Islamophobia: An Introduction to the Academic Field, Methods, and Approaches

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Introduction

Academic fields, even those with established records of examining marginalized communities, are still early in the process of examining "othering" of Islam and Muslims and the racialization of its followers. Moreover, in a broadly secular society and in secular universities in areas such as the USA and Europe, Islam and its adherents are not considered participants or partners in the affairs of "civil society," thus relegating the subject to a single field of religious studies or possibly Middle/Near Eastern Studies. This has resulted in a structural marginalization of the study of Islamophobia at the university.

How should we approach Islamophobia and can we think of it within the field of postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, sociology, or area studies? What is the relationship between present-day Islamophobia and well-documented race and gender discourses? Should Islamophobia be studied as the new manifestation of old patterns of racial and gender formation or can we think of alternative models due to the specificity of the subject matter and the added religious dimension? Furthermore, how should we examine Islamophobia as the new otherness while critiquing Muslim internal and external discourses?

Another set of questions must contend with the postcolonial theory and decolonization. What would be the impact of moving from a postcolonial approach to a decolonial theoretical framework? How does examining and deconstructing Islamophobia impact this area and contribute to the development of a new paradigm? What new or

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modified theoretical frameworks should be employed? Are the existing academic fields and their current methodologies able to deconstruct Islamophobia, or do we need adjustments and, if so, where and how?

All the above questions and others bearing on the field and many areas remain unresolved or unaddressed altogether. Yet on a broader level, the "war on terror" single focus on the Muslim subject and Islam created a global context for the deployment of Islamophobic discourses to rationalize pernicious and highly discriminatory policies across the world. It also brought the field into an early and speedy level of maturity, giving researchers accelerated engagement with power, racism, militarism, and scholarly production and an accelerated level of scholarly production. The Islamophobia Studies field is a budding enterprise, and this volume and its unique contributions in the intersectionality of healthcare, mental health, and anti-Muslim discourses are an illustration of this precise point.

Tracing the Origins of the Term

At the start, let us agree that Islamophobia is an imperfect term. Debating the validity or accuracy of the term Islamophobia is a healthy and worthwhile academic exercise. Almost predictably, every conference in the past 12 years on Islamophobia has raised the question of the term's validity and whether an alternative one might be more useful. Here, I am not only entertaining the rejection of the term altogether by individuals and groups that belong to the Islamophobia industry but also its rejection by those who not only assert that there is no such problem called Islamophobia but rather go further to assert that it is a made-up term to silence any criticism of Islam and the protection of Western civilization from being infiltrated and over run by Muslims. Debate around the validity of the term is no longer a central concern of the Islamophobia Studies field and is only a tangential undertaking without any bearing on the increasing scope of scholarly production. On the contrary, the term has already been extensively adopted into public policy discourses both domestically in the USA and across the globe. Consequently, the United Nations, European Union, and Organization of Islamic Cooperation have all adopted the term at one level or another, and reporting and investigation agencies often use it in publications.

Tracing the emergence of the term is an important aspect of Islamophobia Studies field, which began in the early part of the twentieth century. The term Islamophobia first appears in the French language in relation to the discriminatory treatment directed at Muslims in North Africa by French colonial administrators. *Islamophobie* was the French term used by Alphonse Etienne Dinet in a book written in 1916 and published around 1918 [1]. In the English translation of the book, the word was rendered for meaning purposes "feelings inimical to Islam," but not yet codified into the term Islamophobia [1].

On April 29, 2018, at the 9th Annual UC Berkeley Islamophobia Conference, Seyda Karaoglu presented an original paper, Islamophobia à la Française: A Definition in Étienne Dinet's Hajj Travelogue, based on her master's thesis, which is

a translation "and a study of The Pilgrimage to the Sacred House of Allah (1930), a hajj travelogue by French orientalist painter Étienne Nasreddine Dinet, also believed by many to have coined the term "*islamophobie*." [2] The first attempt to define the term, according to Karaoglu, can be attributed to Étienne Dinet and Sliman Ben Ibrahim [2]. In their work, Karaoglu maintains that "Dinet and Ben Ibrahim defined Islamophobia as the "persistence of Europe's more or less disguised hostility against Islam." Significantly, Karaoglu was impressive in identifying Dinet's and Ben Ibrahim's framing "three elements that are essential to understanding the phenomenon," pointing out that for Dinet, "Islamophobia was first and foremost inscribed in a history that goes back to the Crusades. It was then understood as 'an ideology of conquest' against colonial forces." [2] Finally, Karaoglu maintains that Dinet suggested a typology of Islamophobia, distinguishing between "pseudoscientific Islamophobia" and "clerical Islamophobia." [2] Most importantly, however, Karaoglu argues that Dinet depicts Islamophobia as a networked political ideology developed in bad faith, rather than a simple matter of ignorance about the Muslim faith at the individual level [2].

What Dinet and Ben Ibrahim referred to as Europe's hostility toward Islam was embedded into the European colonial project. Certainly, the French, British, and Dutch colonial programs were racist and posited the inferiority of the colonized population, Muslims included, which involved a process that made possible a whole host of policies to "civilize" the native populations across the globe. Dinet and Ben Ibrahim's use of the term Islamophobia was not in connection to specific colonial policies; rather, it was generally used to describe the ill-treatment directed at the colonized Muslim subject.

Another engagement with the phenomenon of Islamophobia without the actual use of the term itself is easily ascertainable in the work of Franz Fannon, a West Indian psychoanalyst and social philosopher, who wrote a number of important works focused on the Muslim colonial subject. Fanon's work includes *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952; Black Skin, White Masks) which provided "a multidisciplinary analysis of the effect of colonialism on racial consciousness," using his work under French colonial administration [3]. Fanon's most widely known book and published before his death is *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961, The Wretched of the Earth), a work that served as a foundational text for decolonial studies and arguably examined the impacts of Islamophobia without naming it as such. Fanon's experience and theoretical contribution in the field of colonial studies formed in Algeria, the Global South, may be considered as the precursor to the emergence of the term Islamophobia and the treatment of Muslims and Islam in the Global North. As an enterprise, the colonial project was constructed around Islamophobia and sought to negate and dehumanize the Muslim subject him/herself, so as to rationalize and embark upon a program of civilization and domination.

Taking a decolonial and world history approach to the Islamophobia Studies field, Ramon Grosfoguel locates the emergence of Islamophobia in the critical events arising from 1492, the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain and the "discovery" of the new world [4]. In a very widely used article in decolonial studies, "Epistemic Islamophobia and Colonial Social Sciences," Grosfoguel defines and

locates Islamophobia in the emergence of the modern world centered on a process of "genocides and epistemicides" committed against indigenous population including Muslims and Jews [4]. Here, Grosfoguel is arguing that Islamophobia is rooted in knowledge production of the West, which produces Eurocentric worldviews that are inherently founded upon racial demarcation at the level of the human. Ramon maintains that "Epistemic racism in the form of epistemic Islamophobia is a foundational and constitutive logic of the modern/colonial world and of its legitimate forms of knowledge production." [4] Ramon's field of Islamophobia Studies originates in l492 and locates the problem in the formation of the modern Eurocentric world with all the erasures, genocides, and sub-humanness that gave birth to it.

Another article by Ramon Grosfoguel and Eric Mielants (2006), "The Long-Durée Entanglement Between Islamophobia and Racism in the Modern/Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal World-System: An Introduction," provides a road map to Islamophobia Studies from a decolonial vintage point [5]. The article provides four different ways to think about and conceptualize the academic approach to Islamophobia: (1) Islamophobia as a form of racism in a world-historical perspective, (2) Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism, (3) Islamophobia as Orientalism, and (4) Islamophobia as epistemic racism [5]. Gorsfoguel and Mielants maintain "that Islamophobia as a form of racism against Muslim people is not only manifested in the labor market, education, public sphere, global war against terrorism, or the global economy, but also in the epistemological battleground about the definition of the priorities in the world today." [5] The essay is a very useful mapping of Islamophobia across different fields, connecting it to existing frames of academic research.

Coming closer to the more recent period are the late Edward Said's books, *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam*, which managed to reintroduce the term Islamophobia into scholarly circulation as a way to understand the intensification of hostilities toward Islam and Muslims in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution. Said's work provided both a historical lens to explore knowledge production relative to the Muslim subject in Western academia, and a theoretical framing by which to understand the process of otherization. Orientalism located the otherization of Muslims in Western discourse to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1797 and the setting in motion of representations of the East [6]. Here, Said's work locates Islamophobia within the scope of modern European colonization, centering the field on the reproduction of distorted representations of the Arab and Muslim subject. In *Covering Islam*, Said traces the tropes and frames used by the media when talking about Islam and Muslims, which continue to be deployed on a regular basis despite the wealth of information and contacts with the Muslim world [7]. Said's Covering Islam was one of the early works on media representations of Islam and Muslims, which should be read next to Jack Shaheen's seminal work, *The Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, which examined the persistent deployment of stereotypes in movies and TV production [8]. "Public enemy #1" was Jack Shaheen's framing of how Hollywood represents Arabs and post 9/11 Muslims in US media and based on his close examination of over 1000 movies and TV shows (2014: *The Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*) [8]. Up to the date of his passing

in 2017, Professor Jack Shaheen challenged Islamophobia directly before and post 9/11 and was a major critical voice in efforts to counter the pernicious deployment of discredited stereotypes; his contribution stands the test of time.

Islamophobia Entry into Public Policy

A critical moment in the Islamophobia Studies field was the publication of a report by The Runnymede Trust, an independent research and social policy agency which established the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia to examine the problem in the UK. The Commission's report, "Islamophobia: a challenge for us all," was the first such document to examine the problem with an eye toward public policy, using a multifaceted research to ground its findings and recommendations. Runnymede used the term Islamophobia to refer to "unfounded hostility toward Islam" which then provided eight different contrasting sets of what the Commission called closed views versus open views of Islam [9]. In the publication, the commission identified two goals for the report: "(a) to counter Islamophobic assumptions that Islam is a single monolithic system, without internal development, diversity and dialogue, and (b) to draw attention to the principal dangers which Islamophobia creates or exacerbates for Muslim communities, and therefore for the well-being of society as a whole." [9] It is interesting to note that the Runnymede Trust First Commission was set up in 1992 to address the issue of anti-Semitism in contemporary Britain and published a report on the subject in 1994. A reference to Runnymede Trust using the term as early as 1991/1992 is mentioned, but the issued report provides the most concrete entry of Islamophobia into public policy debates. Following the anti-Semitism report, the Commission shifted toward addressing the rising tide of Islamophobia. The report offered some 60 recommendations to various governmental bodies, schools, and civil society institutions to counter the problem. The entry of Islamophobia into public policy and the beginning of a sustained academic engagement in the subject are directly connected to this initial contribution in the UK influencing scholarship across the world.

The emergence and intensification of Islamophobia in the British context followed the Salman Rushdie Affair, the publishing of the controversial novel *The Satanic Verses*, which was based or inspired by Prophet Muhammad's life. Massive protests in the UK and many parts of the Muslim world followed the publication of the novel. Then in 1989, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, issued a fatwa (a religious opinion) calling for Muslims to punish Rushdie for committing blasphemy by attacking the character of Islam's Prophet. The demarcation lines between foreign and domestic were completely blurred and demonization of Britain's Muslim population for protesting the publication was the focus of the extensive Islamophobic campaign. Thus, the Runnymede Trust's report emerges out of and in response to the intensification of the otherization campaign directed at Muslims in Britain in the aftermath of the Rushdie Affair.

Consequently, the Runnymede report should serve as the actual birth date of the Islamophobia Studies field and the entry into the academic and public discourse of

researchers, journalists, and university professors undertaken to interrogate the phenomenon. The distinction I make between the earlier works on Muslims in Western imagination and policy versus the emergence of the Islamophobia Studies field is one of concrete focus on policies and regulations that impact Muslim subjects in specific Western contexts, which was for the first time quantified and legally challenged. Earlier conceptualizations, references, and engagement with the term and the phenomenon were undertaken broadly, referencing the colonial and postcolonial discourses effecting Muslim majority states. What the Runnymede report provided is a grounding of otherization of Muslims in Western society and a locating of it within the long and well-documented history of racism, anti-Semitism, and discrimination.

In 2017, the Runnymede Trust issued a 20th anniversary follow-up to the initial report entitled, *Islamophobia: Still a challenge for us all,* with the "aim… to improve the accuracy and quality of public and policy debate and action in response to Islamophobia." [10] The 20th anniversary report offered a longer and more complex definition to the term: "Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life" [10].

Pedagogical Challenges Facing the Islamophobia Studies Field

The pedagogical challenge is how to study Islamophobia without constantly accepting the externalization of the subject matter, making sure that the approach is understood within the context of critical race theory and related fields including sociology, anthropology, American studies, decolonial and postcolonial studies, and labor and migration studies. Indeed, early scholarly engagement with the field was limited, and responses to Islamophobia were primarily focused on countering negative media and political representations of Islam and attacks on Muslim civil rights. While this work is important and was badly needed at the time, the long-term and structural approach to deconstructing Islamophobia was an urgently needed shift and the only way to undo the Eurocentric way of thinking that informs the media and shapes the political discourse. Here, the book, *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, edited by Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller offers a unique contribution to the field. The editors provide a more critical way to approach the subject by offering the "five pillars of Islamophobia": (1) the institutions and machinery of the state; (2) the far right, incorporating the counter-jihad movement; (3) the neoconservative movement; (4) the transnational Zionist movement; (5) and assorted liberal groupings including the pro-war left and the new atheist movement [11]. The UK research group situates Islamophobia within existing power structures and examines the forces that consciously produce anti-Muslim discourses, the Islamophobia industry, within a broad political agenda.

One of the most engaged scholars with a focused Decolonial approach to Islamophobia is Professor Salman Sayyid, a professor of Social Theory and Decolonial Thought, Head of the School of Sociology and Social Policy at University of Leeds. In 2006 Professor Sayyid organized a workshop hosted by the Centre of Ethnicity and Racism Studies at the University of Leeds (Thinking Thru' Islamophobia) from which the collection of 28 essays co-edited with Abdoolkarim Vakil emerged (Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives). This volume pioneered a radically novel typology of Islamophobia recognizing its global scope (including its occurrence in Muslim contexts) and a political perspective (rather than media and representational theorization of Islamophobia) which articulates local racist and global colonial hierarchies [12]. The approach outlined in that collection is one that Professor Sayyid has built upon. There are four main characteristics of this approach. Firstly, it sees Islamophobia as a historical phenomenon not a timeless one beginning with the Qur'iash or merely a response to 9/11 [12]. Secondly, the approach is characterized by the idea that Islamophobia is global rather than just national or local [12]. Therefore, you can see Islamophobes who are Muslims, and you can also have Islamophobes where there are no Muslims. Thirdly, Professor Sayyid conceptualizes Islamophobia not in relation to hostility or hatred of Muslims but rather as a form of racialized governmentality [12]. Islamophobia is about disciplining Muslims by reference to Westernizing horizons [12]. In other words, the point of Islamophobia is denied Muslim agency. This why Sayyid is convinced Islamophobia occurs only for Muslims as political subjects who have been subjugated. Fourthly, he understands the causes of Islamophobia not in psychological terms or in terms of media distortion but ultimately as political [12]. For Islamophobia is about how we transform relations between the ruled and rulers [12].

Professor Sayyid's approach to Islamophobia is an intersection between critical race theory, decolonial thought, and discourse theory which can be described as Critical Muslim Studies. Academic discussions of Islam and Muslims have tended to be dominated by Orientalism, whether framed within anthropological/ethnographic perspectives, or Islamic Studies, or international relations. In sociology and political theory, Muslims were not part of mainstream disciplinary debates and research. Critical Muslim Studies is a broad multi-fronted effort to develop a distinct research program as an approach to Islam and Muslims which is not bound by disciplinary constraints and is informed by dialogue with critical theory, poststructuralism, and postcolonial political theory. Sayyid's approach is to recognize that the analysis of Islamophobia often reproduces Orientalist tropes, and therefore it is critically important to develop methods and modes of research that go beyond them. Otherwise, the study of Islamophobia becomes part of the problem, not the solution, as it celebrates "moderate Muslims" [12]. Professor Sayyid observes: "My involvement in a project to produce a countering Islamophobia toolkit has reminded me how much of mainstream critique of Islamophobia studies is complicit with the prevailing racial order. The fundamental reason for the spread of Islamophobia is lack of political will to counter it" [12].

Currently, Professor Sayyid is working with Abdoolkarim Vakil on a project to develop a theory of Islamophobia. The difficulty, of course, is that this means taking Islamophobia Studies seriously as a field of study, rejecting the insularity, presentism, and lack of rigor of much of the work that is produced. It seems incredible to Sayyid that "so much research on Islamophobia appears without referencing the existing literature on the topic, without being aware of Islamophobia Studies journal. Books on Islamophobia often appear that are presented as novel contributions -where such evaluations are very often based on ignorance of the field" [12]. Decolonizing the study of Islamophobia is an essential prelude to understanding the phenomenon.

On the European front, Farid Hafez offers a major contribution to the academic field with both the Islamophobia Year Book and the annual European Islamophobia Report project. Farid's entry into the Islamophobia Studies field comes directly from his Ph.D. thesis, work which focused on legal restrictions on building mosques and minarets in two Austrian counties. Farid's first book, *Islamophobia in Austria*, co-authored with John Bunzl, won the prestigious Bruno-Kreisky-Anerkennungspreis of the Dr. Karl-Renner-Institut. Since Islamophobia has different modes of expression, Farid has been able to craft a niche in the Islamophobia Studies field in the German-speaking countries as a primary area of specialization as well as to create a scholarly infrastructure across Europe to produce the annual European report. The academic engagement and scholarly research on Islamophobia in German-speaking countries are linked theoretically to comparable anti-Semitism studies. Naturally, the history and experiences of Jews in Germany serve as a touchstone for examining structurally and epistemically the process of otherization directed at Muslims in the contemporary period.

Forging the Islamophobia Studies field is the current focus of the work at UC Berkeley's Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project (IRDP). This academic program applies a scholarly, systematic, and empirical approach to the study of Islamophobia and its impact on the Muslim communities and minorities in general [13]. What is unique at Berkeley is that the Project is situated within ethnic studies and locates Islamophobia in the long history of othering in the USA and Europe that is grounded in postcolonial theory. Up to this point, the Project has been able to set up an extensive global academic network of faculty, graduate students, and researchers engaged in work related to Islamophobia. The network is formed around a series of annual conferences, each dealing with critical and regionally focused issues.

Approaching the subject in academia requires a fundamental shift in how we define Islamophobia and identify the areas of emphasis for research as we work to counter this pernicious phenomenon. At Berkeley's IRDP, which serves as a global hub for the field, Islamophobia is defined as "a structural organizing principle that is employed to rationalize and extend the dominant global power alignment, while attempting to silence the collective global other" [13]. Yes, the basic term, "Islamophobia," can be defined as "fear," "anxiety," or "phobia" of Muslims, but at the same time, it is a far more encompassing process impacting law, economy, media, and society [13]. At one level, its civil society ideologues attempt to classify

who belongs to the "civilized world," the criteria for membership, and who is the demonized and ostracized global other [13]. At a deeper level, Islamophobia is a renewed drive to rationalize existing domestic and global racial stratification, economic power hierarchies, and open-ended militarism [13]. Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms racial structures that are used to regulate resource distribution domestically and globally [13].

At the core, demonization of the Muslim subject has less to do with the subject himself/herself and more to do with the cunning forces that view the targeting of Muslims and Islam as the best strategy to rehabilitate their discredited agenda and image in society. Peddling and stoking fear is utilized as a substitute for offering sound economic and social policies and engaging in legitimate debates on how best to address the multitude of challenges facing society in general.

The strategy has been tried and tested many times in the past with devastating consequences. Claiming to defend and protect society from a "strange," "foreign," or "different" ethnic, religious, and racial grouping is not new and always ends in absolute disaster. A brief examination of America's history gives us many examples of such a strategy: targeting Native Americans; oppressing African-Americans during slavery, Jim Crow, and to the present; passing the Chinese Exclusionary Act; demonizing Catholics; encouraging anti-Semitism and targeting Eastern Jewish immigrants in the early period of the twentieth century; enforcing Japanese internment; and perpetuating the anti-Mexican discourse. Examining each these episodes in America's history, we can identify the political forces that used fear, bigotry, and demonization to gain power for themselves while claiming a defense of the country from enemies, which in each case led to undermining the constitutional, ethical, and moral foundation of society itself.

Critically, targeting Muslims in the USA serves as a convenient foil for right-wing political forces desiring to roll back civil rights legislation, voter and immigration rights, environmental protection, and equitable economic policies. Islamophobia makes it possible to reduce and narrow the scope of the debates and to frame national issues under the rubric of national security, through a manipulative appeal to patriotism. Here, the terms of debate are set by right-wing forces but also draw in the center, left, and segments of the progressives who respond to criticisms of religion and Islam, such as impassioned arguments to save Muslim women from Muslim men in faraway lands. We must be reminded that the debates are not about the nature of Islam as a religion but rather about the rights of Muslims as citizens and equals in American and Western society in general. Reducing the rights and citizenship of Muslims to a debate about the nature of Islam allows the right wing and Islamophobes to externalize and demonize Muslims, especially by magnifying cultural differences, a strategy which then is packaged into campaigns to save Western society from a possible takeover.

What is deployed first by the right wing eventually infuses all civil society, and the scope of the national debate begins to reflect bigotry at every turn. Let us be clear that the reactionary forces in America that opposed the passage of the Civil Rights, Voting Rights, and Immigration and Nationality Acts have set their sights on reversing the much-needed progress in the country and are utilizing Islamophobia

as the Trojan Horse to achieve this objective. "Take our country back" is shorthand for opposing equality, fairness, and dignity for all Americans, and Islamophobia is used to obfuscate the real targets.

Let us dispense with the notion that the problem of Islamophobia is driven by the media and the constant negative representation of Islam and Muslims. While I concur that media coverage intensifies the problem, the role of the press, as Noam Chomsky aptly argued, is to manufacture consent of the governed [14]. Right-wing economic and political forces identify society's supposed enemies, and the media then is off to the races with the needed distorted coverage. The corporate media is an economic enterprise owned by elites in the Global North, and the scope of coverage is shaped by those who own and operate media organizations. The media pursues the agenda that reflects the elite's priorities, and journalists are under a tight rein on who, what, or when is to be covered, with the final content subject to editorial control.

Targeting Muslims makes them an instrument to shape and reshape power disparities at a time when right-wing political and economic ideas in the West have failed. Right-wing ideas such as deregulation, privatization of education, reducing taxes while expanding military expenditure, shrinking government, and trickle-down economics have ended in failure. Islamophobia, then, emerges from right-wing elites in Western society who are fighting ideological battles among themselves, with Muslims construed as the enemy, making it possible for a proxy cultural, ideological, economic, and religious war to take shape. Fear of Muslims is used as a diversion from the real causes behind social and economic difficulties arising from massive global shifts and, indeed, failed right-wing policies.

In the imagination of civil society, Islam and Muslims are judged and approached as pre-constructed and never allowed to enter the discourse independently. Islam and Muslims become what is imagined and consumed in the confines of a closed-circuit internal reproduction system that always points back to the imagined.

Just as the Star Wars movies have created a rich discourse and tapestry about an imagined and unreal outer space, the Islamophobic imagination has succeeded in creating an unreal picture of Islam and Muslims. What people see and experience daily about the faith is akin to a well-arranged studio set with characters and props to fit into the Islamophobic narrative. Facts, data, and real narratives are irrelevant in the Islamophobic imagination because the constructed frame filters everything and reduces it to stereotypes centering around violence and terror. Unfortunately, many news organizations and political leaders end up reproducing an imaginary reality that links Islam to violent extremism. Furthermore, when for a moment or in complete error the narrative departs from the imagined violent norm, it is corrected by pointing out that these discrepancies represent mere exceptions.

Expansion of the Field

The emergence of the Islamophobia Studies field in the USA is directly linked first to the aftermath of 9/11, which witnessed a spike in attacks directed at Muslims and those are mistaken to be Muslims, as the case of the Sikh community

illustrates. The second significant impact on the emergence of the field resulted from the campaign and election of Barak Obama, the first African-American president accused of being a closet Muslim both during the Democratic primary and the general election. Attacking candidate Obama for his supposed Muslim background or being a closet Muslim was used as a signpost for anti-Blackness and served as fodder for conspiracy theorists as well as the conniving strategists who wanted to seize a wedge issue that could propel Hilary Clinton first as the candidate for the Democratic Party and then the Republicans into the White House after the Iraq War disaster. The Birther Movement, arising from this Islamophobic discourse, sought in 2008 to monetize it into votes at the ballot box. However, the strategy did not work in the 2008 presidential campaign: The US public, exhausted from the disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, was on an anti-war footing and sought to shift power to the Democratic Party.

The third and certainly most significant impact on the field was made by the 2010 midterm elections and the episode of the "Ground Zero Mosque" which thrust Islamophobia into normative mainstream discourses. Just as the Rushdie Affair provided the context for a spike in Islamophobia and the subsequent research and documentation in the UK, the "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy thrusts the issue to the forefront so that no one had the luxury of ignoring it. It is important to remember that the framing of the Cordoba Center into the "Ground Zero Mosque" was the work of Pamela Geller, a central figure in the Islamophobia Industry, which was used as tool to mobilize for Tea Party candidates and extreme right-wing Republicans in the 2010 midterm elections. Here, the election of 2008 served as a catalyst for setting up at UC Berkeley's Center for Race and Gender the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project, a research program to examine the increasing hostility and demonization of Muslims in the USA. In the aftermath of the 2010 election, the Islamophobia Studies Journal began to serve as a hub for the increasing and varied scholarly engagement with the new academic field. In the same way that ethnic studies was born out of the complex set of events and responses to the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam mobilization, the Islamophobia Studies field emerged organically to interrogate and deconstruct the various strands that are at work to otherwise and demonize Muslims and Islam in the contemporary period.

At present, the academic landscape at universities presents a number of challenges for the growth and emergence of the Islamophobia Studies field. First, the challenge at the university level is the continued persistence of what I call latent Islamophobia, which impacts how the subject is addressed and whether academic programs begin to take on the subject matter without the entrenched discriminatory and orientalist attitudes brought to bear on incipient efforts. Second, existing ethnic studies, immigration, labor, and sociology to name a few fields are often uneasy about engaging Muslims and Islam as a racialized group or phenomenon, since this is outside of their constructed canon. A third major challenge is that an increasing number of security and terrorism studies that are focused on the Muslim subject are at the core built on a latent Eurocentric and Islamophobic orientation to knowledge that views Islam/Muslims as a unique and subhuman, apt to produce violence that requires new modes of research and engagement. Here, the emerging fields of

securitization and terrorism studies (with some exceptions) are running to affirm the core problematics that the Islamophobia Studies field is working to challenge. A fourth challenge at universities comes from the explicit links and funding sources that are connected directly or indirectly to the US government with heavy contribution from the Department of Defense and other security-related programs. Heavy dependence on federal funding for various programs and area studies causes institutions to keep a distance from engaging critically and objectively the Muslim subject and Islam. These programs tend to produce a "safe" area of engagement that broadly reflects federal funding priorities. A fifth major challenge to universities embracing the Islamophobia Studies field is the prevalence of pro-Israel voices within the Islamophobia industry, which tend to produce a constant pressure on administrators and leadership to remain at a distance from Muslims and programs that might expose the existing Islamophobic networks and the links to Israel's PR strategies in the USA. This has produced a constant pressure to keep the academic programs away from a "normalized" relationship or engagement with Muslims at the university level.

In the months and years ahead, the Islamophobia Studies field will take shape, and more resources coming into the mix will energize and provide needed space and the academic support. We can end on a positive note by calling attention to the growth in numbers of graduate students, a few with completed Ph.D. theses during the past 3 years, who have engaged and energized the field. This new stream of academics and practitioners in the field, which will contribute to opening new vistas for research and engagement, will forge spaces in universities and centers that otherwise would not have examined the issues due to lack of specialists in the field. The field is here to stay, and the current volume, coming from a new field of scholarly research, will contribute to its continued growth and impact.

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