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Who's the terrorist?: the production of anti-Muslim racism through historical amnesia

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Vassar College

Who's the Terrorist? The Production of Anti-Muslim Racism through Historical Amnesia

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Arts in
Sociology

by

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Abstract

Shortly after the attacks of 9/11, phrases such as “terrorism”, “extremism”, “Islamic fundamentalist,” and other buzzwords were integrated into our cultural lexicon. Meanwhile, there is no commonly accepted definition of terror. The arbitrary use of terrorism by authoritative producers of knowledge, such as law enforcement agencies serve a larger political agenda. Additionally, the role of news media in covering the attacks shaped the public’s understanding and response to these traumatic events. The United States is able to distance itself, as a nation, and its American values far from terrorism because of its position of power globally. The narrative of America as a benevolent nation erases its obvious history of violence and benefits from systemic inequality that prefaced its position as an international superpower. Anti-Muslim racism has become a global phenomenon spread by the excessive coverage of Muslim-led terror attacks in popular media. Media coverage of terrorism as acts of violence perpetrated by Muslims provides justification for domestic policies of increased surveillance, unwarranted arrests, racial profiling, and discriminatory international foreign policies that disproportionately affect racialized Muslims. Through discourse analysis, I explore the difficulty in defining terrorism and the history of U.S. meddling in the Middle East North African region to gain a better understanding of the power structures that perpetuate anti-Muslim racism.

For my parents, who have shown me immeasurable patience, love and strength.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

when you are struggling
in your
writing (art).
it usually means
you
are hearing one thing.
but
writing (creating) another.
-honest | risk
Nayirrah Waheed ~ Salt.

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Preface

This thesis is a labor of love that was birthed from my experiences of incredible wonder, joy, contentment, and pain I felt throughout the process of understanding my identity as a first-generation, Muslim woman of Caribbean descent within the context of an elite American predominately white liberal arts college. This work is also a product of my privilege to be in conversation with the inspirational and thoughtful learning communities, including my professors, peers, administrators, imams, Muslim chaplains, scholars, and especially those folks who possess a wealth of non-traditional (and often undervalued) knowledge including my immediate and extended family, friends, and community members.

The Muslim Student Union led by powerful Muslim women was my first place of homecoming in college. Since joining my first year, I have worked tirelessly with other students, faculty, and administrators to demand resources and institutional accountability for all historically marginalized students while remaining cognizant of Muslim identity existing on par with racial, gendered, and classed identities. My spiritual learning journey continued as I took religious studies classes on Islam and had formative discussions with various religious and spiritual communities. My work as a student organizer also allowed me the opportunity to participate in the Muslim Women's Leadership Program at Union Theological Seminary, where I met an inspirational group of Muslim women, engaged in rich intellectual thought, collective healing, and recognized for the first time that the possibilities for Muslim women like myself, are limitless.

While there were countless positive experiences, there were also difficult ones. My work as a student organizer included compiling evidence and building cases for the necessity for resources including halal food, a prayer space, a Muslim advisor on staff, responding to

Islamophobia, inclusion of Muslim identity in wider campus discussions, and more. Fighting against invalidation and silencing at every step was exhausting. Additionally, the literature and conversations that I was being exposed outside of religious studies classrooms made general claims to Islam that were not representative of my experiences. My experiences are my own and I do not make any claims to represent anyone else's experience, however I questioned what it meant to see my experiences excluded from the larger conversations. If it wasn't being talked about in scholarship or even considered in popular discussion, then did it exist? All of these experiences and questions led to the culmination of this work.

My thesis is a work of synthesis that aspires to illuminate the far-reaching implications of conflating Islam with terrorism. The production of the Muslim terrorist stereotype, as well as, the racialized understanding of Muslim identity has severely limited the ways that we hold conversations about Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim racism. Clearly, my thesis is not comprehensive, but it does aim to make difficult and complex concepts available through accessible language. I have not spent significant time presenting and unpacking stereotypes because there is an already expansive scholarship dedicated to that work. Instead, my focus goes steps further in connecting popular ideas about Muslims to larger structures of power while simultaneously looking at the effects on lived experiences. This required delicate balance as it felt necessary identify and hold structures of oppression accountable without losing sight of individual implications.

In conclusion, my thesis contributes to a particular segment on terrorism and Islamophobia. However, in embodying the practice of talking about Islam as a living tradition, it is important to note that the perception of Islam by Western media is not the *only* thing concerning Muslim communities. There is so much more to Muslim identity than what is being

presented in this thesis. The work that I attempt to do in shifting the framework used to talk about terrorism and Islamophobia is obviously important and has informed much of my personal experience, however I also value its utility in being able to name and identify the points of tension before we can address it and imagine radical alternatives. With all that being said, this is an academic project produced in an elite institution with recommendations for shifting framework within institutions. As such, I have no illusions that this will be the way that we stop Islamophobic attacks or U.S. intervention or impact meaningful change on the lives of individuals. While this work is my means of institutional resistance, I would like to acknowledge the work done through grassroots organizing and direct action campaigns, for the folks who can't wait the years and maybe even decades it will take to shift the discussion, for the folks who are directly affected now, for the folks who are facing discrimination on a daily basis. This work alone will never be enough, but I carry this knowledge with me in all the work that I do.

Introduction

This thesis aims to explore the effects of Islamophobia on racialized Muslims. With the understanding that Islamophobia is not just a specifically Muslim issue, a comprehensive examination of anti-Muslim sentiment can be understood through the lens of anti-Muslim racism. In order to do this work, there needs to be a thorough understanding structures of power and oppression that perpetuate anti-Muslim sentiment. This research was driven by the following questions: How has anti-Muslim sentiment become so pervasive in popular American discourse? How is this rationalized to the general public? What are the effects on the lived experiences of racialized Muslim individuals? While there is extensive knowledge dealing with various aspects of terrorism and Islamophobia, I have yet to come across research that combines the various fractured pieces into a cohesive narrative. In order to present this cohesive narrative, I will first explore the history of defining terrorism in the United States. This will be followed by the critical examination and contextualization of Western authoritative producers of knowledge through a historical re-telling of encounters between Western powers and Islamic civilizations.

An important aspect of my work that is often missing within the academic discourse of terrorism is the exploration of the rich and vibrant Islamic tradition. How could we have conversations about Islam without grounding it within history? The discourse on terrorism and Islamophobia usually operates with the assumption that readers are familiar with Islam. For this reason, inserting scholarly literature on Islam as a faith tradition with literature on U.S. military intervention and other historical contexts felt uncomfortable. However, much of the literature pertaining to the academic study of Islam is highly specialized and inaccessible to the general public. Furthermore, it is typically written by scholars for scholars. With that being said, this work is a synthesis of content analysis of literature across various social science disciplines in

order to put some of the work often done in isolation, in conversation with one another. This allows for the illumination of connections that otherwise could not be made through fragmented comprehension of the complexity of terrorism and Islamophobia. My methodology is discussed further in Appendix B. It is important to interject the discussion of Islamic tradition within this work, as the discourse of terrorism and Islamophobia can often be reductive. This does an injustice to the lived experiences of individuals who identify with this tradition.

Within this thesis, I discuss Islam as a discursive tradition that transcends the boundaries of all other identities, meaning that anyone can be a Muslim. While much of the literature that I present here paints a grim picture, Muslim communities are vast and rich in strength and resilience. Furthermore, this thesis, along with the rest of discourse on terrorism and anti-Muslim sentiment are focused on a small segment of the Muslim experience. Outside of the purview of mainstream media and academia, Muslims are finding new and creative ways to navigate their faith traditions within institutions that do not hold space for them. It is my hope that this thesis will disrupt the dominant narrative surrounding Muslim experiences, as well as, the images associated with Muslim identity.

As a final closing note before the chapter outline, it is important to remember that within academic discussions of structures of power, individual lives are implicated. For this reason, this work demands readers to be self-reflective and critical in their understandings and implications within this work. Upon reading this work, how do we see ourselves implicated in the structures of power and oppression that uphold violence against racialized Muslims?

To begin drawing connections between the framing of terrorism and the development of anti-Muslim sentiment, chapter 1 will grapple with the questions of how definitions of terrorism developed through Western authoritative producers of knowledge. I examine the differential

labeling of acts of violence throughout history with particular focus on the origins of counterterrorism developed in response to anarchists from the 1800s onwards. This chapter will also explore definitions of terrorism found in scholarship, legislation, and media. Holding that knowledge in mind, chapter 2 will shift focus to encounters with West and the progression of Islamism. Using Foucault's concept of regime of truth, I present historical contextualization for encounters between Western powers and Islamic civilizations in Iraq and Iran. This chapter highlights the often forgotten role of the United States in global politics in an effort to understand the development and progression of political Islam, or Islamism. With an understanding of the purposeful association of Muslims with terrorism and the history of U.S. meddling in the MENA, chapter 3 centers the experiences of the so-called Muslim world. This chapter explores Islamic thought and practice for the rich and diverse tradition that it is. That is juxtaposed with the presentation of stereotypes faced by racialized Muslims and the history of systemic anti-Muslim racism in the United States.

Chapter 1: The Difficulties in Defining Terrorism

The following section provides a brief overview of the historical process of defining terrorism within academic scholarship, federal policy, enforcement, and media within the United States. Throughout this process, it is important to consider: Who benefits from exclusive definition of terrorism? And who has the authority to name an action as “terrorism”? Authoritative sources including legislation, politicians, and news media claim to offer objective information, but instead have generated seemingly apolitical meanings attached to terrorism. Academics are also viewed as objective producers of knowledge, however our study of the very social phenomena that we are implicated in, requires our own acknowledgement of personal biases. The idea of producing scholarship on defining terrorism outside of social and political contexts should generate skepticism, especially given the implications¹ of this work. The context provided here is not an attempt at a comprehensive history, rather it is a presentation of key historical and political moments that demonstrate not only the difficulty in defining terrorism, but also its differential application over time.

DIFFERENTIAL LABELING & TREATMENT THROUGHOUT HISTORY

This section will highlight the ways media has contributed to increasingly visible bias, as shown by journalists’ use of creative license, when labeling events with racialized Muslim perpetrators as terrorism, as well as the ways that enforcement agencies have applied their discretion in labeling attacks of violence as terrorism.

The difference in media coverage is seen across similar events of violence with perpetrators of different racial and ethnic identities. For example, in the framing of the Charlottesville attack

¹ The implications include the ability of discourse on terrorism to shape law enforcement, immigration policies, personal safety, and more.

perpetrated by a white man, headlines read, “Deadly car attack, violent clashes in Charlottesville: What We Know” (USA Today, 2017). James Alex Fields Jr., a white man, ran over multiple people at a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville and is responsible for the death of 32 year old woman and injuries of more than 19 individuals (Hartung & Simon, 2017). Alternatively, the attack in New York City, perpetrated by an Uzbeki national with the following headline: “New York City truck attack suspect indicted on terrorism, murder charges” (Hendry, 2017). The events in New York City were perpetrated by Sayfullo Saipov, who also used a vehicle resulting in the death of 8 people and injuring 12. Following the attack, police claimed that Saipov was inspired by videos by ISIS and through this connection with a foreign terrorist organization, they labeled this act of violence as terrorism (Hendry, 2017). In other instances, such as the Las Vegas shooting that took place on October 1, 2017, a white man, Stephen Paddock shot into crowds of people attending a music festival, resulting in the deaths of 58 people and at least 500 injuries (O’Neal, 2018). The headlines referred to him as a “shooter” and “lone gunman.” Following the initial headlines, other report headlines included, “Las Vegas gunman Stephen Paddock was germophobe, possibly bipolar: records” (Balsamo & Ritter, 2018), “Video Shows Las Vegas Gunman Gambling, Eating Alone and Filling His Suite With Guns” (Yee, 2018), “Stephen Paddock’s brother gives insight into shooter’s past, possible motive” (O’Neal, 2018). These headlines point to a desire to understand Stephen Paddock’s humanity and motive. Alternatively, the headlines following the Orlando shooting carried out by Omar Mateen who shot into crowds of people in a gay nightclub leaving 49 dead and dozens more wounded, saw a marked difference. Headlines included: “‘Terrorism in Orlando’: Pulse Nightclub Shooting Bodycam Released” (NBC Bay Area, 2017), “Her Husband Killed 49 People in Orlando. Now She’s On Trial for Terrorism” (Jeltsen, 2018), “In Orlando Massacre, Terrorism and Hate Crime

Collide” (Melber, 2016). The same desire to establish the perpetrators’ humanity and understanding motive beyond the alleged affiliation with foreign terrorist organizations was absent in the case of Omar Mateen. Following the acts of violence in San Bernardino² and Orlando, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point released a report where they claim, “The San Bernardino and Pulse nightclub terrorist attacks were committed by ‘homegrown jihadis’ inspired by the Islamic State, who planned and prepared their brutal attacks hidden from the community and law enforcement” (Straub et al., 2017). These headlines presented here are a few of the many examples of differential labeling of acts of violence, particularly in the association of perceived Muslims with terrorism. The results of biased framing are explored in an extensive study by West and Lloyd (2017), who found that participants identified a crime as terrorism when perpetrated by a Muslim, as compared to the same crime perpetrated by a non-Muslim.³ The intricacies of the importance of media framing and the exploration of media-generated definitions of terrorism are presented in later in the chapter.

Equally important to the differential application of the terrorist label by the media are the definitions of terrorism used by law enforcement agencies, which are usually defined through counterterrorism measures. Understanding the perspective of enforcement agencies is especially important as they can have direct effects on lived experiences. In response to the attacks on 9/11, organizations such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and countless others grew at exponential rates (Newell, 2016; Priest & Arkin, 2010). I will now explore the use of the ‘terrorist’ label

² On December 2, 2015, suspects Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik opened gunfire at a Christmas work party killing 14 people and injuring 21 in San Bernardino, California. It is alleged that Tashfeen Malik declared allegiance to the Islamic State on Facebook prior to the attacks (Schmidt & Pérez-Peña, 2015).

³ For more work related to studying biased media portrayals, see Chermak & Gruenewald (2006), Powell (2011), and Bleich et al. (2016).

through an examination of trends in defining terrorism and generating counterterrorism efforts from key moments in the 1800s and onward. American counterterrorism has historically responded through social distancing and exclusion of threatening populations, which was seen in the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, the 1950s “Communist Witch Hunts” during the McCarthy era, and Trump’s Muslim travel ban. This form of policing has been informed by racialized constructions of social deviance and illegitimate violence with the idea that exclusion of foreign and threatening individuals is the best way to protect white American citizens (Newell, 2016). After all, the United States is still seen by many as ethnically white at its core (Brimelow, 1996). Thus, the variance in naming violence is also informed by American exceptionalism, with the perception of terrorism and violence as a phenomenon that originates outside of the United States. Even when articulating the parameters of domestic terrorism, connections to known foreign terrorist organizations is a key element to identifying an act of violence as terrorism (Appendix A, Table 1). As such, we are socialized to believe that terrorists and Americans are mutually exclusive categories, meaning that racialized (read: white) Americans cannot be seen as terrorists. Prior to the violence of 9/11, there existed differential labeling and treatment of acts of violence depending on identity (race, class, gender, national ties, religion, etc.) and ideology, reflective of the trends that are seen to this day. While the events of 9/11 may have altered the way that we define terrorism, the reactions in the name of counterterrorism were informed by America’s earlier responses to acts of terror, such as the threats of anarchy and presidential assassinations.

The origins of counterterrorism developed in the responses to anarchy in the 1800s. Firstly, the refusal to label anarchist violence carried out by native-born white Americans in the late 1800s as terrorism was explained by the framing of their actions as misguided individuals.

Furthermore, anarchy was distanced from any American association as it was portrayed as an ideology imported from Europe (Newell, 2016). Despite this distancing, Leon Czolgosz, an American self-proclaimed anarchist carried out the assassination of President McKinley in 1901. Although there were clear ties to an ideological agenda, as well as, the potential ties to the foreign-import of anarchy, Czolgosz was not seen as a terrorist. In later cases of anarchy during the 1900s and 2000s U.S. citizens Emma Goldman, an anarchist with ties to Russia, and Anwar al-Awlaki, with ties to al-Qaeda, were labeled as terrorists and were no longer privy to the protections of citizenship. Ultimately, Goldman was deported to Russia and al-Awlaki was killed by a drone strike (Newell, 2016). Here, their differential treatments based on their racial identities, as well as the organizations that they were associated with, highlight the discrepancies in the treatment of terrorists. The responses to these acts of violence centered three main objectives including immigration restrictions to exclude additional anarchists from entering the United States, increased protection for the president, and lastly, the increased surveillance and preventative measures for the federal government. Unsurprisingly, the model for counterterrorism today follows a similar line of thinking.

While there are similarities between the response to anarchy and terrorism, there are also crucial differences in the way these two types of violence have been characterized. To gain a better understanding of this, I will be using Newell's (2016) work on threat construction, inflation, and response. This work gives important insight into the thought process behind assessing and preventing violence. In thinking about the acts of violence that are viewed as acceptable through established norms of social deviance, there are clear distinctions between violence that are allowed and condemned by the state. Thus, as the government negotiates its definitions of the threats that qualify as terrorism and require a counterterrorism response, they

must be cognizant of navigating the boundary between the real and perceived potential violence. The conflation of terrorism and extremist violence with Muslim perpetrators has blurred the lines between real and perceived violence as the analysis of data shows that more deaths have occurred at the hands white supremacists and other non-Muslim extremists (Shane, 2015). In considering the approach of conceptualizing what constitutes a threat, Newell (2016:4) states, “On one hand, threats are objective characteristics of reality that can be either perceived or misperceived. On the other, threats are intersubjective constructions that are based on human agents’ interpretations of their reality.” Post-9/11 has specifically seen the establishment of terrorism with specific relation to Islam, contributing to the institutionalization of identity-based inflation. Despite the post 9/11 erasure of the presence of terrorism and violence since the inception of the United States, contemporary counterterrorism measures are informed by a history of identity-based threat inflation⁴ and pre-existing structures of surveillance, counterterrorism, and barriers to immigration specifically targeting racialized Muslims. As I have covered in this section, the trends established in dealing with anarchy, include framing the threatening population as “other,” allowing for exclusion through immigration laws and enforcement, and increasing surveillance and policing are employed as counterterrorism measures today.

LACKING CONSENSUS AMONG SCHOLARSHIP & POLICY MAKERS

Despite the ever-growing body of literature on terrorism, both in the media and within academia, there remains a lack of consensus on defining the object of study: terrorism. Between

⁴ This term was used by Newell (2016:5-6) to describe the disproportionate perception of a threat versus the objective knowledge of the potential harm of the threat. Newell (2016:6) states, “In this account, individuals perceive terrorism as more threatening than it objectively is because they inflate the probability that rare or unlikely events will occur....”

1936 and 1980, Alex P. Schmid recorded 109 different definitions of terrorism (as quoted in Perry 2004: 250). According to the most recent entry in Oxford Dictionary (2018), terrorism is defined as, “the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.” Hoffman (2006:43), a prominent scholar in terrorism provided the following definition of terrorism:

Terrorism is ineluctably political in aims and motives, violent – or equally important, threatens violence, designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target, conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia), and perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity.

Alternatively, subjective definitions have been supported by influential individuals, such as former FBI Director James Comey who has suggested that people should be able to recognize terrorism when they see it (Huff & Kertzer, 2017; Mahan & Griset, 2013). Furthermore, at the moment that marked the beginning of the war against terror, President Bush’s framing of terrorism in direct response to the events of 9/11 rewrote the history of terrorism in the U.S. by effectively erasing any prior history of terror in the U.S. prior to 9/11. In the president’s speech following the attacks on the Twin Towers, Bush set the tone to identify Muslim as a misnomer for terrorists, and also created a narrative of “good” and “bad” Muslims:

The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics – a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam. The terrorists’ directive commands them to kill Christian and Jews, to kill all Americans, and make no distinctions among military and civilians, including women and children” (The Guardian, 2001).

Clearly, this contentious issue remains unresolved among leading politicians and influential leaders. Meanwhile, many of the scholarly studies on terrorism have worked to identify the necessary elements for an appropriate definition. These include, but are not limited to the intended purpose of attack, the target of the action, the method, and the identity of the terrorist

(Hodgson & Tadros, 2013). Others (Blum et al., 2005; Meisels, 2009) have established a general consensus of terrorism as an act of violence with the desire to instill fear carried out by non-state actors, usually attached to a political agenda. Another approach centers the intended target, in this case ‘innocent civilians’ as central to defining terrorism in the face of other instances of politically-motivated violence (Meisels, 2009)⁵.

Operating under the uncritical assumption that terrorism is inherently attached to immorality and unjustifiable acts raises additional questions about our broad and inconsistent understandings of the concept. If terrorism refers to an act of violence, does it necessarily matter if it is carried out by state or non-state actors? The violence carried out by the state against civilians in Middle East and North African (MENA) countries have been justified through the declaration of war on terror (Buncombe, 2017). However, the media and scholarship have not created space for self-reflection of U.S. military actions within their definitions of terrorism. Therefore, the actions and consequences of the war on terror including civilian casualties are not labeled terrorism (Buncombe, 2017). Nonetheless, these numerous studies (Hodgson & Tadros, 2013; Perry, 2004; Schimd, 1984; Meisels, 2009) have all fallen short of establishing a concrete and all-encompassing definition of terrorism. Although the task of developing a comprehensive definition of terrorism seems impossible, the lack of shared terminology allows for arbitrary labeling that can be used to serve hidden agendas. While the extensive body of literature (Hoffman, 2006; Buncombe, 2017; Hodgson & Tadros, 2013; Perry, 2004; Schimd, 1984; Meisels, 2009; Mahan & Griset, 2013; Huff & Kertzer, 2017) presents the complexity of this loosely defined term as an abstract concept, rather than a fixed understanding, charges of terrorism result in life-altering prison sentences, especially for people who fit the terrorist

⁵ Is there such a thing as an ‘innocent civilian’ who exists outside of structures of power and oppression? Who is allowed within the category of an innocent civilian?

stereotype (Institute for Social Policy & Understanding, 2018). This remains the dilemma as lawyers and policymakers are called upon to make decisions regarding the life and death of individuals on a case-by-case basis, without being held accountable to their personal biases or a standardized definition of terrorism.

DEFINING TERRORISM THROUGH LEGISLATION

The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA)

While the uncertainty around defining terrorism within scholarly literature remains, it is important to be aware of the existing definitions used by United States law enforcement agencies that is reflected in federal policies and legislation. Entangled in the historical moments defining terrorism is also the history of increasing surveillance in the United States. Following the Watergate Scandal in 1972, which revealed excessive warrantless surveillance through wiretapping of both domestic and foreign entities, Congress passed the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) in order to limit the powers of executive surveillance to strictly foreign intelligence. Within FISA lies the oldest definition of international terrorism articulated within legislation, which set the template for many of the definitions that followed. The FISA (50 U.S. Code § 1801) definition states:

- (c) “International terrorism” means activities that –
 - (1) involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States of any State;
 - (2) appear to be intended –
 - (A) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population;
 - (B) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or
 - (C) to affect the conduct of a government by assassination or kidnapping; and
 - (3) occur totally outside the United States, or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to coerce or intimidate, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum.

The clear distinction within this act is made between domestic and international terrorism. Domestic terrorism refers to events that take place within the United States and its territories, versus international terrorism, which takes place outside of that jurisdiction. The distinction between international and domestic terrorists was assumed to be mutually exclusive at the time this definition was written, however it becomes unclear when domestic acts of violence within the United States are conspired with the help of known foreign terrorist groups. This became an important consideration with the granting of permission for surveillance, especially as FISA was intended to prohibit domestic surveillance. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court of Review (FISCR) were created to oversee the delegation of warrants to collect information on suspected foreign individuals or groups obtained through FISA. With their approval, a federal officer could pursue a warrant to authorize collection of information of suspected foreign individuals or groups. With growing concerns about homegrown and foreign-based terrorists in the United States, the lines between surveillance of international and domestic terrorists became increasingly blurred. This is evident by the fact that FISA warrants are never reviewed after FISC approval has been granted and FISA warrants are never made accessible to the person being surveilled. Individuals are not made aware of the warrant for surveillance because the attorney general claims that release of this information is a potential threat to national security. Harper (2014: 1124) states:

Not only would subjecting domestic terrorist groups to FISA surveillance violate FISA itself, but such an application might also be unreasonable under the Fourth Amendment⁶.

⁶ The Fourth Amendment states that, “The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures shall not be isolated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized” (US Constitution).

Moreover, the FISA application and surveillance process is very secretive, lacks a true adversarial process, and is devoid of meaningful oversight. This setting offers an ideal environment for the government to push statutory and constitutional boundaries. Indeed, recent revelations from Edward Snowden offer confirmation that the government is more likely to cross constitutional lines in the name of national security when these institutional factors are present.

The primary concern of domestic surveillance under FISA highlights the extent to which the government is willing and in some cases, allowed to bend the law under the guise of national security protection. Since the initial passage of FISA, there were reauthorizations of sections such as 702, which allowed for the collection of surveillance information on foreign intelligence without warrant by the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations (Ewing, 2018; Chappell, 2012). While the collection of data about foreign individuals is a violent and intrusive abuse of power, the central point of tension is the increasing concerns over the privacy violations of individuals in America. Through loopholes that highlight the fuzziness of international and domestic terrorism, the National Security Agency (NSA) has carried out extensive warrantless and non-consensual surveillance of individuals on American soil (Harper, 2014). This loophole has allowed for backdoor searches of internet search history, wiretapping, and other communication forms of vulnerable populations that put immigrants, Muslims, and all people of color at a higher risk of being targeted (Guliani, 2018; Greene, 2018).

The Patriot Act

In 2001, Congress passed the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act commonly known as the USA PATRIOT ACT, which used identical language quoted above from FISA to define domestic terrorism: “involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state...” (Public Law No. 107-56, Section 802). Interestingly the definition from FISA referred to international terrorism, however the same criteria is being used

to define domestic terrorism in the Patriot Act. In addition to defining terrorism, the Patriot Act contains slightly related stipulations pertaining to Northern border protection (Secs. 401-405) and aid to families of public safety officers (Secs. 611-614). While the mention of increased Northern border protection may seem striking, it is evidence that the expansive definition of terrorism has been used to inform immigration policies and enforcement such as Trump's Muslim Travel Ban and to increase resources as part of counterterrorism measures.

18 U.S. Code 2331

Another reference to terrorism can be found within the United States Code, which is a collection of general and permanent laws of the United States prepared by the Office of the Law Revision Counsel of the United States House of Representatives. The particular code referring to terrorism is found in the section referring to crime and criminal proceedings, 18 US Code 2331 also utilizes the identical language set forth by FISA and the Patriot Act (U.S. House of Representatives 2018). Across these legislative arenas, there has clearly been standardization of the language used to define terrorism; however, the interpretation and practical implementations used against racialized Muslims⁷ after Sept. 11th have differed. This is seen with FISA's initial use as a method to limit the executive branch's surveillance capabilities, whereas the Patriot Act and US Code 2331 have in many ways condoned rampant surveillance.

DEFINING TERRORISM THROUGH GOVERNMENT AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS

Countless government agencies and affiliated organizations are dedicated to missions of counterterrorism and/or counterintelligence, both domestically and internationally. This includes: including the National Counter Terrorism Center, which is known as the primary organization

⁷ This refers to individuals who identify as Muslim, but also to individuals who are racialized as Muslim based on societal understandings of what a Muslim should look like.

dedicated to this work; the Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism as part of the Department of State; the Office of the Director of National Intelligence; the Department of Homeland Security; the Counterterrorism and Criminal Exploitation Unit under the Homeland Security Intelligence's National Security Investigations Division; and the Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF), which works directly with the National Security Council. The following definition of terrorism by key players such as the Central Intelligence Agency is taken from Title 22 from US Code Section 2656f(d) reads as follows:

The term 'terrorism' -- premediated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents. The term 'international terrorism' means terrorism involving the territory or the citizens of more than one country. The term 'terrorist group' means any group that practices, or has significant subgroups that practice international terrorism (22 USC. 2656f(d)).

A key organization that manages counterterrorism today, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was created in 1908 under Roosevelt and was designed to investigate violations of the law regarding "national banking, bankruptcy, naturalization antitrust, peonage, and land fraud" (FBI, 2003). With the continual expansion of the FBI to modern day, one of their main concerns is counterterrorism. As such, the FBI defines international terrorism as "perpetrated by individuals and/or groups inspired by or associated with designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored)", whereas domestic terrorism includes the language of "U.S.-based movements that espouse extremist ideologies of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature" (FBI, 2018).

Thus far, I have briefly reviewed the complexities of defining terrorism and some of the implications of being unable to have a consensus including continued development and expansion of counterterrorism. In this next section, I move into the realm of media and its role in framing acts of violence.

DEFINING TERRORISM IN THE MEDIA

In today's digital age, media coverage serves as an important source of information for the millions of media consumers. According to Pew Research Center (2017), one in four Americans use multiple social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, etc. to stay informed about current events. While media has not explicitly produced definitions of terrorism, the labeling of certain acts of violence as terrorism, as well as, the association with particular images and words (including brown men, "jihad," "Islamic extremism", etc.) has created an unspoken and seemingly natural understanding of the concept. Post 9/11 media coverage of terrorist events in the United States thrives on the politics of fear, which is the understanding of that fear holds the power to create political unity. The narrative of fanatical terrorists, who have no motive, no particular target and could strike at any time creates the looming threat of foreign-driven terror attacks that could victimize all Americans. This fear of an imminent attack justifies any and all counterterrorism measures. Furthermore, the decontextualized presentation of acts of violence perpetrated by Muslims allows for uncritical presentations of the Muslim terrorist stereotype (Altheide, 2006). The implications and importance of media framing will be explored further in chapter 3, its mention here is necessary because of the important role media coverage has in perpetuating systemic bias. Media here refers to news media via print and electronic means, as well as, the growing social media, which has become increasingly important in spreading information.

Media framing through selective coverage of certain events, use of buzzwords, and headline wording provide insight into how the United States rationalizes terror events to the American people. The conflation of Islam with terrorism has led to a one-dimensional image of Muslims

that is often used as a justification to perpetrate violence against them. Despite the years of coverage on terrorism by media, there is a lack of nuance in its coverage as mainstream media condemns these acts as senseless. Media does not present the full complexity of its roots and possible causes. The simplistic accounts of terrorist events create narratives that demonize the racialized Muslim individuals who carry out this violence, in a way that is very different from the presentation of acts of violence carried out by white supremacists and other non-Muslim groups. As we've seen in the previous section on differential labeling of terrorism, the focus for journalists changes based on the racial identity of the perpetrator. In the case of the reporting on acts of violence carried out by white men, the focus is often shifted to their mental health, as well as other aspects of their life that humanize them. However, when reporting on acts of violence carried out by people of color, the emphasis centers the act of violence, their religious affiliations, and plays into racial stereotyping (Lakshmanan, 2017). This creates a skewed understanding of identities of perpetrators who commit acts of violence.

Furthermore, the selective coverage of acts of violence perpetrated by Muslims compared the amount of coverage given to acts of violence perpetrated by non-Muslims heightens awareness of particular events. Identity-based inflation has dangerous implications as the general public's only interaction with Muslims occurs through the lens of terrorist attacks. According to a report by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (2018), people who were perceived to be Muslim and were accused of a terrorist-related charges received 770% more media coverage than individuals of other identity groups accused of plans of violence of similar magnitude. Reporting by news media remains an essential component of shaping public opinion. The news media plays a crucial role in conveying information about current events however, the

quick depictions of wailing sirens, chaos, and destruction does not address the complexities of these acts of violence and the connection, if any, to Islam.

The increased use and accessibility of social media has created an online community that offers sharp critique of the uncritical assumptions presented by news media. Prominent social media figure Nazly Sobhi Damasio, who is a Persian and Venezuelan organizer and activist has been involved in various social justice campaigns through her involvement with groups such as Latina Rebels and La Feminista Descolonial. Offering commentary through multiple social

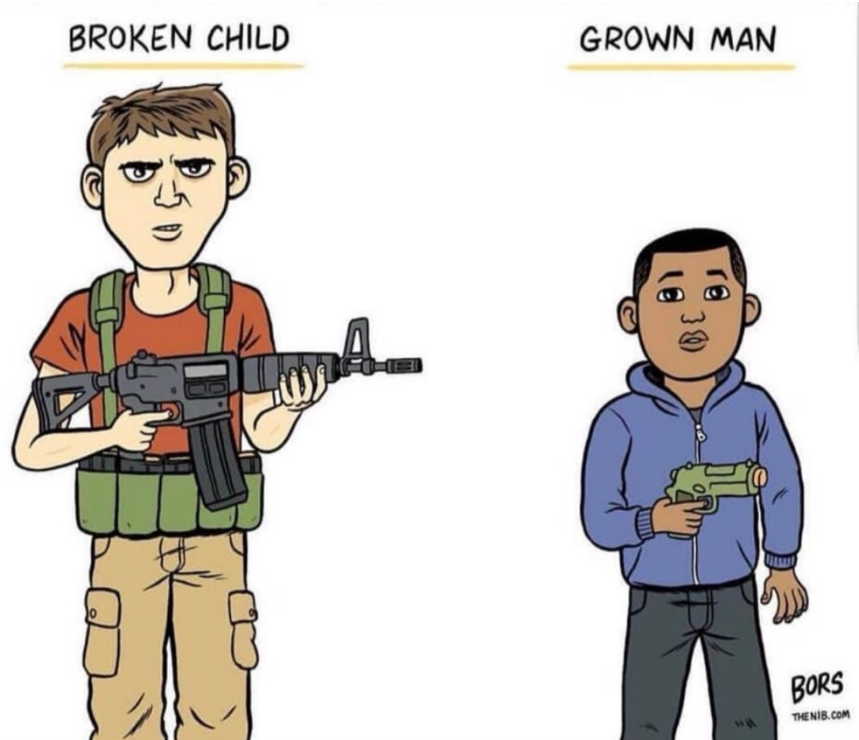


Figure 1. Instagram post by naziejoon.

media platforms, Nazly engages in social media activism to address social injustices across multiple communities. In the example presented here (Figure 1), she features a sign reading, “White Men with guns are America’s biggest terrorism,” bringing attention to the lack of accountability for acts of violence perpetrated by white men.

Another prominent figure, Linda Sarsour, a Palestinian-American, Muslim activist from Brooklyn, New York uses social media to bring attention to her direct action campaigns. Sarsour has worked on the Arab American Association of New York and was the co-chair of the Women’s March on Washington. Her work focuses on creating an inclusive and intersectional social justice movement that builds bridges across communities. Her post (Figure 2) refers to the differential

labeling of terrorism depending on the racial identity of the perpetrator. The powerful imagery of a white man, clearly older with an assault weapon, referring to mass shootings such as the Las Vegas shooting carried out by Stephen Paddock is juxtaposed with a smaller and younger Black boy, referring to the shooting of Tamir Rice, a 12-year old



Black boy shot by police because he was *Figure 2. Instagram post from Linda Sarsour.*

playing with a toy gun. Clearly, the issue of differential labeling of acts of violence is not exclusive to the biased representations of racialized Muslims, but all non-white racial and ethnic groups. However, these images from social media demonstrate modes of activism that works against the objective production of knowledge by the government, legislatures, and academia. The ability of social media to transcend not only geographic barriers, but also political ones is important as a tool for activist work.

COMPARING DEFINITIONS

Within this section, I have explored a brief history of the difficulty of defining terrorism. While this work is not a comprehensive review of the history of defining terrorism, it highlights key issues, contradictions, and implications of definitions presented by legislation, policy makers, media, and affiliated governmental organizations. The definitions of terrorism from a

legislative and enforcement standpoint presented here are often referenced in popular debates of whether an event constitutes terrorism or not. While the legislation including FISA, the Patriot Act, and US Code 2331 defines terrorism and grants the authority to investigate individuals based on suspected terrorism, individuals charged with terrorism must be suspected of having an affiliation with the groups listed by the State Department (Appendix A, Table 1). We've seen through this review that even these definitions lack specific consensus and do not establish a clear link to Islam, as explicitly as mainstream media. This does not mean that legislative and enforcement agencies do not continue to perpetuate stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists. Organizations such as the National Strategy for Combatting Terrorism by the Department of State (2006) identifies the terrorist enemy as the al-Qaida network and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 as an act of war against the United States. While there is no explicit mention of Islam, the general membership of the al-Qaida organization is thought to be militant Sunni Islamists, thereby allowing al-Qaida to be a signifier for Muslim. As seen in the definitions provided by the United States enforcement agencies, the use of the word terrorism is used to categorize violence and mobilize specific responses against racialized Muslims.

Given the complexity of defining terrorism, it is crucial that the individuals and groups using this blanket term are self-critical and reflective in its use. The ambiguity surrounding the boundaries of terrorism is justified based on its evolving nature, however that subjectivity allows the reckless use by lawyers, policymakers, and the media (Perry, 2004). The labeling of violence as terrorism conveys a universally negative connotation assigning moral judgment to a behavior, while also conjuring racialized images of brown, male, bearded perpetrators. The widespread labeling of "terrorism" and "radicalism" has been largely used to delegitimize and mobilize against the Muslim militant groups (Newell, 2016). The condemning of terrorist acts grants

additional power to enforcement agencies to implement preventative measures, in addition to forfeiting the opportunity to critique the counterterrorism responses. This allows for the implementation of questionable policies which would have otherwise not been considered. Furthermore, the response to these acts has focused on identifying terrorism based on the identity of the perpetrator rather than a tactical form of violence that could be used by any identity group.

There have been extensive studies done on comparing definitions of terrorism and attempting to re-define it. My focus is not to engage directly in that work, but to make clear the implications of defining terrorism.

Chapter 2: Encounters with the West & the Progression of Islamism

*Was Building 7 terrorism?
Was nano-thermite terrorism?
Diego Garcia was terrorism
I am conscious the Contras was terrorism
Phosphorous that burns hands – that is terrorism
Irgun and Stern Gang, that was terrorism
What they did in Hiroshima was terrorism
What they did in Fallujah was terrorism
Mandela ANC – they called terrorism
Gerry Adams IRA – they called terrorism
Erik Prince Blackwater – it was terrorism
Oklahoma, McVeigh – that was terrorism
Everyday USA – that is terrorism
Everyday UK – that is terrorism, everyday...
~Terrorist? by Lowkey*

Since the events of 9/11, acts of violence carried out by Muslim perpetrators have gotten increasing amounts of attention. The coverage of these acts label the perpetrators as “terrorists” and describe these acts as senseless attacks on the American way of life. With the focus being exclusively on the gruesomeness of the attacks, the perpetrators are painted as inhumane caricatures brainwashed by religious fanaticism. Their actions are written off as completely incomprehensible, which has the compounding effects of “othering” Muslims and presenting an incomplete understanding of the complex social and political circumstances that lead to these events. Furthermore, xenophobes, nativists, and white supremacists are just a few groups who use these events to demonize the entire Muslim community and perpetuate Islamophobic sentiment and violence. As we explored in the previous chapter, authoritative producers of knowledge including legislation, policy makers, and media have allowed for a broad definition of terrorism that is wielded arbitrarily against racialized Muslims. The presumed understanding of terrorism generated from these authoritative producers of knowledge can be understood through Foucault’s work on the regime of truth. This theory states that every society has a

‘regime’ of truth that is crucial to constructing social norms, which is dominated by the elites and institutions designated as custodians of knowledge.

Despite this widespread negative perceptions, Islam remains one of the fastest growing religions with large numbers of converts (Mamdani, 2002). This trend brings attention to the incomplete narrative presented by authoritative producers of knowledge. This section aims to address some of the following questions: How can we begin to fill in the gaps of understanding terrorism? How can we contextualize the acts of terror carried out by Muslim perpetrators without essentializing Islam and presenting it as “foreign”? How is the discourse of “terrorist” attacks informed by racist, xenophobic, and orientalist notions? Can this contextualization help us understand the allure of Islamic militancy? Will a renewed understanding of the reasons behind terrorist attacks lead to improved relations between the United States and the rest of the world? Will it lead to the prevention of future terrorist attacks?

In order to address these questions, it is important to contextualize the positionality of the United States as a global superpower in command of a powerful and destructive military. The United States takes on the role of intervening in global politics in order to bring democracy and modernity to the far reaches of the world especially those that are rich in natural resources such as oil. America has participated in funding training programs and providing weapons to rebel groups, overthrowing democratically elected governments, and influencing the global economy (Mamdani, 2002; Stuster, 2013). They hold international status and power through their role in the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). American intervention is justified by the depiction of developing countries as backwards, stagnant, barbaric, and clearly lacking American exceptionalism. Despite all of this military might and political influence, media coverage of terrorist attacks in the United States presents itself as an unaware participant

in the global politics that generate anti-American sentiment fueling acts of terror. However, there is an absolute need to explore a deeper, more nuanced understanding behind terror attacks and why they are committed. Working with the common understanding of terrorism and its link to Islam, the discussion of Islamist politics is often had separately from the discussion on Western military intervention. This section aims to illuminate the connections between the two through a historical re-telling of defining moments of encounters between the Western and Islamic societies.

CONTEXTUALIZING SEPT. 11TH

The events on September 11th, 2001 were pivotal moments in history of the United States and the way that terrorist events were covered in the media. Therefore, the study of media coverage on terrorism would be incomplete without addressing it. The attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City on September 11, 2001 were carried out by nineteen individuals who were associated with al-Qaeda. At the time, al-Qaeda was allegedly financed by Osama bin Laden, a fugitive of Saudi Arabia. There were four planes involved in the attack: 2 were used in the World Trade Center, the third in the Pentagon and the fourth crashed in Pennsylvania (Bergen, 2018). While these details are well known and were widely covered by numerous news sources, the history of U.S. interference in global politics is much less known. Later investigation into the attacks of 9/11 considered the cause to be a response to America's support for Israel, their involvement in the Persian Gulf War, and continued intervention in the Middle East (Mamdani, 2002). Post 9/11 led to the invasion of Iraq in the search for weapons of mass destruction although Iraq did not possess nuclear weapons and was a known enemy to al-Qaeda. The attacks served as a justification for the need for retribution and bringing modernity, democracy, and peace to the "uncivilized" Middle East (Mamdani, 2002). The events preceding

and following 9/11 are important in contextualizing Islamophobic rhetoric in politics, as well as, the rising interest of Islamic militancy as a compelling social movement.

The United States has an extensive history of military and political intervention in the Middle East and North African region long before and after the attacks of 9/11. The attackers posed a threat not only to those in the Twin Towers, but also threatened the lives of *all* Americans by attacking the “American” way of life. With this being a devastating act to take place on American soil, the public needed an enemy to hold accountable and they turned to Muslims. Whether the intention was to implicate American Muslims or not, all Muslims, including the ones who had been in America for decades were being asked to condemn the violence and prove their Americanness by denouncing their religion. It was assumed that political views of Muslims could be read simply by their religious affiliation. The simplistic accounts of Islam as a religion of violence were refuted by Muslims who swore that Islam was, indeed a religion of peace. This fueled the ‘culture talk,’ whereby Islam as a complex religion, political ideology, and global civilization was crystallized as the religion boiled down into the debate over whether or not it supports terrorism (Mamdani, 2002). Meanwhile, the role of the United States in creating the conditions necessary for such violent retaliation remained unspoken in the public eye.

The extent of U.S. meddling in the so-called Muslim world, which is more accurately described as the MENA region could easily fill the pages of multivolume sequels, however this is not the focus of my work. The following section will cover important moments of encounter that shape the geopolitical landscape that we see today. The simplified portrayal of the “Muslim” world through non-historical cultural terms as a homogenous community with the stagnant political tendencies is reminiscent of tactics utilized in colonial projects to justify the use of

collective discipline and punishment (Mamdani, 2002). Following the attacks of 9/11, America waged war against terror, radical Islam, Islamic extremism, and what they called the Muslim world. In reality, this manifested through military intervention in an ever-growing list of countries including Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Sudan, and more. The demonization of acts of violence committed by Muslims leaves no room to ponder the ways that for many, Islam is seen as a counter-culture to America's colonial project. This section aims to convey the understanding that Islamic politics did not develop solely as a result of Islamic civilization, but was also informed by encounters with Western power and vice versa. Neither Islamic politics, nor Western power can be understood in isolation and without historical context. Although the sections are broken down by country to make this information more easily understood, the progression of history did not take place in this way. The events described are never happening in a vacuum and while I attempt to include all the relevant information, it could never be fully complete. The following includes brief historical moments of U.S. encounters in Iraq and Iran

Iran

I will now discuss some of the intricate relations between the United States and Iran prior to 9/11. While the 1980s contained important moments in key countries such as Iran and Iraq, the relationships between the Western world and the MENA region stretch further into the past. In 1908, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, later known as British Petroleum (BP) was established. Through transnational capitalism, the British were able to support their economy and prosper through the exportation and selling of Iran's oil (Global Policy Forum, 2018). Finally in 1951, Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh insisted on the nationalization of Iran's natural resource which was not taken well by the British or Americans. The overthrowing of Mossadegh in

retaliation to his plans for nationalization and alleged ties to communism was led by the United States in Operation Ajax, leading to the installation of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. As the new prime minister, Mohammad sought to modernize the nation through support of pro-Westernization and secularization (Marsh, 2003; Allen-Ebrahimian, 2017). His policies aligned with Western nations. However, many Iranians began to protest his rule as they witnessed forced Westernization, stagnant economic growth despite the booming oil industry, heavy repression of any dissenting opinions through the creation of the secret police known as the SAVAK, government corruption, and other concerning issues. While dissatisfied Iranians protested against the U.S.–supported ruler, they were met with violence from the military. The United States provided excessive amounts of funding to support the shah and even went so far as to say,

...we adopted a policy in which provides, in effect, that we will accede to any of the Shah's requests for arms purchases from us (other than some sophisticated advanced technology armaments and with the very important exception, of course, of any nuclear weapons capability) (Hunt, 1996).

Surprisingly in 1979, the Iranian revolution resulted in the removal of Shah Reza Pahlavi which was replaced by the rule of democratically elected Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The new prime minister ran on the idea of an Islamic, particularly Shi'a governing body. This new leadership was frightening to Western nations who wanted to ensure that they were protecting their interests in Iran. However, instead of directly intervening the United States instead began to back the Iraqi government, fueling their desire to invade Iran in a proxy war. I will now shift into the events that occurred in Iraq.

Iraq

Prior to the rule of former U.S. backed ruler Saddam Hussein which lasted from 1979 to 2003, the republic of Iraq was under the rule of Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr who prioritized Arab nationalism and socialism. As a member of the Ba'ath party who believed in the unity of the

Arab nations of the Middle East, al-Bakr led the country into a period of economic growth. In 1979, Saddam Hussein forced al-Bakr to resign and took his place as ruler. These events coincided with the Islamic Revolution led by Khomeini in Iran. Under the Reagan administration, fear of the spread of Islamic radicalism informed the United States support for an Iraqi government led by Saddam Hussein to be its defense against any threat that Iran might pose. As a result, the U.S. aided the war effort of Iraq by sharing key military information, without which Saddam Hussein may not have been successful in the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88. The war started over territorial disputes and the potential threat that an Islamic republic would pose to Iraq's secular Ba'ath party, as the two were seemingly dichotomous. As a result of the war, both leaders Hussein and Khomeini remained in power. However, both countries faced the grave cost of the loss of life, destruction of homes and displacement of millions of people. Here we see the hypocrisy of U.S. benevolent support as a superpower nation because the U.S. continued to support Saddam Hussein and overlooked his sustained use of chemical weapons on Iranians and overall human rights violations carried out by both countries. While Saddam Hussein was a ruthless leader who silenced all dissenting voices, he made progress in Iraq through nationalizing its oil, modernizing its infrastructure, and improving healthcare and social services. In 1990, Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait after accusing them of stealing oil turned his powerful Western allies against him.

Within this history, it is imperative to understand the role of U.S. intervention in the shaping the political turmoil, economic shattering, and growth of militant Islamic insurgency which characterizes modern day Iraq. In March of 2003, the United States declared war on Iraq with former President Bush making the following statement:

My fellow citizens, at this hour American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger. On my orders, coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war" (Bush, 2003).

While the immediate justifications for the occupation of Iraq stemmed from the tragic events of 9/11, the Bush administration drew Western attention to the alleged sectarian violence that was dividing the country. Furthermore, military intervention by the United States was crucial in the instance of Iraq because unlike other countries where the use of economic sanctions or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programs could cripple the country, the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein was able to evade the common strategies in the U.S. playbook. As a result, the U.S. invasion in Iraq achieved the goals of implementing neoliberal practices which had the effect of economically crippling the nation by imposing privatization and foreign ownership of Iraqi companies, establishing high tax rates benefitting only the wealthy, eliminating tariffs allowing massive amounts of cheap foreign imports into the country, and so much more. During the US occupation of Iraq, the US chose members to comprise the political entity to draft the constitution that would be crucial in the transitioning governance. With the influence of members such as US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, the Iraqi constitution which included the necessity for social justice and citizen ownership of Iraq's natural resources was altered so that the profits of businesses and foreign interests were preserved (Zunes, 2009).

Sections of the constitution referring to social justice as described by Docena (2005),

In its place was a provision binding the state to 'reforming the Iraqi economy according to modern economic bases, in a way that ensures complete investment of its resources, diversifying its sources and encouraging and developing the private sector.'

Just as in the human body, the introduction of foreign invaders results in self-defense and rejection, the U.S. occupation with its colonizing and orientalist ideology faced opposition and

rejection. Despite this rejection, the United States imposed its force and swore to stomp out all Islamic extremism for its threat to our democratic freedoms.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL ISLAM

In this section, it is clear that the U.S. pursued its own economic interests, without regard for the lives of Iraqis and Iranians. Despite the guise of spreading democracy and freedom, U.S. intervention resulted in political and economic destabilization, and most importantly, the unnecessary loss of lives. In talking about global politics and war, it can be easy to get caught up in the jargon and political debates, however the lives of countless individuals are at stake. Furthermore, while the situation in each country is unique in its own ways, the intentions of the United States remain self-centered, and just as devious, in its meddling of other countries within and outside of the MENA region. The trend of destabilizing countries and unnecessary loss of life rings true for many of the countries that the U.S. is involved with. It is clear that U.S. military interventions have worked to strategically protect Western interests. In light of this, these efforts have also resulted in U.S. human rights violations and torture of Muslim suspects in prisons such as Abu Ghraib. Given these devastating effects, it should come as no surprise that there are retaliation groups that oppose U.S. involvement, fueled by the desire to counter Western imperialism through Islamic militancy groups.

In order to gain a better understanding of the development of Islamic militancy, we must first understand the development of political Islam, or Islamism. Ayoob (2008:2) provides the following definition:

Islamism covers a broad spectrum of convictions. At one extreme are those who would merely like to see Islam accorded proper recognition in national life in terms of national symbols. At the other extreme are those who want to see the radical transformation of society and politics, by whatever means into an absolute theocracy.

This understanding of Islamism is important because it is cognizant of the range in perspectives that exist in the Muslim community not only about what political Islam represents, but also what its implementation would look like. As demonstrated in this section, the interference of countries like the U.S. in the MENA region resulted in the replacement of Muslim leaders with Western colonial powers, turning countries upside down. Additionally, the one dimensional Western presentation of acts of violence carried out by Muslim perpetrators as incomprehensible fails to recognize the ways that Islamism functions as an effective and unifying social movement. Why is this movement alluring to so many? What are their goals? How are these goals informed by their experiences with the United States? How are Islamic militants different from any other military group fighting for a cause they believe in? These are a few of the questions that remain unanswered through the dismissal of these events as simply wanting to destroy the American way of life, an explanation commonly dispersed through media coverage. Reifer (2006:56) describes:

Today's Islamist resurgence reveals the end of the belief across many parts of the globe in the promissory note of development and modernization, a phenomenon also expressed in the rise of liberation theology. Here, religious based movements took up the banner of anti-imperialist nationalism, combining ethnic and religious identities with that of more traditional national liberation movements.

As Reifer states above, Islamic militancy groups are able to transcend ethnic and national ties, leading to coalitions built on religion. Islam serves not only as a unifier through shared identity, but also a shared set of ideals based on the belief of just liberation. In the context of the MENA region, it is also seen as a means of resistance to Western occupation and domination of the region. The narrative of America as a benevolent nation that looks after the rest of the world erases its obvious history of violence and benefits from systemic inequality that prefaced its

position as an international superpower. As a result, many groups including Islamic militants have formed in response to Western neoliberal militarization.

THE UNITED STATES: A GLOBAL TERRORIST

Through my analysis of the historical context of U.S. intervention in the MENA region, specifically Iran and Iraq, I was surprised to find the lack of the word terrorism being used to describe violence perpetrated by the United States. To recall the definition written in FISA, international terrorism is characterized by “violence acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of criminal laws of the United States” (50 U.S. Code § 1801). The military and political actions of the US in other countries is not labeled in the same way that terrorism is, with its attachment to inexplicable violence. The violent acts of the US are explained away through the generous spreading of American ideals of democracy and freedom. Terrorism is a product of contemporary thought and politics that should not appear fossilized through stagnant political or religious beliefs.

The decontextualized understanding of terrorism and the resulting claims of a monolithic and backwards Islam has far-reaching implications. The problematic framing of terrorism as specific to violence carried out by Muslims has the two-fold effect of generating widespread paranoia among Americans and justifying national security measures that violate civil liberties and promote violence against all Muslims, including American Muslims.

Chapter 3: Implications of Terrorism

Post 9/11 media coverage of terrorist events in the United States often contributes to the politics of fear that relies on the looming threat of foreign-driven terror attacks, allowing for uncritical assumptions of definitions of terrorism (Altheide, 2006). While violent actions perpetrated by Muslims are quickly identified as acts of terror, US interference in global politics and the incitement of proxy wars are not. The one dimensional media coverage that fails to address the history of American meddling in global politics, which is crucial in securing active consent of the American people while political elites continue to pursue their agendas. Given this renewed understanding of the history of US intervention in Iraq and Iran, we will now begin to delve into the ways that incomplete definitions and representations of terrorism continue to reinforce the perceived need for U.S. intervention while having the compounding effect of generating widespread Islamophobia. How does the biased framing of terrorism affect the way that we perceive Muslims? Who is identified as Muslim based on their appearance? How are racialized Muslim communities affected by this framing? How do these communities respond? This chapter will proceed by firstly expanding the common knowledge understanding of Islam past its relationship with terrorism. After filling in some of the gaps in knowledge about Islam, I will move into the discussion of the implications of the reductive framing through the presentation of prominent stereotypes faced by racialized Muslim communities. Lastly, I connect examples of anti-Muslim racism to the larger structures of power and oppression mentioned in previous chapters.

FRAMING THE ‘MUSLIM WORLD’

The public discourse pertaining to Islam has usually centered very specific questions. Among those questions are the considerations of the “Muslim world” defined in opposition to the Western world, the dichotomy of women’s liberation/oppression, and terrorism (Huntington, 1993). How is Islam constructed and framed by those within and without the Muslim community? Western media bombards media consumers with a monolithic Muslim community characterized by stories of violence, women’s oppression, religious fanatics, and Islamic theology (words like *sharia* and *jihad*) painting a one dimensional narrative of the Muslim experience. Alternatively, the multiple Muslim communities that exist have adopted their own methods of response to this media ranging from reactionary denial to promotion of Islam as a religion of peace, or no response at all. The linking of Islam to “radical violence,” “crime,” “fear,” and “victim” is used to generate a semantic field of negative associations, in the same way that dogwhistle politics feeds off of specific coded language (Altheide, 2006). This thing called the Muslim experience is diverse and expansive, something that I could never hope to fully cover. However, this thesis is intended to illuminate connections necessary to broaden our understanding of the already existing scholarship. In this section, we will begin to unpack the creation of constructions of Muslims within and outside of Muslim communities. We will also explore the stakeholders and beneficiaries of such constructions through various understandings of Islam in a religious, cultural, and political sense. This work is not intended to be study of the religion through an academic theological lens, but rather to present an often dismissed component that is essential to understanding the experience of Muslims.⁸ It is rarely the case that

⁸ There are many prominent scholars (Tariq Ramadan, Jerusha Lamptey, amina wadud, Aisha Al-Adawiya) who have already done the admirable, yet thankless work of providing comprehensive studies of Islam within the academic discipline of religious studies or theology.

contextualized conversations of religious and political Islam take place simultaneously. Furthermore, it is important to analyze the ways that historical and political processes have mapped out onto the landscape of Islamic thought and practice. The following sections are separated into tradition and thought with the understanding that the task of completely separating the religious, cultural, and political understandings is impossible. However this approach allows me to identify and tease out the foundational work in order to ultimately present a holistic and nuanced perspective.

ISLAMIC TRADITION

Much of today's rhetoric in media lacks the nuanced understandings of the religious origins, which does injustice to the lived experiences of many who identify with this faith tradition. The popular knowledge that is put forth is often a half-baked attempt to represent a politically convenient version of Islam put forth by journalists, think tanks, and scholars who share similar views. The scholarship on Islam is multifaceted and expansive. The work of making this knowledge accessible becomes increasingly important considering individuals who are only interacting with Muslims through the popular media.

The one-dimensional media presentation of all Muslims as participants in a violent religion has elicited a reactionary response from Muslims who declare Islam as a religion of peace and love. Both portrayals of Islam as violent or peaceful are clearly oversimplifications of this complex religious tradition and erases the multitude of experiences that exist outside of those two options. Additionally, within Muslim communities the ranking of "traditional" schools of thought as more authentic or legitimate has also created reductions in understanding the Muslim experience. These fractured silos of Islamic thought perpetuates dangerous historical amnesia,

privileging of certain types of knowledge, and reinscribing power dynamics. It is important to note that the development of Islamic thought did not arise solely within Islamic civilizations *or* as a response to Western encounters, but through a combination of both. For this reason, it is crucial to approach this understanding of Islam as a tradition which is defined by Curtis (2002:4):

...[T]radition is not an historical product so much as an historical process in which human beings, interacting with each other in discrete social contexts, invent, embrace, and inherit *something* that they care about and argue over, whether explicitly or not. I say 'something' because what it is that people create and pass along is never completely clear. While a tradition may seem to contain distinguishing characteristics and constitutive elements, including certain questions, ideas, rituals, and symbols, these 'things' are always subject to alternation, reinterpretation, and abandonment.

The desire to create a monolithic Islam is used by those within and outside of Muslim communities, as it creates an easily digestible version of Islam that can be molded to serve various political agendas. However, Curtis (2002) emphasizes that tradition does not have to be constructed in opposition to the simplistic presentations of Islam, which are depicted as stagnant and located in the past. In other words, the study of Islam as a tradition acknowledges not only the history of developing the faith and the centuries of dynamic interpretation and practice of Muslims, but also the fact that this process remains continuous within ever-changing social, political, and regional contexts.

Furthermore, while it would be convenient to condemn and disown the unpopular opinions and violent acts that are done by individuals who identify with any particular religion, those individuals' ties to religion are just as valid and just as worthy of analysis within the religious tradition. Instead of falling into the trap of defining an authentic Islam by excluding unpopular experiences, our understanding of the tradition should be rooted in all experiences of self-

identifying individuals interacting with the faith. With the understanding of the vast wealth of Muslim experiences, there is the question of group belonging and cohesion. Who has the authority do who qualifies as Muslim? How is Muslim-ness defined? What are the markers of belonging in a Muslim community?

These questions have been asked from both within and outside of Muslim communities. The question of establishing boundaries of Muslim identity from within the Muslim communities will continue to remain relevant as long as there are Muslims. However it is important to begin contextualizing this information with the origins of Islam in the seventh century. The origins of the Muslim experience stem from a religious tradition whereby Islam, meaning submission in Arabic, was born in Mecca of the Arabian Peninsula. This monotheistic faith practice was a continuity of the Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Christianity that came before it. Like all other faith traditions, there are various sects within Islam who adopt a variety of practices and beliefs. Muslims, who are followers of Islam, received revelation through the sacred text of the *Qur'an* and additional guidance from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the *hadiths*. The basic tenets of Islam are described as the five pillars of ritual practice including *shahada*, *salat*, *zakat*, *sawm*, and *hajj*. The *shahada* is the profession of faith through the belief that there is only one god, Allah and Prophet Muhammad is the last and final messenger. The second pillar of Islam requires prayer five times a day, *zakat* prescribes charity and giving away of wealth to those that are less fortunate, *sawm* is the fasting during the month of Ramadan, and lastly *hajj* which is the pilgrimage to Mecca (Ramadan, 2017). It is important to note there is no universal Muslim experience and that the implementations of these practices are open to interpretation. Muslims experience and interact with their religion through multiple avenues, one of which could mean adopting different levels of practice. In an effort to gain a better

understanding of the umbrella term of Islam, there needs to be a frame shift to one of Islam as a discursive tradition, or an extended discussion through time that adapts and evolves to context depending on interpretation from both those within and without the Muslim communities.

ISLAMIC THOUGHT

In addition to fundamentals of practice, there are important concepts within Islamic thought tied to belief including, but not limited to the popular media terms of *jihad* and *shar'ia*. Islamic scholars of all identities (races, genders, sexualities, socioeconomic classes) have been engaging in intellectual and philosophical conversations and making sense of living out every aspect of their lives in a way that is informed by their faith and beliefs. Furthermore, Islamic thought has contributed in significant ways to the Western knowledge of astrology, mathematics, art, health care, chemistry, philosophy, and much more. These contributions were compounded with the work of self-reflection and consideration beyond the individual that were practiced by many Muslims. This admirable and inspirational work has been carried out for centuries since the birth of the religion and its erasure in media by centering select presentations has violent implications, which will be discussed later on in this chapter. It is also important to note that there remains concerns over the epistemological origins of Islamic scholarship within the Muslim community adding to the rich history of the Islamic discursive tradition. As with any religious tradition, there are various schools of thought that offer opposing and sometimes contradictory interpretations. The history of privileging male Islamic scholars has allowed for the saturation of patriarchal norms into the work of interpreting sacred texts. However, as prominent Islamic feminist scholars become more visible, there is more awareness around the active work against the

historical erasure of the important contributions that women have made in shaping and carrying on the Islamic tradition.

For some scholars, the understanding of the religious tradition has meant a direct call for reclamation of the past with the idea that the time of religious conception represented a real, pure, authentic, and unadulterated version of the religion. As such, believers of this line of thought attempt to simulate a religious community that mirrors a romanticized version of an historical golden age. This strategy is seen as a means of resistance to Western colonial occupation and domination however, the narrative is often employed by those who would benefit from reestablishing past structural inequalities, as well. This has been a powerful line of thinking for Islamist groups, who sell the idea of the return to a golden age of Islam. However, Islam is a dynamic and vibrant faith that has grown tremendously since the time of its inception. The desire to return to the past comes with patriarchal norms and other harmful power structures. It also erases the work of activism and feminist interpretation that has flourished over the years, as well as, the numerous Muslim communities that have developed over time, including the large convert communities across the globe.

With this being said, it is important to understand not only the content of the tradition, but also the way that the tradition operates. The desire to search for an Islam of the past seems promising, however, an alternative approach would be to understand the events of the past to contextualize the present and future. Islamic tradition has a rich and extensive history of various schools of thought engaging and disagreeing on *tafsir*, or exegesis of the Quran. For centuries, scholars have presented various interpretations of the religion and have agreed to disagree. Additionally, these disagreements were not used to delegitimize one way of practicing over

another. The multitude of Islamic scholarly interpretations were still housed under the umbrella of Islam.

Furthermore, the meaning of concepts such as *shari'a* and *jihad*, which are used loosely in Western media, have been studied extensively through Islamic theology. *Shari'a* refers to a way of life in order to feel closer to God. The meaning of *shar'ia* in the context of Islamic theology is described by Ramadan (2004: 32):

Just as the *shahada* is the expression in the here and now, of individual faithfulness to the original covenant by means of a testimony that is a 'return to oneself,' so the *Sharia* is the expression of individual and collective faithfulness.

Within Muslim communities, the understanding of *shari'a* varies from literal to interpretative translations. Meanwhile in an underwhelming attempt to understand Islamic theology, Western media has translated *shari'a* into Islamic law, which is an inaccurate understanding divorced from Islamic scholarship. Consequently, Islamic law or jurisprudence is more accurately represented by *fiqh* (Ramadan, 2004). While *fiqh* operates within *shari'a*, it is also a separate entity that is concerned only with legal interpretations from sacred texts. Another important concept that gets thrown around is *jihad*. Western producers of knowledge have interpreted *jihad* as a holy war with enemies of Islam. However, *jihad* also represents the struggle to live and practice the principles of Islam in one's everyday life (Ramadan, 2004). The attempts by journalists, think tanks, and others in Western media have co-opted terms such as *shari'a* and *jihad*, without engaging with the history of the Islamic tradition. Which definitions are the right ones? Who can speak to concepts of Islamic thought? As stated previously, the beauty of studying Islam as a tradition allows for the existence of multiple, sometimes opposing thoughts. The meanings that have been attached to these concepts of Islamic thought are all a part of the

Islamic tradition. Additionally, scholars have no authority in placing value on true or authentic Islam; that becomes a question of practice.

STEREOTYPING RACIALIZED MUSLIMS

Holding in mind the knowledge of Islam as a rich historical tradition, I will now present and unpack some of the prominent media constructions and stereotypes that inform the perception of Muslim appearance. The exploration and critique of these stereotypes will inform the later discussion on the systematic discrimination against racialized Muslims.

All Muslims are Arab, all Arabs are Muslims

The urge to racialize Muslims is supported by the desire to identify this religiously affiliated group by appearance. The emphasis on racial politics in the United States and uninformed profiling propagates the stereotype of the Muslim Arab. The conflation of Arab and Muslim identity serves the dual purpose of erasing the experiences of Muslims of other identities, increasing tensions between Muslim communities, and effectively “other”-ing Arabs. Concurrently, the understanding of Arab is misinformed and does not connote a particular appearance. Arab identity refers to regional ties to the MENA region. This region is comprised of more than twenty different countries and as such, has populations of diverse religious and racial identities. The homogenization of religious identity within the MENA region allow for justification for U.S. foreign policy that does not accurately represent the actual population of that region. The decontextualized presentation of the MENA region is a tactic used by colonial powers to distribute collective punishment, which is evident in the multiple military engagements that the U.S. is involved in that region (Mamdani, 2002).

Alternatively, history of racialization within the United States led various ethnic and racial immigrant groups to prove their proximity to whiteness. The violent history of assimilation in America centered whiteness as the standard for securing citizenship and establishing national belonging. These ideals were carried out through practices such as racial pre-requisite cases, carried out from the 1870s-1940s and determined which immigrant groups were included and excluded from being white (Molina, 2010). The connection of Arab identity with the Muslim identity, which was already “other-ed” led to the disassociation of Arab with whiteness. Even in the late case of Yemeni Ahmed Hassan in 1942, citizenship was denied on the premise of Muslim identity being non-white. Meanwhile Ex Parte Mohriez who came from Saudi Arabia was granted citizenship because he fit the “statutory definition of whiteness.” (Beydoun, 2013, p.4). While judicial decisions of 1915 and 1942 granted the status of “white” to Arabs, the conflation of Arab and Muslim have barred access to cultural citizenship lending to stereotypes of Arabs as “radicals”, “terrorists”, and “unassimilable.”

Furthermore, the association with only Arab identity with Muslim informs the ways that society perceives Muslim appearance. Without recognizing that Islam, just like any other religion, transcends racial differences and geographic boundaries, there is a violent erasure of the billions of Muslims who do not “look” Muslim. Additionally, the constructions of Muslim identity have been distanced from American identity through an emphasis on racial difference. However, the study of Islamic tradition reveals the rich history of Islam from the foundation of America. The first Muslims were brought to America as slaves and passed down their practices (Curtis, 2002). Contrary to popular belief, Islam is just as much a part of the American fabric as any other faith tradition.

Muslim women wear hijab and are oppressed



Figure 3. Instagram post by mvzlamic.

Images of veiled women and girls are used in the call to save our non-Western sisters in other parts of the world (Figure 3). Like other stereotypes, this one is multifaceted and serves many devious agendas. It once again raises questions of what it means to “look Muslim” through a gendered lens. Wearing *hijab*, *niqab* or head coverings has become synonymous with being Muslim. However, many Muslim women do not cover their head and still find religion and spirituality to be an important part of their identity. This stereotype also engages the savior complex, positioning the United States as a benevolent nation when the reality has seen its use/ deployment to justify military intervention (Lila Abu-Lughod, 2013).

Critique of the stereotype of an oppressed Muslim woman forced to veil does not take away from the very real violence and lived experiences of women who find themselves in that situation. Women such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali have dominated the framing of this narrative by coming out very publicly in support of Islam being an oppressive religion. These stories have received extensive media coverage in support of the need to save Muslim women. However, theirs is not

the only experience had by Muslim women. No one woman or group of women could claim to represent all Muslim women.

In order to garner public support for actions taken against the Muslim community, the narrative of the oppressed Muslim woman was conveniently employed (Saleh 2016; Abu-Lughod 2002). The idea of a woman who was forced to conceal her body due to oppressive patriarchal religious ideology provided a compelling narrative for many Western women who defined their liberation in terms of corporeal freedom. This kind of oppression in a way, seemed to be more easily identifiable than the manifestations of patriarchy present in Western societies. Fluri (2009) describes the problematic nature of the link between liberation and the unveiling of Afghani Muslim women through the Miss Earth Pageant. The use of women's bodies as a marker for gauging the modernity of a society has led to the West's desire to empower oppressed women in other parts of the world to take control of their bodies. The assumption here is that modest dressing or covering of the body could not be the result of a woman's autonomous choice. In the case of Fluri's (2009) work, the Western imperial savior complex that yearns to save Afghani Muslim women from oppressive male-dominated religious ideology also overlooks the privileging of the performance of western standards of beauty in the pageant. Furthermore, the concern of Western feminists following military intervention dismisses the hypermasculine ideals that normalize and justify the use of war and violence in the West. Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) describes the phenomenon of transcendent oppression whereby the West is only able to understand and empathize with gender-based violence that is occurring in faraway places. The stories of lived experiences of women's suffering in other parts of the world are co-opted and consumed as justification reaffirming the narrative of the oppressed 'other.' Following this understanding, many in the West are hungry for stories relaying the experiences of women

situated in entirely different contexts from their own. Additionally, the construction of the Muslim woman as the ‘foreign other’ is projected onto Muslim women who exist within the Western context.

All Muslims are terrorists.

Headlines linking Muslims with “radicals,” “extreme violence,” “religious fanaticism,” “fear,” and “crime” have supported the stereotype of all Muslims being terrorists. Without denying the real violence carried out by Muslims through individuals or groups such as al Qaeda, ISIS, etc., the dominant response towards the Muslim community⁹ has been to demand accountability and condemnation of the acts of violence carried out by other Muslims. Needless to say, this response operates under various assumptions about the ways that religious communities function. This stereotype builds off of the already racialized and gendered images of Muslims that existed prior to 9/11. It has also served the purposes post-9/11 of perpetual dehumanization, criminalization, and enforcement of national security measures including the barring of entry to the country, surveillance, and denial of cultural citizenship.

This section on stereotyping has provided the opportunity to reflect on some of the uncritical assumptions that are perpetuated against racialized Muslims. These stereotypes focus mainly on the ways that racialized Muslims are identified based on their appearance. The understanding of these stereotypes, as well as, the role of authoritative producers of knowledge in creating these stereotypes, is crucial in the discussion of systemic discrimination against

⁹ Singular use here because it is often assumed that all Muslims exist within a unified/homogenous group with the exact same beliefs and understanding of their faith.

racialized Muslims. The following section begins the discussion of Islamophobia and is informed by the historical encounters of U.S. military and political intervention with Islamic civilizations.

NAMING SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION: ISLAMOPHOBIA? ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM?

The history of stereotyping Muslims has become increasingly visible since 9/11, however anti-Muslim bias within the United States has always been present. The use of Islamophobia has also been recently used to describe anti-Muslim bias, however this terminology assumes that these incidents affect only Muslims. The discourse of Islamophobia, or fear of Islam, dominates Western media and popular culture through the perpetuation of the idea that Islam has a monopoly on religious-justified violence. The conflation of Islam with terrorism has led to a one-dimensional image of Muslims that is often used as a justification to perpetrate both domestic and international violence against this particular religious group. The rise in Islamophobic attacks on individuals and mosques, increased racial profiling by law enforcement, unwarranted FBI arrests, intrusive surveillance, and anti-immigration policies are among the many forms of discrimination faced by those who fit the media's portrayal of a Muslim. Not only does Islamophobia distract from the roots of anti-Western sentiment, but it also serves as a wide-cast net that implicates non-Muslims, Western Muslims, and Muslim extremists indiscriminately. For this reason, there is a need to reconsider the way we think about Islamophobia. Carr (2016) uses the concept of anti-Muslim racism to describe a phenomenon that is based on proximity to Muslim-ness. The terminology of anti-Muslim racism hopes to reconsider Islamophobia as a strictly Muslim issue by acknowledging the experiences of individuals who are not Muslim, but are racialized and treated as such. The effects of anti-Muslim bias are felt on a spectrum, based on the proximity to the Muslim stereotype. With this understanding, I will now shift to the

history of anti-Muslim racism in the United States before exploring the ways that this discrimination has manifested in contemporary society. While this section talks about the lived experiences of individuals who are affected by anti-Muslim racism, it is equally important to build upon the historical context of U.S. political and military intervention, as well as, the selective framing of terrorism.

HISTORY OF ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM

The violent practices of the United States' intervention in global affairs knows no bounds as we will explore the ways that these practices are replicated on a domestic level. Barring access to enter the country through the establishment and enforcement of borders was seen as the first line of defense against Muslims. However, this practice is informed by the history of establishing exclusionary immigration policies long before the events of 9/11. British-born journalist Peter Brimelow (1996:10) stated that America has always been ethnically white at its core, which is an important perspective to consider when trying to understand the construction of race, shaping of immigration policies, and conceptions of national belonging. Immigration in the United States has been present since its inception. The mass migrations that occurred during 19th century onward, as well as populations that were already present (including the Native Americans and Black peoples from Africa, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world brought as slaves) culminated into the American population. Policymakers however, were then tasked with establishing the boundaries of citizenship. The deconstruction of the identities of migrants into easily digestible categories erased ties to ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic class, cultural differences, and even identification with multiple races. As described earlier, simply identifying

as Muslim regardless of geographic origin or other identifiers was grounds for exclusion from entering the country or being granted citizenship.

While many Muslim communities from various racial, ethnic, and geographic regions were subjected to the harsh immigration policies, there were already established communities of black Muslims who were brought to the United States as slaves and maintained their practices. Diouf (1998) traces the ways in which slaves, who were thought to have adopted Christianity, actually maintained and passed down their practices of Islam for generations. These already established communities were guaranteed citizenship as a result of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, implementing birthright citizenship and the 1870 Naturalization Act which explicitly extended naturalization to individuals of African descent (Molina, 2010). The resurgence of prominent communities of Black Muslim communities was seen during the fight for civil rights through groups led by the honorable Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Minister Louis Farrakhan, and the Nation of Islam. While some leaders were more open about their commitment to Islam as their faith tradition, all of these groups utilized the teachings and practices of Islam as the framework for their social justice activism. Seeing that much of their work consisted of political disagreement, these communities were subjected to surveillance by the FBI and other local police groups.

Unsurprisingly, the treatment of Muslims today is informed by previous encounters. Following the attacks of 9/11, the United States openly continued its discriminatory practices against Muslims. As I have previously stated, the responses to these acts of violence labeled as terrorism centered three main objectives including immigration restrictions, increased protection for the president, and lastly, the increased surveillance and preventative measures for the federal government. The approach to responding to terrorism has been replicated, which can be seen by

the Muslim travel ban and the increased surveillance of Muslim communities. Post 9/11 commentary has seemingly erased the perpetual surveillance of Muslim communities because while this practice became more widely publicized and accepted in regards to protecting national security in the face of terrorism, it was in fact, the continuation of an already established practice towards Muslim communities.

These historical practices of dehumanization, criminalization, and disregard for human rights and civil liberties have continued to this day. However, the desire to protect national security has allowed for these practices to expand to encompass the surveillance of the entire population. As Bonikowski (2005) explains, the domestic implications for the wider American public has resulted in an epidemic of data collection and unprecedented surveillance. The framing of these intrusive measures as counterterrorism has garnered public support and approval. This surveillance has come in the form of New York Police Department infiltrating sacred prayer spaces as an undercover member, monitoring internet and cellular activity, or even planting evidence in order to warrant an arrest of a suspected terrorist (Kamali, 2017). These measures undermine any attempts to establish trust between law enforcement and communities, while simultaneously creating divisions within the community where members are asked to report on their neighbors. Other forms of discrimination against Muslim communities look like: policies of stop and frisk in NYC, immigration raids, and detention for an unspecified amount of time, separation of families. Additionally, the conflation of racialized Muslims as terrorists have put them at a higher risk for being considered suspects of terrorism or terrorism-related offenses, resulting in longer sentences (Figure 4). Harper (2014:1124) provides insight into the ways that the government is able to identify terrorists:

In many cases, the government seems to classify these actors as international terrorists based on Internet activity that ranges from viewing and posting jihadist YouTube videos to planning attacks with suspected foreign terrorists in chat rooms, thus using FISA’s formidable investigatory weapons against them.

There is no transparency or oversight in the ways that the government is able to bring charges of terrorism or terrorism-related offenses. The broad definition of terrorism leaves this open to interpretation, leading to arbitrary case-by-case decisions. In a study comparing ideologically motivated violence committed by racialized Muslims and non-Muslims, The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (2018: 1) found:

Our analysis of the examples examined in this report found that, for similar plots, Muslim-perceived perpetrators received harsher legal charges and longer prison sentences than their non-Muslim counterparts. Perpetrators identified as Muslim also had qualitatively different media coverage than perpetrators not identified as Muslim.

This clearly demonstrates the ways that selective and deliberate framing of terrorism as a form of violence perpetrated by Muslims has resulted in the institutionalized criminalization of perceived



Figure 4. Graph showing longer sentences for perceived Muslim perpetrators. Source: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (2018)

The sentences sought were an average three times the length for Category A as Category B perpetrators, with the sentences issued being on average four times the length for Category A compared to Category B.

Muslims. These forms of discrimination have been codified into laws, however other forms of violence against Muslims have taken place on a much more personal level.

In its more explicit form, anti-Muslim racism has manifested through organizations such as the American Freedom Defense Initiative, otherwise known as Stop Islamization of America. This organization is led by Pamela Geller and is widely known for being anti-Muslim and pro-Israel. Some of their campaigns include ads such as the one seen in Figure 5 that feature the co-optation of Islamic terminology. Campaigns, such as this one, fuel hatred and encourage violence against racialized Muslims.



Figure 5. Advertisement found on the MTA, sponsored by the American Freedom Initiative.

The lack of centralized data collection for anti-Muslim racism makes it difficult to pinpoint the severity and pervasiveness of this phenomenon. This becomes especially complicated when the institutionalized law enforcement policies endorse anti-Muslim sentiment. However, this work has been taken on by key organizations such as the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project (IRDP) at the University of California, Berkeley. Additionally, organizations such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR, 2017) published a report in which they found 451 incidents of anti-Muslim bias between the months of April and June of 2017. They found that 358 of those incidents were triggered by racial and ethnic origin, followed by wearing a headscarf.

The history of anti-Muslim racism is deeply entrenched in the history of the United States and remains just as prevalent, if not more, today. The construction of the perceived Muslim identity puts individuals at a greater risk for violent acts of discrimination.

Conclusion

The United States has created this myth of Islamic terrorism through historical amnesia allowing for the simultaneous criminalization and ‘othering’ of American Muslims, while also justifying discrimination through immigration and foreign policy. These macro ideas have consequences on individual narratives and experiences. Without the understanding of the encounters between Western powers and Islamic civilizations, the framing of Islamic terrorism is incomplete. This framing continues to uphold the notions of anti-Muslim sentiment. Anti-Muslim racism is a global phenomenon that transcends physical and political borders.

With that being said, there is incredible resilience and strength within Muslim communities. It is important to remember that these communities are full of their own social capital and wealth and should be treated as such. The framework and analysis provided within this thesis are offered as knowledge to be wielded against systems of oppression. The work done in support of racialized Muslim communities needs to be intersectional and actively work against all structures of power and oppression.

Appendix A

Table 1. U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations

Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations	
Date Designated	Name
10/8/1997	Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)
10/8/1997	Aum Shinrikyo (AUM)
10/8/1997	Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)
10/8/1997	Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group) (IG)
10/8/1997	HAMAS
10/8/1997	Harakat ul-Mujahidin (HUM)
10/8/1997	Hizballah
10/8/1997	Kahane Chai (Kach)
10/8/1997	Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) (Kongra-Gel)
10/8/1997	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)
10/8/1997	National Liberation Army (ELN)
10/8/1997	Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)
10/8/1997	Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)
10/8/1997	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)
10/8/1997	PFLP-General Command (PFLP-GC)
10/8/1997	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)
10/8/1997	Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C)
10/8/1997	Shining Path (SL)
10/8/1999	al-Qa'ida (AQ)
9/25/2000	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)
5/16/2001	Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA)
12/26/2001	Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM)
12/26/2001	Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT)
3/27/2002	Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AAMB)
3/27/2002	Asbat al-Ansar (AAA)
3/27/2002	al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)
8/9/2002	Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA)
10/23/2002	Jemaah Islamiya (JI)

1/30/2003	Lashkar i Jhangvi (LJ)
3/22/2004	Ansar al-Islam (AAI)
7/13/2004	Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA)
12/17/2004	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (formerly al-Qa'ida in Iraq)
6/17/2005	Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)
3/5/2008	Harakat ul-Jihad-i-Islami/Bangladesh (HUJI-B)
3/18/2008	al-Shabaab
5/18/2009	Revolutionary Struggle (RS)
7/2/2009	Kata'ib Hizballah (KH)
1/19/2010	al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)
8/6/2010	Harakat ul-Jihad-i-Islami (HUJI)
9/1/2010	Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)
11/4/2010	Jundallah
5/23/2011	Army of Islam (AOI)
9/19/2011	Indian Mujahedeen (IM)
3/13/2012	Jemaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT)
5/30/2012	Abdallah Azzam Brigades (AAB)
9/19/2012	Haqqani Network (HQN)
3/22/2013	Ansar al-Dine (AAD)
11/14/2013	Boko Haram
11/14/2013	Ansaru
12/19/2013	al-Mulathamun Battalion
1/13/2014	Ansar al-Shari'a in Benghazi
1/13/2014	Ansar al-Shari'a in Darnah
1/13/2014	Ansar al-Shari'a in Tunisia
4/10/2014	ISIL Sinai Province (formally Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis)
5/15/2014	al-Nusra Front
8/20/2014	Mujahidin Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC)
9/30/2015	Jaysh Rijal al-Tariq al Naqshabandi (JRTN)
1/14/2016	ISIL-Khorasan (ISIL-K)
5/20/2016	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's Branch in Libya (ISIL-Libya)
6/30/2016	Al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent
8/16/2017	Hizbul Mujahideen (HM)
2/27/2018	ISIS-Bangladesh

2/27/2018	ISIS-Philippines	
2/27/2018	ISIS-West Africa	
Delisted Foreign Terrorist Organizations		
Date Removed	Name	Date Originally Designated
10/8/1999	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine -Hawatmeh Faction	10/8/1997
10/8/1999	Khmer Rouge	10/8/1997
10/8/1999	Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front Dissidents	10/8/1997
10/8/2001	Japanese Red Army	10/8/1997
10/8/2001	Tupac Amaru Revolution Movement	10/8/1997
5/18/2009	Revolutionary Nuclei	10/8/1997
10/15/2010	Armed Islamic Group (GIA)	10/8/1997
9/28/2012	Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK)	10/8/1997
5/28/2013	Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM)	10/11/2005
7/15/2014	United Self Defense Forces of Colombia	9/10/2001
9/3/2015	Revolutionary Organization 17 November (17N)	10/8/1997
12/9/2015	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)	12/17/2004
6/1/2017	Abu Nidal Organization (ANO)	

Appendix B: Methodology

My interest in this project began with being hyperaware of the biased and unfair perception of Muslims portrayed in the media. The representations of Islam in the media were completely different from my experiences with Islam. My intention with this project was to illuminate the connections between terrorism and Islamophobia, particularly because the rhetoric on terrorism is so powerful in channeling patriotism and demanding reactions with harmful implications to racialized Muslims. This thesis was a culmination of work from various social science disciplines, with the hopes of bridging the gaps in the literature through engaging related works that were often done separately from one another. An important aspect of my work is the discussion of Islamic tradition in conjunction with historical contextualization of US meddling in global politics.

To begin my research, I started searching for legal definitions of terrorism within legislation and academia. I found that there was no clear explanation of how someone could be charged with terrorism or terrorism-related charges despite the vast body of literature dedicated to the study of terrorism. Through engagement with scholars on terrorism, I was able to locate sections within legislation that referred to definitions of terrorism. I also wanted to highlight the popular notions of terrorism, which were highlighted by prominent political figures, as well as, the media. Within the first section of the terrorism chapter, I include a comparison of newspaper headlines in response to violence perpetrated by Muslims and non-Muslims. These comparisons were made by choosing acts of violence that were similar based on their method, as well as, the number of casualties. This method of comparison has been used by various scholars (The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2018; Powell, 2011; Chermak, 2006; Hodgson & Tadros, 2013; Papacharissi, 2008). I chose to move into the discussion of encounters with the

West and the progression of Islamism after the chapter on defining terrorism because I wanted the reader to hold the definitions of terrorism present in their minds as I presented the acts of intervention by the United States. Both the framing of terrorism and US global intervention are important in understanding the spreading of anti-Muslim sentiment.

Through my discussion of terrorism as defined by the media, I noted the use of Islamic terminology including *shari'a*, *jihad*, etc., which prompted me to think about the ways to engage in a discussion of this terminology without reducing Islamic thought as a reactionary response to a Western framework. For this reason, the third chapter on the implications of terrorism opens up with the exploration of Islamic thought and tradition. In this way, I was able to highlight the rich and vast tradition of Islamic thought, while also addressing the co-optation of theological terms. This leads into the discussion of stereotypes faced by racialized Muslims. I chose to juxtapose the section of Islamic thought and tradition with the section on stereotypes within the same chapter to highlight the stark difference in representation. Within the section on stereotypes, I was also able to offer critique, provide historical context, and present the effect on lived experiences.

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