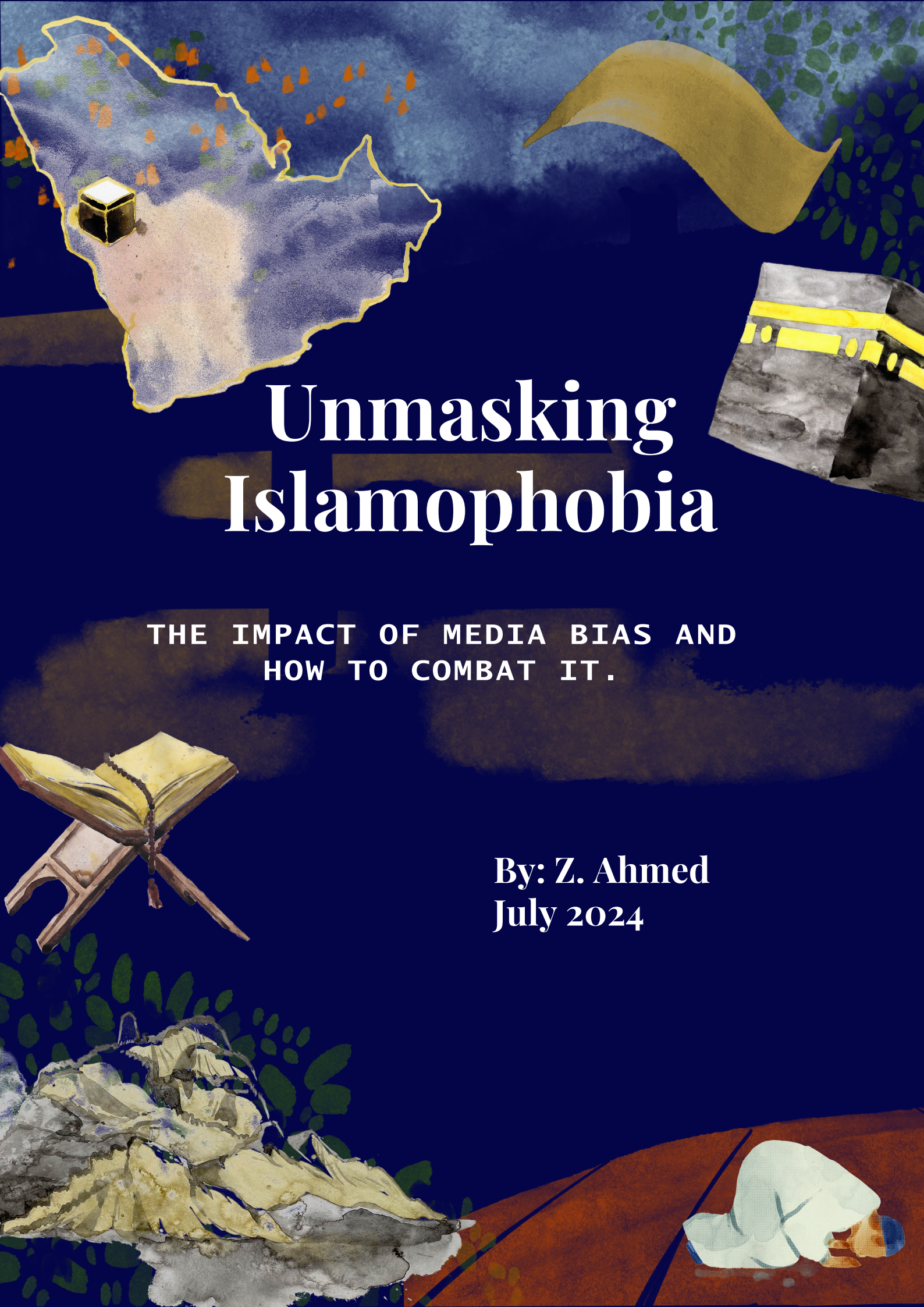




Unmasking Islamophobia

THE IMPACT OF MEDIA BIAS AND
HOW TO COMBAT IT.

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MUSLIMS IN MEDIA

ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENT IN MEDIA

Fear can be manufactured through media coverage.

The excessive coverage of issues and fear-mongering techniques create a disproportionate amount of fear of things that do not have a very high statistical probability of causing harm.

Islamophobia, or dread or hatred of Islam and a subsequent fear or dislike of all or most Muslims, is an example of this manufactured fear as in the last 25 years, Islamophobia has become more explicit, more extreme, and more violent. [1] [2]



Speaker at a demonstration of the initiative We do not want Islam in the Czech Republic in 2015

Sources:

- [1] Bravo López, Fernando. "Towards a definition of Islamophobia: Approximations of the early twentieth century." *Ethnic and racial studies* 34, no. 4 (2011): 556-573.
- [2] Carter, Cynthia, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin, eds. *The Routledge companion to media & gender*. Routledge, 2013.
- [3] Jarmakani, Amira. *Imagining Arab womanhood: The cultural mythology of veils, harems, and belly dancers in the US*. Springer, 2008.
- [5] Severin, Werner Joseph, and James W. Tankard. *Communication theories: Origins, methods, and uses in the mass media*. New York: Longman, 1997.
- [6] Gerbner, G., L. Gross, and M. Morgan. "N. Signorelli (1994) «Growing up with television: the cultivation perspective»." *Media effects: advances in theory and research*. Nueva Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum (1994).

Media as a Tool to Justify Hatred of Muslims

The post-9/11 era has increased hate crimes, discrimination, and government policies set out to specifically target Muslims, particularly visibly Muslim people. As a consequence, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment has found a breeding ground in American media. **This is not to say that anti-Muslim sentiment in media is a recent phenomenon, a careful examination of American media demonstrates that infantilization, exotification, and over-sexualization of Muslim women accompanied by the vilification of Muslim men is a problem that has long plagued Western media.** More often than not negative representations of Muslims in Western media are used to justify discrimination toward Muslims and dehumanize them. [3]

Fear-Mongering and Policy Concerns

The **agenda-setting theory** suggests that media can raise the perceived importance of an issue or a threat through repeated news coverage. This theory explains why the continuous linking of Muslims and terrorism increases Islamophobia and makes people more prone to anxiety about immigration issues or suspicious of their unsuspecting Muslim neighbors.[4] **The cultivation theory**, examines the relationship between people and media and attempts to explain the effects of media consumption on people's perceptions, attitudes, and values. This theory contends that heavy television viewers are monopolized by the views and values presented on television to be correct that they take on the values frequently depicted on television as their own.[5] In addition, they believe the world around them to be similar to the way it is portrayed on the television that they consume. [6] This evidence makes the idea that media has fueled islamophobia all the more plausible.

ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENT IN MEDIA

MEDIA AND POLICY

The media is instrumental in conveying and articulating discourse that helps to represent and unfortunately misrepresent minority groups. The illusory correlation between Islam and terrorism perpetuated by Western media has increased the social and political concerns of Muslims. Much of what one understands about society, especially a society they do not typically interact with, depends on the media. This understanding informs our decision-making skills and what policies or treatment of a group one is prepared to accept. [7]



A city council meeting in Virginia just days before Trump proposed “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” — including Muslim-American citizens. [13]

Another problematic aspect of the term “Islamic fundamentalism” is that it equates Islam with Muslims. Horrid actions of some claiming to act on behalf of Islam are equated by the media to simply “what they do” instead of the flawed nature of some Arabs and some Muslims. **Orientalism has a distinct othering effect as it views the West as morally correct and “the rest” in opposition to Western values. This flawed ideology is dangerous because it views Islam as anti-West and therefore also anti-democratic, anti-modern, and mediocrally backward.** Cultural hostility and racial hatred of Muslims are deeply engrained in the Western media consumers’ minds despite knowing very little about Islam because they are constantly being bombarded with things a few Muslims have done which has distorted their image of the region as a whole. Islamic fundamentalism implies that terrorism, militantism, and rejection of all modernity is fundamental to Islam, which is not the case. [11] [12]

“ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM”

A crucial part of understanding Islamophobia in recent years is defining the term “Islamic Fundamentalism,” a word that is often associated with the removal of secularist institutions in Muslim countries and the idea that Muslims generally dislike “modern” institutions, and thereby a threat to national security. Islamophobic media has furthered the idea that Muslims, Muslim men in particular, are a threat to national security by making an explicit link between Islam and any act of terrorism. Islamic fundamentalism is a term that became popularized in the post 9-11 era in both scholarly and popular discussion, whereas no label like this exists to define terrorist or criminal acts committed in the name of Christianity, Judaism, or any other world religion. Islam and Muslims have continuously been publicly associated with terrorism. Television programs, televised political debates, talk shows, TV shows, cartoons, and novels continuously portray Muslims as anti-modern, radical, militant, barbaric, and undoubtedly anti-Western. This repeated portrayal has had an “othering” effect on Muslims. In addition, the frequent use of the word “Arabs” and “Muslims” interchangeably has led to people becoming victims of not only religious discrimination but also racial discrimination and has increased support for racial profiling and restriction of civil liberties. [8] [9] [10]

[7] Modood, Tariq. “Difference, cultural racism and anti-racism.” *Debating cultural hybridity: Multicultural identities and the politics of anti-racism* (1997): 154-173.

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[13] Fisher, Max. “It’s Not Just Trump: Islamophobia in America Is Spiraling out of Control.” *Vox*, December 1, 2015. <https://www.vox.com/2015/12/1/9822452/muslim-islamophobia-trump>.

Muslims & Gendered Stereotypes

MEDIA PROTRAYAL OF MUSLIM MEN

Muslim men portrayed by the New York Times (NYT) are often discussed in conjunction with **terrorism, militancy, detention, and interrogation**. In addition, the disproportionate and decontextualized portrayal in the NYT of violent acts of Muslim men helps to push the idea that Muslim men are fanatical and barbaric. The New York Times even goes as far as to quote hate speech made by Muslim religious leaders and extremists without also providing contestation from everyday Muslims which undoubtedly inflames passions and anger from both non-Muslims towards Muslims and vice versa. [14]

A particularly tone-deaf article in the New York Times discusses Muslim men in relation to terrorism, detailing the “making of a terrorist”. They do this through examining their prayers, meetings, recruitments, training, and even a day in their lives but they neglect to mention the larger sociopolitical forces at play. **This is because violence and terrorism from Muslim men are simply perceived as the result of the “historical tradition of fanatical violence.”** This view plays into the idea of Islamic fundamentalism and “disregards the structural violence resulting from the West’s economic and cultural hegemony over the globe as well as direct violence supported by Western powers against Eastern interests.” [15] The so-called making of a terrorist that is often mentioned in the New York Times depiction of Muslims does not discuss the structural violence that is prevalent in impoverished unprivileged parts of the globe and rarely relates structural violence to acts of political violence. In addition, the New York Times along with many other media producers can unnoticeably make flagrant generalizations and misrepresentations of Muslims because their audience often shares these Islamophobic assumptions. It is not difficult to understand, then, how one violent incident committed by a Muslim can be used to extrapolate more conclusions about Muslims as a whole without evidence to do so. [16]



This cartoon exemplifies the idea that Muslim women lack agency and that Muslim men are by nature oppressive and controlling of their female counterparts as it shows Muslim men literally puppeteering a woman to say she is not oppressed. [18]

“Imperial logic genders and separates people so that the men are the Other and the women are civilizable. To defend our universal civilization, we must rescue the women. To rescue these women, we must attack these men.”

~Miriam Cooke on how the West legitimizes and justifies foreign intervention by demonizing Muslim men and presenting women without the agency to defend themselves.

14. Alsutayni, Evelyn. "Arabs and Muslims in the Media." In *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*. New York University Press, 2012.

15. Karim, Karim H. "The historical resilience of primary stereotypes: Core images of the Muslim Other." (1997).

16. Karim, Karim H. "American media's coverage of Muslims: The historical roots of contemporary portrayals." *Muslims and the news media* 117 (2006).

17. Karim, Karim H. "The historical resilience of primary stereotypes: Core images of the Muslim Other." (1997).

18. "Reading Political Cartoons." Council for Arab-British Understanding. Accessed February 13, 2025. [https://www.caabu.org/sites/default/files/resources/Reading Political Cartoons - Islamophobia and Multiculturalism.pdf](https://www.caabu.org/sites/default/files/resources/Reading%20Political%20Cartoons%20-%20Islamophobia%20and%20Multiculturalism.pdf).

19. Ridouani, Driss. "The representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western media." RUTA Comunicación (2011).

Existing media coverage of Middle Eastern Muslim men has thematic clusters: “Terrorism being congenital among Arabs and Muslims; Islamic fundamentalism as being synonymous with ‘the return of Islam’; contemporary Middle Eastern violence being referred back to ‘ancient’ tribal, religious, or ethnic hatreds; the United States and Israel as representing ‘our side’ in the contested site of the Middle East; Arabs and Muslims as being virulently anti-Semitic; and the Middle East as being ‘the hatching ground’ of Palestinian violence” (p. 157). Shaheen (1984) examines the portrayal of Arab men in television and outlines the basic myths that are perpetuated and found that the Arabs were often presented as barbaric, uncivilized, having fabulous but undeserved wealth, reveling in acts of terrorism, and “sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery” (p. 4). Another pre-9/11 study of the representation of Muslim and Arab men done by Kabbani (1986) finds similar findings in which there is an insistent claim that Arab men are sex-obsessed and inherently violent. The emphasis on violence, lust, greed, and barbarism has differed over time but remained the primary topoi in Western media when discussing Islam.[17]



Another cartoon depicts a violent barbaric depiction Muslim man slaughtering people mocking the phrase “religion of peace.” [19]

Muslims and Gendered Stereotypes

Media Portrayal of Muslim women



Dario Castillejos' cartoon depicting a burqa as a prison and therefore an escape from such a prison is "liberation."

It is arrogant to assume that Muslim women desire to adopt Western values. This is not to say that the West should never interfere for any cases such as human rights violations. Rather, a culture-specific, socially constructed methodology should be put in place to help Muslim women liberate themselves not from Islam or all Muslim men, but their culture-specific brand of misogyny. Some scholars even suggest that women should liberate themselves through Quranic understandings instead of the Western perspective in which they must forego their identities and beliefs to become "empowered." [24]

In another, New York Times article Muslim women are referred to as "swaddled breeders under house arrest". [25] Furthermore, in an additional article Muslim women are said to be "treated like doormats". [26] In a particularly descriptive report for the Toronto star in 2002, Michele Landsberg, a Canadian journalist, recalls seeing a Muslim couple, describing the man as wearing "casual clothing" and the woman in a burqa walking through Paris and saying that "Those dead, shuttered, hollow-eyed faces were the ugliest image of enslavement I have ever seen. ... To see women in a state of such abject abasement, paraded through the sophisticated City of Light, was literally sickening." [27]

Landsberg's article did not quote the Muslim women in question, or any veiled or non-veiled Muslim women for that matter, to confirm if they shared her views on the hijab. This is not a rare occurrence; **Western reporters rarely quote or survey the Muslim women that they claim to feel so empathetic towards.** But in 2005, Gallup Incorporated an American analysis and advisory company, polled over 8,000 Muslim women from Muslim-majority countries, the results pointed out that Muslim women did not agree with the views presented by Western reporters on their behalf. Very few women mentioned gender equality as a major problem that they have experienced with only 9 to 11 percent of people mentioning gender inequality as a primary concern of theirs, even in secularized Muslim countries such as Turkey and Lebanon. In addition, interestingly, when asked about what they disliked about the West, Muslim women responded with answers such as "pornography," "promiscuity," and "public indecency." Suggesting that despite Western media pushing the idea that the hijab is degrading and oppressive, in the Muslim world lack of modesty is seen as degrading and oppressive. [28]

Muslim women are often portrayed as victims of domineering oppressive Muslim men and their so-called "oppressive" religion.

Muslim women are often portrayed in New York Times articles as desperately in need of Western intervention to save them which can be analyzed as a "benevolent recuperation of the colonialist agenda." [20] **This idea that Muslim women, particularly brown women, need saving from their brown male guardians is a remnant of white supremacist ideology and paternalistic Orientalism.** [21]

In addition, the New York Times also mistakenly portrays the hijab as a form of oppression. One article, in particular, suggests that for oppressed Afghan women to buy cosmetics is a form of liberation in that it represents a Muslim woman exercising personal choice. But this view is narrow-minded and trivializes the plight of many Muslim women in Muslim countries. According to Abu-Lughod, Muslim women in Afghanistan are more concerned with being freed from the "structural violence of global inequality and from the ravages of war" rather than desiring the joys of wearing nail polish. [22] [23]



This idea of lacking agency is also presented in another cartoon by de-Witt in which a Muslim woman is asked what she is looking forward to in the spring and she simply responds, "Not sure, I'll have to ask my husband."

[20] Rakow, Lana F. Women making meaning: new feminist directions in communication. Routledge, 2015.

[21] Bulbeck, Chilla. "(WHITE) FEMINISM AND FOREIGNERS: My Quest for Connection—Musings Spurred by the Festschrift in my Honour." Australian Feminist Studies 25, no. 66 (2010): 493-503.

[22] Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim women really need saving?" (2002)

[23] Mishra, Smeeta. "Saving Muslim women and fighting Muslim men: Analysis of representations in the New York Times." Global Media Journal 6, no. 11 (2007): 1-20.

[24] Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others." American anthropologist 104, no. 3 (2002): 783-790

[25] Dowd, Maureen. "Liberties; Cleopatra and Osama." The New York Times (2001): 13.

[26] Kristof, Nicholas D. "Iraq's Little Secret." The New York Times (2002): 31A.

[27] Mishra, Smeeta. "Saving Muslim women and fighting Muslim men" (2007).

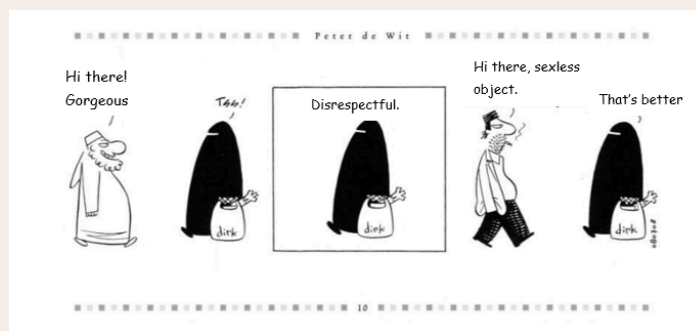
[28] Mogahed, Dalia. "Perspectives of women in the Muslim world." Princeton, NJ: The Gallup Organization. Retrieved March 22 (2006): 2007.

The Hijab IN CONTEXT

A facet of islamophobia is hatred, dislike, and/ or fear of the veil that many Muslim women wear called hijab. Much of the fear and anxiety surrounding the hijab and by extension those who adorn it, stems from the mystification of the hijab which increased after 9/11. **Several studies have found that Western feminists regard the hijab as “the ultimate sign of a Muslim women’s oppression” in addition the veil is often regarded as “mysterious,” “secretive,” “dangerous,” and “radical.” [29] [30][31] Bullock (2000) argues “For the Western media, hijab, by and large, stands for oppression and as shorthand for all the horrors of Islam ... terrorism, violence, barbarity, and backwardness” (p. 42). And this fear of hijab has only grown as a result of Islamophobic Western media. [32]**

An aspect of the Muslim world that Western media is often fixated on is the Muslim women’s veil. **One generalization made about veiled Muslim women is that they are monolithic because their outward appearances in media are made to be identical.** One example of this is when a Boston Globe reporter interviewed three Muslim women wearing abayas and hijabs about their political opinions and was surprised when these women did not share the same opinions as one another saying that “although the three sisters wore nearly identical black abayas and headscarves, each had her own opinion on Iraq’s future, with emphasis on equal rights for women”.[33]

A large part of this misrepresentation is due to the fact that Muslim women are not afforded the opportunity to be interviewed on their views because there is a preconceived notion that they do not have any views of their own to begin with. This idea that Muslim women should not be interviewed and polled ironically has been propagated by the very same Western media that says Muslim men are responsible for stifling their female counterparts’ voices.



In another de Witt cartoon, a woman is seen being called out by her Muslim man “Hi there, gorgeous” when a second man says, “Hi there, sexless object,” to which she responds, “That’s more like it.” This collection of media only scratches the surface of media that consistently portrays Muslim women as not having their own opinions, values, and beliefs outside of their husbands or male guardians. Moreover, this shows how modesty of Muslim women is misconstrued as oppression or degrading. [34]

Many Muslim women have their reasons for why they choose to adorn the head-covering which varies from person to person such as wearing it to be closer to God, or as a form of beautifying oneself [35][36], or to avoid unwanted sexual attention, or as a confirmation of their pride in being Muslim, or to reject negative stereotypes [37], or simply because it is religiously required, or to hide their identity. [38] Historically the hijab has also been worn as a political statement, like in the case of Egyptian women in reaction to Islamophobia. [39] Similarly, many Muslim women adorned the hijab after 9/11 as a symbol of solidarity with other Muslim women and resistance to growing Islamophobia. [40]

One particularly dangerous function of the Western media is that it portrays Middle Eastern and/ or Muslim women as in need of rescuing from their governments. To amplify this perceived oppression, the hijab is painted as oppressive and the women wearing it are depicted as weak and fragile. This reductionist view of Muslim women is “underpinned by an unconscious adherence to liberalism and modernization theory, compounded by an ignorance of any actual details about Muslim women’s lives.”[41]

Furthermore, these misrepresentations of Muslim women in media have tangible effects on Muslim women in their everyday lives. **Several surveys assessing Muslim women’s relationship to their portrayals in media show that they resent being caricatured and presented as in need of salvation, and often fear the negative reactions people may have to their headscarves. [42]** Not to say that they feel negative about their headscarves but about people’s reactions to them in the post 9-11 era. Unsurprisingly, many women removed their veils after 9/11 because they feared the reactions of coworkers, strangers, and other Muslims. Moreover, this reductionist view suppresses Muslim women’s voices and robs them of the agency and empowerment many Western media outlets portray them as lacking in the first place. [43]

The Western media tends to blur these images of hijab, despite as demonstrated previously the fact that they vary drastically from person to person in terms of styling and purpose. Islam and the veil for many Muslim women symbolize empowerment in their identities and faith. Merali, a writer, and researcher specializing in Islamic human rights argues, “We come to attention because of our (perceived) negativity and become the subjects of discussion only when our mistreatment brings us to the notice of critical circles. ... The veil, burqa, chador, and headscarf are blurred into one symbolic entity; all Muslim women—their motivations, their beliefs, and their aspirations—are generalized, despised, or simply denied legitimacy” (p. 174). This analysis provides insight into why the misconception that Muslim women are often presented as a monolith exists and why the media is often fixated on portraying Muslim women as victims of either their religion, their clothing, or their male guardians. [44]

[29] Hoodfar, Homa. "More than clothing." *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates* (2003): 3-40.

[30] El Guindi, Fadwa. "Gendered resistance, feminist veiling, Islamic feminism." *The Alifad Journal* 22, no. 1 (2005): 53-78.

[31] Merali, Arzu. "Mad Woman in the Burqa: Muslim women as exemplar feminists." *Hecate* 32, no. 1 (2006): 173-186.

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[33] Ghannam, Jeffrey. "All eyes on the homeland in Detroit's Iraqi community hope and anxiety as exiles imagine post-Hussein era." *The Boston Globe* (2003): A3.

[34] de Wit, Peter. and Bob van Oosten. *Burka babes. De Harmonie*, 2008.

[35] Wikan, Unni. *Behind the veil in Arabia: Women in Oman*. University of Chicago Press, 1991.

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[43] Khalid, Asma. "Lifting the veil: Muslim women explain their choice." *NPR Special Series* (2011).

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Sexualizing Hijabis as Colonial Violence

The Western mystification behind Muslim women, particularly veiled women stems from the binary opposition of "Orientalism" that sees the world in an "Us vs. them" frame which allows the West to assert itself as culturally or intellectually superior to its Eastern counterparts. This is reflected in 19th-century and 20th-century Orientalist images of Muslim women that depict them as exotic and mysterious or backward and oppressed and their cultures forever static and inferior to the West. [45]. **Orientalist depictions of Muslim women in media have also created another negative impact on the understanding of Muslim women in the West, not only are Muslim women portrayed as one-dimensional, oppressed, and lacking agency they are also oversexualized and fetishized.** This sexualizing is thought to stem from colonial times that write about Oriental women as living in secluded areas of the household called "harems" and represent them as sexually available.[46][47] These depictions of veiled women often portray them as a femme fatal in men's sexual fantasies.

The paintings of women in these secluded parts of the home were not limited to Delacroix as many other Western painters such as Gérôme, Lewis, Renoir, Matisse, and Lecomte du Nouj as well as literary figures such as Flaubert, Nerval, and Lord Byron all wrote about the "elusive and sensual" women of the Orient. [48] These oversexualized images of Arab women have a real and tangible impact as "Ideas and expectations of sexual openness in women of color seep into our consciousness at many moments in our personal lives and cast doubt on Asian/American women's engagements with sexuality." [49] These colonial depictions of Muslim women have carried over from paintings and literature to theatrical performances such as the strip tease "dance of the seven veils." This over-sexualization of modest women may seem in juxtaposition to the Islamophobic images presented earlier, which portray Muslim women as lacking not only agency but also sex appeal. Macdonald elaborates on this idea **"Even though the enticement of the shimmering diaphanous veil of screen representations may seem at the opposite end of any spectrum from the total obscurity of the burqa, the harem of the Western imaginary has left a legacy of mystique and sexual anticipation that still contributes to the veil's fascination"** (p.10). Essentially, the very idea of modesty and obscurity creates desire and unwanted sexual attention for Muslim women. [50]



Ingres's "Odalisque" exemplifies how Western media projects fantasies, curiosities, and criticism of the Islamic world and the perceived treatment of Muslim women and disguises it as historic portrayal. [51]

*black bars were not in the original



"The Women of Algiers", Delacroix portrays non-white women as sexually open and available. The paintings of women in these secluded parts of the home were not limited to Delacroix as many other Western painters such as Gérôme, Lewis, Renoir, Matisse, and Lecomte du Nouj as well as literary figures such as Flaubert, Nerval, and Lord Byron all wrote about the "elusive and sensual" women of the Orient.[48]

To elaborate, the sexualization of harems by Westerners is drastically different from the way in which Muslim women viewed their harems. The harems often served as inspiration for colonial texts and paintings that depicted Middle Eastern women as objects, passive, still, awaiting a man, and often even as "playthings." The depictions of these women in harems are made in spite of the fact that foreign men were often not allowed into these harems and were simply based on the author's or artist's imagination. In juxtaposition, these harems were viewed by Muslim women who lived in these harems as educational spaces, which were a symbol of prestige and a source of pride. [52] [53] [54]

Modern-day Pornographic Images of Muslim Women

The sexualization of Hijab and hijabi women is a form of colonial violence. By making hijab, niqab, and burqa in fetish images and pornography it invites consumers to explore their raced conceptions of Muslim men and women and thereby invites the epistemic violence of the imperial and paternal gaze. It forces Muslim women or the image of Muslims to be subjugated and degraded for the Western consumer. [55]

[45] Said, Edward W. "An interview with Edward W. said." *boundary 2* 20, no. 1 (1993): 1-25.

[46] Kabbani, Rana. *Europe's myths of Orient: devise and rule*. Springer, 1986.

[47] Alloula, Malek. *The colonial harem*. Vol. 21. Manchester University Press, 1986.

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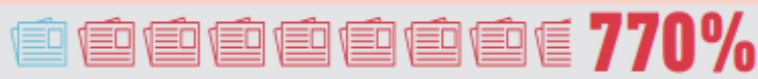
[55] Abujad, I.M. (2021). *Desiring Empire: The Colonial Violence of "Hijab Pornography"*. In: Zouidi, N. (eds) *Performativity of Villainy and Evil in Anglophone Literature and Media*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76055-7_4

IMPACT

in Numbers

MEDIA BIAS

- Muslim- perceived perpetrators receive **770%** more media coverage than non-Muslim perceived perpetrators
- The U.S. Department of Justice issued press releases from its national office **six times** as often in regards to violent plots by Muslim-perceived perpetrators than violent plots by non-Muslim-perceived perpetrators. [56]



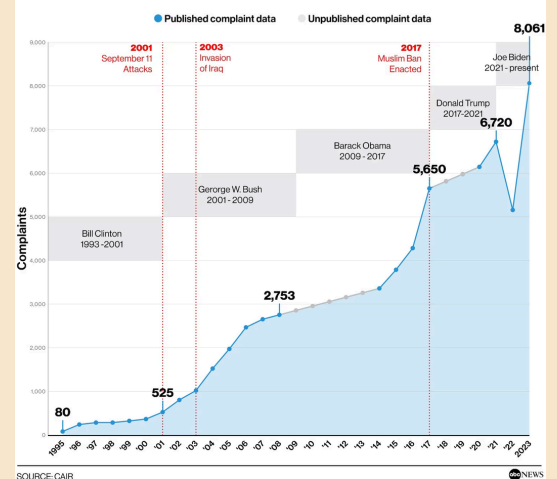
PROSECUTION

- **83%** of Muslim-perceived perpetrators of violent plots were prosecuted with severe legal charges compared to 17% of those not perceived to be Muslim.
- Charging documents **always** mentioned Muslim-associated ideologies in violent plots committed by Muslim-perceived perpetrators while just half of non-Muslim perceived cases referenced perpetrator ideology. [56]



HATE CRIMES

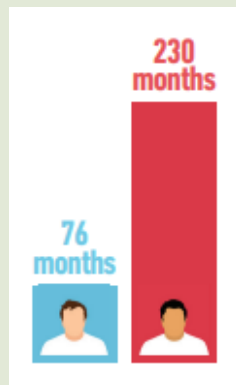
Total anti-Muslim bias complaints received



CAIR received a record-high number of complaints in 2024 after October 7th. According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the United States' largest Muslim civil liberties organization, in 2023, it received over 8,000 complaints of anti-Muslim incidents—the highest number of complaints in the organization's 30-year history. [57]

SENTENCING

- Average prison sentences issued for Muslim-perceived perpetrators of violent plots were **FOUR TIMES** the length of those issued for non-Muslim-perceived perpetrators of violent plots.
- Prosecutors sought an average sentence of 76 months for non-Muslim-perceived perpetrators and 230 months for Muslim-perceived perpetrators, **THREE TIMES the length for Muslims**. [56]



LEGISLATION

- University of California Berkeley has designed a [database of Islamophobic legislation](https://ispu.org/countering-islamophobia/) that helps visualize the growing legalization othering of Muslims
- According to the American Bar Association, since 2010, **233** anti-Sharia bills have been introduced in statehouses. Twenty bills have been enacted into law in 13 states, and **44 U.S. state legislatures have introduced anti-Sharia legislation**. The only anti-Sharia act or amendment to have been struck down was the Oklahoma "Save Our State Amendment," in which a federal court in 2013 ruled that the amendment violated the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

[56] Countering and Dismantling Islamophobia: A Comprehensive Guide for Communities and Individuals." ISPU, April 6, 2021. <https://ispu.org/countering-islamophobia/>.
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REAL STORIES

Wadea Al-Fayoume



Wadea Al Fayoume was a Palestinian-American 6-year-old boy living in Plainfield, Illinois, with his family. Wadea and his mother, Shahin, were attacked by their landlord, Czuba, on October 11, 2023.

Czuba had previously had good relations with the family before this attack; he had even bought toys for Wadea in the past. However, after the increased media coverage on issues in the Middle East, Czuba began to believe that he was in danger from Shahin and her family. On October 11, 2023, Czuba confronted Shahin about “what was going on in the Middle East” and stated that he was angry at her for what was happening in Jerusalem. Shahin responded, “Let’s pray for peace.” Czuba then attacked Shahin with a knife, giving her no chance to defend herself.

Wadea was stabbed 26 times and brutally murdered by the family’s landlord because he was Muslim. Will County’s sheriff stated that he was killed because of the “ongoing Middle Eastern conflict involving Hamas and the Israelis.” His mother, Shahin, who survived, was also attacked with more than a dozen stab wounds.

Shahin told authorities, according to the filing, that on October 11, Czuba confronted her “about what was going on in the Middle East.”

The mother also told authorities that on Saturday, moments before the stabbings unfolded, Czuba told her he was angry at her for what was happening in Jerusalem.

“Shahin stated she responded to him, ‘Let’s pray for peace.’ Shahin stated Czuba gave her no chance to do anything. Shahin stated that Czuba then attacked her with a knife,” according to the filing.

The landlord, Joseph M. Czuba, has been convicted of first-degree murder, attempted first-degree murder, two counts of a hate crime, and aggravated battery with a deadly weapon.

Wadea, being only six years old, knew nothing about the reasons he was ultimately brutally murdered. His family described him as a warm, kind child who focused on enjoying life with his friends and playing outside, and who loved his parents and family deeply.

In his final moments, Wadea offered words of comfort to his mother, a family member revealed Monday. “His last words to his mom: ‘Mom, I’m fine,’” Wadea’s uncle, Mahmood Yosif, told reporters. “You know what, he is fine. He is in a better place.”

Wadea’s story is a shameful reminder of the effects of Islamophobia and how the media can create unfounded fear and hatred of Muslims. [60]

Kinnan Abdalhamid, Hisham Awartani, and Tahseen Ali Ahmed



Three Palestinian men, aged 20, named Kinnan Abdalhamid, Hisham Awartani, and Tahseen Ali Ahmed, were shot by Jason Eaton near their university campus in Vermont. According to police, the victims were speaking Arabic, and two of them were wearing keffiyehs when they were attacked. Two of the victims were shot in the torso, and one was shot in the “lower extremities.” Awartani told NBC News about the shooting: “I just care that, like, justice is served. And to me, that is a part of it. But I know that it is a hate crime.” The increase in media coverage and political discourse in the U.S. has been cited as a reason for the rise in anti-Arab and anti-Islam sentiment amid Israel’s actions in Gaza. [61]

Attempted Drowning of a Three year Old Palestinian Girl



The victim and the victim’s mother did not want to be named in this story.

In 2024, Elizabeth Wolf, aged 42, was charged with a hate crime for attempting to drown a three-year-old Palestinian American girl. Wolf was charged with attempted capital murder of a person under the age of 10 and intentionally causing bodily harm, which police say was motivated by racial hatred.

Wolf approached the victim’s mother and her two children at the pool, asking where they were from and began what CAIR-Texas called a “racist interrogation.” Following this, Wolf jumped into the pool and attempted to drown the three-year-old girl, also trying to grab the six-year-old boy. Luckily, the mother was able to pull her daughter out of the water in time.

This hate crime can also be attributed to the rise of hateful speech surrounding Muslims, Arabs, and hijabis in Western media, according to Al-Jazeera. [62]

[60] Maxouris, Christina. “Palestinian-American Boy Fatally Stabbed near Chicago Had Celebrated His 6th Birthday Just 8 Days Earlier.” CNN, October 18, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/17/us/6-year-old-boy-palestinian-boy-chicago-profile/index.html>.

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What Can YOU Do?

Resources and Action Points

Know Your Rights!



Know your rights...

- [While protesting](#)
- [With law enforcement](#)
- [As an employee](#)
- [While traveling](#)
- [As a student](#)

For more Information on how to protect your rights see the ACLU guide on religious freedom rights and what to do when those rights are threatened in different situations:

- [Click here!](#)

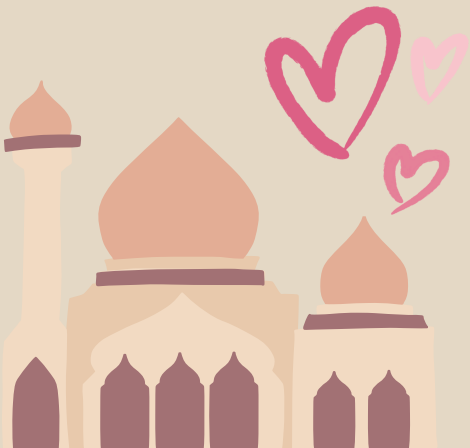
Knowing your rights allows you to be empowered and empower your communities to be able to handle tough situations. In this section I have linked the rights one is entitled to in different situations from the well-known Muslim civil rights organization, Council on American-Islamic Relations.

Understand and Speak Out!

- Develop media literacy and [continue to learn](#) how media perpetuates Islamophobic views
- Demand unbiased media coverage from local news outlets
- Speak out about topics that you feel are important and that may be suppressed by Western media (Ex: Talking about the lived experiences of Palestinians in relation to the occupation and genocide to peers who may not know about the situation may empower them to learn and research more.)
- In addendum to that, counteract Islamophobic media by sharing [facts over fear mongering media](#).
- Encourage the implementation of [anti-Islamophobia campaigns](#) in your community.



Create Safe Spaces!



- Familiarize yourself with common [challenges to mosque construction](#) and ways to manage them.
- Pre-empt opposition and [strategize effectively to secure municipal approvals](#) for building mosques.
- Mobilize [community support](#) prior to publicizing new plans.
- Foster and nurture strong [interfaith coalitions](#) by allowing members of your community to create meaningful relationships with Muslims they will be better at dispelling unwarranted hatred toward them.
- Be an [upstanding neighbor in faith](#).

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