, were born outside Norway).

Norwegian Muslims are a heterogeneous category in terms of geographical background, religious traditions, and degree of religiosity. The majority came from Pakistan, followed by Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iran, and Turkey. When it comes to integration in the labor force, different groups have achieved varying levels of success; nonetheless, the integration of Muslims into Norwegian society has generally been successful.

Annual population surveys among Norwegians on attitudes toward immigration and cultural diversity have shown that the majority are positive about living in a multicultural society and about immigrants having the same rights as the rest of the population. Anti-racism has a strong hegemonic position in Norway. However, 48 percent say they are skeptical about people of the Muslim faith, and five out of ten believe that the values within Islam are completely or partially incompatible with the values of Norwegian society.<sup>2</sup>

### DATA AND METHODS

In the survey, respondents were asked whether they thought negative attitudes toward Jews and Muslims were widespread and whether they considered it necessary to take action to combat these attitudes. The results showed that views on the prevalence of negative attitudes differed for the two groups: although 21 percent responded that they thought negative attitudes toward Jews were widespread in Norway today, the corresponding figure for attitudes toward Muslims was 87 percent. Simultaneously, there was bias in the respondents' views of the relationship between the prevalence of negative attitudes and the necessity to combat them. Although more respondents considered it important to take action to address anti-Jewish attitudes (39 percent) than the proportion that considered it a widespread problem (21 percent), the opposite was the case for negative attitudes towards Muslims, where more respondents considered it a widespread problem (87 percent) than the proportion who saw a need to address it (61 percent) (HL-senteret). Only those respondents who stated that negative attitudes toward Jews or Muslims were widespread were asked to elaborate on what they thought caused these attitudes. Because far more people expressed the belief that negative (*n*) attitudes toward Muslims were widespread, far more (approximately four times as many) answered the question about the reason for these attitudes toward Muslims (*n* = 996) than answered the question about the reason for these attitudes toward Jews (*n* = 253). This article will not analyze the responses concerning Jews; however, two striking differences between the two sets of responses are worth noting. If we group the reasons given for negative attitudes into two different sets as follows: 1) the reasons for negative attitudes were placed *within* the respective categories 'Muslims' and 'Jews' (as if these were designations of groups, e.g., "Almost all rapists and criminals are Muslims"); and 2) the reasons were placed in *external* factors (in stereotypical media representations in Norwegian society), we find that "the reason lies in the group" and "the reason lies outside the group" were used differently for the two minorities. Although the distribution between the categories was fairly equal for attitudes to Jews, significantly fewer placed the reasons for negative attitudes towards Muslims outside the group (approximately one-third). In other words, the majority of respondents stated that the reasons for negative attitudes rested with Muslims themselves (HL-senteret).

There were also thematic differences between the sets of responses (Jews/Muslims). For example, references to religion were widespread in the responses about Muslims, but they were almost absent in regard to Jews. Moreover, direct references to key values in Norwegian society, such as gender equality, secularism and the welfare state, were only expressed in the responses explaining attitudes towards Muslims.

The respondents had only 100 characters available to formulate their responses, and some of them consisted of only a few words. The material, therefore, does not provide a basis for deeper analysis of the individual respondents' arguments. However, this limitation enables seeing what the respondents believe are the primary factors, as in statements such as "rape and terrorism." Although the material results from a question about the general reasons for negative attitudes, many of the responses were formulated as expressions of the respondents' own opinions about Muslims. Consequently, although the respondents were asked to describe what might explain negative attitudes "out there" and independent of their own beliefs, their responses often expressed their personal views. The responses very often lacked expressions of distance, such as "Many believe that Muslims ..."; instead, the majority of them consisted of essentialized assertions about how Muslims *are*.

The question asked in the survey is, of course, a leading one because it asks for the reasons for *negative* attitudes. The material might have looked different if the respondents had not been asked to focus on the negative. For this reason, the material itself does not give grounds for drawing unambiguous conclusions about Norwegian's attitudes to Muslims. Nevertheless, the responses give insights into the terms, metaphors, and adjectives used when describing issues of conflict. Most responses were surprisingly negative in their descriptions of Muslims; not only did they consist of naturalizing statements and generalizations, but – as I will argue – they were also hierarchising and often racist in nature.

Methodologically, the data were read in two different ways. First, I collected the main arguments in the individual responses (one response often contained several themes, such as "the media," "oppression of women," and "terrorism"). Next, I counted the number of times the main themes and terms occurred *across* the different responses. Seeing the responses as one continuous text rather than a set of individual statements allowed for a different type of search for patterns. With help from tools developed in the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Wodak et al.; Wodak) I read the responses as if they constituted one continuous text while I looked for patterns of argumentation and rhetorical strategies. The themes and expressions in the responses were then compared with those in other arenas of discourse about Islam and Muslims, such as media depictions of Muslims. Public debate is central to understanding shared ideas of *the other* (Lyons et al. 60) and has therefore been used as a frame for understanding why the material looks as it does. I also compared my data with previous findings from studies of anti-jihadist websites and comments on the internet (Døving). The fact that the material does not come from any established anti-Muslim discourse arena but from a population survey reveals a disturbing degree of racialized thinking about Muslims and Islam among ordinary Norwegians.

### THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

The nature of the material described above prompted me to turn to literature on prejudice and new racism for analytical tools. Although international academic scholarship has long addressed "new racisms" and different forms of prejudice, systematic studies of the cultural conditions for prejudice in Norway have been scarce (but see Gullestad 2006, Vassenden and Andersson 2011). The above-mentioned survey by the Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities indicates a clear ranking of different minority groups in the Norwegian population (HL-senteret) which corresponds to findings in international surveys (Zick, Kupper and Hovermann 60-6; FRA). However, these surveys fail to explain which factors account for the different attitudes. By looking more deeply into some of the responses to the open-ended questions from the survey and contextualizing them, I have

sought to identify key aspects of images of Muslims and key factors in processes that determine how Muslims are defined. Two central factors seem to be: 1) the concept of religion and 2) the concept of gender.

The questionnaire uses the term 'Muslim', and because 'Muslims' denotes a category of people belonging to a religion, one might argue that the weight placed on religion in the responses is a natural consequence of how the question was framed. However, in light of previous research on anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia, other points of reference, such as culture, ethnicity, primitivism, and violence (although mixed with ideas about Islam), do dominate. The hypothesis behind this article is that religion is expanding as a source of prejudice in contemporary Western society, and is a central component in concealing what in reality is a process of racializing Muslims. Furthermore, I argue that this process can occur because of a general and accepted fear of, or intolerance of, religion, which, in itself, makes it difficult to identify racism against Muslims.

At a time when liberal and secular societies in the Western world are undergoing monumental demographic and social changes, and when religion is increasingly the subject of intense politicization and contestation, there is an urgent need to understand the role that sentiments, affects and antipathies generated by religion may play in producing prejudice. As the material, presented with examples below, shows, religion provides a powerful emotional and intellectual nexus for contemporary forms of prejudice. In this context I understand *prejudice* as complex patterns of exclusion in language, text, and practices that demarcate boundaries between categories of persons based on highly exaggerated or erroneous information and essentializing claims. In contradistinction to critiques of religion, prejudice is based on: 1) highly exaggerated or erroneous information; 2) essentialising claims; and 3) elements of conspiracy theories.

Religious identities and religious beliefs are often considered to be determinants of political outlooks and agendas (Taras 16), and have, therefore, become a powerful source of anxiety. However, it is not only the politics of religion that explains why religion is central in the construction of contemporary sets of prejudices; emotions also seem to play a part. Western concepts of religion have historically been premised on categories generated in and through the Protestant Reformation, i.e., as intellectualistic, interiorised, private, and rational, leaving little scope for emotions or passions (Asad; Masuzawa). Ideas about other groups' emotions or passions seem to be central to the anxieties that religion generates in secular Western contexts. Among the most common culturally expressed anxieties linked to "religious others" are images of their transcending the purportedly rational, ordered, and dispassionate. Furthermore, religious anxieties are linked to distinctions between purportedly "secular" and "liberal" values on the one hand and "religion" on the other. This connection is exemplified by references to debates concerning gender equality and religious tradition, religion versus freedom of expression, religion versus democracy, religion versus individual rights, and other issues. These debates are echoed in the responses in the survey.

How prejudice and racism can appear as legitimate statements about entire groups of people, i.e., be invisible as prejudice or racism, is an important question. Several scholars have noted how prejudice can emerge as a coping mechanism in the face of shared anxieties and perceptions of cultural and/or existential threats in times of societal change (Brubaker; Hastings). The 'new racism', or "cultural racism", alleges inferiority on the part of cultural categories of others perceived to pose a threat to "our way of life" (Baker; Gilroy; Goodwin). The idea that religious categories are intrinsically linked to distinct territorial, moral, or cultural landscapes can be used to legitimize forms of prejudice. I will argue that

the responses are both prejudicial and racist in nature, and will suggest some reasons why it seems not to be recognized as such by its authors – the respondents to the survey.

The question of how to use the term *racism* is by no means settled among researchers in the field. Michel Wieviorka criticizes one use of the term ‘racism’ without taking into account the structural level: the degree to which racist attitudes are woven into key institutions in a society is crucial to the severity of racism and is thus an important difference between every day racism and racism that is rooted in social structures. Another reason for not capturing “racism” in one simple definition is that, in addition to various degrees of racism, there are different forms of racism. Because the term *race* has been used, and is used, for a variety of forms of diversity and ways to differentiate between people (Stuart Hall; Lentin and Titley 62-63), two supplementary concepts related to racism were introduced: “cultural racism” (Fanon) and ‘neo-racism’ (Baker: Balibar). These terms reflect not only a change in the theory of racism, but also the well-documented fact that racism in European society changed during the 1970s and 1980s. It was in this period that the focus shifted *from the other’s skin color* (understood as an expression of *race*) to *the other’s culture and/or religion* as a dominant sign of inequality and subordination; in other words, “racism without races” (Balibar 23; Goldberg 356; Svendsen). As M. Ekman argues in his article online *Islamophobia*, by using “cultural elements to distinguish groups from each other, cultural racism also denies the very notion of race and racism.”

The understanding of racism as a concept that also includes references to religion and culture is not new, because the word *race* only in a very short historical period referred to genetics and biological science (Bangstad and Døving). For centuries, the term *race* has been used in European languages to denote descent and family, or groups of people who were bound by virtue of their beliefs and way of life. Ever since the Late Middle Ages, religion and culture have served as key markers of difference between groups and have provided a basis for ranking each other. Historically, the categories of race and religion overlapped (Frederickson). The classical example of this overlap is the expulsion of Arabs and Jews from Christian Spain in the name of “purity of blood” in the fifteenth century.

Rather than present different standpoints regarding the term “racism” I will explain why I find it relevant to use *racism* as an explanatory theoretical concept as part of the analysis of the data at hand, as a sample of what people *think* or *mean*. I suggest that *racism* should be seen as a *cognitive* process rather than one specific phenomenon. I refer to *racism* as a specific type of understanding of the self as compared with others, and this understanding involves the following processes:<sup>3</sup>

1. Dividing a population into different categories, with some given negative essential traits
2. Reducing an individual’s identity to the given negative traits of a category to which he or she is seen to belong
3. Using these negative traits as arguments for subordination and discrimination

*Racism* can, thus, be understood as a way of generalizing in terms of assigning specific properties to people on the basis of their putative membership in a particular group, with these properties defined as so negative that they constitute an argument for keeping members of the group at a distance, excluding them, and if possible, actively discriminating against them. This negative generalization and subordination of people can be called *racism*, regardless of whether it is justified by skin color, religion, language, or culture (for further

discussion see Bangstad and Døving). Furthermore, it is this understanding of racism that makes the term relevant as an analytical tool in the study of, for example, Islamophobia.

The data set from the survey contains several claims about Muslims that can be defined as Islamophobic. Although *Islamophobia* is a term subject to scholarly controversy (Shryock; Sayyid et al.; Esposito and Kalin), it has become a widely used comparative concept in the cultural and social sciences (Bleich) and forms part of the established vocabulary of international institutions (the UN, the EU, and the European Council). *Islamophobia* in this context is understood as “indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims” (Bleich 1,582) and will be used as an analytical term describing the dimension of prejudice sustaining and perpetuating negatively evaluated meanings about Muslims and Islam (Allen 190) revealed in the survey.

Some scholars view Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism (Schiffer and Wagner), but in the general public debate, it is an absence of references to racism as part of Islamophobia (Meer, N; Bangstad and Døving). I will argue that this absence in public debates has created a room in which sentiments and utterances about Muslims, which in content are both Islamophobic and racist, are able to pass for dislike or legitimate critique. (The view that racism is bad but Islamophobia is common sense is expressed not only in anti-jihadist blogs, but also in public debates). I find it difficult to explain the degree of negative generalization and stigmatization in the data (as in most Western European countries, racism is widely condemned in Norway) other than by asserting that specific rhetoric established in the discourses about Islam/Muslims serves to disguise content that is racist. I will return to this argument in the concluding remarks.

### CATEGORIZING THE RESPONSES

A review (count-up) of the concepts that recur in the responses illustrates the extent to which culture and religion dominate as explanations of the reasons for negative attitudes. In a simple word search, the term “terrorism” generates the most hits, with 245 respondents having used the words “terrorism,” “bombing,” or “extremism” in their responses. The word “women” is the second-most common term, with 136 hits, and if we combine this term with phrases such as “their culture,” “their values” or “their attitudes,” we obtain 320 hits in total. If we add responses containing terms such as “their religion,” “sharia,” “Islam,” and “Quran,” (199 hits), we obtain 501 hits. These results show that negative attitudes are more frequently associated with religious and cultural lifestyle than with terrorism and extremism. If we also count the word “crime” and phrases such as “utilising welfare benefits,” “unwilling to be Norwegian,” “unwilling to be part of society,” or “unwilling to integrate,” we obtain a further 206 explanations in which the mentality, attitudes or values of Muslims can be said to constitute the explanation. Therefore, although *terrorism* as an isolated concept is the word used by the most respondents, terms such as “view of women,” “culture,” “sharia,” “religion,” “Koran,” “values,” “integration,” “Manner,” “their mentality,” and “crime,” are the most frequently used in the material as a whole.

### *Women and Religion*

Illustrative examples from responses referring to gender and religion are: “their own attitude to Western values, democracy and of women;” “oppression of women;” “the way they view women;” “circumcision, honor killings, and that they mix religion and politics;”

“rape and fanatics;” “narrowness, scary humanity, intense attitudes to women;” and “because of sharia.”

To some extent, the responses mirror Norwegian public debate about Islam, in which the role of women has been prominent (Døving and Kraft). The interest in Muslims’ lack of gender equality can also be explained by the facts that Islam as a religion holds a clear gender ideology and that several Muslim communities have gender-segregated cultural practices. Another explanatory factor is that gender equality as a national core value is hegemonic in the Norwegian political discourse. In other words, both aspects of Islam and aspects of the majority society may explain *why* the theme of women is so prominent in the responses. However, even if we can explain the extent of references to women by pointing to public discourse, public discourse does not sufficiently explain the harshness and degree of generalizations in the allegations. Responses relating to women often include terms such as: “violence,” “rape,” “oppression,” and “crime;” for example, “all violence and oppression of women;” “asylum seekers, crime, the view of women;” “overrepresented in prisons, responsible for many assault rapes, gangs, crime, women;” and “terrorism, female oppression, rape, religion.” It is difficult to explain the character of these formulations without linking them to the more marginal but well-established Islam-hostile discourses well known from different online forums. On anti-jihad blogs in particular, Muslims’ treatment of women is an elaborate rhetorical trope in which violence of different types and rape in particular are often included (Døving). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that these responses to the survey are examples of the impact of these anti-Islamic discourses in the mainstream media. Islam as uniquely sexist and Islam as inherently violent are myths that are recycled in several online arenas (Ekman). I will return to some other explanations related to the gender issue later in the article.

Phrases such as “the way they treat women” show that Muslims (“they”) are largely understood as men; in statements like this, men represent Muslimness/Islam, while women are victims of it. Only as wearers of the hijab are women described as active individuals in the material.

Religion is commonly referred to as fundamentalism, abuse (religion is a tool used to exploit others) or plain stupidity. Irrationality seems to be fairly directly connected to an understanding of how Muslims are religious. In addition to references to fundamentalists as “stupid” and “emotional,” “obedience” and “strictness” are typical characteristics mentioned in connection with religion. As a religion, Islam is seen as responsible for the collective mentality of Muslims and characterized by authoritarian structures. In public debate, Imams and mosques are treated with deep suspicion (for an analysis of Imams’ role in Norwegian society versus in public debate, see Døving 2014). In today’s writings on Islam, it is barely possible to discern that the religion is also about forgiveness, the soul, salvation, and the metaphysical, as are most other religions. Islam is described as a religion of politics, period. Again, the responses reflect themes well known from the press; however, as with gender issues, the claims put forward are much harsher and less complex than the media’s depiction of Islam. In the anti-Muslim blogosphere, Islam is the very source of evilness. Islam is represented as an exclusive religion (contrasted with Christianity’s universalism), and a common claim is that Muslims look at ‘us’ as worse than dogs. The “proof” that “they” by virtue of their religion regard themselves as superior to “us” seems to be recurrent in this form of identity politics. Quotations illustrating that Muslims are instructed to not treat non-Muslims with respect are popular in online discussion forums (Døving). The open-ended responses from the survey are of course short, however, their lack of complexity in regard to religion is remarkable. One might expect statements to the effect that Islam was foreign,

different, or strange; however, the references to Islam consist of a bombastic vocabulary that defines Islam as bad, dangerous, extreme, or stupid.

Whenever the term "sharia" is part of a response, it is associated with extremism and a lack of affinity for democracy, such as in these responses: "Fanatical Muslims, sharia law, terrorism" and "No democracy – hidden sharia." Sharia may be a frequently given reason for negative attitudes due to a fear of an alternative law system and society on the margins of Norwegian democracy. It is, however, obvious that the knowledge of what sharia is in Islamic tradition is lacking and that the term connotes to barbarism.

### *Terrorism*

Responses in which "al-Qaeda," "terrorism" or "radical Islam" make up part of the vocabulary have a somewhat greater degree of distance in language than those associated with religion and culture. Responses such as "Islamist terrorist groups" neither generalize nor essentialize Muslims but provide an appraisal, and may indicate knowledge of distinctions between radical and other forms of Islam. In this category of responses, we also find nuanced formulations to the effect that the few destroy the reputation of the many. However, the responses referring to terrorism also contain generalizations, such as: "Due to their involvement in so many negative actions, terrorism, fighting, killing" and "Muslim means 'terrorist.'"

Pnina Werbner argues that "the terrorist," or what she calls *the Grand Inquisitor*, is the dominant stereotype of Muslims in Europe today. *The Grand Inquisitor* is a metaphor for the man who wants to transform all things Western into Islam, and who is willing to use terrorism to do so (Werbner 72-74). Werbner is undoubtedly right about "the terrorist" being a central figure associated with Muslims; however, the data here suggest that the construction of "the Muslim" is to a greater extent built around images of Muslim culture, values, gender roles, and religion.

### *Demand too much. Will not Abide by the Norwegian System.*

Approximately one-fifth of the responses contain references to crime, and many highlight an unwillingness to integrate and a resistance to democracy; for example, "Exploitation of welfare goods;" "Too many do not adapt to Western culture, and many will not integrate;" "Islam is not compatible with democracy;" and "Muslims are anti-democratic." In this category of responses, we also find references to Muslims as a distinctive minority group who receives special treatment from the government; for example, "Getting their own special arrangements" and "Are allowed to establish mosques almost anywhere."

The idea that there are close connections between totalitarian anti-democratic ideals and Islam/Muslims, together with the image of "Muslims sucking on the welfare state," is familiar from anti-Muslim online debates, blogs, and the so-called "alert literature" which warns Europe against Islam and Muslims. The same applies to ideas about Muslims being incapable of democracy, and of being exploitive and violent (Ekman). It is therefore reasonable to assume that these types of responses are influenced by a clearly anti-Muslim discourse.

*Prejudice, Media Coverage*

Approximately one-third of the respondents attribute the reasons for the negative attitudes to somewhere outside the group and to the attitudes of the majority, such as “xenophobia,” “ignorance,” and “lack of knowledge and prejudice.” Additionally, representations in the media and the politics of the Progress Party emerge as clear explanations, often by the same respondents who highlight prejudice among the majority as the main reason; for example, “Prejudices and poor refugee policy, as well as negative statements from politicians, especially from the Progress Party;” and “media coverage.” In this category of responses, we also find expressions such as “the few destroy for the many.”

In a study of representations of Muslims in the media and public debate, P. Morey and A. Yaqin conclude that Muslims in Western Europe are presented through “refraction, not a reflection of reality” (2-4). The terms “Muslim” and “Islam” are often given an underlying meaning as a political problem that must be solved. E. Poole, who has categorized the news through which Islam is presented, concludes that, regardless of whether the news deals with education, labor, beliefs, gender, or other topics, the themes are presented in a coherent and repetitive manner (64,66). One particular set of themes seem to recur in most news stories about Islam, and they are colored by a fundamental negativity (Ibid 66). This seems to be recognized in the population: the media is attributed as a source of negative attitudes in the population, and examples of this claim are found in responses criticizing the majority and in responses criticizing aspects of Islam and/or Muslims. The respondents particularly mention the mediated focus on terrorism and on other negative issues, which creates an inaccurate impression of the Muslim population as a whole. Relationships between attitudes toward Muslims and news coverage have been documented in research (Poole; Hervik; Morey and Yaqin). Still, it is surprising that the perception of the media as a direct source of negative attitudes is so explicitly expressed by so many. The extent to which this phenomenon can be explained by a strong degree of media consciousness, or the focus of the media in general (not only in terms of Islam) on negative events and conflicts, cannot be derived from the material, but would be an interesting topic for further research.

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The responses show that the language in the arenas of anti-Muslim discourse (the sub-public sphere) has influenced the mainstream discourse on Islam and Muslims. However, one view which has dominated in these spheres, but which we *do not* find embodied in the responses of the survey, is that the reasons for negative attitudes lie in the fear that Muslims will take over the country. References to the fertility rate among Muslims are absent from the answers, and only five answers explain negative attitudes by referring to a hidden agenda for taking control of society. It is noteworthy that the *Eurabia* theory and other conspiracy theories about Muslims, which have had a strong influence in blogs and online debates, do not seem to have won credibility in the general population. The absence of references to a Muslim conspiracy may be explained by the fact that the survey was conducted shortly after the terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011, when the fear of a Muslim takeover became known as the main motivation behind the terrorist, and those who had previously believed in a conspiracy had therefore distanced themselves from it. Another explanation may be that fear of a planned takeover was never seen as rational by large sections of the population.

Overall, the responses provide a clear picture of Muslims as anti-liberal, oppressive to women, governed by religion and with a propensity to commit crime, and to have anti-democratic attitudes. Islam and Muslims seem to be seen as in direct opposition to Norwegian values such as secularism, democracy, liberalism, and egalitarianism.

### CONSTRUCTING A MORALISTIC NATIONAL NARRATIVE

In 2005, Jürgen Habermas opened his Holberg Lecture *Religion in the Public Sphere* at the University of Bergen in Norway by referring to religion as “a provocative issue that bothers many of us.” Why does religion seem to “bother” so many in terms of perceptions of Muslims in secular, liberal, and multicultural societies? Is it perhaps because it triggers ambivalence in a national self-image?

Gordon Allport noted, in 1954, in his pioneering work on prejudices that they seem to be ethnocentrically organized. The claim that the making of prejudice reflects a social and national identity is, therefore, far from new. Nonetheless, there is a lack – at least in Norway – of empirically based analyses of what exactly makes sets of prejudices ethnocentrically organized. The examples presented above give at least some insight into the main elements at work in the process of mirroring oneself as opposite to *the other*, they reveal ideas about why “Muslims do not fit in,” about what constitute core values in Norway, and about how Muslims in general seem to lack them.

Gender equality and secularism are two important themes in a Norwegian national narrative. By the term “national narrative,” I refer to public and hegemonic discourses about what Norway and Norwegians are. National narratives are not one clear narrative, but, rather, flexible (Korteweeg and Yurdakul 2), and different narratives exist for different occasions or contexts. For example, the national narrative in the aftermath of the terror attacks on 22 July 2011 was one that embraced multiculturalism, diversity and tolerance (Døving). This narrative makes it difficult to openly show intolerance, and I suggest that the broad use of women and oppression of women as references in prejudicial statements is an attempt to find legitimate forms of expressing anti-Muslim sentiments and still be perceived as tolerant.

As mentioned above, the theme of gender equality is not taken out of the blue; Islam is a religion with specific rules that segregate the sexes, and the majority of Muslims in Norway come from Pakistan and a traditional patriarchal culture. Still, we can assume that only a very small number of the participants in the survey know any Muslims personally, and even fewer seem to have read new statistics about how gender patterns are becoming increasingly “Norwegian” among the immigrant populations. Also, the Norwegian public debate on Muslims and gender is far more nuanced than the responses indicate. For example, research on changes in gender roles has been published in several newspapers, and the press has broadly covered the fact that girls from the Pakistani population are receiving higher education in greater numbers than boys. It is therefore obvious that myths are in play here. Ideas that are picked up from general public debate gradually acquire the status of being personally experienced. A. Lentin and G. Tittle describe this phenomenon as “recited truths” (restored truths). The appeal of these “truths” lies in how they place the majority in a morally superior position. Themes such as women’s oppression, religion, and crime and terrorism form the antipodes in a narrative of a peaceful, egalitarian, and safe Norwegian community. However, the reasons for their appeal are, of course, more complicated than that they constitute an “us”. With C. Levi-Strauss’ theories of oppositional pairs in mind, I suggest that it is those oppositions that reflect important ideals, but ideals that are more

fragile than we want them to be – ideals that are not always confirmed by looking at the empirical world, and that need to be strengthened through some sort of cultural construction, such as prejudice. By making Muslims the bearers of problematic features that we do not want to acknowledge exist in our culture or in ourselves, we need not address the discrepancy between ideals and reality. Norway is famous for its gender equality, and in the political, academic, and journalistic elites, equality between the sexes is highly visible. However, beyond these spheres, Norway has a strikingly gender-segregated labor market. We see these differences clearly in every day life. Can it be the discrepancy between ideals of equality and our visibly-gender-segregated labor market that makes *us* particularly angry about what we think we know about how Muslims “treat their daughters and wives?”

### RACIALISATION OF RELIGION?

*Freedom of speech, gender equality, and sexual freedom provide a transparently strategic vocabulary for marking out the irreducible problem of the Muslim in Europe, and this marking out posits a civilizational hierarchy that has no need to appeal to pathologised [sic] racism. (Lenting and Titley 2012:20)*

Assembling the individual responses from the survey creates a long and gloomy text about Islam and Muslims. The responses state who does not belong and why, and the why is often a clear-cut example of defining an entire category of people (Muslims) as subordinate due to ideas about their natural way of being. The material shows the dominant role of religion compared with other well-known criteria for hierarchies, such as being too numerous, taking our jobs, being dirty, and smelling bad. In his 2014 article “The Multiple Faces of Islamophobia,” Ramon Grosfugels writes on the place of religion in racism as follows:

*In the new cultural racist discourses, religion has a dominant role. The contemporary tropes about “uncivilized,” “barbarian,” “savage,” “primitive,” “underdeveloped,” “authoritarian,” and “terrorist” inferior people are today concentrated in the “other’s” religious practices and believes [...] focusing on the “other’s” religion is a way to escape being accused of racism. However, when we examine carefully the hegemonic rhetoric in place, the tropes are a repetition of old biological racist discourses and the people who are the target of Islamophobic discourses are the traditional colonial subjects of the Western Empires, that is, the “usual suspects. (13,14)*

Grosfugels notes how, in Great Britain, Muslims are associated with Egyptians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis (colonial subjects from former British colonies), and that Islamophobia in Britain is, therefore, associated with anti-black, anti-Arab, and anti-South Asian racism. In France, Muslims are mostly North Africans from former colonies. Additionally, in the Netherlands, Islamophobia is associated with anti-Arab, anti-Asian, and anti-black racism. In Germany, Islam is associated with anti-Turk racism, while in Spain with anti-Moor racism. Similarly, in the United States, Islam is associated with African-Americans and Arabs of all ethnicities. Additionally, in Norway, Islam and Muslims are associated with immigrants, and highlighting specific ethnicities is often part of Islamophobia (being both Muslim and Somali is stigmatized more than being Muslim and Pakistani, HL-senteret). Still, I do not think that racism referring to religion or culture should only be seen in the light of how they overlap with the “old race” categories. As an example, the material analyzed here

lacks references to ethnicity, skin color or other genetically inherited differences. Grosfugels' argument could, therefore, be taken further by saying that religion and culture *alone* often make up the core elements in racist ideas about Muslims (Norwegian white-skinned converts seem to be particularly popular hate-objects in Islamophobic arenas).

To conclude, I want to return to my surprise when reading the responses to the open-ended section of the survey. What can possibly explain the degree of racism in the claims about Muslims in such a broad population survey undertaken in a country where anti-racism (as an ideal) is hegemonic? The answer is likely found in the general acceptance, also among liberal anti-racist voices, of discrediting Islam and Muslims. This widespread attitude has given way to a rhetoric that conceals its message to avoid accusations of racism. The most common way of doing this is to present oneself as a participant in a battle of values in which Muslims are defined as a threat. When statements build on vague stigmatizing generalizations without being recognized as racism, it may be because racism is disguised behind specific rhetorical expressions. The following are some examples:

*It is about freedom.* Hate speech or racism targeting Muslims is often formulated as part of a struggle for freedom. Those who oppose a Muslim presence in Europe claim to do so in the name of freedom because Muslims are said to not endure liberal values. A fight for freedom is a moral battle and can thus be a useful rhetorical means of rationalizing racism. Statements about Islam and democracy, or Islam and human rights as opposites, constitute strong arguments for defining an enemy from within.

*It is about our identity.* In racist forums, the argument to exclude entire groups of people is often legitimized by defining them as threats to the identity of the majority. In other words, the claim that that *they* threaten *us* can act as a form of linguistic legitimization of racist statements.

*The role of intellectuals.* Historians, debaters, and well-known journalists and publishers have played a significant role in the development and dissemination of hatred of Muslims, and their social status has contributed to a rationalization and legitimization of their views. When educated elites stand behind the message, it seems to meet less resistance.

*Fear.* The idea of Muslims as inherently violent seems to be widespread. Typical crime topics from online debates were visible in the responses, such as rape, terrorism, honor killing, violence in marriage and physical violence against non-Muslims (Ekman). Fear is perhaps the most common form of rationalization of racism. Fear is admittedly an emotional state that humans need to survive; however, if warning of danger does not rest on rational judgements, then fear in itself will constitute a danger (Nussbaum). Contributing to fear of other people without sufficient justification puts a community at stake. This is an important insight into the fight against all forms of racism and into why an analysis of how representations of minority religions feed into contemporary issues – such as debates about democratic liberal values, nationality, cultural heritage, and integration politics – is central to understanding how anxieties and prejudices can develop into racism.

If the population of Norway, where racism is highly stigmatized, were systematically reminded about how the central aspect of racism is to define an entire group of people as one who thinks and acts in one determined and immutable way (Fredrickson 9), and if it saw how this understanding is used to legitimize exclusion, is it possible that racism would be recognized, even when Muslims were the target?

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Antisemitism in Norway? Attitudes towards Jews and other minorities in the Norwegian population* (HL center 2012, ed. Vibeke Moe). The central theme of the survey was attitudes to Jews. However, surveys from other European countries have shown that a negative view of Jews often coincides with negative attitudes to other groups; the survey therefore included questions about other minorities. The study was the first population study on this subject to be implemented in Norway. A total of 3,160 people received the survey invitation, and 1,522 answered the questionnaire. The results can be considered representative of the Norwegian population in terms of age, gender, education and geographical distribution.

<sup>2</sup> IMDi 2014 Integreringsbarometeret 2014 *Holdninger til innvandring, integrering og mangfold*.

<sup>3</sup> The understanding of racism as three cognitive processes resembles – and the formulation is inspired by – the description by Taguieff 2008, p. 261.

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# ***Saving Muslim Women: A Feminist-postcolonial Critique of Veiling Legislation in Norway***

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## *Saving Muslim Women: A Feminist-postcolonial Critique of Veiling Legislation in Norway*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the connection between Western feminism and Islamophobia in Norway through an analysis of the veiling legislation of Siv Jensen, the leader of the Norwegian Progress Party. I argue that this legislation is guilty of cultural imperialism because it racializes Muslims in general as inferior, and Muslim women as passive victims in need of white women's liberation. Jensen's feminism exemplifies "Islamophobic victimization" because it suggests that veiled women have no agency under the entrenched patriarchy of Islam.<sup>1</sup> Disguised in feminist language, her veiling legalization construes Islam as inferior and reinforces a colonial master narrative. It is marked by a special concern for what Rey Chow calls "the 'subjectivity' of the other-as-oppressed-victim."<sup>2</sup> Jensen's representation of Islam is Islamophobic in that it perpetuates negative stereotypes about Muslims and defines Islam as both inferior to, and incompatible with, Western culture. She asks a rhetorical question: "Are we going to be on the side of intolerant Islamic leaders who force women to wear the veil or are we going to be on the side of women who fight for greater tolerance and equality?" In doing so, she and her party demonstrate that unveiling is as much about saving Norway from Muslims as it is about saving Muslim women from Islam.

**Keywords:** Muslims; Western feminism; veiling; Norway

### INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on my personal experience of racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia in Norway. As a mixed-race person with a Norwegian father and a Filipina mother, I'm often mistaken for an Arab or a Muslim. When people learn I'm Norwegian, they say, "Really? Then why do you look Muslim?" As a child, racial slurs like *pakkis* for "Pakistani," *jævla Muslim* for "fucking Muslim," and *neger* for "negro" were thrown at me every day in school. The racism I've experienced as an adult is much more concealed. Rather than say directly insulting things, people make comments that presuppose the superiority of Westerners and Western culture. When I was working at a Kurdish men's coffeehouse in Trondheim, a Norwegian customer once asked me if my husband forced me to work overtime, if he allowed me to make any decisions in the shop, and if he treated me well. Apart from his mistaken assumption that my boss was my husband, the true question he was asking in so many words was whether I, as a Muslim woman, enjoyed any agency as a subject. In contemporary Norwegian discourse Muslim women are typically cast as the victims of Muslim men who oppress them under the aegis of Quranic doctrine.

The racialization of people from third-world countries, especially Muslims, is prevalent in Norway. Islam is thought of as a monolithic cultural presence that breeds terror,

violence, gender inequality, and homophobia. In the imagination of many Norwegians, Muslim boys are reluctant to integrate and well-disposed to gang life, while Muslim men are hypersexual, misogynistic, and prone to commit rape. Muslim girls are thought of only as victims of genital mutilation who are forced to wear a veil and take a husband, preferably an older family member, at the age of puberty. In a post 9/11 political climate, right-wing politicians have given new life to these stereotypes. Norwegians have become accustomed to the conspiracy of a coming “Eurabia,” believing, on the one hand, that Islamic values are inclined towards war and terrorism, and, on the other hand, that Muslims are rapidly taking over Europe with Sharia law.

The ostensible oppression and subjugation of Muslim women by Muslim men makes Islamophobia a self-justifying phenomenon. The famous dictum of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “white men saving brown women from brown men,”<sup>3</sup> aptly expresses the patronizing attitude that many Norwegians have towards Muslims. The presumably passive and silent Muslim woman is pointed to as evidence that Islam and its adherents are backwards and inferior. In Norway and the West generally, liberal and feminist groups point to the veil as the ultimate proof of women’s oppression.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the veil has become at once the most visible symbol of Islam and the most visible symbol of Islam’s oppression of women.

This paper will examine the veiling legislation proposed by Siv Jensen, a self-proclaimed feminist and leader of the right-wing Norwegian Progress Party. The Progress Party entered parliament, along with other right-wing parties, in 2013. Its politics are grounded in traditional Norwegian and Western culture and aim to support liberal as well as Christian values. In 2009 Jensen held up the veil as evidence of *snik-islamisering* or “creeping Sharia.” She is the most visible Norwegian politician to capitalize on anti-Muslim sentiment.

Since 2009 she has become the most vocal politician to advocate banning the veil in the public sphere. Adopting an explicitly feminist ideology, she argues that opposition to radical Islam should be at the top of today’s feminist agenda and that unveiling should be one of her party’s signature political issues. Through a critical analysis of her published political statements, I will argue that she is guilty of cultural imperialism because she racializes Muslims as inferior subjects. Her views perpetuate a triple judgment: Muslim women are passive victims in need of white-(wo)men’s liberation, Muslim men are misogynists, and Islam is a patriarchal religion. Jensen’s brand of feminism exemplifies what Irene Zempi and Neil Chakraborti have called “Islamophobic victimization” because it suggests that under the entrenched patriarchy of Islam veiled women have no agency.<sup>5</sup> Jensen is effectively making an Islamophobic appeal to “save brown women from brown men.”

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE MUSLIM AS OTHER

Colonialism arose in the wake of the Enlightenment, a historical moment in Europe when the faculty of reason was increasingly elevated over religion. Indeed, nineteenth and twentieth century intellectuals declared “religious belief” itself to be unreasonable. Karl Marx believed that religion was the opiate of the people. Sigmund Freud argued that religion was for the irrational mind. Friedrich Nietzsche audaciously claimed, “God is dead.”<sup>6</sup> With the dawn of European imperialism, the West saw itself uniquely suited to bring the Enlightenment virtues of reason and rationality to its colonies. Indeed, Enlightenment values still reign supreme in the West; reason rather than faith is understood to be the ultimate judge of everything, the worth of an individual or of a culture, and the merit of an argument. The veil debate in Europe is intrinsically linked to the ongoing Enlightenment project, because those who advocate banning the veil invoke the virtues of secularism.<sup>7</sup> Influenced

by the French value of *laïcisme* (meaning secularism), right-wing politicians are attempting to ban the veil on the grounds that its religious connotations are incompatible with modernity. As a religious symbol, the veil is offensive to secularism because it represents the antithesis of secularism's interest in freedom, democracy, and progress. Ironically, right-wing politicians have their own proselytizing mission: to convert Muslims to the virtues of Western, liberal democracy.

Any investigation of the veil's significance in Norwegian political culture must take into account the way in which Muslims are racialized by the sign of their religious identification.<sup>8</sup> It is a racialization that replicates the colonial move because it seeks to efface and assimilate the identity of the veiled Muslim woman. The veil has become a symbol of Muslims' backwardness and is seen as a threat to Western civilization. In the words of Minoo Moallem, "In the context of modern colonial racial formations, religion becomes not only a means of racialization but also a theoretical tool for justifying assessment of Islamic inferiority and thus the need for European intervention."<sup>9</sup> An intense scrutiny of Muslims and a fixation on the significance of the veil in Muslim culture is legitimized on the basis of a Western desire to civilize the Muslim world. Westernizing and thereby civilizing *the other* is a quintessentially imperialistic project. According to Homi Bhabha, the postcolonial translation of modernity enables itself by "introducing the question of subaltern agency into the question of modernity."<sup>10</sup>

Feminist justifications for unveiling have a long history. During its colonization of the Orient, the West constructed an image of the veiled Muslim woman as an oppressed victim and used it as a part of its justification for expansion.<sup>11</sup> Couched in a "savior narrative," unveiling became one of the principal aims of the Western civilizing mission. In his theory of Orientalism, Edward Said shows how Western discourse maps the world with a static "us versus them" epistemological model so as to construct non-Western cultures and non-Western peoples as inferior to Western cultures and peoples. Racial difference served to distinguish free masters from enslaved subjects; moreover, by racializing their subjects as uncivilized, colonizers demonstrated that these subjects lacked the capacity for self-development. Said shows how Western discourse constructed an image of the Western as *human* and the Oriental as the *still becoming human*, and how, in the scheme of rigid Western dichotomies, the production of knowledge about an inferior *other* served to produce a superior self. Within this framework colonial subjects think of themselves in the manner in which the West has instructed them to think of themselves. As Said points out, "The Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action."<sup>12</sup> In view of its superiority, the West committed itself to the cause of civilizing its inferior counterpart, and since, as Irene Zempi and Neil Chakraborti note, "the veil was seen as a visible barrier to the establishment of Western superiority," unveiling became a chief element of its civilizing mission.<sup>13</sup> Removing the veil of the colonial Muslim subject was viewed as a means to suspend her gender oppression and the oppressive backwardness of Islamic culture. In the words of Leila Ahmed, "The peculiar practices of Islam with respect to women had always formed part of the western narrative of the quintessential *otherness* [emphasis added] and inferiority of Islam."<sup>14</sup>

In the West's current condition, the orientalist principle of *othering* has prepared the way for the use of feminist language to justify Islamophobia. In the same way that veiling proved Muslim inferiority and justified Western colonial expansion, contemporary politicians approach the issue of unveiling from the perspective of a savior narrative: women must be saved from patriarchal and totalitarian Islamic culture. The veil serves as a marker of female subjugation, and unveiling is both justified and mandated as a feminist initiative against gender oppression. Moallem observes, "We are still justifying our civilizing mission which

began in the age of colonial modernity and continues to give meaning to our contemporary world.”<sup>15</sup> As in colonial times, feminist language is used to justify banning the veil in order to save Muslim women from an oppressive dress code that reflects a patriarchal social order. Muslim women become a population in need of redemption by “a global sisterhood” led by Western feminists. Nima Naghibi argues that although the rhetoric of sisterhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was based on the idea of a universal oppression of women, “the image of the backward Eastern woman, who belongs to a more primitive era, served as a contrast to the more highly evolved figure of womanhood in the West and enabled Western women to place themselves in a leadership position vis-à-vis their Eastern sisters.”<sup>16</sup> Western feminism, then, with its imperialistic concern for Muslim women’s oppression, construes Islam as inferior and therefore reinforces the colonial narrative. It is marked by an intense concern for what Rey Chow calls “the ‘subjectivity’ of the other-as-oppressed-victim.”<sup>17</sup>

### *BANNING THE VEIL IN NORWAY*

For more than a decade the Progress Party, led by Jensen, has driven a debate about banning veiling in Norway. Central to the party’s legislative proposal is a perception that multiculturalism will make undesirable allowances for Muslim culture and religion. Unlike Norwegian political parties that embrace a multiculturalist ethic, the Progress Party shares France’s preference for an ethic of assimilation, and sees the veil as an obstacle to the creation of an egalitarian citizenry. In the view of its members, multiculturalism destroys national identity and promotes the oppression of women. Assuming that Islam makes Muslims inclined to war and terrorism, the party argues that Muslims are a barrier to social harmony.

The party’s membership alleges that Islamic values are not aligned with Norwegian ones. Ståle Urbye claimed, “Besides being a symbol of women’s oppression, the veil creates an unnecessary wall between young and vulnerable people who ought to be in contact and dialogue” (*Dagbladet*). Per Sandberg has proposed that Muslims who support the veiling of women, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage have no business in Norway. He went so far as to say that Muslim parents who do not respect laws that make it illegal to wear a veil should be sent *home*” (*VG* 2009, emphasis added). Christian Tybring-Gjedde has claimed that immigration from non-Western (read Muslim) countries “is tearing Norway apart” (*Aftenposten* 2010). Likening the veil to the yellow Star of David that Jews were forced to wear by the Nazis, Kai Roger Hansen allied the party’s goals with those of feminism, and asked this rhetorical question: “Are we going to be on the side of intolerant Islamic leaders who force women to wear the veil, or are we going to be on the side of women who fight for greater tolerance and equality?” (*Sarpsborg ArbeiderBlad*). Finally, Siv Jensen, noting that Muslim children are being physically beaten and subjected to female genital mutilation, opined that Norwegian immigration policy has failed when crimes sanctioned by religion are tolerated in democratic Norway (TV2). Presuming that gendered forms of worship are being forced upon Muslim women, the Progress Party is ready to pin the blame on Islam.

Through its voiced sentiments, the Progress Party seeks to mark the West as a space where gender equality is promoted and protected, and the Muslim world as a space where gender equality is positively forbidden. Michel Foucault argued that since power and knowledge always intersect, knowledge is never innocent, and truth always expresses the interest of the knowing subject.<sup>18</sup> In other words, truth is linked to a system of power, which produces and sustains it. Exploiting this linkage, the Progress Party propagates the idea that the only way to see and know a Muslim woman is to unveil her. Questioning fixed essences

or truths, Spivak has argued that the world is organized politically, economically, and culturally along Western discursive lines, and that the subaltern must be represented by others because the subaltern is incapable of representing herself.<sup>19</sup> Since knowledge and power always intersect, discourse mandates certain ways of talking – and knowing – and forbids other ways of talking, and knowledge always reflects the truth of the knowing author.

The veil debate in Norway erupted in 2003 when an avowed secular feminist and “antiracist” named Hege Storhaug launched a campaign to ban the veil in elementary schools. She argued that the veil signaled support for a totalitarian ideology and the implementation of Sharia law. Given to making Islamophobic statements that are cloaked in feminist rhetoric, she claimed that non-Western immigrants were importing patriarchal values, traditions, and institutions into Norway.<sup>20</sup> She is one of the leading figures in the veil debate and her arguments have strongly influenced Jensen’s views. Following the French decision to ban the veil in 2004, the Progress Party attempted to pass similar legislation. Arguing that the veil symbolizes women’s oppression and thwarts integration, the Progress Party introduced a proposal to ban the veil in elementary schools. The veil, Jensen proclaimed, was not a religious symbol like the Christian cross and the Jewish *Kippah*.<sup>21</sup> In 2006 Storhaug published a book on the problems of Muslim immigration to Norway titled *Men Størst av alt er Friheten: Om Innvandringens Konsekvenser* (But Greatest of all is Freedom: The Consequences of Immigration). Relying on personal interviews, she creates a picture of the Muslim woman as a subservient victim of Muslim men and of Islam. She writes: “The husband’s absolute right to sex, in my opinion, is very much alive today, even among the second-generation Muslims here in Norway.”<sup>22</sup> Interviews with just two Muslim women provide her with all the evidence she needs for this inflammatory contention. As further evidence of women’s subjugation under Islam, she makes a set of sociological observations whose value is more than a little dubious: “the majority of Muslims in Norway,” she alleges, reflect a “resistance against the ‘Europeanization’ of Muslim women . . . most men wear westernized clothes, [with the exception of ties,] while most women are dressed in accordance with Islamic law and the dress code of their country of origin.”<sup>23</sup> Men wear clothes, but women *are dressed*: from Storhaug’s Western perspective, the veil appears as something that is imposed upon the Muslim woman, dressing, and thereby enslaving, her.

Storhaug’s pronouncements have strongly influenced Jensen’s veiling legislation. In 2012 Jensen told *Dagbladet*, one of Norway’s leading newspapers, that one of the most important feminist causes in the world today is the fight against misogynist radical Islam.<sup>24</sup> Convinced that the veil is a marker of Islam’s inherent misogyny, she has made it her feminist mission to liberate Muslim women from veiling. Indeed, Jensen and Storhaug have long maintained that the Progress Party is the only political party that manifests authentic feminism. Storhaug has claimed that if the nation had been governed by the Progress Party for the last 10-15 years, Muslim women would now enjoy greater democracy and basic human rights.<sup>25</sup> Jensen has asserted on multiple occasions that if her party were in power, it would not allow Norway to be penetrated by Islamic law. The message she conveys repeatedly is that the Progress Party reveres the democracy and gender equality that all Norwegians stand for.

#### *SIV JENSEN’S FEMINIST AGENDA: SAVING MUSLIM WOMEN*

Jensen delivered two speeches in 2009 in which she targets Islam as a source of gender inequality, and ties her legislative proposals to ban the veil to a feminist agenda. The speeches were prompted by the request from Keltoum Missoum, a Norwegian woman who

was applying for the Police Academy, for permission to wear a veil with her police uniform. The Police Directorate responded positively to her request, and on February 4, 2009 the Justice Department announced on its website that it was allowing a veil to be worn as part of a police uniform. Jensen reacted by claiming that Norway was experiencing a dangerous process of Islamization. On 27 February 2009, in an opinion piece for Norway's largest newspaper, *Aftenposten*, she wrote:

*This is not about the ordinary Muslim, but about those Muslims who force their daughters and spouses to wear a veil – the hijab – which prevents them from integrating into society and deprives them of their freedom. We have seen how politicians in Norway have quietly made exceptions for Muslims that only serve to segregate them from the rest of society. The debate about whether to allow customs officers and police officers to wear the hijab while on duty are two recent examples. In the last century women fought for equal rights. To an almost parodic [sic] extent. But as soon as demands for gender segregation come from Muslims, they are quietly agreed to out of misplaced political correctness.<sup>26</sup>*

In the interests of not generalizing, Jensen distinguishes ordinary Muslims from exceptional and implicitly bad Muslims – the latter being those who wear the veil or force their sisters or wives to do so. A distinction between good and bad Muslims is a recurrent motif in European debates on veiling. It is a distinction, according to Jocelyne Cesari, “between those Muslims who accept the norms and political values of Western societies and those who reject them.”<sup>27</sup> For Jensen, men who insist that their daughters and spouses wear the veil, thus preventing them from integrating into Western society, are bad Muslims. The veil oppresses Muslim women because it deprives them of the freedom to integrate themselves – by which Jensen means *assimilate* themselves – to Western society. Jensen and her supporters represent the veil as a threat to Norway's respect for freedom and gender equality. As Spivak has observed, “The protection of woman (today the “third-world woman”) becomes a signifier for the establishment for a *good* society.”<sup>28</sup> The veil becomes the sign of a pre-Modern subject who is either prevented by social forces from enjoying gender equality or, worse, does not even desire it herself.

By claiming that Muslim women are forced to wear the veil, Jensen defines them as the victims of Islam and of Muslim men. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty explains, when they are defined as victims, “women are constituted as a group via dependency relationships vis-à-vis men, who are implicitly held responsible for these relationships.”<sup>29</sup> Jensen casts Muslim men as abusers who use Islam as a means to control and suppress women. She pits Islamic values against Norwegian ones, essentializing both and defining Norwegian culture as superior. To be liberated, Muslim women must assimilate themselves to Norwegian society. Since the veil stands as a barrier to that assimilation, Muslim women must renounce their veils.

The Progress Party's attempt to ban police officers from wearing a veil did not receive much support from other political parties, so Jensen used her speech to the party's annual convention in May 2009 to voice an overarching concern about the status of women in Norway. An entire section of her speech is devoted to Muslim women who are forced, because of their religion, to live under oppressive patriarchal conditions. To speak for these women, she invokes Ayaan Hirsi Ali:

*Ali is probably the foremost symbol of today's most important feminist struggle. She is my age and was born in Mogadishu in Somalia. When she was 23 years old, she was forced to marry her cousin in Canada, a cousin she had never met before. When she was supposed to*

*enter a life of marital confinement, she chose instead to move to the Netherlands. I want to quote Hirsi Ali: "To accept abuse and not to dare to criticize it out of fear of appearing racist, yes, that is the purest form of racism." I take Ayaan Hirsi Ali's words for my own.<sup>30</sup>*

An ex-Muslim and a strident critic of Islam, Ali is a self-proclaimed secular feminist who has written extensively about how Muslim and Western societies are engaged in a "clash of civilizations." Holding Islam responsible for her experience of patriarchal abuse, she asserts that the confinement of women to the private sphere is "common everywhere that there are Muslims" and is based on Quranic passages declaring that "a husband may confine his wife within the home, even until she dies there."<sup>31</sup> Jensen has found, in Ali, an insider and an informant who can reveal the truth about Islam. She assumes that there is a universal category of woman with a universal set of needs and a universal feminist struggle that all women can agree upon, yet her analytical perspective is grounded in her experience as a white Western woman, and her attempt to inspire a universal feminist struggle against Islam is informed, ironically, by the experience of one Muslim woman.

As bell hooks (sic) has argued, the assumption of a common women's oppression is usually the assumption of a common white women's oppression.<sup>32</sup> Jensen tries to convince Norwegians that Ali's subjugation is identical to their own. Like Ali, Jensen holds Islam exclusively responsible for the oppression of Muslim women, regardless of their culture and nationality, and she holds up Ali as a role model for other Muslim women to emulate since her rejection of Islam is simultaneously an affirmation of the necessity of becoming Westernized. Jensen cites Ali's appalling experiences of Islam as proof of its inferiority. In *Nomad*, her second memoir, Ali calls the superiority of Western civilization "not simply my opinion but a reality I have experienced and continue to appreciate everyday."<sup>33</sup>

Jensen makes left-oriented politicians as well as Islam responsible for the ongoing abuse of Muslim women:

*The Left oriented elite in Norway has, in its eagerness to appear tolerant, closed its eyes to forced marriage, genital mutilation, torture and abuse, not to mention the right of half of the world's population to an education, a love life, freedom of movement, and most important, freedom of speech. This is our most important contemporary feminist struggle. And it is the Progress Party and other freedom-loving liberals worldwide who are going to take it up. Dear delegates, it is a problem that many choose to close their eyes to these things, but it is not a problem that the Progress Party wants to challenge those who oppress women in the land of Islam. And it is a problem that genital mutilation and forced marriage still happen in Norway even though they are illegal. But it is not impossible to do something about this, if we really want to.*

Jensen's generalizations about Islam and Muslims include references to genital mutilation, torture, spousal abuse, and forced marriage – crimes and/or criminal practices that are antithetical to Western freedoms such as the freedom to choose one's lover and one's spouse, freedom of movement, and freedom of speech. In her conceptual framework, Islam is responsible for criminally victimizing Muslim women and for depriving them of their human rights. Women are robbed of sexual satisfaction by genital mutilation and robbed of love by arranged marriages. Their embodied experience is one of abuse and torture at the hands of men. For Jensen, the effort to end Islam's dehumanization of women is "our most important contemporary feminist struggle." By declaring certain crimes and practices to be synonymous with Islam, Jensen essentializes and criminalizes Muslim culture,

even as she essentializes and blesses what it means to be Norwegian. She associates torture and abuse with Islam and freedom and human rights with Norwegianness. In her orientalist epistemology, Norway is simply more advanced than the Muslim world. Moreover, while she makes crimes of sexual oppression constitutive of the Muslim world, she points to Norway as a place where they do not occur. To borrow an epistemological model from feminist psychoanalytic theory, her analysis transforms a lack in the privileged term – the possibility of violence against women in Norway – into an essential lack of the subordinate term – the inevitability of that violence under Islam. It becomes possible to imagine Norway as a place that is already safe and nurturing for women. To project Muslims as the West's *other* is both an act of Western self-affirmation and a strategy of Western imperialism.<sup>34</sup>

Saving Muslim women is an international as well as a national mission: together with other freedom-loving people, “the Progress Party wants to challenge those who oppress women in the land of Islam.” Wherever this land may be, it is apparently common to oppress women there. The citizens of this land are apparently unable to achieve egalitarianism unassisted; they require help from Western experts like Jensen. She makes further legislative proposals that are intended to help her Muslim sisters escape from the “choke hold” of Islam:

*This is why the Progress Party wants to perform mandatory gynecological examinations of immigrant girls, to require that women must be 24 years old before entering into an arranged marriage, and to create a greater correspondence between the rights and duties of citizenship. This is why we want parents to be prosecuted if they expose their children to such abuse. And this is why we want to improve our services so that women dare to extricate themselves from the choke hold they have escaped from. The Progress Party is on the side of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and all other like-minded people around the world.*

By associating genital mutilation and forced marriage with Islam in general, Jensen takes a particular version of Islam as the only version of Islam, and makes all Muslim women subject to it. For Muslim women to extricate themselves from the “choke hold” of Islam, she proposes 1) a requirement that all immigrant girls be given gynecological examinations (which is ironic since most immigrants to Norway come from non-Muslim countries like Sweden, Poland, and Lithuania);<sup>35</sup> 2) an age limit for arranged marriages (she uses the phrase *hente ekteskap*, which has a mail-order-bride connotation); and 3) laws to prosecute Muslim parents who subject their children to genital mutilation and arranged marriages. These proposals manifest an imperialistic concern. Jensen wants to free the Muslim woman from the control of the Muslim man – to make her into what Spivak calls an “*object* of protection from her own kind.”<sup>36</sup> It is the duty of white women to save brown women from brown men. Jensen creates an image of helpless brown women: “We want to improve our services so that women *dare to extricate themselves*” (my emphasis). Through its use of colonial language, her feminist discourse becomes a site of hegemony. This is well explained in Spivak’s article, “French feminism in an international frame,” where she argues that, in their mission to liberate women worldwide, Western feminists end up producing the non-Western woman as someone who reflects *them*, and someone who *they* need to save. Imperialism is reproduced through a hierarchical separation that highlights the Western subject and renders the non-Western subject all but invisible.<sup>37</sup>

In 2010, Jensen again raised the project of saving Muslim women from Muslim men, when she announced, “Next week we will submit to Parliament a proposal to prohibit the veil in the public sphere, in order to liberate women from oppression and totalitarian

thoughts.” On this occasion she offered a general condemnation of Muslim immigration, saying, “We must deny citizenship to those who undermine Norwegian values.”<sup>38</sup> To rescue veiled Muslim women from oppression, the Muslim men who force them to veil must be denied citizenship.

Jensen’s investment in saving Muslim women is an imperialistic concern. She portrays veiled Muslim women as the passive victims of men and religion, and she portrays white women as the liberators of victimized Muslim women. Her representation of Islam is Islamophobic; it generalizes and perpetuates negative stereotypes about Muslims and defines Islam as incompatible with (and inferior to) the West. As Joseph Massad writes, there is, in the West, a “projection and championing of itself on account of the (fictional) equal position of its women with its men, which must always be contrasted with the position of Muslim women of the East and especially in ‘Islam.’”<sup>39</sup> This Western projection leads to an idealization of the Norwegian nation. Unveiling is as much about saving Norway from Muslim penetration as it is about saving Muslim women from Muslim men.

Returning to Foucault’s concept of the interconnectedness of power and knowledge, representations of Islam have regularly testified to a desire to divide the world into the superior occident and the inferior orient. The result is that discourses concerning Islam and Muslims continue to be circumscribed by the dictates of “Western civilization.” In Jensen’s rationalization for unveiling, she produces the veiled Muslim woman as a passive victim who needs to be rescued from Muslim men. While her feminist agenda may be well-intended, it only replicates the colonial move, since she views the veiled Muslim woman’s experience through a Western lens, and renders the Muslim woman invisible in the process. In Foucault’s poststructuralist framework, human consciousness is constructed discursively. He reminds us that subjects who are perceived as “unqualified” are often denied participation in discourse.<sup>40</sup> To quote Rey Chow, Jensen has made the Muslim woman into “an absolute entity in the form of an image, whose silence becomes the occasion for our speech.”<sup>41</sup> Jensen draws upon her qualifications as a politician to speak for the veiled Muslim woman, to become her “mouthpiece,” as Spivak puts it. By doing so, however, Jensen makes the veiled Muslim woman a mute subordinate and ensures that the only voice we hear is Jensen’s.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Zempi Irene and Neil Chakraborti, *Islamophobia, Victimisation, and the Veil* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Pivot, 2014), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Chow, Rey “Where have all the Natives Gone?” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (New York: Routledge, 2003), 326.

<sup>3</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 296. Spivak offers this dictum as a comment on the relationship between colonizers and colonized. Reflecting on the suppression of Hindu widow sacrifice by British colonialism, she writes that white men are saving brown women from brown men. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, she writes: “white women—from the nineteenth century British Missionary Registers to Mary Daly—have not produced an alternative understanding” (287). Spivak contends that this racist phenomenon is still alive among Western feminists.

<sup>4</sup> Cesari, Jocelyne *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 9).

- <sup>5</sup> Zempi, Irene and Neil Chakraborti, *Islamophobia, Victimisation, and the Veil* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Pivot, 2014, 3).
- <sup>6</sup> See Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 53-84, 118-148. Nietzsche believed that there would come a day when the intellectual climate demanded proof as a requisite of belief. See *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109.
- <sup>7</sup> Cesari, Jocelyne and Sean McLoughlin, *European Muslims and the Secular State* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2005, 4).
- <sup>8</sup> Moustafa Bayoumi, "How Does it Feel to Be a Problem?," *Amerasia Journal* 27 (2001-02): 72-73.
- <sup>9</sup> Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005, 42).
- <sup>10</sup> Bhabha, Homi Conclusion: "Race, Time and the Revision of Modernity" in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994, 244).
- <sup>11</sup> Deina Ali Abdelkader, *Islamic Activist: The Anti-Enlightenment Democrats* (London: Pluto Press, 2011, 14-16).
- <sup>12</sup> Said, Edward *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978, 3).
- <sup>13</sup> Zempi, Irene and Neil Chakraborti, *Islamophobia, Victimisation and the Veil* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2014, 8).
- <sup>14</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 149).
- <sup>15</sup> Minoo Moallem, "Am I a Muslim Woman? Nationalist Reactions and Postcolonial Transaction" in *Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak Out*, ed. Fawzia Afzal-Kahn (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2005), 53.
- <sup>16</sup> Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western feminism and Iran* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, xxv).
- <sup>17</sup> Chow, Rey "Where have all the Natives Gone?" 326.
- <sup>18</sup> Foucault, Michel *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979, 27).
- <sup>19</sup> Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 227.
- <sup>20</sup> Fekete, Liz *A Suitable Enemy: Racism, Migration and Islamophobia in Europe* (London and New York: Pluto Press, 2009, 93).
- <sup>21</sup> Ingeborg Moe, "Frp vil ha Skautforbud" in *Dagbladet*, 02/05/2004, under, <http://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/2004/02/05/390132.html> (accessed, 19, February, 2015). All Norwegian-English translations are my own.
- <sup>22</sup> Storhaug, *Men Størst av alt er friheten*, (Oslo, Kagge Forlag, 2006, 135-136).
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-165.

<sup>24</sup> Jensen has drawn parallels between radical Islam and both Nazism and communism. See Arnhild Aass Kristiansen, “Kampen mot radikal Islam er vår viktigste,” in *Dagbladet*, 03/02/2009, under [http://www.dagbladet.no/2009/03/02/nyheter/innenriks/politikk/siv\\_jensen/islam/5100011/](http://www.dagbladet.no/2009/03/02/nyheter/innenriks/politikk/siv_jensen/islam/5100011/) (accessed 19, February, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Hege Storhaug, “Siv Jensen, Landets ledende Feminist,” in *Dagbladet*, 4/10/2006, under <http://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/2006/10/04/478642.html> (accessed 19, February, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Siv Jensen, “Stikker hodet i sanden” in *Aftenposten*, 02/27/2009, under <http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/Stikker-hodet-i-sanden-6611564.html> (accessed, February 20, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Cesari, Jocelyne “Islam, Secularism and Multiculturalism After 9/11: A Transatlantic Comparison” in *European Muslims*, 46.

<sup>28</sup> Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 298.

<sup>29</sup> Talpade Mohanty, Chandra “Under Western Eyes” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, 55.

<sup>30</sup> Fremskrittspartiet, “Siv Jensen Tale Under Landsmøte 2009 Del 2 av 5.” *Youtube*. Online Video clip, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dj2fzy90n3U> (accessed 1. April 2015). Jensen’s speech can be found in several newspaper articles. I chose to use the video clip in order to make my own translation.

<sup>31</sup> Hirsi, Ayaan Ali, *Nomad: from Islam to America—a personal journey through the clash of civilizations* (New York: Atria Paperbacks, 2013), 163.

<sup>32</sup> bell hooks (sic), “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women” in *Feminist Review* 23 (June 1986): 132.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>34</sup> Massad, Joseph *Islam and Liberalism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 19.

<sup>35</sup> See Statistisk Sentral Byrå, “Migrations, 2014,” SSB.no, under <http://ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/flytting/aar/2015-04-23#content> (accessed, 1 April, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 299.

<sup>37</sup> Spivak Gayatri Chakravorty “French Feminism In an International Frame” in *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, (London: Methuen, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> NTB “Frp vil forby niqab og burka” in *Dagbladet* 02/20/2010, under, <http://www.dagbladet.no/2010/02/20/nyheter/innenriks/frp/burka/10505085/> (accessed April 1, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Massad, Joseph *Islam and Liberalism*, 123.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, Michel *Diskursens Orden*, trans, Espen Schaanning (Oslo: Spartacus Forlag, A/S, 1999), 22.

<sup>41</sup> Chow, Rey “Where have all the Natives Gone?,” 329.

# ***L'Exception Francaise: From Irrational Fear of Muslims to their Social Death Sentence***

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*[The Collective Against Islamophobia in France \(CCIF\)](#)*

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***L'Exception Francaise:  
From Irrational Fear of Muslims to their Social Death Sentence***

**Yasser Louati**

*The Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF)*

Defined as attacks against people and institutions because of their real or assumed adherence to the Muslim faith, Islamophobia in France has been making headlines and raising questions around the world for years. As France is home to the biggest Muslim minority in Europe, it is also the first country on the continent to develop a set of laws and practices specifically tailored for Muslims. The famous law banning Muslim headscarves in schools is only the tip of the iceberg and deserves to be connected to a multiple, decade-long manufacturing of a Muslim problem in France.

When stories of Muslim school girls wearing long skirts broke out, several newspapers approached the Collective Against Islamophobia in France to get the details and were shocked to find out how such Muslim practices that were once perceived to be intolerable racism have become acceptable and even legalized.

The Muslim headscarf or “hijab” represents what French elites despise the most, i.e., an outright statement that one can be Muslim, and French, and not be afraid of showing it. The battle to have it banned can be traced back to 1989. Although a few cases did occur prior to that time, even then, banning school girls from getting an education because of a piece of fabric was the position of a vocal, but minority, group.

Now, fifteen years later, the steady efforts made by writers, opinion makers and militants from the far left to the far right, to have their ideas heard, found reliable collaborators and long term supporters in French media and policy making circles. Within fifteen years, a consensus was built within French elites, despite deeply divergent ideologies on other subjects and militant backgrounds, that Islam, represented by Muslims in France as a whole, are an existential threat to France, its identity and values.

This paper does not intend to analyze in detail how Islamophobia became a structural problem in French society. Several books dealing with the subject are cited for that purpose. What this paper intends to bring into light is how Islamophobia in France became a long term structural problem and how hostile ideas materialized in the willingness to reinterpret constitutional principles such as the separation of church and state, or access to citizenship in order to legalize discriminatory policies leading to a de facto second citizenry for French Muslims.

***THE 1970S: FROM BEING INVISIBLE TO BECOMING SOCIAL ACTORS***

The decade marked the end of a thirty-year-long period of rapid economic growth led by the automotive industry and construction. The whole economy relied on a powerful industrial sector which saw the rise of major car makers like Renault, Citroen, and Talbot, and construction giants like Bouygues.

Both industries relied on cheap and low-skilled labor that was brought from former colonies in Africa. Such migrant workers, whose only intent was to work, and, hopefully, return home, became permanent residents in France. As the country faced the end of its economic prosperity, and unemployment became a structural problem, foreign workers became increasingly seen as an unwelcome group of people who happened to be useful but no longer needed.

Nevertheless, the once-docile foreign working force began to express its anger over massive layoffs, the deterioration of working conditions, unfair treatment, and official policies to keep them at the bottom of the corporate ladder with no prospect for advancement. Two major strikes launched a movement that proved to forever change the relationship between the government and these workers.

In 1972, foreign workers at the mining company Pennaroya used their right to go on strike on a massive basis in order to obtain an increase in their salaries. Their example was soon followed by workers at the Renault factory, who were asking for fair treatment and equal seniority classification between all workers.

The year 1972 saw a new level of mobilisation from foreigners, who went on hunger strikes in protest against mass expulsions. These social movements shocked the nation and the citizenry, who now saw immigrant workers taking part in social movements to the extent that racism became a question of such concern that it led to the adoption in [July 1972, of the law against racism](#).

As global demand for cars increased, French manufacturers delayed investment in new equipment and preferred to use massively lower cost foreign labour in order to cope with demand. In some Paris based factories, the majority of chain workers were foreigners from Muslim countries. For instance, Vincent Gay of the EHESS estimated that they represented between 50% and 75% of car maker, Citroen's, factory workers. Ultimately, wide-scale discriminatory practices to block career advancement for foreigners led to a state of rebellion that was to last until the early 1980s.

The fact that foreigners went from being passive components of the French economy to becoming civic actors capable of banding together to seek equal treatment, led to a change of rhetoric from the government. The link between immigration and unemployment became a popular idea that was clearly expressed by Prime Minister Jacques Chirac in 1976: *"In a country where you have 900,000 jobless people but where you have 2 million immigrants is not a country where the issue of unemployment is not solvable."*

While immigrant workers defied their employers for better working conditions, the government did not miss the opportunity to establish a connection between the social movement and the perceived religious background of those taking part in it. The fact that the building of prayer rooms for Muslims was encouraged by employers in order to dissuade them from spending time at the union's office was quickly forgotten.

Following the 1981 presidential victory of the socialist Francois Mitterrand, the newly appointed government of Pierre Mauroy and his Minister of Interior, Gaston Defer, saw both claiming that migrant workers on strike were being manipulated by religious groups, "Without any connection with social claims." Indeed, the massive strikes of migrant workers in 1982-1984 were quickly Islamized. The post colonial rhetoric came back in full force, as migrant workers were identified as one single body whose only identity was a religious one.

French media, known for their boldness and independence, turned a blind eye on strikers' social claims or their legitimate fears of losing their jobs after the government opened its "liberal parentheses." Instead, a parallel was drawn between them and the masses

that had rallied in Teheran under Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership. For instance, the Minister of Labour claimed that "Shia militants were leading the masses in Paris," forgetting that migrants were from Sunni countries with a nonexistent Shia foothold.

The Seventies were a decade of profound uncertainties. France had just lost its paternalistic figure, liberation hero and father of the Fifth Republic (enacted by the 1958 constitution), General Charles De Gaulle, and was facing economic stagnation, growing unemployment, and an unresolved colonial past. Thus, what was once a secondary question had become more and more central. Immigrant workers, who were once an ignored and despised labor force, were no longer a sociology subject, but, instead, achieved the category of an active social force. Their claims for fair treatment created an awareness in the public that they were probably here to stay.

This was further established when, in 1983, second generation immigrants launched the *Walk for Equality and Justice*. After a series of racist crimes that went unpunished, and the growing sentiment of fear and isolation from the rest of society, a march was launched from the city of Marseille, in southern France, all the way to Paris, 900 kilometers away.

The march successfully reached Paris, comprised of thousands of residents of the ethnically diverse and poor suburbs, but, by the time it reached the capital city, the ruling socialist party had dispatched its militants to counteract the marcher's claims of racial discrimination and to put the discussion under its control. Claims for equal treatment, from the second generation of immigrants who were called "Les Beurs", were ignored, just as they were for their parents.

### *CAN THEY REALLY BE FRENCH?*

The 1983 march for equality was rebranded the *Walk of the "Beurs,"* and is still remembered as such to this day. Ethnicizing a social movement was a way for the political elite and the media to avoid talking about the core issues raised by marchers.

At the same time, French media began a series of incendiary headlines. Right-wing and left-wing weeklies decided to treat the now sizable migrant group as one ethnic group brand, named "Les Musulmans", a label that included any person who identified him or herself as a Muslim, or was perceived as such.

Immigration was by then no longer welcome, and definitely looked at with suspicion. Racist rhetoric, still a taboo then, had to be manipulated to become more acceptable. Religion became the tool of choice to accomplish this manipulation. In a country with a violent history of religious conflict and where the church was kept away from government affairs through laws enacted in 1905, fear mongering based upon a return of religious conflict, especially a foreign religion connected to threatening events overseas (Iranian revolution, Saudi Arabia's oil embargo, the Iran-Iraq war...) was astutely used by politicians of both right and left-wing parties.

The immigrant worker took on the new identity of being a foreign Muslim on French soil, and his children became considered a long term problem.

The Eighties put an end to the myth of migrant workers returning to their respective countries.

Having been in France for decades, with their children having been educated in French public schools, France was adopted as their new home and their children saw it as their only one.

Being born in France meant that descendants of post-colonial immigrants were entitled to full French citizenship, which was not the case during the colonial era. In reaction

to the prospect of seeing a new category of citizens perceived as Muslims or, even worse, openly claiming to be so, the *law of the soil* was put into question as it had been by extreme right-wing and antisemitic movements such as Action Française, according to which, the *law of the soil* (jus soli) was perceived as being too permissive and making it “too easy” for immigrants to become French citizens, thus calling for a return to the *law of the blood* (jus sanguinis).

The combination of economic stagnation and the growing weight of hostile sentiment towards immigrants led to vain attempts from President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (UDF) to have immigrants, particularly those from Algeria, sent back home (Patrick Weil).

In 1984, Alain Griotteray, former resister against Nazi occupation and co-founder of President Giscard d’Estaing’s centrist political party, UDF (Union for French Democracy), released a book in the wake of the March for Equality of Justice of 1983. The chosen title crystallized public debate on the place of the “second generation” in French society. According to the author, the *law of the soil* had to be repealed in favor of the *law of the blood*, because the “second generation refuses to assimilate” and to adopt French values, and are, therefore, “French in spite of themselves.”

The book played a major role in the legislative election of 1986. The President’s party, UDF, and its direct competitor, RPR (Rally for the Republic), led by Jacques Chirac, promised to have citizenship laws reformed, with the argument that becoming French must not be a right but a choice.

After winning the legislative elections, President François Mitterrand nominated Jacques Chirac to the position of Prime Minister. Minister of Justice Alain Chalon proposed to reform the laws of citizenship, but this was rejected by the Council of State (highest administrative authority) on October 30, 1986.

Repeal of the *law of the soil* was abandoned after mass rallies from grassroots organisations, unions and students, but, in April 1987, Jacques Chirac reintroduced his project, and, in June of the same year, established the Commission on Citizenship (branded Commission Marceau) whose mission was to make recommendations for a new code of citizenship.

With Immigrant workers having now become parents, and their children automatically becoming French citizens according to the current system, Jacques Chirac vowed to repeal the automatic acquisition of French citizenship by birth on French soil.

The Commission Marceau submitted its report to the Prime Minister and recommended that children of foreigners between 16 and 20 years of age must express their desire to become French. Being born in France no longer meant being French. Historian, and Duke visiting Law Professor, Patrick Weil, declared it to be “breaking with a tradition of egalitarian and universal recognition which had a deep foundation.”

Support for repealing the *law of the soil* for Muslim immigrants came from Front National (Far Right) president, Jean Marie Le Pen, during his “Being French is inherited or must be earned” national campaign.

While the government added the redefinition of Republican values to its agenda in light of an emerging minority citizenry, international events soon raised questions about the latter’s place within French society, and how to deal with them.

### THE MUSLIM THREAT

The Salman Rushdie episode marked a shift in France’s relationship with its Muslims. From questions on immigration, unemployment and the status of new citizens

from the former colonial empire, it was now a question of opposing values: the West's freedom of speech versus Islam's censorship. As with the early Eighties' strikes, Muslims in France were identified with international events rather than according to their role as permanent residents or citizens.

Furthermore, the Rushdie affair was imported into France even before his book was translated into French. What was, in essence a foreign event, became a debate on whether freedom of speech was threatened in France by the presence of Muslims. Media coverage of the affair put the French Muslim community under an international affair lens and again locked in a foreign entity. As Muslims, they had to somehow support Ayatollah Khomeini's call for the writer's assassination.

It was soon after Khomeini's call that the word "fatwa" (religious opinion given by a Muslim Scholar) entered French pop culture to the point that it became synonymous with "death sentence." French media, which was unfamiliar and completely ignorant of what a fatwa meant, turned to the Grand Mosque of Paris' Chancellor Si Hamza Boubakeur for his opinion. The form of his answer mattered less than its content. He condemned Khomeini's "fatwa", but the presence of a translator at his side further promulgated the portrayal of the Muslim community as a foreign group headed by a foreigner who spoke Arabic and not French.

The focus on the Muslim community, in light of the Salman Rushdie affair in early 1989, was the prelude for a very explosive and long-lasting debate on Muslims in France.

By the year 1989, the landscape was set for a permanent stigmatization of Muslims as a homogenous entity for whom religion is the only lens with which it views the world and its place in society.

### *THE VEIL OF DISCORD AND THE FIRST DIRECT ATTACK ON MUSLIM EMANCIPATION*

In September 1989, three school girls were expelled by their principal on the grounds that their headscarf was intolerable and in violation on the 1905 law on the separation of church and state, i.e., *Laïcité*.

The incident was, at first, only reported in local newspapers, but quickly became a subject of national debate again.

What took place in a small country town 40 miles north of Paris became a nationwide debate (Thomas Deltombe, *L'Islam Imaginaire*).

Surprised by the turn of events, the Minister of Education Lionel Jospin, who believed that "*school is meant to welcome children, not to exclude them*", declared that school principals must establish a dialogue with parents and students in order to convince them to refrain from exhibiting religious articles in schools, but if dialogue failed, going to school is a matter of priority for children, and they must be welcomed in public schools.

Barely twenty-four hours later, five intellectual figures (Alain Finkielkraut, Elisabeth Badinter, Régis Debray, Elisabeth de Fontenay, Catherine Kintzler) co-signed an open letter to Jospin in a weekly newspaper, entitled "Teachers, let's not capitulate."

The 1,100 word-long document began with a comparison between the Minister's position, and that of European leaders who had signed the Munich agreement of 1938, which allowed Adolph Hitler to further develop his ambitions over Europe: "The future will tell us if the bicentenary year (of the French Revolution) will witness the birth of a Munich of the republican school." The authors accused the Minister of allowing school children to enter school "with the religion of their parents", that "children must enjoy forgetting their

community.” According to its authors, *“Respect for traditions does not concern school: The only traditions and differences that are worthy of respect are those that do not contradict human rights or the principle of free inquiry. But, by stating that some belief stands above everything and by declaring that there is a natural difference between human beings, the Islamic headscarf contradicts the two principles.”*

By putting the emancipation of “Muslim women” as one of the reasons for their open letter, and through the use of the third person while mentioning them, the co-authors had forgotten to have one Muslim woman co-sign the open letter with them. The point of the letter as a whole was that men were behind the wearing of headscarves by their daughters and sisters and, given the deep disdain for “their religion”, their “females” must pay the price of this disagreement by being excluded from school.

By mentioning “their fathers” on multiple occasions, the co-authors did not hide their hostility towards Muslim males, which they saw as representing *“the worst patriarchal system on the planet.”* And, in reply to the Minister’s willingness to welcome all kids to school regardless of their religious background, the five co-authors wrote: *“...it is students that we will continue to welcome, not the religion of their parents.”*

During the 1989 veil affair, what the girls had to say about the issue was not documented or relayed. It is not certain whether they had appreciated being spoken about in the third person, as if they no opinion on the matter, or, if their headscarf could possibly reflect a personal choice.

Lionel Jospin, who was compared to a weak Minister giving in to Nazis about to enter French schools, turned to the Council of the State, and, in the meantime, received support from First Lady Danielle Mitterrand and Prime Minister Michel Rocard. His position was also supported by the Council of the State’s notice #346893, issued on November 27th: “Granted for students to include for them the right to express and manifest their religious beliefs in schools in the respect of pluralism and freedom of others, and without prejudice to the teachings, program contents and required attendance.”

French media played a predominant role in defining the place of Muslims in French society, and, during the Creil Veils Affair, they managed to successfully turn the Muslim headscarf into a symbol of fierce rejection. From that period on and to this day, as we shall see later, Muslim girls are not seen as human beings but as a threatening social category about whom we can speak and debate, without ever allowing them to speak for themselves.

Despite the Minister’s position and the Council of State’s notice, the school principal maintained his position to keep the girls out of school. It was only after the ambassador of Morocco pressured the family (whose parents held Moroccan citizenship) that the girls took off their headscarves.

The episode has had tremendous consequences for French institutions and public opinion. Far right-wing political party, Front National, seized the opportunity and led a local electoral campaign, with immigration and Islam as a central topic. Its predictable opposition to the Muslim headscarf was supported by then Neuilly sur Seine Mayor, Nicolas Sarkozy (RPR).

The intellectual elite found itself split between the Minister and Council’s position, and that of staunch anti-veil figures, like Elizabeth Badinter, Alain Finkielkraut or Bernard Henry Levy, who were heavily supported by a seven-week (Thomas Detombe) media frenzy conveying the image of a domestic threat on Laïcité, secularism, republican values and French identities altogether.

To quote Malcom X :

*When you live in a poor neighborhood, you're living in an area where you have poor schools, when you have poor schools you have poor teachers, when you have poor teachers you get a poor education, with a poor education you can only work on a poor paying job and that poor paying job enables you again to live in a poor neighborhood. So it's a very vicious cycle.*

Nevertheless, co-authors of the open letter and those who voiced their opposition to Muslim school girls' wearing a headscarf have not pushed their battle for equality on behalf of Muslim females to the point of questioning the current segregationist school mapping system.

Indeed, the current school mapping system in France predetermines which schools students can attend according to their place of residency. This means that residents of sensitive or poor neighborhoods have no other choice but to attend local schools. It is a fact that quality schools, from kindergarten to reputed higher education institutions in the country, are located in upscale neighborhoods, where it is almost impossible for low income families to send their children. This results in some children being favored from an early age to acquiring a good education, build a strong network, and emancipate themselves by climbing the social ladder, while others are kept at bay.

This structural discrimination, resulting from the current school mapping system, is best documented by Saïd Hammouche and Vincent Edin (Chronicles of Ordinary Discriminations). According to both researchers, quality of teaching is not the only problem. A major factor affecting students' education in poor neighborhoods is the asymmetric access to information when compared to upscale neighborhoods. For instance, while students in the upscale neighborhoods are overwhelmingly served by classes preparing them for the country's best schools (business, law, medical, engineering, public administration etc...), their counterparts in poor areas are mostly served by universities and vocational schools that are not favored by recruiters, as they are seen as being of "lesser" quality or prestige.

In fact, veiled school girls have found staunch opponents to the symbol of discrimination they decided to wear, but find no one to denounce an official system of segregation that obliges them to go to schools located in their neighborhoods. In other words, Muslims are ordered to stop being who they are and ignore their backgrounds, but are not welcome to enter the schools attended by those fighting, on their behalf, for their emancipation.

Five years following the Creil Aaffair, in 1994, the new Minister of Education Francois Bayrou again put the Muslim headscarf on the government's agenda, this time by allowing school principals to exclude girls if they refused to uncover their heads.

In 2002, Jacques Chirac was reelected in an historic election that saw the Front National access the second round. The year 2003 was one of total hysteria, with media outlets broadcasting debates, documentaries and special editions on the headscarf, and how its very presence threatened Laïcité, and that a law must be passed to ban it.

Opinion makers lacked the institutional support needed to turn an ideology into law. This support, however, came from the High Council to Integration.

[Founded in 1989 by then Prime Minister Michel Rocard](#), HCI had, as its core mission, to debate on immigration issues and to bring forward recommendations for a better integration of minorities. It was composed of various personalities chosen from different backgrounds, and appointed by the Prime Minister himself.

Until 2003, HCI had voiced concerns over the exclusion of school girls on religious grounds and had supported the 1989 Council of the State's notice. It had seen no need for further legislation, but, after Jacques Chirac's reelection in 2002, HCI was overhauled with the appointing of new members with radically different positions about Islam, Muslims, integration and the Muslim headscarf.

As Abdellali Hajjat, author of the book *"Islamophobia, or How the French Elite Manufactures the Muslim Problem"* explains: "Analysis of HCI's reports between 1989 and 2012, and of the social composition of all of its different versions (...), attests to the progressive marginalization of social sciences in the development of a discourse on Islam and Muslims." In 2000, the report "Islam in the Republic" was overall opposed to the banning of the hijab in public schools because it was based on the knowledge produced by sociologists and political scientists and specialists of Islam. Only demographer Michèle Tribalat and community activist Gaye Petek challenged opinions of HCI, to the point that the former resigned noisily.

HCI had managed to keep some level of neutrality, thanks the heterogeneity of its member's backgrounds. The balance of powers between progressive and conservative ideologies allowed for HCI to remain protected from direct government interference, and for policy makers to impose its will. That is how HCI remained hostile to the banning of the hijab and the denial of freedom of religion for Muslim girls, up until 2001.

HCI was overhauled after Jacques Chirac's reelection in 2002, and new figures were appointed. This marked a dramatic change in HCI's mission, which then drifted from being a facilitator of integration to an institution backing the government's right-wing ideology. The surprise here is that "Laïcité" had, for over a century, been an almost exclusive property of the left. Jean Pierre Raffarin skillfully turned it into a rightwing ideological tool by having it redefined by MP Francois Baroin, and addressed the power gained within the ruling party, UMP, of the "Tough Right" (Droite Dure) that had been gradually imposing an identitarian agenda.

With Islam having become a central issue in the redefinition of French identity, the social, political and economic claims of Muslims with new-found citizen status, and who were asking for equality, were not welcomed as legitimate, but, instead, as sectarian claims from a minority perceived to be seeking special treatment. In order to counter such claims, the government found Laïcité to be a useful tool.

Consequently, PM Jean Pierre Raffarin ordered a working document on Laïcité from his fellow party member, MP François Baroin. The latter published a report in 2003 titled, "Pour une nouvelle Laïcité" (For a new Laïcité). This new Laïcité, as redefined by François Baroin, is no longer a legal tool for keeping religion and political matters separate, and granting religious freedom to all by keeping the state out of religious affairs. The new Laïcité, as redefined by François Baroin, is a "combattive Laïcité" meant to face the growing visibility, and to convey the identitarian ideology, of the right. The struggle against the Catholic Church having become outdated, Laïcité must now be turned against a new religion: Islam.

The 24-page document was filled with preconceived ideas of Muslims seeking to modify French laws, and anecdotes to support them (a law student intending to take the oath while wearing her headscarf, the launching of a Muslim branded soda "Mecca Cola", some Muslim women reportedly refusing to be treated by male doctors --which is not a problem in the case of a non Muslim woman, some Muslim men refusing to kiss another woman on the cheek...). I will not beat around the bush, and, from the first chapter, consider Islam to be the enemy within.

Furthermore, the document introduced the notion that religion is a strictly private matter. This notion served as a basis to justify the attempts to curb visibly religious signs in the public domain. That this notion meant confining religion and expressions of faith to one's own home is in direct contradiction with basic human rights (Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and objection to this new framing did not move any observer from the ruling party to change the language.

Once HCI was overhauled by the year 2002, its composition raised concerns (later justified) with the appointing of new members that had previously held openly Islamophobic positions and discourse, such as [Claude Imber](#) and Jean Daniel.

The new HCI changed its methodology. Its work was no longer based on research and analysis but on testimonies and police reports (Hajjat-Mohamed), and the continuous lobbying to permanently position Laïcité as the last bastion against Muslim “communautarism” or “Islamic fundamentalism.”

### *NEW LAÏCITE, NEW HCI, WHAT ELSE? A NEW LAW*

The year 2003 marked the final assault on the Muslim headscarf. Fourteen years after the first hijab case in 1989, and nearly ten years after the 1994 Ministerial Circular allowing school principals to exclude girls because of it, two Muslim school girls of Jewish descent were excluded from a high school in the northern suburbs of Paris.

Despite a report from the mediator of the Ministry of Education, Hanifa Charifi, stating that the number of hijab-related cases were slashed by half between 1994 and 2003, and despite a tense social situation that saw thousands take to the streets to protest drastic reforms on retirement and healthcare, the Muslim headscarf was brought forth as a central issue, and kept a near-monopoly on headlines.

A particularly violent campaign was launched by the media, which led to 1,284 articles, reports, inquiries, op-eds, chronicles and readers' letters. In comparison, the widely-unpopular social reforms on health care and retirement were only mentioned 478 times (PLPL, Thomas Deltombe).

More troubling was the position of faculty members throughout the country who did not oppose the call for a law banning the Muslim headscarf and the violent stigmatization of their Muslim students. Teachers in France had long portrayed themselves as holders of a progressive tradition towards minorities, and chose, this time, to remain silent at best.

Faculty members' choice to support, or, to say the least, remain silent on the prospect of marginalizing hundreds of school girls based on their religion, is explained by Pierre Tenanian (*Dévoilements*) for whom three factors played a crucial role: latent racism within French faculties towards minorities from former colonies, an extensive behind-the-scenes work from dedicated right-wing militants united around the Union des Familles Laïques (Union of Secular Families), and the adoption by teachers' unions of anti-hijab rhetoric through the work of far left-wing political party, Lutte Ouvrière.

Obviously, the marginalization of Muslim female students managed to bring archenemies together.

Public debate having been heated to an extreme, President Jacques Chirac pressed on by setting-up two separate commissions on the Muslim headscarf: The Jean Louis Debré Commission and the Stasi Commission (Presided over by Bernard Stasi).

Both commissions' missions were to work on a series of recommendations to address religious signs in schools.

But where the Debré commission gave room for Muslim community leaders to be consulted, the Stasi commission played the role of a farce intended to justify an inevitable law banning headscarves in schools and to further open the flood gates for new liberticide legislation.

Bernard Stasi himself had initially voiced his opposition to a law against the hijab [as stated in January 2005](#) to daily newspaper *La Croix*, and aligned himself with a previous statement made on Radio France International in 1989: “We must absolutely not exclude (students because of their religious garments).” But the rapporteur of the mission, Remy Schwartz, had skillfully chosen the people to be interviewed.

The commission had interviewed 104 persons, but not one single veiled Muslim woman, or parent of one (despite them being the soon-to-be victims of the ban), or social sciences researcher or academic with a more balanced point of view. The integral part of the speakers shared the same militant background or hostility towards the veil. The commission had even managed to interview Iranian writer Chahdortt Djavann, author of an anti-hijab pamphlet that had raised questions about the biased positions of the Stasi commission: “How could they possibly audition a foreign militant writer whom had only been in France for less than ten years but could not listen to a single veiled woman born here?”

The one-sided views expressed during the five months of hearings led *Le Monde Diplomatique* Chief-editor Alain Gresh to call it a public opinion manipulation. Under the leadership of the Commission rapporteur Remy Schwartz (who had also taken part in the Debré Commission), the interviews were oriented so as to depict an alarming situation in which France was under direct assault by Muslim fundamentalists in hospitals and schools, that students were manipulated by their parents and more concerned with ideologies than with learning, that veiled Muslim girls were victims of their fathers’, brothers’ and male neighbors’ will, and that the French Republic was giving way to religious extremism.

In order to further influence the awaited Commissions’ recommendations, and, not waiting the remaining week to end before they were sent to him, President Jacques Chirac publicly took side against the Muslim headscarf, calling it “aggressive” and further stating that one cannot be French while wearing a headscarf: “For the French (...), the veil, like it or not, is a kind of aggression that it is difficult to accept.”

It was after such biased public debate that, on March 14th, 2004, the law against the Muslim veil was voted. The law is seen to this day by academics (Pierre Tevanian, Abdellali Hajjat, Marwan Mohammed, Jean Bauberot...) as a social death sentence for Muslim school girls and a legal backing of further discrimination towards Muslims.

Indeed, the 15 March 2004 law became a filter for entry to public schools. Muslim females are now asked to choose between their religious beliefs and their education. What is paradoxical is that, just like the former colonial power mandated itself to bring indigenous people to civilization (Jules Ferry) against their own will, the French government, led by a majority of white males, mandated itself to initiate the emancipation of Muslim women without asking them their opinion. Even more paradoxical is the notion that the government wants to emancipate them by excluding them from school and from a chance to acquire an education.

The 31,000 signature-strong petition asking the government to repeal the law has not been heard so far, but was met with even new measures imposed by the government.

The twenty-year-long debate on the Muslim headscarf has not ended with the law banning it in public schools. Islamophobic and sexist discourse have become widely accepted and recognized as legitimate discrimination.

This multiple-decade-long focus on the Muslim headscarf can be traced back to the colonial era, as illustrated by a 1958 gathering in Algiers (initiated by the governor's wife) during which Muslim women were invited to come on stage and burn their headscarves as a sign of liberation.

Redefining French identity, changing the conditions of citizenship, redefining a constitutional concept such as *Laïcité*, giving legal backing to religious discrimination and applying a regime of exceptions, seems not to be enough.

In 2008, a legal case further turned the new *Laïcité* into an economic death sentence for veiled Muslim women. The case is known as *Baby Loup versus Fatima Afif*. The latter had lost her job because she had decided to wear a headscarf. Her firing being completely illegal despite being motivated by the March 2004 law, according to the employer, Mrs. Afif referred her case to HALDE (the High Authority Against Discriminations and for Equality) which concluded in 2009 that the employer had broken the law and that her dismissal was based on clear religious discrimination.

But, following that statement, rather than allowing the case to be treated independently, President Nicolas Sarkozy reacted by nominating his fellow political party member Jeanette Boughrab, who was a fierce opponent to the Muslim headscarf, as the new president of HALDE. Thus, in October 2010, HALDE issued a new statement declaring that the firing of Mrs. Afif because of her headscarf was not a case of religious discrimination. Another court ruling further supported the employer in his religiously-motivated discrimination, finding that it was a case of insubordination and serious misconduct.

In order to keep Muslim employees from utilizing anti discrimination remedies, HALDE further suggested that the government extend the status of neutrality (which was then only applied to public schools) to private businesses working with the government, even if the government is not managing them or directly funding them.

HALDE's suggestion was seized by MP Francoise Laborde (Radical Party of the Left) who drafted a bill to the Senate to have the Muslim headscarf prohibited in any preschool institution, and to apply the ban even to self employed nannies working from home. Despite public opposition from the observatory on *Laïcité* (Observatoire de la *Laïcité*) the bill was passed on May 13, 2015.

In November, 2009, the ruling party, under the leadership of its President Jean Francois Coppel, and the Minister of Immigration Eric Besson, launched a nationwide debate of French identity, "*Débat sur l'identité nationale*." The debate is remembered as a complete disaster and a source of embarrassment for UMP members, for it was turned into a platform for racist discourse and gave nationwide coverage for holders of the most extreme anti-Muslim views. Prime Minister Francois Fillon tried to take hold of the debate by announcing his intention to "raise the intellectual level" of the debate, but in vain. In reaction, [twenty writers and academics signed a joint tribune denouncing the "xenophobic norms" of the debate.](#)

But, as the Nicolas Sarkozy style and policies grew unpopular and began to irritate French public opinion, a new debate was launched by his party; this time on Islam and the Republic. After growing unease from within the UMP itself, Jean Francois Coppel had it rebranded, "*The Debate on *Laïcité**," further confirming that the notion of *Laïcité*, or the separation of religion and the state, has become a combat tool against Islam and Muslims in disguise. The debate kept Muslims under the spotlight, and, through a statement made by then Minister of interior Claude Guéant (who once stated that "the French, due to uncontrolled immigration no longer feel at home"), maintained the idea that Muslims cannot be French but are forever foreigners. The protests from the CFCM (French Council of the

Muslim faith) were ignored, and Guéant highlighted his position with a new statement: “The increase of the number of worshippers as well as some behaviors is a problem.”

In the midst of the 2008 financial crisis aftermath, UMP President Jean François Coppel kept on his previous path, initiating a new debate on Muslims, this time by focusing for months on the presence of Muslim women wearing full faced veils. Going beyond the de-facto ban in public institutions following the March 15th law, he urged to have veils banned everywhere on French soil.

A new commission was set up by Communist André Gérin, in order to address the issue. But, concerned over the unconstitutionality of a ban (religious freedom), and, following opposition from the Council of the State, the Fillon government sent a bill to parliament to have full-faced veils banned by making it mandatory for citizens to have their faces uncovered in public spaces, without mentioning Laïcité or religion. The content of the law (voted on 11 October 2010) heavily contrasts with the bill initially drafted in which “extreme” Muslim practices were the reason why a law was needed.

Despite fierce opposition by CNCDH (National Consultative Commission for Human Rights) stating that the law contradicts [article 9 of the European Human Rights Convention](#), the government maintained its position.

On 27 March 2012, while the presidential election seemed lost for outgoing president Nicolas Sarkozy, his Minister of Education Luc Chatel issued a Circular banning veiled Muslim mothers from accompanying their children during field trips. Using the argument of Laïcité and neutrality of public institutions, Luc Chatel extended the obligation of neutrality to parents, despite the fact that they are not government employees. It is highly doubtful that the Minister of Education and his advisers did not that the obligation of neutrality as stated by the law on laïcité only applies to the state institutions, not their users.

Islamophobia in France has, so far, managed to bring together political archenemies from the far left to the far right. The presidential debate of 2012 between Socialist candidate François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy sums it all up. Of all the subjects that were debated, the two candidates only agreed on subjects dealing with Muslims and how Laïcité must be strengthened.

After the January terrorist attacks in Paris, the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) urged the government to avoid further stigmatization of Muslims, but to no avail. The burning down of several mosques and the humiliation of primary school children did not provoke immediate actions by the government, but were either played down or outright supported by Ministers themselves. For instance, Minister of Education Najat Vallaud Belkacem expressed public support for a school teacher that had humiliated a nine-year-old school boy, then had him sent to a police station in reaction to his calling Charlie Hebdo an evil person. Several cases of children being humiliated in public schools were reported to the Minister of Education but none of them were condemned.

Prime Minister Manuel Valls lacked any credibility while calling for national unity after the January 11th march. His previous declarations, such as, “the Muslim veil which keeps women from being whom they are must be an essential fight for the Republic” or, “Islamophobia is the trojan horse of religious extremists” gave no weight to his words in the minds of the French Muslim community.

His refusal to use the word “Islamophobia”, while being comfortable with the use of “Islamofascism” (a word invented by Oriana Fallacci), and his turning a blind eye to the explosion of attacks against mosques and Muslim individuals, gave legitimate grounds for Islamophobic accusations.

The official disdain for Muslims was further made public when the government refused to attend slain Police Officer Ahmed Merabet's funeral (who was killed by the Kouachi brothers during the attack on Charlie Hebdo) in Paris, but the government managed to send its Minister of Environment to Israel in order to attend the funerals of the Jewish victims of the hyper casher terrorist attack. Nicolas Sarkozy, on the other hand, declared that he was shocked by the sight of female members of Ahmed Merabet's family wearing headscarves when he visited them.

Even in the face of death and when they are victims of terrorist attacks, French Muslims continue to this day to receive unfair treatment.

A few weeks later, PM Manuel Valls made headlines again by declaring that France was experiencing a clash of civilizations with "Islamofascists." The latter term was then used by UMP VP and MP Christian Estrosi to explain how a third world war has been declared by Muslims in France, who represent a "fifth column."

In March 2015, just a few months after the attack, and while the CCIF was facing an explosion in anti-Muslim attacks against veiled women, Secretary for Women Rights Pascale Boistard brought forward a proposition to have the Muslim headscarf banned in universities. It only took a few weeks for MP Eric Ciotti (UMP) to engage the issue, and to send a Bill to parliament calling for a ban on Muslim headscarves in universities.

In this permanent Islamo-hysteria, French institutions have not managed to come forward to counter Islamophobia, or to even take it seriously. Anti racist movements have been split on the issue, with institutionalized ones like SOS Racism or LICRA (The League Against Racism and Antisemitism) having been accused of promoting it by downplaying attacks against Muslims, religious discrimination and their support for the March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004 law. The feminist movement is also split on the issue, with a majority supporting the marginalization of Muslim women, and the remainder siding with others, such as Simone De Beauvoir and former comrade Christine Delphy, who saw the permanent stigmatization of Muslims as a blatant expression of post-colonial racism and sexism (according to the June 2015 CCIF report, women represented 73% of the victims of Islamophobia).

Muslim institutions, some of which have been set up by the government, have not fully played their role, if any, in fighting Islamophobia, or, at least, effectively addressed the drift in anti Muslim rhetoric. The relationship between the government and officially recognized Islamic institutions shows the limits of Laïcité as it is applied towards Muslims.

Despite a newly applied dogma of strict adherence to new Laïcité and a strict separation between religion and politics, permanent government interference in religious affairs is "standard operating procedure." Nicolas Sarkozy set up the CFCM, appointed its president, and marginalized dissident voices from within it so that it stays in line with government policies. That official Muslim institutions lack autonomy and independence towards policy makers is an understatement. This in turn explains their incapacity to take positions and tackle Islamophobia in cases where the government is the main culprit (Islamophobia is mostly reported as discrimination (56% of all reported cases to the CCIF), and state institutions are the greatest perpetrators (69% of reported cases)).

The rise of Islamophobia in France, and its becoming a structural problem, did not happen overnight. The colonial past and a eurocentric view of the world have kept the elite in France from looking at the country as it really is: a diverse country built on immigration and a relationship with the rest of the world. The perpetual locking of immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries of the former French colonial empire into a "Muslim box" follows the same pattern that saw Jews locked in a "Jewish box." Vincent Geisser compared the current treatment of French Muslims in France to that of Jews in the Thirties as he drew

parallels with Jean Paul Sartre's book, "Reflection on the Jewish Question" (The New Islamophobia, 2003).

Islamophobia is a direct consequence of the locking of people in an "inherently insoluble" entity from which one cannot escape. The fierce battle to keep recognition of Islamophobia out of the government's agenda weighs heavily on France's capacity to deal with anti-Muslim sentiment, and the subsequent violations of its own human and constitutional principles that have been motivated and justified by the differential treatment of a minority that we do not want to see as equal.

The recent declarations of newly-appointed Head of the Interministerial Delegation for the Fight Against Racism and Anti-Semitism (DILCRA) Gilles Clavreul "[All forms of racism are wrong, but anti-Arab and anti-Black racisms have different meanings than anti-Semitism in its violence. We must be able to tell the specificity of anti-Semitism](#)" maintain a tradition of classifying the various forms of racism, from the least, to the most, acceptable ones.

The total impunity given to anti-Muslim discrimination and assault, as well anti-Muslim hate speech from government officials, members of parliament, policy makers and even journalists, is a sign that Islamophobia is an acceptable form of racism.

Consequences of such tolerance towards Islamophobia have direct effects on the integration of Muslims in France. As school has been transformed from an institution of integration into a place of discrimination and exclusion at an early age, the corporate world is also becoming permeable to Islamophobic discourse.

In a 2014 joint study by Stanford University and Paris School of Economics (La Sorbonne) "*One Muslim is Enough*", three researchers led a field experience in Paris that isolated real or assumed adherence to the Muslim faith as an aggravating factor of discrimination for job seekers. By using strictly similar résumés, but with different candidate names, their conclusions raise serious concerns over the infiltration of Islamophobia in the corporate world. Bearing a Muslim name led to receiving two times less calls for job interviews, in comparison with bearing a Christian name. Candidates having a North African name received 35 job interview invitations, whereas candidates with French sounding names received 100 invitations.

Marie Anne Valfort, co-author of the study and Associate Professor of Economics (La Sorbonne), expressed her concerns over the lack of integration of Muslims, and its social consequences. According to her, "*Their discrimination is a threat to the social cohesion of European countries*" and signals their incapacity to integrate a category of individuals whose proportion in their host societies is meant to grow."

The structural nature of Islamophobia in France, and the violent forms of its expression crystallized around the Muslim headscarf, are explained by Sociologists Francois Gaspard and Farhad Khosrokhavar :

*The headscarf affair came about in a special historic, political and cultural context. It shed light on a number of unsaid things specific to France that touch to a number of truths about itself that it would rather silence, ignore or obscure. If the debate (on the Muslim headscarf) has been so intensive, it is indeed because such garments, by invading tv screens, have revealed a different France from the one that schoolbooks and policy makers have been striving to describe. Eternal France, dear to Charles De Gaulle, seemed brutally threatened in its essence. As if headscarves brought with them a menace weighing on its identity. In reality, upon a few veil girls were concentrated effects of the shock experienced by the discovery of the permanent settling of a population we had wanted to see as foreign (The Republic and the Veil, 1995)*

## *CONCLUSION*

From irrational fear to preconceived ideas leading to a regime of exception, Islamophobia as a French structural phenomenon cannot be analyzed without taking into consideration the weight of France's colonial past and the special treatment it imposed on indigenous peoples of former colonies.

The Islamization of social problems, such as factory strikes and the legal arsenal deployed to contain the growingly visible minority, is directly inherited from the colonial era that France has yet to definitely address and accept. Allowing a two-century-old mindset to dictate the relationship between the majority and minorities, and refusing to view them as French citizens, is not a tenable position.

Furthermore, discrediting Islamophobia and disqualifying those fighting against it as special treatment seekers will not result in the disappearance of tensions between the elite and those that are victims of their discriminatory policies.

The fact that French Muslims are becoming active elements of French society after having been confined to being a sociological subject to be studied by researchers means that friction with the tenants of the social order will persist; Muslim citizens will continue to expect equality and justice.

The lack of diversity within the French elite and its very slow renewal will not make it any easier for Muslims to climb the social ladder. The laws that have been passed against them were meant to maintain Muslims outside of the public sphere, and to rig their access to equal opportunity.

With schools having been turned into places of discrimination, and places of work being able to discriminate in total impunity, French Muslims' future in France is bound to be a long-term struggle to assert their rights as citizens.

The relationship between Muslims and the rest of the country will also depend on Muslims' ability to develop personal economic security, while, at the same time, playing important roles in the creation of national wealth, as well as in their capacity to occupy prominent public positions. One without the other will only lead to the marginalization of those who succeed (cut off from the bottom and isolated at the top) and enable public opinion to maintain negative views on Muslims.

Islamophobia is not only a scourge for Muslims but for the country as a whole. From the early 80's strikes to nowadays, the putting of Muslims at the center of public debates has meant that more crucial issues for French citizens have been ignored. Furthermore, Islamophobia in France has led to an accepted regime of exception that is now being extended to the rest of the country. For instance, the law on surveillance (the French version of the Patriot Act) has meant direct attacks on civil liberties, attacking the right to a private life and the protection against unwarranted wiretapping or data theft by government operatives.

On an institutional level, the French population as a whole is becoming a victim of the authoritarian turn taken by successive governments. Islamophobia has been skillfully used to keep government from answering to 40 years of failed socio-economic policies resulting in the destruction of the welfare state, the decay of the once-world-famous French education system and health coverage, mass unemployment, loss of economic sovereignty, explosion in public debt and even loss of military sovereignty. Muslims have, at least, had the merit of being useful to various governments and policy makers who led the charges against France's own interests.

***The Domestic is Political, and  
the Political is Gendered: An  
Analysis of Veiled Subjects,  
Gendered Epistemologies, and  
Muslim Bodies***

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## ***The Domestic is Political, and the Political is Gendered: An Analysis of Veiled Subjects, Gendered Epistemologies, and Muslim Bodies***

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Perceptions of Islam that rely on hegemonic Western standards of liberalism as their intellectual entry point obfuscate the very categories they seek to inform, namely those of Muslim identities and their respective ontologies. Herein I use the term in much the same way as anthropologist Ann Stoler (2009) when she describes ontology as “. . . that which is about the *ascribed* being or essence of things, the categories of things that are thought to exist or can exist in any specific domain, and the specific attributes assigned to them” (17). Within the false binary that surrounds such discourses, lies an epistemology that articulates its validity within a deeply gendered framework, giving primacy to the rescue of Muslim women from their own religion; a faith that purportedly seeks to subjugate their social, political, and sexual agency.

Focusing on the West’s “War on Terror”, articles of faith, and so-called “native informants,” and drawing on my analysis from the fields of post-colonial studies, multiculturalism, gender studies, and Islamophobia studies I will apply an interdisciplinary lens to synthesize a series of contemporary scholars and authors.

### *THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK*

In her analysis of colonial Victorian England, Anne McClintock described two particular facets of the colonial experience which I will explore herein: 1) commodity racism and, 2) the cult of domesticity. The former, centered on the propagandized use of tangible, commercial objects (in her example, soap), was intended to solidify both conceptions of white racial purity and imperial power dynamics. I argue that Muslim women have become the commodified bearers of tangible *otherness*, therefore their bodies have become the contested spaces on which racist discourses are argued. I further assert that, to Western feminist and masculine sensibilities, the various forms of veiling represent a purported contradiction: a conflation of the public and private spheres - the physical enclosure of a woman within a public setting.

Veiling, therefore, represents a form of reversed domesticity in which the sexual purity and modesty reserved for the domestic sphere, nonetheless, thrusts the manifestation of that value into the public sphere. In other words, the feminist Western rhetoric that derides veiling as an oppressive male construct is inherently false. Its criticism of veiling does not speak directly to a critique of purported oppression, but it insists that such subjugation remain in the domestic sphere, away from Westerners’ ability to rescue. Thus, conflating the public and the private offends both feminist and masculine sensibilities, both of which possess a savior-based orientation towards Muslim women.

*GENDER AND THE 'WAR ON TERROR'*

If gender is, as Joan Scott (1986) claims, "... a social category imposed on a sexed body" (1056), and if political history has been enacted on the field of gender (1,074), then Dr. Rasheed Shaireen's claims regarding the "War on Terror" becomes all the more analytically clear. Beginning her analysis with a description of the juxtaposed images of a veiled woman and the collapsing twin towers which appeared in a photo essay of the New York Times in 2001 (1), Rasheed argues that policies such as the 2001 Bush Doctrine, along with its associated "War on Terror," were not simple manifestations of political and militaristic intent, but an implicit confrontation with perceived monolithic Islamic values. In this model the West (the United States in particular) not only saves repressed Muslim citizens from autocratic, despotic political rule, economic instability, and terrorism, but also transforms Muslim women into historical agents, saving them from their oppressive male counterparts.

Justification of political actions such as this offer not only deeply held bigotries, but also the ethnocentric and gendered assumptions on which all racisms rely. The need to reconstruct Islamic femininity within a liberal framework reveals the perceived threat of the unsaved Muslim woman to Western masculine sensibilities, and the need to exercise what McClintock (1995) referred to as "... militarized masculinity ..." (28). The inability to rescue these women, then, renders the savior country culturally, politically, and militaristically impotent, which helps explain why gendered arguments surrounding Islam and women play on notions of "... the new politics of exclusion" (Rasheed, 2).

Though the use of gendered bodies to appropriate political discourses has many contemporary manifestations, its historiography is best grounded in a colonial and post-colonial context. As McIntock argues regarding the age of Empire, "... women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge." (24). Applied to contemporary geopolitics between East and West, the United States' orientation takes on the identity of liberating feminists, their power and knowledge justified through both essentialist assumptions of Islam juxtaposed with exceptionalist views of Western liberalism. Rasheed notes that Muslim women are encouraged to support this hegemonic agenda (5), a type of false acculturation in which acceptance of Islam relies entirely on adoption of Western sensibilities, and the abandonment of perceived backwards practices and extremism. Such women (and Muslims in general) should then adopt a so-called "moderate Islam," one that conforms to liberal values.

Rasheed is correct in her assertion that Western powers view both Islam and Muslim identity as a threat to the nation-state (8), an idea supported by Ahmed in 2011. Writing of Oxford historian Albert Hourani's article "The Vanishing Veil, a Challenge to the Old Order," Ahmed notes that Hourani's narrative, a metaphor for larger Western perceptions of Islam, "... is grounded in a worldview that assumed that the way forward for [Muslim] societies lay in following the path of progress forged by the West" (27). Arguments such as this hold liberalism as a natural, progressive, exportable ideology, and view Islam with a rigid cultural binary. Dr. Rasheed's analytic goals, then, are to deconstruct such racist discourses, and to offer a "third space" (20) in which Muslim identity can not only be viewed through the appropriate historical, cultural, and geographic contexts, but also a space in which the myth of the archetypal oppressed Muslim woman can ultimately be falsified as caricature.

Understanding such nuances requires one to view gender and sexuality as neither manifestation of particular behaviors, nor as simplistic facets of identity, rather, gender and

sexuality need to be viewed as the embodiment of qualities essential to power dynamics. Colonial scholarship has given primacy to the critical roles of gendered bodies and *othering* of Eastern peoples in the identity politics of defining what was (and wasn't) European. As Stoler notes, European sexualities cannot be viewed in an analytic vacuum, but were instead "... refracted by men and women whose affirmation of a bourgeois self was contingent on imperial products, perceptions, and racialized *Others* that they produced [emphasis added.]" (144). In a contemporary, post-colonial sense, Rasheed notes that the *Others* produced are those Muslims comprising either the Moderate *or* the Radical, with little in between to fill the cognitive void, requiring the need for a third space of identity that exists entirely *outside* of the traditional binary.

### ISLAM, FRANCE, AND THE OTHER – A VERY BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Key to internalizing Rasheed's proposed, "third space" of Muslim identity is a historical context of the unmentioned, yet implicit, first and second spaces of Muslim identity. As a representative microcosm of European attitudes, I will utilize the historical context of the French imperial administration of Algeria. I will focus on France, as Rasheed does, in order to contextualize her discussion of contemporary French racisms aimed at Islam. As Modood (2007) argues, while co-presences that took place far from the metropole during the age of Empire created a strong sense of *otherness* . . . these co-presences have a political character and give rise to the processes and outcomes of political struggles and negotiations around the fact of difference (39). Such co-presences and their respective political character can best be illustrated in the continued discourses surrounding historical and contemporary discourses on Muslims in France.

The initial in-migration pattern of Muslims to France has its basis in the French colonization of Algeria, lasting through the bitterly fought Algerian independence of 1962. Despite both the numerous French citizens living in Algeria (the *pied noirs*, or *colons*) and Algerian Muslims living in the metropole during colonization, numerous obstructions were placed directly in the path of French citizenship. As Alistair Horne (1977) notes in his definitive work on Algerian Independence, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*,

*From the early days legislation had permitted them [Muslims] to be subject to Islamic, as opposed to French, law; this may have been designed as a cultural and religious protection, but it became in effect a prison, because a Muslim wishing to adopt French citizenship had to renounce these rights, thereby virtually committing an act of apostasy... As a result, by 1936, after seventy five years of 'assimilation', no more than 2,500 Muslims had actually crossed the bar to French citizenship. (27)*

Although the ranks of French Islamic citizenry grew throughout the twentieth century, particularly post 1962 Algerian Independence, the French Muslim as *Other* continued (and continues) on numerous socio-political levels that both include, and are transcended by, categories of race, ethnicity, class, religion, and citizenship. While not due to Islamic dress, per se, such physical artifacts nonetheless reinforced the conceptual *Other*.

Western liberalism holds, as Rasheed notes, the treatment of women as evidence of Western exceptionalism. It stands to reason, if one views the veil (and all its varying cultural forms) as a forced, male-constructed symbol of oppression, then the banning of the veil stands as a logical extension of liberal ideals.

From this starting point, bias disguised in the form of healthy intellectual debate takes over, “. . . leading some commentators who may otherwise sympathize with Muslim minorities to argue that it is difficult to view Muslims as victims when they may themselves [be] potential oppressors” (Meer and Modood, 12). Paired with, as Rasheed argues, a “. . . resuscitated national identity and model for humanity . . . the universal, secular republican France,” the banning of the hijab purportedly represents evidence of Western liberal exceptionalism, with a decidedly nationalistic flare in the case of France.

### ARTICLES OF FAITH AND THE OTHER

Rasheed cites Joseph Massad’s point, from his writings in 2009, regarding a lack of clear definition as to what Islam actually is (3). Massad argues that Islam (and, by implicit extension, any religion) is more than textual interpretation; it is a series of socially constructed, historically shifting, non-monolithic lived experiences, the sum of which defies conventional definition and resists attempts at reductive classifications. Because of this lack of definition, entities such as Islam can be ascribed values by non-members, often on the basis of racialized and gendered ideologies firmly based in historical experience.

Rasheed and Welles assert that devalued and essentialist perceptions of Islam are epitomized in cultural artifacts, or so-called, “articles of faith” (1) that offer tangible, perceptible difference between the dominant culture and Muslims. Because the veil and all of its collective iterations are the most tangible example of Islamic culture to out-group members, discourses surrounding Islam typically center on such artifacts. Though Muslim men are textually conferred with the same responsibility of modest dress as Muslim women, women’s clothing that serve as visible articles of faith (e.g., the hijab, the al-amira, the chador, etc.) burden Muslim women not with the purported religious oppression or depressed agency that Westerners claim, but with being the sole representatives of visual difference.

In her description of the rise of commercially available soap in Victorian England, Ann McClintock distinguished what she referred to as *commodity racism* (33) from eugenics-based, *scientific racism*. This distinction, she argued, centered on the propagandized use of tangible, commercial objects (in her example, soap), intended to solidify both conceptions of white racial purity and imperial power dynamics. In much the same way, Rasheed’s articles of faith describe commodified Islamic dress as it exists within the public discourse, making such discourses inherently gendered in nature. To expand the metaphor, symbols such as the veil have become commodified objects for essentialist racisms, native-informant apologists, and those who export the savior narrative.

The racisms, which form the foundation of this narrative, do not always take the form of liberalism, or arguments regarding the exceptionalism of Western feminist ideals, but can rather be espoused in terms of nationalist sentiment. Writing of the origins of the banning of the hijab in France, Auslander writes, “. . . the headscarf . . . represented allegiance to an extremist religious practice of foreign origin.” Furthermore, the court declared that “the headscarf was a sign of a refusal to integrate into French culture and a refusal to respect the principles of secularism” (291).

### NATIVE INFORMANTS AND THE MODERATE MUSLIM

Rasheed’s primary foci, however, are those issues surrounding the role of so-called “native informants” in Islamic female discourses. In particular, she offers numerous

critiques of Irshad Manji's work, *The Trouble With Islam: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*, and Ayaan Hirsi's best-selling work, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*. Rasheed does this in an attempt to both "...analyze how such literary discourses are being used to negotiate cultural stereotypes of women and Islam" (9), as well as to contextualize her arguments surrounding the need for a third space of Muslim identity.

Rasheed argues that such native informant accounts do not necessarily need to be disregarded entirely, but they require a conceptual framework that articulates historicized embodied experiences as just that, and little else. While such first person accounts are, by definition, anecdotal, and thus not generalizable to the larger Muslim population of 1.7 billion people, they are not inherently false in the denotative meaning of the term. By this I mean to say that such accounts are not, strictly speaking, counter-factual, intended to deceive, or illusory in nature. The problem comes from the propensity of Westerners to not contextualize these accounts, and to not question the veracity of such claims in other geographical, political, and social Islamic locations.

Both native informants and their extremist counterparts represent the example of white swans, in the David Hume tradition. Hume famously critiqued inductivism, or the idea that universal statements could be drawn from anecdotal or limited experience, when he stated, "No amount of observations of white swans can allow the inference that all swans are white, but the observation of a single black swan is sufficient to refute that conclusion." This approach is methodologically flawed, as induction allows for valid premises to nonetheless lead to ultimately false conclusions, so when applied to our discussion of gender and Islam, it is little wonder that Westerners hold the opinions that they do; it is also no surprise that first and second space binaries have dominated public discourses.

According to data collected in 2010 by the Pew Research Center, Muslims comprise approximately 0.8% of the general population of the United States, with the percentage by individual states varying between 14% to less than 1% in many instances. This lack of firsthand, meaningful experience of the complexity of Muslim culture (e.g., having close Muslim friends, etc.) allows Westerners to engage in a particularly damaging form of confirmation bias, or the tendency to interpret new information so that it becomes compatible with existing theories, beliefs, and convictions (Dobelli, 21). Native informant accounts, biased media coverage, and outlier examples come to dominate cognition as truths, rather than specific historicized experience needing contextualization. When supplemented by the tendency of subaltern groups to become insular as a response to discriminatory practices by the dominant society, a lack of interaction and engagement offers no counter argument to the binary presented by the loudest of voices.

### MY ANALYSIS

Rasheed claims that the text of native informant accounts do not provide the language necessary to articulate a historicized experience, and that one native informant, (Ali) positions herself as mute, or without agency (15), as a means to argue her position regarding the relationship between her life experience and her religion. Though there is a fundamental truth to this argument, Ali herself seemed capable of putting her historicized experience into perspective. Writing in her best-selling work, *Infidel*, Ali writes, "It is one life story and, as life stories go, very subjective. It is not about empirical data...." (5). This is not meant to refute Rasheed's claim, but to contextualize it, as contextualization is an underlying theme of the majority of claims herein.

To be clear, with regard to critiques of native informants, I do not mean to suggest that Rasheed and other critics are themselves engaging in some sort of counter-essentialism, or claiming universality; they very clearly are not engaging in counter-essentialism and they are not claiming universality. It is merely to note that much of the cited source critique of native informants in Rasheed's essay articulate their collective arguments in languages of exclusion, derision, and, in the case of Hamid Dabashi, borderline insult of informant voices. As multiculturalists seek to lay claim to doctrines of inclusion, articulating their contentions within a framework of exclusion of in-group member voices seems inherently problematic. Much as guarantees of free speech protect offensive, dissenting, and even hate speech, so too must multiculturalism make intellectual room for unpopular, intra-group dissent. Native informants are, after all, Muslims, however limited their interpretation of Islam may be.

As there is an obvious logical distinction between subjective statements and universal truths, Ali's words, at least those from the cited text herein, would, by her own articulation, fall into the category of subjective statements, erasing any claims of universality from both herself and her critics. And, should native informants be derided or critiqued for their purported inauthenticity, it begs the questions: who precisely has an authentic voice, and, is an authentic voice even capable of existing within the complexities of cultural, religious, and historical identities? Who is granted the right to make such determinations, and by what authority? With what veracity can generalized claims be made of any given faith, let alone one that represents 1/7 of the world's population? It is neither within the intent nor the scope of my analysis to address such issues, only to note that they are necessary questions, worthy of scholarly attention.

What is within the scope of my analysis is half of the Muslim identity binary, the lauded moderate Muslim. As Rasheed notes, Islamists are viewed as destructive, as that part of Islam that must be confronted with liberal, secular values (5). She goes on to cite Zia, who contends that the role of the moderate is to disavow any relationship between themselves and radicals, between the acceptable, tolerable Islam and those with whom the West is engaged in ideological conflict (6). In a related article that was cited by Rasheed, Zia notes that, "What was earlier the hypocritical, sudden feminist concern for Muslim women by the Bush [George W. Bush] administration has now become an equally self-serving political approach by the Obama regime that wishes to graft a presumed (moderate) Muslim identity on people in Muslim-majority countries."

This mirror's Rasheed's contention that gender politics have been manipulated in order to reinforce ideological battles between East and West (1). In this ideological struggle the moderate Muslim serves as implicit ally, if not always as informant. Regardless, moderation is tantamount to acceptance of liberalism, Enlightenment values of human rights, progress, and modernity.

### *MUSLIM AGENCY – RECLAIMING THE NARRATIVE*

Rasheed notes that, while counterintuitive, the native informant accounts are not necessarily intended for Muslim women; they target conservative males and Western advocates as their audience (13). This addresses the issue of agency, and the voice of Muslim women in the very discourses surrounding them. As the voices heard on these issues (e.g., veiling, female genital mutilation, etc.) are typically from native informants or out-group members (e.g., non-Muslims), a narrative of Muslim women as victims is created in the public space. Rasheed argues that, because of assumptions surrounding the sameness of author and text, native informant voices are believed to be authentic, speaking for all

Muslim women in all cultural contexts. She further argues that a reconceptualization of this binary is required, as well as the adoption of a third space of Muslim identity.

Understanding locational identities adds elements of complexity to an otherwise reductive discussion of women and Islam, and solidifies conceptions of third spaces. A primary cause of the false binary comes from anecdotal evidence from a few select geographic and political contexts, such as women oppressed by the Taliban in Afghanistan. As Rasheed argues, “Only when we utilize the notion of location to destabilize unexamined or stereotypical images that are vestiges of colonial discourse and other manifestations of modernity’s structural inequalities can we reorganize and work through the complex relationships between women in different parts of the world” (14).

Addressing the issue of location as a means of destabilizing racist discourses on issues such as veiling, Elizabeth Fernea adds complexity by describing the history of veiling in Egypt from the 1960’s to the 1990’s. She notes, for example, that contemporary conservative dress is a new phenomenon, noting that women in Egypt were not necessarily returning to veiling (1), but rather renegotiating the meanings of being female, Muslim, and Egyptian. Fernea goes on to describe that such conservatism was largely a middle and upper-middle class phenomenon taken on by relatively young women in their 20’s and 30’s, and that such women are the daughters or granddaughters of Muslim women who wore Western dress styles (1). The reasons for this, she argues, were largely cultural and contextual to both the shifting identity of Islam, and also to larger socio-political movements, such as second and third wave feminism, the economy of Egypt, and interpretations of the meanings of veiling. Fernea notes, for example, that the veil served to desexualize Muslim women as a proxy of a wave of feminism that sent Egyptian women into the workforce in larger numbers. This allowed Egyptian Muslim men to internalize their female counterparts as legitimized co-workers.

Rasheed discusses the problem with post-colonial feminists; discussing these issues comes, at least in part, from speaking *like* a third world women and speaking *as* a third world woman (19). This distinction is crucial, she argues, because to do the former is antithetical to claims of truth, whereas to do the latter requires occupation of “. . . the social and the symbolic spaces colonized thus far by native informants . . . who themselves are the product of Western Metaphysics” (20).

This same attempt at finding authenticity among competing female voices on a given issues comes from anthropologist Christine Walley, who also used location and identity politics to deconstruct the ethnocentric discourses in her work: *Searching for “Voices”: Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations*.

Through fieldwork in Kenya, Walley concluded that the girls who had the practice done voluntarily, those who were forced, and those Westerners who vehemently opposed the practice were *all* operating within competing cultural contexts, obfuscating who precisely had the voice of authenticity to which the world should listen. Walley’s point is ultimately *the* point – that a search for authentic voices, whether discovered or not, as well as a deconstruction of existing racist and appropriated identities, can only add complexity where reductive thinking resides.

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# *Ahmed Mohamed and the Imperial Necessity of Islamophilia*

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## *Ahmed Mohamed and the Imperial Necessity of Islamophilia*

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, I connect the arrest of clock-making youth Ahmed Mohamed in Irving, Texas to the U.S. carceral imperial state. I argue that his ordeal lies at the interstices of empire, race, and the school-to-prison pipeline, and I consider the ways in which Islamophilia – or “good Muslim” politics – serves as a veneer for persistent criminalization of youth of color, both through domestic procedures of policing as well as through global mechanisms of the U.S. war against terrorism. Based upon my fieldwork with Islamic representative organizations (IRO’s), I show that the discourse on matters of inclusion and political change in the U.S. is deeply confined by colonialist contours of acceptability.

### INTRODUCTION

The story of Texas youth Ahmed Mohamed has, by now, become a commonplace exemplification of the entrenched realities of Islamophobia in the U.S. The 14 year-old who built a clock, showed his schoolteacher, and was promptly arrested, has become a ubiquitous symbol of the bigotry and paranoia that pervades U.S. culture regarding its Muslim population. In fact, many think the treatment of the boy suggests that the incident was *pure* bigotry, not fear of a bomb at all (for had it been, appropriate bomb threat precautions and evacuations would have followed). Of course, Mohamed is not an outlier in his experience. Muslims in the U.S. experience exclusion, discrimination, violence, and threats of violence on a far-too-regular basis. At the time of the writing of this article, the Council for American-Islamic Relations had issued warnings of more than 20 armed anti-Muslim rallies taking place nationwide. Muslims have faced workplace struggles over wearing a hijab or kufi, and presidential candidates call for open profiling and surveillance of Muslim populations (a process that is largely already underway).

Yet, in this article, I look past the framework of Islamophobia in order to make sense of the Ahmed Mohamed incident. I argue that simply classifying the event as another in the long list of anti-Muslim actions risks invisibilizing the myriad intersecting forces at work in criminalizing (and then celebrating) the boy. Instead, I ask the reader to consider the unique intersection of race, the school-to-prison pipeline, the global war against terrorism, and domestic Islamophobia in producing an event like the arrest of the teenager. This intersection, I argue, is a key configuration that embodies what Jeff Maskovsky and Ida Susser call the “new imperial homeland”<sup>1</sup> in which race, militarization, and the carceral state coalesce in a novel way. Rather than subsuming the incident as *either* embodying the disciplinary nature of schooling for students of color, *or* the paranoid xenophobia experienced by Muslims in the U.S., we must recognize the interlocking, multifaceted political realities at work. To classify it neatly as one or the other jeopardizes our understanding of the forms of oppression that are exemplary of political life in the U.S.

Lastly, I do not separate the suspicion and arrest of Ahmed Mohamed from the ensuing outpouring of support he immediately received from: the White House, Facebook,

Google, and Microsoft. Instead, I ask that we see both his ordeal *and* his redemption as part of the same ideological apparatus. In doing so, we can begin to think synthetically about Islamophobia *and* Islamophilia, putting anti-Muslim sentiment and pro-Muslim measures of inclusion and tolerance in close proximity. As I demonstrate below, these shows of inclusion are in fact *part* of the anti-Muslim climate and an integral element of U.S. imperialism.

### REPRESENTATIONAL POLITICS AND MUSLIMS IN THE US

This consideration arises out of 14 months of ethnographic research at “Islam in America” events, where I considered how visibility, inclusion, and political change are navigated by groups that represent U.S. Muslims to the mainstream. My fieldwork, thus, consisted of traveling across the country to Islamic conventions, panels, conferences, and workshops that convened Muslim Americans concerned with the representation of Muslims. My fieldwork made clear that, indeed, Muslims are hypervisible subjects – scrutinized, observed, and examined by both hostile and friendly parties. Along with this entrenched hypervisibility, however, was the understanding that Muslim American organizations and their constituencies have the ability to *leverage* this hypervisibility. As one of my interlocutors pithily told me, “If we’re in the spotlight, that just means it’s our time to shine.” Part of leveraging hypervisibility meant offering a squeaky-clean, apologetic, patriotic Muslim subject – an active consumer, a well-educated and upwardly mobile worker. Time and again, the representational choices made by Muslim American organizations in response to their hypervisibility proved revelatory. For instance, while many at the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) convention in 2011 were eager to invite elected officials and local religious leaders in attempts to build bridges, few were willing to interface with the socialists at the annual Socialism Conference across the street, a conference that was explicitly addressing issues around surveillance, policing, Palestine, and militarism. When I asked why they were not willing to interface with the attendees of the Socialism Conference, many of my interlocutors told me that “it would jeopardize too much if we were associated with them,” revealing that many feel they must act in politically “reasonable” ways, lest they endanger their fragile project of inclusion. “If we associate with socialists or with radicals, people are going to think *we* are radical, and we already have a PR problem in that department,” Linah (a Palestinian American attendee at an ISNA convention) told me. Because of the intensified scrutiny that Muslim Americans experience, their decisions around how to articulate their political desires are a response to the awareness that each of their moves is being watched. Many members of these organizations felt trapped between, on the one hand, earnest geopolitical critique and, on the other, presenting themselves as patriotic, palatable American Muslims. This strategy, which I call “internalized Islamophilia,” can ultimately be understood as an engagement with existing structures of power rather than a radical rupture. In this way, an *integrationist* focus on inclusion of Muslims in the U.S. is prioritized and configured as a more ‘reasonable’ approach than a *counter-hegemonic* strategy.

I, thus, take seriously the gestures toward inclusion and respect for Muslims in the U.S. and globally. The fact that *both* the Bush and Obama administrations made it abundantly clear that discrimination against Muslims is intolerable and un-American is noteworthy. Even from the highest levels of political office, there is a deliberate attempt to separate Islamist terrorism from “true” Islamic practice – one example is the oft-repeated claim that the terrorists have “hijacked” Islam. This reformist<sup>2</sup> focus then creates a space for a type of moderate, palatable, pliable Muslim subject. President George W. Bush told a crowd in Atlanta, not two months after 9/11, that the “enemy tries to hide behind a peaceful faith,”

and he subsequently praised the compassion of “Jewish and Christian Americans who have reached out to their Muslim neighbors.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in President Obama’s 2009 “New Beginnings” speech in Cairo, he articulated a commitment to inclusion and compassion for global Muslims. “I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world,” he said, “one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles – principles of justice and progress, tolerance, and the dignity of all human beings.”<sup>4</sup>

I do not take these shows of sympathy for and inclusion of Muslims – the ways in which the highest political office in the U.S. attempts to redeem Islam – at face value, nor do I bracket them as simple acts of political pageantry. Instead, I argue that this Islamophilic discourse is as much a constitutive feature of the current political landscape as is the Islamophobic discourse. The massive erosion of Americans’ civil liberties and the militarism in Muslim-majority countries are not to be seen as separate from the proliferation of seemingly positive portrayals of Muslims as peace-loving, Muslims as patriotic, Muslims as “just like us.”

This Islamophilic discourse has tangible effects: it opens up space to be occupied by the “good Muslim.” The work of Islamic Representative Organizations (IRO’s) illustrates how these acts fit within a larger context of U.S. militarism, the so-called post-racial landscape, and a renewed interest in the Huntingtonian “clash” between Islamic and Western civilizations.<sup>5</sup> For my interlocutors, Islamophobia was not an all-encompassing, uniformly oppressive force against which they were powerless to respond. Its reach has been uneven, falling disproportionately on some while eluding others. Muslims, far from passive victims, have been active agents in the face of both hostilities and multicultural sensitivities. In fact, they make deliberate decisions with an intent to cope with the anti-Muslim racial landscape in the U.S. Everything from career choices, to attire, to who is selected as leaders of their organizations, can be seen as examples of these deliberate decisions.

I treat with analytic caution the category “Muslim American.” Indeed, since 9/11, “Islam has emerged as a major classification category for governmental policy, and it has subsequently been adopted by the media and the rest of society.”<sup>6</sup> I ask the reader to simultaneously consider Muslim Americans’ identification with the category, a form of strategic essentialism and mode of political solidarity, as well as the imperialist urgencies that mandate the category’s very existence. In other words, the classification “Muslim American” may well be a form of solidifying the sense of an “ummah” among an increasingly alienated population as much as it is an imperial term with which to locate and police Muslims. The choice to call Ahmed Mohamed an “American Muslim” as opposed to a “black American” or a “youth of color” is a choice laden with consequences. The politics of classification force us to make such decisions, and while useful in making sense of the nuances of oppression, may occlude dynamics that are worthy of investigation.

Along with this caveat, I take seriously the need to invoke the category Islamophobia with caution. Is it fair to fold into an umbrella category phenomena that include anti-black racism, xenophobia, or Orientalism? What processes are we actually observing when we invoke Islamophobia? Compare the Sami Al-Arian incident to the fate of those who were affected by the INS Special Registration Act after 9/11/2001. Al-Arian, a Palestinian-American professor who was relentlessly persecuted by the government in unfounded terrorism-related charges, caught national attention over his 11-year ordeal. The Special Registration Act, however, primarily interrogated and scrutinized large numbers of working class immigrants. Ostensibly, each incident *could* be understood as forms of post-9/11 U.S.

Islamophobia, and rightfully so. Yet the latter belongs to a process of racial nativism and xenophobia in which immigrant and working-class people of color bear the brunt of state violence; elite, U.S. citizen, Muslim Americans were spared the spate of deportations and detentions that resulted from the Act. The Al-Arian case, on the other hand, demonstrates a fear mongering politics reminiscent of the Cold War, in which those threats lurking “within” needed purging, and national security threats were used to police and restrict dissenters. To categorize both acts of institutional violence under the same catchall, Islamophobia, risks foreclosing necessary dialogues about class, xenophobia, or a new age of McCarthyist politics.

Furthermore, we must think about privilege and stratification among Muslims themselves. Social class, race, immigration status, or educational attainment are determinants in the experience of Islamophobia. While Muslims may be the *intended* targets of Islamophobia, *some* Muslims shoulder the burden. Determining who speaks to mainstream media outlets, attends multicultural events at the White House, or speaks at public interfaith events, produces a bifurcated sense of Muslim subjectivities under Islamophobia. Some bodies disproportionately experience it, while others get to speak about it. The representative voices combatting Islamophobia, upper-middle class embodiments of the “model minority,” may ultimately be sheltered from the worst aspects of domestic Islamophobia.

### ISLAMOPHILIA AND THE PERVASIVENESS OF IMPERIALISM

Within days of the Ahmed Mohamed incident, progressives had chimed in to critique the shrouded irony in President Obama’s invitation to the teenager. Some argued that the celebration of institutional support for Mohamed deflected attention from a far more insidious problem: that of the increasing hostility experienced by youth of color in the age of militarized education and the school-to-prison pipeline. #SuspensionStories documents the role of zero tolerance policing in schools, highlighting cases where young students are criminalized for yawning, singing, crying, or other similar ludicrous infractions. This emphasis reminds us that Mohamed’s ordeal was less an anomaly than many might think. Others critiqued the hypocrisy of cheering Mohamed from the very White House that has deemed all adult men “combatants” in the drone warfare program. *Gawker* proclaimed that “Obama’s Drone Program Probably Would Have Killed Ahmed the Clock Kid.”<sup>7</sup> DC-based activist Darakshan Raja Tweeted powerfully about the hypocrisy of the White House invitation, pointing to the ways in which the Obama administration itself has explicitly named Muslim youth a locus of concern for those interested in countering violent extremism. Mohamed’s very existence would, in another context, deem him an automatic threat. We ought to ask: “What is accomplished by the White House’s redemption of Ahmed Mohamed?”

By and large, however, the public conversation did not include this consideration. For many, the poles of the debate consisted of whether or not it was *right* for the teacher to regard Mohamed’s invention with hostility – whether or not inherent suspicion of Muslims was reasonable. It remains nearly impossible in the U.S. social imaginary to fathom that *both* poles of Mohamed’s experience may simply be an extension of an entrenched imperialism, one that *relies* upon the emphasis of domestic diversity, plurality, and multiculturalism to justify its exceptional status. This is part of the deep impasse of political life in the U.S. that my work at “Islam in America” programming reveals. My interlocutors are acutely aware that there are certain ‘impossibilities’ in the heart of empire, such as fierce critique of the political process, wholesale indictment of the economic system, or rejection of the notion of American exceptionalism.

Stepping outside of this framework, however, allows us to approach the clock-building incident in a manner that accounts for the multiplicity of forces at work in Ahmed Mohamed's experience. It was undoubtedly one of Islamophobia, in which the very actions of Muslims and Arabs are scrutinized, and inherently regarded as a potential threat to national security. It was equally one of anti-black racism, in which the institutional framework of schooling reinforces the threat posed by young black people. And certainly, it was an embodiment of the increased punitive environment encountered by school-age youth, especially youth of color.

Mohamed's ordeal is remarkable, not just in the hostility he experienced and his ensuing arrest, but also in the outpouring of support he received. With President Obama Tweeting "Cool clock, Ahmed," care packages from Microsoft, and invitations to visit the Facebook headquarters, Mohamed's experience was certainly a bipolar one. It seemed that the very centers of power – in Silicon Valley and Washington, DC – were eager to (quite publicly) redeem the boy. In doing so, they would send a clear message that anti-Muslim bigotry was intolerable, *and* that entrepreneurial and technological know-how were essentially American values.

Thinking synthetically about the arrest and then the immediate celebration (from the White House-Facebook Industrial Complex) of Ahmed Mohamed allows us to consider the scope of "the new imperial homeland."<sup>8</sup> By deeming both reactions as part of the same apparatus, we can begin to see critical connections between domestic race politics and global workings of imperialism. Not doing so is perhaps a disastrous by-product of the lingering area studies paradigm, in which the appropriate focus of "Americanist" scholarship is narrowly defined. As N. Naber writes, "I have run up against the limitations of area-studies divisions that continue to predominate within Middle East Women's Studies—such as the framing of American Studies (including US Women of Color and Native American Feminist Studies) and Middle East Studies (including Middle East Women's Studies) as separate fields and the United States and the Middle East as geographically bounded regions. Such divisions obstruct the possibilities for engagement with important questions such as whether and to what extent racist/classist/heterosexist US prison structures have anything to do with the US War on Terror."<sup>9</sup>

By situating American Islamophobia and Islamophilia alongside each other and in a global and historical context, I suggest that liberal politics of inclusion and racial diversity are part of the construction of America in the social imaginary as an inherently diverse space, and that this self-proclaimed multiculturalism is high on the list of justifications for American exceptionalism. The specific type of multiculturalism I explore here, often lacks any critical content or progressive transformative potential. Instead, it is a strategic tool to which many Muslim Americans themselves have firm objections. "There is no place in America" for critical subjectivities, for, in our political context, the "limits of acceptable thought" are scrutinized and policed.<sup>10</sup>

Rather than taking it for granted, I argue that a certain brand of pro-Muslim discourse is a constitutive feature of the current political landscape. This discourse must be considered alongside the horrific nature of U.S. Islamophobia. By working through these realities synthetically, we can take seriously the seeming contradictions of race and difference in the U.S.—the fact that we see mobilized before us a large-scale erosion of Americans' civil liberties and expansion of militarism in Muslim-majority countries *at the same time* as we see an abundance of seemingly-positive portrayals of Muslims as peaceful, non-dissenting subjects. These shows of humanitarianism, multiculturalism, and inclusivity, *especially* of

certain Muslims, are constitutive features of an imperial homeland, even as its anti-Muslim apparatus undoubtedly intensifies. In other words, “Good Muslim” politics are a foundational feature of the exceptionalism of the current incarnation of U.S. empire.

It is difficult, given disciplinary demarcations and entrenchment of stubborn area studies paradigms, to discuss U.S. Islamophobia without being pigeonholed as a scholar of “race relations” or “Islam in America.” Yet if we are to investigate what we know about empire, Islam, and difference, it is critical to dismantle these boundaries. Naber describes our entrenched understandings of foreign and domestic paradigms as paradigms that:

*conjoin — and are made and re-made through one another — are also crucial axes for alliance building and accountability across disciplines and borders. Yet while framing the domestic and foreign structures of U.S. imperialism as relational and mutually constitutive, [we must] avoid assuming shared experiences, or that people hailed into US imperialism (and its racial and heteropatriarchal foundations) from varying locations share equal struggles. Rather, we might ask how the histories of people from different political locations within the US and the MENA region (and beyond) rub up against each other when they are hailed into similar imperialist structures—in different ways and to different degrees.<sup>11</sup>*

In connecting domestic multiculturalism to global workings of imperialism, we begin to do the important work of *demystifying* empire. This is a critical intellectual endeavor, as the current incarnation of U.S. imperialism is one that easily shrouds itself, even as it expands its reach. The empire’s “grace notes are free markets, human rights, and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known. It is the imperialism of a people who remember that their country secured its independence by revolt against an empire, and who like to think of themselves as the friend of freedom everywhere. It is an empire without consciousness of itself as such, constantly shocked that its good intentions arouse resentment abroad. But that does not make it any less of an empire . . .”<sup>12</sup> Enseng Ho agrees about the remarkable inconspicuousness of U.S. empire, claiming that we live in the time of *invisible American imperialism*. While there is no (or little) formal colonization, there is “maximal projection of military power through sea and air space, a system of subordinate sovereign states, and multilateral institutions.”<sup>13</sup> For Ho, the anti-colonial undercurrent bolstering the popular notion that America’s empire is somehow preferable, allows its dominance to hide in plain sight:

*While previous empires dominated their colonies with pomp and ceremony, the American invention of ‘extraterritoriality’ formalizes the idea that Americans are not really present...Damned if you do and damned if you don’t, flip-flopping between isolationism and nation-building abroad; two priorities at least are clear for the U.S. government: internal securitization of the U.S. population itself, and an increased investment in methodologies of invisibility abroad. Remote control bombers fly ever higher out of sight, while military advisors disappear into the Filipino jungles, Yemeni mountains, and Georgian gorges. As well, security, military, and colonial functions are farmed out to private companies, removing them from political oversight.<sup>14</sup>*

This echoes what Junaid Rana describes as “an American empire that, via its chameleon-like characteristics, is able to hide elements of its domination in plain sight.”<sup>15</sup>

Hardly attributable to any one administration, we see the remarkable bipartisan span of our empire. The deeply entrenched imperialism of the Clinton years was marked by the

use of so-called “soft power” and multicultural tolerance as its keys to validation. “The only difference between the Clinton years [and the George W. Bush era] is that the mask has come off and bellicosity has displaced a certain reticence, in part because of the post-9/11 atmosphere within the US that makes overt and unilateral military action more politically acceptable.”<sup>16</sup> Currently, the imperialism of the Obama age relies upon the central role of diplomacy and markets.<sup>17</sup> In this era, President Obama himself speaks publicly of civilization’s debt to Islam, fiercely rejecting the Huntingtonian argument and emphasizing the presence of a ‘good’ Muslim – domestically and abroad – with whom diplomatic relations are possible. (“Yet despite this multilateral strategy, the Obama administration still resorted to unilateral actions when needed – the assassination of Osama bin Laden, for example...”<sup>18</sup>)

Central to the establishment of American imperialist exceptionalism are race politics and multiculturalism. Historically, questions of multiculturalism “developed in the United States in a very particular time and place, and in a specific relationship to the question of world order.”<sup>19</sup> The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century exemplifies this reality; in the 1940’s, Gunnar Myrdal was puzzled by the remarkable coexistence of American white liberalism and oppression of black Americans, always orbiting around the notion of an essentially inclusive, democratic, egalitarian American ethos on the world stage.<sup>20</sup> During the Cold War, domestic racial politics in the U.S. dovetailed with concerns about the defeat of Communism, for if the U.S. were to justify its superiority, the “problem” of racial oppression would have to be dealt with. The liberation struggles in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century reveal a deep attentiveness among counter-hegemonic voices to interconnections between imperialism and race. By the end of Malcolm X’s life, his focus had shifted radically from American racism to the role of global racism and white supremacy in propping up colonialism and empire.<sup>21</sup> The Black Panther Party, which many primarily associate with domestic liberation struggles for African Americans, positioned itself as fundamentally opposed to American imperialism in *all* its forms (including American racism).<sup>22</sup> In other words, there is an enduring legacy of global structures of domination not just being mirrored by, but being meticulously intertwined with, the workings of racialization that all-too-often are classified as “local” or “domestic.”

Maira argues that there is an intimacy of empire, a way in which imperialism is active on public and private levels, producing surveillance, fear, and solidarity.<sup>23</sup> To understand empire as simultaneously intimate, multicultural, and hidden-in-plain-sight, is to note its nebulousness, the fact that it is at once as sensational and commonplace. It touches down in Afghanistan, in a privatized prison, and, yes, in a public school. Imperialism is the arrest of a boy who is technically skilled (as were many of the hand-picked immigrants permitted into the U.S. as part of Cold War strategy), and imperialism is a warm invitation to show his invention in the White House.

### THE COLONIALITY OF INCLUSION

In 2013, I was mesmerized by a Friday sermon given by Imam Zaid Shakir after the verdict in the George Zimmerman trial had been issued. I quote him here at length:

*Allah tells us in a hadith qudsi, ‘Oh my servants, I have made oppression forbidden for myself and among you. Therefore, do not oppress one another.’ This is an integral part of our religion. Our quest for justice does not allow us to kill indiscriminately and justify it as a quest for justice. But this is what governments argue: Our quest for security allows us to murder indiscriminately. What does that mean as a principle? Our*

*quest for whose security? Have you been consulted? I'd rather be insecure before someone had to die for my security. And I'm sure most of you would agree with me. I would take my chances before I would allow anyone to indiscriminately murder someone so that I can allegedly be safe. This is not just [in other words, this is unjust]...*

*Just cause' isn't being between the age of 16 and 64 in Waziristan. Or Yemen. Or Somalia. Where you're killed now, questioned later. Our president said in the aftermath of the Zimmerman trial, 'we are a nation of laws.' Well, he should start following those laws when he commissions these drone attacks that murder people and then they go to the body, and if he's between 16 and 64, he's a militant. If he never picked up a gun in his life, if he doesn't even know where America is, can't locate it on a map, never heard of 9/11. Just some shepherd minding his sheep on a hillside in Afghanistan or Pakistan or Yemen, then is murdered. And if he's between 16 and 64, his murder is justified. What kind of law is that? The law of the jungle. The law of might makes right [emphasis added]. Allah tells us don't kill the soul [that] Allah has sanctified. We have no right to kill that person. There was no right to kill Trayvon Martin.<sup>24</sup>*

What Shakir does in this khutbah (sermon) is take on the issue of American (in)justice, weaving seamlessly between the United States and the Middle East, connecting drone policy and the not-guilty verdict for Zimmerman, drawing parallels between domestic racial politics to the international workings of the War on Terror.

It was interesting to hear this synthesis from Shakir, a leading speaker at events. In Shakir's khutbah, as in many of his speeches, he deems these injustices foundational, not anomalies, to American political life, a consistent sentiment among the IRO members. Many I spoke with held a fierce condemnation of U.S. foreign policy and the role of anti-terrorism measures in homeland security in the years following 9/11. By and large, IRO members revealed a nuanced awareness of the U.S.'s imperial role in Muslim-majority countries, and most regarded such policy as excessively militarized and imperialistic. It was common knowledge to IRO members that Afghanistan had been a site of such "low-intensity conflict" for the US during the Cold War that the Reagan administration had regarded the mujahideen (people engaged in Jihad) as "freedom fighters," and this was just decades before those very mujahideen would top the list of US enemies. .

Yet, many of my interlocutors had a keen sense of which types of critiques their organizations ought to make – and which ones to silence. "Disciplinary power rules, in effect, by structuring the parameters and limits of thought and practice, [by] sanctioning and prescribing normal and/or deviant behaviors,"<sup>25</sup> and IRO members seemed ever aware of this implicit sanctioning. The "behind closed doors" reactions to organizational responses around issues of Palestine or the War on Terror make clear that these parameters are strongly demarcated in the minds of those who have understood that, as for those vying for complete social citizenship, silence is imperative. While they earnestly hold on to their geopolitical critiques, articulating them would jeopardize their effort of inclusion. The deliberate caution and self-silencing I highlight here illuminate the tense landscape IRO members navigate. In an undeniably xenophobic milieu, they feel they must carefully craft their opposition to Islamophobia in ways that will not intensify their demonization. In other words, they feel that full inclusion for U.S. Muslims requires them to choke back righteous indignation, to be ever-aware of what is at stake in the project of legitimacy. Yet, this sentiment does not stand alone; the counterhegemonic or "countercitizenship narratives"<sup>26</sup> made by IRO's often suggest a righteous cynicism and cutting critique of sociopolitical possibilities in the US, what Shakir underscores in the khutbah above.

For my interlocutors, celebrating the White House's attempt at atonement for the schoolboy's experience is simply the newest manifestation of the ways in which imaginative possibilities – the sense of what is realizable in the U.S. – are deeply curtailed. As Rehan told me matter-of-factly, “We have to *settle* for applauding the Obama Tweet right now. We can't make this about the drone program.” In this one statement, Rehan concisely sums up the perils of coloniality,<sup>27</sup> the ingrained limitations of engaging in dialogue within imperialist parameters. Given the “misanthropic skepticism”<sup>28</sup> of coloniality, Muslims' attempts to prove their civilizational capacities, their humanity, and their sense of humor all work within deeply confined parameters. As such, they constitute an “aspiration of self”<sup>29</sup> that is profoundly colonial, ensnared with the end-goal of legitimacy at the heart of empire.

### CONCLUSION

Waiting, patience, and hope were thus intertwined in my interlocutors' expectation of a better future. While members expressed to me a sense that patient forbearance would hasten the arrival of a better world for Muslim Americans, the coexisting sense of defeatedness, and allegations that the U.S. was an unjust ideological formation at its core, made me wonder just what this hopefulness held. Hope is not as agentive as desire: one who desires something acts to bring about fulfillment of this desire.<sup>30</sup> In other words, there is ambivalence between hope and impossibility, one that I struggled to make sense of during my time in the field. For this specific group of engaged, *privileged* Muslim Americans, it is clear that this status is perceived as being in peril. While invoking a well-known history of U.S. racism and a strong understanding of the contours of contemporary U.S. imperialism, IRO members cautiously walk a tightrope on their path to social citizenship. In other words, their ambivalence and deliberate silence reveals both a sense of anxiety in the face of losing an imagined ‘model minority’ status, as well as an inability to confront entrenched U.S. imperialist racism.

As Islamophilia props up an Islamophobic geopolitical order, Muslim Americans themselves carefully navigate a realm in which it seems that just about any response to Islamophobia exists within the confines of coloniality. While we celebrate the deliberate attempts to include Ahmed Mohamed – a future engineer, perhaps, or entrepreneur – we must think critically about the very nature of inclusion under empire. “As long as the far right remains in charge of defining patriotism[,] and the liberal left continues reinforcing those definitions through weak-kneed appeals to tolerance, broader conversations about the state of our nation will be lazy, irrational, and violent – in other words, everything the current brand of patriotism asks us to be.”<sup>31</sup> As we consider the agentive capacity of Muslims in the U.S., we ought to be diligent in demystifying “Islamophobia” as an analytic frame and take seriously the ramifications of these “weak-kneed appeals” to inclusion.

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# ***Countering Violent Extremism: Islamophobia, the Department of Justice and American Islamic Organizations***

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***Countering Violent Extremism: Islamophobia, the Department of  
Justice  
and American Islamic Organizations***

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**ABSTRACT:** In September 2014, United States Attorney General Eric Holder announced that a new counterterrorism initiative, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), would be tested in three pilot cities across the US. Minneapolis, Minnesota is one of the three pilot cities for the new CVE initiative and is home to the largest Somali immigrant population in the world as well as a very large and diverse multi-ethnic Muslim community. Since 2008, when several young Somali-American Muslims left the US to participate in armed operations in Somalia, the community has suffered in an environment of extreme suspicion and distrust.

The surveillance of Muslim-Americans as a key component of American counterterrorism efforts has been the subject of both legal and academic analysis. Reports of spying, infiltration, and harassment have become commonplace in recent years. While these reports are often accompanied by challenges to the legality of the programs used to collect information, very little if any scholarship exists on how American Islamic organizations respond to this intense level of policing.

This research project examines the narrative generated by Muslim organizations in Minnesota, in response to heightened counterterrorism initiatives – particularly CVE – to assess the impact of counterterrorism programs on American Islamic organizations and to highlight the role of Islamophobia as it informs various aspects of such initiatives.

Initial findings suggest the presence of an accommodationist narrative among several organizations, but further investigation is required to explore the questions that raises. For example: How prevalent is that narrative? Is it indicative of a shift in organizational values? Is it an organizational strategy to appease law enforcement while allowing “genuine” work to continue unhampered?

\*

In September, 2014, United States Attorney General Eric Holder announced that a new pilot city program, initiated through the existing Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) strategy, would be tested in three cities across the US. Since 2008, when several young Somali-American Muslims left the US to participate in armed operations in Somalia, the Muslim community has suffered in an environment of extreme suspicion and distrust. According to Minnesota US Attorney, Andrew Luger, these incidents, coupled with recent departures of Minnesota Muslims to engage in fighting overseas, has resulted in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area’s designation as a target for terror recruitment reduction via the CVE initiative. Minnesota is home to the largest Somali immigrant population in the world, as well as a very large and diverse multi-ethnic Muslim community.

For months prior to the September, 2014 announcement, US Attorney Luger attended dozens of neighborhood, leadership, and town hall meetings to promote the benefits of CVE and to encourage community participation. From the outset, there has been a stark division in the Minnesota Muslim community with regard to CVE; supporters of the initiative eagerly await federal funding, while critics provide reminders of past civil rights violations including covert intelligence-gathering programs innocuously termed “community outreach.”

The surveillance of Muslim-Americans as a key component of American counter-terrorism efforts has been the subject of both legal and academic analysis. Reports of spying, infiltration, entrapment, and harassment have become commonplace in recent years. While these reports are often accompanied by challenges to the legality of the programs used to collect information, very little, if any, scholarship exists on how American Islamic organizations (AIOs) *respond* to this intense level of policing. My research examines counter-terrorism initiatives and their impact on AIOs in an effort to understand how civil society organizations are impacted by law enforcement and government intervention. An excerpt from the larger research project, this writing explores the narrative generated by Muslim organizations and leaders in Minnesota, in response to the recently announced CVE pilot city program. Any discussion of CVE and the Muslim American community is incomplete without an examination of the role of Islamophobia in the conceptualization, creation, and implementation of CVE and is thus featured in this writing.

### THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Theories of policing society and police practices, including historical analysis of social movements impacted by intense policing (G. Marx, Della Porta, Churchill, Ellison, Bonino), are foundational in the conceptualization and development of my research process. Certain aspects of social movement theory – particularly a blend of resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald) – and the social psychological approach that addresses group narrative as strategy. For example: broadcasting accommodation or opposition (Gamson, Morris, Braine, Bedingfield, McAdam, Rascoff) have provided useful insight and perspective into the world of organizations working toward social change. I employ participant observation, discourse analysis and interview methods of data collection for this project. It is important to note the limitations of scope and sample in this research. My role as civic engagement manager with a local Muslim civil rights organization provides me the opportunity for extensive participant observation research, but also influences the sample of respondents. As a result of my association with this organization, I am naturally more likely to engage with people who are concerned with issues of civil rights and tend to be more skeptical of government and law enforcement initiatives of any kind. In an effort to correct this imbalance, I have been diligent in my efforts to engage with individuals and organizations that are vocal supporters of the CVE initiative in Minneapolis/St. Paul. My sample size is relatively small. The nature of this topic relating to issues of national security makes people reluctant to discuss their opinions. As a result, I have primarily been able to engage with community leaders and organizational administrators, those who are accustomed to discussing CVE in the public eye. I recognize that this shapes the perspective of the information I collect and look forward to further research that allows me to survey the much larger general Muslim community.

## OVERVIEW OF COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CVE)

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is a counter-terrorism strategy launched by the Obama administration in 2011. The CVE strategy is outlined in a document (available for free online) titled, "Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States."<sup>1</sup> Three main objectives of the strategy are: 1) "Enhance federal engagement with and support to local communities that may be targeted by violent extremists," 2) Increase "government and law enforcement expertise for preventing violent extremism," and 3) Address "violent extremist propaganda while promoting our [American] ideals." From the same document, specific strategies include: "foster community-led partnerships, improve development and use of standardized training [for law enforcement], and increase the capacity of communities to directly challenge violent extremist ideologies and narratives." The recent CVE pilot city program is based on these objectives.

### ISLAMOPHOBIA IN CVE CONCEPTUALIZATION, CREATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

During a community meeting, Minnesota United States Attorney, Andrew Luger provided the list of what he believes to be the identified root causes of violent extremism.<sup>2</sup> This list includes: disaffected youth with no connection to religious leaders, difficulties at school, identity crisis, poor ties to the broader Minnesota community, generational divide, and poor opportunities for economic and educational growth and development (Luger, public meeting, 2015). This concept of the origins of successful terror recruitment very closely resembles our understanding of what causes American youth to engage in the sale of illegal drugs. Consider the familiar narrative of a youth on the corner, bored, broke and disillusioned, who every day sees a few neighborhood drug dealers with money, expensive cars, and clothes. This youth looks at his own life - no stability at home, no connection to community institutions, no hope for a decent financial or academic future – and suddenly, getting into the illegal drug trade is a very appealing option. Unfortunately, this framework does not explain or address the issue of violent extremism. Michael German, former FBI agent and fellow at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law School, explains the danger of relying on a debunked theory of terrorism in a blog post for the ACLU:

*The recent spate of terrorist incidents and arrests involving Americans has policy-makers and security professionals scrambling to find a future-seeing Precog to help them identify so-called "homegrown terrorists" before they act, like in the movie Minority Report... This is nonsense of course, as virtually all empirical studies of actual terrorists, like this one,<sup>3</sup> find no discernable pattern or profile... Yet this "path" or "funnel" theory remains popular among some security experts and government officials because it is exactly what the government wants to believe — that terrorists (who are hard to find) progress from a discernable pool of ideological radicals and activists (who are easy to find and therefore much easier to target). Why should the government look for hard-to-find terrorists when they can more easily target political or religious groups for surveillance, screening, or pretext arrest? A simplistic theory justifies a simplistic approach and allows government to avoid doing the harder work of developing a more complex approach that might actually work.*

*This mentality drives the increase in law enforcement spying on political and religious groups. The Maryland State Police surveillance and infiltration of nonviolent*

*peace groups and anti-death penalty activists is only one example of many across the country. Likewise, the FBI's use of an ex-convict to infiltrate a number of southern California mosques failed to identify or arrest any terrorists, but managed to increase the community's resentment toward the government.*

German provides a clear picture of how seriously lacking in evidence-based practice the CVE initiative is, and further demonstrates not only its ineffectiveness but its potential to cause harm. I argue that CVE is a discriminatory initiative steeped in an unreasonable and unfounded fear of Islam and Muslims. To further illuminate this point, we should consider the 2013 FBI report detailing the demographics of terrorist attacks on US soil between 1980 and 2005. This report highlights the very small number of US terrorist attacks perpetrated by Muslims. The FBI found that, of all domestic attacks between 1980 and 2005, the demographics represented by perpetrators are distributed as follows: 42 percent Latino, 24 percent extreme left wing groups, 16 percent others, 7 percent Jewish extremists, and 6 percent Islamic extremists. (FBI, 2010) A community leader echoes this finding, “The threat is over exaggerated (sic)! Entrapment projects are highly engaged. It’s almost surprising that we haven’t seen more. It’s almost more PR [public relations] nightmare than *actual* threat. When it [an attack] happens, what story will play?” This sentiment speaks directly to the frustration respondents report about the general public’s perception of the terror threat from the Muslim community, “The recycling of these stories has created an environment that challenges our normal living experiences.” Many local Muslims fear that CVE’s focus on the Muslim and Somali community will only serve to further exacerbate this false perception.

A featured piece of the Minneapolis CVE initiative is a focus on youth - youth mentors, job fairs, and scholarship opportunities. Particularly worrying is Luger’s announcement that Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools will participate in a program to monitor students for signs of potential terrorist threat. Luger explained, “There will be intervention teams in Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools. The schools are very willing. Professionals will be available who can help with difficult conversations to address kids [children] who are exhibiting behaviors of concern” (Luger, public meeting 2015). Opponents of this measure are concerned about monitoring students in an already very unequal public school system. The achievement gap in Minnesota is one of the worst in the US. Critics worry that monitors in public schools looking for suspicious behavior will only serve to further isolate and alienate students who are already struggling. Somali and Muslim students become suspects in their own learning environment.

An article in the *Intercept* demonstrates how pervasive CVE programming can be in an educational environment. The *Intercept* obtained a document labeled “for official use only” and, in February of 2015, laid bare the guidelines of a policy designed to identify possible terrorists in groups of school children. Authors Murtaza Hussain, Cora Currier, and Jana Winter write:

*The rating system, part of a 36-page document dated May 2014 and titled “Countering Violent Extremism: A Guide for Practitioners and Analysts,” suggests that police, social workers and educators rate individuals on a scale of one to five in categories such as: “Expressions of Hopelessness, Futility,” “Talk of Harming Self or Others,” and “Connection to Group Identity (Race, Nationality, Religion, Ethnicity).” The ranking system is supposed to alert government officials to individuals at risk of turning to radical violence, and to families or communities at risk of incubating extremist ideologies.*

*Families are judged on factors such as “Aware[ness] of Each Other’s Activities,” as well as levels of “Parent-Child Bonding,” and communities are rated by access to healthcare and social services, in addition to “presence of ideologues or recruiters” as potential risk factors.*

*A low score in any of these categories would indicate a high risk of “susceptibility to engage in violent extremism,” according to the document. It encourages users of the guide to plot the scores on a graph to determine what “interventions” could halt the process of radicalization before it happens.*

In the article, Mike German states, “The idea that the federal government would encourage local police, teachers, medical and social service employees to rate the communities, individuals and families they serve for their potential to become terrorists is abhorrent on its face.” The fact that a child’s “Connection to Group Identity (Race, Nationality, Religion, Ethnicity)” is a scored indicator of potential for terrorism boggles the mind. It becomes easy to see how Somali and Muslim students adhering to religious or cultural dress and praying five times daily in Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools could be targeted by Luger’s CVE school intervention policy.

#### ACCOMMODATIONIST NARRATIVE

In an effort to measure the impact of counter-terrorism initiatives on Islamic organizations in the United States, I initially employed discourse analysis to examine the response narrative of American Islamic organizations (AIOs). I examined the official websites of several national-scope AIOs, gathering phrases and observing themes that appeared in press releases, mission statements, programming, brochures, and interview responses. I identified four accommodationist themes that appeared repeatedly in language addressing the role of Islam and Muslims in the United States. These themes are as follows: 1) Establishing official Islam – borrowed from the Daniel Rascoff article by the same name, this theme is indicative of efforts to promote a specific (US-approved) version of Islam that is compatible with modern Western life, while eschewing the parts of Islam that are currently rejected by 21<sup>st</sup> century mainstream culture. 2) Emphatic and repeated condemnation of terrorism – this refers to language that exceeds what has become the obligatory denunciation of random acts of terror. This theme indicates a demonstrated commitment to centrally position the condemnation of terror at the core of an organization’s public narrative, in other words “branding” itself an “anti-terror” organization. 3) De-radicalization programming – this language refers to efforts by an organization to develop programming (usually youth programming) aimed at preventing or correcting “radicalization” in the community. Accompanying this theme is the acknowledgement by the organization that radicalization is a chief concern of both the organization and the community they represent and serve. 4) Statements of allegiance to America – like anti-terrorism language, this theme refers to emphatic and repeated professions of a belief in American ideals, commitment to American security and other similar language not typically observed in the official communication of community organizations.

While this narrative response to counter-terrorism initiatives appears in more than half of national AIOs reviewed, it has been observed much less frequently at the level of local community organizations and individuals in Minnesota, a CVE battleground. Although it appears far less often, the accommodationist narrative occupies a majority of media coverage of Muslim and Somali response to CVE initiatives. One particularly vocal

supporter of law enforcement and government efforts to reduce terrorism, Omar Jamal, CEO of American Friends of Somalia, said the following about those who are skeptical of Countering Violent Extremism initiatives in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, “The community has to give this program a chance to succeed.” Jamal went on to characterize those that criticized the program as “fear mongers.”<sup>4</sup> Jamal also publicly claimed that there are active Al-Qaeda cells in Minneapolis and has accused imams of the Abu Bakr As-Siddique Mosque of being responsible for the radicalization of young Somali men who traveled to fight in Somalia’s war against Ethiopian troops in 2008. As Minnesota Public Radio reporter, Laura Yuen, describes him, “...Jamal has become a mouthpiece for everyone’s worst fears” (MPR, April 24, 2009).<sup>5</sup> Omar Jamal also provides religious and ethnic credibility for a controversial former sheriff who provides training on how to identify the threat of Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda in Minneapolis (Lussenhop, 2011).

Another example of the accommodationist narrative is observed in Mohamed Farah, executive director of Kajoog, a youth development organization focused on the Somali community. Farah attended the White House Summit on CVE, and spoke of the value of Kajoog’s work in countering violent extremism initiatives. In his address at the White House, Farah explained the ways in which arts programming can prevent radicalization of youth. Recently, Farah has also made an appeal for \$4.35 million in state funding to go toward the prevention of Al-Shabaab and ISIS recruitment, arguing, “It’s an issue that we must come together to combat. It’s an ideology issue, and we must fight ideology with an ideology” (CBS Minnesota, 2015). A champion of CVE in the Somali and Muslim community, Farah is one of the most vocal supporters of the pilot program.

### *OPPOSITION NARRATIVE*

As stated earlier in this writing, I have observed far fewer instances of the accommodationist narrative at the local community level than amongst national organizations. A significant majority of Muslim community leaders and organization representatives in Minnesota have consistently and repeatedly expressed concern about the potential negative community impact of CVE initiatives. In a press release detailing a public education event on CVE, Jaylani Hussein the executive director of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR-MN) explains, “Constitutional rights are the cornerstone of our society and must not be suspended or limited for any Americans.” Hussein argues, “Allowing the federal criminal prosecutor and law enforcement agencies to engage in social services and organize mentorship and after-school programs only in the Muslim community is unprecedented. It blurs the line between community outreach and intelligence gathering.” Hussein’s criticism highlights the concern that CVE initiatives in local communities amounts to clever disguise of intelligence gathering operations.

However, there is little media coverage of community opposition to CVE initiatives in Minnesota. This is possibly due to a combination of factors, including the high profile and public position of Mr. Luger, combined with the fear and risk that accompanies speaking out against a national security, government initiative. One local organization shared with me their experience of receiving a bouquet of flowers and an anonymous card that read, “Thank you for protecting my community. Turning down FBI-infested money to protect our civil rights takes courage. We appreciate all that you do and cannot thank you enough.” This example speaks to the difficult position opponents of the CVE initiative find themselves in. Several local leaders have been visited multiple times at their homes by FBI agents, and are routinely detained and questioned in airports. Speaking out publicly against a Department of

Justice program places one in a cloud of suspicion. The Minneapolis Muslim community has reported multiple incidents of unexpected visits from the FBI, followed a week later by subpoenas to appear before a grand jury. When Luger and other proponents of CVE claim that average, law-abiding Minnesotans have nothing to fear from FBI home visits, not many are convinced.

### *INTERPRETING FINDINGS*

I recognize the limitation of the binary I chose – oppositional or supportive narratives. Identifying the presence of these narratives does not address the deeper and more complex aspects of this research project. I also recognize that these narratives are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In order to maintain consistency in measuring and identifying patterns, it is simply a place to begin – a process of neatly packing up and organizing very messy narratives, only to unpack them all again. After identifying these patterns in organizational narratives, I can return to some of my initial research questions, “When the accommodationist narrative is present, what does it mean? Is it representative of the thoughts and opinions of the community? Is it merely a strategic tool to deflect unwanted law enforcement attention? Is it indicative of a shift in organizational mission and ideology?” I am nearing the completion of the interview process of this project and hope to gain further insight into these questions.

At this stage in the research, I can hypothesize only that, in order to gain acceptance in the dominant culture, any organization or individual must adhere as closely as possible to whatever narrative is least disruptive to the status quo. It becomes most beneficial to engender some sense of comfort and security among those who hold the power. Position in society and objective appear to have a direct relationship to response narrative. I find that local individuals are most likely to express opposition to CVE, but do so only in private, and with assurance of anonymity. In an environment of fear and Islamophobia, individuals are not willing to express opinions that may land them on the wrong side of an FBI investigation. Local public figures and community leaders are more likely to express opposition to CVE publicly, often in response to concerns from their constituents. National organizations vying for influence in Washington are most likely to express an accommodationist narrative in response to CVE and other counter-terrorism initiatives. It can be argued that these organizations also stand to benefit the most from a closer relationship to those in positions of power.

### *CONCLUSION*

Countering Violent Extremism initiatives in Minnesota appear to have a destabilizing and divisive impact on the local Muslim community. As has already been witnessed with the Prevent program (earlier CVE initiative in Britain), CVE in the US has begun to create an environment of fear and stigmatization (Halliday and Dodd, 2015). Regardless of concerns, this program will undoubtedly proceed. The organization I work for is now hearing reports from chapters across the country that US attorneys in several states have reached out to them to begin the process of “community involvement” in constructing “extremist prevention programs.” Texas Representative Michael McCaul has introduced HR 2899, the *Countering Violent Extremism Act* which proposes a permanent CVE office be established in the Department of Homeland Security. It seems CVE is here to stay.

I am left with several questions: How can civil society organizations and communities that find themselves the target of counter-terrorism initiatives combat the accompanying destabilization and division? How can organizations effectively address the exaggerated public perception of “Muslim terrorism,” fueled by Islamophobic counter-terrorism programs? And, perhaps most importantly, if 94 percent of terrorist acts committed on American soil are committed by non-Muslims, why does the focus of CVE continue to be the Muslim community? I am not yet able to answer these questions, but I look forward to further investigation as well as fruitful conversations with communities targeted by counter-terrorism initiatives.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/sip-final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> As a community member actively engaged in this issue, I am frequently invited to attend briefings, discussions and public announcements dealing with CVE. This particular set of root causes of violent extremism was presented several times publicly from October, 2014 to my last observation in March, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.startribune.com/local/minneapolis/292307031.html>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.mprnews.org/story/2009/04/24/omar\\_jamal](http://www.mprnews.org/story/2009/04/24/omar_jamal)

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# ***Islamophobia and Law Enforcement in a Post 9/11 World***

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## *Islamophobia and Law Enforcement in a Post 9/11 World*

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigated the personal beliefs and attitudes of law enforcement officers toward Muslims and Islam. A consensual qualitative research method analysis (Hill) was performed on data gathered from semi-structured interviews with twelve police officers in training. Qualitative themes emerged from the cross analysis of participant interviews. Nearly all participants endorsed having personally or professionally interacted with Muslims, having previously referred to Muslims as foreigners (un-American others, or belonging to a ethnic/racial group), and expressed willingness and interest in learning more about Muslim culture in order to better serve their communities. Additional typical and variant themes were also found through analysis of the interviews. Study implications, limitations and directions for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, law enforcement, consensual qualitative research

### *INTRODUCTION*

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on the United States, the concept of Islamophobia has emerged in psychological literature and is most commonly regarded as an irrational fear and intense dislike of Islam and Muslims (Bleich, Choma, Hodson, and Costello; Iqbal, Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, and Timani; Pratt). From an affective conceptualization, Bleich defines this construct as “indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims” (1585). These negative emotions range in intensity and include “aversion, jealousy, suspicion, disdain, anxiety, rejection, contempt, fear, disgust, anger, and hostility” (Bleich, 1586). Intense feelings of dread, hostility, hatred, and fear also stem from the belief that Muslims pose a threat to the individual, and to Western society (Iqbal; Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, and Timani). Cognitive appraisals of Muslims as enemies, terrorists, and threats, in addition to widespread lack of knowledge about Islamic faith, further add to negative emotionality toward Muslims (Bleich; Iqbal; Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, and Timani; Pratt). Islamophilia, or the “generalized affection for Islam and Muslims,” contributes to the binary attitudes of “good Muslims” versus “bad Muslims” (Shryock, 9). This splitting of friends and foes promotes stereotypes of “good Muslims,” those who are Sufi, peaceful, moderate, who emphasize choice in deciding whether to wear the hijab, against the “bad Muslims” who practice violence and shari’ah law, oppression of women, who hate Jews, and are Arabic (Shryock). The combination of ignorance about the religion, distorted beliefs toward members of the religious group, and negative feelings concerning the religion and its members, serve as precursors for acts of discrimination (Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, and Timani; Pratt; Iqbal).

The literature suggests that Islamophobia is more complex than simply a manifestation of religious discrimination. Elements of race, ethnicity, gender, nationalism, politics, and immigration also contribute to the fear and dislike of Muslims (Shryock;

Jackson; Kalin). More specifically, these social psychological models of *Othering* (Esses et al.; Soldatova; Gonzalez et al.; Stephan et al.) can be applied to the religion and believers of Islam. The concept of Islamophobia is distinguished from xenophobia, racism, and anti-terrorism, by its targeting of members of a religious faith. The European Union, United Nations, advocacy, and governing bodies in North America and Europe have embraced this concept as a global concern (Shryock).

The rise in Islamophobic sentiment since 2001 has become visible in the American public sector. According to S. Sheehi, Islamophobia can be viewed as an ideological formation that has become engrained in American culture, following decades of stereotyping Muslims and “anesthetizing White America” with racist Muslim archetypes (145). Within the US film and television industries, the presentation of Muslim characters has historically been associated with fear and barbarianism (Shaheen; Sheehi). Stereotyping and the negative portrayal of Muslims in the news media is evident in US newspapers, news websites, news television shows, the internet, popular television shows, film, and among the discourse of opinion leaders (Sheehi; Trevino, Kanso, and Nelson; Yenigun; Shehata; Shaheen; Suleiman). Spanning across political party lines, the association of “fear” with “Muslim” in American political rhetoric, has been a key tool to reinforce Islamophobia (Cole; Sheehi; Nimer).

### MEASUREMENT OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

A review of past measures of Islamophobia reveals significant gaps in the psychological literature. Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, and Timani’s instrument development and validation of “The Islamophobia Scale” has been found to have good internal consistency, and the scale includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements of the construct (Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, & Timani). With the exception of Iqbal’s 2010 study that began by using focus groups to develop their questionnaire, nearly all of the psychological studies of Islamophobia to date have been quantitative in their methodologies.

Two quantitative studies have measured Islamophobia in law enforcement personnel (Mescher; Keeling, and Hughes). Mescher’s 2008 study tested 727 police officers in Germany about Islamophobia attitudes, and quality of contact experiences with Muslims in Germany. These variables were correlated with measures of job satisfaction, political affiliation, individual responsibility, and recognition. Keeling and Hughes’s 2011 quantitative study tests a sample of mid-level police managers in the Midwestern United States. This study’s scale is composed of 33 items and is based on attitudes toward Muslims and Islam, stereotyping, and demographic characteristics that include familiarity and contact with Muslims and Islam (Keeling and Hughes). Results show that “48.6% [of the sample] believed that Muslims were not tolerant of other religions, and a slightly smaller portion (43.6%) disagreed with the idea that Islam promotes peace” (Keeling and Hughes, 313). Additionally, only “51.9% rejected the blanket notion that most Muslims are fanatics” (313). These results from Keeling and Hughes’s 2011 study of mid-level police managers’ attitudes toward Muslims and Islam disproves the idea that management-level law enforcement personnel are free of Islamophobic beliefs. To date, there have been no qualitative psychological studies assessing attitudes toward Muslims and Islam among law enforcement personnel.

### POLICE INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Law enforcement plays a pivotal role in responding to hate crimes against ethnic, racial, and religious minorities. Within a broader context, police officers work to enforce

local, state, and federal laws, to prevent crime, and intervene when crimes and violations of public safety occur. Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, several structural changes within police departments across the United States have occurred to adjust to the growing needs of the country (Jiao and Rhea; Huq, Tyler, and Schulhofer). In addition to focusing on ordinary crimes, police officers are now responsible for responding to the new problem of terrorism (Huq, Tyler, and Schulhofer). Criminal profiling is discriminatory in nature and might include factors such as race, ethnicity, and appearance (Fredrickson and Siljander). Often a “fine line exists between what can be regarded as legitimate criminal profiling, and racial profiling, or, more appropriately stated, discrimination and/or persecution” (Fredrickson and Siljander, 28).

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, law enforcement investigated potential domestic terrorism at the federal, state, and local levels. In their efforts to strengthen security, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) began modifying their profiling techniques, and increasingly questioned Arab and Muslim-looking passengers at airports (Welch; Bonikowski; Sheehi; Abraham, Howell, and Shryock). The term, “Flying while Muslim,” describes the experience of Middle Eastern and Muslim passengers who have been stopped for extensive and humiliating questioning while trying to board airplanes since 9/11 (Sheehi; Welch; Bonikowski). Additionally, federal and local law enforcement continue to monitor Muslim organizations years after 9/11 occurred (Howell). The ongoing surveillance has fostered further feelings of vulnerability and exclusion among the Muslim community (Howell).

M. Powell’s 2012 article in *The New York Times* sheds light on a training film that was shown to at least 1,489 police officers. The film titled, “The Third Jihad,” posited that few Muslim leaders can be trusted (Powell). The narrator of the film stated that “Americans are being told that many of the mainstream Muslim groups are also moderate...when[,] in fact[,] if you look a little closer, you’ll see a very different story” (Powell). While top police officials initially denied showing the film, public access to police documents revealed that it was shown “on a continuous loop” during training sessions in New York (Powell, 2). For officers who viewed the film, there was no known plan to debrief, or add any additional programming in order to correct prejudicial messages that were portrayed in the movie (Powell).

In addition to profiling, the FBI, police officers, and immigration officials have also received criticism regarding the detainment of thousands of Muslim, Middle Eastern, and South Asian men after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Mathur; Howell and Jamal). The economic impact of such law enforcement policies has left many American Muslim communities with destroyed businesses and expensive legal defense fees (Mathur). Arrests by police officers “were made on the basis of tips, reports of ‘suspicious activity,’ which apparently consisted of having a South Asian or Middle Eastern appearance” (Mathur, 34).

The interactions between law enforcement and Muslim Americans during the “terror decade” have left lasting impressions on these relationships today. The Vera Institute of Justice’s 2006 study of the relationships between Arab Americans and Law Enforcement post 9/11, found that many Arab-Americans who are Muslim fear racial profiling, immigration enforcement, and “anti-terrorism” policies more than hate crimes in their communities. While some Muslim Americans became more engaged in advocacy groups, the 2006 study also found that disengagement and withdrawal from Islamic community groups increased after 9/11. The principal of an Islamic school explained, “One of the major pillars of Islam is to give to charity, and people are afraid to give now because they believe that law enforcement is trying to link people to each other. [It] has affected everyone, especially our

school and our ability to raise money” (Vera Institute). Hasisi’s 2008 survey study found that among Arab Americans, Muslims perceived the police force more negatively than their Christian and Druze counterparts.

### *THE PRESENT STUDY*

Because of the complexity of psychological, sociological, religious, and political factors involved in the construct, a qualitative methodology allows for a more meaningful description of the experience of Islamophobia by police officers. The literature shows that a fair amount of tension, mistrust, and conflict exists between law enforcement personnel and Muslim American communities, especially during the years following 9/11. Weak relationships between minority groups and law enforcement personnel not only hinder police officers’ abilities to effectively perform their job duties, but leave detrimental impacts on the psychological welfare of an already oppressed minority religious group. The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe law enforcement personnel’s beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes toward Muslims and Islam.

The qualitative methodology used in this study, the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method, uses an inductive “bottom-up” approach, which draws conclusions based on narrative data. This means that “researchers allow the results to emerge from the data without imposing the theoretical constructs on the data, or imposing as little as possible” (Hill, 8). In other words, generating formal hypotheses before gathering data is counterintuitive to the CQR method. Instead, several domains were predicted to emerge from the data: 1) presence of negative stereotypes toward Muslims and Islam, 2) cognitive appraisal of Muslims as enemies, terrorists, and foreigners, 3) feelings of fear, discomfort, disgust, suspicion, and dislike, 4) avoidance and/or distancing behavior from Muslims, and support for policies that restrict immigration, 5) presence of symbolic threat (i.e. Muslims as threatening to Christianity, Western countries, and traditional American values), and 6) lack of knowledge about Islam.

### *METHOD*

#### *Participants*

The study used a sample of twelve men who were training to become police officers. Recruitment took place at a law enforcement academy in the Midwestern United States using a snow-balling sampling method. Female training officers were invited to participate in the study, but only male officers volunteered to participate. Findings should therefore not be generalized to female police officers. Police officers who identified as Muslim were excluded from participating in the study as the study aimed to understand the experience of non-Muslim American police officers working with a religious minority population. Participants ranged in age from 23-35 ( $M = 27$ ), and with regard to race, eleven self-identified as Caucasian and one as Hispanic. Ten self-identified as Christian, one as Mormon and one as Undecided. With regard to political affiliation, two identified as “Very Conservative,” seven as “Conservative” and three as “Moderate.” Participants varied in their self-reported number of Muslim friends/acquaintances, as one participant listed ten Muslim friends, three had two Muslim friends, one had one Muslim friend, and seven indicated zero Muslim friends. Finally, four police officers indicated that they have previously served in the military (two were stationed in Afghanistan and two in the United States). Each participant received a \$15 gift

card to a local restaurant as an incentive for his volunteered time. Participants were notified ahead of time that they could elect to end their participation at any time without penalty.

### *Research Team Composition And Bias Management*

The research team, consistent with parameters defined by C.E. Hill, was composed of ten graduate doctoral psychology students and one psychology professor. Team member demographics were culturally diverse: three members self-identified as South Asian, two as Caucasian, two as Greek, two as Latina, one as African American and one as Egyptian. Religious diversity was also represented in the research team: six self-identified as Christian, two as Muslim one as Hindu, one as Jain, and one as Atheist. At each step of the data analysis, the research team discussed their own biases and expectations about the participant population and interview transcripts throughout the coding and cross analyses steps. Two members served as auditors throughout the data analysis process to limit team biases.

### *Procedure*

Participants were recruited through a law enforcement training academy in the Midwestern United States after the study received Institutional Review Board approval. The principal investigator (PI) met with administration officials at the law enforcement training facility to provide an overview of the study, and a request for word-of-mouth advertisement of the study was made. The PI also held a brief informational meeting at the training academy for all police officers enrolled in the academy's basic training course, providing a description of the participation requirements for the study. Officers contacted their cohort members and snow-balling was used to attract additional participants.

The twelve participants were interviewed individually in a private office at the law enforcement academy by the PI. Participants were provided with a written and verbal explanation of confidentiality, the study's purpose, and associated risks and benefits for participating. They were told that they could discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The consent form also requested permission to audio record the interviews. The PI obtained permission for a waiver of informed consent from the Institutional Review Board. Participants were therefore provided with a written copy of the informed consent form but were told that they did not need to sign the form in order to guarantee anonymity. Recorded interview responses and demographic questionnaires were coded with a number, rather than by identifying information.

After reviewing the consent form and verbally providing informed consent, participants were asked to complete the brief paper-pencil demographic questionnaire. Next, participants were administered a semi-structured interview by the PI, lasting approximately sixty minutes. Finally, participants were debriefed and provided with the principal investigator's e-mail address in the event that they had additional questions, and they were also given referrals to a mental health services provider if they experienced emotional distress. None of the participants sought out additional debriefing or mental health services through the referral provided.

### *Measures*

The demographic questionnaire was developed by the PI, but was influenced from correlational literature concerning Islamophobia, and a number of participant factors (Ward

and Masgoret; Gonzalez et al.; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle; Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, and Timani; Johnson; Rowatt, Franklin, and Cotton). The brief questionnaire asked participants to self-identify the following variables: age, ethnicity, number of Muslim acquaintances and friends, political ideology, and religious affiliation. Amount of contact with Muslims has been correlated with degrees of Islamophobia and xenophobia (Ward and Masgoret; Gonzalez et al.). Conservative political views and Christianity have also been found to correlate with anti-Muslim prejudice (Rowatt, Franklin, and Cotton; Johnson; Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, and Timani).

The CQR method has much empirical support for understanding complex phenomena in qualitative research (Hill; Hill et al.; Hill, Thompson, and Williams). All participants were interviewed by the same interviewer. The interviewer used a semi-structured interview modeled after Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, and Timani's 2009 "The Islamophobia Scale." Additional questions were developed based on the results of Keeling and Hughes's 2011 quantitative questionnaire, which was administered to mid-level police managers (e.g. "I am interested in learning more about Islam from Muslims"). From both of these scales, some terminology was changed to make the interview more open-ended based on recommendations from Hill. Domains assessed by the interview questions included cognitions, emotions, and distancing behaviors related to Muslims and Islam. In addition, support for anti-immigration or anti-Muslim policies, knowledge of Islam, and feelings of symbolic threat, were also inquired.

### *Data Analysis*

The Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method has been effectively used to study complex psychological phenomena through use of inductive and consensual data analysis (Hill). This method was chosen to better understand the complexity of psychological, historical, political, sociological, and individual factors that contribute to Islamophobia. The PI conducted all semi-structured interviews, and a team of four trained graduate psychology students transcribed the de-identified interviews verbatim. The data analysis was conducted by a primary research team and external auditors in order to minimize researcher biases.

The CQR method analyzes data within and across cases and is composed of four steps: 1) coding data into domains, 2) reducing segments of data into core ideas, 3) developing and sorting data across cases into themes or categories, and 4) organizing the categories into a frequency table. During the first phase, a primary team of nine researchers coded the data into a list of twelve domains while two external auditors revised and approved these data clusters. Next, core ideas were abstracted from data within each domain by summarizing the participants' narratives. These summaries captured the content of what the participants were expressing, in a concise manner. With the help of the auditors, the core ideas were written in a style that was free of interpretations, redundancies, and assumptions. The third stage is referred to as "cross analysis" and it involved a higher level of abstraction. Team members developed categories of common themes that were reflected in the core ideas, within domains, and across transcripts. A list of categories was revised several times based on common themes that emerged across multiple participants. Throughout the entire data analysis process, two auditors served as editors to offer new perspectives, and to provide preliminary feedback about the data. This additional source of feedback and monitoring enhances the validity of the team's conclusions (Hill).

## RESULTS

Table 1 depicts the twelve domains and categories derived from the data. Each category was given a frequency label based on the number of participants who fit into each category. *General* refers to a theme that describes all, or all but one, cases. The label *Typical* was given to themes that fit at least half of the participants (6-10). Categories in which three or more, but less than half, of the cases fit were labeled as *Variant*.

Table 1  
*Frequency Analysis*

Domain, Category and Subcategory	Frequency
<b>1 General Beliefs, Stereotypes, and Attitudes about Muslims</b>	
Muslims Have Different Values	Typical
More Dangerous than Christians	Typical
Binary Attitude of “Good vs. Bad” Muslims	Typical
Worried about Sharia Law in America	Variant
Intolerant of Other Religions	Variant
Tolerant of Other Religions	Variant
Muslims in U.S. are Tolerant but Muslims Abroad are Intolerant	Variant
Anti-American	Variant
Support Terrorism	Variant
Peaceful	Variant
Pray Often	Variant
Wear Turbans	Variant
Dress Differently	Variant
<b>2 Muslim Women</b>	
Subservient to Men	Typical
Attitudes toward Hijabs and Burkas	
Acceptance	Typical
Opposition	Variant
Wonders if Forced to Cover	Variant
<b>3 Challenges in Interacting with Culturally Diverse Groups</b>	
Stereotypes Diverse Groups	Typical
Communication/Language Barriers	Typical
Worries about Offending Others	Variant
Would Like to Become More Knowledgeable	Variant
Accepting of Diverse Groups	Variant

<b>4</b>	<b>Past Interactions with Muslims</b>	
	<b>Has interacted with Muslims</b>	General
	<b>Quality of Past Interactions</b>	
	Neutral	Variant
	Positive	Variant
	Negative	Variant
<b>5</b>	<b>Anticipated Thoughts, Feelings, &amp; Behaviors if Interacting with Muslims</b>	
	<b>Thoughts</b>	
	Stereotypes Come to Mind	Typical
	Hopes Muslim Does Not Have a Bomb	Variant
	<b>Feelings</b>	
	Anxiety/Increased Vigilance	Typical
	Worries About Offending	Variant
	Feels Stressed During All Traffic Stops	Variant
	<b>Behaviors</b>	
	Wouldn't Change Behaviors	Typical
<b>6</b>	<b>Muslims in News Media</b>	
	Media's Biased View Sometimes Causes Me to Think of Stereotypes	Typical
	Media Shows Biased/Negative Stereotypes of Muslims	Typical
	Media Presents an Accurate/Unbiased Depiction of Muslims	Variant
<b>7</b>	<b>Muslims Described as Foreign or Ethnic/Racial Others</b>	
	References to Muslims as Foreigners, Un-American, and an Ethnic/Racial Group	General
	Cannot Distinguish Difference Between Muslims and Arabs	Typical
	Can Distinguish Difference Between Muslims and Arabs	Variant
<b>8</b>	<b>Influence of 9/11 and Terrorism on Perception of Muslims</b>	
	All Muslims Unjustly Stereotyped as Terrorists and Extremists	Typical
	Law Enforcement Now Tasked with Identifying Terrorists	Variant
	Anti-Muslim Prejudice is Decreasing	Variant
<b>9</b>	<b>Being in Close Proximity to Muslims</b>	
	Stereotypes Come to Mind	Typical
	Uncomfortable/Nervous	Typical
	Conditional Acceptance of Muslims	Typical
	Acceptance of Muslims	Variant
	Suspicious	Variant
	Associates Mosques with Terrorist Activity	Variant

	Fears Hate Crimes and Decreased Property Values if Mosque Built in Town	Variant
	Increased Vigilance	Variant
	Avoidance of Muslims	Variant
	Watch More Closely	Variant
	No Change in Behavior	Variant
<b>10</b>	<b>Openness to Learning More about Islam</b>	
	Wants to Learn More to Become a Better Police Officer	General
	Does Not Want to Learn More About Islam	Variant
<b>11</b>	<b>Muslims in the Political/Public Sphere</b>	
	Values Occupational Competence Over Religion	Typical
	Conditional Support for Muslims in Political/Public Sphere and of Islam Being Discussed in Public Schools	Typical
	Concern about Resistance from Others	Typical
	Believes President Barack Obama is Muslim	Typical
	Opposed to Muslims in Public/Political Sphere	Variant
	Opposed to Education about Islam in Public Schools	Variant
	Support for Education about Islam in Public Schools	Variant
<b>12</b>	<b>Anticipated Reaction to Child Marrying a Muslim Person or Converting to Islam</b>	
	Unsupportive/Mixed Feelings about Child's Marriage or Conversion	Typical
	Supportive of Child's Marriage or Conversion	Variant

*Domain 1: General Beliefs, Stereotypes, and Attitudes about Muslims*

This domain describes beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes that participants reported about Muslims throughout their interviews. A *typical* result was that the majority of police officers indicated in their narratives that Muslims have different values than non-Muslims. A common finding among participants whose statements fit this category was an inability to articulate how exactly the values differ, only that they are not the same. Many participants refrained from discussing their attitudes toward this perceived difference in values between Muslims and non-Muslims but simply noted that they varied in content. Other participants contrasted Muslim values from American values. Most participants in this category expressed that it is important that certain American Christian fundamentals remain unchanged despite differences in values between the two groups. Another *typical* finding for this domain was the binary view of Muslims, or belief that there are “good versus bad Muslims.” “Good Muslims” were described by the majority of participants as peaceful, spiritually devoted, and law-abiding US citizens, while “bad Muslims” were depicted as extremists, “die-hard Muslims,” and terrorists from the Middle East. The third *typical* category that emerged from this domain was the belief that, as a whole, Muslims are more dangerous than Christians. Unlike the binary view of Muslims, some participants said that it was more difficult to see a peaceful side to the religion of Islam because of images seen in the media.

Finally, a number of *variant* categories were expressed by less than half of the police officers in regard to beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes toward Muslims. Answers to the question, “do you believe Muslims are tolerant of other religions?” were evenly divided between opinions that Muslims are tolerant, intolerant, and “Muslims in the US are tolerant but Muslims in the Middle East are intolerant.” Other *variant* themes about Muslims included: they are peaceful, they pray often, they wear turbans, they dress differently, they are anti-American (US), they support terrorism, and concern about Sharia Law in America/US (without an ability to articulate which parts of Sharia Law were most concerning).

### *Domain 2: Muslim Women*

Throughout their interviews, participants provided their beliefs and opinions about Muslim women and how they perceive women to be viewed within the religion of Islam. This domain also includes responses to a follow-up interview question about reactions to seeing a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf, which became a necessary additional question based on the abundance of responses related to gender. The belief that Muslim women are subservient to Muslim men was in the *typical* category in this domain. Most police officers discussed their perceptions of Islam by reporting that men are viewed more highly than women within the religion, referring to burkas as limiting women’s freedoms of expression. The subservient theme also included statements about Muslim women’s gender roles pertaining to housework, raising children, and the view that a woman is the possession of her husband. Also in the *typical* category was an attitude of acceptance of Muslim women covering themselves with burkas or hijabs. Half of the participants reported that they had no problem with seeing Muslim women wearing hijabs or burkas because of favorable views toward “America’s [the United States] freedom of religion.” In contrast, less than half of the interviewees reported that they were either opposed to headscarves/hijabs and burkas or wondered if Muslim women were forced to cover themselves with these articles. These attitudes were *variant* and endorsed by a smaller number of participants.

### *Domain 3: Challenges in Interacting with Culturally Diverse Groups*

While not a primary topic of this study, this domain was developed based on participants’ responses to the first interview question, “In your work as a police officer, what are some of the challenges you face in helping people whose culture is different than yours?” The first *typical* finding was that police officers discussed stereotypes of ethnic minorities when describing the challenges they faced in interacting with diverse groups. Examples described were references to immigrants taking advantage of social welfare programs and not wanting to contribute to this country, concerns about ethnic minorities taking over the US, unfavorable attitudes toward minorities who immigrated from patriarchal societies, and perceived hygiene problems of international individuals. Another *typical* category from this domain was communication and language barriers experienced by police officers when working with ethnic minorities or immigrant populations. Most of the participants shared their difficulties in trying to communicate with someone who speaks another language and has different cultural norms, without being disrespectful.

#### *Domain 4: Past Interactions with Muslims*

This domain describes police officers' experiences in interacting with Muslims. Most of the data categorized in this domain were responses to the interview questions, "Have you had any experiences interacting with Muslims? If so, what was that like for you?" In addition, participants' references throughout their narratives to any specific experiences or examples they have had in the past when interacting with people who are Muslim were coded in this domain. A *general* finding from this domain was that all but one police officer had some experience interacting with Muslims in the past, either as police officers, in previous employment, the military, or in their personal lives.

In regard to the quality of their interactions, participants' narratives varied. Police officers' descriptions of their experiences with Muslims were evenly split between positive, negative, and neutral encounters, and there were no *typical* or *general* findings about the nature of these experiences. The following are examples of self-reported, positive interactions: having the chance to learn about Islam from Muslim roommates, having good working relationships with Middle Eastern Muslim, interpreters while serving in the military, a positive relationship with a Muslim family at an officer's child's school (he described the children of that family as "great kids"), and relationships with Muslim inmates whom the officer oversaw at a correctional facility (he described these inmates as "just like anyone else"). Negative past experiences with Muslims included feeling burdened about having to make special accommodations for Muslim inmates during Ramadan, negative encounters with Middle Eastern Muslims while deployed overseas, and negative employment relationships in which Muslim employers and customers were labeled as frightening, violent, and "people who flaunted their wealth." Neutral interactions were reported as unremarkable, without any positive or negative valence. One participant discussed his negative feelings to the hypothetical scenario of pulling over a Muslim in his town, and he made the assumption that the person would hold extremist views about Islam.

#### *Domain 5: Anticipated Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors if Interacting with Muslims*

Narratives coded in this domain were participant responses to a hypothetical scenario. The police officers were asked to imagine conducting a routine traffic stop with a person whom they believe to be Muslim, and to share their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, given that the person they pulled over is Muslim. One *typical* category of responses was that participants described having negative stereotypes come to mind if they were to pull over someone they believed to be Muslim. Another *typical* category from this hypothetical scenario was feeling anxious, uncomfortable, and having increased vigilance to one's surroundings. One police officer attributed his anxiety in these scenarios to his past military experience in the Middle East. Another explained the link between stereotypes, being more alert while on patrol, and being mindful of how he comes across as a police officer. The third *typical* category that occurred in this domain was the indication that the police officer would act no differently in this scenario solely because the person was Muslim. Half of the police officers endorsed this in response to the hypothetical traffic stop scenario. Other participants acknowledged that, even if stereotypes came to mind during the interaction, they would not act on those prejudices. In addition, several *variant* categories of responses to the same scenario were provided but endorsed by a smaller number of police officers. Among these *variant* themes were the thoughts that the participant hopes the Muslim person "does

not have a bomb,” concern about accidentally offending the Muslim person, and the feeling that all traffic stops are stressful, regardless of who is being pulled over.

#### *Domain 6: Muslims in News Media*

Participants were asked how the media has influenced their perception of Muslims. One *typical* finding for most of the police officers was that the media portrays Muslims in a biased and negative light. Examples of these negative biases of Muslims include the media’s depiction of Muslims as extremists, terrorists, violent, threatening, and anti-American/residents of the US. A related *typical* finding, most police officers also reported that the media’s portrayal of Muslims causes them to sometimes stereotype. The opposite belief, that the media portrays an accurate and unbiased view of Muslims, was a *variant* category. A small number of participants expressed that they see the media showing Muslims accurately and some said that “the media teaches Americans more about Islam.” Some officers specified that it also depends on the news station.

#### *Domain 7: Muslims Described as Foreign or Ethnic/Racial Others*

This domain describes participants’ responses to the question, “Is there any difference in your mind between Muslims and Arabs?” It also includes references to Muslims as “un-American,” “foreigners,” or as an ethnic/racial group, that occurred throughout the narratives. A *general* category was found for references to Muslims as foreigners, un-American, and an ethnic/racial group, since all but one participant referred to Muslims in this way during their interviews. The majority of participants indicated that if they were to pull someone over for a traffic stop they would know that they were Muslim by physical features and having English as a second language, stating examples such as, “skin color, hair color, maybe their accent, how they talk, maybe how well they speak English and pronounce their words.” Muslims were also depicted as foreigners by most police officers in the study. Other participants overtly stated that Muslims are not American: “Because they have anti-American values, by definition, they are anti-American!”

One *typical* finding occurred in response to the question about whether participants believed there was any difference between Muslims and Arabs. A majority of the police officers said that there was no difference between the two descriptors. Some commented that if there was a difference they could not identify it. One participant responded to the question by stating, “No. There obviously is but they’re...when I look, think of the two, I think of them being the same person.” Another participant attempted to discern the difference but was unsure whether it had to do with language or religion, ultimately saying that he could see no difference. The one *variant* category in this domain, fit by only a few participants, was the correct identification of Muslims being from a religious faith and Arabs being an ethnic group.

#### *Domain 8: Influence of 9/11 and Terrorism on Perception of Muslims*

Participants were asked how they think the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have affected the perception of Muslims in America. One of the *typical* findings from this domain was the belief that all Muslims have been unjustly stereotyped as terrorists and extremists. The majority of police officers reported that American Muslims are depicted as extremists, even though they had no part in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. A related *variant* finding that arose

from this domain was the belief that anti-Muslim prejudice is decreasing. A few police officers reported that anti-Muslim prejudice was widespread immediately after 9/11 but has decreased since then. The final category that was discussed by a small number of participants about changes in the perception of Muslims since 9/11 was that the tasks of law enforcement personnel have shifted to include identifying potential terrorists. One participant commented on the increased anti-terrorist intelligence gathering in the field: “Law Enforcement back in 2001 wasn’t getting that kind of training that we’re getting now with homeland security, and that even changed how a lot of the agencies are put together. So it’s affected it greatly. I mean it’s swept all the way across there.”

#### *Domain 9: Being in Close Proximity to Muslims*

This domain explored participants’ thoughts, feelings, and anticipated actions regarding being in close proximity to Muslims. Police officers provided answers to questions about their reactions to a mosque hypothetically being built in their town, the growing Muslim population in the Midwest, having Muslim co-workers, and feelings about going to public places where Muslims might gather. One of the *typical* responses was that during these questions many officers referenced negative stereotypes about Muslims while explaining their answers. For example, when one participant was asked how he would react to going to a football game where five or so Muslims might be, he replied, “If there are five of them, who says they’re not there to bomb the place? They’re trying to fit in with everybody, but who knows what they are up to.” Another *typical* category of responses to being in close proximity to Muslims was feeling uncomfortable or nervous. In addition, a *typical* category of conditional acceptance of Muslims in close proximity occurred during most interviews. Many police officers indicated that they would have no problem with Muslims moving to their community, being hired by their police departments, or going to places where Muslims might gather, as long as certain American (US) and Christian fundamentals were maintained. Other participants expressed their support for Muslim police officers being hired in their town *only* if that town had a large Muslim population already. Officers also stated, “It would be kind of cool – so long as they were moderate, you know; you couldn’t work in law enforcement in America [the US] and have an extremist view.”

Additional *variant* categories emerged in participants’ reactions to being in close proximity to Muslims. These *variant* categories include: acceptance of Muslims, feeling suspicious, having increased vigilance, statements that the participants would “act no differently” if in close proximity to Muslims, reflections that officers would watch Muslims more closely than non-Muslims, avoidance of places where Muslims might go, fears about hate crimes occurring or property values decreasing in the participant’s town if a mosque were built there, and associations of mosques with terrorist activity.

#### *Domain 10: Openness to Learning More about Islam*

This domain discusses the extent to which police officers were open to learning more from Muslims about their religion and culture. A *general* response from all but one police officer was openness to this idea. Most participants also stated that they believed they could become better police officers if they learned more about the religion of Islam, cultural norms of Muslims, and ways to communicate respect toward Muslim Americans. It should be noted that only one officer had no interest in learning more about Islam compared to eleven other participants.

### *Domain 11: Muslims in the Political/Public Sphere*

Another element of anti-Muslim prejudice is an unfavorable opinion about Muslims working in political or public sector positions and a negative reaction to Islam being discussed in public institutions. For this reason, participants were asked about their reactions to having a future Muslim American president, Muslims being hired by governmental agencies such as TSA, and education about Muslims/Islam presented in public schools. One *typical* finding from this domain was the self-disclosure that participants value a person's competence for a job over the applicant's religious beliefs. Another *typical* response to the question about the United States' readiness for a Muslim president was the statement that "America [the United States] already has a Muslim president," in reference to President Barack Obama. A third *typical* category related to conditional support for Muslims in the political/public sector and conditional support for education about Islam in public schools. Most participants said that they would support Muslims working for agencies such as TSA, pending things like "hefty background checks" or continued adherence to "traditional American [US] values." Another participant reported conditional acceptance of education about Islam taking place in public schools, stating that it would be acceptable so long as it is comparable to what is taught about other world religions or if it fits within a historical context, such as teaching about the impact of Islam on world wars. The fourth *typical* category related to Muslims in the political/public sphere was concern about resistance from other Americans (residents of the US. For example, some participants discussed negative ramifications of voting for a Muslim president or providing education about Islam in schools because of anticipated widespread outrage from the public.

The final remaining categories in this domain were *variant*. These less frequent themes include opposition to Muslims in the political/public sphere, opposition to Islam being discussed in public schools, and support/favorable views toward having education about Islam in schools.

### *Domain 12: Anticipated Reaction to a Son or Daughter Marrying a Muslim Person or Converting to Islam*

This domain describes participants' responses to a two-part hypothetical question about how they would react to their son or daughter telling them that they wanted to marry a Muslim person, and how they would respond if their child also wanted to convert to Islam. As a *typical* response, more than half of the participants provided unsupportive comments or mixed feelings about this scenario, including that they would be very disappointed and concerned about their child's future. No participants said that they would disown or have an emotional cut-off from their child's life. A smaller number of participants stated that they would be supportive of their adult child's decision to marry someone who identifies as Muslim because they were more concerned about their future son or daughter-in-law's ability to treat their adult child well rather than about their religious beliefs.

## *DISCUSSION*

### *Implications and Recommendations*

Results from the present study were fairly consistent with Keeling and Hughes's 2011 quantitative research regarding Islamophobia and mid-level police managers. In both studies, the majority of police officers indicated that Muslims are dangerous and Islam is not

a religion that promotes peace (i.e., Keeling and Hughes, 2011, found that 46.8% disagreed that “Islam is spread by the sword” and 23.1% agreed that “Islam promotes peace,” and the present study found one *typical* response was that “Muslims are more dangerous than Christians” and only a *variant* response of “Muslims are peaceful”). Second, 60.8% of the participants in Keeling and Hughes’s 2011 study stated that they were “unfamiliar with the teaching of Islam,” and 66.7% believed that Americans have viewed Muslims more negatively since 9/11 (312). This is consistent with the present study’s participants’ requests for learning more about Islam and *typical* findings of Muslims being unjustly stereotyped as extremists since 9/11. In addition, more than half of the mid-level police managers in Keeling and Hughes’s 2011 study stated that “most of the information they have about Muslims and Islam comes from the media” (313), and one *typical* finding from the present study is that the “Media’s biased view sometimes causes me to think of stereotypes.” Fortunately, the two studies also found that most police officers disagree with the stereotype that all Muslims are terrorists (i.e., Keeling and Hughes report “69.6% disagreed that Muslims are terrorists” and only a *variant* theme emerged from this study about Muslims supporting terrorism).

Some findings from the present research, however, differed from the only other study about Islamophobia and law enforcement. Although Keeling and Hughes’s 2011 study found mid-level police managers were able to correctly acknowledge that most Muslims are not Arabs (67.1%), the majority of early career police officers in this 2015 study were unable to distinguish between Muslims and Arabs. Finally, “more respondents disagreed than agreed that they were interested in learning more about Islam from Muslims” (Keeling and Hughes, 313), but the present study fortunately found an almost universal request from police officers to learn more about Islam in order to become more proficient in their careers. Overall, results from both studies suggest that there is much room for improvement with regard to law enforcement personnel’s attitudes toward, and knowledge of, Islam.

The present study has several implications for law enforcement and specifically for police officer training academies. From this study, it is clear that negative stereotypes and inaccurate information about Muslims come to mind for many early career police officers in a variety of situations. Some of the more common stereotypes include the perception of Muslims as terrorists, extremists, foreigners, and un-American *others*. It was also found that most early career police officers from the Midwest view Muslims and Arabs as being the same, without consideration of the variety of ethnicities and racial identities of Muslims around the world. They also were unaware that Arabs and individuals of Middle Eastern descent are heterogeneous in their religious faiths. While this study does not suggest that police officers act on negative stereotypes or behave differently around Muslim Americans, it is clear that police officers, like many Americans/US residents, are primed with negative thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes toward Muslims. Stereotypes seem to come into awareness during hypothetical traffic stops, when participants have been in close proximity to Muslims, and in considering attitudes toward Muslim Americans in public and political institutions. Another major finding was that the US news media, in particular, greatly contributes to such negative stereotypes, and many police officers believe that Muslims are unjustly portrayed in a negative light by the media.

Another important finding was that almost all police officers in this study stated that they were open to learning more from Muslims about Islam and believed that increased education would help them to become more proficient in their careers. Many participants were conscious of their reliance on stereotypes from the media for information about Muslims, but also felt dissatisfied about their lack of accurate knowledge about the religion

and culture. This finding has many positive implications for law enforcement academies, which are interested in preparing officers for serving and protecting a multiculturally and religiously diverse group of US residents.

It should also be noted that all but one participant in this study has interacted with Muslims in the past, either in personal, school, military, or law enforcement settings. Because of the recent demographic changes and increasing multicultural and religious diversity in the Midwest, it is imperative that law enforcement academies consider that police officers from metropolitan cities and small towns alike will be working with people from a variety of cultures and backgrounds.

Finally, all police officers that participated in this study were interviewed following completion of their program's only diversity training module. Given the high frequency of negative stereotyping about Muslims, lack of accurate information about Islam, changing demographics, new responsibilities of police officers to profile terrorists, and officers' openness to learning more about Islam, it is strongly recommended that training academies expand their diversity training programs. More specifically, it is recommended that programs include a cultural sensitivity training component to increase understanding of what it might be like to be a marginalized Muslim American individual, whom others suspect to be a terrorist, based on their religious beliefs. In addition, law enforcement academies should consider teaching officers about relevant cultural norms of Muslim Americans to improve communication and increase understanding between law enforcement and the Muslim community. An example of practical training might include the appropriate procedures for pulling over a Muslim woman at a traffic stop for questioning, who is wearing a burka and does not wish to remove her covering for male police officers. Finally, a module on combating stereotypes seen in news media is suggested for such cultural sensitivity training programs. Most police officers are cognizant of the negative stereotypes about Muslims in the media. A proactive exercise of identifying and dispelling myths and misconceptions about Islam could be a proactive step to prevent racial and religiously-based profiling.

### *Limitations*

The study could be strengthened by incorporating questions about attitudes toward non-Arab Muslims and Muslims from a variety of racial and ethnic identities. Islam is one of the fastest growing world religions and Muslims represent a heterogeneous group of individuals from varying ethnicities and countries of origin. For example, it might have been informative to ask participants a question about experience with African American or South Asian Muslims.

Finally, as is the case with most studies that assess prejudices and controversial topics, several of the participants appeared uncomfortable in speaking their opinions in an uncensored manner. This may have arisen as a result of the social desirability effect or concern about offending the interviewer, despite the fact that the interviewer's personal attitudes and experiences in interacting with Muslim Americans were not disclosed to the participants. It should be noted that several police officers that attended the informational meeting, but chose not to participate in the study, told the primary investigator that their immediate superiors did not give them permission to participate in the study.

### Future Research

Future research could incorporate the CQR method to understand the opinions of experienced police officers or FBI agents who are more directly involved in identifying terrorists domestically and abroad. Secondly, four out of twelve participants in this study had military experience, and it would be beneficial for law enforcement to better understand the psychological processes of men and women who transition from service members to civilian police officers. The impact that serving overseas in the military has on attitudes toward Muslims should be explored in future research.

In addition, future studies could incorporate correlational research regarding relationships between Islamophobia and xenophobia, or attitudes toward ethnic and racial diversity in the United States. While not the primary focus of this study, several police officers indicated some discomfort and lack of trust with growing immigrant populations in their jurisdictions. Future studies could also examine attitudes of police officers toward Muslims in communities with larger Muslim populations, such as Detroit or Dearborn, Michigan. It might be hypothesized that such communities with greater multicultural diversity and historically larger Muslim populations might have more multiculturally informed police officers. If this hypothesis were found true in future research, it would be beneficial for law enforcement to consult with departments from these communities in developing their diversity training programs. Such consultations would be useful for the community policing movement to better understand and improve relationships between religious minorities and police departments.

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# *Islamophobia and “The Three Evils of Society”*

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## *Islamophobia and “The Three Evils of Society”*

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**ABSTRACT:** Edited and expanded text of a speech given by Dr. Hatem Bazian at the Reviving the Islamic Spirit Conference, December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Toronto, Canada.<sup>1</sup>

\*

On August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1967, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. delivered *The Three Evils of Society* speech at the National Conference on New Politics, which is the most prophetic and revolutionary address to date on the questions of militarism, poverty, and racism.<sup>2</sup>

In this speech MLK framed the problem that “has been lurking within our body politic from its very beginning,” by stating, “we are now experiencing the coming to the surface of a triple prong[ed] sickness. He also identified “the sickness of racism, excessive materialism, and militarism,” and considered the three problems as the “plague of Western civilization.”

Revisiting the speech is instructive for anyone who is troubled by the current local-global conditions affecting the human family, with: the visible ravages of racism eating at our soul and causing death and mayhem across the globe; poverty’s death march leaving behind millions of destroyed lives and rendering 99% of the world into servitude and indebted bondage; and, last but not least, the ever expanding military industrial complex, a cancer devouring everything in sight while making fools of people and setting brother against brother, tribe against tribe, nation against nation, religion against religion.

The “three evils” outlined by MLK are all around us; they are the DNA that give rise to the blueprint of today’s falsely called “modern society;” nothing is modern when racism, materialism, and militarism are set by design and are barbarically, clinically, and methodically killing millions.

I can attest to the presence of the “three evils,” having just returned from a trip to Europe, where I attended a series of conferences on Islamophobia. In France, and on a similar scale in England, an average of 52 Islamophobia cases are reported to Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en France (CCIF) on a daily basis.<sup>3</sup> In the US, to date, 71 mosques have been attacked in one way or another.<sup>4</sup> We have transitioned from rhetoric to violence because civil society has been assaulted by bullies and fascists.

### *ISLAMOPHOBIA AND THE THREE EVILS OF SOCIETY: RACISM, MATERIALISM AND WAR*

MLK’s words on militarism and war are haunting, blunt, and exact:

*This war has played havoc with the destiny of the entire world. It has torn up the Geneva Agreement, it has seriously impaired the United Nations, it has exacerbated the hatred between continents, and worse still between races. It has frustrated our development*

*at home, telling our own underprivileged citizens that we place insatiable military demands above their critical needs. It has greatly contributed to the forces of reaction in America and strengthened the military industrial complex . . .*

*This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields, physically handicapped and psychologically deranged cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love. A nation that continues year after year, to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.<sup>5</sup>*

Islamophobia, as a contemporary problem, is incorrectly approached and symptoms are taken for the real causes, which then are used in constructing faulty responses that waste time and much-needed resources. Pointing out this obvious shortcoming in analyzing the problem does not mean that the symptoms are unimportant or insignificant on their own; they are indeed important and significant, but one has to make a distinction when approaching the work on Islamophobia as a specific phenomena and what is needed to remedy it.

Let us first dispense with the notion that the problem of Islamophobia is one driven by the media's negative representation of Islam and Muslims. Although I concur that media coverage intensifies the problem, the press' role, as Chomsky aptly argues, is to manufacture consent of the governed, but the creation of a Muslim boogeyman is far too sophisticated to be framed for people by anchormen and anchorwomen, who need constant image control themselves, and their noses, cheeks and foreheads constantly brushed with Whiteness.

When we narrow the scope of the problem to media representation of Islam and Muslims, then it makes the issue one of image, with community responses focusing on image control, public relations efforts, and politics of respectability discourses. Although one can argue that such responses are needed at one level, in reality, those responses end up actually addressing the symptoms of the disease and not its epistemic and ideological foundations. Furthermore, addressing the symptoms leads to affirmation of the *otherization* paradigm because the image and public relations approach must take, as a point of departure, the market conditions as they are, and then work to improve or shift the perceptions about the subject matter without addressing the root causes.

Economic and political elites have the power and ability to label individuals and groups as "enemies of society," and the media carries out the mission of maligning these targeted individuals and groups. The corporate media is an economic enterprise owned by elites in the Global North, and the scope of coverage is shaped by those who own and operate these companies. The media pursue the agenda that reflects elites' priorities, and journalists are under tight reign as to when, who, and what is to be covered, with the final content subject to editorial control.

At one time or another, the political and economic elites have identified African Americans, Native Americans, Jews, Chinese, Latinos, Japanese, Irish, Italians, Mormons, Catholics, and Vietnamese as "enemy number one," and media coverage reflected their set priorities in each era. It was not a question of what came first, the chicken or the egg, but, the political and economic elites gave birth to the racist eggs that ended up creating the conditions for cooking a fascist omelet.

Indeed, Muslims in civil society are being figuratively punched in the face, and the response has been to rush to get a facelift and plastic surgery or inject Botox, so as to make ourselves look beautiful. The media, Fox in particular, would report the punch this way:

*A Muslim face viciously attacked an innocent Western fist in midair, causing serious laceration to the White, peaceful hand. Police and the FBI are investigating if the face is connected to terrorism, was reading the Qur'an, or said, "Allah Akbar" when barbarically attacking the poor fist. Some blood from the face was found on the fist, and medics were careful in handling it as it might be carrying the infectious Islam virus.*

The scenario above illustrates the problem of how the media twists the truth. The root cause of this faulty reporting is that elites in civil society have prepared and stoked the conditions that embolden persons to take their fists to Muslim faces in the first place.

Let us, likewise, reject the idea that Islamophobia is driven by people who are uninformed about Islam and Muslims. We can make the case for sincere individuals who are incited into hating Muslims and Islam, but the Islamophobia is produced by a set of groups that, and individuals who, have strategic goals and operate from a calculated set of plans.

Here, Islam and Muslims are part of what Edward Said identified as *imagined geographies*. Islam is constituted as an *imagined geography*, that is ideologically constructed in Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilization*, which begins to inform and regulate how the subject is approached.

Islamophobia is funded, produced, promoted, and acted upon by *imagined geography* and *Clash of Civilization* "warriors" who have a vested interest in the *three evils of society*: racism, obscene materialism, and militarism.

Likewise, the third notion to reject is that Islamophobia is a by-product of, or a response to, extremism and terrorism emerging from the Muslim world.

I am completely aware and sympathetic to all the challenges confronting Muslims around the globe: we have divisions, conflicts, arguments, *Fiqh* issues, sectarian violence, and crises, but, in my humble opinion, the compounded challenge is when we approach our internal problems and challenges from an Islamophobic lens.

In Europe, violence committed by Muslims accounts for 2% of all such incidents across the continent, while 98% is the result of in neo-Nazi, nationalist, separatist, and ethnic oriented violence.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, across the US, 94%<sup>7</sup> of committed terrorism violence occurred outside the confines of the Muslim community, and, since 9/11 some 406,496<sup>8</sup> individuals lost their lives as a result of domestic inspired violence, while only 37 such cases were attributed to Muslims (not including the recent San Bernardino killings).<sup>9</sup>

Media coverage plays a major role here, and makes the fringe the norm, problematizes the majority, and criminalizes their existence.

When we begin to rationalize racist circumstances by pointing to whatever ails us locally or globally as the reason why it is occurring, then we move from individual responsibility to a collective guilt-by-association construct.

The same applies to the internal argument, which is a more refined notion, and is grounded in tradition by assigning what is taking place to the realm of faith, thus it is the will of God.

I do believe that everything in this world and the universe is the will of God because His knowledge and power encompass everything. We know not what God decided or has not decided on specific matters, and often, we reflect our own pre-conceived notions of how to respond and assign to ourselves God's voice.

Our own actions do bring God's punishment, but we know not who, when, how, or the methods of God's punishment. Thus, we have a major problem as to how we frame Islamophobia and racism in general.

To be clear, the God who permitted racism, obscene materialism, and militarism does not consent or favor their use. God ordered all of us to uphold justice, even if it is against our own selves. If it is the will of God to permit the *three evils* to exist, it is the same God who commanded us to establish justice.

God commands us to justice, to *ihsan*, and to attend to the next of kin, while prohibiting transgression. I know that absolute justice is not possible, but at least we should stop rationalizing racism as being a response to our individual or collective wrongs, for we have no knowledge of God's will or action in these matters because the Qur'an and Hadith provide the counter to such arguments.

At this point, it is important to define what I mean when using the term "Islamophobia," which is the basis of my research project underway:

*Islamophobia is a structural organizing principle that sits at the present global crossroads, and is employed to rationalize and extend the dominant global power alignment while embarking on a project for silencing the collective global other.*

The basic term "Islamophobia" can be defined as "fear," "anxiety," or "phobia" of Muslims, but, at the same time, it is a far more encompassing process that impacts law, economy, and society.

At one level its "ideologues" attempt to classify who belongs to the "civilized world" and the criterion for membership, and who is the demonized and ostracized global *other*. But, at a deeper level, it is a rationalization of the existing domestic and global racial stratification, economic power hierarchies, and open-ended militarism.

Islamophobia constructs a singular and homogenous undifferentiated image of Muslim men and women that presents all as religious fanatics who are violent and antithetical to civilization itself.

Muslims today are an instrument that shapes and reshapes power disparities at a time when all existing modalities have failed.<sup>10</sup>

By positing Muslims as a threat, the forces of racism, obscene materialism, and militarism can continue to be dominant in our society. Muslims, indeed, are the present global patsies, propped up for all to look at in fear, while the elite, who comprise the 1% laugh all the way to the bank many times over.

"Islamophobia" is not an expression of fear of terrorism or "violent jihad" but instead, it is an expression of:

1. The general alienation, from the political establishment, of a large segment of the middle class and the poor; the loss of economic power brought on by the advance of a self-serving oligarchy in the country, which manifested itself in a steady decline in standard of living for the population.
2. A sense of identity crisis in the US, resulting from the above, which becomes intensified by the rapid demographic changes occurring in the country. White, middle, and working class populations are mobilized against a perceived *other* that is believed to be causing this change.
3. A constructed theological threat, not a terrorist one, that the growing visibility of Islam poses to the US and Western culture in the midst of current identity and economic crises.

The "Muslim question" in the US is simply the manifestation of these crises – what "Islam" is, is a kind of proxy cultural and political conflict through which US ruling elites fight among themselves over what the US is and what it should be in the future. Elites in Western society are fighting among themselves, and Muslims are identified as “enemy number one,” so as to make it possible to fight a proxy cultural, ideological, economic, and religious war, and to gain the upper hand. One can date this proxy war to the end of the Vietnam War, but its current intensification goes directly to Reagan’s presidency and Margaret Thatcher’s terms as Prime Minister in the UK.

The evidence that the elites are using Muslims as a signpost for their “vision” of what the US and the West ought to be include:

- Expanding military expenditures and militarism
- De-regulating the economy and financial sector with massive privatization
- Countering environmental policies
- Expanding public debt to force reduction of government
- welfare reforms (war on the poor)
- Removing funding from public health and mental institutions (dumping people on the streets)
- Education as a commodity (reducing student aid and shifting funding from grants to loans)
- Abortion
- Expanding the prison industrial complex as a counter to civil rights gains (1984 reforms, 3 strikes you are out)
- Attacks on affirmative action
- Attacks on the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Acts
- Immigration to prevent demographic shifts or impacting the status of Whites in US and Western societies

The racial stereotyping and hatred associated with Islamophobia, as displayed by Donald Trump, have been seen before, in the Workingman’s Party and Know-Nothing Party, when anti-Chinese sentiments lead to an exclusionary act in 1882, wherein the Chinese were subject to demonization and violence. In 1871, the single largest day of lynching in the history of the US was directed at Chinese Americans, when 500 White men entered Chinatown in Los Angeles and killed or maimed 18 men.<sup>11</sup> This was followed by another massacre in 1885, when 25 Chinese men were killed by a mob in Wyoming.<sup>12</sup>

During the same time period, (from 1877 to 1950) 3,959 African Americans were lynched in the twelve Southern states. “Many of these lynchings were not executing people for crimes but executing people for violating the racial hierarchy.”<sup>13</sup> Violence against, and lynching of, Chinese and African Americans was about economic, political, social, and religious power, and defining the boundaries of society. In each of these and other cases, it was White backlash or anger about supposed loss of opportunities, position in the racial hierarchy, challenges to manifest destiny, and perceived, or real, shifts in power due to demographics and immigration.

At the time of the *Three Evils of Society* speech, MLK was facing increasing White opposition to Black empowerment and equality; there was an expansion of crony capitalism and an open-ended commitment to military expenditures for the Vietnam war that, all

together, led to deepening poverty and rising discontent in the African American community. The conditions in today's US, and the world, resemble what MLK described in the speech in 1967.

MLK spoke of the United States' "schizophrenic personality on the question of race." He described the two conflicting personalities as: one that professes "the great principles of democracy," and the other that practices the antithesis of democracy. Every step forward in confronting racism in the US has an equal step backward, which MLK perceptively identified to be White backlash-the "old prejudices, hostilities, and ambivalences that have always been there . . . the [W]hite backlash of today is rooted in the same problem that has characterized America [the US] ever since the [B]lack man landed in chains on the shores of this nation." Racism, for MLK, was that "corrosive evil that will bring down [W]estern civilization" and White backlash<sup>14</sup> was nothing more than good old White Supremacy, which is never content with equality.

In confronting materialism, MLK forthrightly described the internal conditions of "the ghetto," where African Americans are locked up in perpetual misery as "a domestic colony." The link between poverty and lack of political statesmanship was addressed. MLK spoke of the readiness of Congress to grant subsidies to the oil industry, and to six cotton plantations that were given more than one million dollars each "not to plant cotton, but no provision is made to feed the tenant farmer who is put out of work by the government subsidy." In discussing these government subsidies, MLK stated, "What they truly advocate is Socialism for the rich and Capitalism [sic] for the poor."

By utilizing the "old boys" network political machinery, Congress, state, and city leadership all worked to disrupt programs intended to uplift African American communities. The constant cry against welfare programs was used as a cover to punish the poor, while extending subsidies to the rich in society. MLK pointed out that American society is deluded "into believing the myth that Capitalism [sic] grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifice; the fact is, Capitalism [sic] was built on the exploitation and suffering of [B]lack slaves, and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor." The system is founded upon exploitation and driving unjust wealth to those on top. According to MLK, "The way to end poverty, is to end the exploitation of the poor, ensure them a fair share of government services, and the nation's resources." In order to end poverty, a redistribution of political and economic power must take place, which has yet to be seriously attempted or promoted. Contemporary religious leadership has bought into capitalism and is preaching "success theology" where God's purpose is erroneously shaped by materialism and devouring the world.

What is needed is a human-centric economy, a sustainable economy, an economy that works for all and not for just a few, and one that truly leaves no one behind. If we are our brother's keeper, then why do we exploit him and derive obscene amounts of profits while cloaking this behavior in divine purpose?<sup>15</sup>

Faith calls upon us to recognize and accept society's stratification as having divine purpose, to make us dependent on one another, to cause some to be the avenue for good deeds for another, and to teach humility and generosity; however, this works only when ethical and moral people apply these principles in society, and are driven by such values.

Corporations, banks, and multi-national corporations are the furthest from being an expression of divine purpose; when religious people tag along for "Capitalism on Steroids," the results are visible to all.

Today, one cannot sit idly and speak of an Islamic economy that mimics, in small and large ways, the obscene and pernicious parts of capitalism and the open market

economy. We cannot sit idly and be content to join exploitative globalization and privatization, which have created a wealth gap deeper than the Grand Canyon and higher than Mount Everest.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the “haves” are seeking to have more, and the “have-nots” have nothing at all except their commodified selves, who are marketed as mere “things” to the highest bidder, or as a series of “likes” and “shares” on Facebook’s daily “parade of insignificance.”

To address the tripartite problem of racism, materialism, and militarism, MLK called for “a radical revolution of values” and a need for people to be maladjusted to injustice. The revolution of values is centered on challenging the destructive status quo.

MLK concluded the speech by stating that the question we ought to ask ourselves when determining what to do is, “Is it right,” and to not act for reasons of politics or because popular sentiments demand it. “And on some positions, it is necessary for the moral individual to take a stand that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular; but he must do it because it is right.” The time is right to ask the question, “Are the current wars ravaging the world, the obscene open-ended militarism, racism, and Islamophobia reflective of the highest human values?” If the answer is “no,” then why are we silent?

What works in the face of civil society’s bullies<sup>17</sup> are well-organized, politically assertive, and empowered communities that are serious about defending democracy, as well as defending collective constitutional, civil, and human rights.

As the US faces an emboldened crop of bullies, the immediate response should be to develop a broad civil and human rights coalition that includes all affected communities that will work diligently and boldly to deter and counter the rising tide of racism and fascism. A comprehensive solution can be achieved with coordinated action from civil society leaders and policymakers in a cultural environment where media are held responsible for magnifying violent, extremist rhetoric.

Defeating the Islamophobes can be done with a greater commitment to democracy, free speech, religious inclusiveness, dignity for all, and a readiness to build a great society founded on ethics.

Approaching Islamophobia from this lens provides a better understanding of what we are facing, rather than the simple conceptualization of focusing on the irrational fear of hostilities directed at Muslims. What we are facing is a deep ideological divide in US and European societies, which is being played out at the expense of the image and status of the Muslim subject in civil society.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://risconvention.com>

<sup>2</sup> Listen to the speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8d-IYSM-08>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.islamophobia.net>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cair.com/press-center/press-releases/13313-mosques-targeted.html>

<sup>5</sup> See military spending: <https://www.nationalpriorities.org/campaigns/military-spending-united-states/>; also <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-the-us-military-spends-its-billions-2015-8> and for a comparative data between US other countries [http://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053\\_defense-comparison](http://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison)

<sup>6</sup> <http://thinkprogress.org/world/2015/01/08/3609796/islamist-terrorism-europe/>; also see the more extensive report at [https://www.europol.europa.eu/latest\\_publications/37](https://www.europol.europa.eu/latest_publications/37)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.globalresearch.ca/non-muslims-carried-out-more-than-90-of-all-terrorist-attacks-in-america/5333619>

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/02/us/oregon-shooting-terrorism-gun-violence/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://securitydata.newamerica.net/extremists/analysis.html>

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.hatembazian.com/content/terrorism-is-wrongly-framed/>, also <http://www.hatembazian.com/content/islamophobia-network-the-fringe-dominating-the-center/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.laweekly.com/news/how-los-angeles-covered-up-the-massacre-of-17-chinese-2169478>

<sup>12</sup> [http://us\\_asians.tripod.com/timeline-1875.html](http://us_asians.tripod.com/timeline-1875.html), also see <http://www.wyohistory.org/essays/rock-springs-massacre>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/10/us/history-of-lynchings-in-the-south-documents-nearly-4000-names.html>

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.hatembazian.com/content/the-mirage-of-white-victimhood/> and <http://www.hatembazian.com/content/americas-open-secret-racism-and-white-supremacy/>

<sup>15</sup> Read <http://www.hatembazian.com/content/immigration-crisis-the-collapse-of-the-post-colonial-state-part-3/> and <http://www.hatembazian.com/content/immigration-crisis-the-collapse-of-the-post-colonial-state-part-4/>

<sup>16</sup> See Oxfam full reports: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/wealth-having-it-all-and-wanting-more-338125> and <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/even-it-up-time-to-end-extreme-inequality-333012>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.hatembazian.com/content/trump-and-civil-society-bullies/>