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Beyond Orientalism and Islamophobia

9/11, Anti-Arab Racism, and the Mythos
of National Pride

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SINCE 9/11, ARAB AMERICANS HAVE EVOLVED FROM WHAT NADINE Naber once described as an invisible group in the United States into a highly visible community that either directly or indirectly affects the United States' so-called culture wars, foreign policy, presidential elections, and legislative tradition. Although diverse religiously, culturally, geographically, economically, and politically, Arab Americans generally have been homogenized in various American discourses as an unstable Southern/Third World (i.e., foreign) presence. In this article, I will summarize the evolution of the Arab image in American media since Ronald Stockton's seminal 1994 analysis, with emphasis on the role of 9/11, and advance the usage of the term *anti-Arab racism* as a more accurate replacement for the traditional descriptors *Orientalism* and *Islamophobia* in relation to the negative portrayal of Arabs in the United States. Although much needs to be said about the complexities inherent in constructing images (sometimes positive but usually negative) of the Arab, I will remain limited here to a discussion of how media images inform definitional imperatives and how, in turn, those definitional imperatives inform the dissemination of media images.

This article will be broken into three parts: The first part will justify my disprivileging of the terms *Orientalism* and *Islamophobia* and outline the features of anti-Arab racism according to the intensive research of corporate American media I conducted during production of my book *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today* (2006); the second part will examine the way anti-Arab racism is interpolated across cultural, religious, and linguistic institutions in the United States and reinvents itself continually based on the peculiarities of American history and the United States' geopolitical relationship with the Arab World; the third part will assess some of the syncretic dimensions of American racism in general, and anti-Arab racism in particular, drawing from, among other theoretical writings, Vincent Leitch's analysis of post-modern disaggregation and Kwame Anthony Appiah's categories of intrinsic and extrinsic racism. Following Anouar Majid's lead (2000), I have difficulty totalizing Arabs as a singular ethnic group when no evidence suggests that such a totalization is viable. In this spirit, I make little distinction between Arabs and Arab Americans, conceptualizing Arabs instead as a globalized ethnic group manufactured into ostensible unity by purveyors of racial or religious dogma, a group that in reality has no binding feature other than an intercontinental geographical origin, itself too vast to facilitate unity realistically. While this article, therefore, is concerned primarily with Arab Americans, it is in a broader sense focused on anti-Arab racism as it affects the globalized Arab and as it is facilitated—indeed, sometimes inspired—by the existence of an Arab community in the United States.

THE MYTHOS OF NATIONAL PRIDE

Since 9/11, patriotism in the United States has been defined in the public sphere as acquiescence to geopolitical interests masquerading as moral imperatives. In turn, most Americans who would consider themselves patriotic formulate the mores of their national identification in opposition to the sanctified mirage of Arab barbarity. The Arab is an ethnic icon manufactured painstakingly in the United States since the nineteenth century, an icon that was expedited into political eminence after 9/11. The Arab thus

exists both consciously and unconsciously in the philosophical contradictions evident in notions of American exceptionalism and its exclusionary reality. Likewise, Arabs in the United States have inherited a peculiar history of exclusionary self-imaging developed during hundreds of years of dispossession and ethnic cleansing in North America that gathered further momentum from within the institutions of slavery, segregation, and an especially resilient anti-immigration mentality.

In theorizing *anti-Arab racism* as something of a corrective to, or even a replacement for, *Orientalism* and *Islamophobia*, I am tasked with examining potential weaknesses or inadequacies of those terms, in many ways a monumental task outside the purview of my methodology. Yet I would be remiss not to focus in some way on the philosophical spaces Arabs either inhabit or are imagined to inhabit in order to locate a context for the justification of a revised terminology in contemplating the interaction of Arabism and Americana—or, to be more precise, the essentialization or frequent misrepresentation of Arabism by Americana. This focus speaks to the title I have chosen for this essay, because to some degree the preposition *beyond*, which can be read forthrightly as advocating replacement, is both descriptive and accusative: the media treatment of Arabs in the United States has gone beyond Orientalism and Islamophobia, and we preclude ourselves from understanding that treatment sufficiently unless we examine how racism alternately informs and inspires it. (*Beyond* also expresses a hope that American society will supersede its negative mentalities, no matter what we name them.) Such an approach intends to name a longstanding phenomenon, anti-Arab racism, and situate it in analyzable frameworks that traverse disciplinary constraints. I am not arguing, then, for the elimination of *Orientalism* or *Islamophobia*, but for their subsumation into discussions that consciously explore how racism, with its multiple socio-historical connotations, influences Arab America and the development of an Arab American critical apparatus.

Because of my methodology and rather narrow focus, I will forego polemical assertions as well as systematic presentation of the unfortunate wealth of examples of anti-Arab racism in various American media. I will assume that the scholarly, multiethnic audience I am addressing is aware of

the attitude I call *anti-Arab racism* and is able to detect it regularly without my guidance. Instead, I would like to give analysis to this racism and explore what it tells us about the United States, why it is so easily reinvented and marketed as responsible, and, most important, how we might effectively name it.

I privilege the naming of anti-Arab racism for the simple reason that it is so infrequently named in both academic discourse and popular culture. And, despite the obvious existence of a bigotry against Arabs in the United States based on historical circumstance and geopolitical necessity, it is not as easy as it appears to apply the term *anti-Arab racism* to the phenomenon because of other historical circumstances: the inscription of the term *Orientalism* into scholarly and activist vocabularies and the popularity of *Islamophobia* as a descriptor for bigotry against Arabs and Muslims in Britain and the United States. *Orientalism* is used to describe the study in the West of the Orient, particularly the Arab World, a field whose most famous scholar, Bernard Lewis, still argues that the term should be considered descriptive of intellectual pursuit rather than prejudicial. The late Edward Said, of course, interrogated the term in his book of the same name and illustrated how a plethora of Orientalists had created a stereotyped image of the East in order to better manage it, thus provoking a connotative transformation in which *Orientalism* came to be synonymous with stereotype, misrepresentation, and essentialism. *Islamophobia*, on the other hand, is a less historically loaded word, having achieved some popularity after 9/11, particularly in Britain, where it has become part of colloquial parlance. Roughly speaking, Islamophobia is to Muslims what anti-Semitism is to Jews, an irrational dislike of individuals or communities based on their religious origin; or, if this definition is deemed too positivistic, we can define Islamophobia as the systematic marginalization by non-Muslims of Muslim individuals or communities based on Islamic practices, Muslim identities, or ethnic features deemed synonymous with religious observance. We might also identify hate crimes, profiling (at airports and elsewhere), and institutionalized discrimination as elements of Islamophobia.

In examining a multivalent bigotry toward Arabs and the role of Arab Americans in the proliferation of that bigotry, my wariness about the term

Orientalism is pragmatic whereas my wariness about the term *Islamophobia* is philosophical. *Orientalism* has been remarkably useful as a descriptive critique of phenomena ranging from misconceptions about Arabs to foolhardy foreign policy, and has seen its use (quite justifiably) increase among Arab Americans in the post-9/11 United States. The term, however, is weighted with considerable theoretical and historical baggage, rendering it, at least in some intellectual circles, oblique or ambivalent. Given its layered connotations and the controversies over its denotation, we can sense in its usage the potential for slippage or a rhetorical imprecision borne of a correspondingly ambivalent or oblique authorial/oratorical intention. Most important, though, *Orientalism* isn't entirely appropriate when we consider the effects of stereotype and bigotry on Arab Americans, who, in a much different way than their brethren in the Arab World, need to be located in a particular tradition of which they have been a partial inheritor. That tradition, uniquely American, includes the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, institutionalized anti-Semitism until the 1960s, and a peculiarly durable xenophobia spanning decades, with, at times, acculturated immigrant groups directing it at newer arrivals. This tradition, of course, has as its partial inspiration a corresponding tradition, that of garrison settlement, slavery, and Messianic fervor, a tradition that has evolved into detectable features of modern Americana that, unlike immigrant histories, do in some way affect Middle Eastern Arabs. This corresponding tradition has inspired the premillennialist overtones so evident in American foreign policy.

Islamophobia, on the other hand, has ambiguities that limit its clarity. Not all victims of Islamophobia are Muslim, and while fear of Muslims, as the word's suffix implies, certainly inspires hatred of them in some cases, we must take much more into account historically in order to accurately delineate a context for the hatred. *Islamophobia*, while a useful descriptor for specific phenomena such as the dispensationalist (Christian Zionist) demonization of Islam as a faith, is necessarily a transnational utterance and precludes, albeit unintentionally, a localized analysis of discrete interethnic encounters. For instance, while Indonesians and Palestinians are both largely Sunni Muslim communities, their geopolitical and interpersonal

encounters with the United States and other Western powers are remarkably dissimilar; insofar as those encounters contributed to the stereotyping of Muslims (and it is impossible to see how they have not), in describing that stereotyping as *Islamophobia* we reduce the encounters to a homogenized framework that might well ignore the fact that a transatlantic Holy Land mania induced a fascination among Americans with the restoration of Palestine to God's chosen people. This Holy Land mania seems to me a more productive way to determine how racism is created and disseminated than eking out in limited intellectual space a theory of misrepresentation based solely on imperialistic desire. While imperialistic desire often is at play in both stereotyping and racism, localized particularities usually determine how the imperialistic desire will evolve. And when we conceptualize this desire as an American phenomenon, we are compelled to assess racism as an institution in North America and then to assess how immigration, Messianism, imperialism, capitalism, dispensationalism, and foreign policy affect the development not of an encounter, but of a tradition.

For these reasons, I use, and encourage others to use, the term *anti-Arab racism* to describe the circumstances outlined above. This usage is not simply a matter of word choice, however. It confronts the issues of Arab American acculturation and deculturation and locates Arab American discourse on Orientalism and Islamophobia within a tradition that must be interrogated if we are finally to help empower an Arab American community suddenly occupying the moral dimension of America's legislative and military affairs, even if the majority of non-Arab Americans—or, for that matter, Arab Americans—do not appear to fully realize it. And this is to say nothing of our most germane inspiration: in order to attack anti-Arab racism successfully, we need first to identify what it is and when it occurs; and we cannot identify and attack anti-Arab racism unless we discover how to name it.

Anti-Arab racism, for example, is fundamental to American race relations. Seven years before 9/11, Ronald Stockton surveyed archetypes of the Arab image in cartoons and other examples of popular culture and concluded that “an exceptional proportion of all hostile or derogatory images targeted at Arabs are derived from or are parallel to classical images of

Blacks and Jews, modified to fit contemporary circumstances” (1994, 121). Based on Stockton’s argument that anti-Arab racism is derivative, it would be foolish to conceptualize anti-Arab racism as a byproduct of 9/11. A more responsible conceptualization will locate anti-Arab racism within a heterogeneous and multitemporal complex of historical factors, although it is clear that 9/11 stratified preexisting attitudes about Arabs (both positive and negative), thereby transforming Arab Americans into discursive tropes invoked to justify various political agendas. For leftist liberals and multiculturalists, 9/11 provided an opportunity to refer to violence against Arabs (and those identified mistakenly as Arab) in order to argue for inclusiveness and tolerance and later to argue for the less admirable cause of electing Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, himself a purveyor of anti-Arab racism. On the other hand, conservatives, particularly neoconservatives, invoked 9/11 as evidence of Arab perfidy and later as evidence of the need to retain George W. Bush to protect “us” from “them”—given the context, “them” is a chilling pronoun spoken inevitably without nuance or modification, acting as the epistemic Other employed to define the White, Christian “us.” We would be foolish to construe as newfangled this sort of xenophobic hysteria denoting a supposedly vanquished racism. Nor is it particularly wise to attribute it to a right-wing lunatic fringe. Democrats during the 2004 elections also pandered to Americans’ fear of Arabs. The attacks on 9/11 provided an ostensibly empirical pretext to legitimize anti-Arab racism, but in no way did 9/11 actually create anti-Arab racism; 9/11 merely validated it.

Indeed, if we return to Stockton, we find countless examples of anti-Arab racism before 9/11 that recall nineteenth-century anthropological essentialism. Likewise, in the same year (1994), Nabeel Abraham documented an extraordinary range of “racism, prejudice, and hate violence” toward Arabs that transcends “the activities of fringe white supremacists and race groups” (1994, 155). Abraham’s study helped pioneer analysis of Arab American alterity, but it is particularly noteworthy because it is one of the first scholarly articles to utilize the term *anti-Arab racism* cohesively. (Stockton, by contrast, concerns himself largely with stereotype and negative imagery, although he explores the ostracism of Arabs in much of its

historical complexity.) Central to my thesis, Abraham suggests “that anti-Arab racism in contemporary society is not only a fringe phenomenon, but extends to mainstream society as well” (160). This suggestion is germane in the post-9/11 United States, where a preexisting anti-Arab racism evolved from a troublesome but politically immaterial phenomenon into a discursive participant in countless issues of great national import (e.g., the USA PATRIOT Act, invasion of Iraq, elections, support for Israel, homeland security).

Let us look momentarily at the features of this anti-Arab racism, keeping in mind that those features precede 9/11 and were in many cases validated by it. The following observations arise mainly from detailed surveys of American print media from 9/11 through 2004:

- Anti-Arab racism is, as Stockton illustrates, derivative, piggybacking the racism introduced to the New World with the dispossession of Indigenes and the slavery of Africans, and later deriving an origin in the historical animosities at play throughout American history among the white majority and various ethnic groups, including Jews, Hispanics, and Asians;
- Anti-Arab racism, like all sociopolitical phenomena, is also unique, having developed its discrete qualities based on what Hilton Obenzinger (1999) calls a “Holy Land mania” in the nineteenth century, inspired by the travelogues of Protestant missionaries and writers such as Mark Twain, John Lloyd Stephens, William M. Thompson, and George Sandys. Travel narratives to the Arab world have long been tainted by stereotypes inscribed methodologically into supposedly neutral anecdotes of discovery, methodologies still apparent in travel narratives by Geraldine Brooks, Judith Miller, David Pryce-Jones, Jean Sasson, and, infamously, Norma Khouri, the con artist whose tale of an honor killing in Jordan enthralled Western readers until journalist Rana Husseini discovered that Khouri’s bestselling *Honor Lost* was a hoax. These stereotypes, in the nineteenth century and today, merely fulfill the stereotyped expectations of American readers, indicating that the audience’s role in the travel narrative is as crucial as the foreign topographies transmitted to the audience

by a mythically curious adventurer. Historically, this adventurer writes his audience's expectations onto the places he is discovering on the audience's behalf. As Steve Clark notes, "Travel reference is to do with world-coherence: the book projects a world, and it is the ethics of inhabiting that alternative domain that are primarily at stake" (1999, 2);

- Anti-Arab racism now is symbiotic with geopolitics. The mythos of national pride generated by American politicians and marketed as a peculiarly violent patriotism would lose its rhetorical power without the manufacturing of a fear of the irrationally hostile Arab. Although geopolitics has always played a crucial role in both the creation and justification of various forms of American racism, it is more explicitly at play in the legitimization of anti-Arab racism after 9/11. In fact, anti-Arab racism gained a moral validation the moment the American capitalist system came into contact with the resources of the Arab world, just as that racism grew out of a longstanding xenophobia the moment the first Arab arrived in North America. Anouar Majid points out how this economic activity often manifests itself philosophically, writing, "The well-meaning journalists and scholars who think that capitalism is the solution to extremism are in fact prescribing the wrong medication. Capitalism, or its dominant euphemism, globalization, *is* what produces extremism" (2004, 157–58). He further illustrates that globalized paradigms for transcultural interchange fail if we do not challenge the very assumptions on which those paradigms generate their authority: "Yet not to challenge 'globalization' is to nourish the conditions for more violence and terror, not simply along the fault lines of cultures and religions, but across the entire globe and within all nations" (2004, 158). This argument, increasingly common in analyses of American racism, attempts to be a corrective to what Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls "the imperial imagination" (1999, 22). Drawing from Frantz Fanon's notion of the mutual construction of identity, Smith notes that the development of a majoritarian identity can only occur through the marginalization of minorities, an opportunity that Arabs have endowed white Americans in the United States historically and that Arab Americans endow patriotic Americans today;¹¹

- Unlike other forms of racism in the United States, anti-Arab racism finds mainstream expression in nearly all print and visual media. This is not to make the foolish argument that racism against other ethnic minorities is muted or exists only outside the mainstream of the United States, but to identify a distinction among anti-Arab racism and its various counterparts by highlighting issues of access and accountability. Anti-Arab racists—including, one could argue, a great many elected politicians—have access to vital forums in the public sphere, where they frequently air derogatory opinions about Arabs with little, if any, public outcry. In fact, I would argue that airing derogatory opinions about Arabs has actually enhanced the appeal of numerous public figures, among them George W. Bush, John Ashcroft, Daniel Pipes, Ann Coulter, Steve Emerson, Stanley Kurtz, and Bill O’Reilly. This lack of accountability, more evident in discourse about Arabs than any other ethnic group with perhaps the exception of Natives, strengthens what Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor calls “manifest manners.” Vizenor writes, “Manifest manners court the destinies of monotheism, cultural determinism, objectivism, and the structural conceits of savagism and civilization” (1994, vii). The “structural conceits” Vizenor critiques have long consigned Arabs to biologically determined fantasies of Eastern barbarism;
- The biggest progenitors of anti-Arab racism in the United States today are Zionists (both Christian and Jewish), a fact that further enables us to situate anti-Arab racism in the framework of foreign settlement and its attendant manifest manners. While most American Jews subscribe to multiple, competing versions of Zionism, some racist and others liberatory, Christian Zionists have overwhelmingly transformed anti-Arab racism from social phenomenon into theological pathology. We do well to remember that Christian Zionists sustain a Messianism in existence in North America since the days of Cotton Mather and have now translated their covenantal sophistry into a newfangled foreign policy mandate—with, of course, the aid of their Israeli and American Zionist beneficiaries, both willing to ignore their end-times fate for the sake of a fragile alliance catering to the worst aspects of Henry Kissinger’s

realpolitik. This foreign policy mandate would be unfeasible without a profoundly embedded anti-Arab racism accepted as natural by both Zionists and much of the American public;

- Although anti-Arab racism is evident most conspicuously in the eras of modernity and postmodernity, it is also a premodern phenomenon. I noted above that we can trace its origin to the early settlement of North America if we contextualize it within certain expressions of American exceptionalism. Before the establishment of the United States, however, geopolitical interventions off the Barbary Coast can be seen as direct antecedents of modern and postmodern anti-Arab racism. As Majid observes, “Barbary corsairs seriously affected U.S. vital commercial interests and consumed the best minds of the new nation. Adams, Franklin, and Jefferson were authorized by Congress under the Articles of Confederation to deal with the Muslim ‘terrorists,’ as Gaddis Smith recalls the episode” (2004, 155). Noting that “Muslim pirates once were declared enemies of the human race,” Majid does not decontextualize these conflicts from the modern animosities between Americans and Arabs, a sensible approach that allows us to identify more precisely the machinery of both Orientalism and Islamophobia by interrogating the foundations of anti-Arab racism;
- Anti-Arab racism sometimes has the ability to reduce Arabs to tropes that are invoked to rationalize or mystify various political agendas. In today’s globalized marketplace (of both finances and ideas), Arabs often hold an irresistible appeal to those wishing to disguise their own interests as pragmatism or construe them as universally beneficial. This situation has produced contradictory narratives that cannot be comprehended without simultaneously considering the scope and function of anti-Arab racism. If, for instance, a company stands to profit from the occupation of Iraq, that company likely will support the occupation and rationalize the support as commonsensical or altruistic. In so doing, it will either directly or obliquely foster anti-Arab racism. If the same company, however, stands to profit from normalized American relations with the dictatorial Saudi royal family (which is the case with Boeing, Halliburton, Bechtel, ExxonMobil, and numerous

other corporations), then that company likely will romanticize or favorably stereotype Arabs and correspondingly rationalize such portrayals as commonsensical or altruistic. This favorable stereotyping also fosters anti-Arab racism either directly or obliquely.

These variegated features of anti-Arab racism illustrate that it is functionally and philosophically heterogeneous. It is foolish to reduce it merely to ethnic or religious acrimony. Although anti-Arab racism is in many ways transcontextual, as are all forms of social exchange, it can be located most frequently (and fruitfully) in the spaces of American history in which the ideology of common sense competes with claims of commonsensical intuition.

THE UNDERPINNINGS OF NATIONAL PRIDE

About the effects of 9/11 on Arab Americans, Carol Khawly (2004) of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee [ADC] writes,

The horrific terrorist attacks of September 11 have had a severe impact on our nation's traditional openness to immigrants and non-immigrants. Immediately after the attacks, the Arab-American community and those immigrants from the Arab or Muslim worlds experienced an unprecedented backlash in the form of hate crimes, discrimination and various civil liberties violations. . . . The [American] government also instituted a series of discriminatory policies and administrative measures, which targeted specific immigrant communities in the United States, mainly the Arab-American and South Asian communities. (Khawly 2004, 42)

Khawly's report is useful materially, but poorly conceived methodologically. While acts of discrimination against Arabs and South Asians (among others) undoubtedly increased after 9/11, we fail to identify the scope of the problem by employing public relations gambits that assess discrimination solely in the context of the event that induced it. A better approach will question the "nation's traditional openness to immigrants and non-immigrants" and the purportedly "unprecedented backlash" Khawly condemns.

One wonders, first of all, toward which groups the nation's traditional openness to immigrants was directed. Nineteenth-century Irish and Italians? Early twentieth-century Syro-Lebanese? Eastern European Jews? Ethnic Japanese after Pearl Harbor? Vietnamese Americans during the Vietnam War? South Asians and African Muslims in the decade before 9/11? In reality, the American polity has been quite inhospitable to immigrants since the first days of the United States (Behdad 2005). This is not to say that immigrants have not succeeded in various ways in the United States throughout its history or that hospitable acts do not occur frequently; I would like to suggest, instead, that totalizing the history of immigration, particularly immigration from the Southern Hemisphere, as traditionally peaceful distorts not only the historical record, but also any proper understanding of the backlash against Arab Americans that Khawly hopes to end. We are best able to understand anti-Arab racism across sociopolitical boundaries and, more immediately, in a continuum that acknowledges the cyclical orientation of American history. In so doing, we might recognize why anti-Arab racism exists rather than merely where it exists and in what capacity. Our methodology in this quest must begin with the moment Europeans landed in North America and continue until we encounter the latest Israeli settlement constructed illegally in Palestine.

Ania Loomba has made some useful comments on the probity of comprehensive historical analysis. In *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, she writes, "Despite their belief in the social grounding of ideas, many intellectuals are not willing to abandon the notion of a human subject capable of knowing, acting upon and changing reality. But innocence and objectivity do not necessarily have to be our enabling fictions. The more we work with an awareness of our embeddedness in historical processes, the more possible it becomes to take carefully reasoned oppositional positions . . ." (1998, 66). In a slightly different framework, Satya P. Mohanty suggests that "we need to be wary of those overly abstract universalist visions of morality or social justice which focus on only the most general features that the various social groups (or individuals) have in common and exclude consideration of relevant particularities, relevant contextual information" (1997, 235). Loomba and Mohanty both theorize the possibility of meaningful social critique

despite the deterritorialization of meaning wrought by Western postmodernism and poststructuralism, a possibility both authors believe to be viable if advocates of meaningful social critique engage the totality of historical movements rather than enabling notions of disinterestedness or objectivity.

Indeed, I would argue that feigning objectivity in any critique of anti-Arab racism merely strengthens the racism. If cultural criticism throughout the twentieth century has illustrated anything of value, it is that racism and its modes of exploitation are interconnected with a host of ancillary concerns—capitalist voracity, religious discourse, sexual anxiety, historical competition—that both consume and substantiate the racism. Those ancillary concerns have created in the United States a national pride predicated on the convergence of patriotism and a Messianic foreign policy akin to the nineteenth-century European quest for Empire—a national pride, then, that invariably is committed to the proliferation of anti-Arab racism because without that racism, its existence has no justification (and its practitioners no ideological certainty).

We can invoke what may by now be a truism to substantiate this argument: racism is inscribed profoundly in the very idea of foreign settlement and plays out gruesomely where it actually occurs. Given this truism, American economic and philosophical support for Israel's settlement of the Occupied Territories calls into question the United States' commitment to human rights and further implicates it for never having adequately confronted its own history of settlement and dispossession. Anti-Arab racism, therefore, is anything but marginal in the United States; rather, it supplies the United States with a moral validation of manifest manners, and, in turn, converges with numerous phenomena many Americans would consider neutral and mundane (e.g., foreign policy, ethnic profiling, neoliberalism, end times theories).

Two other observations about anti-Arab racism may not yet be truisms, but they are certainly demonstrable and apropos of the issues that Loomba and Mohanty raise: that anti-Arab racism supplied the 2004 U.S. presidential election with its rhetorical presence (in many ways the election was a referendum on anti-Arab racism, a referendum that embedded anti-Arab

racism as a mainstream sensibility—or, worse, a patriotic duty); and that anti-Arab racism, contrary to popular opinion, is in no way confined to the political right in the United States.

One particular example illuminates my first observation. In Wisconsin, a so-called battleground state inundated with campaign ads, the most egregious case of anti-Arab racism arose in a television spot for Republican Senate candidate Tim Michels (who subsequently lost to the anti-racist Russ Feingold). The commercial depicted a generic Arab, with the requisite snarl topped by a mustache, standing on a hill in a wooded area, fishing a rocket propeller from a duffel bag and aiming it at some sort of nuclear plant. Meanwhile, the ominous voiceover warns viewers about the dangers of terrorism and the threat “they” will pose if we do not strengthen the provisions of the PATRIOT Act that allow for unwarranted searches, intensive surveillance, and indefinite detention. I mention this commercial not simply because of its blatant (albeit cartoonish) anti-Arab racism, but because in it Michels focused specifically on Arab Americans, not overseas Arabs, by invoking the PATRIOT Act and depicting what is supposed to be an Arab American attacking, for no discernible reason, an apparently important facility. The Arab American, in other words, will endanger real Americans because his congenital barbarity compels him to irrational violence. Furthermore, the totalized pronoun “they” is exclusionary and imbues American-ness with assumed criteria of whiteness and Christianity for which Arabs do not qualify, even if they are residents or citizens of the United States (the stock terrorist in the ad obviously is a resident or citizen of the United States, because if he is not, Michels’s support of the controversial provisions of the PATRIOT Act would be meaningless).

The commercial also involves a physical performance that is worth analysis. It would be devoid of both moral and rhetorical force without the audience’s recognition that the protagonist is Arab; the recognition is even more persuasive if the protagonist is identified as Arab American, an ethnic positioning that reinforces an inside but alien binary essential to the dissemination of contemporary anti-Arab racism. Yet the means by which a nonspecific audience recognizes the generic protagonist as Arab is particularly noteworthy, for it flirts, to some degree, with biological determinism,

if not advocating it directly. Certain physical characteristics are associated iconically with an invented Arab ethnicity and its constituents' innate behavioral pathology (in this case, terrorism). The generic terrorist can thus be identified as Arab without being named.

My second observation that anti-Arab racism is not confined to the political right also is worth analysis. Racism, as writers from Elizabeth Cook-Lynn to bell hooks have illustrated, is never limited to particular social or discursive movements, nor is it ever rooted in consistent sites of cultural or linguistic production. Any comprehensive survey of popular opinion in the United States over the past decade (a time frame that purposely straddles 9/11) will demonstrate that the blatant anti-Arab racism of the political right is, using a vocabulary appropriate to specific political agendas, reinscribed continually in the discourse, or at least the ethos, of mainstream and progressive media. For instance, leftist liberal publications such as *Dissent*, *Tikkun*, and *MoveOn.org* have been guilty of expressing racist attitudes either in the form of support for Palestinian dispossession or by totalizing all Arabs and Muslims as potential terrorists; or the racism arrives subtly by precluding Arabs from speaking on their own behalf. A similar guilt is shared by mainstream (supposedly liberal) publications such as the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Slate.com*, which, given their corporate obligations, cannot realistically be expected to attack anti-Arab racism when it is so fundamental to the interests of American capitalism (and to the survival of the publications). Of major concern to this essay is the recognition that, in keeping with the seminal work of Louis Althusser and Terry Eagleton, we cannot seriously interrogate racism by attributing it solely to one political ideology without analyzing how the racism is interpolated through a multitude of discourses at the benefit of various ideologies.

Beyond this intercultural observation, we can say that anti-Arab racism has specific historical dimensions that render it unique even as it has been an inheritor of countless tensions and anxieties. Some of those dimensions—travel narratology, Orientalist scholarship, imperialism—have been discussed by others in some detail; the dimension I invariably find most interesting is the relationship of anti-Arab racism with settler colonization,

both in the New World and Holy Land. This relationship indicates that a centuries-old Holy Land mania in the United States not only facilitated what Cook-Lynn (2001) calls “anti-Indianism,” but has allowed the anti-Indianism to evolve into support for a new Messianic conquest that positions today’s Arabs in a fascinating theological continuum. If Natives were the first victims of racism in North America, then Arabs, the new schematic evildoers, are merely the latest to be the first.

THE DISAGGREGATION OF NATIONAL PRIDE

Based on the complexities at play in the first two sections, we might note here that syncretism is a definite—or, more accurately, indefinite—feature of anti-Arab racism. We can best understand that syncretism by examining it in the context of some theoretical propositions about racism and the recent globalization of American society. According to the tenets of contemporary literary theory—or, critical theory, depending on one’s tastes—various sorts of fragmentation paradoxically define an increasingly globalized community: cultural, geopolitical, intellectual, religious, and so forth. That is to say, analysis cannot be so easily compartmentalized into universalistic paradigms because the globalized marketplace has precluded isolationist worldviews even while it nurtures a wide range of economic and political inequality. Racism, itself continually in transit, needs to be contemplated in the framework of this reality. To examine the societal underpinnings of anti-Arab racism, then, is to acknowledge immediately that we have decompartmentalized a seemingly concrete institution. (The terms *attitude* or *mentality* might work in place of *institution*, but I prefer *institution* because it demands the recognition of discursive and originary factors.)

These issues are taken up by Vincent B. Leitch in his book *Theory Matters*. Although Leitch does not concentrate in any specific way on racism, he offers some observations about both theory and society that would assist in any serious exegesis of racism in general and anti-Arab racism in particular. Noting a “wider disorganization characteristic of Western societies in recent decades,” Leitch argues that today’s critical paradigms in turn connote “a form of disaggregation that renders pastiche

arguably our dominant organizational mode” (2003, 5). Leitch alerts us to the reality that just as the world is disorganized, or disaggregated, our analyses of it invariably assume something of a postmodern intertextuality that itself intimates disorganization.

Leitch’s argument, convincing on its own, adopts an interesting element when we render it mobile, as we are able to do when contemplating the origin and evolution of anti-Arab racism. I would argue that anti-Arab racism has pervaded the very discourse of national fulfillment in the United States; as such, it has become a disaggregated institution, or a series of institutions, at play—sometimes subtly but often explicitly—in a host of purportedly tangible certainties, such as patriotism, religious devotion, and the national interest. Since I believe that anti-Arab racism is indispensable to those who disseminate it (on both the right and left), it would be unwise to homogenize its indispensability by attributing it solely to, say, Christian Zionists, when all available evidence suggests that it tacitly recreates itself in countless discourses focused in some way on patriotic obligation. In this sense, the disaggregation underlying anti-Arab racism bespeaks a remarkable versatility. At the very least, anti-Arab racism is common, and in its commonplaces we are faced with the totality of all that is fundamentally American.

The Arab American community fits into these complicated equations with more immediacy than foreign Arabs and non-Arab Americans. The vigilantly synthetic American consciousness would, in its present form, be impossible without the by now tired strategy of demonizing the Other—in this case Arabs, all of whom, according to the totalized pronoun usage common in the United States, are terrorists. On the other hand, the painstakingly manufactured images of an innately terroristic Arab world would be impossible without the dialogically opposed images of all-American communities, which increasingly are being defined according to attitude and behavior rather than simply by ethnicity (although the whiteness underlying this imagery has, by no means, dissipated). Where, then, do Arab Americans fit in this transglobal dialectic? Simply stated, nowhere. For this reason, Arab Americans are the exemplars of globalized disaggregation. Arab American disaggregation facilitates anti-Arab racism, for politicians

invoke Arab Americans to justify draconian legislation intended to curtail civil liberties, but simultaneously to extol the American values that mystify imperialism in the Arab world.

If we trace anti-Arab racism to the settlement of the New World, however, we are confronted with more than disaggregation and unstable dialectics. We are in the presence of tradition. This particular tradition has survived over 500 years and regenerates itself despite repeated predictions of its extinction because racism has always been fundamental to the survival of the American polity. The United States has advanced to the stage at which anti-Arab racism most expediently facilitates the invention and fulfillment of a corporatized national interest. It bears mention that George W. Bush would not have won reelection in 2004 without the existence of anti-Arab racism, and that his opponent, John Kerry, attempted vigorously to compete by manufacturing his own version of anti-Arab racism vis-à-vis the issues of civil liberties, foreign policy, and Israel's settlement of the occupied territories. That Bush's anti-Arab racism rarely was mentioned and Kerry's virtually unseen underscores the fact that it is prevalent to the degree of normalcy today in American society. Indeed, the interests of United States corporations in the Arab world contribute significantly to the globalized economic models that render most sectors of the American left and right complicit in the dissemination of anti-Arab racism.

But how, we might ask, does this racism function morally, the major question I have thus far ignored? Kwame Anthony Appiah offers some insight into this question by highlighting what he considers racism's two primary moral types, extrinsic and intrinsic racism. Extrinsic racists, Appiah writes, "make moral distinctions between members of different races because they believe that the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities" (1992, 13). Extrinsic racists believe that people of different backgrounds acquire certain inborn characteristics that warrant appropriate treatment (or mistreatment)—Arabs, for instance, are born terroristic and therefore need to be treated accordingly, with either wariness or force. Intrinsic racists, on the other hand, "differentiate morally between members of different races, because they believe that each race has a different moral status, quite independent of the moral characteristics entailed by its

racial essence” (14). Intrinsic racists, then, are similar to pluralists as they are defined by David Hollinger; they approach various interactions based on the moral status they assign their own group in opposition to those they imagine of others.

Appiah’s categories, first of all, are neither mutually exclusive nor comprehensive. They do, however, permit us to identify some of the moral underpinnings of anti-Arab racism, which in many ways is similar to a range of better known racist dogmas spanning nineteenth-century cultural anthropology to twentieth-century colonial discourse. We can say, perhaps too obviously, that anti-Arab racism is both extrinsic and intrinsic, an acknowledgment that helps us to disengage it a bit from contemporary notions of patriotic duty or national destiny. Anti-Arab racism often is extrinsic, as evidenced by the inexcusable popularity of the late Rafael Patai’s *The Arab Mind*, a positivistic analysis of Arab behavior not unlike Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein’s infamous *The Bell Curve*, or even Ales Hrdlicka’s field work in Indian Country. Intrinsic racism, however, is no less a factor, as evidenced by the moral valuations employed by American Messianists who have invented a hierarchized moral taxonomy, with the Arab as evildoer and the Jew positioned strangely as the hero who, nevertheless, must ultimately succumb to a preconfigured truth.

Morally, then, anti-Arab racism in the United States is indivisible from both historical influence and sociocultural values. In fact, anti-Arab racism is a key element of cultural production in the United States. We cannot conceptualize it solely as a byproduct of geopolitics or as xenophobic delusion, although both of those factors certainly account to some degree for its existence. If we are to understand anti-Arab racism well enough to actually work effectively to dismantle it, we need first never to apologize for it and next to comprehend it in its totality, extrinsically and intrinsically.

CONCLUSION: NATIONAL PRIDE?

This essay has been framed by analysis of national pride in the United States. Numerous expressions of national pride exist, of course, but the predominant expression, symbiotic with the prevailing version of patriotism, has

rendered both imperialism and Messianism synonymous with American identity. This version of patriotism is preceded by anti-Arab racism and would, therefore, be unfeasible without anti-Arab racism, the unnamed but essential purveyor of the national interest. Anti-Arab racism is itself preceded by historical episodes too great to reduce to pithy interethnic dialectics.

Years ago, Amilcar Cabral noted that “culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated” (1994, 54). Cabral’s conflation of political desire and cultural manifestation is no less true today, even across space and time, which indicates that a moral paradigm of enlightenment indeed creates the reality of American domination of the Arab World, and, to a lesser degree, its marginalization of Arab Americans. For this reason, if no other, Orientalism and Islamophobia matter and demand continued interrogation. But if we are to contextualize Orientalism and Islamophobia within a more dynamic methodology, then *racism* must become part of our vocabulary. Even if the word is not part of the discourse in the United States vis-à-vis Arabs, it is, tacitly but pervasively, part of the culture of discursive authority in the United States vis-à-vis both Arabs and those who are otherwise oppressed as a result of legislation rationalized by the fear of terrorism (a phenomenon now exclusive to the Arab World in corporate American media).

In sum, then, anti-Arab racism in the United States is simultaneously over-used and underdiscussed. It is extrinsic, intrinsic, and, most importantly, ubiquitous. In order to challenge it with any success, we are compelled to analyze notions of patriotism and national pride, which inevitably give anti-Arab racism meaning. Conversely, anti-Arab racism mystifies patriotism and national pride. It is in this spirit that I announce openly that I am unpatriotic, a sentiment that should not in any way be confused with disdain. Rather, it speaks to my rejection of anti-Arab racism. I similarly reject the various origins of anti-Arab racism and, in so doing, reject the American metanarrative of manifest manners. I do so with a sad but necessary acknowledgment: Ridding the United States of anti-Arab racism requires nothing less than a rejection of all that is now considered fundamentally American.



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