New Orientalism, Securitisation and the Western Media’s Incendiary Racism

TARIQ AMIN-KHAN

ABSTRACT  The new Orientalism idea is predicated on the clash of civilisations thesis of Samuel Huntington and others—an outlook which has spread swiftly in Western states since September 11. I explore the implications of the new Orientalism and the assertion of white supremacy for diaspora Muslims in Western societies. Its expression in the media in the form of raced and gendered portrayals and demonised cultural representations of Muslims and Islam, with the accompanying assumption of the superiority of Western culture, is identified here as incendiary racism. This racism also underpins the simultaneous vilification of Muslims and Islam, a claim supported by my analysis of media coverage of the ‘niqab debate’, terrorism and sports. Thus, at one level, I analyse the Western media’s depictions. At another, I examine the consequences of securitisation and the Long War, and critically assess the argument that securitisation has existed from time immemorial and represents nothing new—which leads me to challenge its ahistorical assumptions, and the treatment of the securitiser and the securitised as coeval.

Mainstream media outlets, with few exceptions, have been unwilling or reluctant to name white supremacy and/or xenophobia largely as drivers of anti-Muslim racism in Western societies. Similarly, the media have been uncritical in their reportage of US triumphalism, symbolising ‘shock and awe’ and military prowess, which inaugurated the ‘war on terror’’s second front in Iraq in 2003. The ‘war on terror’ began as a mission to right a wrong, but it quickly became a perpetual war, in form only, like the former Cold War. The Pentagon soon acknowledged this reality, and renamed it the Long War. Anti-Muslim sentiment and US triumphalism expressed in the Long War have proceeded hand in hand. Thus, this Long War for Western hegemony has produced a phenomenal rise in anti-Muslim racism in Western societies, which has been considerably aided by the Western media’s coverage of Muslims and the demonisation of Islam along Orientalist lines across

Tariq Amin-Khan is in the Department of Politics and Public Administration, Ryerson University, Toronto, ON, Canada M5B 2K3. Email: takhan@politics.ryerson.ca.
Europe, North America and Australia. These developments have been facilitated by a racially embedded process of securitisation in Western societies that has created the security state, expanded the military–industrial colossus, racialised targeted communities, engendered an intense surveillance matrix, and waged war against militant Islam. Some scholars have argued that securitisation has also affected migrants and refugees in the West, as in the ‘securitisation of migration’. In contrast, a few other scholars from the field of security studies, Stuart Croft most notably, have argued that securitisation is nothing new, and affects not just the securitised; rather, both the securitiser and the securitised are mutually shaped by the process. I offer below a critical assessment of Croft’s position.

The focus of this article is on the historical specificity of the racially embedded process of securitisation. The racialisation of Muslims in the process of securitisation permits Western politicians and many in the mainstream media to target Muslim women, associate Muslim males with terrorism, and criminalise migrants and refugees. One outcome of the process is that some intellectuals and media see Islam as the very antithesis of ‘Western civilisation’. Taken together, these developments have become the signifiers of the new Orientalism.

I will show how the new Orientalism was initially promoted by the likes of Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis and other intellectuals and journalists to serve the political and ideological function of rationalising US imperialism and Western hegemony in the world. However, the economic and strategic motives underlying the targeting of Muslims and Islam, such as the access to, and control of, energy and mineral resources and the monitoring of China’s strategic global ambitions, have been rendered largely invisible in the new Orientalist narratives. I bring up China because it was originally meant to be part of Huntington’s clash of civilisations narrative. I will also mention below migrants and refugees, in the context of discussing xenophobic attacks—intensified since the launching of the Long War—by the new Orientalists. This is to show that the new Orientalism is operationalised, in the first instance, by confronting Muslims and Islam politically and militarily, and by targeting traditional Muslim women as a threat to Western culture, values and ideals. Developments that even mildly alter or challenge the USA’s and West’s economic power, military and cultural prerogatives—such as the arrival of undocumented migrants and refugees on Western shores or the strategic (economic and military) moves of China—are also perceived as threats by the new Orientalists, and the orientalised are then also racialised and made the ‘Other’. Although the gendered manifestations of the new Orientalism mimic some elements of the former version, in the current context their impulse is different. New Orientalism is now symbolised through attacks on Muslim women and the ban on the niqab and hijab, with the simultaneous intention of ‘saving’ such women; it also symbolises the waging of the Long War in Muslim-majority states, alongside the profiling of Muslim youth, and the differential treatment of diaspora Muslims in most Western societies (bearded brown men or ‘British Muslims’ as suspect categories, for example), which reveals the xenophobic and racist underbelly
of this outlook. I will address how media attacks on Muslim women have fuelled white anxiety in the Western world in the aftermath of the Cold War. Thus, I critically analyse media coverage not just of the veil, but also of terrorism trials and media portrayals of Muslims in sports, and of white supremacy more generally. Edward Said has discussed the Western media’s depiction of Arabs and highlighted the notion of ‘Islam as news’. But the more contemporary media coverage of Muslims and Islam is much more racially and ethnically tinged—and not just with the demonising of Arabs. Rather, the slanted coverage is an essentialist dismissal of ‘the Muslim’, which in effect homogenises a very diverse range of Muslim communities: from Africa, West, South, East and Central Asia to the people of the Balkans and diaspora Muslim communities living in the Western world. The concluding section assesses how fear has been reintroduced since the Western state was restructured as the security state, and distinguishes the post-September 11 securitisation process from the ahistoricist abstraction of some security studies analysts.

Orientalism: then and now

At the risk of stating the obvious, Western social scientists historically have vigorously attributed a superior/inferior identity respectively to the ‘Occident’ and the ‘Orient’—with serious social, political and economic consequences as a result for people in the former colonies. In this sense, European historiography has attributed a ‘civilising mission’ to Western Europe vis-à-vis the countries of the ‘Orient’. The purpose behind this mission was initially to deal with the threat of the Ottoman Turks and, later, when Europeans were able to colonise almost the entire globe, the temptation was to see the world develop in Europe’s own image to ensure the non-European world’s subservience and control.

This Eurocentric construction of the non-Western world, the ‘Orient’, was based on three main objectives. The first had to do with the near erasure of aboriginal peoples and the justification of slavery in the Americas. The second was a response to the threat of the Turkish Ottoman expansion into Europe, and the third was the opening of trade routes with India and China, followed by the colonisation of most of Asia, and Africa a century later. In building the edifice of the ‘Occident’, European historians have been so caught up in ‘Hellenomania’ that, in constructing a genealogically pure image of the Greek civilisation as ‘ancestors of the West’, they have actually purged it of its roots in Egyptian, Semitic and various other Southern cultures.

With declining Ottoman influence in Europe by the late 17th century, the theme of Europe’s historical superiority became central to Orientalism and to discussions of the era. As a result of the decline of Turkish influence, the ‘defects’ of the Ottoman state were generalised to all of the great Empires of Asia. During the period of the Enlightenment and the commencement of trade with India the portrayal of Asia as ‘despotic’ laid the basis for a flawed imperial historiography that was designed to serve Western European
imperial interests over India and China. Later, when trade routes with India were opened, the expression of colonial interests was based on an imperial desire to tap into India’s vast wealth. Francois Bernier, a French physician, travelled to Turkey, Persia and pre-colonial India as one of the personal physicians of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. He returned to France to write an extremely disparaging account of India and Turkey, and blamed the ‘declining wealth’ and ‘tyranny’ in India and Turkey on the absence of private property, specifically land. This mangled and incorrect view of India (and also China) was adopted by Hegel in its entirety. Hegel’s Orientalist statements about China’s and India’s stagnant and vegetative existence, especially the notion of ‘oriental despotism’, were to have a remarkable afterlife—and have continued into the present.

Although this outline of the older form of Orientalism, and what has been said about new Orientalism, is from a critical materialist outlook, my purpose in discussing below the incendiary racism of mainstream Western media is to tackle the media’s demonised cultural representations and raced and gendered depictions of Muslims and Islam. The issue of power is implicit in the analysis below of media portrayals of Muslim women, Muslims in sports, the terrorism trial, and the discussion on securitisation. However, an explicit analysis of power in relation to the imperialist cultural and economic domination of the post-colonial world will not be possible here.

With this caveat, it should be acknowledged that the superior/inferior positing of the ‘old’ has been retained in the new Orientalism, but the latter has also been reworked and linked to the civilizational-clash narrative originally espoused by Bernard Lewis and later popularised by Samuel Huntington in his political project *The Clash of Civilizations*. By drawing distinctions between the West and other cultures, Huntington originally (prior to 11 September 2001) identified Muslims and ‘Confucians’ as two groups that will be in a ‘clash’ with the West. In seeking the civilisational dominance of the West, he actually narrowed the ‘inferiorised’ older Orientalist realm of the once broad ‘Other’ (originally, the entire ‘non-European’ world). But this is not to suggest that the historically racialised, oppressed and exploited—the aboriginal and black peoples—have had their conditions of existence favourably altered. Not at all—anti-black and anti-aboriginal racism and exclusion still pervade Western societies. It is just that these two communities have been placed on the backburner, and for the present are not deemed part of the civilisational clash with the West involving Muslims and Islam. Thus, in classic Orientalist style, Huntington considered the trigger for the clash to be the ‘anti-modern’ culture of Muslims (and Chinese)—implying a monolith ‘Muslim culture’ and a singular conception of modernity. This view of Muslims as anti-modern has become ingrained in popular Western attitudes about them and Islam. However, Huntington’s emphasis on culture rested on the universalisation of Western cultural norms or the Westernisation of the world at large—something he has been promoting since his days as a modernisation theorist—without any concerns about the impact of US imperialist foreign policy or the prevalence
of soul-scarring racism. Huntington’s idea of the ‘clash’ no longer remains a mere neo-Orientalist tale once the empire adopts it as a binary, as a fight between ‘good’ and ‘evil’. This binary is also embraced by much of the Western media, which have become a partner with the West in their common cause of obliterating this ‘evil’, while also ensuring the protection of the so-called ‘civilised world’ from the ‘Muslim terrorist’.

The Eurocentrism that underlay the old Orientalist drift was about the universalisation of the European experience, and even led to the adoption of the idea of the European nation-state as the normative model for organising and governing a people or a nation. The new Orientalism has retained the underlying tropes of the older Orientalist forms, but has also given up trying to bring Muslims into the fold of Western thought—as such, a ‘clash of civilisations’ made perfect sense to Huntington. Beyond Huntington the new Orientalism is also about the rise of self-serving and ideologically motivated scholarship in the fields of security studies, terrorism and homeland security. The securitisation process that has ensued since September 11 is neither critically assessed nor questioned. If securitisation is even an issue it is for folks in security studies and in the media who rationalise its assumptions rather than challenge the phenomenon—about which I will say more below. Thus media and academic contributors to the securitisation issue blame much of the insecurity in the world on ‘Islamist terror’ without serious critical examination of US and Western militarism and their imperialist foreign policies. (This is not to say that militant Islam should not be critically assessed, an issue I have tackled elsewhere.14)

Another disturbing feature of the new Orientalism is how it accompanies the rise of white supremacy, which means that, while this article critically examines new Orientalism, xenophobia, and anti-Muslim racism, it is also attentive to the underlying trigger: white culturalism or nationalism.15 The heinous face of white supremacy and its underlying extreme ethno-nationalism was highlighted in the July 2011 massacre in Norway. Although most of the people massacred were white Norwegians, Anders Behring Breivik targeted the largely young members of the Liberal Party to ‘teach them a lesson’ for being ‘soft’ on Muslims and for not knowing how the latter are ‘taking over’ Europe. His hatred was such that he appeared exasperated even with ‘his fellow far right wing bloggers [and saw them as] too accommodating to Europe’s Muslims’.16 More recently the 5 August 2012 massacre of Sikhs in their Oak Creek, WI gurdwara (temple) by a reportedly white supremacist US Army veteran is a most unfortunate reminder that xenophobia and white supremacy affects a whole range of racialised communities in Western diasporas.17 Further, white supremacists, as perpetrators of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant racism and hysteria reject multiculturalism and use fear and xenophobia to raise the alarm about the ‘Islamic peril’: the imagined demographic threat to European and Western societies and their values from the ‘hordes’ of backward and liberty- and ‘democracy-hating’ Muslims. This outlook is also purveyed in mainstream Western media, and has to be viewed as an expression of incendiary racism. In the present context incendiary racism is meant to cause harm to Muslims.
and Islam by enabling an inflammatory, inferiorising and demonising anti-civilisational portrayal of them in the Western media. It is furthered by white supremacist political and media personalities who insist: ‘they hate democracy’: Muslims erode British, Canadian, French, Dutch and American ‘values’; ‘their’ culture poses a threat to ‘our way of life’; and Muslims pose a demographic threat to Western societies. Incendiary racist attacks are also made against the ‘waves’ of ‘illegal’ migrants to Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA.

The most violent and extreme form of white cultural nationalism, expressed in Breivik’s massacre of Norwegians, did not occur in isolation, nor can it be simply dismissed as the work of a ‘madman’ or a ‘lone wolf’, as suggested by many in the media. His actions were deliberately racist and ideologically motivated attacks against Muslims, Islam, and their ‘supporters’—who in Breivik’s mind were part of the Norwegian Liberal Party. Apart from Norway, Europe has many white supremacist groups and even political parties, most notably Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, whose party has even gained state power. Another example is the rabidly racist English Defence League (EDL), which has experienced a meteoric rise in Britain largely by spewing anti-Muslim hate and xenophobia. The Southern Poverty Law Centre (SPLC) has ‘counted 1018 active hate groups in the US in 2011’; SPLC’s definition of ‘hate group’ is: those groups having ‘beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics’.

Niqab: media representation and harm infliction

The niqab has come to represent a contradictory symbol; the divide is between those who embrace it and others, such as the Orientalists, who vehemently reject it. Caught between these polarities are also Muslims and others who would wish to question the patriarchal submission underlying the idea of the niqab, but also feel silenced or defend the right to veil in the face of racist attacks against niqab-wearing women. It is unfortunate that the debate about the patriarchal roots of certain orthodox Muslim cultural practices, such as the veil, which are in some cases similar to orthodox Christian and Jewish practices, has been muzzled as community members, anti-racist activists and scholars take on the immediate task of confronting the heightened state of xenophobia and widespread racism and violence against Muslim women in the West. Likewise, during discussions of how the veil is related to resisting occupation and colonialism, such as its use during the Algerian national liberation struggle against France, the veil conveniently becomes linked with terrorism to force the unveiling of Muslim women. The complex reasons for wearing the niqab or hijab are also not fully addressed in discussions, because the Muslim communities feel under siege, and the woman’s right to wear the veil or not becomes paramount. In this context I will address the racist attacks on niqab-wearing women, as the veil has become a convenient scapegoat for the Orientalist construction of Islam and gender in most Western states.
France led the charge in 2004 by banning the headscarf or any form of head covering in public schools, ostensibly to protect its laïcité ideals; this was followed by Switzerland banning minarets on mosques. These actions in turn prompted the move to ban the niqab in public places; Belgium enshrined this ban in law on 23 July 2011, imposing a fine and seven-day imprisonment for offending women. Earlier, on 11 April 2011, France had banned the niqab amid protests from Muslims living in the country. The penalty for wearing the veil in public in France carries a fine, which is higher for those compelling the woman to wear the veil (symbolising the French state as the woman’s ‘saviour’). The ‘offender’ may be asked to take citizenship lessons; she could also face a possible investigation. The Netherlands has also contemplated a ban on the veil and, in March 2010, the Canadian province of Quebec introduced a bill to force women to uncover their faces in order to receive government services or when entering government offices, public schools and publicly funded institutions. The infantilising and criminalising of women is a trope that Orientalists have relied on historically—whether to ensure their submission or push the ‘civilising mission’. Although the historical use of this trope has been modified in its contemporary application under the new Orientalism, the attacks against the niqab and the hijab have neither relented nor have they been restricted to the French-speaking world.

The slanted and gendered portrayal of the Muslim woman marks her both as a target of racist vitriol and as an object to be rescued from herself and her faith. Muslim women wearing a niqab, hijab, or chador have been the subject of a schizophrenic Orientalist attitude: at one level women have faced vehement racist attacks from Orientalists in the media and racists on the street; at another, some Western politicians, military, police, academics and others in the justice system want to ‘save’ the Muslim woman from Muslim men and the clutches of patriarchy.

Beyond the state-directed moves in France and elsewhere, Britain’s media has also not been far behind in targeting Muslim women. In an incendiary racist move Jack Straw, the then British Labour government’s Home Secretary, penned his weekly column for the Lancashire Telegraph in October 2006, calling on Muslim women in Britain to remove their niqabs, ostensibly to help community relations. ‘His comments were moved to the front page under the headline “Straw in plea to Muslim women: take off your veils”’. Expanding on the earlier explanation of incendiary racism: its thrust in the media is largely inflammatory and the harm underlying incendiary racist actions is meant to collectively humiliate, demonise and inflict pain (and more) on the racialised ‘Other’ in society through xenophobic and bigoted attacks by ideological bullies who feel secure in their power to act, inferiorise and harm this ‘Other’ without any fear of recrimination or repercussion. By provoking hatred and contempt, incendiary racism through the media reduces the targeted group to a humiliating caricature. Straw’s article sparked a debate in the British media, largely supporting his position. Some of the contributors were from Straw’s own Labour Party, including David Blunkett who, ‘in his column in the Sun a week after Straw’s comments […]
reiterated the views of Brown and Blair about “our way of life”, spuriously linking the veil to the issue of immigration in a call for respect for British values.27

In calls for the protection of ‘our way of life’ or ‘our values’, the niqab serves as a foil for the Orientalist framing of Muslim women’s inferiorised identity. The veil is viewed as an oppressive symbol within the Western imagination, thereby enabling claims to Western conceptions of gender, identity and culture as ‘superior’. This reading of Straw’s article finds support in Al-Saji’s notion of the ‘negative mirror’:

[the hijab, niqab or burqa] provide the foil or negative mirror in which Western constructions of identity and gender can be positively reflected. It is by means of the projection of gender oppression onto Islam, specifically onto the bodies of veiled women, that such mirroring takes place.28

The niqab, given the different Western contexts, symbolises the merger of xenophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, which Sivanandan has termed ‘xeno racism’.29

The media’s new Orientalist incendiary racism

The mainstream Western media has played a pivotal role in the spread of incendiary racism within a new Orientalist mould. Prasun Sonwalkar rhetorically asked: ‘Did “the Other” ever get good press?’ and then proceeded to point out that, soon after 9/11, even a largely progressive newspaper like the Guardian produced a supplement ‘with a dark veil in the backdrop and with the bold headline: “How much do we know about them?”’.30 In contrast, Brian Whittaker, the Middle East Editor of the same newspaper, analysed how Muslims became the focus of British newspapers’ coverage, in both British and international contexts, during the first 12 months after September 11. He found a jump of 658% in the Sun, with the lowest increase of 219% in the Express.31 Whittaker’s analysis is an exception; the themes of terrorism and the demographic threat of an exploding Muslim population have been more common, supplanted in the media by an extremely exaggerated focus on the attire of a tiny minority of Muslim women in the West. This focus has an enabling function; it allows the media and politicians to peddle their versions of incendiary racism.

Since September 11 past efforts to modulate Islamophobia have been abandoned in Europe; it has since been open season of incendiary racism against Muslims, Islam and other racialised migrants and refugees. Across the Atlantic the mainstream media coverage can also be viewed through the lens of incendiary racism. Ervand Abrahamian conducted a critical investigation of the US media coverage of Muslims and Islam, and concluded that the ‘mainstream quality media [...] framed September 11 within the context of Islam, culture and civilisations [...] and explained the crisis by relying on the thesis of Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations’.32 He also suggested that, in targeting and demonising Muslims and Islam, the media
‘unanimously adopted [...] Huntington’s own ingrained premises’, which may have more relevance to Edward Said’s Orientalism than many would like to admit. He went on to say, ‘one could argue that seeing the world in large civilisational blocs, the USA is still trying to preserve hegemony over Europe’, and that ‘journalists and their readers find it easier to grasp Huntington’s broad [Orientalist] brush strokes than to examine cumbersome empirical details’. Abrahamian’s illuminating article highlights two important points: the absence of discussion about Palestine, even by those who have been critical of the US media coverage since September 11, and how ‘religious–cultural explanations’ have taken the place of an analysis of power, US foreign policy, and the Long War of occupation being waged in the Middle East. Precisely by ignoring the latter issues, the mainstream media demonstrate that they are not introspective about incendiary racism.

As a result, incendiary racist coverage has even affected the field of sports. By analysing the media coverage surrounding the unexplained death of Bob Woolmer, the white British coach of the Pakistani cricket team, in his hotel room in Jamaica during the Cricket World Cup, Dominic Malcolm et al demonstrated how the media reports were loaded with Orientalist imagery. They examined 768 media stories about the incident in nine British dailies over a period of three months—until Woolmer’s death was finally ruled to be of natural causes by a high-powered team of investigators. The authors concluded that the media coverage was a textbook example of Said’s description of the Orientalist traits that are usually ascribed to the orientalised: violent, irrational and backward; further suggesting ‘that a particular set of stereotypes are not only pervasive but perhaps particularly pronounced in media coverage of sport-related social issues, especially post-9/11’.35

Similarly, the well publicised 2006 arrest of 17 Muslim youths and one older man, labelled the ‘Toronto 18’, exemplifies the media’s rush to judge those arrested on terrorism-related charges—effectively pursuing the incendiary racist path and abandoning the ‘presumption of innocence’ principle. Information in the public domain reveals that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) cast the net so wide that seven young people had their lives needlessly interrupted and adversely affected—the charges against them were eventually dropped, but before this happened they were severely traumatised by being incarcerated for a considerable period. The case was complicated by the fact that two RCMP moles were in the midst of the Toronto 18 from the very beginning, and could very possibly have been charged with entrapment—urging those convicted to pursue their plans through suggestions and encouragement—had the case been tried under ordinary law. But as the trial of the Toronto 18 was the first case under Canada’s new Anti-Terrorism Act, the threshold of conviction was much lower; of the 18 arrests, 11 young men were sent to trial and convicted. John Miller and Cybele Sack undertook a media audit of the Toronto 18’s coverage in four major Canadian newspapers during the period 3 June to 5 August 2006, which they describe as the ‘arrest period’, when the 18th suspect
was finally arrested. They examined 225 columns, editorials and letters to the editor and concluded that:

a significant portion of the published commentary raised unreasonable public alarm, cast suspicion on the followers of a major religion and impugned Islam itself, failed to subject the allegations of the Canadian government and security officials to rigorous scrutiny, and predicted guilt before the suspects were able to exercise their democratic rights to a fair trial.

Reading the mainstream media coverage of the ‘arrest period’ one finds that the Canadian media did not hesitate, in fact rushed, to depict an Orientalist version of Muslims and Islam. Miller and Sack suggest that in the ‘rush to judgment’, opinion columnists and editorial writers declared ‘homegrown’ terrorism to be a fact, and printed dire warnings:

Some headlines during the first four days said things like ‘The jihadis among us’ (National Post), ‘Your neighbour, the terrorist’ (Ottawa Citizen), ‘Generation Jihad: Angry, young, born-again believers’ (The Globe and Mail), and ‘Immigration, diversity under the microscope’ (Toronto Star). Newspapers published almost as many opinion articles as they carried news reports...the frames of ‘moral panic’ and ‘homegrown [terror]’ [used to evaluate the media coverage] imply that Canadians have something to fear and that Muslim terrorists are in our midst. Both can be termed ‘alarmist’ because they have the potential of causing attitudinal or legislative changes that penalise the target group.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, upon learning about the arrest of the Muslim youths, suggested that the plot stemmed from a hatred of democracy, and stated: ‘we are a target because of who we are and how we live, our society, our diversity and our values—values such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law; the values that make Canada great’. The Globe and Mail columnist Christie Blanchford, relying on incendiary racist tropes, went one step further, contemptuously bashing Muslim women:

The accused men are mostly young and mostly bearded in the Taliban fashion. They have first names like Mohamed, middle names like Mohamed and last names like Mohamed. Some of their female relatives at the Brampton courthouse who were there in their support wore black head-to-toe burkas (now there’s a sight to gladden the Canadian female heart: homegrown burka-wearers darting about just as they do in Afghanistan), which is not a getup I have ever seen on anyone but Muslim women.

A columnist for Toronto’s leading daily, the Toronto Star, Rosie DiManno, made even more outrageous racist characterisations, condemning an entire generation of Muslim youth, while instilling fear in her readers to make her point:

Here is your war: Be sickened. Be frightened. Be angry. But don’t you dare be shocked [...]. These accused wanted, if intelligence experts are correct
In reference to the Toronto 18 Mark Steyn, another columnist who is known for his consistent anti-Muslim vitriol and Orientalist characterisations of Muslims and Islam, questioned whether Muslims can ever be loyal to Canada. In 2006 Steyn, along with Barbara Amiel and other writers, wrote a series of articles about Islam for *Maclean’s* magazine; these did not just orientalise Muslims and Islam, but were openly venomous, demonising and ridiculing the community as a whole. In response to this series of articles, three law students filed human rights complaints against *Maclean’s* magazine with the Ontario and British Columbia Human Rights Commission (HRCS). Although the British Columbia HRC accepted the complaint, it did not rule in favour of the law students. In contrast, the Ontario HRC did not accept the complaint, citing the Ontario Human Rights Code (which does not give the Commission the jurisdiction to deal with the content of magazine articles through the complaints process), but took the unprecedented step of issuing a public statement on its website about, among other issues, racism and Islamophobia in the media. This case highlighted the media’s incendiary racist attitude on the issue of freedom of expression. When readers, scholars, and writers began to question whether *Maclean’s* insensitivity towards Muslims had crossed a line, the mainstream print media, in solidarity with *Maclean’s*, began to move the goalposts. The media’s initial response was that the human rights complaint fell under the purview of media censorship; when the public responded that the issue actually had to do with equitable access, the media’s new tune was that the law students were taking advantage of ‘free’ legal remedies, such as those available through the HRC, while an organisation like *Maclean’s* was forced to spend thousands of dollars to defend itself. Finally, *The Globe and Mail* argued that the media have a ‘right to offend’. Throughout all this defensive and aggressive posturing, editorials and opinions presented by the mainstream media included almost nothing about Muslim bashing and racism present in Canada.

**Securitisation and its consequences**

The Long War may be a war against militant Islam, but it is also against those Muslim-majority states that do not accept the empire’s diktats. An analysis of the rise of militant Islam is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to note that militant Islamist and Salafist groups have become a powerful social force in many Muslim-majority states and have violently confronted the post-colonial state in pursuit of their dogmatic and narrow doctrinaire ideas. However, the current resistance of militant Islam against the USA and its NATO allies cannot be seen as
anti-imperialist, as the objective of anti-imperialism is the social and economic liberation of imperialised society—this seems contrary to the goals of militant Islam.49

US and NATO military commanders have used fear in trying to defeat militant Islamists. Reliance on this tactic remains, even though it has been unsuccessful in instilling fear among Afghani and Iraqi Islamists—despite their dehumanised and brutalised treatment. The Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib were subjected to this inhuman treatment, which still continues with some modification in Guantanamo Bay, while the USA and NATO take no responsibility for the deaths of unarmed innocent children, women and men by their militaries or by pilotless aerial drone attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen, among other Muslim-majority states. WikiLeaks’ release of footage showing a US military helicopter deliberately targeting two unarmed Iraqi journalists working for Reuters, along with other men and two children, is a poignant reminder of how little the lives of the orientalised are valued. 50

Similarly, Western politicians and the media have also used fear to justify the increased suppression of due process, introduction of anti-terror laws, and heightened use of surveillance and intimidation in their respective states. The invocation of fear during the Long War parallels the recent cold war history. The USA used fear—of the ‘red menace’—to construct the security state through the enactment of the 1947 National Security Act that also created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Likewise, the fear of the ‘Muslim terrorist’ in late 2001 led to the enactment of the Patriot Act and the US security state propelled the notion of securitisation, which was universalised beyond the borders of the USA to Canada, the rest of the Western states and to key client post-colonial states, in order to launch the war on terror. However, as noted earlier, the current era of securitisation is at a historically unique moment. While it may incorporate some old Orientalist tropes, and some ideological and imperialist motives may be similar to those of the cold war period security state, there is little relationship to the latter.

During the Cold War’s post-McCarthy era although the US security state guided its militarism, fed the arms race by strengthening the military–industrial complex, and presided over its imperialist expansionism for world hegemony, Western societies actually became more open. Due process was generally respected, movements for civil rights, women’s liberation, gay rights and democratic change generally blossomed, and anti-democratic practices and the high-handedness of Western political leaders were broadly challenged. In its current specificity the security state and securitisation have been enormously strengthened by the suppression of dissent and civil liberties with the corresponding expansion of anti-democratic practices and intrusive surveillance within Western states. Simultaneously xenophobia and societal/anti-Muslim racism have been fuelled by the Western media’s incendiary racism. The USA and its NATO allies have persistently violated the sovereignty of many Muslim-majority states at will, through aerial drone attacks, intrusive surveillance and military occupation.51
This focus on militarisation and securitisation has also allowed the field of security studies to proliferate. Scholars in this field appear to be on a self-fulfilling mission of promoting securitisation, given the number of journal articles that are silent on the invasiveness of surveillance and the anti-democratic character of security regimes. A recent book by Stuart Croft, however, was expected to provide critical intervention on security issues and securitisation.\(^52\) It turns out that, despite Croft’s desire to broaden the discussion of identities within particular time and space, he ends up essentialising identity without analysing power or the role of dominant identities. He also does not examine imperialist domination and racialisation; in effect he reinforces securitisation as social constructions rooted immemorially in history, which he claims have a mutual impact on both the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ (p 92). To treat the securitiser and the securitised as coterminous and to contend that they are mutually affected by security regimes means that there is no analysis of power or understanding of powerlessness and racialisation. Similarly, to claim as Croft does, that the ‘securitisation of Islam is not a unique event’ as it is just another social reconstruction among hundreds in history, albeit of a different ‘Other’ (p 259), is to be unmindful of the colonial legacy and the consequences of current imperialist forays in Muslim-majority states, as well as to ignore the deep racism and xenophobia prevalent in Europe and North America. Croft’s ahistoricist views on the subject allow him to maintain that, just because Catholics suffered during the formation of Britain and the Irish through British imperialism, and that the Dutch, Germans and Jews were targeted in Britain, it is now the turn of Muslims to also join the throngs of oppressed people (pp 39–44, 74, 259)—which is indeed a very disturbing rationale for the prevalence and intensification of xenophobic oppression and violence in society. This enables him to conveniently opt out of interrogating securitisation, a field in which he is completely invested. In effect, Croft’s approach ‘normalises’ the securitisation of the ‘Other’ as an uneventful ahistorical phenomenon. And the most that he can then do is to undertake a proper post-structuralist textual analysis of xenophobic writings against Muslims and Islam by British ‘public intellectuals’, politicians and religious leaders, and compare them to the atrocities against the Catholics and the Irish or the ridiculing of the Dutch—to further reinforce his historicist approach (see chapters 1, 5 and conclusion). The effect of such an undertaking, while it recognises that securitisation creates xenophobic responses from the dominant community, is to make a mockery of due process for the securitised and to remain inattentive on how their rights are consistently trampled by the coercive arm of the Western state. But Croft is not interested in challenging the notion of securitisation at the level of the state; rather, he seeks merely to move beyond the Copenhagen School of security studies to offer a theory of securitisation that is more encompassing of identities, time and space (see pp 77–91). In other words, he wants theory to account for the role of influential non-state actors, and media and cultural elites, as well as the military and the police (which are really part of the state’s coercive arm) in shaping the securitisation regimes (pp 70–85). Croft’s penchant for conceiving the development of the
securitisation process as outside the state (through the actions of individuals) is so overwhelming that he dwells at length in his text on the notion of ‘ontological security’—the idea that the nature of the security of the self is effectively a ‘relationship between identity, narrative and security’, which is ‘achieved [almost reflexively] through the creation of a series of relationships performed through everyday routines and practices’ (p 17). But the nature of this type of framing completely omits the role of the state and focuses mainly on his notion of ‘ontological security’, which becomes a coping mechanism for the individual to deal with the ‘benefit’ or the fallout from securitisation. This approach therefore permits Croft to treat the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ as coeval, and to exclude the security state and its securitisation policy from a critical gaze. I have argued here that securitisation is a historically specific process, a post-cold war phenomenon that emerged as the US model of the security state was universalised in the aftermath of the September 11 events, and the paradigm was emulated by all Western, and some key client Muslim-majority states. Furthermore, I have also tried to show that racialisation is deeply embedded in, and a concomitant part of, securitisation through discussions on the niqab, sports, terrorism suspects, and incendiary racism. To ignore racialisation as a process of dehumanisation and to treat it merely as a form of ‘othering’ (an oxymoron that inoculates the dominant group from absorbing the suffering of the ‘Other’) authorises writers like Croft and others in his field of security studies to focus on deepening securitisation without really problematising the role of the Western nation-state and the media in the ongoing subjugation and xenophobic treatment of racialised communities.

In addition to the dehumanised treatment of the Muslim and people who ‘look like Muslims’ in European and North American societies and by the US and NATO militaries, racialised immigrants and Muslims are made scapegoats for Europe’s social ills, and are even blamed for the continent’s economic woes. Journalists and writers—Mark Steyn, Barbara Amiel, Melanie Phillips and Robert Spencer—have referred to the ‘demographic threat’ of Muslims overwhelming Europe and other Western countries in apocalyptic terms, and have even developed a new term for their characterisation: ‘Eurabia’.53 Given this attitude, and as long as some of the incendiary racist media coverage peddles anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim vilification and fables about ‘Eurabia’, hatred and the new Orientalism will eat away at European and North American societies in the Long War era.

Notes
1 In using the terms the ‘the West’, ‘Western’, ‘Muslims’ and ‘Islam’, I have no intention of being reductive or to homogenise the diversity of European, North American, and Australasian societies or the incredible diversity within Muslims and Islam. The terms as used here convey the two polarities and, at times, are convenient identifiers of the subject parties.
6 Ibid, pp 390, 460–468.
10 I use the hyphenated form of the term, post-colonial, not in a postmodern/poststructuralist sense; rather, as a way to ‘periodise from the colonial era the decolonisation of the former colonies [and the formal ending of colonial rule] only to be reinscribed by dependency, subordination, and underdevelopment of post-colonial societies’. See T Amin-Khan, The Post-Colonial State in the Era of Capitalist Globalization: Historical, Political and Theoretical Approaches to State Formation, New York: Routledge, 2012, p 1.
26 Khiabany & Williamson, ‘Veiled bodies—naked racism’, p 70.
27 Cited in ibid, p 74.
28 Al-Saji, ‘The racialization of Muslim veils’, p 877.
33 Ibid, 534.
40 Cited in Miller & Sack, ‘How the Canadian government manipulated the media’, p 1.
42 Cited in ibid, p 289.
43 Cited in ibid, pp 288–289.
46 Ibid.
47 It should be said that incendiary racism in the pages of Maclean’s was again an issue in its 10 November 2010 article, which targeted Chinese students for their high enrolment in Canadian universities, especially the University of Toronto. The article was originally entitled, ‘Too Asian?’, but because of protests from the Chinese community and anti-racist activists, it was re-titled: ‘The enrollment controversy’. See S Findlay & N Köhler, ‘Too Asian?’, Maclean’s, 10 November 2010, at http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/11/10/too-asian/, accessed 2 October 2011.
52 Croft, Securitizing Islam.

Note on contributor

Tariq Amin-Khan is Associate Professor in the Department of Politics and Public Administration, Ryerson University, Toronto. His research interests include the post-colonial state, the security state, capitalist globalism and imperialism, political and militant Islam, South Asian state and society, and the comparative study of multiculturalism. His recent book is The Post-colonial State in the Era of Capitalist Globalization: Historical, Political and Theoretical Approaches to State Formation (2012), which is also available as: Genealogy of the Post-Colonial State in India and Pakistan (Lahore: Vanguard Books).