THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF MUSLIM IDENTITY AS AN ENEMY

‘OTHER’ IN AMERICA

by

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B.A., University of Colorado at Denver, 2008

A thesis submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Colorado in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Political Science

2013
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November 5, 2013
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Thesis directed by Senior Instructor Lucy McGuffey

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that there is a discursive construction of Muslim identity in the United States which is implicit and informs our understanding without being critically examined. I utilize the theoretical construction of Edward Said which he called *Orientalism* to argue that this identity construction can be traced back over half a millennia in European colonial discourse. I focus specifically on the recent Muslim Radicalization hearings by Congressperson Peter King to argue that this discourse is alive and well and taking place in a center of power in our government. While there is a counter narrative that takes place in the hearings it is largely ignored by those who are replaying an Orientalist narrative because a fundamental part of that discourse is a disinterest in facts. I conclude by arguing that this discursive construction needs to be recognized and challenged because it has real world consequences.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Lucy Ware McGuffey
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Michael Hill for using his resources on Capitol Hill to obtain transcripts for the King Hearings when they were still yet unavailable from Congress.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Discourse is a regulated system of producing knowledge within certain constraints whereby certain rules have to be observed… To think past it, to go beyond it, not to use it, is virtually impossible because there's no knowledge that isn't codified in this way about that part of the world.” –Edward Said (Foundation, 2005, p. 10)

In the United States there is a discourse that constructs the identity of Muslims in ways that are problematic. Edward Said argues that this construction of Muslim identity is so implicit in our discourse that we are not aware of how it influences our understanding to the extent that it is frequently repeated ad nauseam, goes unquestioned, and unnoticed. This thesis will examine the construction of Muslim identity, as replayed in recent Congressional hearings, utilizing the theoretical framework of Edward Said.

Beginning on March 10, 2011, Congressman Peter King of the third district in New York began a series of hearings in the House Homeland Security Committee on Islamic terrorist radicalization, which focused on the Muslim American community. The hearings stimulated a lot of mudslinging among political pundits in the media about the efficacy and intent of the hearings. Two questions central to this debate were: 1) did these hearings unfairly target the Muslim community as being responsible for Islamic radicalization and to some extent for terrorism and 2) were these hearings helpful in combating radicalization in the Muslim community or would they harm this effort? From these two initial questions a number of queries, observations, and accusations were

1 The term 'radicalization' is not well defined by the sources used for the purposes of this thesis; it will therefore be defined generically as a person or organization with a propensity toward terroristic violence.
posited, with a myriad of concerns that were often difficult to untangle from one another. A few examples include: questions about how and to what extent the Muslim community cooperated with law enforcement; accusations of association with radical or terrorist elements against individuals, mosques, and other organizations; the recounting of incidents of terrorism, and in some instances the assignment of blame; and so on.

All of these developments deserve attention, but putting aside the details of this or that question, incident, or accusation, there are themes that permeate these hearings and the larger debate which originated much earlier in Western discourse. These themes include broad questions regarding the view that the dominant Western culture has of other peoples and cultures. This view broadly includes notions of American exceptionalism, colonization theory, critical race theory, and constructivist foreign policy, to name a few. In short, understanding the meaning of and construction of the identity of the 'other' in our discourse requires us to ask difficult questions pertaining not just to their identity, but as importantly to the core of our own identity. It is imperative that we understand how we construct the identity of the 'other' because when we construct the 'other' as unknowable, disposable, or as an enemy, history has shown that this can result in horrific consequences up to and including genocide. To that end, this thesis will examine the themes in Western discourse with regard to Islam, Muslims, the Middle East going back centuries, with a particular focus on the construction of difference and how that plays into narratives about Islamic violence, radicalization and terrorism, to ascertain to what extent these themes are replayed by Peter King’s hearings. However, I must first address what others have said about the hearings in order to better explain how my approach is different.
CHAPTER II

MEDIA COVERAGE

With the exception of an article by Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria, which I will address at the end of this section, most of the coverage of these hearings has been done by political pundits and media talking-heads, the majority of whom have dealt with the hearings in a blunt way. While the liberal side has repeatedly compared Congressman King to Joseph McCarthy and his infamous hearings on communist infiltration in the US government, conservatives have repeatedly suggested that these hearings are necessary because our "politically correct" discourse about Islam and American Muslims has put this country at risk of another terrorist attack.

Both of these approaches treat the issue as a matter of law enforcement with the crux of the question being the origin of terrorist threats and how best to combat them. Do threats emanate from the Muslim community as a whole or from individuals? The answer to this question dictates an approach: do we look at individuals or to the Muslim community as a whole? King's hearings focus on the community as a whole. The proponents of this approach argue that being nice about the issue by assuming that the Muslim community as a whole bears no responsibility for terrorism increases the chance of an attack. In contrast, opponents of King's approach argue that it vilifies the Muslim community and makes it less likely that they will cooperate with law enforcement. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of articles taking both sides of this dichotomy and some with other approaches entirely. Many of these articles consist of pundits arguing back
and forth amongst themselves with the seeming intent of scoring points. I have chosen a handful of online newspaper articles that do a fair job of representing the discourse on this subject in the media. I will begin with a few liberal approaches to this subject and follow with a few conservative perspectives.

On the liberal side of the debate, Mike Honda (2011) argues that the hearings are a part of a larger discourse in this country that treats Muslims as the enemy. Honda compares this process to the Japanese internment in the US during WWII. As a small child, Honda, his family, and over a hundred thousand Japanese Americans were locked up in internment camps. Honda reports that:

We were treated like cattle in those camps. Never mind the fact that we were born in America. Never mind the fact that we were patriotic Americans and law-abiding citizens. Never mind the fact that we were constructively contributing to the American economy. Despite all this, hundreds of thousands of Americans suddenly became the enemy at the height of the war, with no cause, no crime and no constitutional protections. (Honda, 2011)

Honda argues that the same kind of rhetoric is being used to demonize Muslims based on their religion rather than their ethnicity. He concludes that for this reason the hearings are morally and strategically wrongheaded: morally because it goes against American values and strategically wrong because alienating the Muslim community will make it less likely that they will cooperate with authorities in combating terrorism.

Another liberal approach is that of Ryan Lenz of the Southern Poverty Law Center (2010). Lenz’s concern is that the approach of King's hearings may increase violent attacks against Muslims. Lenz argues that King is "known for his incendiary remarks about Muslim Americans." For example, King stated in an interview with Politico that "we have too many Mosques in this country. There are too many people
sympathetic to radical Islam." King later clarified that this quote was taken out of context and that he only meant that too many mosques do not cooperate with law enforcement.²

Ibrahim Hooper from the Center for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) "disputed King’s claim that American Muslims do not cooperate with police agencies. Hooper said several law enforcement bodies, including the FBI, have thanked Muslim communities for their assistance. He said King’s history of harsh comments against Muslims undermines the congressman’s credibility to make such claims. “He doesn’t come to this issue with clean hands,” Hooper said. “He comes with the strong perception of bias and an anti-Muslim agenda, and that’s exactly what we don’t need at a time when anti-Muslim sentiment is skyrocketing” (Lenz, 2010).

Congressman Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), a vocal opponent of King’s hearings, expressed concern that they would incite fear and prejudice in our national conversation in a way not seen since Joseph McCarthy's communist witch hunts. Ellison explained:

“What did Joe McCarthy do? He identified people he thought were subversives and then used his congressional gavel to hold hearings to drag people in. He ruined a lot of reputations and injected a tremendous amount of fear in our country” (Lenz, 2010).

On the conservative side of the debate, Andrew C. McCarthy of the National Review also criticized King's hearings, instead for not going far enough in criticizing Islam. McCarthy argued that it is not a perversion of Islam that radicalizes Muslims, but rather that Islam itself is a radical anti-Western ideology whose natural offspring is radicalized terrorists. Thus, McCarthy is thankful for King's efforts in exposing Islam as a radical ideology, but fears that by not going far enough the hearings will not accomplish

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² King was not taken out of context; he did in fact say that there were "too many mosques in this country." He has adamantly denied this despite the fact that the interview was widely available online at the time of the hearings. King may have misspoken, but he was not taken out of context. See: http://www.politico.com/blogs/thecrypt/0907/Rep_King_There_are_too_many_mosques_in_this_country_.html and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5n_n5JQ0BY
anything. He specifically laments that certain self-proclaimed experts on terrorism were not allowed to testify "due to fear of the predictable reaction of the Muslim Brotherhood’s American grievance network" (McCarthy, 2011).3

Pamela Geller, creator of the right-wing blog *Atlas Shrugs*, also criticized King's hearings for much the same reason.4 Geller argues along with McCarthy that King should have invited the same self-proclaimed experts on Islamic radicalism because they know who the enemy is and can define them. Geller goes further and argues that a witness King called, Zuhdi Jasser, was not qualified to testify at the hearing. Geller complains that Jasser is not really a Muslim because he is not extreme enough to be a follower of Islam. Geller suggests that some conservatives view Jasser as,

"the voice of reason in our cause of educating Americans about the threat of radical Islam. But in this, Jasser fails miserably. First off, there is no "reason" in Islam. There is only Islam. You cannot question, reason, or go off the reservation in any way. Hence, Jasser cannot educate about the threat, because he obfuscates the truth and has invented the Islam he follows" (Geller, 2011).

For Geller, Jasser cannot be a Muslim because his identity does not conform to her preconceived notions of Muslim Identity.

For his part, Peter King defended the hearings saying that he would not be constrained by political correctness in defending the country from terrorist threats. King referred to the criticism leveled against him as "mindless" adding that:

3 McCarthy also suggests that 80% of mosques in the United States propagate a complete endorsement of violent Islamic radicalism and that this violence is a part of the religion practiced by 80% of Muslims worldwide (McCarthy, 2011) citing a study of dubious credibility that does not even make this statement (Kedar & Yerushalmi, 2011).

4 Geller was behind the campaign which reached national attention in 2010 opposing the Park 51 project in Manhattan, labeling it the 'Ground Zero Mosque' which stirred anti-Muslim feeling in the US (Elliott, 2010).
While I have no doubt that the Committee’s radicalization hearings have had a significant and beneficial impact in fostering an honest dialogue about the growing issue of radicalization within the United States, I remain concerned that this problem is far from resolved. (Weinger, 2011)

King claims that 13% or 357,500⁵ American Muslims believe that "killing civilians in the name of Islam is justified in some cases," saying, "these numbers are startling and expose a dangerous disconnect between a number of Muslim-Americans and the democratic values cherished by Western nations." King offers this claim despite the fact that the Pew poll he cites for this data, titled "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism" draws exactly the opposite conclusion (2011).

Finally, the only scholarly article written on these hearings to my knowledge is by Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria (2012). Saghaye-Biria uses critical discourse analysis to analyze the replaying of racism during King’s first hearing. Saghaye-Biria argues that each side used rhetorical tools to present the narratives they wish to promote and to discredit the narrative the other side presents. Saghaye-Biria argues that the liberal side of the discourse, exemplified by ranking committee member Thompson, attempted to develop a construction of the identity of the Muslim community as being a part of the solution to threats of terrorism, while the conservative side, exemplified by chairperson Peter King, attempted to discursively construct this identity as being inherently un-American and threatening to our security.

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⁵ The U.S. Census Bureau does not collect data concerning religious affiliation so the population of Muslims in the US is uncertain (U.S. Census Bureau: FAQs).
Saghaye-Biria illuminates a few points about the first hearing: first, witness testimony is not conducive to having a constructive conversation in that testimony is one-way communication; secondly, the people who were invited to testify, and more importantly those who were excluded from testifying, set the stage for the kind of discourse that can take place. Reflecting on this, Saghaye-Biria points out that mainstream Muslim organizations and experts were excluded from testimony and thus silenced. Those who did testify, with one exception, painted a narrative of the Muslim community that not only silenced this community, but suggested that the bulk of the Muslim community lack agency and are being manipulated by malefic Muslim leadership in the US. This creates the image of Muslims as being a homogeneous, manipulable population that in some way bears responsibility for the actions of all of its members. Lastly, Saghaye-Biria expresses concern that congressional hearings by their very nature set a tone for national discourse by expressing a power relationship in which Muslims are deemed to be a problematic element in our society. “Given the function of congressional hearings, such problematization is expected to result in discriminatory policy outcomes” (Saghaye-Biria, 2012, p. 510).

In summary, we see there are a number of approaches being used here. Some suggest the hearings are damaging to the Muslim community, are McCarthyist, and could impede law enforcement in fighting terrorism. Some suggest that the hearings do not go far enough and that we should not be afraid to seek out voices that suggest that Islam in inherently violent and is the cause of terrorism. Finally, Saghaye-Biria points out that in the first hearing both sides sought to further their own narrative, while the hearing itself served to silence Muslims, homogenize them, and deprive them of agency. Saghaye-
Biria’s analysis very strongly points out the problematic construction of Muslim identity with which this thesis is concerned.

As will be discussed shortly, the construction of Muslim identity in the West is much older and much more complicated than any of the above analyses suggest. This will become more apparent as we move along, but for the moment I will note a few things. On the one hand, the liberals are to some extent grasping at straws in trying to identify the source of what they perceive as bigotry. On the other hand, the conservatives are confounded that their own preconceived notions of Muslims are being questioned at all. This is because the discursive construction of Muslim identity is so deeply ingrained in our national conversation that we are scarcely aware of its presence.
CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW: ORIENTALISM

There is a discourse in the West concerning the Middle East which is not grounded in empirical fact, does not allow those being discussed to have a part in the discursive construction of who they are, and that labels Muslims and Islam as being the ‘other’ by constructing them as being ‘illogical,’ ‘violent,’ ‘degenerate,’ and mostly damningly as ‘terrorists.’ Edward Said has labeled this discourse ‘Orientalism.’ This thesis will expound on Said’s construction of Orientalism in a larger historical framework, and then apply this theoretical framework to the first four of King’s ‘Islamic Radicalization’ hearings. In so doing, the question that I am interested in answering is whether King’s hearings replay this discourse or refute it, and to what extent.

However, three caveats are in order. The first is that Edward Said is a scholar of literature and the Middle East; I am neither; my interest is therefore not to evaluate specific details with regard to the history and culture of the Middle East, but rather to discuss the themes in the Orientalist discourse as presented by Said. The second caveat is that since King’s hearings entailed a good deal of media coverage I will focus primarily on the spoken hearings themselves (as opposed to the submitted written testimony), and even within that I will focus mostly on witness testimony. The reason for this strategy is that much of the media coverage, and indeed many of the exchanges in the hearings themselves, amount to little more than partisan gamesmanship by the Republicans and Democrats. Third, in most cases I will not seek to empirically verify or falsify claims, many of which could be examined at great length, because this does not help us uncover the underlying discourse. Rather I will concern myself with how and if these claims fit
into the discourse, and how they aid in the construction of an Islamic 'other.' The reason for this approach is that the partisan gamesmanship being played out in the media largely ignores the issues that I would like to address with this thesis, which is the overall discourse with regard to Muslims and Islam in the United States and how and if it replays the historical Western discourse regarding Islam, Muslims, and the Middle East. This is crucial because the focus of this thesis is on the discursive construction of Muslim identity and most of the gamesmanship and squabbling over details distracts us from this purpose. That being said, I will start with a few, but by no means exhaustive, examples from recent history to illustrate some of the discourse with which this thesis is concerned in order to better frame the issue of identity construction.

**Oklahoma City Bombing**

On April 19, 1995 at 9:02am, a 4,800-pound truck bomb detonated outside of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: this was the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil to date. I had just turned eleven years old less than a month before and was in school that day. My fifth grade class at Greenlee Elementary, only a few blocks from the University I now attend, was interrupted that morning and we were taken to the library to watch the aftermath of the terrorist attack unfold on the news. It is still hard for me to understand the motivation of my teacher in wanting her students to watch these events: were we old enough to be able to interpret such extreme destruction? Certainly this was a calculation, since I do not recall any of the younger students in the school being there, and I imagine we were given a choice in the matter, though I do not recall this either.
What I do vividly recall is the destruction the bomb caused to the Murrah building: the front completely collapsed into rubble; the images of police and other rescue workers searching for survivors in the debris; and people outside of the police cordon interviewed by the media, all in complete shock, trying to understand why this had been done. Particularly jarring were the discussions about a daycare in the building which was in operation during the attack, and that children and infants were likely included among the victims. Who was responsible for this atrocity?

My memory of the days following the attack is vague, but I recall that in the immediate aftermath and for the first few days the blame was largely focused on people from a religion that I had never heard of and a region with which I was only familiar because of the recent war in Kuwait. It was only after a few days that it became clear that the attack was not committed by Middle Eastern Muslims, but rather by mid-western American right-wing extremists.

Ibrahim Ahmad was arrested in the FBI's initial dragnet on a flight home to Jordan from Oklahoma City on the day of the bombing. When authorities told Ahmad that he was being arrested in connection with the bombing, he thought it was the end of the world for him. For a day and a half after the bombing the world thought that Ahmad was responsible for the atrocity until it turned out that American right-wing extremists were the ones responsible (Fuchs, 1995).

The majority of the media in that time period had very few qualms insinuating that Middle Eastern terrorists were responsible for the attack:
Within hours of the bombing, most network news reports featured comments from experts on Middle Eastern terrorism who said the blast was similar to the World Trade Center explosion two years earlier. Newspapers relied on many of those same experts and stressed the possibility of a Middle East connection. The Wall Street Journal, for example, called it a "Beirut-style car bombing" in the first sentence of its story. The New York Post quoted Israeli terrorism experts in its opening paragraph, saying the explosion ‘mimicked three recent attacks on targets abroad.’ (Fuchs, 1995)

Media outlets were following the lead of public officials and federal law enforcement, both of whom speculated that Middle Eastern terrorists were responsible for the bombing. Authorities suspected “radical Islamic terrorists”; an all-points bulletin broadcast on the day of the blast describe[ed] the suspects as two men of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’ with ‘dark hair and beards’” (Fuchs, 1995).

Was this simply a case of the media reporting news that was not factually vetted, or were they passing on speculation by federal law enforcement about possible suspects?

Either way, "they blew it," says Jeff Cohen, executive director of Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a liberal watchdog group that monitored coverage of the bombing. No matter what law enforcement said behind the scenes, the press went overboard on the Middle East angle and underplayed other scenarios, he contends (Fuchs, 1995).

The proposition that the attack was the responsibility of Middle Easterners prompted a couple of dozen media outlets to contact Edward Said, professor of English and comparative literature at Colombia University, within an hour after the bombing. While Said also happened to be a Palestinian, and had a great deal of expertise on western literature with regard to the Middle East, he was not an expert on Middle Eastern politics or terrorism. The only reason that he was contacted by the media was that he was a public intellectual who happened to be from the Middle East. Said says that the media contacted him:
Not because I had anything to do with it, but because by virtue of being from the Middle East [they assumed] I would have an inside insight into this. You know, and of course the proposition is so preposterous and so racist that just if you are from the area you would understand who and why this is being done. Never thinking for a moment that it was a local homegrown boy called McVeigh who was totally American in his outlook and was doing it out of the best principles of American extermination and Ahab-like anger at, you know, the world” (Jhally, Edward Said: On ‘Orientalism’, 2005)

**September 11, 2001**

Most of us remember where we were the morning of September 11, 2001. That morning Mohammed Salman Hamdani left his home in Queens for his job as a lab assistant at Rockefeller University in Manhattan. He never returned home. It was not until March the next year that the Hamdani family learned that their son’s body had been found in 34 pieces in the wreckage of the North World Trade Center Tower five months earlier and had only been recently identified (Dwyer, 2011) (Otterman, 2012).

Hamdani was a certified emergency medical technician and had spent a year volunteering part-time driving an ambulance as well as having been a police cadet for three years. When Hamdani left that morning on his usual route to work at the DNA analysis lab, “his family and friends believed, [he] must have seen the burning towers from the elevated subway tracks in Queens and gone down to help” (Otterman, 2012). However, the media reports about the disappearance of Hamdani in the weeks and months following the attacks suggested a different version of events.

On October 12, 2001 the New York Post published an article about the disappearance of Hamdani which implied that Hamdani may have been connected to the attackers on 9/11 because he was a Muslim. The Post article begins: “The NYPD is hunting for one of its former cadets, initially reported missing in the Twin Towers attack,
issuing an urgent "hold and detain" order for the Pakistani native” and suggests that “Hamdani was last seen, Koran in hand, leaving his Bayside, Queens home for his job as a research assistant at Rockefeller University, but he never made it to work” (Gorta & Crittle, 2001). The article reports that Hamdani’s mother at the time theorized that he was in custody because he was a Muslim and is quoted as saying: "The government has him, like [it] has many of the Muslim kids… They are interrogating him, but they will release him one day" (Gorta & Crittle, 2001). The article ends by saying that his parents and siblings were preparing to make a pilgrimage to Mecca (Gorta & Crittle, 2001) without clarifying that this trip was to pray for the safe return of their son and brother (Dwyer & Wakin, New York Times, 2001).

This is the primary narrative of the article: Hamdani was a Muslim who disappeared on the day of the events of 9/11 who was wanted by authorities. Since the hijackers were Muslim, and Hamdani was a Muslim the inference was that he was somehow involved in the attacks. The article suggests that Hamdani was carrying a Koran with him to work that morning because the authors felt that it was important to point out, not so subtly, that he was a Muslim. The narrative of the article indicates that the primary suspicion of the family and authorities was that Hamdani had gone down to the site of the attacks to help and had been killed in the collapse of the towers. However, the authors go out of their way to add disclaimers when this is mentioned that discredit this hypothesis and cast suspicion on Hamdani. In the first instance the un-named source suggests that Hamdani had not died in the collapse of the towers but instead was being sought by police. After all, he had official NYPD identification which meant that if he were “up to some tricks, he [could] walk past anybody.” In the last few paragraphs, the
authors present the hypothesis that Hamdani had died in the tower’s collapse and then immediately refute the notion:

The Police Department refused to comment on the case, but investigators privately theorize that the family's first notion was correct: Hamdani died in the disaster.

Still, sources close to the investigation say the hunt is still on - cops at the Midtown Tunnel reported spotting someone who looked like Hamdani yesterday morning. (Gorta & Crittle, 2001)

In the weeks and months that followed rumors spread in Hamdani’s neighborhood and college campus that he may have been somehow involved in the attacks. It was not until his remains were identified that these rumors were put to rest once and for all.

The media coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing and the case of Hamdani on 9/11 are anecdotal and therefore cannot stand as evidence for the full breadth of the discourse on Muslim identity in the West. However, they point to a larger problem that the rest of this thesis will investigate: the concept that there is a discursive construction of Muslim identity that is problematic and is so implicit in our cultural narratives that it is rarely questioned.

**Introduction to Orientalism**

Edward Said wrote a trilogy of books, *Orientalism, The Question of Palestine,* and *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the World,* because the discourse and images in the West that portrayed the Middle East and Africa, where he grew up and had lived for some time, had very little to do with his own experience of these places (Foundation, 2005, pp. 2-3). When we in the West think of these regions and peoples, a number of images, treated as objective knowledge, are
conjured up automatically. Said’s inquiry, which began with *Orientalism*, was to try to understand the origin of these preconceived ideas. In the words of Sut Jhally:

The central argument of *Orientalism* is that the way that we acquire this knowledge is not innocent or objective but the end result of a process that reflects certain interests. That is, it is highly motivated. Specifically Said argues that the way the West, Europe and the U.S. looks at the countries and peoples of the Middle East is through a lens that distorts the actual reality of those places and those people. He calls this lens through which we view that part of the world Orientalism, a framework that we use to understand the unfamiliar and the strange; to make the peoples of the Middle East appear different and threatening. (Foundation, 2005, p. 2)

Orientalism constitutes the beliefs, images, assumptions, and other systems of understanding, that are evoked and treated as objective knowledge when the Orient is discussed in the West. This discursive construction of the Orient as different and threatening extends to “Orientals” themselves as being "different and threatening." Orientalism is a discursive construction of other places, far away from our own experience: the Orient as opposed to the Occident, and thus a construction of the unfamiliar as in opposition to the familiar. More importantly for my purpose it is a construction of the identity of the “Orientals” themselves in their far away places, but is also constructs their identity when they are in the Occident.

Since the term “Orient” is in declining use, a clarification is warranted here: when Said refers to the “Orient” he means parts of northern Africa, Asia, and the Middle East as opposed to the “Occident,” which is the countries of Europe, North and South America. Following Said’s lead, I use the terms Orient, and Oriental in conjunction with Orientalism. I acknowledge that these terms are offensive, but recognize that they are the labeling given to the discourse by Said rather than the names of the peoples they invoke. The use of these terms also helps to communicate the part of the Orientalist discourse
which constructs the identity of the "other" as being homogenous which is one of the major theme that I have abstracted from *Orientalism* and which exists implicitly but ubiquitously along with the other themes which will be discussed presently.\(^6\)

Said’s construction of the Orientalist discourse is based on a systematic study of literature and art in Europe which extends back centuries and which culminates with his discursive analysis of modern media. Said explains the overall themes which he sees after this exhaustive discourse analysis providing many examples along the way. What I am presenting are the conclusions that Said reached from this analysis with only a few examples. These could be construed as generalizations on my part however the analysis and conclusions are not my own, though I have abstracted out of Said’s analysis four general ways in which Orientalism operates, to simplify the analysis as will be seen shortly.

In Said’s construction of Orientalism the information of which Orientalism is constructed presents itself as objective knowledge, as factual and based on systematic study of the subjects. However, the information that Orientalism addresses as facts tends to be based on the construction of European colonial powers.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) See: Said, Orientalism, 1978, pp. 53-5, for a discussion on this.

\(^7\) In some cases, a European colonial power overtly built the discursive construction in the act of colonization. For example, when Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798 he brought with him “scientists, botanists, architects, philologists, biologists, historians, whose job it was to record Egypt in every conceivable way. And produce a kind of scientific survey of Egypt, which was designed, not for the Egyptian, but for the European” (Said, Orientalism, 1978, pp. 80-8). In other instances, Orientalist discourse had been constructed by authors and explorer in the region over the course of many centuries and was merely invoked by a colonizing power (Said, Orientalism, 1978, pp. 166-97).
Said explains that most of the information of which explicit Orientalism is composed is philological, or text-based, up until the 20th century. If scholars in France or England in the 18th century wished to study, talk, or write about the Middle East, Africa, or Asia there was an entire discursive construct already in place from which they would draw the bulk of their information (Foundation, 2005, p. 4). Said tells us that this philological discourse had been constructed in a manner which was wholly internally consistent. In other words, these were stories cut of whole cloth which did not merit further examination. It therefore would have been very difficult for any scholar to understand their subject in a way that was different than this already constructed discourse. Said explains that most of the scholars of the Orient in the West never actually set foot in the region which they claimed to study. Said explains that for this reason, among others, the base of knowledge upon which Orientalism rests while not consistent with the actual lives and cultures that it attempts to describe is internally consistent with itself. Thus, the Orientalist discourse includes a number of themes that consistently arise since at least the early 14th century, but tend to have little to do with the reality of life for those described (Said, Orientalism, 1978, pp. 50-2).

There are a few consistent themes that Said identifies which operationalize the Orientalist discourse. Orientalism has an internal circular logic that is self-affirming which has four major themes. Since each piece of Orientalist logic affirms the next, there is no logical place to start in explaining how Orientalist discourse operates. It should also be noted that in some constructions not all of the four themes that I identified are always present. As I go through each theme, I will provide an example or two from Said himself to help clarify.
The first major theme that Said identifies in Orientalist discourse is that the people described are not given room to speak for themselves. The internal logic of the discourse does not leave room for its subjects to have a voice. The Orientalists speak for their subjects without any consideration given to the people for whom they speak. For example, Arthur James Balfour, when lecturing in the British House of Commons with regard to “the problems with which we have to deal in Egypt,” made the moral argument that the Egyptian people were better off under British rule than they had ever been in history. However, Balfour gave no thought to giving any Egyptian a voice in this conversation because surely any Egyptian who was not happy with British dominance must merely be a local troublemaker as opposed to “the good native who overlooks the ‘difficulties’ of foreign domination (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 33).

The exclusion of the voices of those described was internally consistent with a philological discourse written almost entirely by Europeans. “Academic Orientalists for the most part were interested in the classical period of whatever language or society it was they studied” [emphasis added]: therefore the primary consideration of these scholars was not in the current state of the peoples whom they claimed to study but rather a mythologized historical version of the society in which they lived (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 52). When Orientalist scholars approached these societies, the lens with which they looked prevented them from seeing the reality of the daily lives of the people. Said, in essence, argues that these Orientalist scholars could not even really see their subjects as human beings, but rather as an abstraction to be studied rather than as human beings similar to themselves. Instead, they saw an ancient civilization, or often the remains of a
decaying ancient civilization; because of their preconceived mythological construction, they found it difficult to understand why the local populations did not share their vision:

When a learned Orientalist traveled in the country of his specialization, it was always with unshakable abstract maxims about the “civilization” he had studied; rarely were the Orientalists interested in anything except proving the validity of these musty “truths” by applying them, without great success, to uncomprehending, hence degenerate, natives. (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 52)

Orientalists were never challenged to think about the biases in their understanding of the Orient. The exclusion of the voice of their subjects allowed the construction of this internally consistent narrative and their continued exclusion allowed this narrative to go unchallenged by knowledge that might question its foregone conclusions. In this regard Said talks about the construction of the identity of the ‘other’ as being an act of power. Whereas they cannot define themselves they are thus spoken for (1978, pp. 32-33) and that this act of identity construction is a form of imperial power (1978, p. 145) This is an important step in constructing an 'other': defining them, for them, because they cannot define themselves which in turn is establishes a power relationship.

The second major theme that Said identifies in Orientalist discourse is the use of derogatory language in describing its subjects. Language like “degenerate,” “illogical,” “irrational,” “violent,” and “inferior” were used by Orientalist scholars, writers, and commentators to describe the people whom they study (Said, Orientalism, 1978, pp. 31-49). Said cites George Orwell’s description of the perspective of the colonizer in the city of Marrakech in 1939 in French colonial Morocco as an example of how the colonizing powers viewed the Orient:

When you walk through a town like this—two hundred thousand inhabitants, of whom at least twenty thousand own literally nothing except the rags they stand up
in—when you see how the people live, and still more, how easily they die, it is always difficult to believe that you are walking among human beings. All colonial empires are in reality founded upon that fact. The people have brown faces—besides they have so many of them! Are they really the same flesh as yourself? Do they even have names? Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff, about as individual as bees or coral insects? They arise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years, and then they sink back into the nameless mounds of the graveyard and nobody notices that they are gone. And even the graves themselves soon fade back into the soil. (Said, Orientalism, 1978, pp. 251-2)

This view was not isolated to one country or region because the people whom Orientalists described were treated as though they are one homogenous group, one of the major themes of Orientalism. The result of this kind of rhetoric is the tacit creation of the Occident in opposition to the Orient, or the “other” (Said, Orientalism, 1978, pp. 72-3).8 Further generalizations like these build a picture of a vast, non-Western group of people who are the object of pity and fear. Said offers two excellent examples of this kind of stereotype: American statesmen and political scientist Henry Kissinger and retired member of the U.S. Department of State Harold W. Glidden’s perspectives on the Middle East (respectively).

“Kissinger’s method … proceeds from what linguists call binary opposition,” (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 46) in which two subjects are compared in such a manner that does not suggest any subtlety or exceptions because the two are diametrically opposite. The two examples that Kissinger employs here are the West and the Orient. Kissinger argues that the former “is deeply committed to the notion that the real world is external to the observer, that knowledge consists of recording and classifying data—the

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8 For an excellent treatment regarding how we define ourselves by defining our enemies see Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination, by Sam Keen.
more accurately the better. Kissinger’s proof for this is the Newtonian revolution”:
Kissinger argues that because the West had a scientific revolution we view things empirically and since the “developing world” did not they do not view things empirically, so that we are better off intellectually than they are because we are reasonable and logical and they are not, and the line is drawn between us and them (Said, Orientalism, 1978, pp. 46-7).

Glidden’s analysis of the “inner workings of Arab behavior” tells us that Arabs inhabit a “shame culture” in which “absolute solidarity within the group” is of utmost importance, and yet conflict is normal and expected because domination of others is the only way to gain prestige. Hence, when a rational Westerner would seek peace, an Arab would choose to use violence as a means to an end (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 48).

Among Glidden’s other descriptions about Arab behavior:

Arabs live “naturally” in a world “characterized by anxiety expressed in generalized suspicion and distrust, which has been labeled free-floating hostility”; “the art of subterfuge is highly developed in Arab life, as well as in Islam itself”; the Arab need for vengeance overrides everything, otherwise the Arab would feel “ego-destroying” shame. Therefore, … “Westerners consider peace to be high on the scale of values,”… [but] “this is not true for Arabs.” “In fact,” we are told, “in Arab tribal society (where Arab values originated), strife, not peace, was the normal state of affairs because raiding was one of the two main supports of the economy.” (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 49)

Said concludes that the point of “learned disquisition” of those like Glidden’s was similar to that of Kissinger’s: to illustrate without doubt the fundamental differences between “us” and “them” (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 49). We see here that both Kissinger and Glidden speak for Muslims (Arabs, Islam) and in so doing setup an us- vs.-them dichotomoy that establishes the image of a Muslim ‘other.’ However, also note that
both analyses, while speaking for and about Muslims and portraying them in derogatory language, make these assertions without evidence.

This is the third major theme that Said identifies in Orientalist discourse: that the examiner of the Orient does not need to rely on facts or empirical evidence for their claims to be accepted as true. The two previous examples evidence this habit; Kissinger provides no evidence aside from a rhetorical argument: “the point he makes is sufficiently unarguable to require no special validation. We had our Newtonian revolution; they didn’t. As thinkers we are better off than they are” (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 47). Glidden sets up a similar “us-versus-them” dichotomy, and “cites exactly four sources for his views” which paint a “psychological portrait of over 100 million people, considered for a period of 1,300 years” in only four pages. These sources are “a recent book on Tripoli, one issue of the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram, the periodical Oriento Moderno, and a book by Majid Khadduri, a well known Orientalist” (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 48).

This is the apogee of Orientalist confidence. No merely asserted generality is denied the dignity of truth; no theoretical list of Oriental attributes is without application to the behavior of Orientals in the real world. On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things. (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 49)

Said goes as far as to suggest that the “Orientalist attitude in general” is anti-empirical:

It shares with magic and mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are because they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter. (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 70)
The fourth major theme which implicitly underlies all of Said’s analysis of Orientalist discourse is an assumption that all of the “orientals” are the same or at least similar enough that they can be analyzed without distinction one from another. This attitude can be seen in the language itself, the ‘orient’ vs. the ‘occident;’ those of us in the occident are heterogeneous while those in the orient are homogenous. This assumption is especially dangerous when combined with the aforementioned stereotypes because it creates an ‘other’ that is wholly dangerous by virtue of being in distinguishable one from another: a hive mind that cannot be understood beyond how they are to be controlled.

Finally, to reemphasize, this discourse is closed to outside information so that it 1) speaks for its subjects, 2) contains derogatory statements about them, and 3) offers no evidence to support its claims and at each turn 4) homogenizes and generalizes about Muslims. All of these 2) derogatory things that are said about Muslims are true without any need for 3) evidence, and since 4) all Muslims are the same in sharing these fallibilities, they cannot be allowed to 1) speak for themselves. This logical system of knowledge is therefore closed to critique from those whose identity it discursively constructs, while also limiting the ability of those engaged in the process of Orientalist discourse to think outside of the underlying systems of knowledge that it entails.

It is worth stopping here for just a moment to explain the power of discourse in the context of Orientalism. Simply put, discourse is a narrative or story that we tell ourselves. However, discourse encompasses all of the communication that we do as a society. As Said notes discourse takes place within a context, our society, our culture, our language (1978, pp. 272-3). Discourse has power because it is inescapable: we cannot know that which exists outside of the discourse in which we gain our
understanding of the world. Discourse therefore limits our understanding to this context. Finally those who have power over discourse have power over society. So that in the context of the Orientalist discourse those who exercise power create the “orient” and the “oriental” and those that came after this initial construction were limited in their ability to understand this discursive construction by the construction itself. A few examples might help illuminate this phenomena: if one were living in the south during Jim Crow, or if one were living in a totalitarian regime where the only access to information was through the government, it would be very difficult to imagine the world differently. While these are extreme examples, and the Orientalist discourse is more subtle it is arguably as powerful.

**Islamic Orientalism**

Said argues that the Orientalist discourse with regard to the Middle East, Islam, and Muslims carries all of the major themes from Orientalism intact, but with a few nuances and an ontological rigidity that bears some attention before moving on. As noted above, the discourse is a closed system of knowledge that does not accept outside information that might challenge its most basic assumptions. Said tells us that when Orientalists were confronted with an Islam, a Middle East, and Muslims, which differed from the understanding that their discursive construction suggested should exist, they suffered an estrangement, which might have suggested to them that they ought to question their own ontology. Instead, “their estrangement from Islam simply intensified their feelings of superiority about European culture, even as their antipathy spread to include the entire Orient, of which Islam was considered a degraded (and usually, a virulently dangerous) representative” (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 260). In addition to
this ontological rigidity, Islamic Orientalism also included an unshakable religious
significance in that since Islam originated in the same region as Judaism and Christianity
it was seen as an “original cultural effrontery, aggravated naturally by the fear that
Islamic civilization originally (as well as contemporaneously) continued to stand
somehow opposed to the Christian West” [emphasis in original] (Said, Orientalism, 1978,
p. 260). Said argues that because of these factors, a rigid ontology, an intellectual
retrenchment due to estrangement, and Islam’s significance as a religious affront against
Christianity, Islamic Orientalism stopped progressing as a social science and became
more an entrenched ideology that viewed Islam as an ‘other’; the Orient, which was in
conflict with the Occident. In Said’s words:

What I am describing, then, is something that will characterize Islamic
Orientalism until the present day: its retrogressive position when compared with
the other human sciences (and even with the other branches of Orientalism), its
general methodological and ideological backwardness, and its comparative
insulaarity from developments both in the other humanities and in the real world of
historical, economic, social, and political circumstances. (Said, Orientalism, 1978,
p. 261)

Unlike other forms of Orientalism, the Islamic school constructed an image of
their subject as being “somehow opposed to the Christian West” (Said, Orientalism,
1978, p. 260). Said illustrates that there is no single Orientalist explanation for why
Islam might be opposed to the West, but rather a number of narratives that are
consistently invoked. In the next few pages I will provide examples of how Muslims
were discussed by the Orientalists that Said analyses and end by summing up how these
fit together to create an image of Islam that is violently opposed to the West.
For one example, note Glidden’s interpretation of Arab⁹ behavior above: that they live naturally in a state of violence. Islamic Orientalists take this claim even further. While most Orientalists share Glidden’s view, that Arabs are violent by nature (and he does explicitly argue this), they insist that Islam itself is the problem. In other words it is not the particular region, culture or race of the people in question but their religion that poses a problem.

There are a number of ways that Said argues that Islam is portrayed by the Orientalists which fit together into the larger portrayal of Islam as being opposed to the West. The first is that the Orientalist discourse portrays Islam as stuck in time; as an anachronism that was reasserting itself in a revanchist manner after its defeat just prior to the Renaissance (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 280). Said argues that this construction derives from the discursive construction of the orient as being inferior, an ancient civilization trapped in the past. This causes them to suffer inherently because the inferiority of their civilization leaves them in primitive circumstances. This inferiority and suffering causes them to feel resentment toward the occident as the superior civilization. It also causes jealousy of the occident as the superior civilization. Because of this suffering, resentment, and jealousy the orient is a threat to the occident (1978, pp. 249-50).

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⁹ It should be noted that ‘Arab’ does not mean Muslim, and that today the majority of Muslims live outside of the Middle East. However since Said was primarily concerned with Western Orientalist treatment of the Middle East, it is fair to assume that his reference to Glidden with regard to Arabs was also a suggestion about the behavior of Muslims in general.
A modern example of this argument is the phrase used by some Americans to explain the attacks of 9/11: that they “hate us for our freedom.” No other explanation is needed: we have the superior civilization, they hate us because of it. On September, 20 2001 George W. Bush addressed a joint session of Congress, one of the memorable quotes from his speech went as follows:

Americans are asking “Why do they hate us?”

They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. (Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation, 2001)

This is a modern example of this discursive construction at work offering simplistic construction of Muslim identity as angry at the West because of the inferiority of their circumstances.

The second part of this construction is of Islam as fiercely resistant to change. Said argues that there is a narrative of Islam in Orientalist discourse as being immobilized in a mythologized past; this narrative portrays Islam as being in opposition to the West because of its resistance to any change toward modernity. This opposition meant that any exposure to modernity threatened to change Islam and as Islam felt threatened, so too did it threaten the West:

Indeed, so fierce was this sense of resistance to change, and so universal were the powers ascribed to it, that in reading the Orientalists one understands that the apocalypse to be feared was not the destruction of Western civilization but rather the destruction of the barriers that kept East and West from each other. (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 263)

This resistance to change, in the mind of the Orientalists, is reinforced by the notion that Islam is a totalizing force in the lives of Muslims: that is to say that every
aspect of Muslim life is directed by and controlled by Islam. For example, in Sir Hamilton Gibb’s construction, Islam is concerned primarily with the “Unseen\textsuperscript{10}, [and] has an ultimate presence and domination over all life in the Islamic Orient” (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 278). For Gibb then, all life in Islam is subordinated to religion: schools, banking, journalism, all intellectual enterprise, and all politics. In 1932 Gibb tells us that:

Until recently, the ordinary Muslim citizen and cultivator had no political interests of functions, and no literature of easy access except religious literature, had no festivals and no communal life except in connection with religion, saw little or nothing of the outside world except through religious glasses. \textit{To him, in consequence, religion meant everything}. [Emphasis added by Said] (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 279)\textsuperscript{11}

The American experience of Orientalism is slightly different than the European one: Said argues that historically the U.S. had very little direct experience of the Middle East or the Islamic world. As a result, the “Orient” never entered into the imaginative in the United States in the same way that it did in Europe (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 290) (Said, 1981, pp. 12-3). Said argues that for the United States:

\ldots there was no deeply invested tradition of Orientalism, and consequently in the United States knowledge of the Orient never passed through the refining and reticulating and reconstructing process, whose beginning was in philological study, that it went through in Europe. Furthermore, the imaginative investment was never made either, perhaps because the American frontier, the one that counted, was the westward one. (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 290)

\footnote{\textsuperscript{10} Said’s capitalization of the term ‘unseen’ here indicates that while Gibb’s recognizes an Islamic deference to God, as with many other Islamic Orientalists he does not consider this deference to be to the same God recognized by the Judeo-Christian tradition. Rather this is an indication of the Islamic preference for mythological religious belief over secular modernity.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{11} Said notes here that the arguments that Gibb makes are “metaphysical” in that he never specifies when and where the Islam that he invokes is taking place.}
As a result when the US found itself in the position of a world power in the wake of WWII there was no collective approach to the Orient as a subject and our discourse was more or less devoid of substantive content. Without this historical context the US instead approached the Orient as a matter of foreign policy and instrumentalist administration rather than as a conflict with deep historical and cultural origins (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 290).

American Orientalists, particularly military and corporate interests, invested themselves in learning the languages of the Middle East only to the extent that this would benefit them with regard to strategic military advantage or profit. The Middle East was viewed by the newly minted American empire as a source of material wealth and potential conquest, there was however, very little cultural interest given to the region. Those concerned with the region did not study literature from or about the region, excluding even the Orientalist literature from which most of the American attitudes had been adopted. Most of the information about the region and peoples came from so-called experts who based their opinions on 3) 'facts', that is speculation drawn from the imagination of the 'experts', rather than literary examples of what life might be like for the people in question. The loss of the literary and cultural element in the American Orientalist discourse resulted in a further implicit construction of an 'other' for which nothing needed to learned other than how they might threaten us (Said, Orientalism, 1978, pp. 290-2).

The less direct experience of Muslims in the American discourse allows 2) derogatory language to be used against Muslims in a way that no one would dare talk about blacks or Jews (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 301). For example, one could not
suggest that the former group was lazy, violent or stupid, or that the latter group was sinister, untrustworthy, or greedy. While this language used to be commonplace in our culture against blacks and Jews it is no longer permissible to talk this way, especially in the media or by politicians. Yet any and all of these accusations can be freely applied to Muslims in our modern discourse, by public officials, in the media, and in public and private conversation without as much as a pause for consideration of their basis in fact or their hurtful and harmful effect, let alone that a Muslim might wish to respond.

Additionally Said argues that there is a degree to which the West is seen as a modern secular society whereas the Middle East is viewed as being trapped in a caricatured version of Islam, so that it is not Christianity versus Islam, but rather a secular society threatened by one still enslaved by religion. This is the logical extension of the narrative that suggests that Islam is a totalizing system of life, at the same time completely political and theological, and all consuming of the existence of Muslims. As opposed to the West, which has 'grown out of' or matured beyond religion as a civilization. “We” have embraced secular modernity, “they” have not, “we” are therefore more modern than they are: this is the same dialectical opposition illustrated above in Kissinger's construction that created an “us versus them” dichotomy that within the framework of Orientalist logic requires no further examination of its merits.

Lastly, Said identifies the American relationship and view of Israel as being of singular importance in the construction of the American discourse. Considering the aforementioned lack of American experience in the Middle East, the US taking a stance as the most significant ally of Israel, Said suggests, has imported a particular worldview into the American discourse. Israel is viewed as a 'modern' Western state which stands in
opposition to the rest of the Islamic world that surrounds it. Said argues that this construction is directly imported into American Orientalism, saying:

I mean the idea for example, that Hamas terrorists on the West Bank are just interested in killing Jewish children, is what you derive from looking at this stuff and very little attention is paid to the fact that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has been going on for thirty years, it's the longest military occupation in this century. And so you get the impression that the only problem is that Israeli security is threatened by Hamas and suicide bombs and all the rest of it and nothing is said about the hundreds of thousands, millions of Palestinians who are dispossessed, living miserable lives as a direct result of what Israel has done and is doing. So there's a sense in which the Arab struggle for national independence and in the case of the Palestinians for national self-determination is looked at with a great hostility as upsetting the stabilities of the status quo. And that makes it virtually impossible, it's a tragedy, virtually impossible for an American to see on television, to read books, to see films about the Middle East, that are not colored politically by this conflict, in which the Arabs almost always play the role of terrorists and violent people and irrational and so on and so forth. (Foundation, 2005, p. 6)

Conclusion to Orientalism

There are four main themes that come into play when dealing with Muslims in the Western discourse which I will focus on for the purpose of analysis, some of which can be seen in the pages above. The first 1) is that 'they' are not allowed to speak for themselves and so 'we' define them (they are spoken for.) The second 2) is that there many derogatory things that are said about Muslims (stereotyping.) The third 3) is that empirical evidence is often scant or lacking entirely when talking about them (poor evidence.) The Fourth 4) is the homogenization of Muslims into a collective (homogenization.) This last theme is best understood as an underlying part of the first three themes, and as such will be treated alongside them in the analysis to follow.

A few clarifications are in order. These four themes operate so closely together that when one ends another begins, thus it is difficult to choose any particular order for
them: the reason is that this is circular logic. Also, note that in not all cases are all four of these themes present. Let me present two examples of the logical procedure involved to clarify.

This circular logic is self-verifying and self-reinforcing. The premise and conclusion of each argument supports the arguments that precede and follow it, and thus no outside argument or information is required to reach conclusions. Indeed, not only is argument and evidence outside this paradigmatic logic unnecessary it is wholly unwelcome; it is what it is, as it ever was, as it ever shall be, and nothing can change this, not even facts.

This closed system of logic encompasses a view of Muslims as being the 'other:' they are frightening by their differences, portrayed as illogical, angry, and, above all, violent. We cannot trust what they might have to say for themselves because they do not even know themselves in their irrational anger. We hear stories about them, such as their violent acts, people stoned to death for violations of religious regulations we vaguely associate with Islam (Littauer, 2013); people having their hands cut off (AP, For Mali amputee, Islamic extremist legacy lingers, 2013) or being beheaded (Goldman, 2013) for petty crimes or no crime at all; and most of all, suicide bombers (Ghazi, 2013) who are willing to kill themselves for religious martyrdom, a promised gift of virgins in the
afterlife as a reward (Economist, 2004), or simply because 'they hate our freedom' (Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation, 2001).¹²

These taken together give us an illustration of an enemy that we only need to understand well enough to identify them as an enemy and no more. As we will see in the Peter King's hearings, and in the history of this discourse, anything that is contrary to this narrative and logic is unwelcome because any information contrary to this circular logic would damage the internal consistency of the narrative.

¹² Note that these are images and themes that we commonly hear about Muslims from the media, and that it is not my intention to argue for or against the verity of these images, my purpose is to illustrate their existence and examine its origins.
CHAPTER IV

PETER KING’S MUSLIM RADICALIZATION HEARINGS

When Peter King became chair of the House Homeland Security committee in 2010 he committed to hold hearings on radicalization in the Muslim community. King has a colorful history: in 2004 King claimed in an interview with Sean Hannity that no American Muslim leaders were cooperating with law enforcement and 80-85% of these leaders were Islamic fundamentalists (Congressman: Muslims 'Enemy Amongst Us’, 2004). During the 1980s King supported the Irish Republic Army’s campaign of violence in Britain (Shane, 2011). King has also written a book about a Congressman who fights terrorism by holding Congressional hearings, which one Amazon.com reviewer described as “a book about meetings” (Amazon.com). Suffice it to say, King’s past, along with the intended purpose of the hearings, caused some controversy.

Each of the four Peter King hearings occurred with witnesses submitting verbal testimony for five minutes each. At the conclusion of witness testimony, each member of the committee was allowed five minutes to make statements and ask questions of the witnesses. The methodology that I have chosen to use in testing the hypothesis that these hearings replay the Islamic Orientalist discourse is this: I will take each witness in turn and look at the narrative that they present and apply the (1-4) main steps in the Orientalist logic to determine whether their testimony replays the discourse or presents a counter narrative. I will then conclude my analysis of each hearing by examining whether or not the hearing as a whole replays, contributes to, or confutes the Orientalist narrative as a whole.
I spend the most time on the first hearing because it provides most of the themes that are worth examination. The subsequent hearings replay much of the discursive construction in the first hearing, while at the same time focusing more and more on the issue of Islamic terrorism as a law enforcement issue while providing very little substantive detail. The coverage of the hearings therefore gets shorter with each subsequent one.

Table 1.1: List of Peter King’s Muslim Radicalization Hearings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Hearing</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community’s Response</td>
<td>March 10, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Threat of Muslim-American Radicalization in U.S. Prisons</td>
<td>June 15, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Al-Shabaab’s Muslim American Radicalization</td>
<td>July 27, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Threats to Military Communities Inside the United States</td>
<td>December 7, 2011</td>
</tr>
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**First Hearing**

“The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community’s Response”

**Chairperson King’s Opening Statements**

King began the hearings by acknowledging that there was some controversy surrounding the hearings saying:

…this opposition, such as from my colleague and friend Mr. Ellison and Mr. Pascrell, has been measured and thoughtful. Other opposition both from special
interest groups and the media has ranged from disbelief to paroxysms of rage and hysteria. (Hill, Transcript 1, ND)

After acknowledging the controversy surrounding the hearings King responded by arguing that the hearings were necessary because of national security concerns. Some of King’s opponents argued that the focus of the hearing should be on radicalization in general and not focus only on the Muslim community, to which King responded that "this committee cannot live in denial, which is what some of us would do when they suggest that this hearing dilute its focus by investigating threats unrelated to Al Qaida."

King cited a number of sources to validate this claim: deputy national security advisor Denis McDonough said that the U.S. is susceptible to terrorist attack from Al Qaeda via recruitment within the Muslim American community; "Attorney General Holder said the growing number of young Americans being radicalized and willing to take up arms against our country, quote, 'keeps him awake at night.'" Holder also added that those who were critical of the FBI's law enforcement measures "did not have their facts straight," and former Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano having said that the "threat level today is as high as it has been since September 11th because of increased radicalization in our country" (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, pp. 2-3). While King cites these people as sources in his assertion that the hearings are important in fighting domestic terrorism, none of them was called to testify before the committee that day.

King then directed the attention of the audience to a map of the United States that depicted 'terrorist plots', which had been foiled between 2009, and the date of the hearing in March 2010. The data points on the map represented 23 instances in which the government "blocked" "terror plots" in 23 cities across the country. King used this
illustration in an attempt to demonstrate that "the fact is that we've found out no one is immune from these type of threats, these type attacks" (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 3). On the contrary, twenty-three incidents hardly constitute data with statistical significance from which one can draw any conclusion, let alone the assertion that 'we' are all under threat from Al-Qaeda.

King partly concludes the opening statement of the hearing by introducing two of his witnesses, Mr. Bledsoe and Mr. Bihi, saying that:

"Their courage and spirit will put a human face on the horror which Islamic radicalization has inflicted and will continue to inflict on good families, especially those in the Muslim community, unless we put aside political correctness and define who our enemy truly is." [my emphasis] (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 4)

This statement is problematic in a number of ways. King first begs his own argument that Islamic radicalization is a threat which has and will continue to inflict "horror" on all Americans. While there is no doubt that some have suffered grievous losses at the hand of terrorism this is not a normal occurrence in the lives of Americans: statistically Americans are as likely to be killed by a piece of home furniture as they are to be killed by terrorist attacks (Zenko, 2012). Further, his assertion that it is "Islamic radicalization" which is at fault for this "horror" suggests that there is something implicit within Islam that encourages terrorism. In other words, he is suggesting that there is some seed within anyone who is Muslim that can be cultivated by something called radicalization which will then turn them into a terrorist. Lastly, and by far most troublesome is King's assertion that we need to define our enemy.

This assertion would be less troublesome if it were clear whom King intended to define as an enemy. Is our enemy individual actors who would commit terrorist acts in
the name of Islam, or any other ideology for that matter, or do we need to understand an entire community as being responsible for these acts? King repeatedly invokes Al-Qaeda as the primary agent of radicalization, and this is reiterated in the hearing by congresspersons and witnesses, yet the focus of the hearing is not on Al-Qaeda but rather on the Muslim community. So does radicalization arise from within the Muslim community or is it driven by an external actor like Al-Qaeda? We are never told where the line is drawn between terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and the Muslim community. If recruiting is taking place in the Muslim community by Al-Qaeda is it the community that is somehow responsible or are the individual actors involved squarely where we place the blame? King does not make this distinction before he concludes that:

As we approach the 10-year anniversary of the September 11th attacks, we cannot allow the memory of that tragic day to fade away. We must remember that in the days following the attack, we were all united in our dedication to fight back against Al Qaeda and its ideology. (Hill, Transcript 1, ND)

Congressperson Keith Ellison

Ellison and Wolf testified for five minutes apiece as member witnesses and were not subject to questions from the committee. Ellison testified that hearings on Islamic radicalism, which specifically focus on the American Muslim community, tacitly assign collective blame for terrorism on the Muslim community. Ellison’s primary argument in his testimony is that the entire focus of the hearing is on the Muslim community as a collective rather than on the individuals that perpetrated violent acts, as he thought it should be. Moreover Ellison objects to the specific focus on Muslims; after all, in response to other terrorist organizations or acts of terrorism Congress did not react to “the ethnic group or religion of these agents of violence as a matter of public policy” and that “demanding a community response as the title of the hearing suggests, asserts that the
entire community bears responsibility for the violent acts of individuals” (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 10).

Ellison approaches the hearing as primarily a law enforcement issue. He argues that the Muslim community was already hostile to terrorist ideologies that invoke Islam and that the Muslim community has been very cooperative with law enforcement. In Ellison’s view, the approach of the hearings might alienate Muslims, and in fact make them less likely to cooperate with law enforcement.

Ellison concludes his testimony by relating the story of Mohammad Salman Hamdani, and by the conclusion was so emotionally overcome that he ended choking back tears:

Let me close with a true story, but remember that it's only one of many American stories that could be told. Mohammed Salman Hamdani was a 23-year-old paramedic, a New York City police cadet, and Muslim American. He was one of those brave first responders who tragically lost his life in 9/11 terrorist attacks almost a decade ago. As the New York Times eulogized, he wanted to be seen as an all-American kid. He wore number 79 on the high school football team in Bayside, Queens, where he lived.

He was called "Sal" by his friends. He became a research assistant at the Rockefeller University and drove an ambulance part-time. One Christmas he sang Handel's Messiah in Queens. He saw all of the "Star Wars" movies, and it is well known that his new Honda was the one that read -- with the "Yung Jedi" license plates.

Mr. Hamdani bravely sacrificed his life to try to help others on 9/11. After the tragedy, some people tried to smear his character solely because of his Islamic faith. Some people spread false rumors and speculated that he was in league with the attackers because he was a Muslim. But it was only when his remains were identified that these lies were exposed.
Mohammed Salman Hamdani was a fellow American who gave his life for other Americans. His life should not be identified as just a member of an ethnic group or just a member of a religion, but as an American who gave everything for his fellow Americans. (Hill, Transcript 1, ND)\(^\text{13}\)

It should be noted here that Ellison’s testimony goes against the Orientalist narrative, as will the testimony of other witnesses called by the Democrats throughout the hearings. However, it is important to note that testimony which counters the Orientalist narrative is largely ignored by the Republicans on the committee. This holds exactly with the analysis done by Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria in which each side of the aisle is putting forth a narrative and using rhetorical tools to further that narrative. I’m adding to this analysis that because the Orientalist discourse is not concerned with facts and is circular in nature that it is impervious to these counter narratives.

**Congressperson Frank Wolf**

Wolf testifies that there were a handful of terrorists with some connection to his home state of Virginia. He treats these half dozen examples as being sufficient evidence that we are all under threat from Islamic radicalization and terrorism. This mirrors King's assertion that a handful of cases of domestic terrorism constitute a threat to the entire nation. This is no different than most of the discourse from Republican Congresspersons in this hearing and constitutes the backbone of the discourse in these hearings: it asserts that the Muslim community and terrorism are linked. Every time the term 'radicalization' is used in conjunction with Islam and 'Islamic fundamentalism,' it implicitly suggests that

\(^\text{13}\) There were a number of articles published about Hamdani which indicated that he was being sought by authorities in connection to 9/11. I chose the New York Post article above because it was the most blatant in its smear of Hamdani. A list of other articles concerning Hamdani, and Ellison’s testimony was compiled by MediaMatters.org to refute right-wing pundit’s claims that Ellison's telling of Hamdani’s story was fictional.
there is something about Islam that either is terroristic in nature or which allows Muslims to easily be radicalized into terrorists.

This particular representation of the Muslim community is implicit and nuanced and will become clarified as we move deeper into the hearings. There is one example of this process which mirrors the Orientalist discourse, an examination of which will help clarify the discourse thus far which is the treatment of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) by Frank Wolf in this hearing.

“CAIR is a grassroots civil rights and advocacy group. CAIR is America's largest Islamic civil liberties group, with regional offices nationwide and in Canada. The national headquarters is located on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C.” (About Us - CAIR, 2012).

CAIR is involved in many aspects of civil and political life in the US where it concerns American Muslims. For example, CAIR “counsels, mediates and advocates on behalf of Muslims and others who have experienced religious discrimination, defamation or hate crimes.” They follow government activity, lobbying for Muslims and monitoring legislation that might discriminate against them. Their media department gives a voice to Muslims in local and national media in an attempt to portray Muslims in an accurate and favorable light. They are also active in research, conferences, seminars, workshops, voter registration, and outreach to foster interfaith relations (About Us - CAIR, 2012).

Wolf accuses the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) of having "disturbing origins," having connections to terrorist financing, and most importantly, (because it is repeated frequently) that CAIR is an "un-indicted co-conspirator" in the Holy Land Foundation trial. This last item is particularly significant because it is
repeated throughout the hearings. However, before clarifying this claim, I will allow Wolf to make his case against CAIR.

Wolf suggests that CAIR is responsible for silencing the debate; Wolf quotes an editorial in the Columbus Dispatch as saying:

"For many years CAIR has waged a campaign to intimidate and silence anyone who raises alarms about the danger of Islamic extremism…Where CAIR errs is in labeling anyone who discusses Islamic terrorism as a bigot and hate-monger, an Islamaphobe, to use CAIR's favorite slur." (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 17)

Wolf goes on to say that in addition to silencing honest debate, CAIR actively "dissuades American Muslims from cooperating with law enforcement." Wolf tells us in the next breath that when dozens of Somali-Americans disappeared from Minneapolis in 2009 "CAIR attempted to drive a wedge between the Muslim community and the FBI, which was seeking to track down the missing men;" reminding readers that 10 Americans had been killed fighting for or in connection with terrorist actions taken by Al-Shabaab\(^\text{14}\) in Somalia, (whether these are the same men that disappeared Wolf does not tell us) (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, pp. 17-8).

Wolf provides us with one piece of evidence concerning his accusation that CAIR prevents cooperation with law enforcement:

"In January 2011, CAIR's California chapter displayed an old poster on its website which stated, 'Build a wall of resistance, don't talk to the FBI.' Although

\(^\text{14}\) Literally, 'the boys' in Arabic, this is a terrorist group that has been running amok in Somalia for decades.
CAIR removed the poster once the media reported on it, it reflects a larger and I think a very troubling pattern." (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 18)\textsuperscript{15}

Wolf concludes that "CAIR is counterproductive and it is hurting the American Muslim community. I raise these concerns because if we are to successfully counter domestic radicalization, law enforcement in particular will need the active engagement of Muslim communities" (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 18).

Since Congressperson Wolf is an elected official and has served for over 30 years in the House of Representatives, many people would be willing to give him the benefit of the doubt when he makes these claims; my suspicion is that most Americans would grant him this leeway and accept his accusations at face value. I however cannot. This kind of analysis plays directly into the Orientalist discourse in constructing the identity of a Muslim organization as an enemy without providing sufficient or accurate evidence: the evidence that Wolf presents with regard to CAIR is scant, and at best anecdotal.

CAIR explains on its website that the poster Wolf talks about was used by a chapter in California but was not authorized by any central authority in the organization since each chapter of CAIR is independent and under local control. In addition, it should be noted that while Wolf suggests that this incident is part of a larger "very troubling pattern" he does not specify any other incidents to evidence this point. A pattern by definition requires more than one data point, yet this is the only piece of solid evidence leveled at CAIR.
More importantly, the accusation that CAIR is an unindicted co-conspirator in a trial that convicted the Holy Land Foundation and a handful of its members of funneling some 12 million dollars to Hamas is a particularly damning accusation and one that is leveled at CAIR regularly. The problem is that the accusation is baseless.

When U.S. Department of Justice was preparing the case against the Holy Land Foundation, it listed more than 300 "Muslim organizations and individuals, such as CAIR, when it included them on the publicly-filed un-indicted co-conspirator list in 2007" (CAIR, 2012). This filing of "unindicted co-conspirator" was a tactic used by the prosecution in the case of an evidentiary dispute that never came to pass which would have allowed them to introduce hearsay evidence against the Holy Land Foundation. Put differently, CAIR and the other organizations were named unindicted co-conspirators as a legal tactic, but had done nothing wrong. It is literally the prosecution saying that just in case they need testimony from someone they are putting other people’s names in the legal filings, but admitting that they hadn’t done anything wrong. This label *has no legal meaning and is not an indication of guilt*.

The North American Islamic Trust was also included on this list of over 300 persons and organizations and spearheaded the lawsuit against the Department of Justice. In October 2010 the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals found that the Department of Justice had violated the Fifth Amendment rights of all of the named individuals and organizations. Essentially the court had suggested publicly that all of the named individuals and organization were co-conspirators with the Holy Land Foundation which was convicted of funneling money to Hamas. When the organizations and individuals sought legal relief the court responded by sealing the records which labeled them un-
indicted co-conspirator. The problem was that the damage had been done; it was in the public realm that these organizations had been labeled unindicted co-conspirators, and as such sealing the records did not relieve them of the reputational damage that had been done. This was a violation of the Fifth Amendment because this reputational damage was done without recourse to due process of the law (see: Garza, 2012). CAIR concludes:

"…there is no legal implication to being labeled an unindicted co-conspirator, since it does not require the Justice Department to prove anything in a court of law. Merely claiming someone is guilty without due process is both un-Constitutional and offensive to the principles of our justice system." (CAIR, 2012)

This narrative about CAIR fits into the Orientalist discourse: it is not based on 3) evidence because, while it is true that CAIR was labeled an unindicted co-conspirator, this is no longer the case and should not be brought into evidence. Additionally, this accusation is 2) derogatory because it indicates guilt and association with a terrorist organization where none exists. Lastly this preemptively 1) silences CAIR and other organizations by casting unfair doubt on anything they say, and by extension this silences any Muslims, who by extension are then not allowed to speak for their community: it sets a precedent that Muslims must be vetted or approved by people like Congresspersons King and Wolf or they are not allowed to speak for themselves.

This also sets CAIR up as a straw man for right-wing news media and Islamophobic pundits because it casts doubt on everything that any spokesperson from CAIR says. This is particularly damaging because CAIR it is a prominent Muslim civil liberties organization that is present in many media stories about Islam. CAIR is one of
the few organizations that is given an opportunity to speak on behalf of Muslims and this pre-emptive silencing through slander damages their ability to represent their community.

The Testimony of Dr. Zuhdi Jasser

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser is a devout Muslim, a medical doctor, and former officer in the U.S. Navy; he is currently the president and founder of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD), which he established in the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001 “as an effort to provide an American Muslim voice advocating for the preservation of the founding principles of the United States Constitution” (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 19).

Jasser began his testimony by dividing the debate on Muslim radicalization into two polarities: one that “refuses to believe that any Muslim could be radicalized,” even though he says, the U.S. has a “significant problem” with Muslim radicalization that is “exponentially growing.” The other side of this polarization are those who “feel that Islam is the problem” and suggests that all Muslims are radicalized or are becoming radicalized (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 20). Jasser argues that the solution lies somewhere in the middle: neither is it that all Muslims are radicalizing, nor is it that none in the Muslim community are or have the potential to radicalize. Instead, radicalization is a continuum of belief and behavior rather than a sudden change in an individual’s beliefs and behavior, and because this radicalization takes place within the context of the Muslim community it is in large part the responsibility of that Muslim community to deal with this problem. This is the main reason that Jasser has come to testify before the committee: he believes that with the help of public sector resources the Muslim community can fight back against radicalization. He argues, for example, that Al-Qaeda is waging a war to
radicalize Muslims in the US and that in the specific instance of propaganda on the internet they are winning, however with resources from the government the Muslim community can and should be fighting back in this internet propaganda war\(^\text{16}\) (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, pp. 58-9).

This is where Jasser’s argument becomes more nuanced: these elements of radicalization within the Muslim community come not just from Al-Qaeda but from a separation between what he calls “political Islam” and “spiritual Islam.” Jasser’s conceptualization of a political Islam which rejects the notion of a secular state, and is intent of advocating “Islamic laws” which are in contradiction to our government, our society, and our Constitution. The result is Muslims becoming radicalized on a continuum, which results in a culture that refuses to cooperate with legal authorities (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, pp. 20-2). Jasser's concern is that “until we have an ideological offense into the Muslim communities domestically and globally to teach liberty, to teach the separation of mosque and state, you are not going to solve this problem. We are not going to solve it” (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 22). Jasser concludes in part:

So, ultimately, we need solutions. Our organization has talked to and created a Muslim liberty project that looks at inoculating Muslims with the ideals of liberty, giving them the empowerment to counter imams, to feel that they can represent their own faith. (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 23)

\(^{16}\) Jasser asserts correctly that Al-Qaeda has propaganda magazines widely available on the internet. I choose not to cite or include any of this material out of concern that even being in possession of it might put me in a compromising position. I looked at Al-Qaeda's magazines released around the time of King’s hearings to see if they made any mention of the hearings. However, this was around the time that Osama Bin Laden was killed and their magazines focused entirely on praising OBL as a martyr and a great leader. It was at the point when looking at the magazines that I realized that they included articles about how to maintain and fire an AK-47 and detailed instructions on how to build homemade explosives that I decided the material was not something that should be in my possession.
What Jasser is setting up here is a narrative that carries throughout the entire hearing: it is repeated time and again that the majority of American Muslims are good honest citizens, but always with the refrain that there is an underlying current in the Muslim community that is radicalizing; that this radicalizing element rejects American secularism, is isolationist in nature, is propagating sharia (Islamic) law, and is growing.

This fits the Orientalist narrative in a several ways; one key Orientalist assumption is that Muslims come from a background that emphasizes Islam as being a political system, which is in contrast to Western secularism wherein religion is secondary to politics in our civic lives. For example, Jasser argues that in a minority but significant number of mosques, there is a separatist attitude which holds “that the Islamic state takes precedence; Islamic law takes precedence over American law,” however “most of our families left that political Islamic party mentality in the Middle East and came here to be part of a political infrastructure that separates church and state.” So for Jasser the fight is to get the majority of Muslims, who reject political Islam, to accept that there is an internal problem in the Muslim community with which they must deal (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 33).

However, it must once again be noted that his claims here lack evidence. The use of language here should be noted, because while the common refrain throughout the hearings is that the majority of Muslims are 'good Americans' [read: not terrorists] the immediate refrain is always similar to the one Jasser used above, that while it is a 'minority' that reject 'our' values, they are significant in number. Which is it?
This line of argument divides Muslims into two groups: those that are secular, thus westernized and invested in American values; and those that are invested in Islam as an all-encompassing political system, and therefore have little invested in the United States as a political community and are potentially radicalizing or being radicalized. There is a degree to which Jasser is attempting to create a separation between 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims.' This is an entirely arbitrary denotation, as it is unclear by what exact criteria Jasser would like to make this differentiation.

It is also worth noting that this argument furthers a narrative by which either Muslims are members of a group that fully informs their identity and political allegiance or individuals with priorities set by their own self-interest. That is to say that the dichotomy Jasser creates here is between American individualists and those Muslims who have a collective identity. This last item plays an important role in the assignment of blame with regard to terrorist attacks and is a major question in the hearings: when someone who performs a terrorist attack does so in the name of Islam, do we blame the individual, or is the Muslim community to blame or in some way complicit? Should we be looking at individuals for responsibility in terrorist attacks where a ‘radicalized’ Muslim is implicated to the Muslim community as a whole with regard to responsibility?

Jasser suggests that it is the Muslim community that is responsible because it is their children that are being targeted by the radicalizers, and while this argument is certainly true on some level, I question to what degree furthering this narrative is helpful. On the one hand Jasser is saying that this issue is somehow separate from the rest of the American community in that it is the responsibility of the Muslim community to deal with it. While at the same time Jasser also creates a dichotomy whereby some Muslims
are westernized and civilized while others cling to a backward civilization that does not separate church and state. The latter is a clear example of the notion that “we” are a secular society while “they” have not civilizationally evolved enough to move into secular modernity.

Finally, an important consideration with regard to Jasser’s testimony is this: while Dr. Jasser has qualifications which merit respect (his military service, he is a doctor, a respected member of American political society and the Muslim community), He is not an expert on Islam or radicalization in the Muslim community and so his testimony and the accusative language which he uses with regard to radicalization is anecdotal. Since we cannot reasonably universalize an individual’s experience it is difficult to draw strong empirical conclusions from Jasser’s testimony.

For example, Jasser later responds to a question from King saying that he witnessed a sermon in a mosque in Phoenix in which a CAIR sign was held up which said something “extremely insulting about American soldiers and what they are doing in Iraq. And you can't tell me that that doesn't have an effect on radicalization.” Again, this claim is anecdotal and hardly counts as serious evidence.

All of this testimony fits somewhat messily into that part of the Orientalist discourse in which Islam and Muslims may be 1) spoken about without providing much in the way of 3) evidence and yet the rhetoric is given the weight of truth. This problematic discourse is compounded by talking about the entire Muslim community in such a broad and general way.
Mr. Melvin Bledsoe

Mr. Bledsoe is the father of Carlos Bledsoe, also known as Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad, who pled guilty in July 2011 to the murder of Pvt. William Long in 2009 at an Army recruitment center in Little Rock, Arkansas (Staff, 2011). Carlos Bledsoe converted to Islam in college, dropped out and moved to Yemen in 2007; he was arrested by Yemeni police when he overstayed his visa in 2008 shortly after his marriage to a Yemeni woman. Carlos was then deported back to the United States. At that time he was questioned by both Yemeni security and the FBI, however before the murder he was never put under surveillance (Dao, 2010, pp. 1-2).

Melvin Bledsoe’s testimony is primarily concerned with the changes that he and his family experienced as his son was indoctrinated into radical Islam by those who, as he puts it, “programmed and trained my son to kill” (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 23). Bledsoe describes his son in his youth as being a normal “happy-go-lucky kid” who enjoyed team sports, swimming, dancing, and listening to music (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 26). When Carlos left Memphis to go off to college in Nashville in the fall of 2003 Mr. Bledsoe describes a number of occasions and events that indicated to himself and his family that something strange was happening with their son. The first was an intense argument over the Muslim religion with his brother-in-law, which Mr. Bledsoe put down to Carlos perhaps having some Muslim friends and had found offense in some comment. However, the next time Carlos came home he removed all of the pictures in his room including one of Dr. Martin Luther King. When questioned about this behavior Carlos informed his family that he had converted to Islam and that everything he did from then on would “be to honor Allah” (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 24).
His family visited him in Nashville in an attempt to ascertain what was happening with their son. They found out that he had dropped out of school in the beginning of 2005, and was working a temporary job. Carlos had gotten a dog in college but had released the dog in the woods “because he was told that Muslims consider dogs as a dirty creature.” His family could not understand this since the Bledsoes had had a dog in their home since Carlos was 5 years old (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 24).

“All this was part of [Carlos’] brainwashing, changing his thinking a little bit at a time” (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 25). The next step that Mr. Bledsoe describes was that his son began demanding that his employer allow him to pray at certain times of the day, “regardless of what was going on” in his workplace; Mr. Bledsoe explained to his son that this was a very difficult arrangement for an employer (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 25), apparently to no avail. Mr. Bledsoe continues:

At this time, at the next step on his progress of radicalization, Carlos was convinced to change his name. He chose the name Abdulhakim Muhammad. At this point his culture was no longer important to him, only the Islamic culture mattered. Some Muslim leader had taken advantage of my son, but he’s not the only one being taken advantage of. This is an ongoing thing in Nashville and many other cities in America. In Nashville Carlos was captured by best describes hunters [sic]. He was manipulated and lied to. (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 25)

Bledsoe goes on to explain that his son went to Yemen in what he told his family was an effort to visit Mecca. The people that brought him there set him up to work at an English language school. However, the school turned out to be a front for terrorist activities “and Carlos ended up in a training camp run by terrorists. Carlos joined with the Yemeni extremists facilitated by their American counterpart in Nashville” (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 25).
Mr. Bledsoe tells us that it was both an Imam in Nashville, his training in Yemen and Carlos' subsequent stay in a jail in Yemen with “hardcore Al Qaida member[s]” that finally radicalized him into a person that would finally kill Pvt. Long.

It is also apparent from his testimony that while Mr. Bledsoe's situation is tragic, his story is entirely anecdotal. This anecdotal form of evidence, which we also saw with Jasser, works because of the preexisting discourse: we have a pre-constructed notion of Muslim identity and this anecdotal evidence serves to reinforce that image. Bledsoe has no knowledge of Islam, Muslims, the Middle East, radicalization, or terrorism, and without the relevant facts we are left with an absolutely horrible story about a father that lost his son to Islamic radicals, who then murdered an American soldier in cold blood and will spend the rest of his life in prison, but we do not learn anything constructive that might help us understand how this might be prevented in the future. Instead, we are left with an image of an incomprehensible internal enemy that we can fear but cannot understand.

Testimony of Mr. Abdirizak Bihi

Mr. Bihi is a Somali American whose family members are refugees from the ongoing civil war in Somalia. As Mr. Bihi puts it: "my sister and her family, she was one of the luckiest ones that made it to the shores of the United States of America" (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 27). Mr. Bihi is the "Director of the Somali education and the Somali Social Advocacy Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota," and "the uncle of Burhan Hassan" (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 27).Mr. Bihi's nephew at 17 years old along with dozens of other Somali boys disappeared from his community in and around 2007 and are thought to have gone back to Somalia to fight with Al-Shabaab, a Somali based offshoot
of Al-Qaeda, or some other radical group. Bihi's Nephew was shot in the head and buried in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia in 2009. The details as to why he was killed are unclear (AP, Minn. Teen Found Murdered In Somalia, 2009). For two years his family desperately searched for their lost child and Bihi's testimony is primarily concerned with this struggle.

Mr. Bihi says that when Hassan went missing he and his sister approached the community at their mosque asking for help in finding him. However, the next day their religious leaders denounced their claim that any boys had disappeared, saying that they were tools being used by outsiders to discredit Islam and their community (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 28). Bihi says that they spent the next two years trying to convince the Somali American community that there were indeed boys that had gone missing, "after two years of demonstrations, educating, fighting with basically our rental and personal money, and efforts of sleeping three hours a night, two and a half years, we won the heart and minds of the community" (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 28). Despite their victory in getting the community to come to their side in the struggle to find their lost children, the Islamic leaders in the community never came to their aid and in fact fought them at every stage.

Bihi's testimony strongly suggests that there was strong complicity in the mosques and Muslim leadership in stopping them from investigating the missing children. When questioned at subsequent points in the hearing Bihi reiterates this point; that the imams (Muslim clergy), mosques, and leadership in general are not to be trusted, and it should be noted that he never confines this assertion to just his community or just to Somali
Americans, he asserts without caveat that there is some conspiracy going on in mosques in general.

While Bihi's story is as tragic as Mr. Bledsoe's it also raises more questions than it answers and is problematic in much the same way. Firstly, Mr. Bihi does not give us a clear idea of what happened to his nephew other than that he disappeared to Somalia and was found killed in Mogadishu. It is not clear if he was radicalized in some way and convinced to go to Somalia, if he was kidnapped and taken, or in either case by whom. There is some speculation that Hassan was killed by Al-Shabaab because he might have linked them to the disappeared boys and that perhaps he was planning on coming home (AP, Minn. Teen Found Murdered In Somalia, 2009), though this speculation is absent from Bihi's testimony.

As with Mr. Bledsoe, Mr. Bihi does not have any qualifications to talk about this issue in any more than an anecdotal way. While Mr. Bihi's story is no less tragic with regard to the fate of his nephew, we would be better informed by the testimony of a homeland security official for example, or an area specialist, and certainly there must have been someone responsible for an investigation of the domestic case that could have better informed the hearing.

Bihi's contribution to the discourse is that he is using 3) anecdotal evidence to accuse the leadership of the Muslim community 4) at large of being complicit in radicalization, a 2) derogatory statement if ever there was one, which together further paints the picture of Muslims as being an 'other' which we cannot understand and which threatens us. Again this analysis functions in the context of a pre-existing discursive
construction of Muslim identity which is why the anecdotal nature of the evidence presented is not questioned.

In both Mr. Bledsoe's case and Mr. Bihi's case we are left with the tragic testimony of a father whose son is in jail for life and an uncle whose nephew was killed for uncertain reasons. Neither of them can be blamed for taking the opportunity to have their stories heard and to express their frustration and anger at the forces that contributed to the tragic fates of their son and nephew respectively, and while they both have my sympathy they and we would have been better served by testimony from experts whose views were based on a macro study of the issues at hand in these hearings, rather than testimony that is limited to the experience of individuals. This would better fulfill the purpose of the hearings in the Homeland Security Committee which is to keep the country safe from violent extremists.

**Sheriff Lee Baca**

The final witness of the hearing called by the Democrat, ranking member Mr. Thompson, was Lee Baca. The Sheriff of Los Angeles County since 1998, Baca runs the largest sheriff's department in the United States, has jurisdiction over more than 4 million people, has over 18,000 staff, and has worked extensively with the Department of Homeland Security, the Travel Security Agency, and many other federal agencies before and after 9/11 to prevent terrorist attacks on U.S. soil (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 30).

Baca testifies that his Sheriff’s Department has had a lot of success in reaching out to the very diverse "ethnic, cultural, and religious communities that thrive in the Los Angeles area. We establish strong bonds through continuing outreach and physical
presence at important events to every community” (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 31). Baca says that the evidence is that violent extremism is on the rise among all groups regardless of religious affiliation (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 31). Baca expresses concern that the approach of the hearing singles out Muslims as being more prone to radicalization than other groups. He argues that focusing on the Muslim community alone is counterproductive because it feeds into terrorist propaganda that the West is at war with Islam and is counterproductive to efforts of law enforcement to build trust and cooperation with these communities.

Baca argues that the Muslim community and leadership have been very cooperative with law enforcement in his own experience and with regard to the intelligence that comes across his desk on the subject. For example, he cites the Congressional Research Service as reporting that since 9/11 there have been 77 terror plots by domestic non-Muslims, while there have been 41 total plots by both domestic and international Muslim perpetrators. In addition, "reports indicate that Muslim Americans helped foil seven of the last 10 plots propagated by Al Qaida, within the United States" (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, p. 31).

Baca explains that in Los Angeles County, leaders from all sectors of the Muslim American community have come together to form the Muslim American Homeland Security Congress to help law enforcement combat violent extremism. In these efforts and others "Muslim American community leaders in Los Angeles have not hesitated to put themselves in potentially uncomfortable positions to interact with local law enforcement” (Hill, Transcript 1, ND, pp. 31-2). Baca is pointing to a relationship
between law enforcement and the Muslim community that is reciprocal and respectful, and feels that these hearings may serve to undermine these relationships.

Along with Keith Ellison, Baca counters the Orientalist narrative, however this counter narrative that Baca presents is never acknowledged by the Republicans on the committee. Instead they tend to question the other witnesses in the rest of the hearing to confirm their own Orientalist narrative. So it is not fair to say that there are not counter narrative present in the hearing, but rather that the Orientalist narrative is the dominant narrative and is impervious to outside contending narratives because of its lack of concern about facts.

It is important to note that I have not accused Peter King or anyone else involved of replaying this discursive construction for malicious reasons. Indeed, I am fully convinced that King has the best intentions in trying to protect his country and is completely sincere in his motives. The point being that we are all susceptible to this discursive construction of the ‘other.’

**Second Radicalization Hearing**

“The Threat of Muslim-American Radicalization in U.S. Prisons”

As with the previous hearing, I will examine if and how this hearing replays the Orientalist construction of Muslim identity as an enemy ‘other.’ Since many of the themes from the previous hearing are replayed in this second hearing, it will be a significantly shorter analysis. I will therefore summarize the witnesses in the hearing first and analyze their significance afterward. This hearing focused on the threat of Islamic radicalization in U.S. prisons. As with the previous hearing I will only use the
The first witness was Mr. Patrick Dunleavy, former Deputy Inspector of the New York Department of Correctional Services, Criminal Intelligence Unit. Mr. Dunleavy’s testimony starts by telling us that Islamic radicalization in U.S. prisons is a threat with which we should be concerned. Dunleavy testifies that Islam began to establish itself in the U.S. prison system in the late 1960s. He tells us that one of the spiritual leaders that began this movement is currently serving a life sentence for shooting two police officers. Islam in U.S. prisons, he says, became more and more radicalized in the 70s and 80s and increased its converts (Hill, House June 15 2011 Hearing, ND, pp. 5-6).

“Then, in the late ’80s and ’90s, there was an influx of foreign-born inmates from the Middle East, some of whom were incarcerated for having committed violent acts against non-believers, individuals who had either killed, bombed, or stolen money in the name of Allah. They had international connections with terrorist organizations such as Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Al Qaida, Hezbollah and Hamas. After they were arrested and incarcerated, they walked into the prison mosque and were hailed as heroes. They were inspired to deference by the Muslim inmates and by the Muslim chaplains.” (Hill, House June 15 2011 Hearing, ND, p. 6)

Dunleavy cites two examples of inmates being associated with terror plots. The first is an inmate who conspired with others on the outside to bomb the World Trade Center in 1993; the other is a plot which was foiled by law enforcement in 2009 “to bomb synagogues in New York and shoot down military aircraft with Stinger missiles” (Hill, House June 15 2011 Hearing, ND).
Dunleavy’s major concern is that the Islamic religious leaders who are allowed to preach in mosques are not vetted in any sufficient way to prevent those who would radicalize from infiltrating prisons. He cites two examples where this was a concern: one in which an imam was caught attempting to smuggle contraband into a prison; the other in which an imam was hired by the corrections department despite having served time in prison for murder. (Hill, House June 15 2011 Hearing, ND, pp. 6-7).

While the incidents Dunleavy cites are troubling they are anecdotal. Dunleavy’s credentials as a former officer in state corrections gives his testimony authority, but it is curious that he does not provide better data to make his case. This is not to say that he does not have this information, but he does not provide it at any point during the hearing, let alone in his initial testimony. It does seem that if there were a time and a place to present such information a congressional hearing on the subject of his expertise would be that time and place.

The second witness at the hearing was Kevin Smith, deputy district attorney for San Bernadino County, California. Smith tells us that he was a part of the prosecutorial team in a terrorism case that began with radicalization in the prison system. An inmate named Kevin James in the CA Department of Corrections began an organization based on radical Islam around 1997. By the time he was paroled in 2004 James had drawn up plans for recruitment, including acquiring small arms and explosives and training operative to carry out attacks against designated targets. He and a partner recruited two others and began robbing gas stations to raise funds for their new terrorist cell. At some point James dropped his cell phone which authorities were able to use to apprehend and indict the four group members on charges of “of seditious conspiracy to wage a war of
terrorism against the United States government” (Hill, House June 15 2011 Hearing, ND, pp. 8-9).

The third witness was Michael Downing, deputy chief and commanding officer of the Los Angeles Police Department's Counter Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau. Downing argues that prisoners are susceptible to radicalization because they are social discontents with violent tendencies who exhibit high rates of recidivism when leaving prison. Downing concurs with Dunleavy that there are serious problems with the hiring practices of imams in the prison system. He further suggests that religious meetings are not monitored, and that there are radicalization materials readily available to inmates. Downing tells us that there is a sharp distinction between the Islam practiced outside of prison, which is “one of the great and peaceful religions of the world,” and that promotes “value-based living,” which stands in contrast to the radical Islam that inmates encounter which promotes violence, “dysfunction, danger and exploitation” (Hill, House June 15 2011 Hearing, ND, pp. 10-12).

The fourth and final witness at the hearing was Dr. Bert Useem, head of the Sociology Department at Perdue University who specializes in prison organization and violence (Hill, House June 15 2011 Hearing, ND, pp. 12-13). Useem testifies that prisons have not been a major source of radicalization. Useem argues that “three sets of facts support this conclusion.”

First, U.S. prisons now confine 1.6 million people. Each year, 730,000 inmates are released. Second, from 9/11 through the first half of 2011, 178 Muslim Americans have committed acts of terrorism or were prosecuted for terrorism-related offenses. Third, for 12 of these 178 cases, there is some evidence for radicalization behind bars. Putting these three sets of facts together, if prisons
were a major cause of jihadist radicalization, we would expect to see a lot of it, but we don't (Hill, House June 15 2011 Hearing, ND, p. 13)

Useem argues that in his research on the subject\footnote{For example, see: Useem, U.S. Prisons and the Myth of Islamic Radicalization, 2012.} he found a number of important factors that have inhibited radicalization in prisons: prisons are far less violent than they were decades ago. Prisoners are very closely observed by personnel, including watching their behavior for radicalization and monitoring all communications. Correctional leaders have taken steps to mitigate radicalization, including increased communication with law enforcement and active measures to train personnel and screen for radicalizing elements including clergy. Useem also found that the profiles of terrorists and the U.S. prison population is different: U.S. prisoners tend to be poor, while terrorists tend to be well off. Lastly, Useem found that there is a “modest level of patriotism among inmates, which makes prisons a hostile environment toward radicalizing ideologies.”

Once again in this hearing the Orientalist narrative is the dominant one because the majority of the witnesses were called by Republicans knowing that the testimony they give would replay this narrative. As Saghaye-Biria (2012) pointed out in the first hearing who was invited shaped the possible discourse that could take place. Bert Useem provided strong evidence that counters the Orientalist narrative but as in the first hearing this counter narrative was not acknowledged by King and his colleagues. So that while the Orientalist narrative is not totalizing it is impervious to these outside discursive challenges because Orientalism is self contained and not concerned with the rules of
evidence. The result is that those who are pushing and Orientalist narrative are not interested in even considering these counter narratives.

**Third Radicalization Hearing**

“On Al-Shabaab’s Muslim American Radicalization”

The analysis of this hearing will proceed in the same manner as the last. I will start with an overview of the witnesses and then proceed with a brief analysis of whether or not they are replaying the Orientalist discourse on the construction of Muslim identity. The third of King’s radicalization hearings focused on the effect of the Somalian terrorist organization Al-Shabaab on Muslim radicalization in the U.S. which took place on July 27, 2011 (Hill, House July 27 2012 Hearing, ND). Chairperson King starts the hearing off by stating that dozens of Americans had been radicalized by Al-Shebaab and had gone back to Somalia to fight with Al-Shebaab for control of that country. Ranking member Thompson points out that no attack had ever taken place against the U.S. homeland or American interests abroad that originated with Al-Shebaab, that Al-Shebaab numbers less than 3000 members, and is only one of many competing factions for power in a complicated civil war in Somalia. While Al-Shebaab ought to be monitored by law enforcement it does not appear to present any danger to the continental U.S. (Hill, House July 27 2012 Hearing, ND, pp. 2-4).

The first witness in the hearing was Ahmed Hussen, a Muslim Canadian who is active in various civic activities. Hussen testifies that there is a problem of alienation and radicalization in the Canadian-Somali community that mirrors the issues in the
The final witness was Tom Smith, police chief in St. Paul, Minnesota which has a large Somali-American population and other significant immigrant populations. Smith testified that his police department has had a large amount of success in combating radicalization and other criminal activities through engagement with the Somali-American community, including after school programs, sports teams for the youth, and groups for women and girls all led by local police officers. Smith explains that this approach has opened up a once isolated community to freely engage with them to
“address challenges and solve problems. Somali-American youth that may be tempted by an ideology of radicalization can now look to an expanded network of trust, including police officers, mentors to provide support, resources and guidance to steer them in a positive direction.” (Hill, House July 27 2012 Hearing, ND, pp. 11-13)

All four of these approaches treat the question of Al-Shebaab as a law enforcement issue. The first three tell us that Al-Shebaab is a dangerous organization with aspirations to recruit in the U.S. for fighting in Somalia, with the possibility that they may aspire to attack domestically, while the fourth witness gives us some idea of the challenges and approaches that law enforcement might use to combat Al-Shebaab’s recruitment aspirations. Even though, for the most part this is a legitimate exercise in assessing the threat of terrorist organization domestically and abroad, there are a few ways in which this fits into the Orientalist narrative which are worth a brief mention.

This hearing is held in the larger context of hearings about radicalization in the Muslim-American community. While Al-Shebaab is the primary topic of interest here, the forum in which this is being discussed does concern the larger community and as such could be construed to homogenize this community as we have seen elsewhere. It should also be pointed out that though this hearing had a lot of speculation about possible attacks or possible Al-Shebaab aspirations it was void of any evidence to verify these claims. Finally, it should be noted that no Muslims were invited to testify that day, despite a request by congressman Ellison to be allowed to testify. Ellison is not only a Muslim himself, but also is the representative for the largest Somali-American community in the country (Ellison denied request to testify at Al-Shabaab hearing, 2011). As with Saghaye-Biria’s analysis of the first hearing, the people that were allowed to testify shape the possible discursive outcome in the hearing. Taken together in this
hearing, we see a silencing of Muslim voices, a lack of evidence for hypothetical
domestic attacks, and a passive homogenization and slander of the Muslim community by
the association with the other hearings.

**Fourth Radicalization Hearing**

“On Threats to Military Communities Inside the United States”

The analysis of the fourth hearing will be similar to the last two. The fourth
hearing was held as a joint hearing between Senate and House Homeland security
committees on December 7, 2011. The hearing focused on the threat of terrorism in the
U.S. military community (Hill, House Senate Hearing December 7 2011, ND). The first
three witnesses will be handled together because their testimony is very similar, and the
fourth witness will be introduced and analyzed following them.

The first witness was Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Stockton (Hill, House
Senate Hearing December 7 2011, ND, pp. 8-9). The second witness was Colonel Reid
Sawyer director of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (Hill, House Senate
Hearing December 7 2011, ND, pp. 9-11). The third witness was Jim Stuteville senior
advisor to the U.S. Army for Counterintelligence Operations and liaison to the Federal
Bureau of Investigation (Hill, House Senate Hearing December 7 2011, ND). These
three witnesses all have expertise in matters of homeland security and terrorism, and
taken together their testimony forms a cohesive narrative about an organized threat to the
military community, including threats to military families, recruitment stations, military
bases, and diplomatic missions among others.
The witnesses tell us that there is an ongoing and growing threat to the military community domestically and internationally, and that this threat is both internal to the military in that members of the military are being radicalized to attack fellow members of that community. The threat is external in that Al Qaeda is targeting the military community by focusing radicalized, would be terrorists, on attacking this community. The witnesses provide few solid numbers to justify these claims because the specific numbers are only to be discussed in closed session (Hill, House Senate Hearing December 7 2011, ND, p. 12). However, the witnesses’ current engagement with intelligence operations and expertise in this field lends credibility to these claims. This does however beg the question: what does this testimony have to do with King’s radicalization in the Muslim American community hearings?

We find the answer with the hearing’s fourth witness, Daris Long (Hill, House Senate Hearing December 7 2011, ND, pp. 44-46), a retired Marine Corps veteran and father of William Long who was murdered by Carlos Bledsoe in 2009 at a military recruiting center in Arkansas (see above). Long testifies that the government has failed to protect us from domestic terrorist attacks. Long specifically tells us that the failure comes from the unwillingness of the Obama administration and the media to call domestic acts of terror by radicalized Muslims “terrorism.” He suggests that if the media and government officials were more vehement in naming our enemies “Islamic extremists” that some of these attacks could have been prevented. Instead Long says we get platitudes and niceties: instead of calling it terrorism, “Little Rock is a drive-by, Fort Hood is just workplace violence” (Hill, House Senate Hearing December 7 2011, ND, p. 44).
Along with Mr. Bledsoe and Mr. Bihi, Mr. Long has lost a child and all sympathy is due him for his loss. However, in the same way as above it must be pointed out that Long is not an expert on terrorism, Islam, or terrorist radicalization. While his pain is real, his testimony is anecdotal and tells us little about the problems this hearing is attempting to address. Instead, this hearing leaves us with some uncertain knowledge that our military communities are under attack and that in a specific attack the pain of a father is very real.

This hearing drifts farther into the mire of Orientalist discourse in that it treats Islam and Muslims as a complete abstraction: the Muslim community, while implicated by King’s assertion that this is the fourth in his hearings on developments in that community, is conspicuously absent from the hearings. This is because the construction of Muslim identity is predefined and implicitly understood. This identity is built into the narrative in such a way that the actors involved in replaying this discourse are not aware that this is what they are doing. Because Muslim identity is predefined in this way in this hearing, Muslims are not even given an identity: we aren’t told who they are, what they are doing and no hint is given as to the motivation of radicalization or anything else for that matter. Thus not just silencing this community from this hearing but in some sense disappearing them all together into some abstract homogenous enemy about which we know very little except that they threaten us.

While we do have expert testimony that there are threats, we are not given the privilege of hearing any specifics since these are in closed session and thus not for public record. The only specifics we are given are from Mr. Long from whom we only hear a
bereaved father lament the failure of the government and media to say what he thinks ought to be said about those he feels are responsible for the death of his son.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will briefly proceed back through King’s hearings to highlight the construction of Muslim identity as a whole as presented by the hearings. I will highlight the discursive Orientalist construction of Muslim identity which I find are replayed in Peter King’s hearings. Finally, I will return to Said’s Orientalism to briefly discuss where we might consider going from here.

To work back through King’s hearings. In the last hearing, we are told that there is a threat and that people have been killed. The Muslim community is implicated and named, but never defined or explained; they have thus sunk into an abstraction: we do not know who they are but we know their name and that they threaten us in some undefined way.

The third hearing on Al-Shebaab tells us about possible attacks and the hypothetical aspirations of Al-Shebaab to target the U.S. domestically. Here we see that the enemy has a name and a place: Muslims and Somalia. Thus Muslim identity here is solidified but in a distant foreign land and threats are made, but without substance.

The second hearing on prison radicalization brings the threat closer to home and again gives us a few stories of radicalization in prisons. This constructs Muslim identity in a way that could implicate criminality in the population that is being homogenized, and adds the sub-context of prison violence to this identity in addition.

The first hearing gave us a closer look at a few stories that bring radicalization closer to home: a father, whose son was radicalized in Islam, committed a murder in the
name of Islam and is now in prison; an immigrant refugee from Somalia whose nephew was radicalized and ran off to die in the civil war there. Additionally, a self-proclaimed expert on the Muslim community tells us that the cause of these problems comes from Muslims not conforming to American values. This gives us the narrative that anyone, whether they be a Muslim immigrant or an ordinary American father, is susceptible to the influence of radical Islam.

There are two competing narratives at play in these hearings. On the one hand there is the Orientalist narrative, and on the other is a competing narrative that seeks to challenge the assumptions of the Orientalist narrative. It is important to note that the Orientalist narrative, while dominant, as evidenced by the choice of a majority of witnesses that replay the Orientalist narrative, is not totalizing by recognition of the presence of a narrative that challenges Orientalism. That said, the Orientalist narrative is not susceptible to this discursive challenge by virtue of its disinterest in facts. So what we see in the hearing is that those who are replaying the Orientalist discourse more or less ignore facts presented that challenge their preconceived discursive construction of Muslim identity.

Another conclusion from these hearings is that the discursive construction of Muslim identity as an enemy ‘other’ is so deeply ingrained in our society that the actors involved in these hearings are not even aware that they are replaying this identity construction. Peter King’s Radicalization in the Muslim American Community hearings replay the Orientalist discourse in the four ways that I had abstracted from Edward Said’s work: they silence the community by allowing only a few members of that community to speak at the hearings. Rather than focusing on the individuals responsible for terrorist
acts the community itself that is to be taken to task for acts of violence in the name of radical Islam. Instead of taking account of individual action this defames the community and homogenizes them into a whole that is responsible for the actions of all and removes agency from individuals. This removal of agency from individual actors is not new to the narrative but is emphasized by these hearings as a means to solidify the homogenization of the group.

The discursive construction of Muslim identity is whole and complete without any member of the community representing themselves. It goes beyond silencing in that the implicit construction of their identity is already fully constructed. There is no need for Muslims to speak on their own behalf because their identity is already complete. Never mind that the evidence for this identity construction is sorely lacking. The result as Said points out, and it bears repeating, is that things are said about Muslims that no one would dare to say about any other minority group, and because of the discursive construction of their identity and defined and fully understood no one questions these stereotypes.

One of the most prominent aspect of these hearings is the lack of and disinterest in using facts to evidence the claims made by the side that treats Islam as the problem and places the blame on the Muslim community as a whole. Throughout the hearing we get anecdotal evidence to support claims that radicalization is a major threat. Yes, attacks happened. Yes, people were radicalized. Yes, people were killed. Of this there is no doubt, but we need more than a handful of instances to draw firm conclusions, especially if this is being used to implicate guilt in an entire population.
This discursive construction without evidence solidifies Islam into a thing abstracted from any other concern that exists and is threatening to our way of life. We are all vulnerable to it. The people that live in the Muslim community are infected with it, lack agency and are thus helpless against it, and are therefore threatening to us all.

King’s hearings follow a logical course of action. Here we have a story about an American man, Carlos Bledsoe, who was radicalized in prison (albeit a Yemeni prison) so King investigates prisons in his next hearing. Here we have a story about a young Somali man who was radicalized in the U.S. and went to fight with Al-Shebaab in Somalia and was killed, so King’s third hearing is on Al-Shebaab. Lastly, Carlos Bledsoe killed an Army recruitment officer and so King investigates radicalization in the U.S. military in his last hearing.

I have no doubt that King has the best intentions in using these hearings to combat a real and ongoing threat. However, King’s lack of interest in hearing the voices of Muslims and his misappropriation of anecdotal evidence as empirical fact lead to a construction of Muslim identity as an enemy other: Muslims are not allowed to speak for themselves in these hearings and are thus spoken for. The hearings give damning accounts against them with very little evidence or explanation. Their identity is thus defined for them: their identity constructed as a homogenous group with very little agency that is defined as an enemy other.

Returning to Said we must understand that this construction of Muslim identity is part of a much larger, much older discourse. The Orientalist discourse is built into the background of all of our conversations about Islam and Muslims. I have attempted here
to identify this discourse in the hopes that we may move forward in our national
conversation understanding that these underlying assumption and constructions of
identity ought to be questioned when they arise and challenged in their verity.

Finally, a few suggestions about where research might go from here. This
narrative is being replayed all throughout our discourse as a society. It would be easy to
say that it is only a conservative perspective that promotes this discourse: this would be
disingenuous. One need only listen to radically liberal Bill Maher (Poor, 2013) or Sam
Harris (Harris, 2013) to see that the virulently us-versus-them discourse on Islam is not
confined to one political camp or the other.

That said many of the witnesses that King invited and much of his information
seem to come from FOX News, right wing blogs like Pamela Geller (see above) and right
wing talk radio. This problem should be further investigated, especially in light of the
fact that Anders Breivik quoted Geller and other American right wing bloggers in his
manifesto that he published online. In July 2011 Breivik massacred almost 80 people on
an Island outside of Oslo, Norway, it was a liberal political youth camp and many of his
victims were children (Mala, 2011). Breivic committed the atrocity in part because he
believed that Muslims were infiltrating Europe and that liberal politicians were to blame.
This is not to say that this single incident condemns any group or individual other than
the perpetrator, but rather that this kind of rhetoric has consequences regardless of its
source.

Finally, we need to consider how this construction of Muslim identity affects
American foreign policy. This approach is constructivist in that it starts with domestic
culture as an important factor in our foreign policy. While this approach is not whole in and of itself it is well to ask ourselves why it is that we can see or ignore the dead bodies of so many black and brown people around the world. We need to recognize this discursive construction of identity and critically examine it, this is what Said spent his career doing and we ought to continue this important work:

"For a myth does not analyze or solve problems. It represents them as already analyzed and solved; that is, it presents them as already assembled images, in the way a scarecrow is assembled from bric-a-brac and then made to stand for a man." (Said, Orientalism, 1978, p. 312)
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