

# INTRODUCTION

## Two Tuesdays

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SOMETIMES, YOU CAN SENSE that something terrible has taken place. You just know it. The ringing and vibration of your phone doesn't let up. It rings and rings, and after you silence it, it shakes and shakes. In these moments, turning it off seems the best option. But doing so would disconnect you entirely. So it rings then shakes, shakes and rings. Until those familiar sounds form a spellbinding shrill that shouts what the weight of the mood silently whispers to you.

You don't want to hear it. But you can't help it and can't ignore it. The force is relentless, and that feeling stretches itself in every direction. It fills every corner of the room and everything within it and within you. Its urgency, amplified by the nonstop shaking and buzzing of that black device that you watch from a short distance, summons you toward it. That black mirror, which keeps you connected to people and places far beyond while simultaneously trapping you inside its four corners, becomes the messenger of news you don't want to receive. News you've heard before, which stalks you and stalks you at every turn of life.

That *feeling* lords over you before you know what event or incident triggered it. It orders you, simultaneously, to run toward it and heed its message and to avoid it at any and all costs. This existential paradox fixes upon you for moments that feel like forever. Stopping life as you know it and reminding you, although you have hardly forgotten, that *your life* is defined more by these enigmatic moments than

those passing, prolonged stretches that parade as routine life in the spaces between.

These are new world warnings. The stalking shadows of our brave new world that digitally blur distances geographic, real, and surreal. A world where the devices we faithfully carry in our palms are at once mechanisms of ongoing surveillance and machines of doomsday warnings.



At 11:43 a.m. on August 4, 2020, the nonstop shrill of that phone finally won me over. I walked over to it and then opened up a Pandora's box of messages from friends and family: "Beirut has been bombed!" and "Did you make sure Aboudy and his kids are OK?" Seconds later, I opened files of videos and images that, with gruesome color and lucid horror, confirmed the texts. The visuals verified that the city that was home to so many family and friends, and that I called home during a stretch of my childhood, had been targeted by what seemed to be a foreign airstrike. Or, as some reported, a terror attack.<sup>1</sup>

I continued to scroll through my phone, watching a bleak roll of images and videos sent by family and friends, mixed with real-time posts strangers shared on social media. This is a dystopian custom in our bleak new world—tragedy, and all of its morbid detail, is instantly disseminated and explicitly conveyed on our small mobile screens even as it is still unfolding. The reels rush in, in real time, without stopping. And oftentimes, without filter or forewarning.

Time froze. And I stood there fixed along with it, absorbing surreal scenes of streets I knew so well, in a city seated deep in my heart. A place where our apartment building on Verdun Street was submerged by the gray smoke from the explosions and the ghosts of faded memories. A place where only twelve months earlier, my mother and I walked to family visits, to restaurants, and took evening strolls to maintain

strength in her aging legs, only miles from the port where the explosions detonated and brought Beirut back down to its war-torn knees. Explosions that, in that apocalyptic aftermath that Beirut knew so well from wars past, revealed that more than 200 people were killed, 300,000 people were left homeless, and more than 100,000 homes were destroyed.<sup>2</sup> For “a nation pitied” for its modern misfortunes with war and the internal rifts that sink it even deeper, the Beirut blasts revealed that terror is an enterprise not tied to any one faith or nonfaith.<sup>3</sup> While news outlets and pundits pushed us to blame the catastrophe on the familiar list of Muslim networks, in line with War on Terror impulses, the truth revealed that global crusade’s fundamental lie: that terrorism is a uniquely Islamic enterprise. Sometimes, terror is a consequence of corruption, negligence, and as this book illustrates, religious and even secular ideology. More than often, terror is the outcome of old empires and their modern successors, chiefly the United States—my country—which occupies the citadel of neocolonial wars on terror and the new crusades they have spawned.



Flashbacks of memories, recent and those rooted in my childhood, juxtaposed with the reel of horrors I absorbed from my cell phone screen.

Sometimes, you just get *that* feeling. That eerie feeling in the pit of your stomach that looms on the other side of those text messages that you have yet to open, or those incessant phone calls a voice inside orders you to avoid, is what you already know. Not *knowing* in terms of collecting all of the facts and appreciating what has actually taken place, but that deeper, metaphysical *knowing*—a knowing not spurred by detail or evidence, but memory and trauma. Trauma and memory, the two legs of that shadowy feeling that rips through your gut and stirs the fear and anxiety that grip your head and hold your heart.

That feeling, which at first felt foreign but evolved into familiar companion, is hardly mine alone. Rather, it is one that lives within and walks alongside 2 billion Muslims all over the world. It, on Tuesdays and days before and beyond it, rumbles and pulsates like that mobile device on my dining table signaling the occurrence of another disaster in a city that raised my father and houses so many family members and friends. It stalks us, from afar, then comes menacingly close when disaster strikes. This was a disaster I felt in my core before hearing word of it. That feeling I experienced for the first time that dark Tuesday morning on September 11, 2001, loomed over me and over those tragedy-stricken Beirut streets again on the Tuesday morning of August 4, 2020.

The world was not the same place on August 4, 2020, that it had been on September 11, 2001. In fact, it was irreversibly and unmistakably different. But so was I.

I was no longer an anonymous Muslim American student sitting on the sidelines as disaster unfolded in New York City and Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania. I was now a law scholar and public intellectual recognized for his work on law, critical race theory, the War on Terror, and more profoundly, Islamophobia. My first book, *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear*, connected global audiences with my academic work and helped me launch a term I helped shape into a trenchant tool wielded by students and activists, scholars and non-scholars. The War on Terror changed the world, but it also indelibly altered my trajectory and shaped who I am. Despite my best efforts to pursue other paths, the weight of this *war* and the new world order it ushered in pulled me in, and I was helplessly submerged by it.

I could not stand on the sidelines even if I wanted to. People looked to me to make sense of senseless disasters that fell upon Arabs and Muslims. Members of my faith community, in particular, sought me out to make rational and intellectual sense of that very *feeling* that shook through them when crises rattled cities like Boston or Beirut, New Delhi or New York, and to predict what those events that implicated or impacted Muslims spelled for them and their loved ones.

The feeling that moved through me on that Tuesday in September twenty-one years ago, and countless days after that, is that unseen front of Islamophobia experienced by every Muslim. However, Islamophobia as a subject of academic study is, as it stands, bereft of that feeling and the firsthand experiences of Muslims on the ground. The human condition of Muslims, and the countless intersections they occupied in the world remade by the War on Terror, was absent from academic literatures. In turn, Muslims were essentialized as terrorists or targets, faceless culprits of violence or voiceless victims of state aggression, flattened