Islamophobia: AnOther Racism

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Terror and Islamophobia

On Friday, the 13th of November, 2015, the world stood still, horror-filled once more. Heinous terror attacks in Paris again brought focus to the violence of terrorists right in the center of Europe. In the final count, 130 were dead, and over 300 were injured, many critically. Along with broadly cast outrage, messages of solidarity emanated from across the globe: "We are all France today!" France closed its borders and proclaimed three days of national mourning and a state of emergency. Xenophobia regarding Muslims, Arabs, and Islam in Europe and the West was ratcheted up again.

A continuous litany of dangerous assaults on Western populations have been reported in worldwide media, including the assault on the Charlie Hebdo office in Paris in January 2015. News stories are often framed in terms of the threat that Muslim and Arab populations pose in Europe and the "West," and reports focus on the flood of migrants seeking safety and refuge from the wars and impoverishment experienced in the new world order. The issue of Muslims in our midst is raised again and again by pundits and aspiring political candidates, serving to build fears of more violence in the consciousness of publics across the world.

In a Facebook post talking back to his subscribers, Nader Atassi indicated a more nuanced response to the events in France:

Attacks like the ones tonight in Paris are committed to purposely trigger an Islamophobic backlash. That backlash is not an unintended consequence of such attacks, it is part of their logic. ISIS types want an Islamophobic backlash because it lends credence to their narrative that there is a war between the West and Islam. By strengthening and emboldening the xenophobic right-wing in Europe, they strengthen their own worldview. And the most tragic irony is that the backlash may target refugees who themselves had been fleeing ISIS' reign of terror. Our thoughts are with everyone in Paris. May the forces who wish to beget an apocalyptic "war of civilizations" be defeated. (Nader Atassi, November 13, 2015)

When it was announced that SACC was organizing a panel on "Teaching the Anthropology of Race and Ethnicity: The Familiar and Strange in the Classroom," I was concerned that this new, and yet older, racism, what has been renamed as "Islamophobia," would not be included. The topic is of immediate relevance, despite the multivalent complexities it represents for instructors.

My objective in this paper is to bookmark and open the discussion of trends in the "familiar and the strange" of teaching

about race and ethnicity. I will: 1) Define, discuss, and qualify "Islamophobia" as racism; 2) Identify incidents of discrimination, prejudice, and violence toward Muslims and others assumed to be Muslim; 3) Identify advocacy organizations working against Islamophobia; 4) Discuss the relevance of race formation theory to our understandings of Islamophobia; and 5) List a variety of resources that can be used to teach students about Islamophobia.

Race: The Familiar Canon and the Challenge of Islamophobia

We are the beneficiaries of W. E. B. DuBois and his colleague Franz Boas in approaching the color lines of the 19th and early 20th century. DuBois, a prolific author, sociologist, historian, philosopher, educator, and activist, published the sociological study *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. He lived from 1868 to 1963 and interrogated the constructions of race from post-Civil War America through Jim Crow segregation and the struggle for civil rights into the 1960s. One can only imagine the intellectual tasks involved in his deconstruction of the realities of his time, given the attitudes and presumptions about scientific racism, legal social segregation, public lynchings, and other violence directed at the African-American community.

In the 21st century, as a result of decades of study, theory, and analysis, educators have familiar curriculum materials and sets of concepts to identify and demonstrate constructions and intersections of race and ethnicity in human cultures. We define and analyze, apply and exemplify, situations of prejudice, personal and institutional

discrimination, life chances, social location, identity formation, "white privilege," hypo-descent, and a "powerful drop" as part of the repertoire in our teaching "tool kit." These concepts and terms frequent our discussions and analysis of the "color line" encoded in the particular and special history of American racism. The history we study in our now "familiar curriculum" offers a context for current issues, such as the "New Jim Crow" (Alexander 2010) and the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

The familiar "canon" of perspectives on "Race and Ethnicity" can be viewed in the film Race: the Power of an Illusion (2003). The film provides a history of race in the United States, including the discredited "race science" of the 19th and 20th centuries, updated knowledge from genetic science, and critical understanding and perspectives about Jim Crow segregation and the racialization of groups beyond African-descended and Native Americans populations. The racism demonstrated in legal decisions about the naturalization petitions of Asian immigrants, the internment of the Japanese during World War II, and housing policies and redlining involved in neighborhood segregation in the post-World War II 20th century are part of the film's comprehensive account. Interactive websites for the film, the American Anthropology Association's Race Project and the *AAA Statement on Race* all provide major content for teaching about race and ethnicity in the American experience.

Much as W. E. B. DuBois pondered the racism of his world, we need a project for the 21st century to consider Islamophobia in an interconnected world with an expanded,

global, and historical perspective. Islamophobia represents an active construction of social and cultural hierarchy, but with an emphasis on markers of culture and heritage rather than phenotype.

Islamophobia

Press reports and commentary have only recently used the term "Islamophobia" to describe incidents of violence against Muslims in the United States and Europe. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) defines *Islamophobia* as a new term made up of two root elements, specifically "Islam / o / phobia" = Islam + Fear. They state that the precise origin of the word is not known, but it began to be used with reference to a "xenophobic" reaction to changing demographics and global political shifts, probably from the 1980s.

A 1997 report published in London by the British race relations non-governmental organization, the Runnymede Trust, bore the title, *"Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All" (*Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia 1997). The challenge referred to a new reality of increased populations of Muslims in the UK and Europe. That report defined Islamophobia as "unfounded hostility towards Muslims, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims."

The Center for Race and Gender at the University of California, Berkeley, provides a more complex and socio-historical perspective: "Islamophobia is a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended" (Center for Race and Gender 2015).

Reporting Islamophobic Events

Hussein Ibish (2011) recounted on his blog that his experience on a radio call-in program registered a significant uptick in hostile and irrational sentiment regarding Muslims and Islam. Muslims have become, in increasing numbers, targets of exclusions, violence, prejudice, and discrimination—in apartment parking lots, airlines, schools, political campaigns, and multiple other domains of daily living in the United States and elsewhere. In the face of continued "wars without end" and the subtle and explicit militarization of our own society, it is important to monitor such incidents. Islamophobic incidents have increased following the 2015 Paris attacks and shooting in San Bernadino, CA. Advocacy and human rights monitoring organizations in the United States and Europe monitor and compile this information.

A targeted shooting to death of 3 young, vibrant, and upstanding university students in North Carolina in February 2015 is considered by their community to be a "hate crime." In this tragic incident, Deah Shaddy Barakat, 23; his new wife, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, 21; and her 19-year-old sister, Razan Mohammad Abu-Salh, were each shot in the head in their condominium at a complex about three miles from the campus of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Craig Hicks, 46, a self-described "gun-toting" atheist of Chapel Hill, was indicted for their murders. Media reports stated that

the tragic killing was motivated by conflict over a "parking space" (Shapiro 2015).

Anti-female incidents where the hijab is a marker of identity are reported in unusually higher numbers for a targeted minority group. Stereotypes in popular discourse elevate the presumption that Islam subjugates women (Hasan 2012). Antipathy toward Muslim women wearing an hijab or head scarf has been demonstrated in incidents of airline passengers refusing to sit near Muslim women. In 2015, a United Airlines female passenger reported that she was denied a can of unopened Diet Coke because it could be used as a "weapon," when moments later a man sitting next to her was given an unopened can of beer. The woman claimed on Facebook that she was the victim of "Islamophobia." The airline responded, "United does not tolerate behavior that is discriminatory—or that appears to be discriminatory—against our customers or employees" (Shapiro and Faulders 2015).

According to a recent report from California, 50% of Muslim youth experience bullying in public schools (CAIR 2013). A dramatic news item became a sensation on social media after word spread that "Muslim Teen Is Detained Over Homemade Clock" (Fernandez and Hauser 2015). The 14-year-old was pulled from class and taken to a detention center after showing the digital clock to teachers at his suburban Dallas high school. The story went viral, bringing mixed responses, including kudos from President Obama, who invited him to the White House, and from Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg. School officials and police from the Texas suburb, however, claimed the actions were justified. The incident

occurred in Irving, Texas, a suburb of Dallas, where earlier in the spring, the city council endorsed one of several "Sharia" bills that would forbid judges from rulings based on "foreign laws." Islamophobic networks have put forth similar legislative initiatives in multiple states.

In the United States, not only Muslim populations, but also those who are incorrectly assumed to be Muslims—Hindus, Sikhs, and others—have been the frequent target of anti-Muslim vitriol and violence. In the days following 9/11 in 2001, the first revenge murder in the United States was of an innocent Sikh gas station owner, who was shot five times at his place of business in Arizona by a person who assumed he was Muslim.

Similarly, on August 5, 2012, three people were killed and more were injured at a mass shooting at a Sikh community worship center in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. A highly recommended film for classroom use, *Not in Our Town: Walking in Oak Creek* (2014) narrates the details of this devastating and violent incident and its aftermath. The free film and press kit are available for classroom use.

The organization South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) reported in 2014 that "the climate faced by South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities has become increasingly hostile in the four years since SAALT published [its earlier] 2010 report." The "profiling and surveillance by law enforcement agencies, the growth of an Islamophobia industry that demonizes Muslims via the Internet and media, xenophobic political speech, and hate

violence" are all aspects of hostility faced by these communities. Xenophobic political rhetoric refers to rhetoric by political candidates and elected officials. In the newer report, SAALT (2014) stated that over 90% of xenophobic political comments were motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment and that such comments were numerous, insidious, and more likely to be heard on a national platform. In response to the Paris terrorist attacks, the xenophobic rhetoric has escalated, as seen in the statements from Republican presidential candidates and governors in Texas, Florida, and Michigan in debates and other forums. This is a definite change from when statements disparaging Muslims were countered by John McCain during the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns.

Media Stereotypes

Familiar media tropes build into accepted, if only subliminally, representations and stereotypes about "others." Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians are rarely humanized. Sam Keen, in his reissued and poignant film, "Faces of the Enemy" (1987), demonstrates how images of "the enemy" throughout history reveal that the mentality of war requires that "the enemy" be "dehumanized." Dehumanizing the enemy fortifies a simple narrative about the world framed in a Manichean dichotomy of good versus evil. Dehumanizing Muslims includes the stories, myths, and images of the "enemy," and this often correlates with the geo-political landscape of nations and political and economic interests.

Recall the popularity of the movie "American Sniper," which achieved top financial earnings. The narrative of Chris Kyle as a Western warrior skillfully picking off and executing Middle Eastern enemies, combatants, and civilians resonated with the American public and reified the image of evil, enemy Muslims in the minds of movie-goers. Dramatic and emotion-laden visual constructions play into and build support for policies and wars, contradicting any of the real complexities of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and a misbegotten and illegal war.

Amer F. Ahmed, born to Indian Muslim immigrants in Ohio and director of Swarthmore College's Intercultural Center, argued that the consistent framing of Islam as the enemy of America and repeated stereotyping of the violent Muslim terrorist or the crazed sex monster, or as in the case of the Muslim woman, as a subjugated victim or an insidious veiled bomber, is a staple in American media today. The result of the systematic presentation of the Muslim as terrorist is a rationale and bias that justifies profiling, incarceration, detention, criminalization, and violence toward Muslims (Gustin 2013).

Islamophobia: Islamopredjudice versus Rational Objection / Critique of Islam

Is all criticism of Islam to be conflated into a word that implies prejudice and hysterics and fear, namely, Islamophobia? Is it possible to legitimately and rationally critique this Abrahamic and world religion as some philosophers and even atheists do? Roland Imhoff and Julia Recker (2012) sought to identify two sentiments that might be expressed in negativity toward Muslims and Islam. The two categories, "Islamoprejudice" versus "a Secular Critique

of Islam," were identified to survey public attitudes about a dispute over the building of a mosque in Cologne. The two concepts were measured in interviews with individuals as variables predicting an individual's position supporting or opposing a mosque in their community.

The "secular critique of Islam" was unrelated to any forms of prejudice but related negatively to religiosity and authoritarianism. "Islamopredjudice," however, was correlated with explicit and implicit prejudice, right-wing authoritarianism, and a social dominance orientation. This was expressed as anti-Muslim hostility and objection to the building of the mosque. It is useful to note the imprecision of language and meaning conflated in the term "Islamophobia" versus the term "Islamopredjudice" explored in this research.

Not all criticism of a religion would imply an irrational prejudice and hostility. Secular and rational critique is legitimate. Irshad Manji (2015) suggests in her review of Harris and Nawaz's *Islam and the Future of Tolerance: A Dialogue* that, while dialogue can be helpful in building understanding for some, it is typical that atheists and liberals do not accept aspects of Islam or any religion. However, they should not shirk the ethical issues involved in elevating hatred against Muslims and their communities.

Teaching Race and Ethnicity: Organizations and Teaching Materials

Advocacy organizations, such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the American-Arab Anti-

Discrimination Committee (ADC), and SAALT, monitor and record incidents of xenophobic rhetoric and hate violence and provide educational materials for educators, elected officials, and others. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has worked for decades, specializing in civil rights litigation, tracking white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and tracking and reporting racist incidents across the United States. The SPLC's Teaching Tolerance project provides free curriculum, films, and ready lesson plans. Historically, their focus has always been on civil rights issues, and more recently their concerns have broadened to include new U.S. immigrant groups, specifically Arabs and Muslims.

A Teaching Tolerance Blog discussion of Islam and Islamophobia is instructive. Assistant principal Maureen Costello in Illinois lamented a spate of anti-Islamic incidents and rising anti-Muslim rhetoric just before the anniversary of 9/11 in 2010. She wrote on the Teaching Tolerance Blog, "I wondered how to tackle this head-on as an educator. What would I say to my teachers about how to approach the subject in our history classes? How could I be a participant in a difficult conversation in which some of our Muslim students are directly affected?" (Costello 2010).

Some teachers responded to Costello's concerns. One asked her if she felt like she was "walking a minefield?", confessing that she herself hesitated to speak out. Other posts, however, argued that "the topic of Islam and Muslims is not appropriate for classrooms." The response of SPLC Teaching Tolerance staff was strong and immediate:

Not only is it a classroom topic, it's one that must be addressed now, and urgently, as the nation pauses to remember the 9/11 attacks [and the Paris Attacks]. It should be taught now precisely because the rhetoric has gotten hotter, as we hear of Christian ministers staging Quran burnings and preaching anti-Muslim sermons at Ground Zero. What's at stake is nothing less than the meaning of religious freedom. Students need to know that. We urge all educators to teach about Islam and to talk about Islamophobia. Name it. Call it out. It's current events. Teaching about religious freedom is part of civics. Teaching students how to separate fact from opinion is an essential skill. Teaching about religion is not the same as religious teaching. The cultural contributions of religions are an integral part of world history and have an important place in English, art, music, and social studies classes. Students need to understand the danger of religious intolerance. Many of our students are Muslims. They feel threatened and unsafe. It's the right thing to do. [Costello 2010]

Materials to incorporate into teaching units on Muslims and Islam on this site are a useful starting point.

RaceTheory and Teaching Islamophobia

Islamophobia is racism. How can instruction about racism toward Muslims be framed? The ambiguity of moving beyond notions of race as biology linked to phenotype to considering Muslims and their religion can be an impediment for instructors in readily developing an instructional approach to Islamophobia. Much as W. E. B. DuBois developed his evolving understanding of race over his lifetime in consultation with Boas and other scholars, we as anthropologists are challenged by the reality and issues of Islamophobia from a pedagogical and theoretical perspective. Much benefit is gained in reviewing the groundwork established in the field of post-colonial studies.

Stuart Hall, the Jamaican-born proponent of cultural studies in the 1960s and 1970s, asserted until his death in 2014 that race is NOT about biology, but about socio-historical contexts and the constructions within those contexts. He lectured about race as a way of naming and talking, suggesting that race talk is a language with signifiers conveying meanings; it is a discourse and a system of naming used and embedded in how we conceptually organize the world. The framing is large and challenges us to enter into the geo-politics of the globalized world and its populations (*Stuart Hall: Race, The Floating Signifier* 1997).

For Hall, "race" is a floating signifier, not static, but changing with the socio-historical-political changes in our social and culture universe and the larger context of a global anthropology. Discussions and instruction about race in American anthropology have largely focused on the populations and social issues within our borders. With the United States and Europe part of a global geo-political system and an economy dependent on extractions of

resources from other lands, there is a far larger context. With populations on the move across the globe, in many cases propelled by the need to exit lands and countries devastated physically and economically by a new global order, the neo-liberal ideology and global capitalist hegemony, signifiers have morphed into new forms with familiar dynamics.

Sociologists Howard Winant and Michael Omi (1986), like Hall, argue that the process of racial formation has a dynamic relationship to both micro-level and macro-level social relations in a global context. Extrapolating from this approach, Dubois's color-line of the 19th and 20th centuries has everything to do with the history of the European colonial project.

Eurocentrism, Orientalism, Islamophobia, and Post-Colonial Perspectives

Frantz Fanon was an observer of the French in his homeland of Martinique and in the Algerian struggle for independence. His text *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) initiated a discussion about the parameters, structures, and processes of race in a global perspective on European colonialism, and he called for resistance and de-colonization. In his groundbreaking primer on the subject, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said described the racism, special fictions, and bias of Eurocentrism as critical in the geo-political context implicit in a contested era of colonization and imperial hegemony. The "Orient" referred to a generalized region of the globe. The people in this zone were presumed to be inferior to the civilized Europeans and the West.

Fanon's and Said's seminal works opened the way for a critical and productive postmodern and post-colonial scholarship. Said reviewed the antecedents of contemporary Islamophobia's long history and drew into view an inventory and analysis of images and assumptions about colonized cultures and populations of "The East." He described Pope Urban's 1095 proclamations valorizing anti-Muslim crusades, the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Spanish Inquisition established in 1478 (disbanded in 1834), and justification of the conquest and domination of non-Christians.

Conclusion

In 1903, DuBois asked, "How does it feel to be a problem?"

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All nevertheless flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then instead of saying it directly, they say, I know an excellent colored man [today this could be worded as Muslim or Arab] in my town; or I fought at Mechanicsville [today this could be Iraq]. Do not these Southern [today this would be terrorist] outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" I

answer seldom a word. [DuBois 2007]

The query of what it is to be a problem can be directed to Muslims today. *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (2008) is the title Moustafa Bayoumi chose to present narratives based on interviews detailing the individual experiences of seven young (in their 20s) Arab Americans in Brooklyn in the months after 9/11. Individual chapters relate the stories of young students and their families held in detention without charge, the disappearance of friends and family, discrimination in the workplace, and threats of violence. One story is of a young Muslim woman who was blocked from being elected to her high school student government by the school administration.

Kwame Appiah (1993), biographer and scholar of W. E. B. DuBois, eloquently argues that the demands of global citizenship are a cry beyond nativist and xenophobic proclivities that hype fear and hostility toward other human beings. Enacting a global anthropology requires "studying up" (Nader 1972) and being conversant with the context of world histories and the contours of geo-politics and these realities across the planet.

In the classroom, ethnography is a critical pedagogical tool and research method. Whether reading about people's experience or providing opportunity for observation and engagement with others and oneself, ethnographic activities are key in developing an appreciation for and critical stance toward the complex intersection of variables constructing our world. This is a task we need to begin in teaching race and ethnicity with its manifestations in Islamophobia.

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Additional Resources and Suggested Readings

FILM

Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? 2008. San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel. http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/

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ORGANIZATIONS AND WEBSITES

SPLC https://www.splcenter.org/
CAIR www.**cair**.com/
ADC   www.adc.org/
SAALT Report*s*
    http://saalt.org/resources/reports-and-
    publications/

American Anthro Association Race Project
    http://www.understandingrace.org/hom
    e.html

American Anthro Association Statement on
    Race
    http://www.americananthro.org/Connec
    tWithAAA/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=
    2583

National Endowment for the Humanities
    "Muslim Journeys"
    http://bridgingcultures.neh.gov/muslimj
    ourneys/bookshelf

Reza Aslan
    http://www.attn.com/stories/4232/reza-
    aslan-on-islam-and-violence

Consequences of Islamophobia Network
    https://islamophobianetwork.com/conse
    quences