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DO MUSLIMS SCARE YOU?

ISLAMOPHOBIA

A GUIDE FOR **JOURNALISTS**

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Foreword

In recent decades, many Western institutions have made significant efforts to portray Muslims as the "Other". This is evident in various arenas, from political campaigns that aim to "protect" the West from an imagined "Islamic invasion" to cinematic depictions that portray Muslims solely as symbols of violence, backwardness, oppressors of women, and the killers of innocents.

This guidebook aims to highlight the widespread phenomenon of Islamophobia in the media, which presents Muslims in negative frames that dehumanise them. It seeks to showcase examples of such stereotyping in news reportage, cinema and political discourse, while also highlighting how professional journalism can address and correct these practices by adhering to journalistic standards.

The author has collaborated with a team of academics and experts who have years of experience studying Islamophobia in depth and understanding its roots.

Even though this guidebook is being published after October 7, 2023 amid the Israeli aggression against civilians in Gaza, a significant part of it was completed prior to that. While we cannot assert that the anti-Muslim rhetoric has changed since, it has certainly become more explicit, even among institutions that have long purported to uphold liberal principles and high journalistic values.

Therefore, at a time when the humanity of Palestinian citizens is being disregarded, this guide is dedicated to those who want to uphold the principles of professional journalism and presenting the unfiltered truth to their audiences. Its ultimate purpose is to serve journalism's core objective, to inform the public.

- Al Jazeera Media Institute

INTRODUCTION

"It's a slow news day, Mohammed! Go blow something up"...

"I was a young producer working in a prestigious newsroom. It happened over a decade ago, and to this day I think of this crude joke," a Canadian journalist told me, referring to how Islamophobia exists everywhere if you're Muslim and invisible to everyone else.

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion has found that suspicion, discrimination and outright hatred towards Muslims have risen to "epidemic proportions". According to the Pew Research Center, 78 percent of Americans say that Muslims in the US face "some" or "a lot" of discrimination.

The extent of Islamophobia is becoming more evident as its impact affects millions of people all over the world.

Whether it is in legislation or unwarranted public anger and violence, what is critical to countering narratives of division and hate is high-quality, unbiased journalism.

This booklet will help to untangle the specific strands of hate which are Islamophobia, often mangled into a mesh of xenophobia and racism.

The advent of social media has made it important to have a clear view of what is unacceptable and how to avoid bigotry, hate and tropes which can be found abundantly in many Western narratives.

It's challenging to have knowledge and understanding of a different culture and that is often only visible through regurgitated stereotypes and misconceptions. These could result in tensions and hurt, and in extreme violence as well. Understanding terminology and the origins of common stereotypes about Muslims is helpful in discerning the difference.

This guide will provide a brief understanding of everyday Islamophobic manifestations around us and also a guideline on best practices on covering Islam and Muslims. It will serve as a handy toolkit for journalists, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, ensuring their reporting approaches this topic with accuracy, balance and nuance.

Osama Bin Javaid

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CONTRIBUTORS

Author: **Osama Bin Javaid**

Traversing the East-West divide Osama Bin Javaid has reported extensively in the last two decades from conflict zones and political hubs. Often found on the paths less traveled, his career span has taken him through the UK, US, Middle East and Asia. Osama's worked on some of the most important international stories in the last few years which have had a global impact, including but not limited to, the rise and fall of ISIL (ISIS), the Taliban, al-Qaeda, the Arab Spring, multiple refugee crises and the Gulf saga. He believes journalists write the first draft of history so their words, actions all matter. He's worked with the International Association of Religious Journalists and other organizations for theological understanding and interfaith harmony.

Dr Diane Winston

Diane Winston has a PhD in Religion from Princeton University and Master's degrees from Harvard Divinity School and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Between 1983 and 1995, Winston was a journalist at the Raleigh News and Observer, the Dallas Times Herald and the Baltimore Sun and contributed to the Dallas Morning News. She has won numerous press association awards and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for her work in Raleigh, Dallas and Baltimore. Her articles have appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times, and The Chronicle of Higher Education. She holds the Knight Chair in Media and Religion at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, and teaches on the faculties of journalism, communication and religion. She is the publisher of Religion Dispatches, an award-winning daily online magazine of religion, politics and culture.

Abdul Malik Mujahid

Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid is an award-winning author and producer based in Chicago, US. He is president of the Sound Vision organisation which operates Muslim Network TV, and the Justice For All NGO. He also chairs the Burma Task Force USA, a coalition of 38 organisations. As the coordinator of the Bosnia Task Force, Imam Mujahid successfully led efforts in coalition with the National Organization for Women (NOW) to declare rape as a war crime in international law. As a leader of United Power, a coalition of 60 churches, synagogues, mosques and labour organisations in Chicago, he has led efforts for universal healthcare coverage in the state of Illinois. He has served on the Independent Task Forces of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, as well as the Council on Global Affairs in Chicago. He is chair emeritus of the Parliament of the World's Religions. Imam Mujahid has authored more than 400 articles and essays on religion, civil rights and public policy. He has been selected eight times as one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world.
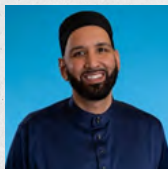
Dr Omar Suleiman

Omar Suleiman is founder and president of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, and an adjunct professor of Islamic Studies in the Graduate Liberal Studies programme at Southern Methodist University. He is also the resident scholar at Valley Ranch Islamic Center and co-chair of Faith Forward Dallas at Thanks-Giving Square. He has taught Islamic Studies at university level since 2008. Imam Omar developed one of the most successful seminars Behind the Scenes: An In-Depth Study of the Spiritual Practices of the Best Generations. In media, he's one of the creators of the internationally acclaimed Inspiration Series, which has reached millions of Muslims and non-Muslims through YouTube and Islamic television stations worldwide.

Todd Green

Todd Green is the director of campus partnerships at Interfaith America. Prior to this position, Green served as a professor of religious studies at Luther College and executive director of America Indivisible. A nationally recognised expert on Islamophobia, Green advised the US State Department on Islamophobia in Europe as a Franklin Fellow in 2016-17. He has provided consultations on Islamophobia to other federal agencies, including the Department of Education, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice and the FBI. He is the author of The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West, and Presumed Guilty: Why We Shouldn't Ask Muslims to Condemn Terrorism.

Dr Yasir Qadhi

Yasir Qadhi has a PhD in Islamic Studies from Yale University, a Master's in Theology from the Islamic University of Madinah and a Bachelor's degree in Hadith. He is currently dean of The Islamic Seminary of America and resident scholar of East Plano Islamic Center.

Corey Saylor

Corey Saylor is an expert on political communications, media relations and anti-Islam prejudice in the United States, with more than two decades of experience. The Wall Street Journal, New York Times and Washington Post have sought his opinions. He has appeared on outlets ranging from Fox News to CNN, the BBC and Al Jazeera. He has been active in combatting the Muslim ban, anti-Islam legislation nationwide, and removing biased and inaccurate materials from law enforcement counterterrorism training. He has authored several reports documenting anti-Islam sentiment and civil rights issues in the US. Saylor has conducted leadership, advocacy and media training across the United States and Europe, including speaking to audiences at NASA, Yale, Princeton and the US National War College.
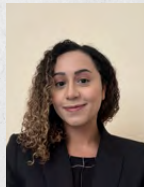
Farah Afify

Farah Afify is an expert on the rise of anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian incidents since the start of hostilities against Palestinians in Gaza in late 2023. She has co-authored publications on Islamophobia in the United States, including Gaza: The Resurgence of Islamophobia in 2023 and CAIR's annual report on the state of Muslim civil rights. Afify is a graduate of Harvard University, where she specialised in the history of American Muslim communities, and the University of Cambridge, where she received a Master's in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies.

CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING
ISLAMOPHOBIA

Many journalists are mindful of their own biases and work hard to ensure balance. Yet so much that's written about Muslims and Islam is steeped in tropes, bigotry and hate. The logical conclusion is that there isn't enough awareness of what constitutes an Islamophobic imbalance.

According to the United Nations[1], "Islamophobia is a fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism, it targets the symbols and markers of being a Muslim."

[1] United Nations. "International Day to Combat Islamophobia." International Day to Combat Islamophobia 15 March. Accessed September 5, 2023. https://www.un.org/en/observances/anti-islamophobia-day.

In his book, The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West, author Todd Green describes Islamophobia as "the fear of and hostility toward Muslims and Islam that is rooted in racism and that results in individual and systemic discrimination, exclusion, and violence targeting Muslims and those perceived as Muslim".

Yasir Qadhi says, "any system of beliefs or any manifestation of the inherent preposition that Muslims are somehow more prone to violence, or somehow not able to fit into the modern world or somehow an impediment to progress; that Muslims as an entirety are a problem, in any sense of the word, would be the basis of Islamophobia".

The definitions of Islamophobia vary. Some organisations and scholars have increasingly moved in the direction of identifying Islamophobia as a direct form of racism.

It is easy and simplistic to conclude that something is rooted in faith and highlight it under the banner of an entire religion.

Journalists must always contextualise what they are writing. It's important to understand that there's typically a deeper reason for whatever the story might be.

> The term appeared as "Islamophobie" in French literature in the early 20th century as a designation for anti-Muslim sentiments and policies and was popularised in English in the late 1990s. Islamophobia is a type of xenophobia, or fear of foreigners or foreign things.[2]
>
> **Encyclopædia Britannica**

[2] Encyclopædia Britannica. Islamophobia. Accessed September 5, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islamophobia.

CHAPTER 2

ROOTS OF ANTI-MUSLIM NARRATIVES

It's important to understand the underlying factors such as, from where does this hate emanate? Why Muslims? And what makes it so widespread?

Muslims have historically been racialised in Western contexts. This has been particularly prominent in modern history. Of course, Muslims are not a race. But they are racialised. They are treated as a race, viewed as a monolithic entity, imagined as a collective threat which must be dealt with as a whole. This explains the larger policies and practices that discriminate against Muslims broadly, without evidence of wrongdoing. If one Muslim does something bad (eg, Osama bin Laden), then ALL Muslims must be somehow connected to this person.

That only occurs because Muslims are treated collectively, not as individuals. The racism in question can certainly also depend on skin colour - for example, some people who get targeted with hate crimes are singled out because they "look" Muslim even though they may have an Arab background, or a South Asian background, but belong to a different religious community. But what we are also talking about here is what social scientists call "cultural racism", or hatred and hostility of others based on religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and perceived ethnicity.

Todd Green believes the three main causes - past and present - of Islamophobia are imperialism, nationalism and racism. Western hostility towards Muslims dates to the Middle Ages, as Islamic empires arose and then came into conflict with European Christian kingdoms and empires. For centuries, Islamic empires had the upper hand militarily, culturally, etc. This shifted in the 18th century and by the 19th and 20th centuries, European empires (notably Britain and France) imposed some form of imperial rule on many Muslim-majority regions. All of this matters because the Western perception that Muslim populations are obstacles to larger political and imperial ambitions has a long history, and throughout this history, anti-Muslim tropes have been generated to perpetuate larger political and imperial ambitions. It's in this context that beliefs emerged that Muslims are uncivilised, irrational, violent and misogynistic.

All of this negativity has taken on a new life in the age of social media and frenzied hashtags, when migrants and refugees have been weaponised by right-wing parties and politics have become more polarised than ever.

Green explains: "In modern history, the rise of nationalism and nationalist movements, particularly those inspired by the far right or conservative political elements, have generated significant Islamophobia. This is particularly the case in countries in which Muslims are a minority population. From India to Myanmar to the Netherlands to the United States, nationalist parties and actors have cast Muslim populations as existential threats to the nation that must be regulated, restricted, or removed. In such contexts, doubt is cast on whether one can be Muslim and Indian, Muslim and Dutch, Muslim and French, Muslim and American, etc. Muslims are a foil against which far-right nationalist movements define national identity."

But at the heart of Islamophobia is also the primal, base fear of "the other". What you don't know and you don't understand, you are likely to automatically consider to be evil, says Qadhi. "So there's a natural protective reflex that people have of their own cultures. Anything that is foreign and alien to their culture at times becomes sinister."

He argues that most people, more importantly journalists, need to be cognisant of this. "People are acclimatised to viewing the world from their own paradigm, and view their paradigm to be inherently superior. So, if another civilisation comes along with other understandings of culture, morality and gender; the assumption is intrinsically made that it is deficient and that it is inferior to what we have."

The Post-9/11 World

In the last two decades, one event and its aftermath has been a catalyst in demonising Muslims and Islam, the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. For those of us old enough, we can tell the younger generation that we live in a post 9/11 world.

"One of the main causes in recent times has been the war on terror," Qadhi says. "And the horrific events of 9/11, which have been decontextualised from the realities of the back and forth between the West and the various aspects of the Muslim world. And if one were to contextualise it, nobody's going to sympathise with terrorism, but one would understand that these acts of violence are not coming from Islam as much as they are coming from sociopolitical causes."

Brown University researchers determined that post-9/11 wars were responsible for the death of 4.5 million people.[3]

In the United States, Michael Rolince, FBI special agent in charge of counterterrorism, Washington, DC, says that more than 500,000 American Muslims were interviewed by the FBI. The same Islamophobic rhetoric has been used around the world to target Muslims.

Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid argues there is an "evil nexus" between terrorism, the so-called "war on terror" and Islamophobia, which are not only connected but mutually reinforce each other.

"This has devastated the lives of Muslims around the world. China calls Uighurs 'terrorists' putting them in detention camps; Burma calls Rohingyas 'foreigners' and 'terrorists' burning 350 villages[4], France went into Central African Republic to fight 'terrorism' resulting in the destruction of almost all of the 435 mosques as per US head of mission statement in the UN[5] and now India is defining Kashmiris and Indian Muslims in similar Islamophobic rhetoric."

[3] Savell, Stephanie. Rep. How Death Outlives War: The Reverberating Impact of the Post-9/11 Wars on Human Health. WATSON INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS - Brown University , May 15, 2023. https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2023/Indirect%20Deaths.pdf

[4] MS, teleSUR/ ms-. "Myanmar Military Burned Nearly 400 Rohingya Villages: Report." News | teleSUR English, December 18, 2017. https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Myanmar-Military-Burned-Nearly-400-Rohingya-Villages-Report-20171218-0028.html

[5] Al Jazeera. "US Envoy: Almost Every Car Mosque Destroyed in War." Human Rights News | Al Jazeera, March 18, 2015. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/3/18/us-envoy-almost-every-car-mosque-destroyed-in-war.

War on Terror's Shadow

Much of what has been written, reported and portrayed in the last two decades has been through the lens of the war on terror and its ensuing military interventions from Asia to the Middle East. Muslim communities have also had a constant cloud of suspicion, fear and surveillance hanging over their heads.

Two decades after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the hate aimed at Muslims has spilled over from harassment to the actual murder of Muslims.

"So, when we delink the 'war on terror' from the zeitgeist, a sociopolitical reality of this time, and when we only present one side and cherry-pick specific incidents, and don't get any context for them, it becomes very easy to then stigmatise and stereotype the causes for these acts of violence," says Yasir Qadhi.

He has had to deal with not just the community which is affected by Islamophobia, but also how it has an impact on wider society.

"The fact of the matter is that the radicalism that we see in the Middle East is actually a reaction to foreign policies imposed on the region. It's a reaction to the military, the social and the political engagements. And the blockades, that America in particular and others have done. So, if you understand these acts as a reaction to political causes, which is what they are, automatically that changes and you understand this isn't necessarily from the religion, as much as it is the standard back and forth that takes place between civilisations and between competing entities."

The ensuing "war on terror" led to a wave of attacks in Europe. In France, terrorist acts are extensively covered by news media. These acts have often been associated with Islam and the Muslim community residing in France, even though police investigations have established no genuine connection to the religion.

Consequently, a certain discourse has developed in France, which is exacerbated after each attack. Commentators and journalists, sometimes self-proclaimed experts (in a wide range of fields from sports and medicine to religion) tend to formulate subjective opinions rather than engaging in rigorous fact-checking, as would be expected from journalism professionals.

A significant number of people, who consume this rhetoric from various media, then believe and even trust this constant onslaught of rhetoric. And that leads to discriminatory and reductive narratives, particularly towards Islam.

CHAPTER 3
POP CULTURE
AND TROPES

"Hollywood had turned to casting Arabs in the roles of villains after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War". Richard Schickel wrote this when Time Magazine was a glossy publication printed, distributed and sold on newsstands.

Now take a step back and think of Muslim characters in most (if not all) blockbusters, TV series, Netflix dramas or even comedy shows.

Muslims rarely appear on screen and when they do, they are often negatively stereotyped. Attitudes towards Muslims may be formed by a variety of factors. However, mass media is a component within the control of storytellers and content creators.

Research led by Stacy L Smith, the founder and director of the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative at the Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism at the University of Southern California, highlights that it is important to understand how often, and in what context Muslim characters appear in entertainment which we ingest on a daily basis.[6]

It has a direct impact on our inherent biases, preconceived notions and subliminal visual imagery of an entire people, simply based on their set of beliefs.

Hollywood has exploited age-old stereotypes about Arabs instead of addressing them.

Jack Shaheen, author of Reel Bad Arabs, writes that Arabs are made to appear backward and dangerous when you look at them through the distorted lens of Hollywood. He's documented the rise in hate crimes after September 11 due to the spread of stereotypes in Western cinema. In his lectures, Shaheen cites the history of the Nazis' distortion of Jews, which was delivered to the masses through films and other propaganda; which in turn paved the way for the Holocaust.

The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative carried out an investigation[7] to examine the frequency and nature of Muslim portrayals across 200 popular episodic scripted series from four countries.

It found a vast majority or 87 percent of scripted series erased Muslim speaking characters altogether.

Of the tiny 1.1 percent of Muslim characters depicted in the 200 series, a disproportionate 30.6 percent perpetrated violent actions against another character. They were also shown to use firearms, bombs or vests with explosive devices and attacking and physically harming others.

The study also found there were no Muslim children 0-5 years of age across the entire sample.

Most of the Muslims were shown as foreigners, and apart from the setting where characters appeared, language was also a way that stories stereotyped Muslim characters.

As a journalist, these findings, or the extent of demonisation, might surprise you.

And that's why it is important to have this knowledge, to empower media professionals to tell stories which are fair and balanced.

[7] Khan, Al-Baab, Katherine Pieper, Stacy L. Smith, Ariana Case, and Sam Wheeler. Rep. Erased or Extremists: The Stereotypical View of Muslims in Popular Episodic Series. Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, September 2022. https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-study-muslim-erased-or-extremists-20220901.pdf

CHAPTER 4
IMPACT ON SOCIETY

The other-ism of Islam has been pervasive both in broader attitudes towards Muslims in Western nations and in official policies.

Islamophobia is a part of daily life for Muslims, according to Diane Winston. She cites racial profiling, negative assumptions about the hijab (the veil), a paucity of Muslim elected officials, assumptions that terrorist acts are perpetrated by Muslims etc; all these are manifestations of an intrinsic bias against Muslims in western societies on a daily basis.

Where sociopolitical differences are stark, Islamophobia has served to unite the most diverse of ideologies. US-based Muslim Scholar Omar Suleiman is of the view that it is this hatred that unites the European Zionist and the Indian Hindutva, the Netanyahus and the Modis. It's what inspires the genocide in Gujrat and the massacres in Gaza. It is Islamophobia that normalises the Muslim victim, converting casualties into statistics. And unfortunately, its prevalence has only increased.

Todd Green says policies and practices singling out Muslims as a population deserving of suspicion and discrimination abound.

This includes surveillance and profiling, detentions, deportations, torture, and restrictions on religious and civil freedoms.

Islamophobia has also proliferated among far-right political movements and politicians. In the US alone, examples include calls for patrolling Muslim neighbourhoods, for excluding Muslims from the possibility of being elected president, and for banning all Muslims from entering the country.

One of the major dangers emanating from Islamophobia is that it justifies the anti-Muslim status quo.

According to Yasir Qadhi, stances which are detrimental to the lives of people in the Middle East and in Muslim majority countries all over the world include military engagements, blockades and the invasions that have taken place. None of these could have happened without the tropes and stereotypes that Islamophobia perpetuates.

Yet the discrimination and demonisation remains largely under-reported. Even in the United States, where religious freedom is enshrined in the Constitution, here's what civil rights activists have been in recent years.

• Mosques and community centres; Ongoing vandalism and resistance to new mosques

• Discrimination based on appearance

• Discrimination against Muslim women

• Discrimination against prisoners

• Discrimination against Muslims in the Armed Forces

• Infiltration and surveillance of Mosques and Muslim communities

• New York Police Department's discriminatory surveillance of Muslim New Yorkers

• The FBI's surveillance in Southern California's Muslim community

• Congressional hearings on the so-called "radicalisation" of the American Muslim community

• Unconstitutional administration of the "no-fly list"

• FBI mapping of local communities and businesses based on race and ethnicity

• Anti-terrorism financing laws

• Invasive questioning at US borders

• Government discrimination against Muslims

• Discrimination against Muslims in public schools

According to the American Civil Liberties Union[8], Muslim communities in the US have faced a disturbing wave of bigotry and outright hostility. From religiously motivated discrimination and attacks on existing and proposed Islamic centres to vicious rhetoric from presidential candidates, Muslims in America are being unfairly targeted simply for exercising their basic constitutional right to religious liberty.

[8] https://www.aclu.org/issues/national-security/discriminatory-profiling/protecting-religious-freedom-muslims

CHAPTER 5
RISKS OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

Hate has consequences not just for Muslims but for wider society. The FBI has told the US congress that in addition to terrorism, "domestic violent extremists collectively pose a steady threat of violence and economic harm to the United States".[9]

One of its reports says there are constant underlying drivers for domestic violent extremism which includes "Islamophobia".

From the genocide of Bosnians at Srebrenica less than three decades ago, and the Gujrat massacres two decades ago, to the ongoing murder and displacement of Palestinians, Islamophobia is at the nucleus of the mass murder of Muslims internationally.

Omar Suleiman adds: "And it's not limited to non-Muslim violence on Muslims. Islamophobia, disguised as a crackdown on extremism, also fuels the egregious human rights abuses of many authoritarians in the Muslim-majority world."

Violence against Muslims can also arise from the hands and actions of individual citizens who harbour hatred towards them, a hatred often inspired by political actors.

Todd Green wants journalists to remember examples such as the Norway massacres of 2011 and the Christchurch attack in 2019.

And then there's the rise in hate crimes. Experts link Islamophobia to an exacerbation of divisions within society. A deterioration of the social fabric almost always results in mistrust and ends in violence.

Anti-Muslim hate crimes have risen since 9/11 in the US and Europe. In the US, these spikes often accompany presidential election cycles, with presidential candidates targeting Muslims implicitly and explicitly with language and policies that frame Muslims as threats to the nation.

9 "Worldwide Threats - FBI." Christopher Wray Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Statement Before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Washington, D.C. , November 5, 2019. https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/worldwide-threats-110519

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Yasir Qadhi believes that the risks of Islamophobia are almost genocidal. "Take 2023 India for example, the type of rhetoric that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) uses is quite literally straight out of Nazi textbooks. How they're in signing up the masses for ethnic erasure." He adds: "Although India may be exhibiting some of the worst cases currently but in Western countries, like France, the notion of France's historic role in Muslim countries like Algeria is totally ignored, when it comes to reporting on the banlieues and Muslims.

Qadhi argues that France has been pillaging Algeria for more than a century and that's completely overlooked when the media talks about a people who, for generations, were colonised.

There's rarely a question, asks Qadhi, of "why so many people of north African origin live in France? The reason is that France claimed Algeria to be its own colony. So if you said one country, well then, now the descendants of your colony's subjects want to claim the same rights as the French. But mainstream politicians in France don't want that and they justify their policies again by weaponising Islamophobia."

The global war on terror was predicated on anti-Muslim tropes.

Violence against Muslims can take the form of state and state-supported/affiliated actors targeting Muslim populations with war and/or widespread violence, according to Todd Green.

We see this violence also in Myanmar with the targeting of the Rohingya. China relied on US rationales for the war on terror to single out Uighurs as a suspect population, and this eventually led to the widespread internment of Uighurs.

In many European countries, a divisive political climate tends to marginalise Muslims (particularly in France). Some French Muslims say this leads to feelings of stigma and exclusion, both in education and the workplace. Discrimination also persists in the job market, with cases of racism and job refusals.

It's crucial to acknowledge that Islamophobia is a problem in France, with acts of violence and discrimination against Muslims. However, there are also subtler and systemic forms of racism that affect the daily lives of some French Muslims.

Because this is rarely reported and discussed in mainstream media, the risk is that a continual exposure to discriminatory treatment, such as job or housing rejections, or repeated police stops due to their skin colour, leads individuals to feelings of rejection and mistrust towards society at large. Academics argue that some might react by adopting a protective or even communal stance. These experiences can reinforce a sense of isolation and can potentially even push some individuals towards radicalisation.

CHAPTER 6
RESTRICTIONS ON MUSLIMS

Islamophobia is one of the main causes for the justification of policies that feed into the breaking and division of society. Minorities in general have suffered from such policies but in the last few decades, Muslims, in particular, have been the target of legislation and media frenzy.

In the West, Islamophobia has led to discrimination and denial of rights. Imam Mujahid says these include "the infamous Muslim ban by the US and the French ban on Muslim clothing. The Islamophobic rhetoric has translated into public policy in Europe. At least 12 European countries have some form of a hijab ban. There are 11 European countries that have effectively banned Halal meat slaughter. Discrimination against Muslim minorities has led to genocide of Muslim minorities. The International Court of Justice has provisionally ruled that Rohingya faced genocide, and the genocidal policies of France in Central African Republic and China in Eastern Turkistan are widely reported. The Washington, DC-based Genocide Watch has issued two genocide alerts for India because of its treatment of Muslims."

Many French Muslims say they face ongoing pressure due to press articles, documentaries, biased reporting and debates, as well as laws that seem contradictory to the principle of secularism, a traditional pillar of French society.

Secularism advocates for the neutrality of the state in religious matters and the separation of civil and religious spheres. This ensures individuals' right to practise the religion of their choice and dress in accordance with their beliefs. Nevertheless, measures that appear to primarily target the Muslim community have been recently implemented, including the ban on burqas, street prayers, burkinis, veils in schools, and more.

> "The Patriot Act, warrantless bulk surveillance, the unconstitutional federal terror watchlist, sending informants into houses of worship - these government activities have predominantly impacted the Muslim community, but they could potentially threaten every community."[10]
>
> **Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)**

[10] https://www.cair.com/op_eds/cair-op-ed-outraged-by-the-fbis-catholic-memo-targeting-muslims-laid-the-groundwork/

Todd Green has written extensively about how Islamophobia has had a real impact on people. He summarises it in the following categories

Restrictions on freedom of religion:

This is increasingly prominent in European countries. It includes hijab and full-face veil bans in France and Belgium, full-face veil bans in other European countries (Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, etc.); bans on the construction of minarets (Switzerland), etc. The US legal system makes it more difficult to regulate what Muslims can wear or build, but even in the US, Muslims can face resistance from local communities when trying to build mosques or establish cemeteries.

At the same time, at the state level, efforts have been made to ban Sharia, or Islamic law. These efforts started in 2010. In the course of a decade, the majority of US states considered legislation banning Sharia, and over a dozen states enacted such legislation (after some tweaking of the language of the proposed bills to circumvent overt 1st Amendment challenges).

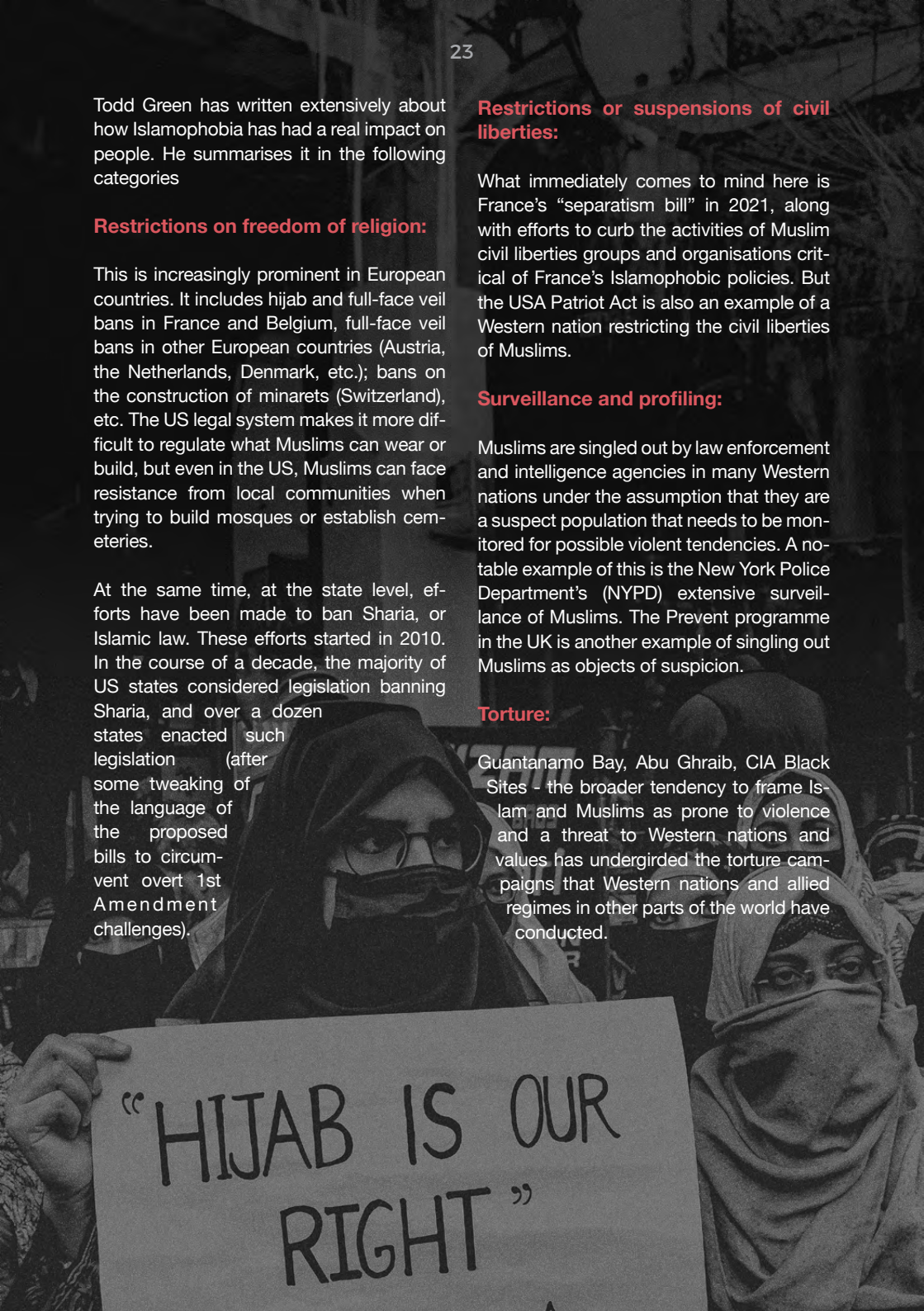## Restrictions or suspensions of civil liberties:

What immediately comes to mind here is France's "separatism bill" in 2021, along with efforts to curb the activities of Muslim civil liberties groups and organisations critical of France's Islamophobic policies. But the USA Patriot Act is also an example of a Western nation restricting the civil liberties of Muslims.

Surveillance and profiling:

Muslims are singled out by law enforcement and intelligence agencies in many Western nations under the assumption that they are a suspect population that needs to be monitored for possible violent tendencies. A notable example of this is the New York Police Department's (NYPD) extensive surveillance of Muslims. The Prevent programme in the UK is another example of singling out Muslims as objects of suspicion.

Torture:

Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, CIA Black Sites - the broader tendency to frame Islam and Muslims as prone to violence and a threat to Western nations and values has undergirded the torture campaigns that Western nations and allied regimes in other parts of the world have conducted.

"HIJAB IS OUR RIGHT"

CHAPTER 7
THE ROLE OF NEWS MEDIA

"All Muslims are not terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims"-a widespread misnomer which is racist, Islamophobic and inaccurate. Yet somehow, it continues to creep up on mainstream media in multiple languages. Ever wonder why?

News outlets (TV, print, digital) fail to explicitly designate terrorists, who at times but not always, happen to be Muslims, as an aberration to the vast majority of peaceful, law-abiding citizens. There is little to no reporting on Muslim culture, events, family lives, unless there is an "extreme" element attached to it. Most reporting is done with the Middle East in wider focus and Israel, in particular. Palestinian journalists have repeatedly pointed at the skewed framing of stories, the language, the narrative and even facts being reported in mainstream outlets. It became even more evident when Russia occupied Ukrainian territory and the media reported it in stark contrast to how the Israeli occupation, as per the United Nations, is reported.

Language plays a key role with adjectives such as radical, extremist and fundamentalist often slapped only on stories involving Muslims. The digital transformation of the media landscape has made it even more problematic as websites lure audiences with clickbait and sensationalism.

Omar Suleiman says seemingly innocent questions are often loaded with Islamophobic presumptions. "Why haven't you [as an imam] condemned the Taliban for…?" I was recently asked this question after delivering a speech at the Oxford Union. Why am I, a Palestinian-American, responsible for condemning the government of Afghanistan? In asking this question, the Islamophobes, and those in the middle of the ideological aisle, have stereotypes reinforced. If I ignore the question in its entirety, the stereotypes are further solidified. Compare the context of this question to that of a rabbi in the US - who has no history of publicly supporting Israeli apartheid - being asked to condemn Israeli crimes after delivering a speech."

Journalists often conflate Islam and Muslims with violence, providing disproportionate coverage of stories involving Muslims and violence, says Todd Green. Islam in general, and Muslim men, in particular, are the sources of oppression.

Journalists also tend to frame Muslim women as inherently and uniquely oppressed. Stories of so-called honour killings and women forced to veil have been prominent in Western media stories.

"Muslim women who cover their hair or bodies are oppressed or benighted" Diane Winston says about the regular portrayal of how the media reports on Muslims.

"Inaccuracies such as; most if not all Muslims are religiously orthodox. Reports often convey Muslims have dual allegiance and there is a reductive approach to Muslims and Islam. There is rarely a report on Muslim diversity and very few, if any, stories on Muslims as 'normal' Americans."

CHAPTER 8

WHEN NEWSROOMS GET IT **WRONG**

CASE STUDIES:
HOW THE MEDIA ADVERTENTLY OR INADVERTENTLY PERPETUATES ISLAMOPHOBIA

MUSLIM JOURNALISTS AROUND YOU

At the Canadian public broadcaster CBC, a Muslim journalist recalls being in a large meeting where a prominent reporter, under the guise of "look how racist my relative is", mocked a Muslim prayer item. It was to be used as a bathroom mat so the racist relative could wipe on it. This was an amusing quip for the newsroom meeting. So even in large, mainstream newsrooms, journalists and news leaders don't always realise they have bought into an Islamophobic narrative.

The Muslim journalist is convinced his colleague held no conscious bias towards his faith or its practice, but was merely falling prey to unconscious bias that has been ingrained by society and media.

OKLAHOMA BOMBING

But the issue is wider than Muslim journalists facing Islamophobia, it's a detri-mental force for an entire community.

In the immediate aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, CBS News terrorism expert, Steven Emerson, indicated: "This was done with the attempt to inflict as many casualties as possible. This is a Middle Eastern trait. Okla-homa City, I can tell you, is probably considered one of the largest centres of Islamic radical activity outside the Middle East." Other media outlets repeated this speculation that the perpetrator was possibly from the Middle East, again without evidence. Ultimately, the perpetrator was Timothy McVeigh, a white, Christian American and Gulf War veteran.

Todd Green lists this as advertent to the extent that Emerson has proven over time to be a major peddler of Islamophobic tropes. The fact that other media outlets picked up this analysis after Oklahoma City and reproduced it is more inadvertent Islamophobia.

FOX NEWS LIVE · STEVE EMERSON TERRORISM EXPERT · RISE OF RADICAL ISLAM · ENSES WERE ISSUED FRI TO IMMIGRANTS WHO WEREN'T REQUIRED TO TAKE

ANTHRAX ATTACKS

In October 2001, the New York Times speculated at length on the possibility that associates of the al-Qaeda hijackers were behind the wave of anthrax attacks taking place in the US at the time, without evidence to support such a claim. It was later revealed that the perpetrator of the anthrax attacks was a researcher for the US Army.

COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT

Thomas Friedman, a New York Times foreign affairs columnist, wrote a column in 2005 in which he claimed: "To this day - to this day - no major Muslim cleric or religious body has ever issued a fatwa condemning Osama bin Laden." The message was clear - prominent Muslims implicitly condone the 9/11 attacks and those behind the attacks. The problem was that Friedman was wrong. The New York Times itself published a full-page advertisement one month after the attacks that contained statements from prominent Muslim scholars and leaders denouncing the attacks. Signatories included the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, the king of Jordan and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Friedman's claim was factually incorrect, but it did perpetuate a narrative in which Muslims are prone to condone violence.

The New York Times

OP-ED COLUMNIST

If It's a Muslim Problem, It Needs a Muslim Solution

By Thomas L. Friedman

July 8, 2005

Share full article

Yesterday's bombings in downtown London are profoundly disturbing. In part, that is because a bombing in our mother country and closest ally, England, is almost like a bombing in our own country. In part, it's because one assault may have involved a

FGM: CULTURAL NOT 'ISLAMIC' ISSUE

CNN's Don Lemon and Alisyn Camerota interviewed the scholar Reza Aslan. They asked him to respond to claims by the comedian and political commentator, Bill Maher, in which he claimed that Muslims are violent and intolerant. Aslan disputed this claim, and then gave an example from Maher in which Maher was factually incorrect - the claim that female genital mutilation is an "Islamic problem" whereas there are Christian communities and countries with large Christian populations that practise FGM, and that there are plenty of Muslim-majority countries in which FGM is not a prominent practice. When Aslan tried to offer nuance to understandings of Muslim women by indicating that there are Muslim women who struggle with receiving basic rights in some countries and yet Muslim women in other countries have been elected as heads of state (unlike the United States which has yet to elect a woman as head of state). Lemon responded: "In many countries, Muslim women are not part of free and open societies." Aslan replied by affirming this was the case in countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia, but in other countries - Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia - Muslim women have many more freedoms.

The exchange in this interview is quite illustrative of mainstream journalists relying on simplistic notions of oppressed Muslim women (and Islam as the oppressor of Muslim women) and getting defensive when called out on their biased assumptions.

DISCRIMINATION

A French journalist who is suing a major news agency narrated how he was picked on for being a Muslim, treated differently, denied religious holidays and eventually let go for identifying biases when Israeli and Palestinian protesters were treated differently by the newsroom.

TYPECASTING

Journalists should think of the golden rule: treat others as you would like to be treated.

Imam Mujahid says: "A New Jersey journalist called me for an interview. At the end of the interview, he told me that I don't seem to be the type of person my profile in their record says I am. Later a board member at the Parliament of the World's Religions shared with me a profile sent by an Islamophobic US organisation describing me as an extremist. I noticed an almost total drop in media interviews after that. So investigate the organisation sending you folios. This may be a part of the $105m funding of the Islamophobia machine as reported by Time Magazine[11]."

U.S. • RELIGION

U.S. Charities Funneled More Than $105 Million to Anti-Muslim Groups, New Report Finds

[11] Mansoor, Sanya. "U.S. Charities Donated $105 Million to Anti-Muslim Groups." Time, January 12, 2022. https://time.com/6138552/charities-funded-anti-muslim-groups-report

BLOW SOMETHING UP!

The same Canadian journalist, who worked at the CBC, witnessed another example of Islamophobia in a news meeting earlier in his career.

Again, it happened under the guise of humour. When colleagues complained about a "slow news day", one producer told the junior Muslim journalist: "Quick, blow something up!"

But the response from the most senior news leader in the room was much different on that occasion. She immediately called off the meeting, dispersed the team, apologised to the Muslim associate producer and then called in the joke-maker to do the same.

The Muslim journalist left the room with far less hurt and on good terms both with his boss and the person who had made the crude joke.

ISLAMOPHOBIA DURING
THE GENOCIDE IN GAZA

Corey Saylor & Farah Afify

Since the escalation of hostilities in Israel and Palestine in October 2023, Islamophobia has been on the rise in the United States. Between October and December 2023, 3,578 complaints of anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian incidents have been reported to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a 178 percent increase from the previous year[1]. This data is directly linked to the Israeli government's attacks on the Palestinian people. In the months following Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip, a number of political leaders, corporations, institutions of higher education, media executives, and social media networks have promoted or otherwise relied on Islamophobic tropes to justify the Israeli government's apparent intent to commit genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

Islamophobia has historically been weaponised in Israel-Palestine discourse to perpetuate racist tropes targeting Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians that serve to discredit legitimate critiques of Israeli state policy and ultimately deny the Palestinian people from "realising their full civil, political, national, and human rights."[2]

Among the most widespread tropes invoked against supporters of Palestinian human rights is one that posits Muslims and Arabs as, by nature, prone to violent action. Although non-violent action has been "far more prominent and consistent" in the Palestinian call for self-determination, American politicians and media executives have depicted Palestinians as "almost entirely violent".[3] Relying on this trope, the largely peaceful and principled calls of Palestinians and their Muslim and Arab supporters for human rights have been portrayed as dangerous and threatening.

[1] Ismail Allison, "CAIR: New Data Shows the End of 2023 Was a 'Relentless' Wave of Bias, Community Resilience Is 'Impressive,'" CAIR, January 29, 2024, https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-new-data-shows-the-end-of-2023-was-a-relentless-wave-of-bias-community-resilience-is-impressive/.

[2] Mitchell Plitnick and Sahar Aziz, Presumptively Antisemitic: Islamophobic Tropes in the Palestine–Israel Discourse (New Jersey: Rutgers Center for Security, Race and Rights, 2023), https://csrr.rutgers.edu/issues/presumptively-antisemitic/, p. 3.

[3] Plitnick and Aziz, Presumptively Antisemitic, p. 12.

Another Islamophobic trope in operation is that Muslims and Arabs possess animosity and act violently specifically towards fellow religious minorities. Any protest against Israeli state policies by Muslims, Arabs, Palestinians, and their sympathisers is therefore framed as a form of bigotry towards entire religious minority, a dangerous and inaccurate conflation that has been repeatedly revoked by human rights activists[4]. As a result, the legitimate criticism of Israeli state policies of apartheid, which have also been levied by expert scholars, are immediately discredited, due to a belief that Muslims, Arabs, and particularly Palestinians, cannot possibly be objective or trustworthy observers. This suspicion towards any Muslim, Palestinian, or Arab call for Palestinian human rights ultimately lends itself to the dehumanisation of Palestinians, who are rendered "casualties of war" rather than victims of state-sanctioned violence.

These Islamophobic tropes have been promoted by a number of actors since October 2023, including those in the highest levels of political office in the United States. Rather than confront the Israeli government over reports and footage of the massive death toll in Gaza, President Biden dismissed the credibility of the Palestinian Health Ministry's reports: "I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed."[5] His remarks relied on the trope that Muslims and Arabs are inherently biased and therefore cannot be legitimate critics of political affairs when he questioned Palestinians' ability to be trustworthy sources of information. However, while President Biden promoted Islamophobic stereotypes in public, reports have emerged that the US State Department has "regularly cited ministry statistics without caveats" and "the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which tracks deaths in the conflict, has found the ministry's numbers to be reliable after conducting its own investigation."[6]

Other US government leaders, like National Security Council official John Kirby, also relied on Islamophobia to dehumanise Palestinians. After at least 10,000 Palestinians, including 4,000 children, had been reportedly killed in Gaza, Kirby, who with visible emotion mourned the lives of Ukrainian civilians killed by Russian forces, claimed in reference to civilians in Gaza: "And being honest about the fact that there have been civilian casualties and that there likely will be more is being honest, because that's what war is. It's brutal. It's ugly. It's messy."[7] Rather than heed the calls of Palestinians, Muslims and Arabs to consider Israel's actions as evidence of crimes against humanity, Kirby dismissed Israeli activity as "war" and suggested that Palestinian lives were ultimately expendable in this pursuit.

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[4] Plitnick and Aziz, Presumptively Antisemitic, p. 12.

[5] Glenn Kessler, "Biden's Dismissal of the Reported Palestinian Death Toll," Washington Post, December 2, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/11/01/bidens-dismissal-reported-palestinian-death-toll/.

[6] Kessler, "Biden's Dismissal."

[7] "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, National Economic Council Director Lael Brainard, and NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby," The White House, October 26, 2023, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/10/26/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-national-economic-council-director-lael-brainard-and-nsc-coordinator-for-strategic-communications-john-kirby/.

Outside of political leadership, Islamophobia has been deployed by civil society organisations seeking to stifle criticism of the Israeli government's policies of apartheid against the Palestinian people in the past and now amid the ongoing crisis. As reported by the Rutgers Center for Security, Race and Rights over the past several years, pro-Israeli organisations have responded to a public shift towards sympathy for Palestinians by increasingly doubling down on anti-Muslim rhetoric.[8]

For example, in its most recent attempts to target critics of the Israeli government in October, the Anti-Defamation League, in collaboration with the Brandeis Center, released a letter to the presidents of nearly 200 colleges and universities calling on them to investigate pro-Palestinian student groups for "providing material support to Hamas". The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) quickly blasted the move, arguing that the accusations were made "without citing any evidence" and that "calls to investigate, disband, or penalize student groups on the basis of their exercise of free speech rights" should be rejected.[9] The ADL's call not only threatened students' free speech but also relied on an anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian trope that supporters of Palestinian human rights are by nature violent and would therefore fund violent activities abroad.

The use of these Islamophobic tropes to draw suspicion towards Muslim, Palestinian and Arab critics of Israeli apartheid has also extended to corporations. While many corporate leaders simply refused to acknowledge the existence of Palestinian civilians while releasing public statements, others explicitly sought to stifle any condemnation of Israeli attacks on Gaza, specifically painting student activists critical of Israel as biased.

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[8] Plitnick and Aziz, Presumptively Antisemitic, p. 37.

[9] Anthony Romero et al.,"Open Letter to Colleges and University Leaders: Reject Efforts to Restrict Constitutionally Protected Speech on Campuses," American Civil Liberties Union, November 1, 2023, https://www.aclu.org/documents/open-letter-to-colleges-and-university-leaders-reject-efforts-to-restrict-constitutionally-protected-speech-on-campuses.

As an example, Citadel LLC CEO Kenneth Griffin claimed that he used his considerable influence as a major donor to urge Harvard University administrators to "come out forcefully in defense of Israel," seemingly seeking to counter a viral statement released earlier by students[10]. When asked by the New York Times if Citadel would ever hire the head of a student group who signed the statement, Griffin reportedly responded with an unequivocal no. Also in response to the statement released by Harvard students, on social media platform X, Pershing Square Capital Management CEO William Ackman publicly called for Harvard to release a list of signatories to CEOs so that they do not "inadvertently hire any of their members"[11] Multiple other CEOs, including those at FabFitFun, EasyHealth, Dovehill Capital Management, and Sweetgreen, have publicly supported him in threatening the careers of students[12].

Universities and political leaders have also seemingly targeted students for expressing vocal support for Palestinian human rights. In October, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis asserted he had closed two chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), an organisation advocating for Palestinian rights, in his state. These chapters were reportedly ordered to "shut down because they violated the state's anti-terrorism statute"[13] In November, Brandeis University became the first private university to ban a student chapter of National Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP)[14] Columbia University administrators reportedly altered event policies 17 days before suspending Students for Justice in Palestine and Jewish Voice for Peace student groups for violating university policies[15]

Since October 2023, traditional and social media platforms have also censored those who have attempted to raise concerns regarding the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinian civilians, particularly Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians, further promoting the Islamophobic trope that renders any criticism of Israel unacceptable. Both Al Jazeera and Newsweek have produced comprehensive lists of journalists who have faced consequences for supporting Palestinians[16] Reports also emerged indicating that Upday, a news aggregator app that is a subsidiary of the publishing giant Axel Springer, handed down directives to amplify Israeli perspectives and minimise the Palestinian civilian death toll in October[17]

Finally, social media platforms like Facebook have not only failed to protect Muslim, Palestinian and Arab voices from hateful rhetoric and potential attacks; they have

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[10] Rob Copeland, "Powerful Donors Push Universities to Condemn Criticism of Israel," The New York Times, October 17, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/15/business/harvard-upenn-hamas-israel-students-donors.html.

[11] Bill Ackman (@BillAckman), "I have been asked by a number of CEOs if @harvard would release a list of the members of each of the Harvard organizations…", X, October 10, 2023, https://twitter.com/BillAckman/status/1711788747086233661.

[12] Matt Egan, "Harvard Student Groups Issued an Anti-Israel Statement. CEOs Want Them Blacklisted," CNN, November 28, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/11/business/harvard-israel-hamas-ceos-students/index.html.

[13] Denise Royal and Steve Contorno, "Florida University System Says It Has Not Deactivated Students for Justice in Palestine Chapters," CNN, November 9, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/09/politics/florida-students-for-justice-in-palestine-chapters/index.html.

[14] Olafimihan Oshin, "Private University Bans Students for Justice in Palestine as Middle East Fallout Spreads," The Hill, November 8, 2023, https://thehill.com/homenews/4296741-first-private-university-bans-students-for-justice-in-palestine-as-middle-east-fallout-spreads/.

[15] Sarah Huddleston, "Columbia Updated Its Event Policy Webpages. Seventeen Days Later, It Suspended SJP and JVP," Columbia Daily Spectator, November 17, 2023, https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2023/11/17/columbia-updated-its-event-policy-webpages-twelve-days-later-it-suspended-sjp-and-jvp/.

[16] See Aleks Phillips, "Full List of Journalists Fired over Pro-Palestinian Remarks," Newsweek, October 25, 2023, https://www.newsweek.com/full-list-reporters-fired-pro-palestinian-remarks-1837834 and Rami G Khouri, "Watching the Watchdogs: Fear in Newsrooms Silences pro-Palestine Voices," Al Jazeera, November 1, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/11/1/watching-the-watchdogs-fear-in-newsrooms-silences-pro-palestine-voices.

[17] Daniel Boguslaw, "Europe's Largest News Aggregator Orders Editors to Play down Palestinian Deaths," The Intercept, December 5, 2023, https://theintercept.com/2023/10/19/upday-news-gaza-israel-axel-springer/.

also reportedly participated in censoring those very same voices from sounding the alarm over human rights abuses in Gaza. In December, Human Rights Watch released a report documenting 1,049 cases in which "peaceful content in support of Palestine ... was censored or otherwise unduly suppressed" by Meta.[18]

Indeed, these apparent attempts at censoring Palestinian or pro-Palestinian voices seem to be systemic. In October, internal documents released demonstrate that Meta had been reportedly hiding Palestinian comments at a greater rate than Israeli comments. According to the Wall Street Journal, "Normally, Meta only begins to hide such comments when its systems are 80% certain that they qualify as what the company calls hostile speech…" Temporarily, "Meta cut that threshold in half over a swath of the Middle East, hiding any comment deemed 40% likely to be inflammatory…" and later further lowered "the bar to hide comments from users in Palestinian territories if Meta's automated system judged there was at least a 25% chance they violated rules". In other words, Meta

has seemingly judged that Palestinian social media posts are more likely to promote hateful language, once again relying on the trope that Palestinians cannot possibly be reliable sources of information.[19]

The incidents presented here are only a few of the ways in which Islamophobia has been deployed in recent months to discourage criticism of the Israeli government. This rhetoric not only puts Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians in danger but also continues to be used to justify the Israeli government's apparent intent to commit genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza.

[18] Rasha Younes, "Meta's Broken Promises," Human Rights Watch, January 26, 2024, https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/21/metas-broken-promises/systemic-censorship-palestine-content-instagram-and.

[19] Sam Schechner, Jeff Horwitz, and Newley Purnell, "Inside Meta, Debate over What's Fair in Suppressing Comments in the Palestinian Territories," Wall Street Journal, October 21, 2023, https://www.wsj.com/tech/inside-meta-debate-over-whats-fair-in-suppressing-speech-in-the-palestinian-territories-6212aa58.

CHAPTER 9
BEST PRACTICES

Journalists can avoid Islamophobia by being more nuanced and if they are willing to go deeper than just the headlines.

• Look at how Islam is practised around the globe. Yasir Qadhi sees the solution in media professionals not being "one dimensional". His advice is, "Do not link an ideology directly to a religious understanding or text."

• If journalists use Muslim sources for stories that are not about Islam or Muslims, it will help the audience to see the community around them as normal individuals.

• Learn more about Islamophobia and use the term Islamophobia.

• Abdul Makik Mujahid, the imam, says: "Connect Islamophobia with anti-Semitism and other forms of racism. Note that Muslims are a target of white supremacists' hatred.

• While reporting an incident, humanise the victim.

• Identify a Muslim when in a positive role like saving lives through the invention of Pfizer's Covid vaccine, for example.

• Share stories of how Muslims are contributing positively to their communities and countries in and outside of the Muslim world in virtually all fields, from science and business, to arts, entertainment, and sports."

• It's important that those reporting on events involving Islam look at the broad spectrum of Muslims around the world.

• If journalists are compelled to say "Muslims do X" they had better back it up by research. Often, fewer than 2 percent or 3 percent of Muslims do something which is taken as a broad generalisation for all.

• If journalists interview multiple people who are actually involved and not interview outsiders, the narratives would be different. Yasir Qadhi finds one of the biggest problems is with "so-called experts. They really are not experts at all. Many of these pundits simply rehash the talking points that, frankly, politicians appreciate. Journalists who peddle to politicians, who are always in sync with the 'policies of the country', they're clearly not engaging in active journalism."

• Talking to experts for in-depth analysis and opinion is important but equally significant is your local community. If journalists talk to them about how they perceive their representation in the media, it's a crude test of gauging the subjects of your story and what they would like to see as well.

Swap "THE MUSLIMS"

As the old adage goes, "Words are potent weapons for all causes, good or bad". Indeed, word choices are extremely important.

Diane Winston has a simple test for journalists every time they report on a story involving Muslims. They should substitute "Christian" or "Buddhist" or "LBGBTQI+" for Muslim and ask if the sentence is biased. She urges writers to use a Muslim as the anchor character in a story, instead of a Caucasian.

It's important that journalists challenge the longstanding narratives around them, for instance, every single policy of the government is almost never ethical. In the age of populism and post-fact politics, politicians are constantly doing things that are in the best interests of "their people" which could be based on religion, ethnicity, language, race - and will put others at a disadvantage.

When covering Muslims, diversity also matters as they come from various ethnic, regional or sectarian backgrounds. So media professionals at the minimum should be aware of basic things such as differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

With so much around us being calculated and shown to us by algorithms, journalists must be wary of what they say about Islam and Muslims on social media.

Newsrooms must add Muslim representation such as reporters and editors to their staff. In the not-so-distant past it was done for women, Black people and other minorities.

At the heart of it is a very simple principle, treat Muslims as regular people.
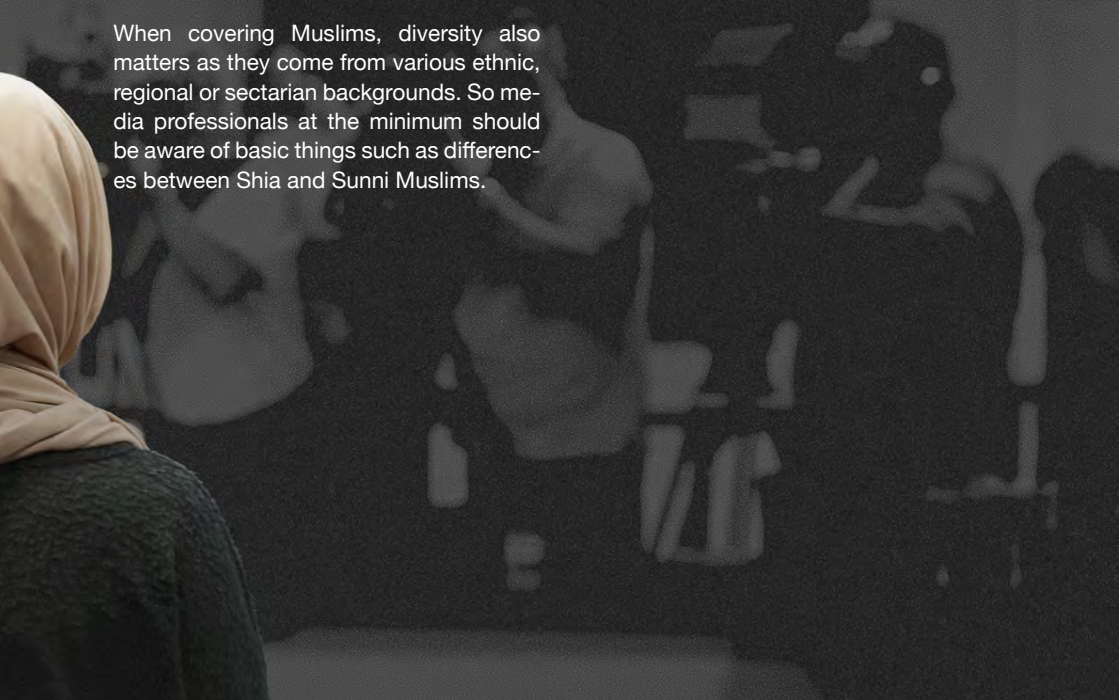
CHECKLIST

Journalists must always avoid red flags which appear in the following categories. Here are a few questions to help narrate your story.

DEMONISATION

☑ Is it fair criticism?

☑ Is it an exaggeration?

☑ Is this blown out of proportion?

☑ Is this symbol, insult or comparison justifiable?

☑ Is an entire group being demonised for the actions of an individual?

☑ Does this fall into the category of "stereotypical behaviour" of millions of diverse people?

☑ Will this end up accusing people in your area of having dual loyalty? Would it still work if you replaced Muslim with any other religion or group?

☑ Am I repeating a libel or a slander against them if my source is making vicious claims or remarks?

☑ Have I given a right to response to the group this is being levelled against?

DOUBLE STANDARDS

☑ Is a community being singled out here?

☑ Will we apply the same level and intensity of this critique if it was not about Muslims?

☑ Would it be discriminatory, unethical, career-ending even, If this was being reported on another religion?

DELEGITIMISATION

- ☑ If this story was told about another people, would it also question their right to exist?

- ☑ How are you describing the act? Terrorism or mental issues; act of an individual or collective responsibility of community; nth-generation foreigner or a local citizen?

DENIAL

- ☑ Is my language balanced and inclusive? Should I reconsider my adjectives after I have written them?

- ☑ It is perfectly okay to criticise Muslims but is the criticism giving them a right to explain their position?

CHAPTER 10
THINGS TO AVOID:
A LIST OF DON'Ts

• Avoid fear mongering. "Them and Us" is a way to divide societies.

• Never assume violent perpetrators with a Muslim background must be driven primarily or solely by religion, whereas perpetrators who are white (and presumably not Muslim) are struggling with psychological issues, or they presumably have political motives independent of religion. In reality, violence targeting civilians and innocent people often has complex, intertwining motives. This includes the 9/11 attacks, which in some ways were products of Cold War politics and US policies in the Soviet-Afghan War. Journalists should avoid a reductionist perspective in their coverage of stories in which violent actors have a Muslim background.

• Don't say "Muslims do this or that" when you've talked to a few Muslims. You can't generalise with a community this big. Don't identify a criminal as Muslim or obliquely by referring to the Muslim country he or she comes from.

• Avoid asking Muslims to speak out and condemn terrorism, under the assumption that Muslims at large should be presumed guilty of harbouring sympathies towards violent extremism and terrorism unless they speak out and overtly condemn violence. This is not an assumption that applies to white Christians when violence is committed by people with these backgrounds, even when done so in the name of Christianity, like violent acts commited by the Ku Klux Klan or Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army.

• Don't interchangeably use terminology like Islamist and terrorists in the same sentence. Most people who are called Islamists in the media are Democrats using peaceful means of change. Don't use the term Islamist. Muslims around the world have no term like this in their own languages to describe themselves or different movements.

• Don't treat Islam as a monolithic religion. Don't depict 1.8 billion Muslims as one uniform entity despite a thriving diversity in lives and opinions. Islam has considerable internal diversity, as do all religions. Framing Islam as a monolithic religion is often a precursor for some of the worst Islamophobic stereotypes because it paves the way for identifying an extreme figure with all Muslims.

• Don't leave out Muslim voices and perspectives on stories pertaining to Muslims and/or Islam. Such voices should be central to the story and not marginal or absent.

• Don't use inflammatory language (fundamentalist, extremist, terrorist). Don't conflate extremism with terrorism.

• Don't privilege the voices of people or organisations that harbour hostility towards Muslims and Islam. This doesn't mean critical perspectives should always be excluded, but these perspectives should not become the primary voices in a news story about Islam and Muslims. The general rule here is to let practitioners of a religion speak for that religion, not that religion's opponents. This is even more the case for opponents who hold bigoted views. We wouldn't privilege anti-Semitic voices in a news story about Jews and/or Judaism. We shouldn't privilege Islamophobic voices in a news story about Muslims and/or Islam.

• Don't exoticise or romanticise Muslims or Islam.

• Don't use perpetual political propaganda in coverage. For example, many journalists in the United States used the Trump administration's language of a "travel ban" to describe his policy of banning entry into the country from select Muslim-majority countries, a ban that had roots in his 2015 campaign promise to ban all Muslims from entering the country. The language of the "travel ban" was a political euphemism meant to distract the broader public from the overtly bigoted roots of the ban and its clear targeting of Muslims. This language, moreover, was meant to give the ban enough legal legitimacy that it would pass muster in the courts (which it struggled to do until the Supreme Court finally upheld the ban in 2018).

• Don't believe online misinformation or disinformation about Islam. Don't limit stories about Islam and Muslims to violence.

• It's "never appropriate to compare 'their' worst with our 'best'", as the late Krister Stendahl of Harvard Divinity School once noted. Don't compare the worst elements in Islamic history with the best elements of, say, Christian history. If you are going to talk about sexual violence against women, for example, don't single out Muslims as having a particular problem with this without noting that large numbers of women in Christian-majority contexts are also targeted with sexual violence. Likewise, don't lift up Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King in Christianity and then ask why Islam lacks such figures. Such efforts reflect considerable ignorance, not to mention prejudice.

• Don't negatively stereotype Muslim women and Islamic attitudes to women. Muslims are bursting with life and culture waiting to be covered.
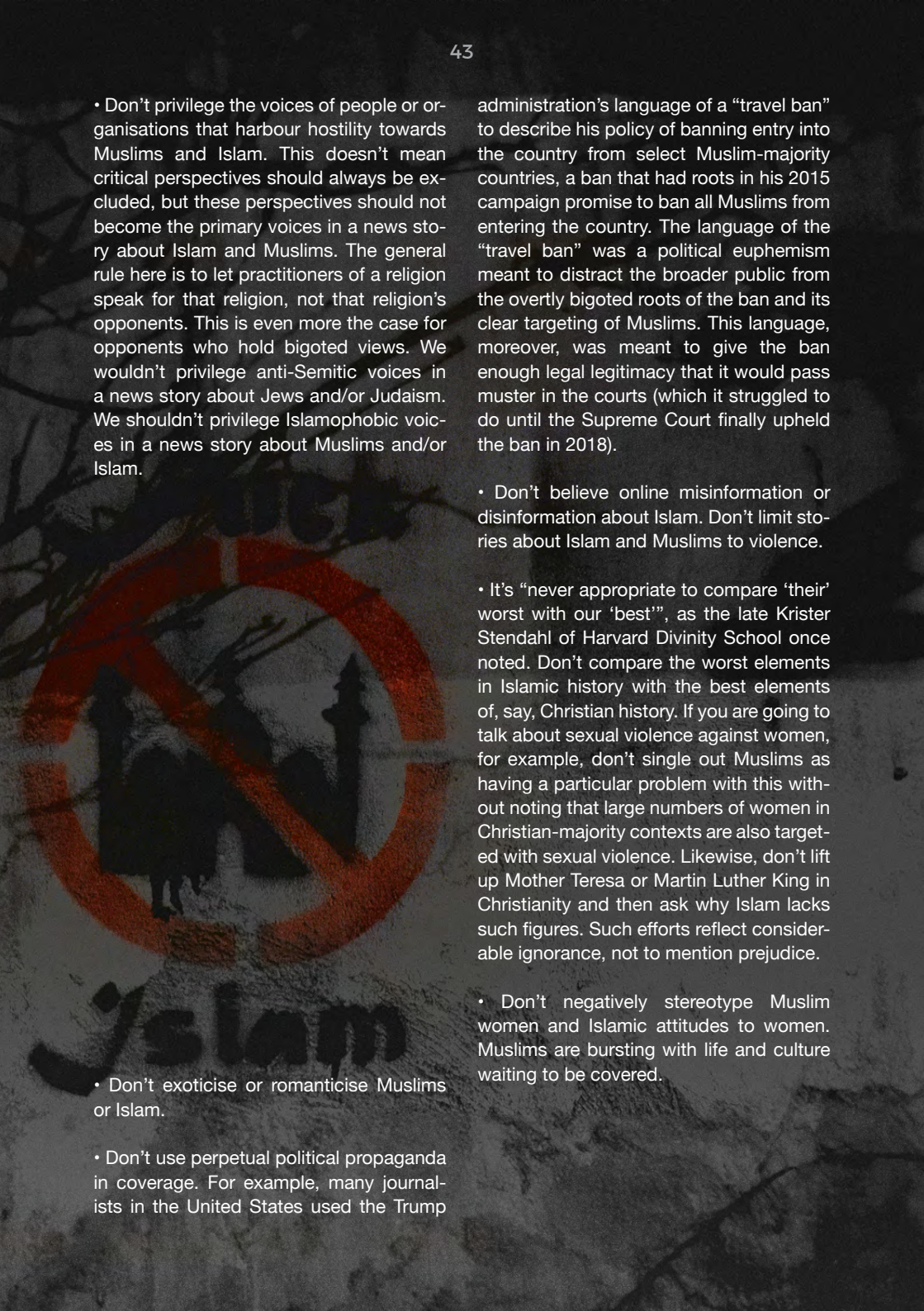
• Don't use language such as "Islam teaches" or "Islam believes". Religions don't teach or believe anything. Religious practitioners do. Be specific as to which Muslim or Muslims teach or promote particular views, particularly in stories in which such views might be associated with anti-Muslim tropes (such as Islam and violence). In a similar vein, avoid language that mistreats Islam.

• Don't assume that religion is the cause for all negative Muslim behaviour. Don't apply the archaic Christian terminology of "fundamentalist" to Muslims and Islam. It may create confusion. Saudi Arabians to the Taliban and Gaddafi at one time or the other have been described as fundamentalist. All three are different.

• Don't write "Islam is the fastest growing religion". In the case of the US where this myth was perpetuated, it's most likely 'Nones' (religiously unaffiliated) who are the fastest growing group.

• Don't allow cartoons to use Muslim-style dress or other religious symbolism to perpetuate the image of all Muslims as terrorists.

• Don't fall for the conspiracy theories of Muslims "taking over". This myth of Sharia taking over the United States and the world has resulted in 100-plus bills in US state legislative bodies denying Muslims their constitutional rights as Americans to practise their faith. The French media's use of this myth led to the genocide of Muslims in the Central African Republic. Indian BJP-RSS coined the hashtag #loveJihad, #landJihad and others to create a conspiracy theory that Muslims are trying to take over India.

CHAPTER 11
MISUSED LANGUAGE

In the 1940s classic Language in Thought and Action author SI Hayakawa's main takeaway is that true reporting relies on the avoidance of "loaded words".

Todd Green says even a word such as "terrorism" is not something with a broad agreement on an objective definition.

Violence labelled as terrorism in the media has often applied to violence carried out by people with a Muslim (or otherwise "foreign") background. Violence by white extremists, on the other hand, has typically not been labelled as "terrorism". Likewise, violence with a disproportionate impact on civilians by state actors - the United States, Israel, etc - rarely gets described as "terrorism" by journalists. Journalists should use caution when choosing to apply - or not apply - the word "terrorism" to violence targeting civilians.

Here are a few words from Al Jazeera English's style guide to help maintain a neutral description of conflicts and fighters.

• **TERRORISM/TERRORISTS** - One person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. Do not use these terms unless attributed to a source/person.

• **EXTREMIST** - Do not use. Avoid characterising people. Often their actions do the work for the viewer. Could write "violent group" if reporting on Boko Haram agreeing to negotiate with the government. In other words, reporting on a violent group that's in the news for a non-violent reason.

• **ISLAMIST** - Do not use. Journalists should describe groups and individuals, by talking about their previous actions and current aims to give viewers the context they require, rather than use a simplistic label.

• **JIHAD** - Do not use the Arabic term. Strictly speaking, jihad means an inner spiritual struggle, not a holy war. It is not by tradition a negative term. It also means the struggle to defend Islam against things challenging it.

• **MILITANT** - Use this term to describe individuals who favour confrontational or violent methods in support of a political or social cause. For example, you can use the term to describe Norwegian mass killer Andres Behring Breivik or Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. But do not use it to describe a group of people, as in "militants" or "militant groups" etc.

CHAPTER 12

BASIC TERMS
USED BY MUSLIMS

If your work requires dealing with Muslims, stories in Muslim majority countries, mosques or other issues related to Islam, here are a few words that you might hear.

Adhan - The Muslim call to prayer. The "dh" is pronounced like the "th" in "thus".

Ahl al-kitab - Arabic for "People of the Book". The term is used in the Quran to describe Jews and Christians, who also follow revealed texts.

Alhamdulilah – Arabic for "All praise is due to God". A phrase that Muslims are encouraged to use in all of life's situations. Pronounced al-Hamdu li-'Ilah.

Allah - The most commonly used linguistic term for "God" in Arabic. Allah is the same monotheistic God worshipped by Christians and Jews.

Allahu Akbar - Arabic phrase meaning "God is Great". This phrase is used in many situations. Muslims recite it in their daily prayers and at any time that they want to acknowledge God's magnificence. They might use it when they are happy, when they wish to express approval, or even during times of extreme stress.

As-salaamu alaikum - Arabic phrase meaning "Peace be upon you". This is a traditional Islamic greeting. The response is "Wa alaikum as-salaam" meaning "And upon you peace".

Ayatollah - A religious leader among Shia Muslims. It is used as a title of respect for one who is considered - by consensus - to be an esteemed leader among Shia clergy.

Bismillah - Arabic for "In the Name of God". Muslims are encouraged to begin every act with this phrase. Pronounced bis-mil-lah.

Caliphate - Arabic word for a form of Islamic government that led the global Muslim community in past centuries.

Dawah - Inviting others to Islam through words and actions.

Dhikr - Literally, "remembrance", this Arabic word usually refers to remembrance of God. The "dh" is pronounced like the "th" in "thus".

Fatwa - A religious edict or legal opinion that is written by qualified scholars commenting on issues relating to Islam.

Fiqh - Islamic jurisprudence.
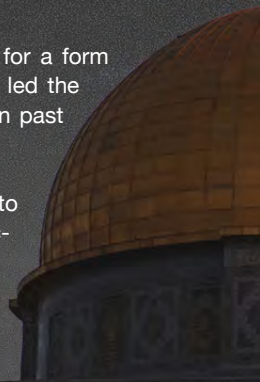
Hadith - Written narrations of what the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said and did during his lifetime. Hadith are considered one of the primary resources for Muslims, second only to the Quran.

Hijab - Commonly used to describe modest Muslim dress, specifically the head scarf that many Muslim women wear. It is not a "burka" or a "veil". NOTE: A face veil is called a "niqab".

Ijtihad – A component of fiqh whereby Islamic laws are derived from sources other than, or not necessarily including, the Quran or the Sunnah.

Imam - One who leads congregational prayers in a mosque or in any other location. It is an honorific title.

Insha'Allah - Arabic for "God Willing". Muslims use this phrase to indicate that they expect to do something in the future or when they hope that something will be realised. It is also used as a reminder that God will determine the future.

JazakAllahu Khayran - Arabic for "May God reward you with good". Often used by Muslims in place of "thank you".

Masjid – The Arabic word for "mosque", an Islamic house of worship. Plural: masajid.

Masha'Allah - Arabic for "As God wants it". It is used as an expression of admiration or glorifying God for anything with which one is pleased.

Mufti - A Muslim jurist who interprets Islamic law.

Mullah - A Persian word with a meaning similar to "imam".

Mussallah - Literally, a "place of prayer". A room or space designated for prayer, but not necessarily a masjid.

Salat - The Arabic word for "prayer". Muslims offer salat five times a day at prescribed times to fulfil the second of their five pillars of faith.

Shahada - The Islamic creed. It is the declaration of belief in the oneness of God and in Muhammad as His messenger. In English it translates to: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

Shariah - Islamic law derived from the Quran and Hadith by scholars.

Sheikh - An honorary title of respect.

Sunnah - Denotes the way the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) lived his life. The sunnah is the second source for Islamic jurisprudence after the Quran. The Hadith are the written source of the sunnah.

Ummah - An Arabic word meaning "community". It is often used to express the idea that Muslims worldwide belong to one community.

About the Author:

Osama Bin Javaid

Emmy-nominated broadcast journalist Osama Bin Javaid has been making complex conflict zones understandable for global audiences for two decades. For the last 10 years, he has been working in the Middle East with Doha-based Al Jazeera English.

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Osama specialises in reportage and investigative pieces for TV and digital platforms, and has worked in Qatar, Italy, Syria, the United Kingdom, the United States, Kazakhstan, Germany, Iraq, Malaysia, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Oman, Sudan, Yemen, Libya, Jordan, Azerbaijan, Myanmar and Austria. He has also frequently travelled to the Asian subcontinent and has extensive knowledge of groups and issues in India-Pakistan affairs and the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran border.

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