

Ministering to Other People's Fears: Effects of Anti-Muslim Hostility on American Muslim Participation in Public Life

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the manifestations and effects of anti-Muslim hostility in the United States, asking how anti-Muslim hostility affects the nature of American Muslim participation in public life. It argues that cultural trauma among American Muslim communities, resulting from an expectation of routine harm, conditions the nature of participation in public life undertaken by many American Muslims. Drawing on original datasets documenting anti-Muslim hostility and outreach efforts undertaken by American Muslim communities, we can see that ministering to non-Muslim fears has become a central element of participation in public life. This burden of “humanization” pushes us to consider central elements of American “freedom mythologies” around public life and to ask what responsibility non-Muslims have in advocacy work on behalf of American Muslim communities.

Keywords: Islamophobia, cultural trauma, affect theory

INTRODUCTION

Incidences of public anti-Muslim hostility in the United States rose exponentially in late 2015 and continued at significantly heightened rates through the end of 2017, the date range under consideration in this article.¹ Anti-Muslim hostility include an incredible variety of things: nasty encounters in line at stores, vandalism of mosques and Muslim-owned businesses, harassment, assault, murder, public campaigns against mosque construction, Qur'an desecrations, anti-Muslim curriculum reform, local and state-wide regulatory and legislative efforts across the country targeting Muslim communities in a variety of ways, school bullying, and instances of anti-Muslim national political discourse and policies. This selection—and I emphasize *selection*—of what I have learned while building a dataset of anti-Muslim hostility for a website called Mapping Islamophobia provides some sense of the conditions of public life for Muslims in today's America.²

By this I mean the conditions in which Muslims in the United States participate in the wide variety of activities that constitute public life: attend schools, ride public transportation, drive through town, run for office, vote, shop, attend city council meetings. The list could go on and on. Public life includes but is not limited to political life; it consists of everything that brings us into contact with people beyond our most intimate relations. The data I have collected from news sites about the conditions of public life for American Muslims has led me to the conclusion that we *must* ask critical questions about core elements of America's "freedom mythology." Namely, for American Muslims, is participation in public life free and voluntary?

In other words, do American Muslims enjoy the same ability as members of majority or otherwise privileged communities to choose when, where, and how to participate in public life? The short answer is that *at the very least* the conditions of public life appear to have quite a profound effect on the *nature* of American Muslim participation in public life.

In addition to collecting data on incidents reflecting anti-Muslim hostility, I have also been collecting data on what American Muslims, both individually and collectively, have been doing to counter Islamophobia, to push back against public hate in order to improve the conditions of public life for themselves, their families, and their communities.

As I have been working through both datasets, I have been struck by the incredible amount of time American Muslim communities and individuals have put into efforts to humanize themselves in the eyes of the broader, non-Muslim American public. Here, I include participation in interfaith dialogue, holding mosque open house events, "ask a Muslim" events, public presentations about Islam, and other similar initiatives. The data collected from news sites about such activities serve as a strong rebuke to those who might claim that Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hostility results at least in part from American Muslims being insufficiently integrated into American public life.

Yet for a variety of reasons this data also gives reason to pause for some further questions. For example, to what extent are the conditions of public life for American Muslims *requiring* this kind of work? And if in fact these conditions are creating significant constraints on the nature of participation, what does this tell us about the capacity of American Muslims to choose when, where, and how to participate in public life? What is the relationship between anti-Muslim hostility and the "good stories" about all the work American Muslims do to show non-Muslim publics that they are, in fact, human?

Some time ago, early on in the development of Mapping Islamophobia, I was giving a public talk on anti-Muslim hostility. During the question and answer session, a member of the audience asked why I

spent so much time focusing on negative things when there were lots of positive stories about Muslim/non-Muslim friendliness and cooperation I could tell. This certainly affected the trajectory of my research. I have come to see that anti-Muslim hostility and the “good stories” do not exist on parallel tracks. They are intimately connected, and this relationship serves as a window through which we can glimpse the conditions of public life for American Muslims. What we see is that the threat of harm is woven into the conditions of public life. This appears to affect the nature of participation for many, many American Muslims.

THEORIES, CONCEPTS, AND APPROACHES

The theoretical insights of three scholars inform my analysis and presentation of data. Each of these scholars in their own way engages core theme in hate studies. In trying to capture the conditions of public life for American Muslims, I draw on the work of cultural geographer Anna Mansson McGinty (2018), who distinguishes and explores the connection between what she calls systematic “Islamophobia” and “embodied Islamophobia”. That is, McGinty analyzes how Islamophobic public discourses and institutional policies play out in people’s lives and on their bodies.

Sara Ahmed’s (2014) work on the cultural politics of emotion has proved vital to the way I think about analyzing and presenting data relating to the conditions of public life for American Muslims. Her engagement with affect theory—which religious studies scholar Donovan Schaefer (2015) describes as a way of approaching culture, history, and politics through non-linguistic forces, such as emotion—has pushed me to prioritize humanistic engagement with data. This includes both how I try to capture the emotional effects of anti-Muslim activity for American Muslims (individually and collectively) in my analysis and what I ask of my readers. This is crucial for thinking about how anti-Muslim hostility reverberates in the lives of American Muslims.

The dataset I have been building, all drawn from media coverage of anti-Muslim hostility, includes information about where and when incidents occur, which allows temporal and geographical analysis of this pressing social phenomenon in American life. The dataset also includes qualitative information, providing the stories behind each row of data. While I present some very basic empirical information in this article, I privilege a humanistic, affective presentation of data because this helps us make sense of the relationship between anti-Muslim hostility and patterns of American Muslim participation in public life.

This in turn leads me to Angela Onwuachi-Willig’s (2016) interven-

tion in theories of cultural trauma. She follows earlier work in bringing the concept of trauma from the individual psychological realm to the collective socio-cultural realm, but she asks whether general theories about cultural trauma apply equally to majority and non-majority communities in the United States. I explore Onwuachi Willig's intervention in more detail below. For now, I will note that applying her theorization of cultural trauma to the conditions of public life for American Muslims yields important insights into the effects of anti-Muslim hostility.

Capturing the Conditions of Public Life for American Muslims

To begin answering questions about the conditions of public life for American Muslims and how anti-Muslim hostility affects participation in public life, we must first consider how to measure—or perhaps more accurately, capture—conditions of public life. The “conditions of public life” is a rather abstract concept. How, then, can we make it more concrete? Anti-Muslim hate crimes are an obvious place to begin. However, as the reader will see, there are significant limits to using hate crimes as a stand-in for the conditions of public life more generally.

In 2016, there were a total of 381 anti-Muslim criminal offenses (FBI 2016a). More than one incident per day is certainly an alarming rate. However, the FBI is the first to admit that there are no reliable national statistics on hate crimes in general, let alone anti-Muslim hate crimes. The Department of Justice estimates that victims in over half of incidents that could be classified as hate crimes do not report their experiences to law enforcement (Masucci & Langton, 2017). This means that the FBI's annual hate crimes reports, which in 2016 included a total of 6,100 cases, skims the surface of agency estimates on the true number of crimes motivated by hate: about 260,000 per year (Sandholz, Langton, & Planty, 2013). There are myriad reasons for this gap.

Among the most significant reasons is the lack of uniform national standards around what constitutes a hate crime. Some states—Wyoming, Indiana, Arkansas, Georgia, and South Carolina—do not even have hate crime statutes. Elsewhere, the voluntary nature of the hate crime reporting system results in low participation rates. In California, which according to criminologist and attorney Brian Levin is better than most states when it comes to hate crime reporting, only 30 percent of law enforcement agencies submitted data in 2016 (Hauslohner, 2017). Furthermore, only one percent of agencies in Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and New Mexico submitted hate crime statistics that made its way into FBI totals.

The case of the state of Minnesota reflects these and other institutional barriers to data collection. For the purpose of this paper, Minnesota is a

useful illustrative example of the limits of hate crimes statistics as a measure of anti-Muslim hostility. The state has a significant Muslim population, it shows up with regularity in Mapping Islamophobia data, and it is squarely among the so-called “purple states” in American political culture, functioning as something of a “control” when considering rates of public anti-Muslim hostility by state.

According to a report in the *Star Tribune*, which draws on FBI and Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension data, over the last decade, nearly two-thirds of the over 435 law enforcement agencies in Minnesota report zero hate crimes per year in their jurisdictions (Montemayor, 2018). This includes law enforcement agencies in some of the state’s largest cities, such as Rochester and Duluth. This mirrors national trends. Across the country, 187 law enforcement bodies serving communities of 100,000 or more either reported zero incidents or did not report any statistics at all for the FBI’s annual report. In all, 88.6 percent of participating law enforcement agencies across the country reported zero hate crimes in their jurisdictions in 2016 (FBI, 2016b).

The reasons behind non-reporting or zero reports can vary. Some agencies wait until a suspect has been identified. In some situations, jurisdictional questions prevent local law enforcement agencies from reporting on something that is part of an investigation being undertaken by a larger agency. Both of these scenarios are at work around a 2017 incident in which an unknown suspect or suspects targeted the Dar al-Farooq Islamic Center in Bloomington, Minnesota, with a homemade bomb. Past incidents involving the same Center suggest that this crime was likely motivated by hate. However, neither these earlier cases, including an anonymous threat to blow up the facility, nor the more recent bombing appear in Minnesota hate crime data because either the case remains unsolved and/or the FBI is handling the investigation.

It is also unclear who is responsible for ascertaining whether bias or hate motivates a particular incident. Minnesota state law requires reporting when either a victim or a law enforcement agent believes that an incident was motivated by race, religion, origin, gender, sex, age, or perceived sexual orientation. Some jurisdictions wait until a prosecutor deems an incident to be bias or hate-related. This leaves a tremendous amount of room for subjective evaluation, and this is where institutional questions around hate crimes reporting meets the social, political, and cultural settings in which people and agencies make decisions.

It is impossible to ascertain motivations behind particular decisions by law enforcement agencies in Minnesota and elsewhere to *not* report an incident as motivated by bias or hate. It is fair to wonder, however, how the attitudes that give rise to “hoax” discourses around anti-Muslim crimes

might at times affect the evaluation process, both in Minnesota and elsewhere across the country.

In December of 2016, for example, ABC News published a story on false reports of anti-Muslim incidents; drawing on comments from Muslim advocacy organizations that worried even a handful of false claims would undermine the many legitimate reports reflecting sharp increases in overt anti-Muslim sentiment and activity (Tan, 2016). The Breitbart News Network, with its 70 million-plus monthly viewers, then picked up and reported on the story, describing a “wave of hate crime hoaxes” involving American Muslims (Binder, 2016).

More recently, *Front Page Magazine*, which claims to have nearly one million unique visitors per month, published an article in February of 2018 arguing that false reports of anti-Muslim incidents fundamentally distort hate crimes statistics³. (Greenfield, 2018). The author cites a handful of well-known examples to create the impression that anti-Muslim activity is not as much of a problem as Muslims might lead you to believe. “Islamophobia hoaxes never die,” he says. “They become statistics” (Greenfield, 2018).

How might the circulation of “hoax” discourses, especially in communities in which news sources like Breitbart and *Front Page Magazine* are particularly popular, affect the evaluation process? Might it affect the standards that officials use to determine whether to report a claim? Might concerns about being taken seriously affect willingness to report an incident in the first place?

Even with institutional and other kinds of impediments, there was a sharp rise in *officially reported* anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2016, mushrooming by 20 percent over 2015, which had itself set a post-2001 high-water mark (FBI, 2016b). Given Department of Justice estimates of hate crime underreporting in general, it stands to reason that anti-Muslim hate crimes follow the same patterns. Indeed, my own dataset is a microcosm of broader challenges around hate crime statistics.

For example, following practices of many law enforcement agencies, I code incidents a hate crime only when there is a suspect who has been booked and/or charged with a criminal offense that includes a hate-crime designation. Otherwise, it remains coded as a bias-related incident, a broad designation that admits to a range of activities that are not necessarily criminal in nature. Moreover, my decision to draw data only from news sources with a clear editorial policy and chain of command means that I knowingly exclude incidents if they appear in sources that do not meet this standard, a step I take to insulate the data from claims that it represents “fake news.”

Despite these problems, hate crime statistics remain a crucial tool in efforts to protect civil rights of non-majority communities. I am certainly

not suggesting otherwise. That said, even with more reliable reporting practices hate crimes statistics alone would remain insufficient to measure the conditions of public life for American Muslims. Anti-Muslim hostility manifests in myriad ways that fall short of criminal activity but that nonetheless contribute to the lived environment of American Muslims or, in other words, the conditions in which American Muslims decide when, where, and how to participate in public life. According to a 2017 Pew Research Center survey, nearly half of American Muslims *report* having experienced one or more instance of anti-Muslim hostility over the previous year, including being treated with suspicion, singled out by airport security and/or law enforcement, called offensive names, or being physically threatened or attacked (Pew, 2017). How can we begin to capture this lived environment?

From the beginning of 2015 to the end of 2017, there were at minimum 825 instances of *publicly reported* anti-Muslim activity. (I want to emphasize here that this is a minimum. As I note, the data I have collected represents only those incidents that receive media attention from reputable news sources.) A number, however, cannot alone communicate the effects of anti-Muslim activity on the conditions of public life for American Muslims. Concretizing something abstract like the conditions of public life requires an affective mode of inquiry.

In the opening of this article, I provide a brief list of the kinds of activities I have seen in building the dataset for Mapping Islamophobia. It is crucial to humanize basic empirical measures of anti-Muslim hostility, like the number of events per year or by state over time, by highlighting particular exemplars of activity motivated by anti-Muslim and anti-Islam sentiments. It is further necessary to present these exemplars in a way that provides some insight into the cumulative effects of anti-Muslim hostility, helping to create affective understanding of the conditions of public life for American Muslims.⁴ This is an essential step in demonstrating how anti-Muslim hostility might be influencing the nature of American Muslim participation in public life.

As Sara Ahmed (2014) argues, experiences leave emotional impressions upon us. These impressions accumulate, constituting a history through which we understand subsequent experiences—or, in other words, they create a lens through which we analyze a lot of what surrounds us. As I discuss later in the article, the cumulative effects of anti-Muslim hostility create an expectation of routine harm, and evidence seems to suggest that this expectation has a significant role in determining when, why, and how a good number of American Muslims engage broader American publics.

In an effort to capture the place of emotion in how anti-Muslim hostility affects American Muslim participation in public life, I have deliberately

chosen to present data as vignettes rather than in a more recognizably quantifiable form. Most of the following incidents below are from 2015 through 2017. However, I also include stories from before that period to underscore that this is not a new phenomenon. Anti-Muslim hostility became an ever-greater part of public life—especially public discourse—in the 2000s, thanks in no small part to the emergence of what Nathan Lean calls the Islamophobia industry (Lean, 2015) and the mainstreaming of anti-Muslim sentiment (Bail, 2015). The great increase we see in 2015 is a long-term result of these developments. I draw from media reports to present these manifestations of contemporary anti-Muslim hostility as brief vignettes, stitching together incidents of similar kinds to illustrate similarities across time and geography. I also include some incidents in which non-Muslims are targets of anti-Muslim hostility. Where appropriate, I incorporate some broader context, as this surely becomes part of the experience of the event itself. I offer further explanation below about why I have chosen to present these stories in this fashion. Please take the time to read these brief stories slowly and carefully. Ideally, the reader can let each one sit with them for a moment before moving on to the next.

VIGNETTES

In September of 2012, an unknown vandal or vandals deface graves in the Muslim burial section of Evergreen Cemetery in Evergreen Park, Illinois, multiple times over two weeks. There are seven such incidents over a three-year period (Brachear, 2012).

On August 5, 2013, the Des Plaines, Illinois, City Council rejected the American Islamic Center's proposal to convert two empty office buildings into a mosque and community center, citing loss of property tax revenue. The buildings had been vacant for two years. The city's planning commission had recommended that the Council approve the proposal (Krishnamurthy, 2013).

On October 25, 2013, a woman named Rose, driving a Toyota Corolla in Orlando, Florida, is run off the road by another driver in a large pickup truck. Before successfully forcing her off the road on the third attempt, the pickup truck driver mocked her headscarf, tying a flannel shirt around his head. Rose's two daughters aged one and four, were in the car during the incident (Stennett, 2013).

On November 12, 2014, the New Hampshire Republican Party adopts a platform plank stating that it will protect against the implementation of shari'a law in New Hampshire (McDermott, 2014).

On February 4, 2015, South Carolina state representative Chip Lime-

house introduces H3521, a bill seeking to ban the consideration of shari'a from South Carolina judicial proceedings. Supporters of the bill claim it is a necessary part of a larger war against radical Islam (Borden, 2015).

On February 12, 2015, self-proclaimed atheist Craig Hicks shoots and kills Deah Shaddy Barakat, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, and Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Although the incident allegedly resulted from a parking dispute, Hicks had made comments in the past about the victims' religious identities (McCoy, 2015).

In March of 2015, William Whalen, a teacher at New River Middle School in Fort, Lauderdale, Florida, prevents a new student, who is Muslim, from entering the classroom, saying, "We don't need another terrorist in this class" (Lipscomb, 2017).

In April of 2015, a teacher at Foster High School in Richmond, Texas, draws on materials taken from popular anti-Muslim and anti-Islam web sites for in-class instruction. The materials claim to expose Muslims' hidden, conspiratorial agenda of domination and forced conversion, a popular trope among anti-Islam and anti-Muslim activists (Murphy, 2015).

On November 16, 2015, members of the Islamic Center of Pflugerville (Texas) arrive to find that vandals had smeared feces on the front door and had left pages torn from a Qur'an on the ground (Ulloa, 2015).

On November 19, 2015, an unidentified man grabs a female student at San Diego State University and tries to pull off her head scarf. During the incident, the man called the student a terrorist and made other anti-Muslim comments (Warth, 2015).

On December 26, 2015, Daniel Coronel Wilson, Jr., attacks Amrik Singh Bal (68) in Fresno, California, first by hand and then by running him over with a car. Before attacking the victim, Wilson allegedly said to his friend, "ISIS. Terrorist. Let's get him." Singh Bal is Sikh. (Lopez, 2016).

In December of 2015, members of the Gurdwara Singh Sabha Sikh Temple in Buena Park, California, arrive to find "Islam" and "ISIS" spray-painted in the parking lot (Casiano, 2015). In December of 2015, a rideshare passenger insults the driver with expletives and accuses him of being an ISIS sympathizer before punching him in the head (Buhain, 2015).

In December of 2015, Bernards Township, New Jersey, rejects the Islamic Society of Basking Ridge's plan to build a mosque. After 39 planning board meetings, the township's main reason for blocking the project was that proposal did not contain space for adequate parking. The Islamic Society of Basking Ridge subsequently filed suit and a federal judge ruled in their favor. Although it denied discrimination, the town

acknowledged applying different planning standards to the project than to previous church or synagogue projects (O'Brien, 2017).

On June 8, 2016, Thomas Russell Langford waves a gun and threatens members of the Masjid al-Madina in Raeford, North Carolina. The encounter followed a series of troubling incidents, including bacon being left at the entrance of the mosque and a vehicle, thought to be Langford's, following people home from the mosque. When police arrive they find multiple weapons in Langford's truck (Futch, 2016).

On August 12, 2016, Vernon Majors shoots and kills his neighbor, Khalid Jabara, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Jabara and his family, Lebanese Christians, had filed multiple reports with law enforcement about Majors, who regularly abused them verbally with profanity and anti-Muslim slurs (Miller, 2016).

On August 27, 2016, Americans for a Secure Wyoming, which seeks to ban Islam in the state, holds an anti-Islam rally in a public park in the City of Gillette. The rally ended with a Qur'an burning (Ballard, 2016).

On September 15, 2016, the Tennessee Board of Education releases new draft middle school social studies standards, essentially removing basic literacy about Islam from instruction. The revised standards omit basic facts relating to Islam, including the physical location of Saudi Arabia, the origins of Islam, and information the Qur'an, among other things. The changes appear to reflect public complaints about Islamic indoctrination in public schools (Wagner, 2016).

In November and December of 2016, at least twelve mosques receive identical letters across the country announcing that the election of Donald Trump as President is a day of reckoning for Muslims. The letter declares that Trump will cleanse America of Muslims, just as Hitler did with Jews in Germany (Ellement, 2016).

On January 27, 2017, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, signs an Executive Order ceasing entry of all refugees into the country for 120 days, barring Syrian refugees in general, and blocking entry to the United States by citizens of seven Muslim majority countries for 90 days. The order also reduces the overall refugee quota by more than half. The action comes after candidate Trump had called for an outright ban on Muslims entering the country (Liptak, 2017a).

On January 30, 2017, Azra Baig stands in line at a New Jersey Modell's Sporting Goods. A man in the check-out line next to her says, "Oh, that Muslim ban is long overdue." Of the incident, Baig said, "He said it loudly so I would hear it, so I knew it was directed at me." (Baldwin, 2017).

On February 1, 2017, Idaho state representative Eric Redman introduces

a bill banning foreign law from Idaho state courts. The bill does not mention shari'a specifically, a common tactic in recent years as sponsors seek to head off court challenges on first amendment grounds, but Redman acknowledges that it is a significant motivating factor. He introduced a similar bill in 2016 (Clark, 2017).

On February 19, 2017, Gerald Sloane Wallace leaves an expletive-filled voice mail at the Muslim Communities Association of South Florida, a mosque in Miami Gardens, Florida. He threatens to shoot and kill members of the community, later admitting that he has made similar calls and threats to other Miami-area mosques (Weaver, 2017).

On March 6, 2017, the Bayonne, New Jersey, zoning board fails to pass a proposal submitted by the non-profit Bayonne Muslims, who were seeking to convert an abandoned warehouse into a mosque and soup kitchen. Those voting against the proposal did so basing their decision on traffic and parking concerns on the dead-end street. Public opposition to the project was virulently anti-Muslim (Villanova, 2017).

On March 6, 2017, staff at the Santa Fe Public Library report to police that they suspect a patron of urinating on three copies of the Qur'an in the library's collection (Horwath, 2017).

On March 27, 2017, a family returns to their Fairfax County, Virginia, home to find that vandals have scrawled anti-Muslim graffiti and destroyed a Qur'an and prayer books. The family also reported missing valuables (Weil, 2017). On March 28, 2017, a man in Troutdale, Oregon, returns home to find anti-Muslim hate speech spray-painted on his walls and a note, held in place by bullets, threatening his life. The man is Iranian American and identifies as Baha'i (Oregonian, 2017).

On April 5, 2017, Delaware state senators Dave Lawson and Colin Bonini protest a Muslim-led prayer opening a legislative session. Lawson called the event, which featured a Qur'anically-inspired prayer, despicable (Rush, 2017).

On April 14, 2017, members of the Islamic Center of Hattiesburg (Mississippi) arrive to discover that vandals had damaged their sign. In 2014, an unknown suspect or suspects fired multiple shots at the Center (Beveridge, 2017).

On May 6, 2017, a customer at Trader Joe's in Reston, Virginia, verbally harasses and taunts a Muslim woman standing in line, expressing regret that the United States allowed the woman (who was born in the United States) to enter the country and suggesting that she was in trouble now that Obama (who is Muslim, according to the harasser) is no longer in office (Washington Post, 2017).

On June 13, 2017, Asad Khan announces that he is closing his restaurant in Galveston, Texas, after months of harassment. In late 2016, he arrived at the restaurant to find the front windows covered in bacon and bacon grease. In the months that followed he received calls and messages laden with anti-Muslim slurs and death threats and faced accusations of making up all of the incidents (Guillen, 2017).

On June 18, 2017, Darwin Martinez Torres allegedly kills Nabra Hassanen, a teenager from Reston, Virginia. He beats her to death with a bat after harassing Hassanen and her friends from his car and following them into a parking lot as they walked to the All Dulles Area Muslim Society for Ramadan celebrations. Police suggest the incident likely resulted from road rage, though family members are certain that Hassanen's death was the result of anti-Muslim hostility (Jouvenal & Zauzmer, 2017).

On June 24, 2017, members of the Masjid Annur Islamic Center in Sacramento, California, find a burned Qur'an stuffed with bacon handcuffed to a fence on the property. The event occurred during Ramadan (Glover, 2017). On October 11, 2017, Robert Marley, a member of the Taylor Township board in Taylor Township, Indiana, angrily confronts residents protesting a presentation by anti-Muslim activist Usama Dakdok. Marley had invited Dakdok in response to the Kokomo City Council's decision to include a Muslim prayer at the start of a council meeting earlier in 2017, which he bitterly opposed (Myers, 2017).

On December 26, 2017, a group of teenage girls attack Souad Kirama in a Brooklyn, New York, Panera Bread, punching and spitting at her while screaming anti-Muslim slurs. There were multiple witnesses. None intervened (Tracy, 2017).

On January 26, 2018, Libby Hilsenrath of Chatham, New Jersey, files a complaint in federal court alleging that the Chatham School District is requiring her middle school-aged son to read materials and complete assignments that advocate conversion to Islam, violating his religious freedom. The material in question was part of a world cultures and geography unit (Westhoben, 2018). These vignettes demonstrate, but certainly do not exhaust, the variety of ways that anti-Muslim hostility manifests in public life. I have presented them in this fashion, unadorned by interspersed analysis, to illustrate as viscerally as possible the cumulative emotional effect of incident after incident, small and large.

ANALYSIS

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed (2014) argues that typically we understand emotion in one of two ways. From a psychological perspective, emotions begin from the inside and move outward, thereby manifesting how our response to a situation or to another person or people.

From a sociological perspective, emotions are what bind people together, drawing the individual into relation with others, and thus move from the outside in. Ahmed (2014), in contrast, wants us to consider what she calls the “sociality of emotions” (p. 9). That is, she wants us to think about how emotions accumulate over time, through various and manifold interactions, to form the “I.” The “I” then imagines itself in relation to the social “we” and acts in the world accordingly. This in turn affects how the “we” relates to the “I,” and so on. The circulation of emotion is ongoing. This is what she calls the sociality of emotions (Ahmed, 2014).

In the case of anti-Muslim hostility, I am especially interested in how fear functions to create the “I” and the “we” in society. The idea that Muslims pose a threat to an American way of life is central to contemporary anti-Muslim discourses, having entered the mainstream in part through the 2010 controversy around the Park51 Muslim community center project in lower Manhattan. The fear that results from the perceived threat, which creates an imagined “we” as the “real” America for those with anti-Muslim feelings, manifests as anti-Muslim activity. This then generates fear for American Muslims, generating a self-understanding (an “I”) that exists in tension with the broader “we” of American society.

I am struck by how frequently I come across expressions of real befuddlement by those directly affected by an anti-Muslim incident. In one case, for example, a member of the Muslim community in Madera, California, responded to anti-Muslim signs left at the local mosque by saying, “We’re not travelers. We live here. We’re Americans. We’re Rotarians” (Marcum, 2010)! The data I have collected suggests that this response, and accompanying fear that results from an established history of anti-Muslim hostility, leads to American Muslim efforts to humanize themselves, to show that in fact they share values that make them American. In this way, fear—other people’s fear and fear for American Muslims that results—is an essential element in the conditions of public life for American Muslims.

As I will discuss, it is not necessary for an individual to experience each and every incident directly to be affected by them. The circulation of stories, informally through family and friend networks and social media as well as more formally through media outlets, has the potential to create an effect across an entire community. Beyond the often unreported bias-related incidents that many American Muslims directly experience as they move through their days, it is this precisely this effect that colors the experience of public life and, in turn, influences when, where, why, and how people participate. The cumulative effect of anti-Muslim hostility appears to lead many American Muslims to minister to other people’s fears. It is in this context that we must situate the “good stories” on which the audience member at my public talk suggested I focus my attention.

The Good Stories?

From the beginning of 2015 to the end of 2017, the same period during which there were at least 825 incidents of public anti-Muslim activity, there were at minimum 695 instances of American Muslim individuals and communities engaging in humanizing work. At the beginning of the article I refer to this portion of the Mapping Islamophobia data as “the good stories.” Sometimes, this work is a reflection of American Muslims simply striving to be good people—outreach efforts in the wake of natural or human-made disasters, for example. (Though even here communities will often strategize about how to represent what they are doing to non-Muslim audiences.)

But much more often it seems like humanizing work is a direct response to conditions of anti-Muslim hostility; individuals and communities who feel the need to convince others that they are not a threat. During this period, according to data from Mapping Islamophobia, 82% of documented American Muslim participation in public life was of the humanizing variety; 13% involved American Muslims running for political office, whether local, state, or national; and 5% involved Muslim communities—outside of advocacy organizations—reaching out to elected officials.

With this data in hand, it becomes difficult to imagine that if the conditions of public life were different, if anti-Muslim hate was not an endemic feature of American life in our moment, that American Muslims would be participating in public life in the same way. The conditions of public life, in other words, seem to be affecting the nature of American Muslim participation in public life. The following are examples that provide illustrative examples and are crucial to making empirical measure meaningful on a human scale.

One such example is the case of Ayaz Virji (Tevlin, 2017). In 2014, Virji and his family moved to a small town in western Minnesota, where he assumed the post of chief of staff and medical director at the local hospital. After the 2016 presidential election, Virji began to wonder what his neighbors, many of whom had voted for an openly anti-Muslim candidate, thought of him. He worried for his wife and kids. It is in this context that he began receiving invitations to talk about Islam to local communities. He was hesitant. But he accepted, despite on one occasion being offered a bullet-proof vest by a neighbor in light of chatter he was hearing on the eve of one such event in a nearby town. The events left Virji feeling agitated and upset. Yet he did them (Tevlin, 2017).

Many, many others report that outreach efforts are an essential part of being Muslim in America in today’s environment. Mohammad Qamar, a doctor who lives in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, says that speaking about

Islam at civic organizations like his local Rotary club “is not just important. It is a necessity” (Anderson, 2017, p. 22). A director of interfaith dialog at the Muslim Community Center of South Dakota, Qamar also regularly invites people to visit his mosque.

A recurring theme in the Mapping Islamophobia dataset of humanizing work is that of invitation. Mosque open houses, in which a worship community offers an open invitation to the general public, are quite common, and while the numbers of such events may have increased in recent years, they are not in themselves a new phenomenon. By contrast, beginning in late 2015 more and more individual Muslims began making themselves available so that curious members of the public could meet a Muslim and ask questions about Islam. It is hard to pinpoint the first such event, but there are two that seem to be among the earliest iterations of what has become a common feature of American Muslim participation in public life.

Just after the tragic San Bernardino shootings in December 2015, Moina Shaiq placed an advertisement in her local Fremont, California, newspaper advertising an opportunity to “Meet a Muslim” (Brodeur, 2018). She arrived at the designated coffee shop and, much to her surprise, over 100 people showed up. Since that time, Shaiq has travelled around the country doing similar events. Like Ayaz Virji, she has no formal training in Islamic studies, nor is she a professional advocate. Yet she feels a responsibility to make herself available because, she says, “every day, Muslims are being dehumanized” (Brodeur, 2018). This dehumanization results, in her view, from an environment in which people feel free to vocalize and act on anti-Muslim hostility and fear.

That same month in 2015, Mona Haydar, a resident of Cambridge, Massachusetts, held question and answer session on a sidewalk beneath signs that read “Talk to a Muslim” and “Ask a Muslim” (Annear, 2015). Of her initiative she said, “We are just normal people. There is definitely fear in America, and I want to talk about it, because it’s actually misplaced and misguided—I am really nice” (Annear, 2015)! Like Shaiq’s “Meet a Muslim,” Haydar’s “Ask a Muslim” event has inspired many similar events across the country since she made herself available for questions outside of a public library.

There are differences in how Virji, Qamar, Shaiq, and Haydar seem to feel about their work, but there is a common theme that runs throughout their descriptions. Ayaz Virji is clearly uncomfortable having been thrust into his role as spokesperson for Islam. He began speaking about Islam publicly only because people asked and he felt a responsibility to humanize Islam (Tevlin, 2017). Mohammad Qamar, in his capacity as interfaith director at his mosque, appears to be more at ease as a representative of his community, though he, too, acknowledges that outreach is a *necessity*

(Anderson, 2017). Moina Shaiq does not seem to mind representing Muslims and Islam. It is clear, however, that she has taken on the burden because of what it means to be Muslim in post-September 11 United States. Mona Haydar displays real enthusiasm for her initiative, yet it is essential to note that in her own description it is the fact of other people's fear that prompted her to make herself available to the public (Annear, 2015). In all four cases, it is clear that the conditions of public life for American Muslims play a significant role in shaping the nature of their participation.

For Meyran Omar, a Somali-American woman living in Minnesota, activities driven by anti-Muslim sentiment—itsself a product of fear of Muslims and Islam—create an environment that is anxiety-provoking (to say the least). For many Muslims, the more common these public activities become, the more visceral the anxiety. In her own words: “When I am on my way home, while I am driving or walking or even going into my apartment, I look around and I never had that fear before” (Osman, 2017).

A recent study published in the *Journal of Women's Health* suggests that Omar is not alone. Researchers Henna Budhwani and Kristine Hearld (2017) found that almost two thirds of the Muslim women they interviewed reported carefully monitoring what they say, that almost two-thirds reported avoiding certain social situations and locations, that nearly forty percent reported being careful about their appearance, and that over twenty percent reported regularly steeling themselves for possible insults from other people. The researchers are careful to point out that future work regarding internalized stigma would benefit from more careful attention to the source of discrimination. Nonetheless, other research shows that levels of anxiety and fear are far higher in Arab communities than in other groups of similar socio-economic statuses. As an example, Amer and Honey (2012), while stopping short of definitively attributing these higher rates to “perceived hostility and discrimination,” suggests that these stressors—even for non-Muslim Arabs—play a significant role (p. 415).

This is of course not to reduce Muslim communities to Arab communities, nor to definitively generalize across gender identities, but as Amer and Honey (2012) point out there is scant research on mental health in American Muslims communities more broadly. Given the complex terrain around race and religion in the United States—especially regarding Islam and Muslim communities—we are left to piece together a picture of how public hate affects life for American Muslims from various sources. Research on mental health in Muslim and Arab communities is one important source. The data I have been collecting for Mapping Islamophobia is another.

When we draw together insights from these different sources of data, we can see that the presence of public hate may be creating what scholars call “cultural trauma” (Alexander, 2004). Much scholarship on the topic of

cultural trauma seeks to understand the broad effects of a shocking event or development that fundamentally shifts a community's expectations around what constitutes a normal and routine life. The attacks of September 11, 2001, certainly qualify as the kind of event that scholars of cultural trauma would identify as affecting people across an entire community in this way, well beyond those directly involved (Smelser, 2004). This bears out in a variety of ways, among them a general anxiety about security as well as an increased cultural presence of sadism (Levin, 2014). Yet, as critical race scholar Angela Onwuachi-Willig (2016) asks, is it possible that community-wide trauma can also result from a long history of harm? If so, what are the possible implications for non-majority communities that fall victim to racism and racist violence?

Cultural Trauma and the Conditions of Public Life

In considering the long-term effects of racism and racial violence on African American communities, Onwuachi-Willig (2016) demonstrates quite effectively that cultural or community-wide trauma can result from a long history of routine harm. I argue that her theory of cultural trauma is applicable to American Muslim communities and can help us make sense of how the conditions of public life affect American Muslim participation in public life. Her insights illuminate why Ayaz Virji, Mohammad Qamar, Moina Shaiq, and Mona Haydar—and countless others—might feel compelled to minister to other's fears. When we apply Onwuachi-Willig's (2016) theorization on cultural trauma, we can begin to see that in broader context the "good stories" are a much more complex phenomenon than they appear at first glance.

Public anti-Muslim hate produces fear and anxiety based on what has happened or what might happen as a result of one's Muslim identity or, as in a good number of cases, one's perceived Muslim identity. According to Onwuachi-Willig (2016), this expectation can transcend individual trauma to become community-wide cultural trauma when three conditions are in place. These are the conditions that, at least in part, generate the necessity of humanizing work, or the "good stories."

The first and foundational condition in which an expectation of routine harm generates community-wide cultural trauma is a long-established history of harm affecting the community in question. What length of time is sufficient to constitute a "long-established history?" Based on my research, it is clear that the conditions of public life for American Muslims in the sixteen-plus years since the September 11 attacks have left their mark, creating an expectation of routine harm. Anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia have been a consistent feature of life in the post-September

11 United States, some of it officially sanctioned, some not, some subtle, some very much out in the open. The cumulative effect of routine harm, even for those not directly experiencing specific incidents, has profound consequences.

In the months following the September attacks, law enforcement agencies, with the support of the federal government, rounded up and detained hundreds of Arab and Muslim men, especially in the New York City area. The NYPD established the Demographics Units, dedicated to the surveillance of Muslim communities. (Of course, the FBI has long maintained surveillance programs relating to American Muslim—especially African American—communities, though the scope and number of law enforcement agencies involved ballooned after September 11.⁵) Over time, detention programs did end and by 2014 law enforcement agencies had begun to see that the optics (and lack of concrete results) of the surveillance and infiltration of American Muslim communities was counterproductive. (Apuzzo & Goldstein, 2014)

Nonetheless, throughout the 2000s and into the 2010s, government action continued to create the impression that American Muslims in general were legitimate targets of suspicion. Airports have become a common site in which this suspicion plays out: Muslims being singled out by the Transportation Security Administration for extra screening, being removed from flights because of other passengers' discomfort and being subjected to interrogation—experiences like this have given rise to a popular phrase and social media hashtag, #flyingwhileMuslim.

Other instances of officially sanctioned harm abound. Law enforcement agencies continued to target American Muslims for surveillance and infiltration long after 2001, a fact that is the subject of ongoing legal action (See Adely, 2018, for example). In late 2016, the FBI conducted what appears to have been a sweep of American Muslims in the days leading up to the Presidential elections, visiting homes across the country (Sidahmed, 2017). (This becomes especially significant when we learn that American Muslims voted at a lower rate than many non-majority communities.) In a case that began with a class action lawsuit filed in 2002 over the aforementioned detention programs, the Supreme Court ruled in 2017 that American citizens could not sue federal officials responsible for potentially unconstitutional policies put in place in times of security crises (Liptak, 2017b). Finally, after months of threatening to stop all immigration and visitors from Muslim majority countries as a candidate, since the beginning of 2017 President Trump has attempted on numerous occasions to enact what numerous federal courts have labeled a “Muslim ban.”

These are instances that exemplify what Onwuachi-Willig (2016) calls officially sanctioned harm. Another way of thinking about them is in terms

of McGinty's (2018) concept of systemic Islamophobia. Most of the vignettes I present earlier in the article involve everyday forms of harm resulting from interactions with other people. These constitute what McGinty (2018) would call embodied Islamophobia. Particularly when set in the context of the history of officially sanctioned harm, the cumulative effects of everyday experiences, quite understandably, produces fear—an expectation that something bad will happen. It is just a matter of time. Maheen Haq, a student at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, in a beautiful op-ed, calls this “fear in your heart.” (Haq, 2017)

As Mohamed Omar, the director of the Dar al-Farooq mosque in Bloomington, Minnesota, said just after the August 2017 bombing, “The threat is unknown. We do not know what is going to come” (Montemayor, 2018). When it does come, even when motivations are not clear, an established history of routine harm also appears to make it more likely for those affected by an incident, or who hear about an incident, to assume that anti-Muslim hostility is to blame. This is certainly true in the case of Nabra Hassanen, which I include in the vignettes earlier in the article, whose parents bitterly contest the determination by law enforcement agencies that her death was not the result of a hate crime.

Officially sanctioned and everyday anti-Muslim incidents have grown considerably over the last three years, but they have been part of the conditions of public life for American Muslims for far longer. Even after a significant decline following an initial post-September 11 spike in anti-Muslim incidents, between 2002 and 2014 rates remained around 400% higher than pre-September 11, 2001 levels. Taken together, these established histories of officially sanctioned harm and everyday anti-Muslim hostility combine to create a climate of fear. The tremendous increase in anti-Muslim hostility since 2015 has merely intensified a phenomenon with a long history.

The second condition that contributes to an expectation of routine harm becoming community-wide or cultural trauma is the occurrence of an event or series of related events that generate widespread media coverage. This focuses attention on the history of routine harm and (re)affirms the marginalized status of the community. Media coverage of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hostility has been on the rise for many years, starting with reports of mass detentions after September 11 and their implications for the civil rights of American citizens. This trend has continued, if not increased, over the past three years. Coverage of anti-Muslim hate crimes has increased as incidents themselves have increased. Similarly, the several attempts to implement restrictions of immigration and refugee arrivals from a number of Muslim-majority countries have led to a significant increase in public discourse around anti-Muslim hostility. The entire Mapping Islamophobia project, in fact, is possible because of increased media cover-

age. This is certainly a two-sided coin: On the one hand, media coverage has begun to communicate the extent of the problem to non-Muslim communities, but it is also a constant reminder to American Muslims of their contested status in the United States.

Third, in response to this coverage, there needs to be an increase in public and private discourses about the *meaning* of routine harm—at home, school, in town meetings. In my research and in informal conversation I have heard many stories about families speaking with their children about the implications of being Muslim in today’s America, about what might happen if young women decide to wear a headscarf, a topic of particular significance given the gendered visibility this decision brings; about young men not using their given names if they mark them as Muslim; about being bullied at school, which by some estimates is four times as likely for Muslim students as it is for the general student body (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). (This includes bullying *by teachers or administrators*, which constitutes one quarter of reported incidents, as in the vignette earlier in the article.)

As with increased media coverage of anti-Muslim hate, many civic organizations and local, state, and national political leaders regularly speak about what routine harm toward particular communities says about our country. The volume of op-eds and letters to the editor written by Muslims and published in reputable news sources since 2015, each testifying to the fear that is part of life for American Muslims in towns and cities across the country, shows that families and Muslim communities more generally are talking—a lot—about the meaning of routine harm. This, too, is a two-sided coin, drawing attention to a significant problem *and* reaffirming the marginal status of American Muslims.

I have found Onwuachi-Willig’s (2016) work on cultural trauma theory very helpful for a few reasons as I analyze what the data I have collected for Mapping Islamophobia tells us about anti-Muslim hostility and its effects. Insofar as Onwuachi-Willig (2016) is drawing on research regarding African American experiences, her work—especially when brought into conversation with data from Mapping Islamophobia—helps connect American Muslim experiences to broader histories of racial violence and intimidation around participation in public life (Elfenbein, 2017). This is important because it shows that anti-Muslim hostility is not *entirely* the result of current developments. It is tied to longstanding questions relating to white supremacy in the United States—and the harms that follow—dating back to before independence, especially in connection with participation in public life. This underscores that there is not necessarily a quick or straightforward fix for this situation—and why questioning “freedom mythologies” is more important than ever.

At the same time, Onwuachi-Willig (2016) argues, the very conditions that can give rise to cultural trauma also open up new possibilities: While the emergence of public discourses around the *meaning* of routine harm can generate community-wide trauma, it also creates conditions for social change insofar as it can lead those not directly affected by anti-Muslim hostility to begin thinking more seriously about its implications and to become more active allies. This offers some important hope for improved conditions of public life for American Muslims.

CONCLUSION

Onwuachi-Willig's (2016) insights about social change highlight that American Muslim communities—as evidenced by the data—are doing *more* than their part to push back against public hate. Her insights into cultural trauma provide a frame for understanding why American Muslims, despite evidence that raises some questions about the utility of outreach efforts, at least in the shorter term, remain incredibly committed to humanizing efforts. This is important to note as a response to those who might claim that anti-Muslim hostility results from a lack of engagement in public life by American Muslims.

Still, the incredible amount of humanizing work in which American Muslims are engaged results from community-wide trauma and is not necessarily a reflection of free and voluntary participation in public life. Furthermore, a focus on ameliorating other's fears, rather than, say, freely and voluntarily participating in policy debates about pressing issues facing our local communities, our country, and our country's role in the world, will end up reinforcing difference more than normalizing American Islam and Muslim communities for the broader American public. Of course, engaging in humanizing work and participating in policy debates are not mutually exclusive, but asking any more of American Muslim communities to ameliorate other's fears places a tremendous burden on people who are already doing more than anyone could possibly ask in this regard.

A key question, then, is what large and small steps those outside of American Muslim communities can take to create the conditions in which American Muslims can freely choose when, where, and how to participate in public life. In my somewhat darker moments, I fear that humanizing work will continue to dominate the ways in which American Muslims participate in public life for the foreseeable future. In my more positive moments, I focus on the small steps we can all take to be active bystanders and advocates, most importantly in our families and our local communities, to lessen the burden on those already victimized by the specter of public hate.

NOTES

1. "Islamophobia" is the term most commonly used to describe activities that are meant to threaten and/or harm Muslim individuals or communities. In this article, I am following the lead of Juliane Hammer, who argues that Islamophobia, which refers to something inanimate, "Islam," obscures the very real ways that anti-Muslim hostility plays out on the bodies and in the lives of Muslims. For more on this point, see Hammer, 2013. On the term "Islamophobia," see Green, 2015.

2. This web site, mappingislamophobia.org, is a publicly-facing resource documenting anti-Muslim hostility and its effects. The datasets that animate Mapping Islamophobia and from which I draw for this article is freely available for download on the web site. The site has been made possible by generous support from Grinnell College and the Mellon Foundation-funded Digital Bridges for Humanistic Inquiry, a collaboration between the University of Iowa and Grinnell College. I have had the pleasure of working with a number of my students in collecting and analyzing data, including Julia Schafer and Farah Omer. I am grateful to the Gonzaga Institute of Hate Studies for providing a venue to present early findings of this research.

3. *Front Page Magazine* is published by the David Horowitz Freedom Center, which describes its mission as combatting "the efforts of the radical left and its Islamist allies to destroy American values and disarm this country as it attempts to defend itself in a time of terror."

4. Affective understanding implies experiencing something in a way that combines intellectual and bodily registers. Emotion is crucial to the idea of affective understanding because we experience it across these registers. Fear is an important example. When we respond to something with fear, this emotional response manifests in our thoughts as well as our bodies. See Ahmed, 2014, especially 1-19.

5. There are a number of essays in *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security Before and After 9/11* that treat portions of this history, including Sylvester Johnson, "The FBI and the Moorish Science Temple of America, 1926-1960," Karl Evanzz, "The FBI and the Nation of Islam," and Michael Barkun, "The FBI and American Muslims After September 11."

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