



# ISLAMOPHOBIA: A CRASH COURSE

## PART 1 — UNDERSTANDING THE SYSTEM



## ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Jessica El Haj is a Canadian Muslim, a mother, a Registered Nurse, and the founder of Rumanah Wellness.

**Rumanah Wellness** is a public benefit platform empowering Muslim women toward holistic wellness embodied in:

- **Ruh** — Spiritual connection
- **Roots** — Cultural context & individuality
- **Rhythm** — Life stage & personal journey

**Connect with us:**

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**[RumanahWellness.ca](http://RumanahWellness.ca)**  
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**[a](#)**

# WORD ASSOCIATION:

## WHAT DOES "ISLAMOPHOBIA" MEAN TO YOU?

**STEREOTYPING**

**HATRED**

**BULLYING**

**EXCLUSION**

**DISCRIMINATION**

**OTHERING**

Muslims are frequently judged based on assumptions about their beliefs, behavior, and politics — leading to harmful consequences in daily life.

# KEEP YOUR GOAL IN MIND

This presentation isn't about complaining — it's about building change with intention

## INCLUSION

Creating spaces where Muslim identity is welcomed

## SAFETY

Fostering environments free from fear and harm

## ADVOCACY

Learning how to speak up and create change

## UNDERSTANDING

Building knowledge to dismantle systemic barriers

As we journey together, keep *your* goal in mind. Let it guide how you absorb these ideas and shape your next steps as an advocate.





## CHAPTER 1

# DEFINING ISLAMOPHOBIA

We need to define what we're facing before we can take action. Understanding the full scope of islamophobia — its roots, manifestations, and mechanisms — is the foundation for meaningful change.

# THE "OFFICIAL" DEFINITION

- ❑ Islamophobia may mean and represent different things for different people.

## BC HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

### ISLAMOPHOBIA INCLUDES:

Stereotypical tropes and hostile acts

Racial profiling & security surveillance

Comments viewing Islam as barbaric or threatening

*Must be distinguished from lawful critique of Islam, as with other organized religions.*





# LET'S BE REAL

**ISLAMOPHOBIA IS AN ACADEMIC AND SANITIZED TERM FOR RACISM AND BIGOTRY.**

**Racism** is the process of assigning meaning, danger, or inferiority to a group to justify exclusion, control, or harm. Islam becomes the placeholder for race because of perceived identity.



# THE REALITY: MUSLIMS ARE FREQUENTLY JUDGED

## BELIEFS

Assumptions about what Muslims believe, regardless of individual faith practice

## BEHAVIOR

Expectations that Muslim actions reflect on the entire community

## POLITICS

Presumed allegiances and political positions assigned without evidence

## BELONGING

Questioned loyalty and constant pressure to prove "compatibility"

KEY CONCEPT

# INTERSECTING IDENTITIES SHAPE EXPERIENCE

Islamophobia doesn't feel the same for everyone. It has different expressions shaped by intersecting identities — gender, race, citizenship, language, political affiliations.

When these identities overlap, the barriers can be heavier and the climb steeper.





# GENDERED ISLAMOPHOBIA

**Muslim women are often targeted through harmful stereotypes:**

- Portrayed as oppressed and in need of saving
- Viewed as cultural and security threats
- Subject to normalized dehumanizing narratives

**Muslim women and girls face compounded discrimination that combines misogyny with anti-Muslim bias.**

# ANTI-BLACK ISLAMOPHOBIA

**Black Muslims** experience both anti-Black racism and Islamophobia simultaneously. These compounded oppressions create unique barriers:

- Greater vulnerability to profiling and violence
- Erasure from mainstream Muslim narratives
- Barriers to access, equity, and inclusion
- Heightened surveillance and policing





# ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM

**Anti-Palestinian racism** is a form of racialized Islamophobia and anti-Arab discrimination targeting Palestinians and those expressing solidarity with Palestinian rights.

## **SYMBOLIC ERASURE**

Palestinian symbols are often banned under claims of "safety" or "neutrality"

## **POLITICAL SILENCING**

Advocacy for Palestinian rights is falsely equated with extremism

## **CULTURAL DENIAL**

Palestinian identity and history are systematically invalidated

# INTERSECTIONAL RACISM IN ACTION



Identity is complex and multi-dimensional. When multiple marginalized identities intersect, discrimination compounds and intensifies.



# ISLAMOPHOBIA'S REACH EXTENDS BEYOND MUSLIMS

Islamophobia may appear to target only Muslims, but its effects ripple much further.



## RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES

Anyone perceived as "Muslim-looking" faces discrimination regardless of actual faith



## IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES

New arrivals from Muslim-majority countries face heightened suspicion and barriers



## PALESTINIAN ALLIES

Supporters of Palestinian rights experience professional and social consequences



## FAITH MINORITIES

Sikhs, Hindus, and others are misidentified and targeted through islamophobic violence



CHAPTER 2

# THE ACTIVIST THEORY OF RACISM



# CULTURAL ISLAMOPHOBIA

The first gear: **Cultural racism** encompasses stereotypes, myths, and negative images circulating in media, literature, and popular culture. These shape societal thinking about who belongs and who doesn't.



MOVIES & TV



NEWS MEDIA



SOCIAL MEDIA



BOOKS



ADVERTISEMENTS



POP CULTURE

# MEDIA FRAMING

What images does popular culture paint of Muslims?

- Terrorist
- Uncultured
- Backward
- Oppressed
- Violent
- "Incompatible with Western values"





# LANGUAGE ENGINEERING

Language shapes how we think. In the context of islamophobia, words are often engineered to create fear.

## "MODERATE MUSLIM"

Implies that being Muslim requires qualification — that Islam is inherently extreme unless proven otherwise

## "RADICAL ISLAM"

Ties violence directly to the faith itself, rather than to individual actors or political contexts

## "ISLAMIC TERRORISM"

Suggests Islam is inherently violent, not the actions of certain individuals operating outside religious teachings

These phrases suggest Islam is inherently violent, rather than recognizing the actions of individuals.



# 80%

Four out of every five media stories about Muslims in the U.S. are negative — shaping public perception through relentless negativity.



# CANCER & COCAINE

Even life-threatening diseases and dangerous drugs receive more balanced coverage than Islam and Muslims in mainstream media.



# 770%

When the perpetrator is Muslim, media coverage increases — amplifying fear and reinforcing dangerous stereotypes.



# INSTITUTIONAL ISLAMOPHOBIA

The second gear: **Institutional racism** refers to laws, policies, practices, and systems that disadvantage, marginalize, or disproportionately harm Muslims and those perceived as Muslim.



**SCHOOLS**



**WORKPLACES**



**GOVERNMENT**



**HEALTHCARE**



**FINANCIAL SYSTEMS**



**POLICY**

# INSTITUTIONAL ISLAMOPHOBIA IN SCHOOLS

Institutional racism in schools often shows up through:



## BIASED CURRICULA

Islam framed through conflict, extremism, or orientalist narratives



## RESTRICTIVE POLICIES

Limitations on religious expression, prayer spaces, or cultural dress



## LACK OF SAFETY

Absence of culturally safe spaces for Muslim students to learn and grow

📄 **Real example:** A Grade 7 social studies PowerPoint lecture includes a slide titled "Terrorist Government" above a picture of Afghan men in traditional dress.





# **BILL 21: INSTITUTIONAL ISLAMOPHOBIA IN LAW**

## **QUEBEC, 2019**

Bill 21 prohibits certain public sector employees from wearing "religious symbols" at work.

- Targets teachers, police officers, judges, and authority figures
- Disproportionately impacts Muslim women who wear hijab
- Restricts career access in education, policing, and government
- Denies equal opportunity based on religious expression

This law is a notorious example of institutional islamophobia codified into legislation.



# POLICY AS A WEAPON: THE MUSLIM TRAVEL BAN

Framed as a "security measure," the Muslim Travel Ban in the United States was a clear example of institutional islamophobia.

## TARGETED BAN

Restricted entry from Muslim-majority countries under the guise of national security

## FAMILY SEPARATION

Tore apart families and prevented refugees from seeking safety

## ACTIVIST DETENTION

Pro-Palestinian activists face detention or deportation for political speech



# INDIVIDUAL ISLAMOPHOBIA

The final gear: **Individual racism** refers to the beliefs, attitudes, or actions of an individual that express prejudice, bias, or hostility toward Muslims.

It gets more attention than other forms because its harm is immediate and visible. It usually involves someone getting hurt, insulted, or actively excluded.



**HATE SPEECH**



**VANDALISM**



**PHYSICAL VIOLENCE**



**RACIAL SLURS & JOKES**



**STEREOTYPING**

# 1800%

## THE SPIKE IN HATE CRIMES

In 2023, islamophobic and anti-Palestinian hate crimes spiked by as much as **1800%** in some Canadian regions (NCCM).

### STATISTICS CANADA REPORTS:

- **94% increase** in anti-Muslim hate crimes
- **52% rise** in hate crimes against Arabs and West Asians

❏ These numbers are likely **underreported** — many incidents go unreported due to fear, lack of trust in authorities, or normalization of discrimination.

### Rising Hate Crimes





CHAPTER 3

# THE INDUSTRY

# ISLAMOPHOBIA IS NOT OPINION

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## OPINIONS ARE PERSONAL

They come from individual experiences and honest reflection.

## ISLAMOPHOBIA IS MANUFACTURED

Shaped by media, politics, policy, and repeated narratives designed to create fear.



# ISLAMOPHOBIA: A MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR INDUSTRY

The manufacturing happens through repetition, carefully crafted headlines, selective storytelling, and a system that teaches people to fear and distrust without evidence.

## 1 REPETITION

Same narratives repeated across platforms until they feel like truth

## 2 SELECTIVE STORYTELLING

Emphasizing violence when perpetrators are Muslim, downplaying context

## 3 SYSTEMIC FEAR

Institutions adopt policies based on manufactured threat perceptions

Islamophobia is not organic — it is **constructed, circulated, and sustained** for profit and political gain.





#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

# WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

## DEFINITION

Islamophobia is racism and bigotry disguised as cultural critique

## INTERSECTIONALITY

Islamophobia compounds with other identities – gender, race, political affiliation

## THREE GEARS

Cultural, institutional, and individual racism work together to perpetuate discrimination

## MANUFACTURED SYSTEM

Islamophobia is a multi-billion dollar industry, not organic opinion

# PART 2 EXAMINES: PERSONAL & SOCIETAL IMPACTS

Understanding the system is the first step. Next, we'll explore how islamophobia affects individuals, families, and communities — and what we can do about it.

