BOOK REVIEWS

Christopher Bail, *Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream* by Christopher Bail (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015. $27.95 ISBN 9780691159423).

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Christopher Bail's Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream is a fascinating and original contribution to the growing number of critical examination of Islamophobia in the United States, especially since 2001. Bail's sociological study is the first quantitative study of anti-Muslim activism. The author clearly announces in the opening pages that "principle contribution" of his work is "a new theory that explains how cultural, social psychological, and structural processes combine to shape the evolution of shared understandings of social problems in the wake of crisis such as September 11th" (9).

Bail's explores a "shared understanding" about Muslims in the United States, which, he claims, goes through shifts upon disruptions in social "equilibrium," such as with September 11. The originality of the study comes less from this operative use of "shared understanding" or his "new theory," analysis, and conclusions than from the quantitative methodology by which he approaches the topic and gathers data. Specifically, he grounds his theory in "the new wave of "big data" research" or the "increase in text-based data" available through the internet, digitalization of media, political texts, and social media. (11) In particular, Bail uses plagiarism detection software to compare press releases from 120 civil society organizations, traditional media outlets, and social media who contributed and "competed to shape shared understandings of Islam" in the years after 9/11 (11-12).

In this regard, Bail's work is a contribution to the sociology of "big data" and also offers information to corroborate previous research by academics, activists, and think tanks that map the mainstreaming of anti-Muslim "fringe" groups and their Islamophobic sentiments. He notes the rise of civic engagement of both Muslim civil liberties organizations and the "foundation" and rise of the anti-Muslim "fringe" as exemplified by those such as Daniel Pipes and Steven Emerson.

Bail uses plagiarism detection software to show a trend in the media as "a dramaturgical stage at the center of the public sphere" (41), where journalism played to and preyed on the emotional sensibilities of an anxious post-9/11 American audience regarding perceptions of Muslims. This plagi-

arism software detected that sensationalist and, Bail insinuates, fundamentally lazy news outlets picked up and disseminated sensationalist, psychologically evocative, and Islamophobic articles and talking points that originated in and were disseminated by previously insignificant fringe groups such as Pipes' Middle East Forum and Emerson's Center for Security Policy. Bail asserts that "though the vast majority of civil society organizations produced pro-Muslim messages, journalists were captivated by a small group of anti-Muslim fringe organizations." Consequently, the pandering to the "negative emotions" after 9/11 enabled "fringe organizations to transcend their obscurity and humble resources by appealing to the media's legendary appetite for drama" (51). Therefore, Islamophobic groups capitalized on "shared emotions" of anxiety after 9/11, which "contributed to the solidification" of social networks and a "realignment of the cultural environment" that made anti-Muslim crusades such as the anti-Sharia law campaign gain traction within mainstream Americans (72).

While US mainstream media was enamored by the anxiety-provoking message of fringe groups, these same news outlets "ignored" positive representations about Muslims and Islam (55) despite what Bail claims as the "superior resources and dense social networks" of mainstream Muslim American civil society organizations (such as CAIR and ISNA) (54). These groups, ironically, were accused of being fronts for homegrown radicalization and increasingly, according to Bail's theory, Muslim Americans were marginalized and disenfranchised from policy making processes and further targeted, stigmatized, and frozen out of the civil society by mainstream political organizations and political figures.

In setting out his methodology and theory for how social organizations create social change, Bail critiques notions the sociological concept of "resonance" that assumes social organizations create social analysis that "fits" preexisting cultural discourse. Finding this theory "circular," Bail "introduces an evolutionary theory of collective behavior and cultural change" (6). In this respect, the study speaks to and is trying to advance particular data-based sociological theories and methods. This goal and intent has a place within disciplinary discussions, and I suspect it is fascinating and would elicit much discussion among his cohort. However, within the context of a larger academic and mainstream audience, his methodology hurts his study in a variety of ways—not least of which is that Bail's critique of "resonance," of cultural, historical, and social ideological dynamics at the heart of all forms of racism, ends up dismissing the volumes of research on relevant topics such as "the fringe network" that could have formed a shorthand and base for this data driven analysis.

More specifically, Bail's contribution to the study of Islamophobia is damaged by a number of oversights. Most notably, he neither engages the

considerable literature on Islamophobia, which overlaps significantly with this study, nor the social and racial history in the United States. He ignores the major studies regarding Islamophobia in the United States, including the Fear Inc. project sponsored by the Century for American Progress (work that would support Bail's assertions), and scholarship on Islamaphobia by Deepa Kumar and Nathan Lean, Janet Abu Lughod's work on gender, Anne Norton's work on the political history of the "Muslim problem," anthropologist Nadine Naber's and fellow sociologists Louise Cainkar's work on Arab Americans, Evelyn Alsultany and others work on the media, Rana Junaid's work on South Asian Muslim Americans, Sohail Daulatzai's and Shermon Jackson's differing but equally valuable work on Black Muslims, and my own work attempting to understand the ideological underpinnings of Muslim-baiting.

Had Bail integrated rather than dismissed these works, he could have avoided many serious missteps. For example, despite the overall agreement of most historical and sociological studies on race, media, and Islam in the United States, he asserts that, while "Muslim American experienced significant discrimination during earlier periods" (17) and that they "continued to face numerate challenges in the 1970s," pre-2001 surveys reveal "a plurality of Americans held favorable views of Islam" (17).

Part of the methodological problem in Bail's study is that he fails to track how anti-Muslim views pre-2001 were expressed not exclusively in terms of Islam but in terms of anti-Arab racism. This would be missed by software searching exclusively for "Islam" and "Muslims" not "Arab," "Palestinian," or "Lebanese." This shortcoming embodies a failure to parse out the shared and overlapping but nuanced histories of Muslim and Arab Americans or to consider how post-9/11 Islamophobia might be a recasting of previous forms of racism (not only anti-Arab racism but anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism) in the United States. Bail blends the racial, social, and class divide between Black American Muslims and immigrant Muslim American communities. For a study that portends to discuss the diversity of civil society groups and rigorously maps them in a rather savvy visual and technological way, there is no substantial discussion of these groups' demographic, class, or social positions that grossly differentiate organizations like CAIR, which enjoys access to mainstream media and civil society, from other marginalized groups, which he largely dismisses as insignificant due to their lack of reach within the political mainstream.

Bail's analysis of the data comes from his otherwise ingenious use of plagiarism programs. However, this data is enframed by a series of thinly proved assumptions that form a shaky basis for his analysis and conclusions. The assumption that Muslim American struggled with forms of prejudice prior to 9/11 but that Americans generally held, as Bail states, a

"positive or neutral view" of Islam underpins his central analytic question: How did mainstream Muslim organizations lose so much influence within the American public sphere (14)? This question, coupled with How did anti-Muslim fringe organizations captivate the American public sphere?, is not backed by any quantitative data that authoritatively demonstrates that Muslim American (or Arab American) organizations ever actually had any significant influence on law makers, media, or civil society. In fact, studies by fellow sociologists and anthropologists show the opposite—that Arab and Muslim Americans have continued to be subjected to racist portrayals of themselves in the media and news as well as in policy circles.

Bail's claims that Muslim American organizations failed to make inroads into the mainstream media and influence mainstream public opinion after 9/11 because they offered "complex, dispassionate statements" that were "easily overshadowed by the pithy emotional auguries of anti-Muslim organizations that warned of a looming clash of civilizations between Islam and the West" (57). This leads to one of the most problematic assertions of the book:that Muslim American organizations "mistook" the prevalence of sensationalist and visceral Islamophobic stories in the media—due to the inroads of fringe groups—for a rise in anti-Muslim perception in American public opinion. As a result, these Muslim American organizations spent more time and resources on condemning anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiment than "condemning terrorism" (58).

Here, Bail's narrative, otherwise clear and well-written, serves to blur and displace issues. He overplays the visibility and impact of hacks like Walid Phares, Emerson, and other outside rightwing news outlets and Republican circles. The mainstreaming of fringe discourse was not responsible for but occurred concurrent to the prosecution of Muslim American activists and philanthropic organizations (such as Holy Land Foundation or Sami al-Arian, who is not mentioned) by the United State Attorney General. These prosecutions were independent of and, indeed, preceded, in many cases, the rise of the fringe in the media and public circles.

Likewise, training of federal and police counterterrorism agents was not the result of the influence of the anti-Muslim fringe. Rather, the accessibility, cultural legibility, and political relevance of an Islamophobic and Orientalist canon (authored by those such as Bernard Lewis, Raphael Patai, and slew of ideologues influenced by Leo Stauss, Samuel Huntington, and Francis Fukushima) filtered into official circles and state programs not through Islamophobic activists but through mainstream politicians (Dick Cheney, John Ashcroft) and advisors (Elliot Abram and Douglas Feith) who created laws and policies based on Islamophobic discourses. In this regards, the book grossly fails to locate the rise of Islamophobia within a global and national moment, particularly against the backdrop of the rise of

the neoconservative movement and neoliberal globalization and the new vision of the Middle East within those two imaginations.

This is precisely where Bail's "new theory" breaks down because it ignores the centrality of the state in establishing institutional Islamophobia as the centerpiece of the Homeland Security discourse, which targeted, isolated, pilloried, incarcerated, intimidated, spied on, and entrapped Muslims with the full resources at the disposal of the American government, especially in (but certainly not limited to) the Bush years. This is not to mention overlooking the impact social history of race, religion, gender, class, and ethnicity on Orientalism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab sentiment in the United States. In this regard, the work fails to properly address the ideological, cultural, and social underpinnings of Islamophobia, not to mention its political effects and purposes. Bail's qualitative work could have easily been put in dialogue with these critical and established understanding how Islamophobia functions in the post-9/11 moment as a means to further particular political agendas while also feeding and feeding on pre-existing Islamophobic perceptions and policies already at play within American culture and polity.

Not to be petty, but the potentially valuable study is plagued by a number of distracting factual errors, such the claim that Cat Stevens is an American Muslim. (He's actually British.)Likewise, the "Islamic Jihad" credited with the attack on the Multinational Forces (the Marine and French barracks) in Beirut in 1983 and hijacked TWA flight 847 should be distinguished as Islamic Jihad Organization, which is different from the current Islamic Jihad as the former was really a minor group with some high profile successes that should actually probably be ascribed to Hizbullah. The Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee is not the AAADC but the ADC. The JDL was not only "implicated in the bombing of the Boston headquarters of the AAADC [sic] as well as the assassination of its chairman in 1985" (24). More correctly, the JDL blew up the Boston office of the ADC (injuring two) but killed in a separate attack Alex Odeh, the West Coast regional director of the ADC in a bombing of the ADC office in Santa Ana, two cases that have not yet resulted in the arrest or prosecution of all of those involved in the violence.

Christopher Bail's Terrified offers interesting qualitative information along with a handful of fresh anecdotes and tidbits into how social change occurs through various media. Its brief theorizing of the role of Twitter and Facebook is circumspect and explores out how social networks are formed and morph with shifts in technology. The quantitative data is at time fascinating and surprising, offering a critical rejoinder to previous understanding of, say, the surprisingly low level of funding fringe groups might have.

These strengths carry the study and make it a respectable contribution to the growing academic work on Islamophobia despite its shortcomings.

NOTES

1. Reviewer Dr. Stephen Sheehi is the Sultan Qaboos bin Said Chair of Middle East Studies at the College of William and Mary.