Foreword

Re-educating against Miseducation

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This is a book for teachers, a way to open a discussion about the racism and fear that has been created through what we call Islamophobia. Naturally, we are aware that there are many racisms and that Islamic and Arabic peoples are not the exclusive victims of hatred. However, this book will specifically address issues which apply to those who are Muslim or who come from largely Muslim countries. We use the term Islamophobia to isolate instances which have been applied to Islamic peoples or those who appear to be Muslim…naturally, all Muslims are not Arabs, and not all Arabs are Muslims, but in an Islamophobicly constructed 21st century, those who perpetuate crimes of hatred and discrimination don't ask for nuanced identities.

Islam has become a target of discrimination and bigotry and has often been misconstrued in the media, vilified by news pundits, religious leaders, and politicians, and is a subject of miseducation in schools. We categorize these acts as Islamophobic. A short but current list delineates some global incidents:

- The 2005 youth riots in France which blamed Muslims for their inability to integrate and assimilate
- The Danish *Jyllands-Posten's* publication of unfavorable cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed

- The suggestion that Muslim women wearing *hijabs* was anti-feminist (by non-Muslim women)
- The refusal of Muslim prayer space in universities
- The continued detainment of and accusations surrounding "home-grown" terror plots of countless Muslims in North America
- Suspicion of terrorist sympathies in Muslim youth born in Western countries

Muslims have been defined inaccurately by media and politicians, perpetuating a misinformation "trickledown" in communities and schools. Muslims and Arabic peoples often live under a political climate and an education system that has continued to create Islamophobic perceptions in many citizens.

The term, "Islamophobia" creates controversy, with notable authors, such as Rushdie and Manji (2009), writing that they "… refuse to renounce our critical spirit out of fear of being accused of 'Islamophobia,' a wretched concept that confuses criticism of Islam as a religion and stigmatisation of those who believe in it." Adding to the confusion between Islam and the variances of those who call themselves "Muslim" is the use of the term "phobia," which alludes to some kind of mental illness, an involuntary revulsion of sorts when confronted with the Qur'an, prayer rugs, or Muslims in general as opposed to a learned bias.

Although we recognize the limitations of the term Islamophobia, we understand that it defines experiences of discrimination, dehumanization, and misrepresentations of Muslims, those of Muslim heritage, and a systemic miseducation about Islam itself. Islamophobic bias has targeted a large mosaic of people associated with the religion and amalgamated them as one. The *Ummah*, the global Muslim community and collective consciousness including those Muslims living in diaspora, has been in a continued state of varying assault. From the physical violence at such places as Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan to assault on identity, as can be seen in the overwhelming portrayal of Muslims and people associated with "Islamic countries," Islamophobia has played a hand in the overt and tacit acceptance of the majority in the West to these horrific and disturbing actions.

In this sense, we recognize that current aggressive actions against Muslims in the East and the West stem from the historic Islamophobic views of the East and, as a consequence, we frame our theoretical approach of this manuscript in a "de-colonizing" or "anti-colonial," critical pedagogy, acknowledging that Islamophobia reflects the ongoing experience of colonialism and imperialism. It is important to note that colonialism is not a "thing of the past," but an ongoing reality for much of the world. If educators are committed to breaking the cycle of prejudice and bias against Muslims

and Arabs, then the historic context to the Western–Eastern relations needs to be understood beyond Osama Bin Laden and 9/11. For instance, 9/11 was not the direct result of disapproving public responses to such issues as women wearing the *hijab* to vote, or the manner in which the printed media, in particular, frame Muslim images. These types of perceptions existed in the West long before 9/11 changed the world. Scholars like Jack Shaheen and Edward Said have discussed the deeply seeded racist fears sown through Islamophobia.

Although visible Muslims (women and men who dress in traditional religious manner) receive great amount of prejudice, people who are connected to Islam in less obvious manners are also the targets of intolerance. This book discusses both religiously recognizable Muslim experience and less researched groups, such as second and third North American generation students with Muslim or Arabic backgrounds. How does the child of Muslim grandparents navigate through an education system's systemic set of public *truths* that consistently portray Islam and Muslims in a negative manner? Is the option for this child to denounce his or her heritage, ways of knowing and loved family members to successfully navigate through schools? This practice is not unlike other minority experiences in our schools in which defence of their heritage, ancestors, and ways of knowing must be set aside to conform to Western sets of *acceptable* facts and knowledge (Stonebanks, 2008).

Our hope is for educators to move toward an inclusive classroom which creates personal and classroom spaces of learning based on research and personal discovery, so that they may become active participants in their world (Steinberg, 2009; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998). However, we do recognize that information regarding Islam has not been made readily accessible to teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the public. We hope that the content of this book will assist teachers and students to move toward the emancipatory educational path of critically considering reasons for Islamophobia and popular perceptions toward Islam, Muslims, and Arabic peoples. This book should not be considered a panacea for Islamophobia, but we will provide pedagogical considerations. We will discuss the historical context of Islam, the diversity of the Muslim experience, Muslim contributions to civilization, the manner in which media and schools shape Western understanding of Islam and Muslims, and, educational resources. Our hope is that educators consider this collection of writings as the first step to research within their own classrooms and that progress against Islamophobia stems from their own and their students' efforts.

Our intent is to provide educators and students an accessible understanding of some of the current struggles of members of the greater Mus-

lim community. We will discuss the context from which these struggles derive, the manner in which formal and non-formal locations of learning have reproduced misconceptions and strategies to develop a just classroom. A major incentive for developing this manuscript comes not only from our own research and prior publications but also from our extended conversations in developing this book with Joe Kincheloe, whose deep commitment to recognizing that individual beliefs, familiarity, "ways of knowing," and connections to Islam through personal experience had to counter the prevalent distorted perspectives of Islam "taught" by both non-formal and formal locations of education. It is Joe's pedagogy, his spirit of indignation, against Islamophobia we hope to emulate in creating a socially just curriculum.

We have organized the book into four parts. In Part One: *There Is No One "Muslim World,"* the authors establish a historical and ideological framework for teaching against Islamophobia. In Part Two: *Reading Islamophobia,* each chapter engages in a content analysis of Islamophobic texts. Part Three: *Categories on the Board—"Muslims You Never Knew,"* speaks on the politics of identity and autobiographical narrative. We complete the book with Part Four: *Teaching against Islamophobia* in which the authors give specific examples of anti-Islamophobic teaching in schools. This book can begin to name Islamophobia, and to create a dialogue. We have created a forum on our website, freireproject.org, and invite you to participate in this endeavor to engage in the conversation about critical pedagogical attempts to change and redefine educational discourse.

References

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