

Article

The Registration of Religious Identity: Parallels between the United States' (Proposed) Muslim Registry and Apartheid South Africa's Population Registration Act

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ABSTRACT

This article explores aspects of the disciplinary documentation of religious, and by extension, racial identity within the context of post-9/11 United States. Using Donald Trump's proposal for a Muslim registry as both a framing device and a point of departure, this article provides a comparative documentary analysis illuminating the chilling parallels between the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) program in the United States and the Population Registration Act (PRA) of Apartheid South Africa. In both cases, documentation was used to control and discipline individuals according to particular aspects or features of their identity. In post-9/11 United States, the particular aspects or features of an individual's identity of concern are their Islamic religious identity; meanwhile, in Apartheid South Africa, the aspects or features of identity that were of paramount significance were one's race and ethnicity.

This article helps provide some conceptual tools for scholars interested in the classification, registration, and documentation of diverse kinds of identities. It presents a documentary analysis of the racial registration strategies of Apartheid South Africa to help historicize and problematize the United States' previous and proposed religious registry programs. Its aim is to draw lessons from South Africa's painful past to provide an urgent warning of the oppressive implications of identity registrations like the NSEERS program and the worrying possibility of another misguided and counterproductive Muslim registry.

Kosciejew, Marc. "The Registration of Religious Identity: Parallels between the United States' (Proposed) Muslim Registry and Apartheid South Africa's Population Registration Act," in "Information/Control: Control in the Age of Post-Truth," eds. James Lowry, Stacy Wood, and Andrew J Lau. Special issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 2, no.2 (2019).

INTRODUCTION: DISCIPLINARY DOCUMENTATION

The information contained within identity registration documents and systems can be, and are often meant to be, used to control and discipline society. Marc Kosciejew refers to these kinds of documents and systems as disciplinary documentation, explaining how it “has real effects on individuals because they help shape individuals’ identities through the meticulous recording of personal information.”¹ Indeed, identity registration documents and systems have been used throughout history to control and discipline individuals for different purposes, from identifying and quarantining diseased individuals during plagues to separating and hierarchizing people according to their skin color. During the controversial and contested 2016 American presidential campaign there was an ominous call for the introduction of a Muslim registry to identify, monitor, and track individuals of Muslim identity, origin, or affiliation in the United States. As a candidate, and now as President, Donald Trump promised to pursue aggressive policies targeting various groups, especially Muslim immigrants, migrants, and refugees, and indicated his intention to establish a Muslim registry.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, Muslim individuals have been singled out for discriminatory and unjust treatment by many governments in the names of national security and counterterrorism. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, many governments around the world, notably led by Washington, began conducting a relatively vague and open-ended so-called “War on Terror”, in which Muslim individuals have been framed as the primary enemies of national security and hence the main targets for domestic and/or foreign attack, rendition, incarceration, torture, subjugation, and surveillance. Indeed, throughout this post-9/11 era, many governments, militaries, security and intelligence establishments, and certain cultural elites, have broadly construed Muslim people as security threats to the state, terrorist threats to public safety, and cultural threats to the liberal order and Western values.² Many of the policies and practices emanating from this “War on Terror,” however, have helped to racialize Muslim individuals by legitimizing Islamophobia and institutionalizing discrimination against

¹ Marc Kosciejew, “Disciplinary Documentation in Apartheid South Africa: A Conceptual Framework of Documents, Associated Practices, and their Effects,” *Journal of Documentation* 71, no. 1 (2015): 106.

² See for example: Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does It Feel to be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (New York City: Penguin Books, 2009); Moustafa Bayoumi, *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror* (New York City: NYU Press, 2015); Todd Green, *Presumed Guilty: Why We Shouldn’t Ask Muslims to Condemn Terrorism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018); Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012); and Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (New York: Verso, 2014).

them.³ As Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills and David Miller, there is presently a very serious onslaught on the status of Muslims in public life in the United States and many other countries and contexts.⁴

Trump's proposal for a religious identity register is therefore neither new nor unique in the contemporary political and legal context of the United States. Washington has been pursuing the "War on Terror" abroad through military adventures and at home through anti-Muslim rhetoric and practices. In 2002, the government established the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) to monitor the movement of Muslim individuals within the country. This identity register "served as a tool that allowed the government to systematically target Arabs, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and South

³ See, for example: Hilary Aked, "Islamophobia, Counter-extremism and the Counterjihad Movement," in *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, ed. by Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 163-185; Moustafa Bayoumi, "Racing Religion," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 6, no. 2 (2006): 267-293; Shenaz Bunglawala, "The 'War on Terror' and the Attack on Muslim Civil Society," in *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, ed. by Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 97-120; Margaret Chon and Donna E. Arzt, "Walking While Muslim," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 68 no. 2 (2005): 215-254; Craig Considine, "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and 'Flying while Brown,'" *Religions* 8, no. 165 (2017): 1-19; Deepa Kumar, "Islamophobia and Empire: An Intermestic Approach to the Study of Anti-Muslim Racism," in *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, ed. by Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 49-73; Arun Kundnani, "Islamophobia as Ideology of US Empire," in *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, ed. by Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 35-48; Narzanin Massoumi, *Muslim Women, Social Movements and the 'War on Terror'* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Saner Selod, "Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim American Men and Women post-9/11," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 77-95; Falguni Sheth, "The Racialization of Muslims in the Post-9/11 United States," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*, ed. by Naomi Zack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Raymond, Taras, "Islamophobia Never Stands Still': Race, Religion, and Culture," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013): 417-433.

⁴ Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller, "Fighting Back: Challenging the State and Social Movements from Above," in *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, ed. by Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 271-274.

Asians from designated [mainly Muslim-majority] countries for enhanced scrutiny.”⁵ Although NSEERS was formally dismantled in 2016, Trump’s proposal for yet another religious identity registry was a strong signal that there remains momentum for continued disciplinary documentation of Muslims within the political and security discourses of the United States.

This article explores aspects of the disciplinary documentation of religious, and by extension racial, identity within the context of the post-9/11 era United States. Using Trump’s proposal for a Muslim registry as both a framing device and a point of departure, this article provides a comparative documentary analysis illuminating the chilling parallels between the NSEERS program in the United States and the Population Registration Act (PRA) of Apartheid South Africa. In both cases, documentation was used to control and discipline individuals according to particular aspects or features of their identity. In post-9/11 United States, the particular aspects or features of an individual’s identity of concern are their Islamic religious identity; meanwhile, in Apartheid South Africa, the aspects or features of identity that were of paramount significance were one’s race and ethnicity. This article therefore contributes to the Library and Information Science (LIS) field by introducing this comparative documentary analysis of the racial registration strategies of Apartheid South Africa to help historicize and problematize the United States’ previous and proposed religious registry programs targeting Muslim individuals in the post-9/11 era.

The following discussion is arranged into six main sections. The first section discusses the post-9/11 United States’ national security obsessions and the ways in which Muslim individuals are framed and targeted as enemies of the state. It examines aspects of Islamophobia, which is arguably at the center of these registration systems, and how it operates as a mode of racialization and, consequently, racialized control of Muslim individuals. This section, however, does not intend to fully examine the complex meanings, interpretations, and effects of Islamophobia, but instead to provide an overview of this racist phenomenon in order to help contextualize the subsequent sections. The second section presents Trump’s proposal for a Muslim identity registry, purportedly to help conduct counterterrorism efforts in the interests of national security. The third section examines the United States’ recent registration of Muslim individuals’ religious identity through the NSEERS program, created by the George W. Bush administration and continued by the Barack Obama administration. Indeed, Trump’s proposal shows that the desire for continued disciplinary documentation of Muslims,

⁵ Penn State Law Immigrants’ Rights Clinic and Rights Working Group, “The NSEERS Effect: A Decade of Racial Profiling, Fear, and Secrecy,” Center for Immigrants’ Rights Clinic Publications, Book 11 (2012), https://elibrary.law.psu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=irc_pubs (accessed on November 1, 2018).

exemplified by NSEERS, is presently still thriving. The fourth section explores Apartheid South Africa's racist documentary system in order to contextualize the fifth section's analysis of the PRA and its effects on the lives of South Africans. The sixth section demonstrates the parallels between the United States' NSEERS program, accompanied by Trump's proposal for yet another Muslim registry, and the Apartheid-era PRA and its system of racialized documentation. The article concludes with a call to reconsider totalizing policies and practices regarding sweeping registrations of identity.

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND THE RACIALIZATION OF MUSLIMS IN POST-9/11 UNITED STATES

Since 9/11, the United States' political, legal, and security approaches to national security and the "War on Terror" have profiled Muslim people as security problems and threats. Washington's "security concerns have become a pretext for articulating deep-seated religious, cultural and ideological fears."⁶ Muslim people have been framed and targeted as enemies of the state in order to garner public support for domestic policies, such as the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and foreign policies, such as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, ostensibly to keep the United States safe from another terrorist attack. They have been excluded as "others" from the broader American national identity because of "the application of terrorism to [their] bodies"⁷ and hence "the racialization of [their] bodies and cultural values as anti-American, perpetually foreign, misogynistic and violent."⁸ The Islamic religion, in other words, has been conflated with race and racism.

As Chon and Arzt argue, "religious difference is a critical component of the racial formation of the other in the context of terrorism."⁹ This racial formation, or racialization, is "a process where new racial meanings are ascribed to bodies, actions and interactions. These meanings are not only applied to skin tone, but other cultural factors such as language, clothing, and beliefs."¹⁰ These laws and policies, purportedly designed to protect the American public, have racialized all Muslims by homogenizing them as a threatening monolithic bloc, vilifying them as potential Islamic militants and terrorists, and degrading them as having backward perspectives incompatible with American society and values. This homogenizing, vilifying, and degrading construction is a kind of Islamophobia that "bundles religious, ethnic and cultural prejudices together even though

⁶ Taras, "Islamophobia Never Stands Still," 422.

⁷ Selod, "Citizenship Denied," 81.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Chon and Arzt, "Walking While Muslim," 240.

¹⁰ Selod, "Citizenship Denied," 79.

a narrow definition of the term flags religion as playing the central part.”¹¹ In this context, “Islam is acquiring characteristics of immutability, innateness, inevitable inheritability and, importantly, inferiority. In other words, religious difference is being ‘racialized.’”¹² Muslim individuals, regardless of their physical appearance, country of origin, social status, economic situation, let alone their degree of religious belief or devotion, have been narrowly defined and arbitrarily grouped together based upon a totalizing approach to their religious identity.

TRUMP’S PROPOSED MUSLIM REGISTRY

The racialization of Muslim identity has been accompanied by rising anti-Muslim rhetoric. In most post-9/11 electoral cycles in the United States, anti-Muslim rhetoric tends to spike as some politicians and candidates call or campaign for discriminatory measures to be taken against Muslims in order to protect the American public. These calls help awaken concerns and stoke fears about the alleged threat posed by the religion of Islam and its followers, and in turn helps normalize proposals and legitimize policies to restrict various rights of Muslim individuals.¹³ As Nihad Awad, the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) argues, fear and hatred of Muslims have “moved from the fringes of American society to the mainstream.”¹⁴

While spiking during most of these recent campaigns, the 2015-2016 election cycle particularly stands out for its frenzied peak of “some of the worst anti-Muslim rhetoric and proposals to date from presidential candidates.”¹⁵ Many politicians and candidates, particularly within the Republican Party, made various “controversial comments including, ‘Islam hates us,’ ‘[Muslims are] uncorked animals,’ and ‘I would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation’ ...Another Islamophobic buzzword, the fear of ‘creeping sharia,’ or Islamic law, has led to [proposed] legislation designed to vilify or otherwise target Muslims at an institutional level.”¹⁶ One of the most strident

¹¹ Taras, “‘Islamophobia Never Stands Still,’” 417.

¹² Chon and Arzt, “Walking While Muslim,” 228.

¹³ Nathan C. Lean, “Mainstreaming Anti-Muslim Prejudice: The Rise of the Islamophobia Industry in American Electoral Politics,” in *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, ed. by Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 123-136.

¹⁴ Nihad Awad, “Introduction,” in *Confronting Fear: Islamophobia and its Impact in the United States 2013-2015* (Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Center for Race and Gender at UC Berkeley, 2016), v.

¹⁵ Green, *Presumed Guilty*, 38.

¹⁶ Considine, “The Racialization of Islam in the United States,” 1.

anti-Muslim candidates during this election cycle was Donald Trump, the Republican Party presidential nominee and ultimate victor of the campaign.

During his incendiary presidential campaign, Donald Trump publicly expressed anti-Muslim sentiments in the name of national security by supporting the suspension of immigration by Muslims and other people from some Muslim-majority countries, and endorsing a proposed government registry of Muslims.¹⁷ This proposed Muslim registry would help monitor individuals of Muslim origin, identity, or faith within American borders by requiring their personal information to be recorded in a special database. It must be noted that this proposed Muslim registry was, and presently remains, a proposal; in other words, it does not yet exist as a fully designed and implemented program. Thus, when asked how a possible Muslim registry would be implemented and operated, Trump claimed that it would be an issue of management. He speculated that people would sign up and register in the database at various locations, stating that they would visit “different places. [They] sign up at different places. But it’s all about management. Our country has no management.”¹⁸ When further pressed if Muslims would be under legal obligation to sign in to and register with such a database, Trump responded that “they have to be...There should be a lot of systems, beyond databases, we should have a lot of systems.”¹⁹ In other words, a robust information management system with enforced practices would help ensure the identification, monitoring, policing, and controlling of Muslims in the United States.

Some Muslim Americans expressed escalating worries and heightened fears of discrimination, violence, deportation, and detention and specifically “voiced worries about a Muslim registry, and the prospect of being tracked and investigated by the government.”²⁰ Alarms were further raised when one of Trump’s prominent supporters, Carl Higbie, referenced Second World War-era Japanese-American internment camps as a precedent for a Muslim registry, arguing that “there is historical, factual precedent to do things that are not politically popular and sometimes not right, in the interest of national security.”²¹ There are indeed similarities between this proposal – and its

¹⁷ Richard Pérez-Peña and Laurie Goodstein, “Muslim Americans Speak of Escalating Worries,” *The New York Times*, November 18, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/19/us/muslim-americans-speak-of-escalating-worries.html> (accessed October 1, 2017).

¹⁸ Gabriel, “Donald Trump Says He’d ‘Absolutely’ Require Muslims to Register.”

¹⁹ Nicky Woolf, “Spokesman Claims Donald Trump Never Called for Muslim Registry Despite Video Evidence,” *The Guardian*, November 18, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/17/trump-camp-denies-muslim-ban-registry> (accessed on October 1, 2017).

²⁰ Pérez-Peña and Goodstein, “Muslim Americans Speak of Escalating Worries.”

²¹ Johan Engel Bromwich, “Trump Camp’s Talk of Registry and Japanese Internment Raises Muslims’ Fears,” *The New York Times*, November 17, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/18/us/politics/japanese-internment-muslim-registry.html?_r=0 (accessed on October 1, 2017).

predecessor, discussed below – and Japanese internment during World War II. Islamic religious difference, for instance, has been upheld as grounds for suspicion and scrutiny “just as religious differences contributed to the consolidation of Japanese American racial difference during World War II.”²² The connection of a Muslim registry with Japanese internment camps compounded the already growing and spreading worry over the registry. According to Robert McCaw, a spokesperson for CAIR, the two possibilities “might seem to be different in degree, but that the two ideas – a database of names and internment camps based on religious or ethnic heritage – were inexorably linked.”²³ McCaw worried that “I really do feel as though the prospect of internment is always tied to registries of people.”²⁴

Although Trump made favorable indications and statements about a possible Muslim registry, he equivocated on its implementation, tweeting that “I didn’t suggest a database – a reporter did. We must defeat Islamic terrorism & have surveillance, including a watch list, to protect America.”²⁵ Moreover, according to a formal statement issued by the Trump presidential transition team directly responding to the possibility of a Muslim registry, “Trump ‘never advocated’ for a registry tracking individuals based on their religion, despite video evidence showing Trump doing exactly that.”²⁶ The statement further claimed that “President-elect Trump has never advocated for any registry or system that tracks individuals based on their religion, and to imply otherwise is completely false. The national registry of foreign visitors from countries with high terrorism activity that was in place during the Bush and Obama administrations gave intelligence and law enforcement communities additional tools to keep our country safe, but the President-elect plans on releasing his own vetting policies after he is sworn in”.²⁷ Although Trump admittedly did not specifically campaign on the need for a Muslim registry, he has not unambiguously rejected the idea of some kind of special database or identification system that identifies, monitors, and tracks Muslim individuals within the United States. Trump, in other words, has neither clearly objected to such a registry nor has he issued a full retraction regarding any of his indications or statements in favour of it. His mention of a “watch list” to purportedly help keep America safe, in fact, indicates that he still favours a registry, even if it is not called or referred to by such a name or title.

²² Chon and Arzt, “Walking While Muslim,” 215.

²³ Bromwich, “Trump Camp’s Talk.”

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Alan Rappoport, “Donald Trump Steps Back from Calling for Muslim Registry,” *The New York Times*, November 20, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/11/20/donald-trump-steps-back-from-calling-for-muslim-registry/?ref=first-draft> (accessed on October 1, 2017).

²⁶ Woolf, “Spokesman Claims Donald Trump.”

²⁷ Ibid.

Trump's proposal for a Muslim registry, however, is not unprecedented in the United States. The previous NSEERS program allowed the government to systematically target Muslim individuals, as well as other people from predominantly Muslim countries, for advanced scrutiny. The NSEERS program was established and implemented by the Bush administration early in its mandate and maintained by the Obama administration until its final weeks. As the Trump presidential transition team's formal statement noted there indeed was a "national registry of foreign visitors from countries with high terrorism activity that was in place during the Bush and Obama administrations." The difference, however, between Trump's proposal and the previous Bush and Obama registration program was basically in nomenclature only; in fact, "the difference between a 'Muslim database' and [the previously referred to] 'database of particular people in the US from particular countries, which happen to be majority Muslim' might seem like a meaningless distinction, something to give a gloss of neutrality to something clearly discriminatory. But that gloss of neutrality matters a lot. It's the reason the federal government was able to keep a database for a decade."²⁸ Trump's proposal, admittedly, does not mask its purpose with any gloss: a new kind or version of this program would specifically and unambiguously be for the surveillance and scrutiny of Muslims.

THE PREVIOUS MUSLIM REGISTRATION PROGRAM: NSEERS

The previous registration program – NSEERS, or as it was commonly known as “special registration” – was implemented by the Bush administration to ostensibly serve as a counterterrorism tool. It was formally implemented to coincide with the first anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2002. NSEERS initially fell within the remit of the Department of Justice but was eventually transferred to the then new Department of Homeland Security. It consisted of two registration programs aimed at foreigners from an official list of twenty-five countries considered by the Bush administration as possible national security threats or terrorist havens. Of the listed countries, twenty-four were Muslim-majority societies, including Iran, Iraq, Sudan, and Syria. The twenty-fifth was North Korea.

The government argued that “NSEERS did not constitute racial profiling because every eligible male from the listed countries was required to register regardless of religious affiliation.”²⁹ Presumably the inclusion of North Korea also “showed” that this program was not racially profiling followers of the Islamic faith. Nevertheless, NSEERS disproportionately targeted Muslim individuals. It collapsed citizenship, ethnicity, and

²⁸ Dara Lind, “Donald Trump's Proposed 'Muslim Registry,' Explained,” *Vox*, November 16, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/16/13649764/trump-muslim-register-database> (accessed on October 1, 2017).

²⁹ Penn State Law Immigrants' Rights Clinic and Rights Working Group, “The NSEERS Effect,” 21.

religion into race and authorized immigration officers to register whomever they had reason to believe should be specially registered.³⁰ The program was “particularly reviled in the American Muslim community, where the brunt of its enforcement [was and] is felt.”³¹

The first registration program required all foreign nationals from the listed countries to register with the government when entering and exiting the United States. The process of registration “required certain individuals to be fingerprinted, photographed, and interrogated about their background and biographical information (including details about their families, birthdays and birth places, financial information, etc.) at a port of entry/exit or at local immigration office.”³² Individuals failing to comply with NSEERS faced significant penalties including fines, criminal proceedings, and imprisonment. Yet it was exceedingly difficult to comply with the program’s regulations and guidelines due to their ineffective distribution and communication; for instance, “the federal government relied principally on notices in the Federal Register to inform the public of registration requirements and, like the majority of the American population, most individuals subject to NSEERS were not familiar with the Federal Register or the requirements contained therein.”³³ This version of the program was suspended in 2011 when the Department of Homeland Security delisted the twenty-five countries, apparently as a result of improved intelligence programs and tracking of immigrant visa overstays.

The second registration program required male foreigners over the age of sixteen from the listed countries residing in the United States to register with immigration offices – involving documentary processes such as fingerprints, photographs, and interviews – and to report regularly at designated intervals to these offices. These individuals were further required to re-register every year and obliged to inform immigration officials within ten days when they moved addresses, assumed a new job, or started studies at a new educational institution. Individuals who did not register for whatever reason were either deported, barred from applying for American residency or citizenship, or both. This personally-identifiable information was ultimately used to monitor and track these individuals’ and their movements across the country.

The second registration program of NSEERS operated for over a year until its apparent information transfer to other newer Department of Homeland Security surveillance programs in December 2003. It remains unclear how this information has

³⁰ Bayoumi, “Racing Religion,” 277.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 271.

³² Penn State Law Immigrants’ Rights Clinic and Rights Working Group, “The NSEERS Effect,” 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

been used since this part of the program ended.³⁴ Nevertheless, by this point in 2003, “nearly 13,800 people had been placed in deportation proceedings because of the program – but, according to the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the program did not help the government open a single terrorist-related criminal case.”³⁵ Although it only lasted a little over one year, this second registration program’s effects drastically impacted many people’s lives by breaking apart families, disrupting employment, interrupting or preventing studies, and deportations. According to the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee’s legal director Abed Ayoub, “we have individuals still to this day who are unable to adjust their status. And once [the government] delisted the countries, nothing was done to address the residual effects.”³⁶ NSEERS overall was an arbitrary, discriminatory program featuring many troubling policy concerns including the racial profiling of individuals based on their religious affiliation in addition to a “lack of transparency, misuse of data collected through [its registration processes], the negative impact of preserving the underlying regulatory structure, and the program’s ineffectiveness as a counterterrorism tool.”³⁷

The NSEERS program, however, was neither formally closed nor dismantled. It was only suspended. Its suspension was not a result of concerns about discrimination, but because of technological redundancy. Since its inception, newer and more sophisticated “programs that collected information about people entering and leaving the US [became available, so the government] could stop using NSEERS without losing any data.”³⁸ NSEERS consequently became “outdated compared to newer [surveillance] systems like US-VISIT, a comprehensive program for tracking visitors to the U.S. from nearly every country, which is still in use today...[It was] retired in favor of newer border-security surveillance programs.”³⁹ The Department of Homeland Security argued that the program’s structure must remain in place to restart it when and if needed. The department stated that it chose “to retain this regulatory framework to enable prompt action to require registration of a category or categories of aliens, if necessary, through rapid publication of a Federal Register Notice.”⁴⁰ Its structure therefore still exists; consequently, it could simply be restarted. Thus, Trump’s calls for vetting programs for and databases of Muslims could realistically be put into practice because of both the precedent set during the Bush and Obama eras, and specifically since the structure for a registration program remains intact.

³⁴ Kaveh Waddell, “America Already Had a Muslim Registry,” *The Atlantic*, December 20, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/12/america-already-had-a-muslim-registry/511214/> (accessed on October 1, 2017).

³⁵ Waddell, “America Already Had a Muslim Registry.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Penn State Law Immigrants’ Rights Clinic and Rights Working Group, “The NSEERS Effect,” 19.

³⁸ Lind, “Donald Trump’s Proposed ‘Muslim Registry’, Explained”.

³⁹ Waddell, “America Already Had a Muslim Registry.”

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The possibility of reinstating NSEERS, or reimagining it in another form, is alarming, especially for those individuals who would be caught in its snares. Indeed, the very program of NSEERS itself, in addition to the spectre of Trump's proposed Muslim registry, have historical parallels with a similar kind of discriminatory identity registration program in Apartheid South Africa: The Population Registration Act (PRA). Both registration programs ultimately concentrated on some aspect or feature of racial identity. While the NSEERS program "was a political and bureaucratic policy that created a race out of a religion,"⁴¹ the PRA was a legal cornerstone of a race-obsessed state, mandating the official registration of all South Africans' racial and ethnic identities based on their skin pigmentations. Let us now turn to a brief overview of the documentary system that helped racially and ethnically separate South Africans, followed by a specific exploration of the PRA's foundational role in this system.

THE APARTHEID STATE'S RACIALIZED DOCUMENTARY SYSTEM

The Apartheid state's ideological objectives and practices of racial and ethnic separation largely rested upon and were facilitated by its racialized documentary system; indeed, racialized documentation was a common feature of everyday life within South Africa. Certain kinds of disciplinary documentation, embedded within state, public, and private institutions, were required to help ensure, maintain, and protect continued racial and ethnic separation and, ultimately, white rule. Hermann Giliomee argues that white South Africans, particularly the politically dominant Afrikaners, were an insecure people in need of legislation (documentation) to ensure its survival.⁴² Legal lines – in other words, legal documentation – had to be designed and instituted "in order to establish white as well as black in their 'proper' place in society."⁴³ The Apartheid state mandated that all South Africans be classified, registered, and documented by race and ethnicity, which in turn determined how their lives would be regulated.

As Nigel Worden states, "the cornerstone of Apartheid was the division of all South Africans by race."⁴⁴ He further explains that the entire population was racially, and then ethnically, compartmentalized legally, politically, economically, socially, religiously, and culturally.⁴⁵ Skin pigmentation and ethnic background helped determine an

⁴¹ Bayoumi, "Racing Religion," 275.

⁴²Hermann Giliomee, "The Growth of Afrikaner Identity," in *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, ed. by William Beinart and Saul Dubow (New York: Routledge, 1995), 200.

⁴³ Giliomee, "The Growth of Afrikaner Identity," 201.

⁴⁴ Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 95.

⁴⁵ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 95.

individual's life trajectory from cradle to grave. Apartheid's documentation materialized these racial and ethnic identities, controlling and disciplining every individual – white, black, colored, and Indian – regardless of whether or not they personally accepted or believed in their officially constituted color classification, registration, and documentation.

Aletta Norval shows how the Apartheid state was not just obsessed with racial differences, but also with ethnicity, or the concept of the *volk*. The word “volk” was used “to distinguish between different ‘peoples’, such as the Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans.”⁴⁶ William Beinart and Saul Dubow also show how Apartheid “involved creating clear legal distinctions not just between black, coloured, Asian and white, but also within African society,”⁴⁷ and within each racial group. They also note that “the rhetoric of Apartheid bore considerable similarities to white supremacist statements of the segregation era, but the central appeal to Afrikaner ethnic exclusivity was a distinctive aspect of Apartheid.”⁴⁸ Many white Afrikaners wanted to ensure their own unique ethnic characteristics, because for them, ethnic differences were just as significant as racial differences. Races are not homogenous, or so the Apartheid state claimed, but instead are heterogeneous groups comprised of different peoples with different cultures and, in some cases, different biological characteristics. It was therefore not enough to separate the races; the different ethnic groups also had to be partitioned and ranked as much as possible.

Partitioning and ranking the population along racial lines and then along ethnic lines created a series of new subject positions which did not previously exist. Norval explains that “the once ‘homogenous’ African population was argued to consist of separate Bantu ‘national units’, or different ‘ethnic’ groups.”⁴⁹ She continues that “not only the Afrikaans- and English-speaking communities could now exercise their right to difference [under Apartheid]; also, the Zulu, Sotho, Venda and Xhosa ‘national units’ could partake in that freedom.”⁵⁰ This ethnicization of difference helped maintain the illusion that Apartheid was natural, just, and moral because it provided a framework in which each race, and then each different *volk* could exercise and realize its own separate development, to make its own decisions, nurture its own unique and distinct cultures, and exercise self-determination.

The Apartheid state's racialized documentary system, in turn, played vital roles in helping materialize these official racial and ethnic identities and, in so doing, helped keep

⁴⁶ Aletta Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (New York: Verso, 1996), 172.

⁴⁷ William Beinart and Saul Dubow, “The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid,” in *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, ed. by William Beinart and Saul Dubow (New York: Routledge, 1995), 17.

⁴⁸ Beinart and Dubow, “The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid,” 14.

⁴⁹ Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse*, 170.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

the Apartheid state functioning; consequently, the documentation became rigid, defining and delineating strict and uncompromising racial and ethnic categories in which South Africans were obliged to fit. These documents and their associated practices helped enable and ensure surveillance of the South African racial and ethnic landscape, providing a continuous, omnipresent, panoptic gaze over South Africans' lives. The documentary practices further served as routinized and institutionalized surveillance tools that had the power to control and discipline individuals according to their racial and ethnic identities. The PRA was the foundation of this racialized documentary system.

THE POPULATION REGISTRATION ACT

The PRA was the documentary backbone of the Apartheid state, requiring that South Africans be racially and ethnically classified, registered, and documented "into four categories: white, coloured, 'Asiatic' (Indian) and 'Native' (later 'Bantu' or African)."⁵¹ Each classification and registration contained multiple ethnic subgroups within it. Every South African resident was classified "administratively into one of these four categories and as a result [had] different political and social rights."⁵² This foundational classification and registration document helped transform these racial and ethnic identities into tangible phenomena by which individuals were obliged to live their lives; indeed, this document had very specific consequences for individuals. Every individual was entered into official population registers to keep statistics on the racial and ethnic composition of the country, to distribute individuals across the Apartheid state's racialized and ethnicized hierarchy, and to exercise control over each racial and ethnic group.

The PRA helped transform South Africans into racialized and ethnicized cases to be placed within a strict hierarchy and then analyzed, controlled, disciplined, and managed. It circulated within a complex documentary system involving institutions involving a multitude of actors, including diverse officials, bureaucrats, security authorities, and individual South Africans themselves. This documentary system, moreover, generates the inertia of and for (more) documents, "creating the need for more detailed documents, the maintenance and updating of registers, the transcription of information from one document to another, the circulation of documents throughout the regime's system, the accounting of documents, the transmission of documents' information to centralized points of control, and the comparison of these documents during meetings of officials."⁵³

⁵¹ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 95-96.

⁵² Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity," *Sociological Forum*, 2, no. 2 (1987): 374.

⁵³ Koscijew, "Disciplinary Documentation in Apartheid South Africa," 106.

The PRA also required many kinds of documentary practices in order for its inscriptions to emerge and become informing; for example, it had to be analyzed, consulted, discussed, and used by hospital administrators and staff to properly classify and register a newborn baby; or, as another example, it had to be examined and debated by members of a race classification board when deciding the proper classification and registration for a person appealing their documented official racial and ethnic identity. The PRA gained power and inertia as it moved across and throughout this complex documentary system, helping to capture, classify, and define South Africans, and functioning as a relay of power through which the Apartheid state impressed its racial and ethnic categories on the real world.

The PRA constructed a color space of different skin pigmentations and standardized, universalized, registered, and materialized them into official racial and ethnic categories that, in turn, partitioned and ranked South Africans according to color. While it sorted, aligned, and placed people into rigid categories, it also helped torque individuals who did not fit; it constructed the colored category as a “catch-all” slot in which to approximate and place racially mixed people and, in turn, prevent skin color confusion and preserve Apartheid’s ideological objectives and practices of racial and ethnic separation.

Indeed, colored South Africans did not fit neatly into any of the Apartheid state’s official racial and ethnic categories.⁵⁴ Because the Apartheid system depended greatly upon the PRA to help institute and maintain a panoptic gaze and control over South Africans, its failure to place an individual into its racial and ethnic categories presented serious problems for achieving racial and ethnic separation. Bi- or multi-racial identity was considered “an abomination, the epitome of evils of ‘mishmash cohabitation’ ...septic with the germs of *bloedvermenging* [blood-mixing].”⁵⁵ For a state and its documentary system obsessed with racial and ethnic identities and differences, an individual – or worse an entire population – that could not be defined as clearly white, black, or Indian was confounding. If there were a case of a racially and ethnically ambiguous individual – the individual of color – documentary confusion could ensue and, consequently, the Apartheid state’s ideology and power could be seriously undermined. Because every South African had to be defined, classified, registered, and documented as one of the

⁵⁴ The “coloured” term/label is still formally used in South Africa today to refer specifically to individuals of bi/mixed racial heritage. See for example: Statistics South Africa, “Mid-year population estimates 2018” (2018), <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022018.pdf> (accessed on 28 January 2019); and Statistics South Africa, “Application for Employment,” <http://www.statssa.gov.za/vacancies/Z83/Z83.pdf> (accessed on 28 January 2019).

⁵⁵ Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2003), 188.

PRA's official racial and ethnic categories, an individual who could not be placed into one of them became a great threat to racial and ethnic separation.

Thus, in order to capture and place those individuals who did not fit neatly into its official racial and ethnic categories, the PRA included the category of "colored" in order to fix and rank those individuals of mixed-race heritage or ambiguous skin pigmentation into Apartheid's racialized and ethnicized hierarchy. A bi- or multi-racial individual's identity would consequently be torqued to fit this classification and registration through both formal and informal considerations. Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star explain that torsion is a process that occurs when something and its particular identity cannot be aligned with a formal classification system; it is "the twisting that occurs when a formal classification system is mismatched with an individual's biographical trajectory, memberships, or location... [which occurs when] the prototypical and Aristotelian are conflated."⁵⁶ Torsion happens when lived experience and the formal classification system do not match up or slide out of sync.

To diminish the threat to the Apartheid state's official racial and ethnic separation, the PRA therefore defined the "coloured" category as being applicable to individuals who were neither white nor black.⁵⁷ Moreover, the PRA inscribed the racial characteristics of a "coloured" person by describing who was white. A white person was a person who "in appearance obviously is a white person and who is generally not accepted as a coloured person; or is generally accepted as a white person and is not in appearance obviously not a white person."⁵⁸ Or put differently, a rose is a rose is perhaps not a rose. The "coloured" category served as a kind of catch-all placement in which to disambiguate, classify, mark, register, rank, and partition those racially and ethnically ambiguous individuals who may have appeared white but were not accepted as white, or who were indeed only half-white and half-black or half-Indian, or who were half-Indian and half-black, and so on.

Although the PRA constructed this catch-all category to ensure every person could be properly classified and registered and therefore fit into Apartheid's racialized and ethnicized hierarchy, colored South Africans nevertheless continued to pose problems. Bowker and Star note that when conflating Aristotelian and prototypical categories, room is left "for either to be invoked in any given scenario (especially by those in power)."⁵⁹ For South Africans, the conflation of Aristotelian and prototypical categories, specifically in the "coloured" category, illuminated the documentary

⁵⁶ Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 223.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth S. Landis, "South African Apartheid Legislation 1: Fundamental Structure," *The Yale Law School*, 71, no. 1 (1961): 15.

⁵⁸ C. G. Weeramantry, *Apartheid: The Closing Phases?* (Melbourne: Lantana, 1980), 174.

⁵⁹ Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 223.

confusion in classifying, registering, and documenting people into “life-determining boxes, outside of their control, tightly coupled with their every movement in an ecology of increasingly densely classified activities.”⁶⁰ Perhaps more than any other racial and ethnic group, coloured South Africans could never be sure of their assigned, registered, and documented racial and ethnic identities. Although other South Africans could, at any time, be reclassified, reregistered, and documented as another racial or ethnic identity, “coloured” persons lived in constant fear of being reclassified, particularly as a black person. One interpretation meant one kind of life, another interpretation could radically and completely alter that life whether moving up or down the ranks of Apartheid’s racial and ethnic hierarchy.

The PRA therefore began the process of partitioning and ranking South Africans according to their official racial and ethnic identities, two important techniques of power that help control and discipline individuals into obedience. The PRA guaranteed that each South African was classified and put into particular racial and ethnic categories, or places, and that each place was designed and made specifically for those individuals classified as those particular racial and ethnic identities. The partitioning of the population further helped establish and ensure a strong panoptic gaze over South Africans. The PRA’s many associated documentary practices, the interactions it demanded and permitted, and the institutions in which it circulated and was consulted, enabled the Apartheid state to exercise power over every individual life. The effect of this documentation was total surveillance of racialized and ethnicized cases which generated knowledge about each person, their actions, behaviors, and movements.

This documentary partitioning also facilitated the hierarchizing – or ranking – of South Africans. A rank is the place that an individual occupies, or more precisely is made to occupy, within a system of classification, registration, and documentation. The PRA’s official racial and ethnic categories put South Africans into separate and fixed positions of different values. It ensured that white South Africans, especially Afrikaners, were placed at the top of the hierarchy, fixing them into first-class positions within South Africa; black South Africans, meanwhile, were placed on the lowest rung of the hierarchy, marking a fourth-class place of little to no official value in or to South Africa.

The PRA was a vital component of the Apartheid state, connecting its various spheres together in order to achieve and maintain racial and ethnic separation. The PRA distributed individual South Africans according to their rank in the space of a racialized order and alignment of ethnic groups according to an increasing or decreasing level of political, economic, and social rights, freedoms, and opportunities.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

PARALLELS BETWEEN THE AMERICAN NSEERS PROGRAM AND SOUTH AFRICA'S FORMER PRA

The NSEERS program, as well as the threat of Trump's proposed Muslim registry, share many parallels with Apartheid South Africa's PRA. Both the NSEERS and the PRA share the same fundamental purpose to capture and fix individuals according to official identities and place them into a system of surveillance. Each individual caught in these systems become analyzable cases to be controlled and disciplined; indeed, "once an individual's intimate details are [classified, registered, and] documented, the individual becomes an analyzable case that can be shaped, controlled, and disciplined, thus becoming a unit of knowledge."⁶¹

Like the PRA, the primary objective of NSEERS was to classify, register, and document individuals' according to an official racialized identity – in this case, a religious-based aspect of identity – in order to keep statistics on Muslims in the United States, distribute them across the government's surveillance and security system, and to exercise control over their mobility and employment, educational, and other opportunities. Further, similar to the PRA's transformation of South Africans into racialized and ethnicized cases, NSEERS transformed Muslim individuals in the United States into racialized cases to be partitioned, ranked, and placed within a registration for controlling, disciplining, and managing their movements and opportunities. NSEERS served, in other words, as a central database in the control and discipline of Muslim individuals, which turned them into analyzable cases to be managed, monitored, and studied. It captured and stored these individuals' personal information and further shared it with various other political, security, and intelligence institutions for their own particular "War on Terror" objectives and policies.

The NSEERS program, moreover, would similarly torque individuals who did not fit into its categories of Muslim identities, origins, and affiliations. Just as the PRA established the ambiguous "coloured" category in which to register, document, and place bi- and multi-racial people, NSEERS applied to all people, Muslim or otherwise, arriving from its targeted list of mainly Muslim-majority countries. The PRA defined "coloured" individuals as being neither white nor black; NSEERS included individuals who were not Muslim, in addition to those individuals who were neither devote nor practising Muslims, because of their citizenship featured in its listed countries. In fact, just as the PRA's "coloured" category functioned as a kind of "catch-all" placement for racially-ambiguous individuals, the NSEERS program included a broad geography of special registration that made "descent or inheritability of Islam...the defining criterion."⁶² Considerations of descent or inheritability had nothing to do with so-called enemy nationality, political

⁶¹ Koscijew, "Disciplinary Documentation in Apartheid South Africa," 106.

⁶² Bayoumi, "Racing Religion", 278.

affiliation, religious belief, or personal worldview, but instead “about one’s blood relationship to Islam. Through that blood relationship, legal barriers [like NSEERS were] established to exclude as many Muslims as possible, and that fact consequently turns Islam into a racial category.”⁶³

Moreover, just as the PRA helped partition and rank South Africans according to their official racial and ethnic identities, NSEERS began a similar process for Muslim individuals in the United States according to their religious identity. First, this religious partitioning ensured that Muslim individuals were put into a religious category or place; further, this place would be designed and made specifically for those people classified and registered as belonging to that religious identity. Partitioning, after all, ensures that each person has their own place and each place has its own person.

Second, this religious ranking helped ensure that Muslim individuals occupied, or more specifically were forced to occupy, a place within this registration program. Similar to how the PRA put South Africans into separated and fixed positions of different values, NSEERS ranked Muslim individuals in separate and fixed positions of different values from other Americans, immigrants, and individuals of other non-Muslim religious identities, origins, or affiliations. The PRA distributed South Africans according to their rank in the partitioned space of a racialized and ethnicized order that determined either increasing or decreasing levels of rights, freedoms, and opportunities. NSEERS similarly distributed individuals according to their rank in the partitioned space of a racialized order, based on the Islamic faith, that determined either increasing or decreasing levels of rights, freedoms, and opportunities. A Muslim individual, for instance, partitioned and then ranked in this program confronted different legal obligations and outcomes for their lives – such as their residency requirements, citizenship opportunities, movements around the country, entry and exit permissions, etc. – compared to other non-Muslim individuals.

Finally, just as the PRA established a racialized panoptic gaze over the diverse citizens of South Africa, the NSEERS program similarly helped cast a racialized panoptic gaze over the diverse Muslim population in the United States. It established racialized spaces that registered, universalized, and materialized these spaces into common standards for diverse but connected institutions, infrastructures, and actors for different purposes and uses. It facilitated the alignment, comparison, contrasting, identification, matching, approximation, marking, ranking, and placing of individuals and entire groups according to their (perceived) religious identity. The NSEERS program ultimately served as a blunt bureaucratic tool for the government to “mobilize statistics and bodies to prove that it [was] cleansing the country of a terrorist threat, all at the expense of Muslims in the United States.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Bayoumi, “Racing Religion,” 288.

CONCLUSION: A PARALLEL FATE

In the post-9/11 United States, many political and legal approaches to national security have created a hostile environment for Muslim individuals by racializing and vilifying them as a racial group. It is assumed “that Muslims as a whole pose...a clear and present danger to the nation”⁶⁵ because “they share [this] common religion.”⁶⁶ Islamophobia – which is arguably at the center of these approaches that include the previous NSEERS program and Trump’s proposed Muslim registry – operates as a mode of racialization to exercise control over the Muslim population in the United States.

This operation of racialized control echoes Apartheid South Africa’s PRA’s similar racialized control of South African citizens through the registration of their racial and ethnic identities. The NSEERS program and the PRA transformed individuals into analyzable cases to be racialized, classified, registered, monitored, compared, contrasted, partitioned, and placed with similar cases and ranked within a discriminatory hierarchy. It is through such documentary systems “that the individual is disciplined into a docile body, or, in Apartheid South Africa [and in post-9/11 United States], a racialized body”⁶⁷. The NSEERS program and the PRA served as important tools in their respective governments’ bureaucratic arsenals helping control and discipline individuals according to particular aspects or features of their identity. Although both registration programs are now gone, their effects nevertheless continue to haunt their respective countries. In the United States, anti-Muslim rhetoric and Trump’s public proposal for another Muslim registry shows that the momentum for Islamophobic policies continues to thrive. In South Africa, some government policies and documents still use the PRA’s racial categories for various political and economic purposes, albeit with different connotations than the Apartheid era.

This article has drawn attention to the parallels between these two cases of identity registration in order to help provide some conceptual tools for scholars interested in the classification, registration, and documentation of diverse kinds of identities. It contributes to the Library and Information Science (LIS) field by introducing a documentary analysis of the racial registration strategies of Apartheid South Africa to help historicize and problematize the United States’ previous and proposed religious registry programs targeting Muslim individuals in the post-9/11 era. Its aim is to draw lessons from South Africa’s painful past to provide an urgent warning of the oppressive implications of identity registrations like the NSEERS program and the worrying possibility of another misguided and counterproductive Muslim registry.

The alphas and the epsilons of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, preordained to a specific station in life from which no effort could remove them, came alive every day in

⁶⁵ Green, *Presumed Guilty*, 40.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁷ Koscijew, “Disciplinary Documentation in Apartheid South Africa,” 107.

Apartheid South Africa between white and non-white individuals and groups with the help of the state's documentary system, beginning with and building inertia upon the uncompromising, panoptic, and discriminatory PRA. If a sweeping Muslim registry is (re)instituted, a parallel fate could befall American Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

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