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What Is Islamophobia?

The word *Islamophobia* is not new, despite the fact that one would be hard pressed to find many instances of it prior to the 1990s. It first appeared in its French form, *Islamophobie*, in a book by the painter Etienne Dinet in 1918.[1] In the past few decades, however, the word has become an integral part of political and public discourse. This is due

> **Islamophobia: hatred, hostility, and fear of Islam and Muslims, and the discriminatory practices that result.**

largely to a much-cited study conducted by a British think tank, the Runnymede Trust, in 1997. The study defines Islamophobia as "dread or hatred of Islam" and as "unfounded hostility towards Islam."[2] It also defines Islamophobia in light of the concrete expressions this hostility

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1. Jocelyne Cesari, "Islamophobia in the West: A Comparison between Europe and the United States," in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, ed. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.
2. Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997), 1, 4.

takes, such as the deliberate exclusion of Muslims from mainstream social and political life. This definition is the one most frequently employed in debates pertaining to anti-Muslim sentiment in the West.

The term has plenty of critics. Some scholars, sympathetic with the need to analyze and combat anti-Muslim prejudice, maintain that the very word *Islamophobia* is a misnomer. They argue that a literal interpretation suggests that the primary object of fear or discrimination is religion (Islam), when in fact the prejudice in question is best understood under a different framework, such as racism or xenophobia. Other critics reject the word because they believe it stifles freedom of speech and the freedom to criticize the beliefs and practices of a particular religious tradition or community.

This chapter will unpack this controversy and develop a working definition of Islamophobia. After an overview of the Runnymede Trust's findings in its 1997 study, I will tackle some of the most common questions and criticisms raised about Islamophobia. I will conclude by putting forth a definition of Islamophobia that is informed largely by the Runnymede definition—the fear, dislike, or hatred of Muslims and Islam—yet nuanced to address some of the more significant concerns from critics.

The Runnymede Report

The Runnymede Trust was established in 1968 during a time of significant social and cultural upheaval in Europe and the United States. Its purpose was to counsel the British government on race relations. In 1996, the Runnymede Trust created the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. The commission's purpose was to analyze the discrimination experienced by many Muslims in Britain and to make policy recommendations to the government that

would help combat this discrimination. Its report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, was released one year later. Often referred to as the Runnymede Report, this study has served as the starting point for many subsequent analyses of Islamophobia in Europe and North America.

The timing of the report was not coincidental. Increasing tensions between non-Muslims and Muslims, both in the West and between the West and Muslim-majority regions, fed the conditions that gave rise to the report. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, for example, contributed to negative perceptions of Muslims and Islam in the West. On the domestic front, the Rushdie Affair of 1988–1989 revealed the tensions between non-Muslims and Muslims within Britain. The Rushdie Affair refers to the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), a novel by the British-Indian writer Salman Rushdie. It provoked considerable controversy among some Muslims in Britain and abroad due to its critical depictions of Islam. This episode will be described in more detail in chapter 5, but for now what is important is that the strong reaction by some Muslims to *The Satanic Verses* gave rise to a backlash against Muslims in Britain and to the perception that Islam could not adapt to Western standards of free speech. The authors of the Runnymede Report have this event in mind when reflecting on the rise of anti-Muslim prejudice in Britain and the recognition that "there is a new reality which needs naming."[3]

As stated above, the Runnymede Report defines Islamophobia as "dread or hatred of Islam" that, by implication, translates into "fear or dislike of all or most Muslims."[4] It notes that prejudice against Muslims has reached a scale requiring action to protect the basic rights of Britain's Muslim citizens. By identifying Islamophobia as

3. Ibid., 4.
4. Ibid., 1.

a distinct phenomenon that singles out Muslims for special consideration and protection, the commission recognizes the challenges and even dangers of conveying the message that Muslim beliefs and practices should somehow fall outside the realm of critical inquiry. This is why the report goes to great lengths to differentiate what it deems legitimate criticisms of Islam, rooted in "open" views, from the "closed" views that constitute Islamophobia.

Features of Islamophobia

What follows is a brief discussion of the eight closed views identified by the Runnymede Report as characteristic of Islamophobia. While the commission has Britain in mind, its observations apply more broadly to the West. For this reason, the examples I use to illustrate each closed view will reflect a variety of Western contexts.

1. **Islam as monolithic and static.** The list of closed views begins with the notion that Islam lacks both diversity and internal differences and disagreements. In other words, all Muslims are basically the same, holding uniform worldviews and ideologies. In many ways, this perception drives much of the Islamophobia that one encounters in the West. If Islam is monolithic and unchanging, and if media coverage focuses on violence or terrorism carried out in the name of Islam by a small minority of Muslims, then it is easy to draw the conclusion that what one sees on the news is somehow endemic to Islam and all Muslims. Similarly, if women in a Muslim-majority country such as Saudi Arabia face severe restrictions on their public behavior—for example, the prohibition to drive—many in the West might conclude that all Muslim women face similar restrictions, when in fact Saudi Arabia is the exception and not

the rule. This contrasts with the assumption that other religions or belief systems are diverse and dynamic and do not lend themselves to easy characterizations that apply to all practitioners.

To put the difference starkly, if al-Qaeda launches violent attacks against Western targets, some might conclude that this is due to an inherent quality in Islam and that, by extension, all Muslims are prone to violence because all Muslims are fundamentally the same. By contrast, when Anders Breivik, a self-identified Norwegian Christian, went on a killing rampage in and near Oslo in July 2011, Christianity and Christians as a whole were not implicated in his crimes.

Another example involves the US presidential campaign of then Senator Barack Obama in 2008. Some of Obama's opponents frequently suggested that he was a Muslim. They emphasized the time he spent as a child in Indonesia, his Muslim father, and his Muslim-sounding middle name, Hussein. The motivation to brand Obama as a Muslim rested in the assumption that Islam is monolithic. Since the Muslims most Americans were familiar with were the terrorists they saw or read about in the news, any connection between Obama and Islam might also be construed as a link between Obama and terrorism or extremism. The assumption that Islam is monolithic easily lends itself to the guilt-by-association principle at work in the campaign to label Obama a Muslim and in much of the Islamophobic discourse one finds in the West.

2. **Islam as separate and other.** Another characteristic of Islamophobia is the idea that Islam shares none of the core values found in other religions, particularly Judaism and Christianity,

or in Western culture. Western values such as respect for religious diversity or freedom of religion have no home in Islam.

The debate over the building of minarets in Switzerland illustrates this perception. In 2009, the Swiss People's Party, a radical right party, led a campaign in Switzerland to prohibit the construction of new minarets—that is, towers located on or next to mosques. During a television interview, a reporter asked Ulrich Schlüer, a member of the party and a major figure behind the anti-minaret campaign, if the proposed ban was fair in light of the fact that it targeted minarets but not church steeples. Schlüer responded that the comparison was invalid because the steeple and the minaret represent two religions that hold two very different sets of values: "I think Christianity is an attitude of freedom, of recognizing different meanings, of tolerance. Islam has nothing to do with tolerance."[5] Put another way, Christianity embraces and epitomizes Western secular values such as toleration and freedom, the very values Islam rejects. Since Islam is so different, so "other," its symbols cannot be allowed to occupy public space and promote values that are "foreign" to the Swiss people.

3. **Islam as inferior.** A third closed view is that Islam is not only different from but also inferior to the West. Islam is barbaric, irrational, and sexist, in contrast to the civilized, enlightened, and gender-equal West.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former Muslim and prominent critic of Islam, frequently invokes these types of critiques in her writing and speaking. She contrasts the Enlightenment principles pervading the

5. Ulrich Schlüer, interviewed by Julie Hunt, "Anti-Minaret Campaigner Puts Case," October 6, 2009, *swissinfo.ch*, http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/multimedia/video/Anti-minaret_campaigner_puts_case.html?cid=1012760.

West, such as free inquiry and individual freedom, with Islam. "Islam," she writes, "is incompatible with the principles of liberty that are at the heart of the Enlightenment legacy."[6] She argues that Islam's "obsession with subjugating women is one of the things that makes [it] so reprehensible."[7] She does not believe that Islam has anything to offer the West because it lags behind the West intellectually, culturally, and ethically.

   4. **Islam as the enemy.** Islam, according to a fourth closed view, is identified as hostile, violent, and aggressive. Islam is a religion bent on conquest, and, for this reason, there is an inevitable "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West.

We will return to the clash of civilizations thesis in subsequent chapters, but what is important at this point is to emphasize how Islam is linked inextricably to violence and terrorism in a manner that feeds not only Western foreign policies and wars against Muslim-majority countries but also domestic policies that place restrictions on Muslims living in the West or that single out Muslims as people who are particularly susceptible to terrorist activity. For example, the profiling of Muslim passengers in US airport security lines can certainly be interpreted as based in the assumption that all Muslims are prone to terrorism and thus must be targeted for additional security measures in order to protect non–Muslim Americans.

   5. **Islam as manipulative.** Another common Islamophobic characteristic is the assumption that Muslims are objects of suspicion because they are viewed as devious, relying on their

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6. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey through the Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 214.
7. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 163.

religion to give them some strategic military or political advantage.

An illustration of this view is the hysteria in recent years over "creeping Sharia" in the United States. Beginning in 2010, a wave of legislation swept through state legislatures. The purpose of the legislation was to ban *Sharia*, or Islamic law, from individual states.

Sharia: Islamic law based on the Qur'an and the Sunna (the example of Muhammad) that provides a blueprint for proper conduct in accordance with God's revelations.

Supporters of this legislation argued that Muslims were taking advantage of the free exercise of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment in order to spread their faith and to grow in numbers and influence. The anti-Sharia lobby insisted, however, that Muslims were not sincere in their admiration or respect for the First Amendment but sought protection under the US Constitution only to wait for a strategic time to attain a critical mass and then to impose Sharia law.

6. **Racial discrimination against Muslims justified.** The report notes that racism and Islamophobia in the British context are often mixed together; as a result, anti-Muslim feelings and anti-Asian sentiment are often connected.[8] In other Western contexts, it might be anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiments. When Muslims are involved, racist practices and prejudices get a pass.

8. Many Muslims in Britain have a South Asian background.

To take an earlier example, profiling in US airports is often defended not only in light of the religious identities of Muslims but also on the basis of their race and the belief that one can easily spot a Muslim based on outward appearance, presumably including skin color. Sam Harris, a prominent atheist philosopher and critic of Islam, plainly states this in regard to airport security lines: "We should profile Muslims, or anyone who looks like he or she could conceivably be Muslim, and we should be honest about it."[9] Racial discrimination and racist exclusionary practices are typically deemed unconstitutional today in the United States, but here is a case in which such discrimination is presented as normal and necessary.

7. **Muslim criticisms of the West invalidated.** In this closed view, the Western critique of Islam is a one-way street. Western politicians, religious leaders, and journalists can freely criticize Islamic beliefs and practices, but they give little or no heed to Muslim perspectives on and criticisms of Western values or practices.

For example, many Western nations have intense debates about freedom of speech, and all set some limits on the scope of such speech. Some European countries have laws that prohibit Holocaust denial. One is not free in countries such as Belgium or Austria to deny or condone the genocide that took place in Nazi Germany. But when Muslims raise critical questions about the problems with speech that deliberately and disrespectfully denigrates the texts, figures, or practitioners of Islam, their views are often rejected outright. In 2005 and 2006, various Muslims inside and outside of Denmark raised such questions in response to satirical cartoons of Muhammad published

9. Sam Harris, "In Defense of Profiling," *Sam Harris: The Blog*, April 28, 2012, http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/in-defense-of-profiling.

by a Danish newspaper. Their questions were largely dismissed, with some public figures going so far as to point out that the real problem was the inability of Muslims to understand and accept the Western commitment to freedom of speech.

8. **Anti–Muslim discourse as natural.** The report finally notes that anti-Muslim discourse is so pervasive that even some public figures who ardently fight for tolerance and equal rights for all citizens may express little or no concern for the discrimination faced by Muslims in their midst. Prejudiced statements or views about Muslims are not deemed bigoted; instead, they are normal.

In October 2010, a well–respected journalist with National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States, Juan Williams, openly proclaimed that the sight of Muslims on an airplane made him nervous. NPR took action and fired him, and Fox News subsequently hired him. A major debate ensued over whether NPR overreacted in its decision to dismiss Williams. Had Williams articulated that the sight of Jews or African Americans on an airplane caused him anxiety, NPR's decision to fire him would have attracted broad support. Instead, Williams articulated a sentiment deemed acceptable enough by a wide spectrum of the American public that NPR's decision to oust him, more than his original statement, became the focal point of the controversy.

In surveying these eight features of Islamophobia, the report focuses more on pointing out the closed views than addressing the open views, views that reflect an engagement with Islam in which common ground and legitimate differences are examined, acknowledged, and respected. The report also devotes considerable attention to detailing the consequences of Islamophobia in Britain,

including employment discrimination, exclusion from mainstream politics, and prejudice in the media toward Muslims and Islam.

The Runnymede Report has become a point of reference for many political and scholarly discussions since its publication in 1997. Its definition and framing of Islamophobia have also given rise to critical questions and concerns, including whether the concept of Islamophobia helps or hinders our understanding of anti-Muslim prejudice, how Islamophobia relates to more commonly identified forms of prejudice, and the extent to which Islamophobia is a construct that stifles free speech and inhibits one's right to disagree openly with the teachings of Islam. In the remainder of this chapter, I will address these and other common questions and criticisms in an effort to move toward a working definition of Islamophobia.

Does "Islamophobia" Stifle Legitimate Criticisms of Muslims and Islam?

One frequent criticism voiced against the concept of Islamophobia is that it can suppress freedom of speech and inhibit open discussion and debate about religion.[10] Should Islam receive special protection when it comes to critical discussions about religion in democratic societies? Is there a risk that anyone who criticizes Islamic beliefs and practices is automatically labeled an Islamophobe? These are questions that even those who are sympathetic with Muslims and their experiences of bigotry recognize as legitimate.

The most vocal critics reject out of hand the existence of Islamophobia and warn that any flirtations with the concept will lead the West into the fiery pit of cultural relativism and will undermine the freedoms that set "us" apart from the world of Islam. A notable

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10. For a straightforward articulation of this concern, see Kenan Malik, "The Islamophobia Myth," *Prospect*, February 2005, http://www.kenanmalik.com/essays/prospect_islamophobia.html.

instance of this criticism is found in a manifesto issued by twelve authors, among them Salman Rushdie and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, written in response to the violence sparked by the publication of controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in Denmark and across Europe in 2005 and 2006. Titled "Together Facing the New Totalitarianism," the manifesto denies the existence of Islamophobia:

> We reject the "cultural relativism" which implies an acceptance that men and women of Muslim culture are deprived of the right to equality, freedom and secularism in the name of the respect for certain cultures and traditions.
>
> We refuse to renounce our critical spirit out of fear of being accused of "Islamophobia," a wretched concept that confuses criticism of Islam as a religion and stigmatisation of those who believe in it.
>
> We defend the universality of the freedom of expression, so that a critical spirit can exist in every continent, towards each and every maltreatment and dogma.[11]

The authors view freedom of expression and Islamophobia as mutually exclusive concepts, insisting on the need to reject the latter in order to allow the former to flourish.

The fact that many of these authors are sometimes criticized as inciting or sustaining Islamophobia by doing what they renounce in the manifesto—stigmatizing Muslims under the guise of criticizing Islam—is not the main point I want to make. The larger point is that the freedom of speech issue addressed in the manifesto is a concern shared more broadly across the political and religious spectrum. Even the Runnymede Report recognizes this potential problem. This is why it insists that one can disagree with and criticize the beliefs and practices of Muslims without being Islamophobic: "It can be

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11. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Chahla Chafiq, Caroline Fourest et al., "Together Facing the New Totalitarianism," *BBC News* (UK), March 1, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4764730.stm.

legitimate to criticize policies and practices of Muslim states and regimes, for example, especially when their governments do not subscribe to internationally recognized human rights, freedoms and democratic procedures, or to criticize and condemn terrorist movements which claim to be motivated by Islamic values."[12] One of the reasons the report distinguishes between open and closed views of Islam is to safeguard freedom of speech and to set it apart from Islamophobic discourse.

How do we address this dilemma? What standards should apply when differentiating Islamophobia from legitimate, critical discourse about Muslim beliefs and practices? Let me suggest three overlapping criteria for making this crucial distinction.[13] First, criticisms of Islam should be based on aspects of the religion that many Muslims recognize as a part of their faith and should avoid guilt by association. For example, disagreeing with the belief that the Qur'an is God's fullest self-disclosure to humanity does not qualify as Islamophobic. It reflects a legitimate difference of opinion over an *actual* belief held by a large number of Muslims, a belief that one would not reasonably expect Buddhists or Christians to embrace. On the other hand, to accuse all Muslims of being inherently prone to violence in light of the deadly campaigns against civilians conducted by extremist groups such as al-Qaeda or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) violates this criterion. The

> *Qur'an*: Islam's most sacred and authoritative text, revealed to Muhammad by God via the angel Gabriel; the word literally means "recitation."

12. Commission on British Muslims, *Islamophobia*, 4.
13. Variations on the first and third criteria that I put forth here can be found in John E. Richardson, *(Mis)representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 2004), 25.

accusation does not reflect the authentic beliefs and practices embraced by the overwhelming majority of Muslims. In fact, many Muslims might suspect that the critic has ulterior motives for distorting or misrepresenting their beliefs and perhaps is attempting to stigmatize and malign all Muslims for personal or political gain.

Second, criticism should not lapse into hate speech or otherwise endanger the safety of Muslim citizens. For example, in 2012 the American Freedom Defense Initiative posted an ad on a large billboard at a New York train platform that read: "19,250 Deadly Islamic Attacks Since 9/11/01—and Counting. It's Not Islamophobia, It's Islamorealism" (see image 9). Organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League denounced the ad as hate speech and as a deliberate attempt to mislead the public.[14] The billboard's message is dangerous because it has the potential to incite violence against Muslims by branding them as enemies who are complicit in the killing of innocent people.

hijab: a headscarf worn by some Muslim women that covers the head but leaves the face exposed; more broadly, the term refers to modest dress and behavior for both Muslim women and men.

Finally, criticisms of Islam should not be translated into actions undermining the freedom of religion or the equal opportunity for Muslim minorities to practice their religion as other religious communities do. For example, in Europe, it is commonplace for non-Muslims to voice discomfort over Muslim women who wear *hijabs* or *burqas*, perhaps on the grounds that this

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14. Christopher Mathias, "Islamophobia Billboard at Metro-North Station Causes Outrage One Month after Pro-Palestinian Billboard," *Huffington Post*, August 17, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/17/islamophobic-billboard-at-metronorth-station-pamela-geller-pro-palestinian-ad_n_1797651.html.

restrictive clothing undermines equality of the sexes. Such criticism is not necessarily Islamophobic; it can represent a valid perspective, one shared by some Muslims. But if this discomfort translates into legislation that prohibits Muslim women from freely choosing to wear hijabs or burqas in light of the dictates of their consciences, we have

burqa: a colorful garment worn by some Muslim women that covers most of the body and face but with eyeholes or a grid around the eyes.

ventured into the realm of Islamophobia. The ban on burqas in public spaces in France and Belgium illustrates the violation of this criterion, particularly given that women from other religious communities, such as Catholic nuns, do not face similar restrictions or scrutiny of what they can and cannot wear.

None of these criteria precludes public scrutiny and criticism of Muslim beliefs and practices. Islam does not get a pass from disagreement with or even dislike of specific Islamic beliefs and practices. The criteria do, however, ensure that this freedom to disagree is not used as a cover to practice outright bigotry or discrimination.

Does "Islamophobia" Reinforce What It Seeks to Combat?

The Runnymede Report's insistence on differentiating between "open" and "closed" views of Islam has another danger. If it is considered Islamophobic to believe that all Muslims are terrorists (a closed view), then one strategy to combat this perception is to argue that "real" Islam is peaceful and nonviolent (presumably an open view, or at least an opposing view). Such a response might be well intentioned, but it actually exchanges one static, monolithic view of

Islam and Muslims for another. Since the view of Islam as lacking in diversity tops the Runnymede Report's list of closed views, it would seem that the response noted here actually reinforces the very concept it seeks to combat.

The scholar most critical of this pitfall in the Runnymede Report's binary approach to Islamophobia is Christopher Allen.[15] Allen argues that the report actually lapses into essentialism in its efforts to combat Islamophobia. To essentialize is to attribute innate and enduring qualities to all people associated with a community, religious or otherwise. To claim that all Muslims are violent, for example, is to engage in essentialism. But to describe all Muslims as peaceful is equally essentialist. Allen believes this is the problem with the report's dualistic model of closed versus open views of Islam. The tendency is to compensate for the closed views by creating open views that reduce all Muslims and all of Islam to one underlying essence.

> **essentialism: the belief that a people, culture, or religious tradition possesses an unchanging set of characteristics or some inherent essence.**

Andrew Shryock has a name for countering the Islamophobic image of "bad Muslims" with "good Muslims"—*Islamophilia.* Critics of Islamophobia who are prone to Islamophilia are sometimes desperate to construct the perfect, acceptable Muslim. The model Muslim is one who espouses nonviolence, is highly educated, embraces gender equality, believes firmly in democracy, and participates actively in interfaith dialogue. Shyrock reminds us that this is not only wishful thinking but also a harmful construct that both neglects diversity within Islam and attempts to force Muslims to

15. See Christopher Allen, *Islamophobia* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

conform to a Western ideal that, in turn, can be manipulated by non-Muslims for political purposes.[16]

Simplistic visions of "good Muslims" are not the answer to sinister depictions of "bad Muslims." Islamophilia is not the cure for Islamophobia.

Is Islamophobia Really about Religion?

Some of the reservations about the term *Islamophobia* are rooted in the belief that the word incorrectly suggests that the object of fear is Islam as a religion. The most prominent representative of this view is Fred Halliday. Halliday's words have been cited so frequently that they are worth reprinting here: "'Islam' as a religion *was* the enemy in the past: in the crusades or the *reconquista*. It is not the enemy now: Islam is not threatening to win large segments of western European society to its faith, as Communism did, nor is the polemic, in press, media or political statement, against the Islamic faith. . . . The attack now is against not *Islam* as a faith but *Muslims* as a people."[17] Halliday suggests that a more accurate term to reflect the focus on the people rather than the religion is "anti-Muslimism." Other scholars propose alternate terms such as "Muslimophobia."[18]

It is true that important differences exist between the ways that Muslims were conceived of as the enemy in the Middle Ages and how this takes place today. Certainly, the Christian theological

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16. Andrew Shryock, "Islam as an Object of Fear and Affection," in *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend*, ed. Andrew Shryock (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 1–25. See also Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004).

17. Fred Halliday, "'Islamophobia' Reconsidered," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (September 1999): 898.

18. See Burak Erdenir, "Islamophobia qua Racial Discrimination: Muslimophobia," in *Muslims in 21st Century Europe: Structural and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Anna Triandafyllidou (London: Routledge, 2010), 27–44.

justification for opposing Muslims prevalent in the Middle Ages no longer holds in modern Europe, which is not surprising given the secularization and decline in Christianity's influence that has swept the continent. We are not seeing battles in Europe to eradicate Muslim heretics in order to preserve and defend the ultimate truth of Christianity.

Even so, Halliday's analysis falls short on two grounds. First, stereotypes about Islam as a religion *do* feed much of the Islamophobia that is rampant in the West. Islam is often equated in the media and in public discourse with terrorism, misogyny, backwardness, and so forth, and this is often done with Islam as a religion and an ideology in mind. Islam is attacked as a "faith," even if such attacks, at least in Europe, are not primarily driven by the need to defend Christian truth claims.

Second, if one crosses the Atlantic, it is actually not that difficult to find manifestations of Islamophobia in the United States driven by theologies that view Islam as the enemy of the one true religion—Christianity. The prominent evangelist Franklin Graham contrasted Christianity with Islam, which he called "a religion of hatred" and "a religion of war."[19] In 2003, Lieutenant General William Boykin, a decorated military officer and a high-ranking official in the US Defense Department, made headlines for claiming that the War on Terror was a Christian battle against the representatives of Satan. The opinions of Graham and Boykin are certainly controversial and are in no way representative of the great diversity of Christian views of Islam in the United States. But they are reminders that hostile views of Islam, rooted in concerns to defend and preserve the Christian faith if not the Christian nation, are still alive.

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19. Bobby Ghosh, "Islamophobia: Does America Have a Muslim Problem?," *Time*, August 30, 2010, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2011936,00.html.

Halliday's alternative to Islamophobia, anti-Muslimism, fails to capture the reality that religion is still a significant part of anti-Muslim sentiment. That said, Halliday's insights about Islamophobia are still helpful because they remind us that religion is not the only explanatory factor worth considering.

Is Islamophobia a Form of Racism?

If there is an explanatory factor that rivals religion in the debate over what drives Islamophobia, it is racism. Islamophobia is not racially blind, nor is it simply a manifestation of older forms of racism rooted in biological inferiority. It is an example of what some scholars have labeled "cultural racism." This form of racism incites hatred and hostility based on religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and ethnic backgrounds.[20] Animosity toward Muslims is expressed in terms of cultural and religious inferiority, with Muslims and Islam labeled as barbaric, violent, uncivilized, and inferior to Western culture and civilization. The presumed insurmountable differences between "Muslim culture" and the West serve as the basis for exclusion and discrimination. The argument of cultural inferiority has gained significant traction in recent decades, in part because many politicians, journalists, and public figures do not

> **cultural racism: hatred and hostility of others based on religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and ethnicity.**

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20. See Commission on British Muslims, *Islamophobia*, 12; Liz Fekete, *A Suitable Enemy: Racism, Migration and Islamophobia in Europe* (New York: Pluto, 2009), 194; Mehdi Semati, "Islamophobia, Culture and Race in the Age of Empire," *Cultural Studies* 24 (2012): 256–75; Raymond Taras, *Xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 14.

see it as racist; they assume that racism must involve overt appeals to skin color or biological inferiority.

Two questions are frequently raised in debates about whether Islamophobia is a form of racism. First, if Islamophobia represents a fear of Islam as a religion, does labeling it racism confuse matters? How can it be both? Some scholars prefer to choose one or the other. But in light of the complexities of cultural racism, it is nearly impossible to choose one over the other. Islamophobia is driven by animosity toward religion *and* race. Race, culture, ethnicity, and religion are often conflated in Western discourse about Islam, and hostility based on religious differences is difficult to extricate from bigotry based on cultural and ethnic differences.

An illustration of Islamophobia as a manifestation of cultural racism can be found in "We Owe Arabs Nothing," an article written by Robert Kilroy-Silk, a former British politician and television talk show host. Published by the *Sunday Express* on January 4, 2004, the article describes Kilroy-Silk's views of Arab countries as anything but "shining examples of civilization." He indiscriminately labels all Arabs as "suicide bombers, limb amputators, [and] women repressors," making obvious references to negative stereotypes of Muslims and Islam.[21] The article generated so much controversy that his BBC program, *Kilroy*, was canceled soon after the article's publication. The article demonstrates how religion and race are easily conflated in Islamophobic rhetoric. Where animosity based on race ends and that based on religion begins is unclear. In this case, as in many others, Islam and Muslims are racialized, but not by abandoning religious elements.

A second question that is often debated concerns the matter of choice. Can you call Islamophobia racism when, unlike race,

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21. Quoted in Ali Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 110.

religious identity is a voluntary choice, not something with which you are born? The assumption here is that one chooses to embrace Islam, one chooses to become (or remain) a Muslim, and therefore one can "unchoose" this identification and consequently avoid discrimination. Victims of racism, on the other hand, are targeted for something over which they have no control or choice.

With this question, once again we encounter notions of race and racism rooted in biological categories that do not fully capture the type of racism under analysis here. Moreover, as the scholars Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood argue, people do not, in fact, choose to be born into a Muslim family, nor do they choose to be born into a society in which to be a Muslim, or to have ethnic roots in a Muslim-majority country, automatically makes one an object of suspicion among the non–Muslim majority population.[22] Many people suffer discrimination and hostility in the West simply because they are *perceived* to be Muslim, either because of outward dress or through family heritage or ethnic lineage. These realities would not disappear even if self–identified Muslims chose to identify with another religious community or dropped a religious identity altogether.

Is Islamophobia Connected to Anti-Semitism?

On the surface, a possible connection between anti–Semitism and Islamophobia, particularly in the European context, may seem a bit of a stretch. After all, anti-Semitism, particularly from the late nineteenth century through World War II, resulted in the systematic and mass

anti-Semitism: prejudice and hatred toward Jews.

22. Nasa Meer and Tariq Modood, "Refutations of Racism in the 'Muslim Question,'" *Patterns of Prejudice* 43 (2009): 345.

extermination of over six million Jews, some two-thirds of the Jewish population living in Europe on the eve of the Holocaust. Whatever challenges Muslims have faced in postwar Europe, they have not encountered this level of brutality and violence, even if one takes into account the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s. The long shadow of the Holocaust makes it very difficult to bring to light significant analogies between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

It is not the Holocaust alone that makes comparisons difficult. The anthropologist Matti Bunzl argues that, leaving aside historic animosities aimed at Jews and Muslims by Europe's Christian majority, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have served two different functions in modern European history. Anti-Semitism reflected an attempt to secure ethnically pure nation-states by recourse to a racist ideology that targeted and excluded Jews from the national community. German nationalism, for example, relied on anti-Semitism and the supposed racial inferiority of Jews to rally support for a strong German nation. Other European countries also experienced strong waves of anti-Semitism and arguments about the incommensurability of Jewish and national (English, French, Norwegian, and so on) identity. Islamophobia, by contrast, reflects a different project of exclusion, one in which the desire to protect and maintain European civilization and anxieties over what it means to be European manifest themselves through anti-Muslim prejudice. The preservation of European identity, as opposed to national identity, is at the heart of Islamophobia.[23]

These differences should not be underestimated, but there are good reasons why comparing Islamophobia and anti-Semitism is worthwhile. First, Europe has a long history of targeting and excluding minority (that is, non-Christian) religious communities.

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23. Matti Bunzl, "Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia," in *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds Old and New in Europe*, ed. Matti Bunzl (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2007), 1–46.

Jews and Muslims constitute the two most prominent communities in this regard, and while the reasons for this exclusion in modern history may be less rooted in Christian theology than was the case in the premodern era, the development of European identity over against these cultural and religious "Others" has been a long process that paved the way for contemporary anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.[24]

Second, both phenomena in the modern era have involved significant elements of racism, whether biological or cultural. In other words, both Jews and Muslims have been racialized by majority populations and have suffered significant discrimination and hostility as a result. For this reason, some organizations, such as the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia, have conducted studies that view the challenges of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as part of the same continuum. Even the Runnymede Trust embarked on its effort to understand and analyze Islamophobia in 1997 only after publishing a study on anti-Semitism three years earlier that drew parallels between anti-Semitism as a form of racism and the rise of anti-Muslim prejudice.

Finally, in response to Bunzl's argument, it is not at all clear that there are two different projects at work here, one aimed at building the nation-state and the other at preserving European civilization. Much of the anti-Muslim rhetoric that one finds in Europe today expresses concerns for the preservation of both national and European identity.[25] Far right political parties, in particular, have tapped into fears in various electorates that Muslim immigrants pose a significant threat to what it means to be Swiss or French or Danish. At the same time, issues that transcend national identity, such as whether or not

24. Esther Benbassa, "Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism, and Racism: Europe's Recurring Evils?," in Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia*, 77–89.
25. One example of this argument can be found in Cora Alexa Døving, "Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: A Comparison of Imposed Group Identities," *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning—Islam og minoriteter* 2 (2010): 52–76.

to admit Turkey, a large Muslim-majority country, to the European Union (EU), bring out anxieties over what it means to be European.

Jews and Muslims have been the historic outsiders in Western history, whether they have been opposed on religious or secular grounds. Any historical analysis of Islamophobia that disregards the similarities with anti-Semitism will fail to get at the deeper anxiety that has permeated projects to construct Western identity over against cultural and religious "Others."

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Despite the questions and concerns discussed above, no scholar has managed to coin an alternate term for anti-Muslim prejudice that has received a significant following. Whatever the reservations some have against the Runnymede Report's analysis of Islamophobia, most scholars agree that its definition continues to serve as the starting point for most studies and discussions of anti-Muslim prejudice.

For these reasons, I will follow the Runnymede Report in defining Islamophobia as "dread or hatred of Islam" and "fear or dislike of all or most Muslims."[26] However, in light of some of the concerns discussed in this chapter, I wish to clarify my use of this term throughout the book by addressing two key points. First, I will use Islamophobia interchangeably with anti-Muslim and anti-Islam bigotry and hostility because I believe that Muslims do experience exclusion and discrimination based on their real or perceived religious identities. Second, my use of the term will assume that it reflects bigotry rooted in cultural racism in addition to perceived religious differences. Race and religion are inextricably intertwined in Islamophobic discourse and actions, and in most of the examples of Islamophobia that I use in this book, I will make no attempt to argue that they are reflections of

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26. Commission on British Muslims, *Islamophobia*, 1.

only one or the other. With this in mind, let us turn our attention to the origins of anti-Muslim hostility in the West.