Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women in The American Media Frame

An Analysis of The Framing of Muslim Women by Fox News And CNN in The Age of Islamophobia

Hafsah Nawaz Sial

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Abstract

Gendered Islamophobia is a term used to describe the difference in how Muslim women are affected differently by Islamophobia than Muslim men. This includes how the differences in the portrayal of Muslim women in the media when compared to the portrayal of Muslim men in the era after 9/11. This thesis analyzes various different narratives that have been attached to Muslim women by the American media, how Muslim women are framed by Fox News and CNN, and what effects this framing has had on Muslim women in America. To do this, this thesis first explores the deep history of Orientalism and how this has transformed into Islamophobia within the American context. The thesis then examines how this history has led to the creation of the various different narratives that are attached to Muslim women specifically in the form of gendered Islamophobia, how both Fox News and CNN use these narratives in frames that echo their political affiliations, and how this framing affects Muslim women living in America. Using Congresswoman Ilhan Omar as an illustrative and analytical example of a prominently visible Muslim woman, this thesis analyzes how the narratives that are attached to Muslim women in general are reflected in Fox News's and CNN's coverage of Omar as a hijab-wearing Muslim woman in Congress, and how it has affected Omar's career both positively and negatively. Finally, the thesis offers some suggestions to change the prevalent narratives and framing that are used by the news media's depictions of Muslim women to move away from Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes that are currently present in both Fox News's and CNN's framing of Muslim women.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Deborah Lynn Kitchen-Døderlein, for the incredible amount of help and encouragement. Thank you for believing in me and helping me throughout the writing process for this thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introducing the Thesis Aims

The rise in Islamophobia in Western media after the tragedy of 9/11 is well documented.[1] American media sources from all sides of the political spectrum have taken part in portraying Muslims, and consequently Islam as an opposing force to America and American values. Muslims in the West, including American Muslims, have had to navigate increasingly hostile attitudes that affect their lives and livelihoods.[2]

Recently, however, there has also been an increase of Muslims, especially Muslim women, becoming more visible in American public spaces despite the negative views associated with them in the media. Among these emerging names is Ilhan Omar, one of the first Muslim women elected to serve in the House of Representatives in 2018.[3] The Democratic Representative was elected from the Democratic stronghold of "Little Mogadishu," also known as the city of Minneapolis in Minnesota. The nickname "Little Mogadishu" was bestowed to Minneapolis because of the city's large population of Somali Americans, majority of whom are Muslim. Her journey to Capitol Hill was a difficult one. Omar has had to face a lot of criticism, both for her stance on Israel, and because of her visibility as a Black Muslim woman wearing a hijab.[4]

This thesis will examine the framing and the narratives surrounding Muslim women in both conservative and liberal American media outlets, and how it has impacted and shaped Muslim American women and their lived experience. To do this, the thesis will first examine the different historical phases of Islamophobia in America, and how Islamophobia has affected the narratives attached to Muslim women. This is necessary to understand the context in which modern-day Islamophobia in America operates, and how the narratives that are attached to Muslim women are formed. Additionally, I will not only look at the statistics of

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[1] Christine Ogan et al, "The Rise of Anti-Muslim Prejudice," *International Communication Gazette* 76, no. 1 (October 2013): pp. 27-46, https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048513504048, p.28

[2] Saifuddin Ahmed and Jörg Matthes, "Media Representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A Meta-Analysis," *International Communication Gazette* 79, no. 3 (2016): pp. 219-244, https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048516656305, p.231

[3] Maha Bashri, "Elections, Representations, and Journalistic Schemas: Local News Coverage of Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib in the US Mid-term Elections," *ESSACHESS- Journal for Communication Studies* 12, no. 2 (2019): https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A612114445/AONE?u=oslo&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=a86a6309, p.130

[4] Mariam Alkazemi et al, "Attribute Agenda Setting on Twitter and the *Wall Street Journal*: The Case of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar," *Review of Middle East Studies* 55, no. 1 (2021): pp. 35-55, https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2021.31, p. 37

the Muslim women that were affected, but also use secondary sources that include interviews with Muslim women in America in conjunction with primary sources.

I will also use Representative Ilhan Omar's career as a politician as an illustrative and analytical example of how the different narratives used to depict Muslim women in general has impacted her image and career as a Muslim woman in Congress. The topic of Islamophobia and how it affects Muslim women is an emerging topic within research surrounding Islamophobia. Nevertheless, there are not any studies that use a specific public figure like Ilhan Omar to illustrate and analyze how Islamophobic narratives attached to Muslim women can affect a veiled Muslim woman and her career in the American political landscape, which is something this thesis aims to do.

1.2 <u>Thesis Overview</u>

In this first, introductory chapter of this thesis, I will present an overview of the rise of Islamophobia and its roots in the foundation of the United States of America. To understand the rise of Islamophobia in the American media after 9/11, it is first important to know the origins of Islamophobia in America. Examining Islamophobia's historical presence in early American history explains the process which created the context of the narratives that are prevalently attached to Muslim women in the media. The first chapter will also include a section on framing and narratives, and how they can be utilized by media outlets and politicians to build an image of a specific group, in this case Muslim women, that either invokes sympathy or incites hatred towards them in the minds of the audiences that consume these narratives.

In the second chapter, the thesis will first look at how Islamophobia is framed in the American news media. This will be followed by a section that examines what "Gendered Islamophobia" is, as it is the focus of this thesis, which will present the different narratives attached to Muslim women. I will then look at specific news stories and stories from both Fox News and CNN and explore how the different media outlets frame their texts regarding Muslim women. This is necessary to understand the framing that is then given to Ilhan Omar in the different media outlets, and to highlight the similarities and differences between the framing of Muslim women in general and an individual, powerful, Black Muslim woman. I will also highlight the misogyny that is attached to the American media's narratives regarding Muslim women and the news stories written about Ilhan Omar, and how misogynistic undertones play a key part in the framing of Muslim women.

The third chapter of this thesis will be focused on exploring how the media's framing of Muslim women has affected the lives of Muslim women in America, and what kind of prejudices and challenges Muslim American women continue to face daily because of the narratives that have been forcefully attributed to them. To visualize these challenges that most Muslims American women face, this thesis will explore the life, career, and political imaging in the media of Ilhan Omar, and how she deals with these narratives as a Black, visibly Muslim woman in the American public eye. In the biographical sub-section, the thesis will use Omar's own autobiography as the main source, while the sub-sections about her media imaging will analyze news stories from Fox News and CNN.

The final chapter of this thesis will be a conclusion, wherein the aim is to highlight the most important findings of the rest of the thesis, and attempt to offer a possible solution to the various problems uncovered in the content analysis presented in chapter two and three.

1.3 <u>Methodology</u>

As the thesis mainly concentrates on the American media's portrayals of Muslims and Islam, the primary sources will be Fox News and CNN. The thesis uses news stories from both outlets, as well as columns, and transcripts from select segments from Fox News television shows published as stories on the Fox News website. I have chosen to examine news stories from Fox News and CNN that are available online as they are the most popular sources of news perused by the American public.[5] Though MSNBC is regarded as the liberal voice in opposition to Fox News's conservative, CNN is a more popular source of news online when compared to MSNBC.[6] This is purely in terms of news stories published online and the traffic that both Fox News and CNN generate to their respective websites, and not in terms of viewership ratings on the cable news channels, where the Fox News television channel has dominated for several years when compared to the ratings garnered by the news channels of both MSNBC and CNN.[7]

The timeframe of the news stories for Ilhan Omar is restricted to the period from 2018 and onwards. This is because there are very few news stories available on her before her

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[5] Similarweb. "foxnews.com vs cnn.com Traffic Comparison," Similarweb (Accessed May 10, 2023), https://www.similarweb.com/website/foxnews.com/vs/cnn.com/.

[6] Similarweb. "foxnews.com vs nbcnews.com Traffic Comparison," (Accessed May 10, 2023), https://www.similarweb.com/website/foxnews.com/vs/nbcnews.com/.

[7] Mark Joyella, "Fox News Hits 23rd Consecutive Month As Most-Watched In Cable News As CNN Sees Gains In January," Forbes, February 1, 2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/markjoyella/2023/02/01/fox-news-hits-23rd-consecutive-month-as-most-watched-in-cable-news-as-cnn-sees-gains-in-january/.

election to the House of Representatives. The timeframe for news stories about Muslims and Islam is restricted to the period between 2015 and onwards. In total, there are eighty stories chosen from both Fox News and CNN, with thirty of these news stories focusing on Ilhan Omar from each outlet. These news stories include both opinion pieces and news reports, and the intention behind the inclusion of both these forms of news stories is to analyze what sort of opinions are being highlighted by the different media outlets.

The rest of the news stories are focused on Muslim women, with fifty news stories accessed from both outlets. The criteria for the selection of news stories that are chosen is based on news-worthy events in relation to Ilhan Omar, and every tenth news story in relation to the topic of Muslim women and Islam. The reason for this is based on the search results yielded by both the Fox News and CNN website archives. The search results for the keyword "Ilhan Omar" yields 14000 results on Fox, however, only a thousand of them are news stories, while the rest are video clips from the Fox News channel, wherein the relevancy of the clip varies greatly, as Ilhan is often tagged in clips that pertains to the discussion of Democratic politicians. There is also a separate category entirely on Ilhan Omar on the Fox News website, however, it is not possible to know how many pieces of content there are included in this category, as they are not numbered.

The results for the keyword "Ilhan Omar" only yields 790 results on CNN's website, of which 122 are video clips from the CNN channel, leaving 653 news stories. However, like the clips at the Fox News website, there is varying degree of relevancy of the video clips to the written text in the news stories. A reader can choose whether they want more relevant results, or if they want newer results with less relevance to the keyword, something that results in newer stories being entirely irrelevant to the keyword in some cases. Stories about various Democratic politicians will appear when searching for the keyword "Ilhan Omar", even though the subject matter often has nothing to with Omar. This problem reappears if the reader filters to see more relevant news stories, as the number of news stories on Omar is lower than the initial number of 653. Unlike Fox News, there is no separate category for Ilhan Omar on CNN's website. Because of the varying levels of relevancy of news stories on Ilhan Omar, I have chosen to select news stories responding to specific events in her case instead of choosing every fifth news story, which is the method used for the second keyword.

The second keyword which is used to search for news stories on Muslim women is "Muslim women". On CNN's website, it yields more than two thousand results, only thirty-five of which are video clips. Nevertheless, the problem with newer news stories being

irrelevant to the keyword persists. Because of this, I have chosen the filter for the more relevant stories, as the number of news stories on Muslim women is large enough for the selection method of choosing each fifth news story in this manner. This is easier on the Fox News website, as the keyword "Muslim women" yields 11800 results, of which 10400 are news stories including a written text that is often combined with automated video clips that have varying degrees of relevancy to the text of the news story.

It is worth noting that the search results for both keywords on both websites are randomized. The news stories are not sorted in a chronological or alphabetical order, and the "Newest" tab on the CNN does not present the newest stories in true chronological order either, as the chronological order falls away on the second page of the search result.
The method used to approach the source material consists of conducting a content analysis of the primary texts. This analysis is based on the language that the different texts use when addressing the same issues. The thesis will look at the different narratives used in the framing of Fox News and CNN's news stories when it comes to Muslim American women and consequently, the narratives used in the framing of Representative Ilhan Omar.

1.4 On Framing in The News Media

Framing is a well-studied concept within the field of social science. As the focus of this thesis is framing in the news media, it is then relevant to examine the various ways in which framing is used in, and by, the news media. To summarize, framing can be defined as a concept that deals with the methods of presenting and selecting information about a people or an event in a manner that highlights the presenter's subjective opinion, existing narratives and stereotypes relating to the person or event, instead of the objective facts of a situation, influencing the audience to agree with the presenter of the information.[8] A frame is what the news media uses to present an incident, and narratives are what color the content of the content piece. An example of this would be to repeatedly highlight and stress misogynistic interpretations of the Qur'an when reporting on a gathering of Muslim feminists.

A frame works by setting the agenda, whereby news media outlets choose what is news-worthy and what should be afforded spotlight of the news worthy occurrences that take place in a day.[9] According to Entman, a frame defines a problem, examines the causes of the

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[8] Claes H. de Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 56, no. 3 (2012): 365–75, https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1177/0002764211426331, p.366-367
[9] Samia Manzoor et al, "Application of Agenda-Setting, Framing and Propaganda during News Production Process," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 3, no. II (2019): 213–28, https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2019(3-ii)17, p. 214

problem, and offers a solution to this problem.[10] Other scholars disagree with this definition, as frames can often occur without suggesting a solution to a problem. Framing is also never limited to a single content-piece, and often occurs in an environment where other pieces of content echo each other. The repeated use of the same keywords, and the absence of others is essential to the forming of a frame with longevity in the minds of the audience, eventually shaping their beliefs.[11]

There are several types of frames, and different scholars have made their own systems to categorize different types of frames. Frames used by journalists are often divided into three categories: systemic, temporal-contextual, and organizational. Systemic, also called strategic frames, and organizational frames are often not dictated by the journalist writing a news story, but by the political affiliation of the media organization the journalist is writing for, and the relation the organization might have with individual politicians, while the temporal-contextual frame is dictated by the amount of time that has passed since an event.[12]

Claes de Vreese notes that journalists in the news media rarely have the freedom to write outside of the narratives and frames of the organization they work for. In de Vreese's own classification, journalistic news frames are often generic news frames which journalists use to link different themes together over time, across different cultural identifiers. An example of this can be to link a story about Muslim women living in Africa in the 10th century to Muslim women in America in the 21st century to highlight a lack of change in their social status within Muslim communities.[13]

Most news stories often feature two sides in conflict and tend to "slant" towards the side that the media organization favors. Slanting is the process which allows the author's bias to color the piece of news content by favoring one side over the other in the framing. Entman writes of three different categories of bias that exist in the news media. The first one is content bias. An example of this would be report on Israeli citizens being "murdered" by "violent Islamist terrorists," but Palestinian citizens being "killed" by "individual actors."[14]

The second bias that occurs in the news media, is distortion bias. Here, the content

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[10] de Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," 2012, p.367

[11] de Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," 2012, p. 369

[12] Claes H. de Vreese and Matthijs Elenbaas. "Media in the Game of Politics: Effects of Strategic Metacoverage on Political Cynicism," *Politics [The International Journal of Press]* 13, no. 3 (2008): 285–309. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208319650, p.286, and de Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," 2012, p.370

[13] de Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," 2012, p.370

[14] Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): 163-73, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00336.x, p. 166

itself is falsified and distorted, while presented as factual, with the context of the situation being entirely erased. For example, a story about police officers killing an unarmed black teenager can be distorted to portray the police officers as heroes defending the community from a dangerous criminal. Finally, the third type of bias is decision-making bias, where the journalist and media outlet choose to feature only one side of a story. For example, a journalist can choose to only interview the bully, and not the victim, in a schoolyard fight, simply because it is in their best interest, for example, because a higher up, like the CEO or president of the media organization, is related to the bully.[15]

All of these biases enable slanting, which allows the news media to present a picture where the viewer only pays attention to what they are "allowed" to see.[16] Framing in the news media is not a new practice. However, as the political actors on the left and right are becoming increasingly polarized, the differences in the framing of news stories from different media outlets is obvious to even casual viewers.

This does only serve to empower the effect that framing has on the audience, as most consumers have a preferred news media organization that they get their news from. Research shows that these viewers are more likely to believe and agree with their preferred news medium's point of view and be skeptical of news organizations with other political leanings.[17] A person who gets their news from Fox News will most likely be a conservative voter, while a person who gets their news from MSNBC or CNN will likely be a more liberal voter.

As such, it would not be an exaggeration to note that framing is a crucial tool in shaping the way a viewer may choose to cast their vote, and thus, plays a pivotal role in the way an election might swing. It is important to note that viewers and the news medias of their choice that align with the viewers' political leanings are trapped in a mutually reinforcing relationship.[18] If a conservative outlet like Fox News suddenly stopped supporting Donald Trump, they might lose their viewers who make up a large percentage of Trump's voting base. As such, news media organizations are also influenced by the opinions of their viewers.[19]

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[15] Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," 2007, p.167
[16] Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," 2007, p.167-168
[17] Rafeel Wasif, "Terrorists or Persecuted? The Portrayal of Islamic Nonprofits in US Newspapers Post 9/11," *Voluntas* (Manchester, England) 32, no. 5 (2021): 1139-153, doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00317-x, p.1140
[18] Wasif, "Terrorists or Persecuted? The Portrayal of Islamic Nonprofits in US Newspapers Post 9/11," 2021, p.1140
[19] Wasif, "Terrorists or Persecuted? The Portrayal of Islamic Nonprofits in US Newspapers Post 9/11," 2021, p.1141

1.5 <u>Defining "Islamophobia" and Recognizing its History in America</u>

Though we understand that the word "phobia" means "fear" in the term "Islamophobia," we do not have a clear definition for what the word "Islam" is referring to in this term.[20] A definition for the term "Islamophobia" was suggested by the Runnymede trust in 1997, and Considine explains the Runnymede Trust's definition of the term in eight points.[21] To summarize these points, "Islamophobia" can be defined as a fear of not just Muslims, but also of Islam, where Islam and Muslims are viewed and portrayed as the ultimate "Other" to the West and its values.[22] To put it crudely, Islam and Muslims are the morally deviant villains opposed to the heroic West, threatening to end the Western way of life. The last point in Considine's list notes that Islamophobia, or distrust, prejudice, and exclusion of Muslims is normalized to the extent that it is viewed as something natural, like the natural fear one has for a dangerous predator.[23]

The reason why the dissection of the term "Islamophobia" to such an extent is necessary is because there is not a single, agreed-upon definition that all scholars researching Islamophobia have for the term "Islamophobia."[24] The Runnymede Trust's definition has been criticized by scholars like Bleich as incomplete and inconsistent. Bleich explains the term in his own words as he defines it as "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims."[25]

This definition is still lacking, as it excludes non-Muslims who are confused with Muslims because of their skin-tone, their national origins, and their clothing. The first person who lost his life on American soil in the aftermath of 9/11 because of violence motivated by Islamophobia, was not an Arab or a Muslim. He was a Sikh man selling American flags, murdered because his beard and turban caused his attacker to confuse him with a Muslim.[26]

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[20] Erik Bleich, "What Is Islamophobia and How Much Is There?" Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept," *American Behavioral Scientist* 55, no 12 (2011): 1581–1600, https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1177/0002764211409387, p.1582

[21] Craig Considine "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown,"" *Religions* 8, no. 9: 165. (2017), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8090165, p. 6

[22] Considine "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown,"" 2017, p,6

[23] Craig Considine "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown"" 2017, p. 6

[24] Bleich, "What Is Islamophobia and How Much Is There?" Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept," 2011, p.1581

[25] Bleich, "What Is Islamophobia and How Much Is There?" Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept," 2011, p.1591-1592

[26] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, Oakland, California, University of California Press, 2018, p. 35

Therefore, a more complete definition of the word would be "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims, and those who are perceived as Muslims."[27] This is the definition I use in this thesis.

Islamophobia in America is not a new phenomenon, and it can be traced to the founding of the United States of America. Some scholars of Islamophobia point to the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979-1981 as the event that triggered the creation of modern Islamophobic attitudes in the minds of most Americans.[28] Though there was a hostage crisis in 1977 in Washington D.C led by Islamist extremist, the 149 hostages were released in just three days, whereas fifty-two American citizens were held against their will in Iran for more than a year.[29] 1978 is also the year when Edward Said published his book *Orientalism*. Said's book presented a critical analysis of the Western concept of the "Orient," and the false narratives attached to people living in the "Orient," a word that was used as a synonym for the continent and the peoples of Asia.[30]

Orientalism is the name of the ideology that depicts the people of the Orient, their religions, philosophies, and ways of life as being "backwards" and unwilling to change.[31] It also exoticizes women of the Orient, presenting an image of the mysterious, veiled belly dancers of Arabia, a trope now attached to Muslim women. In short, Orientalism is a false narrative used by Western powers to justify their colonization of Asian countries they conquered, as it paints the Orient to be the inherent opposition of the West, its people, and its ideology, and simply as an eternal "Other" to the West.[32]

In his book *American Islamophobia*, Khaled Beydoun asserts that Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon in America and calls it "(…) the progeny of Orientalism".[33] Islamophobia and the idea of the Muslim "Other" can be traced back to the arrival of the first Muslims on the North American continent. The first Muslims to arrive in what would be known as the United States of America were enslaved Black Africans.[34] However, though there were an estimated 600 000 to a million African slaves who were Muslims, their Muslim identity was

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[27] Bleich, "What Is Islamophobia and How Much Is There?" Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept," 2011, p.1591-1592

[28] Ahmed & Matthes, "Media Representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A Meta-Analysis," 2016, p. 221

[29] Historic Timeline | National Counterterrorism Center, "Historic Timeline | National Counterterrorism Center," 2023. Dni.Gov. https://www.dni.gov/nctc/timeline.html.

[30] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* London, Penguin Books, 1978

[31] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 52

[32] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 50

[33] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 28

[34] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 46

erased from the pages of history. One reason for this is that many slaves hid their religion to avoid angering their white slave-masters, something that ultimately led to the erosion of Muslim identities in the minds of African Americans even after the abolition of slavery.[35]

Islam was understood to be something the barbarians of the Arabian desert dreamt up, often described to be a false religion propagated by a false Prophet in 18th century America. This led to Islam being framed as the antithesis of Christianity, which meant it was seen as an antithesis to white Americans. Muslims were thus barred from being naturalized in the United States of America from 1790 till 1944. The ban on Muslims becoming citizens of the United States of America, something Beydoun labels "the first Muslim Ban," acted as a natural deterrent to Muslims from poorer countries wishing to realize the American Dream for themselves, though many still emigrated to the United States nonetheless.[36]

Beydoun also notes that Orientalist tropes which failed to differ between Arab and Muslim identities, caused Christian Arabs to be banned from being naturalized, and racialized Muslim identities to be seen as the same as Arab identities.[37] It was first in 1907 that a Christian Arab was naturalized. The first Muslim was allowed citizenship in 1944, coinciding with the time that the Saudis found huge reservoirs of oil.[38] It was not until the Iran Hostage crisis that Islam and Muslims were on the front page of every newspaper in America.[39]

During the era between 1944 and 1978, the common enemy of all Americans had been the Soviet Union. As the Cold War was coming to an end, America lacked a common enemy, and the Iran Hostage Crisis provided just that. Therefore, it is correct to trace the rise of modern-day Islamophobia to 1978. Nevertheless, it is important to know and remember that Islamophobia was already embedded in the fabric of American society long before the Iran Hostage Crisis and was simply revived when Iran's newly instated Islamic theocracy kidnapped sixty-six American citizens.[40]

The media's portrayal of the incident was colored by the inherent Orientalist views already present in the subconsciousness of American society, and the idea of Islam and Muslims being an inherent enemy to the Western, and thus, American, way of life was further strengthened by the fact that the newly risen government in Iran was led by scholars of

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[35] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 48-49, 56
[36] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 47, 54, 64-65
[37] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 53
[38] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 64-65
[39] Ahmed & Matthes, "Media Representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A Meta-Analysis," 2016, p. 221-222
[40] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 86

Islam.[41] People saw a regression of women's rights happen in real time as Iran evolved into a theocracy that enforced harsh Islamic laws on its people. All the while they spouted hatred towards the United States and the rest of the West. These factors allowed the media to paint Islam and Muslims as the new "bogeyman" for American citizens, and a new age of Islamophobia began.[42]

In 1993 the World Trade Center was attacked, killing six people, and leaving a thousand wounded. Though there had been an uptick in terrorist incidents where the perpetrators were Muslim, it had largely been outside of American borders.[43] The attack on the World Trade Center was the first attack to hurt and kill so many American people, which ultimately triggered an increase of Islamophobic attitudes in the United States. When a truck bomb, rigged by a white supremacist, killed 168 and wounded hundreds of other American citizens in Oklahoma, the media was quick to blame Muslim terrorists with utmost conviction shortly after the attack, even before it was confirmed by the police, as the modus operandi was claimed to be that of Islamic terrorists.[44] When it was clear that the perpetrator had been a white man, there was almost no correction of facts by the media. Suddenly the attacker was merely a man that struggled mentally, and not a terrorist.

Ultimately, the World Trade Center was attacked once again on 9/11, leaving 2977 people dead, and many more injured.[45] With this, the terrorist organization known as Al-Qaeda was the face that was superimposed on every Muslim globally. This was taken to be the ultimate proof that Islam and Muslims were never going to be able to agree with the West and values, and like Bin Laden, would try to kill every American and Western citizen. Political pundits on every network denounced Islam as the religion of extremist, cave inhabiting barbarians. Turbans, the Arabic language, garb, facial features, skin tone, and long beards soon became synonymous with the image of a terrorist, and thus, a Muslim. This image was promoted by the media, political commentators, and politicians on every side of the aisle alike.

Predictably, as the media continued to push Islamophobic narratives in the aftermath

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[41] Ahmed & Matthes, "Media Representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A Meta-Analysis," 2016, p. 222
[42] Considine "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown,"" 2017, p.1-2, Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 83, and Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims,* Archway Road, London, Pluto Press, 2012, 2017, p.50
[43] Historic Timeline | National Counterterrorism Center, "Historic Timeline | National Counterterrorism Center," 2023
[44] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 73
[45] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 93-94

of 9/11, there was a staggering increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes. The FBI reported that there had been a 1600 percent increase in instances of hate crimes motivated by Islamophobia in 2002, and only 1 in 4 Americans had a positive view of Muslims in 2004.[46] By 2008, attacks motivated by Islamophobia had tapered, but the 2016 election cycle brought forth a renewed rhetoric of unmitigated hatred toward Muslims in America.[47]

The Republican debates for primary often seemed like a competition in how one could sway voters with the most inflammatory and hurtful statements towards Muslims, with Donald Trump ultimately being chosen as the champion of the Republicans. In December of 2015, 53 total attacks on Muslims and mosques were reported, shortly after the start of the election cycle.[48] Many more followed. When Trump was elected, many thought his promises were the usual bluster of politicians trying to win an election. Though it can be argued that many of his promises went unfulfilled, Trump delivered on his promise of cracking down on Muslims. One of President Trump's first actions as President was to call for "(…) a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." as he enacted America's second Muslim ban in 2017, 73 years after the first American Muslim ban ended, banning the entry of people from seven countries where Islam was the major religion.[49] This was the attitude that colored the remainder of Trump's presidency, something that promoted Islamophobic attitudes within Trump's Republican voter base. However, it also caused Democratic voters to change their attitudes and be more open to Muslims, something that led to the election of the first Muslim women in Congress.

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[46] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 103-104
[47] Considine "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown,"" 2017, p.9
[48] Engy Abdelkader, "When Islamophobia Turns Violent: The 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections," *The Bridge Initiative,* Georgetown University (2016), SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2779201, p. 4
[49] Considine "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown,"" 2017, p. 9

Chapter 2: Muslim Women in American News Media Frames

2.1 <u>Islamophobic Framing in American Media</u>

I have briefly delved into what framing is, and how it is used in the news media. This section will examine how the media has framed Muslims and Islamophobia, and how private actors have used Islamophobic rhetoric to enrich themselves. The most prominent narrative that has been featured on America regarding Islam and Muslims has been that of extremism and terrorism. This is perhaps understandable, as the first encounter every single American citizen recalls when one mentions the religion of Islam or Muslims is 9/11.[50]

Islamophobia has existed in some form or other before throughout the history of the United States, to the point of having been supported by the government for much of the country's existence. However, though Islamophobia was an omnipresent force, festering in the subconsciousness of American society, it had never been so widespread among American citizens as it became after the 9/11 attacks. As people watched their fellow Americans hurling themselves out of the towers so that they would not be burned alive, the flame of hatred against Muslims was reignited.[51]

The media, whether liberal or conservative in their political leanings, was quick to add fuel to this fire as pundits and commentators who framed Islam and Muslims as the Oriental "Other", wholly incompatible with the modern world and Western society, were given airtime on every news network. Al-Qaeda soon became synonymous with Islam and Muslims. This in turn led to a sharp uptick in anti-Muslim hate crimes, and xenophobic and antagonistic tendencies towards Islam and Muslims were slowly normalized for everyday Americans.[52]

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, an industry of Islamophobia was born as Muslims and Islam were made into a monolithic mob which wanted nothing more than to tear down the West, especially America and its people.[53] The complexities of the religion of Islam and Muslims were erased as Islam became synonymous with violent ideologies like "terrorism"

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[50] Allison E. Betus, Erin M. Kearns, and Anthony F. Lemieux. "How Perpetrator Identity (Sometimes) Influences Media Framing Attacks as "Terrorism" or "Mental Illness."" *Communication Research* 48, no. 8 (2021): 1133-156. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1177/0093650220971142, p. 1136

[51] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 93-94

[52] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims*, 2017, p.3-4

[53] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017, p. 3-4

and later, "fundamentalism," and all Muslims were "terrorists".[54] This framing became so drilled into the subconsciousness of most Americans that the word "terrorist" will often invoke a caricature of an angry Middle Eastern bearded man in a turban, or a woman in a burqa.

The limited presence of Muslim voices in the national conversation further isolated Muslim Americans, as there was no one present to defend Muslims and Islam from being touted as the new enemy of America. "Facts" about Islam were presented by unqualified pseudo-scholars who really had no idea what Islam was.[55] The religion of Islam was once again framed to be the antithesis to Christianity, as it had been in America's founding days, and no Muslim scholar was invited to debunk this claim. Only a miniscule number of Muslim voices had been given the spotlight for a short amount of time after the tragedy of 9/11, and they were soon drowned out by the narrative of vilification of Islam and Muslims that became accepted as factually accurate.[56]

Inevitably, the framing and narratives surrounding Islam and Muslims slowly began to gain nuance in the media, in part pushed by academics and scholars who tried to fight against the Orientalist narratives and the label of "terrorists" being attached to Muslims.[57] This did not mean a sudden acceptance of Muslims and Islam, but the idea that there were some Muslims that were simply better than others soon began to gain popularity. The terrorists were named "Islamist terrorists" instead of just "Muslim terrorists," with the word "Islamist" denoting a "radicalized" Muslim that followed an extremist interpretation of Islam, as opposed to a regular Muslim.[58]

Thus, the narrative of "good" Muslims and "bad" Muslims was created by the media to note a distinction between bad Muslims who were radicals, extremists, and terrorists, and the "good" Muslims.[59] The criteria of being considered a "good" Muslim was not limited to simply being a law-abiding and productive citizen, but described Muslims who actively supported the state's surveillance of their friends and families in Muslim American

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[54] Ahmed & Matthes, "Media Representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A Meta-Analysis," 2016, p. 231

[55] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 32

[56] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017, p. 16, 19-20, 46, and Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 32

[57] Ahmed & Matthes, "Media Representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A Meta-Analysis," 2016, p. 236-237, Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p.31

[58] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 96,116

[59] Nazia Kazi, "Voting to Belong: The Inevitability of Systemic Islamophobia," *Identities* (Yverdon, Switzerland) 26, no. 2 (2019): 127-45, https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.uio.no/doi/full/10.1080/1070289X.2017.1329180, p. 130

communities, and those who denounced their own traditions and erased their heritage to embrace the Western way of life. These people were termed as being "moderate "Muslims by the news media. For the news media, a "moderate" Muslim was a regular American, preferably clean shaven, choosing to wear Western clothing, all the while applauding America's policies regarding Islam both inside and outside of the country.[60]

This led to the creation of "native informants" among Muslims.[61] Native informants were often framed as "moderate" Muslims who called for internal reforms within Muslim communities and a new interpretation of Islamic scriptures, while stressing the necessity of change in Muslims.[62] These native informants were not scholars of Islam, and often based their assessments of Islam on their personal experiences where they had been mistreated or restricted by Islam or their fellow Muslims in some form or another. Additionally, many of them were financially motivated to publicly denounce Islam, as some became regularly featured guests on shows hosted by infamous Islamophobes like Bill Maher.[63]

A notable example of this is Maajid Nawaz, who claims to be a reformed radical Islamist. He has used this story to gain fame and popularity in Western news media circles, gaining government support for his think-thank named Quilliam in the UK. The purpose of Quilliam is said to be the prevention of radicalism, but an examination of Quilliam's financial records reveals notable discrepancies that point to Nawaz using the organization to enrich himself.[64]

Another prominent name among female native informants is Ayan Hirsi Ali, a well-educated ex-Muslim who presented herself as a critic of Islam and "Islamic" practices like honor killings, female genital mutilation, and forced marriages. Though Hirsi Ali is an accomplished academic, her area of expertise is not Islam, but political science.[65] Nevertheless, she is presented as an expert on Islam by the news media because she comes

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[60] Kazi, "Voting to Belong: The Inevitability of Systemic Islamophobia," 2019, p. 131-132

[61] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017, p.164

[62] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017, p. 165, and Fox News. "Fundamentalist Fail: Muslim Woman Calls for Reform despite Attempts to Silence Her." (Fox News. FOX News Network, April 2015). https://www.foxnews.com/us/fundamentalist-fail-muslim-woman-calls-for-reform-despite-attempts-to-silence-her.

[63] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017, p.171-173, and Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p.30

[64] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017, p. 175-178

[65] Virginia Gorlinski, "Ayaan Hirsi Ali." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 12, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ayaan-Hirsi-Ali

from a Muslim family.[66]

     The news media's inclusion of native informants allowed a further level of legitimacy to their framing of Muslims and Islam as a backward religion unfit for the modern world, with Muslims seeking to destroy the American way of life and wishing to force an Islamic way of life on all "infidels."[67] Female native informants like Hirsi Ali and Asra Nomani also speak of their negative experiences they had growing up in Muslim communities because of their gender. Their stories often painted them as victims of the "Islamic" patriarchy, all the while ignoring how Muslim women in the West were increasingly becoming a common target of hate crimes fueled by what has been termed "gendered Islamophobia".[68]

2.2 <u>Gendered Islamophobia</u>

Trump's presidency was an era of unmitigated and uncensored hate lambasted onto the various non-white communities in American like the Latinx community, the Asian American community, the Black community, and the Muslim communities. The murder of George Floyd highlighted rampant systematic racism in America and the continued struggle of African Americans to get recognized as human as white Americans. Islam is a religion, and Muslim Americans are made up of African Americans, Asian Americans, and is a growing religion in the Latinx community.[69] Using Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, Muslim Americans continue to stand at an overlapping intersection of hate where a they can be targeted either because of their race, their nationality, or their religion.[70]

     Beydoun refers to the Muslim American community as a miniature model of the Muslim world, consisting of more than 80 nationalities.[71] As such, the image of a Muslim man which is often that of a turbaned, bearded, brown man dressed in loose, "Arab" clothes distinctly different from modern-day Western clothing is a false one. This false image finds its roots not only in the media's framing of Muslims, but also in the racialization of Muslims, where the diversity of the Muslim American community was replaced with a singular image

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[66] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017, 167

[67] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017, p. 171

[68] Barbara Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," *Social Identities* 20, no. 1 (2013): pp. 74-89, https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2013.864467, p. 79

[69] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 14

[70] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039, p. 1265

[71] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 20-21

of an Arab dressed in cultural garb.[72] Most Muslim Americans do not dress or look like this stereotype of an Arab, as most Muslim Americans are not Arabs ethnically.[73] They are often indistinguishable from their non-Muslim counterparts. On the other hand, many Muslim American women, however, are quite easily recognized as Muslim because of their hijab, an article of clothing Muslim women don to be modest in their dressing.[74]

Because Muslim women are so easily recognized as Muslims, they are in danger of being targeted by what Alimahomed-Wilson and Perry call "Gendered Islamophobia," a term coined by Jasmine Zine for this phenomenon.[75] Gendered Islamophobia is a specific form of Islamophobia directly aimed at Muslim women. While women are often the targets of misogynistic hate crimes, and Muslim men are often the target of Islamophobia, Muslim women often suffer attacks because of being both female and Muslim. Muslim women are often more visibly Muslim compared to their male counterparts, and as such, their intersection of hate has an additional factor. They can be attacked because they are visibly Muslim, because of their ethnicity, because of their nationality, because of their gender, because of their race, or a combination of these factors.[76]

To exemplify, Ilhan Omar can be, and is often, attacked because of her faith, her gender, her ethnicity, and/or her status as a first-generation immigrant from Somalia. This is because there are racists, misogynists, and Islamophobes who want to target her not only because of her politics, but because of what she represents. Representative Omar is perhaps the most famous visibly Muslim Black woman in America. Therefore, she often makes an easy target as there are several stereotypes already attached to her, something that the media is prone to using in their framing of her statements and political stances.[77]

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[72] Considine "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown,"" 2017, p. 8
[73] Considine "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown,"" 2017, p. 3
[74] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p. 80
[75] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p. 79, and Sabrina Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance." *Gender & Society* 34, no. 4 (2020): 648-78, https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.uio.no/doi/full/10.1177/0891243220932156, p. 652
[76] Rachel R. Steele and Sakina Bengali, Gwynne Richardson, Mackensie Disbennett, and Yasmeen Othman. "Muslim Women Negotiating Their Identity in the Era of the Muslim Ban." *Journal of Gender Studies* Ahead-of-print, no. Ahead-of-print (2021): 1-12.https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1080/09589236.2021.2016382, p. 3-4
[77] 1. David Shortell, "Florida Man Pleads Guilty to Threatening Rep. Ilhan Omar," CNN Politics, (Cable News Network), April 20, 2022, https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/19/politics/ilhan-omar-florida-man/index.html.

2.3 <u>Muslim Women in American News Media: Prevalent Narratives</u>

There is a clear gendered division in the portrayal of Muslims in American media.[78] Muslim men are often vilified and shown to be instigators of violence, whereas Muslim women are either victimized and shown to be oppressed and submissive in most cases, or as the mothers of the Muslim men that want to install a reign of terror in the West. Muslim women are often afforded limited agency by the media, which causes the narratives assigned to Muslim women to be unopposed and appear as facts.[79]

The news stories that victimize Muslim women often use words like "abused," "oppressed," "struggling," "silenced," "terrorized," and "terrified" to describe the Muslim women that are being discussed and reported about. The narrative of victimization often alludes to the idea of Muslim women being in need of a rescuer from the outside, an impression which was widely used as one of the reasons to justify America's "War on Terror" post 9/11.[80]

Though it remains true that Muslim women are also vilified to a degree, being depicted as the mothers who nurture their sons into becoming terrorists, the narrative of victimhood has been at the forefront when it comes to Muslim girls and women specifically.[81] Thus, the narrative of vilification regarding Muslim women has been used less in regards to Muslim women in general by American media, and whenever they are vilified, they are likened to Muslim men and described as being "just as bad as" their male counterparts.[82]

The idea of Muslim women being victims at the hands of Muslim men due to the religion of Islam gained traction because it is a truth that speaks of the patriarchal countries that many Muslim women are from, like Afghanistan and Iran. Both countries are under Islamic theocratic regimes that gained power through violence, and both regimes enforce hardline, misogynistic interpretations of the religion of Islam.[83] This narrative has been bolstered by the support of native informants like Ayan Hirsi Ali and Asra Nomani.[84]

It is an undeniable truth that women living in Muslim majority countries are indeed not as free as women in the West, and this has been the driving force behind the narrative of

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[78] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p.82-83

[79] Rachid Acim, "Islamophobia, Racism and the Vilification of the Muslim Diaspora." *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 5, no. 1 (2019): 27-44, https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169/islastudj.5.1.0026, p. 28

[80] Acim, "Islamophobia, Racism and the Vilification of the Muslim Diaspora," 2019, p. 38

[81] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p. 82

[82] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p. 83

[83] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p. 82

[84] Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017

victimhood attached to Muslim women in American media.[85] Some media outlets lean into this narrative more than others. On the other hand, some media outlets lean toward viewing both Muslim men and women as the same, while some place Muslim men and women on the opposite sides of each other. Often, the difference lies in the political affiliations of the media outlet in question, and what kind of image of Muslim men and women they want to portray.[86]

An example of this difference in framing can be observed when exploring another narrative attached to Muslim women. Within this narrative, the words used to describe Muslim women are "strong," "hopeful," "fighters," "resistant," and "rebelling," often in opposition to a male figure or the religion of Islam. This narrative came to the forefront in American media in the aftermath of the Taliban's shooting of Malala Yousufzai, was that of a female Muslim "freedom fighter," fighting against the oppression wrought by Islam and Muslim men. This has caused the vilification of Muslim men to increase, whereas Muslim women are held in higher regard in specific contexts where they are portrayed as the silent sufferers of violence wrought by Muslim men, framing them as supporters of America's war against Muslim men.

This narrative is not discussed as a separate concept by scholars and is instead discussed in conjunction with the narrative of victimhood of Muslim women, as it is female Muslim victims who end up having to fight against their abusers.[87] Additionally, the narrative of the female Muslim who fights back against her oppressors only started gaining popularity after Malala became a prominent figure. Even then, it has not been categorized as a separate narrative. However, I have observed that there is a distinct enough difference in the wording surrounding Muslim women who are depicted as victims and Muslim women who are depicted as fighters that it is necessary to make a distinction between these narratives.

In short, the Muslim women depicted as victims or in need of a Western rescue from their Muslim male partners and Islamic cultures are passive and submissive, and likened to Western victims of Islamist violence.[88] The Muslim women fighting alongside Muslim men against the West are vilified and depicted as the ultimate enemy, while the Muslim women fighting against Muslim men are depicted as allies in the West's "War on Terror" against Muslim men and Islam.

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[85] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p.82

[86] Ahmed & Matthes, "Media Representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A Meta-Analysis," 2016, p. 233

[87] Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance," 2020, p.651

[88] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p.82

Another narrative attached to Muslim women by the news media is one that has been present in the framing of Muslims since the advent of Orientalism in America. In Orientalist framing, Muslims in general are the eternal "Other" to the West, and this framing is ever-present in the framing of Muslim women in contemporary news media.[89] This is not the only Orientalist narrative regarding Muslim women specifically that is currently used across all media forms, and not just in the news media.

Through the Orientalist lens, Muslim women have historically been depicted as exotic and mysterious belly dancers in harems, often to be seen but never to be heard.[90] Most scholars point to the "harem belly dancer" narrative being ever-present in the media's depictions of Muslim women, however, this narrative is more openly used in drama serials, music videos, and films when compared to the news media's usage of this narrative. The narrative of the "harem belly dancer" has led to the overt sexualization of Muslim women's bodies and their clothing. As a result, articles of clothing like the hijab, niqab, and burqa which are symbols of modesty and religious piety for Muslim women, have become sexualized as well.[91]

One example of this is Cardi B's music video for her song "Bodak Yellow."[92] In the music video, Cardi is a veiled woman, hiding her body, face, and hair. While riding a camel through a desert, she beckons the viewer to follow her with her gaze. Later in the video, she is scantily clad as a man dressed as in an Arab "thobe" throws money at her.[93] The music video presents a perfect example of how the "harem belly dancer" narrative has been attached to the image of women from the Middle East, and consequently, Muslim women in general, and how it is used to sexualize them. Because even though Cardi is entirely veiled in the shot of her on the camel with a niqab-like cloth covering her hair and face, she is still intended to be projecting an image of sexual desire.

Though "Bodak Yellow" presents a classic example of the "harem belly dancer" trope, in which Cardi B is portraying a hypersexualized "Muslim" Arab woman, it is not the only way in which this narrative is realized, especially not in the news media. As the clothing Muslim women use to appear modest has been sexualized, there is an increased interest with unveiling Muslim women and "freeing" them from their "restrictive" articles of clothing like

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[89] Acim, "Islamophobia, Racism and the Vilification of the Muslim Diaspora," 2019, p. 37
[90] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p.80
[91] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p.81-82
[92] Cardi, B, "Cardi B - Bodak Yellow [OFFICIAL MUSIC VIDEO]." Youtube, June 24, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEGccV-NOm8
[93] A "thobe" is a cultural garment worn by Arab men, often appearing as a long white dress.

the hijab and niqab. This obsession with unveiling Muslim women is not only found in the "harem belly dancer" narrative, but also in the narrative of victimhood that is attached to Muslim women.

This can be exemplified by the character of Nadia in the Netflix series "Elite."[94] Nadia is a hijabed Muslim student who takes off her hijab and starts indulging in alcohol, drugs, and premarital sex, all of which are prohibited in Islam. Her taking off her hijab and essentially abandoning her faith is depicted as her taking charge of her own life decisions, not bowing down to the restrictiveness of Islamic Sharia law, and essentially portraying her as a woman who has accepted the rescue offered to her by the West.

The news media does not use the narrative of the "harem belly dancer" like the entertainment media does. However, whenever the news media reports on a story concerning the clothing of Muslim women, there is an inherent objectification and "othering" of Muslim women present in the narrative, whether the story is positive or negative towards Muslim women. The Muslim women choosing to wear the hijab are often depicted as having a foreign, and in some cases, brainwashed understanding of modesty, or their hijab is made into a symbol of resistance against Islamophobia. There is a difference in how conservative and liberal outlets frame each of these narratives, something that is examined further in the sections that follow.

2.3.1   In Media: Fox News And CNN's Framing Of Muslim Women

When comparing CNN's stories and Fox's news stories, one will notice that there are similarities in the way that both media outlets use the narratives of victimhood, vilification, and the Muslim freedom fighter. However, the outlets frame these narratives in a manner that differs from the others, in alliance with their political leanings. For example, the imaging presented of Muslim women in Fox's news stories often echoes the narrative of victimhood, with the emerging narrative of the Muslim female freedom fighter being on the rise.

The narrative of vilification regarding Muslim women has been fading from the American media's portrayals, and though Fox News hosts news stories that ascribe to this notion, this is extremely limited when reporting on Muslim women in general. Despite this, the narrative of vilification increases exponentially regarding individual Muslim women like

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[94] Jai Toor, "Netflix's 'Elite' and the Endless Attack on Muslim Women's Agency." Fourth Floor, August 20, 2020, https://www.thefourthfloor.co.uk/culture/netflix-elite-and-the-endless-attack-on-muslim-women.

Ilhan Omar.[95] Looking at a collection of fifty examples of news stories and opinion pieces published on CNN and Fox News each, totaling one hundred different news stories, the narratives that are most prevalent in Fox News's coverage of Muslim women, are those of victimization of Muslim women living in both America and in Muslim countries, or that of the female Muslim freedom fighter.

Sixteen of the news stories from Fox News victimize Muslim women, and sixteen of the news stories use the freedom fighter narrative.[96] Eleven of the chosen news stories use a narrative that leans towards the narrative of vilification of Muslim women, while seven of the news stories frame Muslim women as outsiders by deploying the Oriental narrative of the "Other".

It is worth noting that seventeen of the chosen news stories from Fox News have the Associated Press credited as the author, while eleven other news stories have Fox News staff credited as the authors. While attempting to cross reference these news stories with the Associated Press news site, I have not discovered similar news stories there. Therefore, it is possible that these news stories that are attributed to the Associated Press may have been given new headlines and been rewritten by a Fox News journalist, though this is not definite.

The fifty news stories from CNN feature sixteen news stories and opinions where the narrative of victimization is central to the text, mirroring the number of news stories Fox News features with the same narrative.[97] The majority of the news stories from CNN use the female freedom fighter narrative, with twenty-seven of the fifty stories selected featuring a female Muslim fighting or resisting against an opposing force.[98] There is only one news story which features the narrative of vilification of Muslim women of the chosen news stories from CNN, as the newer news stories from CNN often lean heavily towards the narrative of the "freedom fighter." The remaining six stories, like the seven stories from Fox News, portray Muslim women as outsiders to the American society. This distribution of narratives paints an entirely different picture of Muslim women as compared to Fox News, because even though it is somewhat one-dimensional, this minimized vilification of Muslim women leads a loyal reader of CNN to be more sympathetic towards the plights of Muslim women, whereas a loyal reader of Fox News will remain more skeptical.

All narratives attached to Muslim women by American news media organizations are

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[95] See section "Fox News: Ilhan Omar" under Bibliography
[96] See section "Fox News: Muslim Women" under Bibliography
[97] See section "CNN: Muslim Women" under Bibliography
[98] Dean Obeidallah, 2021, Kate Maltby, 2019

rooted in Orientalism, and can be understood to be different forms of "othering". Muslim women who are victimized, vilified, or framed as freedom fighters are depicted as perpetually foreign, using words like "them" against the "us" in the context of Muslim women and the American society at large. However, this argument, while not without truth, erases nuance from the discourse at hand, as both Fox's and CNN's goal of framing can then be understood to ultimately exclude Muslim women from the dominant American society, something that is not entirely true, as we can see in the analysis of how these narratives are utilized by CNN and Fox News.[99]

In Fox's news stories, the focus of most of the news stories is on the Muslim women living in America or the West.[100] This might be because Fox News is a media house very local to America when compared to CNN, which has a more global reach. The women in question are given limited agency when they are victimized, and the oppressing factor is always either the religion of Islam, or to a lesser degree, Muslim men.[101] It is important to note that because of the current situations in Iran and Afghanistan, most of the more recent news stories use a narrative of victimization regarding Muslim women. However, even in these news stories, like Tyler O'Neil's report "Taliban promises to protect women's rights... with a catch," the oppressor is still alluded to be Islamic law rather than the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law.[102]

Another news story on Fox News, written by Ruth Ravve, discusses how "Muslim Women in U.S. Struggle to Balance Western Freedoms and Islamic Culture," wherein Muslim women are given an opportunity to speak of their own experiences in their own words.[103] Nevertheless, their voices are soon drowned out by the same narrative of victimization. The news story ascribes "Islamic culture" to be the villain of the abuses that the women in the news story have suffered, erasing the distinction between religion and culture entirely, something that appears to be intentionally misleading.

Fox News's framing of the victimhood narrative depicts Muslim women as the victims of Muslim men and Islam, and similarly, their framing of the Muslim female freedom fighter

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[99] Acim, "Islamophobia, Racism and the Vilification of the Muslim Diaspora," 2019, p. 36-38

[100] See section "Fox News: Muslim Women" under Bibliography

[101] See section "Fox News: Muslim Women" under Bibliography

[102] Tyler O'Neil, "Taliban Promises to Protect Women's Rights... with a Catch," Fox News (FOX News Network, August 17, 2021), https://www.foxnews.com/world/taliban-promises-protect-womens-rights-with-catch.

[103] Ruth Ravve, "Muslim Women in U.S. Struggle to Balance Western Freedoms and Islamic Culture," Fox News (FOX News Network, March 25, 2015), https://www.foxnews.com/story/muslim-women-in-u-s-struggle-to-balance-western-freedoms-and-islamic-culture .

narrative has the Muslim women opposed to Muslim men and Islam. In Don Snyder's news story "Despite threats, woman who opened liberal mosque in Berlin keeps fighting for religious freedom," those who threaten the woman fighter for change of the old Islamic doctrine in question are a male majority that is unwilling to see change in Islam. Thus, the oppressor once again is Islam in its current form and Muslim men.[104]

In the rare instance where a news story from Fox News reports on an incident where Muslim women are the victims of Islamophobia rather than their male counterparts, Muslim women are often depicted as unsympathetic victims. When Louis Casiano writes about a Muslim woman settling a lawsuit after she had been forced to remove her headscarf and abaya, a traditional loose dress many Muslim women wear with their hijabs, when turning herself in for a minor traffic violation, Casiano headlines the news story with "Minnesota Muslim woman gets $120G settlement after claiming jail forced her to remove hijab."[105] Here, the way Casiano writes 120 thousand dollars like "$120G," honing the reader's focus in on the amount of money the Muslim woman received in her settlement rather than the indignity she suffered.

Her side of the story is instead reduced to the verb "claim," something that leaves room for doubt, despite there being ample evidence of her experience at the hands of the law. Due to the ambiguous formulation of the headline, the reader of this news story will not be sympathetic to the experience suffered by the Muslim woman due to Islamophobia, even though it is framed with a narrative of victimization attached to the Muslim woman in question. Instead, they will focus on the amount of money the Muslim woman has received in her settlement of the lawsuit.

Similar to Fox News, CNN's framing of these narratives focuses on the victimization of Muslim women, however, the oppressors of the Muslim women in the news stories by CNN are not just the religion of Islam or Muslim men. Instead, the oppressors of Muslim women in CNN's news stories are the local regimes and the local government which enforce the restrictive laws that Muslim women and men are forced to obey, including Western

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[104] Don Snyder, "Despite Threats, Woman Who Opened Liberal Mosque in Berlin Keeps Fighting for Religious Freedom," Fox News (FOX News Network, September 27, 2017), https://www.foxnews.com/world/despite-threats-woman-who-opened-liberal-mosque-in-berlin-keeps-fighting-for-religious-freedom .
[105] Louis Casiano, "Minnesota Muslim Woman Gets $120G Settlement after Claiming Jail Forced Her to Remove Hijab." Fox News. (FOX News Network, December 18, 2019), https://www.foxnews.com/us/minnesota-muslim-woman-gets-120g-in-settlement-after-claiming-jail-forced-her-to-remove-hijab.

countries.[106]

Another aspect that differs in CNN's framing of the Muslim female freedom fighter from Fox News's portrayal of the same narrative, is the inclusion of Muslim women who are fighting to be free of their oppressors living in their countries of origin. An example of this is Kate Maltby's news story "Saudi Arabia and Iran share a mutual disdain for women who speak up," wherein the women mentioned are currently living under the regimes they are fighting.[107] Dean Obeidallah's opinion piece "Our Muslim allies must step up to protect the women of Afghanistan" employs a similar framing as he prompts the neighboring nations of Afghanistan to protect and join the women of Afghanistan in their fight for their rights. However, this news story leans on the narrative of victimization as well and gives the impression that Muslim women need a rescuer from the outside.[108]

A difference of framing worth noting when it comes to CNN's use of this narrative is that most of the stories are from other countries, and most of the ones that are about Muslim women facing anti-Muslim backlash in the West are also situated in Europe, and not in the U.S.[109] These news stories are also unique from the other news stories mentioned because the opposers to Muslim women are non-Muslims who do not accept their faith, a framing that is rare, but increasing in its usage.

The difference in framing between the two outlets becomes even more apparent when we look at an incident reported by both outlets. The incident both outlets cover concerns the cancellation of a planned presentation about Islam by a Muslim woman in a Connecticut school due to the teacher of the class receiving threats. Though the facts reported in both news stories are the same, there are noticeable differences in the way the two outlets present these facts. Fox News's Greg Norman writes the headline as "Connecticut school cancels Muslim speaker after 'threatening' calls to teacher," with a picture of the school in question, while CNN's Intisar Seeraj and Christina Zdanowicz write "School cancels Muslim speaker after community backlash" with a video reporting the incident.[110]

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106 See section "CNN: Islam" under Bibliography
107 Maltby, "Saudi Arabia and Iran Share a Mutual Disdain for Women Who Speak Up," CNN (Cable News Network, March 19, 2019), https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/18/opinions/saudi-arabia-iran-repression-of-women-maltby/index.html.
108 Dean Obeidallah, "Our Muslim Allies Must Step up to Protect the Women of Afghanistan," CNN (Cable News Network, August 16, 2021), https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/16/opinions/women-of-afghanistan-taliban-opinion-obeidallah/index.html .
109 Sahar Aziz, "Women Facing Anti-Muslim Backlash," CNN (Cable News Network, January 26, 2015), https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/25/tv/aziz-muslim-women/index.html .
110 Greg Norman. "Connecticut School Cancels Muslim Speaker after 'threatening' Calls to Teacher." Fox News. (FOX News Network, November 17, 2017), https://www.foxnews.com/us/connecticut-

CNN's news story focuses on the incident itself, not naming people while quoting the different parties involved in the incident, with the exception of Moreu, the superintendent of the school. Seeraj and Zdadanowicz use the narrative of victimization, framing the story as another incident of Islamophobia in America affecting Muslim women. Additionally, by only naming Moreau, they also point out a person that could have done something to prevent the incident, as he is portrayed as someone trying to placate people, and not much else.

Fox News's framing of the incident is quite different, as Norman names every single person involved in the incident. Though the framing of the incident uses the narrative of victimization in Norman's news story to a degree, it is overshadowed by the inclusion of the narrative of the Orientalist "Other". The Muslims quoted in the incident are portrayed to be angered and the school officials are portrayed as buckling under outside pressure of both angry parents and irritated Muslims while trying to do the "right thing". Notably, whereas the quote from the Council on American Islamic Relations is preceded by the verb "said" in CNN's news story, it is preceded by the verb "blasts" in Fox News's news story.

Due to these differences in usage of narratives, Fox News's news story depicts a confrontation between two parties, where Muslim women are a slightly sympathetic "Other," and the school administration, depicted as the "us" in relation to the "Other," are just simply caught in the "crossfire" between unknown Islamophobes threatening their teacher and Muslims. In CNN's story, the usage of the victimization narrative leaves the reader with an impression of Muslim women being the target of yet another incident of Islamophobia.

The last narrative attributed to Muslim women discussed in section 2.3 was that of the "harem belly dancer," and while none of the news stories have ascribed to this deeply misogynistic narrative as explicitly as Cardi B's "Bodak Yellow," it persists and colors news stories from both outlets. Often, the news stories that are about the bodies of Muslim women and their choice of clothing deploy the narrative of the Oriental "Other" in conjunction with either the narrative of victimhood, and/or the narrative of the Muslim freedom fighter. In the Fox News's news story "Indonesians hold 'Islam's answer to Miss World," the author primarily uses the narrative of the Oriental "Other" to describe the Muslim women and the clothes they wear in "Islam's" version of the beauty pageant, as it is implied that such a

school-cancels-muslim-speaker-after-threatening-calls-to-teacher, and Intisar Seeraj, and Christina Zdanowicz. "School Cancels Muslim Speaker after Community Backlash." CNN. (Cable News Network, November 17, 2017), https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/16/us/school-cancels-muslim-speaker-after-community-backlash/index.html.

concept is not something viable in the West on an international level by the author.[111]

The news story also blends in the narrative of victimization and that of the female Muslim freedom fighter to describe the women participating in the pageant. They are victims of the Islamic hardliners who are against even this "modest" version of the pageant, and they are afforded the female freedom fighter narrative simply because they stand in opposition to the Islamic hardliners. Traces of the narrative of the Oriental "Other" can be also found when the author denotes how "immodesty" includes showing shoulders and hair according to the event organizer in a manner that expresses disagreement with this definition of immodesty.[112]

Fox News's news story leaves the impression of Muslim women being suppressed by the Islamic hardliners, while also fighting for their place in the public space. Nevertheless, because the story is from a foreign country, and because they are holding an "Islamic" version of a beauty competition, the average reader would not empathize or be impressed by the struggle of these Muslim women, as they remain a representation of the Oriental "Other". We can see something similar happen in a CNN news story concerning young hijabed women in America.

In Harmeet Kaur's news story "Hijabistas: Young Muslim women meld fashion and faith" for CNN, Kaur discusses the rise of hijab wearing fashionistas among Muslim women living in the West.[113] Kaur approaches the story using the narrative of the female Muslim freedom fighter, as the "hijabistas" are daring to be visibly Muslim women in the West despite the threat of danger from both Islamophobes and Islamist extremists. However, Kaur inadvertently exoticizes and "others" the Muslim women she is praising, as she portrays them as beautiful young women who are dressed in a modest manner despite not needing to, raising the reader's interest in knowing what these beautiful women look like without this modest clothing. The subject matter Kaur is reporting on is simply Muslim women being integrated into Western societies. However, because she is somewhat excessive in her praise of the visual beauty of the Muslim women, describing them as "models," she ultimately manages to sexualize, exoticize and depicts them as the Oriental "Other."

The reason why both news stories end up "othering" the Muslim women in question is because the hijab and other news stories about the articles of clothing worn by Muslim

[111] AFP, "Indonesians Hold 'Islam's Answer to Miss World.'" Fox News (FOX News Network, December 5, 2015). https://www.foxnews.com/world/indonesians-hold-islams-answer-to-miss-world.
[112] AFP, 2015
[113] Harmeet Kaur, "Hijabistas: Young Muslim Women Meld Fashion and Faith." CNN (Cable News Network, September 16, 2016),https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/cnnphotos-hijabistas/index.html.

women for the purpose of modesty are seen as symbols of resistance against being integrated into the modern era for Muslim women living in Muslim majority countries, and as symbols of resistance against being integrated into American society for the Muslim women living in America. The laws banning the face veils and restricting the use of hijabs in European are a result of this idea that paints hijabs, niqabs, and burqas as symbols of oppression and the Oriental "Other" and is deeply embedded into Western societies.[114]

Kaur's news story attempts to normalize the Muslim women wearing hijabs, but ultimately fails to do so because while she exemplifies how hijab wearing women can be a part of Western society, her focus on the individual Muslim women involved and their beauty detracts from the larger conversation. Nevertheless, though Kaur's news story does unintentionally portray the Muslim women from the lens of the Oriental "Other," it also introduces the idea that Muslim women in the West can be integrated members of society with their hijabs, and not despite it.[115]

2.3.2   Misogyny, Sexism And Muslim Women in American Media

Whenever women are at the Center of the conversation, the discussion of misogyny and sexism is inevitable. In the case of Muslim women who stand at the intersection of gendered Islamophobia, it is not easy to identify if they are being attacked because of their religion, gender, ethnicity, or a combination of the three. The most obvious attack on Muslim women motivated solely by their gender is often committed by Muslim men. These are often instances of domestic violence where women are physically or mentally abused at the hands of the Muslim men in their lives.

Violence against women in Muslim communities is often attributed to the religion of Islam, or extremist interpretations of Islamic scripture. Muslim women are victims of Islamism and Muslim men, suffering simply because they are women. Restrictive laws and policies like Iran's morality police and Afghanistan's erasure of women from public spaces are commonly cited as examples of misogyny against Muslim women, as these policies take away their autonomy and freedom, while dictating their dress code and behavior. [116]

On the other hand, Western policies like France's ban on the face veil and the hijab in the public sector in the name of "freeing" Muslim women are not depicted as being misogynistic, despite also being policies that dictate the dress code and limit the freedom of

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[114] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p.81
[115] Harmeet Kaur, 2016.
[116] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p.81-82

Muslim women. Additionally, even though Muslim women are given the narrative of victimization in the context of the European campaign against the face veil and headscarves worn by Muslim women specifically, they are portrayed as the victims of Islamophobia, and not misogyny. Essentially, when those who commit violence against Muslim women are Muslim men, it is misogyny, and when the ones targeting Muslim women are non-Muslims, it is because of Islamophobia, according to the media.[117]

In the news stories from Fox News and CNN that this thesis works with, there are not many stories that demonstrate a strong narrative of misogyny. That does not mean that there is no evidence of misogynistic undertones in news stories from both outlets. However, whenever there are misogynistic undertones in these news stories, they are often aimed either at an individual woman, or women who wear the face veil or hijab. In CNN's case the only news story that could be understood to have clear misogynistic undertones towards Muslim woman would be in Theodore Schleifer's news story "Donald Trump's take on burkas: Islamic women might prefer them," where he is reporting on Trump's remarks on Muslim women that wear the face veil.[118]

Predictably, Trump's remarks are mocking and degrading towards the Muslim women who choose to wear the face veil, suggesting that they might choose to do so to hide unattractive physical attributes. However, while Schleifer reports on these misogynistic and Islamophobic remarks made by Trump, he does not attempt to fact check Trump, or present a counter narrative. Because of this, the news story's message echoes Trump, and does nothing to curb the misogynistic and Islamophobic rhetoric in Trump's statements. A loyal reader of CNN will see Trump's name in the title, and dismiss these statements made by him as yet another instance of his racist and misogynistic tendencies on display, while someone who is not a regular reader of CNN might take Trump's statement's to be humorous and based in truth, instead of the objectification of Muslim women that it is. Nevertheless, this is the only news story of my selection from CNN that has such openly misogynistic messaging that goes unchallenged.

Similarly, though Fox news has several stories with subtle misogynistic undertones like "Indonesians hold 'Islam's answer to Miss World" and ""Minnesota Muslim woman gets $120G settlement after claiming jail forced her to remove hijab" discussed in section 2.3.1, it

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[117] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p.82, 84
[118] Theodore Schleifer "Donald Trump's Take on Burkas: Islamic Women Might Prefer Them | CNN Politics." CNN. (Cable News Network, October 27, 2015), https://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/26/politics/donald-trump-burkas-new-hampshire/index.html

is Adam Shaw's "UK's Boris Johnson refuses to apologize after saying Muslim women in burqas look like 'bank robbers'" that has the strongest undertones of sexism and misogyny.[119] Like the CNN's news story on Trump's remarks, Shaw reports on misogynistic remarks made by Boris Johnson. However, whereas Schleifer did not provide a counter narrative to Trump's remarks, trusting the readers to formulate their own opinion on the matter, Shaw provides context to the situation that makes Johnson appear as the "hero" standing by his remarks and refusing to bow down to the backlash generated by his statements. Johnson's remarks on burqas and the face veil are misogynistic and Islamophobic, though he argues that they are not. As Shaw allows Johnson to explain himself, he makes him appear the more sympathetic character handling a bad situation. The women Johnson has attacked are ultimately forgotten in Shaw's contextualization of the situation, as the figures demanding an apology are politicians on the left, and less importantly, Muslim women.[120]

Shaw's news story, while depicting Muslim women as the victims of a misogynistic verbal attack, ultimately supports and defends Johnson's political outlook, and this is the definite difference between Shaw's news story and Schleifer's news story on CNN. While Schleifer does not counter or rebuke Trump's remarks, Shaw ends up subtly supporting Johnson's statements about Muslim women. Additionally, none of these news stories afford the Muslim women any agency, as the case often is with news stories about Muslim women in American news media. Misogyny against Muslim women also occurs more in Fox's news stories, especially against liberal female politicians like Ilhan Omar, something that is examined further in the next chapter.[121]

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[119] AFP, 2015, Louis Casiano, 2019, and Adam Shaw, "UK's Boris Johnson refuses to apologize after saying Muslim women in burqas look like 'bank robbers'" Fox News (FOX News Network, August 8, 2018), https://www.foxnews.com/world/uks-boris-johnson-refuses-to-apologize-after-saying-muslim-women-in-burqas-look-like-bank-robbers
[120] Adam Shaw, 2018
[121] See section "Fox News: Ilhan Omar," "Fox News: Muslim Women" under Bibliography

Chapter 3: Muslim Women Living In America And Ilhan Omar

3.1 <u>The Impact of The Media's Framing on Muslim Women in America</u>

As a result of this framing of these narratives, a loyal reader of Fox News will often have the impression that Muslim women are oppressed entirely in their countries of origin. Thus, the ones living in the United States and the West are fighting against their oppressors because they have the freedom to do so in the West. Nevertheless, the reader cannot trust Muslim women entirely, as some of them can be as radical as their male counterparts. Similarly, a loyal reader of CNN will have an impression of Muslim women that views them as either submissive victims in need of rescue by Western governments, or fierce women that are fighting against the violent and oppressive Muslim men.

It is true that women in both Afghanistan and Iran are currently treated as second-class citizens. However, Fox News's framing of this treatment has given the impression that this is entirely brought on by the enforcement of a universal interpretation of Sharia law that every Muslim in every Muslim majority country, male or female, believes in wholeheartedly, something that is entirely untrue. While the examples of the regimes in Afghanistan and Iran show what a society intolerant of women looks like, they are also not true for the rest of the Muslim world, a notion that CNN's framing of this narrative does include. The narrative of victimization of Muslim women at the hands of Muslim men is often used as a justification for the American military to intervene in a country, which may provide an explanation as to why Muslim women from every Muslim majority country have been depicted as victims of violence committed by Muslim men with the sole exception of Palestinian women.[122]

Though women are not treated equal to men in Muslim countries, this fact is not unique to Muslim countries specifically. The patriarchal societies of the world are not limited to a single religion and its followers, a fact that is overlooked and deliberately ignored by the media narratives that build upon the idea of Muslim women being unique in their suffering. The notion that the West is more advanced as a civilization in terms of gender relations when compared to Muslim countries originates, like many things, from Orientalist theory, and has

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[122] Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance," 2020, p.651, and Nathan Lean. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Hatred of Muslims.* 2017, p.145

been termed "femonationalism" by scholars.[123]

Nevertheless, this narrative continues to be a point of debate which is increasingly relevant not only because of the events occurring in Afghanistan and Iran, but also because of the way Muslim women are treated in America. Barbara Perry notes that more than 86% of hate crimes committed against Muslims are targeted towards Muslim women, partly because they are often more visibly Muslim than Muslim men, and partly because they are women, and thus, perceived as vulnerable and weaker.[124]

Muslim women in the West and America, stand at multiple different intersections when it comes to their identity.[125] Be it their gender, race, ethnicity, or religion, which is accompanied with an appearance that makes it easy for onlookers to identify them as Muslim if they wear a hijab, niqab or a burqa, Muslim women in America navigate through a multitude of different intersections of identity through their daily life, something Muslim men do not, as they are less easily recognized as Muslims. It also means that because women, people of color, and Muslims are all targets of hate crimes, Muslim women of color are more likely to be targets of hate crimes.[126]

Alimahomed-Wilson introduces a matrix in which she categorizes how Muslim women in America can be a target of hate crimes in four different categories that intersect with each other in the intersection of gendered Islamophobia.[127] The four categories are structural, hegemonic, interpersonal, and disciplinary. Like Alimahomed-Wilson, Beydoun also distinguishes between different forms of Islamophobia present in America, though he only includes three categories.[128]

The first category that Alimahomed-Wilson and Beydoun both include is structural Islamophobia, also called institutionalized Islamophobia, referring to the Islamophobia present in American institutions. The reinstatement of the Muslim ban finally highlighted the presence of structural Islamophobia for those outside the Muslim American communities, as Muslim Americans have felt the weight of state-sanctioned Islamophobia for much longer. The US PATRIOT act signed by Bush, and the establishment of the Department of Homeland

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[123] Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance," 2020, p. 651-652

[124] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p.79

[125] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p. 79

[126] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p. 80, 85

[127] Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance," 2020, p. 653

[128] Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance," 2020, p. 653, 657 and Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 32

Security put Muslim Americans under constant surveillance of the state, and Muslims who were perceived to be more religious were listed as "potential radicals" by the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI.[129]

Additionally, due to the introduction of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, the phrase "flying while brown" became another recognized symptom of structural Islamophobia, as "random" searches targeted those with Arab or South Asian features disproportionately. The experience of "flying while brown" is in many ways worse for Muslim women than for Muslim men, especially if they are wearing headscarves or face veils.[130] If someone does not speak English while traveling in America, they are further disadvantaged, and this rings true for immigrant Muslim women. Muslim women going through airport security are the targets of thorough pat downs, sometimes past the point of sexual harassment. If a woman is wearing a niqab, she is often forced to unveil herself in front a crowd of passengers and male TSA agents, and in extreme cases, hijabed Muslim women can be forced to take off their hijab and their clothes or strip searched by TSA agents.[131] Alimahomed-Wilson attributes the interest in making Muslim women disrobe to the hypersexualisation of Muslim women's bodies present in entertainment media, like the "harem belly dancer" narrative that has been attached to Muslim women since the era of Orientalism.[132]

The hegemonic category in the matrix of gendered Islamophobia concerns itself with shaping opinions and ideas about the Muslim women and Islam, according to Alimahomed-Wilson.[133] Beydoun categorizes this as private Islamophobia, wherein private actors target Muslims, with the media falling under this category.[134] However, though the media's framing of Muslims and spreading of Islamophobic rhetoric is considered a private act of Islamophobia, it is also supported by structural Islamophobia. As we have observed, Muslim women are rarely afforded agency in both CNN and Fox's news stories. This is deliberately done, as it prevents Muslim women from taking control of the narratives attached to them.

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129 Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 27, 36-39, 100
130 Considine "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and "Flying while Brown,"" 2017, p. 12, and Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 101
131 American Civil Liberties Union. "ACLU of Illinois Challenges Ethnic and Religious Bias in Strip Search of Muslim Woman at O'Hare International Airport," January 16, 2002. http://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-illinois-challenges-ethnic-and-religious-bias-strip-search-muslim-woman-ohare.
132 Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance," 2020, p. 659
133 Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance," 2020, p. 664
134 Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p.32-35

This is something that Ahlem Muhtaseb examines closely in the article "US Media Darlings: Arab and Muslim Women Activists, Exceptionalism and the "Rescue Narrative,"" where she details how the media effectively silences Muslim women that speak out against the narratives ascribed to them by pointing out aggressors other than Muslim men or Muslim governments.[135]

The third category in this matrix is the interpersonal category, and this is about the gendered Islamophobia Muslim women encounter personally.[136] Interpersonal gendered Islamophobia is about the discrimination Muslim women face both from within Muslim communities, the threats of violence, and the sexism Muslim women face daily because of their visibility as Muslims made more clear by the hijab. A quarter of hijabed Muslim women report that they have been pushed while taking the subway in New York, a number that is alarming.[137] Consequently, 83% percent of Muslim women in America report "feeling unsafe" in public, a number that is almost doubled when compared to Muslim men, of which only 45% responded as feeling unsafe.[138]

In the article "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women," Alimahomed-Wilson interviews young Muslim American women that speak about instances in which they have been affected by Islamophobia.[139] A staggering 85% of respondents reported experiencing verbal violence motivated by Islamophobia, while 25% reported experiencing physical violence, and Muslim women who wore the hijab were more likely to experience being targeted in these hate crimes than Muslim women who did not wear it.[140]

Alimahomed-Wilson quoted a young hijabed woman's experience where the young Muslim woman describes how she would get trash and drinks thrown at her whenever she took the school bus, something that ended up affecting her overall attendance as she stopped

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[135] Ahlam.Muhtaseb, "US Media Darlings: Arab and Muslim Women Activists, Exceptionalism and the "Rescue Narrative," " *Arab Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1-2 (2020), pp: 7-24, https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169/arabstudquar.42.1-2.0007, p. 21-22

[136] Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance," 2020, p. 667

[137] Jay Croft, "1 In 4 Muslim Women in New York Say They've Been Pushed on a Subway Platform While Wearing a Hijab." CNN (Cable News Network, June 19, 2018), https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/19/us/new-york-anti-muslim-harassment-survey-trnd/index.html.

[138] Sabrina Alimahomed-Wilson, "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women." *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 5, no. 1 (2017): 73-97. muse.jhu.edu/article/657586, p. 80

[139] Alimahomed-Wilson, "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women," 2017, p. 74

[140] Alimahomed-Wilson, "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women," 2017, p. 77, 80-81

taking the bus to school.[141] The majority of the women in Alimahomed-Wilson's study also reported trouble getting hired, and those that did get hired in retail or in the customer service sector, experienced a frightening level of verbal abuse being directed at them by customers.[142] Alimahomed-Wilson also noted that many of the women were reluctant to report incidents of hate crimes, especially verbal hate crimes to the authorities, as they did not think that they would be taken seriously. The women who did end up reporting, felt dismissed and disparaged.[143]

This wariness is not unique to Muslim women, as hate crimes are generally underreported across all demographics, with the FBI only reporting six to eight thousand hate crimes yearly, while the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated there to be around 260 000 hate crimes taking place in America annually. This reflects a failure on behalf of the authorities, as they have failed to garner and retain the trust of the people they are supposed to protect.[144]

The final category within this matrix is the disciplinary category, concerning how Muslims have been under constant surveillance by the government in the aftermath of 9/11. This category also falls under the category of structural Islamophobia defined by Beydoun. It consists of the institutionalized and structural Islamophobia in American institutions whose primary focus is to spy on Muslim communities, while also functioning to stop Muslims from unifying across cultural boundaries within the American Muslim diaspora.[145]

This structural and institutionalized of Muslims surveillance was further strengthened under Obama, as he introduced Countering Violent Extremism. Countering Violent Extremism, also called CVE, is a policy that encourages Muslim Americans to report on friends, family members, and mosques that they thought were in danger of radicalization. CVE was essentially a modern interpretation of the "divide and conquer" strategy, as it divided Muslims amongst themselves by instructing them to report on each other. Trump's ban on Muslims entering the country was the last link in a series of restrictive structural and institutionalized policies against Muslims in America, and not something unexpected, given the vitriol Trump and his Republican colleagues had spouted against non-white and Muslim

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[141] Alimahomed-Wilson, "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women," 2017, p. 81
[142] Alimahomed-Wilson, "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women," 2017, p. 83
[143] Alimahomed-Wilson, "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women," 2017, p. 82
[144] Alimahomed-Wilson, "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women," 2017, p. 85, and Acim, "Islamophobia, Racism and the Vilification of the Muslim Diaspora," 2019, p. 35
[145] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, 112, 128

communities during their campaigns.[146]

The different categories Alimahomed-Wilson outlines highlight the different ways in which gendered Islamophobia has impacted the lives of Muslim women, and how the news media's framing of Muslim women affects their daily lives.[147] It also shows how these narratives are also supported by the policy makers, used to justify America's "War on Terror," a war that has had no winners in the twenty years it has raged, as the "War on Terror" was never against the Islamist extremists, but against the ideology of Islamist extremism. Ultimately, these narratives only served to marginalize an already marginalized group by depicting them as the bogeyman that is trying to take away the freedom of ordinary Americans and portraying them as the eternal "Other" to the Western civilization, building a wall between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities inside and outside America. Nevertheless, Muslim women like Ilhan Omar prove that these walls are breaking down, despite concerted efforts to strengthen them.

3.2 <u>Introducing Ilhan Omar</u>

Ilhan Omar and her story is used for the purpose of illustrating and analyzing how the media narratives that are ascribed to Muslim women by CNN and Fox News affects Ilhan Omar's media imaging, her life and career, and what kind of hurdles she faces as a Black Muslim woman in Congress. Ilhan Omar, born October 4th, 1982, is a member of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota, which is affiliated with the Democratic Party. She is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, elected from Minnesota's 5th District, which has historically been a Democratic stronghold. Ilhan Omar is a Muslim Somali woman born in Mogadishu. Omar and her family fled from Somalia to Kenya in 1991, arriving in Kenya in in 1992. They lived in the Utange Refugee Camp in Kenya from 1992 to 1995.[148]

The family experienced a tough time in the camp, and eventually chose to come to America. Omar explains the reason that they chose America instead of countries like Norway and Sweden, was, as her father explained to the then nine-year-old Omar, because "Only in America can you ultimately become an American. Everywhere else we will always feel like a

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[146] Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia*, 2018, p. 112-115, 128-129

[147] Alimahomed-Wilson, "Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women," 2017, p. 79, and Alimahomed-Wilson, "The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance," 2020, p. 653

[148] Ilhan Omar, *This Is What America Looks like: My Journey from Refugee to Congresswoman*, New York: WILLIAM MORROW, 2021), p. 16, 40

guest."[149] Omar's mother passed away when she was two years old, so she idolized her father and grandfather, as they were supportive of her endeavors throughout her life. Omar's clear admiration and gratefulness for the male figures in her life is evident throughout her autobiography.[150]

After a lengthy process of interviews, Omar's family finally arrived in America in 1995. From then on, they moved around in the country until they eventually settled down in Minneapolis in Minnesota in 2001. Omar describes the time after the move to America as turbulent, as she could not speak English, and faced racism as a young Black girl, something she had not experienced before.[151] Omar was naturalized as an American citizen in 2000 and completed High School in 2001.

She soon married according to the Islamic faith and gave birth to her first child at the age of twenty-one, and another followed soon after. The marriage had its problems and Omar and her first husband divorced in 2008. Omar remarried, but separated from her second husband in 2011, and reconciled with her first husband. She also graduated from North Dakota State University with an undergraduate degree in political science and international studies in the same year. [152] Omar divorced her first husband again in 2019, and married businessperson Tim Mynett in 2020. The couple has faced criticism for their business dealings, as Mynett's firm has been accused of using Omar's campaign funds for the couple's own benefit.[153]

In 2016, she ran for the Minnesota House of Representatives, becoming the first American of Somali origin to become a legislator in the United States. After that, she ran for the United States House of Representatives in 2018, becoming one of the first Muslim women in Congress alongside Representative Rashida Tlaib from Michigan, and the first woman to wear a hijab in Congress.[154] She, along with Representative Tlaib, Representative Alexandra

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[149] Ilhan Omar, *This Is What America Looks like: My Journey from Refugee to Congresswoman*, 2021, p. 52

[150] Ilhan Omar, *This Is What America Looks like: My Journey from Refugee to Congresswoman*, 2021, 7

[151] Ilhan Omar, *This Is What America Looks like: My Journey from Refugee to Congresswoman*, 2021, 70, 75

[152] Ilhan Omar, *This Is What America Looks like: My Journey from Refugee to Congresswoman*, 2021, p. 98, 130, 154,

[153] Sam Dorman and Peter Hasson. "Ilhan Omar's Campaign Paid Her Husband's Firm Nearly $2.8M." Fox News. FOX News Network, November 10, 2020, https://www.foxnews.com/politics/ilhan-omar-husband-campaign-firm

[154] Eli Watkins, "First Muslim Women in Congress: Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar | CNN Politics," CNN (Cable News Network, November 7, 2018), https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/06/politics/first-muslim-women-congress/index.html.

Ocasio-Cortez, and Ayanna Pressley are members of a progressive left-wing group in Congress called "The Squad," which is an emerging sub-group within the Progressive Caucus. All initial members of The Squad were elected to Congress under the age of 50 in 2018 and are known to be the most progressive members of Congress. In 2020, they were joined by Cori Bush and Jamaal Brown, and more members joined in 2023.[155]

3.3 In Media: Conservative and Liberal News Media Imaging

Ilhan Omar, like most Black Muslim women, stands at different intersections regarding her identity. She is a refugee, a Black woman, a visible Muslim, an immigrant, and an American politician of color not born in America. As such it is no surprise that she is often scrutinized and criticized by the media in a different manner than her peers. Though both she and Rashida Tlaib are Muslim women who are extremely progressive, Omar is under fire more often than her colleague, Representative Tlaib. Alkazemi et al suggest that this might be because Omar is a more visible Muslim than Tlaib because of her hijab, in addition to being a Black woman.[156]

By virtue of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar being a veiled Muslim woman in power, she defies the most prevalent media narrative out of the narratives discussed in chapter 2, that being the narrative of a submissive, oppressed, and demure Muslim woman just by existing. This causes the media to be even more polarized in their framing of her, despite CNN's history of supporting liberal politicians and Fox News's history of targeting them in their news stories. Because Fox News is a conservative news media organization, their framing of Ilhan Omar reflects the statements that conservative politicians like Donald Trump have made about her.

Fox News and other conservative media outlets depict Ilhan Omar using the narrative of vilification, zeroing in on her actions, and criticizing Omar at every turn. Though it is not unusual for conservative media to vilify members of the Democratic Party, especially The Squad, Ilhan Omar has received an unprecedented amount of criticism from Fox News. Her case has not been helped by the accusation of antisemitism and blatantly Islamophobic

[155] Alexander Sammon, "A New 'Squad' Is Heading to the House," Slate Magazine (Slate, November 9, 2022), https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/11/progressives-midterms-maxwell-frost-delia-ramirez-summer-lee-greg-casar.html.

[156] Alkazemi et al, "Attribute Agenda Setting on Twitter and the *Wall Street Journal*: The Case of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar," 2021, p. 37

misinformation spread by Trump and his allies about her.[157]

Another reason for this push by conservative media to stereotype Omar as a villainous Muslim can be because the opposers Omar has faced in her life have not been male Muslims, but openly racist people who have attacked and threatened her. Most news stories on Fox News have either Islam or Muslim men as the opposite force to Muslim women. Omar is a person who embraces both the male influences in her life and her religion quite openly, and because of this open acceptance of the Muslim men in her life, she too, is depicted as "just like them" in regard to Muslim men in general. Because of this, she is almost always vilified instead of victimized in Fox's news stories.

While analyzing thirty news stories written about Omar hosted on Fox News, a clear bias is apparent in the news stories and opinion pieces hosted on the media outlet.[158] Of the thirty news stories from Fox News about Ilhan Omar, twenty-one vilify Omar, while in the remaining nine news stories she is "othered". In these news stories, Omar is depicted as a personification of the Oriental "Other," portrayed as standing opposite the values of the conservatives and Christians that make up the majority of Fox News's target audience.[159]

Some of Fox's news stories about Ilhan Omar include clear misogynistic notions in their framing. An example of this is the news story "Somali community leader says Ilhan Omar married her brother". The news story itself is a transcript from a Tucker Carlson show, accompanied by a video clip from said show where Carlson discusses this story with Scott Johnson, who has been peddling the story of Omar's supposed marriage to her biological brother for three years at the time of the news story's publication. Omar, for her part, has refuted these claims every time they have been brought up, and even writes about it in her autobiography, describing the story as fabricated.[160]

Johnson quotes the "Daily Mail" as his source, which is a disreputable English tabloid, something he admits himself. He also mentions that Ilhan's "clan," meaning her extended Somali family in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint-Paul are quite unhappy with this story getting out. However, Carlson seems to be quite skeptical of Johnson's story and tries to wrap up the segment, though he does not refute Johnson's claims. Johnson, sensing that he was not believed, names the male Somali community leader the Daily Mail had interviewed

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[157] Alkazemi et al, "Attribute Agenda Setting on Twitter and the *Wall Street Journal*: The Case of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar," 2021, p. 42
[158] See section "Fox News: Ilhan Omar" in Bibliography
[159] Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," 2013, p. 81-82
[160] Ilhan Omar, *This Is What America Looks like: My Journey from Refugee to Congresswoman*, 2021, 210

as Abdi Nur. Abdi Nur is quite a common name in the Somali community, and as Johnson does not offer any more facts about this person, he does not appear to be more believable to Carlson, who thanks Johnson for speaking the truth monotonously before ending the segment.

Though it is clear that Carlson did not believe a single word Johnson said about Ilhan Omar's supposed marriage to her brother, the fact that it was chosen as the headline of this news story is reflective of how Fox News wishes to portray Ilhan to their base. The story of Ilhan Omar marrying her brother is deeply sexist in that it portrays Ilhan as an easily used accessory for fraud, something Johnson claims is the reason for the marriage. It is also "othering" as it invokes disgust towards her and her supposed husband for engaging in incest, as well as alienating, and degrading her as a person in the eyes of the reader.

Another way in which conservative media outlets try to vilify Omar further is by reporting on her daughter, Isra Hirsi. Hirsi is a climate activist who identifies herself as a communist. When Hirsi first added the communist symbols to her Twitter page, Fox News immediately ran the story "Ilhan Omar's daughter, a prominent climate activist, adds communist hammer and sickle to Twitter bio."[161] Communism is still seen as something inherently un-American, especially amongst conservatives, due to the Cold War. Hirsi's communist views are then used to attack Omar, though Hirsi is a grown woman making her own decisions. Nevertheless, Hirsi's communist declaration is portrayed as a reflection of Omar as a mother.

Omar is further vilified in Tyler O'Neil's news story "Ilhan Omar mocked for voicing outrage over Easter worship on plane: 'Why do you hate Christians?'"[162] Omar's supposed outrage is a tweet suggesting in jest that she too would offer prayers out loud as the Christians in the video being discussed. However, conservatives framed this to be outrage over Christianity being practiced. The answers to her tweet included conspiracy theories about her, including the one that suggested she had married her brother.[163]

Additionally, a common phrase that is to be found in most of the coverage on Omar by

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[161] Houston Keene, "Ilhan Omar's Daughter, a Prominent Climate Activist, Adds Communist Hammer and Sickle to Twitter Bio," Fox News, (FOX News Network May 20, 2021), https://www.foxnews.com/politics/ilhan-omar-daughter-isra-hirsi-hammer-sickle

[162] Tyler O'Neil, "Ilhan Omar Mocked for Voicing Outrage over Easter Worship on Plane: 'Why Do You Hate Christians?'," Fox News (FOX News Network, April 18, 2022), https://www.foxnews.com/politics/ilhan-omar-mocked-for-voicing-outrage-over-easter-worship-on-plane-why-do-you-hate-christians.

[163] Ilhan Omar, *This Is What America Looks like: My Journey from Refugee to Congresswoman*, 2021, p. 213

conservative media outlets is that of "Go back to where you came from."[164] Alkazemi et al write about this in their journal article "Attribute Agenda Setting on Twitter and the Wall Street Journal: The Case of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar," examining the negative hashtags on Twitter aimed at Congresswoman Omar.[165] One of the negative hashtags was "#GoBack". Another term attached to Omar and other members of the Squad to a lesser degree is the word "globalist."[166] Omar is often accused of putting other nations' interests before the interests of America, whether it is because she criticizes Israel or criticizes America's foreign policy. In Trump's era of "America First," this is seen as direct opposition to the conservative agenda, which is then taken as an open invitation to criticize Omar.

Alkazemi et al conclude that the conservatives use this invitation to the fullest extent, and the number of negative tags and tweets rises in conjunction with the publishing of a news story critical of Omar in Rupert Murdoch's Wall Street Journal.[167] They conclude that though the data was limited, they can safely state that the WSJ is trying to attach a specific narrative to the name of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, and that specific narrative is closely related to the term "nation," as the conservative media accuse her of putting other nations before America. This constant affirmation of an accusation builds a picture of a person who is willing to betray the United States, and this again circles back to the narrative of vilification that the conservative media is actively pushing on Congresswoman Omar.[168] As a result of this framing, Omar has had to face numerous death threats from white supremacists.[169]

On the other hand, liberal outlets like CNN portray Omar quite differently from their conservative peers. The liberal media outlets' framing of Omar varies from author to author, and what kind of controversy Omar is experiencing. Nevertheless, Ilhan Omar is not vilified by liberal media outlets like she is by the conservative news media. In fact, there is only one news story from CNN of the thirty selected that vilifies her. The coverage Ilhan Omar receives from liberal news outlets follows the narrative of the Muslim freedom fighter, where

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[164] O'Neil, "Ilhan Omar Mocked for Voicing Outrage over Easter Worship on Plane: 'Why Do You Hate Christians?'," 2022.

[165] Alkazemi et al, "Attribute Agenda Setting on Twitter and the *Wall Street Journal*: The Case of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar," 2021, p. 42

[166] O'Neil, "Ilhan Omar Mocked for Voicing Outrage over Easter Worship on Plane: 'Why Do You Hate Christians?'," 2022.

[167] Alkazemi et al, "Attribute Agenda Setting on Twitter and the *Wall Street Journal*: The Case of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar," 2021, p. 47

[168] Alkazemi et al, "Attribute Agenda Setting on Twitter and the *Wall Street Journal*: The Case of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar," 2021, p. 47

[169] Kevin Bohn, "Rep. Ilhan Omar Says She Has Experienced Increase in Death Threats | CNN Politics," CNN, April 15, 2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/14/politics/ilhan-omar-death-threats/index.html.

she is framed to be portrayed as a survivor who has stood steadfastly against all odds and achieved something unprecedented.[170] Of the other twenty-nine news stories on Omar from CNN, the narrative of the female Muslim freedom fighter is used in twenty of them. Five of the remaining stories depict her as a victim, while four employ the narrative of the Oriental other.

The news stories frame her as a victim of a Republican smear campaign, or of Trump's lies.[171] News stories like Daniel Dale's "Fact check: Trump promotes false smear of Rep. Ilhan Omar" are not rare, as there is a constant stream of misinformation about Omar released from conservative media outlets and politicians alike.[172] Other news stories in liberal media also call out or refute Fox News and conservatives directly when defending Omar and other notable members of the Democratic Party, like in Brian Shelter's news story "How Fox News fuels Trump's fixation with AOC and Ilhan Omar".[173] Shelter's news story provides an analysis of the way the conservative echo chamber functions and how it is affecting Omar and AOC.

Omar is inevitably forced into the victimhood narrative here, along with AOC, as they are being portrayed to be unprovoked victims of the conservatives' attacks. This type of framing is remarkably like CNN's framing of Muslim women in general, even though the opposers are not radicalized Muslim men, but conservative Republicans. However, this is subject to change whenever Omar and Tlaib criticize Israel, as the only story in which Omar is vilified to some degree by CNN is about her stance on Israel.[174]

CNN's main narrative when framing Ilhan Omar is, as mentioned, that of the female Muslim freedom fighter. This is because both Tlaib and Omar are very much anomalies as the first Muslim women in Congress. Though both women are elected from districts where there are a large number of Muslim communities, what sets Omar apart from Tlaib is her story. Tlaib was born and raised in America and represents a typical non-religious Muslim

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[170] Rafia Zakaria, "Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar Embody a New Era for Muslim Women," CNN (Cable News Network, January 3, 2019), https://edition.cnn.com/2019/01/02/opinions/rashida-tlaib-ilhan-omar-muslim-women-congress-zakaria/index.html.

[171] Daniel Dale, "Fact Check: Trump Promotes False Smear of Rep. Ilhan Omar," CNN (Cable News Network, September 18, 2019), https://edition.cnn.com/2019/09/18/politics/trump-smear-omar-dancing-9-11-video-terrence-williams/index.html.

[172] Dale, "Fact Check: Trump Promotes False Smear of Rep. Ilhan Omar," 2019

[173] Brian Stelter, "How Fox News Fuels Trump's Fixation with AOC and Ilhan Omar," CNN (Cable News Network, July 22, 2019), https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/21/media/fox-news-aoc-ilhan-omar/index.html.

[174] Sara Sidner and Mallory Simon "These Muslim and Jewish Community Leaders Are United in Frustration at Ilhan Omar's Comments | CNN Politics." CNN (Cable News Network, March 17, 2019), https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/17/politics/ilhan-omar-minnesota-constituents-anti-semitism/index.html

American woman. Omar is a more visibly practicing Muslim woman who came to America and realized her American Dream all while holding onto her faith and her cultural traditions.

In the news story "Ilhan Omar blasts 'demented views' in first extensive comments since Trump tweets," Omar is the voice of reason against Trump's unhinged Islamophobic tweets.[175] In another news story, "Tucker Carlson blasts Rep. Ilhan Omar, and she calls him a 'racist fool'," her casual dismissal of Carlson's racist remarks is applauded.[176] Though Tlaib and Omar are both anomalies, defeating decades of Islamophobic sentiment which had been heightened in the 2016 election to unforeseen heights, to reach Capitol Hill as Congresswomen, Omar is an impossibility. When Omar was first elected, the person who started the "birtherism" movement against Obama was president. Omar was a Somali refugee who was not born in America. Therefore, her election to Congress seems like even more of an impossibility. Because of this, Omar is always afforded the narrative of the female Muslim freedom fighter by liberal outlets.

3.3.1   Facing Accusation of Antisemitism

Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib are often bound together, especially when the topic of antisemitism is written about. Fox News often refers to Omar's old tweets criticizing Israel and even pro-Israel Congress members as antisemitic in nature.[177] Tlaib has Palestinian roots and often criticizes Israel's treatment of Palestinians and the illegal settlers taking over Palestinian land. However politely these concerns might be worded, both Tlaib and Omar are inevitably accused of antisemitism by both liberals and conservatives alike, and both have had to walk back their remarks on various occasions. Nevertheless, both Omar and Tlaib remain, as described by CNN, "defiant" in their stance on Israel, and contest that the criticism of a regime is not equal to the criticism of a religion.[178]

This criticism is aimed more towards Omar more than Tlaib, whose remarks on Israel are often either ignored or gently rebuked by liberal politicians and news media because Tlaib

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[175] Sunlen Serfaty and Noah Gray, "Ilhan Omar Blasts 'demented Views' in First Extensive Comments since Trump Tweets | CNN Politics," (Cable News Network, April 30, 2019), https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/30/politics/ilhan-omar-response-trump-attacks/index.html

[176] Brian Stelter, "Tucker Carlson Blasts Rep. Ilhan Omar, and She Calls Him a 'racist Fool' | CNN Business," (Cable News Network, July 11, 2019), https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/10/media/tucker-carlson-ilhan-omar-fox-news/index.html

[177] Lukas Mikalionis, "Ilhan Omar's Israel Tweets the Latest in Long Line of Controversial Comments," Fox News (FOX News Network, February 12, 2019), https://www.foxnews.com/politics/ilhan-omars-israel-comments.

[178] Veronica Stracqualursi, Sunlen Serfaty, and Ashley Killough, "Ilhan Omar Remains Defiant after Being Called out at AIPAC | CNN Politics," CNN (Cable News Network, March 27, 2019), https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/26/politics/ilhan-omar-aipac-criticism-mike-pence/index.html.

has Palestinian roots. Omar is seen as a typical Muslim antisemite in this context. The Israel-Palestine conflict has been framed as a conflict between Muslims and Jews by both the West and Muslim majority countries. This framing erases the existence of Palestinian Jews and Christians who are also affected by the conflict alongside their Muslim countrymen and women, and feeds into the narrative of the Israel-Palestine conflict being just a religious one instead of a political one.[179]

Because of this history between Muslims and Jews, Omar's criticism of Israel's policies suppressing Palestinians is framed as antisemitic because she is a Muslim woman. This is exacerbated due to a tweet in which she wrote "It's all about the Benjamins, baby!" when referring to the role of lobbyists and especially AIPAC's presence in Capitol Hill, which was inferred as an antisemitic dog whistle by both conservatives and liberals.[180]

While Omar did walk back the tweet in question, she did not take back her criticism of lobbyists and AIPAC. She has also continued to criticize Israel and its policies, saying in an interview that had it been another country than Israel, most people would condemn their actions. She also compared Israel to Iran in that both are theocracies and not democracies, pointing out the double standard in the different ways the two countries are portrayed in American media, something that again drew backlash from the media.[181]

As a result of her continued criticism of Israel, Omar has been removed as a member from most of the House committees now that the House of Representatives is controlled by Republicans.[182] Omar was a member of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights under the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and with her removal, there is no member born in Africa on the Subcommittee on Africa. Omar has criticized this decision as xenophobic and racist, with House Minority leader Hakim Jeffries also calling the exclusion of Omar and other Democrats from key positions an act of "political revenge".[183]

Ultimately, Omar's remarks against Israel have been criticized as antisemitic, and have had real consequences for her beyond the usual backlash from the news media and politicians, as she has been removed from committee assignment because of them. However,

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[179] Acim, "Islamophobia, Racism and the Vilification of the Muslim Diaspora," 2019, p. 26
[180] Lukas Mikalionis, 2019
[181] Lukas Mikelionis, "Rep. Ilhan Omar Slammed for Saying She 'chuckles' When Israel Is Called a Democracy, Compares It to Iran." Fox News. (FOX News Network, January 31, 2019), https://www.foxnews.com/politics/ilhan-omar-slammed-for-saying-she-chuckles-when-israel-is-called-democracy-comapres-it-to-iran.
[182] Clare Foran and Kristin Wilson, "House Passes Resolution to Remove Ilhan Omar from Foreign Affairs Committee | CNN Politics." CNN (Cable News Network, February 3, 2023), https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/02/politics/house-vote-ilhan-omar-committees/index.html.
[183] Clare Foran and Kristin Wilson, 2023

much of the backlash aimed at Omar for these statements from the conservatives is rooted in Islamophobic rhetoric which pits Islam against Judaism and Christianity, and with Omar being a Muslim woman, she is an easier target for accusations of antisemitism. Her removal from House committees at the hands of the Republicans, some of whom have proven to be bigoted, antisemitic, racist, and Islamophobic themselves, is hypocritical at best, and an action motivated by Islamophobia and xenophobia at worst.[184] Nevertheless, the fact of the matter remains that Ilhan Omar is an easy target for her political opponents because of her identity as a Black, Muslim woman who immigrated from Africa, primarily because of the existing narratives pertaining to her identity as a visibly Muslim woman.

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[184] The Forward and Mira Fox, "The Long List of Marjorie Taylor Greene's Antisemitic, Anti-Muslim Conspiracy Theories." Haaretz, (February 4, 2021), https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/2021-02-04/ty-article/a-look-at-marjorie-taylor-greenes-antisemitic-anti-muslim-conspiracy-theories/0000017f-db0d-d856-a37f-ffcda2410000.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This thesis has examined the historical roots of Islamophobia in America and how it has evolved over time to take various forms that target Muslim women in a specific manner. It highlights how deeply embedded Islamophobia is within American culture, expelling the notion that it is a newer phenomenon within the American context. As the thesis's aim is to examine the concept of gendered Islamophobia, and how the news medias from both side of the political spectrum in America frame Muslim women according to their political affiliation using specific narratives attributed to Muslim women, the thesis examines fifty news stories each from Fox News and CNN to conduct a content analysis of the prevalent narratives within the framing of both outlets. Additionally, the thesis uses thirty news stories each on Ilhan Omar from both Fox News and CNN as an illustrative and analytical example of how Muslim women are framed by the liberal and conservative news media outlets.

Some of these narratives, like that of the Oriental "Other," the victimization narrative, and that of the "harem belly dancer" can be traced to old Orientalist tropes used to exoticize and sexualize Muslim women and present them as mysterious and submissive to their male counterparts. Other narratives like the vilification narrative, and more recently, the narrative of the female Muslim freedom fighter, can be found to be established in the aftermath of 9/11, where women where either framed to be just as bad as Muslim men, or as fellow soldiers in the War on Terror against Islamist terrorism.

Both Fox News and CNN frame Muslim in a manner that reflects their political affiliations. Though both Fox News and CNN employed the narrative of victimization sixteen times in the selection of news stories this thesis utilizes on Muslim women from Fox News, Fox News also included the narrative of vilification in eleven of their stories, while the selection of news stories from CNN only had one story where the narrative of vilification was used to frame Muslim women. On the other hand, twenty-seven of CNN's stories used the narrative of the female Muslim freedom fighter to frame their news stories, whereas sixteen of Fox's news stories featured this narrative in their portrayal of Muslim women. The remaining news stories from both outlets frame Muslim women using the narrative of the Oriental "Other," though there is an argument to be made that all narratives attached to Muslim women by American news medias are different versions of "othering," as all of these narratives are attributed to Muslim women only, and not to other women in American society.

As a result of the persistent negative framing Muslim women have been subjected to

by the news media, Muslim American women must navigate different intersections of gendered Islamophobia. Up to 85% of American Muslim women report experiencing verbal abuse because of their religion, including Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who has also reported receiving death threats because of Islamophobia on several occasions, while a fourth of Muslim women report having been targets of physical violence.[185]

The analysis of Fox News and CNN's coverage of Muslim women as a group and Ilhan Omar specifically reveals a more noticeable difference in the way conservative and liberal outlets framed Omar in their news stories. In the case of the liberal media's coverage of Muslim women and Ilhan Omar, there is little to no difference between how CNN covers Omar and Muslim women as a group. She, alongside her colleagues in The Squad, are hailed as symbols of increasing acceptance and progressiveness both within the Democratic Party and in American society at large. As such, Omar is often given positive coverage, and if she finds herself in the middle of a controversy, she is supported by the liberal media in most cases.

Because Omar's story does not fit the framing of the narrative of the Muslim freedom fighter that Fox News presents, and because she is a Democrat, she is vilified instead. Omar, alongside her colleagues in The Squad are often framed as a threat to the Judeo-Christian values that America was built upon by Fox News. Because of this, Omar is often involved in controversies that would not have occurred if she was not an outspoken, veiled, Black, Muslim, immigrant woman.

From this we can conclude that Omar's political career has both benefited and suffered from the prevalent narratives about Muslim women present in the American news media. However, it is also worth noting that there is a heavier loss than gain. As Alkazemi reports, there is a conscious effort by the conservative media to limit Omar's political image to a specific narrative using both traditional and social media.[186] In contrast, there is no organized effort to combat the misinformation attached to Omar's name except incidental news stories which are often overlooked.

Ilhan Omar's career as a politician in the current American climate will always be colored by the narratives and the current framing of Muslim women as a group. If she chooses to be a visibly Muslim woman, she will have to navigate the different intersections of identity that being a Black refugee Muslim woman in America brings with it, be it in her daily life or

[185] Kevin Bohn, 2019
[186] Alkazemi et al, "Attribute Agenda Setting on Twitter and the *Wall Street Journal*: The Case of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar," 2021, p. 54

her political career.

To change this, the conversation about Islamophobia and what it is must change. Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon in America, but rather a newer form of old prejudices rooted in Orientalist tropes and stereotypes. Though it is a fact that events like 9/11, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, and the Iran hostage crisis have contributed to the evolution of Islamophobia in America, they did not create these narratives and stereotypes that are attached to Muslims and Islam. It is then important to know and acknowledge the presence of these deep roots of Islamophobia in the fabric of the American nation, as ignoring them hinders the efforts to combat Islamophobia in America.

Acknowledging the history of Islamophobia also allows us to recognize the many forms it takes, and how it operates within different parts of the American society, like government institutions, media organizations, and politics. It also helps us recognize how Islamophobia affects different demographics within Muslim communities, especially regarding gendered Islamophobia.

This thesis has presented an examination of the way Muslim women are framed in the news media by news media outlets on two different sides of the political spectrum, and detailed the problems this framing has had on Muslim women living in America. There is no simple answer to as to what can be done to resolve these problems, as they are entrenched deeply within different avenues of American society and culture. However, the first step is to change the way Muslim women are framed by both sides of the political spectrum, and to give Muslim women the agency to present their own story in their own words in a way that befits their lived experience.

This includes dispelling notions of how women are viewed in Islam both within Muslim communities and outside them and stopping the fixation on the hijab and other symbols of religiosity. The debate on the clothing worn by Muslim women has largely consisted of non-Muslims speaking over the Muslim women in question, and detracted from the larger problems Muslim women face in their daily lives due to Islamophobia. Allowing Muslim women who chose to cover and those who do not cover to take control of the conversations about them will dispel the various narratives and stereotypes attributed to them, and make non-Muslim Americans see them as being as American as any other person, rather than the eternal outsider to American society.

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