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Whiteness, Christianity, and anti-Muslim racism

Sherene H. Razack

Once we settle on the term, the questions begin: What is the psychosexual structure and historical character of whiteness that renders it so aggressive, so tortured, so interested in subjugation? Clearly something complex and elusive is at work in the phenomenon beyond prejudice (Allport 1958), no matter how sophisticated our typology of that complex event becomes.

(William Pinar, The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America)

Whiteness, defined variously by scholars as a social relation, an identity, an ideology and crucially, as property is an acquired competence, a constructed dominance over those who do not possess it. As Cheryl Harris (1993) brilliantly argues, being white ensures economic returns, a positional superiority that gives whiteness something in common with property: The right to exclude. Whites therefore have ‘a possessive investment in whiteness’, the historian George Lipsitz (2006) argues. To the extent that one can accumulate it, whiteness offers privilege. It is something that has to be protected and there is no better way to protect it than to ensure that the line is maintained between those entitled to it by virtue of their skin colour and other visible differences and those who must be kept out. To inhabit whiteness is to know oneself as entitled to the fruits of earth and to merit its bounty. It is to be committed to a system in which the earth’s bounty is not shared with those undeserving of it. Whiteness is both an aspiration and a location in a social hierarchy, or even a set of locations (Frankenberg 1993). It is also a state of mind. It requires strong emotions about the entitlement of whites and the unfitness of others.

As William Pinar (2001: 19) suggests, it is a tortured condition, riven through with anxiety and profoundly interested in subjugation.

One hundred years ago, the African–American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois sought to describe this condition in ‘The Souls of White Folk’ (1999), an essay that is far less cited than his book The Souls of Black Folk. For Du Bois (1999), whiteness was an embodied condition characterised by ‘a great mass of hatred’, emotions principally directed at Black people who would lay claim to an equal humanity. Linking American whiteness to colonial aggrandisement the world over, Du Bois (1999: 23) put the connection between whiteness and property bluntly: ‘It is the duty of Europe to divide up the darker world and administer it for Europe’s good’. Whiteness is inevitably an emotional condition marked by aggrievement over lost
entitlement and racial hostility. It is a condition given over to racial fantasy. White ‘orgy, cruelty, barbarism, and murder done to men and women of Negro descent’ (Du Bois 1999: 19) were driven by everyday rages that take white people to ‘the bottom of the world’.

I have seen a man – an educated gentleman – grow livid with anger because a little, silent black woman was sitting by herself in a Pullman car. He was a white man. I’ve seen a great, grown man curse a little child who had wondered into the wrong waiting-room, searching for its mother: ‘Here, you damned black ---’. He was white. In Central Park I have seen the upper lip of a quiet, peaceful man curl back in a tigerish snarl of rage because black folk rode by in a motor car. He was a white man.

(Du Bois 1999: 19)

‘I see these souls undressed and from the back and side’, Du Bois (1999: 17) writes, considering what it is about whiteness that it should be so maniacally desired and so violently secured. His answer, ‘that whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever’ (Du Bois 1999: 18) alerts us to the material and affective project of white supremacy, a racial project of accumulation created and sustained by ‘tigerish snarls of rage’ (Du Bois 1999: 19) directed at little Black girls and Black folk riding in a motor car.

Christianity gives content to whiteness, endowing colonialism and racial capitalism with a moral base and its cultural character (Bonnett 1998: 1038–1039). As Du Bois observed white entitlement to the land in the New World was defended as a God given right (Blum 2007). Beginning with his observation that in the settler colony whiteness is conflated with godliness, several scholars make the case that Christianity plays a prominent role in how white identity emerges in the United States. Edward Blum, a scholar of Du Bois, suggests that the role of religion in race-making may go unnoticed because religion is often understood as super-structural and not, as Du Bois saw, central to how subjects come to understand themselves as white (Blum et al. 2009: 3). ‘Creating, defining, and defending whiteness’, Blum (Blum et al. 2009: 5) shows, ‘played a significant role in biblical debates over slavery’. Seeking divine sanction for slavery early on, whites relied on the bible to promote white power, unity and ‘national whiteness’ for a long time after the abolition of slavery. White people acted on their colonial impulses as Christians, imagining that their superiority mandated the occupation of Indigenous lands and domination of racialised others (Fessenden in Blum et al. 2009: 14). The conjoining of Christianity and white entitlement to the land gives American whiteness a distinct frontier aesthetic. With its emphasis on an aggressive gun toting masculinity, white settler whiteness combines with religious fervour, producing ‘a conjunction of the sacred and violence’, that we see in militant religion the world over (Pieterse, 1993: 38). Anti-Muslim animus, a part of a basket of colonial fears easily develops into an affective politics where white Christians come to know themselves as a persecuted and vulnerable minority permanently under threat, denied their birthright as Anglo-Saxon and obliged to confront what is imagined to be a profoundly anti-Christian state that refuses to secure white Christian interests. In the school conflict I describe later, we see an example of how whites seek to gain power and to protect white entitlement through the idea of the Muslim as threat to white Christian life. Importantly, although the legal case that is discussed ultimately fails, the suit provides an opportunity to enact a colonial fantasy of a conflict between white settlers and the foreign threat posed by Muslims. It provides the basis for a broader mobilisation of white politics and an anti-Muslim affect travels from the local to the national stage notwithstanding the setback at the local level.
Historicising white Christian aggrievement

Emerging from the settler's conviction that whiteness and Christianity form the basis of entitlement to the land and its bounty, today's anti-Muslim groups are a part of a broader right-wing racial politics that include unqualified support for Israel, bans on abortions, gun rights, and immigration clampdowns. All such goals are in aid of the promotion and protection of what has been strategically referred to as 'Judeo-Christian values' and way of life. In practice, the politics of anti-Muslim groups entail a defence of a particular kind of whiteness, defined as the right to property, a right held against racialised others who are considered to be standing in the way of the prosperity of white Christians. White Christian aggrievement feeds on anti-Muslim racism as well as on anti-Black, anti-Mexican and anti-Indigenous racism, among others, accumulating grievances that find political expression. The Muslim comes to prominence in the white Christian imaginary whenever real live Muslims are seen to be threatening white life.

The founding of the state of Israel in 1948 thrust Muslims as the historical enemies of Christendom into another colonial fray (the first one being when Protestant settlers brought their old world Christian antipathies to America) and continues to have considerable impact on anti-Muslim feeling and the politics of the Christian Right in the United States. Imagined as the population standing in the way of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, a precondition for the eschatological scenario of the Rapture and the second coming of Christ. Christianity gives content to white power in this imaginary as the land (both America and Israel) is declared to belong to those who possess a God given right to it and who must defend it from those unworthy of sharing in its bounty. The events of 9/11 mark another watershed moment when anti-Islamic polemics surfaced with a vengeance from Christian evangelical sources, among other groups. Anti-Islamic polemics are often thought to originate in religious sentiment. Such is the claim made by Richard Cimino (2005) in his charting of American evangelical discourse on Islam. Defining evangelicals as distinguished by an emphasis on a personal relationship to Christ, the authority of the bible, and the importance of evangelising others, Cimino argues that it is Christian evangelical resistance to the new pluralism of American life that makes anti-Islamic discourses so attractive and useful. In essence, anti-Islamic discourses work to sharpen the differences between Christianity and Islam, helping to maintain the legitimacy of the former. Evangelical anti-Islamic feeling grows in the fertile soil of the sense of victimisation among evangelicals in the wake of the expansion of secular, liberal forces in American society. This explanation emphasises recent anti-Islamic feeling although it acknowledges its origins more than two decades earlier. Reviewing popular evangelical literature from 1991 to 2003, Cimino found anti-Islamic discourses to be central to all strands of the Christian evangelical movement. The texts of the Christian evangelical movement suggest, however, that aggrievement has a decidedly racial and patriarchal cast to it and that Israel looms large among anti-Islamic proponents.

If the racial project that is settler colonialism in North America has a Christian core, then evangelical values fuel the racial project in specific ways. The religious belief, for example, that social problems merely reflect individual problems enabled white evangelicals to attribute black inequality to personal failing and to resist any attempt at structural or systemic change (Cimino 2005: 11–12). As Michael Smith found in his late 1990s study, Christian evangelicals cling to the idea that the problem of race is the problem of a few wicked people. The protection of the biblical family that lies at the core of the evangelical belief system has always meant the white biblical family, as evangelical leaders such as Pete Peters openly averred. Ann Burlein, whose study of Peters and James Dobson shows the racial line that runs solidly through evangelical belief and politics, notes that the white biblical family is imagined as under siege from a host of ‘unruly
bodies’ including sexual minorities, immigrants, and African Americans (Burlein 2002: 86). In the communities around Peters and Dobson, Burlein (2002) finds the biblical storylines of an embattled Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celtic peoples who consider themselves to be the 10 tribes of Israel and God’s chosen people. Under siege by secular humanists and liberal multiculturalists, such Christians, although diverse in many ways, understand the bible-based family with its specific gender roles as key to the nation’s (white) cultural heritage. Burlein shows that Peters was attempting to mainstream white supremacy through the bible, a biblicisation linking past and present and visible in the use of language such as harlots and infidels (Burlein 2002: 44). His brand of defence of Christianity required militias and gun rights. Dobson focused on the family as the bulwark against an urban and foreign takeover (Burlein 2002: 195). In the same vein, Sophie Bjork-James (2018) argues that in defence of a lost social order, the sexual politics of Christian evangelicals is white sexual politics, where whiteness is defined through opposing Queer and Trans rights. Anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic sentiment rides in on these old racetracks helping to shore up the white Christian family.

**Christian Zionism**

Muslims have a starring role in white racial fantasies when the Christian evangelical movement turns to Israel and to the eschatological scenario of the Rapture. It can be difficult to understand the fervour of non-Jewish supporters of Israel, writes Martin Marty (2013) in his foreword to Robert O. Smith’s *More Desired Than our Owne Salvation: The Roots of Christian Zionism*. In Marty’s and Robert Smith’s view, we can only understand this support if we consider today’s Christian Zionists as the heirs of beliefs that emerged from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English Protestantism. The historical line Smith (2013) traces from English Protestantism to contemporary Christian Evangelicals such as John Hagee, founder of Christians United for Israel (CUFI), and prominent Christian Evangelicals such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson contains, as can be expected, a strong strain of antipathy to Islam and to Muslims. If the logic of the Christian evangelical line of political theology can be difficult to follow, it is instructive to consider its powerful affect. How Muslims matter to today’s Christian evangelicals, and how these feelings sustain an undiluted support for the state of Israel is a story that begins much earlier that the events of 9/11. In his book, Robert Smith explains the theological basis that sustains Christian Zionism:

> Pouring Muslims, Catholics, and Jews into its apocalyptic mould and casting them in scripturally determine roles, the English Protestant tradition of Judeo-centric prophesy interpretation traced throughout this book exhorts the cultural heirs of English Puritanism to claim their status as instruments of God’s redemption of the world.

*(Smith 2013: 6)*

Importantly, the redemptive project holds a different place for Jews than it does for Catholics. Smith writes:

> the English Protestant tradition of Judeo-centric prophesy interpretation explored here constructed Jews as essentially occidental and, as eventual converts to Protestant faith and who would fight the enemies of Christendom, as standing on the correct side of the divide between civilisation and savagism.

*(Smith 2013: 6)*
For Robert Smith (2013), American pro-Israel sentiment is mainly ‘a religious impulse’ that has meant that any support for the Palestinian position is construed as immoral, collapsed as it is with a general suspicion of Islam. 9/11 merely amplified such sentiments (Smith 2013: 9). Political discourse regarding the state of Israel turns on the cultural/moral and ideological affinity between Christians and Jews, an affinity I suggest is racially sustained as each group invests in the idea of manifest destiny. Theology, in other words, rides in on racial feeling and vice versa.

It is useful to reflect on the depth of the sentiments Robert Smith (2013) describes as cultural/moral and ideological, and which I maintain are deeply racial. Smith (2013) documents how the founding of the state of Israel was a deeply formative event for today’s Christian evangelical leaders such as Hagee and Falwell. Support for Israel and suspicion of Islam were lessons absorbed at the kitchen table where Baptist parents impressed on their children the biblical origin of the founding of Israel. Christian publications that stressed God’s will in creating the state of Israel were liberally sprinkled with a strong Orientalism and open suspicion of Islam. Christian feeling was often fostered through such civilisational sagas. Few Israeli leaders, Smith writes, could resist what might otherwise have been an uncomfortable alliance. A shared commitment to American and Israeli exceptionalism – each nation enacting a racial superiority over those whose lands it has seized – smooths over any lingering difficulties. Likewise, few American politicians can afford to dispute the declaration of Jerry Falwell that God will punish anyone who tries to take Israeli land. The strength of the theopolitical commitment to the Rapture and the racial frisson that comes with each drawing of a civilisational line give content to whiteness and legitimacy to settler projects the world over.

Robert Smith advises that we not consider merely quaint the Christian evangelical notion that political support for Israel is ‘god’s foreign policy’ (Smith 2013: 16). What may seem quaint is in fact a solid political lobby and when Hagee issues claims that Catholics sponsored the Crusades, the Inquisition and the Holocaust and that the conflict in the Middle East is not over land but is over theology, he is able in Smith’s words, to persuade significant sectors of Christians that God has ‘racially excluded Palestinians from any claim on the land’ (Smith 2013: 18). While not all Christian Zionists are evangelicals and not all evangelicals are Christian Zionists, scholars studying the correlation between religiosity and affinity to Israel note that what unites a diverse field of Christians on the issue of support for Israel is the perception that America is a unique moral community with a unique destiny (Smith 2013: 34). Manifest destiny, critical race scholars remind us, is a racially inspired and sustained project. As Smith discusses and as several polls show, it is a combination of whiteness and religious practice that likely produces unconditional support for Israel (Smith 2013: 36). Indeed, Black protestants can share the same religious orthodoxies as their white evangelical counterparts without strong support for American exceptionalism, their vilification of Muslims tempered by the history of slavery and the ‘terrorists’ in the big house (Smith 2013: 41–44). As scholars of non-white evangelicals show, anti-Islamic sentiment is deliberately fostered in the contemporary period but communities of colour such as the Koreans and Korean Americans Judy Han (2018) studies, in participating in Islamophobic workshops ‘maybe following the trail of American footsteps but they are also calibrating their strategic proximity to the US empire’ (Han 2018: 212).

If it is entirely possible that ‘white evangelical support for the State of Israel is simpler and more basic than most theorists have assumed’ (Smith 2013: 45), it is surely because racial feeling deeply animates responses to Palestinians. Christian Zionists are unabashed about their belief that it is Western civilisation that must be defended from the march of Islam. The historical Protestant perception of Catholics and Muslims (the Pope and the Turk) as enemies lends a solid base on which the contemporary civilisational divide is built and will not easily disappear.
from American life (Smith 2013: 47). Such sentiments framed ‘the self-understanding of Anglo-American colonists’ (Smith 2013: 126). Moors and Indians easily melded in the colonial mind. Similarly, American Republican politicians find it easy to equate the Jewish settler with the white settler, as Smith (2013: 178) documents. If there is any lesson to be drawn from the tracing of these historical lines, it is that the roots of anti-Muslim racism predate 9/11 and structure the emotional commitments and investments that underpin it. A solid racial line runs through its outwardly biblical base.

**Vengeance**

In her study of the rise of Christian Zionism over the past two decades, Victoria Clark (2007) describes the violent Christian evangelical subject as a subject deeply invested in the idea of white Western superiority. Clark devotes a chapter in her book to ‘taking Texan’, the term from the late reverend Jerry Falwell who used it to refer to violent retaliation against anyone who attacks Christianity.

Harking straight back to the Puritan ethos of Old testament eye-for-an-eye justice of us and them, good and evil, black and white, the language Falwell imagined talking to Hezbollah is rooted in the culture of descendants of the Puritan Scots who subdued the Irish for Cromwell and then departed for the Western extremity of the new World in the early nineteenth century. The idiom of hard men engaged in wresting the Wild West frontier of the future United States, first from its indigenous American-Indian inhabitants and then from Mexicans, Texan is pithy to the point of callous, in-your-face, and frequently humorous. (Clark 2007: 256)

Texan speakers use phrases such as ‘God's foreign policy statement’, ‘Israeli of the heart’, and make frequent references to the coming apocalypse. Quoting the biblical verse from Genesis 12:3 that those who support Israel will be blessed while those who do not will be cursed, those who talk Texan warn Israelis that they must never give up land that God has ordained for them. Defence of the land requires combatting the grand evil of Islamic ‘fundamentalism’ through pre-emptive strikes against Muslim communities (Clark 2007: 271). Clark (2007) maintains that for most Christian Zionists, belief in Armageddon, when Jesus returns to the earth and specifically to Jerusalem is not metaphoric. Christian Zionists deeply believe that they will survive the terrible destruction that is unleashed at the End Times and be whisked away to heaven. The rest of the world, Clark advises, urgently needs to understand the power of such beliefs and its impact on American foreign policy in the Middle East (Clark 2007: 5). Citing polls in 2006 that confirm that almost one half of all Americans believe that Israel was given to Jews by God and that 31% believe that this is so to facilitate the second coming, Clark suggests that such a heightened quotidian relationship to the Rapture has not occurred since the Crusades (Clark 2007: 5). The appeal of such beliefs surely lies in the work they do to install a superior Christian subject who is able to wrest both America and Israel from those who stand in the way of Christianity's triumph. The vengeful subject defending the world against Satanic enemies and usurpers is a subject drawn to the thunderous militaristic appeals of their pastors. Clark encountered such American Christian evangelical tourists on a tour of Jerusalem, subjects who were endlessly fascinated with the Israeli military and wanted the right to shoot one of their guns (Clark 2007: 185). Easily imagining themselves in a story of the Crusades or, equally, on the American frontier, what is unquestionably racial fantasy comes fully dressed as religious obligation. To be maintained, such powerful fantasies require a material base, one provided by

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racial capitalism at home and US imperial interests abroad. In the school conflict considered, we see Christian parents aggressively protecting white Christian life encouraged and sustained by organisations dedicated to the political goals of Zionism and conservative white Christianity, goals soaked in notions of white entitlement. Bringing together anti-Black, anti-immigrant, gun rights advocates, and conservative Christians, the school conflict illustrates how whiteness as property is made on the ground through the figure of the Muslim.

Harnessing aggrievement in the classroom

The subject in whom whiteness, property, Christianity, and Zionism meet is a subject formed by a number of abject Others, among them the Muslim construed as “Islamic terrorist”. A passionate defender of an America without Islam, the anti-Muslim Christian subject is featured in the school battle below often following a script circulated by Christian/Zionist organisations and individuals. Defending Christianity in an embodied, active way, outraged, and aggrieved white parents announce themselves as protecting their children from “Muslim terrorist” attempts to recruit Christian children. These scenes reveal the features of Christian anti-Muslim feeling and the close relationship such apparently religious feelings have to a deeply felt sense that white people must defend themselves from the foreigners bent on displacing them and remaking their world. They reveal as well the network of interests of Christian right, evangelical, and Zionist organisations who circulate narratives of these local conflicts nationally, depositing into the national psyche the feeling that white Christian America is threatened all round, and in its most vulnerable places by its historic Islamic foes.

In the fall of 2001, a teacher in Contra Costa County, Northern California in the small school district of Byron (1,500 students), using an apparently standard instructional guide in World History first developed in 1991 (Handy 1991), taught a unit on Islam to a seventh-grade class. The pedagogy of the unit emphasised simulation and students were encouraged to adopt roles as Muslims for three weeks to help them understand what Muslims believe. As a part of the role play it was suggested that students adopt Muslim names, recite Muslim prayers in class, memorise a passage from the Quran, and give up something for a day to understand fasting during the month of Ramadan. The students were also asked to formulate a critique of elements of Muslim culture. If the timing of the event shortly after 9/11, and the role play assignments and pedagogical approach were ill-advised, the exercise itself was modelled on a one-dimensional portrait of a medieval, conservative Islam (the manual emphasised 610-1100 A.D.) that emphasised Islam’s archaic foreignness. An Orientalist framing of Islam became the basis for Christian resentment of an educational unit apparently meant to foster religious tolerance.

In 2001, the simulation exercise seemed guaranteed to attract the attention of Christian conservatives in the small rural school district. Students and parents sued the school district arguing that the activities in question crossed a line from education to endorsement of a religious practice and ultimately to religious indoctrination. The plaintiffs in the suit, Jonas and Tiffany Eklund and their two children particularly objected as Christians to the simulation exercise and to what they considered to be a too tolerant portrayal of Islam. They pointed out that only the unit on Islam required such role play. A federal district court in San Francisco found no constitutional violation in the school’s practice, a decision that prompted online observers to name the judge in question as a ‘Public Enemy’, to condemn her support for abortions, and to suggest that she was an Al Qaeda supporter (Enemy Judge 2004). The US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit agreed with the lower court’s decision and ultimately, the Eklunds lost their case in the Supreme Court where the decision to dismiss the suit emphasised the school district’s argument that schools need to be able to address religion in the curriculum.
without fear of reprisal. The court concluded that the unit on Islam did not attempt to indoctrinate (Eklund v. Byron Union School District 2005). That the Ecklunds failed in their suit does not alter the circulation of an anti-Muslim affect but instead sustains it. Law provides the stage on which the conflict is framed as one between normative white citizens and a foreign Muslim enemy. The participants perform a Christian colonial morality play even though the play’s conclusion is that this time around, the enemy does not need to be engaged in battle. The script that is enacted provides the basis for a broader mobilisation of whiteness from the local to the national stage.

The Ecklunds were not simply lone parents who disagreed with the teaching of Islam in the curriculum and who decided to challenge it in court. They were supported in their activities by the Thomas More Law Centre, an organisation that describes itself as a non-profit public interest law firm based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, whose mission is to: ‘Preserve America’s Judeo-Christian heritage; Defend the religious freedom of Christians; Restore time-honoured moral and family values; Protect the sanctity of human life; Promote a strong national defence and a free and sovereign United States of America’ a mission it accomplishes ‘through litigation, education, and related activities’ (Thomas More Law Center 2019a). Firmly anchored in a politics of Christian, conservative values, the law firm has been involved in several lawsuits against school boards. The Ecklund lawsuit was one in a concerted longer-term strategy revolving around the teaching of Islam in schools, a strategy in which other conservative Christian groups such as ACT for America have actively participated for almost two decades (ACT for America 2020). For example, in 2011, ACT for America published ‘Education or Indoctrination: The Treatment of Islam in 6th through 12th Grade American Textbooks’ in which it took issue with the presentation of Islam as a religion of peace (ACT for America 2011). In 2019, the Thomas More Law Centre published what was billed as a special investigative report that claimed to have uncovered evidence that ‘Islamic propaganda was being forced on teachers in rural school boards’ (Thomas More Law Center 2019b). This latter report, primarily directed at school boards who hired a Muslim consultant Huda Essa to lead a two-day seminar on Islam, maintains the same positions as in the earlier discussed Ecklund case, including arguments about the lack of attention to Christianity and Judaism, the suppression of Islam’s propensity to wage war, and omission of its “terrorist” histories. Essa, the Law Centre charged, ‘While quick to indict America as guilty of “cultural genocide’’, was ‘silent on the 1400 years of actual genocides, also known as jihads, in which Muslims wiped out Jewish tribes on the Arabian Peninsula, and slaughtered millions of Christians throughout the Middle East, North Africa and the European Continent’ (Thomas More Law Center 2019b). As with a meme, the storyline of Muslims as historical aggressive marauders circulates widely, ensuring its repeatability intact.

The Thomas More Law Centre has devoted a considerable part of its relatively small budget (1.5 million) to cases involving banning Islam in schools. Its founder, Richard Thompson, a prominent Christian evangelical lawyer, is heavily involved in the anti-abortion movement and is a frequent media voice on Fox News among others (President and Chief Counsel 2019). The Ecklund’s suit also attracted the support of the Mountain States Legal Foundation, an organisation that filed a friend-of-the-court brief supporting their position (Trotter 2006). The Foundation lists its budget at 2.1 million and describes its mission as ‘constitutional liberty, economic opportunity and the right to own and use property’ (About Us 2020). Involved in several guns rights cases such as opposition to Boulder, Colorado’s efforts to raise the minimum age for firearms possession to 21, as well as opposing environmental and Indigenous rights and the tearing down of Christian war memorials, the Mountain States Legal Foundation labels itself ‘the spirit of the American West’ committed to defending the frontier it imagines as one
peopled by sheep farmers, ranchers, and miners who are under attack by governments opposed to white property interests. Indeed, the defence of America (and Israel) from marauding Muslims is often understood on the unabashedly colonial terms expressed by the Mountain States Legal Foundation. For its part, ACT for America, founded by Brigitte Gabriel, a notable Lebanese American anti-Muslim activist, identifies five issues of central importance to her organisation: Israel (and specifically efforts to change the definition of anti-Semitism to include criticism of Israel); Immigration reform (and specifically an end to sanctuary cities, the building of the Wall, and greater policing of migrants); anti-terrorism, defined as confronting the violence of radical Islam); military and law enforcement (and notably advocating for greater policing); and constitutional freedoms, a category in which can be found textbook reforms, and campaigns against honour killings and FGM, attributed to Islamic cultures.

Whether in legal briefs, blogs, special investigative reports, Fox News media appearances or columns in the Jerusalem Post, Christian evangelical groups and their supporters who share the political agendas mentioned earlier portray Islam as a terrorist group not a religion, and a people at war with Christianity. Decades long, the campaign began reaching new heights following the election of Donald Trump to the American presidency. In a letter to the Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos in 2017, the Christian Action Network – declared a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Centre (Tyree and Metzgar 2017) – laid out its specific objections to the teaching about Islam in schools. The lesson plans indoctrinate children in the Islamic religion, the Network declared, and amount to ‘a Sunday school class for Islam’. The curriculum also fails to devote sufficient time to Christianity, Judaism or Hinduism. The lesson plans must be removed, the organisation demanded, and the Secretary should issue a public announcement that anyone using these materials violated the Establishment Clause of the Constitution and should be prohibited from obtaining federal funding.

The Christian storyline discernible for the past 19 years is also circulated by Middle East Forum, the think tank founded by Daniel Pipes, one of the most prolific of Zionist individuals regularly publishing articles on the threat of radical Islam. Invoking the spectre of the “Islamic terrorist”, Pipes (2002) wrote that the Eklund's lawsuit confirms that American children were being recruited for Islamic terrorism through schools. Suggesting that the students were forced to utter the words ‘Allahu akbar’ (God is Great) and duped into believing that the words are merely a common salutation in the Islamic world rather than a ‘militant Islamic war-cry’, Pipes (2002) even wondered whether John Walker Lindt, the soldier known as ‘The American Taliban’ might have been subjected to the same school curriculum as the Eklund children when Lindt was a child in California. As he (Pipes 2002) wrote in the Jerusalem Post, referencing The Thomas More Law Centre's and Richard Thompson's arguments in court, impressionable 12-year-olds, like the Eklund children, were at risk of being recruited to terrorism when they were exposed to material such as the simulation exercises. Interventions from Christian right organisations and Fox News repeat ad nauseam the logic that to teach about the Islamic world is to indulge in indoctrination, to engage in terrorism, and to denigrate Christianity and Judaism. As Christopher Bail found using plagiarism detection software, the same three-word phrases circulate throughout the media and are lifted verbatim from anti-Muslim organisations for legal projects such as anti-Sharia bills introduced in state legislatures (Bail 2019: 102–103).

Conclusion

The white anti-Muslim subject varies locally but shares a Christian core. In America, that subject's Christian inflection is often, although not always, of the evangelical variety and maintains important links to Zionist Jews both in the United States and Israel. For this subject,
whiteness, Christianity and the Muslim as archetypical enemy come together to provide a deep sense of purpose, selfhood, and national belonging. Such emotions feed anti-Muslim legal and political projects even as those projects themselves foster subjects who believe that in acting ‘Islamophobically’, as Ghassan Hage put it, they are protecting what makes their lives worth living (Hage 2017: 13). The anti-Muslim subject of the school conflicts is often someone who feels aggrievement and rage that home is being invaded and must be defended, emotions that circulate around the figure of the Muslim, although Muslims are seldom the only target. When these emotions are channelled into an organised defence of white entitlement through religion, they sustain a coalition of interests dedicated to the protection of a racial order. Law is the conduit through which anti-Muslim animus travels forging whiteness as it does so even when legal suits brought by white Christian parents fail. Deposited in the legal record and ready for transport to the national stage, the story of whiteness that is achieved through anti-Muslim racism gains ground each time it is performed, filling white Christians with the warmth of entitled belonging and righteous rage.

**Note**

1 A version of this chapter will be appearing in *Nothing Has To make Sense: Upholding White Supremacy through Anti-Muslim racism*, Minn.: MN: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming.

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