

Can Islam Be Satirized? Celeb Jihad's "Explosive Celebrity Gossip" and the Divide between Islam and Mainstream American Culture

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The Selena Gomez nipple parade continues as she once again walks the streets of New York City in a sheer top with no bra on in the photos below. What the hell does this Mexican skank have against bras? While us Muslims would certainly prefer to see women like Selena in thick black wool burkas (or better yet on the ground crumbled in a heap after a lapidation), we can at least tolerate ones (for now) that wear undergarments and do not just allow their sex organs to be out flapping in the breeze like Selena is doing in these pics

Mohammed¹

The above epigraph exemplifies the crass satirical commentary of celebrity gossip website Celebjihad.com, which reports its news as if written by Islamist fundamentalist extremists. Celeb Jihad's rendition of Islam is excessive, transgressing mainstream American allowances for misogynistic, racist, and homophobic violent discourse. Posting since 2009, Celeb Jihad's author(s) exemplify U.S. thought on Islam post-9/11. As Razack writes, mainstream U.S. discourse makes an explicit division between the United States and Islam, where "the West's distinctive attribute is freedom, in contrast to the Islamic world's fidelity to a world of culture, religion, and community."² While the website is over the top, it at the same time portrays hegemonic American understandings of Islamic

fundamentalists. The pop culture bent of the website and the tension between whether the fundamentalism represented by Celeb Jihad is real or performed marks Celeb Jihad as satire, “a broad category of political humo[r] and lampooning.”³

Despite the discursive division between the United States and Islam, the dominant way of viewing race in the United States is through a postracial lens. As Silva notes, dominant white supremacist ideologies insist that racism no longer exists. Material effects of racism are explained away with other reasonings. Bonilla-Silva discusses this idea in detail, labeling the phenomenon “color blindness.”⁴ Goldberg relatedly discusses his own theory of antiracism. As opposed to antiracism, antiracism encourages an erasure of race and histories of racism. Race becomes a benign category; its material effects are ignored through a call to color blindness.⁵ Both Bonilla-Silva and Goldberg are marking processes of postracialism where dominant frameworks assert that the United States is in an ideological space where race is no longer relevant.

However, discrimination continues to affect racial minorities’ lives, and Muslims hold a particularly ambivalent position in the discourses of postracialism. While the Muslim population in the United States differs widely in terms of race, U.S. popular discourse recognizes “Muslim” as a unified, identity-based label. Muslims are thus “racialized”: while they are incredibly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, nation of origin, sect, class, immigration status, and so on, Muslimness is considered their primary identity.⁶ Seeing religion as the primary identity marker of Muslims allows for the discursive rendering of “the Muslim World,” “they versus us,” “the Muslim terrorist,” and “the oppressed Muslim woman” without a full understanding of cultural, sect-related, or national differences. Racialization also provides the “evidence” for a binary between the free, tolerant United States and oppressive, regressive Islam. Post-9/11, U.S. political discourse did provide Muslims with another option: the good Muslim. As Mamdani states,

“Bad Muslims” were clearly responsible for terrorism. At the same time . . . “good Muslim” were anxious to clear their names and consciences of this horrible crime [9/11] and would undoubtedly support “us” in a war against “them.” But this could not hide the central message of such discourse: unless proved to be “good,” every Muslim was presumed to be “bad.” All Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against “bad Muslims.”⁷

Mamdani thus goes on to say that good Muslims cannot truly exist. When racialized and constructed as a monolith, good Muslims cannot divide themselves from bad Muslims. This is an integral component of racialization and the U.S./Islam binary.

This also allows Muslims to serve as the “other” against which the open-mindedness of the United States is juxtaposed. While constructing race, racialization relies on supposedly immutable characteristics and is therefore nearly impossible to counter. Discourses of American tolerance and postracialism cannot exist without constructing Islam as aggressively, violently nontolerant. Muslim Americans are therefore located in a confusing liminal space. On the one hand, they are promised the tolerance of U.S. postracialism. On the other, they are demonstrative of a supposedly regressive Islam: a religious ideology that has no place in the “progressive” United States.

Through parody, Celeb Jihad breaks down the idealized tolerant United States by forcing dominant discourses of the United States—in this case, popular culture icons and news media—to engage with Islamic fundamentalism. By asserting an “Islamic” viewpoint on American pop culture, Celeb Jihad does maintain problematic stereotypes of the Islamic fundamentalist. Despite this, through ambiguous humor, it also reveals mainstream U.S. Islamophobia and demonstrates the impossibility of a divide between U.S. freedoms and Islamic oppression. Ultimately, however, stereotypical understandings of Islam dismiss this ambiguity, calling into question the possibilities of satirizing Islam.

Satire and Celeb Jihad

Scholars have identified humor and satire as potential methods for opposing the stultifying effects of postracialism. Rossing argues that “humor functions as a critical, cultural project and site for racial meaning-making that may provide a corrective for impasses in public discourse on race and racism.”⁸ Satire involves confusing and questioning the messages behind the multifaceted component of its humor, often rendering any political messages absurd by pushing them to their extremes. In the post-9/11 cultural and political climate, as Hughey and Muradi point out, settling on the “true” message behind identity-based satire has become more complicated:

Political comedies like that of *South Park* and *Family Guy*, as well as other comedic icons like Stephen Colbert, Sasha Baron Cohen, Sarah Silverman, and the hit film *Team America: World Police* (2004) rely upon, and simultaneously produce, a blurring of the line between “authentic” and “satirical” racism/nationalism. In this sense . . . *Family Guy* and *South Park* can succeed at using over-the-top commentary to demonstrate post- 9/11 anti-AMESA [Arab, Middle Eastern, and South Asian] nationalism, but they can also fail horribly at it. Instead of satirizing racist patriotism, these shows can impersonate it.⁹

In their discussion of satirical television shows *South Park* and *Family Guy*, Hughey and Muradi assert that post-9/11, satire can both confirm and complicate racist stereotypes. Forms of humor like satire are difficult to interpret, particularly when postracialist ideologies insist on the benign nature of identity categories like race and refuse to fully address the effects of racial difference. Satire leaves possible interpretations open, forcing ambiguity in inferring humor as racist, antiracist, or benign, among other potential readings. Satire's refusal to directly reveal a single obvious interpretation blurs meanings so that what is or is not racist is indistinguishable.

While blurring this line may seem counterproductive in offering a clear antiracist standpoint, humor provides a distinct avenue to address racist sentiments. Refusing to come across as either racist or antiracist allows for the popularization of ambiguous humor, which encourages the possibility of alternative readings or of antiracist sentiment without completely bucking postracial norms. Thus, as Willett and Willett aver, whereas direct, "condescending political strategies that are directed toward reasoning with a xenophobe fail, and even risk producing backlash, humor or wit can transform negative affects and alter the social landscape through waves of cathartic laughter."¹⁰ Laughter through ambiguous text can offer a potential variant to a society saturated with subtle racism and xenophobia. The reactions to satiric discourse on race and racism can fluctuate and may have detrimental and/or productive results. Analyzing how race functions in Celeb Jihad's satirical sphere requires compensating and understanding the fluctuations between possible racist and antiracist discourse evident in the website's satirical content.

Celeb Jihad interprets Muslimness satirically, as indicated in this article's epigraph. The website also makes this expressly clear in its disclaimer: "CelebJihad.com is a satirical website containing published rumors, speculation, assumptions, opinions, fiction as well as factual information. Information on this site may or may not be true and is not meant to be taken as fact. CelebJihad.com makes no warranty as to the validity of any claims."¹¹

In spite of this disclaimer, Celeb Jihad's satire remains confusing particularly because it performs racialized religion in an online space. In *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*, Nakamura ties together online racial performances and the cultural processes of postracialism. According to Nakamura, online spaces allow users of color to "actively visualize themselves . . . their differing races, their complicated genders, their generative and bereft bodies," despite the larger postracial environment that discourages such depictions.¹² While Nakamura's focus on the material is significant, she does not address how the inability to often see the bodies of online cultural producers complicates representations of race on the Internet.

Celeb Jihad refuses to disclose the "real" national, religious, or racial belongings of its author(s). Erasing racial origins makes the website palatable to postracial discourse. Celeb Jihad's online racialized performance makes distinct racial and religious boundaries invisible, allowing for the website's palat-

ability in today's postracial cultural sphere. Because readers cannot know if the performers are "truly" Muslim, the website prevents readers from attacking Muslims ("It's just satire!") or attacking the potentially non-Muslim authors ("Maybe they are Muslims!").

This is particularly true because while the website is supposed to be satire, the "satirical" ideas it espouses are the same kind of stereotypes seen in "realistic" Hollywood depictions of Muslim men. The authors of *Celeb Jihad* are obscene, violent, and irrational. This type of depiction aligns with the ways Muslim men are described in news and popular media.¹³ Crude sexuality is the stereotypical element that takes center stage in *Celeb Jihad*. *Celeb Jihad*'s articles focus on young, female stars who often began their careers on children's television networks like Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel. Celebrities frequently covered by *Celeb Jihad* include Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus, Ariana Grande, and Victoria Justice. All of these women are under 25 years old, started their careers as child actors, and gained fame through television shows on the Disney Channel or Nickelodeon. Gomez, Cyrus, and Grande have gained more fame post-Disney Channel and post-Nickelodeon shows, with singing and acting that often includes overt sexualization. Gomez, for example, starred in the raunchy 2013 film *Spring Breakers*, and Cyrus caused a media uproar with her bawdy performance of "Blurred Lines" with Robin Thicke on the 2013 MTV Video Music Awards. *Celeb Jihad* maintains and encourages the sexualization of these women by republishing photos and scenes taken by "legitimate" sources, such as the paparazzi, magazines, and film and television shows.¹⁴ The website also republishes photos posted online by the celebrities themselves.¹⁵ Some photos and videos have been taken from celebrities without their consent, including nude photos and sex tapes from the 2014 Sony Pictures Entertainment hack.¹⁶ Finally, the website also publishes nude photos, purportedly of celebrities, that are digitally doctored so that the nude body quite obviously does not belong to the head pasted on top.

Celeb Jihad's authors are lecherous, jealous of American sexual "freedoms," and misogynist. In one article, for example, Mohammed leads with a nude photo, purportedly of actress and model Megan Fox:

As we learned from the atrocious amount of celebrity nudity we witnessed in 2014, there is seemingly no limit to the depths of depravity that infidel whores in Hollywood will sink to.

With the coming of the New Year we should expect this degeneracy to intensify, as the Hollywood harlots become even more brazen in their immoral ways. As evidence of this, take this new photo above of actress Megan Fox showing off her sinful nude sex organs while in a white corset.

Even though Megan Fox clearly has no future in Hollywood due to her severe lack of acting talent, she continues

to inflict us with her sickening bare feminine body. If this is the type of sluttiness we are getting from a washed up has-been like Megan Fox, one shudders to think of what sort of displays we will be seeing from stars that are still relevant or are up and coming in 2015. Though rest assured my Muslim brothers that Allah will never give us more celebrity nudity than we can handle. Praise be onto him!¹⁷

Mohammad toes the line between both condemning and desiring Fox. The website puts Fox's female body on display, although in this case, as in many of the pictures Celeb Jihad posts, the picture is quite obviously edited to display Fox's head atop an anonymous, traditionally attractive nude body. The author lusts over explicit female sexuality in the public sphere while at the same time violently admonishing Fox for her sexuality.

While the website explicitly marks itself as satire, the supposedly satiric writing here would not be out of place in an American film drama about fundamentalist Islamist extremists. It mirrors Shaheen's analysis of the sheikh figure in Hollywood film, a man who, despite his harem full of Arab women, cannot help but "swiftly and violently deflower Western maidens."¹⁸ The Muslim man is both sexually repressed and lascivious. He cannot help an innate desire for sexualized white women but at the same time loathes himself for this desire.

While dominant American ideologies explain Islamic terrorism through Muslim men's premodernity and innate violence, this depiction requires depicting Muslim men as sexually deviant and frustrated. Razack argues that when examining what makes a terrorist violent, scholars in terrorism studies see the psyche as a privileged source of information:

That is to say, the terrorist is driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces. The terrorist psyche is born in abnormal family dynamics, with the West's own heterosexual family as its point of contrast. . . . Terrorists are depicted as failed heterosexuals who need the promise of virgins in heaven to commit to the cause.¹⁹

Abnormal sexuality and its connection to emasculation are thus integral parts of dominant U.S. understandings of Islamist terrorists. Because Celeb Jihad conforms to this understanding of Muslim men, it perpetuates stereotype.

At the same time, however, Celeb Jihad's satire is not so far off from the "real-life" depictions of violent Islamist extremists as "terrified of women" or motivated by "gaining immediate entry into paradise and enjoying the company of nubile virgins there."²⁰ These two quotations, taken from the *Washington Post* and *USA Today* op-eds, demonstrate that Celeb Jihad can so easily mock the fundamentalist because the figure—whether the depiction is satirical or serious—is always farcical.

Rejecting a Clear Distinction between Americanness and Islamic Fundamentalism

Through its satire, Celeb Jihad breaks down the possibility of Muslim inclusion into U.S. culture by asserting an Islamic occupation of U.S. popular culture. In August 2011, Celeb Jihad posted a topless photo of—allegedly—pop country singer Taylor Swift. Swift is well known for her young, innocent persona; popular among preteen and teen girls, she is often lauded for avoiding the lure of sex, drugs, and alcohol to which other young stars have been susceptible. Swift’s popularity rests instead, as *60 Minutes* reports, on songs “about love and heartbreak and being the ordinary girl next door. She’s been called ‘the poet laureate of puberty.’”²¹ In some senses, Swift represents an idealized American pop star. Not only does she maintain generally virtuous actions and appearance, but she also typifies the American Dream through her small-town beginnings and rise through the ranks of pop and country music thanks to her own songwriting. Fitting into the genre of country music also helps solidify Swift as representing cultural Americanness. Celeb Jihad’s posting a topless photo of Swift marks her as potentially deviant, thus breaking down the idealized Americana she represents.

The commentary on this photo is fairly typical of Celeb Jihad. It attacks her class level and innocent persona and, regarding the authenticity of the photo, urges readers to “examine the picture thoroughly for yourself and draw your own conclusions no matter how wrong they are.”²² However, rather than ignoring the website’s satirical absurdity, Swift and her attorneys chose to engage with the website’s tactics by sending “a letter to the site claiming Celeb Jihad had wrongly identified the 21-year-old crooner as the subject of a ‘leaked’ X-rated topless pic.”²³ E! News reports that in this letter, “Swift’s people are demanding the site’s owner remove the photo immediately because it contains ‘false pornographic images and false news’ about their client; if they don’t remove the pic, the missive says Swift will sue for trademark infringement.”²⁴ This is a standard response to slanderous images posted on the Internet, particularly for a celebrity generally “known for her squeaky-clean image.”²⁵

True to the satirizing of American pop culture accomplished by Celeb Jihad, in response to Swift’s request and threat, the authors issued a “compromise”:

Unlike the heathen savages in America, us Muslims are a loving and peaceful people. With that in mind we here at Celeb Jihad have decided to be the bigger man, and compromise with Taylor Swift in regards to our topless picture article that she is so upset about.

We will remove the article if Taylor Swift simply agrees to convert to Islam. To convert to Islam, Taylor Swift must publicly renounce her Jew God Jesus, and accept Allah as her

lord and master. She must then sacrifice a goat and devour its entrails. Pretty standard stuff really.

Taylor we eagerly await your response to our most generous offer. Allahu Akbar!²⁶

By choosing to respond to Swift's threat in this way, the authors of Celeb Jihad force the people they satirize to engage with their absurdity. Celeb Jihad presses the celebrities it depicts to interact with this parody/nonparody of Islam. Particularly for Muslims, racialized religion "defines, molds, predisposes what can occupy one and what can be occupied, where and over what being occupied can take place and under what conditions."²⁷ Celeb Jihad resists the standard notions of who can construct American culture by asserting the occupation of American popular culture by Islam. In this sense, then, Celeb Jihad's focus on American popular culture through the lens of Islamic fundamentalism deconstructs ideas of appropriate Islam versus U.S. boundaries. Including Islamic fundamentalism *as possible* within the realm of Americanness allows this satiric representation to reject a clear distinction between Americanness and Islamic fundamentalism.

Instead, Celeb Jihad shows that American popular culture can be shaped through an Islamic lens. While celebrities like Taylor Swift are generally thought of as far removed from the Islamic political and cultural sphere, here they are dealt with through an "Islamic" lens. While satirizing Islam through stereotype, Celeb Jihad also demonstrates the similarities between Islamic fundamentalism and mainstream American culture. By emphasizing their similarities, the website draws attention to the absurdity behind the supposedly concrete divide between Islam and the United States.

Thus, though its racist and/or antiracist sentiments are unclear, Celeb Jihad satirizes both Islamic fundamentalism and American popular culture. Through its articles and the subsequent reactions from the U.S. mainstream, Celeb Jihad blurs the line between parody and reality. Are these photos real or doctored? Are these authors Muslims or racists? Are the politics of celebrities really as described by Celeb Jihad? What are the politics the website espouses? Part of the success of this website's parody lies in its audience's inability to answer these questions. Because the website works to obfuscate these answers, the motives behind Celeb Jihad are unclear.

Importantly, too, the website's parody relies not only on the author's commentary but also on the material he uses. Celeb Jihad's racism and misogyny does not only stem from its commentary. It relies on the photos as well. As mentioned above, much of the material posted on Celeb Jihad comes from "legitimate" sources. The paparazzi photos the authors post are not very different from tabloids in grocery store checkout lanes that proclaim, "Kris Caught in Bed with Lamar!" or "The Best Bodies Issue: Starring J. Lo and 78 Sexy Stars." Additionally, the website's Islamic lens, constructed as misogynist and objectifying, is not so different from mainstream U.S. celebrity gossip sources. Taylor Swift's body is a constant source of celebrity gossip. *Hollywood Life, People,*

and *MTV*, among many other news outlets, demonstrate this with stories dedicated to her oft-concealed belly button. *TMZ* manages to both fixate on her belly button, showing pictures taken of the singer in a low-rise bikini, and insult Swift for her standard high-waisted bottoms, labeling them “granny panties.”²⁹ These mainstream celebrity news sources objectify female celebrities just as Celeb Jihad does, making explicitly sexual remarks about women’s bodies.

Celeb Jihad’s commentary thus works to close the gap between supposedly hypermisogynist Islamic viewpoints on women and woman-friendly America. Because there is little difference between “Islamic” and U.S. misogynistic viewpoints on female celebrities, Celeb Jihad points out the farcical nature of a concrete divide between the U.S. and Islam. The website satirizes not only Islam but also American popular culture as sexist and racist.

This is not a “celebrity gossip website.” It is a website that traffics in young, female celebrity bodies. However, this material is not only found on this website. Indeed, this website just one among many “pretending” to be in an uproar about Miley Cyrus’s latest sexual kerfuffle. Just as the website has some “truth” to its depiction of Islam, it also has some “truth” to its depiction of American popular culture. Mixed in with the doctored nude pictures are “real” pictures of these women, taken by “real” Americans that are also meant to sexualize celebrities. By taking the tried-and-true celebrity gossip format and writing it through an “Islamic” lens, the website repudiates the supposedly clear distinction between America as progressive and Islam as regressive. Leaning on the supposed patriarchal nature of Islam, the website both capitulates to and questions ideas about Islamic and American patriarchies, particularly concerning the sexualization of young women. By maintaining stereotypes of the Islamic fundamentalist man, the website also points out that selling young women’s bodies is a crucial aspect of American popular culture.

Taking Celeb Jihad Seriously

The blurring of bogus or real Islamist militants becomes palpable in reactions to Celeb Jihad’s articles. In one 2010 post that gained mainstream media attention, for example, Celeb Jihad claimed that singer Justin Bieber declared his support for Park51, also known as the Ground Zero mosque.³⁰ The article discusses an alleged

interview with *Tiger Beat*, [in which] the pop sensation stressed that freedom of religion is what makes America great, and went on to say that those who oppose the Mosque are motivated by bigotry.

“Muslims should be allowed to build a mosque anywhere they want,” the singer said. “Coming from Canada, I’m not used to this level of intolerance, eh.”

Bieber went on to say that Muslims are “super cool,” Christians are “lame-o-rama,” and that the mosque will help “start a dialogue” with all religions about which Justin Bieber song is the most awesome.

“I was like seven when September 11th went down, and frankly I’m surprised people are still going on about it. Move on, already!”

Added the singer, “Everyone needs to just chillax and dance!”³¹

As in the article on Megan Fox, this article blurs reality and satire. In this case, Celeb Jihad satirizes Islam, U.S. politics, and tween celebrity culture. The author takes a genuine political controversy and celebrity figure and intertwines the two to make a joke that also ends up being political commentary.

When this article was published, Bieber was a tween phenomenon, particularly among young girls. He was known for nonexplicit, sappy love lyrics and a boyish mop of hair. The thought of this benign pop star expressing volatile political viewpoints, particularly in *Tiger Beat* magazine, is what makes the story laughable. He is a sixteen-year-old boy talking politics in a magazine dedicated to tween star gossip and photo collages.

Nevertheless, some of the points Bieber supposedly makes are legitimate and similar to the points that political pundits were making at the time. Bieber points out that the United States is supposed to value freedom of religion. However, he negates this religious freedom by discussing the public uproar against the Ground Zero mosque. The idea that American freedom of religion can encompass Islam becomes akin to Bieber’s *Tiger Beat* politics: laughable. Reality (Islamophobic viewpoints on the Ground Zero mosque) is equated with satire (interfaith dialogues on Justin Bieber songs). Just as Celeb Jihad points out the always already farcical nature of the Islamist militant, here it demonstrates the sarcastic, disingenuous nature of freedom of religion for Muslims in the United States.

The impossibility of Islam in the United States becomes all the more palpable considering the public response to Celeb Jihad’s article on Justin Bieber. Despite its obviously satirical approach, some took the article seriously. For example, as *The Washington Post* reports, “Andy Sullivan, a construction worker, founder of the 9/11 Hard Hat Pledge, and staunch opponent of the plans for the Park51 mosque and community center, recently appeared on WNYC radio to announce his boycott of Justin Bieber, after Bieber allegedly made pro-Ground Zero mosque remarks in *Tiger Beat* magazine,” prompting coverage in news outlets such as *Salon* and *Rolling Stone*.³² While these news outlets describe Sullivan’s response as somewhat absurd, the larger public sphere’s engagement with the satire of Celeb Jihad as sincere points out how difficult it is to parse apart reality and satire on the website. The “real” threat of Muslims so close to Ground Zero and the satirical article by Celeb Jihad merge here, demonstrating

that in mainstream American discourse, all Muslims are the same. Sullivan's response reveals that the "real" fundamentalists, the satirical fundamentalists, and the "good" Muslim American community builders all pose the same foreign threat, a threat that must be excised from the free and tolerant United States. By intertwining genuine political events and their extremist satire, Celeb Jihad's article conveys that the United States is not as tolerant or postracial as it presents itself, particularly for Muslim Americans.

This same theme, identifying Islam as threat foreign to U.S. freedom, is also clear in the mainstream media's responses to Celeb Jihad's 2014 article on model and actress Kate Upton. Celeb Jihad posted nude photos of Upton, purportedly acquired from outtakes of her photo shoot for *Sports Illustrated* magazine's 2014 swimsuit issue. As with the photo of Megan Fox discussed above, Celeb Jihad quite obviously altered these photos so that Upton's head is pasted onto a different woman's body. According to E! News, in response to the article, *Sports Illustrated*

wrote a legal letter to a holy Islamic extremist celebrity gossip website asking them to take down a photoshopped³³ topless pic, which the site claims is from her 2014 *SI* shoot. Since the story broke, the website posted more obviously photoshopped raunchy pictures and showed their true feelings about women saying, "Kate Upton is a woman, and thus livestock." It's safe to say we won't be visiting that site any time soon.³⁴

In this television segment, E! does not report the satirical nature of the website, instead seeming to take the Islamist extremist angle seriously despite mentioning the obvious photo doctoring. Further, rather than noting the ridiculous satire of the website, E! uses the article on Upton as an opportunity to distance its own entertainment news from that of Celeb Jihad. Very much unlike Celeb Jihad, E! treats women well. By comparing their own reporting to the regressive Celeb Jihad, E! can come across as pseudofeminist. However, during this news story, video taken during Upton's *Sports Illustrated* shoot plays. In the clips, she floats around a zero-gravity chamber wearing a gold bikini. E!'s attempts to assert its own "progressive" views on women ring hollow as the story encourages viewers to objectify Upton. The divide between mainstream U.S. and "Islamic fundamentalist" viewpoints on celebrity women here is non-existent. Yet despite this, E! tries to claim a moral superiority solely based in a discursive rendering of Celeb Jihad as "Islamic." Underlying Islamophobic assumptions come to the forefront here, as objectifying women becomes "dirty" only when expressly Muslim.

Both Sullivan of the 9/11 Hard Hat Pledge and E! News attempt to convey clear divisions between U.S. and Islamic values by ignoring the satirical nature of Celeb Jihad. Instead, both use the website as an example of the problem-

atic nature of Islamic values, particularly regarding freedom and tolerance. In his explanation for boycotting Bieber, Sullivan says, ““He [Bieber] said something that clearly hurt my kids, and hurt me.””³⁵ Sullivan, however, does not explain why he is hurt by Bieber’s support of the Ground Zero mosque. As with E!’s pronouncement that they “won’t be visiting that site any time soon,” his response relies on audiences’ preexisting knowledge of a divide between the United States and Islam. Both responses also demonstrate the ease of producing “evidence” of Islamic backwardness. Ultimately, despite their many differences, both Sullivan and E! establish that in mainstream U.S. discourse, Islam is thought of as a monolith, even when satirical.

Conclusion: Can Islam Be Satirized?

American audiences are used to hearing about humor and Islam in an us/ them fashion: “we” develop jokes about “them,” and “they” respond with violence. This formula has been visible in the events and subsequent interpretations of the 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoon controversy and the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shooting. Both of these incidents started with Western satirizing of Islam and ended with violence committed by Muslims against the publications. In the wake of the *Hebdo* attack, “*Charlie Hebdo* became a global name . . . fuel[ed] by the viral Twitter solidarity hashtag *Je suis Charlie* [and] the free speech-affirming symbolism given to the pencil to commemorate the victims.”³⁶ Despite being located in France and French politics, in the United States *Charlie Hebdo* quickly became a stand-in for Western freedoms, particularly free speech. Tolerance of and solidarity with this satire allowed Americans to demonstrate “an *absolutist* position on free speech.”³⁷ Satire where Islam is the butt of the joke has in some ways become representative of American free speech.

Celeb Jihad’s satire is different, most obviously because it supplies “Muslim” cultural commentary on American popular culture. But beyond this clear change, Celeb Jihad’s satire is also ambiguous. The straightforward East/West binary makes no sense here: America’s misogyny and its culture is Muslim (and vice versa). Still, this binary is maintained through a depiction of Islam as monolithically extremist.

Ultimately, Celeb Jihad and reactions to the website show that Islam cannot be satirized. This does not mean, as many editorials argue, that “free speech . . . [and] the ability to vigorously criticize other religions only applies to the non-Islamic ones. Islamic criticism is off limits.”³⁸ Rather, Celeb Jihad’s satire simply cannot be read as such because the stereotype of the violent Muslim man is all-encompassing. Satirical representations of the Islamic fundamentalist—even when expressly written as satire—can easily be folded into U.S. stereotypes. And has been demonstrated through political events such as President Donald Trump’s “Muslim ban,” constructing all Muslims as inherently violent has material consequences.³⁹

As explained above, satire's ambiguity is central to questioning postracialism and more overtly discriminatory political messaging. As I have demonstrated throughout this article, however, even with satirical ambiguity, Muslims cannot so easily access these social goods. Celeb Jihad can humorously address U.S. tolerance and Islamic regressiveness, depicting these ideals simultaneously as both true and false, real and satirical. But the U.S. mainstream necessarily sees and ignores this ambiguity. If satire is a central avenue for breaking down stereotype in popular discourse, reactions to Celeb Jihad demonstrate that new avenues to satirically approaching Islam must be dreamt up.

Notes

1. Mohammed, "Selena Gomez Shows Her Nipples Again," *Celeb Jihad*, June 24, 2015b.
2. Sharene Razack, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 49.
3. Simon Weaver, "Liquid Racism and the Danish Prophet Muhammad Cartoons," *Current Sociology* 58, no. 5 (2010): 676.
4. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).
5. David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 21-22.
6. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22-23.
7. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 15.
8. Jonathan P. Rossing, "Deconstructing Postracialism: Humor as a Critical, Cultural Project," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (2012): 45.
9. Matthew W. Hughey and Sahara Muradi, "Laughing Matters: Economies of Hyper-Irony and Manic-Satire in South Park and Family Guy" *Humanity & Society* 33, no. 3 (2009): 210.
10. Cynthia Willett and Julie A. Willett, "Going to Bed White and Waking Up Arab: On Xenophobia, Affect Theories of Laughter, and the Social Contagion of the Comic Stage," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 2, no. 1 (2014): 87.
11. "Disclaimer," *Celeb Jihad*, September 8, 2015.
12. Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 206.
13. For examples, see Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), and Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).
14. Some examples of articles depicting these photos are in Mohammed Mohammed, "Ariana Grande Upskirt Shot of Her Butt Cheeks," *Celeb Jihad*, December 29, 2014b; Mohammed, "Ariel Winter Shows Off Her Teenage Tig Ol' Bitties," *Celeb Jihad*, December 23, 2014c; Mohammed, "Jessica Alba Candid Bikini Pics from Cabo San Lucas," *Celeb Jihad*, January 6, 2015a.
15. Examples include Mohammed, "Kendall Jenner Shows Promise with Bikini Selfie," *Celeb Jihad*, December 31, 2014d; Mohammed, "McKayla Maroney Straddling Her Bike on Instagram," *Celeb Jihad*, May 5, 2014e.
16. Examples include Mohammed, "Alicia Silverstone Sex Tape Video Leaked by Sony Hackers," *Celeb Jihad*, December 19, 2014a; Mohammed, "New Scarlett Johansson Nude Cell Phone Pics Leaked," *Celeb Jihad*, September 21, 2014g.
17. Durka Durka Mohammed, "Megan Fox Nude in a White Corset for the New Year," *Celeb Jihad*, December 31, 2014f.
18. Shaheen, 25.
19. Razack, 47.
20. Dinesh D'Souza, "Don't Blame God for Terrorism" *USA Today*, November 16, 2009; Robert S. McElvaine, "The Birth of the Myth that Men Are Closer to God," *Washington Post*, November 11, 2001.
21. "Taylor Swift: A Young Singer's Meteoric Rise," *60 Minutes*, May 19, 2013.
22. Mohammed, "Taylor Swift Topless Private Pic Leaked?" *Celeb Jihad*, August 17, 2011b.
23. Josh Grossberg, "So True? So False? Is Taylor Swift Suing Mad over an Alleged Topless Photo?" *E! Online*, October 31, 2011.
24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.
26. Mohammed, "Taylor Swift Offered Compromise in Topless Pic Scandal," *Celeb Jihad*, October 31, 2011a.
27. Goldberg, 358.
28. Star, Cover, May, 18, 2015; *Us Weekly*, Cover, June 1, 2015.
29. "Taylor Swift Finally Shows Her Belly Button!" *TMZ*, n.d.
30. Park51 was proposed in 2010 by Soho Properties. Located at 41–51 Park Place in New York City, two blocks away from the World Trade Center site, the building was initially proposed as a thirteen-story Islamic community center, including areas for recreation, education, performing arts, and a mosque. Soho Properties later scaled back plans to a three-story museum and prayer space (Patrick McGeehan, "Con Ed Sells Building near Ground Zero Where Plans for Mosque Caused Uproar," *New York Times*, August 20, 2014; Basharat Peer, "Zero Tolerance and Cordoba House," *FT Magazine*, August 13, 2010).
31. Jimmy Jihad, "Justin Bieber Supports Construction of Ground Zero Mosque," *Celeb Jihad*, August 17, 2010.
32. Alexandra Petri, "Reports of Justin Bieber Support for 'Ground Zero Mosque' Greatly Exaggerated," *Washington Post*, December 30, 2010; see also Justin Elliot, "Mosque Foes Launch Bieber Boycott," *Salon*, December 30, 2010; Matthew Perpetua, "Ground Zero Mosque Protestor Bans Justin Bieber," *Rolling Stone*, December 30, 2010.
33. Digitally altered using the computer software Adobe PhotoShop.
34. "Kate Upton's Naked Photo Battle," *E! News*, *Celeb Jihad*, March 17, 2014.
35. Arun Venugopal, "Park51 Proponents, Opponents Plot Their Next Moves," *WNYC News*, December 14, 2010.
36. Jane Weston Vauclair, "Local Laughter, Global Polemics: Understanding Charlie Hebdo," *European Comic Art* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 6. doi:10.3167/eca.2015.080102.
37. Saadia Toor, "Art as/and Politics: Why the Attack on Charlie Hebdo Was Not about a 'Fear of Art,'" *Social Research* 83, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 26 (emphasis in the original). <http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=61368a11-993c-4e54-8441-7b74e199d385%40sessionmgr120&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPWNvb2tpZSxpcCxcjG1kMmN1c3RpZD1zNzMyNDk2NCZzaXRlPWVob3N0LWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=116749287&db=f5h>.
38. Mike West, "Can Islam Ever Be the Subject of Criticism?" *Herald-Sun*, February 26, 2006, A13; see also Amanda Foreman, "Charlie Hebdo and a Rubicon Moment for Free Speech," *Wall Street Journal*, May 6, 2015; Pamela Geller, "Pamela Geller: A Response to My Critics—This Is a War," *Time*, May 6, 2015; Siddique Malik, "Free Speech Makes America Exceptional," *Courier Journal*, May 20, 2015. <https://courier-journal.com>.
39. The initial reasoning behind the "Muslim ban," or Executive Order No. 13769, 3 C.F.R. 8977 (2017), was to "protect the American people from terrorist attacks by foreign nationals admitted to the United States." In the aftermath, those challenging the order noted the lack of evidence of supposed ties to terror in the countries implicated in the ban (see Eugene Kiely, "Terrorism and Trump's Travel Ban," *FactCheck.org*, February 24, 2017. <http://www.factcheck.org/2017/02/terrorism-and-trumps-travel-ban>). The ban and those individuals prevented from entrance into the United States thus exemplify the material implications of Islamophobic sentiments.