

How does President Obama approach negative sentiments towards Muslims in his rhetoric?

The defining and uniting function of the presidency

American Studies



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Abstract

This thesis examines the way in which concepts about national identity, especially in the form of national narratives, influence presidential rhetoric concerning the negative portrayal of Muslims. This thesis found that narratives of religion and diversity are useful in presidential rhetoric to unite the nation by reminding them of what is American. Secondly, it found that the stereotyping of Muslims has its roots in international politics. Lastly, it found that Obama creates a narrow Muslim American identity in his speeches, by emphasizing patriotism of Muslims and normalizing Muslim Americans by making Islam in a comprehensible version of religion by emphasizing the similarities with American values.

Keywords: national identity, presidential rhetoric, Muslims

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Introduction

“You’re right where you belong. You’re part of America too.” President Obama made this statement when he visited the Islamic Society of Baltimore on February 3rd, 2016. Apparently there was need for the president to make a statement such as this one, which is supported by statistics. Within a month after the Paris attacks on Nov. 13, the rate of hate crimes against Muslims had tripled from 12.6 a month to 38, according to an analysis by a California State University research group. 18 of those crimes took place since the shooting in San Bernardino on December 2nd by a couple who were supporters of ISIS (Lichtblau n.p.). These hate crimes include assaults on hijab-wearing students, arsons and vandalism at mosques, and shootings and death threats at Islamic-owned businesses. Corresponding with this behavior towards Muslims is the popularity of Donald Trump, who does not distinguish between mainstream Muslims and Islamist terrorists when he calls for “a ban on migrants from any part of the world with a proven history of terrorism against the United States or its allies” (Martin and Burns n.p.).

However, this manner of behavior towards and speaking about Muslims is not a recent development, and bares resemblance with the immediate period after 9/11. Soon after the planes flew into the towers, it was up to Bush to identify the new enemy, and Bush’s address to the nation on the same day of the attack already gave a definition: “America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism.” Thus, after the great enemies of the past the United States had a new enemy, namely terrorism. However, a few days later it was apparently necessary for Bush to deliver a speech at the Islamic Center of Washington, saying Islam is peaceful; “The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends. It is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them.” Despite this message, U.S. policies after 9/11 reflect an indiscriminate targeting of Arabs and Muslims; measures such as mass arrests, secret and indefinite detentions, closed hearings, FBI interviews, wiretapping, seizures of property, removals of aliens with technical visa violations, and mandatory special registration have affected at least 100,000 Arabs and Muslims living in the United States. However, none of the 1,200 people that were arrested could be charged with connections to terrorism (Cainkar, “The Social Construction of Difference” 255).

Returning back to the present, the latter part of Obama’s presidency marked a resurgence of anti-Muslim rhetoric. Simultaneously, the news is filled with reports about

terrorists attacks around the world, also in the United States itself, which were committed by people who became radicalized through information on the internet provided by the Islamic State. This problem could not be “solved” in the same manner as was attempted after 9/11, by attacking a foreign country and executing leaders of terrorist organizations. Somehow this situation has created suspicions about where people’s loyalty lie, with their religion or nationality. Women wearing hijabs are suspicious. Questions are asked whether Muslims are truly American. The randomness of the idea ‘it could be anyone’ also seems to incite a profound fear in people. Furthermore, since Muslims are a small group in the United States, the only time that people hear about Islam is in the context of terrorism and fear. And then there is President Obama who attempts to change the perceptions of Muslims in the United States.

Topic

Observance of this phenomenon leads to questions about the connection between concepts of difference and belonging that are involved. How does Obama’s rhetoric concerning Muslims relate to constructs of national identity, citizenship, and race? In order to answer this main question, three other subquestions must be asked, since the phenomenon of Obama’s rhetoric concerning Muslims is indicative of underlying topics.

- 1 How is national identity constructed and what role does the president have in it?
- 2 How has the stereotyping of Muslims developed?
- 3 How does Obama approach islamophobia in his speeches?

In chapter one, this thesis will examine national identity and the narratives that are involved, especially concerning race and religion, and the importance of presidential rhetoric to national narratives. An important notion to this chapter is that when speaking about national identity, citizenship and race, we are speaking of social constructs. National identity is not a factual, permanent, and fixed concept; identity in general never signifies anything static, unchanging, or substantial, but rather “an element situated in the flow of time, ever changing, something involved in a process” (Wodak et al. 11). Also citizenship is a concept that goes further than the official status of citizenship; it is a concept that invokes questions about national identity and what it is to belong and be accepted. Furthermore, this thesis will demonstrate that race is a construct that can be changed and used at will. The first chapter will further elaborate on the different interpretations and ramifications of some of these concepts.

Then, in order to explain the current situation, chapter two examines the history of anti-Muslim tendencies in the United States, and will explain the context of Obama’s

speeches. The specific rhetorical situations of the speeches are very important, since it correlates to the focus shift of Obama's speeches. Furthermore, it shows how Obama stands in relation to the years before his presidency, when after 9/11, George W. Bush was also confronted with the issue of anti-Muslim behavior in American society.

To close off, the third chapter will focus on Obama with a close textual analysis of parts of speeches. First of all, it will give a short analysis of Obama's vision of America. Second of all, it will focus on the way Muslims are 'normalized' to fit in with American national identity. The speeches that have been selected for this have in common that they attempt to counteract the negative portrayal of Muslims.

There also matters that will not be addressed in this thesis. First of all, this thesis will not research the change of opinions through Obama's speeches. As will be explained in the first chapter, it is virtually impossible to accomplish this, and it disregards the symbolic importance of presidential rhetoric, a notion that is key to this thesis. Second of all, this thesis will not attempt to explain the differences in interpretations of Islam, and what the "real" interpretation of Islam is. It will mainly focus on the political and social implications of the associations of terrorism with Islam.

Previous literature

A substantial amount of literature focusing on the post-9/11 climate in the United States focusses on George W. Bush, which is in itself not surprising; it demonstrates that power is attributed to the presidency in configuring the political debate and the repercussions presidential actions have on society. However, Obama's presidency has by far not been analyzed as often, since his presidency has not ended yet. Especially the topic of how Obama has dealt with Bush's legacy has only been examined in opinion articles in newspapers superficially. Expected is that more analyses will ensue in a few years. For example, presidential rhetoric has been researched extensively, but stops with Bush.

However, there are still ideas and theories that are also applicable to Obama, such as David Zarefsky's "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition," in which the key function of the presidency is formulated as 'defining social reality.' J. Maggio's analysis that built on Zarefsky's concept of the power of definition, focused on the recreation of reality after 9/11, and showed how Bush has defined 'friend' and 'enemy', a definition that has impact to this day. Vanessa Beasley has also written a valuable contribution on presidential rhetoric and national identity in a book called "You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric". She examined inaugural and state of the union addresses of U.S.

presidents from 1885 till 2000, in which she identified a pronunciation of allegedly transcendent national values, and an opportunity for the ritual reenactment of peoplehood (Beasley 148). In this form of presidential rhetoric she found a way to study American nationalism with its values and rituals; especially her notion of the shared beliefs hypothesis has been important for the start of this thesis.

National identity has also been the center of discussion for years; American Studies can be seen as an academic field focused solely on American national identity. Samuel P. Huntington, who is known for the concept of ‘clash of civilizations’ has written a book on American national identity, tellingly called *Who are We?* His ideas on what constitutes American identity are interesting to examine, since he takes an “American” approach to it; in his foreword he states that this book is shaped by his own identities as a patriot and scholar (xvi). While Huntington is a scholar, he indeed makes assumptions that can only be attributed to his patriotism, which makes it a very interesting work. Another book on American national identity has been helpful as background information, namely *Religion, politics, and American identity*, since it focuses on the period after 9/11. This is important, since 9/11 traumatized the nation and had a deep impact on perceptions of national identity.

There has been no previous literature that focuses solely on the way presidents conceptualize Muslims. In literature about Bush, some remarks that he made on Islam are noted, but it is always in the context of terrorism. There is also no literature on Obama examining how he manages the consequences of 9/11, besides from the standpoint of politics and foreign policy. There is, however, a significant number of scholars, especially from the perspective of social and cultural sciences, who write on the experiences of Muslims, before and after 9/11. Most of this research focuses on media and popular culture, such as Evelyn Asultany’s book *Arabs and Muslims in the Media; Race and Representation after 9/11* and Carol Fadda-Conrey’s article “Arab American Citizenship in Crisis: Destabilizing Representations of Arabs and Muslims in the United States after 9/11.” Other research, such as Louise Cainkar’s, is more focused on the political implications of 9/11 for Muslims demonstrated in government policies and ideologies. *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* examined the conceptualization of Arab Americans throughout approximately the last century, a book to which Cainkar has also contributed. Overall, Cainkar’s research provides theories and framework for how representations in the media and popular culture can be examined.

A remarkable absence of religion scientists can be observed, concerning the topic of Islam in the U.S. For instance, *Religion, Politics, and American Identity* focuses on Christian

expressions of religion in politics, confirming the image of an “American identity” that is defined by Christianity. The absence of religion scientists addressing Islam in America is indicative of the importance that is attributed to the group of Muslims there is in the United States. Of course, this is logical in some sense, considering the unequal amount of Muslims versus Christians in the United States. However, it fails to address the impact of an overwhelming Christian majority in U.S. politics on other religious groups, such as Muslims and Sikhs.

Chapter 1. Constructing national identity

1.1 National identity

Samuel P. Huntington states that “national identities, like other identities, are constructed and deconstructed, upgraded and downgraded, embraced and rejected” (107). National identity is not a solid entity, unchanging and determined; it is a vague construct, living in the minds of individuals, changing with time. At the same time, essentialist ideas emerge when people speak about what is truly “American”, as Obama also does. These imaginations of national narratives are important, but before speaking further on this subject, it is necessary to address the largely contingent and imaginary character of nation. According to Wodak et al. there is no generally accepted definition of a ‘nation,’ which corresponds with the elusive character of it, but at the same time there are things that can be said about the imagining of nationhood. The concept of nations as imagined communities was first coined by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities*, originally published in 1983, and of which a second edition was published in 2006. The idea is that members of a larger group do not know each other personally, but still feel a connection with each other. The members have a mental image of their affinity with the community in their head. The forming of nations are not only strengthened by imagining, but also by performing. The common past and culture are emphasized, in combination with rhetoric, national mythos and invented traditions. This imagining and performing of national identity can be described, as opposed to finding essentialist definitions of “national identity.”

Reflecting about imaginations and performances of national identity in the United States another concept emerges, namely civil religion. This concept was used by sociologist Robert N. Bellah in his classic essay “Civil Religion in America” from 1967. This theory asserts that there is an elaborate and well-instituted civil religion in America, with certain fundamental beliefs, values, and rituals. Although it can function parallel to someone’s religion, it is also independent of established religions, just as it is not contained to American politics, but a broader cultural phenomenon. As Wade Clark Roof explains, it refers to a cultural repertoire of myths, symbols, rituals, stories, and texts that can be drawn upon (287). For example, it has its prophets, like Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln, and its sacred places, such as shrines to Washington and Lincoln. There are also sacred texts, such as the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, and ceremonies, such as Memorial Day and presidential inaugurations. Furthermore there are hymns, such as “God bless America”, and

symbols, such as the flag and Lady Liberty. The significance of civil religion is indicated by Roof; “myths are the means by which a nation affirms its deepest identities and frames its rationale for political action” (287).

1.2 National narratives

In the formation of national identity, people have always been excluded. Identity is often formed in contrast with opposite identities, or what is called ‘the other.’ This process of differentiation can often lead to the creation of ‘the enemy,’ which has connections to civil religion; a setting where God and country are closely aligned leads to a tendency to frame conflicts with other nations as essentially a struggle of “good” versus “evil,” which gives a moral judgement to the situation. After 9/11, a discourse of ‘the enemy’ was employed to describe the terrorists, and when Muslims were associated with them, is also became a moral judgement. Part of the reason of this lies in the national narratives about race and religion.

1.2.1 National narratives about race

It can be concluded that racism is inherent to nationalism, but Benedict Anderson disagrees. According to Anderson, progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals insist on “the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism”, and this vision on nationalism would disregard that nations also inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love, especially in cultural products of nationalism as poetry, prose fiction, music and plastic arts (141). According to him, it is very rare to find analogous nationalists products expressing fear and loathing. With this, Anderson disconnects nationalism and racism; “The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations ...” (149). However, in the American context, it seems that racism has been closely related to national identity. “Within the context of immigration to the United States, “race” has been a central framework for locating immigrants along a continuum from black to white and thereby determining the degree to which they deserved or did not deserve citizenship (Ong qtd. in Naber 13).

This central framework of race has lost its importance according to some, since the election of a black president would signal the post-race era. While it is doubtful that this is an accurate reflection of society, it discloses the place of racism in today’s society; since race is not supposed to be an issue anymore, racism cannot be there either. This has led to a situation in which explicit racism, a denial of the persistence of racism, and a celebration of the end of racism operate simultaneously (Asultany 168). In the next chapter, it will be clarified how

Islam, a religion, can be associated with race and how this leads to a situation of racism where the racism is denied.

1.2.2 National narratives about religion

The United States can be seen as a religious country, since nearly two-thirds of Americans call religion very important (Gutterman 79). Religion is also thought to be a great part of the history of the United States since the arrival of the Puritans in America in the colonial period. Their influence has stretched out into civil religion, as Vanessa Beasley asserts that U.S. presidents have associated American identity with the nation's traditional civil religious beliefs, and specifically Puritan notions of an American civil religion, ideas such as the American people as God's chosen people (660). Religion in the U.S. is, however, not a pluralistic whole in which all religions are at the same level of importance. Huntington speaks about "the continuing centrality of Anglo-Protestant culture to American national identity" (30). The fact that the first Catholic President was only elected in 1960 gives the impression that the God that is referred to in national identity is a very protestant one in origin.

However, next to this white, Christian hegemony in national identity, there is also the importance of the freedom of religion. The First Amendment to the Constitution states that no law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof. There have always been boundaries to this freedom, however. In reality, it referred mainly to the different Protestant movements in the early days of the nation, and later it was also extended to include other forms. In his book *The Myth of American Religious Freedom*, David Sehat states that "Protestant Christian influence in U.S. history was long-standing, widespread, and, from the perspective of dissenters, coercive" (2). From this perspective, another phenomenon can be clarified; literature about the negative portrayal about Muslims recurrently mention US Christian leaders expressing criticism towards Islam, such as "brash and insulting commentary" (Smith 40), which according to Smith is not helping the American understanding of Islam. This phenomenon cannot be ascribed to a clashing of religions, since Muslims and Christians cooperate in Arab-American organizations and there are also Christian leaders that condemn hate speech against Muslims and Islam; it can best be explained from a political and cultural standpoint of these Christian leaders.

The conceptualization of America as a Christian nation can have consequences for the acceptance of Muslims, especially when Muslim identity is seen as being in opposition.

An example of this is Huntington, who writes about a ‘clash of civilizations.’ He states that on 9/11 “America was targeted as the enemy ... because it was Christian” (358). According to Huntington, militant Islam is the next new enemy after Communism, and draws comparisons between them (358). Furthermore, he states that “Muslim hostility encourages Americans to define their identity in religious and cultural terms,” which is according to him, an identity in opposition with (militant) Islam (358). By ascribing Muslim antipathy against America to religious and cultural differences, Huntington downplays the importance of US foreign policy in establishing attitudes towards the United States.

Despite challenges to religious freedom, the sacred text of civil religion, the Bill of Rights, informs Americans that religious freedom is American. The two national narratives that emerge from this history, namely America as “a nation under God”, and more specifically, a Christian nation, and America as the place of religious freedom, have an impact on the perception of Islam in the United States. It can cause Muslims to be considered un-American, but at the same time the narrative of religious freedom can be used against that specific anti-Muslim rhetoric, which can be seen in chapter three.

1.3 The function of presidential rhetoric

When discussing national identity and the role of the president in forming it, the first issue is the effectivity of presidential rhetoric in defining national identity. It is difficult to measure the effects of presidential rhetoric, since it is difficult to measure the change of people’s beliefs or attitudes. David Zarefsky makes a point when stating that “... replacement of an attitude or opinion with another is only one kind of attitude change. Reinforcement of one’s initial position, modification in the salience of a belief or attitude, changes in perception of what other beliefs or attitudes are related to the one at hand, or differences in interpretation of what the belief or attitude means are all examples of other types of change.” (608). The effects of presidential rhetoric are thus much broader than just changing one opinion to another. It is, however, good to take into consideration that the popularity of the president with the audience is essential in changing people’s mind. 1987’s research on what moves public opinion by Page, Shapiro and Dempsey found that “unpopular presidents ... apparently have no positive effect on opinion at all” (34).

The second issue is the audience of presidential rhetoric. Zarefsky says that especially in the contemporary era, the primary audience for presidents often is other politicians or the media (611). The message of the president is hence generally mediated through other sources. Page, Shapiro and Dempsey’s research also found that news commentary constitute major

influence on public opinion (35). This may seem as though presidential rhetoric has little effect. However, ultimately, presidential rhetoric remains important. Maggio states that because the president is the only U.S. politician that is elected by the entire nation, the president's rhetoric, even if on a purely symbolic level, is extremely important to the polity (810).

1.3.1 The uniting presidency

Vanessa Beasley observes that U.S. presidents have promoted an ideational standard for American identity that could easily accommodate diverse constituents (216); this is what she describes as the shared beliefs hypothesis. This can be exemplified by the shared national narratives; the goal of these narratives are the unification of a nation. She also notes that "chief executives clearly have a great interest in making sure that the American people feel united, even if citizens' actual demographic, economic, and psychological conditions would suggest otherwise" (Beasley 654).

Maggio notes a strong association between unity and security in Bush's rhetoric: "unity is a key to the nation being safe from terrorists" (819). Furthermore, Maggio notes that this also may mean a suspension of democracy, whose essential element is disagreement and conflict. However, Bush is not unique in emphasizing unity. When speaking about ISIL in the 2015 End of Year Press Conference, Obama said "all of us can do our part by staying, vigilant, by saying something if we see something that is suspicious, by refusing to be terrorized, and by staying united as one American family" (3). This seems to be a juxtaposition, since being suspicious of the actions of other mostly does not work in the favor of unity.

1.3.2 The defining presidency

"Social reality is ...not fixed – especially social reality that is mediated through news outlets and government spokesmen. "Reality" is fluid, and it is often shaped by presidential rhetoric" (Maggio 813). According to Zarefsky, the president has the power of definition; this should not be taken as a power to persuade in the standard way this is understood as changing opinions, which was mentioned previously. Rather, the power lies in setting the limits of debate and/or reality. Zarefsky discerns four ways in which presidents exercise their power of definition, namely association, dissociation, condensation symbols, frame shifting (612-613), while he acknowledges that these are not the only rhetorical techniques employed by presidents. By associating is meant that associations are created with other terms, expanding

the meaning of a term to cover the new case at hand; an example of this would be defined September 11 as “war” (612). Dissociation denotes breaking a concept into parts in order to identify one’s proposal with the more favored part. President Kennedy identified his arms control programs with “real peace”, not just the temporary absence of military conflict, thereby taking apart the concept of “peace” and reconstructing it (612). Condensation symbols refer to symbols which designate no clear referent but “condense” a host of different meanings and connotations that otherwise might diverge, which is useful in defining an ambiguous situation because people can highlight different aspects of the symbol yet reach the same conclusion (613). Frame shifting can be exemplified by Bush changing the frame of the war; when no weapons of mass destruction were found he invited listeners to see the war from the perspective of the benefits of eliminating a tyrant, thereby changing the justification for the war (613).

Maggio has used Zaresfky’s framework to examine six separate presidential addresses, among which the “Islam Is Peace” speech given on September 17, 2001, describing the speech as an admirable attempt of Bush to reject negativity towards Muslims (820).

“The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don't represent peace. They represent evil and war... It's a great country because we share the same values of respect and dignity and human worth. And it is my honor to be meeting with leaders who feel just the same way I do. They're outraged. They're sad. They love America just as much as I do.”

In this speech Maggio discerns two techniques, namely association and dissociation. Bush uses association to blend Muslims-Americans into the fold of “normal” Americans like himself; “they love America just as much as I do”. Also, Bush dissociates the terrorists’ versions of Islam from the “real” Islam: the real version of Islam teaches peace, not violence. Maggio states then that “Bush again claims a kind of hermeneutic sovereignty in this moment by claiming to know the “real” Islam” (820).

Chapter 2. Stereotyping of Muslims

2.1 Demographics of Muslims in the United States

First of all, it is necessary to state that it is unclear how many Muslims reside in the United States. Since there is no national census in which religion has to be indicated the numbers are only speculations, exemplified by the range of 4-7 million that Jane I. Smith proposes (28). Some estimates include virtually all people that are assumed to be Muslim since they come from a certain country, while other estimates look at mosque visits and communities. Furthermore, these estimates are unclear about what the requirements are to be called a Muslim, also since many Americans of Muslim heritage consider themselves secular and are non-observant Muslims (Smith 29). Pew Research Center estimates that there were about 3.3 million Muslims of all ages living in the United States in 2015, which is about 1% of the US population (Mohamed n.p.). Certain states and areas, such as New Jersey and Chicago, are more densely populated by Muslims and have two or three times as many Muslim adults per capita as the national average. Pew Research Center also states that just over half of the growth of the American Muslim population from 2010 to 2015 is due to immigration, the other main cause of growth being natural increase. Another Pew research shows that between 1992 and 2012, a total of about 1.7 million Muslims entered the U.S. as legal permanent resident, which constitutes a large portion of the overall U.S. Muslim population (“The Religious Affiliation of U.S. Immigrants” n.p.).

The Muslim community is very diverse in the United States, as Smith states that “America today is home to the most heterogeneous Muslim community at any time or place in the history of the world” (29). There have been many Muslim African slaves who brought Islam in a very early stage to the United States, even though forced conversion meant an end to practicing Islam. Around the 1890s, there was an immigration wave from Great Syria of mostly Christian, low-skilled Arabs, but there was also a small group of Muslims (Smith 29). Later, around the 1960s mostly well-educated Muslims Arabs came to the US. The lifting of the immigration ban in 1975 brought new waves of immigrants. South and Southeast Asians who arrived later, have been well educated and economically sufficient (Smith 29). Many others, however, have been poorer and lacking in both education and occupational skills. Political turmoil in various parts of the world has brought refugees to American shores from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. South Asians and Arabs are the most sizeable of the immigrant Muslim groups in America, followed by Iranians, Sub-Saharan

Africans, East Asians, former member of the Soviet Union and many smaller communities (Smith 30). These ethnic differences are not causing full separation; according to Louise Cainkar, “American Muslims appear to be achieving a greater degree of racial integration than any other American religious group” (“American Muslims in the 21st Century” 178). This means that the different ethnic groups are not separated, but cooperate in mosques and organizations.

2.2. *Racialization of Islam*

In order to understand how Obama’s rhetoric concerning Muslims relates to constructs of national identity, citizenship, and race, it is useful to first narrow the group of Muslims to those of Arab descent. The experiences of Arab Americans are significant in demonstrating the changes in perceptions of Muslims, even though this group comprises both Muslims as Christians; the change in their experiences is connected to a comprehensive whole of foreign politics, racism, and domestic policies. This combination has had effect on many people; according to Cainkar, “persons with Arabic-sounding names, whether Christian or Muslim, report experiencing job discrimination and anti-Arab comments, and persons with the “Arab/Middle Eastern” phenotype have been physically attacked regardless of religion” (“The Social Construction of Difference” 244). This arbitrariness in attacks signifies apparent generalizations between ethnicity, religion, and affiliations with terrorism, and also demonstrates the importance of the Arab experience for many other Americans.

According to Cainkar, the social status of Arabs has changed from marginal white to a more subordinate status that shares many features common to the experiences of people of color, as she explains in the article “The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience” (248). The general profile of the Arab experience in the early part of the twentieth century displayed more social, political, and economic incorporation than that of racially excluded African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, and Latinos (Cainkar, “The Social Construction of Difference” 243). The early Arab experience was largely similar to that of white ethnics as measured by residential, employment, and marital patterns, as well as land ownership, voting, and naturalization rights, which was not the case anymore in the 1960s. Dominant themes in the Arab American experience were then exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, and selective policy enforcement (249). This lasted into the decades after, leading to Shelly Slade concluding that in the early 1980s “Arabs remain one of the few ethnic groups that can still be slandered with impunity in America” (Qtd. in Cainkar, “The Social Construction of Difference” 249). The racial formation processes experienced by

Arab Americans differ in both historical timing and pretext from that of other groups in the United States, because when other ethnic groups gained more civil rights and social acceptance, that of Arabs declined. This also means that Arab exclusion cannot be exclusively tied to ideas about race and the superiority of whiteness.

In 1978, Edward Said, whose work is still influential today, acknowledged and described the existence of ‘Orientalism,’ which constructs a binary opposition between East and West and attributes an immutable “essence” to the East or Orient, and continues to permeate Western media, government policies, and academia and operates as a discursive, ideological justification for Western colonial and imperial projects in the Middle East (Naber 20). Cainkar proposes that the binary opposition between East and West is traceable to the emergence of the United States as a global superpower (249). After the Second World War, The United States has interfered in many conflicts in the Middle East, for example the Arab-Israeli conflict. At the time, Palestinians were portrayed by the media as a culturally barbaric group, which caused difficulties for Palestinian Americans to maintain an American identity at the time (250). It also shows in immigration policies; after 1965, it was considered against liberal democratic principles to blatantly discriminate in immigration policies by country of birth (258). However, the Iran Crisis of 1980 was mentioned as a reason for the 1981 law that promoted the regulation of persons from select ‘foreign states’ in immigration law. Furthermore, in 1991, during the Gulf War, selective policies emerged concerning persons holding Iraqi and Kuwaiti passports and travel documents. Cainkar states that “since the end of quotas and the dawn of the civil rights era, punitive or controlling special immigration policies based on country of birth or nationality have been applied solely to persons from (non-European) Muslim-majority countries (with the exception of North Korea) and to Arabs.

The importance of this observation lies in the assumption that there is a relationship between national origin and presumed inherent cultural and ideological traits, what can also be called “race.” One of the definitions of ‘race’ by the Oxford Dictionary is “a group of people sharing the same culture, history, language, etc.; an ethnic group.” However, at the same time, Arabs cannot be considered a racial group because they encompass many geographical regions and skin colors. This discrepancy is also noted with Arabs themselves. Cainkar reports a research about how Arabs view their place in the racial structure of the United States. While the Census Bureau defines Arabs as white (when they check the box ‘other’ and write-in ‘Arab,’ they are recoded as white), many Arabs disagree with it. They think that their treatment in American society, their actual skin color and other phenotypical criteria, and Arabs being distinct from white Europeans, conflict with being described as

‘white’ (“The Social Construction” 261). It is also problematic for Arabs in the workplace. Cainkar states that Arabs have experienced the double burden of being excluded from the full scope of whiteness *and* from mainstream recognition as people of color (251). This means that they are still white and ineligible for affirmative action.

The question still remains how ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ can be conflated, and could lead to the racialization of Islam. Nadine Naber and Louise Cainkar have different hypotheses on the origin of the conflation of Arab and Muslim. Cainkar states that in the 1990s, increasing numbers of immigrant and second-generation Arab Muslims became engaged in religious practice. While not every Arab Muslim underwent this change, which privileged religiosity over secularism, community-wide transformations in ethos and practice were dramatic and measurable and continue to this day (“The Social Construction of Difference” 247). This was part of a global Islamic revival, and according to Cainkar, caused essentialized constructions of violent and backwards Arabs to be extended nearly seamlessly to Muslims (248). This notion is, however, difficult to substantiate: the extension of Arab identity to all Muslims cannot be sufficiently explained by an Islamic revival alone. It rather shows the fluidity of perceived identities. According to Naber, the intensification of representations of Islam as a signifier of evilness and Otherness originated from the period of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and was exacerbated in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution (post-1979), when hegemonic discourses on the “Arab Other” in the United States increasingly deployed the assumption that all Arabs are Muslim and that Islam is an inherently backward and uncivilized religion (32). The process has probably been a combination of factors, and resulted in the arbitrary reasons for attacking certain people after 9/11.

2.3 After 9/11

Before 9/11, there was already negative stereotyping of Arabs present in the United States, in media and politics. Only this could lead to the quick finger pointing that happened after 9/11. The introduction mentioned already a number of domestic policies that were implemented that targeted Arabs and Muslims. While Bush said in his “Islam is peace” speech that Muslims and Arabs were not the enemy, government policies proved otherwise, and the media also enforced these ideas. The consequences of negative stereotyping was measurable; a 2004 nationwide survey conducted by Cornell University found that 44 percent of people in the United States favored some kind of restriction on the civil liberties of Arab and Muslim Americans, that 50 percent perceived Muslims as violent, dangerous, and fanatical, that one-third believed that a majority of Muslims was hostile to the United States,

and that nearly half of U.S. citizens perceived Islam as both dangerous and as having values fundamentally different from those of Christianity (Asultany 133). Smith states that “while they don’t believe that most American Muslims condone violence, they do worry that an increase in the number of Muslims allowed to immigrate may lead to the growth of radical cells” (Smith 40). These widespread perceptions of Muslims and Islam exist next to national narratives about diversity. Asultany states that after 9/11 “the conception of the American citizen became suddenly and momentarily centered on opposition to Arabs and Muslims (who became marked as noncitizen terrorists), but this citizenry nevertheless took pride in its multicultural diversity” (133). In this period, the relation of Muslim identity to American identity has been considered as opposites.

There were also attempts made to counteract these negative stereotypes, especially in response to the hate crimes that targeted hundreds of Arabs, Muslims, and those mistaken for them. Some public service announcements (PSAs) attempted to create inspirational images of a united multicultural American citizenry. Asultany has examined the ways in which PSAs narrated Islam and the United States as compatible in an effort to challenge ideas about their oppositional nature and inspire national unity during a time of crisis (134). She compared three advertising campaigns, the Ad Council’s “I am an American,” the Council on American-Islamic Relations’ “I am an American Muslim,” and the U.S. Department of State’s “Shared Values Initiative.” Asultany argues that in an effort to deconstruct the opposition between American citizen and Arab Muslim terrorist, the PSAs reproduced restrictive representations of diversity, or what she terms “diversity patriotism”, that is, “a version of American patriotism that glorifies the notion of a diverse citizenry and emphasizes America’s multicultural unity” (134). Asultany discerned different strategies, of which especially one stands out in relation to the topic of this thesis. It is a version of diversity patriotism that approximates patriotic sameness through the figure of the good Muslim; this involves representing Muslims as similar to Americans by articulating their service to the nation, legacy in the United States, diversity, and heterosexual family values (134).

The matter of contention is the narrowness of the definition; it requires individuals to approximate a patriotic sameness in order to gain access to cultural citizenship. Asultany states that Judaism in the United States is a comparable historical phenomenon, where Jews had to remake their Jewishness into a bastardized but comprehensible version of Christianity (148). It reveals that Islam must be represented in a particular form in order to fall under the umbrella of liberal multicultural inclusion and tolerance, a form emphasizing likeness to and

compatibility with a dominant, and conservative, American culture.

2.4 The influence of IS

While attempts have been made to disaffiliate Muslims from terrorism, other forces have been at work too, especially the Islamic State (IS). IS has no nationalist intentions, but presents itself as a jihadist militant group, that follows a fundamentalists interpretation of Sunni Islam, and aims to establish a caliphate. How this groups presents itself is divergent from for instance, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which was considered a terrorist organization till 1991, and is Muslim, but focuses on establishing a Palestinian nation-state instead of a caliphate. IS is, however, purely focused on political Islam, and this notion could have influenced the perception of Muslims by people in the West, by extending the ideology and identity of IS to Muslims in general. In that case, IS has been very problematic for the perception of Muslims in the West, especially since they receive a substantial amount of media coverage. The way that IS is dependent on media coverage, also confirms that “terrorist incidents are essentially acts of communication,” stated by Lauren Williams, researcher with the Lowy Institute for International Policy (Peacock n.p.).

The Lowy Institute analyzed the relation between Islamic State propaganda and the mainstream media; they concluded that as a result of the danger involved in sending Western journalists to Syria and Iraq, the mainstream media is made reliant on material produced by Islamic State, which is propaganda serving Islamic State’s objectives (Williams 1). This means that when IS presents itself as an Islamic society where the principles of the faith are held high, this image will be taken over by Western media. According to the analysis, this is also what IS intends to achieve:

“Rhetoric that appears to link Islam or the broader Muslim community with Islamic State’s acts of terror reinforces key elements of the group’s propaganda. Such rhetoric can have a polarising effect, damaging relations between Muslims and the non-Muslims community. Islamic State preys on feelings of alienation in Western society. Divisive rhetoric reinforces those feelings of alienation and feeds into Islamic State’s “‘grand narrative’ according to which the West has embarked on a war against Islam and – by extension – a ‘war against all Muslims’”. Islamic State anticipates the shock and horror that its attacks and videos provoke, as well as the public debates surrounding freedom of speech, censorship, and the right to offend that follow. This contributes to a reductive and binary ‘us versus them’ ethos that pits freedom of speech against all Muslims in a way that benefits Islamic State. Anything that

reinforces alienation among target audiences will make Islamic State's work easier.”

(Williams 11)

The grand narrative of the West embarking on a war against Islam and a war against all Muslims is a narrative to divide Muslims and the West and to create oppositions, first of all intending to grow support with Muslims for IS. This narrative, however, also creates an interplay of inflammatory reporting about the Muslim community in the context of terrorism which has a polarizing effect, which in turn reinforces Islamic State's messages.

In order to diminish the effects of IS propaganda, the Lowy Institute advises “a more thoughtful and responsible use of Islamic State publication and videos by the media and the use of less sensationalist and divisive rhetoric by political leaders and media representatives” (15). However, while British, French, and Australian news outlets are reported to have adopted policies concerning IS material, American news outlets, such as Fox News, are reported to disregard this approach (8). It can be concluded that, especially in the United States, a more critical approach is needed towards IS' claims, amongst others their claim to represent Islam. However, it is unlikely that this approach will turn around the narrative that has continued for decades.

Chapter 3. Obama's rhetoric

3.1 Obama's vision

Before addressing the way in which Obama addresses Islam in his speeches, it is necessary to examine Obama's rhetoric in general, especially in the way he views America. This is imperative, since it discloses national narratives that he makes use of. Obama's rhetoric can be seen as being in stark contrast with Bush. Bush has often been analyzed in the context of civil religion, a concept that was explained in the first chapter, and his rhetoric is described as priestly, blessing America as a chosen nation with a special mission to fulfill and legitimate its actions (Roof 293). This is in contrast with prophetic rhetoric, which de-emphasizes notions of chosenness and uniqueness, and calls the country into question when it fails to live up to its own ethical ideals (Roof 294); this resembles Obama more. At the Selma March 50-Year Anniversary Address, Obama says: "What greater expression of faith in the American experiment than this, what greater form of patriotism is there than the belief that America is not yet finished, that we are strong enough to be self-critical, that each successive generation can look upon our imperfections and decide that it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals?" (3). In contrast with Bush, America being 'a beacon for the world to see' is not in its perfection of ideals of freedom and democracy, but in its belief that America is "a constant work of progress" (4).

In accordance with this, a strong belief in the nation can be found with Obama. It can be put aside as an expected characteristic of presidents, but it is interesting because of the content of that belief. It is especially present in the A More Perfect Union speech, Obama's first important speech, delivered on 18 March 2008, while he was still a senator. It is a highly idealistic speech and therefore very interesting for gaining knowledge about his ideas about America and its ideals. He makes some interesting remarks about his firm conviction, "a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people, that, working together, we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds." Obama mentioning both his faith in God and in the American people displays a continuity in speaking about God and nation; the possibility of America changing for the better is rooted in his faith in God, which would suggest that God wants and intends that America changes, which would indicate that God has a plan for the nation. However, this plan is more rooted in the conviction that God is concerned with the earth than a belief in America's uniqueness.

3.2 Obama and Islam

In the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Hussein Obama was accused by right-wing activists of being a closet Muslim, a secret Muslim, and a sleeper cell agent (Asultany 163). Apart from this, there were many more suspicions and accusations of Obama being a Muslim. This had an impact on his actions during election time; for instance, he did not visit mosques despite invitations (Asultany 165). A Pew Forum poll in August 2010, a year and a half into Obama's presidency, revealed that 18 percent of American still believed that Obama is Muslim (Asultany 166). This poll also indicated a correlation between those who believe that he is a Muslim and those who oppose his presidency; "Beliefs about Obama's religion are closely linked to political judgements about him."

In his speeches made from 2009 till 2016, the subject of Islam and Muslims seem to have changed priorities. In the beginning, Obama seemed to be reluctant to speak about Islam. A part of this can be linked to Obama's tactic of distancing himself from Islam, as in his presidential campaign, to not estrange voters. Another part can be related to a changing of urgency to speak about Muslims. Obama's first years of his presidency were mainly about the economic crisis the country was in and the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. But then, in 2013, there was the Boston Marathon Bombings. The perpetrators were two brothers who were radicalized by ISIL propaganda on the internet. Still, this did not change much to Obama's choice of subjects in speeches. The important year for that was 2015, when both in Europe and the U.S. terrorist attacks happened by radicalized Muslims. It was the year of the shooting at Charlie Hebdo, the Paris attacks, and the San Bernardino attack. From this point on, the subject of Muslim terrorists became more important in his speeches.

Evidence of this is visible in the National Prayer Breakfasts. This event is held each year and each year Obama gives a speech. In 2010 at the 58th National Prayer Breakfast, there is an enumeration of faith-based efforts; it is referring to multiple faith-based efforts "by evangelicals at World Relief. By the American Jewish World Service. By Hindu temples, and mainline Protestants, Catholic Relief Services, African American churches, the United Sikhs. By Americans of every faith, and no faith, uniting around a common purpose, a higher purpose." However, no Muslims are mentioned here. This is very much in contrast with the 63rd National Prayer Breakfast in 2015, where an Islamic Hadith is mentioned between the Torah and the Holy Bible, concerning the Golden Rule that each of these faiths encourages that we should treat one another as we wish to be treated. It seems that at that point, 5 Feb. 2015, Obama felt compelled to include all, in order to give an example of inclusion by

seeking to place Islam on the same level and within the same value structure as other faiths, Christianity and Judaism in particular.

3.3 Representations of Muslims and Islam

Elements of Obama's speeches resemble the representations as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) used in their advertising campaign. According to Asultany, the CAIR advertising campaign represents Muslims as similar to Americans by articulating their service to the nation, legacy in the United States, and to draws a parallel between the diversity of America and the diversity within Islam (141). The campaign emphasized the compatibility between Americans and Muslims and the possibility of a patriotic American Muslim identity. This is also found in Obama's speeches, especially the Iftar Dinner speech and the Islamic Society of Baltimore speech. These speeches were directed to Muslims, but also were meant to address other groups in the United States. The Iftar Dinner Speech was held in 2010 at the Iftar Dinner, which celebrates the end of the Ramadan, a yearly event that is hosted in the White House. A large part of the speech refers to the controversy about the building of a mosque near Ground Zero. The Islamic Society of Baltimore speech was held in February 2016, in a turbulent time for Muslims. As was said in the introduction, the end of 2015 saw a resurgence in hate crimes against Muslims following the Paris attacks and the San Bernardino attack. This was thus an important speech since it responded to the problems at that time.

In the Islamic Society of Baltimore speech, Obama uses several images to describe Muslims. First of all, Obama emphasizes the legacy of Muslims in the United States; he challenges the notion that Muslims are "foreign" or "new" immigrants, and therefore un-American. "Islam has always been part of America. Starting in colonial times, many of the slaves brought here from Africa were Muslim. And even in their bondage, some kept their faith alive. A few even won their freedom and became known to many Americans. And when enshrining the freedom of religion in our Constitution and our Bill of Rights, our Founders meant what they said when they said it applied to all religions... Generations of Muslim Americans helped to build our nation." (4). In stating this, Obama connects with the national narratives about the diversity of America and the freedom of religion. It serves as a reminder of what is 'truly' American.

Second of all, he emphasizes the diversity of Muslims. "The world's 1.6 billion Muslims are as diverse as humanity itself" (4). By emphasizing the diversity of Muslims in the world, he attempts to delink Islam from Arabs. Furthermore, it ties in with the national

narrative of diversity within the United States. Obama has underscored several times the importance of diversity in America and often reminds its citizens of that 'fact'.

Third, Obama depicts Muslims as productive citizen-patriots (a term used by Asultany), their service to the nation overarching multiple forms. There is service in the form of doctors, educators, and people who work for social justice, including the participation of 'newer' Muslim Americans in building the nation. There is, however, also service in a more patriotic form: "Muslim Americans keep us safe. They're our police and our firefighters. They're in homeland security, in our intelligence community. They serve honorably in our armed forces -- meaning they fight and bleed and die for our freedom. Some rest in Arlington National Cemetery. So Muslim Americans are some of the most resilient and patriotic Americans you'll ever meet. We're honored to have some of our proud Muslim American servicemembers here today." (4) Serving in the armed forces can almost been seen as the epitome of patriotism, especially for Muslims. They are often accused of criticizing the American government, especially concerning foreign policy. A Muslim in the armed forced who dies for the country epitomizes patriotism.

Furthermore, Obama portrays them as participating in quintessential American activities. When describing the Islamic Center, he says that this is the place where kids play baseball, football, and basketball, where Cub Scouts and Girls scouts meet and recite the Pledge of Allegiance (2). It normalizes and Americanizes the activities that Muslim Americans participate in, especially when he mentions they recite the Pledge of Allegiance. This is a strong symbol, since it signifies the loyalty and devotion towards the United States, exactly what they are accused of not having.

Besides normalizing Muslim American activities, Obama also normalizes Islam and the practice of the religion. "To the folks watching this today who haven't - think of your own church, or synagogue, or temple, and a mosque like this will be very familiar. This is where families come to worship and express their love for God and each other." (2). It reminds of the remaking of Judaism into a comprehensible version of Christianity that Asultany noted (148); difference is here that the synagogue and temple are also mentioned. Making Islam comprehensible by emphasizing similarities also happens with the content of Islam: "like so many faiths, Islam is rooted in a commitment to compassion and mercy and justice and charity" (3). By saying this, Obama uses his power as President to define and to give meaning, and in this case, he defines Islam. At the Iftar Dinner at the White House Obama also said that "Al Qaeda's cause is not Islam – it's a gross distortion of Islam." Obama, a non-Muslim, defines what is Islam or not through the power of the presidency.

Additionally, Obama defines the situation that American Muslims are in; “And since 9/11, but more recently, since the attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, you’ve seen too often people conflating the horrific acts of terrorism with the beliefs of an entire faith. And of course, recently, we’ve heard inexcusable political rhetoric against Muslim Americans that has no place in our country.” Obama gives an explanation of what is happening and what is right and wrong about the situation. This hermeneutic sovereignty Maggio also found with Bush (820).

Lastly, Obama puts the problematic situation into the big picture of national values. In the Islamic Society of Baltimore speech, he holds people to the national narrative of religion: “And so if we’re serious about freedom of religion -- and I’m speaking now to my fellow Christians who remain the majority in this country -- we have to understand an attack on one faith is an attack on all our faiths. And when any religious group is targeted, we all have a responsibility to speak up. And we have to reject a politics that seeks to manipulate prejudice or bias, and targets people because of religion.” This reference to national values also can be seen in other situations, such as when an attack had happened. When Obama gives a speech, it is also significant what Obama does not say; he always focusses on the victims and the staying together as a nation, and not the person of the perpetrator. When he talks about the victims, he speaks about them in a personal way, but also puts their death in a bigger, national perspective. For example after the Fort Hood shootings, where 13 servicemen and women lost their lives, Obama speaks about their legacy and how the country could not exist without people like these men and women. He reminds people of what the America is, by saying repeatedly “We are a nation that...,” followed by values and ideals.

Conclusion

To conclude, the notion of nation has a contingent and imaginary character, but finds its way into reality by imagining and performing. National myths and narratives of identity are ways in which national identity can be imagined. These narratives are formed by ‘values,’ even though it is meant as an ideal and people do not often hold themselves to it; this is the task of the president, making Americans responsible to live up to the national values. National narratives often stand in relation to otherness, and the notion of the opposite or enemy is important in defining own identity. National narratives about race are changing; race has been a central framework in the U.S., even though some say it lost its importance after Obama was elected, evoking the notion of a ‘post-race’ society. This is problematic when it comes to racism, since the persistence of racism is denied while it is still there. National narratives about religion are still important today; Christian hegemony makes religious freedom difficult, not because of the religion itself, but because it is thought of as an essential national narrative defining American identity, which is problematic for other religions and their place in society. However, the narrative of religious freedom can be used to address negative behavior towards certain religions, which is also part of the function of presidential rhetoric. The function lies also in the fluidity of social reality and that it can be shaped by the president. This power of definition gives frameworks to events, and gives meaning. At the same time, one of the most important goals of presidential rhetoric is achieving unity, even when people do not feel united as in times of crisis.

An unclear amount of Muslims is living in the United States, but the estimate of 3.3 million makes clear that they are a minority in the US. The US Muslim community is characterized by diversity, originating through the various time periods they arrived and the multiplicity of countries they came from. The change of experiences of Arab Americans through the decades show an increasing negative attitude towards them. At the same time, Islam became racialized, extending these experiences to the Muslims community. The increasing negative attitude is not so much caused by perceptions about race and religion, but more by the changing relations in international politics and increasing involvement of the United States in them. Especially conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli war and the Iranian Revolution generated negative stereotypes through American media and political statements. These sentiments that were already present in American society were crucial to the backlash that Muslims experienced after 9/11. Negative stereotyping of Muslims became even more

present and was visible in the increase of hate crimes and government policies against Arabs, Muslims, and people who were mistaken for one of both. The counteracting of negative stereotypes by PSAs was not fully successful, since it produced restrictive representation of diversity, while glorifying America's multicultural unity; it mainly sought to produce a form of diversity that was compatible with a dominant and conservative American culture. In the last few years, the terrorist acts of IS have been particularly disturbing for the image of Muslims. This is caused by the way IS uses terrorism to communicate an image of a war between the West and Muslims; Western media are often not critical enough about what IS says about itself, such as their 'Muslim identity.'

Obama has a different approach to presidential rhetoric as Bush had. In general is Bush's rhetoric more priestly, blessing America as a chosen nation with a special mission to fulfill and legitimate its actions, while Obama's rhetoric is more prophetic, de-emphasizing its uniqueness and calling the country into question when it fails to live up to its own ethical ideals. Furthermore, Obama sees America less as a beacon and more as a constant work of progress; this gives him the freedom to appeal to the values that people consider essentially American but not live up to. During his campaign, Obama had to distance himself from Islam in order to convince people that he was a Christian, and because of that, appealed more to voters. During his presidency, the subject of negative behaviors towards Muslims in American society became more important, the nadir being in 2015, when the Charlie Hebdo attack, Paris attacks, and the San Bernardino attacks took place. From this point on, this issue was more often mentioned in his rhetoric, a good example being the speech at the Islamic Society of Baltimore, dedicated to the situation. Elements of his speeches resemble the representations that CAIR used in their advertising campaign. Obama challenges the notion that Muslims are 'foreign' or 'new' immigrants, and emphasizes the legacy of Muslims in the United States. He underscores the diversity of Muslims all over the world, which delinks Islam from Arabs. Furthermore, he presents Muslims as productive citizen-patriots, especially through their service to the country in the armed forces. Obama normalizes Muslim Americans, by showing how American their activities are and by making Islam in a comprehensible version of religion by emphasizing the similarities with, for instance, Christianity. Additionally, he condemns the rhetoric against Muslims and defines the situation by doing that. Lastly, he puts problematic situations, such as this one, in the bigger picture of national values and American identity. In the end, Obama tries to unify the country through its national narratives, which is one of the main functions of the presidency.

The main question of this thesis was how Obama's rhetoric concerning Muslims relates to constructs of national identity, citizenship, and race. The conclusion shows that this question has many components with their own developments through the centuries, but also that these components are interrelated; the common thread is the importance of national narratives in concepts about religion and diversity. It also shows the problematic nature of unity and diversity at the same time; these concepts often seem to be juxtaposed. For example, Arab and Muslim Americans are included, as long as they comply with acceptable forms of sameness and difference. It can be concluded that the exclusion of Muslims is not based in religion, but in politics, which was a new insight for me. This fits in with the notion that Muslims have the best chance for inclusion in the US by emphasizing their religion instead of ethnicity, since this corresponds with the national narrative of religious freedom. The outcome of this thesis is also valuable in explaining the controversy about the building of a mosque near Ground Zero. The intellectual debate on religious freedom was redirected to an emotional plea to respect the victims of the terrorist attacks (Asultany 168). The diffuse nature of the argument shows the grey area between religion and race that exists in the negative portrayal of Muslims.

There are several notions that can be taken from this thesis. As Wodak et al. also notes, awareness is needed of dogmatic, essentialist and naturalizing conceptions of nation and national identity; they threaten or make impossible difference-sensitive inclusion, that is pluralistic coexistence of various ethnic groups, language communities, religious communities and forms of life. Furthermore, Asultany argues that "the way in which Muslim fundamentalism is used to explain terrorism erases the complex political history that has led to authoritarian regimes and severe economic disparities. It also erases the ways in which Islamic militancy emerges from politics, not religion, even though it certainly converges with religion. Furthermore, it ignores the strong current of secularism within Islam and suggests that the only path to democracy in Arab and Muslim countries is via secularism, as if democracy and Islam are incompatible." (108).

The issue of negative portrayal of Muslims will not end soon. However, the increasing urgency of the problem lays bare important tendencies in society that can be learned from, and as Obama says, makes it an opportunity for improvement.

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