

# Anomie, Religio-Political Fundamentalism and American Evangelicalism: Rightest Americanism and Islamophobia

*By Farhan Chak*

# Islamophobia Studies Journal

Volume 4 • Issue 2 • Spring 2018

Produced and distributed by



ISSN: 23258381 (print)

EISSN: 2325839X (online)

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The cover art work was designed by Hani Kharufeh, and was commissioned by IRDP to draw attention to three articles focusing on Islamophobia in East Asia.

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The *Islamophobia Studies Journal* is a bi-annual publication that focuses on the critical analysis of Islamophobia and its multiple manifestations in our contemporary moment.

*ISJ* is an interdisciplinary and multi-lingual academic journal that encourages submissions that theorize the historical, political, economic, and cultural phenomenon of Islamophobia in relation to the construction, representation, and articulation of "Otherness." The *ISJ* is an open scholarly exchange, exploring new approaches, methodologies, and contemporary issues.

The *ISJ* encourages submissions that closely interrogate the ideological, discursive, and epistemological frameworks employed in processes of "Otherness"—the complex social, political, economic, gender, sexual, and religious forces that are intimately linked in the historical production of the modern world from the dominance of the colonial/imperial north to the post-colonial south. At the heart of *ISJ* is an intellectual and collaborative project between scholars, researchers, and community agencies to recast the production of knowledge about Islamophobia away from a dehumanizing and subordinating framework to an emancipatory and liberatory one for all peoples in this far-reaching and unfolding domestic and global process.

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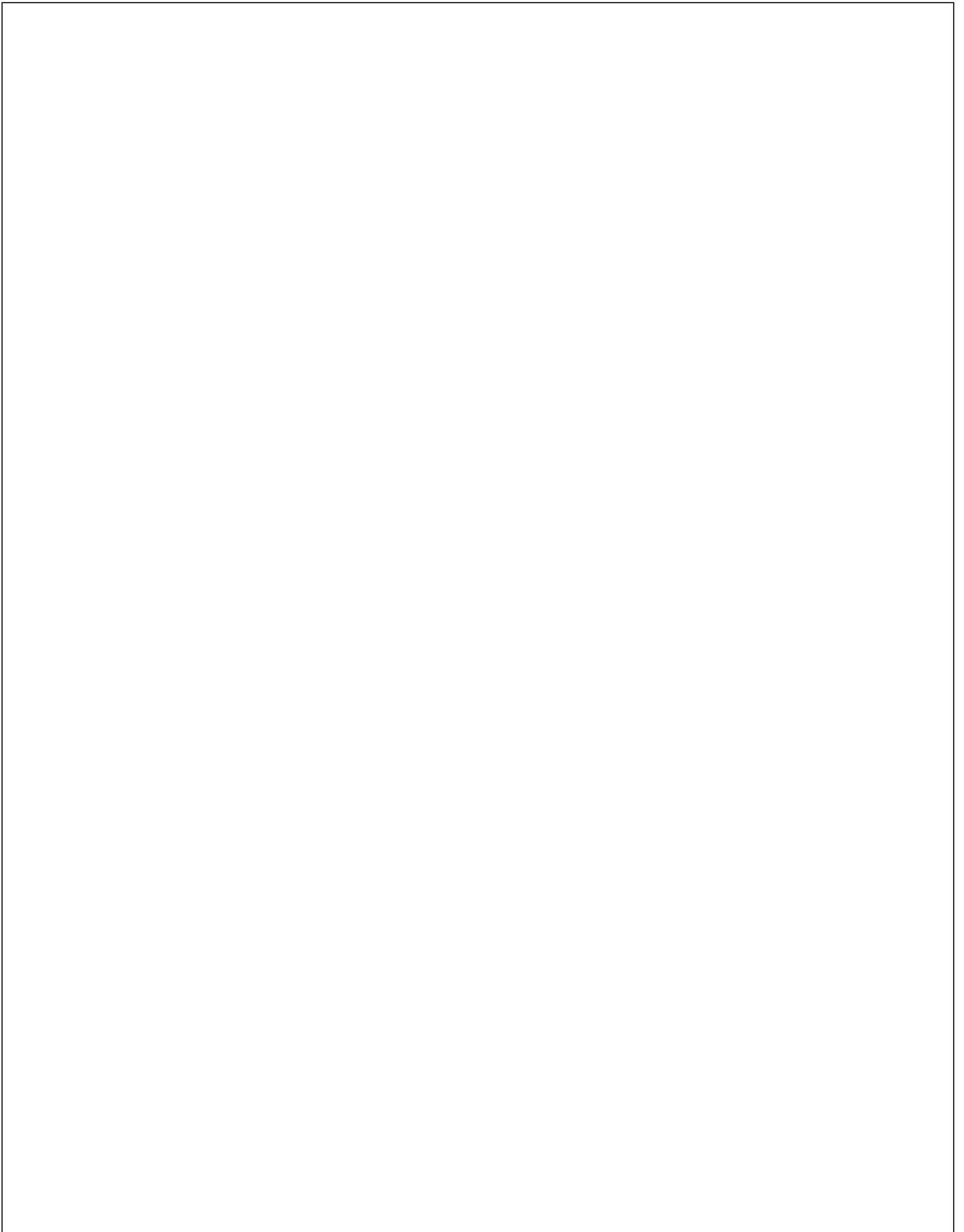
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**Editorial Statement****Trump and the Collapse of Neoliberal Economic Order!**

The string of right-wing political parties gaining the upper hand in elections across Europe and now joined by Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. election points to a much bigger phenomenon: the collapse of the neoliberal economic and political order. Consequently, focusing on each election outcome across Europe and the U.S. misses the overall global picture and the economic, political and social trends that are at work, which are transforming the world as we know it. Debating the massive influx of immigrants from the global south and from war-torn countries, loss of jobs and decline in income levels in the global north and the rapid demographic shifts caused by them masks the real causes behind them.

The economic and political instability across the global south was brought about by policies that have been put in place over a long period of time. These policies were supported by liberal and conservative parties alike in the U.S. and Europe with devastating impacts across the globe. Political elites across the globe bought into a neoliberal economic model that called for privatization, leveraged financing, expanded public debt, de-regulation, free movement of capital and a manufacturing shift to countries that provided the cheapest labor cost and fewest environmental protection guidelines. Overseeing this neoliberal order was the World Bank and the IMF, the structural bouncers for the global financial system.

In a short period of time, the neoliberal economic and political models became the effective blueprint for every country seeking to enter into the global market. Entry into the global market meant disruptions to the local industry and economy, as well as increased dependence on multi-national corporations for downstream assembly jobs and opportunities. More than anything else, the global market was driven by trickle-up economics to the Northern Hemisphere, and a financial pipeline was set up that sucked every possible penny from the Southern Hemisphere. Neoliberal economic and political order translated into a massive uprooting of the work force which was coupled with the intrusive long arm of Northern Hemisphere agribusiness that laid claim to vast arable lands and the displacement of farmers from ancestral lands.

By disrupting industry and agriculture in the Southern Hemisphere, the multi-national corporations from the global north—which were supported by political elites in the North and corrupt elites in the South—created the conditions that resulted in civil and regional wars. Even when we think of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, the real stimulus for conflicts in the region centers on oil and natural gas first and foremost, which gets masked by a fictitious and fomented religious tension. Furthermore, the U.S. interventions in

Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya are intertwined with oil interest and the desire to limit China's access to this most valuable and strategic resource.

The economic destruction in the global south translated into an immigration wave to the North. In addition, the neoliberal economic project led to an intensification of political instability that fed existing cleavages in the global south and caused an eruption of civil and regional wars centered on existing natural resources. Neoliberal globalization translated into a globalized trail of consequences, including black market arms trade, violence and the emergence of both state-sponsored and independently commissioned terrorism. The competition among the major players in the neoliberal economic order gave birth to the chaos and instability on the periphery with each state attempting to situate itself in a survival of the fittest type of discourse in a highly distorted market.

In similar ways but outwardly different, the neoliberal economic and political order had devastated working-class communities and blue-collar jobs across the global north. As jobs were shifted offshore, the pressure on the domestic workforce was to give in to corporate demands for reduced wages, longer work schedules and scales of efficiency that translated into higher profit margins for corporations. Yes, technological innovations did play a role in some parts of the economy, but the shifting of the jobs was a feature that impacted all types of jobs, including those that are in the technology sector itself since manufacturing pursued cheap labor overseas.

Closing factories, reducing jobs and reducing real income in Europe and the U.S. had its mirror image in uprooting people from vast farm lands, destroying incipient industry, consolidating domination over natural resources and cementing oppressive political order in the global south. Facilitating ease in capital investments from the U.S. and Europe into Southern Hemisphere economies meant massive human dislocation and a pipeline of immigrants and refugees heading up to the North. Investments that were intended to increase the profit margins of multi-national corporations and capitalize central bank balance sheets in the U.S. and Europe is the primary driving engine behind the chaos underway across the globe, including the global north.

The collapse of the neoliberal economic and political order is visible across the global south, and the outcome has ushered in civil wars, military coups, ethnic and religious strife with hundreds of thousands, if not already millions, dead. Europe and the U.S. witnessed the loss of jobs, cyclical recessions, almost a depression level of loss in manufacturing and massive influx of immigrants and war

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refugees. The economic hardship meeting an influx of immigrants and refugees produced the needed subjectivity to marshal the xenophobic forces to the ballot box. Adding to the above, Europe's and the U.S.'s resort to military intervention so as to cement hegemonic control of oil, natural gas and market shares in the Middle East and Africa added to the call to vote.

The election results in the U.S. and Europe over the past few years should be seen as a distorted response to the global crisis. Attempts to solve the problem by building walls, increased deportation and making immigration or human movement more difficult addressed the symptoms and not the real causes behind the crisis. Also, promising to bring back manufacturing jobs and massive infrastructure spending will create the illusion of problem solving since the underpinnings of the real crisis will not be touched. Furthermore, President Trump has already ushered to the financial sector his readiness to remove whatever weak regulations that were put in place after the 2008 financial sector collapse.

Trump's economic proposals, if adopted, and I have the feeling that they will rapidly be pushed through Congress and the Senate, will produce a much more accelerated level of wealth concentration. The infrastructure spending will be carried out on the basis of debt financing that will be a boon to the banking industry, which is ready once again to leverage the economy for the benefit of the few. Furthermore, cutting corporate taxes and reducing the rates paid by the rich will re-introduce the discredited theory of trickle-down economics, which will end up costing jobs in the long run and creating another major financial crisis in a few years from today.

The neoliberal economic order was cooked up in the global north, wedded into corrupt and militarized elites in the global south and produced the unfolding chaos across the world. Trump and extreme right-wing political parties across Europe are promising to bring about economic change to the middle and working class and the poor, but don't hold your breath on such promises since this train has come around before and it left devastation and broken lives across the globe.

What is certain is that the rich will get even more obscenely rich, and the poor and the working class will be sold downstream again as a commodified product to be auctioned during election time. The whole edifice being constructed by right-wing parties and politicians is centered on monetizing working-class pain and suffering into votes and seats of power, and then coming back and robbing the same people again. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice,

shame on me. The neoliberal economic order is the problem, and shifting the blame or racializing the causes by targeting immigrants and Muslims is a right-wing game intended to prevent a real change from taking shape.

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## *Introduction*

Scholars working in the Islamophobia studies field have mainly focused on interrogating the phenomena affecting Muslims in Europe and North America, a fully understandable focus considering the intensity of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and xenophobic discourses underway. Academics, human rights researchers and journalists have set out to document the various manifestations of Islamophobia and its multifaceted impacts on civil society, as well as offer a host of specific remedies to counter its effects in Europe and North America. Moreover, several multinational governmental and nongovernmental organizations, including the United Nations, European Union Parliament and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, have developed monitoring agencies for data collection to document Islamophobia and offer regular reporting on conditions affecting Muslims in Western countries.

However, a major blind spot for researchers and academics continues to persist, the existence of Islamophobia in non-Western societies as well as Muslim-majority states is an area calling for immediate attention. Remedying this gap in research is addressed by three articles in this volume. The rising tide of Hindu ultranationalism in India has set in motion a pernicious cycle of discrimination, bigotry and politically encouraged violence targeting Muslims and other religious minorities living in the country. India, a home to an almost 180 million Muslim population, has witnessed possibly (except for the ongoing genocide in Myanmar) one of the most violent expressions of Islamophobia in civil society anywhere in the world. Myanmar and the Central African Republic are the point of comparisons for India's Islamophobic discourses, two countries that are in the throgs of an actual genocide. Here, the issue is not to identify which country has the worse conditions for Muslims, a valid point of comparisons, but to illustrate how India, the largest democracy in the world, has slipped into being compared to this globally condemned collection of countries.

"Love Jihad," "lynching" and "removal of citizenship" for Muslims have become the norm in India rather than being the exception. Two articles in this volume are a critical addition to contextualizing Islamophobia in the Indian context. Prashant Waikar's article "Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva: An Analysis of Narendra Modi's Political Discourse" offers "a conceptual overview of language-games and a review of how Hindutva defines Hindus and Muslims, before analyzing how Modi articulates Islamophobia." It concludes that "Islamophobia may have permeated outside of Hindutva and into the Hindu mainstream." The second paper on the subject of India is a joint piece by Mohammed Sinan Siyech and Akanksha Narain titled "Beef-related Violence in India: An Expression of Islamophobia," which "explores the narratives offered by these Hindu right-wing groups to first isolate them as 'Others' and subsequently justify violence against Muslims." The two articles are the first of their kind in the field and provide a background on the ideological foundation of Hindu ultranationalism, the Hindutva and its effects on a national scale. The current Hindu nationalist government under the leadership of Modi is stoking Islamophobia and utilizing it as an electoral strategy to win seats for power and expand its footprint across the country, but the consequences are far reaching, as both articles assert.

A third article "Muslim Surveillance in Japan: A Narrative Aimed at Trivialization" by Saul J. Takahashi examines the securitization of the small Muslim community in Japan. According to Takahashi, "The [Japanese] police deemed all Muslims to be potential terrorists, surveilled mosques and other establishments, and clandestinely gathered detailed personal information on 72,000 persons." This article is a very important addition to the literature and

points to the global nature of the surveillance of the Muslim subject and the deepening of Islamophobia discourses in countries and regions that have a small and statistically negligible percentage of Muslims. Here, the emergence of this type of discourse should be understood within the unique social, cultural, religious and historical Japanese context. We are sure that this article will open the door for other researchers to examine areas and regions that up to this point have been kept outside the scope of the academic field.

Gaps in the field still exist for academic studies and articles covering Islamophobia in China, Philippines, Thailand, Mongolia, Sri Lanka and other parts of Asia. Furthermore, the field has not examined Islamophobia in parts of Africa, Central America and South America, which might require a different theoretical framework to properly account for the specificity of the historical, cultural and political entanglements. We hope that the next few volumes of the *Islamophobia Studies Journal* will address these gaps more systematically and look forward to scholars and researchers contributing toward this important undertaking. This volume and the authors contribute toward expanding the Islamophobia studies field and our hope is that many will be encouraged to plant their academic flags in areas needing immediate attention.

*Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva:  
An Analysis of Narendra Modi's  
Political Discourse*

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*ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL*  
VOLUME 4, NO. 2 Spring 2018, PP. 161–180.

Published by:

Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project,  
Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley

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*Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva: An Analysis of Narendra Modi's  
Political Discourse*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article analyzes the narratives of Islamophobia in Hindu Nationalism (Hindutva). Specifically, it analyzes how Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), articulates Islamophobia in his speeches, interviews, and podcasts. In total, a discourse analysis of 35 such documents has been conducted. Conceptually, this article applies the notion of language-games to understand how Modi articulates Islamophobia. The article contends that while Modi's Islamophobia is executed subtly, it is nonetheless a function of the way in which Hindutva conceives of Muslims as subordinate to Hindus. Two Islamophobic narratives in Modi's political discourse have been mapped out: (1) the erasure of Indian Muslim histories in Modi's economic development agenda, and (2) the characterization of Hinduism as having a taming effect on Islam in India. The article provides a conceptual overview of language-games and a review of how Hindutva defines Hindus and Muslims, before analyzing how Modi articulates Islamophobia. The article concludes by suggesting that a Hindutva-driven Islamophobia may have permeated into the Hindu mainstream.

**Keywords:** Hindutva, Islamophobia, discourse analysis, language-games, Narendra Modi

*INTRODUCTION*

Hindu Nationalism (Hindutva) is as an ideology premised on otherization. It constructs an idealized Hindu as the archetypical citizen of India. Through the superiorization of the Hindu, Hindutva necessarily imagines an array of identities to be unworthy of belonging to its conception of India. Hindutva's otherization project inferiorizes a number of identities: Dalits, liberals, Christians, feminists, but most of all, Muslims (Sharma 2011). Hindutva thus envisions India to have always been a Hindu nation, and perceives Islam and Muslims as an alien force which, through invasion and war, caused a seismic demographic shift to the detriment of the natural state of Hinduness in the subcontinent (Flåten 2016). India's Hindu population is estimated to be at 80%, while Muslims are the country's largest religious minority comprising roughly 15% of the population (Central Intelligence Agency 2018a). Members of Hindutva groups such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) have been accused of instigating violence between Hindus and Muslims (Jaffrelot 2009a), forcibly converting Muslims to Hinduism (Eshwar 2009), assaulting and murdering Muslim men because they fear Muslims are attempting to increase their population by duping Hindu women into converting and marrying them (i.e. "Love Jihad") (Dey 2017), and rallying supporters to lynch Muslims for eating beef because the cow is considered sacred in Hinduism (Ramachandran 2017). Beyond physical acts of violence, Hindutva engages in symbolic assaults against Muslim selfhood by attempting to anchor the history of Muslim predominance in the subcontinent as a period of unrivaled violence (Flåten 2016), characterizing Muslim men as ruthless oppressors of Muslim women (Agnes 2016), and portraying Muslims as the fifth column biding their time before seizing control of India—just

as they are deemed to have done 800 years ago (Afzal 2014). In this context, it is clear that Hindutva is Islamophobic by design.

With this in mind, this article aims to analyze the narratives of Islamophobia in the Hindutva discourse. The concern is with demonstrating how Hindutva organizes its vision of India as a Hindu nation through the otherization of Muslims. To achieve this, I shall analyze the narratives of Islamophobia in podcasts, interviews, and speeches given by the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, since he took office in 2014.<sup>1</sup> A discourse analysis has been conducted on 35 podcasts, interviews, and speeches. This entails analyzing the construction of chains of equivalences in the corpus, or the way in which statements are mobilized into particular ideas, and the resulting ideas into narratives (Critchley and Marchart 2004; Dallmayr 2004; Laclau 2004; Sayyid 2003). Conceptually, the article applies the notion of language-games—as developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953), and taken further in the context of Islamophobia by Salman Sayyid (2014). To my knowledge, this article is the first empirical application of Sayyid’s conceptualization of Islamophobia. Not so much as a validation of his conceptual approach, since everything is a language-game, but as a demonstration of how language-games can be approached empirically. Additionally, it does not yet appear that a discourse analysis of an Indian statesman’s political narratives has been conducted to analyze and explain how Islamophobia is articulated. These are the two research gaps this article aims to address. Two Islamophobic narratives in Modi’s political discourse have been mapped out: (1) the erasure of Indian Muslim histories in Modi’s economic development agenda, and (2) the characterization of Hinduism as having a taming effect on Islam in India. Before discussing these narratives, this article shall first provide a conceptual overview of language-games, relate it to Islamophobia, and then explain how Hindutva characterizes the categories “Hindu” and “Muslim” as existing in an irreconcilable antagonistic relationship. The article concludes by suggesting that Hindutva’s Islamophobia has permeated outside of the confines of Hindu nationalist ideas and into the Hindu mainstream, but cautions that this claim still needs empirical validation.

#### LANGUAGE-GAMES: AN OVERVIEW

In the “*Philosophical Investigations*,” Wittgenstein (1953) proposed that language-use is a context-bound activity. Referring to this as language-games, he argued that to understand how people use signifiers to communicate and convey specific messages, one must first understand the contextual undercurrents that predispose them toward using signifiers in particular ways (Wittgenstein 1953). In other words, the way in which language is used cannot be divorced from the contexts in which they reside. An insult can only be understood as an insult because the context in which it is used allows it to be interpreted as an insult. Using the word “blue” as a racial slur would make little sense, but using the “N word” does. Why is this so? Neither the term “blue” nor the “N word” possesses an essential racial undertone. Signifiers have no essence. Indeed, Roland Barthes (1977) demonstrated that signifiers are polysemic. They mean what they mean depending on the contexts in which they are used. Thus, with the “N word” comes centuries of social, political, economic, and cultural dehumanization and decimation of blacks—what Salman Sayyid (2014, 22) termed as a particular arrangement of contextual “assemblages”—that renders it possible to read, interpret, and feel insulted by even hearing or reading it.<sup>2</sup> Since the signifier “blue” does not reflect and carry the burden of such conditions, it would make for an unintelligible racial slur.

Importantly, how we use language continuously reproduces the norms, values, and beliefs that both structure the social world and provide the cues that make it possible to navigate through the social world (Bernans 1999; Butler 1996). Asking a shopkeeper “how much” effectively

reproduces the relations of commerce between the buyer and seller—both materially, in that actual things are bought and sold, and immaterially, in that those social roles are acknowledged and maintained. Similarly, the act of using the “N word” reproduces the racialization of people into blacks and non-blacks, the notion that people can be racialized in such a way in the first place, the concomitant racism—and crucially, the relations of power between those who use racist language and those who suffer from it. In other words, a racist language-game reflects and reproduces power differentials between races, and thus reflects and reproduces racial hierarchies between people (Sayyid 2014). Wittgenstein (1953) therefore argued that language-games also *sustain* the forms of life—or societal contexts—they are situated in.

The example given thus far, of the “N word,” is one that seeks to thread the relationship between a signifier used to convey explicit racism with the structures of race relations in society. Yet, racism is often implicit as well. Everyday racism in the form of microaggressions can be used by people unconsciously (Delgado and Stefancic 2012; Quillian 2008). Racism at the policy level can become institutionalized, normalized, and thus pass undetected (Giroux 2003). The demands on racial minorities to assimilate into the majority culture can be dressed up as narratives of social integration that seek to foster social harmony (Louati 2015). These examples are comparatively subtler than explicit racial slurs, but remain potent in their otherization of specific people. It is, therefore, necessary to demonstrate how and why language-games are conceptually relevant to analyses of implicit types of racism. After all, if the point of language-games is to provide a conceptual measure of racism, then its application cannot be exclusively limited to types that are explicit. Here, the Wittgensteinian notions of language-games being rule-governed activities and having family resemblances lend themselves well to this discussion (Wittgenstein 1953). Given that language-games operate within specific contexts, people can only successfully participate in a language-game if they have been socialized into sufficient proximity<sup>3</sup> of the context sustaining that language-game (Noor 2016; Rodney and Stephan 2012). Indeed, language-games are bound by the shared body of knowledge which weaves together a particular grouping of people. Thus, Farish Noor (2016, 202–03) places considerable emphasis on the notion that language-use is a socially learnt activity. Just as one needs to learn the rules of football, rugby, and cricket to play each of those sports, one must “*learn* the rules of dating . . . *learn* the rules of joking, and . . . *learn* the rules of lying” (emphasis original) to be able to date, joke, and lie successfully (Noor 2016, 202).

In the same vein, one must have also learned the rules of a language-game to identify, interpret, and understand it—even if he is not a physical participant of that language-game. As such, Sayyid (2014, 21–22) duly notes that being able to identify racism *as racism* is an interpretive practice premised on the idea that one would know what cues to look out for. In other words, the language-game of racism has specific rules that must be followed or understood for it to constitute racism in the first place. The fundamental rule that renders a racist language-game identifiable is its mobilization of signifiers in ways that seek to undermine the capacity of people to enact their racial identities (Sayyid 2014, 14). A racist language-game is one that marginalizes people because of their racial identities, and thus chips away at their sense of selfhood. Consequently, different types of racism—both explicit and implicit—become identifiable as racism because they follow this fundamental rule of racism. Here, the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblances becomes relevant. Different activities such as rugby, football, chess, cricket, and poker share “a complicated network of similarities” that predisposes people toward classifying them under the rubric of “game” (Wittgenstein 1953, proposition 66). To understand how this applies to racism, consider the following examples:

1. Being told to go back to “your” country because your presence defies the country’s ethno-national archetype.
2. Being the repeated target of police brutality, like with the blacks in the United States.
3. Being problematized by the state’s health authorities—as happens often to both Indians and Malay-Muslims in Singapore.
4. Being told to “get over” your anger at the structural damage caused by colonial legacies to your country.
5. Being the butt of racist humor outside of contexts in which racialized humor may be intersubjectively permissible.<sup>4</sup>
6. As is the subject of this article, nationalist political speeches that demarcate the ethno-national parameters of membership to the nation.

Each form of racism may be semantically similar or different from another both in terms of how, as well as the extent to which they may marginalize a racial identity. Yet, because they all share in common the agenda of racial marginalization, there is a resemblance between all these forms of racism. Thus, Sayyid (2014) argues that Islamophobia too becomes identifiable as a specific racist language-game by virtue of the fact that (1) various forms of Islamophobia resemble various forms of racism, (2) though tactically different, various types of Islamophobia become identifiable as such because they resemble each other in their marginalization of the Muslim identity, (3) Islamophobia both reflects and reproduces a hierarchy of racialized groupings, with Muslims relegated beneath the race that has been rendered socially, politically, economically, and culturally privileged in that specific context, and (4) Islamophobia reflects and reproduces the racist common sensibilities of a given cultural context. In Modi’s renditions of Hindutva, Islam and Muslims assume the position of the antagonistic Other subordinated to Hindutva’s version of the Hindu. While Modi’s speeches rely on and reproduce the cultural common sense of BJP’s vision of a Hindutva India, his use of Islamophobia is subtle and implicit. Yet, it resembles the racial hierarchization central to Hindutva, and thus becomes identifiable as Islamophobic. Before demonstrating this, it is first necessary to explain what the signifiers “Hindu” and “Muslim” mean in the context of the Hindutva ideology.

#### *WHO IS A HINDU?*

The term “Hindu” was first used as a geographical signifier in the fifth century BCE to denote the region east of the Indus River (Khilnani 2017). It only evolved into a religious signifier 1,300 years later in the eighth century CE because Muslim traders and travelers to South Asia—themselves members of a new but relatively coherent monotheistic religion—needed a signifier to overcome the cognitive disarray that came with encountering a gamut of animistic beliefs and practices that, in some instances, were similar to each other, and in others, starkly contradictory (Khilnani 2017). Indeed, far from being a cohesive religion, what is today referred to as Hinduism has been defined as a “conglomeration of sects” (Thapar 1989, 216). Notably, the term only came to possess religious signification for Hindus themselves in the sixteenth century CE, though the set of traditions it signifies continues to remain diverse (Lipner 2012, 12). For these reasons, “Hinduism as a religious category” has been described as “a practical signifier . . . scholars of religion” rely on to make epistemic claims, though this does not of course override the fact that it remains a category for thoroughly heterogeneous beliefs (Ahuja 2016, 5). In Hindutva, the signification of “Hindu” loses considerable nuance. Instead, it signifies the coagulation of multiple concepts—land, language, and religion—into a monolithically racialized category (Sarvakar 2009).

Hindutva contends that Hindusthan (land of Hindus) encompasses what is today known as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. This concept has been referred to as *Akhand Bharat* (undivided India) since partition in 1947 (Krishna 1994; Ogden 2010). The dominant language defining the people of this land is deemed to be Hindi (Chand 2011), with the dominant religious identification being Hinduism (Jaffrelot 2009b). As such, Hindutva imagines Hindus as a race descendent from those who historically lived in Hindusthan, spoke Sanskrit, the language from which Hindi is mostly derived, and practiced Hinduism. In the context of a Westphalian international system, Hindutva reconfigures the otherwise heterogeneous “Hindu” into a singularized and thus racialized ideological tool for an Indian ethno-nationalist project. While these founding ideas of Hindutva originated in the nineteenth century, the grassroots movements—like the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS—organized formally in the 1920s (1) in response to the Khilafat movement, a pan-Islamist movement which sought the restoration of the caliphate after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and (2) as an independence movement against British colonial rule (Jaffrelot 2009b). Insofar as they were anticolonial in their actions and aspirations, the Hindutva movements have till today adopted the racialized discourse the British produced of the subcontinent (Thapar 2014). One of the most brutal legacies of European colonialism is the invention of race (Alatas 1977; Fanon 1967; Forman 2006; Gowing 1979; Mbembe 2001; Noor 2016; Said 1978; Stoler 1997). Race was constructed to organize and divide colonial subjects who seemingly shared “visible and heritable traits” (Goldberg 2009, 4) into discernible groupings to make colonial rule administratively easier (Alatas 1977).

In South Asia, a critical manifestation of colonial racialization was the grouping of people into mutually antagonistic and indeed, monolithic religious categories of Hindus and Muslims (Nandy 2002). To construct a racialized cartography of South Asia, the colonial administration gathered historical data and interpreted it through the lens of a pseudo-scientific racial logic (Thapar 2014). This was a fourfold process which entailed (1) the reduction of a person’s diverse identities into an all-encompassing singular identity, (2) the abstraction of those defined and anchored in terms of that singularized identity into a monolithic group, (3) the deduction that a person’s every action can be understood as a manifestation of his singularized identity, and (4) the notion that those actions could then be treated as defining characteristics of the entire group of people who have been anchored in terms of that singularized identity (Sen 2006). The consequence of this logic was the division of precolonial South Asia by the British into two distinct, and indeed, mutually hostile epochs defined by religion—the Hindu civilization (i.e. Ancient India, pre-thirteenth century CE) and the Muslim civilization (i.e. Medieval India, thirteenth century CE to nineteenth century CE) (Mill 1817). Notwithstanding the ahistorical quality of such a characterization of South Asia—“counting numbers and giving them religious labels was unheard of prior to the nineteenth century,” indicating that South Asians did not *just* identify with their religious affiliations—the production of racialized knowledge has had damning consequences for the religio-political composition for colonial and post-colonial India (Thapar 2014, 53). Not only did it provide the historical justification for the British colonial state to define, act toward, and govern South Asians in terms of their apparent all-encompassing religious identifications, both Hindu nationalists and Islamists have derived their divisive political ideologies from the monolithic significations of the colonial categories of “Hindu” and “Muslim” (Thapar 2014).

In the context of Hindutva, colonial definitions of “Hindu” and “Muslim” became and remain foundational to an ethno-nationalist vision of a distinctly Hindu India. Hindutva actors have appropriated the problematic notion that Ancient India was a coherent and cohesive Hindu civilization to argue that Hindu predominance over the region coincided with India’s golden era—as global leaders in political innovation, economic development,

and the creative arts (Flåtén 2016). The golden era came to an end after what is deemed to be the Muslim invasion of Hindu India (Flåtén 2016). The BJP's outline of a Hindutva vision of India characterizes the decline of the country with the arrival of the "Islamic sword," and indeed, refers to the "era of Islamic invasions" as "the bloodiest period in the history of mankind" (Bharatiya Janata Party n.d.).<sup>5</sup> Hindus were thus deemed to have been trapped in a state of "enslavement" since the commencement of Muslim rule (Sharma 2009, 152). By labeling Muslims as invaders—thus, fundamentally foreign to the region—Hindutva actors (1) assume the historical people and polities of South Asia to have been held together by a collective consciousness of shared Hinduness (Mahmood 1993), (2) imagine the contemporary nation-state of India as possessing an essential relationship with those polities (Sharma 2011), and thus (3) characterize contemporary Hindus as the natural "inheritors of the past and claimants to dominance in the present" because, to them, India has *always* been Hindu (Thapar 2014, 119). Thus, to Hindutva actors "Hindu" mutates into a signifier that delineates the parameters of belonging in the Hindu nation of India. By virtue of its ethno-nationalist quality, it is a project that privileges and safeguards majoritarian groups through the de-minoritization of public space (Kemp 2004). To do so, Hindutva must project itself above and against other forms of identification that do not fit into the rubric of its conception of a Hindu. Identities often on the receiving end of subalternization include (1) Christians, because they are deemed to be reminiscent of colonialism (Clarke 2002), (2) leftists, because they contest the ideology's ahistorical narration of South Asian history (Thapar 2009), and (3) as is the subject of this article, Muslims, because they are deemed to be the unrivaled threat to the Hindu nation of India (Afzal 2014).

#### MUSLIMS AS THE ANTAGONISTIC OTHER

Hindutva frames Muslims as antagonistic to Hindu India in a number of ways. As has been mentioned briefly, the period of Muslim predominance is viewed as a foreign invasion. Hindutva narrations of historical wars that occurred between different kingdoms tend to be amputated from their spatio-temporal contexts and become reframed as a series of wars between heroic indigenous Hindus and barbaric foreign Muslims. Three notable examples of this include narrations of the twelfth-century battles between the Rajput Prithviraj Chauhan and Sultan Muhammad Ghaur, the sixteenth-century battles between the Rajput Maharana Pratap and the Mughal emperor Akbar, and the seventeenth-century battles between the Maratha ruler Shivaji and the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Claimed to be the final Hindu Emperor, Prithviraj Chauhan is depicted (1) as having lost to Muhammad Ghaur's devious warring tactics and (2) as having been captured, blinded, and executed—though not before assassinating Muhammad Ghaur as a blind prisoner of war (McLeod and Bhatnagar 2001). Prithviraj Chauhan receives even greater veneration because he courageously refused to convert to Islam (Talbot 2015). Maharana Pratap is characterized as having defended Hindu India (i.e. Hinduism) from Akbar's territorial expansion (i.e. expansion of Islam) even though historical evidence indicates that "both sides had the support of *both* Muslims and Hindus" (emphasis mine; Siddiqui 2017, 160). Finally, while Shivaji was a pragmatic leader willing to enter into alliances with and against Hindus and Muslims alike (Khilnani 2017), Hindutva ignores his embracement of *realpolitik* and instead describes him as a bastion of Hinduism who valiantly defended Maharashtra from Aurangzeb's Islamic tyranny (Hansen 2001). Through the rehistoricization of these conflicts as examples of the endemic Hindu-Muslim conflict, Hinduism became conflated with courage and righteousness, while Islam became equated with barbarism and wickedness.

It has been noted that Hindutva regards the period preceding Muslim predominance as the golden era of Hindu civilization. Beyond the political, economic, and cultural achievements of Hindu kingdoms, it appears that Hindutva conceives of Hindu civilization as glorious because of the absence of a significant number of Muslims in the region. Consequently, the numerical growth of Muslims is regarded with suspicion. Since Muslim rulers were regarded as barbaric and wicked, the implication was that Islam could only spread through barbarism and wickedness. Thus, Hindutva rationalizes the numerical growth of Islam and Muslims to be a function of conversions enforced *en masse* by ruthless Muslim rulers—though this too is an ahistorical account (Eaton 1985; Thapar 2014). It has been empirically demonstrated that Islam spread gradually, over a period of some 400 years, because of geological changes (e.g. the way rivers flow) and the resultant economic contingencies (e.g. implications for irrigation and agriculture) (Eaton 1985), rather than in a sudden massive wave that Hindutva actors claim. Nonetheless, the origins of the 500 million or so Muslims in South Asia today (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) are treated to be a product of a vicious Medieval Muslim policy: convert or die. The logic of Hindutva dictates that (1) Muslims only became Muslims out of fear, (2) all Muslims in the region were originally Hindu, and thus (3) Muslims today can and should be reconverted to Hinduism since their Hindu ancestors only became Muslim as the alternative was death (Eshwar 2009; Kim 2017; Singh 2015).

Beyond invading the subcontinent, brutalizing the Hindu Kingdoms, and forcibly converting Hindus to Islam, Hindutva claims that Muslim rulers were zealots because they repeatedly destroyed Hindu temples across South Asia (Van der Veer 1987). While Muslim rulers and their representatives no doubt destroyed numerous temples, they also patronized and funded many (Metcalf and Metcalf 2006; Thapar 2014). What is more, Hindu rulers too were responsible for destroying the temples of their Hindu rivals (Khilnani 2017). Hindu and Muslim rulers alike destroyed temples because they were sites of political and economic power, not *just* religious symbolism. Temples signified a sovereign's control over the region and also functioned as a storage facility for wealth (Eaton 2000). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that regardless of their religious convictions, aspiring hegemonies would seek to assert their control by destroying spaces of power associated with their rivals. Nonetheless, Hindutva imposes a modern understanding of temples as purely religious spaces onto the past, zeros in exclusively onto incidents of temple destruction by Muslims, and rationalizes it through the lens of Hindu-Muslim religious irreconcilability (Sen 1993). Consequently, temple destructions become framed as an Islamic—and indeed, *sacrilegious*—assault on sites of Hindu worship, and thus the Hindu Gods themselves—rendering Muslim rulers as embodiments of *Rakshasas* (the demon enemies of the Hindu Gods) (Sharma 2009). As such, Muslims are conceived of as barbaric, wicked, and demonic in opposition to the courageous, righteous, and Godly Hindus. One of the most devastating implications of this discourse was the series of Hindu-Muslim riots which claimed over 2,000 lives in the aftermath of the 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, by Hindutva militants who argued that the 460-year-old mosque ought to be destroyed to avenge the hitherto unverified claim that a Hindu temple dedicated to the God-King Rama was demolished to make room for it (Ganguly 2003; Islam 1997; Jaffrelot 2009a; Thakur 1993). Their interpretation of the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, has also led them to conclude Rama's birthplace to be Ayodhya—thus elevating not just the perceived sacrosanctity of the space, but their hostility toward the very presence of a mosque there.

Hindutva also characterizes Muslims as bandits for having (1) stolen land and dividing Hindusthan into India and Pakistan, and (2) robbing India of secularism and religious equality. While Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah arguably intended for the country to be a secular Muslim-majority state (Ahmar 2012; Ahmed 2010; Cohen 2002), Pakistan has often been

subsumed by polarizing and repressive Islamist influences—perhaps most notably under the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq (Burki 1988; Nasr 2004; Richter 1979; Ziring 1988). The prevalence of Islamism, as well as the fact that Pakistan has lagged behind India considerably on most development indicators (Central Intelligence Agency 2018a, 2018b), has arguably provided the factual and logical foundation necessary for Hindutva to characterize Pakistan as a poorly governed territory. That it was nonetheless carved out for Muslims at the expense of a unified India, the birthright of the Hindus as it were, only exasperates the frustration Hindutva articulates toward the very existence of Pakistan. As such, Pakistan embodies both the failure of contemporary Muslim-majority rule and the detrimental effect of losing land to them—because an India free of Muslim-majoritarianism outranks Pakistan in terms of political maturity and economic development. Within India, the fact that Muslims maintain religious laws to govern personal affairs (e.g. marriage, divorce, inheritance) is perceived as a violation of the secular foundations of the Indian Constitution (Ogden 2012). The establishment of a separate Muslim Personal Law is perceived as an unfair concession to Muslims—a peculiar accusation given that Hindus too have a set of personal laws under the Hindu Code Bill (Kumar 2017).

That said, the notoriety of the 1985 Shah Bano Case, the debate over the constitutionality of triple *talaq*, and the concomitant demand for the government to stay out of issues concerning Muslim Personal Law by (extremely) vocal conservative clerics who managed to mobilize popular support in favor of their antigovernment stand (Mohanty 2016) has arguably rendered Muslim Personal Law more visible than any other religious laws in Indian media discourse. This has made it easy to gloss over the fact that religious laws in India are not exclusive to Muslims—which would render *all* religious groups in technical violation of Hindutva's apparent desire for secularism. In this context, Muslims are framed not only as barbaric, wicked, and demonic, but as bandits for having stolen land and secularism. Hindus occupy the role of the courageous, righteous, and Godly victims of Muslim thievery. Islamophobia is thus a function of Hindu-Muslim antagonisms in India, and indeed, operate through the racial hierarchy which mandates that Muslims be subordinate to Hindus in a plethora of ways. As shall be demonstrated, Modi's narratives resemble these antagonisms and hierarchies, albeit more subtly.

#### ERASING INDIAN MUSLIM HISTORIES

Throughout his tenure as Prime Minister, Modi has consistently pushed his economic development agenda to the forefront of India's political discourse (Modi 2014b, 2015a, 2016a, 2017i). He argues that the problems plaguing India today—communalism, casteism, open defecation, corruption, poverty, nepotism, labor precarity, the lack of clean water, inequitable distribution of energy, and the absence of proper sanitation—can be eliminated if Indians were to collectively prioritize economic development (Modi 2017d). This is why he has repeatedly called for Indians to come together as one—as “team India”—and “march towards development” (Modi 2017d). Framing development as a catch-all solution for a range of problems that have deep material and non-material consequences for most Indians no doubt elevates the appeal of Modi's neoliberal vision. He is correct to state that India needs a better transportation network, a more efficient government bureaucracy, and needs to literally be cleaned up. What is more, the political mobilization of caste and religion has had damning consequences for the country's socio-political fabric. His vision is presented rationally and, to the frustrated public, can come across as emancipating. It purports to bring the entire population, “125 crore countrymen,” together to “build a New India”—one that is “secure, prosperous, and strong” (Modi 2017d). The development agenda is logical, seductive, and easy to get behind.



Modi's vision of a developed India is reliant on the imagery of the past. He seeks to bring Indians into his developmental fold by using a discourse that visualizes the past—one in which India was a political, cultural, and economic powerhouse—as the nostalgic nodal point which manufactures a longing for a return to that past, and thus functions as the reference point for what contemporary India must strive toward. Modi (2017d) therefore says that “team India” must take up the cause to reclaim India's historical glory. To do this, Modi has proposed that they undertake a number of actions:

1. Indians should buy goods made in India, particularly clothing made of “Khaadi . . . on a regular basis,” as doing so “helps poor people” who sew the fabric to earn an income (Modi 2014d). Indeed, Modi (2017d) claims that if Indians were to purchase Khaadi, it would facilitate the drive toward economic independence, not unlike how Mahatma Gandhi encouraged Indians to boycott British-made goods, and thus the British economy, by “(empowering) his countrymen to weave the fabric of independence with cotton and the spinning wheel.”
2. Patna University needs to lead the charge of innovation to relive the glory of when “Nalanda and Vikramshila”—universities “as old as the river Ganga,” a potent simile given that the Ganges has quite likely existed for a few millennia—made Bihar the region's leading education hub (Modi 2017a).
3. Biharis must “take Bihar to new heights,” away from endemic poverty and underdevelopment, to replicate the “grand history of . . . three great ancient states—Ang, Magadh and Mithila”—which at different junctures, spread across the subcontinent from modern-day Bihar (Modi 2017g).
4. Modi (2017f) insists that the “Kandla Port” in Gujarat “can not only be the focal point of Gujarat's economy, but can also play a significant role in driving India's economy through the transport sector.” This would effectively revive “India's maritime trade legacy” from “5000 years ago,” when the ancient “Port of Lothal,” also in Gujarat, “was . . . a great centre of maritime trade” Modi (2017f). The claim that “the flags of more than 84 countries” were located at Lothal indicates the sizeable volume of trade flowing through the historical port, and functions as a reminder that this economic “strength can be restored again” (Modi 2017f).
5. About 800 years ago, the priest Lord Basaveshwar argued that the only path to “Kailash, the abode of Shiva”—the residence of one of the central Hindu Gods (i.e. heaven)—available is through “labour, hard work,” and “perseverance” (Modi 2017c)—a Hindu ethic and spirit of capitalism, as it were. Indians today thus need to embrace these values, not just to make India an economic powerhouse, but “to attain Swarga” (heaven) (Modi 2017c).
6. Indians needs to reclaim the knowledge foundations that enabled genetic sciences to be used for child birth in the time of the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, plastic surgery to enable the rebirth of the Elephant God Ganesh, and advances in astronomy made by Aryabhata in 500 AD (Modi 2014c).<sup>6</sup>

The common thread among all these examples—there are numerous others in many of his speeches on economic development—is that they make references to forms of life that are distinctly underpinned by Hindu experiences, at least retroactively. There is of course nothing problematic *per se* about using Hindu examples to discuss an economic development agenda. There is much South Asians have to be proud of in the social, political, cultural, and economic heritage they have inherited from empires of the past. What is problematic though is the fact that *only* Hindu experiences are being made central to the development discourse—no other.

This is important for three reasons. First, making linkages between the historical and mythical achievements of Hindu figures and Gods with his current development aspirations constructs, reinforces, and normalizes the idea that—as Sharma (2011) has argued in a different context—there is an essential relationship between the nation-state of India today and the ostensibly Hindu polities of the past. Such a discourse attempts to make this connection seem intuitive, natural, and unquestionable. Second, this discourse seeks to characterize the category Hindu as having been eternally dominant in India—both in terms of material control and as the primary tool of identification. In other words, it imposes a contemporary vision of a Hindu past onto the past (Thapar 2014). Third, monopolizing the economic development discourse with Hindu experiences effectively negates the positive significance of non-Hindu experiences altogether. This feeds into the larger context of the Hindutva narrative on Muslims.

As discussed earlier, the Hindutva discourse views Islam and Muslims as foreign, violent, and thus hostile to the seemingly natural state of Hinduness in the subcontinent (Afzal 2014; Flåten 2016; Jaffrelot 2009b; Sharma 2009, 2011; Thapar 2014). Wars between Hindus are, of course, never discussed. Consequently, it is not possible to imagine the Hindu past as being anything but positive—and the Muslim past as categorically negative. This dishonest assessment of history does its best to entrench the conception of Muslims as outsiders—as if there was an objectively real inside to begin with. Modi does not go as far as his fellow Hindutva ideologues by chastising the history of the Muslim period as one of plunder and death. Yet, it is crucial to situate Modi's silence on this period within the larger context of Hindutva ideas. His decision to stay mum on all references to Muslims ignores all contributions made by various Muslim figures to the political, economic, and cultural inheritance of modern India. The silence on the economic, philosophical, governance, and military innovations that Muslim rulers brought to the subcontinent through inter-civilizational encounter is problematic because it effectively negates these contributions and thus entrenches the impossibility of imagining Muslims as having had a positive influence on modern-day India; beyond tokenistic mentions of the Taj Mahal and Sufi poetry. Consequently, Modi's decision to omit reference to any Muslim contribution silences the Muslim voice of history to legitimize a thoroughly skewed anti-Muslim version as the one that best captures India's genealogy. Thus, Modi's insistence on using the Hindu past to purportedly unite all Indians regardless of religion—recall the signifiers “125 crore countrymen” and “team India” (Modi 2017d)—through the insidious erasure of Muslim histories necessarily renders his neoliberal vision of India a divisive and Islamophobic discourse.

#### *AN ISLAM TAMED BY HINDUISM*

On the surface, various statements Modi has made about Muslims and terrorism appear counter-intuitive to an argument that attempts to characterize his narratives as Islamophobic. He has referred to “Indian Muslims” as loyal and patriotic citizens who “will live for India” and “die for India,” and has even dismissed those who may think Indian Muslims would join groups like Al-Qaeda as “delusional” (Modi 2014a). Modi has also repeatedly stated that terrorism is “a global threat” that is “bent on destroying” those who stand for humanitarian values of “democracy,” “love and non-violence” (Modi 2017h). What is more, Modi has consistently maintained that terrorism has no faith, and is not a product of any religious belief—fringe or otherwise. Indeed, he said that “(the world needs) to undertake . . . a focused measure . . . to delink terrorism from religion” (Modi 2015b). In 2016, Modi was even invited to speak at the World Islamic Sufi Conference held in New Delhi, where he praised the contributions of Sufi saints and poets, Sufi ideas, and the Quran for spreading the “message of harmony,” and “of peace, tolerance and love” (Modi 2016b). It should be remembered that Modi is the head of an

ethno-nationalist government with a number of explicitly anti-Muslim leaders. When Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, he was even accused of being complicit in the mass murder of nearly 800 Muslims in his state during the infamous 2002 riots (*BBC News* 2012). Yet, the statements Modi has made are, in and of themselves, difficult to disagree with. As shall be demonstrated however, it is precisely his use of language that appears empathetic toward Muslims that obscures his own mobilization of Islamophobia—a potent strategy that perhaps enables the racism in his discourse to pass unchecked. To understand how Modi demonstrates Islamophobia through his apparent defense and praise of Islam, it is necessary to interrogate his use of signifiers such as humanity, India, Indian, and Sufi.

When articulating the civilizational accomplishments of Ancient India, a recurrent point Modi makes is that Ancient Indians were defined by an humanitarian ethos. This he believes is indicated by the fact that prominent social reformists like Buddha, Mahavir, Saint Sri Ramanuja Acharyaji (Modi 2016c), and Sri Madhvacharya led “reforms against evils in (Indian) society” (Modi 2017e). To Modi, the fact that they plied their revolutionary trade in Ancient India functions as the historical precedent necessary to account for why generations of Indian reformists—Mahatma Gandhi, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, and Pandit Deen Dayal to name a few (Modi 2016c)—rose to prominence and gained immense popularity amongst the masses. Since India’s “ancestors” were willing to “live and die for” these beliefs, they have not only “kept the Indian civilization alive for centuries,” but have effectively ensured that the notion of “humanity is in our blood” (Modi 2017j). Thus, Modi states that “compassion, kindness, brotherhood, and harmony are” values that are “naturally a part of [India]” (Modi 2017j). The apparent emergence of a continuous stream of social reformists across multiple generations is rationalized through the argument that India and Indians are inseparable from this humanitarian ethos. In other words, to be Indian is to inevitably be humanitarian. Indeed, he claims that Indians today have inherited a “cultural legacy” defined by “Buddha,” “Gandhi,” and the Hindu God Krishna—one of the central figures who champions righteousness (*dharma*) in the Hindu epic, Mahabharata, the Hindu scripture, Bhagavad Gita, and a number of other stories in Hinduism (Modi 2017d). This cultural inheritance is deemed to function as an in-built bulwark against violence within Indians which guarantees the permanence of humanitarian values in India.

Thus far, Modi is making a rhetorical connection between a set of significant but nonetheless vague values with ancient and contemporary figures who are, today, classified as Hindu. Though Buddha and Mahavir were very much anti-Brahmanical and thus founded their own religious movements, Buddhism and Jainism, that were (theoretically) free of the caste system’s hierarchical segregation of people (Khilnani 2017), Modi’s narrative co-opts them into the rubric of Hinduism. Here, Modi falls back onto the fact that Hindutva regards Buddhism and Jainism, not as independent religious movements, but as sects of Hinduism (Jaffrelot 2009b). It is perhaps the ambiguity of what constitutes Hinduism—the very fact that it is first and foremost “a practical signifier” (Ahuja 2016, 5)—that enables Hindutva and Modi to accomplish this. In dominant versions of Hinduism, Buddha is regarded as the ninth incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu (Holt 2004). The significance of this point cannot be understated. The founder of Buddhism, Gautama Siddhartha, is believed to have been born in the sixth century BCE (Marques 2017). If he was the second last incarnation—Vishnu is said to have 10—this by implication makes it possible to frame Hinduism as an older source of knowledge for other religions. Indeed, versions of Hinduism which regard Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu also characterize the popularly known Rama and Krishna as the seventh and eighth incarnations respectively. In this context, Buddha is defined as a revolutionary humanitarian, not because of his agency as the founder of Buddhism, but through his status as a Hindu God. In other words, the humanitarian values Modi speaks of become framed

as foundational and intuitive to Hinduism. Other systems of belief only come to contain humanitarianism *because* of their contact with Hinduism.

This then elucidates what Modi (2016b) actually means when he states that “Sufism is the voice of peace, co-existence, compassion and equality; a call to universal brotherhood.” To Modi (2016b), it is clear that Hinduism and Sufism share a specific set of values in common. Sufism is described as a religious orientation predicated on “humanism,” love for nature, eradication of discrimination—an orientation in which “service to God meant service to humanity.” Building upon this, he crucially states that “Sufism blossomed in India’s openness and pluralism” (Modi 2016b). Here, it must be remembered that in Hindutva, the nation-state of India is one that is characteristically Hindu—geographically, linguistically, and religiously. Therefore, the logic of Hindutva dictates that India’s body of cultural knowledge—the totality of norms, values, and beliefs that purport to weave Indians into a unified cultural fabric—is by definition Hindu as well. Any distinction between Indian and Hindu effectively collapses. Consequently, just as Buddhism and Jainism are treated as peaceful offshoots of Hinduism, every other religion can only become one of peace because it has been sufficiently made to fit into the workings of Hinduism. In other words, there are no Islamic values of peace, love, and humanity outside of Hinduism. The very idea, the *very possibility* of plurality and co-existence in Islamic thought can only exist when it is mediated and filtered through Hinduism. Deemed to be “the face of Islam in India,” Sufism becomes the Hinduization of Islam. Not syncretic, but fundamentally Hindu in its orientation. In this context, the Islamophobia in Modi’s statement, that Indian Muslims are patriotic people who would never be drawn to terror groups like Al-Qaeda, becomes clear. He is in effect stating that Indian Muslims have inherited a legacy of a Hinduized Islam, and are thus predisposed toward being loving and peaceful—just like other Indians. Indian Muslims are peaceful because they are believers of a Hinduized Islam. Given that Hindutva otherwise frames Islam and Muslims as violent, the implication of Modi’s narrative is that it is Hinduism that has made the Indian brand of Islam nonviolent and humanitarian. A peaceful Islam would have been impossible without its contact with Hinduism. In other words, Indian Muslims have not joined terrorist outfits because their violent Islamic inclinations have been tamed by Hinduism. God forbid what would have become of them otherwise.<sup>7</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Using the notion of language-games, this article has provided an analysis of the Islamophobic narratives in Modi’s discourse. The Islamophobia in his narratives are a reflection of the Hindu–Muslim antagonisms prevalent in Hindutva. As Sayyid (2014) notes, racism is made possible because of the racial hierarchies that structure society. With this in mind, this article has sought to demonstrate Hindutva’s conception of a racialized hierarchy in which Muslims are subordinated to Hindus and thus Hindutva’s employment of Islamophobia, through an analysis of Modi’s narratives. While Hindutva explicitly frames Muslims as the irreconcilable Other to its conception of a Hindu, Modi’s otherization of Muslims is comparatively subtle—at times, done through the defense of Muslims. Though Modi’s language is considerably less violent than how Hindutva conventionally denounces Muslims, there are telling similarities—family resemblances, in Wittgensteinian terms—between his and Hindutva’s assault on the Muslim identity. The two narratives discussed in this article are the erasure of Muslim histories in his economic development agenda and the notion that Hinduism has had a taming effect on Islam in India. Before concluding, it is prudent to recall the Wittgensteinian notion of language-games being rule-governed activities, which entails that people need to be socialized into sufficient proximity of the context in which that language is being used for them to understand how

and why signifiers are mobilized in particular ways (Noor 2016; Sayyid 2014; Wittgenstein 1953). To understand what Modi is articulating necessarily implies a sufficient familiarity with the set of ideas Modi is drawing upon, as well as the rules he is employing to narrate those ideas. In other words, if Modi is being Islamophobic and, not just getting away with it, but becoming more popular (Stokes, Manevich, and Chwe 2017), this implies that the people to whom he is speaking not only understand his Islamophobia, but they *permit him* to become more popular while using it. There are, of course, a number of interpretations of this apparent empirical trend that do not immediately assume Indians are pro-Islamophobia. Indeed, it would be ridiculous to assume that some 90% of Indians are racist because they approve of Modi's leadership (Stokes, Manevich, and Chwe 2017).

Here, it is possible to put forth three interpretations of this data. First, there may be a small group of people who staunchly believe in the ideals of Hindutva, and thus approve the subordination of Muslims in India. Second, a large number of people may not interpret Modi's narratives as Islamophobic, and therefore do not associate him with being racist. Finally, another large segment of Indians either attempt to disconnect Modi's Islamophobia from his economic promises, or are willing to tolerate the Islamophobia so long as their socio-economic conditions do not deteriorate. This point is significant since most people surveyed were urbanites, and they perceived Modi's economic policies somewhat positively (Stokes, Manevich, and Chwe 2017). In every case, the people are themselves either supportive of Islamophobia, blind to it, or are willing to let the racism pass out of socio-economic self-interest. No matter which position they may fall into, they are necessarily complicit in the perpetuation of his Islamophobia. To say they do not understand him does not make sense, or else he would have hardly been on the winning side of the 2014 federal elections. A loss would have meant that he was playing a different language-game alien to the audience. Evidently, this is not the case. Consequently, the one salient conclusion that can be drawn from this is that there appears to have been a significant normalization of Islamophobia in India insofar that the characterization of Muslims as subordinate to Hindus may have permeated outside of Hindutva and into the Hindu mainstream—though not homogeneously. Future researchers would be advised to conduct qualitative and quantitative studies to verify this hypothesis, and if validated, analyze the extent to which Islamophobia has been normalized in India. Only then can strategies to dismantle Islamophobia be proposed to better the conditions of life Indian Muslims find themselves in—lest Modi's (2017b) claim, that "India takes pride in being the land of diversity," ceases to be meaningful.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Ismail Patel for his critical comments and feedback that have enabled the development of this article. I would also like to thank Juhi Ahuja for her helpful advice for an earlier draft of this article.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindutva political party won the 2014 Indian federal elections by a landslide. Since then, they have won 14 state governments, with member-parties of its coalition, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), controlling an additional five.

<sup>2</sup>Even here, it is crucial to note that this is not a hard and fast rule. There are a number of contexts in which the "N word" does not have a racist connotation. Common examples include hip-hop music and stand-up comedy. The point is, context always matters.

<sup>3</sup>I do not think it is possible to measure proximity. One need not be American to understand American slang. One could even belong to a society that is vigorously anti-American and still understand American slang because of exposure to American pop culture. Proximity and sufficiency are subjective qualities that will inevitably differ in terms of degree from person to person.

<sup>4</sup>Indeed, there is a fundamental difference between racist humor being used among friends versus how Charlie Hebdo unilaterally imposes its version of racist humor upon everyone at the expense of minorities.

<sup>5</sup>Even bloodier than the (hitherto) bloodiest war in history—World War II.

<sup>6</sup>In the Mahabharata, the warrior Karna and his brothers, the five Pandavas, were born not of child birth, but as a result of the blessings of six different Gods. Modi deems their unconventional birth to be a consequence of genetic science. Prior to becoming the Elephant God, Ganesh was decapitated by Shiva, before being resurrected by him with the head of an elephant. Modi states this could only have been done through plastic surgery. Aryabhata was a historically real astronomer who made a number of hypotheses that—as a result of euro-centric scientific knowledge production—have been mostly attributed to European scientists.

<sup>7</sup>Two possible points can build upon this argument. First, is how he would describe non-Indian Muslims in the context of terrorism. The only example he employs is his frequent condemnation of Pakistan as a country that sponsors terrorism. To be clear, his use of such language is limited only to the government of Pakistan—not the people. While he does tacitly frame India as a Hindu nation located in a complex geopolitical environment, he does not remotely insinuate Pakistan as being a state that uses terrorism to attack Hinduism through India. Pakistan is repeatedly condemned, but not because it is Muslim-majority. At the same time, Modi continues to praise other Muslim-majority countries—UAE, Afghanistan, and Malaysia to name a few—as he would any other non-Muslim majority country. In the context of foreign policy, there is little evidence to suggest he is using Islamophobic language. The second issue would be how he discusses allegations of state-backed crimes against humanity in Kashmir. Here, there is definitely a more substantive argument to be made that he is describing it in Islamophobic terms—particularly through his unfortunate dismissal of the atrocities committed by the Indian army against Kashmiri Muslim civilians. To the extent that this could be a significant line of argument to make, I do not possess sufficient knowledge on the Kashmir dispute to comfortably offer a discussion.

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## *Beef-related Violence in India: An Expression of Islamophobia*

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*ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL*  
VOLUME 4, NO. 2 Spring 2018, PP. 181–194.

Published by:

Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project,  
Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley

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**ABSTRACT:** India's largest minority group—the Muslims—have often found themselves excluded from the mainstream political power circles in India. The historical constructed “clash” between Muslims and Hindus has been used by members of the far right—such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bajrang Dal (BD)—to present the Muslim community as outsiders and evil others with sinister plans to subjugate the Hindu masses. This article explores the narratives offered by these Hindu right-wing groups to first isolate them as “Others” and subsequently justify violence against Muslims. We show how the anti-Muslim propaganda used to demonize this group has manifested itself in instances of mob violence against Muslims who have been accused of slaughtering cows. Radical Hindu nationalist groups have portrayed the act of killing Muslims for slaughtering cows as a sacred duty on multiple occasions. This act is supplemented by the political silence of the current leadership on these incidences. Thus, this article informs readers of a specific process of Islamophobic violence that exists in India, a largely understudied phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Hindutva, India, beef-related violence, Muslim minority

### *INTRODUCTION*

In India, violence carried out in the name of the cow appears to be on the rise. This increasing trend has been highlighted by the lynching of Mohammed Akhlaq Saifi, a man from Rajasthan, who, on September 28, 2015, was killed for allegedly storing beef in his freezer. This was followed by a slew of other such attacks and murders since then.

The article primarily discusses how the normalization of violence in the name of the cow has taken place in India. It will examine how mob violence against Muslims is not a spontaneous occurrence but an outcome of a broader Islamophobic discourse that has evolved since the 20th century. Importantly then, the justifications of violence against the Muslim community in India cannot be divorced from the larger geopolitical and historical occurrences in the country.<sup>1</sup>

To draw the links between the anti-Muslim/Islamophobic discourse and the violence carried out in the name of the “sacred” cow, this article will outline the process of normalization of violence. First, it will draw on sources that venerate the cow for sociopolitical, economic and cultural/religious reasons. Second, it will provide a sketch of how the sacredness of the cow has been used to advance violence, and finally, it will posit that the government's unwillingness to stop this violence is what normalizes Islamophobic violence against Muslims.

This article refers to Islamophobia as distinction, exclusion, or restriction toward, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human

rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.<sup>2</sup> Islamophobic violence therefore is a violent expression of the above phenomenon.

Further, we also refer to mainstreaming or normalization, as any process, be it to breathing after exercises or to computing, that becomes ordinary and accepted by certain actors. In the context of violence, this can be understood as a way to let the process of violence become an accepted reality by the society.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the fact that there have been multiple such events post-2014 points out to this violence becoming a mainstream activity. Rigorous statistical analyses of these cow-related lynchings show that since 2010, lynchings over cows and beef add up to 94 incidents. Of these, about 90 have occurred specifically after the Hindu right-wing party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) formed the government in 2014, with an estimated 86% of fatal victims being Muslims and the remaining belonging to the Dalit, Sikh and Christian community.<sup>4</sup>

Important for readers to note is the wide prevalence of anti-Dalit violence in India as well. Dalits or the lower caste communities who are present all over India are often times, the other victims of antibeef-related violence. Among the many jobs that are relegated to the Dalits in India is clearing animal carcasses. Moreover, due to the cheap cost of beef (as opposed to other sources of protein), Dalits heavily rely on the consumption of beef. This has led to focused instances of violence against Dalits as well. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to explain anti-Dalit beef-related violence, and as such, the article zeroes in on the anti-Muslim component of this category of violence which has its own dynamics and processes. To understand the shaping of this process, we begin with the historic discourse prevalent in the country that specifically targets Muslims.

Academic literature offers many ways to analyze violence in different situations. We have chosen to work on this through a few central themes. First, the article uses the Durkheimian notions of the sacred and the profane to explain how cow eaters are vilified. Second, the article uses Kant's perspectives on morality which illustrate how acts of violence can be framed within the context of a sacred duty (a deontological morality), which combined with the abovementioned concept of the sacred and the profane help rationalize any sort of violence toward Muslims on account of their beef-eating habits. Finally, the article uses a framework by Elcheroth and Reicher on how violence is perpetrated/silently approved via political figures, an apt description of what happens in India, as will be explained further. To understand the events that led up to this phenomenon, we look at the shaping of perception regarding Muslims in India.

In the early 20th century, the political situation of India was dominated by the oppressive rule of the British, the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese who were ruling the country for almost four centuries and concurrently Indians fighting against the colonial presence. During this turmoil, in the 1920s, calls for a separate Muslim nation began to arise throughout the country.<sup>5</sup> The Muslim League, led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, attempted to gain popularity among Muslim masses in India and secure electoral wins, often by exploiting the insecurities of the sizeable minority.

Among these were the widely held paranoia that Muslims will never be safe in India or treated equally by the Hindu-majority population.<sup>6</sup> Such a paranoia was also fueled by the other side, that is, the Hindus (and Sikhs), through writings adopted by various ideological figures.

The best example of this was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, an ideologue who was arrested many times by the British. Savarkar in 1923, while serving his sentence as a political prisoner in the infamous cellular jail, wrote a hugely influential pamphlet called *Who is a Hindu?* which defined the concept of Hinduness and outlined a political vision for India. The pamphlet's biggest (and most controversial) contribution was its definition of a "Hindu" as a person who accepted India as both his or her fatherland and holy land, which effectively excluded Christians and Muslims who consider geopolitical spaces outside India as their holy lands.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, another major strand of discussion in Savarkar's works was the matter of "Hindu weakness." According to him, Hinduism had become "polluted" and weakened by the

entry of the Muslims since the 10th century and later on, by the British colonizers since the 19th century.<sup>8</sup> This assertion was made in the destruction and plundering of temples made by the Muslim invaders of the time and the Hindu inability to stop the British in the colonial era. To overcome this weakness and gain its independence, he stressed that the British would have to be resisted.<sup>9</sup>

This message propagated by Savarkar and others helped increase animosity toward Muslims, and in the years leading up to the partition, the justification for the otherization of the Muslim was further intensified with stories of the past including the abovementioned citation of the Muslim rule in India as an oppressive one.

Thus, using historical narratives of oppressive and barbarous Muslim rulers in India, extremists frame this as a civilizational battle between Hinduism and Islam, one that may in extreme cases require the culling of Muslims to prevent further problems. This manifested in the numerous riots between the Hindu–Muslim and Sikh–Muslim communities, which was also fueled by various political and economic underpinnings.

Post partition in 1947, the construction of Muslims as an evil “other” was almost necessary to justify the existence and unity of a hitherto diverse and syncretic set of ideologies as well as to assert Hinduism. As Saeed argues, often times, the ability of any master discourse (here: Hindutva) to bring together its varied followers (members of various castes and diverse sects that fall under the umbrella term of Hinduism) lies in its ability to focus its followers’ hatred toward the threat of a specific evil (in this case, Islam), regardless of its ability to actual threaten and disrupt the master discourse.<sup>10</sup>

Subsequently, new frontiers for Islamophobia in India were pushed as an agenda by extremists.<sup>11</sup> The case of questioning the loyalties of the Muslims in the country is one such case. As stated by a prominent scholar of Indian politics:

In the fascist Hindutva imagination, the Indian Muslims are continuously reviled as Pakistani “fifth columnists,” as “enemies of the nation,” and so on, and their patriotism is said to be suspect.<sup>12</sup> The Muslim as the menacing “other” occupies a central place in Hindutva discourse, and this has been used to legitimize large-scale anti-Muslim violence.<sup>13</sup>

It was in this backdrop that that Hindu right-wing groups, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal (BD), took to bringing multiple communities under one banner. This was then used as a basis to justify exclusion of and violence against Muslims in the postpartition era. Such an agenda was pursued through various publications and propaganda distributed over the postindependence era. These publications were instrumental in otherizing the Muslims in India in line with their vision of forming a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation).<sup>14</sup>

Another narrative that was pushed by extremists is the issue of conversion, whereby Muslims are cast as a nefarious community intent on converting all Hindus to Islam.<sup>15</sup> This conversion of adherents of different religions to Islam has worked alongside another myth that also gave way to rising fears of Muslim populations in India, that is, the high growth rate of Muslims.<sup>16</sup>

This takeover of India by Muslims falls into the broader theme of “Hindu weakness,” referring to an effeminate Hinduism that the right wing saw in Mahatma Gandhi’s discourse on *Ahimsa* (nonviolence). Indeed, the assassination of Gandhi in 1948 was justified by Nathuram Godse, a former member of the RSS, under the pretext of protecting Hinduism from becoming a weakened version of its glorious past.<sup>17</sup> Such sentiments were what eventually contributed to one of the largest communal events that took place in 1992, that is, the

destruction of the Babri Masjid and the ensuing riots preceded by various tussles that had taken place over the past decades.<sup>18</sup>

The following three sections will demonstrate how this rhetoric relates to the present spate of cow-related lynchings that have taken place.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COW

To better understand how and why people are being mobilized to exclude and attack Muslims under the banner of the cow, it is important to understand why the animal is considered sacred to so many Hindus. Various Hindus and political figures often point to scriptural examples of the cow being a sacred animal. Lots of these opinions are held by the common Hindus, especially, from the Brahmin community. These claims, however, end up getting used by right-wing groups to demarcate those people who cause harm to the animal, being the Muslims, the Dalits and the Christians. However, there also exists a plethora of academic research and religious texts which contest the Hindu right-wing propaganda about Hindus having traditionally refrained from consuming meat, especially, beef. The *Rig Veda*, the oldest of the four *vedas* and the oldest Hindu religious text, categorically indicates that cows were not only consumed, both regularly and during rituals, but were also offered as a sacrifice.<sup>19</sup> Despite the clinching evidence against the far-reaching and widely believed theory that Hindus have always revered the cow and never consumed its meat, the bovine creature continues to divide communities in India and carry the label of being “sacred.”<sup>20</sup>

Doniger, in her book *On Hinduism* illustrates that early religious texts, from the Brahmins to 3rd-century BCE *Dharmasutras* and texts written by ancient scholar Panini, have multiple references to cows as food and an animal that is sacrificed upon the arrival of guests.<sup>21</sup> However, as Thapar points out, later Hindu texts began to insist the very opposite with varying degrees of restraint, ranging from complete prohibition to allowing consumption of old and nonyielding animals.<sup>22</sup>

The reasons for this change are manifold. Firstly, for an agrarian society like India, the cow and its male counterpart were always prized possessions. The animals provided milk for sustenance, labor for tilling of fields and transporting goods and persons and were counted as wealth. Resultantly, one cannot deny the importance the animal has played in the Indian society. Moreover, the continued portrayal of the animal in Hinduism, especially religious art, given its association with Lord Krishna has cemented the label of it being “sacred.” However, it is important to note that though the bovine animal is considered sacred, it is not worshipped. While its iconography graces the walls and interiors of temples, it does not command a temple built in its name.<sup>23</sup>

The increasing number of religious dictates concerning beef and the strict habit of non-consumption of cows became associated with or a marker of the upper class, especially Brahmins. In fact, a community’s decision to give up the consumption of beef became a source of upward social and caste movement. This is one of the reasons why a domesticated animal became such an important and sacred symbol within the Hindu community. The economic ramifications coupled with the religious significance make it more palatable for us to understand why and how a “sacred” animal can become a rallying factor for thousands and thousands of Hindus across the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Notably, the cow was used as a “divider” long before Hindutva brigades sprung up, be it during the influx of Muslim armies from North or the instances of dissent and rebellion against many Muslim rulers. However, it was with the British rule and the subsequent religious reform and nationalist movements that one finds the articulation of the “sacred cow” in contemporary political forms.



The cow, as Therese O'Toole points out, becomes the "sacred" link between religious reform and Hindu nationalism.<sup>24</sup> The need to unite against the "other," which started off as the colonial invaders and then expanded to include Muslims (and Christians), was satiated and articulated through the issue of the cow, specifically cow protection.<sup>25</sup> The homeland had been invaded and one (read Hindus) needs to protect it. This as Saeed would state constituted a master narrative that helped to unite people against the common enemy (here referring to the Christians and the Muslims). Interestingly, those who "invaded" the "homeland" were also those who consumed beef. Thus, the cow became the perfect metaphor and symbol for political and religious movements.

By the end of the 19th century, the cow protection movement gained traction, and by the 1920s and 1930s, it became a major source of fodder for the Hindu nationalist agenda.<sup>26</sup> Under the leadership of the Arya Samaj, founded by religious reformer Dayanand Saraswati, in the 1890s, serious progress was made in uniting and creating a monolithic Hindu community. Saraswati has been credited for highlighting and popularizing the significance of the cow for Hindus, especially in the fight to unite against the British and the Muslims. It was his belief that the slaughter of cows (and other animals) was the reason behind the downfall of Hindu rulers at the hands of beef-eating invaders. *Gokarunanidhi* (Cow: The Ocean of Mercy), a pamphlet penned by Saraswati, shed light on the issue of protecting the sacred creature and served as a critique of the Hindu society.<sup>27</sup>

In the following decades, the issue of cows became an increasingly meaty issue and a prominent bone of contention primarily between Hindus and Muslims. The beef over the issue intensified as religious nationalism and communalism tightened its grips over the subcontinent. To mull over whether Hindus consumed cow meat and did the ancient texts sanction it or not has become a moo(t) point in present-day context. This, however, is not because history and accurate understanding of ancient texts do not impact contemporary politics and society, in fact they very much do. It is because today, the importance of the cow is derived not just from texts and scriptures but also from the pivotal role in forming religious and national identities during the colonial era, which have become deeply embedded in the Indian society.

However, what is interesting to note is that the term "beef" in India is an all-encompassing term; it includes not only cow meat but also the meat of oxen and buffaloes. Moreover, where and what element of beef is legal/illegal in India differs from state to state, given the country's federal structure. In the southern Indian state of Kerala and Northeastern states of the country, all forms of beef are an integral part of peoples' daily diet.

Similarly, which Hindu community considers consumption of beef as blasphemy or not also differs significantly. The Northern and Central parts of India, also known as the cow belt, view the bovine animal as highly sacred and the consumption of its meat is a strict no-no. However, as one moves away from this belt, the restrictions are greatly reduced.

Despite the fact that buffaloes, which fall under "beef" in India, though important farm animals, do not command the status that its sister-milch animal commands, the distinction has been glossed over by the cow-vigilante groups and Hindu right-wing groups. While both cows and bulls feature extensively in Hindu religious art, the buffalo not so much. In fact, the cow and bull are mentioned more often than any other animal in the Vedic literature.

While the buffalo is sacred to a handful of Indian communities, given its association with the God of death, Yama, it is also the demon Mahishasura that was defeated by Goddess Durga.<sup>28</sup>

The heavy restrictions on consumption of cow meat and the animal's sacredness mean that the majority of Indians who consume beef in India, specifically northern India, consume buffalo and not cow meat. And yet, the violence perpetrated against them is in the name of the sacred cow and not the buffalo.

### THE LOGIC OF MOB VIOLENCE

As previously stated, the analysis of violence perpetrated in the name of the cow does not negate the existence of other forms of crowd lynchings. In fact, mob violence against individuals in India is a grim reality that has been documented before the emergence of the BJP in 2014 as the central government. Nonetheless, the high incidences of occurrences of such lynchings that have taken place in the four-year tenure of the BJP warrants a more thorough study of the phenomenon.<sup>29</sup>

Notably, violence in the name of the cow is not a new phenomenon. In the 19th century, various reports from the then British government, documented the formation of cow protection societies. Historians have credited the aforementioned Dayanand Saraswati, as the first person to have popularized cow protection societies in the 1880s, a movement that picked up some steam initially but eventually petered out after his death.<sup>30</sup> This movement was rejuvenated again in a few years till it became a central point of shaping the Hindu identity. Eventually, the trend of protecting cows soon translated into riots which culminated in the 1889 UP riots, considered as one of the most brutal incidents killing about 100 people.<sup>31</sup> What has differed from these old movements and the present-day cow protection however is that the rioting against Muslim communities (which had also taken place for many other reasons beyond just cow slaughter)<sup>32</sup> has now descended into focused violence against Muslim individuals perpetrated by seemingly random mobs.<sup>33</sup>

However, despite a random occurrence of these incidents, mob violence is an event that contains a lot of historical baggage. According to Brundage, the phenomenon of mob lynching is not just a spontaneous spurt of violence but “a ritual that explicitly enforces the outcaste status of its victims (authors note: in this case the Muslims) which combines the fellowship of a hunt with the honor of serving the alleged needs of the community.”<sup>34</sup> This theory is given credence as seen in the otherization of the Muslim community by the Hindu right wing through the 20th century. The final element in synthesizing the propaganda against Muslims and converting it to violence can best be understood through Kantian perspectives on morality.

As Alcorta and Sosis argue, the construction of evil, which necessitated a violent response, has previously been achieved by exaggerating cannibalistic and eroticized myths against communities and an institution that has helped disseminate these images. This practice was prevalent during the medieval era in propelling and sustaining witch hunts as well as targeting Jews based on certain perceived monstrous practices adopted by these two communities.<sup>35</sup> As we have shown so far, while not so extreme, extremist depictions of Muslims as a foreign race bent on destroying or subjugating the Hindu community by ruling over them, destroying their temples or even by converting them have contributed to constructing the community as an evil one. Thus, Alcorta and Sosis refer to Durkheim who posited that the differentiation between the sacred and the profane is an integral part of religion.<sup>36</sup> In their words, “Sacred things are powerful; they are charged with symbolic significance and moral meaning. It is not just inappropriate to treat sacred things profanely; it is viscerally repugnant.”<sup>37</sup>

This has been emphasized and highlighted by various ideologues and literature such as the *Organiser*, the English mouthpiece of RSS, in 2015 proclaiming that the *vedas* ordered death for cow killers.<sup>38</sup> It makes sense then, that the consumption of a creature considered sacred by a vast number of people is not just bad but also savage and therefore profane in Durkheimian terms. Moreover, in some cases, systematic steps have taken place to kill the cow slaughterers under the reasoning that they illegally transport the bovine animals. Some of the orchestrated efforts have taken place under the banners of groups such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP),

Bajrang Dal (BD) and local Gau Rakshak Samitis (cow protection societies). Thus, various ideologues have characterized the Muslims as a cow-eating community, a sentiment that trickled down to mobs too.<sup>39</sup> Just seconds before 15-year-old Junaid Khan, a boy out shopping with his brother, was stabbed to death in a local Delhi train on the eve of Eid in 2017, he was mocked for being a “beef-eater” and a Muslim.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the protection of the cow has been marked as a duty that needs to be upheld by citizens (a narrative that took root over the late 19th century).<sup>41</sup> Immanuel Kant explained that violence can be justified on grounds of this violence being a sacred duty and hence necessary. An example of this would be violent action, under the banner of “Jihad,” being justified and encouraged as a religious duty for Muslims.<sup>42</sup> It is this type of reasoning that is used to kill Muslims who eat cows. It is also instructive for the reader that in half of the 63 instances, the meat/animal involved were not cows but buffaloes and other cattle signaling how effective the exclusion of the community has been so far. To understand how this developing violence was accepted and normalized in a matter of three years, we look to the role of the current BJP-ruled central government in India.

#### MUTE LEADERS: CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE

In the 2014 general elections, the BJP’s thumping majority in the elections which granted them a majority in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) shocked most political pundits.<sup>43</sup> The thrust of now Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s campaign was largely pushed toward “development”; an agenda that has been harped on for the past four years. Yet, the underlying currents are not far from usual Hindutva politics that have been outlined throughout the article.

While the Prime Minister and his cabinet pontificate about “development,” “Make in India” and numerous other schemes, there has been a simultaneous rise of hate crime in the country against Muslims.<sup>44</sup> Grassroots workers have been killing people and beating up Muslims for supposedly consuming beef.<sup>45</sup> “Gaurakshaks” or cow protectors have barged into hotels, rounded up truck drivers transporting cattle and even forcibly taken the cows from Muslim families under different pretexts.<sup>46</sup> This normalization of violence against the consumers of beef is a result of the rhetoric spread against them, as outlined in the previous section. Despite groups coming out in protest against such violence and propaganda, the lack of action by the government has only emboldened organizations and individuals spreading hate.

As Elcheroth and Reicher argue, political leaders can bring about violence in one of the three ways, that is, (1) repressively—by inciting violence, (2) structurally—by allowing violence to occur unfettered and (3) symbolically—by alluding to violence in the past—thereby signaling to the public that such violence is a part of a historical narrative and as such part of the normal dealings between communities.<sup>47</sup> In our analysis, the ruling party in India has two contributions in perpetrating and thereby normalizing violence.

Firstly, the top echelons of the government allow violence to take place *structurally* by keeping silent about the killings as described above. This silence is also combined with the fact that failed police and legal proceedings have not been tough on the offenders in the case of Mohammed Akhlaq in Dadri, more than 10 people involved in the lynching were set out on bail without any major penalty being imposed on them.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, the tactic employed by Modi and his senior ministers of letting every individual instance of cow-related violence die down before commenting on it, so as to avoid getting caught in the eye of the storm, seems to bear fruit.<sup>49</sup> Vigilantes continue to wreak havoc, target Muslims, ostracize them for consuming beef, and the ruling BJP fails to even

rebuke them. Most responses that arise from the polity come long after lynchings have taken place. Although the prime minister is not expected to respond to minute incidents of violence and unrest, the lack of reaction on the lynching of multiple people is striking. This lack of response is made even more acute when taking into context PM Modi's monthly podcast series *Mann Ki Baath* (Matters of the heart) that purports to address issues faced by the Indian public. Despite the regularity and the democratization of content on this series, many critics bemoan the lack of discussion on the beef-related lynchings by the PM on this platform.<sup>50</sup>

The silent poisoning of public discourse and institutions so as to structurally perpetuate violence is now even more visible. In a Gazette notification, in May 2017, the government introduced a new act which would regulate the sale, purchase and slaughter of not only cows but other milch and draught animals as well. The government banned the sale of cows and buffaloes for slaughter through animal markets, stating that only "agriculturalists" will be allowed to trade in animal markets. In the wake of this ban, senior BJP leaders asked Muslims in India to give up eating beef, hinting at their profanity (in Durkheimian terms) for eating it.<sup>51</sup>

Secondly, this silence of the top command does not just extend to the miscreants involved in the lynchings but also to those party members who advocate the killing of cow slaughterers, thus making them perpetrate violence *repressively* according to the above classification. These encompass personalities such as Haryana's minister of education (a northern state) and other major Members of Parliament (MPs) who have explicitly defended mob lynchings related to the cow.<sup>52</sup> While some of these leaders have recalled their statements following private "dressing downs," the fact that censuring of such statements is not vigorous or public is in itself a cause for normalizing violence. As argued by Kurzon, this sort of silence is a speech act that implies consent.<sup>53</sup>

Needless to say, while the Supreme Court intervened and stopped the institutionalizing of violence in the name of the cow, it cannot stop the spreading of political propaganda and public discourse which relies in otherizing the Muslim community, painting them as "evil," beef-eaters and perpetrators of violence. The judicial body can neither effectively intervene in the social churning nor stop right-wing parties from eulogizing those attacking and sidelining the Muslim community in an attempt to save the *gau mata* (mother cow).

### CONCLUSION

Mainstreaming violence against beef eaters (who visibly constitute of Muslims) is not a one-off event. It is a result of evolving forms of Islamophobic narratives that have been perpetrated throughout the history of India, both in the colonial and postcolonial times. This article has highlighted how a few extreme organizations such as the RSS, the VHP and the BD have tried to hijack Hinduism and then construct the image of a Muslim as an evil that needs to be removed or at the least dealt with definitively in India.<sup>54</sup>

This otherization of Muslims has taken place by claiming them to be (1) descendants of foreign invaders who destroyed religious symbols in India, (2) Pakistani agents in India, (3) intent on dominating the country demographically by reproducing without control and by converting Hindus to Islam and (4) sacrilegious individuals who eat cows, which is a sacred entity in the Hindu religion.

Thus, while India was known for bouts of communal violence, targeted killing of Muslims due to their alleged crime of slaughtering cows has stormed the center stage again. The usage of mass media and civilian-recorded videos disseminated over mobile networks in India coupled with the refusal of the central government to criticize those who perpetrate this act in a timely fashion are both symptoms of the problem and a new and evolved mechanism of

normalizing the violence. The reasoning provided for these killings is often deontological projecting the protection of the cow, even through violent means, as a sacred duty.

In contemporary times, the Islamophobic violence is most pronounced due to the continued reinforcement of the Muslim identity as “beef-eaters.” Despite India being the largest exporter of beef and fifth largest consumer of beef, predominantly a single community is the target of all ire. Arguably spates of cow-related violence in the 1880s may imply that this could also be a temporary phase and may decline as the days pass, dependent on many issues. However, this is still a worrying trend that sabotages India’s attempt of creating a good image globally. On one hand, India is on the path of rapid economic progress as a result of its manufacturing and services industries, and yet on the other hand, people are killing each other over a “farm animal.”

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Dr Irm Haleem for her guidance on the structure of the article. We would also like to thank our colleagues and friends: Paul Hedges, Mohammed Nawab, Juhi Ahuja and Parvathi Anantha who reviewed and provided useful comments on the manuscript. Last, we also owe our gratitude to Abdul Basit for his initial inputs for the article.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The writers, however, caution readers against inferring to the present context as a “civilizational” fight between Hindus and Muslims. Hindu–Muslim relations in India have long been held up as a veritable model of interreligious harmony to all racially intolerant countries. While there have been many incidents of violence between these communities, across the length and breadth of history, the comparable quantum of members of both communities living in peace exponentially exceeds their more violent counterparts. This article makes no qualms about stating that the study is just one specific aspect of the present-day tensions and is not what dictates and defines the relations between Hindus and Muslims in India, either today or in the past and hopefully in the future.

<sup>2</sup>Farah Elahi and Omar Khan, “Introduction: What is Islamophobia?” in *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All*, ed. Farah Elahi and Omar Khan (London: Runnymede, 2017) <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Islamophobia%20Report%202018%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>Mark Peters, “What Does It Mean to ‘Normalize,’ Exactly?” *Boston Globe*, November 17, 2016, accessed October 9, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2016/11/17/what-does-mean-normalize-exactly/nsvIiXsSwh5aDDW3lsBnTO/story.html>.

<sup>4</sup>For a complete breakdown of mob-related beef lynchings in India, look at the interactive database prepared by India Spend. “IndiaSpend – Hate Crime Checker” Updated as of October 2018. <http://lynch.factchecker.in/>.

<sup>5</sup>During the course of the anticolonial struggle numerous groups rose up against the British (and other dominant groups in the country) both independently and collectively. For example, the Champaran satyagraha (1917) saw tenant farmers revolting against both the landlords and the British.

<sup>6</sup>There were, of course, many other reasons why there was a demand for separation, however, the two above-held opinions were the easiest to accept. For more on this, see Nisid Hajari, *Midnight’s Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India’s Partition* (New York: Harcourt, 2015), 23–69.

<sup>7</sup>The fact that Savarkar used the term *pitrabhoomi* (fatherland) as opposed to the common imagery of the motherland (*matrabhoomi*), according to many scholars, points toward exclusivist tendencies within Savarkar’s

ideology. This, however, is only one of the reasons why parallels have been drawn between the Hindu right-wing ideology and ideologues and fascists.

<sup>8</sup> Heather Selma Gregg, *The Path to Salvation: Religious Violence from the Crusades to Jihad* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 52–73.

<sup>9</sup> Gregg, *The Path to Salvation*. Savarkar was imprisoned for a long period of about 23 years due to his anti-British rhetoric.

<sup>10</sup> Saeed uses this analogy in the case of Islam as a Master discourse which was used by the Iranians to justify all anti-Western ideas and products. For more on this, see Bobby Saeed, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (New York: Zed Books, 1997), 45–50; 84–127.

<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, conflict in the Muslim-dominated Kashmir valley which was (and continues to be) primarily driven due to geopolitical reasons is another factor where Muslims often came into the limelight. This is so because both India and Pakistan lay claim to the valley, and the local militants who conducted guerrilla warfare-style attacks against the Indian government are primarily Muslims (but Kashmiris). Pakistan also tried to take advantage of this by sponsoring Kashmiri Muslim-led insurgencies and sending Pakistani terrorists. Much has been written about the Pakistani involvement in Indian Kashmir. See the following two publications for a quick read on the same: Vinay Kaura, “India’s Challenge: Containing Kashmir’s Insurgency,” *The Diplomat*, July 14, 2016, accessed December 15, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/indias-challenge-containing-kashmir-insurgency/> and Peter Chalk, “Pakistan’s Role in the Kashmir Insurgency,” *Rand Commentary*, September 1, 2001, accessed December 29, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2001/09/pakistans-role-in-the-kashmir-insurgency.html>.

<sup>12</sup> India was divided into a Muslim-majority Pakistan and a Hindu-majority India on the basis of the two-nation theory. As a result, Muslims who stayed back in India have been viewed with an eye of suspicion.

<sup>13</sup> Yoginder Sikand, “Sayyid Abul Hasan ‘Ali Nadwi and Contemporary Islamic Thought in India,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 88.

<sup>14</sup> For more on this, see Akshay Mukul, *Gita Press and the Making of Hindu India* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2015). 8–24.

<sup>15</sup> According to Van der Veer, Hindu right-wing animosity additionally increased post the 1973 oil shock in the Gulf when Indian Muslims from the southern states began to seek better economic opportunities in the Gulf regions. The remittance money sent back home to families was conspiratorially painted by right-wing ideologues as money used for conversions, M. G. Chitkara, *Converts Do Not Make a Nation* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House), 318. For a prominent instance of blowback against the Muslim community in India, read the case of the Dalits of Meenakshipuram where 800 Dalits converted to Islam, “Flashback: How 800 Dalit Hindus in Meenakshipuram Were Converted to Islam 33 Years Ago,” *India TV*, December 12, 2014, accessed October 1, 2017, <http://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/flashback-how-800-dalit-hindus-were-converted-to-islam-33-years-45123.html>.

<sup>16</sup> In the 1981 census, the Muslim growth rate was estimated at 4.1 to that of Hindus at 3.6 which perpetuated the myth that Muslim growth rates were much higher due to their allowance to marry four women. In recent times, some politicians have termed this phenomenon as “Population Jihad”; further mystifying and demonizing the Muslim community that engages in it. Kanchan Srivastav, “Muslims Pursuing Population and Land Jihad: Pramod Mutalik,” *DNA India*, August 29, 2015, accessed October 9, 2017, <http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/interview-muslims-pursuing-population-and-land-jihad-pramod-mutalik-2119612>.

<sup>17</sup> Nathuram Godse, *Why I Killed Gandhi* (New Delhi: Farsight Publishers, 2015), published by his younger brother much after his death.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed account of the destruction of the Babri Masjid and its repercussions across the nations, see A. G. Noorani, *Destruction of the Babri Masjid—A National Dishonour* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Doniger, *On Hinduism*, 502.

<sup>20</sup> One does note that it is not just Hindus adhering to the right-wing ideology who consider the cow as a sacred animal.

<sup>21</sup> Wendy Doniger, in *On Hinduism* 502.

<sup>22</sup> Utpal Kumar, "Why Right Is Not Right: Historian Romila Thapar Talks about the Outburst against Intolerance by the Intellectuals," *India Today*, November 2, 2015, accessed January 13, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/lifestyle/culture/story/why-right-is-not-right-historian-romila-thapar-talks-about-the-outburst-against-intolerance-by-the-intellectuals-271020-2015-11-02>.

<sup>23</sup> Dwijendra Narayan Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* (London: Verso, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Therese O'Toole, "Secularising the Sacred Cow: The Relationship between Religious Reform and Hindu Nationalism," in *Hinduism in Public and Private: Reform, Hindutva, Gender and Sampraday*, ed. A. Copley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 84–109.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Mahisha = buffalo, asura = demon.

<sup>29</sup> Delna Abraham and Ojaswi Rao, "86% Dead in Cow-Related Violence since 2010 Are Muslim; 97% Attacks after 2014," *Indiaspend*, June 28, 2017, accessed October 9, 2018, <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/86-dead-in-cow-related-violence-since-2010-are-muslim-97-attacks-after-2014-2014>.

<sup>30</sup> John R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 219–51.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> India has a rich history of communal violence and riots. An important resource to refer to for communal violence is the book *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), written by Ashutosh Varshney.

<sup>33</sup> In some cases, it is also important to note that out of the recorded 65 incidents, 23 incidents of mob violence were not random and were perpetrated by members of groups such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal (BD) and local Gau Rakshak Samitis. See the following for more information on this: Abraham and Rao, "86% Dead in Cow-Related Violence since 2010 Are Muslim."

<sup>34</sup> Brundage analyzed mob violence in the context of White on Black violence in the US during the 19th and 20th century. For the quote, see Supriya Nair, "The Meaning of India's 'Beef Lynchings'," *The Atlantic*, July 24,

2017, accessed October 9, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/india-modi-beef-lynching-muslim-partition/533739/>. For more on mob lynching as a phenomenon, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930 (Blacks in the New World)* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>35</sup> Candace Alcorta and Richard Sosis, "Ritual, Religion, and Violence: An Evolutionary Perspective," in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Mark Jurgensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 571–93.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> "RSS Weekly Keeps up Beef Rant," *The Telegraph*, October 20, 2015, accessed October 15, 2017, [https://www.telegraphindia.com/1151020/jsp/nation/story\\_49058.jsp](https://www.telegraphindia.com/1151020/jsp/nation/story_49058.jsp).

<sup>39</sup> Shashi Tharoor, "India's Sacred Cows and Unholy Politics," *Gulf News*, November 12, 2015, accessed October 19, 2017, <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/thinkers/india-s-sacred-cows-and-unholy-politics-1.1618956>.

<sup>40</sup> Apoorv Anand, "What Is behind India's Epidemic of 'Mob Lynching'?" *Al Jazeera*, July 6, 2017, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/india-epidemic-mob-lynching-170706113733914.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Thomas, "Communities in Conflict: Fighting for the 'Sacred Cow'," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2013): 130–47.

<sup>42</sup> For a concise understanding of deontological reasoning and how it has been used to justify various types of violence such as violence in the Crusades or that justified on grounds of spreading democracy, refer to Irm Haleem, *The Essence of Islamist Extremism: Recognition through Violence, Freedom through Death* (New York: Routledge Press, 2012), 32–3.

<sup>43</sup> Partha S. Ghosh, *BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications & Distributors), 15.

<sup>44</sup> "India: Hate Crimes against Muslims and Rising Islamophobia Must Be Condemned," *Amnesty International*, June 28, 2017, accessed December 29, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/india-hate-crimes-against-muslims-and-rising-islamophobia-must-be-condemned/>.

<sup>45</sup> Cow, buffalo and ox meat is collectively referred to as beef in India. Given the federal structure of the country, every state has different rules pertaining to the slaughter, consumption and possession of their meat.

<sup>46</sup> Rajendra Sharma and Ashish Mehtal, "51 Cows of Muslim Family 'Snatched by Alwar Cops,'" *The Times of India*, October 15, 2017, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/51-cows-of-muslim-family-snatched-by-alwar-cops/articleshow/61086561.cms>.

<sup>47</sup> Guy Elcheroth and Stephen Reicher, *Identity, Violence and Power: Mobilising Hatred, Demobilising Dissent* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 132–55.

<sup>48</sup> Tanima Biswas, "Vishal Rana, Main Accused In Mohammad Akhlaq's Murder, Gets Bail," *NDTV*, August 1, 2017, accessed December 25, 2017, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/vishal-rana-main-accused-in-mohammad-akhlaqs-murder-gets-bail-1731774>.



<sup>49</sup> “India: Hate Crimes against Muslims.”

<sup>50</sup> Sandip Roy, “With Each Lynching, The Pradhan Sevak’s Silence Rings Out Louder,” *Huffington Post*, June 26, 2017, accessed January 15, 2018, [http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/06/26/with-each-lynching-the-pradhan-sevaks-silence-rings-out-louder\\_a\\_23001659/](http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/06/26/with-each-lynching-the-pradhan-sevaks-silence-rings-out-louder_a_23001659/).

<sup>51</sup> “India BJP Leader Says Muslims Should Stop Eating Beef,” *BBC*, October 15, 2015, accessed December 28, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34546960>.

<sup>52</sup> Asit Jolly, “Why Three Innocent Men Had to Die to Save the Cows,” *DailyO*, October 19, 2015, <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/dadri-lynching-hp-udhampur-akhlaq-noman-zahid-beef-cow-slaughter-bjp-ml-khattar-sakshi-maharaj-amit-shah/story/1/6859.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Dennis Kurzon, “Thematic Silence as a Speech Act: From Lexis to Discourse,” in *Implicitness: From Lexis to Discourse*, ed. Piotr Cap and Marta Dynel (The Netherlands: Benjamin Publishing, 2017), 217–32.

<sup>54</sup> Though one must note that this othering did not commence with the establishment of the abovementioned organizations.

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*ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL*  
VOLUME 4, NO. 2 Spring 2018, PP. 195–209.

Published by:

Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project,  
Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley

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## *Muslim Surveillance in Japan: A Narrative Aimed at Trivialization*

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**ABSTRACT:** In 2010, it came to light through leaked internal documents that the Japanese police were engaging in sweeping, blanket surveillance of all foreign national Muslims in the country. The police deemed all Muslims to be potential terrorists, surveilled mosques and other establishments, and clandestinely gathered detailed personal information on 72,000 persons. Almost immediately after the leak, a narrative was created by the media and the authorities, whereby Muslims had been subjected to harm through the malicious leaking of their personal information. This narrative recognized the responsibility of the police insofar as they had been unable to adequately secure the information; however, it served to deflect attention from the fundamental human rights issues. This narrative was eventually accepted by the Japanese judiciary, in a judgment with potentially grave consequences for human rights protection in Japan in general.

**Keywords:** surveillance, Japan, human rights, media, judiciary

### *INTRODUCTION*

On October 28, 2010, 114 internal documents of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police (TMP), totaling over 450 pages, were quietly published on the internet, using a popular file sharing application. To this day, it remains unclear who leaked the documents, what the objective was, and even whether the leaking was intentional. The leaked papers show that, from at least 2004, the Japanese police had been engaged in systematic and indiscriminate religious ethnoprofiling, with every Muslim residing in Japan considered to be a potential terrorist risk and put under extensive, highly intrusive surveillance. Mosques were deemed as potential “terrorist infrastructure” and were systematically surveilled, with attendees followed and detailed information gathered and stored in a police database.

Subsequent to the leaking of the documents, a narrative was created by the mainstream media and the authorities. In this narrative, the police were at fault for not having adequately secured personal and sensitive information collected in the course of antiterror operations; their responsibility for not having prevented the leaks was widely recognized. However, this narrative served to deflect any potential attention toward the fundamental issue, namely, that the blanket surveillance operation that the police had been engaging in for years was blatantly violative of international standards of human rights. There was no questioning of the notion that Muslims were, merely because they were Muslims, risks to national security that required extra scrutiny from the state.

This dominant narrative was eventually ratified by the Japanese judiciary, which accepted the surveillance as a “necessary measure” to prevent terrorism, and belittled its negative impact on human rights. The final judgment sets a worrying precedent for human rights protection in Japan.

### *RELIGIOUS PROFILING AND BLANKET SURVEILLANCE OPERATION*

The scope of the surveillance revealed in the papers is massive. Although official data regarding religion does not exist in Japan, one scholarly study estimated in 2012 that there was

a total of approximately 110,000 Muslims residing in the country (Tanada 2013, 11). Muslims in Japan naturally come from a wide range of countries, but all were deemed by the police as potential security risks, for no other reason but that they were Muslim. It should be stressed that though the documents leaked were predominantly from the TMP, and it appears that the TMP took the lead in the operation, the surveillance was a national effort, with police forces all over the country engaged. The operation targets all “nationals of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Muslims of other nationalities,” with the note that

with regard to persons with non OIC nationalities, officers should ascertain from the individual’s words, actions, or clothing etc. whether they are Muslim. . .when it is not clear, the officer should report to the Public Security officer to request a decision. (Keishicho 2007a, 1)

The TMP also lists several predominantly Muslim regions within particular countries not generally associated with the religion, namely, the Xinjiang province in China and certain provinces in Thailand and the Philippines<sup>1</sup> (Keishicho 2007a, 1). In one document in May 2008, the TMP states that they had collected and stored information on 12,677 persons, amounting to 89% of the 14,254 OIC nationals living in Tokyo (Keishicho 2008c, 1). The operation continued to expand in the run up to the G8 Summit in Hokkaido in July of that year, to the point where the TMP boasted that information had been collected on 72,000 OIC nationals nationally (Tokyo Chiho Saibansho 2014). Over 200 TMP police officers were assigned full-time duties related to the surveillance operation, in the run up to the 2008 Summit (Keishicho 2008d, 1), and special commendations were awarded to outstanding officers who expanded the bulk of data (Keishicho 2008c, 1).

Of course, not all Muslims in Japan are of foreign origin. The same 2012 study estimates that there are approximately 10,000 Muslims of Japanese origin (Tanada 2013, 11), but there is no acknowledgment of this population in any of the leaked documents. There is one document stressing the “threat of home grown terrorists,” but the paper refers only to the potential of foreign nationals becoming radicalized during their stay in Japan (Keishicho 2008b). The paper also stresses the “threat” of approximately 1,600 children of Muslims being raised in Japan, who will be in their late teens to early twenties during the next G8 summit to be held in the country, in 2016 (Keishicho 2008b, 5). Japanese spouses of foreign Muslims are mentioned in passing here and there in the documents, but there is no indication that they would also be targets of surveillance. However, at least two naturalized Japanese citizens of Middle Eastern origin *were* targeted for surveillance.

In the eyes of the Japanese police (and perhaps the majority of the Japanese populace—see, for example, Sato 2015), therefore, Muslims represent “the other” at two levels. Not only do they ascribe to a foreign, strange religion, but they are also by definition foreigners—either one being in and of itself a cause for suspicion. Even if a foreign national Muslim manages to obtain Japanese citizenship, he will always remain an “other,” with unknown, suspect loyalties. It may have been that this mind-set caused the Japanese police to overlook the possibility that an indigenous Japanese could convert to Islam.

Whatever the case, extremely detailed information was collected on individuals, including not only photographs, addresses, dates of entry into the country and immigration records, employment history, and family information but also attendance at mosques and general level of religious devotion. Some individuals were classified as informants, with details on any information they had provided, whereas others were clearly treated as suspects. In either case, police officers are instructed to cultivate relationships with Muslims, in the hope of obtaining

information on any radicalized elements within the community. The TMP provides guidelines on how to approach Muslims, including to “refrain from making comments on religion” and to “take care that the subjects do not get the idea that you are targeting them simply because they are foreigners” (Keishicho 2007a, 1).

Besides monitoring the entire Muslim community, several documents show that there was occasionally heightened surveillance of particular “high risk” individuals or groups. One document notes that “In light of the fact that [Japan] has sent the Self Defense Forces to Iraq in support of the United States. . . we must not be complacent regarding the risk of international terrorism” and goes on to state that particular risks are posed firstly by “individuals who exhibit strong anti-American tendencies in their actions, words, or past activities, and who may engage in illegal activities” (Keishicho 2005a, 1). It is indicative that the expression of “anti-American” political views is on its own treated as a potential terrorist flag and is linked intrinsically with “illegal activities.” The document states that individuals who “express extremely critical views of the United States, Western countries, Israel, or of Western culture” are also high risk, warranting extra care (Keishicho 2005a, 1).

There are no examples given of what may constitute “extremely critical views” and why such views should instantly classify a person as a terrorism risk in a country where freedom of expression is supposedly protected. One Kuwaiti national doing graduate studies in Tokyo is categorized as “high risk” because “he has tendencies leaning towards Osama bin Laden, e.g. stating that he ‘believes only the Prophet Muhammad. The US policies towards Islam are mistaken’” (Keishicho n.d.-c, 1).

Other criteria are aimed at gauging the target’s level of faith, showing that the TMP believed that devout Muslims are *ipso facto* potential terrorists. Individuals who “consistently engage in prayer and other religious rituals” or who “refrain from alcohol and non-halal food” are listed as terrorist risks (Keishicho 2005a, 1). Throughout the documents, observations are made regarding the level of religious devotion of target individuals and which mosques (if any) they attend regularly. One person is treated as a risk because he “started to pray after his first daughter was born” (Keishicho 2008e). Another is deemed as a potential terrorist because he attends Arabic classes with his children (Keishicho 2005d).

Yet other criteria for ascertaining “high risk” are even broader, to the point of being virtually meaningless. Persons who use prepaid phones or internet cafes are deemed to be suspicious, as are persons who carry cameras or who rent cars while they are staying at hotels. A shave is also a terrorist risk, as the TMP lists persons who “recently shaved their beards, etc.” as requiring heightened attention (Keishicho 2005, 1, 2). Even being a quiet, reserved person is grounds for suspicion, as potential terrorists apparently include people who “avoid standing out, and do not speak loudly” (Keishicho 2005a, 1).

At times, entire nationalities are deemed as “high risk” groups. One report refers to heightened surveillance of all Lebanese nationals in Tokyo, due to “concerns that Hezbollah might engage in attacks against Israeli interests” (Keishicho n.d.-a). Staff from the Iranian embassy in Tokyo were also surveilled, for no reason other than that “the United States has designated Iran as a terrorism supporting country” and “the newly elected President Ahmadinejad is thoroughly anti-Western.” The TMP secretly obtained from the bank of the Embassy account details of all staff, and monitored the flow of money for extended periods of time (Keishicho 2005b, 1; 2005c).

Facilities such as mosques, halal restaurants and food shops, and Muslim-owned businesses unrelated to religious activities (e.g. used car dealerships) were also subject to surveillance, as well as restaurants, factories, apartment buildings, and other facilities where Muslims lived or were employed. Officers are reminded “not to neglect curry restaurants” and bars as “it

has been confirmed that many Muslims” work at such businesses. Officers also surveilled student dorms (Keishicho 2007a, 1). Mosques in particular are deemed to be “high risk” for no reason other than that they are “[centers] for Japanese Muslims [sic] in the area. Persons who attend the mosque create their own community, and the mosque could therefore be used as terrorist infrastructure, a recruiting center, or a hub for Islamic organizations” (see Keishicho n.d.-b,1).

One report elaborates how police surveilled a mosque 24 hours a day (including using video cameras during the night), logging the number of persons who entered the mosque on each day and following newcomers to gather information. “Information of special note” in the report includes a note that a certain individual was absent from the mosque two weeks in a row, indicating the thoroughness with which the police approached the operation (Keishicho 2007c, 1). One 2008 document lists the total number of attendees at 14 mosques in Tokyo during the month of Ramadan as 22,750, with a detailed breakdown of attendance by facility and a comparison to Ramadan the previous year. The same report lists, in bold type, information about plans for new mosques in several locations in Tokyo (Keishicho 2008a, 1).

#### *“RESULTS” OF THE SURVEILLANCE*

This surveillance operation is reminiscent of operations in other countries that have come to light in recent years, in particular in New York City. Like those other operations, the TMP has very little to show in terms of concrete acts of terrorism that may have been prevented. The bureaucracy does, however, make considerable efforts to show results.

TMP highlights in several documents that they were able, in 2008, to arrest a foreign national (seemingly from an Arab country) who was attempting to establish an office of Hezbollah in Tokyo. According to the TMP, this person had been randomly approaching other Arab nationals in public places and inviting them to his home (which he called the “Hezbollah Japanese branch”), where he showed them videos of Hezbollah battling Israel and allegedly engaged in other “organizational activities.” This person also had a poster of Hassan Nasrallah prominently on display in his apartment, on the wall facing the direction of Mecca. There is no indication of any actual link to Hezbollah, real or even imagined by the individual concerned, and at least one commentator has noted that Hezbollah, famed for its secrecy, internal discipline, and standards of recruitment, would want to have nothing to do with such an oafish character (Tahara 2011, 103). The person was arrested on unrelated charges that were eventually dropped—however, the TMP boasts that it was able to ensure he was in detention during the 2008 G8 Summit, neutralizing any potential danger (Keishicho 2008a, 3, 4).

The only other specific case referred to, also from 2008, is that of a Pakistani national who had come to the TMP’s attention because of his allegedly “pro-jihad” postings in an internet chat room. TMP states that, upon further investigation, they determined that he “hated the United States and wanted them to leave Iraq” and felt that Pakistanis were subject to discrimination in Japan—neither of which are views that are particularly uncommon or controversial. The TMP confiscated his computer and put him under 24-hour surveillance but was unable to find evidence of any actual crime, and he was never charged (Aoki 2011, 50). Nevertheless, the TMP stresses both of these individuals had “strong anti American and anti Israel emotions” and that detecting such persons are “key” to the success of the operation (Keishicho 2008a, 4).

At least one commentator has pointed with dismay to the sheer incompetence of the police exposed in the documents. Basic knowledge of Islamic organizations is shown to be clearly lacking (see, for example, Tahara 2011, 102), and in one regional meeting of counter terrorist managers held by the National Police Agency (NPA), the police state they “are at a

complete loss with regard to gathering information through the internet. . . obviously special language skills are required. . . NPA has no great ideas, so we are open to any you might have” (Keisatsucho 2009, 2).

One document outlines a planned mission of the TMP to Malaysia, where they will

visit mosques in Kuala Lumpur and ascertain from their architectural structure whether they are Turkish, Persian, or Arab. [The mission will also] examine the languages of signs etc. in the vicinity of the mosques to ascertain what groups attend the mosques. (Keishicho 2007b, 4)

Tahara states that he

had to laugh. . . [this mission] can only be called taxpayer funded tourism. There is no connection in Malaysia between the architecture of a mosque and the affiliation of the attendees. . . This betrays the superficial level of the knowledge [of the TMP]. (Tahara 2011, 104)

The TMP also appears to think that the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), an Islamic political party in Malaysia, is a terrorist organization, and the mission plans to ask the law enforcement authorities in that country if they are aware of any PAS “cells” in Japan (Keishicho 2007b, 5).

#### *INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ON RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS PROFILING*

The practice of “profiling” a particular group for suspicion as a potential terrorist or other criminal threat merely on the basis of their ethnic, religious, or other affiliation is by definition a violation of the principle of nondiscrimination. Besides being a fundamental principle of international law, nondiscrimination is enumerated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Article 2 of the ICCPR notes that state parties must

respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the [ICCPR], without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,

whereas Article 26 states that “All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law.” The right to freedom of religion is enumerated in Article 18 of the ICCPR, which states that

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include. . . freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. (Article 18.1)

Like several other Articles in the ICCPR (not including Articles 2 and 26, above), Article 18 includes some grounds on which a state party can legitimately restrict the right to manifest one’s religion, stating in Article 18(3) that “Freedom to manifest one’s religion. . . may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order,

health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others” (Article 18.3). The Human Rights Committee (1993, 3), the body of independent experts created by the ICCPR to monitor implementation of its provisions, states that “In interpreting the scope of permissible limitation clauses, States parties should proceed from the need to protect the rights guaranteed under the [ICCPR], including the right to equality and non-discrimination.”

It is worth noting that, unlike most of the other similar Articles, this provision does not include national security as legitimate grounds for limitation—this was not an oversight, but an intentional omission on the part of the drafters (see Taylor 2005, 325). Nor can states derogate from Article 18, even in times of “public emergency which threatens the life of the nation” (Article 4).

Japan is a state party to the ICCPR, as well as the International Convention against All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which defines racial discrimination as

any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent or national origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social cultural or any other field of public life. (Article 1.1)

The question of profiling of Muslims as a terrorist threat, and the negative human rights implications thereof, has of course received heightened attention in the “war on terror.” Although in the strict sense, this would be “religious profiling,” for historical reasons the practice has often continued to be referred to as “racial profiling” or “ethnoreligious profiling.” The Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism<sup>2</sup> notes that “in practice, most terrorist profiles use ethnic appearance and national origin as proxies for religion, as religious affiliation is normally not readily identifiable (and in any case easy to conceal)” (Scheinin 2007, 13). As noted above, this was the case with the Japanese operation as it focused predominantly on nationality (or region of origin) as an indicator for the target’s religion.

In any case, the human rights standards applicable to racial profiling would, *mutatis mutandis*, apply to profiling on the basis of religion as well. The Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Intolerance notes that “racial and ethnic profiling. . .has targeted particular individuals and communities solely on the basis of their race, ethnicity, national origin *or religion*” (emphasis added) and that it

constitutes a violation of human rights. . .Because of its fundamentally discriminatory nature and because it exacerbates discrimination already suffered as a result of ethnic origin or minority status. . .The Special Rapporteur recommends a clear and unequivocal prohibition of the use of racial and ethnic profiling by law enforcement agencies. (Ruteere 2015, 18, 19)

The Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban:

Urges States to design, implement and enforce effective measures to eliminate the phenomenon popularly known as “racial profiling” and comprising the practice of police and other law enforcement officers relying, to any degree, on race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin as the basis for subjecting persons to investigatory activities, (United Nations [UN] 2001, 33)



a recommendation that was reiterated in the Review Document eight years later (UN 2009, 14).

Like other human rights treaties, both the ICCPR and the ICERD create independent committees (commonly known as “human rights treaty bodies”) to monitor implementation by state parties of the treaty’s provisions—the aforementioned CCPR in the case of the ICCPR and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) for ICERD. At regular intervals (every four years for ICCPR, every two years for ICERD), state parties are requested to provide reports to the relevant treaty body on the implementation of treaty provisions. Unsurprisingly, these “state reports” tend to gloss over problematic issues, so the treaty bodies also receive reports from NGOs and other actors on the state of human rights in the country. The treaty body engages in a dialogue with representatives of the state under review in a public session, often raising difficult questions for the delegation, and, at the end of the process, issues a set of recommendations (“Concluding Observations”) for the state to improve its human rights performance. The views of the treaty bodies are not legally binding, but they are understood to be authoritative determinations of a state’s human rights obligations, and states are expected to afford them appropriate weight. Treaty bodies have also pronounced concern regarding the blanket surveillance of Muslims, including, as shall be shown, on the Japan case.

#### *THE “PRIVACY” NARRATIVE VERSUS HUMAN RIGHTS*

Despite the clear conflict with Japan’s international human rights obligations, the Muslim surveillance case has been framed by the authorities, the mainstream Japanese media, and even by the Japanese judiciary as a simple case of sloppy handling of personal data, not a violation of the right to nondiscrimination and freedom of religion. The “problem” with the events, as presented in this narrative, was not that all Muslims were deemed by law enforcement as potential terrorists for no other reason than their religion and that officials engaged in sweeping surveillance in violation of international law. Rather, the “problem” was that this personal information had not been secured adequately and ended up being leaked to the public.

In this narrative, the case becomes analogous to the leaking of customer data by a private company. Muslim residents (more precisely, foreign national Muslim residents) were recognized as victims, but victims of a malicious leak, not victims of unlawful, violative surveillance. The police were widely admonished, but mainly for not having taken sufficient care in controlling the information collected. Questions about the operation itself were almost never raised.

From the initial leaking of the documents, the media reinforced this narrative. For example, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, a right-leaning newspaper boasting the largest circulation of all broadsheets at over 15% of all households in the country, published a total of 37 articles (including one editorial) from 2010 through the final court judgment in 2016. The newspaper is highly critical of the police’s mishandling of “information collected as part of counter terror investigations” and for the agency’s initial reticence to admit fault. However, at no point is it even suggested that the operation itself may have been unlawful or violative of human rights—indeed, one of the first articles stresses that “some of the Muslim foreign nationals cited in the documents. . .are suspected to have links with international terror groups,” thereby attempting to frame the operation as a legitimate one (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2010b). Interviews with victims do appear in some of the articles, but the harm they suffered is depicted solely as a result from the leaking of their information. Cynically, several articles even highlight how the police have arranged for protection for the people whose information had been leaked, arguably portraying the police in a positive, if not even heroic, light.

On the other end of the political spectrum, *Asahi Shimbun*, a left-leaning daily broadsheet that is the most influential among the educated class of the country, gave the case much less coverage, publishing a total of 14 articles during the same period. Although *Yomiuri* focuses on the police's inept handling of the leak, *Asahi's* criticism centers on the scale of the operation, arguing that the immense manpower and other resources could have been used more effectively—thereby also missing the fundamental point. The human rights-based arguments raised in court are detailed in two articles and connected to concerns that, if the authorities so wished, Japanese could potentially be subjected to the same sort of blanket surveillance. Those are of course valid concerns, but human rights should not only be important when Japanese are at risk.

Naturally, the trivialization of the entire case as one of “data mishandling,” as observed in *Yomiuri*, suited the authorities, who were quick to adopt it. Although the TMP initially refused to comment regarding the leaked documents, the agency eventually issued a statement in December 2010 admitting “a high likelihood that [the leaked documents contain] information collected by police officers” (Keishicho 2010). The TMP apologizes for the “distress and inconvenience” caused by the leaking of the information, but it does not acknowledge, and to this day has not acknowledged, the existence of the surveillance operation itself—rather, they claim implausibly that though information had been collected on potential security risks, there was never any targeted surveillance of Muslims as such.

Both the CCPR and CERD reviewed the performance of Japan in 2014, during the events. Unsurprisingly, the state reports submitted by the Japanese government made no mention of the surveillance case, but the issue was raised in submissions by civil society actors, leading to tough questioning of the government delegations during the public sessions.

In particular, members of CERD asked, “what was being done to end the blanket surveillance of Muslims” and “whether an apology would be issued to those concerned” (CERD 2014b, 6, 7). The government responded that

in order to protect public safety and maintain order, the police found it necessary to collect certain information in a fair and impartial manner and in accordance with the law. It did not however engage in excessive monitoring of the Muslim community . . . information on police information gathering activities was confidential. However, the Committee could rest assured that those activities were conducted in strict compliance with the law. (CERD 2014b, 3, 8)

Astoundingly, at the session of the CCPR (Human Rights Committee 2014b, 4), the delegation tried to shirk any responsibility for the events, stating that “a compensation claim had been filed in relation to the online disclosure of personal information pertaining to a number of Muslim citizens. The National Police wished to offer its support to the individuals affected.” Once again, the dominant narrative in Japan—and presumably in the minds of the government delegate who made this statement to the CCPR—was that it was the leak that was the “problem,” not the surveillance itself.

Unsurprisingly, neither treaty body was impressed by these responses and both had harsh words in their Concluding Observations. CERD (2014a, 9) stated that they

[considered] systematic collection of security information about individuals, solely on the basis of their belonging to an ethnic or ethno-religious group, a serious form of discrimination. . . The Committee urges the State party to ensure that its law enforcement officials do not rely on ethnic or ethno-religious profiling of Muslims.

The CCPR also expressed similar concerns (Human Rights Committee 2014a, 6).

*PROCEEDINGS IN THE JAPANESE COURTS*

Almost immediately after the leaking of the documents, it came to light that Dai-san Shokan (2010), a left-leaning publishing house in Tokyo, had published all the documents as a book, without any redaction of personal information such as names, addresses, and phone numbers. A group of 17 Muslims (including two naturalized Japanese citizens and two Japanese spouses of surveillance targets) whose information was included in the documents group petitioned the Tokyo District Court for an injunction to stop further publication, which was granted immediately. Dai-san Shokan argued that it had published the documents precisely to expose the surveillance operation as violating human rights, but the court criticized them for being “self-righteous” and subsequently ordered Dai-san Shokan to pay damages to the group (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2010a). *Yomiuri* is also very critical of Dai-san Shokan (perhaps also due to the publishing house’s political slant), citing at considerable length the judgment against the publication of documents as a “grave and irreversible violation of privacy.”

Soon afterward, the same group of Muslims filed another civil suit, demanding compensation from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Arguments based on international human rights standards such as the ICCPR and ICERD, as well as human rights provisions of the Japanese Constitution, were advanced in court. In January 2014, the Tokyo district court delivered a judgment awarding damages of JPY 5,500,000 (approximately USD 50,000) to each plaintiff save one, who was awarded a lesser sum of JPY 2,200,000. However, the judgment is based completely on the above narrative, namely that damages were owed only because the state had been unable to prevent the leaking of highly personal information. As shall be examined in detail below, the human rights-based arguments that the collection of that information had been unlawful from the outset were dismissed with inadequate, if not cursory, consideration. The group appealed to the appeals court, but this court reaffirmed the findings of the lower court, making only minor changes to the lower court ruling (a common practice in Japanese courts; Tokyo Kouto Saibansho 2015). On May 31, 2016, the Supreme Court dismissed the group’s appeal, confirming the judgment of the appeals court as the final judgment (Saiko Saibansho 2016).

The group’s arguments regarding the unlawfulness of the surveillance operation centered on three main points, namely that it had violated their right to be free from discrimination, their right to freedom of religion, and their right to privacy. These arguments are interrelated: the blanket manner of the operation, targeting all Muslims in the country simply on the basis of their faith, was clearly discriminatory and falls foul of the principle of nondiscrimination. The operation also prevented Muslims from exercising their freedom of religion: since merely being Muslim would lead to them to be treated with suspicion by the police, they were in effect discouraged from practicing their faith openly. Finally, the police violated the right to privacy of the individuals in the group as it collected and retained highly personal information without consent.

It is worth examining the judgment of the court, as it exhibits two tendencies. As noted above, the court consistently frames the case as one only of an invasion of privacy caused by the leaking of personal information. The arguments of the group that their human rights were violated by the surveillance itself were simply swept aside, with the court giving wide deference to the authorities. In addition, the court is quick to accept vague and generalized assertions that Muslims, by mere virtue of their religion, are a potential security threat and that special measures targeting the Muslim community are necessary to counter terrorism.

*Ethnoreligious Profiling: A "Necessary Activity"*

In a case of this nature, the court would first be expected to determine the rights at stake. The court would then examine, on the basis of the facts, whether the measures taken by the state had infringed on any of those rights. If that were answered in the positive, then the court would examine whether those measures could be justified in light of any of the permissible grounds for limitation, as noted above in the section on ICCPR and any applicable jurisprudence.

However, in this case, the court immediately put the cart before the horse, stating that the blanket surveillance of Muslims was "a necessary measure to prevent international terrorism" (Tokyo Chiho Saibansho 2014). Before making any other examinations, the court simply decided that surveillance was justified and used that as a lens through which it would view any question of rights violations. This created a practically insurmountable obstacle to any rights-based claim, at least regarding the surveillance itself since the court had already announced that the operation was legitimate.

In an attempt to justify the notion that the surveillance was "necessary," the court cites the US government's designation of a number of "radical Islamic" organizations as terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda and Hezbollah. The court produces a long list of terrorist attacks that had taken place "in recent years," starting with the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in the New York (none of the terrorist attacks had taken place in Japan) and then points to general statements by Al Qaeda to the effect that Japan (and other countries), as a country allied with the United States, was a potential terrorist target. There is no suggestion—in submissions of government lawyers or in the findings of the court—of any specific, concrete threat to Japan.

The court then cites the Dumont case, where it had come to light in 2004 that Lionel Dumont, a suspected high ranking member of Al Qaeda, and several other suspected members of the organization, had entered Japan and resided for a period of time between 2002 and 2003. The Dumont case is not connected in any way with the surveillance operation, but the court notes that Dumont was "a devout Muslim. He never failed to pray five times a day, and frequented mosques in [the areas of Japan where he resided]" (Tokyo Chiho Saibansho 2014). Although not stated in so many words, the logic of the court is clear: since Dumont, a known terrorist, practiced Islam with devotion, adherence to the principles of Islam must be an indicator of being a terrorist. This logic is a textbook definition of the religious profiling that, as noted above, is prohibited by international human rights law.

*The Right to Manifest One's Religion*

The court then construes the right to freedom of religion extremely narrowly, arguing that there was no infringement of this right insofar as the state did not resort to force to prevent Muslims from practicing their religion. The court states

Since there was no direct interference with Muslims' exercise of their religion, even supposing difficulties were caused regarding some religious matters, such difficulties would be of an indirect and unintended nature. . . Given that [the surveillance] was a necessary and inevitable measure to prevent terrorism, there is no violation of [human rights]. (Tokyo Chiho Saibansho 2014)

The notion advanced by the court, that the right to religion is infringed upon only if force is used, is extremely problematic. The court seems to believe that a state is only in

violation of the right to freedom of religion if it expressly bans a particular religion, forcibly closes down all its religion's facilities, and actively arrests and punishes persons who attempt to practice that religion in their own homes. This is clearly not what is envisioned by international standards, which prohibit (with limited exceptions, as noted above) any action that has the effect of hampering the manifestation of a particular religion (see, for example, Taylor 2005).

The court does touch on the potential effect on the targets of surveillance, but in an extremely casual manner. After reiterating that the operation was necessary to prevent terrorism, it states merely that "any effects on the plaintiffs' [rights] are limited to discomfort or aversion they may feel when police officers are in the area of, or inside, a mosque. . .there is therefore no violation of [the relevant constitutional provision]" (Tokyo Kouto Saibansho 2015). The cavalier way in which the court dismisses the effects of surveillance is difficult to justify, and in their submission to the Supreme Court, the group rightly objects, arguing

there are no grounds for the court to simply decide that Muslims feel only "discomfort or aversion" . . . When the police, without any concrete evidence of a crime. . . treat one as a "potential radical Islamic terrorist" without any justification, the affect will not be "discomfort," but "fear." (Musurimu kanshi jiken bengodan 2015, 43)

However, these arguments were not heeded by the court.

#### *CONCLUSION*

The Japanese Muslim surveillance case raises a number of troubling questions regarding the perception of Muslims in the country, in particular in official circles. Law enforcement authorities seemingly had no reluctance in treating all Muslims as potential terrorists for no reason other than their religious beliefs. Devotion to religious principles, such as praying five times a day or attending religious services regularly, were treated as red flags indicating a heightened security risk. Criticism of American foreign policy, in particular military adventures in the Middle East, and the Israeli occupation of Palestine also lead people to be branded as particularly dangerous, requiring heightened attention.

The judiciary as well was quick to accept vague, unsubstantiated assertions by the government that all Muslims pose a high terrorist risk and legitimized official religious profiling in violation of international law. In addition, it is telling that at no point in the minds of any official actors involved did it seem to occur that the Muslim community could include indigenous Japanese—The Muslim was always a foreign, threatening, and monolithic "other."

As noted above, the court did award considerable damages. Nevertheless, this was in accordance with the dominant narrative created almost immediately after the leaking of the documents, that whatever harm the victims had suffered was because of the leaking of their information—not because of the violative gathering of the information itself. This narrative served to deflect attention away from the fundamental human rights issues and to diminish the gravity of the entire case.

From the purely human rights point of view, the case sets an extremely worrying precedent. The court disregarded completely international human rights standards and found in favor of mass surveillance of an entire religious minority, on the basis of sweeping claims only vaguely connected with national security. The implications for human rights protection in Japan as a whole are potentially grave.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is indebted to Makoto Iwai Esq. for his comments on an earlier version of this paper. Responsibility for the paper lies with the author alone.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>It is not clear why no mention is made of predominantly Muslim provinces of Myanmar.

<sup>2</sup>Special Rapporteurs are independent experts appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council to report on particular human rights issues of concern.

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*Schools of Thought in  
Islamophobia Studies: Prejudice,  
Racism, and Decoloniality*

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*ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL*  
VOLUME 4, NO. 2 Spring 2018, PP. 210–225.

Published by:

Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project,  
Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley

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*Schools of Thought in Islamophobia Studies: Prejudice,  
Racism, and Decoloniality*

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**ABSTRACT:** Anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia are not just phenomena—they have increasingly become the focus of a new field of research: Islamophobia studies. Frequent national and international conferences and publications in this area bear witness to this. This article discusses the different prominent approaches to the concepts of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism that can be found in academic literature. It discusses the different theoretical strands within Islamophobia studies rather than the commonalities they share. In broad terms, three “schools of thought” can be identified in Islamophobia studies. The first conducts research on Islamophobia in the context of prejudice studies, the second is informed by racism studies and draws on the postcolonial tradition, and the third contributes to the second through the addition of a decolonial perspective.

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, anti-Muslim racism, prejudice studies, postcolonial studies, decoloniality, critical race theory

*INTRODUCTION*

In a review in *Ethnicities*, Brian Klug (2012, 666) surveyed the already growing literature on Islamophobia and stated that Islamophobia is a concept that has come of age, as it now “functions as an organizing principle for scholarship and research.” In the Anglosphere, Islamophobia has become widely accepted as a term to name the racism focused on the figure of the “Muslim,” and its historical development and genealogy has been traced in great detail (Allen 2010); however, in other parts of the world (especially in Europe), the terminology itself is still questioned a great deal, not only by Islamophobes but also within academic spheres. Hence, numerous articles have been written to discuss the semantics and etymology of Islamophobia (Muftic 2015) and to propose alternative terminologies, as was the case in the late 1990s in Fred Halliday’s (1999) work. This article pursues a different goal. Rather than discussing what the correct terminology might be, we will explore the meaning, theories, and concepts behind what authors mean when they refer to Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism in the more theory-based literature on the topic, as Klug (2012) has already done to some extent in his review article.

While the idea of Islamophobia first appeared in 1910 in the context of French colonization in Algeria (Allen 2010), the definition provided by the British think tank the Runnymede Trust was the first to introduce the concept to a wider audience in 1997. Nevertheless, we can see a diverse development of the meaning different authors ascribe to Islamophobia and/or anti-Muslim racism. While numerous scholarly books began to appear around 2005 (Klug 2012, 666), within the subsequent 10 years we can even argue that a new field of “Islamophobia studies” is in the process of emerging. It is materializing in many ways in academic institutions. Since 2010, Hatem Bazian has organized the annual International Islamophobia Studies Conference at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, and since 2013, a Transatlantic Islamophobia Studies Conference has been held in Paris.

Since 2014, Farid Hafez from the University of Salzburg has organized the biannual Islamophobia Studies Conference for three German-speaking countries: Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. He is also the editor of the *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook*, which he founded back in 2010. Since 2012, Bazian has edited the *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, a biannual journal. He organizes these activities at the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project at the Center for Race and Gender at UC Berkeley. In addition, the Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University, headed by John Esposito, is a permanent research project dedicated to the study of Islamophobia. Moreover, several think tanks, such as the US-based Center for American Progress and the Turkey-based Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, have been regularly putting out research publications on Islamophobia. Armin Muftic (2016) frequently updates an international bibliography for Islamophobia studies, currently including more than 1,100 titles; 210 books, 60 edited volumes, and 346 articles in books and 502 journal articles. In 2017, these efforts culminated in the establishment of the Islamophobia Studies Consortium comprising more than 20 universities from all over the world. Alongside many other irregular conferences and publications, the emergence of these institutions and fora testifies to the emergence of Islamophobia studies.

At the same time, the rise of Islamophobia studies does not mean that authors have a common conception of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism. Consequently, this article intends to map the field of Islamophobia studies and identify different theoretical approaches in the large amount of work that has been produced by the academic community thus far. I especially concentrate on the more theory-based literature on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism and those organizations that are, today, part of what I have called institutions that conduct work in Islamophobia studies. I aim to map different theoretical approaches to Islamophobia studies and anti-Muslim racism studies.

In the next section, I will briefly discuss the main assumptions in the initial definition of Islamophobia that was proposed by the Runnymede Trust, which ultimately established the foundation for the debates that followed for a long time (Bleich 2011, 1582). The third section will discuss theoretical literature that has very much stuck to the definition as proposed by the Runnymede Trust, which can be categorized as prejudice studies. The section that follows discusses approaches that are more rooted in critical race theory and include important postcolonial approaches. Many of these authors—especially beyond the Anglo-Saxon world—explicitly refer to the notion of “anti-Muslim racism” and refuse to even use the term Islamophobia. The penultimate section discusses the literature that explicitly uses a decolonial perspective, before I draw some conclusions in the final section. This article is the first of its kind to theoretically map the field of Islamophobia studies. The aim of this article is not to present an innovative new approach or evaluate strengths and weaknesses of every approach, albeit the critique of every approach in these three schools already entails substantive criticism and arguments towards the other.

#### NAMING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Without a doubt, Islam and Muslims today have become a global topic of debate, from Los Angeles to Tokyo, from Stockholm to South Africa. Questions of how to integrate Muslims, how to accommodate the Islamic religion, and how potentially dangerous Islam is to the achievement of peace on earth appear to be widespread. How one should think about Islam and Muslims has become a relevant political position, in addition to considering the positions Muslims have in society and the positions they ought to have. Frequent public debates have kept the figure of the Muslim in the spotlight, whether these discussions concern terrorist

attacks, bestselling books, or events—including the most recent “Muslim ban” of US President Donald Trump or the advice given by the European Court of Justice to regulate the wearing of the hijab—that are divided along religious lines of difference. As a consequence, an impression is created about what is really at stake concerning an imagined “real Islam” and “real Muslims.”

As I have already indicated, the first terminological definition of Islamophobia was offered in 1997 by the Runnymede Trust in its report: “Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All.” The report was authored by the then newly established multi-ethnic and multi-religious Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. In this report, Islamophobia was defined as holding “closed views of Islam.” These views include seeing Islam and Muslims as the following:

1. A single monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities.
2. Separate and other—(a) not having any aims or values in common with other cultures, (b) not affected by [other cultures], and (c) not influencing [other cultures].
3. Inferior to the West—barbaric, irrational, primitive, or sexist.
4. Violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, or engaged in “a clash of civilizations.”
5. A political ideology, used for political or military advantage.

These “closed views” may lead to the following:

6. Criticisms made by Islam of “the West” being rejected out of hand.
7. Hostility towards Islam being used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.
8. Anti-Muslim hostility being accepted as natural and “normal.”

In contrast to these “closed views,” the Runnymede Trust presented “open views of Islam” as an alternative. These “open views” are characterized as follows:

1. Islam [is] seen as diverse and progressive, with internal differences, debates, and development.
2. Islam [is] seen as interdependent with other faiths and cultures—(a) having certain shared values and aims, (b) affected by (other faiths and cultures), and (c) enriching [other faiths and cultures].
3. Islam [is] seen as distinctively different, but not deficient, and as equally worthy of respect.
4. Islam [is] seen as an actual or potential partner in joint cooperative enterprises and in the solution of shared problems.
5. Islam [is] seen as a genuine religious faith, practiced sincerely by its adherents.
6. Criticisms [by Islam] of “the West” and other cultures are considered and debated.
7. Debates and disagreements with Islam do not diminish efforts to combat discrimination and exclusion.
8. Critical views of Islam are themselves subjected to critique, lest they be inaccurate and unfair.

This definition has provoked several criticisms. I will quote part of the critique from Mohammad Tamdgidi, who expressed his discomfort with the dichotomized categorization the Runnymede Trust produced. According to him, the

Runnymede Trust's "open views of Islam" unfortunately falls in the trap of regarding Islam monolithically, in turn as being characterized by one or another trait, and does not adequately express the complex heterogeneity of a historical phenomenon whose contradictory interpretations, traditions, and sociopolitical trends have been shaped and has in turn been shaped, as in the case of any world tradition, by other world-historical forces. (Tamdgidi 2012, 76)

In addition, he views the proposed "open views of Islam" list as an oversimplification and distortion of the tradition of Islam "away from its complex heterogeneity and in favor of a monolithic view that is simplistically portrayed as being all positive" (Tamdgidi 2012, 77). Tamdgidi, in my view, is right in this critique, but it still very much relies on the notion—although plural—of a real "Islam." As a result, although he criticizes the construction of Islamophobia and Islamophilia as "aspects of the West's epistemic racism and its own looking glass self-projected upon colonized subjects as if it points to their essential attributes" (Tamdgidi 2012, 78), there remains an attempt to ontologize the categories of "Islam" and "Muslims" within the concept of Islamophobia.

It can be assumed that the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (consisting of Muslims and Non-Muslims) proposed this definition due to general disquiet among Muslims, who often lack agency in public spheres and attempted to create a positive self-image through this definition, something which has been observed in African American movements (Hall 1994, 15–25), for example by asserting that God was a black man (Cone 1969). Similar to other conceptions of racism this first definition of Islamophobia created a category for Islam and Muslims that is stabilized and continuously reaffirmed by uttering the word "Islam" (Terkessidis 2004, 53–66). It ultimately constructs the category "Islam" itself by looking at it from the perspective of an Islamophobe.

Nevertheless, there are some points that the Runnymede Trust affirmed and that have largely been shared across the literature in Islamophobia studies until today. Specifically, a common view is that Islamophobia works through homogenization, views Islam as inferior and an enemy, and leads to discrimination. These characterizations have been collectively asserted by most authors in the vast literature on Islamophobia.

### *PREJUDICE STUDIES*

The impact of the Runnymede Trust's definition can be seen in the project called The Bridge Initiative, which was led by John Esposito at the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim–Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. It defines Islamophobia as follows:

Islamophobia is prejudice towards or discrimination against Muslims due to their religion, or perceived religious, national, or ethnic identity associated with Islam. Like anti-Semitism, racism, and homophobia, Islamophobia describes mentalities and actions that demean an entire class of people. Jews, African-Americans, and other populations throughout history have faced prejudice and discrimination. Islamophobia is simply another reincarnation of this unfortunate trend of bigotry. (The Bridge Initiative 2016b)

According to this definition, Islamophobia is, once again, first and foremost about Muslims. It shares the traits of generalization, simplification, and negative attribution that lead to discrimination, as demonstrated by the Runnymede Trust.

At the same time, it clarifies what it does not mean by Islamophobia: “Rational criticism of Islam or Muslims based on factual evidence is not intrinsically Islamophobia, just as criticism of the tenets or followers of other religions or ethnic groups does not necessarily indicate bigotry or prejudice” (The Bridge Initiative 2016b). In this statement, the Bridge Initiative counters criticism of the notion of Islamophilia, which was challenged for being an implicit part of the Runnymede Trust’s definition of Islamophobia. However, it does ultimately still operate within the notion of the existence of a “good Muslim.” One article from the Bridge Initiative, which dealt with the election campaign of the current president, Donald Trump, states that Trump was “wrong about Muslims” (The Bridge Initiative 2016a). But the question still remains: was he really wrong or might something else explain his prejudiced views?

In part, the approach of the former head of the Berlin Center for Antisemitism Studies, Wolfgang Benz, can also be seen to belong to this school of thought. He is certainly one of the first authors within the German-speaking literature to have engaged with the concept of Islamophobia (under the names of *Islamfeindschaft* and *Islamfeindlichkeit*) and enriched the study of Islamophobia with his expertise in the long-established field of anti-Semitism studies (Benz 2009, 2011). At the same time, Benz defines Islamophobia in his writing as a form of “resentment.” Resentments are defined by Benz (2011, 161) as “dangerous.” He argues, “They start as prejudice and have the tendency to culminate in hatred of stigmatized individuals, groups, and ethnic, religious, or national communities, hatred that is released by violence” (Benz 2011, 161). Benz (2009, 9–20) explicitly frames Islamophobia within the context of prejudice studies and attributes it to social psychology (Benz 2011, 165). For him, the majority–minority relationship is a fundamental component of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (Benz 2011, 183). The conceptualization of minorities and majorities implies the existence of real subjects. Here both Esposito and Benz follow what I would call the school of prejudice studies, in which Islamophobia is regarded as an expression of mentalities and actions, a form of prejudice. This is an approach from social psychology and attempts to explain prejudice as the result of social-psychological behavior patterns (Jaschke 2013).

At the same time, it must be said that not all social-psychological approaches necessarily have to exclude dimensions of power and domination, although they primarily focus on individual patterns of thought and individual patterns of action. As a result, not all work in prejudice studies fundamentally neglects structures of power and domination. Various approaches in prejudice studies, such as social dominance theory (Heitmeyer 2002) and critical social psychology, do in fact incorporate questions of power. Consequently, the designers of the long-term study on right-wing attitudes in German society (Decker et al. 2016, 11–21) argue that ideologies of inequality are not only directed against individuals. In contrast, they emphasize that such individual aggressions also go hand in hand with the aim of enforcing authoritarian and anti-democratic societal structures (Decker et al. 2016, 11). Both authors point out that the focus on individual attitudes in their research can never be thought of separately from society as a whole: “As people with authoritarian or ethnocentric attitudes vehemently turn against an open society, they themselves are the product of this society” (Decker et al. 2016, 12). Similarly, other social-psychological approaches that deal with Islamophobia also incorporate power structures into their analyses (Ünal 2016).

In addition to the critique of the absence of power relations in many approaches to Islamophobia studies that are based on prejudice studies, there is another central aspect that should be mentioned here that I have already gestured towards several times. According to a critique that stems from racism studies in general and anti-Semitism studies in particular, questions pertaining to Islam and Muslims should be separated from one another, as has been done in anti-Semitism studies. The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1976, 8) presented this

theorem clearly in his essay “Anti-Semite and Jew”: “If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him.” Many authors have built on this analogy between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (Hafez 2010b; Levey and Modood 2009). Following this reasoning, Edward Said made an early statement in this area in his book *Orientalism*:

Additionally, the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, regressions, investments, and projections. (Said 1979, 16).

This means that we are not necessarily talking about real forms of “Islam” but rather about images of Islam, which serve the conception of the “self” and the “other.” The “Muslim Other” is used in Islamophobic discourses for the projection of the self’s deficits, which are negatively framed.

A frequently recurring statement in the public discourse on Islam, which is a vivid example of the power of the imagination, is that “not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims.” This statement tells us less about reality than it does about representation—that is, the perception—of terror in associated media coverage (Friedrich and Schultes 2013). This is because the very concept of Muslim people, as well as that of Jewish people in anti-Semitism, is an abstract one used to conceal mental processes. As Sartre said, “Far from experience producing his idea of the Jew, it was the latter [idea about the Jew, author/s] which explained his experience” (Said 1979, 8).

Nevertheless, as already noted before, the prejudice studies approach to Islamophobia studies has especially contributed in studies on how Islamophobia works through homogenization, making “Islam” inferior and discriminating Muslims. But criticism of the neglect of power structures and the use of ontological categories for “Islam” and “Muslims” are taken into consideration in what I consider to be the most prominent strand in academic Islamophobia studies literature today: racism studies informed by the central assumptions of postcolonial theory, such as othering and power relations. Klug observed as early as 2012 that a shift in the literature was occurring in the direction of viewing Islamophobia through the lens of racialization (Klug 2012, 677). I will outline this approach in the next section.

#### POSTCOLONIALITY AND RACISM STUDIES

Postcolonial studies do not have a unified theory or methodology. Nevertheless, its essential ideas derive from the works of Edward Said (*Orientalism*, 1978), Gayatri Spivak (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 1988), and Homi Bhabha (*Nation and Narration*, 1990). From this literature, basic concepts such as Othering (Said), subalternity (Spivak), and representation, hybridity, and the provincialization of Europe (Bhabha) are taken. The notion of “postcolonialism” does not—in a narrow sense—refer to a merely historical understanding of colonialism. As the decolonial thinker Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues, the notion of coloniality refers to something different than colonialism:

Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as

a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243)

This is what postcolonial studies discusses. Racism studies has adopted the essential assumptions of postcolonial thinkers, such as the construction of race, and the role dominance and power relations play, among other things.

One of the central concerns of current work in racism studies can be observed in the deconstruction of basic assumptions that stabilize and reproduce the most basic racialized constructions, which form the bases for racist thought. As a result, for most authors today, engaging in the discipline of Islamophobia studies does not mean engaging with Islam and Muslims, but rather with the dominant culture (Attia et al. 2015) in those societies where anti-Muslim racism is located. Consequently, it is not just about Islam. It is also less about the nature of Islamophobia, as this only gives us information about the make-up of Islamophobic, dominant societies themselves. According to this argumentation, the 9/11 attacks, as well as other terrorist attacks carried out by so-called "Islamists," were never the origin of Islamophobia. Many of the works, inspired by the Foucauldian theory of the power/knowledge complex, analyze Islamophobia as a form of discourse (Hafez 2010b, 2017; Kallis 2013; Prasad 2013; Pucher 2012; Ramm 2009; Saeed 2007; Schiffer and Wagner 2011; Shumsky 2004; Ureta and Profanter 2011). According to this theorization, the aim of Islamophobia studies is to criticize power structures that aim to govern the subjects they have constructed.

Iman Attia, who wrote about anti-Muslim racism as early as the late 1990s, took the issue up again in her 2007 publication after the topic became more obviously virulent in society. According to her, studying anti-Muslim racism entails the deconstruction of social processes of construction carried out by power structures. For her, it is about a "hegemonic-critical revision of dominant images and discourses . . . which serve the stabilization of power" (Attia 2007, 5–7). According to her, anti-Muslim racism is a form of cultural racism, in which "religion is . . . culturalized and transformed into the essential components of the cultural conceptions of self and other" (Attia 2007, 9).

There are a number of other works that share this wider conception of racism in which a racialization of actual or attributed religious belonging takes place. While many authors in the academic sphere follow this line of argumentation, it should be mentioned here that a conceptualization of Islamophobia that is informed by racism studies appeared at quite an early stage in the Anglosphere, as we can see in Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown's (2004, 29) introduction work to their book on *Racism*, as well as those by Nasar Meer, Tariq Modood, and many others (Kyriakides et al. 2009; Meer and Modood 2009, 2010, 2012). At the same time, we should not underestimate the diversity of racism studies as a field, and it is not sufficient to state that Islamophobia is a form of racism, as we encounter several competing notions of racism. Thus a "racism without races" (Balibar et al. 1990, 28) gives us a different conceptualization of anti-Muslim racism, in which the identity aspect of religion is placed to the fore compared to other notions of racism and the emphasis on religion in the construction of difference is only a semantic one. Brown, for example, argues that an analytical distinction is made between the racialization of an ethnic group, on one hand, and a religious group, on the other. The second form of racialization does not primarily focus on biological and somatic differences, according to Brown (2000, 74). This distinction between racialization and racism is rejected by other authors. Mark Terkessidis (2004, 98), for example, interprets racialization in a broader way as a process "in which, on the one hand, a group of people is defined as a natural group through certain characteristics and, at the same time, the nature of this group is constructed in



relation to one's own group." This broader understanding of racism makes it easier to include anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia within such a concept of racism.

Hafez has proposed the following definition in his *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook*:

When talking about Islamophobia, we mean anti-Muslim racism. As Anti-Semitism Studies has shown, the etymological components of a word do not necessarily point to its complete meaning, nor how it is used. Such is also the case with Islamophobia Studies. Islamophobia has become a well known term used in academia as much as in the public sphere. Criticism of Muslims or of the Islamic religion is not necessarily Islamophobic. Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilizing and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat—real or invented—and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed “we.” Islamophobia operates by constructing a static “Muslim” identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalized for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts, because Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam.<sup>1</sup>

While Hafez's definition emphasizes power structures, others have also explicitly pointed to the crucial relevance of considering racism as a “social relationship.” Benjamin Opratko and Fanny Müller-Uri thus criticize Deepa Kumar's conceptualization of Islamophobia as a “power tool” as “reminiscent of earlier Marxist conceptions of racism as a tool, used by the ruling elites to divide the subaltern classes” (2016, 120). They utilize critical race theory and attempt to go beyond functionalist and instrumentalist conceptions of racism. For them, the “culturalization as well as economization of the social come together in the figure of ‘the Muslim’” (Opratko and Müller-Uri 2016, 127). Anti-Muslim racism here is understood as “a central dimension of the hegemonic structure of Western societies” (Müller-Uri 2014, 127). What Müller-Uri presents here is a larger and structural conception of racism. The focus is not on a person to be a racist, but the awareness of our racist practices, which are inscribed in our socialization and knowledge. Based on this conceptualization, other authors argue that there is a “structural, implicit, or unconscious process of racial othering, which can accompany all our actions, and an obviously focused, explicit, and conscious doing of race” (Kreutzer 2015, 21). The concept of “dominant society” addresses precisely this structural dimension of anti-Muslim racism. In this context, anti-Muslim racism is understood as a “dominated social relationship” (Müller-Uri 2014, 62), an ideological discourse, or symbolic or epistemic violence (following Spivak) in an asymmetrical power relationship that devalues the “other” and valorizes the self (Müller-Uri 2014, 68).

Drawing on Frantz Fanon and Theodor W. Adorno, Müller-Uri (2014, 91) argues, by taking into consideration the apparent post-racial turn in Europe, that anti-Muslim racism is about “an essentialist conception of culture, which appears as the functional equivalent of the biological racial concept,” which in this case does not refer to culture, but rather to religion. Central to this is the naturalization of a cultural or religious difference, which constitutes the ideological core of all racisms (Müller-Uri 2014, 96). Müller-Uri (2014, 97) reminds us that Jews were already regarded to be a “mental race” in anti-Semitic thought, which meant that they were “culturally not assimilable.” And so too today the figure of the Muslim is imagined as an object, who is deindividualized within a collective and constructed in a way that follows similar patterns to that of an essentialized Muslim culture. Referring to Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, and Jacques Derrida, Iman Attia (2009, 23) highlights, with regard to Europe, that “exploitation . . . no longer works exclusively or primarily through direct violence” but “goes hand in hand

with cultural hegemony.” According to Attia (2009, 23), “the focus on culture . . . thus places culture as the third element alongside structure and subject.” This further serves to regulate this “danger.” As Attia (2009, 89) points out elsewhere, “anti-Muslim discourses are presented as a form of self-defence, which is analogous to national-socialist and right-wing presentations of anti-Semitic discourses, which have previously been framed as a form of self-defence.”

While this strand of Islamophobia studies draws primarily on the area of racism studies that is informed by critical race theory and tends to abandon the notion of Islamophobia itself, there is another strand that includes the postcolonial approach but takes it a step further. This approach does not consider the project of deconstructing epistemic Eurocentric violence and narratives of anti-Muslim racism in hegemonic Islamophobic discourses to be the most central issue within its analysis. It not only argues, as Achille Mbembe (2014, 23) does in his “Critique of Black Reason,” that Islamophobia merely allowed an already existing structure of colonial thinking to expand widely. This postcolonial tradition already has a global perspective and frames Islamophobia within the history of the “modern world system” as “a history of the expansion of European states and peoples into the rest of the world” (Wallerstein 2007, 11), but, at the same time, criticizes the Eurocentrism they see as inherent to this approach (Grosfoguel 2011, 2). This approach is called a “decolonial” practice, which I will outline in the next section by drawing mainly on the research of Ramon Grosfoguel who, like Hatem Bazian, works on Islamophobia from a decolonial perspective and has theorized it in highly explicit ways.

#### *DECOLONIALITY*

The Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project, which was founded by Bazian at the Center for Race and Gender at UC Berkeley, offers the following working definition of Islamophobia:

Islamophobia is a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve “civilizational rehab” of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise). Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended. (Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project 2016)

This approach differs in its global perspective. It reflects Grosfoguel’s (2016, 10) definition of racism as “a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the lines of the human that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the ‘capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system’.” Grosfoguel uses this description to express that the culturalist and structuralist reduction of characterizations of the world system is misleading. Instead, he deploys the concept of the

coloniality of power as an . . . intersectionality . . . of multiple and heterogeneous global hierarchies (“heterarchies”) of sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures. (Grosfoguel 2011, 10)

His approach is based on a more interlinked and non-hierarchical understanding of the economic structure versus the cultural system. He conceptualizes both “global ideological/symbolic and colonial/racist culture as constitutive, together with accumulation processes and the inter-state system, of the core–periphery relationships at a world-scale” (Grosfoguel 2011, 16).

So, what is the difference between postcolonial and decolonial studies? Decolonial scholars do not deny the important contributions made by postcolonial studies, and they also explicitly build on the critique carried out by postcolonial studies in Western knowledge production. However, scholars in decolonial studies, such as Anibal Quijano (2007), María Lugones (2007), and Walter D. Mignolo (Mignolo 2000), see themselves as making an intervention in postcolonial studies.

Grosfoguel’s (2011, 3) project within decoloniality is—as it is for others—the decolonization of postcolonial thought that is intellectually focused on Eurocentric thinkers who are embedded in the poststructuralist/postmodern Western canon, such as Foucault, Derrida, and Gramsci (Grosfoguel 2011, 2). He argues for a critique of modernity from the Global South that is critical of both Eurocentrism and Third World fundamentalism and instead pursues: (1) a decolonial epistemic perspective that employs a broader canon of thought, (2) a critical dialogue between diverse epistemic/ethical/political projects that moves towards a pluriversal (instead of universal) world, and (3) an adaptation to the epistemic perspective of thinkers from the Global South (Grosfoguel 2011, 3). He proposes numerous ways of countering Eurocentric epistemology (Grosfoguel 2011, 25). The fight against Islamophobia, which he conceptualizes as a form of racism, becomes part of a larger global struggle against racialized inequalities and exploitation. It is essentially an epistemological struggle of the subaltern, which Grosfoguel considers to have agency in contesting the current world system.

Grosfoguel identifies different forms of Islamophobia at work. One form stems from a global historical perspective, beginning in 1492 with the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the European peninsula and the origins of the transatlantic slave trade. The other is a form of cultural racism that began with the end of Nazi Germany, anti-colonial struggles, and the civil rights movements in the West. Other forms are Orientalism, in relation to the tropes that are used, and epistemological racism, “the most invisible form of racism” (Grosfoguel 2012, 19), which delegitimizes Muslim subaltern voices and positions Western hegemonic actors as the objective parties. Grosfoguel (2011, 2) makes a distinction “between those who read subalternity as a postmodern critique (which represents a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism) and those who read subalternity as a decolonial critique.” This is exactly the point where the Muslim subject re-enters the debate from the peripheral backdoor of Western world domination.

Decolonial scholars, such as Salman Sayyid, explicitly refer to decolonial thought in relation to Islamophobia studies. For Sayyid, the “Muslim question,” as it is construed in Europe, points to a series of interrogations and speculations that reveal a difficulty in Western dominance over Islam/Muslims. These, in turn, would open up an arena of cultural, governmental, and epistemological intervention (Sayyid 2014, 3). According to Sayyid (2014, 4–5), the figure of the “Muselmann” represents the Muslim who has to be controlled, but who at the same time is also a living dead figure, who has no agency. He believes that the problem for Muslims does not have as much to do with the essentialist concepts that are used to describe them (which, in current literature, is in fact the main focus of the approach informed by postcolonial studies and critical race theory). Instead, he argues that the challenge of being Muslim today is that there is no epistemological or political space for the identity (Sayyid 2014, 8). Accordingly, the inclusion of Islam in Western epistemology as a concept would destabilize the colonial order. Sayyid wants to introduce a post-positivist, post-orientalist, and decolonial perspective to create exactly this space. For him, decolonization is the method needed to create a potential

global demos. For Sayyid, it is not democracy in its present form, along with the attendant socio-economic neoliberal order, which is capable of creating such a global demos free from racism. Drawing on Mignolo, he refers to decoloniality as a project of “epistemic disobedience” (Sayyid 2014, 12). For Sayyid, decoloniality is not an attempt to eliminate all power structures, nor is it an attempt to establish a utopia. Rather, he sees decoloniality as an attempt to overcome the maxim of colonialism/modernity, namely the violent hierarchy of the West and the non-West. For Sayyid (2014, 13), the decolonial project is a struggle for the potential decentralization of the West. He is concerned with the attempt to give the Muslim subject a name in the world and not to leave them speechless and at the mercy of postcolonial relations, orientalist patterns of thought, and positivist epistemology. For Sayyid, Islamophobia is considered here as an attempt to prevent the Muslim subject from being given a place in the world as a Muslim. As a result, the Muslim subject re-enters the concept of Islamophobia through the backdoor of a critique of the current world system. To name this space, the decolonial theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres (n.d., 24) proposed a way to achieve decolonial epistemic disobedience in his 10 theses, which frame the decolonial project in such a way that an individual subject will emerge as: a “questioner, thinker, theorist, writer, and communicator”; a creator involved in an aesthetic, erotic, and spiritual decolonial turn (26); an agent of social change (28); and, lastly, an actor in a collective (28). In this sense, Sayyid becomes a Muslim agent who regards Islamophobia as a hindrance to this project of achieving Muslim agency in the global world system.

#### CONCLUSION

This article provided an overview of theoretical debates in the field of Islamophobia studies since the first systematic definition was provided in 1997. I argue that we can speak broadly of three different schools of thought in Islamophobia studies. The first school conducts research in Islamophobia studies as primarily a form of prejudice studies. Representatives of this school, which I have discussed in this article, are John Esposito (Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University) and Wolfgang Benz (Center for Anti-Semitism Studies). Beyond this work, there is a large amount of literature that shares the basic assumptions of this approach (see also: Bunzl 2007; L. Brown et al. 2013; Lean 2012). The second school, which views Islamophobia through the lens of racialization, places Islamophobia primarily in an asymmetrical power relationship and makes theoretical links to critical race studies and postcolonial studies. This approach is perhaps the most widespread current approach within academic literature, finding especially large—although not exclusive—acceptance among the sections of that academic community that prefer to employ the notion of anti-Muslim racism rather than Islamophobia. We can particularly mention the works of Nasar Meer and Brian Klug in the Anglosphere and the works of Iman Attia and Fanny Müller-Uri in the German literature, which are all based on critical race theory. Most of this literature relies on a broader understanding of racism and conceptualizes racialization primarily as a form of essentialization, where it separates cultural racism from phenotypical characteristics. At the same time, there is also reason to believe that for some racist actors—especially within the right-wing camp—religion is nothing but an expression of the cultural abilities of a certain race (Priester 2003, 268–98). Thus, the general debate in racism studies of whether culture is a mere substitute for race or rather a euphemism for a biological category is approached in different ways. Since the decolonial approach also shares many of the insights of postcolonial studies, the scholars, who pursue the first, could also be named here, especially Hatem Bazian in his Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project at UC Berkeley. However, it makes sense to see the decolonial school as

a third school, first, due to its larger epistemological and second, due to its political project. Theoretically, it is a critique of Eurocentrism in postcolonial theory that brings the “Muslim subject” back as a subaltern voice who can determine their own future. This approach goes beyond a narrow understanding of science and is a political project that calls upon agency to break what Grosfoguel (2016, 10) has called the “capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system.”

#### FUNDING

This article was prepared during my stay as a Fulbright-Botstiber Visiting Professor for Austrian-American Studies at the Center for Race and Gender at the University of California (UC), Berkeley. I presented an abridged version of this paper at the 8th Annual International Islamophobia Studies Conference in 2017, which was organized by the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project at the Center for Race and Gender at UC Berkeley. An earlier version was presented at a conference at the University of Münster in January 2016.

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>Farid Hafez, Working definition of Islamophobia. Accessed December 11, 2018. <http://www.jahrbuch-islamophobie.de/islamophobie>.

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*Anomie Écrasant, Religiopolitical  
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*ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL*  
VOLUME 4, NO. 2 Spring 2018, PP. 226–246.

Published by:

Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project,  
Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley

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*Anomie Écrasant, Religiopolitical Fundamentalism and American Evangelicalism: The Advent of Rightest Americanism and Islamophobia*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explains how intensifying levels of Durkheim’s “anomie”—that is, the weakening of social bonds, social alienation and normlessness—lead to the development of a fundamentalist offshoot of American Evangelicalism termed “Rightest Americanism” and its virulent Islamophobia. To begin, it does so by arguing the anomic condition is not uniform, and a variety of intensities are possible. Consequently, Teymoori, Bastian and Jetten describe “high anomie” as containing high levels of disregulation and disintegration. Adding to that, Chak (2019) argues that at its most intense manifestation “anomie écrasant,” it includes value incoherence and moral ambivalence across social spheres leading to high levels of social frustration. Collectively, that intense anomic condition leads to a uniquely “conflicted” cultural milieu that cultivates religiopolitical fundamentalism. And, in the United States, this led to a vitriolic strain within Evangelicalism described as “Rightest Americanism,” which weaves together the return of Jesus Christ, the destruction of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Islamophobia into a violent, apocalyptic social imaginary. Not only that, it also advocates for World War III and the end of the world. Now, with the presidency of Donald Trump, there are legitimate concerns on how this dangerous ideology poses a danger to global peace.

**Keywords:** modernity, secularism, fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, apocalypse, Islam, Palestine and Islamophobia

*INTRODUCTION*

The European Enlightenment was, in Kuhn’s (1996) terminology, a “paradigm shift” of considerable vitality that was displacing values, erasing normative precincts and shattering the tacit moral order. Uninhibitedly, it portrayed Europe’s deliverance from longstanding intolerances, fallacies and folklores. For that reason, it reflected Europe’s emancipation from “self-incurred immaturity” that had stifled human agency, restricted freedoms and ignored equality (Kant 2010). Clearly, the imaginative processes that the Enlightenment unleashed enabled astonishing achievements. Yet, notwithstanding its creativity, it was, also, manifestly problematic. By unshackling people from the erstwhile moral order, it was complicit in abolishing conventional value and meaning, decreasing social connectivity and eradicating deference, thereby, complicating critical aspects of personal and public life.

Eventually, responses to the disappearance of meaning led to numerous intellectual trajectories. Originally conceptualized by Holyoake (2015), the pervasiveness of secularism was instrumental in fostering novelty, encouraging inclusion, delineating confines of power and material well-being (Cox 2013). It maximized space for individual expression, emphasizing freedom, celebrating equality, heightening ingenuity and empowering people—but, still, observing compromise (Fawcett 2015). Most importantly, its widened embrace welcomed pluralism, skyrocketing innovation. Yet, concomitantly, it was amplifying incoherence, social alienation and moral ambivalence. Specifically, it did so by being unable to fill

in the “spaces of meaning” that were hitherto emptied by the Enlightenment’s paradigm shift. Actually, replacing meaning was complicated since unbridled human autonomy and self-determining freedom places, as Al Attas (1978) poignantly recognizes, the “West” in a “perpetual state of becoming, while never being.” This condition of never “being” or actualizing meant concrete meaning was not being effectively planted/reintroduced into social spheres since there was no clear mechanism for social agreement to materialize, leaving humans unfulfilled. Consequently, this led to a perpetual state of competing norms, without ever acquiescing to the conclusions of social contestation, only recognizing its impermanence and fluidity.

That social disintegration has been persuasively described by Durkheim’s theory of “anomie,” which describes the emergence of social alienation and the collapse of homo duplex—an inherent duality in the human condition. In fact, homo duplex “corresponds to the double existence that we lead concurrently; the one purely individual and rooted in our organisms, the other social and nothing but an extension of society” (Durkheim 1973: 162). As the social regulatory influence of society subsides, it results in diminishing civic responsibility, weakening social bonds and disregard for authority. In other words, society no longer functions to moderate human behavior, gravely undermining shared life and values. Attesting to that, Elwell (2017) writes the modern individual is “insufficiently integrated into society. Because of these weakening bonds, social regulation breaks down and the controlling influence of society on the desires and interests of the individual is rendered ineffective; individuals are left to their own devices. Because of the dual nature of human beings this breakdown of moral guidance results in rising rates of deviance, social unrest, unhappiness, and stress,” that is, the anomic condition.

Further developing Durkheim’s claims, Teymoori, Bastian and Jetten (2016) describe the anomic condition as manifesting in a range of intensities. High anomie contains excessive levels of both disregulation and disintegration, and that “the cumulative increase in perceived breakdown of both leadership and social fabric is the beginning of the emergence of high anomie in society.” Adding to that, Chak (2019) describes a particularly potent anomic condition as “anomie écrasant,” which includes value incoherence across social spheres leading to moral ambivalence and high levels of social frustration. This coincides with minimal levels of Williams’ (2009) fourfold needs taxonomy: (1) a meaningful life, (2) self-esteem, (3) belonging and social connectivity and (4) security. Together, this intense anomic condition leads to the emergence of fundamentalism (Chak 2019).

To begin, this article highlights the relationship between Durkheim’s anomie and the advent of religiopolitical fundamentalism in order to set the framework from which our analysis proceeds.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, those explorations/findings are applied in understanding the emergence of a perilous, fundamentalist offshoot of Evangelicalism called “Rightest Americanism” and its Islamophobic harangue. Here, the trilateral relationship—between intense “anomie écrasant,” religiopolitical fundamentalism and US Evangelicalism—allows us to explain key features of a vitriolic ideology—“Rightest Americanism” that weaves together dispensationalism, the Scofield Bible, a belief in the Rapture, the Creation of Israel, return of Jesus Christ, the destruction of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Islamophobia into a violent, apocalyptic creed. Essentially, this ideology is nothing short of a *doomsday* concoction and reacts to lurking social alienation and normlessness. It does so to catechize a divisive mind-set that seeks to rebuild a Jewish temple and await the return of Christ, for the *chosen* to watch Earth’s destruction from the sky (Haswell 2002). Moreover, with the presidency of Donald Trump, there are legitimate concerns on how much influence this harrowing ideology has.

### ANOMIE ÉCRASANT<sup>2</sup>

Broadly speaking, Durkheim (2014) analyzes how anomie emerges with the weakening of traditional methods of developing solidarity and intensifying during “transitional” periods, when new modes of cohesion are slow to surface as a consequence of rapid change. Further explaining, Elwell (2017) says an “increasing division of labor weakens the sense of identification with the wider community and thereby weakens constraints on human behavior. These conditions lead to social ‘disintegration’—high rates of egocentric behavior, norm violation and consequent delegitimation and distrust of authority”—hence, the anomic condition. Of course, Teymoori, Bastian and Jetten (2016) highlight gradations of the anomic condition discernable by two variables: (1) a breakdown in leadership and legitimacy, leading to disintegration of social bonding and (2) a breakdown of the social fabric of society that leads to disintegrating moral standards. In other words, the intensity of the anomic condition is dependent on levels of social *disregulation* and leadership *disintegration* in society. Using that, Chak (2019) argues – and for the purposes of this study, at its most piercing intensity—“anomie écrasant,” a markedly aggressive religiopolitical fundamentalism arises in response to those debilitating social conditions. That includes value incoherence and moral ambivalence across social spheres leading to high levels of social frustration as well as reactive political activism.

To explain, what is so critical for “anomie écrasant” to materialize is value incoherence and moral ambivalence across social spheres (Wong 2006). Descriptively, Taylor (2007) pens that

as we function within various spheres of activity—economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, recreational—the norms and principles we follow, the deliberations we engage in, generally don’t refer us to God or to any religious beliefs; the considerations we act on are internal to the “rationality” of each sphere. . . .

Taylor goes on to equivocate rationality in economics to profit and, in politics, to the greatest benefit to the greatest number, instead of, for instance, self-interest. Yet, how does he reach those inferences? Certainly, norms “loosely” exist in each social sphere that may not be immediately comprehensible, rational or even agreed upon—and certainly are not permanent. And, this is where human agency and cultural preferences—by those with the resources to manufacture and dictate their choices—fill in the blanks as to what “meaning” might be in each sphere. Yet, there is no benchmark—no intrinsic set of standards that is foundational to each sphere, which, thereby, may input values, or even, any rationality whatsoever. And, what the benchmark in each sphere is, could, quite possibly, just become what those with power want it to be. Here, normlessness emerges that explains the dissonance of ethical precepts across social spheres, hastening both social deregulation and disintegration.

To elucidate, consider former Secretary of State Madeline Albright’s justification for the death of 500,000 Iraqi children being “worth it,” for nonexistent weapons of mass destruction (Stahl 1996). This, too, side by side next to her willingness to register as a Muslim in America to, purportedly, defy Trump’s Muslim registry (Scott 2017). Or, in another instance, when President Trump was recorded using predatory and vulgar language toward women, then, simply shrugged it off as “locker room banter”—as if that, then, makes it acceptable (Fahrenheit 2016). Again, consider the three young women denied air travel due to an on-site agent who deemed their fitted clothing inappropriate (Lazo 2017). Still further, consider US Vice President Mike Pence’s refusal to be alone in a room with the opposite gender or have private dinners with them (Kimble 2017). And, consequently, being ridiculed on numerous mainstream media outlets for what would amount to respecting his wife’s wishes concerning

the ways he engages with the opposite sex (Green 2017). Or, consider the under-reported rape culture that is sweeping US campuses (Barnes 2015). All this, explicitly, is indicative of moral ambivalence, value incoherence and America's culture wars, revealing a level of moral waywardness which is utterly confusing for those seeking a semblance of normative values (Hartman 2015). These instances, and they occur daily, are symptomatic of a society in which people have no clear idea on what is, or is not, acceptable in the social sphere that they happen to be in. This is, precisely, what leads to corresponding social frustration.

Of course, the assumption that each of life's social spheres has its own set of distinct values is problematic. While arguable that domestic values (i.e. US internal politics) operate distinctly to those that unfortunate Iraqis or Syrians happen to reside within, it is, nevertheless, morally indefensible if one believes in a universal, comprehensive value system or the United Nations Charter. After all, without shared obligation, who decides which set of values takes precedence? Hence, the moral ambivalence of modernity. From that, Albright's justification and Secretary of Defense James Mattis' more recent dismissal of large civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria as "a fact of life" make sense. Yet, it fuels the fundamentalist narrative by rationalizing disregard for international law and mutual commitment to standards (Pengelly 2017). This duplicity heightens moral ambivalence and elitism of a preferential citizen. To wit, for President Trump, in the *locker room*, vulgar language is understandable, acceptable, even encouraged. Whereas, in the public sphere, it is not—or, perhaps it is, as long as women are not present. And, what three young women choose to wear at home is their prerogative, yet in the public sphere there are varied boundaries. Or, how Vice President Mike Pence chooses to engage with the opposite gender is his prerogative, but he must commit to the undefined standard set by those in a position to adjudicate. The problem is that none of this is clearly explained. This moral ambivalence, a product of self-determining freedom, which is driving America's culture wars, has a deep psychological impact on society (Wong 2006). It rationalizes duplicity, effects social connectivity, lowers security and meaning, thereby, leads to a heightened Durkheimian anomic state, aggravating the conditions of religiopolitical fundamentalism.

Consequently, as social alienation increases, a breakdown in leadership occurs. That further diminishes society's social regulatory function, and this coincides with vanishing moral precepts and ethical boundaries. In this quandary, it is easy to predict what people are looking for—certainty, values, clarity, identity, self-worth and reinstatement of meaning – even if through use of myth and the miraculous. In fact, this is the fundamentalist niche since it responds to those lost spaces of meaning and uses the very modern response "that I do not need to explain myself." Why? Because, much like individualism and self-determining freedom, human beings need not justify their choices. People are viewed, as Taylor criticizes, as beings with inner depths in which we can find truth internally. "Speaking in tongues" and "having a 'Born Again' experience" (Haswell 2002) are clear examples of this rejection of rationalism and thumbing one's nose at offering an explanation (*Aljazeera News* 2014). Particularly, since no one can disprove what one "feels" and "God knows exactly what I mean" (Poloma 1982). In fact, Biblical scholars in the Evangelical tradition unequivocally state,

the qualification for the perception of Biblical truth is neither philosophic nor philological knowledge, but spiritual insight. Any thoughtful man must honestly admit that the Bible is to be treated as unique in literature, and, therefore, that the ordinary rules of critical interpretation must fail to interpret it aright. (Torrey and Dixon 2003)

### WHAT IS RELIGIOPOLITICAL FUNDAMENTALISM?<sup>3</sup>

Until now, this article highlighted how intense levels of Durkheim's anomie facilitated social alienation, disintegration, disregulation, normlessness and moral ambivalence across social spheres. This results in society degenerating and shared meaning disappearing. That later development, arguably, leads to the growth of religiopolitical fundamentalism. Yet, now, it is appropriate to clarify what "religiopolitical" means? To begin, let's understand "fundamentalism" as Packer writes, "in its original context, which is relatively modern, *fundamentalism* was a Twentieth Century name for historic Evangelism."<sup>4</sup> This is attributed to the popularity of the edited, 12 volume collection called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*, which was written to clarify Christian values in rejoinder to tremendous Liberal cultural ascendancy (Torrey and Dixon, 2003).<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the origin and usage of the term "fundamentalist" is closely affiliated with a certain strand in Christian thinking (Morris 2008).<sup>6</sup> In fact, initially, it was often expressed in a manner denoting pride or a sense of commitment to one's faith. Yet, now, there is a pervasive sense that the designation is derogatory. Here, Harris's lucid description is succinct. She writes that "fundamentalists" exhibit four primary characteristics, namely, (1) primitivism, (2) quest for certainty, (3) rejection of traditional authority and (4) activism (Harris 2008). Yet, while concise, this study adds three additional principles to comprehensively describe religiopolitical fundamentalism. Namely, (5) sole ownership of truth and (6) propensity for violence, or what Armstrong (2000) calls "militant piety." And, lastly, (7) Political power – or the search for/acquisition of political power. Collectively, these seven tenets, offer a broad description of "religiopolitical fundamentalism" and a clue to how it develops as a reaction to intense levels of anomie.

Firstly, Harris (2008) describes fundamentalism as "primitivist" since adherents aim to "go back to their roots." This idea of "going back" aims for historicity and is connected to the manner in which she describes fundamentalists as "primitivist." Moreover, she uses this description to explain the fundamentalist tendency to revert to an earlier age of simplicity, by which one may escape the complexities of spiritual observance in modern life. She writes,

fundamentalists are primitivist in the sense that they wish to live in accord with the beliefs and practices of the earliest followers of their faith—for Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad and his first four successors; for Protestant fundamentalists, the earliest Christians of New Testament times; for Sinhalese Buddhists, inhabitants of a mythical narrative, when Buddha visited Sri Lanka by supernatural powers and consecrated the land.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, a fundamentalist narrative aims to "go back" to some form of idealized conceptualization of their respective history, which would purify their present ill-considered predicament. Which, of course, has been disrupted by modernity's unraveling meaning and rupturing of normative benchmarks. In a practical way, by stressing "primitivism," fundamentalists wish to reclaim "benchmarks" or ideals that are not reflected in their current reality.

Secondly, Harris (2008) describes fundamentalists as "anxious for certainty." While this may be true, it is not altogether clear if only fundamentalists exhibit this tendency. Also, latent in this description is an uneasy assumption that there is something irritating with desiring certainty. Armstrong (2000) writes that human beings, despite the distressing evidence to the contrary, tend to insist that life must have some ultimate meaning and value. Perhaps, in this, Harris is unknowingly projecting her own cultural assumptions by asserting an *anxiety for certainty* is fundamentalist. Contrarily, it is not the quest for, or a belief in, certainty that is

troublesome. Instead, it is the inability to accept diversity, deny the possibility/viability of another opinion and violently attempt to eradicate dissent, which is “fundamentalist.” Comparatively speaking, the so-called secularists in the Middle East are much more “fundamentalist” in that way than their Islamic-oriented counterparts (Chak 2017).<sup>8</sup> Still, anxiety for certainty is a very real consequence of “anomie”—emerging in a cultural milieu in which social bonds are constantly deteriorating. Understandably, relativity and moral ambivalence cause anxiety and fundamentalists respond to that with order and absolutist convictions.

Thirdly, Harris (2008) elaborates that fundamentalists bypass the traditional authority of intervening years. This is because engaging with tradition means recognizing development, which conflicts with their quest for certainty—that only occurred in the idealized past. However, while fundamentalists problematize traditional authority, they shrewdly substitute it with preferred charismatic alternatives. By doing so, they bypass the intervening years of development, are enabled to reinvent traditions, conveniently ignore contrary positions and repackage a novel criterion for untainted belief. For that reason, a fundamentalist rejection of traditional authority does not accurately communicate the density for them doing so. Actually, they cherry-pick new spiritual guides that fit, or are tailored to fit, their own agenda (Hankins 2008). Further explaining, Harris (2008) states that

fundamentalism is most at home within Protestant Christianity, from which Evangelicalism emerges, where there is a history of distrust of both tradition and interpretation. Essentially, fundamentalists believe that they simply go “back to the Bible,” and that anyone can understand the plain sense of scripture. They view interpretation as interfering with the immediacy of God’s revelation.

Yet, interestingly enough, while they critique traditional scholars for their purported interference, they, too, do precisely the same, albeit with their own rationalization.

Finally, let us collectively explore Harris’s (2008) four tenets of fundamentalism: primitivism, the quest for certainty, rejection of traditional authority and activism. Conceivably, one does not merely propose to reiterate an early era as the ideal and the eras following as mere efforts to catch up. Instead, at least, in for instance *pax Islamica*, there is a reinvention of that “ideal” relevant to the context in which it arises, which disqualifies any contradiction toward the core values inasmuch as it seeks to garner legitimacy (Chak 2014). Certainly, for one to “catch up” to an ideal, it must, from the onset, be accepted as the benchmark to achieve. For that reason, “ideals” exist as a consequence of principles espoused by any epistemic tradition and its consequent enculturation (Grusec and Hastings 2007). Admittedly, since the Enlightenment, Western civilization erased a comprehensive benchmark or an “ideal” particularly across social spheres. This is, precisely, what Durkheim alludes to describing the death of homo duplex and the breakdown of society’s social regulatory function, which causes anomie. For it is “society,” above all, which is

a composition of ideas, beliefs and sentiments of all sorts, which realize themselves through individuals. Foremost of this ideas, is the moral ideal, which is its principal *raison d’être*. To love one’s society is to love this ideal and one loves it so that one would rather see society disappear as a material entity than renounce the ideal which it embodies. (Durkheim 1973)

And, the eradication of the “ideal,” then, causes relativism, moral ambivalence which, then, leads to anomie. At this point, the fundamentalist narrative emerges as it responds to these conditions with practical, albeit bigoted, narrow and uncompromising solutions, which

nevertheless cannot be disproved by virtue of self-determining freedom. Primitivism, anxiety for certainty, disregard for traditional authority are associated with a belief in the monopoly on truth that disregards the possibility of another opinion. In addition, all that must be fixed with activist violence, both its rationalization and use. Admittedly, just having an opinion or being unwilling to accept another, does not necessitate something out of the extraordinary. Though, once violence is rationalized, even encouraged, to eliminate opposing perspectives, which is then coupled with the acquisition of political power, then it becomes the pejorative “religiopolitical fundamentalist” trajectory. And, in the United States, this led to a fundamentalist offshoot of American Evangelicalism.

#### *AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM*

Unreservedly, American Evangelicalism owes much to its European intellectual progenitors, yet its development in America was chillingly unique (Gibben 2011). Beginning in the early eighteenth century, American Evangelicalism has come to be defined through a series of “awakenings” or religious revivals that galvanized the faithful but rely on a sense of pervasive depravation throughout society (Armstrong 2000). This is how Durkheim’s anomic condition was instrumentally utilized by critical figures in the US Evangelical movement, to call for “awakenings” in response to depraved social conditions. The “First Great Awakening swept across the American colonies, up and down the eastern seaboard, from the 1730s into the 1760s. . . and was associated with two key figures, Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield” (Hankins 2008, 4). Both charismatic Evangelical preachers were instrumental, yet in significantly different ways, in spreading Evangelical beliefs as articulated by David Bebbington (2005). However, they included a furiousness directed toward perceived social malaise. Edwards was scholarly appealing to his followers through a sophisticated understanding of science, nature and psychology (Marsden 2003). Whitefield, contrarily, was a superstar of sorts, crisscrossing the United States and giving fiery and theatrical sermons (Stout 1991). Both, while using variant proselytizing strategies, presented a populist, simplified Evangelical belief system, that angrily responded to societal collapse, including resentment at moral ambivalence, questionable religious authority, perceived growing promiscuity and sinfulness in society (Hankins 2008).

To begin to explain Evangelical theology as championed by Edwards and Whitfield, this section relies on renowned British scholar David Bebbington. He has poignantly clarified the essentials of Evangelicalism in a fourfold manner: (1) Biblicism, (2) Crucicentrism, (3) Conversionism and (4) activism (Bebbington 2005). Eerily, these criteria resemble Harris’s (2008) tenets of fundamentalism, that is, Biblicism/Primitivism, Anxiety of certainty found in Crucicentrism and conversionism, and activism. Looking closely, “Biblicism,” essentially, implies accepting the Bible as the literal Word of God or Biblical inerrancy, and, undoubtedly, gives a clear sense of certainty to faithful adherents. Intuitively, this concept is, also, connected with Harris’s (2008) description of fundamentalists as “primitivist” and “anxious for certainty.” As such, this idea argues for the supremacy of Biblical writ, and does so by rejecting interference with what it considers the immediacy of revelation and the principal of inerrancy—both concepts that imply the Bible is free of all errors and “Scripture being clear” (Morris 2008). Here, unequivocally, American Evangelicals believe that God communicates directly to the faithful through His Book—and, while mediators exist, there is emphasis on “self-determining” freedom to directly contact God and “go back” to the original Biblical message. Theoretically, this empowering concept was cleverly utilized by Edwards and Whitefield to communicate that the Biblical message can be ascertained by the layman, was accessible to all, and esoteric semantics are not required. In fact, interference led to a corruption of the Bible’s original message. Therefore,



by doing this, both religious leaders were diminishing, and often outright rejecting, traditional scholarship on the Bible. In fact, today, Biblicists continue to believe that interference in the immediacy of revelation, by clergy and traditional scholarship, has misguided the Christian faithful (Armstrong 2000). Consequently, this paved the way for American Evangelicals to input their own creedal peculiarities since meaning was now *up for grabs*.

Secondly, American Evangelicals adhere to the principle of “Crucicentrism” (Bebbington 2005). This is, quite frankly, more than simply a belief in Christ’s crucifixion. All Christians regard the crucifixion as essential to understand Christianity, yet, American Evangelicals would take it farther. Hankins (2008), commenting on the importance of crucifixion says,

Traditional or orthodox Christians of all sorts have always emphasized the importance of Christ’s death and resurrection, but some modern forms of liberal Christianity have stressed Christ’s moral witness more than his crucifixion. Liberal Christians sometimes interpret Christ’s death on the cross as a symbol of Christ’s selfless love that humans should emulate. (Hankins 2008, 2)

From that, American Evangelicals, taking a cue from liberal Christians, interpret Christ’s sacrifice not just as a symbol of his love for his followers but as “a sacrifice for the sins of humankind followed by Christ’s literal and bodily resurrection without which there is no hope for the salvation of humans” (Hankins 2008, 2). Both Edwards and Whitefield utilized this concept to impact their congregations, especially, by manipulating through shaming and guilt-induced sermons—which we will return to. Evidently, Crucicentrism rejects traditional scholarship and mainstream interpretations on Christ’s sacrifice, then, adopts a twisted liberal rendering of Jesus’s crucifixion, by saying Jesus died for their sins. This emphasis on “sin,” rather than love, and reintroducing a sense of shame and guilt, for which Jesus died for, transforms the narrative immensely. Essentially, for American Evangelicals, Jesus’ death was a consequence of one’s sins and the only way one can rid their own selves of the pain of being complicit in his death is through being “Born Again” (Sproul 2010).

Third, the next Evangelical principle that Bebbington outlines is “conversionism” and is interrelated with the concept of being “born again,” which, specifically, refers to a life-transforming and supernatural experience that Evangelicals believe is central to the Christian faith (Sproul 2010). For most Evangelicals, conversion is a singular and immediate event, though, what is important to highlight is the emphasis on recommitting oneself to Christ through, often, elaborate rituals and ceremonies symbolic of that affirmation. As a consequence, “the conversion experience itself is most often considered a onetime event that marks the beginning of one’s Christian walk” (Hankins 2008, 2–3). Moreover, as Harris eloquently states, “conversion testimonies provide good evidence that the way in which a person understands his or her entrance into the faith is primarily experiential rather than intellectual” (Harris 2008, x). Of course, Evangelicalism insists that once a person is “born again,” or converted, then that individual should develop in their relationship to Christ, the proof of which is them seeking out others for conversion and, thereby, do God’s work—but, again, this is all very personal and emotional; the hallmark of self-determining freedom. Specifically, though, it responds to Harris’s fundamentalist description of anxiety for certainty and modernity’s loss of meaning, by an individual simply having a personal, esoteric experience that no one can deny, challenge or question.

Fourthly, Bebbington’s (2005) final description of Evangelicalism is activism. More specifically, in Evangelical terms “activism” refers to the belief that Christians, who are “born again”—thereby initiated, have a vital responsibility to be “active” in the world around them (Harris 2008). Again, there is nothing problematic with being an activist per se. This may be just proselytizing,

spreading the “good news” of Christ and gaining adherents. Of course, Evangelicals are mandated to preach, whether through charities or missionary work, that Christ’s death took away the sins of the world, so that individuals who accept Christ can experience salvation (Harris 2008). What is critically important here is that being “born again” is an unregulated license of sorts that permits one to do God’s work. It is purely a personal, experiential experience without any need for rationalization or justification to another. For that reason, American Evangelicals believe

that the most fundamental aspect of human life, one’s relationship with God, is a matter of choice. *One chooses to be born again*. Beyond this life-changing decision, evangelicals tend to take their religion into their own hands, shaping it accordingly. They are innovative rather than traditional, populist rather than elitist, intuitive rather than scholarly, activist rather than conformist, and individualistic rather than hierarchical. In short, they are quintessentially American [read secular] in their quest to shape their own destinies, religious or otherwise. (Hankins 2008)

Socially, this unbridled activism, without any regulation, could pose serious problems when an adherent takes this as permission to reject the laws of where they are, thereby, rationalizing their actions by what the Bible says, as in the repugnancy of the infamous child rape and kidnapping case in Toledo, Ohio (Guerra 2017).

Looking closely, the activist impulse deserves closer examination. For, simply put, spreading good news is not the problem, nor is there anything extraordinary in firmly holding opinions. Certainly, any pluralistic and inclusive society is required to give space to its diverse citizenry in a manner befitting shared space. What makes “activism,” potentially, so problematic is when it takes on a “militant piety” form (Armstrong 2000); necessitating violence to rid the world of alternative beliefs or peoples and ignoring social consensus or local authority. And, this is precisely where extremism enters traditional Evangelicalism and transforms it into a violently religiopolitical fundamentalist narrative that we refer to as “Rightest Americanism” led by Christ’s soldiers of Zion (Sizer 2006).

Moreover, fueling this explosive activism is an unduly pessimistic cultural outlook. American Evangelicals, by focusing on sin, shame and guilt, as well as describing the world as overwhelmingly evil, further a disparaging narrative that is responding to the heightened anomie experienced in the breakdown of society. Hankins (2008, 5) writes that “when he [Jonathan Edwards] became pastor he encountered a myriad of social sins, including drunkenness and sexual promiscuity in Northampton and the surrounding New England towns.” He viewed the social degradation around him, the breakdown of the family and rising crime as a consequence of the disappearance of Christ—or morality, in society. That, he insisted, would lead to the ruin of America and ultimately the demise of Christianity (Marsden 2003). Squarely, he placed the blame on loose liberal ideas that were deflecting social responsibility in the name of self-expression. In response, his strategy was to frighten and terrify. Then, once sufficient fear was placed in the hearts of the listeners, he would offer an olive branch. Basically, his most recognized sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” did just that (Hankins 2008). In it, Edwards describes a menacing and unforgiving God who “holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked” (Marsden 2003, 223). Continuing, he said, “His wrath towards you burns like fire; . . . you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended Him. . .” (Marsden 2003, 223–224). With such harsh language, Edwards was endeavoring to show his congregation that they were all guilty of rebellion against God, and, as such, deserved hell. He emphasized the worthlessness of his parishioners and instilled in

them a deep sense of low self-esteem. Yet, that is not where he would emotionally abandon them. After battering their self-worth, humiliating them and reminding them of their sinfulness, he would volte-face and describe a light at the end of this dark tunnel. That light was put there by God who wanted to deliver them from everlasting torment and the raging fires of hell, even though, the congregation was reminded, they were unworthy. All that was required was to recognize Christ's sacrifice. Edwards, then, would go on to say:

And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has flung the door of mercy wide open, and stands in the door calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners;. . . many that were very lately in the same miserable condition that you are in, are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love to him that has loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. How awful is it to be left behind at such a day? (Marsden 2003, 224)

Altogether, the consequence of anomie in America, led to an Evangelical worldview that was bitter and angry, or "culturally pessimistic" (Harris 2008). And, this pessimism continues to this day. American Evangelicalism views the world in frightful, calamitous ways, and there is an entire religious and cultural industry—including the "Left Behind" by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye (1995) and "The Late Great Planet Earth" by Hal Lindsey (1970) literary genres, supporting this enculturation.<sup>9</sup> Increasingly, life is seen as pitiful and, even lately, President Trump brazenly described it as "American carnage" (Blake 2017a). However, this pessimistic outlook is not without reason. In fact, it is quite useful in creating a sense of despair that fundamentalists rely on. Sadly, rather than confront the core issues driving social uneasiness with modernity, and attempting to rehabilitate the social regulatory function of society, or reintroducing consensual meaning through public institutions, American Evangelicalism responds with anger, shame and guilt-centric preaching that has produced an aggressive extremist variant, that this article describes as Rightest Americanism.

Nowhere was this phenomenon better explained than in Grace Haswell's (2002) *Forcing God's Hand* and in Chris Hedges' (2008) best-seller *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America*, which glaringly calls out certain elements among American Evangelicals as extremists for exporting terrorism and working toward apocalyptic violence. And, to be clear, American Evangelicals are not a small, insignificant group without impact. Damian Thompson (1999) in his book *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* explains that the growth of Evangelical Christianity, possibly, exceeds any other religion in the world today and that we are witnessing the fastest expansion of Christianity in history. Furthermore, according to the best sociological data available, just under one-third of Americans are Evangelicals. . . (Hankins 2008). In fact, as testament to its popularity, Dale Crowley Jr, a religious broadcaster, in Washington D.C. says,

There's a new religious cult in America. It's not composed of so-called crazies so much as mainstream, middle to upper-middle class Americans. They listen—and give millions of dollars each week—to the TV Evangelists who expound the fundamentals of the cult. They read Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye. They have one goal: to facilitate God's hand to waft them up to heaven free from all trouble, from where they will watch Armageddon and the destruction of Planet Earth. This doctrine pervades assemblies of God, Pentecostal, and other charismatic churches, as well as Southern Baptist, independent Baptist, and countless so-called Bible churches and mega-churches. . . it is the fastest growing religious movement in Christianity today. (Haswell 2002, 5)

Not only their numbers, they have become politically extremely important. As Hankins (2008, 1) states,

Evangelicals and fundamentalists are highly visible during political campaigns, especially presidential races every four years. A key question for every would-be Republican presidential candidate is how well he or she will appeal to evangelical voters, especially those associated with the Christian Right political movement.

Haswell (2002) concurs, stating this radical ideology has become increasingly popular among political and military elites. If proof was required, the presidency of Donald Trump is clearly indicative of how millions are subscribing to this apocalyptic narrative (Lee 2017). In other words, the power of American Evangelicals is vast—politically, culturally and economically; however, a sweeping generalization of US Evangelicals is not judicious or accurate. Fundamentalism, as Armstrong (2000) elucidates, is manifest in every major world religion. Nevertheless, “Rightest Americanism” shares some theological similarities with US Evangelicalism and, in the final following section, it is critical to explore the dangerous ideas that they profess.

#### ALT-RIGHT APOCALYPSE OR “RIGHTEST AMERICANISM”

The “Alt-Right” is a *loaded* term, used pejoratively in mainstream media, presumably, tied to numerous public personalities. As John Daniszewski (2016) describes, it is “a name currently embraced by some white supremacists and white nationalists to refer to themselves and their ideology, which emphasizes preserving and protecting the white race in the United States. . . the movement has been described as a mix of racism, white nationalism and populism,” emerging as a divisive subsidiary of mainstream American Evangelicalism. Sarah Posner (2016) describes it as a schism, magnifying under the headship of Donald Trump, that exposed “the dark, rotting core of Evangelicalism.” Upon closer scrutiny, however, the designation is not altogether clear. Its association with or against LGBT rights, multiculturalism, free trade and climate change is vague and elusive, particularly, since self-declared “Alt-Right” activists present contrary viewpoints. Nevertheless, there seems to be a discernable link to both Evangelicalism and Islamophobia (Walsh 2016). Even more troubling, there are questions concerning it and Islamophobic comments made by powerful members of Donald Trump’s inner circle—former and current, including Steven Bannon (McCarthy 2017), Reince Priebus (Varandani 2016), and Michael Flynn (Nelson 2016). However, due to the ambiguity of the terms and contentious association of public personalities to the Alt-Right, and what it precisely amounts to, this article coins the term “*Rightest Americanism*.” By doing so, it sets aside a distracting debate and explores the values that they champion, including how being an *activist* for Christ entails being an Islamophobe, causing the destruction of Earth and watching the deaths of millions of people.

From the onset, the “Rightest Americanism” apocalyptic ideology incorporates Bebbington’s (2005) four-point description of Evangelical belief, with a furious amalgamation of the following interrelated variables: (1) dispensationalism, (2) the Rapture, (3) the Scofield Bible, (4) creation of Israel, (5) destruction of Al-Aqsa Mosque, (6) creation of Temple Mount, (7) return of Christ and (8) Armageddon (Haswell 2002). Altogether, this extremist ideology has usurped traditional Christian theology, redefined critical features of Biblical canon and is actively encouraging extremists to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its surrounding compound, so that the “Temple Mount” may be created in its place, for Jesus to return to Earth and save the chosen few prior to Armageddon (Mauro 1927).

First, the “Rightest Americanism” branch of fundamentalist American Evangelicalism believes in two interrelated concepts called “dispensationalism” and “rapture” (Mauro 1927). Both ideas were championed by numerous Evangelical personalities, including Briton John Darby and American Cyrus Scofield (Sandeen 1970). Yet, what Darby initially, and Cyrus Scofield afterwards, did was rubbish standard Christian theology concerning Jesus’s earthly return *after* a period of time of great human suffering known as the “Tribulation” (Mauro 1927). How they did so was by introducing the concept of dispensationalism, which believes human, earthly life is divided into different time periods or “dispensations” (Mauro 1927). In each of these epochs, God unravels His plan for humanity for both the immediate and forthcoming world order. Moreover, in each dispensation, humanity endures a specific test that separates the chosen from the damned. Eventually, during the “final” dispensation, Jesus will return to Earth *before* the “Tribulation”—but remain in the sky and save his beloved “born again” children by way of something called the “Rapture,” igniting Armageddon (Armstrong 2000). That, eventually, will culminate in a thousand years—a millennium—of peace on earth. Hence, the alternative description of dispensationalists as “pre-millennial” since, unlike traditional Christian doctrine, Jesus will scoop up his chosen few to the heavens *before* the Tribulation, instead of *after*, from which they can watch the last days of Earth in the great final battle called Armageddon.<sup>10</sup>

Looking closely, the “rapture” is an indispensable idea to understand both dispensationalism and “Rightest Americanism.” Interestingly, the term is nowhere to be found in Biblical Scripture but it, literally, means “catching up,” and it is an honor reserved for Christ’s true representatives (Mauro 1927). Specifically, though, it was Cyrus Scofield and his Scofield Reference Bible, in which this ideology finds clear definition (Sandeen 1970). And, through this controversial doctrinal belief, no longer does Jesus return *after* the great Tribulation as has been taught for nearly 2000 years in Christian theology. Instead, to reiterate, Jesus returns to Earth *before*, yet, only appears in the Sky to save the chosen “born again” Christians. Haswell (2002) describes these radical American Evangelicals as believing the early Christians misunderstood scripture and “before the wars and agony engulf the world, Christ will descend and snatch away His true followers. We don’t have to die first. Those who are Born Again can be free of any worries about the Tribulation, the years of wars, the destruction”.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, being “born again” becomes all too important—as a matter of fact, vital, since only they may be potentially honored with the “rapture.”

Next, no understanding of “Rightest Americanism” would be complete without careful exploration of the Scofield Reference Bible, considered the most published Bible in the history of Christianity with unimaginable influence on millions of devotees (Sandeen 1970). Scofield and a team of seven coeditors developed the prominent features of the Scofield Reference Bible. Taking the standard text of the Bible, they added definitions of terms, marginal notes explaining certain passages, Scofield’s own paragraph divisions and headings, and an outline (Hankins 2008). To explain, the Scofield Bible—which provides lengthy translations and explanations alongside Biblical text, introduces entirely new concepts into Christianity. In fact, it could be regarded as an entirely new Bible with significant distinctions that have been condemned by numerous Christian scholars (Mauro 1927). Critics argue, persuasively, it confuses Biblical text with opinion, but aside from that, it has the unique distinction of emphasizing the creation of the State of Israel (Mauro 1927). It does so by specifically teaching a unique camaraderie between Zionism and the Evangelicalism. Hence, the term Christian Zionists, for those who believe Jesus has an earthly plan for “Jews” and heavenly plan for Christians—all others will perish (Sizer 2006).

For both Evangelicals and “Rightest American” fundamentalists, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 was a prophecy fulfilled. Former President Jimmy Carter said,

the creation of Israel in 1948 means a return, at last, to the Biblical land from which the Jews were driven so many hundreds of years ago. . .the establishment of the nation of Israel is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and the very essence of its fulfillment. (Sizer 2006, 109)

Concurring, L. Neslon Bell, the former editor of the major journal *Christianity Today*, said, “For the first time in more than 2000 years, Jerusalem being in the hands of the Jews, gives the student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible” (Haswell 2002, 61). Certainly, for Biblicists, the establishment of the State of Israel was something wondrous and miraculous. Timothy Weber (2004, 15) states that for many the insistence on restoring a Jewish state in “the Holy Land seemed far-fetched. But after the founding of Israel in 1948 and its expansion after the Six-Day War, dispensationalists promoted their ideas with the confidence that Bible prophecy was being fulfilled for all to see.” Importantly, the centrality of Israel does not arise out of guilt for past persecutions or even sympathy for those who suffered in the Holocaust. Rather their support is based on wanting Israel “in place” as a landing base for the “Second Coming of Christ” (Merrill 1984). In other words, “Rightest Americanism” needed Israel to be created, and, more specifically, the Third Temple created, for other Biblical prophecies to come true.

Now, herein lay the problem for those who subscribe to “Rightest Americanism” and actively work toward fulfillment of what they consider Biblical prophecy. Specifically, that entails the destruction of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Palestine and creation of the Third Temple Mount in its place, so Jesus can return, save his select few, and Armageddon then follows. Accordingly, what is so repugnant is that adherents actively work to aggravate world conflict, including attempts to destroy Jerusalem’s Al-Aqsa Mosque (Armstrong 2000). And, it is here where Islamophobia comes into the fore as a tool used to rationalize this monstrous ideological outlook. As unbelievable as it may seem, Haswell (2002) relates the story of a Christian dispensationalist group who traveled to Israel in 1999 and plotted to destroy Jerusalem’s most holy Islamic site. After being arrested, she says, “Israeli police accused them of planning a ‘bloody apocalypse’ to hasten the Second Coming of Christ” (Haswell 2002). In fact, those who were arrested, and eventually deported back to the United States, are no different than other dispensationalists who insist that this must be done. Indeed, for “Rightest Americanism,” God wants it done. Thereafter, Haswell (2002, 63) goes on to describe her conversations with her Jewish guide in Jerusalem, who when passing the Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound, points to it and says there “we will build our Third Temple. We have all the plans drawn for the temple. Even the building materials are ready.”

Actually, “Rightest Americanism” believes that by taking initiatives to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque, or aggravating world conflict, they are proving their spiritual wherewithal to Christ (Armstrong 2000). This, then, explains their infatuation with demonizing Islam and Muslims, to rationalize the destruction of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This explains the deeper *raison d’être* for the Islamophobia industry, and its troubling agenda, since Christ cannot return unless the Temple Mount is rebuilt on Islam’s third holiest site. Most worrisome, though, is millions are being swept into this radical ideology, perhaps, unaware of the ramifications of what it involves. All in all, Rightest Americanism is as much about building community, through shared values and coalescing around a shared threat. Here, too, Islamophobia is useful since both Islam and Muslims serve as the thing despised. It serves as a rallying point for

diverse groups of people who are manipulated to channel their discontent toward something presented as detestable.

### CONCLUSION

This article explored the complex relationship between Durkheim's anomie, the development of religiopolitical fundamentalism, and its manifestation in the United States as an extremist offshoot of American Evangelicalism termed "Rightest Americanism." It did so by analyzing how secular modernity facilitated the unraveling of society, and as such, produced the disaffecting conditions, such as a loss of shared meaning, social alienation and moral ambivalence—that is, anomie, where fundamentalism found its niche. Likewise, anomie caused the invalidation of Durkheim's conceptualization of "homo duplex" since, in that egregious cultural ecosystem, society no longer plays a social regulatory function. Resultantly, liberal relativity, individualism and self-determining freedom devolve into self-absorption—the "me" generation if you will, which poses challenges for the development of consensus. Consequently, social alienation increases and "anomie" heightens. In that predicament, people long for certainty, clarity and authority—reclaiming what modernity prevents from actualizing. That, then, allows for new, troubling fundamentalist interpretations of religion to surface and, in the United States, led to the "Rightest American" extremist outgrowth of Evangelicalism. More troubling, its twisted ideology uses Islamophobia to rationalize global war and the return of Christ.

Religion, notwithstanding fanciful prophecies of it becoming antiquated, remains an important factor for the social construction of reality in many societies. Actually, at the heart of the fundamentalist narrative is the importance of "society." And, in as much as modernity attempts to disrupt collective life and, inadvertently, disengage people, fundamentalists seek ways to reconnect. Religion, therefore, is just one of many tools that human agency may utilize for building communities and social capital and, ultimately, shared meaning. In the US context, the sheer magnitude of extricating society, with rapid industrialization and without a buffer in the form of a potent historic, cultural legacy and the massive structural violence that brought about the United States, meant that imagined communities were even more unbelievable, and divisive. A young, new country without the comfort of age-old traditions, enticing people from all over the world to migrate, was bound to lead to cultural and social confusion. There was potential to embrace this diversity and more skillfully manage it to encourage consensus, instead, it was sloppily targeted by Rightest Americanism as a cause of social discontent, to distract from the deeper social malaise in society. Nonetheless, as a consequence of that not happening as pervasively as it should, alternative fundamentalist trajectories spread since they at least attempt to respond to anomie.

Marsden (2003) comments that US Evangelicalism has become part and parcel of American folk culture based on its resistance to perceived social change and promise of resolve against moral crisis. Yet, notwithstanding its deep rootedness to the American experience, US Evangelicalism contains in it as Sharlet (2012) highlights a much more serious threat:

The classic means of explaining it away—class envy, sexual anxiety—do not suffice. We cannot, like H. L. Mencken writing from the Scopes "monkey" trial of 1925, dismiss the Christian Right as a carnival of backward buffoons resentful of modernity's privileges. We cannot, like the *Washington Post* in 1993, explain away the movement as "largely poor, uneducated, and easy to command." We cannot, like the writer Theodor Adorno, a refugee from Nazi Germany, attribute America's radical religion—nascent fascism?—to Freudian yearning for a father figure. (Sharlet 2012, 337)

None of that suffices to explain either the appeal or pervasiveness of this growing radicalism in the United States. Yet, that, precisely, is what this article attempted to shed light upon. Though, importantly, rather than lay an inappropriate, sweeping characterization of US Evangelicalism, it clarified that an extremist offshoot of Evangelicalism responds to increasing social alienation, moral ambivalence and spiraling resentment toward modernity. Hence, it traces its appeal to a deeper resentment to heightened anomie and the collapse of society.

Consequently, the response to an intense anomic condition leads to “Rightest Americanism”—an apocalyptic ideology that has usurped traditional Christian theology, redefined critical features of Biblical canon and is actively encouraging extremists to destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque, so that the “Temple Mount” may be created in its place. All of this is done with the express purpose for Jesus’ return to earth and saving the chosen few prior to Armageddon. As a consequence of that aspiration, “Rightest Americanism” needs Islamophobia, to rationalize violence against Islam and Muslims, Arabs and, by default, those defending the Al-Aqsa Compound who may prevent the re-creation of the Temple Mount. As outrageous as this creed is, other religiopolitical fundamentalist aberrations, whether in Islam, Judaism or Hinduism, contain similar divisive, intolerant and apocalyptic agendas (Armstrong 2000). From this, the important realization is that the destruction of society is heightening these grievances and rather than shutting people out, attempts must be made to reach out, neutralize and embrace global diversity.

Two contradictory tensions, among others, are dominating modern social life. One, a compelling force that is pulling us apart—individualism, and the other that aims to bring countless multitudes together. This push and pull reflects twin divergent forces of autonomy and community; rights and responsibilities; certainty and doubt. This dialectic ought to be managed in a way that respects both but needs to result in a middling of polarities and work through negotiation and consensus-building for shared meaning to occur. Notably, by not adequately responding to this push and pull, and being unable to address social alienation, the consequences are atrocious. Moreover, far from being an extremist characteristic, the quest for certainty and shared meaning is human and is what has propelled the dominance of populist leaders, which, in turn, brings us to the world according to President Trump.

Divisive, racist and misogynist; these are words that productive members of American civil society have used to describe President Trump (Khan 2016). He toots his own horn, derisively lambasts his opponents—even those with disabilities (Cooper 2015) and resorts to immature name-calling as a schoolyard bully (Rivenbark 2016). His speeches are littered with positive buzzwords and phrases: “Winner,” “Success” and “Make America Great Again,” all of which are demonstrably devoid of substance. Still, emptiness aside, his strategy wove gold to the establishment’s bewilderment. Yet, what is surprising to many, actually should not have been. Unfortunately, liberal America’s repugnancy to all things Trump have blinded many into not recognizing modernity’s collusion and the formidability of this contemporary American firebrand. All the hullabaloo aside, this is what America relates to—brash, reality TV, not thoughtful, conscientious commiseration (Rosenblum 2016). Hardly a political analyst predicted Trump’s electoral victory, especially after the explosive outcry over his “locker room” banter fiasco (Fahrenthold 2016). Yet, hardly a peep was heard concerning Harvard University’s unsurprising sex scandal or the expanse of rape culture on American campuses (Barnes 2015). Again, the moral ambivalence and value incoherence.

Of course, neither the intellectuals nor the A-Listed Actors guild—who for far too long have been complicit in falsely accentuating American flimflam—support President Trump. Actually, they are partly responsible for the false projections that enable the United States to swagger as if it had it all figured out—almost believing its own untruths and fixated on



convincing the rest of the world that they had answers for them too. Hop, skip and jump around the world and you will hear these types talking about “how great” America is and how others need to catch up. And, what establishment America is really upset at, both Democrats and Republicans, is this unraveling of the great White Hype. Sadly, neither a duplicitous Syrian policy, financial meltdown, drone attacks on civilians, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, mass shootings or Black Lives Matter were enough to do the trick. Now, they have the monstrosity of President Trump, who Michael Moore (2016) befittingly described as a Frankenstein candidate representing the worst of male privilege and wealth.

Americans are intensely aware of how hypocritical and fleeting their society has become—and they hate it, but many seem unable to make sense of it. President Trump reminds us all of that. Being told lie, after lie, Americans, more than anything else, do not want more of the same (Lind 2016)—they are antiestablishment (Rosenfeld 2016) and fume at political correctness (Fingerhut 2016). That is exactly what they would have gotten with Hillary Clinton who, according to a CNN Poll, a whopping 68% of people<sup>12</sup> describe as untrustworthy—the single most important quality of leadership. Add to that, some of President Trump’s ruthless supporters engaged in voter intimidation (Oxford 2016), disenfranchisement of women, minorities and people of color at a level hitherto not witnessed (*Washington Post* 2016). The Rule of Law exists on paper—its thug life in reality; crime levels are astronomical (Bruer 2016), domestic and sexual violence against women (Rabin 2011) is at epidemic proportions, women’s rights are secretly mocked, and the divide between the rich and poor is increasing. This deterioration is, precisely, a manifestation of anomie and the demise of homo duplex. And, it occurs at such a sophisticated level that it, at once, acknowledges its decay, yet will work to deepen discontent for immediate profiteering. In fact, as Wertheim and Sommers (2016) brilliantly unveil, Americans have gone from supporting the underdog to celebrating the man who befriends him, helps him up, gives him hope and kicks him in the teeth.

What, though, is so potentially devastating is how so little is being done to directly address the root causes of how a megalomaniac, riding the anomic waves of discontent and social alienation now leads the most militarily and economically powerful nation on Earth. This is, to be precise, where President Trump fits in, a shocking antiestablishment, unapologetic individual that speaks in an idiosyncratic way, according to Professor Jennifer Scalfani (2016) who wrote the “Idiolect of Donald Trump.” In that article, she articulates the appeal of “The Donald” is his brassy, gaudy style which reflects what Americans are so desperately seeking—finally, at last, someone who seems to speak truth to them—no matter how ugly or untrue.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>James Innell Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 19.

<sup>2</sup>R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, eds. *The Fundamentals: A Testimony for Truth* (Michigan: Baker Books Publishers, 2003), 3.

<sup>3</sup>Joe Morris, *Revival of the Gnostic Heresy: Fundamentalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 68.

<sup>4</sup>Farhan Mujahid Chak, “Society, Secularism and Anomie: The Emergence of Fundamentalism,” *Journal of Religion, Politics and Ideology*. Forthcoming Spring 2019. These preparatory sections rely on a forthcoming article.

<sup>5</sup>Chak, "Society, Secularism and Anomie."

<sup>6</sup>Chak, "Society, Secularism and Anomie."

<sup>7</sup>Harris, Harriet A. 2008. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, vi.

<sup>8</sup>Farhan Mujahid Chak, "The Post-enlightenment Moral Crisis and the Emergence of Secular Tyranny in the Middle East," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (2017): 34(1): 49-76.

<sup>9</sup>Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 83.

<sup>10</sup>Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism: 1875–1982* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academia Books, 1983), 14.

<sup>11</sup>Grace Haswell, *Forcing God's Hand: Why Millions Pray for a Quick Rapture—and the Destruction of Planet Earth*. (Maryland: Amana Publications, 2002), 34.

<sup>12</sup>Aaron Blake, "4 Brutal Poll Numbers that Greet Hillary Clinton." *Washington Post*, 2017b, July 25. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/07/25/4-brutal-poll-numbers-that-greet-hillary-clinton-at-the-democratic-national-convention>.

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*Muslim Communities of Georgia:  
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Challenges*

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*ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL*  
VOLUME 4, NO. 2 Spring 2018, PP. 247–265.

Published by:

Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project,  
Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley

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## *Muslim Communities of Georgia: Old Problems and New Challenges*

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the article is to analyze the problems concerning the Muslim minorities in Georgia with a predominant Orthodox Christian majority of population and to discuss the Georgian society's perception of Islam and Muslims in Georgia. After the brief historical survey, the following questions are analyzed: how religion (Islam) affects the national identity of three Muslim groups in Georgia—Ajarians (native Georgians), Azerbaijanis and Kists (descendants of Chechens and Ingush emigrated from the North Caucasus); peculiarities of their religious practices, attitudes to each other and relations with other religious groups (mainly with orthodox Christians), degree of their integration in Georgian society, their international contacts; and activities of Foreign actors (Turkey, Iran and different transnational Muslim organizations) in the country.

**Keywords:** Georgia, Islam, Ajarians, Azerbaijanis, Kists

### *BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY*

The majority of the population of Georgia, practically encircled by the Islamic world, is Orthodox Christian. At the same time, during the Middle Ages and the early Modern Era, intensive contact with the Islamic world created favorable conditions for the spread of Islam in Georgia. After the conquest of Tbilisi by Arabs in the eighth century, the city became a capital of the Islamic emirate from the 730s or 770s<sup>1</sup> (nisba at-Tiflisi<sup>2</sup> or at-Taflisi, for the first, mentioned in Arabic historical sources at around that time). Georgia's King David IV retook the city in 1122, and Tbilisi became the capital of the reunified Georgian Christian state. It continued, however, to have a significant Muslim minority.

Till the second half of the eighteenth century, Georgia, which had been fragmented into small kingdoms and principalities from the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, was practically divided by the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran. This division was legitimated by the 1555 Amasya Treaty between these two Empires.

Their religious policy differed from each other—when Ottomans preferred total Islamization of the population of the Southwest Georgia or noninterference in the religious affairs of some provinces of western Georgia, Iranians tried to convert Georgian elites in the eastern part of the country without affecting the Christian majority of the population.

In eastern Georgia, the Kingdom of Kartli was ruled by the members of the Bagrationi Georgian royal family, but at the same time, he was appointed by the Safavid shah, and he would be necessarily converted to Islam. It is worth to note that in the Persian documents, his title was Vali—the servant of the shah and in the Georgian documents—king. The situation changed in 1745 when under the general weakness of the Iranian state Kings of the eastern Georgia returned to Christianity. It must be noted also that native Georgians, converted to Islam, played an important role in Safavid Iran.

The situation in southern and western Georgia, under the direct rule or domination of Ottomans, was different. The establishment of Ottoman rule over South Georgia

(Georgian name of this province is Samtskhe-Saatabago or Meskheti) was a major defeat for feudal Georgia.

During this period, Islam spread to various segments of the rural population. It came first to the abovementioned southwest region of Georgia, where the Ottomans created the pashalik of Akhaltsikhe (Childir). Later, Islam was embraced by ethnolinguistic minorities in the country, and it was also spread through the arrival of waves of Turkic-speaking Muslims.

The western part of this region is called Ajara. The process of Islamization there was difficult. In the sixteenth century, according to the Ottoman census of mountainous Ajara, the majority of the population was Christians, and they paid religious taxes.<sup>3</sup> Initially, mostly noblemen were converted to Islam. The process of the total Islamization of the population was completed only by the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

The nineteenth century marks the beginning of a new era in the history of Georgia's relations with the Islamic world. These relations were above all shaped by Georgia's incorporation into the Russian Empire, which gradually led to a weakening of Ottoman and Iranian influence in western and eastern Georgia, respectively.

In this period, Georgia still remained high on the agenda of the Iranian and Ottoman foreign policy—the result of the Russo-Persian and Russo-Turkish wars in the nineteenth century was the incorporation of the most part of the South Caucasus in the Russian Empire.

It must be stressed that a considerable number of nineteenth-century Georgia's inhabitants were Muslims. But, there are several complexities for the determination of the exact number of Muslims, their ethnic origins, the dynamics of its change: some records make it practically impossible to distinguish ethnic Persians and Azerbaijanis from other Muslim groups. At the beginning of the century, Muslims were chiefly referred to as the "Tartars (Tatars)," and sometimes reference is made to the "Turkish-Tartar" population. However, certain distinction is made later (particularly after the Russo-Turkish and Russo-Persian wars resulted in an increase in Muslim populations of the Russian Empire). The name "Tartar" in reference to the Azerbaijanis was retained—for instance, famous Russian poet A. Pushkin notes that the owner of Tbilisi's famous Persian bathhouse was a Persian, while the bathhouse attendant was a Tartar.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Ajara Region*

Even before the advance of the Russians into the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, the strategic importance of Ajara had increased. The changed geopolitical position of Ajara likely strengthened the position of Islam. Several new mosques along the Black Sea coast and also in the mountain villages of upper Ajara were constructed: "Three of the oldest and most important mosques of upper Adjara (those of Didach'ara, Ghorjomi and Khulo) were built between 1820 and 1830."<sup>6</sup>

The Muslims of Ajara are, virtually without exception, Sunnis. There were no religious institutions of higher education in Ajara under the Ottomans. Instead, the children of the Ajarian nobility were sent in some cases to religious schools in Turkey. For most, however, there was limited opportunity to learn Turkish or Arabic.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that tensions between Muslims and Christians in Ajara increased in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1855, during the Crimean War, many Ajarians fought on the side of the Turks, and during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878, Adjarians held a number of top positions in the Ottoman armed forces, while some 6,000–10,000 Ajarians served as soldiers.<sup>8</sup> During World War I, Ajarian muhajirs (emigrants to the Ottoman empire) formed a division within the Turkish army.<sup>9</sup>



After the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878, Ajara became part of the Russian Empire under the terms of the Treaty of Berlin of 1878, and the city of Batumi was turned into a free-trade zone. Article 6 of the preceding Treaty of San-Stefano (signed at the beginning of the same year) was not changed, according to which the population living in areas conquered by Russia had been given permission to sell property and emigrate to Turkey. It was then that many of the Muslims of the region began to emigrate. Orthodox Christian missionaries also began actively proselytizing in the region in the late nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> As a result, there has long been a strong Christian presence in the region, which remains the case today.

Russian sovereignty proved a hardship for many Ajarians. Previously, the Turkish border had played an important role in the economic life of the region. With the establishment of the Russian border guards and tariff posts, movement across the border became much more difficult.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian administration began to make an effort to win the loyalty of Muslims in Georgia, one consequence of which was an end to the policies promoting emigration. The Russian state financed the construction of mosques and opening of new madrassas in Ajara and elsewhere. As a result, some 400 mosques were built in Ajarian villages, while Batumi had three mosques, two of which belonged to Turks and one to Ajarians. State officials also began to support the Muslim clergy in the hopes that it “would be compelled to operate in accordance with the interests of the government, and the government in turn could supervise its actions and have constant control over it.”<sup>11</sup> Imperial authorities created a special administration to oversee the Islamic establishment, formed educational religious centers at the local level and prohibited study in Muslim countries.

Firouzeh Mostashari remarks that the Russian stance toward Islam in the Caucasus varied depending on the ethnoreligious composition of specific regions. Thus, in areas where Islam was considered weak, the Russian administration supported the missionary efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church. By contrast, in places where Islam was seen as “deeply entrenched,” the Tsarist bureaucracy aimed at co-opting local religious leaders.<sup>12</sup> In general, the flexible religious policy of the Russian authorities was successful. The guarantees were given to the Muslim population returning to Ajara, however, the opinion that between 1881 and 1882, half to two-thirds of the emigrants returned to Ajara<sup>13</sup> seems exaggerated.

To summarize, it must be said that imperial Russian policy toward Georgia’s Muslim minorities was not static and changed depending on circumstances. On one hand Russian authorities tried to convert Muslims and to change the demographic situation in favor of Orthodox Christianity. On the other hand, these same authorities later tried to win the loyalty of the Muslim religious leaders and their flock.

The second half of the nineteenth century is considered as a time of the nationalist movement emergence in Georgia. In spite of the resistance to the policy of Russification, the Russian advance to the south was perceived as a positive from the point of view of the Georgian nationalists—the retreat from the South Caucasus of the “Muslim” Ottomans and Persians coincided with “Orthodox” Georgia’s interests. In this nationalist perspective, Ajara was perceived as a lost region that ought to be brought back into the orbit of the Georgian nation.<sup>14</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the slogan of the Georgian national movement was “language, homeland, faith (Christianity),” but after the reattachment of Ajara in 1878, where the Georgian-speaking population was Muslim, for the strengthening of the Georgian national consciousness among them, the last part of the abovementioned slogan was removed.

In general, it must be stressed that “re-Georgianization” of the province of Ajara was successful. Most Ajarian Muslims continued to identify themselves as Georgian. As a result, during World War I, a “Committee for the Liberation of Muslim Georgia” was created in

Tbilisi. The goal of the organization was to “liberate” Muslim Georgia from Turkish rule. For some Ajarians, however, Islamic identity meant loyalty to Turkey. This was true even before the October Revolution in 1917, but the establishment of the Communist authority in the region and the threat it posed to traditional religious practices and also to nationalist sentiments radicalized the pro-Turkish elements in the Ajarian community. A pan-Turkish and pan-Islamist party, *Jemiet Islam*, was founded in 1921, which advocated unification of Ajara with Turkey.

The establishment of the Soviet power and creation of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in February 1921 were followed that June by the formation of Ajara as an autonomous republic (ASSR) within the Georgian SSR.

The immediate reasons for the creation of the Ajarian ASSR were not ideas of ethnic or cultural differences but were the direct outcome of political negotiations between the Turkish and Soviet governments, laid down in the Treaty of Kars (October 1921). The Turkish government insisted on this arrangement to guarantee protection of the Muslim population as well as to leave open the possibility of later territorial claims. Second, the status of Ajarians remained vague. The issue of whether Ajarians should be considered a separate group was vigorously debated.<sup>15</sup> Even to this day, the Treaty plays an important role in influencing relations between Turkey, Russia and Georgia. For example, while signing a Treaty of Friendship and Good Will with Georgia in 1992, the Turkish president demanded that Georgia provide proof that Tbilisi would abide by the Treaty’s conditions.<sup>16</sup>

In 1929, as a response to the aggressive policies to force women to remove their veils and to close religious schools, the Muslim peasant population of Ajara rebelled, and this rebellion was considered as one of the largest and most violent of such incidents in Soviet history.<sup>17</sup>

In 1930s, the border between Turkey and the Soviet Union in Ajara started to close. The Soviet authority put limitations on travel to Turkey for receiving religious education or for obtaining a title. Ajara was among the targets of mass repressions during World War II. To avoid exacerbating tensions, starting November 15, 1944, at the decree of the State Defense Committee of the USSR, 15,568 Muslim families (69,869 persons) were evicted from the border zone. A total of 4,055 such families were evicted from Ajara, and of this figure, 1,770 were ethnic Georgian families.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Azerbaijanis of Georgia*

The first “Azerbaijanis” (in fact, Turkish-speaking Muslims) to arrive in Georgia were nomadic Turkic tribes (*eli*) that began settling in the region in the eleventh century. The second wave came in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when another group of nomadic Turks (*luruqs*) established themselves in southern Georgia. At the same time, so-called Qizilbash tribes settled in the eastern part of the country.<sup>19</sup> During the early modern period, these nomads became settled and underwent a process of adaptation to the state service. By the nineteenth century, most were peasants living in villages, but some had become merchants and craftsmen in urban areas.

The Muslim population of Tbilisi in the nineteenth century was substantial and also ethnically quite diverse, consisting of Persians, Turkic speakers (referred to later as Azerbaijanis), Dagestanis and Volga Tatars, among others. Of these, the most numerous were the Persians, followed by Azerbaijanis. Both were Shiites, whereas the other Muslims in Tbilisi at that time were Sunnis, and relations between the two communities were tense.<sup>20</sup> They had different mosques and different places in the Muslim cemetery, and they avoided contact with each other.

High birthrates led to a rapid increase in the size of the Azeri population in Georgia throughout the Soviet period—for example, between 1959 and 1989, Georgia's Azeri population doubled. Azerbaijanis' birthrates are still high. Marriages of Azerbaijanis with other nationalities are extremely rare.<sup>21</sup>

In the late Gorbachev and early post-Soviet periods, Georgia's Azerbaijanis became politically active. An Azeri organization, "Kairat," was established, which demanded greater autonomy for the Azerbaijani-majority regions. It soon lost its mobilizing potential; however, today there is little evidence of nationalist or separatist sentiments. The close, strategic partnership of Georgia and Azerbaijan creates conditions for the loyal attitude of Azerbaijanis toward the Georgian State.

In Tbilisi, the 18,000-member Azeri community is split almost evenly between Shiites and Sunnis. Unlike the nineteenth century, however, relations between the two communities are good, as suggested by the fact that there is a single Friday mosque serving both. Until the early 1950s, the Tbilisi mosque served Sunnis only, but the city's only Shiite (Persian) mosque, which dated from the sixteenth century, was destroyed by the Communists in 1951. As a result, Sunnis and Shiites were forced to share the same mosque, and the arrangement appears to have strengthened ties between the two communities.<sup>22</sup>

In general, though, the religiosity of Georgia's Azerbaijanis is modest—few strictly follow all Islamic rituals. Attending a mosque and having a *mullab* lead prayer is connected mostly with burial rites. Many consider themselves believers, but they lack the time to pray regularly and dutifully. In the late 1990s, field research in Azeri villages indicated that only 13% of men and 9% of women prayed five times a day.<sup>23</sup> (Their number is slightly augmented in the last 20 years.) Observing Ramadan is more common—about 20% of Azerbaijanis fast during the month. And, virtually all celebrate Bairam (the end of fasting), with many using the occasion to visit the tombs of relatives.

Islam has considerable influence over the national consciousness of Georgia's Azerbaijanis, many of whom equate religion with nationality. Thus one-third of those questioned in the field research in the late 1990s considered Islam to be their nationality ("my nationality is Muslim").<sup>24</sup> Similarly, for many, the Koran is part of their national culture, and reverence of the Koran and memorization of its chapters is an expression of faith to national tradition.

### *The Kists of Pankisi Gorge*

The Kists of Georgia are descendants of Chechens and Ingush (who call themselves collectively "Vainakhs"), who migrated to the Pankisi Gorge in eastern Georgia from the north in the beginning of the 1830s. Most of the original migrants were pagan, although there were also elements of Islam and Christianity in their practices. In Georgia, Pagan and Muslim Kists were pressured by state authorities to embrace Christianity—indeed in some cases to the point of coerced conversion but in sum, the majority of Kists converted to Islam.

It must also be noted that there were no traces of Muridism<sup>25</sup> among the Kists, which means that in contrast to Chechnya and Dagestan, the Kists had nothing to do with Shamil's Caucasian Islamic Umma and the process of the introduction of "common Islam" into the North Caucasian region.

It must be noted that after the establishment of Soviet rule the position of Islam even strengthened among the Kists in the Soviet period, in part because "wandering" mullahs continued to proselytize and managed to persuade many to convert to Islam, a process that continued into the 1970s.

As with most Georgians, Christian and Muslim alike, religion has as much a national meaning for many Kists as it does spiritual. Those who are Christian tend to identify themselves as Georgians (although they maintain their consciousness as Kists); those who are Muslim hold to a Vainakh identity, even in places where Georgian is their home language and the language of instruction in local secondary schools. Muslims also tend to maintain closer contacts with their relatives in Chechnya and Ingushetia than do Christians.

Among Kists, as with Chechens and Ingush, the Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqats*)<sup>26</sup> are well established. In an unusual historical reverse, the Sufi orders in the Caucasus, far from waning, practically absorbed official Islam. Nearly all the “Arabists” [who knew Arabic language—G.S.] and ulama of Dagestan and Chechnya were members of a *tariqat*, and they identified themselves with the national resistance against Russian pressure.<sup>27</sup>

Unemployment and difficult economic conditions induced many younger Kists to emigrate to Russia during the 1970s and 1980s, but in the late 1990s, the number of residents in the region has at least doubled due to an influx of refugees from Chechnya (many of them have already returned to Chechnya).

So-called Wahhabis<sup>28</sup> first appeared in the Pankisi Gorge in 1997. Many newly converted Chechen Wahhabis arrived in Pankisi Gorge with the status of refugees and attempted to convert young Kists by preaching about “pure Islam.” In pursuance of this goal, numerous citizens of Arab countries and Turkey, financed by various Islamic organizations, settled in the Kist villages and began their activities.<sup>29</sup>

#### CHALLENGES FOR MUSLIMS IN TODAY'S GEORGIA

*Today Muslims Represent around 10% of the Georgian Population*<sup>30</sup>

On the eve of independence (1991), Islam in Georgia was extremely weakened: hardly structured, unorganized and its influence was negligible as a result of the deep secularization of society, antireligious policy of Soviets and post-war social changes.<sup>31</sup> But in the context of the overall religious revival in the late and post-Soviet period, the rise in the level of religious identity of the Muslim citizens of Georgia is noticeable. The foreign religious charitable organizations (state-financed and nongovernmental), first of all, Turkish and Iranian, are extremely active in this sense. New mosques have been constructed and, sometimes, young people have been sent to the religious educational institutions of the Islamic countries to receive higher Islamic education. All these processes have been funded by the foreign Islamic organizations or individuals.

This process of the religious revival (firstly Christian, and after Islamic) was quite complicated. As Gammer notes, there are two alternatives of Marxist-Leninist ideology: nationalism and religion. In the Soviet Union nationalism was not considered a completely reactionary phenomenon, definitely not as reactionary as religion. Therefore, the strongest movement was nationalism—the main leading force at the end of the Soviet era. But soon religion also was transformed in a uniting force of the discontent societies, firstly Christianity, and after Islam.<sup>32</sup>

Contrary to popular belief, the Soviet system did not forbid private practice of Islam, but instead heavily restricted outward public expression, institutional development and Islamic education.<sup>33</sup> During the Soviet period, some kind of “underground” Islam existed which was expressed by circumcisions, religious weddings and burials. Funerals were held at night and in secret. Religious weddings were held rather regularly. An important part of the Muslim population celebrated religious holidays, although religious life was taking place in the underground. These situation helped in the transmission of religious traditions (basically by oral form), both Islamic and Christian.

Fundamental changes in Georgian Muslims' lives in Ajara took place during the period of "Perestroika." This very period is characterized by the process of re-Islamization of Ajara that was accompanied by a revival of the religious activity and restoration of mosques.<sup>34</sup> This process was activated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The majority of the currently active mosques in Ajara were built during the period of Georgia's independence.

The distinctiveness of Ajara is conditioned by the autonomous status of the region formally based on religion. After Georgia obtained independence, this distinctiveness is preserved. This was partly conditioned also by the Christian-messianic and ethnonationalistic ideas which prevailed in the national liberation movement: "In most part, the marker of the re-emergence of the Georgian national identity is ethno-religious."<sup>35</sup>

In Georgia, Orthodox Christianity in reality became an integral part of the national movement and a leading force for the consolidation of Georgian Society. Islam was perceived as an alien religion imported into Georgia by Muslim "invaders" and the best solution was seen in the promotion of Christianity among native Georgian Muslims, that is, Ajarians (Georgian Azerbaijanis are "others," and they did not attract much attention of the Georgian society and authority): "In the country with the formally dominant Christian religion, everyday discourse regarding Muslims is largely negative, especially in case of the Georgian Muslims."<sup>36</sup> In general, one of the main features of independent Georgia's policy (under different governments) has been the strengthening of the Orthodox Christianity position. The particular role of Orthodox Christianity in the history and culture of Georgia is stressed in the Georgian constitution, but equal rights for different religions are also underlined. In 2002, a constitutional agreement, so-called "Concordat" was signed between the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) and the State. In this concordat, the particular historical role of the Orthodox Church for the Georgian nation is stressed: "Thus the majority religious group. . . is defined not only by the absolute numeric majority of the population belonging to it, but also by the preferential treatment of it from the state."<sup>37</sup> As with the other Soviet successor states with significant Muslim populations today, Georgia's central government is increasingly concerned about the possible politicization of Islam in the republic.

The main problem relevant to Muslim Georgian nationals is the low level of their civil and sociopolitical integration. A vivid example of this problem is the low level of Muslim citizens' employment in both the central and the local governance systems. One of the key reasons behind the alienation of Muslims is a negative attitude toward them on the part of the followers of other religions, especially, the dominant religion, Orthodox Christianity. The widespread term Tatar in reference to Muslims is related to religion more than to ethnic affiliation. This word, when used to refer to all Muslims, bears negative connotations and thus causes offense and frustration among Muslims. Georgian Muslims do not use this term to refer to themselves: "The term 'Tatar' has long been rooted in the Georgian mind as synonymous with 'Muslim', carrying connotations of violence and aggression."<sup>38</sup>

Muslims in Ajara point out that they face discrimination both in the public and the private sectors due to their religious affiliation. According to them, Muslims are viewed in Ajara as advocates of a pro-Turkish orientation. It is a traumatic feeling for an Ajarian Muslim to be "the second-rate" (secondary) citizen. It is common for them to consider that "for Georgia we always are step-children" and at the same time to stress that "we are Georgian Muslims, we aren't Tatars."<sup>39</sup>

Although most inhabitants of Ajara *did* identify with the Georgian "nation," they did so as *Muslim* Georgians. This combination, which contradicted the dominant idea of "Christian-Georgian unity," was not only seen as an oxymoron by Georgian nationalists and Church representatives, it also became increasingly problematic for Ajarians to maintain this stance.<sup>40</sup> "Other" by religion<sup>41</sup> became "ethnically" "other."

Today, frequently, Ajara is considered as a first province of Georgia where Christianity was spread (Christianity became the “state” religion of Georgia in the 330s). Symbolically, in 2000, in Georgia, 3,000 years of statehood were celebrated (in fact, with no real historical evidence of this), with 2,000 years of Christianity—so, it was symbolically stressed that Christianity was deeply enrooted in the Georgian Nationhood from the very beginning of the Common Era. Ajara is considered a place where Andrew the Apostle preached Christianity in Georgia for the first time:

It was an excellent occasion for the Georgian orthodox Church to raise awareness of Ajara’s presumed deep Christian roots and, moreover, to reinforce its missionary work among the region’s Muslim population. One of the celebrations was a procession to the place where the first church in Georgia was supposed to have been built.<sup>42</sup>

The village Sarpi which is divided between Turkey and Georgia and where the border between two countries passes became also the symbol of the belonging of two different religions (i.e. civilization)—on the Turkish part, a mosque dominates the landscape and on the Georgian part, a recently constructed Orthodox church. In Ajara, first of all in Batumi, several orthodox churches were renovated or constructed, often on symbolic and memorable places. Even, an old but well-preserved Catholic church was converted to the Orthodox church (it is worth noting that a new small Catholic church was built instead).

Christianity enjoys substantial state support in Ajara today. Islam, in contrast, is not supported by local authorities. As a result, many younger Ajarians are embracing Christianity—some by conviction and some by the desire to fully identify with other (i.e. Christian) Georgians. However, it is impossible to know exactly how many conversions have taken place. Undoubtedly, the process of re-Christianization has accelerated, although a significant number of Ajarians still consider themselves Muslims and carry out Islamic rites. The coexistence of two religions even in one family, where young are Christians and elders are Muslims became usual in Ajara (young say—we prefer to return to the faith of our ancestor; elders say—we are loyal to the faith of our parents). New Christians interpreted their baptism as a “return to their native religion” as well as a regaining of “one’s true self.”<sup>43</sup> The convert to Christianity is considered as “baptised Georgian”:

Such notions were understandable given that Islam had been associated with an Ottoman past which had been vilified in official discourse since the beginnings of Soviet rule, while the link between the Georgian nation and Christian faith had become the bedrock of nationalist ideology in the post-Soviet era.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, it must be stressed that the acceleration of conversions to Christianity in Ajara is strongly connected to social and economic grievances. More convenient places for the Islamic revival during the last 25 years are the mountainous and more remote parts of Ajara. Here, the municipality of Khulo has become the heart of it. But even in Khulo, Christianity has slowly taken over.<sup>45</sup> For example, close to the Khulo mosque, an Orthodox seminary is built.

It must be also noted that today the evidence suggests that most Muslims in Ajara have a respectful attitude toward Christians and Christianity. Doubtless in part, this is because Ajarians afford their ancestors great respect, and many of those ancestors were Christians. In day-to-day life, Christians also demonstrate respect toward Muslims’ traditions. For example, Christians even congratulate Muslims on the feast of Maulid (Mevlud) and present to them confections.<sup>46</sup>

In the “Sunni” Ajara, the major foreign religious player is Turkey. A considerable number of young Ajarian Muslims have received religious education abroad during the last two decade. Many of them are financed by the Turkish “Marmara Foundation for Education” (Marmara Egitim Vakfi).<sup>47</sup> In part, education of young Ajarians (even non-religious) is financed by their relatives, Turkish citizens of Georgian origin.<sup>48</sup> The religious administration of Turkey, Diyanet is especially active in this direction. Among Turkish “nongovernmental” religious organizations who are active in Ajara, it can be cited Süleymancı (partisans of the Turko-Muslim thinker Hilmi Tunahan [1888–1959]), Nurcu (adherents of Saïd Nursi [1876–1960]) naqhibandi community of the conservative cheikh Mahmut Ustaosmanoğlu, and Fethullahçı—network created by Fethullah Gülen.<sup>49</sup>

The criticism and counteractions by the Georgian Orthodox Church and different sections of Georgian society have visibly limited the options for Turkish religious influence.

There are frequent complaints in local Georgian newspapers that the government has failed to monitor the quality of the education that young Ajarians are receiving in religious institutions abroad. As a result, there are fears that some young Ajarians are becoming “Wahhabi” in orientation. For Wahhabis, practices traditional to Islam in Ajara are *bida* (perverse innovations). Some young Ajarians who have received religious training abroad do, in fact, seem to embrace Salafism to one degree or another. A generational conflict has thus emerged among Ajarian Muslims, with the older generation favoring traditional Islam and some of the younger generation favoring Salafism. The conflict, however, appears to be less acute in Ajara than in many other Muslim-majority regions in the former Soviet Union.

The first religious publications on different aspects of Islam started appearing in Georgian from the early 1990s. “Catechism” Islamic (Ilmihal) was the first of its kind to be published in Georgian. Several publications (also for children) are now available on the sites muslimgeorgia.org and islam.ge. The first is based in Turkey, and its mission is more educational, but there are also some analytical articles and interviews. It stresses the importance of Islam and Muslims in Georgian history and nonaccurate policy of Georgia’s central government toward Georgian Muslims. On the second site, there are also some research papers, and it is based in Georgia. Generally, the pro-Turkish character of these two sites must be stressed. It must be also noted that figures cited on these sites are often exaggerated. For example, according to muslimgeorgia.org, the number of Muslims in Georgia is around 1.5 million, and according to the Mufti of Georgia Jemal Paksadze, the number is 800,000. In reality, the number of Muslims does not exceed 500,000 (including nonactive believers).<sup>50</sup>

In eastern Georgia, the situation concerning Muslims is different. Georgian authorities are much less interested by the religiosity of “non-titular” Azerbaijanis<sup>51</sup> than of Ajarians—“native Georgians.” In general, Azerbaijanis show what might be called “indirect loyalty” to the Georgian state—that is, their attitude toward the national state depends mostly on the relationship between their “national homeland” (Azerbaijan) and their country of residence (Georgia).

The issue of unemployment has its own peculiarities in Azerbaijanis. Ignorance of the national language is the main problem in this region. The state has taken important steps to remedy this; however, knowledge of the Georgian language does not automatically lead to employment.<sup>52</sup>

The competition of the Turkish and Iranian organizations is most noticeable among the Azerbaijani population of eastern Georgia which, through a low level of religious education, sometimes cannot even distinguish Sunni and Shia branches. Iranian and Turkish “charitable” organizations try to “convert” them on “their” religion.

Logically, the common bond of Shia Islam should bring Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan closer. Yet, in practice, this has been a source of estrangement between them because the secular government of Azerbaijan has been wary of Iran's influence among its Shia population.<sup>53</sup> Such an obstacle in Georgia is less visible, and consequently, there is much more possibility for Iranians to propagate the Iranian version of Islam (i.e. the values of the Islamic republic).

There are two main Iranian Foundations presented in eastern Georgia (including Tbilisi): of the Grand Ayatollah of the Shia world—al-Sistani (who lives in Iraq, but the funding is provided from Iran) and of the Supreme leader of the Islamic Republic—Ayatollah Khamenei. There are Shia madrassas and mosques functioned by the financial aid of these foundations in towns and villages of eastern Georgia inhabited by Azerbaijanis, the young are sent for religious education in Iranian religious schools and universities, and so on.

The religious fervor of the Kists appears to have grown considerably in recent years. In addition, there is evidence that Salafis (Wahhabis) are active in the region. There are tensions between Salafis and those believers who adhere to traditional highlander forms of Islamic worship. Salafis call themselves the followers of pure Islam and oppose all practices not sanctioned by the Koran. They look at Sufi Islam as a deviation from the original Islamic rules.

The attitude toward Salafis among the Vainakhs is controversial. Most Chechen refugees and several Kists (especially younger ones) support them. Nevertheless, elder Kists are against Salafis, the efforts of different Islamic movements (both radical and rather moderate ones) to create, by using different means, a new Islamic unity based on their own interpretation of religion, confront with local, traditional forms of Islam, which as they see it, do not correspond to the "spirit" of "pure Islam." The presence of Salafism, in Pankisi and elsewhere in Georgia, has likely given fuel to Russia's continuing, but unsubstantiated, accusations that Georgia is supporting or turning a blind eye to militant activity.<sup>54</sup>

There are no official data about the number of adherents of Salafism in Pankisi Gorge (and in general, in Georgia) but by local information, their number increased significantly these recent years and they already outnumber adherents of "traditional" Islam. With foreign financing, the Salafis are in a better economic condition than followers of traditional Islam. The majority of imams received their education in Saudi Arabia. According to unconfirmed information provided by locals, Saudi Arabia funds their education.<sup>55</sup>

The most important problem for the international community is the rumors about the presence of Muslim terrorists in the Gorge. Western nations are becoming increasingly concerned that the al-Qaida and "Islamic State" terrorist organization has established a base of operations in Georgia. Although the number of terrorists hiding among the several hundred Chechen fighters in Pankisi is estimated to be fairly small, these terrorists are part of a broader network aiming to create Islamic states across the Caucasus and Central Asia. It must be stressed that around 100 Georgian citizens are among the fighters of the "Islamic state." The main majority of them are from the Pankisi Gorge.

The idea of the Islamic State helping and saving oppressed and unprotected Muslims has proved to be attractive for those who did not agree with existing norms, did not like existing reality, and wanted to change it. In other words, it was impossible to achieve overall well-being (within the Muslim community) and bring one's own life in order. Small groups of those who wanted to introduce such major changes emerged in Georgia at this stage. In spite of this, the number of people who have become involved in these processes has remained insignificant up to now.<sup>56</sup>

What threat does the Islamic State pose to Georgia? I share the view that "Georgia, as a territory, is not an object of direct interest in the absence of appropriate conditions—especially a multitude of supporters."



However, unfortunately, it happens so that Georgian citizens, young people (even children), find themselves via Turkey in Islamic State-controlled areas and enlist in the ranks of the militants. This, of course, is a serious problem, although, naturally, it does not entail a mass event—Georgia is a small country and such sentiment is uncommon among the local Muslim community. Bennett Clifford argues that

For Georgian Muslims, the decision to fight abroad in Syria or Iraq is a highly personal decision, and no single factor conclusively determines participation. . . On the other end, ideology and the growth of Salafi Islam are often considered the largest “pull factor” drawing Georgian Muslims to Syria and Iraq.<sup>57</sup>

It must be stressed also that some Georgian citizens have significant leadership positions in different jihadist groups in Syria. Most of Georgian “Jihadists” are from the Pankisi Gorge but there are also Azerbaijani and Ajarian natives.

I also partially agree with the idea that the radicalization of Muslim youth is triggered by the social and economic problems currently prevailing in the Pankisi Gorge. However, the economic factor is not the only culprit. Other significant aspects also come into play, which may also, perhaps, have certain parallels in Western countries (one cannot say that in the West socioeconomic issues provoke Muslim youth to go to war). First and foremost, generations being raised under these new circumstances have memory issues, arising from the Russian war in the North Caucasus and the resettlement of refugees to Pankisi, and with them, the introduction of new Islamic ideas.

The second issue is the Internet, social networks and websites exhorting radical ideology, which are easily accessible to young people. The implications of such exhortations are such that young people in Pankisi develop the will to fight in the name of Islam for completely obscure purposes.<sup>58</sup>

Georgia has not faced a direct Islamist terrorism threat. However Georgian Jihadists threatened from Syria the Georgian authorities and population using social networks. It is worth to mention the video message published on November 23, 2015 that showed four young Georgian citizens who had traveled to Syria from Georgia, addressing the Georgian population and threatening them with bloodshed, beheadings of kafirs, and jihad. This threatening video was the first of its kind aimed at Georgia, and it obviously should have worried the respective security bodies and the population in general.<sup>59</sup> In May 2017, “Jihadist” threatened, for the first time, Ajarian Muslim leaders considering them as “apostats.”<sup>60</sup>

Religious education of Muslims in Georgia is limited to madrasas at mosques that serve the functions of parish schools to some extent. These madrasas have no legal status in Georgia and documents issued by them cannot be used as certificates of education. Thus, to receive higher education, Muslims are forced to travel abroad, and again, the choice of country of destination is determined with the consideration of religion. Ajara residents receive theological education in Turkey, Pankisi Muslims study abroad mainly in Arab countries, while Shida Kartli Muslims travel to Iran to this end. There is, however, a relatively small Sunni community in Shida Kartli, and its representatives also travel to Turkey to receive education.

It should be noted that graduates of theological schools usually return to Georgia and seek work in local mosques. Given the quality of their religious education, they easily gain respect and influence on locals who may not be versed in the basics of Islam. As some experts point out, it is impossible to depoliticize religion completely, and as such, persons are influenced by one or another religious branch confessed by a given country (Sunni, Shia, Salafi movement, and others); moreover, they are often guided by denominations interpreted in

accordance with the national interests of the countries where they receive education. Thus, it should be taken into account that given the current state of affairs these foreign educated Muslims may potentially serve the interests of other countries in Georgia.

Georgia's state policy regarding religious minorities is heavily shaped by the strong political influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church has been funded since the signing of the Concordat in 2002, as a form of restitution for the damage inflicted by the Soviet regime. For the same reason, other "traditional" religious groups have also received state funding since 2014: the Muslim community, the Armenian Church, the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. The state does not provide a rationale for the specific amounts granted to each group. This lack of transparency, as well as the potential for state control of the religious groups, has been criticized by local civil society organizations.<sup>61</sup>

The Georgian government tried to extend its control over the Muslims and for this aim in May 2011, an Administration of Georgian Muslims (AGM) was established. Formally, it is a nongovernmental organization but financed (so controlled) by the Georgian government. With the creation of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia and in the process of their further transformation, the government aimed to control and guarantees a managed organizational structure of Muslim organizations or religious organizations in general:<sup>62</sup> "The new administration replaces the semi-independent, Baku-based Caucasus Board of Muslims (CBM) which until recently was the governing body for Georgia's Muslims."<sup>63</sup>

The Chairman of this organization is Georgian Muslim, and his two deputies—Azerbaijanis. This organization competes with the "representation" of the Muftiat of the Caucasian Muslims (based in Baku). The creation of the "Georgian Muftiat" was extremely negatively perceived in Azerbaijan. The Mufti of the Caucasus Allahshukur Pashazade even called it "a part of the 'Great Armenia' project."<sup>64</sup> Today "The Muftiat" is practically and informally divided—"Muftiat of Western Georgia" which is occupied by the problems of Ajarians and "Muftiat of Eastern Georgia" which controlled Azeri Muslims and has close ties with Baku.

In the early 2010s, Turkish and Georgian authorities reached an agreement about the restoration and reconstruction of Georgian churches in Turkey and Ottoman mosques in Georgia.<sup>65</sup> In Georgia, it implied, first of all, the reconstruction of the so-called Azizie mosque in Batumi but this project remained unaccomplished.<sup>66</sup> Supporters of the new mosque's construction often mentioned that Batumi Ortajame Mosque was overloaded on Fridays, and mass prayers, because of the increase in parish, and people used the yard and adjacent street to pray. For this reason, they were requesting to build a second mosque in the city. This argument was shared by certain groups of politicians, experts and political parties.<sup>67</sup>

On May 11, 2017, Muslim citizens of Georgia were notified about two important decisions of the authorities: In Batumi, Muslims were denied a construction permit for the mosque<sup>68</sup> (it is worth to note that Muslims already bought the terrain in Batumi), and in Mokhe village of the Adigeni municipality (western Georgia), an historical mosque was transferred to the National Agency of State Property (the official reason is that on the place of the mosque, it used to be a Christian church and its stones were used for the construction of the mosque).<sup>69</sup>

In the statement of the Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI), it is stressed that both decisions made regarding property and the construction of the house of worship once again demonstrate the state's discriminatory policy, and violate the constitutional rights of Muslims to have adequate conditions for worship and to equally exercise freedom of religion.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, as usual, there are no problems regarding the building of Orthodox churches.

To summarize, these three Muslim communities have more differences than common features. Their common interest is to attract more attention and respect to their religious rights from part of the Georgian State and Georgian society. In general, Islam is considered as a

“traditional” religion and as such is tolerated by the Georgian authorities but the central place of Orthodox Christianity in the Georgian national narrative; exclusive rights of the Georgian Orthodox Church can be considered as one of the main obstacles to the full integration of Muslims in Georgian society and nationhood. It must also be stressed that there is no feeling of unity between these Muslim communities, and this also does not help them to achieve their aims.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Gocha Japaridze, “The Emirate of Tbilisi,” in *Islam. Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (in Georgian), ed. G. Japaridze (Tbilisi: Nekeri, 1999), 73.
- <sup>2</sup>The Arabian form of a pronunciation of the name of Tbilisi which then entered in Russian and European languages and was the official name of the city till the beginning of the twentieth century.
- <sup>3</sup>Zaza Shashikadze, “Osmaluri gadasakhadbi acharashi” [Ottoman Taxes in Adjara] (in Georgian), in *Batumi State University Works*, IV (Georgia: Batumi, 2002), 217.
- <sup>4</sup>David Bakradze, *Arqeologiuri mogzauroba guriasa da acharashi* [Archaeological Journey in Guria and Ajara] (in Georgian) (Georgia: Batumi, 1987), 72, 84–85.
- <sup>5</sup>Alexander Pushkin, *Puteshestvie v Arzrum vo vremya pokhoda 1829 goda* [Travel to Arzrum during the Campaign of 1829] (in Russian), Works, vol. V. (Moscow, 1960), 418.
- <sup>6</sup>Mathijs Pelkmans, *Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 96.
- <sup>7</sup>George Sanikidze and Edward Walker, *Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia* [Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies] (Working Paper Series, 2004), 7, accessed October 11, 2018, [http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/publications/2004\\_04-sani.pdf](http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/publications/2004_04-sani.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup>Vakhtang Iashvili, *Achara Osmalebis dros* [Ajaria Under the Ottomans] (in Georgian) (Batumi, 1948), 138.
- <sup>9</sup>Ilia Datunashvili, “mihajiruli modzarobis sheqmnis religiuri paqtorebi” [Religious Factors of the Creation of the Muhajir Movement in Caucasus] (in Georgian), in *History of the Near East Countries. New and Newest Period*, ed. O. Gigineishvili (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1989), 14.
- <sup>10</sup>Alexander Frenkel, *Ocherki Churuk-Su i Batuma* [Essays on Churuk-Su and Batum] (in Russian). (Tiflis, 1879), 62.
- <sup>11</sup>*Akti, sobrannii Kavkazskoi arkeologicheskoi komissiei* [Acts, collected by Archeological Commission of Caucasus], v. IX (in Russian) (Tbilisi, 1884), 126.
- <sup>12</sup>Firouzeh Mostashari, “Colonial Dilemmas: Russian Policies in the Muslim Caucasus,” in *Of Religion and Empire. Missions, Conversions, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. R. Geraci and M. Khodarkovski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 229–49.
- <sup>13</sup>Mathijs Pelkmans, Op. cit., 99.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>16</sup> Aslan H. Abashidze, *Ajaria. Istoria, diplomatia, mezhdunarodnoe pravo* [Ajaria. History, Diplomacy, International Law] (in Russian) (Moscow, 1998), 265. Article I of the Kars Treaty between Turkey and Russia (March 16, 1921) and article VI of the Kars Friendship Treaty between Armenian SSR, Azerbaijan SSR and Georgian SSR Turkey signed with the participation of the Russian Federation (October 13, 1921).

<sup>17</sup> About the 1929 rebellion, see: Timothy K. Blauvelt and Giorgi Khatiashvili, “The Muslim Uprising in Ajara and the Stalinist Revolution in the Periphery,” *Nationalities Papers*, 2016, doi:10.1080/00905992.2016.1142521.

<sup>18</sup> Sergo Dumbadze, “Indignities of the Soviet Power” (in Georgian), in *Historical Journal*, vol. XI (Batumi, 2002), 26–27.

<sup>19</sup> About the settlement of nomads of Turkish origin in Georgia see: Valerian Gabashvili, *Feudal System of Georgia in 16th–17th Centuries* (in Georgian) (Tbilisi, 1967).

<sup>20</sup> Yuri Anchabadze and Natalia Volkova, *Starii Tiflis. Gorod i Gorozbane Ancient Tbilisi. City and Citizens in 19th Century* (in Russian) (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 248.

<sup>21</sup> For example, by 1989 a natural increase among the Georgian equaled 7.6%, and Azerbaijanis—22.8%.

<sup>22</sup> The reason the mosque was destroyed was apparently official opposition to the Shiite practice of self-flagellation during Ashura (“officially” it was announced the destruction of the mosque was necessary for the enlargement of the adjacent avenue).

<sup>23</sup> Géorges Sanikidze, “Islam et musulmans en Géorgie Contemporaine,” in *La Géorgie entre la Perse et l’Europe*, ed. I. Nathkhebia and F. Hellot-Bellier (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009), 288.

<sup>24</sup> Sanikidze and Walker, *Op. cit.*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> A variety of Sufism, which spread in North Azerbaijan and from there to the North Caucasus, Muridism is based on the asceticism and the spirit of self-sacrifice. Strictly hierarchical relations between Master (murshid) and disciple (murid) have particular importance. The militarized form of Muridism was the ideological and organizational base of the Imamate of Shamil (1841–1859) in the North Caucasus. About Muridism in the North Caucasus see, for example: Z. D. Muradiev, *Severokavkazskii miuridizm: istoki i sovremennost'* [North Caucasian Muridism: Roots and Modern Times] (in Russian) (Leningrad, 1989); N. I. Pokrovskii, *Kavkazskie voiny i imam Shamilia* [Caucasian Wars of Imam Shamil] (in Russian) (Moscow, 2000); N. A. Smirnov, *Miuridizm na Kavkaze* [Muridism in the Caucasus] (in Russian) (Moscow, 1963).

<sup>26</sup> About Sufi brotherhoods in the North Caucasus see V. Akaev, *Sheikh Kunta-Hadzhi: zhizn' i doktrina* [Sheikh Kunta-Hadzhi: The Life and the Doctrine] (in Russian) (Grozny, 1994); Alexandre Bennigsen, “The Qādirīyah (Kunta Ḥājjī) Ṭarīqah in the North-East Caucasus: 1850–1987,” *Islamic Culture* 62, no. 2–3 (1988): 63–78; Paul B. Henze, “Fire and Sword in the Caucasus: The 19th Century Resistance of the North Caucasian Mountaineers,” *Central Asian Survey* 2, no. 1 (1983): 5–44; Paul B. Henze, *Islam in the North Caucasus: The Example of Chechnya* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1995); Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, “Sufi Brotherhoods in the USSR: A Historical Survey,” *Central Asian Survey* 2, no. 4 (1983): 1–35; Anna Zelkina, *Quest for God and Freedom: The Sufi Response to the Russian Advance in the North Caucasus* (London: Hurst, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (University of California Press, 1986), 21.

<sup>28</sup> It is not an appropriate name but in post-Soviet countries, it is usual to call “salafis” or adherents of “pure Islam”—Wahhabis. Even Georgian experts use this word till now. See for example: Giorgi Gogvadze and Sergi

Kapanadze, "Daesh and Challenges Facing Georgia," Policy Document, Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS), 2015, November, <http://grass.org.ge/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Daesh-and-Challenges-Facing-Georgia.pdf>, accessed April 20, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> See George Sanikidze, "Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Caucasian Region: 'Global' and 'Local' Islam in the Pankisi Gorge," in *Regional and Transregional Dynamism in Central Eurasia: Empires, Islam and Politics*, ed. T. Yuama (Sapporo: Hokkaido University Press, 2007), 263–82.

<sup>30</sup> As well as Ajarians, Azerbaijanis and Kists, among other small communities of Muslims of Georgia can be included so-called Meskhetians Turks (or "Ahiska Türkleri") i.e. "Turcs de la province d'Ahiska" (Akhalsikhe—town in the southern Georgia) which were deported to Central Asia in 1944. A small number of "Meskhetians Turks" returned to Georgia but the majority live in Russia, Azerbaijan and Central Asia. (About "Meskhetians Turks" see for example: *Meskhetian Turks. Solutions and Human Security* [The Forced Migration Projects of the Open Society Institute, 1998]; Lela Inasaridze, "Meskhetian Return Stirs Georgian Dissent," in *IWPR'S Caucasus Reporting Service*, 163/2003, <https://goo.gl/MdIwZ8>.), accessed April 20, 2017; Abkhazs, Avars, communities of Turks and Iranians who are settled in Georgia.

<sup>31</sup> Bayram Balcı and Raoul Motika, "Le renouveau islamique en Géorgie post-soviétique," in *Religion et politique dans le Caucase Post-Soviétique*, ed. B. Balcı and R. Motika (Istanbul: Institut français d'études anatoliennes, 2007), 18, 225–49.

<sup>32</sup> Moshe Gammer, "From the Challenge of Nationalism to the Challenge of Islam. The Case of Daghestan," in *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus. Post-Soviet Disorder*, ed. M. Gammer (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 179.

<sup>33</sup> Bennett Clifford, "Georgian Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq—Factors of Violent Extremism and Recruitment," #48, 2015, 3, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, Tbilisi.

<sup>34</sup> Tina Shiopshvili and Ruslan Baramidze, eds. *Qar'tveli musulmebi t'anamedroveobis konteq'stshi* [Georgian Muslims in the Context of Modernity] (in Georgian) (Batumi: N. Berdzenishvili Institute, 2010), 527.

<sup>35</sup> Sopho Zviadadze, "'me ar var t'at'ari, me var muslimi q'art'veli': religious transp'ormatsia da religiuri identobis ramdenime t'avisebureba acharashi" ["I'm not Tatar, I'm Muslim Georgian": Transformation of Religion and some Peculiarities of the Religious Identity in Ajara] (in Georgian), in *religia, sazogadoeba da politika saq'art'velosbi* [Religion, Society and Politics in Georgia], ed. N. Ghamgashidze (Tbilisi: The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, 2016), 15–32, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Ruslan Baramidze, "Islam in Adjara—Comparative Analysis of Two Communities in Adjara," in *Changing Identities: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia*. Collection of Selected Works. Scientific ed. Viktor Voronkov and ed. Sophia Khutsishvili and John Horan (Tbilisi: Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office, 2011), 96–125, 97.

<sup>37</sup> Inga Popovaite, "Religiosity Patterns of Minority and Majority Religious Groups in Armenia and Georgia," accessed May 22, 2017, [https://www.academia.edu/7296222/Religiosity\\_Patterns\\_of\\_Minority\\_and\\_Majority\\_Religious\\_Groups\\_in\\_Armenia\\_and\\_Georgia](https://www.academia.edu/7296222/Religiosity_Patterns_of_Minority_and_Majority_Religious_Groups_in_Armenia_and_Georgia).

<sup>38</sup> *Political Aspects of Islam in Georgia*, Project executors: Irakli Menagarishvili, Giorgi Lobjanidze, Natela Sakhokia, Giorgi Gvimradze, Project supported by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Tbilisi: Strategic Research Institute, 2013), 63.

<sup>39</sup> Zviadadze, Op. cit., 25.

<sup>40</sup> Mathijs Pelkmans, "Baptized Georgian: Religious Conversion to Christianity in Autonomous Ajaria" (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Working Paper No. 71, 2005), 2.

<sup>41</sup> Apart from Muslims, there is a small community of Georgian Catholics. In recent times, small communities of Georgian Baptists, Bahaites etc. have emerged.

<sup>42</sup> Mathijs Pelkmans, "Religion, Nation and State in Georgia: Christian Expansion in Muslim Ajaria," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22, no. 2 (2002): 249.

<sup>43</sup> Pelkmans, "Baptized Georgian," 27. Pelkmans investigates several cases of Conversion of Ajarian Muslims to Christianity and argues that "economic and political considerations may have influenced people's decision to be baptized more than religious concerns."

<sup>44</sup> Mathijs Pelkmans, "Religious Crossings and Conversions on the Muslim-Christian Frontier in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 19, no. 2 (2010), 109–28, 110.

<sup>45</sup> Inga Popovaite, "Georgian Muslims Are Strangers in Their Own Country," accessed May 22, 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/inga-popovaite/georgian-muslims-are-strangers-in-their-own-country>.

<sup>46</sup> Mevlud is even celebrated by Christians as the feast of the family, unity, of the memory of ancestors. See Zviadadze, Op. cit., 19.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Sieca-Kozlovski and Alexandre Toumarkine, *Geopolitique de la mer Noire. Turquie et pays de l'ex-URSS*, 7. Les acteurs religieux (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 92.

<sup>48</sup> Ekatherina Meiering-Mikadze, "L'islam en Adjarie: Trajectoires historiques et implications contemporaines," *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien* 27 (1999): 41.

<sup>49</sup> About their activities see: Balcı and Motika, Op. cit., 36–39. In 2016–2017, as a result of the "Anti-Gülen" policy of the Turkish government, some educational institutions in Georgia associated with the Güllen movement were closed.

<sup>50</sup> The official data for the 2014 number of Muslims in Georgia was 398,677 (total population—3,713,804). In Batumi there were 38,767 Muslims (Total number of inhabitants—152,839) and in general in Ajara—132,852 (total population 333,953). The number of Azerbaijanis is around 300,000. Today around 6,000 Iranian citizens have resident status in Georgia. It is quite difficult to calculate the exact number of Turks, settled in Georgia, because lots of them are of Georgian origin and have double citizenship. By the estimation, their number does not exceed 50,000. In 2010, 586 Muslim Mekhetians lived in Georgia and several thousand of them are still waiting for the repatriation to Georgia. (George Sordia, "Muslim Mekhetians and the Problem of their Repatriation" (in Georgian), *Solidaroba*, 2010, #2(35). The number of other Muslim groups (Kists, Avars etc.) does not exceed 15,000 (see: Sanikidze and Walker, Op. cit.)

<sup>51</sup> The majority of Azerbaijanis live in the Kvemo Kartli region of Eastern Georgia. This region has great strategic importance—the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline crosses this region and on the other hand, it is situated between Georgia's frontiers with Azerbaijan and Armenia. See Silvia Serrano, "Les Azéris de Géorgie. Quelles perspectives d'intégration?" *Cahiers d'Études sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien* 28 (juin-décembre 1999): 231–51.

<sup>52</sup> *Political Aspects of Islam in Georgia*, 74.

<sup>53</sup> Shireen Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 171.

<sup>54</sup> C. Prasad, "Georgia's Muslim Community: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy?" (ECMI Working Paper No. 58, 2012), 12, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://www.ecmi.de/publications/detail/58-georgia-s-muslim-community-a-self-fulfilling-prophecy-235/>.

<sup>55</sup> Goguadze and Kapanadze, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Ruslan Baramidze, "Islamic State and Georgia's Muslim community," June 17, 2015, accessed March 17, 2017, [https://ge.boell.org/en/2015/06/17/islamic-state-and-georgias-muslim-community#\\_ftn1](https://ge.boell.org/en/2015/06/17/islamic-state-and-georgias-muslim-community#_ftn1).

<sup>57</sup> Bennett Clifford, *Georgian Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq—Factors of Violent Extremism and Recruitment* (Tbilisi: Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, #48, 2015), 7–8.

<sup>58</sup> George Sanikidze, *The Islamic State and the "Great Game" in the Middle East* (Expert Opinion No. 44, GFSIS, 2015), <https://www.gfsis.org/library/view-opinion-paper/44>.

<sup>59</sup> Goguadze and Kapanadze, "Daesh and Challenges Facing Georgia," 8.

<sup>60</sup> See <https://on.ge/story/10990>, accessed May 26, 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Mariam Gabedava and Koba Turmanidze, "Iran's Soft Power in Georgia—Weak for Now, Bigger Potential for the Future," in *Religion and Soft Power in South Caucasus*, Policy Perspective, ed. Ansgar Jödicke and Kornely Kakachia (Tbilisi: Georgian Institute of Politics, 2017), 61.

<sup>62</sup> Ruslan Baramidze, "Political Process, Social Activity and Individual Strategies in Georgia: Institutional Transformations, Struggle for Identity and Georgian Muslims in the Media" (CAP PAPERS, 166, CERIA SERIES, 2016), April 2016, 11. <http://centralasiaprogram.org/archives/9598>, accessed April 20, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Prasad, *Op. cit.* In July 2011, former president of Georgia Saakashvili signed a legislative amendment to the civil code into law which has allowed religious minorities to register as legal entities of public law for the first time. The amendment, praised by the international community, triggered protests by the Georgian Orthodox Church.

<sup>64</sup> See <http://www.amerikishma.com/content/article-124702684/535631.html>, accessed May 16, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> It must be noted that Georgian experts were very disappointed by the quality of the restoration of Georgian churches in Turkey, but in May 2017, the new agreement was signed. According to this agreement "Georgia and Turkey will work together on restoring and safeguarding monuments of cultural heritage found along the border between the two states." It is supposed that Georgian and Turkish specialists will participate in the restoration of medieval Georgian churches and medieval Ottoman mosques. See <http://agenda.ge/news/79946/eng>, accessed June 1, 2017.

<sup>66</sup> The so-called Azizie mosque was named after the Ottoman sultan Abdülaziz I (1861–1876) and was constructed in the late 1860s, just before the Russian conquest of the region. The mosque was situated in the historical center of Batumi. At the beginning of Soviet rule the mosque was destroyed. Today there are several buildings on the site of the mosque and its yard. About debates in Georgian society concerning the reconstruction of the Azizie mosque, see for example: Ruslan Baramidze, *Saq'art'velos muslimuri t'emi da sakbelmtsip'o politika (1991–2012 tslebi)* [The Muslim Community of Georgia and State Policy (1991–2012)] (in Georgian) (Batumi: Horos, 2014).

<sup>67</sup> Baramidze, *Saq'art'velos muslimuri t'emi*, 241. It must be noted also that after the enlargement of the Batumi municipality's territory several villages and a small town with small local mosques became part of the city, so formally today there are several mosques in Batumi.

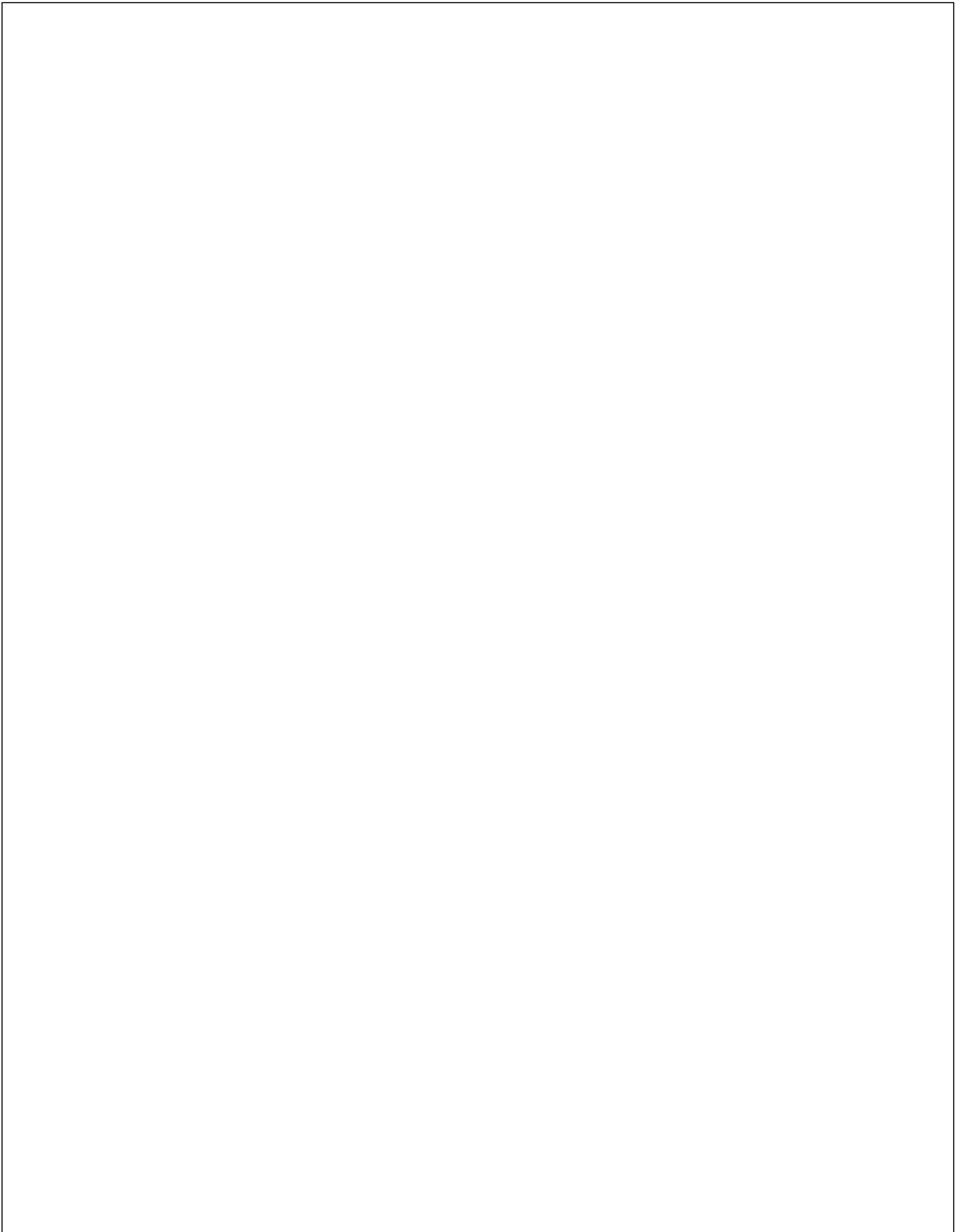
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<sup>68</sup>It is worth noting that former Georgian Prime Minister and tycoon Bidzina Ivanishvili stressed several times that he is ready to finance the construction of the new mosque (or enlargement of the ancient mosque). See for example <http://thouse.ge/new/1866-bidzina-ivanishvili-mzad-var-batumshi-mechetis-mshenebloba-davafinanso>, accessed May 15, 2017. The head of the Ajarian autonomy also promised Muslims that authorities will find another place in Batumi for the mosque. But till now, it is only a promise without any sign of its accomplishment.

<sup>69</sup>About the problem of the Mokhe mosque, see, for example, Mariam Gvartadze and Eka Chitanava, "Georgia: Government and Orthodox Block Muslims Regaining Mosque," accessed May 19, 2017, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2260](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2260).

<sup>70</sup>See <http://www.tdi.ge/en/statement/brief-issues-batumi-and-mokhe-mosques>, accessed May 22, 2017. The Tolerance and Diversity Institute is a nongovernmental organization which represents the interests of ethnic and religious minorities (including Muslims) in Georgia and defends their rights.





# Anomie, Religio-Political Fundamentalism and American Evangelicalism: Rightest Americanism and Islamophobia

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