

“Racism without Races”—Socio-Cultural Racialization in Islamophobia and Beyond

Abstract:

It is often claimed that ethnically diverse cultural groups like Muslims and Latinos are *racialized* in many contemporary societies. But this is puzzling if one takes racialization to involve assuming that members of a group share a biological essence. I offer an account of racialization that solves this puzzle. What I call *socio-cultural racialization* is the social construction of a fictional racial essence that is taken to be rooted in social facts rather than biological ones. It is this “racism without races”—racialization without the biological notion of race—that gets applied both to groups like Muslims and to groups like Black people that have also been biologically racialized. I argue that socio-cultural racialization has a wider justificatory force in our present world in which this biological notion of race is censured (at least officially) in most social and political institutions. I conclude by offering an original hypothesis as to why this form of racialization is less frequently recognized as ideological mystification than biological racialization.

Introduction

It is often claimed that groups like Muslims and Latinos are *racialized* in many contemporary societies—that is, they are treated as racial groups. But this is puzzling if one takes racialization to involve assuming that members of a group share a biological essence, since it’s widely known that Muslims and Latinos come from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In this paper, I offer an account of racialization that solves this puzzle. What I call *socio-cultural racialization* is the social construction of a fictional racial essence that is taken to be rooted in social facts rather than biological ones. To begin illustrating the similarities and differences between these two forms of racialization, I offer the following examples. These quotes are from two people with ostensibly opposed political ideologies—the first from the far right, and the second from the center-left:

I always joke that that black American men go crazy in their teens and 20s because of all their excess testosterone, have lots of babies, sex, violence, drugs, sport and music and then at 35, when their testosterone reduces to near the levels of white men, all settle down and become washing-machine repairmen. I may not be so far from the truth... We do not like to talk about biology when related to

race, but what is good for winning 100m races might not be great for passing A-level maths exams.

- Catherine Blaiklock, former UK parliamentary candidate and economics spokeswoman for the pro-Brexit UKIP party¹

Because [Muslims] are violent. Because they threaten us. And they are threatening. They bring that desert stuff to our world ... We don't threaten each other, we sue each other. That's the sign of civilized people. And they don't ... People who want to gloss over the difference between western culture and Islamic culture and forget about the fact that the Islamic culture is 600 years younger and that they are going through the equivalent of what the west went through with our Middle Ages, our Dark Ages when religion had way too much power ... do so at their peril.

- Bill Maher, US liberal television pundit²

These quotes associate danger and violence not just with *particular* Black people or Muslims, but with Black people and Muslims *in general*. The phenomenon I want to highlight in these quotes, however, is that not only are these generalizations made, but that there is in each case an implicit *theory* behind the generalizations. In Blaiklock's case, there is a classical pseudo-biological racial theory. In Maher's, there is instead a pseudo-sociological theory about "Islamic culture" and "civilization."

My core contribution in this paper is an argument that *both* generalizations are forms of racialization—though in each case with a different underlying theory: one biological, and the other socio-cultural. Sociologists like Saher Selod and Salman Sayyid have argued that a powerful image of Muslims as frozen within a dangerous, backward culture has led to a situation in which Muslims are seen as a monolithic group whose traits are passed down through family cultural ties.³ These images have a hold on people despite the fact that biological race theories have been discredited in the eyes of most who endorse liberal, democratic norms—norms that someone like Bill Maher claims to endorse unreservedly. Racialization of this sort therefore seems to be a "racism without races."⁴

¹ (Walker 2019)

² (Jalabi 2014)

³ (S. Sayyid 2011; S. Sayyid 2014; Selod 2015; Selod and Embrick 2013)

⁴ This phrase which I repeat from my title is a play on the title of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's book, *Racism Without Racists*, the topic of which is how racial inequality persists in the United States despite the decline of more articulated, explicit racist bigotry (Bonilla-Silva 2014). I borrow and alter the slogan to name a form of racist ideology that does not arise from pseudo-biological concepts of race, and in its own self-conception does without the concept of race (which it conceives of as exclusively pseudo-biological).

Researchers like Selod and Sayyid have explored the empirical evidence for the claim that groups like Muslims are racialized. Here, I instead develop some conceptual resources that allow us to understand the racialization of Muslims, and to distinguish this kind of racialization from the classic pseudo-biological form. I take the racialization of Muslims as a paradigm case of socio-cultural racialization, although I will show how my account has the resources to explain the racialization of many different groups. In Part I of the paper, I set the stage for my typology of racialization by first discussing a fundamental ambiguity in the notion of racialization and then sketching an account of racialization as a type of ideological false consciousness. In Part II, I offer my own novel typology of four different senses in which a social group can be racialized. I argue that the fourth sense—socio-cultural racialization—is most illuminating for understanding Islamophobia, and that it is distinct from mere cultural or religious prejudice. Finally, in Part III, I advance an original hypothesis as to why this form of racialization possesses particular expediency and durability in the 21st century. I submit that this is one reason why socio-cultural racialization is increasingly applied to groups like Black people as well as groups like Muslims, in many cases replacing biological racialization as the dominant form of racist ideology.

Part I: Preliminaries

Ambiguities in the notion of racialization

One of my main goals in this paper will be to distinguish four different senses in which *social groups* can be racialized. But before doing this, it will be helpful to give a sense of how the term is commonly used by social scientists and theorists, and address the ambiguity in this usage that is most important for my purposes.

Most definitions of “racialization” in dictionaries, as well as in social science and political organizing resources, include *both* the idea of applying racial categories to a non-racially defined group, *and* the idea of constituting a group as a race in the first place. This captures the ambiguity I focus on—namely, is racialization when a previously existing racial category is somehow applied to or associated with a social group, or is it when a wholly new racial category is brought into existence by treating a group as a new race? The former seems to be at work in the following sorts of claims one might hear—that restaurant kitchen workers in the United States are increasingly racialized as Latino, or that athletes like skiers and swimmers are racialized as white.

The classic sociological discussions of racialization, however, have tended to emphasize the latter. I take it that when sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant were among the earliest and most influential to systematically use the term “racialization” in their classic work *Racial Formation in the United States*, this sense had to be central to what they intended. They define racialization as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group,” where this extension specifically involves “imparting social and symbolic meaning to perceived phenotypical differences.”⁵

Because this latter sort of racialization refers to the processes by which racial categories are created in the first place, I call this *primary* racialization. In contrast, the former type—weaker associations of groups with racial categories—might be thought of as *secondary* racialization, because the groups are only secondarily associated with a race, and are not taken to be identical to a race. In my scheme below, senses 1 and 2 are forms of secondary racialization, and senses 3 and 4 are forms of primary racialization.

The social construction of racial categories; racialization as false consciousness

I take it that primary racialization is identical to what many describe as the social construction of race. Primary racialization involves the creation of a kind-term or category of human being, where it is imagined that anyone belonging to that (actually non-existent) kind does so in virtue of sharing an ancestrally inherited property or set of properties passed on to all members of the family. These properties are supposed to be shared by all and only members of that race, and are taken to explain the physical, behavioral, and cultural predispositions of the race.⁶ This set of properties is what is often referred to by theorists as a racial essence—hence why primary racialization is also often called the *essentialization* of race.

There are two characteristics of racial essences that need to be noted. First, the characteristics attached to race are supposed to possess a degree of immutability. Whatever characteristics an individual inherits in virtue of their race are thought to be subject to some minor variation and perhaps resistible through great effort, but ultimately, as possessing a kind of overriding force that generally produces its usual effects. Racial characteristics are thought of on analogy with the physical markers which are supposed to provide a clue to

⁵ (Omi and Winant 2014, 111). For another similar example, see Miles and Brown 2003, 101.

⁶ See Mallon 2006, 528-529, and Appiah 1998, 54, for the characterization of racial essences which I draw on here.

their presence. A disposition for dark skin might be subject to differences of degree and manipulated through technical means, but if it is present in the bodily inheritance of a person, it will always tend to manifest. Second—and this is what I think distinguishes the idea of racial essences from other kinds of human kind essences—racial groups are taken to maintain their distinctness, and the particular set of features associated with them, by passing on their traits to all children of those belonging to the group, through relative endogamy and social isolation.⁷ Classically, the properties that form a racial essence are taken to be grounded in a person’s biology (sense 3 of racialization in this paper), but in this paper I explain the character of ideologies which ground racial essences instead in supposed social facts (sense 4 here).

Haslanger’s sketch of the different possible forms of social construction is helpful to understand the process of primary racialization. In its most basic and inclusive sense, she writes, “something is a social construction in the general sense just in case it is an intended or unintended product of a social practice.”⁸ She then further divides social construction into two broad categories: causal construction and constitutive construction. Something is causally constructed, she writes, if and only if “social factors play a causal role in bringing it into existence or, to some substantial extent, in its being the way it is.”⁹ Most racialized groups are certainly causally constructed, either entirely (in the case of Black people in many colonial societies) or are to a large extent (like, perhaps, pan-Latin American Latino communities in US cities). Constitutive construction, however, is the form I would like to focus on here. “X is socially constructed constitutively, as [a kind] F,” Haslanger writes, if and only if “X is of a kind or sort F such that in defining what it is to be an F, we must make reference to social factors.”¹⁰

In primary racialization, then, racial kinds are constitutively constructed. The ideology corresponding to the racial kind has it that the kinds depend on special essential properties, but these properties don’t actually exist. Instead, what explains *which kind an individual is taken to be* is the social process of categorization, which operates by identifying certain external markers (including physical appearance, place of origin, language, citizenship,

⁷ This idea of races, then, is distinguished from *disabilities* as kinds because it is imagined to be passed on to *all* children of the parents from a racial group.

⁸ (Haslanger 2012a, 86)

⁹ (Haslanger 2012a, 87)

¹⁰ (Haslanger 2012c, 131).

clothing, customs, and family ties, for example), and then assigning people to kinds based on those. What is central to racialization is that certain markers are given a kind of depth they otherwise would not have—they stand in not merely for contingencies of an individual’s physical or social inheritance, but for a deep, shared structure that is supposed to explain the individual’s characteristics and justify giving them a certain social position. But that is the illusion in a social construction, while what is *real* is the social process that gives the particular markers this deeper meaning.

What makes the creation of the kind ideological, or a form of false consciousness, is first of all that the conscious participation of individuals in this process of categorization relies on a particular mistaken assumption. Namely, it relies on the assumption that properties inherent in the individual’s body (in the biological case) or in a distinct, imagined social process or culture (in the socio-cultural case) explain their belonging to their kind, and not the social process of categorization which is actually responsible. Hence it is an untrue and mystifying social explanation. Moreover, racial explanations have most often been used as a way to justify social hierarchies, which is the second reason why I refer to racialization as ideological.¹¹ Because of this feature, and because it is useful to have a term to pick out such a common and dangerous phenomenon, I propose to reserve the term “racialization” for false ways of thinking about ancestry-based human kinds, even as “race” itself can refer to objective social kinds created through the process of racialization and where one does not take this kind to be grounded in a racial essence.¹²

I have proposed that the term “racialization” ought to be reserved for false theories of human kinds—specifically, ones that propose behavioral essences passed on ancestrally through relatively endogamous family groups. Because of this, my paper takes the form of an ideology critique. This means that my aim is not to offer an exhaustive logical mapping of all the ways one might think about races or associate social groups with races, but rather to identify the forms of actual racial thinking that are most morally and politically pressing. And because this is an analysis of actually existing ideologies, rather than an analysis of what

¹¹ As Geuss and Shelby outline, the tradition of ideology critique sometimes refers to ideologies as “false” for epistemic deficiencies, like the inclusion of false beliefs, and sometimes for functional deficiencies, that is, because they play the function of reinforcing or upholding some normatively undesirable social practice (Geuss 1981; Shelby 2003). Racialization ideology involves both types of deficiencies.

¹² Haslanger is a recent prominent example of such a view on which we should understand races to be non-essentialist social kinds created through social hierarchies (Haslanger 2012a).

concepts are possible, the specific contents of race concepts are often not clearly articulated. In some cases, particular race concepts might not have determinate content and may even be internally incoherent. Individuals in a social context in which the ideology is prevalent may act on socially trained impulses to external markers without always being able to explain the significance of those markers (one thinks of the reflexive and vague terror the Arabic language causes to many around the world).

My contribution to ideology critique here takes the form of a typology of racialization. The goal is to draw one's attention to the different ways in which a group can be racialized, in order to prepare one to recognize actual instances. I don't take it that ideology critique is sufficient to undermine racialization, and not only because in this paper it occurs only in the abstract form of a typology. It's also insufficient because racialization involves more than ideational content. The process by which a group comes to be treated as a race, as well as the processes that reinforce the ideology once it is in place, involve all kinds of extra-mental factors, such as structural inequalities in wealth and power. As long as these continue to exist, an ideology will tend to be reproduced. However, seeing the ideology clearly *as* false should aid in practical efforts to address it.

Part II: Four Different Senses of “Racialization”

A. Secondary Racialization

Sense 1: Numerical Racialization

The first is the weakest sense in which a group can be racialized, and it is a form of secondary racialization. Here, the racialization of a group is merely the widely shared, false belief that all or a significant number of members of some group, itself not characterized by reference to race, come from some preexisting racial category or categories. I call this numerical racialization, where the members of a group are racialized just because it is falsely believed that when you count them up, all or a significant number will belong to the same racial categories.¹³ Moreover, in order to distinguish this from sense 2 (which I will introduce in the next section), in sense 1, the racial composition of the group isn't thought to have

¹³ Moreover, one can think of this racialization as coming in degrees, on two different axes—first, on how widespread the belief in the racialization of the group is, and second, on how what portion of members of the group in question are taken to belong to the racial group. Moreover, these patterns of racialization will change over time, reflecting both real changes in group racial composition and the change in people's perceptions of this, real or unreal.

anything to do with the features generally taken in the society to define the relevant racial categories (the essential properties of the race, one might say, or as a relative notion, the things more important in making the race what it is). In other words, in numerical racialization, *why* the group in question mostly belong to the particular race is taken to be a contingent matter.

One might observe that there is such a thing as a *true* widely shared belief that all or most members of a group also belong to a particular race or races. Most obviously, such a belief would be true of any group whose membership itself contains racial requirements. But it may be true other groups because of contingent histories. For example: if one were to claim that most of the nation of Iceland falls under the category “white,” this would merely reflect the actual state of affairs. It is true merely through the history of the descendants of Norse settlers, and the country’s relative geographic isolation, and not due to any explanation that depends on the existence of a white racial essence. But a true, merely numerical belief about the racial composition of a group isn’t epistemically or *necessarily* functionally deficient, and therefore isn’t a form of racist ideology.

So, a group is numerically racialized if it is falsely believed they all or mostly belong to a particular racial group for contingent reasons. Muslims are racialized in this sense in many non-Muslim countries—it is assumed that all Muslims are either Arab, South or Central Asian, or an otherwise indeterminate “brown” race, when Muslims of course belong to all racial categories, and even in huge numbers to some racial categories not often thought to contain many Muslims, like East and Southeast Asians. The fact that in European and European colonial societies Muslims are often ascribed an indeterminate “brown” race, or a combination of races “I know not what,” is evidence that the racialization of Muslims can’t be captured using just sense 1, because it seems that a wholly new racial category is being brought into being. For this reason, the racialization of Muslims will specifically require senses 3 and 4 which I elaborate below.

Groups defined through ancestry or through culture transmitted by family are among the most commonly numerically racialized groups. Latin Americans and Latinos are, in the global context (that is, especially outside of Latin America, but also among certain globalized Latin American elites and middle classes) numerically racialized as mixed-race (usually indigenous and white mixed-race, or *mestizo*). And this racialization of Latin Americans and Latinos as mestizo occurs despite the fact that many residents of Latin America possess

ancestry that is more uniformly African, European, Indigenous, or other, and the fact that there is significant skin-color prejudice and inequality in many Latin American cultures. As with Muslims, however, I don't think that sense 1 exhausts the sense in which Latinos are racialized in North America, however. Namely, since the racial category that Latinos are believed to belong to is usually not merely a general notion of mixed-race of any combination, but some more contentful notion of a Latino *race*, I think the racialization of Latinos is better understood by senses 3 and 4 of racialization which I characterize below.

If a group is racialized in sense 1, the main significance of this is that the group will come to have applied to it whatever the social significance of the racial category in question is. So if Muslims are believed to mostly be Arabs, or another stigmatized “brown” racial category, then it becomes socially reasonable to apply all expectations of that racial category, and all rules of how to treat that racial category, to Muslims. In contexts where Arabs and various other “brown” races are thought to be dangerous and violent, Muslims will be treated with the caution this fact is believed to merit. In other cases, false racialization in sense 1 could mask the true racial situation of members of a certain group. If it is assumed that all Latin Americans are mestizos, then it can be thought that there is no need to address more fine-grained racial issues within Latin American societies—such as colorism, or social hierarchies based on skin-tone, and anti-black and indigenous racism. But racial differences and hierarchies actually do exist within Latin American societies.¹⁴

Sense 2: Associative Racialization

It isn't merely false beliefs about the racial *composition* of groups that I designate by the term “secondary racialization,” however. Many people are rightfully concerned to point out misconceptions about the racial composition of groups (i.e., “not all Muslims are Arab!” “Not all Swedes are white!”). But the racialization of a group can cause noteworthy social effects *even when* its numerical racial ascription is more or less accurate according to social norms about who belongs to what race. Namely, it is noteworthy if it is believed that the group has the racial composition it does *because of* what are taken to be some of the most characteristic feature of the races in question, and not merely for reasons contingent to these.

¹⁴ For one overview of this topic, see (Telles and Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) 2014).

This is sense 2 of racialization: when it is falsely believed that members of a particular group tend to come from a particular race, and where features taken to be essential to the races in question are used to explain *why* the members of the group tend to come from those racial categories. The degree to which a group is believed to *tend* towards a particular race may be entirely vague within the ideology, but the key point is that the tendency is not believed to be contingent to what are taken as the characteristic features of the race. A group is racialized in this sense if it is not *defined* in terms of race, but *is* inextricably associated in people's minds with particular races, due to some notion of racial essences. I therefore call this second sense "associative racialization."¹⁵ Associative racialization appears to be even more widespread than numerical racialization. This is because there is an observable tendency for beliefs about group racial composition to reflect not merely numerical estimation, but various beliefs that stereotype and essentialize the races in question.

Some instances of associative racialization of a group go along with numerical racialization of that group—that is, the group is both falsely believed to mostly consist of individuals of a certain race, *and* it is falsely believed that this is due to a tendency explained by essential features of that race. However, associative racialization need not include numerical racialization, for two reasons. First, as I noted above, many interesting cases of associative racialization occur alongside accurate beliefs about the racial composition of the group being racialized. Second, one can imagine some instances of associative racialization that don't involve thinking that the group in question is mostly composed of a particular race, *because* of other factors which are taken to prevent this. In this kind of associative racialization, it is thought that, despite the fact that most members of the group do not belong to the race in question, the members of who group who *do* belong to that race belong to it because of their race. It is just that other factors prevent the tendency for the group to mostly become of the race in question. For example, anti-Semitic ideology might

¹⁵ As with sense 1 (numerical racialization), sense 2, associative racialization, can be spoken of as being partial or complete, of coming in degrees on two different axes. First, one can discuss degrees along the axis of how widespread the racialization belief is held within the society. In this case however, the second axis would not be *how many* of the group are taken to belong to a race, but instead *how strong* the tendency is for the characteristics of the group to require that its members belong to a particular race. It may be believed that there's merely *some* significant tendency for members of the group to belong to particular races, or it may be believed that the characteristics of the group make it almost or wholly necessary that its members belong to a particular racial category. And as before, one can expect patterns of racialization change significantly over time, and vary from place to place.

acknowledge that the majority of bankers are not Jewish (because this is impossible given the relatively small global population of Jewish people), but nonetheless associatively racialize bankers, believing that the bankers who are Jewish are bankers *because of* their imagined Jewish propensity for greed. Moreover, this ideology might even entail that if the relevant constraints were removed, the majority of bankers would tend to become Jewish.

I'll now offer a few more examples of associative racialization. First, an example of the second category from the previous paragraph—associative racialization alongside an accurate assessment of a group's racial composition. In the early years of the genre, rappers were almost fully associatively racialized as Black, and by the vast majority of US society; now, they are strongly but partially racialized as merely non-white, especially Black and Latino, by the majority of people. In the popular imagination, rap's associations with criminality and violence drew it close in conceptual association to the traits ascribed to Black people as a race. It was believed that only those already prone to criminal activity could be drawn to participate in such a genre, and in this way, a false ideological explanation for why most rappers were Black could be offered. Country musicians, in contrast, came in the latter part of the 20th century to be almost fully racialized as white by most people, despite the genre having many of its roots in African-American music. The association with US agricultural heartland and the authenticity of hard work (as compared to messy urban decay) were naturally apt to be associated with conceptions of the white race.

I already indicated some reasons why associative racialization could be a significant phenomenon, but I will say something more general about these now. First of all, the existence of associative racialization indicates that an ascription of social meaning to the group has already occurred that ties the group to various beliefs about a racial essence. That is, just by being associatively racialized, the group has already shown itself to be inextricable from traits taken to belong to some racial essences. For example: if rappers are racialized as Black in this sense, then one knows that there must be something believed about rappers as a group that makes them apt to be tied to traits taken to be essential to Blackness.

Secondly, as with numerical racialization, the racial ascription may tend to further expand the social meaning of the group. That is, this ascription will cause racialized groups to take on more aspects of the social meaning of the racial categories ascribed to them, even those aspects of the racial essence that weren't initially thought to explain the racial composition of the group. The group may come to acquire the whole set of traits attributed

to the racial essence through a process of association, even if only some of those traits were relevant in the first instance.

Are Latinos and Muslims associatively racialized? In the case of Latinos, the answer is no, if Latinos are defined merely as the group of people whose ancestry goes back to members of Latin American societies. It's not possible for a group *merely* defined by ancestry to be associatively racialized, because race is determined by ancestry, and so the tendency within the group to belong to a particular race will always be due to the contingent history of the group. Muslims, on the other hand, appear to be highly associatively racialized (which is possible because they are a religious and cultural group, rather than merely an ancestry-defined group). Muslims are not only thought to come primarily from several non-white races—Arabs, South and Central Asians, and other “brown” races—but furthermore, it is often believed that only someone from one of these races would choose to remain a Muslim. There has likely been a complex feedback loop in which traits associated with the races believed to inhabit Muslims countries come to be further associated with Islam and Muslim culture, and vice versa.

However, this doesn't exhaust the phenomena one could describe as the racialization of Muslims. For it's not merely that Muslims are always taken to belong to other preexisting racial categories and to share in the features of those. Rather, they sometimes seem to be spoken of as if they were a race on their own. Muslims, that is, come to form a kind with its own essence, its own unique set of characteristics which are passed on—not due to the fact that Muslims belong to other races, but due to the tendency of “Muslimness” to develop certain characteristics in those belonging to the group. This essentialization of a social group like Muslims, however, might take two forms, which respectively make up the remaining sorts of racialization I will sketch out.

B. *Primary Racialization*

Sense 3: Biological Racialization

Racialization in my third sense is what one might call “biological racialization,” the first of the two categories of primary racialization I will discuss—the creation of racial categories in the first place. A group is racialized in this sense if 1), many of the common, superficial characteristics shared by its members (especially features of bodily appearance that do not depend on the individual's sex) are widely and falsely believed to be evidence

that they possess deeper behavioral tendencies, due to facts of their biological composition, and 2) these tendencies are believed to be passed on through familial ancestry traced back to a particular place.¹⁶ Moreover, for the most interesting cases of biological racialization, I would like to add a third characteristic: 3), that the tendencies attributed to the racialized group are taken to justify putting them in particular social roles. It's not that 3) is strictly entailed by 1) and 2); instead, it's that it's extremely common, and the most important cases of biological racialization in the social world are the ones that do possess 3).¹⁷

The paradigmatic example of a biological racialization is the belief that all members of a particular race share an essence—that is, a heritable property or set of properties, understood in biological terms, that are shared by all and only members of that race, and that explain the physical, behavioral, and cultural predispositions of the race.¹⁸ However, biological racialization might not rely on a fully-blown belief in racial essences, but instead merely on the idea that populations that differ in bodily appearance also possess corresponding differences in various aptitudes. Such a belief could rely merely some weaker sort of “biobehavioral kinds” that support generalizations, where the characteristics generalized about are taken to be relevant to how some set of social relations are organized.¹⁹ Though biologists, social scientists, and philosophers are largely in agreement that there are no such things as racial essences or particularly noteworthy biobehavioral racial kinds, belief in essences persists, as does belief in the weaker biobehavioral kinds.²⁰

Biological racialization is often taken to be a characteristic social process of the modern world—since the period of global European colonization began in the 16th and 17th centuries, many different groups of people have been characterized as sharing racial essences

¹⁶ This characterization of what makes a group biologically racialized is closely parallel to a possible characterization of what it is for a group to be biologically *gendered*. In the case of gender, however, it specifically those bodily features that relate to one's role in sexual relations that are taken to be evidence of deeper behavioral tendencies, and those deeper tendencies are imagined to be passed on through whatever mechanism passes on the gender essence (like X and Y chromosomes, for example).

¹⁷ Once again, I take myself not to be proposing an exhaustive logical mapping of all possible forms of thinking about races, but rather to focus most on the ones that have moral and political significance.

¹⁸ See Mallon 2006, 528-529, and Appiah 1998, 54, for the characterization of racial essences which I draw on here.

¹⁹ The term “biobehavioral kind” and the distinction between such kinds and full-blown essences is made by (Mallon 2006, 529 fn. 12).

²⁰ For discussions of the arguments against the existence of biological racial essences, see (Kitcher 1999; Appiah 1998; Hoffman 1994; Hacking 2005).

based on perceived physical differences. The belief in differential aptitudes and capacities has often been used as a justification for subjugation of various racial groups, and as a guideline for discriminatory treatment and the allotment of social roles. Biological racialization has repeatedly served as a justification for the separation and differential status of social groups, by deploying the idea that racial differences are innate, natural, and therefore immutable. From projects of empire and colonization (see Hacking 2005), to nation-state building (see Omi and Winant 2014), to control of immigration (see Bayoumi 2006) and more, the idea that a group of people represent a subspecies of humanity has been a powerful ideology in the modern period, often seemingly backed up by the classificatory power of natural science.

Theories of racial essences suffered not only intellectual defeat in the 20th century, as I mentioned above, but a powerful, if incomplete, social and political defeat. Anti-racist and anti-colonial movements in the 20th century, as well as the defeat of the Nazis, created a strong association between the idea of biological race and the morally reprehensible social systems it has propped up, and eliminated it as a live ideological option for many. However, it continues to live on in much of the world. Many racial nationalist groups continue to advocate such theories, and occasionally someone will attempt to revive racial science in theoretical terms. As Ian Hacking notes, various versions of racial naturalism have been floated that are weaker than the traditional theories, but still share some of their problems.²¹

Latinos, I argued above, are not only numerically racialized as non-white; they are often specifically numerically racialized as mixed-race, or mestizo. However, it's clear that for the latter to be true, "Latino" must become its own particular racial category through primary racialization, and that this may take a biological form. The category of mestizo, of course, did not exist prior to the establishment of the Spanish colonies, in which a complex legal hierarchy of races and mixed-races was established. Moreover, the category of mestizo is not well-known or socially relevant in Anglophone North America. It is clear, however, that the massive increase in immigration from Latin America to the United States in the 20th century was accompanied by the creation of a distinct social category for Latin American immigrants and their descendants. Though images and ideologies around this identity are very confused—as evidenced by the mixed use of the terms Hispanic and Latino, and the extent to which these are described variously as races and as ethnicities—there is a distinct

²¹ (Hacking 2005, 104-106) See Herrnstein and Murray's infamous *The Bell Curve*, and Hacking's discussion of it (Herrnstein and Murray 1994; Hacking 2005, 104-109)

imaginary around the particular characteristics of Latinos in Anglophone North America.²² In some cases, a notion of a Latino race, as a biological kind, seems to lurk behind ideas of Latino difference. Though no doubt overlapping and connected with the racist imaginaries about black people and indigenous Americans, a specific set of racial characteristics is often attributed to Latinos. This delusion includes the idea that Latinos are predisposed by nature to be hot-blooded, lazy, greasy, stupid, and particularly prone to being overly superstitious or religious.

However, many of the characteristics attributed to Latinos seem more readily explained by appeal to cultural features. For this reason, I argue that though Latinos are certainly biologically racialized, one can't understand the extent to which Latinos are essentialized solely through a process of biological essentialization. One will have to understand the final sense of racialization I will discuss below.

With Muslims, this is even more true. Muslims don't seem to be a plausible candidate for biological racialization. It's a basic fact that as a religious and cultural group with permeable boundaries and an international presence, Muslims come in all sorts of genetic and phenotypical varieties. As Islamophobes themselves are fond of repeating: "Islam is a religion, not a race!" Although there may be cases (perhaps particularly in North America) in which individuals are ignorant of the vast range of geographic diversity present in the worldwide population of Muslims, and therefore able to imagine that Muslims mostly represent a particular subspecies of humanity, this won't usually be the case. However, I will argue the phenomenon people have tried to capture by saying that Muslims are racialized isn't merely numerical and associative racialization. Muslims face primary racialization, not biologically, as a distinct subspecies, but in a process of socio-cultural essentialization that parallels the creation of races.

Sense 4: Socio-cultural Racialization

The fourth sense in which "racialization" might be used, then, is the following. It is essentialization of relatively endogamous groups, and therefore a form of primary racialization, but where the essence is located in the social, rather than the biological. A group is *socio-culturally* racialized when the group is widely and falsely believed to possess

²² For one discussion of this, see Alcoff 2009, especially pages 112-122; discussion of the confusion of race and ethnicity occurs from 118-123.

these two features—1), that certain superficial characteristics (like language, social customs, and religious practice) are evidence that there are a set of traits that make the group what it is, and that tend to appear in spite of whatever conscious human efforts are made; 2), that the group maintains its distinctiveness and passes traits on through relatively endogamous family structures. And as with biological racialization, the most interesting cases also possess 3), that these traits are taken to justify particular social treatment of the group. However, when a group is socio-culturally racialized, these traits that necessarily appear for its members are supposed to be grounded not in biological facts, but instead in social or cultural facts.

It is believed that the social practices and habits of the group exert a strong enough force over the development of individuals that particular traits arise with a high degree of inevitability and immutability. Conscious resistance to the traits, by insiders or outsiders, is therefore taken to be basically equivalent to attempts to change something like heritable biological features—one won't get very far with it. In many examples, this is taken to be true both in the sense that the traits will continue to persist as long as the socio-cultural essence does, and that the socio-cultural patterns constituting the essence are themselves taken to possess a kind of self-maintaining durability. The exact degree of these two senses in which the culture is taken to be immutable will vary from case to case of socio-cultural racialization, and will probably possess a degree of vagueness in most cases. However, as in the case of biological racial essences, these socio-cultural essences are taken to possess a kind of unity apart from other social forces influencing the group, and to be explanatorily primary in some way.

As I argued above, biological racialization can't account for some of the ways in which certain characteristics are believed to be fixed traits of Latinos and Muslims. In the case of Latinos, I argued that it's likely that Latinos face some degree of biological racialization, but that many of the traits attributed to them are more readily chalked up to social and cultural factors. For instance, Latinos are often believed to be irremediably patriarchal, irresponsible and unable to maintain stable economic and political institutions, or prone to irrational ossification of them in bureaucratic form, and prone to both petty and organized crime. These traits are 1) falsely assumed to attach to all Latinos, and more importantly 2), thought to be explained by generalized Latino cultural tendencies (rather than local and specific explanations, in cases where these traits do hold true of particular Latinos).

Such ideological tendencies are typical for essentialization: the assumption of a generalized and mystical explanation for a perceived social phenomenon, rather than a specific analysis on the sort of principles one would use to accurately explain any other social phenomenon.²³

In the case of Muslims, I argued that biological racialization is generally not possible. Here, socio-cultural racialization does the most work. Muslims are believed to be patriarchal, medieval in their attitudes to science and politics, illogical, tribal, prone to extreme violence, and incapable of governing themselves. If the racialization of Latinos paints them as a sort of country bumpkin cousin of the liberal, post-Enlightenment “West”—a degenerated or incompletely rationalized version of European culture—then the racialization of Muslims paints them as the inversion of the so-called “West.”²⁴ They are represented as the height of backwardness, a refusal to join the modernity, and a threat to the liberal world order. The explanations offered for this cite a combination of “Islam” as a creed that is spoken of as exerting the same pull over all Muslims, despite local and regional differences, and Muslim “culture” as a monolithic entity that somehow traps its inhabitants in an earlier civilizational stage.

Objections to the notion of socio-cultural racialization and its application

One might still have various doubts about whether groups like Latinos and Muslims really *are* socio-culturally racialized, in the way I have described—that is to say, whether false beliefs about the characteristics of such groups are really attributed to them in a manner analogous to traditional race-based essentialization.²⁵ One place a similar dispute appears is in a discussion between Linda Martín Alcoff and Tommie Shelby. In response to Alcoff’s claim that Latinos face a specific form of *racism* that deserves to be called anti-Latino racism, Shelby responds that although Latinos certainly face racism insofar as they belong to other oppressed races, they don’t face racism *qua Latino*. “Race,” Shelby claims, “denotes groups

²³ For a relevant attempt to identify a false, ideological explanation and replace it with a concrete, political one, see Mahmood Mamdani’s *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Mamdani 2005). Mamdani calls the essentialization of a group like Muslims “culture talk,” and attempts to give a concrete historical account of the rise of political Islamic terrorism, rather than a mystifying, essentialist one. See Chapter One for his account of “culture talk.”

²⁴ (Said 2003; Mamdani 2005, 18-27)

²⁵ This is distinct from the debate about whether or not one ought to reserve the terms “race” and “racism” for bodily or biologically premised racism. On this question, I have to admit that I don’t have a firm view. But even if one ought to reserve the terms for such racisms, this changes nothing in my argument—one should merely think of the notion of socio-cultural racialization as claiming that a process is occurring that is *like* biologically-premised racism in important ways.

defined by inherited somatic characteristics, descent relations, and continental origins,” and Latinos doesn’t represent a single lineage or grouping along any of those lines.²⁶ Shelby concedes that there can be racism that is “*ostensibly* based on culture”—in such cases, he takes objections to another group’s culture or language to be merely respectable code for underlying race-based bigotry. However, this is then just biological racism with a cultural mask. In the terms I’ve provided, Shelby thinks that Latinos are numerically and associatively racialized, but that they do not face primary racialization, either biological or socio-cultural.

To call anti-Latino animus racism, Shelby claims, is something like a category mistake. We already possess categories for bigotry and ideological animus against a cultural group, says Shelby, in notions like cultural intolerance, ethnocentrism, nativism, and xenophobia. My own view, contra Shelby, is that the central similarity between biological and socio-cultural racialization justifies the use of the terms “race” and “racism” to refer to phenomena of socio-cultural racialization.²⁷ However, even if Shelby is right about the terminological point, I would like to defend one central aspect of Alcoff’s project, which I see as pointing out that the alternative notions Shelby offers are insufficient to capture animus against Latinos. The parallel drawn with racism isn’t just rhetorical flourish—it *does theoretical work* in the full account of the oppression of Latinos. I also think it’s instructive to compare to the case of Muslims, since most of the points simply carry over to that case.

The reason why it’s instructive to draw a parallel between pseudo-biological racism and the socio-cultural essentialization of groups like Latinos and Muslims is, as I laid out at the start of this discussion, because both involve ascribing a particular set of traits to the group and maintaining that these traits appear with a degree of inevitability. These forms of animus are not simply cases of negative value judgments against particular social or cultural practices—they involve a process of coming to see members of the group as bound to tendencies that are generally more powerful than individual character or local circumstances. They involve a parallel form of mystification as that involved in race essentialism.

For illustration, one can look at a few of the alternative categorizations Shelby considers. All of the alternatives Shelby offers attempt to do without a notion of essentialization (as in primary racialization), and instead are all different kinds of “group-

²⁶ (Shelby 2009)

²⁷ I also think the history of the terms “race” and “racism” has long been applied in contexts of both biological and socio-cultural racialization, especially before the height of official scientific racism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

based prejudice operating through stereotypes.”²⁸ But, as the problem, as I’ll show now, is that these alternative categorizations would only convincingly capture phenomena like Islamophobia if one *does* take them to involve essentialization. First, cultural intolerance. “*Cultural intolerance*,” Shelby writes, “is hostility toward a group because its members refuse to conform to the established beliefs and practices of a society.”²⁹ But, as with pseudo-biological racism, the hostility towards groups like Latinos and Muslims only bears an indirect relationship to members of the groups’ actual behavior. The hostility doesn’t originate from a refusal to assimilate but seems to exist regardless of it. Islamophobia doesn’t seem to be hostility *because* Muslims refuse to conform to the beliefs and practices of society. In fact, Muslims are often targeted even when they *do* conform—Islamophobic attackers often don’t seem to mind particularly whether they have attacked a conservative believer or a secular liberal. Rather, the hostility seems to be because the Muslim is seen as someone who simply is not believed to be *capable* of conforming to those practices insofar as they are connected to ‘Muslimness’ or ‘Islam’ (which may be conceived of as its own alien and competing set of practices, culturally inherited psychology, or ideology). Even where it is hoped that Muslims will conform, the hope that they will conform *follows* the hostility, not the other way around. They are conceived of as alien first, and asked to conform second.

“*Ethnocentrism* (or ethnic chauvinism),” writes Shelby, “is the belief or implicit assumption that one’s own culture is superior to that of others. *Xenophobia* is prejudice or hostility toward those regarded as foreign.” And these two are certainly at play in anti-Latino hostility and Islamophobia, but on their own, these categories miss a lot of the content of the two forms of animus. Islamophobes are not equally disposed towards every foreign culture. Islamophobia contains particular ideological content about the Muslim Other, as anti-Latino hostility does about Latinos. While the exclusive or preferential valuation of one’s own culture or ethnicity affects these ideologies, they cannot go the whole way to explaining them. Latinos and Muslims as groups are specifically targeted as possessing worrying essential attributes due to their socio-cultural forms.

Moreover, how is the idea of “one’s own culture” to be interpreted in these formulations of ethnocentrism and xenophobia? Is it merely as the prejudiced person perceives their own culture to be? Notions of national and civilizational identity are often

²⁸ (Shelby 2009, 130)

²⁹ (Shelby 2009, 130)

formed in opposition to a perceived other or enemy, so the notion of one's own culture may already depend on beliefs about alien cultures. In that case, the essentialization of other groups would explain ethnocentrism, and not the other way around. White citizens of secular liberal states and those connected to European Judeo-Christian traditions are likely to have a notion of their own culture that is already defined in opposition to particular other cultures—for instance, defined against the backwards 'developing world' with its lack of social and political enlightenment. As Edward Said and others have argued, the notion of a distinct cultural zone with essential characteristics that could be marked out as the 'Orient,' and within this, especially the Muslim other, played a large role as the negative image that would cement for Europeans a belief in their own cultural and moral supremacy.³⁰ In short, phenomena like ethnocentrism and xenophobia may often depend on something like socio-cultural racialization of another group in order to exist.

To sum up: the other categories that Shelby has offered are not sufficient, on his own understanding of them, to capture anti-Latino animus and Islamophobia. It's not merely that he hasn't offered up enough candidate categories for non-racialized oppression. The issue, again, is that Shelby here only considers what he calls "group-based prejudice operating through stereotypes."³¹ But like pseudo-biological racism, Islamophobia and anti-Latino animus involve more than merely prejudicial stereotyping. They involve an essentialization of the groups in question—not merely some exaggerated generalizations—but the belief, tacit or explicit, in an overriding force that makes the groups what they are. If one were to flesh out some of his candidate notions like xenophobia and ethnocentrism to make them adequate to the cases at hand, one would have to resort to a view on which these other notions incorporate socio-cultural racialization within themselves. Shelby himself suggests that essentialization marks the distinction between prejudicial stereotyping and racism when he notes, referring to cultural intolerance, that "When assimilation is a real avenue to full acceptance, we are not dealing with racism."³² However, as is often the case with Latinos and Muslims, assimilation often does not lead to full acceptance. If we are not dealing with racism in these cases, we are dealing with something very similar to it.

³⁰ (Said 2003)

³¹ (Shelby 2009, 130)

³² (Shelby 2009, 131)

Regardless of one's stance on the terminological question, the central commonality between biological and socio-cultural racialization is crucial to understanding the relevant phenomena.

Part III: The Durability and Significance of Socio-Cultural Racialization

So we need to ask: What is the illusion (if any), and what is the reality (if any) in social constructions?

Moreover, traditional efforts to justify racist and sexist institutions have often relied on viewing women and people of color as inferior *by nature*. There is an unmistakable pattern of projecting onto subordinated groups, as their 'nature' or as 'natural,' features that are instead (if manifested at all) the result of social forces. If one function of references to 'nature' is to limit what is socially possible, thereby 'justifying' pernicious institutions, we must be wary of any claim that a category is natural...

- Sally Haslanger, Introduction to *Resisting Reality*³³

What makes socio-cultural racialization harder for some to recognize?

Various people have argued that socio-cultural racialization seems to be increasingly prevalent—both more respectable than biological racialization, and more evidenced in the official discourse of social and political institutions since the late 20th century.³⁴ Further sociological and historical research would be required to uncover many of the reasons for this. But in this final section, my main goal is to offer one reason that is visible from the philosopher's analysis of the conceptual content of socio-cultural racialization. This is that the *type* of facts that such ideologies claim to be grounded in—social and cultural features of ancestrally defined groups—are the *same type of facts* as those generally believed to ground distinctions between types of human beings among those for whom classical racism *is* discredited. Both are social facts.

Before I can elaborate further on this, it helps to see the contrast case. With biological racialization, there is no longer much plausibility to the idea that what *actually* grounds the racial categorization of people are the same sort of facts as what racist ideology itself claims this categorization to be grounded in. The illusion of this notion of race is one about biological facts, and its dissolution happens through pointing to a set of social facts on which it actually depends. The *true* biological facts that are involved are seen to be only skin deep—and mere contingencies of physical appearance and other minor heritable traits are

³³ (Haslanger 2012b, 5)

³⁴ For example, in Balibar 1991, and Modood 2001.

not believed to be robust enough to ground the traditional idea of races. Many of us in the present world are now trained to spot such false complexes of premises about what is supposedly “natural,” especially when it comes to race. As Haslanger points out in the quote at the beginning of this section, social constructionist arguments have been very powerful against claims that particular social institutions must be the way they are because of how *nature* is. Gender and race, for instance, were seen to be just features of the natural world, having little to do with the particular form of social arrangements. But now, there is widespread skepticism that basic natural facts must absolutely determine the form that social institutions take.

The illusion of socio-cultural racialization occurs, despite awareness of social constructionist arguments, in two steps. First, it is accepted that social facts are generally what explains differences in groups of humans, so the pseudo-sociological explanation of the ideology isn’t immediately suspicious—in contrast, introducing biological facts here would be seen by many as a kind of category mistake. The debunking of biological racialization as a social construction depended on showing that social facts are the only things that could really ground the racial distinctions. In socio-cultural racialization, it’s already claimed that the distinctions are social, so there is no stark difference, in the *kind* of facts involved, between what the ideology points to in order to explain its distinctions, and the kind of facts that are generally thought to be plausible for explaining such distinctions. The ideology explains the group as constituted by social facts, and these are just the sort of facts that we social constructionist critics tend to think such group distinctions are grounded in. If that is the case, then the theory of group difference that the ideology offers can’t be accused of any illegitimate invocation of ‘nature.’ The group differences in socio-cultural racialization are *not* claimed to be natural, as in biological racial theory.

The second step of the illusion is that the thin facts or *markers* of a socio-culturally racialized group, which are supposed to be explained by the socio-cultural essence, are themselves the same type of facts as what is supposed to ground them (within the socio-cultural racialist theory). What happens in socio-cultural racialization is that a cultural or ethnic group acquires a kind of dual image, in which they can be seen either as the group of agents with certain social relations that they *actually* are, or else as their *mystified, racialized equivalent*, depending on which serves the practical or political interests of those considering them. On the one hand, socio-cultural racialization *does* point to actual differences in social

practice, appearance, and familial ties. On the other hand, the racialized image of these groups goes far beyond these thinner facts it is based on, to posit a kind of cultural force more powerful than the individual or even collective agency of the group's members. The resemblance between the thinner social facts the racialization is based on, and the kind of social explanation many of us are now trained to find plausible, allows one of these images to be mistaken for the other.

So the essentialized image of the group can easily be mistaken for the image that reflects the actual social relations existing within the group. This allows those gripped by an ideology of socio-cultural racialization to deny that they are making any illegitimate claims about what is natural. They can simply point to the image of group as a mere set of thin social facts. As those held in grip of the ideology move back and forth between claims about these thin social facts, and thick claims about the imaginary essentialized group, the difference isn't noticed. This is how it is possible that Latinos or Muslims can be held *both* to be incapable of assimilation, *and* demanded to assimilate. Conceived as racial groups, it is believed that they are either incapable of conforming to the standards of an enlightened society, or prone to perverse unwillingness to do so—hence justifying barring them from various forms of equal treatment. But seen just as a group constituted by thin social facts, they are just a group of agents engaged in collective activity like any other, and can be demanded to meet the cultural standards of the dominant society.³⁵

The mere invocation of social constructionist argument, therefore, won't do much to dissolve the illusion of socio-cultural racialization. For example, if one were to try to express this as the claim that *Islam* or the community of Muslims is socially constructed, one would run the risk of serious misunderstanding. Since most already think that Islam—the sum of religious institutions, practices, and worldviews based on the Prophet Muhammad's teaching—is primarily the product of collective human actions, to most, the claim won't seem to express anything new. And the claim that any community of Muslims is a social

³⁵ So Shelby is wrong about the difference between claims about the failure of traditional race groups to assimilate, and claims about the failure of cultural or ethnic groups to assimilate. He states that in the case of racial groups, its members are believed to be *incapable* of assimilating, whereas in the case of cultural and ethnic groups, they are presumed *unwilling* to do so. He is wrong because *both things* are often believed of the very same socio-cultural groups. Mostly importantly however, it is often believed that members of such groups are in a significant sense unable to assimilate. However, Shelby rightly notes that this latter belief suggests the group had been racialized—which suggests that the category of socio-cultural racialization is needed to make sense of these cases, contra Shelby (Shelby 2009, 133-134).

construction is nearly tautological. But this isn't what one hoped to express with this claim, in the attempt to debunk an instance of socio-cultural racialization.

The crucial thing to note in dissolving the web of socio-cultural racial ideology, then, is that it relies not on making claims directly about nature, but instead on attributing to social and cultural groups a 'second nature' that operates much the same way. Common forms of social constructionist arguments and their relatives have trained many to be skeptical about claims that social arrangements are just natural. But what is problematic about the claim that races were 'natural' was not its *location* in genes or hormones rather than behavior. Rather, it was that this claim attributed undesirable traits, and therefore a lesser standing, to races, and held these to be mostly unchangeable, beyond human intervention. A social form or practice can just as easily be claimed to be unchangeable or beyond human intervention, in the form of a second nature. The social is presumed to be the product of conscious, collective activity, and therefore changeable (sometimes erroneously, as Haslanger notes).³⁶ However, in socio-cultural racialization, a vision of a social group can be frozen, given fixed traits—but as an image of the social, it still works as an ersatz facsimile of the real social facts.

This is why the dissolution of socio-cultural racialization involves specifically showing that there is such an ideological frozen image that is socially constructed, quite apart from the real, thinner social facts that are used as markers for the ideology. Both the ideological explanation and the real dissolution of the ideology explain that the group is constituted by social facts. It's just that in each case, the explanation depends on an entirely *different* set of social facts. According to the ideological explanation, an imagined social force produces certain characteristic traits in members of the group that determines which individuals belong to the group. In reality, in contrast, the sorting of individuals is determined by a social process of hierarchical categorization.

What's dangerous about socio-cultural racialization?

Socio-cultural racialization, then, represents the possibility of a social process very much like pseudo-biological racialization, but that does not rely on any belief in this classical, biological notion of races. This allows it much wider justificatory force in a world in which this "traditional" idea of races is at least officially, in most social and political institutions,

³⁶ Haslanger's example is the birth control pill—a manipulation of the biological that was a much more effective means for women to control their own fertility than previous non-biological social interventions (Haslanger 2012d, 211-212)

censured. I have been arguing that the phenomenon of socio-cultural racialization therefore needs to be recognized because it presents a particular danger in our present ideological circumstances. Moreover, I have intended to make the case that Latinos and Muslims are among the groups whose oppression cannot be accurately understood, and understood to be as pernicious as it is, without seeing them as socio-culturally racialized. However, the dangers of socio-cultural racialization do not stop at its most obvious targets—we have already seen socio-cultural racialization step into fill the gaps in institutional ideology left by the decline in some cases of biological racialization.

First, however, a word more about the socio-cultural racialization of Muslims. Muslim communities are among the most policed, surveilled, and subject to war and military occupation in the world today. Much of this is done under the rationale of security. Muslim culture, it is generally thought, promotes outbursts of violence more than almost any other culture. So policies are enacted and whole institutions are created to monitor and control groups of Muslims, ostensibly for the safety of various nations.

In the United States, one year following the attack of September 11th, the Bush administration enacted the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), better known as “special registration,” which “at required all nonimmigrant males in the United States over the age of 16 who are citizens and nationals from select countries to be interviewed under oath, fingerprinted, and photographed by a Department of Justice official.”³⁷ The select countries eventually included 25 Muslim-majority countries (North Korea being the only exception), supposedly the most high-risk nationalities for terrorism, but as Moustafa Bayoumi notes, the list did not include various European countries that were known to have organized Al-Qaeda activity, or indeed, various nationalities (including the US) known for other forms of terrorism.³⁸ This made likely Muslim ancestry into the main criteria of who poses a danger.³⁹ NSEERS resulted in an extensive form of discriminatory surveillance, thousands of deportations, and the separation of many families—but not a single charge of terrorism was ever made on the basis of NSEERS. Although the program’s registers were discontinued in 2003, many of the practices of NSEERS monitoring of individuals from predominately Muslim countries continued

³⁷ (Bayoumi 2006, 271)

³⁸ (Bayoumi 2006, 274)

³⁹ (Bayoumi 2006 278)

through the Obama presidency.⁴⁰ Moreover, all of this was the historical forerunner to the now infamous “Muslim ban” instituted by the Trump administration.

When a group is socio-culturally racialized, the interests that a social or political institution has in excluding or controlling that group can be posed merely as a response to social facts that one shouldn’t ignore. If Muslims are seen to possess some kind of violence inherent to their culture, then it can be claimed that the surveillance and deportation of people from places that are mostly Muslim is just a matter of responding to the social facts, and not an illegitimate and fantastical basis for discrimination—like racism. This appears again and again in the institutional oppression that Muslims face, famously in France, where secularism is used to justify surveillance and repressive social policies that fall disproportionately on Muslim communities. In recent years this phenomenon can be seen clearly also in Britain’s PREVENT anti-terrorism legislation, which significantly expands surveillance of Muslim communities on the grounds that it is looking out for failure to conform to “British values,” which it is feared could pose violent risks to British society.⁴¹

Not only does the framing of such policies allow the unjust treatment of Muslims as a cultural and religious group to be more easily swallowed, it also gives institutions a convenient proxy for the control of more specific groups that are not in fact defined by being tied to Islam. Namely, it gives a convenient alibi for the violent control of Arab, North African, and Central Asian populations by wealthy Western states and global elites. It does this in two areas: both within those regions, in the form of military and geopolitical domination on the part of wealthier states, and within the metropole of wealthy, Western nations, in the form of control and exclusion of massive migrant and refugee populations. Given the role countries like the US and Britain have played in both these forms of control, it’s convenient to be able to portray many of these actions not as brute force or as premised on problematic racist assumptions, but instead merely on the supposedly rational need to respond to the threat of Muslim culture with “securitization.” The fantastical image of the violent Muslim—violent somehow *because* they are Muslims—overshadows completely the reality of diverse and complex regional character of these groups. Arabs, for example, of course are also racialized on their own to some degree, but the image of the Muslim now

⁴⁰ (Bayoumi 2006, 271-273, 289 fn.3)

⁴¹ (Weale 2017); (“Preventing PREVENT: Student Handbook on Countering PREVENT Agenda on Campus” 2015)

tends to overtake the mere image of the Arab to some extent. It's not merely Muslims, of course, that form the Arab political opposition in places like Palestine and Syria, but the idea of defending against the dangerous Muslim is deployed to make one forget this. What sounds more defensible, after all, than that common refrain of Islamophobes, that they object not to a people and their political demands, but instead to a religion, a repressive, backward culture, and the beliefs involved?

But to return to a point I began to raise above, the Muslim is only one possible and potent locus of socio-cultural racialization. Socio-cultural racialization has already begun to step in to fill the ideological gaps left by biological racialization. In the US, variants of the “culture of poverty” thesis have been repeatedly applied to Black people. This thesis holds that African Americans remain in poverty despite the reduction of formal discrimination because of their cultural norms and practices.⁴² And anti-Semitism, of course, has long persisted despite the vehement repudiation by many of its biologized form in Nazi racial theory.

As theories like this take shape as common and powerful ideologies, broadly shared in various societies, it is crucial that we become as live to the possibility of socio-cultural racialization as some have become to the possibility of biological racialization. This is not to say knowing of the possibility of socio-cultural racialization will allow us to recognize every instance of it immediately. But determining what it shares with biological racism, and how it differs from it, does allow one to understand the general form. It allows one to see why these kinds of ideologies possess a durability in the face of the powerful legacy of social constructionist arguments aimed at what is natural, and encourages one to scrutinize theories that generalize about the culture of particular groups.

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⁴² The locus classicus of the culture of poverty type theories about African-Americans is the Moynihan Report, produced by sociologist Daniel Moynihan for the US Department of Labor in 1965 (Moynihan 1965). For an overview of some of the criticisms of such theories, see (Heideman and Birch n.d.).

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