

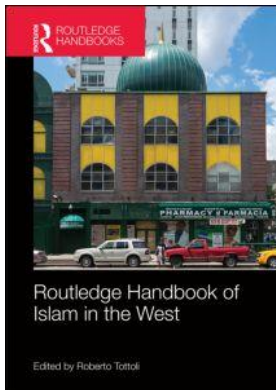
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### **Social and political Islamophobia**

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# Social and political Islamophobia

## Stereotyping, surveillance, and silencing

Salua Fawzi

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Much of the literature treating Islamophobia credits the infamous Runnymede Trust publication *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (Runnymede Trust 1997) with being the first to use this term in contemporary discourses. The report explains how the term Islamophobia describes the prejudice, hostility, and hatred directed towards Muslims that excludes them from mainstream political and social affairs, and proposes solutions for minimizing its effects. Since its appearance in the Runnymede report, the term Islamophobia has continued to generate a plethora of academic literature.<sup>1</sup> Some of this literature has attempted to determine its expediency and articulate how it is useful in describing some of the many injustices directed at Islam and Muslims, especially those living in the West.<sup>2</sup> Other literature suggests that “Islamophobia comes off as a nebulous and perpetually contested category” (Sayyid 2010: 2), that it “is the term plus its social histories, including contestations, in materially embedded forms” (Vakil 2010: 72), and that it possesses no widely agreed upon or accepted definition that “permits systematic comparative and causal analysis” (Bleich 2011: 1581).

Despite these valid and even cautionary insights encouraging a thorough, concrete,<sup>3</sup> and more transparent conceptualization of how the term is being employed and what social phenomenon it is in fact describing, politicians, academics, activists, lawyers, and ordinary citizens continue to use the term with little hesitation in a variety of polemical discourses. Thus, despite the contestable and ambiguous nature of the term “Islamophobia,” one reality looms bright. Islamophobia, whether it accounts for a form of racism, a moral panic, or a deep-seated fear of a religion or individuals who practice that religion, is gravely affecting the lives of Muslims living in the West and does not appear to be subsiding in spite of outspoken critics from both within and outside of various Muslim and non-Muslim circles. It is not surprising, then, that Islamophobia, given its occupied space in political, academic, religious, and media discourses, has come to define a bitter social reality in which Islam and Muslims are considered threats to social security and welfare. However, while Islamophobia may initially target a particular religion or the followers of that religion, its ramifications extend beyond Islam and Muslims, in that its influence has demonstrated that the restriction of civil liberties is possible so long as a socio-political agenda, whether or not it is warranted or justified, has gained clout amongst a frightened and consenting population.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter will begin by exploring examples of Islamophobia in the United States and Europe and how Muslims have responded to the challenges imposed on them. It will then move to a discussion of American Muslim youth as well as the NYPD's counter-terrorism program, which targeted Muslims in New York and neighboring states, especially Muslim students. In doing so, it hopes to contribute to research on the experiences of Muslim American youth and highlight the negative impact that Islamophobia continues to have on the identity formation of an impressionable demographic that respectfully continues to resist and challenge the stereotypical and discriminatory policies that are preventing it from exercising its freedom of religion and speech, in a nation that has often taken pride in offering its citizens such privileges.

### Political and social Islamophobia

According to Greg Noble (2012: 215), "Islamophobia as the intensification of a long-standing anti-Muslim prejudice amounting to a widespread hostility in the West, is a complex and dynamic phenomenon." As such, it is important to bear in mind that those who may be deemed "Islamophobes" or acts that might be considered "Islamophobic," like those Muslims they target, cannot fall into one clean and unified camp, which is a significant point to consistently bear in mind for those attempting to pinpoint the reasons, fears, and anxieties fueling such rhetoric and behavior.

One argument that has gained popularity in anti-Islamic discourses since 9/11 is whether or not Western societies should be accommodating towards Islam and Muslims. Bryan S. Turner (2011: 169) contends that "the possibilities for pluralism and tolerance have since 9/11 been severely tested and constrained by a discourse of terrorism and security" whereby an "intelligent and cosmopolitan treatment of Islamic communities in Europe and elsewhere has been halted by legal and political responses to 'terrorism'." While discourses regarding the maintenance of security are not detrimental to social order or cohesion *per se*, the more recent establishment of binaries that pin good vs. evil, non-Muslims vs. Muslim as well as us vs. them divide society and erode any potential for constructive and engaging dialogue that encourages mutual understanding and respect. The need for nurturing such potential is becoming increasingly urgent when politically driven public discourse on terrorism and national security still dominate and undermine the potential for a cohesive and pluralistic society.

As Mehdi Semati (2010: 259–61) notes, the current discourse on Islam and Muslims is "inextricably bound with the issue of terrorism, which tends to frame all other issues concerning the Middle East" and has led to the "intensification of the generic category of 'Arab-Middle Eastern Muslim' Other." This essentialized "other" takes root in a variety of popular discourses fashioning Muslims into a homogeneous, fixed, and unwavering category that is anti-modern and, more importantly, anti-Western, with little regard for the easily detectable and accessibly identifiable nuances that in fact represent Muslims from all around the world who simply do not embody this negative and dangerous depiction.

If such nuances exist, and terrorist acts initiated by Muslims only account for a small percentage of the larger Muslim population, why then does an Islamophobic sentiment still dominate popular Western discourses? According to Stephen Sheehi (2011: 131), "Islamophobia is not a political ideology in and of itself nor is it an isolated dogma just as Islam itself is not simply a political ideology." He cautions that Islamophobia is in fact something more "substantive, abstract, sustained, ingrained and prevalent," and that it derives from a "culture that deploys particular tropes, analysis, and beliefs, as facts upon which governmental policies and social practices are framed" (Sheehi 2011: 131). These Islamophobic beliefs, as Sheehi and many others have articulated, have very real consequences and deeply affect American Muslims, Arab

Americans, and people of Southwest Asia on a variety of levels (Sheehi 2011: 141). Some of these consequences include torture, kidnappings, incarcerations, executions, surveillance, entrapment, racial profiling, banning the building of mosques, Islamic schools and prayer rooms, along with more rampant hate crimes such as vandalism and hate speech. The American–Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) and the Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR) have diligently recorded these incidents.<sup>5</sup>

Other consequences have included federal policies that have supported unwarranted arrests, searches, and seizures, the closing of charities suspected to be affiliated with terrorist organizations, interrogations, detentions, deportations, all working under the assumption that Muslims are potential enemies within the state that must be controlled and punished by the state. Thus, given the aforementioned policies, “what is most problematic about Islamophobia is its essentializing and universalizing quality, which casts both Islam itself and all Muslims as real or potential enemies in a way that, if similarly applied to Jews or Christians, would seem delusional at best, vile at worst” (Shryock 2010: 9). One of the issues at stake, then, is that Islamophobia has not proven successful in generating policies that simply target these potentially dangerous threats to society and has expanded to the “familiar pattern of racial scapegoating,” where much of the stereotyping and discrimination affects those who are members of “groups crudely demarcated primarily by physical appearance” and are subsequently discriminated against in the same manner as Muslims (Love 2010: 193–4). The fact that non-Muslims are also being targeted based on physical appearance represents the racist elements of Islamophobia that do not constructively or strategically pinpoint potential threats and have instead included non-violent Muslims and non-Muslims under its questionably protective umbrella.

### The media and Islamophobia

Nathan Lean’s (2012: 40) account of Islamophobia argues that the threat of Islam has been purported by a variety of individuals who “used lurid imagery, emotive language, charged stereotypes, and repetition, to exacerbate fears of a larger-than-life, ever lurking Muslim presence.” Lean (2012: 184) also notes that the Islamophobia “industry” in the United States is growing, and has created and exploited fear as a means to coerce society, resulting in the perpetuation of prejudices and stereotypes that have found a niche in right-wing populism which has percolated into American and European societies, affording governments the opportunity to curtail civil liberties and constitutional rights without sufficient opposition from the general population. Frank P. Harvey (2008) similarly addresses this notion of amplified and fluid fear, in light of issues pertaining to the maintenance of homeland security, arguing that weak theories of fear can produce counterproductive policies that do not always assuage public anxieties. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, this fear has manifested itself beyond the fear of Muslims and Islam but has had a reverse effect in its inspiring fear amongst Muslims in the United States, who now fear their own government.<sup>6</sup>

According to Louise Cainkar (2010: 182), the federal government’s handling of domestic security post-9/11 via “its use of ‘us and them’ narratives, sweeping generalization, and dragnet actions buttressed the sentiments of hate-mongers by giving credibility to the notion that there was an identifiable terrorist phenotype and mode of dress.” A brief list of these fear-mongers includes some right-wing politicians (Conason 2010), supporters of America’s Tea Party movement such as Pamela Geller (Burghard and Zeskind 2010), conservative news agencies such as Fox News,<sup>7</sup> online bloggers, among others, who feed into the clamoring of a Muslim threat, oftentimes with questionable evidence. Furthermore, as Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood (2010: 131) note, “while Muslims are increasingly the subject of hostility and

discrimination ... their status as victims of racism is frequently challenged or denied.” Thus, what is problematic about the rhetoric espoused by these fear-mongers is their almost condescending ignorance of anti-Muslim prejudice as a substantial social phenomenon that needs to be addressed. This ignorance stages variant obstacles for Muslims<sup>8</sup> because it dismisses the need for social reforms which will afford them respect and safety.

Much of this media discrimination is apparent in various domestic debates. Such examples include the construction of Park51,<sup>9</sup> a proposed Islamic community center near the World Trade Center,<sup>10</sup> as well as debates over the eminent danger of *shari‘a* (Awad 2012).<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, this mass media coverage, which is “central to the development of a threatening environment and hatred of Muslims and Islam” (Iqbal 2010: 95), mythologizes Islam and creates a construction of Islam as an eternally backward and dangerous global threat in need of surveillance and control. Moreover, it remains dismissive, condescending, or skeptical of the internal and longstanding debates amongst Muslim intellectuals, thinkers, and activists who continue to make a concerted effort to address Islam’s relationship with modernity and the West in their writings and activist efforts.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, very little media coverage has been afforded to the positive achievements of Muslims throughout the world, including the efforts of activists vying for political and social reform. This is problematic given that these efforts might afford American and Western audiences the opportunity to reconsider the overarching threat of Islam and Muslims in a more informative way. Modifying the negative media coverage of Islam and Muslims is an arduous task, but, as Samer Shehata (2007: 81) notes, “If the communication traffic flows only in one direction, there is no dialogue. Muslims, both individuals and organizations, must demonstrate a concerted effort to combat radicalism.” While Shehata’s point should be well taken, it is also important to note that, given Arabs and Muslims do not possess the resources nor the media required for altering such widespread public opinion, “the tides of public opinion continue to operate against them” (Jamal 2009: 213). As such, it has yet to be determined whether their voices will gain resonance as a predominant or more widely accepted norm representing the larger Muslim community, especially when, in order to combat many of these stereotypes, American Muslims are faced with a complex system of relatively longstanding and negative portrayals<sup>13</sup> that cannot be swiftly erased by acceptably pleasing moderate, liberal, acculturated voices from within the Muslim community. These stereotypes can in fact only be diffused rigorously on the part of the media, which must own up to its responsibility in critically engaging with its depictions of Muslims and Islam in order to rectify the distance that has been created between Muslims and their peer communities, a social distance that has since 9/11 “been exacerbated, especially in places where people interpret Muslims as posing a serious cultural threat to American liberalism” (Cainkar 2010: 179).

Thus far, this chapter has described the media’s role in propagating Islamophobic rhetoric. However, Islamophobic American citizens are also to be held accountable for maintaining these stereotypes by not being discerning enough to educate themselves about Islam and whether or not terrorism and violence are indeed the values the majority of Muslims in the world share. I write this because counter-Islamophobic rhetoric has become increasingly accessible and abundant since 9/11. While it would take energy and discipline to sort through these multiple narratives in order to arrive at a nuanced and more comprehensive conclusion, the fate of reform lies among all people, who, as responsible citizens, should engage with these ongoing debates in an open and constructive manner, rather than succumb to propaganda that inspires counterproductive fear, if nothing else.

In Europe, Muslims, too, find themselves compelled to contest negative stereotypes along with a slew of other xenophobic acts since 9/11, including attacks on their mosques, schools,

and other centers (Awan 2010: 526). As Joceylne Cesari (2010: 9) astutely notes, the “securitization” of Islam might appease European citizens fearful of prospective terrorist attacks, but in the same vein has caused a catch-22 in that “the measures intended to prevent radicalization actually engender discontent and prompt a transformation of religious conservatism to fundamentalism.”

Throughout Europe, concerns over migration have proven to have an “important impact on the success of populist and radical right parties in Western Europe” (Helbling 2012: 2). The link between Islam and discriminatory immigration policies has resulted in the constriction of immigration laws directed at migrants from Muslim majority countries, partially as a result of poor socio-economic conditions (Cesari 2010: 11). Many of these new restrictions require potential immigrants to establish their integration before becoming members of the European Union. As Ibrahim Kalin notes, Muslims who are living in the West “are asked to embrace assimilation and thus lose their identities,” even though no such identity can be clearly defined or encompass all those it represents under its umbrella (Kalin 2011: 13). As such, these restrictions “demonstrate changing expectations of immigrants, who are now required to show more compatibility than ever with lifestyles of host countries” (Cesari 2010: 12), oftentimes lifestyle choices that do not necessarily reflect that country’s socio-cultural majority but are in fact elements that would inevitably alarm more conservative Muslims. Thus, Muslims in Europe face an exclusionary attitude predicated upon their being situated as immigrants who must prove their assimilation even before being afforded an opportunity to organically integrate into their new host countries, an unwelcoming and unsettling obstacle for any immigrant desiring to build a new life for themselves and their families.

Ultimately, the questions surrounding Muslim integration and the anti-immigration tendencies deriving from nationalist and exclusionary sentiments can essentially be dubbed “Islamophobic” or “anti-Muslim” in that they have categorized Muslims as a potentially threatening “other.” As Cesari (2010: 13) notes, “it has become acceptable to associate Muslim immigration and the potential for terrorism,” which has generated the view that these Muslims are “foreign enemies.” Thus, the practice of Islam remains under close monitoring in some parts of Europe. For example, in Spain, France, and the Netherlands, preaching in mosques deemed radical by these states has aroused cause for concern and has even resulted in the deportation of imams (Cesari 2010: 17). Other Islamophobic policies in Europe which infringe the civil liberties of Muslims include arbitrary legal rulings based on preconceived stereotypes about “Islamic norms”<sup>14</sup> in Germany and France. Islamophobic legal security measures include police surveillance and the monitoring of financial transactions in France, as well as the freezing of funds “associated with terrorism or proscribed groups” in the UK, which has resulted in the detention of foreign nationals and the deportation of others (Cesari 2010: 21).

It is important to bear in mind, though, that examples of “Islamophobia” in Europe range from country to country and reflect the respective country’s political stances, and the incidents that have facilitated growing concerns of securitization in light of potential or past terrorist attacks such as the July 7 subway attacks in London. Other causes for concern include the fact that Muslims face poor economic integration in major Western European nations (Pew Research Center 2007: 19). My reason for emphasizing these specificities is to highlight that any prospective monitoring of Islamophobic tendencies in European countries should include the particular socio-economic milieu inspiring particular policies and creating certain attitudes, not as a means to justify these developments but to provide a more nuanced treatment of how they have emerged, what end they serve, and whether or not the treatment of Muslims has improved in particular states that have found ways to effectively integrate Muslims culturally and socio-economically.

## Reactions to Islamophobia

Given the foothold of Islamophobia in Western societies, it is not surprising that many American Muslims and immigrant Muslims, as previously noted, have become more outspoken and engaged members of their communities, expressing critical views regarding both foreign and domestic policies affecting Muslims worldwide, as well as countering negative stereotypes associated with terrorism and Islam's incompatibility with Western values. In light of the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror, this realm of belonging has been colored by a variety of actors who proclaim variant views concerning what it means to represent and belong in Western society. These debates alert us to the processes of negotiation many Muslims in the West are currently entrenched in, processes that attempt to weave together their religious identity with a sense of national belonging in spite of the fact that such efforts are not always met with success and there continues to be suspicion regarding Muslims' patriotism and loyalty to the state.

The efforts of Muslim Americans have positioned their community and Islam in a more public manner in the heat of ongoing debates regarding whether or not Muslims must adhere to a rather rigid and somewhat contestable<sup>15</sup> set of Western standards. As Katherine Ewing (2008: 10) points out, "although some individuals chose to downplay their identity as Muslims, many others became more self-conscious in asserting it," with their involvement in Islamic institutions in their respective Muslim communities all the while maintaining an American identity "consistent with their understanding of Islam." Jen'nan Ghazal Read (2008: 123), in her in-depth interviews with Muslim and Christian and Arab Americans, also concluded that both groups had a "universal attachment" to their American identity despite their religious affiliations because in the USA they felt they had the freedom to practice their religion.

Many individual Muslims, mosques, and organizations have remained outspoken advocates that Islam is not a terrorist religion and have condemned the 9/11 attacks. For example, the Council on American–Islamic Relations (2009: 269) reasserted that the American Muslim community has consistently condemned attacks of terrorism, and believes that those who break the law should be prosecuted but that this due process should extend to all. Many of these Muslims also resist hegemonic tendencies that present a one-dimensional and austere representation of Islam that forbids certain practices (Ewing and Hoyler 2008: 96). Others are working through a process of "deculturalizing" Islam "as an attempt to purify Islam in the West of any specific cultural ties" (Joseph and Reidel 2008: 165), and instead opt for stressing the more universal values and ethics fundamental to certain Islamic beliefs. Such values might include tolerance, plurality, and gender equality.

Another site where Muslims are continuing to speak out is Muslim comedy, which appears to be a potential medium for a more successful combating of some Islamophobic stereotypes. According to Mucahit Bilici (2010: 196), Muslim ethnic comedy in the United States has "become a series of inversions played out against a background of Islamophobia" that "aims to bridge the divide that separates Muslims from the rest of American society by reaffirming both sides' common humanity." Inspired by Islamophobic behavior and thought, these Muslim comedians share their experiences and joke about the FBI, airport security, nuclear war signs, and represent their experiences from a distance and in such a manner that chips away at the walls of otherness and paints a "funny" rather than a "scary" picture of Muslims. Thus, as Bilici (2010: 207) notes, "Muslim ethnic comedy lifts, albeit temporarily, the restrictive limits on the self and abolishes the gulf that separates the Muslim minority from the American mainstream." While comedy may be limited in its ability to effectively challenge many of the broader strokes of Islamophobia voiced in mainstream American discourses, Muslim comedians who turn

Islamophobia into an advantageous medium inspire empathy for Muslims and innovatively inform outsiders of the injustices directed at Muslims by offering an alternate, less politically motivated and frightening space to consider these issues.

However, not all Muslims in the United States have welcomed such public attention and they have remained reluctant in speaking more candidly about the struggles the Muslim community is facing. As Jane Smith (2010: 32) notes, many Muslims living in post-9/11 America fear a potential government backlash for speaking out about their disagreement with US policies. In light of these fears and obstacles, Yvonne Haddad and Robert Ricks (2009: 14) argue that, while Muslims are working to “overcome these challenges and become fully empowered participants in civic and political life,” it has yet to be determined to what extent these Muslims will be afforded the opportunity to define what it means to be American and in which direction their challenges will take them. Thus, it is still uncertain whether the future will be more optimistic for Muslims in the United States, who have been living within social and political parameters that continue to marginalize and exclude them despite their cooperative efforts.

In Europe, Muslims face similar issues in relation to their identity formation, forcing them to redefine their identity within the confines of a stigmatized and discriminatory view of themselves. Still though, European Muslims have not been fully paralyzed by such obstacles. As Justin Gest (2010: 228–9) notes, many European Muslims are participants in an identity formation that “does not necessarily require a religious foundation of any kind, so long as it accommodates local cultural understandings, satisfies government frameworks, or addresses their personal challenges.” Similar to Muslims in the United States, these European Muslims are also working towards the establishment of a more global Muslim identity in a process that Arun Kundani (2008: 40) describes as being “more likely to lead to new forms of democratic activism than to political violence unless diverted from this course by counter-productive policies.” While it is inevitable that a thin and perhaps even gray line outlines these prospective accommodations and what they may entail, it is clear that Muslims, like other citizens of Europe, are vying for a space where their concerns are valued and seriously taken into consideration.

Many of these requests reflect the issues at stake in that particular state. One such example would be the vote to ban the headscarf in public schools in France or the building of minarets in Switzerland. Ultimately, many Muslims in Europe remain flexible<sup>16</sup> in adapting to their respective Western societies while maintaining their Muslim identity. However, Tahir Abbas (2011: 109), in his study of the Muslim experience in the UK, points out that “If a minority community begins to adopt the cultural practices of the dominant ethnic community but is still rejected by majority society, assimilation is hardly a viable political or cultural option.” Tariq Ramadan poses similar points when he discusses the London bombers responsible for the 7/7 attacks. He writes that the London bombers “had an adversarial mindset, a psychology, involving ‘us’ versus ‘them’,” and that while they were technically legally integrated into society they were not psychologically integrated and “in their perception they were polarized” (Ramadan 2012: 31). Abbas’s and Ramadan’s insights are crucial because they identify a key disconnect in the social integration of Muslims in the West, namely that their full integration not only involves efforts made on their behalf but requires society to meet them halfway for any mutual cooperation and integration to exist and, more importantly, persist against the slew of negative stereotypes that categorize Muslims in the West as being guilty by association.

## Youth and Islamophobia

One of the unfortunate consequences of Islamophobia is the troublesome impact it has on the integration of Muslims in the West, more specifically Muslim youth, who in the aftermath of



9/11 find themselves in a particularly sensitive and even compromising position. In the United States, for example, Karen Leonard (2005: 473) argues: “Although not all Muslims see their religion as their most salient characteristic, non-Muslims may make that identification,” which in turn “encourages young people of Muslim ancestry to examine how their religion relates to other aspects of their identity as Americans, for people are multi-faceted beings with hybrid and flexible identities.” This notion of flexibility and hybridity becomes increasingly significant when considering the identity formation of Muslim youth, who are pawns in debates over the meaning of citizenship, as well as measures and criteria for social classification.

For these Muslim youth, the increased awareness of their Muslim identities was inspired by many of the changes that occurred in their communities post-9/11, when the demonstration of anything Islamic was indeed subject to distrust and when their own sense of belonging became a politicized endeavor given that their own development was connected to a broader socio-political context (Ewing and Hoyler 2008: 80). As Sunaina Maira (2009: 14) notes, the discussion of Muslim American youth after 9/11 “is tinged with these deeper social and national anxieties about how Muslim, South Asian, and Arab Americans will position themselves in relation to the nation-state and what kinds of citizens they will become.” Since 9/11, many scholars have addressed the identity construction of Muslim youth in North America and what is at stake in the negotiation process afflicting this demographic.

Katherine Ewing and Marguerite Hoyler (2008: 81), in their research on South Asian Muslim youth in the Raleigh-Durham area of North Carolina, note that these American Muslim youth, when asked about the tension between being both American and Muslim, “articulated a range of responses to the tension, including ambivalence, a questioning of the desirability of being American, a desire to meld cultures and efforts to resolve the tension by transcending national and particularistic cultural or ethnic identities.” Ewing and Hoyler’s research also found many of these youth felt compelled to display their Muslim identity in a more purposeful manner through participation in Muslim Student Association activities which sought to inform others about Islam (Ewing and Hoyler 2008: 84).

Selcuk R. Sirin and Michelle Fine’s (2008: 1) research on Muslim American youth also discusses some of the many challenges directed towards this demographic, obstacles such as “particular psychological challenges.” Notwithstanding these challenges, many of these Muslim youth did not give up on their American identity in favor of their Muslim identity, “despite the many pressures from Muslim fundamentalists and some Western intellectuals, who claim that one cannot be a good American and a good Muslim at the same time” (Sirin and Fine 2008: 2). Instead, Fine and Sirin’s research found that many Muslim adolescents and young adults “carved out *hyphenated selves*,” which “refers to their many identities, including their standings as Muslims and Americans, that are at once joined and separated by history, politics, geography, biography, longings and losses” (Sirin and Fine 2008: 3). Their research further found that, despite surveillance and discrimination, many of these Muslim Americans “seem to find a way to highlight their belonging to both cultures, illustrating once again that identity negotiation is not a zero-sum arrangement” (Sirin and Fine 2008: 127).

While the aforementioned literature provides examples of integration and negotiation, other Muslim youth continue to struggle with the Islamophobic sentiments surrounding them. For example, Ewing and Hoyler (2008: 85) explain that the rhetoric and policies that emerged from 9/11 “deprived” the youth they spoke to of a “sense of full cultural citizenship” and “posed challenges to adolescent Muslims’ nascent political identities, even leading some to question the virtues and values of being American.” Sherman Jackson (2011: 98) also notes that one of the effects of Islamophobia is the “less direct though equally potent contribution it makes via the alienation it spawns among second- and third-generation ‘immigrant’ Muslims,” many

of whom “lack the experiential groundedness in a ‘back-home’ culture to provide them with a livable, deeply felt sense of identity-in-difference.”

Ultimately, the experiences of Muslim American youth cannot be reduced to a single template, and the degree and capacity in which these youth identify with their American and Muslim identities will inevitably be shaped by their own personal experiences and how they have internalized and found ways to fuse or resist elements of their multifaceted identities. However, the strain that Islamophobia imposes on this youth is a matter that should be taken seriously. As Mehdi Semati (2010: 270) argues, “one of the immediate perils of Islamophobia is that it could lead to the marginalization of those youths who might see themselves rejected by the society to which they belong.” This rejection could lead these youth to feel “foreign, distant, and unwelcome” (Kalin 2011: 16), or they could find themselves dealing with “disillusionment, social disorder and in the worst case scenario irrational violence” (Ahmed 2007: 19).

### The NYPD’s counter-terrorism program

In February of 2012, the effects of Islamophobia on Muslims and, more specifically, American Muslim youth reached a new climax when the Associated Press (AP) attained leaked documents<sup>17</sup> exposing that the New York City Police Department (NYPD) had been closely monitoring Muslims living in New York as well as neighboring states. In their extensive and Pulitzer Prize winning investigation,<sup>18</sup> the AP revealed that the NYPD had tracked, by employing undercover agents as well as informants, places of worship such as mosques within a 250 mile radius of New York, cafés, shopping centers, bookstores, as well as places of employment frequented by Muslims in an effort to obtain as much comprehensive information as they could about Muslims (AP n.d.a). The information gathered by the NYPD’s Demographics Unit was then used to build databases monitoring all aspects of these innocent Muslims’ lives (Goldman and Apuzzo 2012a).

While the extent of the NYPD’s surveillance might have initially come as a surprise and inspired an uproar from the community, civil rights activists, and public officials, such invasive and arguably ineffective surveillance is in fact not novel to the counter-terrorism efforts created after 9/11. Hatem Bazian, in his discussion of the post-9/11 Counter-Intelligence Program, explains that the FBI, as well as other security agencies, has been involved in recruiting informants, targeting the Muslim community along with its institutions (Bazian 2012: 167). Bazian proposes that “a more direct conclusion drawn from these operations is that the FBI and Justice Department consider Muslim Americans as “incubators of terrorism that must be monitored and, if needed, infiltrated to preemptively catch them before they plan an attack” (Bazian 2012: 167). While the deterrence of future attacks is clearly necessary for maintaining public safety, these operations have unfortunately been successful in “creating a big gulf within the targeted community” (Bazian 2012: 199) due to the volunteering of information by Muslim informants. The volunteerism of these informants, who were speaking out of fear, inspired distrust and suspicion amongst members of respective Muslims communities. Consequently, Muslims who have, in the past, publicly expressed their religiosity and discussed their religious points of view more openly with their peers now fear those informants who might turn their backs on them in order to cooperate with the authorities.

According to AP reports, NYPD investigators considered local mosques to be the “center” of Muslim life. The NYPD sent undercover agents to these mosques to gather information from informants known as “mosque crawlers.” These monitoring programs were built with “unprecedented help from the CIA” (Goldman and Apuzzo 2012d). These informants recorded the content of sermons such as responses to the Danish cartoon controversy (“Intelligence Division

Central Research Analysis Unit” 2006), and others were instructed to “create and capture,” “where the informant would try to start a conversation about terrorism or another controversial topic, record the response elicited, and share it with the NYPD” (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013: 11). The NYPD also recorded the license plate numbers of those parked near the mosque and even put cameras on light poles aimed at these mosques (Goldman and Apuzzo 2012b). Deputy commissioner David Cohen, as well as other managers, claimed this information was collected in order to provide the NYPD with the ability to “take the pulse of the community” (Goldman and Apuzzo 2012b). This surveillance even extended outside of the NYPD’s jurisdiction, infiltrating mosques in New Jersey and Long Island (Goldman and Apuzzo 2012a).

In an effort to protect the “homeland,” however, these surveillance attempts have hindered local forms of police monitoring. By chipping away at the trust between the Arab American and Muslim communities and law enforcement officials, the NYPD has “undermined the community policing efforts,” creating greater distance between themselves and Muslim institutions/leaders (Lane 2012: 707). The NYPD’s efforts in New Jersey are also said to have “hindered investigations and created ‘additional risks’ in counterterrorism” (Henry 2012). Furthermore, the leaked NYPD efforts “have made Muslims more hesitant to reach out to law enforcement and less trusting” (Henry 2012). This hesitation has created dire effects for mosques and community organizations, which are now “unable to advocate for improved law enforcement practices within their community” (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013: 36). More importantly, the Demographics Unit, in its spying, eavesdropping, and monitoring, failed to generate a lead or incite a terrorism investigation (Goldman and Apuzzo 2012c).

In their counter-terrorism efforts, the NYPD also monitored approximately fifteen student-run Muslim Student Associations in the Tri-State area. The Associated Press revealed that the NYPD were tracking all activities, ranging from student-run trips to entries on websites and blogs, and recording the names of both professors and students who had not previously been accused of any wrongdoing for Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly (Hawley 2012). The justification for establishing such surveillance was the fact that twelve people who had previously been accused or convicted of charges related to terrorism had once belonged to Muslim Student Associations (The Takeaway 2012). Again, working outside of their jurisdiction, the NYPD monitored schools as far away as Yale and the University of Pennsylvania (Hawley 2012). These student groups gained the NYPD’s interest because they attracted young Muslim men who could potentially be drawn into terrorist groups and the NYPD “worried about which Muslim scholars were influencing these students and feared that extracurricular activities such as paintball outings could be used as terrorist training” (Hawley 2012), for example.

In March of 2013, the American Muslim civil liberties groups such as the American Civil Liberties Coalition (MACLC), the Creating Law Enforcement Accountability and Responsibility (CLEAR) project, and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) released *Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and Its Impact on American Muslims*, a detailed report explaining the negative and “devastating” impact the NYPD’s surveillance program has had on the Muslim community by silencing their voices in a variety of contexts as well as damaging their relationship with law enforcement, among others (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013). The report is divided into four parts and provides a background to the mapping and monitoring of American Muslims, findings that illustrate how this monitoring has affected the community, responses to the NYPD program, as well as future recommendations (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013: 3–6).

Salient points in the findings note that many interviewees contended that the NYPD’s monitoring “disrupted and suppressed” their practice of Islam in terms of their dress code as

well as the sorts of religious activities they participated in (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013: 12). The report found that the policing of mosques and other areas of worship no longer made these Muslims feel safe but compelled them to feel that they were placing themselves on the radar given that every mosque was now a potential “hot-spot” and that potential mosque goers might in fact be NYPD undercover agents who were reporting back their activities. The NYPD’s leaked operation generated suspicions amongst these Muslim Americans and tainted the mosque, which was no longer considered a safe haven but rather a breeding ground for spying. This suspicion hindered the ability of the community to nurture its spiritual development, interact peacefully as a unified front, and prevented some mosques from operating as a “true community center” (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013: 15). Muslim Student Association outreach efforts were also affected because press coverage of the NYPD’s infiltration prevented those on college campuses from wanting to be associated with the association or its members (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013: 31).

As previously noted, a lack of trust permeated the Muslim community when they discovered the NYPD’s operations. This lack of trust was not only directed at police officials but spread to inter-communal affairs, a development particularly problematic for many of these Muslims who “believed that suspicion of their Muslim peers went against their nature, their religious beliefs, or their desire to be active and supportive members of the community” (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013: 26). The report also found that many Muslim youth, fearing potential scrutiny, began exercising self-censorship in terms of their political speech and activism, the self-editing of religious Sunday school curricula, as well as their affiliations with student groups such as Muslim Student Associations. The report further notes that the NYPD’s surveillance program “has, in fact, quelled political activism, quieted community spaces and strained interpersonal relationships” (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013: 20). More importantly, the self-censorship evoked by this surveillance has infringed these Muslims’ individual liberties such as free speech, freedom of religion, and the right to free assembly, and has bypassed the government’s prohibition on discriminating against a group or individual based on religion (MACLC, CLEAR, and AALDEF 2013: 48).

## Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the immense foothold that Islamophobia has in Western societies, as well as its negative impact on Muslims socially, politically, and psychologically. It has placed particular emphasis on Muslim youth in the West and their responses to Islamophobic rhetoric, given that these youth “are viewed as the next generation of citizens and who symbolize the possibility of threat to or support of the existing social order, giving youth a charged ideological significance” (Maira 2011: 112). Although much of the literature cited in this chapter illustrates an engaged and cooperative youth, in light of the NYPD’s counter-terrorism operations it is clear that invasive surveillance has only exacerbated the struggles these young people are already facing and has planted seeds of fear amongst this demographic. While these negative effects might be considered collateral damage in a grander effort to ensure public welfare and safety, such objectives have been favored at the expense of respecting and protecting these Muslim youth, many of whom are American citizens, and are deserving of the same rights and privileges afforded to their non-Muslim peers. Moreover, such efforts have silenced the voices of this demographic, jeopardized the survival of communal and civic engagement, left them feeling ostracized and victimized, and have unjustly labeled them as potential suspects.

If anything can be learned from the NYPD’s operations, it is that information is both a powerful resource and a powerful weapon. While obtaining information for the sake of

protecting the state is necessary, the invasion of privacy, overly generalized and superficial assessments of Islam and Muslims, as well as the incitement of fear have only compromised the trust and cooperation of Muslims, who now feel betrayed and marginalized by their own law enforcement. Moreover, these operations, in conjunction with Islamophobic sentiments, may potentially alienate entire communities of innocent Muslims, especially those youth whose religiosity and allegiance to the state are placed under scrutiny. Only time will tell if these young people can break their silence through strength in their convictions and through the support of their communities, who must now work even harder to overcome their wariness and mistrust of law enforcement officials and each other.

## Notes

- 1 Edward Said's *Covering Islam* is another seminal text addressing what is now referred to as "Islamophobia," and many of the writers referenced in this chapter cite this work. In it, Said (1981: 4) writes: "Insofar as Islam has always been seen as belonging to the Orient, its particular fate within the general structure of Orientalism has been to be looked at first of all as if it were one monolithic thing, and then with a very special hostility and fear" and that the "negative images of Islam continue to be very much more prevalent than any others' reducing Islam to not what it 'is' ... but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be" (Said 1981: 144). Said's work is thus relevant to the treatment of Islamophobia in that it highlights the "othering" of Islam in predominantly Western discourses.
- 2 *Thinking through Islamophobia* is one such text that posits conceptual questions regarding the validity of the term and polemical debates regarding the fixation on its validity that often miscast some of the larger issues at stake regarding this phenomenon.
- 3 Erik Bleich discusses how conceptualizing Islamophobia in a more concrete manner is crucial for drawing any comparisons concerning its levels over time and within specific geographic spaces, and "is also the foundation for more informed public debates and more effective policy decisions" (Bleich 2011: 1592–4).
- 4 An example of this would be the creation and putative implementation of the Patriot Act under the Bush administration or Operation Green Quest, when the homes and businesses of American Muslims were invaded.
- 5 See their websites, [sun.cair.com/](http://sun.cair.com/) and [adc.org/](http://adc.org/), for more information.
- 6 Cainkar (2010: 183) explains that in his study, the fear of government "far outweighed any other post-9/11 fears among Arab Muslim Americans."
- 7 According to Lean (2012: 66), Fox News has been, "for the better part of the last decade, at the heart of the public scaremongering about Islam, and has recently become the home for a slew of right-wing activists who regularly inhabit its airwaves to distort the truth to push stereotypes about Muslims."
- 8 For an excerpt from Bill O'Reilly's show where he displays skepticism regarding the existence of Islamophobia, see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwgxcAH2R6U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwgxcAH2R6U).
- 9 The Park51 project did not receive negative attention when it was first revealed in December 2009, but in May of the following year, when plans were presented to the local community board, the project generated a great deal of national and international controversy with the help of an organization called SIOA (Stop Islamization of America) (Abboud 2012: 171).
- 10 Lean (2012: 40) writes that the prospective building of the Park51 center "reawakened the suppressed emotions of a nation deeply wounded by the tragedy" and that the opposition felt it was offensive to build a mosque so close to Ground Zero given that it was Muslims, despite their deviation from the mainstream Muslim population, that were responsible for the attacks.
- 11 The *shari'a* "scare" has appeared in both Canadian and American public discourses, especially in debates concerning whether or not *shari'a* should be employed in family law arbitration with respect to marriage, divorce, and inheritance.
- 12 See Safi (2003).
- 13 As previously noted, these stereotypes are represented in news coverage, but even Hollywood has played its part, according to Jack Shaheen (2003: 182), in "using Islam to justify violence" and in painting a picture that Arabs and Muslims pose a grave threat to the West.
- 14 See Cesari (2010: 15) for a list of such examples in German and French legal cases.

- 15 In qualifying Western standards as being contestable, I am alluding to the various debates on Western secularism and the public sphere which address issues of plurality, tolerance, freedom of expression, and in which capacity the aforementioned should take root as social norms. For example, in *Rethinking Secularism* (Calhoun et al. 2011), R. Scott Appleby's "Western Secularity," Charles Taylor's "Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere," and Craig Calhoun's "The Secular, Secularizations, and Secularisms" have either defined the term secularism, explaining its current appropriation and historical derivation, deconstructed and problematized terms associated with it, or illustrated its affects on the public sphere and demonstrated its influence on social, political, and, more important for the purposes of this chapter, religious concerns.
- 16 Cesari (2010: 17–19) notes that in focus groups in Paris, London, Amsterdam, and Berlin, respondents illustrated flexibility in their conception of rituals and practices such as prayer and the wearing of the *hijab*.
- 17 These leaked documents can be accessed online: [www.ap.org/media-center/nypd/investigation](http://www.ap.org/media-center/nypd/investigation).
- 18 For a comprehensive list of AP's coverage, see [www.ap.org/Index/AP-In-The-News/NYPD](http://www.ap.org/Index/AP-In-The-News/NYPD).

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