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COMMENTARY: CONFRONTING IDEOLOGY: ISLAMOPHOBIA VS. ISLAMIST FUNDAMENTALISM

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On January 29th, 2017, Alexandre Bissonnette, a 27-year-old far-right anti-immigrant and anti-Islam Quebecois, entered into a mosque, killed six Muslims and injured dozens as they prayed at the Centre Culturel Islamique de Quebec. While the incident shocked the Quebecois and Canadian public, it was a proof that Islamophobes are as prone to killing innocent civilians as are militant Islamists.

In her article, "confronting Ideology: Islamophobia vs. Islamist Fundamentalism," Nuzhat Khurshid discusses Islamophobia and Islamist fundamentalism. In doing so, she examines the two ideologies in an historical context in light of the relationship between the West and the East. She categorizes both ideologies as equally racist, supremacist, and conflicting to one another. Looking at Islamophobia in historical perspectives, the author sees the "tradition-modernity" dichotomy as originating from traditional colonialism, and manifesting today by the "ever-expanding needs of capitalism." While the author traces Islamophobia back to the times of Orientalism, I would argue that anti-Mohammedenism dates back to the times of the crusades. Mohammedans were seen as these barbaric and anti-Christ Easterners.

The author also suggests that the 'West' and 'Islamist fundamentalism' are borrowing one another's ideas and tools. Islamophobia might be a reaction to Islamism and, Islamism and Muslims' radicalization might be a reaction to Islamophobia. I call this dichotomy the "co-radicalization process" through which both camps (militant Islamists and far-right Islamophobes) are radicalizing one another (Shepherd, 2017). The importance of understanding this co-radicalization process is key to understanding how the two (Islamists and Islamophobes) feed into one another's radical views. In other words, one's continuity is dependent on the other's existence. One group feeds on the grievances done to the Muslims, and the other on the fear of the threat of these Muslims. Thus, we should give equal attention to both sides. Nonetheless, with the rise of Trump and the European far right parties, Islamophobia is being normalized and institutionalized. It is fair to suggest that Islamophobes, unlike Islamic fundamentalists, enjoy the support of the media and certain politicians.

Notwithstanding their heterogeneous nature regarding their looks, beliefs, and practices, Western Muslims are otherized and 'orientalized' by Western governments, media, and institutions. The author repeatedly emphasized the heterogeneous status of Muslims, which is a reality that Islamophobes seem to ignore. The latter homogenize all Muslims as being barbaric, misogynistic, and a violent pre-modern nation. For instance, Canadian Muslims comprise of Africans, North Africans, Asians, Middle Easterners, European-born Muslims as well as converts (Spalek & Lambert, 2008, p. 264). Their involvement as active citizens is being increasingly framed by positive civic engagement, collaboration with authorities, and counter-radicalization measures. Likewise, communities are gradually seen as important allies for addressing social problems such as violence, youth disengagement, and radicalization, either

through establishing community institutions that host and embrace their youth, or through collaborating with the government in similar initiatives (Tiflati, 2017).

Furthermore, Muslims, particularly visible Muslims, often experience prejudices as a result of exclusionary practices and discourses on identity, values, belongingness to the nation, and secularism. For instance, in Canada, Arabo-Muslims are the group hardest hit by various forms of discrimination and marginalization (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 234). Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry have also increased during the times of the Parti Québécois's Charter of Values in 2013. This Islamophobia emerged through the concept of race when Muslims were perceived negatively by virtue of assumed biological, cultural, and social qualities (i.e. skin colour, country of origin, name). This form of Islamophobia also affects Christian Arabs (e.g. Lebanese) who are mistaken for being Muslims (Oueslati, Labelle & Antonius, 2006, p. 54) based on their names, skin colour, and countries of origin. It is a form of ethnicization and racialization of Islamic identity and of Muslimness. Muslims also experience uneasiness and discrimination when they are called onto speaking for their "religion" and their "people." Their names and skin color play a major role in their 'otherization' and therefore their exclusion.

The author ends her article by emphasizing the role that Islam, as a religion, can play in countering extremism. Amid discussions of religious identity and radical violent action, the role of Islamic ideology in terrorism occupies counter-terrorism research. Through contextualizing radical ideas in scripture, Islamic education can be employed to combat behavioral radicalization (Tiflati, 2016). Opinions are often divided between those who believe that Islam itself is part of the problem and those who believe that it is only a vehicle through which radicalization occurs (Bartlett & Miller, 2012, p. 9). Certain Muslims believe that religious education, despite containing aspects of radical talk and thought, is effective in avoiding the rhetoric of radical actions. In other words, by promoting religious pride along with national pride, reaching out to other communities, and building a shared identity, these schools can promote social coexistence.

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