

Missing From 'Islamophobia' Accusations Is Recognizing That Muslims Do It, Too

Those claiming "Islamophobia" must be willing to have a conversation on how monolithic representations of Islam and Muslims alienate a vibrant Muslim subculture.

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On April 18, well-known Muslim reformer Maajid Nawaz appeared on the Joe Rogan Experience podcast to [announce](#) that the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) had quietly removed its list of so-called "anti-Muslim extremists" from its website. While the SPLC has a positive reputation for its work tracking and suing neo-Nazis, its inclusion of Nawaz, a prominent counter-extremism campaigner, on its list of "extremists" blurred the line between Nawaz's legitimate critique of Islamism (and defense of moderate Muslims) and true anti-Muslim bigotry.

Unfortunately, it seems as if the SPLC has made a habit of blurring such crucial distinctions. This past February, the SPLC helped the Muslim Law Student Association at the D.C. School of Law to host a [Muslim Law Symposium](#) focused on "The Everyday Ramifications of Islamophobia." The symposium claimed to address attacks on Muslim Americans by persons and organizations associated with the current presidential administration.

Despite its admirable goal of fighting anti-Muslim hatred, the symposium—and SPLC's presentations—missed the mark. The event failed to acknowledge the Muslim-against-Muslim supremacism that does just as much damage to American Muslim communities as external anti-Muslim prejudice.

As Muslim Americans, our priority must include addressing the internal ostracism of Muslims who do not align with the institutional Islamist leadership in the United States, a movement that has had more than 50 years to [impose itself](#) as the ostensibly legitimate, monolithic representation of American Muslims. Yet to work meaningfully, Muslims and well-meaning allies like the SPLC must be willing to have a conversation on how monolithic representations of Islam and Muslims alienate and victimize a vibrant Muslim subculture—a subculture (of which Nawaz and I are part) that favors diversity and inclusion without oppressive adherence to a particular political philosophy.

Muslims Commit These Same Claimed Offenses

At the symposium, one panelist—Saleema Snow, an associate professor of law at the D.C. School of Law—explained that American immigration laws have traditionally been based on race. Applying this legacy to President Trump’s “Muslim ban,” Snow described it as a form of “othering” Muslims.

The “ban’s” accompanying debate about national security notwithstanding, Snow’s lecture did not address that the same “othering” affects Muslims who disagree and disassociate with a hard-left, often Islamist narrative of Muslim victimhood. Nawaz, for instance, told Rogan of the many threats he has received from other Muslims who believe Nawaz’s moderate views amount to [apostasy](#)—and thus warrant his murder.

If anti-Muslim bigotry is systematic and institutionalized, as co-panelist Yolanda Rondon, a staff attorney for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, explained, then we must look at every instance where it occurs. The symposium did a tremendous job outlining the early [Muslim American legacy](#), which includes Muslims whom other Americans did not always recognize as human. Rightly so, but we must also examine when

Muslims treat their co-religionists in the same way and the effect such treatment has on the community as a whole.

For instance, the [alienation](#) of Muslim women from Muslim places of worship has lead Muslim women to create their own mosques, such as Los Angeles's Women's Mosque or San Francisco's Qal'bu Maryam Women's Mosque. But that alienation and subsequent initiatives were not mentioned at the symposium.

Anti-Muslim Behavior Is Not Limited to Non-Muslims

Muslims like Nawaz continue to struggle against fundamentalists and Islamists who cater to the most extreme Muslim voices. In 2017, Ani Zonneveld's organization, Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV), was [kicked out](#) of a conference held by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) simply for partnering with the LGBT group Human Rights Campaign.

Souleiman Ghali, founder of the largest mosque in San Francisco, faced fierce opposition from within his community to [removing the wall](#) segregating men and women during prayer. Ghali was later forced to fire an imam for preaching violent [hate against Jews](#) during sermons. The imam in question later sued Ghali and the mosque itself.

Also, of course, Islamists castigate (and level [accusations](#) of lying and conspiring against) any Muslim who speaks out against internal sexual abuse and associated Islamist hypocrisy, like [Asmi Fathelbab](#) on [Linda Sarsour](#) or [Henda Ayari](#) on Tariq Ramadan.

These instances are also "Islamophobia," and are a significant roadblock to developing pluralism among American Muslims. Sadly, the SPLC seems to have swallowed the manipulative Islamist narrative that Islam is a monolith, Islamists thus

have a popular mandate, and that so-called bigotry towards Muslims only counts when it comes from outside the Islamist fold.

These were missing conversation points during the symposium, which chose to ignore all manner of Islamist elements: [Arab](#) petro-dollars [importing](#) Salafi imams and [rising Islamist](#) anti-Semitism into our [mosques](#); Islamist [persecution](#) of peaceful [Ahmadiyya Muslims](#); and the [steamrolling](#) of [American Somali Muslims](#) by the self-proclaimed “civil rights” group, the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR). These examples of “othering” are missing from SPLC’s discussion of anti-Muslim extremism, or indeed, SPLC’s assessment of American hate groups at all.

The duty of American Muslims—and the anti-hate groups that claim to defend them—is to unify and inspire, to lead honest conversation, and to reject the often politically motivated accusations of “Islamophobia” that permeate so many conversations about American Islam. We have opportunities and advantages that far surpass anything our ancestors had, but we, and our friends in the SPLC, must abandon crippling victimhood and destroy the Islamist monolithic narrative in favor of a truly nuanced understanding of bias and bigotry.