

ABJECTION, ORIENTALISM, AND THE REINFORCEMENT OF
MUSLIM DISCRIMINATION GLOBALLY

by

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This thesis seeks to identify how discrimination against Muslims in global communities is perpetuated through social, political, and legal mechanisms. By using theoretical frameworks like that of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and the concept of racial abjection, this thesis aims to answer the question: Are implemented laws on a global scale that target Muslims really neutral? This thesis argues that the persistent construction of Muslims as the 'other' in societies creates and sustains cycles of marginalization that are reinforced by not only policy but media narratives as well. By investigating the escalation of France's hijab ban, the US Patriot Act following the events of 9/11, Slovakia's attempts to limit Islam as a recognized religion, and Xinjiang's regulation on de-extremification, this thesis seeks to reveal how Orientalist and abjection-based logics are institutionalized at the state level. These ideologies are further reinforced through ideas that are portrayed in the media such as the "Good Muslim" versus the "Bad Muslim" dichotomy analyzed by Mahmood Mamdani which enables exclusion, violence, and even restrictions on religious expression.

With a war escalating before society where again, the 'other' is this time the Iranian Muslims, providing a colonial historical legacy allows for a more contextual understanding of the future discriminatory escalation that is imminent. History is repeating itself yet again, and by

focusing on specific countries as case studies, the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the vast scope of colonial legacy in giving rise to perpetual global islamophobia. This project seeks to educate and unveil the masks that continue to allow racism and Islamophobia to run rampant through societies globally in hopes that change through education is possible. By using a literature-based methodology, this thesis's research draws from works by Said, Mamdani, Shaheen, and others, combining policy and media analysis to trace how Islamophobia operates as a major global system of power. It demonstrates how these systems are not just applied to Muslims but that they are rather a transnational feedback loop of policy, fear, and representation that distorts public knowledge and justifies continued marginalization. This thesis was created to expose the systemic nature of anti-Muslim bias and advocate for a reexamination of the political and cultural structures that perpetuate it in hopes for broader efforts toward inclusivity and true equality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to educate and help understand why Muslim discrimination continues to infest the world with hate, fear, and ignorance. This discrimination is a complicated on-going cycle that this thesis aims to unpack by using a framework built upon different concepts. By understanding what Orientalism and racial abjection is, one can begin to understand where this discrimination comes from.

Starting with the evolution and emergence of the term ‘Orientalism’, it is best defined and explained by Edward Said. In Said’s book entitled *Orientalism*, he describes Orientalism as a Western concept that was created to have dominance over, reconstruct, and have authority over the “Orient”.¹ The use of the term “Orient” is to mainly describe people of the East which is a reflection of the tendency to homogenize large, diverse parts of the world even though they do not share a single cultural identity.² This tendency is usually a racist or ignorant way of grouping unfamiliar people and is accounted for and better explained coupled with the concept of racial abjection.

Abjection on its own first appeared as a concept in *L'Abjection Et Les Formes Misérables* (Abjection and Miserable Forms) by Georges Bataille in 1934. In his essay, Bataille states “*Le mot de subversion se réfère à la division de la société en oppresseurs et opprimés [...]*” (The word subversion refers to the division of society into oppressors and oppressed). Bataille uses the concept of subversion which is society’s inherent human tendency to create division into oppressors and oppressed to start building the concept of abjection. In his piece, Bataille explains how “*Mais les forces impératives n’exercent pas directement sur les opprimés leur action*

¹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1979.

² Japan Society. “What’s the Matter with Saying ‘the Orient’?” *Japan Society*, 20 Apr. 2021, japansociety.org/news/whats-the-matter-with-saying-the-orient/.

coercitive: elles se contentent de les exclure sous forme de prohibition de contact” (But the imperative forces do not exert their coercive action directly on the oppressed: they merely exclude them in a form of a prohibition of contact). Bataille is demonstrating how oppressors feel the need to come from complete sovereignty while the oppressed are formed from the wretched population where they are excluded and seen as the ‘other’.³ When applied in terms of race, the hierarchy Bataille describes is plainly seen and has been created through colonialism roots where the dominant race is white people above all ‘others’, who again, are homogenized as one ‘people’. Bataille’s work laid the grounds for *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (*Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*) by Julia Kristeva in 1980. In this essay, Julia Kristeva describes the ‘abject’ as something that has been rejected or thrown out because it disturbs a sense of who you are. It is this fear that guides one’s actions to create a distance from said abject and helps one make sense of themselves.⁴ Kristeva’s use of the word ‘abject’ is synonymous with the way Edward Said uses ‘the Orient’. It is the ‘other’ that is pushed away and categorized as different.

Through Kristeva’s analysis, this fear helps rationalize Orientalism defined by Edward Said where the Western world separates themselves as the better amongst the people from the East. Said, Bataille, and Kristeva’s analyses give rise and understanding to the worldwide discrimination, hatred, and fear of Muslims which is defined as Islamophobia. Islamophobia has remained a transnational issue that continues to mold and direct policy, society, and attitudes

³ Bataille, Georges. “Abjection et formes misérables.” *Documents*, no. 7, 1934, pp. 382–383.

⁴ Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1982.

worldwide.⁵ With these concepts and new understandings in mind, this thesis analyzes how these concepts are reflected in society and are reinforced by policies all over the globe.

Anti-Muslim hate is prevalent on a global scale and continues to infest the world when it is actively implemented in government and has an insufficient government response. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) highlights the urgency of acknowledging and creating a response to such policies globally, as they incite hate and vigilante violence. Mentioning many Asian countries and specific policies that continue to perpetuate Islamophobia institutionally, the USCIRF also mentions the issues that occur in countries in Europe⁶.

1.1 Background and Context

The extreme hostility and fear towards Muslims and Islam are encapsulated under the term Islamophobia. Islamophobia leads to social and political discrimination, hate speech, hate crimes, and more. Through Islamophobia, governments and societies have justified mass incarceration, mass surveillance and have even let it influence domestic and foreign policy.⁷ This prejudice against Muslims is not localized yet is a global system that works across culture, law, and policy. Islamophobia has been said to have arisen after the events on September 11th, 2001, however, that has been debunked by Edward Said's description of colonial Orientalism. Written in 1979, Edward Said states "Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma. Until the end of

⁵ Kulik, Rebecca M. "Islamophobia." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 29 Oct. 2025, www.britannica.com/topic/Islamophobia.

⁶ USCIRF. "USCIRF Calls Attention to Prevalence of Anti-Muslim Hate around the World." *The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)*, 15 Mar. 2024, www.uscifr.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscifr-calls-attention-prevalence-anti-muslim-hate-around-world.

⁷ Esposito, John L. "What Is Islamophobia?" *Bridge Initiative*, 17 Jan. 2023, bridge.georgetown.edu/about-us/what-is-islamophobia/. Accessed 06 Jan. 2026.

the seventeenth century, the ‘Ottoman peril’ lurked alongside Europe [...]”⁸. The fear of Islam dates to the Ottoman Empire which threatened the Christian rule. Islam during this time was also demonized and contemporary Islamophobia demonstrates similar implications and feelings towards Muslims and Islam. Contemporary Islamophobia, although containing the same sentiment and racial and cultural biases Islamophobia carries, tends to be hidden and disguised through ‘neutral’ legal measures.

Modern Islamophobia seen throughout the world today appears in specific language which boils down to being the same old Islamophobic rhetoric. Terms globally such as “integration”, “modernity”, or “security” are used to mask these biases instead of overt racism. Similarly, aside from Islamophobia in policy, media narratives reinforce these biases and vice versa to create a negative feedback loop of racism towards Muslims and the Islamic religion. Social inclusion for Muslims is often harder because of these negative biases and to get around them, these “Orientals” must adjust to Western ideas of what a “Good Muslim” versus a “Bad Muslim” are. Mahmood Mamdani defines and critically analyzes the concept of a “Good Muslim” versus a “Bad Muslim” and states in his work “A good Muslim is a secular Muslim, whereas a bad Muslim is a doctrinal Muslim”⁹. By working to redact the identity of a Muslim, the Western world has forced assimilation upon Muslims to feel like if they do not abandon their religious expressions of hijabs, prayers, etc. they are the continued ‘other’ in society. This idea of “goodness” being correlated with conformity to Western norms and secularism makes religious expression suspect and leads to hijab bans, surveillance policies, and religious regulation laws. When applying these concepts of the “Good Muslim” versus “Bad Muslim” and Islamophobia, it

⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1979, 59.

⁹ Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. Pantheon Books, 2004. 15.

shows that this is an example of racial abjection as Islamic culture is only acceptable when it suppresses visible differences from the Western way of life. Mamdani's concept also holds Orientalist views as the standard is based upon the Western idea of secularism as the universal standard. Islam is seen as something that needs to be softened, managed, corrected, and most importantly, controlled. Although there is much literature on Islamophobia through cultural or political lenses, there is a gap of research that analyzes Islamophobia on the scale in which this thesis aims. This thesis aims to research Islamophobia as a global system that merges legal structures with representational discourse.

1.2 Research Questions

This research aims to address how the systemic discrimination and marginalization that Muslims face globally is contributed by social, legal, and political mechanisms. The main conceptual frameworks that are the building blocks of this thesis are that of Edward Said in his concept of Orientalism, along with the combined concepts by Georges Bataille and Julia Kristeva relating to racial abjection. These concepts emphasize the human tendency to create the 'other' and in doing so, frames Muslims as the constructed 'other' in global societies. My research questions are as follows:

- How do the concepts of racial abjection and Orientalism contribute to the construction of Muslims as the 'other', and how does this process lead to the marginalization and villainization of Muslims on a global scale?
- How do 'neutral' laws and policies across different global contexts reflect and reinforce discrimination against Muslims?

Together, these questions aim to take a wider approach to understanding the perpetual cycle of Islamophobia globally by examining the legal, social, and media mechanisms guiding this discrimination.

1.3 Organization of Thesis

This thesis is structured by first explaining the foundational conceptual frameworks that construct Muslims the ‘other’ in global societies. It then moves towards concrete examples of discrimination through legal policies and media narratives, and finally, it moves towards synthesizing these analyses to explain how such practices continue a broader negative cycle of marginalization and exclusion.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the main research questions of the thesis and incorporates the guiding foundational concepts that are used in the arguments of this research. It explains the significance of Orientalism and racial abjection and how these are important lenses in examining Islamophobia.

Chapter 2 aims to get more in depth with the ideas of Orientalism, racial abjection, the Good Muslim vs Bad Muslims rhetoric that forces assimilation and exclusion and introduces racial hierarchies and the creation of the ‘other’. It also investigates how Islam has been a threat to Western discourse throughout time and links colonial Orientalism to post-9/11 Islamophobia.

Chapter 3 begins to investigate the case studies focused on in this thesis such as France’s hijab ban, the U.S. Patriot Act, Slovakia’s restrictions on Islam as a religion, and Xinjiang’s “de-extremification” policies. This chapter also demonstrates how these cases specifically institutionalize discrimination.

In Chapter 4, the original policy goals are investigated versus the actual impact they have had, and it questions whether these policies were racially motivated and where the line between national security and discrimination is drawn.

Chapter 5 proceeds by analyzing what impact the media has on public perceptions of Muslims and looks at how Hollywood has continued this sort of villainization. This chapter aims to demonstrate how media narratives reinforce legal and social discrimination.

Chapter 6 focuses on how Islamophobia affects people socially and psychologically and suggests ways in which policy and media can be changed to stop this negative cycle.

Chapter 7 is a limitations section that addresses the conceptual limits of this thesis including the challenges of how the Western self sees itself while constructing the other. It acknowledges the difference between Orientalist discourse and overt propaganda while acknowledging that media and policy analysis provide partial views of this complex dynamic in the construction of the 'other'.

Chapter 8 acts as a conclusion to this thesis and summarizes key findings while reflecting on the contributions this thesis makes to understanding global Islamophobia.

By organizing the thesis as so, it allows for a natural progression from theory to evidence to consequences, demonstrating how modern policy, media, and historical roots contribute to sustaining global cycles of discrimination against Muslims.

Chapter 2: The Foundations and Development of Islamophobia

Islamophobia has not adopted a single official definition from the United Nations; however, it is best defined as follows:

“a fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims or non-Muslim individuals 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 which targets the symbols and markers of being a Muslim.”¹⁰

With this definition, islamophobia is the underlying system of prejudice and hostility toward Islam and Muslims. Anti-Muslim hate, therefore, can be defined as the manifestation of this prejudice that results in discriminatory actions and behaviors like harassment, exclusion, hate speech, and violence against Muslim people.

A common misconception when discussing Islamophobia is that its origins started after the attacks that occurred on 9/11. Islamophobia, although its forms may have varied and evolved, goes back to the 11th century where the Crusades aimed to reclaim the holy land from the “barbaric” Islamic Empire¹¹. Since the first crusade in 1095, the beginning of a systematic description of Islam and Muslims as the ‘other’ and enemy of Western Christendom has plagued the world¹². This kind of villainization of Muslims to be seen as terrorists, dangers to society, threats, etc., initially came from hidden discourse in film, tv, etc., before the 9/11 attacks, but has

¹⁰ Awan, Imran, and Irene Zempi. *A Working Definition of Islamophobia*, Nov. 2020, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/Islamophobia-AntiMuslim/Civil%20Society%20or%20Individuals/ProfAwan-2.pdf.

¹¹ Othman, Hussain. “Islamophobia, the First Crusade and the Expansion of Christendom to Islamic World.” *Medievalists.Net*, 11 Jan. 2015, www.medievalists.net/2015/01/islamophobia-first-crusade-expansion-christendom-islamic-world/.

¹² Othman, Hussain. “Islamophobia, the First Crusade and the Expansion of Christendom to Islamic World.” *Medievalists.Net*, 11 Jan. 2015, www.medievalists.net/2015/01/islamophobia-first-crusade-expansion-christendom-islamic-world/.

since evolved into more serious forms through governmental policy and general distortion of knowledge¹³. Villainization is when someone or a group of people are spoken about negatively or portrayed in a negative way to influence others to see them as bad¹⁴. Since the Crusades, the villainization of Islam and Muslims was a strategic method to pursue and conquer. By distorting knowledge and creating untrue stereotypes, public opinion is gained. This kind of distortion of knowledge has been blamed on plain ignorance yet stems from colonial legacies creating a deeply rooted form of racism known as Orientalism. Defined and explained by Edward Said, Orientalism, coupled with the concept of racial abjection, demonstrates that by grouping all Arabs, Muslims, and people who fit the part together, the creation of the ‘other’ harms these communities by spilling into every aspect of society.

2.1 Orientalism and the Construction of the ‘Other’

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* was written in 1989, yet still offers an explanation and insights into the Islamophobic tendencies of global societies today. In 2003, Said’s book *Orientalism* was reprinted with a 25th anniversary preface. In his new edition Said states, “I wish I could say that the general understanding of the Middle East, the Arabs, and Islam in the United States has improved somewhat but alas, it really hasn’t.”¹⁵. Although Said is specifically mentioning the United States here, Islamophobia is prevalent globally and the actions driven by Orientalist thought process continues this discrimination. Said’s framework details “The East” and how “The West” created the “Orient” to help explain contrasting people, ideas, personality, and experiences from their own. This Orientalist style of thought makes a distinction between

¹³ Ayoub, Abed A, and Christopher S Habiby. “Discrimination and the Civil Rights of the Muslim, Arab, and South Asian American Communities.” American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 1 Mar. 2022.

¹⁴ “Villainize Definition & Meaning.” *Dictionary.Com*, Dictionary.com, www.dictionary.com/browse/villainize. Accessed 6 Mar. 2026.

¹⁵ Said, Edward. “Preface.” *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, 2003, p. xviii.

“The Orient” (the ‘others’ from the East) and “The Occident” (the dominant people from the West). The creation of the “Occident” through Orientalism is based upon power. This power “Occident” is used for control over the Orient, and many countries act through this framework by using policy to target the “Orient” in Western societies. By using mechanisms like reification, the Occident can alienate and assert dominance over the East.

The concept of reification is primarily understood from the detailing by Georg Lukás. Lukás’s concept of reification focuses on how it is a form of exclusion where human-made structures like the “Occident” and the “Orient”, are seen as “natural law”¹⁶. This justification of “natural law” allows the “Occident” to treat the “Orient” as a commodity to dominate and have control over. By using “natural law” as justification for this domination, the West believes that they are inherently better and superior to the East. Reification has been described as a “schizophrenic structure of racist ideology” because of its contradictory nature¹⁷. Through reification, the ‘other’ is constructed as fixed and unchanging where their supposed essence is treated as natural and used to explain all their actions. Yet at the same time, this same group is portrayed as unpredictable and perpetually threatening. In the case of Islamophobia, Muslims and Arabs are homogenized into a single category while simultaneously being framed as volatile and dangerous. Thus, racist ideology freezes the ‘other’ into a static identity even as it imagines them as a destabilizing force.

A common misconception that all Arabs are Muslim persists globally. Additionally, the term “Middle East” reflects a reified and Orientalist framework, as it groups diverse peoples and cultures into a single region defined in relation to the West. The misconception that all Arabs are

¹⁶ McKenna, Tony. “Lukás: Reification and the Class Consciousness of the Proletariat | Counterfire.” *Counterfire*, 9 Aug. 2010, www.counterfire.org/article/lukacs-reification-and-the-class-consciousness-of-the-proletariat/.

¹⁷ Dimick, Matthew. “Race and Reification.” *Historical Materialism*, 21 Apr. 2024, www.historicalmaterialism.org/article/race-and-reification/.

Muslim, and that all Muslims are Arab is proven false as there are Christian Arabs, Atheist Arabs, Mizrahi Jews, and various other faiths that exist in Arab communities. With that, it's important to note that only 15-20% of the Muslim population is Arab¹⁸. Being "Arab" is not a race, yet it is more similar to the same grouping of people under, for example, the "Hispanic" category. It is a grouping of people from countries that share a specific language or a common culture, not necessarily people of the same race. Edward Said emphasizes that groupings like this falsely unify identities like "Islam" and invent new collective identities to group large numbers together. Even with a diverse range of communities, they are still grouped together as the "Orient" and must be opposed as it creates danger in a society. This danger lies in the development of negative misconceptions about many people who are all very different yet are grouped into a single, negative view. Take Muslims in America for example. In 2017, about half of Muslim American adults said they personally experienced some kind of discrimination simply because of their religion¹⁹. These negative Orientalist views lead to daily discrimination for Muslims living in Western societies and globally.

The concept of Orientalism is fluid in that the categories of "Occident" and "Orient" are relational rather than geographically fixed. Different societies can construct their own internal "Orient." In China, for example, Muslims are positioned as an internal 'other' in ways that mirror Western Orientalist frameworks. This socially constructed logic enables the continual production of suspicion and exclusion, as dominant groups define themselves against a vilified "other". In 1798, the human tendency to villainize the 'other' was apparent in the United States.

¹⁸ Inclusion Geeks. "Debunking Six Myths about the Arab Community." *Inclusion Geeks*, 2 Apr. 2024, www.inclusiongeeks.com/debunking-six-myths-about-the-arab-community/.

¹⁹ Mohamed, Besheer. "Muslims Are a Growing Presence in U.S., but Still Face Negative Views from the Public." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 1 Sept. 2021, www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/09/01/muslims-are-a-growing-presence-in-u-s-but-still-face-negative-views-from-the-public/.

The Alien and Sedition Acts were targeted laws against French and Irish immigrants during a time of tension between the U.S. and France²⁰. The *Act Concerning Aliens* (1798) enacted that “it shall be lawful for the President of the United States at any time [...], to order all such aliens as he shall judge dangerous [...] to depart out of the territory of the United States”²¹. This clause gave the president the power to subjectively deem those as “dangerous” without any criminal conviction. Policy language such as this frames non-citizens as the societal ‘others’ within US society, and similar policies today ‘other’ Muslims in comparable ways.

The tension between the “Occident” and “Orient” leads to discrimination at the social level that extends into governmental discrimination, excluding and segregating based on fear. This dynamic reflects the very core of Orientalism which is the fear of the ‘other’. Abjection leads to Orientalist thinking as it describes the human tendency to construct the ‘other’ out of fear of difference from oneself.

2.2 Racial Abjection and Racial Hierarchies

Through this tendency to create the ‘other’ out of fear of differing, when applied in terms of race, racial abjection is born, and racial hierarchies naturally develop. Colonization has run rampant through the world and left its mark in many ways, including the ways in which humans justify wrongdoings. Since the transatlantic slave trade, colonization justified segregating people based on race as “whites were granted privileges denied to black people”²². Through this racial hierarchy, people feel as being the dominant race, they are inherently better than those who are

²⁰ Walenfeldt, Jeff. “Alien and Sedition Acts | Summary & Significance | Britannica.” *Britannica*, 27 Dec. 2025, www.britannica.com/event/Alien-and-Sedition-Acts.

²¹ U.S. Congress, *An Act Concerning Aliens*, 5th Cong., 2nd sess., July 6, 1798, in *Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress*, General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11, National Archives.

²² Alden, Clinton. “White Supremacy: From Colonial Foundations to Modern Systems Structures.” *White Supremacy: From Colonial Foundations to Modern Systems Structures*, Clinton Alden’s Substack, 11 May 2025, clintonalden.substack.com/p/white-supremacy-from-colonial-foundations.

not, and that the ‘others’ are deviants from the ‘normal’. “Without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like “us” and didn’t appreciate “our” values-the very core of traditional Orientalist dogma”²³. Edward Said clearly defines here that the idea of abjection and the creation of the ‘other’ is at the very core of Orientalism, which in turn creates racial abjection. By using Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection, it provides insights into the origins of racism, demonstrating that it is an act of exclusion²⁴. As an act of exclusion, racial abjection is the way of ‘othering’ and excluding based upon someone’s race. Abjection explains the structural and political acts of exclusion and inclusion, which are the building blocks of human social existence²⁵.

Under the Critical Race Theory (CRT), defined in 1989 but constructed throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s, it is even more apparent that abjection, Orientalism, and this control over the ‘other’ is a socially constructed type of racism embedded in all forms of society²⁶. The Critical Race Theory is loosely based on legal frameworks that race is a socially constructed idea that is used to oppress and exploit people of color. It is important to note that this theory is not based upon individual biases or prejudice but is something that is embedded in legal systems and policies²⁷. Under the CRT, the targeting of Muslims via legal policies becomes more apparent that the goal of such policies is not “security” but is another form of racial abjection embedded in societies all over the globe.

²³ Said, Edward. “Preface.” *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, 2003, p. xx.

²⁴ Meyer, Carolin. “Essay on ‘abjection and Race’ (2020).” *Carolin Meyer*, 2020, carolinmeyer.onfabrik.com/portfolio/essay-on-abjection-and-race-what-do-studies-of-abjection-contribute-to-our-understandings-of-embodiment-and-experience.

²⁵ Davis, Brandon R. “The Politics of Racial Abjection: Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race.” *Cambridge Core*, Cambridge University Press, 10 Aug. 2022, www.cambridge.org/core/journals/du-bois-review-social-science-research-on-race/article/politics-of-racial-abjection/1C0D0A232C8FCB93BC93B32CFF8F20D0.

²⁶ Sawchuk, Stephen. “What Is Critical Race Theory, and Why Is It under Attack?” *Education Week*, Education Week, 6 Jan. 2026, www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05.

²⁷ Duignan, Brian. “Critical Race Theory - Racism, Oppression, Inequality | Britannica.” *Critical Race Theory*, 11 Jan. 2026, www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory/Basic-tenets-of-critical-race-theory.

2.3 Islam as a Historical Threat in Western Discourse

The negative loop of Islamophobia originates from fear of the ‘other’ and develops into normalized forms of racism towards Muslims. One of these tactics is to normalize ‘othering’ by use of media and public discourse. Through the media and even in tv shows and movies, Muslims are cast in a certain way across all platforms. In *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Jack Shaheen makes a point to demonstrate through 900 different films how Muslims have distorted knowledge to think they are all Arabs and vice versa. The essay demonstrates how Arabs and Muslims are made to be seen in the same light every time as heartless, brutal, uncivilized, religious fanatics, hating Jews and Christians, with a love solely for wealth and power, etc.²⁸. This extreme portrayal of Muslims and Arabs has led to distorted knowledge that has created certain biases and false stereotypes of one ‘people’. Shaheen goes on to describe how Arabs and Muslims are portrayed in a way to demonstrate a political and cultural menace whose religion is incompatible with the ‘normal’ Western way of living. This, in turn, continues the normalization of ‘othering’ these groups of people through racial abjection.

Similarly, in 1997, Edward Said wrote another book entitled *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. In this book, Said aims to demonstrate how the world has come to know Islam through politics, media, and scholarship²⁹. He also emphasizes the worrying state the world is in when it understands Islam only through these ways. He mentions how the ways the West has delivered information about Muslims and Arabs make it nearly impossible for fair and accurate representations to be made. His most powerful message is that knowledge and power are always intertwined. Everything heard or covered about Islam has almost always been produced to meet a strategic need instead of trying to tell the truth³⁰.

²⁸ Shaheen, Jack G. “Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 588, 2003, pp. 171–93. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049860>.

²⁹ Basha, Sayed. “Covering Islam: Edward Said on Media, Power, and Perception.” *Islamonline English*, 20 Oct. 2025, en.islamonline.net/covering-islam-edward-said-on-media-power-and-perception.

³⁰ Said, Edward W. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Vintage Books, 1997.

2.5 The “Good Muslim” vs “Bad Muslim” Rhetoric

Islam all over the globe has been framed as not just a threat to cultural or religious values but more of a threat to socio-political order that needs to be controlled. Tariq and Zafar (2023), in their piece written in Islamabad, Pakistan, entitled *Neo-Islamophobia: A New Western Social Order* explain in detail just this. In their piece, they state “...a new style of governance [is] adopted by Western political elites who capitalize on Islamophobia as a political strategy to shape the social order.”³¹. This is directly related to the mechanisms used by the Western world to assert its dominance over the East. These Orientalist views have led to the concept created initially in 2002 by Mahmood Mamdani. In 2002, Mahmood Mamdani introduced the world to the “Good Muslim” vs “Bad Muslim” rhetoric before expanding more deeply on this concept in 2004.

For the Western world to coexist with the ‘other’, they expect them to assimilate and fit what the Western world assumes is a proper Muslim. This rhetoric of the “Good Muslim” vs the “Bad Muslim” was another method to have control over and dominate those who were not from the West. In the same way, Orientalism, reification, and racial abjection were, and are used to justify the alienation of these ‘people’. Mamdani’s rhetoric is used to Westernize these people into what is ‘normal’ or ‘correct’. He goes on to explain that this rhetoric was created to control, and if you did not conform to a “good Muslim”, you were not a civilian, but you were categorized as a terrorist or oppressed, and thereby a threat to society³². Even as a differing religion from the West, Mamdani explains that Islam is reduced to not a lived faith but a political

³¹ Tariq, Muhammad, and Zafar Iqbal. “Neo-Islamophobia: A new western social order.” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, vol. 13, no. 1, 26 May 2023, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.131.10>.

³² Mamdani, Mahmood. “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism.” *American Anthropologist*, vol. 104, no. 3, 2002, pp. 766–75. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3567254>.

identity that must be managed³³. This management leads to control, political agendas, and a general fear of Islam. This fear is not directed solely at people who practice said religion, but those who fit the part from the generalizations people hear and see in different forms of media. It boils down to a skewed and limited amount of knowledge, ending in the creation of the ‘other’ and hence, the negative loop of Islamophobia even visible on the political spectrum.

³³ Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. 2004.

Chapter 3: Case Studies of State Institutionalized Islamophobia

European countries are actively supporting an Anti-Muslim bias through discrimination in public institutions, passing legislation that impacts core religious traditions, and by allowing online harassment and violent attacks to go unpunished³⁴. All over the world, experts are reporting rising numbers of Muslim discrimination and calling for acknowledgment of the issue and for something to be done. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated that there has been a disturbing rise in anti-Muslim hate and reminded governments that it is their duty to protect religious freedom, and for online platforms to curb hate speech³⁵. Racial profiling, discriminatory policies, hate speech, and outright violence, the Secretary General continues, are prevalent in nations that are doing little to nothing to combat this bigotry. By examining specific laws/policies across North America, Europe, and Asia, a sense of familiarity among the policies arises, leading to the question of whether these laws/policies are truly neutral and if they genuinely intend to achieve their stated goals.

3.1 France's Hijab Ban to Ensure 'Secularism'

France has long been named "The Church's Eldest Daughter" for its historical loyalty to the Vatican since 496 AD³⁶. During the Crusades of St. Louis in 1248, King Louis IX of France set out to reclaim Jerusalem from the Muslim rule by first conquering Egypt as leverage³⁷. With France's historic part in the Crusades, the demonization of Islam and Muslims was a necessary

³⁴ USCIRF. "USCIRF Calls Attention to Prevalence of Anti-Muslim Hate around the World." *The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)*, 15 Mar. 2024, www.uscifr.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscifr-calls-attention-prevalence-anti-muslim-hate-around-world.

³⁵ "UN Chief Calls for Global Action Against Rising 'Anti-Muslim Bigotry.'" *Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 15 Mar. 2025, www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/15/un-chief-warns-of-global-rise-in-anti-muslim-bigotry.

³⁶ Coffey, Kathy, et al. "The Church's Eldest Daughter." *U.S. Catholic*, 11 Sept. 2008, uscatholic.org/blog/the-churchs-eldest-daughter/#:~:text=Published%20September%2011%2C%202008,hungry%20souls%20are%20looking%20for.

³⁷ Madden, Thomas F. "Crusades - Holy Land, France, King Louis IX ." *Britannica*, Jan. 2026, www.britannica.com/event/Crusades/The-Crusades-of-St-Louis.

part for them to pursue their goals. The same methodology to maintain Western dominance and positional superiority over the ‘Orient’ in the 11th century is still used in the 21st century.

Centuries later, the symbols of Islam that hinted at the once subordinate Catholic self to the Islamic Empire were still demonized. In the French colonization of Algeria (1830-1962), forced veil removal of women became a tool to cast off Islamic culture and force Algerian women and men to follow in becoming “model French citizens”³⁸.

In France, throughout 1877 to 1905, the principle of *laïcité* (Secularism) was progressively adopted, and aims to prohibit public manifestations of religion³⁹. Adhering to this principle, in 2004, the French Parliament enacted law No. 2004-228. This new law, which is still enacted, states “*Dans les écoles, les collèges et les lycées publics, le port de signes ou tenues par lesquels les élèves manifestent ostensiblement une appartenance religieuse est interdit*” (In public schools, colleges and high schools, the wearing of signs or clothing by which students conspicuously display a religious affiliation is prohibited)⁴⁰. This law unfairly affects Muslim students while others seem to get off more easily. Whether it was ignorance or uncaring for Muslims being able to practice their religion fairly, it stems from the Orientalist view that Muslims are the ‘other’. In this case, the population of Muslims in France have the choice to conform or be punished. This ideology weaves its way into Mamdani’s concept of the “Good Muslim” vs the “Bad Muslim,” where those who are “Good Muslims” will abandon their headscarves, etc., to be a part of this ‘secular’ Western society.

³⁸ Black, Hilary. *Freedom, Norms, and the Ban of the Muslim Veil in France: 1830-Present*, 22 Jan. 2010, web.artsci.wustl.edu/tparsons/tparsons/black-article.pdf.

³⁹ Cohen-Almagor, Raphael. “*Indivisibilité, Sécurité, Laïcité: the French ban on the burqa and the niqab.*” *French Politics* vol. 20,1 (2022): 3–24. doi:10.1057/s41253-021-00164-8

⁴⁰ France. *Loi n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 relative à l’application du principe de laïcité dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics*. Légifrance, République française, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGIARTI000022931753/>.

In the religion of Islam, the wearing of a ‘veil’ or what most see as a hijab or niqab is optional but offers Muslim women protection, dignity, and modesty. The Holy Quran states that women should pull down upon them cloaks from their heads because in doing so, they are not recognized and not molested⁴¹. The wearing of a hijab is a choice Muslim women can make on their own, but one that allows women to interpret the Quran as they please and practice Islam correctly from their point of view. When the hijab is banned in schools, Muslim women who choose to wear a hijab are stripped of their religious freedom to practice Islam. Aside from banning religious symbols that prevent students from practicing their religion, Islam tends to be more affected by these laws. French teachers themselves have been reported to state that they see cross necklaces at times, but do not bother to report them⁴². As a cross is not required or advised in the Bible to be worn for Christianity to be practiced, there is little repercussion to their respective religious freedoms.

As time went on, the secularist ideology spread into more policies being enacted that unfairly targeted Muslims. In 2015, President François Hollande went to the French Parliament, where he successfully extended a state of emergency to address terrorism adequately and to ensure a better state of national security⁴³. Under this state of emergency, without providing any real and clear reasons for doing so, officials searched houses, mosques, and businesses, etc. Under International Human Rights Law, one of the two contingencies for a state of emergency to be in effect is that nothing be imposed in a discriminatory manner⁴⁴. In France, the opposite

⁴¹ Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. “Do Muslim Women Have to Wear Veils?” *Islam Ahmadiyya*, www.alislam.org/question/muslim-women-wear-veils/.

⁴² Solomon, Adina. “Why French Students Can’t Wear Crosses.” *Adina’s Musings*, 16 Apr. 2015, adinasmusings.wordpress.com/2015/04/16/why-french-students-cant-wear-crosses/.

⁴³ Cohen-Almagor, Raphael. “*Indivisibilité, Sécurité, Laïcité*: the French ban on the burqa and the niqab.” *French Politics* vol. 20,1 (2022): 3–24. doi:10.1057/s41253-021-00164-8

⁴⁴ Amnesty International. “Upturned Lives the Disproportionate Impact of France’s State of Emergency.” *Amnesty International*, 2016, www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/EUR2133642016ENGLISH.pdf.

seemed to happen. Muslims in France were searched left and right to the point where French Muslims described the events as believing they were Islamophobic attacks to get revenge⁴⁵. At Mosques, the places of worship for Muslims, French citizens reported the police breaking down doors, walking in with their shoes (violating the Islamic code of purity within the house of Allah), throwing the Quran on the floor, and seizing Imams (the equivalent of priests)⁴⁶. The blatant disrespect for Islamic tradition and religion that did not occur in other places of worship shows more than just ‘protecting national security’, but a hatred and aggression towards these ‘individuals’. Another Frenchman reported to Amnesty International that everyone in his restaurant was not checked for IDs, but the police simply looked around and left. Clearly, these police were not looking for “genuine threats” but were looking for a type of ‘individual’ based on characteristics that aligned with the Islamic religion⁴⁷.

Under *laïcité*, the French government has successfully gotten away with inconspicuously banning certain Muslim symbols in public, but as time has progressed, this ‘inconspicuous’ bias against Muslims has become increasingly apparent. In France, the banning of ‘religious symbols’ was common, but in 2016, French municipalities became more specific in their targeting. The banning of a specific type of swimwear, the burkini (a modest form of swimsuit commonly worn by some Muslim women), was banned from public beaches and pools⁴⁸. Seeing that this ban on burkinis, as the higher court stated, “seriously, and clearly illegally, breached the fundamental

⁴⁵ Ibid, 2016.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 2016.

⁴⁷ Amnesty International. “Upturned Lives the Disproportionate Impact of France’s State of Emergency.” *Amnesty International*, 2016, www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/EUR2133642016ENGLISH.pdf.

⁴⁸ Tazamal, Mobashra. “Timeline: France’s Targeting of Muslim Women’s Dress.” *Bridge Initiative*, 25 Oct. 2023, bridge.georgetown.edu/research/timeline-frances-targeting-of-muslim-womens-dress/.

freedoms to come and go, the freedom of beliefs and individual freedom,” it was clear that this ban was a targeted attempt to limit Islam in French society⁴⁹.

Although the ban on burkinis was just at the municipality level, the discrimination against Muslims in France did not cease. More policies, such as the French Football Federation (FFF) banning hijabs, the banning of the burkini again in 2022 in Grenoble, and the banning of French athletes from wearing hijabs while competing in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, were upheld⁵⁰. The moment it became even more abundantly clear that *laïcité* was being used as a front to target Muslims was in 2023, when, for the first time, not just a ‘religious symbol’ ban was mentioned by Parliament, but a specific article of clothing was banned, the abaya⁵¹. Under law No. 2004-228, the French Parliament specifically identified the abaya as violating the law banning religious symbols in schools. Lawyers fighting this ban have identified it as “arbitrary,” as there is not a single legal definition of what an abaya looks like, and it has never been classified in any religious terms in Islam⁵². It is even more important to mention that no other single article of clothing has been specifically identified and banned from any other religion. Islam is continuously limited and banned in France, giving rise to a sense of wrongness to Muslims who do not conform to French ‘norms. By looking at the timeline of policy in France, laws masked by their principle of *laïcité* have shown a continued version of Orientalism in their attempts to limit, Westernize, and dispel any sense of Islam by targeting Muslims versus other ‘individuals’.

⁴⁹ Slotkin, Jason. “Top French Court Suspends Riviera Town’s Burkini Ban.” *NPR*, NPR, 26 Aug. 2016, www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/08/26/491483307/frances-high-court-overturms-riviera-towns-burkini-ban.

⁵⁰ Tazamal, “Burkini Ban”, 2023.

⁵¹ Krizsan, Elek. “France’s Abaya Ban in Public Schools: The Argument for Cosmopolitan Conduct as an Alternative Outlook on French Civic Solidarity to Laicite.” *Onero Institute*, Onero Institute, 23 Mar. 2025, www.oneroinstitute.org/content/frances-abaya-ban#:~:text=In%20September%202023%2C%20the%20French%20Ministry%20of%20National,after%20successfuly%20fighting%20legal%20challenges%20to%20the%20policy.

⁵² Mawad, Dalal, et al. “French Schools Turn Away Girls Wearing Abayas as Muslim Rights Group Challenges Ban.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 6 Sept. 2023, www.cnn.com/2023/09/06/europe/france-abaya-ban-scli-intl/.

3.2 The U.S. Patriot Act and Post-9/11 Surveillance

The United States of America has been a country riddled with Islamophobic tendencies that have evolved and changed since the attacks that occurred on September 11th, 2001. On September 11th, 2001, members of the Al-Qaeda terrorist group, known to be Islamic extremists, hijacked four commercial airplanes, where they intentionally flew two planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and another into the Pentagon⁵³. Almost 3,000 people were killed in the attacks and completely shifted the ways in which Islamophobia and Muslim discrimination can be seen today in American culture⁵⁴.

Following the horrific terrorist attacks that occurred on 9/11, on October 26th, 2001, President George W. Bush signed and enacted the Patriot Act⁵⁵. The United States Patriot Act was a clear pathway to discriminate against Muslims through its targeted language and by ceasing the rights of these targeted people. In Sec. 213 of the Act, authorities were given the right to delay notice for warrants and use more invasive techniques for monitoring without prior authorization through wiretapping, home searches, frisks, etc.⁵⁶. The wording used by Congress in the Patriot Act. mentions how these types of people are already grouped and are being discriminated against. Congress states, “When American citizens commit acts of violence against those who are, or are perceived to be, of Arab or Muslim descent, they should be punished to the full extent of the law”. Although Congress is speaking about the punishment of people who discriminate, they are admitting that there are perceptions and groupings of people who are Arab

⁵³ 9/11 Memorial & Museum. “9/11 Memorial Timeline.” *9/11 Memorial & Museum*, [timeline.911memorial.org/#:~:text=On%20September%2011%2C%202001%2C%20nineteen%20terrorists%20who%20were,Trade%20Center%2C%20and%20a%20third%20into%20the%20Pentagon.](https://www.911memorial.org/#:~:text=On%20September%2011%2C%202001%2C%20nineteen%20terrorists%20who%20were,Trade%20Center%2C%20and%20a%20third%20into%20the%20Pentagon.)

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Duignan, Brian. “USA PATRIOT Act | Facts, History, Acronym, & Controversy.” *Britannica*, 9 Jan. 2026, www.britannica.com/topic/USA-PATRIOT-Act.

⁵⁶ United States Congress. *Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT Act) of 2001*. Public Law 107-56, 26 Oct. 2001. *Congress.gov*, www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ56/PLAW-107publ56.pdf

or Muslim-looking. By treating the entire religion of Islam as an identity that is dangerous, criminal, or the ‘other’, US citizens are racially abjectifying people who fit their perceptions and groupings. However, US citizens are not necessarily to blame for the root of this Orientalist view. US citizens may spread this type of Orientalist thinking that there is a single group of people that is inferior, but it is policies like the Patriot Act that distort initial knowledge. Policies like the Patriot Act mention “terrorists” but never mention specifically who these “terrorists” are, which has led many Americans to believe that all Muslims are a part of the terrorist organization that committed the atrocities on 9/11⁵⁷.

Implemented and intended for national security, the Patriot Act instilled so much fear of harassment in Muslim Americans’ lives that even many Muslim women changed the way they dress to avoid becoming targets⁵⁸. Whatever the intentions of the new policy, it was most affecting the Muslim, South Asian, and Arab communities. The US Justice Department general himself reported that the most complaints that came from the Patriot Act were those of these communities who reported being physically and verbally abused by government officials⁵⁹. The Patriot Act, in its ambiguous wording, led government officials to interpret the law differently, and it ended in abuses by law enforcement, a rise in hate crimes against Arab, Muslim, and South Asian communities, extreme racial profiling, and even citizens “watching” neighbors who had “threatening traits”⁶⁰. By villainizing and dehumanizing the ‘other’ as a threat, racial abjection is

⁵⁷ United States, Department of Justice. *What Is the USA PATRIOT Act?* U.S. Department of Justice, n.d., www.justice.gov/archive/ll/what_is_the_patriot_act.pdf

⁵⁸ United States Congress. *United States Patriot Act. 2001.*

⁵⁹ Ahmed, Arshad, and Farid Senzai. “The USA PATRIOT Act: Impact on the Arab and Muslim American Community.” *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU)*, 5 Aug. 2017, ispu.org/the-usa-patriot-act-impact-on-the-arab-and-muslim-american-community/.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 2017.

a prominent reason why the Patriot Act led to more ‘othered’ people who had ‘traits’ of a Muslim.

After 9/11, the Orientalist and racially motivated policies did not stop after the enactment of the Patriot Act. Another racially motivated policy enacted was the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS). Enacted in 2002, the NSREERS created a method to log “aliens” who potentially posed a national security threat⁶¹. Instead of targeting suspected terrorists as individuals, the NSEERS program was directed at certain groups of people with the same racial background. The most impacted by the NSERS were people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent, who, even though American citizens, were at times deported to countries like Pakistan, where they had never been before⁶². The NSEERS was focused on targeting twenty-five countries, where North Korea was the only non-Muslim majority country⁶³. The NSEERS program was in place targeting specific countries for about nine years, where, later, the American Department of Homeland Security (DHS) removed designated countries from the NSEERS list. Not in hopes to remove discrimination against certain people, but the designated country list was removed from NRSEERS simply because “The improved and expanded DHS and Department of State systems capture the same information for visitors,” making the NSREERS previous process redundant⁶⁴. Although the discrimination against Muslims was never fully acknowledged that these policies were unfair and discriminatory, President Donald

⁶¹ United States, Department of Justice. “National Security Entry-Exit Registration System.” *U.S. Department of Justice*, 5 June 2002, www.justice.gov/archive/ag/speeches/2002/natlsecentryexittrackingsys.htm

⁶² Sherer, Paul M. “Targets of Suspicion: The Impact of Post-9/11 Policies on Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in the US.” *Immigration Daily*, 21 July 2004, www.ilw.com/articles/2004,0721-sherer.shtm.

⁶³ Lee, Sarah. “Understanding Nseers: A Comprehensive Guide.” *Number Analytics // Super Easy Data Analysis Tool for Research*, 17 June 2025, www.numberanalytics.com/blog/understanding-nseers-comprehensive-guide.

⁶⁴ United States, Department of Homeland Security. “DHS Removes Designated Countries from NSEERS Registration.” *Department of Homeland Security*, May 2011, www.dhs.gov/archive/dhs-removes-designated-countries-nseers-registration-may-2011.

Trump proved that all the racially motivated policies of the past were, in fact, about controlling the Muslim population in the USA.

In January of 2017, President Trump declared and signed a “Muslim Travel Ban” where he temporarily banned entry for people coming from Yemen, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Sudan, and Somalia; all Muslim-majority countries⁶⁵. Without the deception and tactics to spread more Muslim discrimination, the President of the United States did not just make a statement to the media that would be heard everywhere, but he created a legal measure to prevent and limit an entire religion from entering the country. Donald Trump actively put a name on the ‘others’ in society, banning them from entering the USA because “Muslims” are dangerous and a threat to society. Without using specific terms like Islamic radicalists, terrorists, etc., Donald Trump managed to instill fear and hostility in the American people towards an entire religion. Trump first handily admitted the banning of an entire religion, yet this ban was a continuation of the string of racist and Islamophobic laws that preceded 9/11. After being elected back to office in 2024, Trump reignited his travel ban, this time targeting 19 mostly Muslim and African countries⁶⁶. This new ban solidified the discrimination and ongoing negative feelings towards Muslims and the religion of Islam. This thesis only mentions some of the many policies in the US over the past two decades that have targeted people of “Muslim descent” and Arabs, but they all spread the same Orientalist biases against Muslims to be seen as the “enemy”, “aliens”, “terrorists”, and the ‘other’.

⁶⁵ LegalClarity Team. “The Muslim Ban: Legal History and Current Status.” *LegalClarity*, 27 Jan. 2026, legalclarity.org/the-muslim-ban-legal-history-and-current-status/.

⁶⁶ Council on American-Islamic Relations. *2025 Travel Ban Guidance*. Council on American-Islamic Relations, 9 June 2025, www.cair.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025TravelBanGuidance.pdf.

3.3 Slovakia's Restrictions on Islam as a Recognized Religion

To maintain control over Islam, different Orientalist methods are employed across global societies. In Eastern Europe, Slovakia demonstrates a distinct approach through racial abjection to marginalize Islam, differing from the strategies used in France and the United States. Under Article 24 in Slovakia's Constitution, it states “*Sloboda myslenia, svedomia, náboženského vyznania a viery sa zaručujú[...]bohoslužbou, náboženskými úkonmi, zachovávaním obradov alebo zúčastňovať sa na jeho vyučovaní*” (Freedom of thought, conscience, religious belief, and faith shall be guaranteed[...])⁶⁷. Although Slovakia's constitution guarantees freedom of religion and grants the freedom to practice religion publicly, in 2017, the Slovak government passed a new law that restricts this freedom to apply only to ‘recognized religions’.

The new law enacted regarding the registration of religions raised the requirement for official religious registration from 20,000 to 50,000 adult participants. With only about 6,000 Muslims in Slovakia, this number is unattainable and leaves Islam as a “civic association” instead of a recognized religion⁶⁸. Slovakia currently acknowledges 18 religions as ‘official’, which grants these groups state subsidies to support their religious activities. The government of Slovakia, through this new policy, demonstrates that they uplift and support certain religions but excludes and ‘other’ those that are not as prevalent or ‘important’ in their society. In addition to no state funding, unrecognized religions like Islam have no rights to things like building a mosque or having space for burial grounds⁶⁹. Muslims are forced to rely on informal or rented

⁶⁷ Slovak Republic. *Constitution of the Slovak Republic*. Art. 24.

⁶⁸ Singh, Manbilas. “The Plight of Religious Minorities in Slovakia: Is Islam Banned in Practice? .” *Arclantic*, 3 Apr. 2025, www.arclantic.com/the-plight-of-religious-minorities-in-slovakia-is-islam-banned-in-practice.

⁶⁹ Singh, Manbilas. “The Plight of Religious Minorities in Slovakia: Is Islam Banned in Practice? .” *Arclantic*, 3 Apr. 2025, www.arclantic.com/the-plight-of-religious-minorities-in-slovakia-is-islam-banned-in-practice.

spaces for prayer, which is often denied, given Slovakia's Islamophobic nature in society. The religion of Islam has been left barred from identifying itself officially as a religious group, and Slovakia remains the only European Union state without a single mosque in its country⁷⁰. With government officials continuously making anti-Muslim statements, it comes as no surprise that Slovaks carry a very racially abject mindset towards Muslim people. A report from the U.S. Department of State mentions a local Slovak NGO, where they reported that the majority of Slovaks admitted thinking that the religion of Islam was "very dangerous," and 43% stated that Islam should be banned from the country completely⁷¹. Slovakia's contradictory policy, in which Muslims are formally granted the constitutional right to practice Islam but are denied legal recognition and the ability to build mosques or publicly display their faith, reveals how Slovakia both discriminates against and controls Islam as an 'othered' religion in society.

3.4 Xinjiang's Regulation on "De-Extremification"

China has a dense population and a social structure in which religion does not occupy the same societal role or significance as it does in many Western societies. Religion in China is controlled and 'guided' by the government under 宗教中国化 (The Sinicization of Religion). This idea of Sinicization is where religion, to be compatible in socialist China, will gradually form Chinese characteristics and behavioral norms, and must integrate with China's traditionalist and socialist society⁷². Religion, if not adhering to Sinicization, is seen by the government as a mindset that is incompatible with socialism and affiliates it with corruption and wavering loyalty

⁷⁰ Rae, Evelyn. "Slovakia Does Not Recognise Islam, Has No Mosques, and Won't Allow Islamic Ideas to Be Taught in Schools." *Caldron Pool*. 17 Nov. 2018, caldronpool.com/slovakia-does-not-recognise-islam-has-no-mosques-and-wont-allow-islamic-ideas-to-be-taught-in-schools/.

⁷¹ "2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Slovakia." *U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State, 2021, www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/slovakia/.

⁷² Zhihua, Yin. "Systematically Promote the Sinicization of Religion in Our Country." 系统推进我国宗教中国化—中国社会科学网, 18 Nov. 2025, www.cssn.cn/skgz/bwyc/202511/t20251118_5949730.shtml.

towards the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)⁷³. In a society where the traditional ideas of Orientalism (the West's 'othering' of the East) are used differently, racial abjection can help explain why Muslims and Islam continue to be discriminated against even in an 'Eastern' country. Racial abjection harks on the idea that certain groups of people are 'incompatible', dangerous, or a threat to one's society, and in the region of Xinjiang under the CCP, this is demonstrated through the abuse faced by the Uyghur people.

The Uyghur people are Sunni Muslims who have resided in the region now known as Xinjiang for over 1,000 years, dating back to before the 8th century CE. Most of the Uyghur people are in the northwestern part of China, in the Xinjiang autonomous region⁷⁴. In China, there are five autonomous regions that, in practice, are reserved for particular ethnic minority groups. These regions were established to enable people to exercise more rights in using their local languages, preserve local culture, and enact their own laws. Although autonomous, every region must follow the central government, which has much control over these regions⁷⁵. Accordingly, any law or policy enacted by autonomous regions must comply with the regulations established by the Chinese National Party under the leadership of President Xi Jinping.

In 2017, the autonomous region of Xinjiang passed a new law entitled *新疆维吾尔自治区去极端化条例* (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-Extremification). In this new law, only in effect in the Muslim-dominated region of Xinjiang, it was created to “为了遏制和消除极端化, 防范极端化侵害, 实现社会稳定和长治久安” (contain and eradicate

⁷³ Nadeem, Reem. "Measuring Religion in China." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 30 Aug. 2023, www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/08/30/measuring-religion-in-china/.

⁷⁴ Britannica. "Uyghur | History, Language, China, & Muslims | Britannica." *Britannica*, 28 Jan. 2026, www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur.

⁷⁵ Antoine. "China's 5 Autonomous Regions: What They Are and Why They Matter." *China Facts Maps*, China Facts Maps, 27 July 2025, chinafactsmaps.substack.com/p/chinas-5-autonomous-regions-what.

extremism, prevent extremist violations, and bring about social stability and lasting peace and order)⁷⁶. Following the passage of this law, the creation of ‘re-education camps’ started to appear in the autonomous region. Along with the mass surveillance and cultural suppression this law brought about, many experts call it a form of “total cultural erasure”⁷⁷.

Under this ‘counterterrorism’ law, atrocities have been committed against the mostly Muslim Uyghur people who have been detained. Reports describe beatings, food deprivation, denial of medical attention, and child separation, all under the forced “Sinicization” religious policy in socialist China⁷⁸. Through the implementation of the law, the execution has led many countries, including the United States, to define China’s actions against the mostly Muslim Uyghur population as a “genocide”, where the UN stated “crimes against humanity” are being carried out. Across hundreds of so-called “detention sites” throughout the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, more than 1.8 million Uyghurs have been detained. While the exact number of deaths in custody remains unknown, fatalities have certainly occurred⁷⁹. Directly from the law enacted in Xinjiang China, regarding ‘extremism’, the law states that they are trying to prevent, contain, and eradicate extremism while punishing and preventing extremist criminal activity⁸⁰. The real intentions behind this law were to ‘prevent, contain, and eradicate’ the ‘other’ and to punish and prevent any more of the ‘other’ from infiltrating Chinese socialist ways of life.

⁷⁶ *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-Extremification*. Translated by China Law Translate, 29 Mar. 2017, www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-regulation-on-de-extremification/.

⁷⁷ Antoine. “China’s 5 Autonomous Regions: What They Are and Why They Matter.” *China Facts Maps*, China Facts Maps, 27 July 2025, chinafactsmaps.substack.com/p/chinas-5-autonomous-regions-what.

⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State. “Report to Congress on the Imposition of Sanctions Pursuant to the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act Pursuant to Sec. 6(a) of the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, P.L. 116-145.” *Department of State - United States of America*, 8 Dec. 2023, www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Report-Imposition-of-Sanctions-Pursuant-to-the-Uyghur-Human-Rights-Policy-Act-of-2020.pdf.

⁷⁹ “China’s Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 11 Apr. 2019, www.cfr.org/backgrounders/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights.

⁸⁰ *Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-Extremification*. Translated by China Law Translate, 29 Mar. 2017, www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/xinjiang-uyghur-autonomous-region-regulation-on-de-extremification/.

In China, like many other countries, the 'other' in question is the Muslim population within their sacred borders.

Chapter 4: Original Policy Intentions Versus Their Impact on Islam

In the case studies discussed throughout this thesis, it is imperative that the laws are framed and examined within their original context. This is necessary to evaluate whether these laws are truly contextually reactive or are racially motivated mechanisms of exclusion. Instead of the stated intentions from government officials to ensure national security, secularism, cohesion, or cultural preservation, the wording and implementation have different effects. When examining the wording and implementation of these laws, a recurring global pattern demonstrates these policies often are disproportionately targeting Muslim communities.

By looking into official justifications, the enforcement of these practices, and consequences faced by society, this chapter demonstrates the gap between stated intent and the lived impact. As the examination of similar policies worldwide is deepened, the question of whether these laws are the workings of Islamophobic and Orientalist ways embedded within governments arises. By drawing the line between security concerns and mere discrimination, it aids in determining whether a nation is truly concerned with safety or if it is implementing racial abjection into law, and thereby implementing it into society.

The countries analyzed in these case studies may differ in their contexts however, the marginalization of Islam is the one thing that does not change. When policy repeatedly isolates a single religious group, this discrimination begins to question whether it was intended or if it can be dismissed as incidental.

4.1 Original Policy Intentions

Whether the embedded Islamophobic wording or the ways in which these targeted policies are enforced, the policies examined in this thesis have functioned as means to continue global Muslim discrimination. Before looking deeply into their consequences, it is imperative to examine how these laws were originally justified by those in power. Governments avoid

instating policies that are blatantly discriminatory and instead, they frame these laws as protective security measures, terrorism protectants, or due to threats to national identity. Through the evaluation of official policy language, political speeches, and more, this section aims to address whether these policies were shaped by anxiety relating to Islam. By understanding the justification and original stated intent for these laws, it allows for the comparison of what governments claim to protect and intent and what these policies ultimately lead to in practice.

4.1a Original Policy Intentions (France)

France's notorious bans on religious symbols to promote their principle of *laïcité* have been questioned by many as targeting certain groups of people, such as Muslims. In response, when these policies are being formulated, Presidents, lawmakers, and the French people defend them by detailing arguments against this suspected discrimination. When the ban on religious symbols in public schools was introduced, it was relatively straightforward to leave it to the principle of *laïcité* to address any potential discriminatory accusations. However, as more policies under *laïcité* emerged, the reasoning was unclear and unjustifiable.

In 2015, there was a series of terrorist attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in France that led to the immediate declaration of a State of Emergency on November 13th, 2015⁸¹. In France, Law No. 55-385 1955 under Article 5 states that during a state of emergency, government officials can prohibit the movement of people and can detain or prohibit persons when there are “serious reasons to believe that his or her behavior constitutes a threat to public security and order”⁸². With this vague wording directly from the French legislation, the state of emergency gave the right to group and categorize large numbers of people as ‘threats’,

⁸¹ Ray, Michael. “Paris Attacks of 2015 - Response, Global Condemnation, Solidarity.” *Britannica*, 30 Dec. 2025, www.britannica.com/event/Paris-attacks-of-2015/The-response-to-the-Paris-attacks.

⁸² France. *Loi n° 55-385 du 3 avril 1955 relative à l'état d'urgence*, Art. 5. Légifrance, République française, <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGITEXT000031504662/>.

something that Edward Said warned against. Due to this reification and ‘grouping as the other’ that Said describes the only places of worship that were raided and shut down were mosques⁸³. This left many French Muslims without a place to properly pray and further demonstrated how a certain group of ‘people’ without real suspicion were being targeted.

With the rising tension and fear of Muslims who were being targeted through policy in France, more Islamophobic incidents occurred, indicating that they were seen as the ‘other’⁸⁴. With the discrimination through policy, French Muslims reported more discrimination in housing, employment, and other less vital things that made and continue to make Muslims in France feel like they are “second-class citizens”⁸⁵. This feeling Muslims in France have felt is explained by racial abjection, where the other is cast out and othered because of fear and ignorance from the “Occident”.

Aside from concerns over ‘national security’, French politicians have justified banning Muslim-affiliated types of clothing, such as the burkini, as unhygienic or as a danger to public safety. When explaining the reasoning behind banning the burkini, Mayor René-François Carpentier, defended the ban of the burkini in his town of Marseille, stating that burkinis do not provide adequate buoyancy and could cause more issues if a swimmer needed to be rescued⁸⁶. Not only are burkinis made of the same material as ‘normal’ swimsuits are made of, but they also meet the safety standards of the *Société de Sauvetage* (Lifesaving Society), a society dedicated to

⁸³ Müftüoğlu, Bilal. “France: Trois Mosquées Fermées Dans Le Cadre de l’état d’urgence.” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 2 Dec. 2015, www.aa.com.tr/fr/monde/france-trois-mosqu%C3%A9es-ferm%C3%A9es-dans-le-cadre-de-l%C3%A9tat-durgence/484713

⁸⁴ Ray, Michael. “Paris Attacks of 2015 - Response, Global Condemnation, Solidarity.” *Britannica*, 30 Dec. 2025, www.britannica.com/event/Paris-attacks-of-2015/The-response-to-the-Paris-attacks.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch. “France : Abus Commis Dans Le Cadre de l’état d’urgence.” *Human Rights Watch*, 3 Feb. 2016, www.hrw.org/fr/news/2016/02/03/france-abus-commis-dans-le-cadre-de-letat-durgence.

⁸⁶ Shuster, Yoav. “Court Rules French Burkini Ban Unlawful after Police Confrontation: The Jerusalem Post.” *The Jerusalem Post* | *JPost.Com*, 17 July 2025, www.jpost.com/international/article-861347.

education on water safety in France⁸⁷. Even while burkinis are a safe form of swimwear and have been proven to be just as hygienic as ‘normal’ swimwear, there still lies the issue of *laïcité*. There is no religious connection or mention of women needing to wear burkinis when swimming in the Islamic religion. The burkini or full-body swimsuits are free to be worn by anyone who chooses to do so. From *The Times of Israel* news source, an Israeli swimsuit designer is quoted stating, “What does a woman do in France who wants to cover up for sun protection [...] or scarring [...] It doesn’t make any sense that they are banning a specific type of modest swimwear. It’s very racist to me”⁸⁸. Moreover, journalists who work in the fashion industry have reported that over the last decade, modest swimwear has become a global trend⁸⁹. Without a religious tether, hygiene issues, or safety issues, the banning of the burkini demonstrates yet another effort to control Islam in France.

The initial intent of banning the burkini and the abaya has also been said to be a positive thing that is freeing oppressed Muslim women and getting rid of a potential gateway to dangerous Islamic radicalism⁹⁰. This reasoning for banning specific articles of clothing is the exact dichotomy demonstrated in the “Good Muslim” vs “Bad Muslim” concept. French legislation is telling its population that “dangerous” and “Bad Muslims” look and wear certain things, which instills fear into the eyes of those who fit that description. On the other hand, the French legislation is forcing Muslims to conform to a more Westernized view of what Muslims should be assimilating into, or they are punished and cast out of society.

⁸⁷ Arab, Nadine. “Debunking Myths around Burkinis.” *Cairo Gossip*, 22 July 2020, cairogossip.com/gossip/life-style/debunking-myths-around-burkinis/.

⁸⁸ Cheslow, Daniella. “French Uproar Creates Opportunity for Israeli Burkinis.” *The Times of Israel*, 4 Sept. 2016, www.timesofisrael.com/french-uproar-creates-opportunity-for-israeli-burkini-makers/.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 2016.

⁹⁰ The Associated Press. “French Court Rules against ‘burkini’ Swimwear for Religious Reasons.” *NBC News*, 22 June 2022, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/france-court-rules-burkini-swimwear-religious-reasons-rcna34833.

When questionably discriminatory policies are on the rise in France, much clarity is brought when politicians and lawmakers from France make openly Islamophobic comments to ‘other’ Muslims in society. President Emmanuel Macron, while giving a speech on his ways to fight radicalization, stated, “Islam is a religion that is in crisis all over the world today; we are not just seeing this in our country”⁹¹. Given his position of power and the number of people his word reaches, Macron spreads fear and hate over Islam as a religion instead of directly addressing the extremists who commit atrocities in the name of Islam. President Macron’s Islamophobic comments do not stop there; he also has stated that “the Muslims in France have ideologies that defend separatist ideas” and that there is a “need to reform Islam”⁹². Macron clearly has anti-Muslim sentiment that he has spread to thousands of citizens in France. The proof is in the aftermath of the French government's attitudes towards Muslims, where there has been a rise in Islamophobic actions and racist attacks in the country⁹³. Attacks like that of two Muslim women stabbed by the Eiffel Tower and two Jordanian brothers exposed to racist violence in France are just some of the many increasing attacks on innocent Muslims simply because of their faith⁹⁴. Islamophobia spread by the actors in the French government is not limited to the President, however. In 2015, the French Prime Minister, another person of grand importance in France, stated in an interview that he doesn’t believe in using the term ‘Islamophobia’. He reasoned that it was an excuse to silence critics of Islam and a weapon

⁹¹ “Macron Says Islam ‘in Crisis’, Prompting Backlash from Muslims.” *Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 2 Oct. 2020, www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/2/macron-announces-new-plan-to-regulate-islam-in-france.

⁹² Dursun, Ahmet, and Enes Canli. “Muslim World Unites against France.” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 27 Oct. 2020, www.aa.com.tr/en/world/muslim-world-unites-against-france/2020875#:~:text=French%20President%20Emmanuel%20Macron%27s%20remarks,to%20racist%20violence%20in%20Paris.

⁹³ Ibid, 2020.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 2020.

against reforming parts of the religion, like equality for women and questioning the Quran⁹⁵. Downright denying people of their reality for being targeted and claiming that there are valid reasons to reform Islam as a religion is another mechanism to continue discriminatory actions against Islam as a whole. These Islamophobic ideologies reach large audiences, and given everyone's status, it solidifies the Orientalist view of the 'other' in society, and proves that these laws are not neutral, but are attempts to limit and control the Islamic population in France.

4.1a Original Policy Intentions (USA)

Targeted attempts through policy have plagued the American legal system to 'other' and vilify those who are seen as different or a threat. After the events on 9/11, the policies that followed demonstrate clear evidence of this discrimination. Unlike France, which attempts to 'other' and control Muslim identity through secularism, the United States differs in its approach in doing this. The United States has consistently relied on the anxiety of foreign influence to control what people belong and who doesn't, a method that is identical to Orientalist views and racial abjection intent⁹⁶.

When formulating and instating the Patriot Act, Congress stated that the intent was for "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA Patriot Act) Act of 2001"⁹⁷. They go on to define the Patriot Act as an act to not only deter and punish terrorists but to enhance law enforcement, "and for other purposes"⁹⁸. The last statement of "and for other purposes" is the ambiguity in the law that led to

⁹⁵ Goldberg, Jeffrey. "French Prime Minister: 'I Refuse to Use This Term "Islamophobia."'" *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 16 Jan. 2015, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/01/french-prime-minister-manuel-valls-on-islamophobia/384592/.

⁹⁶ Lucero, Marissa. "'Alien:' Tracking Its Story throughout Immigration History." *UNM UCAM Newsroom*, 22 Sept. 2021, news.unm.edu/news/alien-tracking-its-story-throughout-immigration-history.

⁹⁷ United States Congress. *Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT Act) of 2001*. Public Law 107-56, 26 Oct. 2001. *Congress.gov*, www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ56/PLAW-107publ56.pdf

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 2001.

the villainization and abuse of Arabs and Muslims in the United States. The US Patriot Act included wording on how Muslims should be protected from violence and discrimination, and that the violent increase of attacks against Muslim and Arab people after the events on September 11th is condemned. Even with this written into the policy, discrimination and Orientalist ‘othering’ are still pursued. Whether racially profiled when detained by government officials or socially blacklisted from financial institutions based on Islamic surnames from a master government list, Muslims were discriminated against politically and socially because of the targeted laws after 9/11⁹⁹.

Policies that followed the tragic events on 9/11, although stated for reasons other than discrimination, had the same results each time. The NSEERS program was created to enhance national security by monitoring visitors from countries deemed “high-risk”, prevent potential or remaining terrorists from being in the US, and improve the overall integrity of the immigration system. Instantly, the NSEERS program was doomed to have discriminatory effects as wording like “terrorist” was already deemed associated with Muslims, and “high-risk countries” established by the policy were Muslim-majority countries. The NSEERS registered more than 83,000 people from 96% Muslim majority countries, where these people were tracked, harassed, and led to harm to tens of thousands of families and communities across the nation¹⁰⁰. This creation of the NSEERS policy was merely a way to discriminate and criminalize Muslims, which led to no real cessation of security threats and pinned Americans against Muslims, not just in the US, but all over the globe. Collateral damage might be expected while striving to save the

⁹⁹ Ahmed, Arshad, and Farid Senzai. “The USA PATRIOT Act: Impact on the Arab and Muslim American Community.” *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU)*, 5 Aug. 2017, ispu.org/the-usa-patriot-act-impact-on-the-arab-and-muslim-american-community/.

¹⁰⁰ Gastelum, Juan. “NILC Applauds Termination of Nseers, George W. Bush–Era Registration System - NILC.” *National Immigration Law Center*, 22 Dec. 2016, www.nilc.org/press/nilc-applauds-termination-of-nseers-george-w-bush-era-registration-system/.

US and terminate all national security threats; however, with all the harm the NSEERS program had on Arab and Muslim communities, it led to not a single prosecution for terrorism and never found a true national security threat through their vetting process¹⁰¹.

Islamophobia in the US continues and has gotten more violent and aggressive due to President Trump. The term alien in the US has been used for over 200 years and was retired from government in 2021 due to its dehumanizing connotation. In January of 2025, the term was reinstated and used in official documents by the Trump administration¹⁰². The Trump administration has revamped Islamophobia once again, but this time being openly Islamophobic through policy and through speech. In 2021, President Biden ended the 2017 Trump instated Muslim Travel ban stating that it was a part of hate crime legislation and did not align with true American values of protecting immigrants¹⁰³. In 2025, Trump revamped his travel ban, deeming that it separates immigration and national security. This time, however, the same reasoning was used when he discussed his intent for the 2017 Muslim Travel Ban¹⁰⁴. In defending the intent for the 2025 travel ban, the Trump Administration stated that they are “Strengthening National security through common sense restrictions”. As for the previous ban in 2017, Trump reasoned that “Making America safe is my number one priority. We will not admit those into our country we cannot safely vet”¹⁰⁵. Donald Trump made his Orientalist message very clear to all

¹⁰¹ Azmy, Baher, and Noor Zafar. “National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request | Center for Constitutional Rights.” *Center for Constitutional Rights*, 3 Jan. 2017, ccrjustice.org/home/what-we-do/our-cases/national-security-entry-exit-registration-system-nseers-freedom.

¹⁰² Lucero, Marissa. “‘Alien:’ Tracking Its Story throughout Immigration History.” *UNM UCAM Newsroom*, 22 Sept. 2021, news.unm.edu/news/alien-tracking-its-story-throughout-immigration-history.

¹⁰³ Wilkie, Christina. “Biden Pledges to End Trump’s ‘muslim Ban’ on His First Day in Office.” *CNBC*, 20 July 2020, www.cnn.com/2020/07/20/biden-pledges-to-end-trumps-muslim-ban-on-his-first-day-in-office.html.

¹⁰⁴ Semotiuk, Andy J. “Travel Ban Reinstated by Trump with Mostly Muslim Countries.” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 10 June 2025, www.forbes.com/sites/andyjsemotiuk/2025/06/09/travel-ban-reinstated-by-trump-with-mostly-muslim-countries/.

¹⁰⁵ BBC News. “Trump’s US Travel Ban: What’s The Full Story?” *BBC Newsround*, BBC, 6 Dec. 2017, www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/38794001.

Americans: America is not safe when Muslims are around. Hence, his “Muslim Travel Ban” executive order no.13769¹⁰⁶. Trump’s travel bans have been completely discriminatory in that there were no terrorist attacks in the US by people from the countries banned on the list¹⁰⁷. With no immediate security threat, Trump’s Muslim travel ban was not triggered by specific security events, yet it was another Orientalist attempt to create a religious exclusion legally acceptable. Knowing that Trump actively campaigned for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the US, his policies were enacted to discriminate and hinder the Muslim population in the US¹⁰⁸. Just like the immediate policies following 9/11, Trump’s bans and policies to discriminate are no different; they strive and aim to control and dismantle any ‘other’ that may infringe on the Western ‘correct’ way of life.

4.1c Original Policy Intentions (Slovakia)

In Slovak society, the exclusion of Islam through policy is not accidental, yet there is a buildup of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment that has been institutionalized. The Slovak National Party (SNS) states that the new policy enacted in 2017 on religious registration was designed to prevent speculative new religious movements and satirical religions¹⁰⁹. By limiting which religions are considered ‘official’ or ‘real’ and hence granted status, this goes against their own Slovak Constitution, which states that freedom of thought, conscience, religious belief, and faith shall be guaranteed. The creation of the new law followed the peaking interest in Islam

¹⁰⁶ Trump, Donald J. *Executive Order 13769: Protecting the Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States*. 27 Jan. 2017. *The American Presidency Project*, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-13769-protecting-the-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states.

¹⁰⁷ Valverde, Miriam. “Democratic Lawmaker Says No Terrorist Attack since 9/11 From.” *Politifact - The Poynter Institute*, 29 Jan. 2017, www.politifact.com/factchecks/2017/jan/29/jerrold-nadler/have-there-been-terrorist-attacks-post-911-countri/

¹⁰⁸ Colvin, Jill, and Bruce Smith. “Trump Calls for ‘complete Shutdown’ on Muslims Entering US.” *AP News*, AP News, 7 Dec. 2015, apnews.com/united-states-presidential-election-events-b0f4f54bad2843898b8b3b67559588aa.

¹⁰⁹ Urban Muslimz. “Muslims in Slovakia Remain Marginalised by Discriminatory Laws.” *Urban Muslimz*, 14 Sept. 2020, urbanmuslimz.com/news/islamophobia/muslims-slovakia-discrimination-laws/.

during the migration crisis from 2015 through 2017¹¹⁰. The migration crisis was a time where there was much unrest in the Middle East, and many people were forced to leave their homes and find refuge in other countries to seek asylum¹¹¹. The fear alone that Islam may become a recognized religion in Slovakia through refugees, adding to the number of people registered to Islam, was enough for the Slovak government to create a new law to ensure that would not happen. This Orientalist fear of the ‘other’ was calmed when the government ensured the ‘other’ would hold no real place in their society.

Slovakia has long resented and discriminated against Islam and even refuses to teach students the impact of ancient Islamic civilizations. These are civilizations that have huge impacts and discoveries in the sciences, in medicine, philosophy, and the natural sciences¹¹². This Orientalist fear in Slovakia dates to the Ottoman Empire, where Islamic rule ruled over Slovak lands for over 200 years. After the eventual defeat of the Ottoman Empire, Islam was quickly replaced by Protestant Christian groups. These groups remain recognized official religions, while Islam is pushed out of society to be left in the past¹¹³. With many attempts to limit Islam in Slovak society, the Muslim population was steadily rising. In 2021, there were around 3,900 Muslims, which was double the amount in 2011, and now that number stands at about 6,000 Muslims¹¹⁴. With this growing ‘threat’ of the ‘other’ in society, Slovakia made efforts to diminish that growth by not recognizing Islam altogether.

¹¹⁰ Islamská nadácia. “Slovakia, Islamic Foundation, (2023), Report: Islamophobia in Slovakia 2023, Bratislava.” *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*, 2023, fra.europa.eu/en/databases/anti-muslim-hatred/research-and-data/9824.

¹¹¹ Školkay, Andrej, et al. *The Populist Challenge of Common EU Policies: The Case of (Im)migration Policy (Slovakia) Between 2015 and 2018*. October 19, 2020, School of Communication and Media, Bratislava, Slovakia. DEMOS Project Report. <https://demos-h2020.eu/uploads/files/Reports/MIGRATIONPOLICYSLOVAKIAfinal.pdf>

¹¹² Urban Muslimz. “Muslims in Slovakia Remain Marginalised by Discriminatory Laws.” *Urban Muslimz*, 14 Sept. 2020, urbanmuslimz.com/news/islamophobia/muslims-slovakia-discrimination-laws/.

¹¹³ Tazkiyah. “Islam in Slovakia.” *Tazkiyah - Islamic Personal Development*, 28 Sept. 2024, kharchoufa.com/en/islam-in-slovakia/.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 2024.

With Muslims and Islam being a very small minority population in Slovakia, there is an alarming number of hate crimes that have steadily increased due to the fear and ignorance toward Islam that Slovak officials have perpetuated. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights reported numerous hateful words about Muslims from public figures in Slovakia, which has heavily impacted the perceptions the public has¹¹⁵. Officials like Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico have been very vocal in their anti-Islam rhetoric. He has stated that there is no place for Islam in Slovakia and deems ‘them’ as a threat to Slovak identity and society. He has gone on to state that not a single Muslim migrant should be let into the country, as the Muslim population should not be allowed to grow¹¹⁶. By using the wording “them” and “threat”, Prime Minister Fico is feeding off Orientalist views by villainizing the ‘other’ and grouping “them” as one. Aside from Prime Minister Fico, other important Slovak figures like Slovak National Society Chairman Andrej Danko stated that “We must do everything we can so that no mosque is built in the future”¹¹⁷. And in that way, Slovakia has succeeded.

This new law was more than its stated intent to avoid satirical religions, etc., but was a way to prevent Islam from ever becoming a recognized religion and thereby part of Slovak society. The proof of this lies in the way this law is upheld. Of the 18 officially recognized religions by the Slovakian government, only 5 have the required 50,000 signatures. These religions are still considered official as they were established before the new law of 2017 and therefore still stand as registered official religions in Slovakia. Of the 18 religions, 16 are

¹¹⁵ Islamská nadácia. “Slovakia, Islamic Foundation, (2023), Report: Islamophobia in Slovakia 2023, Bratislava.” *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*, 2023, fra.europa.eu/en/databases/anti-muslim-hatred/research-and-data/9824.

¹¹⁶ Singh, Manbilas. “The Plight of Religious Minorities in Slovakia: Is Islam Banned in Practice? .” *Arclantic*, 3 Apr. 2025, www.arclantic.com/the-plight-of-religious-minorities-in-slovakia-is-islam-banned-in-practice.

¹¹⁷ Urban Muslimz. “Muslims in Slovakia Remain Marginalised by Discriminatory Laws.” *Urban Muslimz*, 14 Sept. 2020, urbanmuslimz.com/news/islamophobia/muslims-slovakia-discrimination-laws/.

Christian religions, with the last 2 being Judaism and the Bahá'í Community¹¹⁸. This new law was clearly not a neutral law but a targeted law for religions that were not registered to never be able to become recognized. Islam is seen as a threat and dangerous, which is why, even though there are around 6,000 followers of Islam in Slovakia, the 'non-threatening' Bahá'í religion with only around 680 followers is a recognized religion, but Islam remains a "civic association"¹¹⁹. The world continues to exclude Islam based on false connotations and misunderstandings of the faith. When an entire religion is villainized through policy and those in power, it trickles down into every aspect of society and negatively affects those who are 'othered'.

4.1d Original Policy Intentions (China)

The effects of enforcing the Xinjiang "de-extremification" law in China have led to actions the United Nations classifies as "crimes against humanity" and that many countries have categorized as "genocide"¹²⁰. The genocidal conditions are not the result of an autonomous region acting alone, but of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) authorization and willful oversight, which allows systemic violence against Muslims in China to continue. Through the specific wording detailed within the articles of this law, this law is not neutral but a way for racial abjection to infect yet another global society.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-extremification is organized into six chapters, each containing several articles. The first chapter, entitled *General Provisions*, under Article 1, states that there were already laws in place regarding de-extremification. Even with these de-extremification laws set in place under the CCP that apply to

¹¹⁸ Manbilas, Is Islam Banned in Practice?, 2025.

¹¹⁹ *Number of Bahá'ís by Country*, bahaipeedia.org/Number_of_Bah%C3%A1%E2%80%99%C3%ADs_by_country. Accessed 3 Feb. 2026.

¹²⁰ "Who Are the Uyghurs and Why Is China Being Accused of Genocide?" *BBC News*, BBC, 24 May 2022, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037.

China as a nation, the autonomous region known for its mostly Muslim population employed a new, stricter law against extremism. The justification was that “together with the actual conditions of the autonomous region, to contain and eradicate extremism, prevent extremist violations, and bring about social stability and lasting peace and order”. This wording, “actual conditions of the autonomous region”, may be referring to the religious extremism that was on the rise in the Xinjiang region from the early 1990s through the late 2010s. This religious extremism was nothing like the actual practice of Islam and led to many terrorist attacks over this time that killed hundreds of people¹²¹. With a clear original intent to de-extremify what society had looked like in Xinjiang, how the law was implemented went far beyond ending terrorism and violence. How a country addresses terrorism and extremism should not end in crimes against humanity and accusations of genocide against a specific group of people. This new law in 2017 from the Xinjiang region created a way in which Muslims were ‘othered’ and then removed from Chinese society.

The original intent for this law may have made sense due to the violence the Xinjiang region was experiencing, but the subtle yet obvious ways in which the law aims to target a religion instead of dangerous terrorist threats are blatant in its wording. In Article 3 under Chapter 1, it states “the influence of extremism, [...] spreads radical religious ideology and rejects and interferes with normal production and livelihood”. The use of the word “normal” is an extremely subjective word and having it in a legal policy demonstrates exactly how racial abjection played a part in the formation of this law. The Chinese government wants to remove and punish anything different from the Chinese “normal” that is threatening to society. In addition to this, Article 3 goes on to promise that this policy will “contain and eradicate

¹²¹ Nordic Times Editorial Staff. “The Untold Story of Terrorism in China.” *The Nordic Times*, 12 Oct. 2025, nordictimes.com/world/the-untold-story-of-terrorism-in-china/.

extremism and prevent and punish extremist criminal activity”. While this wording is less subjective, there still lies the issue of never defining what “extremism” is and only mentioning that it can in forms of be “propositions and conduct using distortion of religious teachings[...]”. This statement is a clear objective to remove Islam from China, as they do not agree with their “distorted religious teachings”. To stop this ‘other’ from spreading, they “eradicate” it, and the Chinese government has done so in ways that violate basic human rights.

This law on de-extremification in Xinjiang is not a law solely worried or created due to violence necessarily, but is one that, in its own wording, is more focused on targeting a religion that strays from the Chinese socialist way of life. In Article 4 of the first chapter, they go on to state “De-extremification shall persist in the basic directives of the party’s work on religion, persist in an orientation of making religion more Chinese and under law, and actively guide religions to become compatible with socialist society”. This law is associating Islam with extremism to eradicate it from Chinese socialist society because it is the ‘other’ that does not align with their “normal” way of life. If the law wasn’t already a clear demonstration of attempts to eradicate Islam, the law goes on to be even more specific. Article 9, states that under the influence of extremism, these words/actions are prohibited “(6) Using the idea of something being not-halal to reject or interfere with others’ secular lives; (7) Wearing, or compelling others to wear, burqas with face coverings, or to bear symbols of extremification; (8) Spreading religious fanaticism through irregular beards or name selection;”. These measures constitute racist and Islamophobic attacks that directly target individuals based on traits they have associated with an entire religion. By explicitly equating the wearing of face coverings (a practice commonly associated with Islam) with extremism, the law exposes its underlying logic; “extremism” operates as a stand-in for Islam itself. As a result, the law is not a neutral security

measure but one aimed at restricting and effectively eradicating Islamic religious expression. The criminalization of a name or a particular style of beard because it signifies extremism, or a specific religion illustrates just how targeted and deeply Orientalist this law is. Rather than restricting only certain forms of dress, as in the French secularism case, the law extends its reach to outlaw names and styles of facial hair, reducing religious and cultural identity itself to a marker of criminality. In the setting forth of this law, reports have detailed “Suppression of expressions of culture and minority language use, destruction of mosques and Muslim cemeteries, and child separation policies”¹²². This is a form of cultural erasure directed towards the religion of Islam and is justified under China’s “Sinicization” mantra.

China’s actions towards the Uyghur people have been categorized as a genocide by many major nations, and similarly, the most horrific genocides in our time have been those focusing on race/religion. The Holocaust targeted mostly Jewish people, the Rwandan genocide targeted the Tutsis for religious and cultural differences, and the Cambodian Genocide targeted ethnic minorities¹²³. These examples are just some of the many horrific genocides that have occurred throughout time globally. The genocide China is committing against the Muslim population in Xinjiang is no different. The Chinese government is actively suppressing cultural identity and attempting to erase an entire identity from their country, as they are the ‘other’. Their reasoning is Islamophobic, and denying the truth of these activities on a global stage does not exempt them from the vile actions they are committing against the Muslim Uyghur people.

¹²² U.S. Department of State. “Report to Congress on the Imposition of Sanctions Pursuant to the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act Pursuant to Sec. 6(a) of the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, P.L. 116-145.” *Department of State - United States of America*, 8 Dec. 2023, www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Report-Imposition-of-Sanctions-Pursuant-to-the-Uyghur-Human-Rights-Policy-Act-of-2020.pdf.

¹²³ Genocide Education Project. “Cases of Genocide | Modern-Era Genocides.” *Genocide Education Project*, <https://genocideeducation.org/resources/modern-era-genocides/>.

In the autonomous region of Xinjiang, with its over 11 million mostly Muslim population, it is clear why a targeted law like this one has not been implemented in any other minority autonomous region. China is committing crimes against humanity because the Uyghur people are Muslims who do not fit their ‘way of life’ and are justifying a genocide based on their idea of “Sinicization” the same way France attempts to Westernize Islam based on ‘Secularism’. With China so worried about the ‘other’ not fitting into their social norms and customs, they use Sinicization and socialism as ways to dilute diversity, and they have done that by using a de-extremification law to justify having “re-education camps” to kill a certain group of people who try to escape their control¹²⁴. The passing of this law allowed for the encampment of the Uyghur people to be justified, and with a national de-extremification law already in place, this new law was a targeted way to dispel and remove the ‘other’ from Chinese society. As the CCP oversees and ultimately has control over the Xinjiang region, they are enabling this genocide to continue.

4.2 Security, Discrimination, and the Question of Racial Motivation

After the examination of these laws and their official intentions, the similarity in their effects on Muslim populations leads to the question of whether these were genuinely reactive measures to protect the population or whether they were created and instated from racialized and Orientalist assumptions about Islam. With justifications surrounding national security and similar reasoning, the result of the targeting and disproportionate effect on one religious community blurs the line between security concerns and discrimination. The vagueness of the official wording in policies like “national identity”, “secularism”, “extremism”, etc., allows governments to enforce such laws in ways that disproportionately target Muslims. Even if not explicitly stated,

¹²⁴ Maizland, Lindsay. “China’s Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 11 Apr. 2019, www.cfr.org/backgrounders/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights.

when the same result is achieved through these types of laws globally, it can be concluded that there is a racial motivation embedded in the policy.

With justifications in every country stating specific security concerns which predated these laws, it is not solely the question of whether these laws arose because of legitimate security concerns; meanwhile, the question is why these laws consistently target and disproportionately affect Muslims. In each case study, the vagueness in the initial policy allowed for the enforcement to be discriminatory when carried out. Through French policy, the justification of a ‘Secular’ France is given, and broadly first instated the ban of “religious symbols”. In France, these banned symbols included those that are customary and, in some cases, required to practice Islam, limiting Islamic practice. France went on to ban the burkini under issues with “hygiene”, yet this vague language soon took a turn that was a clear way to limit Islam due to the misconceptions of the religion. The Prime Minister of France was quoted as stating that the burkini was more than just unhygienic but was an “enslavement of women”. Because of the Orientalist misconstrued thinking that Islam is the ‘other’ and thereby wrong, different, and dangerous, the racially abject narrative that banning a conservative swimsuit is saving these women from being oppressed arises. In framing it in a way where French officials are ‘saving’ women from oppression, the public eye is satisfied and sees no wrongdoing in banning this modest type of swimwear. From initially banning “religious symbols” that disproportionately affected Muslim children from practicing Islam to then banning a specific type of swimwear commonly worn by Muslims, it is a clear indicator that the former was just another way to target Muslims under the guise of ‘Secularism’. If the escalated banning of specific swimwear wasn’t enough, the French government went on to ban the abaya. The banning of the abaya, which is a type of long dress commonly worn by Muslim women, was a direct targeting of Muslims, as its

‘Western’ counterpart was not banned. An abaya’s counterpart in the ‘Western’ world would be any type of long-sleeved sundress. The ambiguity of banning this type of clothing was a direct attack on Muslims through policy and was the result of an escalation from many former policies.

This escalation in policy, which revealed the ultimately disguised racially abject methodology of ‘othering’ and then controlling Muslims, is similarly exhibited in the way the United States implemented laws after 9/11. By framing the laws as ones that dealt with “national security” and were targeting “high-risk terrorist countries”, society accepted these justifications as they were doing what was necessary to protect society. Realistically, these laws and policies, such as the NSEERS program, had no success in catching any terrorists or potential risks to national security. Instead, these laws and policies led to the harassment, abuse, and targeting of Muslims in the United States. With the Orientalist view that Muslim-majority countries were dangerous, the US sought to monitor these ‘others’ because their religion could ruin the ‘American’ way of life. Following the long series of Islamophobic policies from the United States government, President Donald Trump and his escalation revealed the true reasoning behind these laws. Just as France began with a vague banning of religious symbols and ended up justifying new targeted policies to ‘save’ Muslim women from oppression, the United States, forcing people from Muslim-majority countries to register their presence for “security reasons,” escalated when Trump created the “Muslim Travel Ban”. Trump’s escalation to use definitive Islamophobic wording may not have been an escalation by policy per se, as much as a simple escalation in its wording. Every country listed under Trump’s Muslim Ban of 2017 was also

listed under the NSEERS program of 2002, demonstrating that the policy was not necessarily different, but just the outward Islamophobic wording in the policy was¹²⁵.

Without the eventual blatant Islamophobic wording in policy, countries like Slovakia demonstrate Islamophobia through policy by different means. In creating a circumstance where Islam simply has no place in their country, Muslims cannot win. In Slovakia, people are said to have the freedom to practice whatever religion they choose, yet there is a policy in place that does not recognize religions as religions unless they meet a minimum number of persons. Not only is this an impossible quest for Muslims, but the policy is not enacted equally for everyone. Those religions that did not meet the new minimum but had the previous minimum before this new policy was enacted to be a recognized religion were able to keep their status. With Islam as a growing religion, they did not have the numbers, and as they began to reach the old minimum, the new minimum to reach was made nearly impossible. It is hard to demonstrate neutrality in a law like the one enacted in Slovakia when members of the Slovak National Party (SNS) demonstrate clear Islamophobic intentions. SNS Chairman Andrej Danko stated that “Islamisation starts with a kebab and it’s already underway [...] let’s realise what we can face in five to 10 years ... We must do everything we can so that no mosque is built in the future,”¹²⁶.

Even with Muslims outnumbering many of the recognized religions in Slovakia, they are not acknowledged or allowed to practice freely as others do. Muslims in Slovakia cannot practice Islam as there are no mosques and are denied as a religion by society. As the Muslim population began to grow, the Orientalists’ fear that these ‘others’ were multiplying scared the Slovak

¹²⁵ Tzamaras, George, and Belle Woods. “Ending Nseers Closes Dark Chapter in U.S. History.” *AILA*, 22 Dec. 2016, www.aila.org/library/ending-nseers-closes-dark-chapter-in-us-history.

¹²⁶ TH Team. “Slovakia Blocks Islam from Gaining Official Status as a Religion.” *The Insight International*, 15 Mar. 2022, theinsightinternational.com/slovakia-blocks-islam-religion-2016-12-01#:~:text=%E2%80%9CIslamisation%20starts%20with%20a%20kebab,of%20key%20elections%20next%20year.

government. To prevent this growth and limit Islam, they enacted their new recognized religious restriction policy. This policy, although different in its methods to discriminate, does so by implementing a law that is not carried out equally. Like France, where certain religious symbols such as small crosses were not punished, yet hijabs were, Slovakia allows religions that do not meet the new minimum number to be recognized, while Islam is not. In order to limit the growth of the Muslim population due to misconceptions and Islamophobia, Slovakia used this policy to rid Islam from their society. Even when there is no direct wording about Islam or Muslims in a policy and are therefore ‘neutral’ policies, the enforcement of these laws is religiously concentrated.

The enforcement of a ‘neutral’ law that is enforced through ethnic profiling is none better demonstrated by Xinjiang’s law on “De-Extremification”. A law whose stated intent was to unify and protect Chinese culture through “Sinicization” resulted in what the UN classifies as “crimes against humanity”. This policy and its effects are proof that neutral laws through language may not always be neutral. The Chinese law on de-extremification is like the ideas of secular France, as everyday things like halal items, face coverings, irregular beards, or names could be punished for symbols of extremism. Just as in France, China depicts certain commonly associated symbols with Islam as dangerous and extremist. This Orientalist view that the ‘other’ is different and ‘dangerous’ bleeds through China’s law and is clear through the way it is carried out. Although China also preaches freedom of religion, cultural markers of Islam are associated with China as extremist and vilified. China and France both allow Islam to be practiced in their country if it is seen as non-threatening. This idea is the basic framework of the “Good Muslim” vs “Bad Muslim” rhetoric. In France, a “Good Muslim” woman will not wear any coverings or show her symbols of Islam, and similarly, in China, “Good Muslims” will conform to Chinese society and

not have any ‘threatening’ names, clothing, facial hair, etc., to be accepted and not persecuted in society.

Acknowledging that France and China experienced terrorist attacks from extremist groups that associated themselves with Islam, as well as the United States, makes it understandable that it led to policies that crack down on these threats. These policies, however, even with a contextual reaction, become racially motivated in certain ways. When the scope exceeds the specific threat, racially motivated questions begin to arise. Policies like the NSREERS program were labeled as “obsolete,” yet stayed in place and harmed and harassed thousands of people¹²⁷. When identity markers are used instead of criminal behavior, the enactment of these laws turns racial. Coming from a specific country or wearing a certain article of clothing should not automatically lead one to think of criminal terrorist behavior. This is when the rhetoric starts to shift from “extremists” to “Islam”. Even after immediate threats subside, a policy that continues to racially target people is a clear indicator that these laws are not in place to protect but have an ulterior motive. Across the globe, from democracies to authoritarian systems, security measures repeatedly become a framework where Muslim identity is regulated, restricted, or even erased.

¹²⁷ Tzamaras, George, and Belle Woods. “Ending Nseers Closes Dark Chapter in U.S. History.” *AILA*, 22 Dec. 2016, www.aila.org/library/ending-nseers-closes-dark-chapter-in-us-history.

Chapter 5: The Media Representation, and the Cycle of Islamophobia

For the cycle of Islamophobia to persist, it relies on public fear, ignorance, and the media to continue the normalized racism in global societies. The spreading of Orientalist views about Islam and the continued racial abjection of Muslims in society heavily depend on how the media influences people. Whether its statements made by those in power that reach millions of people, the normalized Orientalist lens depicted in Hollywood, or the fear and incorrect knowledge about Islam spread to all, public distortion of knowledge plays a huge part in global Islamophobia. In the United States, members of the public fear Muslim terrorists but tend to ignore other threats in society. When the media in the US is 357 percent more likely to give more media attention to terror attacks carried out by extremist Muslims than other groups, this result is unsurprising¹²⁸. This imbalance of media coverage reinforces the perception that violence is inherently part of Islam. The result is not simply biased reporting but creates the construction of a racialized hierarchy that shapes how the public in society understands national identity, belonging, and security issues.

In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said mentions the negative outcomes of the media as people learn “fragmented knowledge [that is] available on the internet and in the mass media”¹²⁹. Information is readily available and accessible, yet it is stripped from its original context and historical depth. Television, film, and different types of media commonly repeat stereotypes of Muslims and reinforce negative connotations that are normalized in society. These depictions

¹²⁸ Georgia State University. “Terror Attacks by Muslims Get Disproportionate News Coverage.” *Georgia State University News*, 19 Feb. 2019, <https://news.gsu.edu/2019/02/19/terror-attacks-by-muslims-get-disproportionate-news-coverage/>.

¹²⁹ Said, Edward. “Preface.” *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, 2003.

have gone back decades and have misconstrued the understanding between reality and representation.

In this chapter, the argument is centered around how media representation is not incidental in its Islamophobic forms but is a foundation for its continuation in society. With the continuous portrayals of danger, backwardness, and extremism, the media creates its own negative cycle where fear of the ‘other’ justifies real-world suspicion, exclusion, and the ‘othering’ of Muslims.

5.1 The Influence of Media on Public Perception

The reinforcement and negative cycle of Islamophobia continues to infest society, in part due to the role the media plays in spreading the word and normalizing this kind of discrimination. In shaping public perception, the media influences people’s opinions on the ‘Orient’, whether it is consciously recognized or systematically ignored. Edward Said, in his piece entitled *Orientalism*, speaks about the media and how words like “terrorist” serve the general purpose of keeping people angry. He goes on to explain that media images receive so much attention and are often exploited during times of insecurity, such as the period following 9/11 attacks. Said warns that so-called “experts” who report on issues base their statements on the general line and tone of their governments. When these governments have outwardly shown and demonstrated how Muslims are practicing “the enslavement of women”, “terrorist activities”, and are “threats to society”, the media only continues to perpetuate these narratives¹³⁰.

Events like 9/11 have demonstrated global reporting that is broadcast and reaches societies everywhere. The United States has commonly used the media as a tool to leverage its

¹³⁰ Said, Edward. “Preface.” *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, 2003.

political agenda by controlling people's opinions on Muslims and Islam. Similarly, France has used media and speeches to gain public support for discriminating laws against the Muslim community. In countries like Slovakia, where the Muslim population isn't as prominent, society's perspective and understanding of Islam can and is influenced by what they see on the news instead of personal experiences with Muslims. By controlling the narrative broadcast to millions of people, powerful countries can justify wrongdoings without backlash.

After 9/11, the media became a huge part of how people globally saw Muslims and Islam. In the documentary *Control Room* (2004), directed by Jehane Noujaim, the film demonstrates how media narratives not only perpetuate the concept of racial abjection but also reinforce Orientalist power structures in the United States. Media outlets do so by marginalizing the 'other' to uphold systems of oppression against Muslims. Throughout the documentary, audiences are shown the differing news images that were shown on US broadcasting stations versus those in the Middle East. During the Iraq War, Arabs and Muslims were portrayed negatively to justify the invasion and to create more alienation of these people within their society. In *Control Room*, an Al Jazeera journalist, Hassan Ibrahim, demonstrated how US media coverage dehumanized Iraqi citizens by failing to include images of civilian casualties and the destruction of Iraqi homes. Instead, the US news outlets were flooded with reports of American 'heroism'. The omission created a one-sided narrative that vilified Arabs and Muslims, framing them as the aggressors while ignoring their suffering.

Certain situations depicted in the documentary *Control Room* (2004) even demonstrated the United States's role in setting up situations that never happened to further support their political agenda. In this scene, US forces created a scenario to demonstrate how they were liberating the people of Iraq from Saddam Hussein. It showed a crowd of people cheering as a

statue of him came down, and even went as far as interviewing people from Baghdad on how thrilled they were to be ‘free’. *Control Room* (2004) debunked this event and proved that the actual event of the statue coming down had no crowd or cheering, and the people interviewed were exposed as never even being from Baghdad. The US government used the media as a tool to gain public support, as it understands how powerful the media is in shaping society’s opinions. With governments recognizing the power the media has; it is no revelation that stereotypes in the media become normalized in global societies. The media that came after 9/11, depicting all Muslims as terrorists, spread globally to many societies and influenced their knowledge on how to perceive ‘these people’. These events created a definitive connection between Islam, radicalism, and terrorism in the global media, and they had a huge impact on the perceptions people abroad, specifically Slovaks, acquired¹³¹.

This negative reporting on Arabs and Muslims is not confined to American news outlets, and in countries like Slovakia, the majority of news regarding Muslims and Islam is negative. The dominance of the media in Slovakia lacks personal experience with Muslims and brings a partial understanding and negative outlook on Muslims, as there is no deeper context seen¹³². Just as Edward Said mentions how the media gives a partial and incomplete outlook on the ‘Orient’, the exact situation is demonstrated in Slovakia. The fear that surrounds Islam in Slovakia is coupled with the negativity of the media, which portrays Islam as a violent religion¹³³. This is the most common way Slovaks create stereotypes against Muslims and is only reinforced when policy is also targeted against Islam.

¹³¹ Tkáčová, Hedviga, Eva Al-Absiová, Marwan Al-Absi, and Martina Pavlíková. “‘Media Invasion’ Against Islam in the Context of the Slovak Republic.” *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2021, pp. 165–179. Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda, Trnava.

¹³² Ibid. 2021.

¹³³ Ibid. 2021.

With this power in the media to dominate the way society feels about groups of people, such as those who practice Islam, governments like that of China use controlled propaganda to continue their discrimination. By framing things in neutral language, China has doubled down on propaganda by trying to create a sense of “normalcy” in the Xinjiang region¹³⁴. With accusations of a “genocide”, “crimes against humanity, and “internment camps” in Xinjiang by major nations, the Chinese government organized propaganda tours for foreign diplomats and the media¹³⁵. The Chinese government does this to promote its narrative that there is nothing out of the ordinary going on. Simultaneously, however, the government blocks independent observers and UN human rights experts from seeing the conditions in Xinjiang. Even while controlling what select media see, it is hard for China to hide the atrocities it is committing. By controlling the media, governments understand that it has a huge influence on the societies and push negative stereotypes and Orientalist thinking through these outlets.

France has had a long history of constant feelings that French Muslims are a threat to the state because of their identity expression. This ideology became mainstream and ingrained in French society due to the embrace of politicians and the media. Policy targeting Muslims, coupled with the negative media portrayals seen by French society, continues this cycle of Islamophobia. These negative feelings towards Muslims in French society have become even more apparent when the Muslim community in France is alienated and has increasingly more state-incited violence and hatred¹³⁶. Through the use of media, which reaches millions of people

¹³⁴ Uluyol, Yalkun. “China’s Cover-Ups Don’t Hide Unending Abuse for Uyghurs.” *Human Rights Watch*, 10 Sept. 2025, www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/05/chinas-cover-ups-dont-hide-unending-abuse-for-uyghurs.

¹³⁵ Uluyol, Yalkun. “China’s Cover-Ups Don’t Hide Unending Abuse for Uyghurs.” *Human Rights Watch*, 10 Sept. 2025, www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/05/chinas-cover-ups-dont-hide-unending-abuse-for-uyghurs.

¹³⁶ Hafez, Farid. “State-Sponsored Islamophobia in France Encourages Violence.” *Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 5 July 2025, www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/7/5/state-sponsored-islamophobia-in-france-encourages-violence.

all over the globe, the cycle of Islamophobia cannot cease when governments funnel negative stereotypes and Islamophobic ideas through these outlets.

5.2 Hollywood and the Villainization of Muslims

The news media broadcast to society plays an important role in shaping public opinion, but the normalization of Islamophobia allows this negative cycle to continue. Through popular culture like films, shows, etc., there is a powerful force normalizing Islamophobia and negative stereotypes of Muslims. Building on Edward Said's argument in *Orientalism* (1978) that modern media reinforces reductive and incorrect representations of the "Orient", film has transformed these normalized stereotypes into everyday cultural narratives in society. The film world has not simply recreated or reflected the fear the West has of the East, yet it has actively played a role in producing and normalizing Islam as the 'other'.

Muslims and Arabs have been historically depicted as villains, terrorists, sheikhs, etc., that have long been around before the events of 9/11. These depictions have perpetuated the idea that Muslims are outsiders and people of violence, religious extremism, and culturally backwards¹³⁷. Cast off as harmless examples of entertainment, these depictions serve as a process of racial abjection where ingroups and outgroups are reinforced. This reinforcement allows and justifies suspicion and continues Islamophobic assumptions. In popular films like *The Siege* (1998) and *East is East* (1999), the recurring narrative that Islam is inherently linked to violence is reinforced and shapes public perception consciously or unconsciously in ways that go beyond the screen. In *The Siege* (1998), the depiction of Muslim men praying and then scenes cutting to bombings and chaos connect and link the Islamic religion to terrorism. Scenes in this movie transition from Arabic text and mosques to scenes of violence and destruction, subtly

¹³⁷ Shaheen, Jack, "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 558, July 2003, 171-193.

grouping a threat into a single scene. Movies like *The Siege* are not uncommon, however. Films like *Aladdin* (1992), *Iron Man* (2008), *American Sniper* (2014), and *East is East* (1999), among many other globally famous movies, take a similar stance when depicting Muslims and Arabs.

These types of media narratives that frame Islam negatively are not just theoretical; real-world connections to governmental policies that discriminate against Muslims demonstrate the continuous societal divisions between the “Occident” and the “Orient”. Through these films and entertainment forms, the stereotypes embedded in them are ingraining the idea that violence is inseparable from being Muslim, and that Islam is a religion that justifies violent actions¹³⁸. The repeated narrow and negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims lead to implicit bias within any society. Implicit bias refers to the unconscious attitudes and connections that shape an individual’s judgements, perceptions, and behaviors without conscious awareness¹³⁹. When Islam is continuously linked to extremism and violence in media and political discourse, these types of associations are internalized by members of society and influence everyday interactions. These implicit biases may be seen through heightened suspicion, social distancing, or fear toward visibly Muslim individuals, such as women who wear hijabs. These reactions to Muslims are not usually formed from personal experiences; however, they are reinforced ideas that have accumulated through targeted policy rhetoric, negative news coverage, and entertainment media.

¹³⁸ Baig, Khadija. “Media Portrayals of Religion: Islam.” *MediaSmarts*, mediasmarts.ca/diversity-media/religion/media-portrayals-religion-islam#:~:text=The%20most%20prevalent%20Islamic%20stereotype.as%20justification%20for%20violent%20actions.

¹³⁹ Ruhl, Charlotte. “Implicit Bias: What It Is, Examples, & Ways to Reduce It.” *Simply Psychology*, 2 Aug. 2023, www.simplypsychology.org/implicit-bias.html.

Chapter 6: The Consequences of “Othering”

The racially abject thinking emerging from Orientalist views of Islam and Muslims produces consequences for Muslim communities across the globe. Perpetuated Islamophobia becomes embedded in policy, public opinion, and in everyday social interactions. As argued by Edward Said, the knowledge spread about the “Orient” is inseparable from structures of power. When policy attempts to regulate Islam based on appearances, through surveillance measures, or through cultural restrictions, Orientalist logic that Muslims are backward and in need of reform is institutionalized. Media narratives depicting Muslims and Islam in a negative way further enhances this by normalizing discriminatory policies and discrimination.

These processes manifest in many concrete forms such as religious restrictions, cultural suppression, ‘justified’ violence, and the normalization of discrimination. This pattern of global ‘othering’ affects nearly two billion people, about a quarter of the world’s population, demonstrating that Islamophobia is a systemic and transnational issue in need of response¹⁴⁰.

6.2 Impacts on Muslim Communities

The cycle of Islamophobia, continued through processes of “othering,” produces profound consequences for Muslim communities that are often minimized or excluded from public discourse and the media. Cultural suppression, the normalization of “justified” violence, psychological harm, and the pressure forcing some children to miss school rather than remove visible signs of their faith are among the life-altering effects of this marginalization.

When states implement policies that restrict how Muslims may visibly practice their religion, they limit not only individual expression but also communal religious life. In countries such as Slovakia, for example, some mosques lack official permits and are therefore unable to

¹⁴⁰ “Global Muslim Population.” *مواقيت الصلاة* 2026, timesprayer.com/en/muslim-population/.

hold formal prayer services, illustrating the legally enforced cultural suppression faced by Muslim communities¹⁴¹. The teachings of Islam emphasize the importance of communal practice in mosques as Islam encourages Muslims to support one another and grow together as a harmonious community¹⁴². With policy that limits this, governments are actively suppressing Islam in practice. Another form of cultural suppression that impacts Muslim communities is banning religious symbols or types of modest wear.

In many countries such as Italy, Germany, Belgium, France, Norway, Bulgaria, Tunisia, Kosovo, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, these bans have prevented Muslim women from practicing Islam as they see fit¹⁴³. Women in these societies feel ‘othered’ and targeted unless they conform to Western norms of what being a “Good Muslim” should look like. A Muslim woman in France reported her struggles with the ban seeing that the secular regime was simply a technique to govern Muslim Minorities¹⁴⁴. Others explain that wearing a hijab or niqab deepens their relationship with Allah and brings more joy and well-being into their lives while also steering unwanted male attention away¹⁴⁵. Without the choice to wear garments that support their religious practice, the state infringes on freedom of religion and expression. In some cases, girls are forced to choose between education and practicing Islam. French schools have turned away students who attempted to enter wearing hijabs, denying them access to educational spaces

¹⁴¹ “Global Muslim Population.” *مواقيت الصلاة* 2026, timesprayer.com/en/muslim-population/.

¹⁴² Abdul Lateef, Abu Abdillah. “The Importance of Communal Life in Islam: Strengthening Bonds and Building Unity.” *Arabic Virtual Academy*, 10 Oct. 2024, <https://arabicvirtualacademy.com/the-importance-of-communal-life-in-islam-strengthening-bonds-and-building-unity/>.

¹⁴³ Newkey-Burden, Chas. “The 95 % Muslim Country That Has Banned the Hijab.” *The Week*, 1 July 2024, <https://theweek.com/religion/the-95-muslim-country-that-has-banned-the-hijab>.

¹⁴⁴ Karim, Sara. “What Does the French Ban on Wearing Abayas Tell Us About the Control of Muslim Women’s Bodies?” *LSE Gender*, 1 Feb. 2024, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2024/02/01/what-does-the-french-ban-on-wearing-abayas-tell-us-about-the-control-of-muslim-womens-bodies/>.

¹⁴⁵ Open Society Foundations. *Unveiling the Truth: Why 32 Muslim Women Wear the Full-Face Veil in France*. April 2011. Open Society Foundations, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/unveiling-truth-why-32-muslim-women-wear-full-face-veil-France>.

meant to foster learning and inclusion¹⁴⁶. Beyond cultural and religious suppression, Muslim communities also face negative impacts in the form of ‘justified’ violence, online harassment, and normalized hatred.

With Islam being villainized in society through the media and regulated through specific policies, the ingrained fear and hatred of Muslims creates a perception that people are entitled to take personal action against those who do not conform to their definition of a “Good Muslim,” by Western norms. The consistent instances of anti-Muslim hate speech in Slovakia have been largely attributed to public statements made by politicians. This anti-Muslim sentiment is part of a broader trend across Europe where an increase in hate crimes against Muslims in Slovakia is prevalent¹⁴⁷. Rhetoric from those in power and the media, unifying a nation by oppressing and differentiating from Muslims, enforces the sense of normality that Muslims are the “Orient” in society and therefore cast out and lesser than. The justification of violent actions against Muslims stems from institutionalized discrimination, informed by ideas like secularism or “Sinicization,” allowing people to view Muslims as threats to society.

Violence and harassment directed at Muslims globally follow from this type of logic. Attacks such as two French women ripping off hijabs and stabbing two Muslim women, accompanied by hate speech like “This is not your home” and “dirty Arabs,” were downplayed in the French media, which faced backlash for underreporting the incident¹⁴⁸. This demonstrates the hatred for hijab-wearing Muslims that policies banning religious dress in public spaces actively reinforce. Similarly, in the United States, negative media coverage and rhetoric

¹⁴⁶ Colliva, Claudia, Chris Liakos, and Tara Subramaniam. “French Court Upholds Abaya Ban in Public Schools.” *CNN*, 7 Sept. 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/07/europe/french-court-rejects-abaya-appeal-intl/index.html>.

¹⁴⁷ Editorial Team. *Islam in Slovakia*. 28 Sept. 2024, Kharchoufa, <https://kharchoufa.com/en/islam-in-slovakia/>.

¹⁴⁸ AFP. “Two French Women Charged over Racist Stabbing of Veiled Muslim Women.” *Al Jazeera*, 22 Oct. 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/22/two-french-women-charged-over-racist-stabbing-of-veiled-muslim>.

contribute to deadly consequences. In 2023, Joseph Czuba, a landlord, murdered a six-year-old Palestinian boy and attempted to kill his mother because of their Islamic faith, stating, “you as a Muslim must die,” and stabbing the boy 26 times¹⁴⁹. The rhetoric spread through media, political statements, and discriminatory policies shapes societal perceptions of Muslims, ultimately enabling horrific attacks. The constant fear that Muslims themselves could be targeted erodes mental health and psychological well-being.

Living in a society where others harbor hatred, view you as dangerous, or consider you lesser is deeply detrimental to mental health, and this is the reality for many Muslims around the world. In the United States alone, discrimination and stressors stemming from Islamophobia are major contributors to adverse mental health outcomes for Muslim Americans, increasing fear, stress, anxiety, insecurity, and social isolation¹⁵⁰. In countries where Islamic symbols are villainized, Muslim women’s mental health is particularly affected, as visible expressions of faith, like the hijab, invite heightened discrimination and harassment¹⁵¹. The American Psychiatric Association has documented that Islamophobic incidents produce toxic and persistent stress, impacting entire Muslim communities¹⁵². The cycle of Islamophobic and Orientalist ‘othering’ has real and lasting consequences, allowing hate, violence, and discrimination to permeate the lives of millions. Being part of a religion should not force individuals to live in constant fear, and through deliberate steps, a more inclusive world can allow Muslims to live in peace and harmony alongside others.

¹⁴⁹ Stracqualursi, Veronica. “Illinois Landlord Sentenced to 53 Years in Prison for Hate-Crime Murder of Palestinian-American Boy.” *PBS NewsHour*, 8 Jan. 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/illinois-landlord-sentenced-to-53-years-in-prison-for-hate-crime-murder-of-palestinian-american-boy>.

¹⁵⁰ Alkhatib, Sarah A., et al. “The Effect of Islamophobia on the Mental Health of Muslim Americans Following the Tragedy of September 11th.” *BCPHR Journal*, no. 85, 2024, <https://bcphr.org/85-article-alkhatib/>.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 2024

¹⁵² American Psychiatric Association. “Muslims and Mental Health: The Impact of Islamophobia.” *American Psychiatric Association*, <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/diversity/education/stress-and-trauma/muslims>.

6.3 Reimagining Policy and Media Responsibility

With targeted adjustments to media representation and policy implementation, the cycle of “othering” that fuels Islamophobia can begin to unravel, creating societies grounded in greater harmony and mutual understanding. Policies should focus on security threats based on clear and imminent danger rather than religious identity, avoiding vague language that allows for misapplication or abuse. Likewise, media outlets can play a critical role by using accurate language, educating the public, and providing reliable information about Muslim communities. Through coordinated institutional efforts to reduce Islamophobia, society can move toward embracing difference and retiring the Orientalist framework of “Orient” versus “Occident”.

Through government efforts to address hate speech and extremism targeting religious minorities, more inclusive and tolerant societies can be born¹⁵³. Governments worldwide have taken steps to combat Islamophobia, yet at times have regressed by ending these initiatives. In Canada, the Office of the Special Representative on Combating Islamophobia was created in 2023, with Amira Elghawaby, a hijabi Muslim woman, appointed as the first Special Representative¹⁵⁴. Canada established an institutional outlet through which a Muslim perspective could be represented. This was reflected in improved monitoring of anti-Muslim incidents, the creation of community groups where advocacy and education were prioritized, and direct support for affected communities¹⁵⁵. It offered a promising path toward addressing Islamophobia; however, this anti-discrimination office was shut down in February 2026 due to concerns over “national unity”.

¹⁵³ Editorial Team. *Islam in Slovakia*. 28 Sept. 2024, Kharchoufa, <https://kharchoufa.com/en/islam-in-slovakia/>.

¹⁵⁴ Government of Canada. “Canada’s Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia.” *Canada.ca*, 4 Feb. 2026, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/combating-islamophobia-canada/special-representative.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Tschannen, Rafiq A. “Canada’s National Amnesia on Islamophobia.” *Policy Options*, 17 Feb. 2026, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/2026/02/islamophobia-office/>.

Another effort to combat Islamophobia was in the United States of America. In 2024, the Biden administration created the nation's first-ever *National Strategy to Counter Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Hate* (2024). In addressing the increased violence and hatred spreading across the nation and specifically mentioning the murder of Wade AlFayoumi, the six-year-old Palestinian American boy, the Biden administration set forth a movement to cease this hatred and fear of the "other"¹⁵⁶. Although this initiative remains in place, it has been hindered since the change in administration, particularly through the termination of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility programs and related activities¹⁵⁷. In addition, policies such as renewed travel restrictions affecting Muslim-majority countries and heightened political rhetoric have contributed to the persistence of Islamophobia.

Initiatives like those in Canada and the United States have also been implemented in countries like France and the United Kingdom. With that being said, many have regressed and no longer provide meaningful support to Muslim communities¹⁵⁸. France has actively shut down NGOs that aimed to educate the public and address Islamophobia, contributing to a social climate in which even acknowledging anti-Muslim discrimination is increasingly contested¹⁵⁹.

These policy examples demonstrate that while initiatives that remain in place and create real change are essential in addressing Islamophobia and shifting how society views Islam,

¹⁵⁶ *The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Hate*. December 2024, The White House, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/National-Strategy-Doc.pdf>.

¹⁵⁷ Trump, Donald J. *Executive Order 14151: Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing*. 20 Jan. 2025. *Federal Register*, vol. 90, no. 18, 29 Jan. 2025, pp. 8339–41, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/29/2025-01953/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing>.

¹⁵⁸ National Secular Society. "'Islamophobia' Used to Shut Down Debate, Says Government." *National Secular Society*, 16 Nov. 2021, <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/11/islamophobia-used-to-shut-down-debate-says-government>.

¹⁵⁹ Amnesty International. "France: Shutting Down Anti-racist Organisation Risks Freedoms." *Amnesty International*, 12 Nov. 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/11/france-shutting-down-antiracist-organisation-risks-freedoms/>.

institutional efforts alone are not sufficient. As seen previously, public perception is also powerfully shaped by narratives circulating through news outlets, political commentary, and the normalization of negative stereotypes. Without a shift toward more responsible and accurate media representation, even well-intentioned policies struggle to create lasting and meaningful change.

The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) provides a guide for how journalists can more accurately and positively report on cases dealing with Muslims and Islam. They aim to educate society on Islam while offering statistics and facts that debunk common myths and misconceptions. They understand that education can play a huge role in addressing Islamophobia and hope to spread this positive awareness. For journalists, the ISPU outlines five media approaches that are successful ways to report on Islam. Their approaches are to expand the voices that are heard, move beyond the security lens, treat Muslim Americans like any other Americans, avoid implicating religion as the sole explanation for negative behavior, and remain factual while avoiding Orientalist language¹⁶⁰. These five steps to “successful media reporting” mirror the very strategies needed to reverse and retire the racially abject feelings of ‘othering’ Muslims in society. A study reported by *The Times of Israel* demonstrated that articles relating to Catholics, Jews, and Hindus in the United States had roughly a 50–50 proportion of negative to positive coverage, while coverage of Muslims was 80% negative¹⁶¹. By following the advice of the ISPU and avoiding an Orientalist lens that frames Muslims as the “Orient” within society, the

¹⁶⁰ Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. *Covering American Muslims Objectively + Creatively: A Guide for Media Professionals*. ISPU, 2024, <https://ispu.org/journalists/#approaches>.

¹⁶¹ Bleich, Erik, and A. Maurits van der Veen. “Study Shows Muslims Face Overwhelmingly Negative Portrayal in US Media.” *The Times of Israel*, 27 May 2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/study-shows-muslims-face-overwhelmingly-negative-portrayal-in-us-media/>.

media can portray Muslims in a better light and hopefully diminish the effects of Islamophobia on Muslim communities worldwide.

Other journalists also understand the importance of reporting on Muslims accurately and offer advice like that of the ISPU. Hannah Allam mentions that overgeneralization is dangerous, and that Muslims come from very diverse backgrounds that should not be grouped¹⁶². This advice echoes Edward Said's argument that Orientalism reifies and groups people as one to control them. Allam also goes on to give practical advice, such as not reporting on Muslims if the only reason for the coverage is simply that they are Muslim. If reporting on female soccer players for example who wear headscarves is done so only because of their headscarves, then there is no real point in making an article about them. This method of reporting further ostracizes Muslims in society, as they are sometimes covered not for meaningful reasons but simply because they are Muslim and perceived as different. Through simple alterations in policy that standardize protections against discrimination along with straightforward changes in media reporting practices, the effects and negative cycle of Islamophobia can slowly begin to disintegrate and create a global society where Muslims are not the constant face of the 'other' in society.

¹⁶² Jain, Kalpana. "6 reporting tips for covering Islam in America." *Journalist's Resource*, 7 Feb. 2019, <https://journalistsresource.org/race-and-gender/six-tips-for-reporting-on-muslims-in-america/>.

Chapter 7: Limitations

This chapter is an integral part of this thesis as it seeks to address the conceptual and methodological limitations of this research. It includes a deeper look at the development of Islamophobia throughout history and addresses how the Western ‘self’ sees itself while constructing the ‘other’. Additionally, it aims to acknowledge the difference between hidden Orientalist discourse and overt propaganda in society. While acknowledging that media and policy analysis provide partial views of this complex dynamic in the construction of the ‘other’, this chapter aims to focus on how this research could be deepened and better contextualized.

7.1 The Historical Construction of Islamophobia

In this thesis, the analysis of the historical roots of Islamophobia, which date back to the 11th century, was brief, as this project was limited by length and time constraints. However, it is important for readers to acknowledge the long history that has led to the ingrained islamophobia in the world today. Christian Europe and Muslim rule have long combatted each other, which ultimately led to the negative perceptions of Islam as a whole. The Battle of Vienna (1683) marked the beginning of the long-term decline of the Ottoman Empire. Once the empire was vanquished in 1922, European nations subconsciously sought to avoid being subordinate again¹⁶³. This direct link, in which Muslim political expansion was perceived as a direct threat to European sovereignty and identity, is where Islamophobic roots began.

In countries like Slovakia, where Muslim populations are relatively small compared to the overall society, the historical background and memory of these conflicts continue to influence the discriminatory state of political and cultural discourse. Following the collapse of

¹⁶³ Shvangiradze, Tsira. “How the Battle of Vienna Ended Ottoman Expansion in Europe.” *TheCollector*, 24 Sept. 2025, www.thecollector.com/battle-vienna/.

Yugoslavia in the 1990's, Bosnia remained an ethnically and religiously mixed area with a large Muslim population. In parts of Eastern Europe, the fears surrounding Muslim communities grew, and to protect national identity, the limiting and exclusion of Muslims was necessary¹⁶⁴. The fears lingering from instability and inferiority to the Ottoman Empire continuously shape modern perceptions of threat, and in countries like Slovakia with a limited Muslim population, this is a fear that is now mostly irrational, continues to shape policy and opinions on Muslim communities.

7.2 The 'Self' and the Construction of the 'Other'

The persistence of these narratives through my thesis could have been better understood through a closer look at the Orientalism framework developed by Edward Said. This thesis mainly focuses on the construction of the "Orient" and its impacts but leaves out the conceptual idea that the "Orient" does not exist and is merely a made-up creation by the "Occident"¹⁶⁵. Within this framework, the West defines itself as rational, secular, and advanced, while the Orient is the opposite and is traditional, irrational, and resists progress. To construct their own identity, the West uses these descriptions of the "Orient" to define the 'self' which is the West.

During the French expedition led by Napoleon Bonaparte during the French campaign in Egypt and Syria, the French gained access to scholarly work by the Egyptians. This newly found knowledge was used back in Europe, where it cultivated public fascination over the "Orient," yet simultaneously the 'self' reinforced its authority over it¹⁶⁶. The construction of the Western self depends upon the simultaneous recognition of an opposing 'other', as the idea of the strong and

¹⁶⁴ "Genocide in Bosnia." *Holocaust Museum Houston*, 3 Aug. 2023, hnh.org/library/research/genocide-in-bosnia-guide/.

¹⁶⁵ Said, Edward. "Preface." *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, 2003.

¹⁶⁶ Anitha, G. "An Impression on Occidental and Orientalism in Cultural Studies." *Notions*, vol. 11, no. 1, June 2020, pp. 47–51. <http://notions.anubooks.com/>.

powerful ‘self’ only becomes meaningful, tangible, and real when there is an opposing ‘them’¹⁶⁷. Hence, for Orientalist discourse to exist, it must operate through this kind of contrast. This fictional idea of the “Orient” becomes a mirror in which the West compares and then defines itself. Western identity is only stabilized when this differentiating from a cultural other happens, and Edward Said defines this relationship as one of “flexible positional superiority”¹⁶⁸. Through this idea of “flexible positional superiority,” the ‘self’ can position itself above the “Orient” through all forms of engagement, whether that be politically, scholarly, culturally, or militarily.

The concept of the “Orient” frames them as people from the “East”, yet countries such as Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco who are commonly grouped as “Oriental” nations, are not geographically located in the East relative to Europe. The classification of these countries as part of the “Orient” demonstrates that it is not the basis of geography that creates the “Orient”, yet it is those who have different cultures or mindsets from their own that are cast off as the lesser “Orient” in relation to the “Occident”. In this thesis, the inclusion of what is considered a country of the ‘East’, China, was used to demonstrate how Orientalism is not geographically fixed. The inclusion of this country as a case study was not explained in depth due to length and time constraints.

7.3 Media, Hidden Discourse, and the Normalization of Orientalist Narratives

Media representation is used as a type of hidden discourse to reaffirm Orientalist views on the ‘other’. Differing from overt propaganda like that of Donald Trump actively naming a “Muslim Travel Ban”, Orientalist discourse persists as it operates in subtle and normalized ways. The repeated portrayals of Arabs and Muslims societies as oppressive, violent, terroristic, and

¹⁶⁷ Anitha, G. “An Impression on Occidental and Orientalism in Cultural Studies.” *Notions*, vol. 11, no. 1, June 2020, pp. 47–51. <http://notions.anubooks.com/>.

¹⁶⁸ Said, Edward. “Preface.” *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, 2003.

culturally incompatible with Western ways of living gradually establish these views as common sense and natural. Film and television hold a huge role in this process, where Muslims and Arabs are portrayed as extremists and culturally repressive.

In the most common depictions of Muslims, movies like *The Siege* (1998) show Muslims praying at a mosque, then immediately cut to a scene of a terrorist's agenda and bombings with no explanation. These overused comparisons become normalized assumptions, but by the reversal of these hidden discourse methods, the opposite can begin to happen, and the Orientalist depictions of Muslims and Arabs can begin to disintegrate.

In the sitcom *We Are Lady Parts* (2021), an all-Muslim female punk band is depicted and followed. Not only are all these characters accurately portrayed and played by actresses who have real connections and experiences with Islam, but their characters are not created and included to simply be seen as the "Orient". The women in this television series are seen praying and wearing headscarves, and then simply go on to start playing their punk music again. They are Muslims who do not hide their culture, they pray, and they stick with tradition, yet they are portrayed as 'normal'. They, like all 'normal' women portrayed in movies, have boy problems, and it is not because of their religion or "Oriental-ness". Portrayals like this that discreetly demonstrate to viewers that the "Orient" or Muslims are just like everyone else and have normal life problems in ordinary human contexts open doors to accurate depictions that can challenge established assumptions about Islam and Muslims.

Orientalism cannot exist without the "Orient", and the "Orient" cannot exist and come to be without the hidden discourse laced throughout society in forms of films and television. By reversing these depictions through multidimensional Muslim characters, a gradual disruption in these Orientalist narratives may begin to occur.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis explores the ways in which discrimination against Muslims is perpetuated in global societies through social, political, and legal frameworks. It questions whether the laws that have been passed globally, which disproportionately affect Muslims, can truly be considered neutral. The thesis argues that the continued construction of Muslims as the ‘other’ perpetuates cycles of Islamophobia, further embedded through policy, media representation, and normalized stereotypes.

Through the frameworks of racial abjection and Orientalism, this thesis demonstrates how Muslims are constructed as the ‘abject,’ positioned outside of social norms and treated as the ‘other’ in society. The construction of the ‘other’ has perpetuated Islamophobia through policy, media, and social assumptions. Laws framed as secular or neutral often reflect this racial abjection, showing how discrimination operates under the guise of national unity. Across global contexts, so-called neutral policies targeting religious expression, migration, or security repeatedly institutionalize Islamophobia even while claiming impartiality.

The cycle of Islamophobia is continued by policy, negative media representation, and the normalization of this discrimination. These dynamics shape public perception in ways that rationalize fear, exclusion, and even violence. Islamophobia has tangible consequences, including poor mental health outcomes, cultural suppression, fear, and isolation for Muslims. More worryingly, portraying Muslims as inherently violent or incompatible with society creates a sense of “justified” violence against those who identify with Islam as they are seen as dangerous.

As the second-largest religion in the world, Islam is practiced by millions globally, making the effects of Islamophobia an urgent concern¹⁶⁹. When Muslims are consistently constructed as the “Orient,” and as a threat requiring reform, exclusion becomes normalized. This cycle allows discrimination to be overlooked, and in extreme cases, mass violence or ethnic cleansing can occur while the suffering of Muslim communities is minimized. The logic of racial abjection establishes hierarchies in which some lives are considered less grievable or less worthy of protection like the “Orient” and “Occident” framework.

Dismantling the cycle of Islamophobia requires more than policy reform or media correction; it calls for a reimagining of how societies understand shared existence. Deconstructing theoretical frameworks such as “The Good Muslim” vs. “Bad Muslim” rhetoric and rejecting reified groups that reduce complex identities to stereotypes is required for change to occur. As Donna Haraway writes, “Making kin is not a metaphor; it is a practice of learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying together on a damaged earth”¹⁷⁰. In a world often driven by fear and separation, refusing to ‘other’ people becomes an act of collective responsibility and care. Replacing Orientalist ideologies with kinship, solidarity, and accountability offers both a critique of current circumstances and a vision for a more just and inclusive global society.

¹⁶⁹ Vaughan, Don. “What Is the Most Widely Practiced Religion in the World?” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/story/what-is-the-most-widely-practiced-religion-in-the-world>.

¹⁷⁰ Haraway, Donna. "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin." *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2015, pp. 159-165.

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