Decolonizing terrorism

Racist pre-crime, cheap orientalism, and the Taqiya* trap

Ahmed Ajil

A decolonial lens

Decolonization must first and foremost be concerned with changing institutions and power structures in a way that serves the liberation and emancipation of the oppressed, lest decolonization becomes little more than a "metaphor" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). Besides that, at an epistemic level, decolonization efforts must also confront the persistent colonialities in the production of knowledge. Firstly, in their own right, because of the resulting epistemic injustice and secondly, because they, in turn, influence how colonial power is deployed, preserved, and re-negotiated on the ground, with tangible repercussions for individuals and communities. This dual focus of decolonial scholarship – both on the production of knowledge and the social power structures – is particularly applicable to how the phenomenon called terrorism has been studied and dealt with. In terms of knowledge production, the field of terrorism studies has been criticized in many regards, especially concerning its problematization of Islam, Muslims, and assumed psychological-culturalist traits of individuals associated with this religion. Given the field's Western-centrism, the persistent focus on Islam and Muslimness as a central factor in terrorism research can be understood as a continuation of an orientalist tradition of thought (Said, 1978) and adoption of the collective imaginary of the 'Arab villain' which has served to legitimize the colonization of Arab-Muslim peoples (Salaita, 2006; Shaheen, 2003). In practical terms, the impacts of counterterrorism policies and practices have been borne disproportionately by Black and Brown Others, especially those associated with the imaginary of the Arab-Muslim figure.

This chapter adopts a specifically decolonial reading of terrorism research and practice, by narrowing in on the logics, narratives, mechanisms, and dynamics that, so my argument, are vestiges and vectors of colonialist logic that serve to oppress, marginalize, and disenfranchise the Arab-Muslim Other. These colonialities maintain the image of a dangerous and lunatic Arab-Muslim Other and downplay the role of colonial violence in the past and present. I argue

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* As will be explained below, the term *taqiya* refers to the dissimulation of one's true religion or beliefs in order to escape harm.

that these characteristics are inscribed in the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) establishing systems of knowledge and hierarchy that disfavour the Arab-Muslim Other. The term colonialities in this context refers to narratives, ideologies, and patterns of thought that posit the Arab-Muslim Other as intellectually inferior, culturally retrograde, and a threat to the security and safety of the white body.

To do so, I draw on my experiences as a scholar and practitioner in this field over the past decade. I have been studying the trajectories and stories of those called terrorists and listened to the views of practitioners who engage with them, whether in the realm of politics, policymaking, prosecution, criminal defence, prison, probation, or reintegration. My research is primarily qualitative, including hundreds of hours of interviews and ethnographic observation in Europe, North America, and the Arab World as well as analyses of social media (Ajil, 2022b). In Switzerland, where I am based, my fieldwork has included observations of terrorism trials and participation in about 20 conferences on counterterrorism. In my function as a scientific collaborator at a think tank on prison and probation, I have been part of the development of policies and practices relating to terrorism and radicalization prevention in Switzerland. I have also been increasingly involved in legal cases (criminal law, administrative law, asylum law) concerning individuals accused of or tried for terrorism-related offences to support lawyers and provide expertise. Through this work and direct contact with defendants and convicts, I have been able to access confidential documents and analyze the discourse and praxis of the War on Terror. Since 2017, I have documented, using reflective writing and autoethnography, my various experiences in the field and inside the workings of the counterterrorism *dispositifs* (Foucault, 1980).

As an Arab-Muslim scholar of political violence, I am both the subject and object of my research. Through my navigation of the realms of terrorism research and counterterrorism praxis, I have – intellectually – experienced the weight of colonial power, especially because my scholarship tends to be critical. I highlight state violence and analyze terrorism as a product of it. I denounce state practices in the fight against terror. I do not shy away from pointing out violations of the fundamental rights of those accused of being or convicted as terrorists. This stance collides with the hegemonic discourse on terrorism. Therefore, my opinions, positions, and scholarship often provoke strong reactions and even censorship, which create brief moments during which the veil of colonial power is lifted. For instance, when opinion pieces are refused by major newspapers because my argument "neglects the simple statistical reality that the overwhelming number of terror attacks are committed by Muslims" (A. Ajil, personal communication, 26 February 2020, translated from German) or "because it only shows the perspective of the convicted terrorist" (A. Ajil, personal communication, 15 April 2021, translated from French), or when scientific articles are refused because "it seems like the author is justifying terrorism" (A. Ajil, personal communication, 2 March 2021), or through reactions in conferences and workshops. I have made a constant effort to document and analyze these moments in as much detail as possible.

After presenting my reflections on the entanglement of state-centrism and orientalism in knowledge production on terrorism, I elaborate on how colonialities, which serve to marginalize and alienate the Arab-Muslim Other, have been able to reach further into the ordinary lives of innocent citizens due to a racially charged ideology of preventionism. I argue that underlying the identified colonialities is the notion of *Taqiya*, which has institutionally legitimized mistrust against the Arab-Muslim Other in all spheres of society's engagement with the terrorist phenomenon. It serves, however, specifically to ensure that the Other remains stuck in the figure of the terrorist.

The Muslims are coming!: Defending the state against the Other

The pursuit of 'security' in the post-9/11 era has meant insecurity for many peoples, predominantly from the Global South but also those associated with it in the Global North, through imperial violence in the form of neo-colonial military interventions and occupations, extra-judicial kidnappings and killings, torture, indefinite detention without trial, and deportation of suspects to states where they face torture. In the domestic sphere, the dominant security paradigm facilitated "the rise of the preventive state" (Zedner & Ashworth, 2019, p. 429) with expansionist surveillance practices and pre-crime policing.

These practices have led to the stigmatization and marginalization of those associated with terrorist danger, miscarriages of justice, and disproportionate restrictions on the rights of suspects. The right to a fair trial is circumvented through the use of administrative rather than criminal law, civic space is shrunk, and the rule of law is weakened (Abbas, 2019; Amarasingam, 2021; Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016; Zedner & Ashworth, 2019). A United Nations (2020) report highlights that counterterrorism is informed by overly simplistic generalizations and stereotypes and lacks a "robust scientific basis" (p. 1) and "human-rights-based monitoring and evaluation" (p. 6).

The counterterrorism *dispositifs* around the world – *dispositif* in the Foucauldian (Foucault, 1980) sense, which includes the practices, laws, documents, discourses, and narratives that underlie and perpetuate a particular power balance and hegemonic frame of reference – have evolved in symbiosis with the realm of research. The past 20 years have seen the development of a strand of scholarship somewhat in isolation, dismissing the knowledge that had been produced before, leading to its subjugation as largely "unknown" knowledge (Jackson, 2012).

This field is characterized by a particularly high level of promiscuity that involves the realm of policymaking. Terrorism scholars' research priorities and findings tend to mirror the terrorism-related concerns of states and legitimize their counterterrorism efforts (Jackson, 2012; Schmid, 2013; Silva, 2018). Some observe that "the state has been not just the primary sponsor of knowledge-production, but also the primary consumer of research" (Stampnitzky, 2011, p. 7) with respect to terrorism, while others have qualified radicalization research as a form of "embedded expertise" (Mills, Massoumi & Miller, 2020, p. 9). Criminology's increased engagement with terrorism has done little to change this, given that it is mainly the positivist and state-centrist mainstream of the discipline that has engaged with this object of research (Ahmad & Monaghan, 2019).

It is hardly surprising, then, that terrorism research examining the role of institutional actors, policies, and state violence remains marginal (Duclos, 2020; Qureshi, 2020). Structural, socio-political, geopolitical, and historical factors are sidelined in the analysis (Ajil, 2022a; Geisser, Marongiu-Perria & Smaïl, 2017; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010; Jackson, 2012; Kublitz, 2021; Lafaye & Rapin, 2017). State terrorism also remains underexplored, being mentioned in 2.1 percent of articles published between 2007 and 2016 (see Schuurman, 2019). Meanwhile,

> [G]overnments ignore research critical of status-quo surveillance, intelligence and policing strategies in favour of questionable 'indicator' and 'evidence-based' studies attempting to identify the cultural, theological, psychological or even social characteristics of those in the so-called radicalisation process.
>
> *(Silva, 2018, p. 45)*

The field's state-centrism is accompanied by an orientalist outlook: Besides the research-policy promiscuity, almost all terrorism research considered relevant is produced in European and North American universities (Campana & Lapointe, 2012; Mohammed, 2021), and focuses

on phenomena and movements that are predominantly located in the Middle East and North Africa (Schuurman, 2019), hence reproducing a traditionally colonialist relationship between the metropolis and the periphery (Mohamedou, 2018). In concrete terms, this has paved the way for orientalism's renewed entering into force through increased emphasis on the figure of the Arab–Muslim Other and the problematization of Islam:

> The understanding of that violence of the savage has become boxed into a discussion on terrorism that strips it of its political nature and moves to discuss anthropologically the Muslim, Arab, Brown, Black, or Southern perpetrator and the scriptures of their nominal religion.
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> *(Mohamedou, 2018, p. 20)*

Cheap orientalism

While orientalism, as described by Edward Said (1978), was complicit in justifying colonial projects and dehumanizing the colonized, it arguably also required a certain level of sophistication and a broader understanding of the Arab-Muslim world. With the rise and spread of terrorism studies and pseudo-expertise in media, journalism and among different professions involved in countering the terrorist threat, I have observed what I consider *cheap orientalism*: By perpetuating racist stereotypes and problematic assumptions about terrorism, it has similar effects but requires much less sophistication. It suffices to throw around a few Arabic terms or Islamic concepts such as *Jihad, Shari'a, Taqiya* or *Hijra* to convey the impression of being a terrorism expert. I realized this when reading through a report produced by a prison guard who had spent time in a French prison with 'radicalized' prisoners. It was obvious that the individual had no deeper understanding of the terms and concepts used. Someone without a prior understanding of these concepts may, however, be easily fooled into perceiving this person as a jihadism expert. *Cheap orientalism* is particularly worrisome because the focus on jihadist violence is often the only reason why such practitioners or researchers become interested in the Arab-Muslim world. Thereby, their engagement with the cultures and religions associated with it is based on an exclusively securitizing and criminalizing lens. The 'knowledge' they produce and disseminate will then further corroborate the association between Islam and terrorism.

In practice, this translates as an abuse of terms and concepts associated with Islam in the context of working with individuals who have been accused or convicted of terrorism-related offences. Practitioners, such as police officers, prison guards or psychologists, use such *ad-hoc* acquired pseudo-knowledge to confront individuals of concern, enthusiastic about the prospects of 'understanding how these people think' and knowing how to deal with them, yet completely oblivious to the grossly dehumanizing nature of their statements. One police officer I interviewed mentioned that he had "learned so much about Islam" and was able to confront accused individuals with his acquired knowledge, which as he admitted was often counterproductive. During my research with terrorism convicts, I was often told that such pseudo-theological confrontations performed by non-Muslim laymen are extremely offensive and tend to further alienate the accused and convicted.

Violent Muslims

Terrorism research and counterterrorism practice are riddled with theses that – explicitly or implicitly – link Islam to violence. They rest on predominantly speculative and far-fetched assumptions or selective extracts from Islamic scriptures and are inscribed in a larger discourse

of clashing civilizations and Islam's supposed incompatibility with democratic values. They draw on the works of authors and activists who suggest that the Judeo-Christian civilization is being invaded by groups with an Islamist agenda (Carr, 2006; Kundnani, 2014). They include so-called *comprador intellectuals* – referring to native intellectuals that serve the interest of the oppressor (Andrade, 2020; Dabashi, 2011) – with an Islamic background or name who contribute to associations of Islam with violence, misogyny, and oppression. These ex-Muslims often benefit from the fact that the Islamic identity has become a precious political currency that helps amplify their voice and visibility.

The fear of 'Islamization' is pervasive in Europe and Northern America. While the fear itself is at least partly based on orientalist associations of the Arab-Muslim figure with dangerousness, it is in the reactions against this perceived invasion that we can track down colonial vestiges more fruitfully. More generally, they appear as a vehement rejection of multiculturalism, diversity, and political correctness. In relation to terrorism, they manifest in calls to fight back more decidedly against what is seen as Islamist terrorism, "not on our knees, but standing upright, eye to eye, using our police. The same police that you dislike" (Addor, 2020, translated from French), as a Swiss parliamentarian said during debates on increasing anti-terror measures. Behind such statements often lurks the white supremacist fantasy of a strong white Europe (Kundnani, 2014).

The reactions also appear as celebrations, in the public sphere, of harsh sentences for terrorism-related offences, regardless of the actual acts committed. Admittedly, those who demand no mercy for terrorist offenders tend to have in mind the perpetrators of attacks in Paris, Brussels or Berlin. The reality is, however, that most terrorist offenders have committed not a single act of violence, but engaged in acts considered as propaganda, typically via social media (Ajil & Lubishtani, 2021). Such nuances are dismissed in favour of a monolithic 'they are all the same' mentality. This dehumanization would not be possible were the archetypical terrorist in the collective imaginary not one with Arab-Muslim traits. The toughness of the stance is in this respect differential.

The fact that engagement in jihadist terrorism is explained by mainstream terrorism scholarship as mainly religiously motivated is itself a manifestation of coloniality. It posits a sort of continuum between religiosity and violence: The more religious, the logic goes, the more likely the individual is to adopt a sectarian ideology that promotes violence in the name of Islam. This assumption leads to the securitization of aspects of life that are *a priori* unrelated to security matters and ultimately the extension of biopolitical control over Muslim bodies.

In a nationally funded study on extremism among youth, a group of predominantly white male researchers set up a questionnaire to determine extremist attitudes. The questions, posed only to interviewees who identified as Muslim, asked about their perception of the importance of religion (the higher the importance, the more extremist the attitude) and their observation of Islamic principles (the more observant, the more hostile towards non-traditional Muslims). On the other hand, believing that the conflicts in Islamic countries have to do with the interventions of Western powers was qualified as hatred of the West. During a conference where these results were presented, a group of German researchers described how they entered into conversations with supposed Salafists on Facebook, by creating fake profiles that used Islamic names and a Koran as a profile picture. It is particularly worrisome that such researchers are visibly oblivious to the fundamentally racist nature of their instruments.

Criminalizing anti-colonial critique

A compounding effect of the field's state-centrism and orientalism manifests itself in the downplaying of the role of the colonial past and neo-colonial enterprises. As I have pointed out

elsewhere (Ajil, 2022a), grievances in relation to colonial suffering are sidelined as foci of analysis (see also Agozino, 2003; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010; Mohamedou, 2018). Prominent radicalization scholars consider colonization to be a "thing of the past" (Roy, 2015) and ridicule its pertinence for contemporary forms of terrorism. This also has to do with the post-ideological and anti-racialist[1] self-understandings of Western academia. Insisting on the link between colonial violence and terrorism – which Mohamedou (2018) calls "colonialism boomerang" (p. 166) – is often seen as excusing terrorism. Anti-colonial activist groups are accused of nurturing extremism and allowing "grievances […] to be extrapolated in a radicalisation process" (Porter, 2015).

In terms of criminalization, this means that political engagement marries poorly with religious convictions. It becomes a zero-sum game between radicality and religiosity. The crackdown on Islamism and political Islam in various contexts has produced a chilling effect among Muslim activists. They are often aware that apolitical religiousness is unproblematic in the eyes of the state, and a certain level of secular activism as well. When political activism takes place in a religious lexicon and out of religious convictions, the association with extremism and terrorism is quickly established. As Kundnani (2014) wrote, in the post-9/11 era, the most disconcerting is

> Western Muslims who identify with the victims of Western state violence in other parts of the world. To be classed as moderate, Muslims must forget what they know about Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan and instead align themselves with the fantasies of the war on terror; they are expected to constrain their religion to the private sphere.
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> *(p. 110)*

Counterterrorism operates on the idea that "believing Muslims are oppressed is a sign of extremism" (El-Bar, 2020). In very tangible terms, this has led to the criminalization, under terrorism legislation, of Facebook posts where ordinary individuals vent their indignation about the victims of the Syrian civil war (Ajil & Lubishtani, 2021).

The racist pre-crime

The fight against terrorism has generated a significant shift into the pre-crime sphere. This has meant that activities are now being prosecuted that were previously considered to be legal. They include posting images or videos on social media, communicating with certain individuals and groups, playing politico-religious chants, etc. With the pre-crime shift, the criminal justice apparatus reaches ever further into a presumably preventive sphere, where activities are increasingly detached from the actual act of violence. This intensified reach is characterized by both more criminalization, and more preventive intervention before a criminal offence is committed. The underlying ideology of *preventionism*, i.e., the belief that security threats should be averted as soon as possible, is a racially charged one. Since it is impossible to monitor the entire population and identify 'potential terrorists', the preventive lens must necessarily discriminate between risky and non-risky identities, places, and attitudes. In the absence of concrete acts of violence in the pre-crime sphere, criminal justice practitioners, prosecutors, and judges must resort to assessments of the individual's beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and purported dangerousness. This is precisely where the theories and assumptions, collective imaginaries and racist stereotypes come in: They serve to establish a hierarchy of risky activities and attitudes and fill the gaps left by the inherent lack of information that characterizes the pre-crime sphere. This is exacerbated by the lack of literacy and competency of the predominantly white, male, non-Muslim-dominated criminal justice apparatus in the Western context.

In practice, preventionism translates as a securitizing focus on religious practices and the wearing of religiously loaded symbols (e.g., headscarf). In a recently distributed pamphlet called "Recognising religious radicalisation" (A. Ajil, confidential documents, translated from German and French) by the Swiss intelligence service, wearing a long beard or a headscarf is associated with Salafism which in turn is explicitly associated with terrorism. In 2015, a police corps in Switzerland sent out a letter to schools and youth organizations to "recognize jihad sympathizers", which said that "sudden change of appearance (e.g., beard)", "sudden interest in Islam or IS" or "quitting a job" (Kantonspolizei, 2015, translated from German) should be reported to the police. During police investigations or in court, this association between Islam and terrorism police is blatantly construed when authorities ask defendants if they identify as practising Muslims or how they interpret certain parts of the Koran. In his expertise on an individual convicted of terrorism-related offences, a psychiatrist responded to the items of a risk assessment instrument with sweeping generalizations such as "based on his religion, he must believe that he holds the only truth" (a major risk factor according to the instrument) or "A feeling of collective victimhood is a given among Sunni Muslims today" (A. Ajil, confidential documents, translated from German) (a risk factor as well). This persistent focus on religion when questions should revolve around an individual's interest or engagement in violent ideologies or groups makes it hard to challenge the argument that individuals are on trial *for being Muslim*.

It further appears that, where information is fragmentary, state power tends to operate according to a logic of *in dubio contra reum*, which means, when in doubt, to assume terrorist links or intentions. At the macro level, this can be found in the collective imagination that intuitively associates Islam with terrorism. While the collective imaginary is elusive and hard to study, it manifests itself in the tacit or explicit assumptions regarding the Arab-Muslim figure. For example, when it comes to media portrayals of the Islamic State group, news of beheadings, rape, enslavement and massacres are commonplace. It is often readily accepted that the group represents, if not all Islam, then a problematic strand of it. While these crimes are indeed committed by this criminal organization, it is the lack of questioning of the link between Islam and violence that reveals stereotypical thought patterns. A report that a Christian or secular militia was committing such crimes would likely provoke a question or two regarding the veracity of the report or incite demands to look further to understand why. There would likely be reservations as to the direct association between Christianity and violence. That a group called Islamic State commits these crimes is more readily accepted.

Within the criminal justice system, the logic of *in dubio contra reum* manifests itself at all stages. It is at play when in situations of stress, those associated with the Arab-Muslim figure are more readily qualified as suspects, for example, when an Algerian-French man chasing the perpetrator of a terrorist attack is arrested by police and described as a potential accomplice by the media (Werly, 2020). It shows when prosecutors and judges decide to define a person as supporting a terrorist group despite extremely thin evidence; it leads journalists to judge defendants not by their acts, but by their attitude and behaviour in court; and it leads people not to question when an Arab-Muslim is qualified as a terrorist. There is, hence, a *selective mental effort* when it comes to the Arab-Muslim figure, and it is in the non-questioning and the taking-for-granted that colonialities surface. This also means that the burden of proof is shifted from the state to the accused individual: They must prove that they are *not* a terrorist sympathizer or *not* dangerous, which is a virtually impossible task.

Finally, racist pre-crime preventionism is characterized by a *high tolerance of false positives* (i.e., wrongful accusation, detention, or conviction of terrorist offences) when the target group is associated with the Arab-Muslim figure. When government representatives, journalists, or researchers argue that some judicial errors can be tolerated for the sake of the greater good

(i.e., a hypothetical sense of safety for the dominant group), this attitude is a racially charged one, because it is the Arab–Muslim body that must endure these false positives. False positives would not be tolerable if they affected members of the dominant group.

Institutionalized mistrust: the Taqiya trap

My final argument is that state power's engagement with the Arab–Muslim Other is encapsulated in the notion of *Taqiya*. Briefly put, *Taqiya* ascribes some legitimacy to lying about one's faith to escape harm and death. The concept has been heavily debated and lacks a consensual definition in Islamic jurisprudence (Suleiman & Khan, 2017). Historically, it is reported to have mostly been used by Shia Muslims to escape death throughout centuries of persecution during the domination of the caliphates. It has also been used against Shia Muslims to declare them liars and infidels. Some argue that the accusation of *Taqiya* is now being used in Europe against all people of the Islamic faith, to delegitimize them and discredit any efforts at integration (Skovgaard-Petersen, n.d.). Parallels can be drawn with anti-Judaism. Unsurprisingly, the idea has been zealously pushed by groups with agendas hostile to immigration and Islam (Daro, 2018).

On the one hand, *Taqiya* serves to institutionalize mistrust (see Stephen & Squires, 2004) against the Arab–Muslim figure and the Islamic religion and culture. This mistrust can be read as a particularly well camouflaged form of racism within criminal justice, which is essentially founded on scepticism: Averting threats to society and national security requires a permanent scrutinizing focus on risky groups. Mistrust is a valued attribute of crime work because it stands in opposition to the naivety of those who are fooled by criminals and terrorists. It is associated with competency. Yet, behind this veil of seemingly professional and necessary mistrust, racist tropes and colonialist ideologies operate unheeded. Through the securitization of previously non-security-related spheres of society and the pervasive fear of terrorism, the institutionalized mistrust was able to spread widely and inform society's general engagement with the Arab–Muslim Other.

On the other hand, it acts as a trap for those members of the Othered body who are associated with the terrorist phenomenon. Once an association is established – facilitated through the collective imaginary and *in dubio contra reum* logics – it is extremely hard for suspects or convicts to rid themselves of it. The idea of *Taqiya* serves to maintain a veil of suspicion and to block any acknowledgement of progress on the part of the accused. Any statement made by the accused or any positive behaviour (in prison, for example) is considered part of a general deception strategy believed to be strategically adopted by terrorists (Hussein, 2015). *Taqiya* is consistently brought up by practitioners and researchers to point out that 'the terrorists' cannot be trusted. Since it is not yet as widespread a concept as *Jihad* or *Shari'a*, it also seems to be a convenient token to show off some ostensive expertise on the topic (cheap orientalism). During my research and practical engagement, I have found various instances where *Taqiya* is used to silence, delegitimize, exclude, marginalize, oppress, and mistreat the Arab–Muslim Other.

Sometimes, *Taqiya* is also mobilized against practitioners and researchers. A German social worker recalled being excluded from the most sensitive discussions and even facing interrogation-like encounters with security agents who were openly sceptical of her trustworthiness as a Muslim woman. Once, she was directly accused of *Taqiya*. On another occasion, a prosecutor declared that "a Salafist has never betrayed a brother" (A. Ajil, personal communication, 2 March 2017, translated from German), indicating sweeping mistrust of anyone accused (by the prosecutor herself) of terrorism-related offences. In court, I have witnessed multiple situations firsthand, where the prosecutor or the judge declared the defendant's statements as

untrustworthy and used the concept of *Taqiya* to corroborate their position. De Koning (2020) encountered this use of *Taqiya* in Dutch courts as well.

Finally, those labelled as terrorists are faced with constant *pressure to repent*. Judges and authorities often point out the lack of repentance among terrorist suspects or convicts, sometimes to justify harsher sanctions. To those individuals, it is often not clear what they should repent of: In the pre-crime sphere, they have usually not committed any physical acts of violence. They often feel like they expressed their sympathies for a terrorist group, but mainly out of indignation about the lack of defence for suffering civilians. Understandably, they often refuse to show repentance for that inherently political engagement, but the pressure to repent does not differentiate in that respect. Not to speak of cases of miscarriage of justice, where convicts maintain their innocence – in such cases, the epistemic violence of being pressured to show repentance is colossal (Ajil & Jendly, 2020). The pressure to repent is again a racially charged one: It focuses on the Otherness of the labelled terrorist because, beyond the criminal offence committed, the individual is seen to have broken the tacit pact that allowed them to enter or remain in the country on the condition that they must never err. They are accused of "nastily abusing the granted hospitality" (Swiss Federal Criminal Court 2016, translated from German). This logic is at the core of the degrading practice of citizenship stripping, which is the ultimate proof of the Other's conditionality of existence within the dominant white body.

Concluding remarks: decolonizing terrorism

The argument laid out here is that knowledge production on terrorism is state-centrist and orientalist: It serves to unleash state power against the Arab-Muslim Other under the banner of fighting terrorism. The worlds of research and policymaking are closely entangled, both structurally and epistemically. The focus on the Arab-Muslim Other has led to a problematization of anything associated with Islam. Grievances about the colonial past and present are dismissed and the phenomenon is depoliticized. Knowledge production benefits from the workings of *comprador intellectuals* and *cheap orientalism*. Given the intertwining of research and praxis, colonialities travel easily between all segments of society and especially within the criminal justice system.

I argue that these characteristics of the field are particularly worrisome because the pre-crime shift has created a larger state-sanctioned space for these colonialities to operate. The focus on Islam makes it hard to deny that individuals are on trial for being Muslim. The logics of *in dubio contra reum* and a selective mental effort divert the burden of proof from the state to the individual and increase the tolerance of false positives. On the other end, once individuals are labelled as terrorists, the concept of *Taqiya* makes it impossible for them to rid themselves of the label. More generally, I propose that *Taqiya* translates as a general and institutionally sanctioned mistrust of the Arab-Muslim Other.

So, where do we go from here? Identifying and naming the colonialities at play in societies' engagement with the Arab-Muslim Other is a necessary step. To decolonize terrorism research and practice, however, these colonialities must be actively confronted. This requires a joint engagement of scholars, activists, lawyers, and grassroots organizations, especially representatives of the Arab-Muslim body, to highlight and denounce the workings of colonial power behind the veil of the fight against terror. The task is a daunting and tedious one. May the light be with us.

Note

1 Anti-racialism is a form of racial denial, "characterised by historical amnesia, through which the histories of colonialism and slavery are not deemed important for the way race operates in contemporary Europe" (Boulila, 2019, p. 1408).

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