

Invisible Violence: Gender, Islamophobia, and the Hidden Assault on U.S. Muslim Women

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Abstract

Drawing on forty semistructured interviews with young Muslim American women, FBI hate crimes data, and civil rights policy reports, this research explores the rise of institutionalized private violence directed at Muslim women. While saving Muslim women from Muslim men through U.S. military invasion remains a dominant cultural ideology and justification for the global War on Terror, I argue that “saving Muslim women” from violence garners significant attention only when foreign Muslim men are positioned as the assailants of such violence. One central form of violence that remains unexamined for Muslim women’s lives is the increased exposure to violence in the public sphere following the rapid securitization of the United States after the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Of the women interviewed for this study, 85 percent reported experiencing verbal assaults or threats within public spaces, and 25 percent reported experiencing physical violence. This research finds that, although white American men are disproportionately responsible for public forms of Islamophobic violence, the race and gender of these assailants often remain invisible within media accounts.

Introduction

In the second most diverse city in the United States, a Long Beach headline appeared on a notice taped to a light post: “Police Seek Public’s Help in Hate Crime against Muslim Woman.” The violent mid-afternoon attack occurred in a grocery store parking lot where a man choked a thirty-two-year-old Iraqi woman while he ripped off her hijab and cursed racial epithets at her.¹ The suspect, who was reported to be a “thin, white man wearing a white buttoned-up shirt, black pants, and black shoes,” remained at large. The last three words of the public notice reported that police investigators

believed the attack to be “an isolated incident.” The Police Department’s use of the term “isolated” implied that this incident was disconnected from larger or long-term patterns of prevailing violence directed at Muslim women. In a 2016 *New York Times* article, Eric Lichtblau indicated that hate crimes had reached their highest point since 9/11, demonstrating that this type of violence has not abated. While researchers sought to understand the extent of backlash violence that occurred in the first few years after 9/11 toward those perceived as Muslim, Middle Eastern, and/or Arab Americans (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009) and with specific attention to women (Cainkar 2009; Naber 2008), ongoing reports of hate violence remain unexplored by researchers.

This article examines how the intersections of Islamophobia and gender shape the context of violence against Muslim American women in the United States. In exploring this phenomenon, this research draws on forty semistructured interviews with young Muslim women, FBI hate crimes data, and civil rights reports.² I employ the concept of “institutionalized private violence” to emphasize the role of institutional power in fostering a climate in which individuals, as private citizens, engage in violent acts, both verbal and physical, directed at Muslim women within the public sphere (for example, work, school, the street, transportation, stores, and restaurants).³ The scope of this research also takes into account the historical context and shifting Islamophobic climate that has intensified over the last decade. The increased securitization within the U.S. homeland, coupled with two wars waged in the Middle East, has had profound effects on American Muslim women living within the boundaries of the nation state, including a heightened exposure to violence in the public sphere since 9/11.

This research also seeks to expand normative conceptions of violence toward women. While certainly myriad forms of violence toward women exist, the most widespread form of violence nationally and internationally is often identified as intimate partner violence (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2016; World Health Organization 2016). This important fact should alone account for much of the resources, attention, and research dedicated to understanding this pattern. However, I argue that, in the case of Muslim women, there is an urgency to explore the multiple, intersecting systems of power that shape violence in the public sphere.⁴ This focus offers opportunities to examine the overlapping dimension of state violence and its consequences for differentially situated groups of women.

This article draws on Smith’s (2008) concept of “recentering,” which emphasizes placing women of color’s experiences of violence at the center of analysis in order to challenge the dominant multiculturalist paradigm

prevalent within the mainstream U.S. antiviolence movement. This article then recenters U.S. Muslim women's experiences of violence in order to gain new insight into the complex ways in which violence operates holistically in women's lives. By "recentering" U.S. Muslim women, it becomes clear that the War on Terror abroad, along with the rapid expansion of the domestic Homeland Security State, is vital in understanding the context of violence perpetuated within the United States.

The passage of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 marked the largest federal reorganization of the government since World War II, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continue to be the most expensive wars in the history of the United States (Bilmes 2013). These two significant structural shifts in the composition and priorities of the state were accompanied by an emphasis on policing the racial, gender, and national social order in the face of the perceived threat of the Muslim "Other." In examining the origins of anti-immigrant violence in the history of the United States, Akers Chacon and Davis (2006) argue "what truly demarcates the United States is not so much the scales or frequency of state repression, but rather the extraordinary centrality of institutionalized private violence in the reproduction of the racial and social order" (15). The authors further highlight the role of private actors such as white supremacists, corporate police, and vigilantes in carrying out such widespread violence against immigrants.

In a similar fashion, the post-9/11 Homeland Security State has emboldened the rise of institutionalized private violence through the advancement of a "deputized public" that remains vigilant through its constant surveillance and scrutiny of Muslims in the homeland. Within the United States, institutionalized private violence reinforces the notion that the public sphere should restrict Muslim women's mobility, dress, employment, education, and immigration statuses. Institutionalized private violence is a key (and neglected) area of violence positioned between the traditional interpretations of public and private realms of violence. James (1996) also notes that

frequently, in the United States, where racial fears and hostilities are manipulated, state and civil society seem to speak in one voice regarding policing, punishment, and violence as the media, educational institutions, and private citizens are organized to further state hegemony in spite of their autonomy from state apparatuses. (6)

Thus, the collusion between the state and private actors is important in understanding the reproduction of violence within the public sphere. Within this context, Muslim women are experiencing ongoing violence within the United States.

American politicians and media outlets routinely focus on the ways Muslim women experience violence at the hands of Muslim men within Middle Eastern countries, with the notable exception of Palestinian women who are depicted as undeserving of Western sympathy. This serves to buttress ongoing support for military campaigns and occupation, while undermining critical analyses of the ways the state perpetuates violence both domestically and abroad. The United States deploys the framework of women's rights to justify the global War on Terror, highlighting the urgency to "save Muslim women" abroad (Abu-Lughod 2002, 2013; Young 2003). However, this research juxtaposes the institutionalized private violence waged at U.S. Muslim women domestically, especially in light of ideological discourses that construct Western nations as the embodiment of freedom from religious, sexual, ethnic/racial, and gender persecution (Puar 2007).

Intersections of Violence: Women as Targets

Scholars have suggested that women of color's experiences with violence are shaped not only by their gender but also mediated through a complex intersection of race, class, sexuality, and citizenship status (Bhattacharjee 2002; Crenshaw 1991). To understand these intersections of violence, scholar activists have suggested a redefinition of *violence* that would include forms of state violence (Davis 2003; James 1996; Whitlock 2012). While the antiviolence movement has indeed sought to enlarge the definition of interpersonal violence to include the ways women of color experience state violence, these analyses mostly focus on sexual and domestic violence. In contrast, this research analyzes how violence against Muslim women is carried out by an emboldened citizenry (that is, strangers), *not* intimate partners. However, there are important overlaps with these previous theoretical contributions to the study of violence against Muslim American women. Forms of violence waged against Muslim women are shaped by the convergence of Islamophobia, racism, and sexism and cannot be solely ascribed to any one of these particular systems of power.

Research on discrimination and violence against U.S. Muslims and Arab Americans over the past decade have typically relied on nonintersectional frames. That is, racial and/or religious motivations of hate violence were given primacy, while gender (and, thus, U.S. Muslim women) remained invisible in many hate crime reports (Ahmad 2002; Lee 2008; Volpp 2002). As evidenced in Lee's (2008) study on hate crimes, "acknowledging the humanity of Arabs and Muslims is a small first step we can take towards combating the Arab-(or Muslim)-as-terrorist stereotype and the hate violence that can

result from this stereotype” (14). Lee’s findings lead us to believe that hate violence is solely attributed to racial or religious stereotyping, rendering gender as unmarked in these acts of violence. Research along these lines has also persisted without an examination of the assailants who perpetuate such forms of gendered Islamophobic violence.

Among the growing research documenting the rise in violence against Arab and Muslim communities over the last decade, there are only two empirical studies that integrate gender within their analyses (Cainkar 2009; Naber 2008, 2012). Both studies found that Muslim women were more likely to experience violence in the public sphere than were Muslim men. In Naber’s (2008) research on Arab Americans,⁵ she argues, “[A] general consensus among community leaders was that federal government policies [after 9/11] disproportionately targeted men while hate crimes and incidents of harassment in the public sphere disproportionately targeted women” (293). Cainkar (2009) also found in her study that Arab and Muslim women experience twice the rate of “hate encounters” compared to their male counterparts. A hate encounter is defined as an incident

in which perpetrators engage in offensive activities motivated by feelings of prejudice toward a person or persons with the ascribed status of Arab or Muslim, without addressing whether the activity qualifies as a crime or not. (292)

Moreover, Muslim women who wore the hijab were disproportionately victims of hate encounters (230). Other scholars have also pointed to the scapegoating of women who wear the hijab as a particular vulnerability for hate violence (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Bryan 2005).

It is important to contextualize why Muslim women are the disproportionate targets of violence in the public sphere in contrast to Muslim men. One area that sheds light on this question is the cultural stereotypes and representations of Muslim women. Mainstream Western representations have depicted Muslim women as either passive victims of male violence or as hypersexual, mysterious women subject to seclusion in the harem for the fulfillment of male sexual fantasies (Haddad, Smith, and Moore 2006). These stereotypes simultaneously ascribe sexual exoticism and powerlessness to Muslim women, which contributes to the ways dominant groups perceive them. In particular, women who wear the hijab are subjected to harassment based on stereotypes about their religious, racial-ethnic, and gender identities. As Aziz (2012) notes,

[S]parse attention is paid to the impact of the post-9/11 national security era on Muslim women, and specifically those who wear the headscarf. Irrespective of their place of origin or the color of their skin, the headscarf marks these women as sympathetic to the enemy, presumptively disloyal, and forever foreign. (192)

The headscarf is viewed as a threatening signifier of difference. Moreover, these stereotypes position Muslim women's bodies as passive and incapable of resisting male dominance as evidenced by their presumed inferior position to Muslim men in their own "backwards" Islamic culture.

A Feminist War?

The persistent violence against Muslim American women is intricately linked to the War on Terror, which is often described as a "war without borders." The institutional mistreatment of U.S. Muslims domestically is connected to the political agenda of the United States in the Middle East. Maira (2009) argues, "U.S. empire continues to rely on the twin processes of foreign coercion and domestic repression." Moreover, "[T]he national consensus for U.S. foreign policies is strengthened through historical processes of scapegoating 'outsiders' and conflating internal and external enemies that link the domestic and foreign fronts of U.S. imperialism" (41). Muslims living in the United States are rendered suspect by their alleged association with the "enemy" abroad.

Abu-Lughod (2013) critically examines how the ideology of "saving Muslim women" is used to justify foreign military invasions. In the case of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, liberating women was an important aspect of the rhetoric of war that emerged (Bhattacharyya 2008; Yaqoob 2008). The U.S.-led war would not only "liberate" the Afghan people from the shackles of the fundamentalist Taliban regime but would also serve as an equally important act to liberate women from their backward, oppressive male counterparts (Abu-Lughod 2002, 2013). In an interview, President George W. Bush suggested that the invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq have been in the interest of Muslim women (Bhattacharyya 2008, 19). It was the first time right-wing conservative pundits were in agreement with leftist politicians in a united pseudo-feminist front. Ironically, right-wing conservative politicians have typically been the first to criticize feminist agendas in the United States, but, in assessing the situations in Afghanistan and other Muslim majority countries, they transformed into feminists overnight. Similarly, Gayatri Spivak has described this colonial ideology as a relationship that is premised on "white men saving brown women from brown men" (1994, 93). The War on Terror has pre-empted a hegemonic discourse to circulate that focuses on the cultural differences of the Middle East and Muslims in general (Abu-Lughod 2013). The focus on cultural and religious beliefs only solidifies the immutable differences between "us" (meaning a quintessential Western, democratic, free, and secular United States) and "them" (a backward, oppressive, patriarchal, and fanatically religious Middle East).

In the years following the invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. general public continues to believe that fighting terrorism is almost as important as Muslim women's rights. In a survey exploring the largely negative perceptions Americans hold of U.S. Muslims, researchers found that 68 percent of Americans would change their views if Muslims would take measures to improve the status of Muslim women (CAIR 2006). This suggests, implicitly, that subordinated Muslim men's masculinity stands in stark contrast to the more revered dominant American (Judeo-Christian) masculinity. Laura Sjoberg (2007) argues that American masculinity is characterized by its traits of courage, benevolence, and self-sacrifice, while Iraqi masculinity is defined by its defiance, lunacy, and propensity for random violence. A closer look at hate-crime data on violence, harassment, and assaults on U.S. Muslim women suggests a different picture. That is, the persistent harassment and violence experienced by Muslim women at the hands of American white-male assailants trouble the benevolent-savior narrative prevalent in media coverage of foreign military occupations.

Muslim Women Navigating Public Institutions and Spaces

All of the forty interviewees in this study were minors at the time of the 9/11 attacks and, therefore, came of age in an increasingly hostile Islamophobic climate.⁶ Of all the hate violence reported to the FBI in 2001, California had the highest number of incidents (Bryan 2005) and continues to report significant rates ever since. The persistence of hate violence in California makes these interviews all the more pertinent in demonstrating why it is important to study the institutionalized private violence that Muslim women experience in California. These interviews provide a unique view that has not been examined within this context. Moreover, since most existing research has focused on the "backlash" violence that occurred within the first few years, there still remains an important gap to understand the experiences of young Muslim women who grew up in the decade *after* 9/11. Rather than understand violence toward Muslim women in the public sphere as occurring at a particular moment of crisis, these interviews reveal an ongoing pattern of violence against Muslim women and demonstrate the impact of this violence on their lives.

The majority of the Muslim women interviewed for this research reported experiencing some form of verbal or physical violence in public institutions or public spaces. Among the interviewees, 10 women reported incidents of physical violence, thereby constituting 25 percent of the sample. Muslim women had expressed a variety of responses in dealing with such violence including modifying their appearance, avoiding specific places, and asking

family members or others to accompany them on the bus or in certain public spaces. Cainkar's (2009) study on Arab and Muslim Americans similarly found that women were almost twice as likely (83 percent) to report feeling unsafe in public spaces compared to 45 percent of men (235).

During the course of the interviews, it was also apparent that this fear was an important factor in many of the women's decisions regarding their own mobility. Safeena commented,

I don't walk around in traditional clothes at the mall or most places anymore. I just know it's asking for trouble. I feel it has a lot to do with where you are going. If I go to Sands Mall, I definitely won't wear them, but if I go to some other mall like Morristown Mall, I won't care as much.⁷

The first mall Safeena is referring to is a shopping center located in a predominately upper-class and majority-white area in California. In contrast, Morristown Mall is located in a predominately working-class area and populated mostly by residents of color. Popular discourse often depicts neighborhoods with predominately working-class individuals and people of color as inherently unsafe or dangerous. However, Safeena's remarks lead to an opposite conclusion; in this instance, spaces that are marked as white and upper-class are the source of "trouble" for her.

Of the forty women interviewed, thirty-four (85 percent) reported experiencing verbal assaults and/or threats. Sara recalled,

I was walking down the street and this guy honked at me. When I looked up, he started cursing me out and flipped me off. I ran around the corner, and he followed me in his car, yelling, "You fucking sandnigger bitch! Go home!" until I finally ducked into a store.

After this incident, Sara was careful to make plans to walk with others or get rides from friends and family. If she knew she was not able to make alternative transportation arrangements, she avoided going out altogether. Sara's story is not only important in terms of the dangerous violence that is present in the public sphere but is also representative of the climate in which men feel empowered to target Muslim women seemingly without any consequence. The man's comments demonstrate the intersectionality of these attacks; both Sara's racial background and gender were marked by the use of the racial slur "sandnigger" and the gendered epithet "bitch." The phrase "go home" presumed her alien status within the nation. Within this rhetoric, she did not belong in the country and was positioned both outside of, and in opposition to, the assailant's perceptions of what it means to be American. The Muslim woman posed a symbolic threat to the social and moral fabric of the United

States and, therefore, needed to be neutralized or “put back in her place,” both outside the country and also inside the home (that is, the gendered domestic sphere). In this sense, she had no right or entitlement to the public sphere.

Another participant, Jen, also recounted,

I used to take the bus to school, and I would get spit on or get trash thrown at me by guys at my school. Sometimes they would pour drinks on my hijab. I couldn't take it anymore, so I just started ditching school so I wouldn't have to take the bus.

Jen's experiences of harassment from men on the bus deeply affected her school attendance. To avoid such harassment, she stopped attending school regularly, thereby compromising her chances of college admittance.

Explanations of this form of harassment often assume Muslim women are attacked because of their perceived cultural threat, as opposed to examining the motivation of dominant groups in exercising power over marginalized groups. In a newspaper report, the *Tampa Tribune* stated,

in these volatile times, the hijab can make Muslim women a target of hate crimes. Islamic groups nationwide have reported more than 500 incidents against Muslims, or people who resemble Middle Easterners, since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Some police agencies have recommended that women stop wearing their hijab temporarily or stay at home. Most say that is not an option. (Bearden 2001)

According to this report, state authorities believed that an effective strategy to combat such violence is for women to withdraw temporarily from the public sphere. This reasoning is similar to victim-blaming discourses wherein the clothing and behavior of rape victims are scrutinized. This focus leaves noticeably absent a rendering of *who* is committing such violence, the motivations for such violence, and the unequal power relationship between men and women that enables such violence to occur on a systematic basis (Brownmiller 1975). Media coverage attributes this violence to the visibility of their headscarves, without examining the social structures and broader sociopolitical climate that contributes to an environment that fosters such violence.

Since the age of the women interviewed for this study were relatively young (18–25), school was a significant site in which they experienced ongoing harassment. In recent years, a report issued by the Council for American Islamic Relations indicated that almost half of California Muslim students reported some form of “bias related bullying” (CAIR 2013). In addition, one-out-of-five Muslim women reported being harassed about their hijab. In an interview with Neem, she indicated that she

was looking forward to college, but when I arrived, I encountered more discrimination and harassment than ever before. I guess because I attended a predominately minority school where there were a bunch of Muslims, I didn't realize how bad it could be to attend college and only be one of a few.

In a similar vein, Malia reported being harassed on an ongoing basis while in high school: "I would receive anonymous notes saying 'Your dad's a terrorist' or 'Muslims are terrorists.' At first I reported it, but no one ever did anything about it. No one took it very seriously." In another interviewee's account, Dallah reported six different times when she experienced physical violence and one additional threat of physical violence, during her attendance at secondary school. Four of these times involved students ripping off her hijab. Incidents such as these framed an overall context for the women interviewed whereby many of them reported feeling their experiences were not seen as "important to those who could change it," as Zarin stated. Among the most extreme accounts, three women reported changing schools, and one reported dropping out altogether.

The situating of violence as no more than an "isolated act" fails to hold the state accountable in allowing such violence toward Muslim communities. Moreover, Muslim women are at a disadvantage in reporting such violence given the siege on Muslim communities by local and federal authorities. The threat of violence and harassment positions Muslim women in a state of fear that controls their movements in public, their interaction with strangers, and their mode of dress and religious expression. Jena commented:

I couldn't tell anyone I was Muslim when I got an internship at a preschool. It was so crazy. But, I knew a lot of the people who worked there didn't like Muslims and were always saying negative things about us. I was afraid of how I would be treated if they knew.

Contrary to the dominant cultural ideology in the United States that stresses freedom of religion as a hallmark of protected expression, Jena felt that her employment would be in jeopardy if she identified herself as Muslim.

Stereotyped representations of Muslim women in the United States often assume that women living in the Middle East are restricted from going out in public, cannot interact with men in the public sphere, and are oppressed by wearing the restrictive covering of the hijab or burqa. In contrast to the stereotype that Muslim women cannot go out in public, most of the women interviewed worked outside the home. There were two distinct patterns in terms of their employment: they either received employment through networks within the community or worked in low-paying customer-service

positions, which was more likely. Furthermore, twenty-eight interviewees reported having one parent located in a working-class profession, which included retail, clerical work, sales, and entry-level service occupations. Thus, in many of these families, it was a class expectation that their daughters work outside the home to support their family financially.

Many of the women reported difficulty with getting hired or experienced harassment at their places of employment. Dana, who works at a fast-food chain talked about the ongoing struggle at her work:

When I first started working there, for a few months, I didn't have any problems, but then a new manager was hired and constantly was on top of me for every little thing. The manager would call me out in front of everyone else and say that I didn't stand correctly, smile correctly, or that I was a bad example of a worker. I was always being humiliated. The management always was telling me that I had to take off my scarf. They would say that I was scaring away the good American customers.

Dana's Muslim attire was apparently un-American, according to the manager. The manager reified Muslims as outside the realm of being American, thereby imbuing citizenship with a nonmarked religious signifier, Christianity. Additionally, being American was equated with being good, while rendering the contrast of that identity in Dana, as Muslim, as implicitly bad. The assumption that "good American customers" would be scared of Muslim women's attire reinforces the supposed dangerous qualities inherent in being Muslim. The wearing of the hijab is then a symbolic threat to being American. Despite the continuous harassment at work, Dana remained committed to wearing the hijab.

In addition to harassment by employers, customers and clients were also a main source of harassment. In one such incident, Roukia commented,

One day a guy asked me where I was from. I said the Middle East. He told me that I should be worried about saying that out loud because we were responsible for September 11th. He started yelling at me and saying that it was our entire fault and Arabs were violent people. Then, right before he walked out, he told me that I better watch out when I leave work because something bad could happen to me.

Roukia worked in a medical office and was quite shaken up after the incident. Ironically, even though the client accused Arabs of being violent, he in turn threatened Roukia with violence. Despite the fact she had a good rapport with her fellow co-workers, Roukia was still not insulated from clients' verbal

harassment. Given that women are more likely to be located in service positions, this proved to be a significant source of ongoing harassment for the Muslim women interviewed. Moreover, the unpredictability of interaction with the public made for an uneasy work environment; women never knew who was potentially going to harass them.

Verbal violence in employment was a common occurrence for many of the women interviewed. While working at a retail store, Fizah stated,

A customer complained to the manager that I didn't speak English and that I shouldn't work there because I am not American. The manager said, "Yes, she is American and speaks English; that's why I hired her." And then, as they were walking out, they shouted, "Go back to your country!"

Fortunately, Fizah had a supportive manager who defended her to the customer; nonetheless, the manager could not prevent the customer from yelling at Fizah. Summiya also reported a disturbing experience:

I was working at [a retail store in the mall], and this customer, who was a white guy, wanted to take the shopping cart outside the store into the mall. He got upset because another worker told him he couldn't. I offered him another bag to take his stuff, and he called me a "stupid terrorist" and left. I was shocked at first and upset, but now I just expect it and laugh it off.

Similarly, Khaliya said,

When I first started working at [a retail store], these guys came in and followed me around the store. They started saying stuff: "Why do you wear that [scarf]? You know you are going to go to hell." It kept going on and on. I tried to ignore them, but then they finally started yelling at me: "You f*** terrorist!" I ducked into the bathroom and started crying. I was so angry because I wanted to yell back at them but couldn't. I decided to quit because I just couldn't deal with my anger when things like that would happen.

Most of the women who worked indicated that they had ongoing experiences with violence, although some cases were much more severe than others. Nonetheless, the climate for work seemed to be hostile, particularly for those wearing the hijab. This article of clothing was imputed with multiple, negative meanings within the workplace. In its most problematic aspect, the hijab was often viewed as threatening to customers.

Given that most incidents were a series of unconnected events, the women were less likely to report such violence and instead saw it as a "necessary challenge" they had to overcome in their work in order to keep their jobs. Adir said, "I don't feel that I have much of an option to leave my job. I think

these kinds of things will always happen no matter where I work.” Coping individually with such persistent violence and harassment was a key dimension of their experiences and an active strategy to deal with their situations at work. Such routine experiences added an additional level of stress to their jobs that their non-Muslim co-workers did not necessarily have to deal with on a daily basis.

White Men as “Invisible” Assailants of Institutionalized Private Violence

The interviewees’ disclosures of such significant violence and harassment allowed for their experiences to be triangulated with other existing documentation of hate violence. Since hate violence tends to occur in “public spaces—the street, public transportation, stores, work, and school” (Bakalian and Borzorgmehr 2009, 126), media outlets will cover these events if reported to state authorities. Based on analysis of hate-crimes data collected by the FBI from 2001 to 2012, this research found that white offenders were consistently the overwhelming majority of known offenders of hate crimes that were categorized as anti-Islamic (see Table 1).⁸ Moreover, in Los Angeles, of the known hate-crime assailants in September 11-related attacks, the majority were also white and overwhelmingly male (91 percent) (Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations 2013, 17).⁹ While the *FBI Report on Hate Crimes* estimates that anywhere between 6,000 to 8,000 total hate crimes occur yearly, the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that there are approximately 260,000 hate crimes annually (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2013), suggesting that there is a significant underreporting of hate crime. It then can be inferred that hate violence toward Muslims is likely to be much higher than these statistics reveal here. Moreover, in 36 percent of the post-9/11 backlash hate crime cases reported in Los Angeles, the racial and ethnic backgrounds of victims were unknown or reported as “other.” According to the *2001 Hate Crime Report* of the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, “Many law enforcement agencies had difficulty identifying the racial and ethnic backgrounds of victims of post-September 11th backlash, perhaps because they did not fall into traditionally targeted groups” (18). In 2001, Los Angeles County recorded the highest number of hate crimes ever reported in the history of the Commission, a period spanning 21 years.

The mainstream media’s framing of hate violence, including expert opinions given by state officials, conveys sympathetic and humanizing portrayals of assailants committing such violence. As one *San Diego Tribune* newspaper

Table 1: FBI Anti-Islamic Hate Crimes, 2001–12

Year	Total Known Race Offenders	Total Whites	Total Percent of White Offenders
2001	240	200	83.33%
2002	86	59	68.6%
2003	67	51	76.1%
2004	104	86	82.69%
2005	76	52	68.4%
2006	100	80	80%
2007	79	61	77.2%
2008	75	53	70.66%
2009	71	49	69%
2010	105	77	73.3%
2011	102	72	70.58%
2012	81	61	75.3%

Source: Compiled from Table 5 of the yearly FBI report on hate crimes

article suggested, “The motivations for hate crimes are that: ‘People tend to act out of fear or frustration to try to feel normal again’ said Jerry Stratton, a detective with the San Diego Police Department who works with the Anti-Defamation League” (Green 2001). The generic use of the term “people” generalizes the feelings of the perpetrators of hate violence to the rest of the (dominant) population. This narrative demonstrates that hate violence assailants are *not* violent and instead are “reasonably frustrated” that their lives have been disturbed by the events of 9/11. In concert with the findings of this research, which suggests that white men are more likely to be the assailants of anti-Islamic hate violence, this commentary by a state official can only be seen as a form of gendered and racialized identification with the collective identities of American white men.

Another benign construction of the motivations for hate violence was provided by the Los Angeles Commission on Human Relations, the agency responsible for issuing the city’s hate-crime report. Its 2001 report indicated that “the weeks immediately following the tragedies of September 11th provided a sad commentary to how some Americans acted on misplaced patriotism” (18). The attribution of overzealous “patriotism” to Americans who commit these acts of violence conveys sympathy, while simultaneously collectivizes their sentiments. It also highlights the identity category of American instead of the specific racialized and gendered identities of the assailant, which remain unmarked. It then seems irrelevant that white men are committing these crimes; instead, the characteristic of being overzealous patriots

is more important. Both of these frames indicate that there are reasonable motivations for non-Muslims to feel frustrated or fearful following the events of 9/11. The generous nature of statements such as this, made on behalf of a narrow population of assailants, would never apply to any other marginal population of color who were found to be the majority of assailants for any particular crime.

After 9/11, a police detective issued this empathetic statement: “We understand the anxieties of the general public and the feeling across the city and Long Island right now, but it’s a time where we also have to show restraint and respect for people at the same time” (Burson 2001). In this comment, Nassau Police Det. Sgt. Gary Shapiro identifies with the non-Muslim population and equates anxieties about 9/11 with motivations for assailants to enact violence. However, instead of questioning the source and intention to do harm as the problem, he stresses “using restraint” to deal with such triggering emotional times for non-Muslims. In other words, he is indicating in his use of “we” that the police understand why non-Muslims would want to act violently toward Muslims, but, alas, it is important to control one’s anger. This legitimizes the desire to act and commit hate violence but asks only that people do not actually commit such violence. In contrast, Muslims who have experienced the brunt of hostility and discrimination since 9/11 would never be offered such collective sympathy. In fact, as a population under persistent scrutiny and attack, Muslims are forced constantly to dispel myths about their religion and culture.

In one reported hate crime, Faiza Ejaz was waiting to be picked up by her husband outside a shopping mall. Adam Lang, who was 76 years old, attempted to run over Ejaz with his car, but she jumped out of the way. He then proceeded to scream that he was “doing this for his country and was going to kill her” (Human Rights Watch 2002, 21). This example demonstrates not the “overzealousness” of patriotism but instead the degree to which violence is inherently linked to the defense of the nation-state. Patriotism after 9/11 moved beyond mere pride in one’s country:

Because crimes motivated by hatred are generally committed by males—mirroring the prevailing pattern of violence—addressing issues of gender are central to understanding ethnoviolence in a post 9/11 society. Barbara Perry explains that perpetrators of ethnoviolence are responding to threats to their gender, race, and national identity since they realize that their whiteness no longer guarantees them status and security. “Consequently, many white men experience a sense of displacement and dispossession relative to people of color. This imagery of ‘white-men-as-victim’ provides

an ideological rationale for recreating people of color as legitimate victims.” From the viewpoints of those unleashing ethnoviolence, their actions are believed to be justified because especially in the wake of 9/11 they are protecting “their” country—the homeland—from the threat of outsiders. (Welch 2006, 72–73)

The author’s analysis of white masculinity is important in understanding the heightened public securitization after 9/11. Furthermore, it reveals that security is a relative term and has been extended only to privileged dominant populations within the U.S. context. Communities of color, queer individuals, immigrants, and women have always faced insecurity within the nation, collectively rendering their status precariously unsafe given the ongoing institutionalized violence these communities face. Young (2003) argues that, after 9/11, an authoritarian security paradigm emerged that took “a form analogous to that of the masculine protector toward his wife and the other members of his patriarchal household. In this structure, masculine superiority flows not from acts of repressive domination but from the willingness to risk and sacrifice for the sake of the others” (9). Within this context, assailants and newspaper reports link hate violence to larger discourses of benevolent and patriarchal forms of masculinist protection. According to the FBI, a hate crime is constituted as a criminal offense that is “motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity” (2012, 4). Thus, the constitution of a hate crime is on the basis in which an individual *victim* is targeted due to his or her collective association with a larger group in society. However, that logic does not similarly apply to the *assailants* of hate violence. Instead, assailants are viewed as individuals who commit isolated acts or incidents that are not attributed to a collective status or group membership. This myopic focus on the victims’ identities ignores the relationship between hate-violence victims and assailants, which involves dominance and subordination and ultimately mimics relationships of power between groups in broader society.

Homeland Security and the “Newly Deputized Citizenry”

The Homeland Security State has significantly altered the vast ways institutions “think” about security and terrorism and, by extension, how the general public perceives Muslims in the United States. Muslims have been rendered suspect within state institutions through a variety of measures and policies that have disproportionately targeted them, including racial profiling,

detainment, and deportation. Since the state has acted concertedly to racially profile and target Muslims, great obstacles remain for the public to think or act differently. This is further linked to the prominent rise and state investment in the surveillance of Muslims by the general U.S. public. While both local police departments and the FBI have pre-eminently taken up the task on behalf of the state to surveil, monitor, and map Muslim communities, there still remains a key role for the public to take up in the fight against terrorism.

Spearheaded by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), “citizen surveillance campaigns” have abounded across the nation; these campaigns focus on deputizing the public to be on vigilant alert of suspicious activity. In a 2011 statement by Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, titled “Urging Public Vigilance,” she states, “[W]e continue to urge the public to be vigilant and report any suspicious activity to law enforcement. Simply put, if you see something, say something.” The Department of Homeland Security’s “See Something, Say Something” campaign, which has been replicated throughout the country in police departments, transit agencies, military bases, and airports, relies on vague notions of suspicious behavior—the ambiguous “something”—that indicates the presence of terrorism. In a similar campaign by Amtrak Texas, “customers are asked to report such activity as taking photos of equipment—including trains—and loitering, staring, or watching employees and customers” (Hossain 2014). The meaningless implication of these behaviors are preposterous yet, coupled with an identifiably “Muslim” profile, have potentially serious ramifications.

Customers are emboldened to be the first line of defense against thwarting terrorism with no training in this matter. Private citizens can now thwart terrorist plots with a virtual crime app, which “you and your neighbors can use to report behaviors and activities that make you feel uncomfortable or do not look right.”¹⁰ Reporting a behavior that makes one feel uncomfortable is dubious and opens the door for unwarranted scrutiny of Muslims within the public sphere by private actors. Several police departments and military bases have adopted the “iWatch, iReport, I Keep Us Safe” campaign, which serves as a community program that asks citizens to report suspicious behavior such as “a person wearing clothes that are too big and bulky and/or too hot for the weather.”¹¹ This particular behavior is enmeshed with ethnocentric overtones, since many Muslim women who wear the abaya, or other form of modest dress in the summer, are already deemed suspicious. The vague behaviors listed in these programs serve further to invite the collective racial/gender/religious profiling of Muslims within the public sphere by a “deputized

citizenry.” Guarding against the imminent threat of terrorism is now a task of a newly alert deputized public in which “Homeland Security Begins with Hometown Security,” as the new 21st-century DHS slogan declares.

While the reporting of mundane, suspicionless behavior seems to pervade the new Homeland Security State’s logic, Muslims who have *actual* crimes to report are rendered suspect by officials because of their presumed ties to terrorism. A 2003 *Los Angeles Times* article revealed that the “FBI Has a Pledge and a Request for Muslims: The Agency Promises to Investigate Hate Crimes and Asks for Help in Finding Terrorists.” As the United States was preparing for war in Iraq, the FBI was interested in locating possible terrorists and suspected Saddam Hussein sympathizers. In that same article, FBI Director Robert Mueller stated that “protecting civil rights is a high priority, and he encouraged the Middle Eastern communities to work with the FBI in reporting hate crimes and assisting terrorism investigations” (Reza 2003). The promise to investigate hate crimes should be carried out regardless of Middle Eastern communities’ commitment to assisting with terrorist investigations. Mueller’s statement assumes that FBI employees are allowed to selectively choose which crimes they will investigate, dependent on the cooperation provided by the victim’s community. Moreover, it demonstrates that the rights of Muslims can be withdrawn, or selectively enforced, depending on their perceived cooperation with the FBI. Thus, while a newly deputized public has become empowered to report suspicious behavior, the general Muslim public’s concerns over their own safety and security from violence is a secondary concern of the state.

Conclusion

In this research, it is important to highlight the experiences of Muslim American women to counter the dominant stereotypical portrayals of their lives. While the focus in this work has been on Muslim women in the United States, it is apparent that these women are often seen in a very similar way to Muslim women in impoverished countries or under authoritarian or extremist government. Chandra Mohanty (2003) discusses the tendency to construct “third-world” women as a unitary, undifferentiated, and monolithic category. This discursive representation produces colonial constructions of non-Western women. Universal discourses, Mohanty argues, not only strip the active agency from women living in developing nations but also reinforce and consolidate the notion of an “average third world woman [that] leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being

'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)" (346). This monolithic construction of the "third-world" woman necessarily relies on the implicit contrast to "Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions" (ibid.). When applied to global representations of Muslim women specifically, Mohanty's work illuminates the ways Muslim women in the United States are subject to similar assumptions about their positionalities. Muslim women in the United States are undifferentiated from stereotypes of the "third-world" Muslim woman, which makes them susceptible to violence because of their assumed subservient status. The dominant portrayal of Muslim women as victims, uneducated, and domestic encourages an environment in which committing institutionalized private violence against them seems warranted. If Muslim women were seen as valuable and deserving of the same rights as dominant members in society, there would be repercussions for those who commit such atrocious violence.

Within the popular U.S. imagination, Muslim women have been constructed as both foreign and un-American. Prowar rhetoric justifying the invasion in Afghanistan and Iraq has focused on the lack of rights afforded to women in Islam. This portrayal of Muslim women has conflated the practices of the Taliban and religious fundamentalists with all Muslims. Since fundamentalism is often equated with Islam, there remains an inability to discern any religious practices of Muslims as anything but "extreme." This representation contributes to the invisibility of "average" Muslims living in the United States. The religious practices of U.S. Muslims are then seen as threatening and opposing American culture and identity.

This research demonstrates a troubling of traditional interpretations of violence against Muslim women. Abu-Lughod's (2013) ideological frame of saving Muslim women from Muslim men, via military force, remains a dominant cultural feature of the global War on Terror. However, I argue that the ideology of "saving Muslim women" from violence only applies when (foreign) Muslim men are positioned as the assailants of such violence. That is, Muslim women's experiences of institutionalized private violence in the U.S. homeland positions the people enacting such violence as invisible subjects, thus individualizing cases of violence against Muslim American women as isolated incidents. White American masculinity—the convergence of dominant racial-gender statuses—relegates the assailants of institutionalized private violence against Muslim women as simultaneously raceless and genderless. As a result, U.S. Muslim women become the victims of an

“invisible” pattern of violence. When Muslim men are not the assailants, such violence ceases to exist in the public imaginary. As a result, Muslim American women become “unworthy of saving” as victims of institutionalized private violence in the homeland since the perpetrators are disproportionately white men—the so called heroic “saviors” of Muslim women abroad.

There has not been an investigation into the motives of white men as a group, whose intersectional identities are relevant in committing these acts of violence; nor is there attention to the ways their masculinity, whiteness, or religion makes them predisposed to commit such acts. The absence of Muslim American women in the media as citizens and residents of the United States subjected to such violence has the effect of making Muslim women symbolically foreign. In other words, since the media fixate on Muslim women abroad, these women are never perceived as being at “home” in the United States. Therefore, their presence in this country is cast as perpetual immigrant, foreign “Others,” and never as full Americans deserving of civil liberties and citizenship.¹²

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Notes

1. This violent incident occurred in 2014, just steps from my house in the parking lot of a grocery store I regularly frequent. See *CBS Los Angeles* report "Long Beach Police Investigate Possible Hate Crime Against Woman Wearing Muslim Garb," July 23, 2014. Retrieved from <http://cbsloc.al/2fgSnoU>, accessed December 12, 2016.
2. This research utilized primary government sources, including statistical data ranging from 2001 to 2012 from the Federal Bureau of Hate Crimes Statistics, City of Los Angeles Commission on Human Relations Annual Hate Crimes Report from 2001 and 2013, and the Department of Justice's Research Institute Reports. Additionally, I analyzed content that was published from a variety of special human rights policy reports that were issued during the initial aftermath of 9/11 (2001–3) from several nonprofit organizations and research centers including Human Rights Watch, Arab American Discrimination Committee Research Center, Council of American Islamic Relations Research Center, and the American Civil Liberties Union.
3. I borrow the concept "institutionalized private violence" from Akers Chacon and Davis (2006) where they focus on the role of private nonstate actors who were responsible for anti-immigrant violence in the history of the United States. Among these private actors are corporate police and private detective agencies, organized white supremacists, and vigilantes.
4. Historically, feminists theorizing violence against women have notably pointed out the separation of the public sphere and private sphere as a contributing factor in understanding the subordination of women, and thereby women's susceptibility to violence (Mackinnon

1989; Pateman 1989). The public sphere has historically been “privileged as the sphere of production, governance, and politics,” while the private sphere has been “devalued as the realm of reproduction, the family, and child rearing” (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010, 37). This distinction has deleterious effects on women’s status in society in that activities that take place within the “home” or in private are deemed outside the purview of the public. Often, women’s experiences of violence within the home are also seen as beyond the scope of the state, thereby rendering private matters to be dealt with by patriarchal authority within families (Binion 1995; Fregoso and Bejarano 2010). Thus, feminist analyses of the public/private split fundamentally question the inability of the state to act in good faith to protect women in the home from intimate partner violence. In response to such critiques, the mainstream antiviolence movement in the United States has sought to enlarge the state’s authority and response to violence against women through criminal statutes and enhanced policing (Rojas Durazo 2007). However, the reliance on the criminal justice system has imposed additional challenges for women of color. Since immigrant communities of color have been disproportionately targeted through Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in addition to local and federal policing authorities, women of color are pitted against their communities when they report intimate partner violence to authorities (Silliman 2002). Moreover, the increasing reliance on law enforcement to “solve violence against women” ignores the intersectionality of women’s experiences of violence surrounding race, class, gender, and sexuality whereby women of color already disproportionately face punitive measures under state policing (Bhattacharjee 2002; Crenshaw 1991; Davis 2003).

5. Naber’s study uses ethnography and interviews with 30 board members, six lawyers, and 50 community members between 2002 and 2003 in the San Francisco Bay Area.

6. This research utilizes data derived from a subset sample of 60 semi structured interviews, primary governmental documents, nonprofit research human rights reports, and newspaper articles. The interviews were conducted in 2009 with Muslims between the ages of 18 and 25, in which forty identified as women and twenty as men. For the purposes of this paper, I will be drawing on the interviews conducted with only the forty women. The women’s responses I analyzed for this paper are from a portion of the interviews that asked questions pertaining to discrimination in employment, public spaces, airports, schools, law enforcement, government agencies, and commercial transactions (service at stores, restaurants, and businesses) after 9/11. Respondents identified with a variety of national and ethnic origins, including the Middle East (Lebanon, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia), North Africa (Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria), and South Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh). Although studies have been carried out that analyze the Muslim population at large, there has not been much focus on Muslim youth with the exception of Maira (2009) who focused only on South Asian Muslim immigrant youth. I chose to interview both South Asian and Arab American Muslims because, after 9/11, both of these groups were subjected to discriminatory treatment by state policies and the general public. Also, the general public does not easily discern the difference between these two larger racial/ethnic groups.

7. The names of these malls have been changed to pseudonyms.

8. While non-Hispanic whites are approximately 62 percent of the population, white men are only 31 percent of the general population. Since men are the most likely to be the assailants of such crimes, it is reasonable to presume that white men are *disproportionately* committing hate crimes.

9. The Los Angeles Hate Crime Commission also collects data on hate crimes that have multiple motivations; however, gender is the most underreported category. While at the state level such reporting might be mandated, the federal level has been more complicated. The Hate Crimes Statistics Act historically did not mandate the FBI collect statistics on crimes motivated by gender (Jeness 2003). Therefore, it has been difficult to track crimes based on the gender of victims and perpetrators in hate crimes until the FBI announced on November 23, 2009, that the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, recently passed, will begin the tracking of gender as an equal and important category in hate crimes in future reports.

10. See i Watch Harris County campaign at <http://www.iwatchharriscounty.com>.

11. “iWatch, iReport, I Keep Us Safe” is a campaign that several military bases and police departments nationwide rely on for tips regarding suspected terrorist activity. The suspicious activity behavior I am referring to is listed as point six on the New York National Guard’s website material at <https://dmna.ny.gov/atfp/>. Thomas Cincotta (2010) also issued the report *Platform for Prejudice: How the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative Invited Racial Profiling, Erodes Civil Liberties, and Undermines Security*, which discusses many of the inherent problems with the suspicious-activity reporting focused on in these programs such as iWatch. See http://www.publiceye.org/liberty/matrix/reports/sar_initiative/, accessed December 12, 2016.

12. I would like to thank Jennifer Hamer and the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and detailed feedback on earlier drafts of this work. I also am indebted to my research assistant Marwa Itani and the young women who graciously shared their experiences in hopes that their stories would be told. This article is dedicated in loving memory of my mom.