

*A New Intersectional Model to Illuminate the Workplace Discrimination of Arab-American and Muslim Women in the U.S.*

Following the coordinated terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001 (henceforth 9/11), Arabs living in the U.S. have experienced both increased exclusion and hostility (Aziz 2009, 2). Along with becoming more xenophobic and hostile towards outsiders, approaches to studying Arab society and interpreting Arab-American identity remain male-centric (Aziz 2009). According to Sahar Aziz, a civil rights litigation expert and law professor, civil rights organizations and National Security specialists have disregarded the experiences of Arab-women in the post 9/11 era (Aziz 2009). In the following essay I explain how discrimination models, theories that attempt to understand and define the ways discrimination operates, have also failed to consider the experiences of Arab-American women post 9/11. Furthermore, intersectionality, a feminist sociological theory that examines oppression as multiple overlapping systems, has focused exclusively on Muslim Arab-American women, but failed to fully regard the experiences of non-Muslim Arab women. I demonstrate these trends of erasure by examining faulty workplace discrimination models and research.

This is not to suggest that non-Arab Americans did not experience the changes brought on by 9/11, for they absolutely did. For example, Muslims who are not Arab still experienced anti-Muslim slurs, attacks on mosques, and other types of persecution based on religious identity (Aziz, 2009). However, 9/11 has produced a particular entrenched relationship between definitions of modern terrorism, foreign and domestic policy, the Muslim religion, and Arab ethnicity (Commission Report 2004). When 19 anti-U.S. militants hijacked four airliners and killed over 3,000 people under the leadership of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, the Islamic extremist group based in and partly funded by Saudi Arabia, Arab identity became enduringly linked with Muslim extremism (Commission Report 2004).

Given this link between Arab and Muslim extremism and the misconceptions that have emerged as a result, it is important to define these terms and, specifically, how they function in this essay. A Muslim is any individual who submits to the religion of Islam (Pew 2009). It is true that many Middle Eastern and Arab countries have a large Muslim population; however, Muslims are found on all five inhabited continents and only about 20% of them live in the Middle East or North Africa (Pew 2009).

Although Islam, like any other religion, has a unique culture or doctrine associated with it, Muslims are diverse in their views and political opinions (Mogahed 2009).

Arab is a multi-ethnic linguistic category, while ‘Middle Eastern’ is the term used to describe people who come from the Middle East, the region of the world that borders the Mediterranean Sea and includes parts of Western Asia and Egypt (de la Cruz 2003; Britannica). Interestingly, most Arab/Middle Eastern individuals, including myself, use these two terms interchangeably. In this essay, I prefer the term Arab because it describes any individual with ancestries originating from dozens of predominantly Arabic-speaking countries or areas of the world including the region geographically categorized as the Middle East (de la Cruz, 2003). Thus I perceive the category Arab as more inclusive of the groups impacted by 9/11. The one exception where I use the term Middle Eastern rather than Arab is in the following section where I discuss census data; I do this to be consistent with census classifications.

To understand the grievances and needs of Arab-Americans in a post 9/11 era filled with anti-Arab sentiments, it is necessary to distinguish them from the “majority” white (Kahn 2010). In many ways Arab-American experiences diverge from white privilege; yet, in 1978 the U.S. Office of Management and Budget defined four racial classifications placing Middle Eastern persons in the category of white (Khan 2010; Suleiman 1997). The othering and racialization of Arab identity from “white” to “of color” can be gleaned from racial profiling and the relationship between citizenship, nation, and identity that has developed (Velopp 2002). Various advocate groups including the Arab-American Institute have voiced a detachment from white identity (Suleiman 1999). “Check it right, you ain’t white” was a slogan of the “Yalla! Count” campaign, which encouraged Arab-Americans to write in “Arab” as their race rather than checking the “white” option during the 2010 census (York). Omar Masry, an advocate of the campaign, identifies experiences of disconnection by saying, "I remember when I was 17 years old and filling out applications to join the military or to apply for scholarships, and I didn't see a box for 'Arab-American.' Yet, growing up around 'white kids' in high school, you definitely felt different" (Kahn 2010).

Although institutions do not define Arab as a race separate from white, I argue that Arab discrimination can be studied in the context of race since changing mentalities and increased racialized prejudices caused the ethno-linguistic category of Arab to become distinctly racialized after 9/11 (Aziz 2009, 2). Thus anti-racist interventions, models of resistance designed to interrupt hegemonic attitudes and practices surrounding race, that have been historically used to understand the lives of people of color, (Luft 2010), become, I argue, appropriate in studying Arab-Americans. When specifically examining the lives of Arab-American women, anti-sexist interventions must also be used. Though intersectionality theory, an intervention of feminist scholars, has illuminated the unique lived experiences of Black women, emphasis on the experiences of other minority women is lacking - Arab women in particular.

An increase in xenophobic mentalities towards Muslims and Arab-Americans has distinctively interacted with surviving gender-based discrimination in the workplace to create unique concerns and experiences for Arab women in the post 9/11 era, yet women remain absent from related research and discussion (Aziz 2009). As a Non-Muslim Lebanese-American woman, my experiences have been systematically erased when issues such as workplace discrimination, labor market mobility, and corporate leadership are examined. Since I am poised to enter the workforce upon graduation, this pattern of erasure will impact me personally and professionally. Both as a student of feminism and as a Lebanese-American woman, I cannot accept that there is no place in academia where my workplace experiences can be studied, or even presented as a trustworthy account. Workplace discrimination can harm employees by devaluing their work and decreasing their sense of self-worth; and, additionally, harm businesses by creating legal vulnerabilities, loss of productivity, or low staff morale (EEOC). Furthermore, unfair workplace practices are important to examine since they often indicate or contribute to greater structural inequality in society (EEOC).

Above I define significant terms of identity in the context of this essay (Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, etc.) because self-perceptions of Arab-Americans as being non-white can begin the discussion on Arab racialization after 9/11 and suggest that the erasure of non-Muslim and Muslim women in workplace discrimination models and research is a problem. In the following portion of this essay, I argue

that, by centering religion and ignoring non-Muslim Arab-American women completely, existing theoretical models have not fully illuminated the experiences of all Arab-American women. First, I outline the foundations of intersectionality theory and the contributions made by Black feminists who articulate the invisibility of women of color. Next, I use the work of founding intersectionality scholar and legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain how feminist and discrimination models have ignored Arab-American women in systems comparable to how legal discourse historically ignored African American women.

In the sections that follow, I examine how changes in the conceptualization of Arab-American identity following the attacks of September 11, 2001 impacted the experience of discrimination. I discuss how the details of 9/11 played a role in justifying the emergence male oriented approaches and entrenched stereotypes and ideologies, causing the limited amount of research conducted on women to be overly focused on the hijab. I then review the data and research that has been collected on sexual and ethnic harassment in the workplace, highlighting the absence of Arab-American women in these works as evidence of knowledge production that is male-centered, white supremacist and western-centric. I emphasize these narratives because their focus on religion bolsters my claim that non-Muslim women are being ignored and because, as I will explain, new narratives are crucial to the model I propose.

Using the works of Fredric Jameson as applied by Rachel E. Luft, I outline how composed ideologies used by social groups to make sense of the world become culture logics and (or) social and mental habits of an era. I analyze the post 9/11 era's cultural logic of Islamophobia arguing that it has caused religion to become the center of discrimination studies on Arab-American women. I give evidence of Islamophobia by presenting measurable changes in rates of violence and stereotyping. I argue that an improved discrimination model must decentralize religion in order to demonstrate that cases of discrimination are a racialized gendered problem rather than a cultural problem. To conclude I demonstrate how expanding theories of intersectionality and bridging them with improved discrimination models can better illuminate the reality of Arab-American women's experiences, especially those who are non-Muslim, by merging the most effective features in each field of study. By briefly discussing a study

from the Netherlands, I demonstrate how men have remained central to minority discrimination studies, how intersectional discrimination may operate invisibly in the workplace, and how an intersectional model can be applied.

### **BLACK FEMINISM AND INTERSECTIONALITY**

From its conception, the Women's Liberation Movement placed white women at the center of study while marginalizing the experience of minority women (Combahee River Collective 1977). An intersectional approach to feminist theory was introduced to combat this marginalization by revealing the multiplicity of oppressions minority women face (The Combahee River Collective 1977). The Combahee River Collective, a group of second wave Black feminists, was formed to address the axis that continuously intersects with race to create the unique lives of minority women (Combahee River Collective 1977). These women understood that the Women's Liberation Movement had placed its attention exclusively on the experiences and needs of white, middle-class women (Combahee River Collective 1977). Kimberlé Crenshaw was subsequently credited with coining the term "intersectionality" as a concept with which feminists of color could explain the interconnecting jeopardies (Crenshaw 1989). This approach as articulated by Crenshaw and other intersectionality theorists, helps us gain a more complete perception of how various identities simultaneously construct one's reality.

Kimberlé Crenshaw critiqued the single-axis frame of discrimination using a multitude of court cases such as *Degaffenreid vs. General Motors* to demonstrate the ways in which intersectional discrimination against minority women was either treated as racism or sexism, but not an interplay of both factors (Crenshaw 1989). In *Degaffenreid vs. General Motors*, a group of five Black female employees sued General Motors under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, claiming that the corporation's seniority system was discriminatory towards Black women (Crenshaw 1989). The case intended to argue prejudice on the grounds of simultaneous race and gender discrimination. However, because anti-discrimination law approached race and gender separately, it was impossible to prove a case of intersecting discrimination (Crenshaw 1989). In other words, since General Motors hired women, albeit white women, they could not be accused of sex discrimination; since the company also hired

African Americans, albeit men of color, they could not be seen as discriminating against individuals based on race (Crenshaw 1989).

Workplace discrimination experienced by Arab-American women has been erased by circumstances similar to the flawed systems of law impacting the workplace, illustrated in the *Degaffenreid vs. General Motors* case as analyzed by Crenshaw. Historically, gender discrimination in institutions has been studied extensively, but has often focused exclusively on white women. By challenging this trend, the Black Feminist movement made considerable contributions to ensuring that Black women were considered in discrimination models. However, other minorities such as Arab-American women have remained marginalized. While the post 9/11 era has caused an increased interest in the study of Arab-Americans in U.S. institutions, these studies have focused entirely on Arab-American men. Thus in ways similar to those outlined by Crenshaw's example revealing the erasure of Black women, Arab-American women have been erased by various single axis approaches that do not account for their intersecting identities and lived experiences associated with simultaneous oppressions.

The empirical studies on how both sex and ethnicity affect the frequency of sexual and ethnic harassment at work are extremely limited. In one of few articles, Jennifer L. Berdahl and Celia Moore study the interactions of gender with minority ethnicities by examining the workplace experiences of individuals who are non-Caucasian (Berdahl 2006). The study included European, Asian, Caribbean, African, Latin, Central, or South American, and few (4% or less) "Aboriginal, *Arab*, or Pacific Islander" peoples (Berdahl 2006). Berdahl and Moore were interested in how the experience of harassment is impacted both by being a woman and a member of a minority group. Berdahl and Moore proved that membership to both of these groups increases one's chance of harassment. In the study, minority women experience more sexual harassment than all men, minorities experience more ethnic harassment than all Whites, and minority women experience more harassment overall than majority men, minority men, and majority women (Berdahl 2006). Although the study did not explicitly focus on Arab women, it shows that intersectional discrimination against minority women aside from black women exists, demonstrating a need to expand discrimination models to account for these intersecting factors.

## POST 9/11 IMPACT ON THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF IDENTITY

Changes in the conceptualization of Arab-American identity following the attacks of 9/11 have drastically impacted the intersecting factors of Arab women's identities. Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, an emergence of demonization and violence in the context of national tragedy has facilitated a new identity category of persons who appear "Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim," whereby members of this group are identified as terrorists and no longer retain the identity of citizens (Velopp 2002). Susan Akram, an Associate Clinical Professor at the Boston University School of Law, outlines the demonization of Arabs and Muslims before and after 9/11, paying particular attention to the rarely acknowledged, unshakeable history of U.S. legislation, foreign policy, and pop culture trends marginalizing and dehumanizing the Arab world (Akram 2002). 9/11 redirected preexisting nativist biases against all people of color to Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians as they became subject to a de-Americanization process and racialization of identity (Aziz 2009, 2).

The misperception that Islam is representative of all Arabs and that it is a radical and violent religion has also contributed to changes in conceptualizations (Aziz 2009). Across the country there has been an increase of reported anti-Muslim and anti-mosque movements. Dozens of mosques have faced vandalism, hate emails, and serious threats of destruction. On April 20, 2011, there was an attack on the Islamic Center of Cartersville in Georgia, with vandals shattering its doors and windows with rocks, one of which was reportedly painted with "Muslim murderers" (Aziz 2009). These kinds of racial slurs indicate dangerous socially entrenched stereotypes. Changes in conceptualization are also closely linked with increased harassment on the individual level. According to the FBI's annual hate crime report in 2001, the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the United States went from 28 in 2000 to 481 in 2001 (Kaushal 2005). Reaffirming this increase, a Chicago police department reported 51 hate crimes targeting Muslims within the two-month period following 9/11, while only four such cases occurred for the entire previous year (Kaushal 2005).

These manifestations indicate how hate and hostility can be translated into certain expressions of discrimination with institutional implications. In her book, *New Dictionary of Historical*



*Ideas*, Maryanne Cline Horowitz asserts that hate crimes reflect a serious bias against persecuted groups, and that racially motivated grievances continuously retain a problematic need for revenge and retribution (Maghan 2015). This racial hatred and mistreatment has been expressed among various institutional settings of interaction with Arab and Muslim Americans, including within the workplace (Greenhouse 2010). In just the first eight months following 9/11 the U.S. Employment Opportunity Commission (E.E.O.C.) received 301 wrongful termination reports and 488 complaints of “September 11th-related employment discrimination” (Kaushal 2007). Research has also indicated that the effects and declines in wages are greater for Arab-Americans living and working in areas with higher rates of hate crimes related to religious or ethnic discrimination (Kaushal 2007).

### **MEN AS THE SUBJECT OF DISCRIMINATION MODELS**

Studies that claim to study Arab-Americans in institutions can be helpful in understanding oppression and discrimination; however, they are not fully complete. In reviewing Islamophobic and xenophobic manifestations, particularly in the workplace, theorists and researchers tend to be male centric. For instance, to study hiring bias towards Arab-Americans, sociologists Daniel Widner and Stephen Chicoine designed a correspondence study using names associated with white and Arab ethnicities (Widner 2011). Randomly selected white American names included: James Yoder, Robert Krueger, John Mueller, Michael Schwartz, William Novak, and David Schmitt (Widner). The randomly selected Arab names were Abd al-Hakiim Amar, Qahhar Kazim, Abu Amjad Khazin, Mamuud Irshad, Shakir Imtiaz, and Abd al-Malik Khalil (Widner). Though their intentions were to study the whole group, notice all the names listed above are names of men (Widner 2011). They found that equally qualified Arab (male) applicants needed to submit a greater number of résumés to receive interview callbacks or responses, not accounting for Arab-American women who likely face similar setbacks when seeking job opportunities (Widner 2011).

There is a trend for discrimination researchers to exclude women from the conversation. In the essay, *Labor Market Effects of September 11th on Arab and Muslim Residents of the United States*, researchers Kaushal, Kaestner, and Reimers demonstrate a clearly male-centric approach by tracking

possible wage declines between 2000 and 2002. They also included men with similar appearance such as African Arab, Afghan, Iranian, and Pakistani men, yet women remained absent (Reimers).

Similarly, the results of Neeraj Kaushal, Robert Kaestner, and Cordelia Reimers demonstrate how Arab women are completely excluded from the conversation of workplace discrimination. These researchers conducted studies on labor market effects of Arabs living in the United States, focusing on attitudes adopted after the 9/11 attacks. Kaushal and her colleagues found that 9/11 did not significantly affect changes in employment or hours of work Arab and Muslim men received, but a relative decline of over 20 percent in the wages of Arab men did occur. Faisal Rabby and William M. Rodgers' article on *Post 9/11 U.S. Muslim Labor Market Outcomes* (2011) also focused entirely on men. This study focused on the employment-population ratios and hours worked of young Muslim men between 16 and 25, ignoring young working women.

Because the post 9/11 era's approach to terrorism was established in an environment of male led aggression that was primarily concerned with a religiously-centralized male-enemy, I argue that these circumstances further facilitated a rise in male centric studies on institutional racism and prejudice. The term "terrorist" became a racialized construct in which persons, especially men, perceived as Arab or South Asian were classified as "terrorist others" (Aziz, 2009). In fact, many gendered policies were implemented in response to male-centric research hoping to explain the motives of 19 male hijackers. For instance, in November of 2001, the State Department announced that it would slow visa-granting processes to Arab and Muslims between the ages of 16 and 43, particularly focusing on men (Akram). Escalated stereotyping, changes in conceptualization, and the policies that followed 9/11 attracted the attention of many researchers who wished to study the impacts of 9/11 stereotypes related to mistrust, terrorism, and feelings of lack of security on the economic opportunities of Arab-Americans; almost exclusively the impacts on Arab-American *men*.

Researchers have provided evidence supporting claims that 9/11 has impacted the economic opportunities and experiences of prejudice for Arab-American (men), yet they completely ignore how such experiences intersect with gender, which on its own creates inequality. By focusing

exclusively on men, these studies exclude approximately half of their intended group of study. Some researchers who are interested in this subject have included this shortcoming as a self-critique, but neither the feminist field nor socio-economic disciplines have confronted these shortcomings. For example, Daniel Widner and Stephen Chicoine study the impact of ethnically Arab résumé name on job callbacks in their article *It's all in the name: Employment discrimination against Arab-Americans*. In their concluding paragraph, they recognized, “Additionally, labor market discrimination against Arab women using a similar methodology should be undertaken in order to determine whether these results are generalizable beyond gender” (Widner). Though these researchers recognize this erasure, they have neither challenged nor explored this flaw.

### **RELIGION AS THE CENTER OF INTERSECTIONAL STUDY**

Though intersectional scholars believe that single-issue research and analysis cannot comprehensively understand or address the oppressions that interlock for individuals who are members of more than one oppressed group, there has been a problematic emergence of feminist work that centers religion as the most prominent axis to interact with gender when considering Arab women. What little literature has been produced on the discrimination of Arab women in institutions has been overwhelmingly focused on clothing identifiers exclusive to Islam (the hijabi and other degrees of veiling). In the next section, I introduce the few personal narratives and cases related to workplace discrimination against Arab-American women I was able to obtain. In my analysis, I focus on the hijab not as a marker of religious difference but rather as a marker of the ways in which Arab women are racialized and gendered in the workplace. I use case studies to provide thicker narrative descriptions of the plight of victims of workplace discrimination, by providing unique standpoints that, when collectively examined and interpreted, can provide more reliable knowledge regarding U.S. institutions as complexly raced and gendered.

As Crenshaw demonstrates, flaws in legal discourse can illuminate lived experiences of minority women. Using E.E.O.C. federal lawsuits as evidence, I present three personal narratives that examine racialized gendered discrimination on the basis of veiling.

I. At 18 Halla Banafa was turned down for a job stocking merchandise at an Abercrombie Kids store in Milpitas, California. According to the E.E.O.C., the manager made a note of Banafa lacking the “Abercrombie look” on the interview form. “I never imagined anyone in the Bay Area would reject me because of my head scarf,” Banafa said. Unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employer, federal law requires the accommodation of headscarves, prayer breaks, and other practices based on Muslim religious beliefs. In addition to this case, Abercrombie has expressed discrimination in other cases as well. In 2004, Abercrombie agreed to pay \$40 million to settle an E.E.O.C. lawsuit where it was charged with racial bias against Asian, black and Hispanic employees, many of whom said they had been steered to low-visibility jobs at the back the store. The year prior to Banafa’s complaint, Abercrombie refused to hire a 17 year old wearing a hijab at a store in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Ronald A. Robins Jr., Abercrombie’s general counsel, said the company disputed both claims, adding that the retailer “makes every reasonable attempt to accommodate the religious practices of associates and applicants, including, when appropriate, allowing associates to wear a hijab” (Greenhouse, 2010).

II. Imane Boudlal, a 26-year-old from Casablanca, Morocco, worked as a hostess at the Storytellers Cafe at Disneyland Anaheim, California for about two years when she decided she would begin wearing her hijab at work. Boudlal said her supervisors told her that if she insisted on wearing the scarf, she could work either in back or at a telephone job. Disney officials claimed that her headscarf conflicted with the establishment’s early-1900s theme and proposed a more “period appropriate” hat with some scarf to fall over her ears. Ms. Boudlal rejected this as un-Muslim and said Disney officials wished to “hide the fact that I looked Muslim.” Michael Griffin, a Disney spokesman, said the company’s “cast members” agree to comply with its appearance guidelines and that “When cast members request exceptions to our policies for religious reasons, we strive to make accommodations,” adding that Disney has accommodated more than 200 such requests since 2007 (Greenhouse, 2010).

III. In 2008, Muslim Somali workers reported discriminatory practices at JBS Swift & Co., a meatpacking plant in Nebraska. Employees complained that restrooms had profane anti-Muslim graffiti draw on them, their prayer breaks were often interrupted, and the company refused to move their

meal breaks to right after sundown during the month of Ramadan (when Muslims are required to fast during the daytime). According to the E.E.O.C. Muslim employees staged a walkout after which the company fired all protesters. Chandler Keys, a Swift spokesman, declined to discuss the lawsuit, but said that since 2008, the company has had no similar incidents (Greenhouse, 2010). Like the previous two narratives, the last one is based on Muslim veil discrimination. Unlike the previous two narratives, the last one focuses on Somali employees – a group that is not considered Arab by the U.S. census (de la Cruz). Nonetheless I include it, because narratives are very limited and the experiences of non-Arab Muslims are important in understanding discrimination against the Muslim religion.

### **THE VALUE AND ABSENCE OF PERSONAL NARRATIVE**

Given that personal narratives demonstrate situated knowledge, feminist standpoint theorists who believe that research on power relations should begin with the lives of the marginalized should especially support and integrate the memoirs of Arab women into their research. In her “Outsider Within” essay, Black feminist scholar and intersectionality theorist Patricia Hill Collins argues that the “standpoint” of the marginalized is needed to identify and understand oppression (Collins). Collins presents the unique narratives of Black women working as “outsiders” within, to reveal the true experiences of minority women from a standpoint that hopes to be more illuminating than the prejudicial accounts of others speaking on behalf of minority woman (Collins). Black domestic workers processed a tainted sense of access to intimate white spaces such as households, yet they were invisible in white society. In addition, Collins meant to present the narratives of Black women as trusted evidence by making these women the subject, rather than the objects of research.

These intersectionality theorists contributed to illuminating the marginalized experiences of Black women by collecting and examining their first-hand accounts. For any model to create successful intervention within their lives, I recommend the use of narratives produced by Arab-American women about their dilemma in the workforce might correct distorted accounts that focus on veiling as the primary source of discrimination. The narratives I presented above are problematic for two reasons. First, this limited collection of narratives demonstrates the lack of available narratives and documented oral

histories considering the experience of Arab-American women as worthy of study. This trend is a serious flaw of current feminist and discrimination studies.

A second flaw of current feminist and discrimination studies is the central focus on religion. Muslim-centered feminist literature is valuable and can be drawn on to better understand the experiences of some Arab women yet this method is extremely problematic because of its limited frame. Focusing on religion and garments specific to Islam overlooks the important lived experiences of non-Muslim Arab women and women who choose not to wear the hijab. In addition, it distorts the experiences and identities of those who do wear the hijab as they become responsible for representing the plight of all Arab women many of whom cannot be accurately represented by this particular group of Arab women. According to the Pew Research Center, approximately one million Muslim women live in America and 43 percent of them wear headscarves all the time while 48 percent choose not to at all (Khalid, 2011). Regardless of their reasons, the fact remains that half a million Muslim-American women lack the hijab identifier, yet still experience marginalization in the workplace.

The trend of religion as the center has only served to reinforce Islamophobic research and knowledge production. Three primary factors have contributed to why Islam has remained dominant in race and gender studies and discussion following 9/11: First, the United States' complex political histories with the Middle East and Islam have created religious, cultural, and attitude clashes. Second, feminist discussions prior to 9/11 were heavily concerned with veiling in Islam and the oppression of women (exclusively how oppression operated outside US borders) in the East. Lastly, entrenched stereotypes in the U.S. have constructed a modern culture logic characterized by Islamophobia. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the third factor because the first two factors function as interactions or causes of culture logic and because culture logics have been used by past intersectionality theorists to argue for alternate approaches in Black feminist scholarship (Luft).

### **POST 9/11 AND THE PREVAILING LOGIC OF ISLAMOPHOBIA**

Given the shortcomings of discrimination models that elevate religion, I justify the decentralization of religion in anti-discriminatory interventions concerning Arab-American women. I use

a theoretical approach based in culture logics introduced by anti-racist scholar Rachel E. Luft as a critique of intersectionality. According to Luft, in the post-civil rights era of new or “symbolic” racism racial formations are defined in terms of color-blindness. Therefore successful anti-racist intervention has to include strategic and temporary race-only methods. Luft recognizes the value of intersectionality and what it has achieved for women of color, but also asserts that single, race-only, strategic approaches are needed at times. Though intersectionality goal is to elevate differences as a theory of understanding and changing the social world, when intersectionality is uniformly deployed as a “blanket application,” differences become flattened. Patricia Hill Collins had a realization similar to Luft when she warned against creating “a new myth of equivalent oppressions” (Luft).

Since race logics of the post 9/11 era are defined in terms of Islamophobia, I propose that models of discrimination decentralize religion at times in order to illuminate the genuine intersections of race and gender in hopes of achieving successful intervention avoiding the flattening of differences along a continuum of race/ethnicity/religion. Interventions are “intentional acts of resistance designed to interrupt hegemonic attitudes or practices regarding gender and/or race and asserts that culture logics affect how intervention functions” (Luft). Just as Velopp describes a de-Americanization process, Michael Suleiman, in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, describes the overwhelming “not quite white” mentality that has historically impacted various groups within the U.S. and illuminated America’s “fixation on race” (Suleiman, 1999). Throughout the history of Arab immigration to the United States, there has been a need to clarify, accommodate and reexamine their relationship with race in America. In each historical period, but arguably more so in the post 9/11 period, Arabs in America have confronted significant race-based challenges to their identity (Suleiman, 1999).

## **INTERSECTIONALITY, MODELS OF DISCRIMINATION, AND THE NEED FOR COLLABORATION**

### **INTERSECTIONAL RESEARCH IN THE NETHERLANDS**

Discrimination models have been primarily concerned with the subordinate male target hypothesis when engaging the intersection of ethnicity with sex. This theory suggests that intergroup

competition is central to discrimination, especially economic discrimination, and that intergroup competition occurs primarily among the males of society; therefore, male centered studies become necessary. By preferring the study of Arab men, the works I mentioned above unintentionally follow the subordinate male target hypothesis (Deros). When studying workplace discrimination against Moroccans living in the Netherlands, Eva Deros and Ann Marie Ryan also supported the prevalence of the subordinate male target hypothesis (Deros). Deros and Ryan proved that the intersection for ethnicity and sex on hiring Arab men is viewed as more threatening than Dutch men, Arab women, and Dutch women (Deros).

Existing models on discrimination in the United States have proven unreliable in explaining the experiences of ethnic minority women such as Arab women in the workplace. In the Netherlands, Eva Deros and Ann Marie Ryan's approach is to study "the effects of multiple stigmatized group memberships," or as feminist scholars call it intersectional identities, in the workplace. Deros and Ryan examine employment discrimination against those of Arabic origin, a recognized understudied ethnic group, namely in Western societies (Moroccans living in the Netherlands). They recognize multiple stigmatized groups may be treated differently in the hiring process, which reaffirms the usefulness of studying specific intersections of characteristics (Deros). They find that Arab women are more disadvantaged than Arab men and Dutch women or men; even when implicit prejudice against Arabs is low (Deros). In addition, despite some advances in women's employment status, most women still hold lower-paying, lower-status jobs than men do (Deros). This work is valuable because it is the only intersectional examination of gender and race as related to Arab peoples that I discovered.

## **CONCLUSION**

Considering a political climate marked by attack on America soil, the impact of 9/11 on the United States' national psyche, and the prevailing culture logics of the post 9/11 era, I believe studies on intersecting race and gender must be conducted in the U.S. for Arab-American women. I am confident that impacts in the U.S. will differ from those in the Netherlands. Intersectionality theories and discrimination models should be bridged to expand the experiences of Arab-Americans to include the



unique experiences of Arab-American women. These two bodies could successfully integrate the racialized gendering of Arab-American women, but have not yet done so. Instead, intersectionality theory has been overly focused on religion and the hijab, while discrimination models have been overly focused on men. The current frameworks of feminist and discrimination theorists are inherently flawed because much of their research and theoretical models revolve around making presumptions of identity and group participation (e.g. all Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims are Arab). Furthermore, they too heavily focus on studying Muslim men given that Muslim men had orchestrated the attacks of 9/11. As a result, Arab women, particularly non-Muslim Arab women suffering from emerging stereotypes have been ignored in the subsequent examination of how those stereotypes operate.

By applying a black feminist lens to existing models of discrimination, this new model of intersectional discrimination makes visible the experiences of Arab-American women by embracing Luft's theory of decentralizing axis. First and foremost, it approaches discrimination in terms of intersectional identities rather than mutually exclusive ones. Just as Luft recognized the need to elevate race studies, this model does so to illuminate more diverse experiences of Arab American women who do not identify as Muslim. This new model of intersecting discrimination expands discrimination models by focusing on ethnic minority women, Arab-American women in particular. To expand the utility of existing models, intersectionality must be integrated with single-issue approaches that will elevate race, the most easily identifiable identity for a non-white individual, over religion to reassess the exclusion of Arab women as a racialized gendered problem rather than a cultural problem. The new model avoids entrenched shortcuts or heuristics that confine Arab Women to studies of Islam and religion. Additionally, an emphasis is placed on oral histories, a method that has been utilized by intersectional feminist theory, but not adequately enough for Arab women or non-Muslim Arab-American women. Because of the interplay of disciplines (broadly political science, national security, feminism, human rights, economy, legal studies etc.) it is difficult to define an exact department where intersecting discrimination models and future research will be accommodated. It is this interplay that also illuminates the need and worth of an innovative intersecting discrimination model.

