

“American Jihad:” Representations of Islam in the United States after 9/11

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Abstract

This paper looks at competing uses of the concept of jihad in American society in the aftermath of 9/11. It examines three alternative meanings given to “American Jihad.” Three of the instances all have “American Jihad” as their title: a book by Steven Emerson, a commencement speech by a Harvard student, and an episode of NBC TV series “Law & Order.” All three cases are acts of politics and moments of regulation of the entry of the concept of jihad into cultural circulation.

Introduction

Jihad is one of the few Islamic concepts that the American public happens to hear or read about on an almost daily basis. It has an obvious privilege in appearing so frequently in the headlines.¹ What makes the American public’s encounter with jihad even more interesting is the fact that the relationship between Islam and the United States is no longer one between two distinct parties, but rather a complex relationship between two partly overlapping identities. The concept of jihad and the debates surrounding it emerge as key to exploring the representation of Islam in the aftermath of 9/11. What is jihad? Is it holy war or piety? Who defines jihad in the United States?

In this paper, I discuss the representation of Islam in the United States after 9/11. In the first part, I elaborate the process of globalization and the consequences of 9/11 for Muslims in this country. In the second and main part, I focus on the competing uses of jihad by highlighting the different

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forms that such popular phrases as "American Jihad" have taken in the public discourse. Such forms of representation are not only ideological, but also are contested by multiple actors of cultural production. My discussion draws upon three recent claims to this concept, all of which have "American Jihad" as their titles: a book by Steven Emerson, a 2002 commencement speech made by a Harvard University senior, and an episode of "Law & Order." All three cases are political acts and instances of regulating the entry of jihad, as a concept, into cultural circulation.

Orientalism, Globalization, and Islam

To understand the structural forces that play important roles in the current shape of (American) Muslims' lives, it is helpful to recall the historical background between Islam/Muslims and Europe. What is at stake here, basically, is European colonialism and the Muslim responses to it. Here, I make two arguments: First, one of the main Muslim responses to colonialism and Orientalism was Muslim nationalism, which assumed two forms: secular nationalism and religious nationalism,² the latter of which is perceived in the West as fundamentalism.³ Second, westernizing authoritarian nation-states contained Muslim nationalism for several decades. However, globalization has made this containment impossible to sustain. Thus, both globalization and the rise of a Muslim diaspora have altered the nature of the relationship between Islam and the West, both in Muslim countries and in the West. Thanks to globalization, specifically *media* and *immigration*, both the West and Islam are "at large."⁴ The relationship between Islam *and* the West now has an emerging new component: Islam/Muslims *in* the West.

Early encounters between the European empires and the cultures of Islam took myriad forms, among them peaceful cultural exchange, trade, and military confrontation. This interaction later on assumed the form of colonial domination. European colonialism and domination over most of the world, including almost all Muslim societies, produced its ideological justification in the form of Orientalism.⁵ Thus, Orientalist scholarship developed as a product of Europe's imperial desire to know and dominate "others." Not surprisingly, it focused on the differences between Europe and the "others." Not only did it owe its emergence to this imperial desire, but it also adopted the gaze of the imperial power to which it remained attached.

As a result, the Orientalist way of looking at the Muslim "other" created a world of binary oppositions in which the "other" was defined in

terms of *lack* of or *absence* of something found in Europe. This dichotomous portrayal of the Christian West and the Muslim East created a Manichean mental map of civilization versus barbarism, the elements of which are still being recycled in the populist speeches of such political leaders as George W. Bush. This is the historical background of President Bush's half-conscious use of *crusade* in one of his early speeches after 9/11, and of the new-found popularity of the word *jihad* as part of the media's vocabulary of terrorism.

Even in the past, the relationship between imperial power and Orientalist representation was not a matter of one-way representation, for the very images and arguments it generated were put into practice as objective/natural descriptions by both the colonial and the post-colonial nation-states. An ideology of modernization through nation-states was activated at a time when territorial colonization was dying.⁶ The overall outcome of territorial colonialism and cultural modernization was authoritarian nation-states and nationalism as an ideology. Colonialism, Orientalism, and authoritarian westernization eventually paved the way for the rise of indigenous nationalism. The nationalism of the victims, just like that of the victimizers, could be cultivated and imagined on different (and almost totally arbitrary) grounds, such as language, ethnicity, and religion.⁷ Pre-globalization nation-states in the Muslim world attempted to create insular national communities on the basis of ethnicity, culture-language, and religion.

The response to colonialism in the Muslim world was, essentially, nationalism ranging between two poles: secular nationalism, which at times became self-colonization (e.g., Kemalism in Turkey) and Muslim nationalism (e.g., contemporary Iran), which is mostly known as political Islam or fundamentalism. The process of globalization has arguably undermined self-colonizing nationalism while galvanizing Muslim nationalism. Globalization and the rise of transnational public spheres have significantly empowered social movements and ideologies that bypass the nation-state by facilitating both subnational and supranational flows.⁸

Globalization is primarily thought of in terms of economic forces by both its proponents and opponents. The centrality of the economy in triggering globalization cannot be denied.⁹ However, globalization has had unintended cultural consequences, among them undermining authoritarian nation-states by reducing their ability to control the flow of commodities, ideas, and peoples across their borders.¹⁰ This development enabled

Muslims (as people) and Islam (as a cultural repertoire) to become mobile. It also contributed to the dismantling of the ideology of modernization and created sizable Muslim communities inside Euro-American societies. Therefore, "covering Islam"¹¹ is no longer an issue of covering "others" in the Middle East. The question of representing Islam needs to be rethought in light of the Muslim presence in American society.

What brought about this new configuration was the process of globalization, which arguably has had the following effects on Muslim communities: the emergence of post-colonial *self-confidence* for Muslims, which mostly took the form of Muslim nationalism; *de-nationalization* (and *de-territorialization*) due to increased contact with other Muslims, which resulted in a post-nationalist religious identification (ummah); and unmediated, direct interaction with non-Muslim peoples and ideas, which contributed to the *democratization* and *multiculturalization* of Muslims.

Globalization not only blurred the distinction between domestic and international politics, but also made the success or failure of certain domestic (yet transnational) actors (i.e., American Muslims) contingent upon the outcomes of Washington's foreign policy choices. Muslim minorities living in Europe and, more importantly, in the United States were becoming the first contemporary Muslim groups to be exempt from the power structure produced by American foreign policy. Although some of them might consider their immigration the result of American foreign policy, once they were inside the United States they enjoyed more freedoms. Once they were outside the power structure that significantly inhibited the chances of democracy in the Middle East, they could challenge existing claims about the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Unfortunately, 9/11 and subsequent governmental arrangements related to homeland security (such as Patriot Act I and Patriot Act II) have terminated this privileged status of American Muslims vis-à-vis Muslims living under oppressive nation-states.

The impact of globalization transformed both diasporic and non-diasporic Muslim communities, as well as the very framework of Orientalism within which Islam had been perceived in Euro-American societies. In classical Orientalism, the subject matter (viz., the Orient or Islam) was geographically and spatially distinct from European geographies and cultures. But the subject matter and political object of neo-Orientalism is no longer spatially distinct from Euro-America, for Islam is no longer external to Europe and North America.¹² This new component in the matrix of relations between western and Muslim societies affects how the Orientalist discourse operates.

If the language of classical Orientalism was *crusade*, the language of neo-Orientalism is one that battles the soul of Islam. Given that it can no longer exclude and dismiss Islam in order to crush it, it now feels the need to penetrate and redefine it. In other words, neo-Orientalism makes distinctions between *good* and *bad* Muslims or between *Islam as a great religion* and *terrorism*. More distinctions are made between *good* and *bad Islams* than between the West and Islam.

American Muslims and the Politico-Cultural Aftershocks of 9/11

In the last few decades, the once invisible and marginal religion of Islam has emerged as the second largest religion in much of Europe and North America. Islam and Muslims are no longer foreign to many western societies. The presence of Islam in the United States is an outcome of several interacting processes, such as slavery, colonialism, cold war politics, the economically driven process of globalization, and religious conversion.¹³

The bulk of Muslim immigration and *mainstreamization* in the United States took place at the time of globalization and was partly a result of it. This temporal location or moment of insertion into American society at large is very important. Muslim immigrants settled in a *de-territorialized*¹⁴ (and even an unstable) world in their host country. Therefore, their identity has still not yet been accommodated fully, for further negotiations on this identity remain partly suspended. Revolutionary transformations in communication technology, as well as the unprecedented scale of interpenetration of domestic and international politics, continue to hinder the process of cultural settlement by those emigrant communities that have left their homelands.

In the case of Muslims, the images and politics of their homelands arrived either simultaneously with them or immediately after their own arrival in their country of destination (i.e., United States). In other words, the nature and impact of American foreign policy on the Muslim world and its consequent coverage in the American media create an atmosphere of *otherization*, in which the Muslim community's integration into the larger American society is continuously threatened and undermined. Even when American Muslims are legal citizens, they continue to be excluded from "cultural citizenship."¹⁵

The growth of the Muslim minority and its visibility in the religious-demographic landscape of the United States reached its peak around the

2000s.¹⁶ Muslim participation in electoral politics became, as some have argued, important during the 2000 presidential election, when leading Muslim organizations decided to support George W. Bush's candidacy. The processes and tendencies of the American Muslim community's institutionalization and *mainstreamization* were profoundly disrupted as a result of the 9/11 terrorist attack. The combined effect of the ensuing changes in domestic and international politics was the exclusion of Islam from the process of globalization.

The consequences of 9/11 on Muslims in the United States have been dramatic. First and foremost, the decades-old media habit of associating Islam with terrorism¹⁷ found its justification in the 9/11 attacks. Islam is perceived to be an inherently violent religion and is approached from within the reductionist framework of security. According to a *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life* survey, a declining number of Americans say that their own religion has a lot in common with Islam: 22% now, as compared with 27% in 2002, and 31% shortly after 9/11.¹⁸ This survey also reveals that 44% of Americans now believe that Islam encourages violence among its followers. Another study that looks at the immediate lexical company of *Islamic* in American television discourse also gives interesting results: The top three of the 15 most popularly used noun phrases from the television transcripts corpus in which *Islamic* is used as an adjective are *Islamic fundamentalist(s)*, *Islamic jihad*, and *Islamic world*, respectively.¹⁹

Groups and individuals who have a vested interest in demonizing Islam and Muslims in the United States have also seized the opportunity to attack Muslims and Islam. A phenomenon reminiscent of anti-Semitism, known as Islamophobia, is emerging and finds expression in a multitude of ways without being subjected to anti-discriminatory measures. In addition to a large-scale loss of legitimacy for Muslims, there has been an erosion of civil liberties at large.²⁰ New administrative changes affecting the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), as well as the interrogation of Muslim immigrants by such security agencies as the FBI, undercut the American Muslim community's growing numbers and consolidation.

One theoretical aftershock of 9/11 has been the return of Orientalism as a veteran body of perspectives on Islam and Muslims. Advocates of this framework, among them Martin Kramer, have sought to popularize their critique not only of postcolonial theory, but also the entire discipline of Middle Eastern studies in the country.²¹ Neo-Orientalism embraces a large spectrum of participants from academia to the media.²² The neo-Orientalists fighting

back are asking that Middle Eastern scholarship be subordinated to American foreign policy interests and certain brands of American patriotism.²³ Even such veteran Orientalist scholars as Bernard Lewis have made a return to the popular corners of the American public sphere, where he explains “the crisis of Islam” or answers “what went wrong” with the Muslims. According to Danny Fostel of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the return of Orientalism has already found some echo among the new generation of academics.²⁴

The return of Orientalism is currently taking place more in popular literature than in academic works. The shock and impact of 9/11 has created fertile ground for the proliferation of what can be called “alarmist literature.” This growing body of popular literature on Islam simply demonizes Islam and Muslims. A representative sample of titles includes the following: Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam* (Modern Library: 2003) and *What Went Wrong* (Perennial: 2003); Steven Emerson, *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living among Us* (Free Press: 2003); Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America* (W.W. Norton & Company: 2003); Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions about the World’s Fastest Growing Religion* (Encounter Books: 2002); Serge Trifkovic, *Sword of the Prophet* (Regina Orthodox Press: 2002); and Anonymous, *The Terrorist Hunter* (Ecco: 2003). Among the best-known alarmist writers are journalist Steven Emerson and Middle East analyst Daniel Pipes. There has been a vicious war of images between such ideologically motivated critics of Muslims and the Muslim advocacy groups within the United States. Such concepts as jihad are among the most contested ones, and American Muslims feel a greater need to reclaim their religion and identity more than ever before.²⁵

In the next section, I show how different actors attempt to shape the American public’s perception by defining jihad in the aftermath of 9/11. I discuss three cases in which this concept was assigned meaning through textual, audio, and visual interventions.

But before discussing these instances of the use of *jihad*, I should note a fourth instance. As a matter of fact, this particular use precedes the other three. The first book to bear the title of *American Jihad* was, in fact, written by Steven Barboza,²⁶ an African-American convert via the Nation of Islam. The Lost and Found Nation of Islam in the Wilderness of America, also known as the Black Muslims, was led by such African-American Muslim leaders as the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X. The original movement eventually converged with orthodox Sunni Islam under the leadership of Warith Deen Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad’s son. Although the

non-orthodox version of the Nation of Islam has been reactivated and continues under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan, it remains a transit point for African-Americans on their way to orthodox Sunni Islam.

After becoming an orthodox Sunni Muslim, Barboza published a collection of interviews with prominent indigenous American Muslims: *American Jihad: Islam after Malcolm X* (Image: 1995). The temporal location of this attempt to define *American Jihad* not only registers the subaltern and historical roots of jihad in indigenous American culture, but also posits it within the context of the African-American experience, without which American identity remains incomplete. The identification of African-Americans with jihad, as a token of identity, is very interesting. As the following section shows, the contestation over the concept of jihad revolves more viciously around what can be called *immigrant* uses of the concept. In this ongoing struggle, it should be remembered that neither the voices nor the powers that amplify them are equal.

American Jihad No. 1: "American Jihad: The Terrorists Living among Us"

Steven Emerson is a well-known contributor to the growing alarmist literature on Islam and terrorism in the United States. His *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living among Us* was published after 9/11, but the author himself has a longer history of "educating" the American public about "Islamic terrorism."

Emerson is an extremely controversial journalist. His critics include members of the American Muslim community, which sees itself as the primary victim of his depiction of Muslims, as well as various independent critics, civil rights groups, and interfaith organizations. He has been accused of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab bias. His credibility has been seriously damaged by his past unsubstantiated claims: that Muslims were responsible for the bombing of Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building (1995) and, along with Islamists, for the crash of TWA 800 (1996). In both cases, he was later proven wrong. Despite his loss of credibility in American mainstream media for several years, he returned to the public scene stronger than ever after the 9/11 tragedy. He is the founder and director of the "Investigative Project" (www.investigativeproject.net), a secret organization that investigates terrorist networks.

American Jihad is an updated version of the author's 1994 documentary, "Jihad in America." Broadcast on PBS, it stirred a great deal of reaction

from American Muslims. Since then, Emerson has become a household name for many American Muslims and has been a frequent media resource as a “terrorism expert.”

The introduction of *American Jihad* starts with horrifying images of a Hamas commander speaking to an American Muslim crowd in the American heartland, Kansas City, in 1989. The speaker and his audience celebrate the stabbing of people and blowing up of buses. Observing this gathering, Emerson argues that Muslims harbor “the dream of a world under Islam.”²⁷ He enumerates various mostly unrelated Islamic organizations throughout the world, and claims that terrorist groups are exploiting this country’s civil liberties for terrorist causes. Discrete political, military, and civil organizations, which Emerson identifies as Islamist, are collectively seen as part of a “worldwide network of militant Islamic organizations”²⁸ for, according to him, “all share the same goal of an Islamic world”²⁹ After criticizing the FBI, the CIA, the INS, and other American security agencies for not pursuing aggressive policies against Muslims in the United States, Emerson claims the 9/11 attacks were carried out by this network. He concludes that “it is a *certainty* that terrorists, *already living among us*, will continue to pursue their destructive agenda.”³⁰ His certainty about terrorist attacks seems to be unchanged both before and after 9/11. For example, in a 1997 interview, Emerson told Daniel Pipes that Americans should “get ready for twenty World Trade Center bombings.”³¹

The entire book is an extended version of the ideas laid out in the introduction. In several chapters, the author uses further illustrations, expands his arguments, and provides more personal stories and observations to back up his claims about various individuals and organizations. It does not even provide a discussion of jihad, a concept central to its arguments. In fact, its prologue provides a caricature meaning of jihad as holy war:

The jihad, the fighting, is obligatory on you wherever you can perform it. And just as when you are in America you must fast – unless you are ill or on a voyage – so, too, must you wage jihad. The word jihad means fighting only, fighting with the sword.³²

Quoting Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian fighter in Afghanistan, Emerson immediately makes his preference about jihad’s potential meanings clear: holy war against the West and violence against “Jews and infidels.”³³

As a consequence of relying on such a simplistic and superficial definition, he ends up blaming all Muslims for militant Islam. The fact that he

makes a few disclaimers here and there, both in his documentary and in *American Jihad*, does not salvage the overall picture he depicts. It is not surprising that in one of the appendices, Emerson provides a list of Muslim organizations that he considers terrorist support networks: CAIR (the Council on American-Islamic Relations), MPAC (the Muslim Public Affairs Council), AMC (the American Muslim Council), AMA (the American Muslim Alliance), ISNA (the Islamic Society of North America), ICNA (the Islamic Circle of North America), and many other mainstream American Muslim organizations. Of course, the problem here is that almost no organizations are left off this list, except for a few individuals who the author considers to be non-extremists.

An overall evaluation of Emerson's *American Jihad* reveals that the author tries to set an alarmist mood in order to hide a series of otherwise questionable claims. Emerson is reluctant to warn Americans that not all Muslims are terrorists. Rather, he seems to prefer leaving his readers with the impression that Muslim immigrants are potential terrorists simply because they are Muslim. He also fails to acknowledge the presence of approximately 6 million American Muslims, whose religion and identity is in question in this particular book. By neglecting and hiding this fact, Emerson presents a picture of Islam as a "foreign" and "terrorist" ideology that has penetrated American society. He makes no distinction (if not actually erasing existing ones) between the civil and religious rights of millions of American Muslims.

Having entered into this discussion by positing Islam as a foreign and simultaneously terrorist ideology, he provides an exaggerated picture of claims that might have been made by Muslims (including terrorist Muslims). Emerson seeks to create an impression in which those militants who are informed and motivated by Islam want to *dominate the entire world*. The book depicts any identification with Islam as a threat to everybody, non-Muslims and Muslims alike, independent of time and space. In other words, Islam as a religion cannot coexist with other faiths, for it will always work to impose itself on them.

Emerson's account is a deliberate conflation of different social, political, and military movements, given that he presents them as one and the same. Such movements include anti-colonial independence movements, legitimate resistance against occupation, democratic political movements, and, finally, "terrorist" groups. He also insists on erasing borders between different categories. This becomes obvious in his account of Muslims in the Middle East and those in the United States, as he makes no distinction

between Middle Eastern Muslims and American Muslims who are American citizens. In addition, he is reluctant to distinguish between legitimate civil societal movements and armed groups, as well as between Israel and the United States.

Emerson's book proffers simplistic categories, such as "the West" and "infidels and Jews." By using such ill-defined, ambiguous categories as "the West" and "civilization," the author achieves two goals: classifying and hiding Israel under the rubric of the West, and presenting all speeches and activities against Israel as being against the United States as well. Anti-Israeli speeches by Palestinians, in which the negative connotation of Jews (which, in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, is likely to refer to Israelis) are presented as anti-Semitic statements.³⁴ By simply taking such words out of their context, Emerson manages to depict anti-Israeli statements as both anti-Semitic and anti-American.³⁵

In a similar vein, Emerson deliberately leaves the Arabic word for God (*Allah*) untranslated, so that American audience will consider the Muslims' concept of God as one that diverges from its Judeo-Christian meanings. The terror associated with jihad is also further highlighted through such phrases as *holy jihad*³⁶ and *militant jihad*.³⁷ This usage is awkward for a book that sees jihad as a holy war. Yet, it reveals the author's desire to depict jihad in the worst possible terms.

Emerson's *American Jihad*, a polemical book with obscure sources and unsubstantiated assertions, strives to disseminate alarm and fear. It also, arguably, smuggles the Israeli agenda into American public opinion by linking al-Qaeda with Palestinian organizations and showing the American Muslim community as dominantly radical. The book uses Israeli intelligence³⁸ as its main source of information, makes dramatic generalizations, and gives no room to mainstream American Muslim voices in order to depict all American Muslims as potential terrorists. His apparent super-patriotism appears to be a strategic choice concealing a different agenda.

One of the few individuals who have the lion's share of shaping American popular culture's portrayal of jihad, Emerson has exploited the fears generated by 9/11 so skillfully that he has become a main actor in the cultural production of jihad and in shaping American public perception of (American) Muslims. Depicting jihad as holy war and terrorism against Americans by strange, fundamentalist Muslims, however, does not remain unchallenged. The story of Zayed Yasin, a Muslim student at Harvard, is an example of a counter-representation. It turns out that jihad means quite different things to both individuals.

American Jihad No. 2: "Of Faith and Citizenship: My American Jihad"

Zayed Yasin, 22, was one of the three students who made commencement speeches at Harvard on June 6, 2002. When the title of his speech, "American Jihad," appeared on the list of speakers in *The Harvard Crimson*, a group of students protested and called upon him to make an explicit condemnation of violent jihad. A petition signed by his fellow students asked the university administration to withdraw his speech. Some compared his not-yet-made speech to a KKK speech. He was asked to condemn suicide bombers. What was interesting, however, was that all of this occurred before he had even delivered his speech. He received hundreds of hate e-mails as well as a death threat, was called a terrorist sympathizer, and was accused of supporting the Holy Land Foundation. In the meantime, experts and community leaders discussed the meaning of jihad.

The controversy spread throughout the campus and was soon picked up by national papers and wire services. Under tremendous pressure from his critics and part of the university administration, Yasin agreed to change the title of his speech from "American Jihad" to "Of Faith and Citizenship," with the subtitle "My American Jihad." He also agreed to make references to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He told a reporter:

I am confronted with the assumption that because of my name I came from some other country, that I'm a foreign student, that I'm not American or, if I am American, that I'm not as good an American or as true an American or as trustworthy an American as someone named Joe Smith, and that's something that is ... that I resent very much.³⁹

The Washington Times also published a story about the controversy.⁴⁰ During graduation day ceremonies, Yasin's opponents distributed red, white, and blue ribbons to protest the speech. Yasin, considering this a "dishonest abuse of patriotism,"⁴¹ responded to the implied statement that he was un-American and unpatriotic, by pinning one of these ribbons on his academic gown. Yasin eventually made his speech. He started by discussing his personal experience as a Muslim and as an American:

I am one of you, but I am also one of "them." What do I mean? When I am told that this is a world at war, a war between the great civilizations and religions of the earth, I don't know whether to laugh or cry. "What about me?" I ask. As a practicing Muslim and a registered voter in the

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, am I, through the combination of my faith and my citizenship, an inherent contradiction?

I think not. Both the Qur'an and the Constitution teach ideals of peace, justice and compassion, ideals that command my love and my belief. Each of these texts, one the heart of my religion the other that of my country, demand a constant struggle to do what is right.⁴²

After affirming the compatibility between an American identity and a Muslim identity, or, in his own words, between his faith and his citizenship, Yasin discussed the meaning of jihad in an attempt to draw attention to what he sees as its primary meaning:

I choose the word "struggle" very deliberately, for its connotations of turmoil and tribulation, both internal and external. The word for struggle in Arabic, in the language of my faith, is jihad. It is a word that has been corrupted and misinterpreted, both by those who do and do not claim to be Muslims, and we saw last fall, to our great national and personal loss, the results of this corruption. Jihad, in its truest and purest form, the form to which all Muslims aspire, is the determination to do right, to do justice even against your own interests. It is an individual struggle for personal moral behavior. Especially today, it is a struggle that exists on many levels: self-purification and awareness, public service and social justice. On a global scale, it is a struggle involving people of all ages, colors, and creeds, for control of the Big Decisions: not only who controls what piece of land, but more importantly who gets medicine, who can eat ... So where is our jihad, where is our struggle as we move on from Harvard's sheltering walls?⁴³

By raising this alternative meaning, Yasin not only made the concept familiar for non-Muslims, but also translated it into universal terms. Jihad as the determination to do right and do justice, and as an individual struggle for personal moral behavior, is something that any American citizen would support. Starting from his personal experience, he attempted to establish a link between jihad and the American dream. In the face of *otherization* and *foreignization*, he reappropriated the American dream and reclaimed the concept of jihad.⁴⁴ He redeployed the concepts of jihad and the American dream in relation to each other, and, in so doing, contributed to the cultural reproduction of both concepts. "My opponents tried to separate me from America. I wanted to give the opposite message: the harmony of values,"⁴⁵ he says:

The true American Dream is a universal dream, and it is more than a set of materialistic aspirations. It is the power and opportunity to shape one's own life: to house and feed a family, with security and dignity, and to practice your faith in peace. This is our American Struggle, our American Jihad.

As a Muslim, and as an American, I am commanded to stand up for the protection of life and liberty, to serve the poor and the weak, to celebrate the diversity of humankind. There is no contradiction. Not for me, and not for anyone, of any combination of faith, culture and nationality, who believes in a community of the human spirit.⁴⁶

Ignited by a news story about Yasin's speech in *The Harvard Crimson*, debate over the concept of jihad took on a life of its own. Such critics as Daniel Pipes and representatives of the Muslim community appeared on television to discuss exactly what jihad means. Pipes compared "My American Jihad" to "My American Kampf" in a talk he delivered at Hamilton College.⁴⁷ On "Nightline," he insisted that jihad means holy war and that it has to be accompanied by an explanation of its bloody history and condemnation of terrorism. When asked by Maher Hathout, spokesman of the Islamic Center of Southern California, why his own interpretation should be used as the only definition, Pipes replied: "Harvard needs to decide which side it is on in the war on terror."⁴⁸

Pipes' often vulgar criticism of academics of Islamic studies in the United States is known, thanks to his website www.campus-watch.org, where he keeps dossiers on professors who are not sympathetic to his agenda. In an article entitled "Jihad and the Professors," he criticized the alternative meaning raised by Yasin and most of the scholars of Islam:

The truth is that anyone seeking guidance on the all-important Islamic concept of jihad would get almost identical instruction from members of the professoriate across the United States. As I discovered through an examination of media statements by such university-based specialists, they tend to portray the phenomenon of jihad in a remarkably similar fashion – only, the portrait happens to be false.⁴⁹

According to Pipes "it is bin Laden, Islamic Jihad, and the jihadists worldwide who define the term, not a covey of academic apologists. More importantly, the way the jihadists understand the term is in keeping with its usage through fourteen centuries of Islamic history."⁵⁰ He concluded that, in jihad "the goal is boldly offensive, and its ultimate intent is nothing less

than to achieve Muslim dominion over the entire world.”⁵¹ The result of listening to other meanings, he argued, was to “becloud reality, obstructing the possibility of achieving a clear, honest understanding of what and whom we are fighting, and why.”⁵²

Emerson and Pipes not only describe jihad’s meaning in their own ways, but are actually trying to define it. As long as jihad remains defined as holy war, all Muslims will be suspected of terrorism, because jihad is an undeniable part of their religion. If Emerson and Pipes are providing a particular content for the concept of jihad to the American public, Yasin is unmaking that particular meaning. What seems to be taking place is a war of words. Emerson’s hegemonic definition is resisted by Yasin’s counter-definition.

But according to ABC reporter Gillian Findlay, the problem “was not how Muslims define jihad but how Americans choose to understand it.”⁵³ How do Americans understand jihad? What is the culture and imagination associated with jihad in the minds of the American public? Of course, we do not have any surveys specifically designed to elicit answers to such questions. Nor are Americans constantly airing their understanding of jihad. However, one way to determine the popular image of jihad is to look at how it is used in popular culture, especially in film and television. Therefore, in the next section I look at an episode of popular American television show, “Law & Order,” which had the same title: “American Jihad.”

American Jihad No. 3: “Law & Order: American Jihad”

In one episode of NBC’s “Law & Order: American Jihad,” viewers watched a homicide story, according to the commercial, in which the “perversion of religion and politics results in double homicide.”⁵⁴ The story starts with the discovery of the corpses of professors Hugh and Louise Murdoch, who are shot dead in their apartment. Detectives Briscoe and Green try to determine if Hugh Murdoch’s controversial work in stem-cell research could have motivated a religious zealot to commit the murders.

But it soon becomes apparent that it was Louise Murdoch’s volunteer work of raising money and awareness for women’s issues in the Middle East that attracted Greg Landen’s attention. This troubled young man is a white American Muslim convert who also uses the name Mousah Salim. District attorneys McCoy and Southerlyn attempt to decipher Landen’s interpretation of Islam, which they believe might have led him to take extreme measures to exercise his own personal demons. The typical

ambivalence that surrounds the story is not completely resolved. Also, the show does not clarify what Landen's real motives were: religious zeal or personal/sexual problems.

The possible explanations offered to the episode's viewers do not help Islam's image as a religion. One implication is that Landen converted to Islam, a religion that allegedly considers men superior to women, but committed the crime because of his misogyny. The other implication is that he became Muslim and, because of his extreme Islamic beliefs, committed the crime. Apparently, both implications are negative for Islam. The show ends without giving the exact answer. This ambivalence arguably reflects two conflicting pressures: the political correctness that supposedly regulates the representation of different religions on the screen, and the popular image of Islam as a violence-inducing religion. Tied in with this latter element is the tendency to see converts out of Christianity as having certain pathologies, as in the case of John Walker Lindh, the media-christened American Taliban.

The impact of this episode can be traced in different ways. For one, I tried to find online comments and reactions to the episode. One viewer, for example, inquired about the real plot and wondered if it was a gender crisis:

Okay, I need all of your help ... my sister and I are having this debate about the newest episode "American Jihad" ... She is convinced that the Muslim guy was in fact a hermaphrodite ... which was why he turned to fanatical Islam, why he had the issues with women and his parents, etc. I am not convinced.⁵⁵

In response to her inquiry, another viewer wrote that he did not "think it was anything as exotic as that." But "I think," he said, "it was just that the girl had scorned him (broke up, laughed at his sexual inadequacies whatever) and his young male ego collapsed and he turned to Islam for he felt [that] was the only place he could have power over her."⁵⁶ Another viewer's comment derived similar conclusions about the American Muslim convert, "... he's really just a guy who can't get it together with women, so he joined a religion that put him in a superior position to them."⁵⁷

The episode's narrative makes several interventions: Conversion to Islam by white Americans is associated with certain pathologies, the title seems to have been given in relation to the murders (in other words, conversion to Islam and violence intersect in the image of jihad), the Islamic concept of jihad is violent, and Islam considers women to be inferior to men. Jihad, a concept expressed by a foreign word and associated with

Islam, enters into American life in the form of deviance/pathology. The story responds to the dominant image of Islam as a misogynistic religion. Even when the potential equation between Islam and violence is not fully acknowledged, Islam's presumed misogyny finds clear expression.

In that sense, it is interesting that despite the employment of stereotypical negative images about Islam, the producers chose not to make a bold argument about jihad. Jihad, like many other words and more than any other Islamic word, lends itself to competing interpretations. Islam is acquitted from the guilt of murder, but suffers from the accusation of misogyny in this particular episode.

Conclusion

The representations of Islam in the United States after 9/11 tend to be predominantly negative. There is, however, a more open public discourse geared toward understanding Islam, for this religion, as well as its related concepts, are increasingly becoming everyday themes and terms. The encounter between American society and Islam as a global religion creates both tensions and promises. This unprecedented encounter places a tremendous burden on the shoulders of the American Muslim community. In response to this historical challenge, American Muslims are increasingly engaged in communicating what they believe to be Islam's peaceful face to the larger American public. The work that such a challenge produces is the subject of another study. Nevertheless, it is clear that Muslims must become far more engaged in representing themselves through advocacy work as well as various counter-hegemonic practices.

This account of the concept of jihad is symptomatic of the challenges that American Muslims face. The Americanization of Muslims living in the United States can derive lessons from the trajectory of jihad. Jihad can be a foreign word associated with terrorism, or it can become a familiar word/phrase like *freedom* and *struggle for justice*. It also can take its part in the make-up of the American dream. Negotiation and contestation over this concept highlights the ongoing process of establishing American Muslims as a mainstream community. The three case studies presented above illustrate the contestation over defining Islam and the varying levels of integrating Muslims into American society.

The ultimate meaning that jihad will take in the minds of the American public is something that will be decided by the cultural politics of this country, which feature such actors as the Muslim activist Zayed Yasin as well as

such neo-Orientalists as Daniel Pipes. This interplay is implicated by the domestic politics of integrating a contested immigrant community as well as American foreign policy. The interaction between the two not only brings to the table more complexity, but also subjects the fate of American Muslims to developments beyond their immediate environment.

Endnotes

1. For a recent example, see "Va. 'Jihad' Suspects: 11 Men, Two Views," *The Washington Post*, 8 August 2003.
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5. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978).
6. Among other theorists of modernization, see Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1964) and W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
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9. James Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15.
10. Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism, and Identity* (London: Sage, 1995); John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
11. Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage, 1981).
12. For the emergence of European Islam, see Nezar AlSayyad and Manuel Castells, *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: Politics, Culture, and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002).
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16. Yvonne Y. Haddad (ed.), *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
17. See, for example, Jack G. Shahan, *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture* (Washington, DC: Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, 1997).
18. *Religion and Politics: Contention and Consensus*, The Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, Washington DC, July 24, 2003.
19. Patrick Martin and Sean Phelan, “Representing Islam in the Wake of September 11: A Comparison of US Television and CNN Online Message-board Discourses,” *Prometheus* 20, no. 3 (2002).
20. For more information, see CAIR’s annual report, *Guilt by Association, Civil Rights Report 2003 Council on American-Islamic Relations*, Washington, DC, July 2003.
21. Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001).
22. Kristine McNeil, “The War on Academic Freedom,” *The Nation*, 25 November 2002.
23. Daniel Pipes’ CampusWatch.org is also part of this campaign.
24. Danny Fostel, “Islamic Studies’ Young Turks,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 13 September 2002.
25. See, for example, Michael Wolfe, *Taking Back Islam: American Muslims Reclaim Their Faith* (Rodale & Beliefnet Inc., 2002)
26. Steven Barboza, *American Jihad: Islam after Malcolm X* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).
27. Steven Emerson, *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living among Us* (New York: Free Press: 2003), 2.
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35. *Ibid.*, 200.
36. *Ibid.*, 48.
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54. Law & Order: "American Jihad," Season 13, Episode 278, NBC, October 2002.
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