

Islamophobia and Postcolonialism

Continuity, Orientalism and Muslim Consciousness

Abstract

In this article I tentatively delineate three ways in which I understand the Islamophobia concept is being informed by postcolonial scholarship. The first functions as *continuity*, in so far as it is claimed that historical colonial dynamics are reproduced in contemporary postcolonial environments, broadly conceived. The second involves *translation*. This is related to the first means but is different, and centres on the utility in particular of Orientalist critique for the Islamophobia concept. The third concerns an account of Muslim consciousness, in so far as it is argued that ‘the making of Muslims’¹ is signalled by the emergence of the concept of Islamophobia; in one view as part of a wider ‘decentring’ of the West². I argue that the third framing rests on terrain that is also populated by scholarship beyond the postcolonial tradition. This is because it expresses a story of how Muslims have contested and sought revisions to existing citizenship settlement, not least the ways in which approaches to anti-discrimination are configured; something that is observable within imperfect liberal democratic settlements that contain institutional levers through which to challenge Islamophobia.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Postcolonialism, Orientalism, Citizenship, Muslim Consciousness

¹ Vakil, A.K. (2010) ‘Is the Islam in Islamophobia the Same as the Islam in Anti-Islam; Or, When is it Islamophobia Time?’, in: A. K. Vakil and S. Sayyid (eds) *Thinking Through Islamophobia*. Hurst & Co. p. 43

² Sayyid, S. (1997) *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentricism and the Emergence of Islamism*. London: Zed Books.

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I am read by many people as a champion of Islam, which is complete nonsense. I wasn't trying to defend Islam. I was simply talking about a very specific form of activity: representation³

Introduction

'History has many cunning passages', explains the lead character in T. S. Eliot's *Gerontion*⁴, while reflecting back on Europe after the First World War from his perspective as somebody who had lived most his life in the nineteenth century. It was an observation with relevance far beyond Europe's borders. In the period Elliot was composing his poem, the British Empire (having already claimed jurisdiction over a quarter of the world's population) was busily pushing the Ottomans from the Holy City of Jerusalem. As Field Marshal Edmund Allenby entered through the Jaffa Gate in December 1917, dismounting together with his officers as a mark of respect, he is alleged

³ Said, E. (2005) *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said*. London: Bloomsbury. Page 220.

⁴ Eliot, T.S. (1998 [1920]) 'Gerontion', in: *The Waste Land, Prufrock and Other Poems*. Courier Dover Publications. Page 20.

to have remarked: ‘The wars of the crusaders are now complete’⁵. Whether or not these *precise* words were spoken⁶, the sentiment was consistent with the contemporary view of ‘empire builders as quasi-crusaders returning to complete the work their ancestors had begun’⁷. Indeed, and were I drawing on parallel French protagonists, an analogous tale might remind readers of how the first French military governor of Syria, General Henri Gouraud, ‘on arriving in Damascus in 1920, was heard to say, ‘Behold, Saladin, we have returned’⁸.

While anecdotal, these vignettes illustrate how colonial encounters themselves often looked backwards to earlier adversarial relations. In *this* essay I look forwards to consider how postcolonialism hangs over present debates; namely, the relationship between postcolonialism and Islamophobia. How does it help the latter concept, for example, if we draw in Edward Said’s observation that ‘for Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma’?⁹ This is an especially valid question because for many observers Said is positioned as ‘a seminal source in the literature on Islamophobia’¹⁰. Yet as the opening quotation details, Said did not characterise his work as a defence of Islam or of Muslims

⁵ Bar-Yosef, E. (2005) *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Page 17

⁶ Phillips, J. (2010) *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades*. London: Random House.

⁷ Riley-Smith, J. (2005) *The Crusades: A Short History* (Second ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. P. 19

⁸ Riley-Smith, J. (2005) *The Crusades: A History*. New Haven: Edward Peters. Page 303. There are various but slightly diverging accounts of this. Another comes from Ali who says Gouraud travelled to Saladin's tomb, kicked it and proclaimed: ‘The Crusades have ended now! Awake Saladin, we have returned! My presence here consecrates the victory of the Cross over the Crescent.’ Ali, T. (2002) *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*. London: Verso. Page: 42.

⁹ Said, E. (1995 [1978]) ‘Orientalism’, in B. Ashcroft, G. Griffith and H. Tiffin (1995) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge. Page: 59

¹⁰ Klug, B. (2012) ‘Islamophobia: A Concept Comes of Age’, *Ethnicities*, 12 (5), 665-681. p. 670.

per se. Does this matter? More broadly, and as the title of this article asks, is Islamophobia itself best understood as a postcolonial concept?

Our observation is that postcolonial thought is being used to service an account of Islamophobia in three respects. The first points to *continuity*, in so far as the kinds of colonial dynamics intimated above are reproduced in contemporary postcolonial relations. The second involves *translation*. This is related to the first but different, and centres in particular on the utility of Orientalist critique for the Islamophobia concept. The third concerns an account of Muslim subject hood, in the sense that the emergence of the category of Islamophobia signals ‘the making of Muslims’¹¹, possibly as part of a wider ‘decentring’ of Western hegemony¹².

Islamophobia as Continuity

In many respects the first possibility requires the most space to be discussed even though it is arguably the simplest to grasp. It effectively describes a kind of discursive historical institutionalism that has established a path for relations that are continually reproduced anew. One example of this is found in part of the Runnymede Trust’s¹³ first report, which cautiously suggested ‘a continuous line from the Crusades of the medieval times through the Ottoman Empire and European colonialism to the Islamophobia of the

¹¹ Vakil, A.K. (2010) ‘Is the Islam in Islamophobia the Same as the Islam in Anti-Islam; Or, When is it Islamophobia Time?’, in: A. K. Vakil and S. Sayyid (eds) *Thinking Through Islamophobia*. London: Hurst & Co. p. 43

¹² Sayyid, S. (1997) *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentricism and the Emergence of Islamism*. London: Zed Books.

¹³ Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (CBMI) (1997) *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*. London: Trentham Books. Page 5

1990s'. A similar reading might be reflected in Taras's¹⁴ view that 'the *supposed* historical incompatibility of European and Islamic values....is central to Islamophobia' (emphasis added). It is more broadly a common characterisation, even while others may commence their story later. Grosfoguel and Mielants¹⁵, for example, start with the *Reconquista* but nonetheless sum up Islamic-Western encounters in comparable teleological terms:

The year 1492 is a crucial... the Christian Spanish monarchy re-conquered Islamic Spain expelling Jews and Arabs from the Spanish peninsula while simultaneously 'discovering' the Americas and colonizing indigenous peoples. These 'internal' and 'external' conquests of territories and people not only created an international division of labor of core and periphery, but also constituted the internal and external imagined boundaries of Europe related to the global racial hierarchy of the world system, privileging populations of European origin over the rest. Jews and Arabs became the subaltern internal 'Others' within Europe...'

While these accounts serve to challenge others¹⁶ that insist on a Muslim 'propensity towards violent conflict'¹⁷, what is striking is how they share in the 'myth of confrontation'¹⁸ in so far they determine a pattern of history in which future encounters are cast. While it is certainly true that our timing of how racialized categories have saturated cultural portrayals of Muslims needs to commence earlier sooner than the

¹⁴ Taras, R. (2012) *Xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press. Page 419.

¹⁵ Grosfoguel, R. and Mielants, E. (2006) 'The Long-Duree Entanglement Between Islamophobia and Racism in the Modern/Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal World System', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge*, 1 (Fall), 1-12. Page 2.

¹⁶ Much of course can be traced to Lewis' (1990) characterisation of Muslim complaints during the Rushdie affair as 'the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage.' Lewis, B. (1990) 'The Roots of Muslim Rage', *The Atlantic*, September, 1990. Available here: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/09/the-roots-of-muslim-rage/304643/> Viewed 26 June 2014

¹⁷ Huntington, S. (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster. Page. 258

¹⁸ Halliday, F. (1996) *Islam and the myth of confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East*. London: I. B. Taurus.

conventional story of Atlanto-centric racial formation¹⁹, this is not the same as stating that there has been a perpetual discursive conflict between Muslims and the west from the Crusades onwards. For these reasons I wish to set a *direct* discussion of this macro historical debate to one side for the rest of this article and move on to the others. Indeed, and hitherto, I have made a concerted effort to take a grounded, empirical but non-positivistic, approach in relating the study of Islamophobia to the study of race more broadly. As such I have spilt much ink elaborating an account of the concept of Islamophobia that hopefully does not need to be reproduced here.²⁰ To use literatures other than one's own, I could summarise my position as being consistent with at least this part of Vakil's²¹ assessment, for whom Islamophobia means that:

First of all...neither Muslims nor Muslim Subjectivity is essentially or reducible to a 'religious' or 'faith' matter. Moreover, the involvement of 'Islam' too does not relegate discussion to a theological register or matters of belief or doctrine. Religion is 'raced' Muslims are racialised. It means secondly, that hostility to Islam cannot be separated from discrimination against Muslims *in neat and unproblematic ways*... Where Islam is integral to Muslim identities, the denigration of Islam impacts on Muslim respect and self worth, but what is primarily and fundamentally at stake in this is not a matter of the protection of belief per se, but rather of unequal power, legal protection and institutional clout, in the context of entrenched social inequalities...

With this in mind I would like to continue to elaborate my tripartite account of how postcolonialism is being used to inform the Islamophobia concept, in the knowledge that

¹⁹ Meer, N. (2013) 'The Role of Race, Culture and Difference in Antisemitism and Islamophobia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36 (3), 385-398

²⁰ Meer, N. (ed.) (2013) *Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia*. London: Routledge; Meer, N. & Modood, T. (2009) 'Refutations of racism in the "Muslim Question"', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 43(3/4), 332-351; Meer, N. & Noorani, T. (2008) 'A sociological comparison of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.', *The Sociological Review*, 56(2), 195-219; Meer, N. (2006) "'Get off your knees" - Print media public intellectuals and Muslims in Britain', *Journalism Studies*, 7(1), 35-59.

²¹ Vakil, A.K. (2010) 'Is the Islam in Islamophobia the Same as the Islam in Anti-Islam; Or, When is it Islamophobia Time?', in: A. K. Vakil and S. Sayyid (eds) *Thinking Through Islamophobia*. London: Hurst & Co. p. 276

there remain significant disputes over the use of the concept amongst its advocates (not to mention its detractors). It is precisely because I recognise that there is by no means consensus that I welcome this opportunity to bridge across different literatures and engage with other strands of thought that have helped the Islamophobia concept ‘come of age’²². Having rested the first (of three) ways that we observe the interaction of postcolonialism and Islamophobia, which turns on a set of historical injustices at one end and a macro-civilisational contest at the other, I next turn to a more nuanced discussion of how postcolonialism is being conceived. I then relate this to the second way postcolonialism and Islamophobia are being understood, namely through *Orientalism*, before moving to discuss the third issue of Muslim agency.

Historical and theoretical postcolonialism

Much hinges on how we understand not only Islamophobia but also postcolonialism, and setting out an account of how we are using the latter will help us to grasp where it stands in relation to Orientalism, which in turn I will later relate to the Islamophobia concept. For example, Hesse and Sayyid²³ complain that hitherto ‘the postcolonial analytic has tended to focus on politics as practices of cultural representation’, which have ‘left unattended transnational questions of political power’. These authors have therefore sought to reframe postcolonial critique²⁴. In contrast, Maussen and Bader²⁵ have rejected

²² Klug, B. (2012) ‘Islamophobia: A Concept Comes of Age’, *Ethnicities*, 12 (5), 665-681. page: 666

²³ Hesse, B. and Sayyid, S. (2006) ‘The postcolonial Political and the Immigrant Imaginary’, in: N. Ali., V. S. Kalra., and S. Sayyid (2006) (eds) *A Postcolonial People*. London: Hurst. Page: 16

²⁴ Sayyid, S. (1997) *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentricism and the Emergence of Islamism*. London: Zed Books; Sayyid, S. (2000) ‘Beyond Westphalia: Nations and Diasporas – the Case of

the discursive features of post-colonialism to focus on regimes of governance as these relate to Muslims in post-colonial settings. It is certainly the case that while scholarship on postcolonialism takes in a number of foci, it principally turns on the interaction between political and cultural relations forged *during* colonialism, and which can be observed in the *aftermath* of decolonization. This is why the appellation ‘post’ can be misleading, for the challenge that postcolonial inquiry presents is not only anchored in what happened *after* decolonization, but instead on the form and content of colonialism, and its subsequent (indeed contemporary) implications. We might here make a tentative distinction between *historical* and *theoretical* postcolonial scholarship.

The former begins with an account of the emergence of European modernity, and the extent to which this has been tied to European rule over the Global South. In this view, and since 1492 (for many the date which marks the ‘beginning of the modern era’²⁶), when Columbus landed in the Americas and the Catholic *Reconquista* captured the Iberian peninsula - Spanish, Portuguese, British, French and Belgium Empires annexed and appropriated the material and human resources of the entire African continent, large parts of South and East Asia, Australasia and Latin and Central America. How these Empires went about this varies, for subsequent colonial rule took different forms. The short term plunder of the Spanish Conquistadors, indentured labour of the Congolese by the Belgians, to the creation of a compliant British Imperial Raj, and the settler societies

the Muslim *Umma*’, in B. Hesse (Ed.) *Un/settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Disruptions*. London: Zed Books.

²⁵ Mausen, M. and Bader, V. (2012) ‘The particular position of Muslims and the special status’, in: M. Mausen, V. Bader and A. Moors (eds) (2012) *Colonial and Post-Colonial Governance of Islam: Continuities and Ruptures*. Amsterdam: IMESCO. Page: 12

²⁶ Todorov, T. (1982) *The Conquest of America*. New York: Harper Perennial. Page 5.

and colonies of North America and Australasia, all offer very different examples. Britain alone, at its height before the First World War, exercised a claim to a quarter of the planet's population. How could a small island in the North Sea have achieved such an expansive reign?

The answer requires more than an audit of its military, especially naval, capacities. A better explanation rests in how the British Empire *administered* its rule through 'varying constitutional and political arrangements' across a range of territories, and which were 'connected by a diverse set of strategic, cultural or historical links, rather than by allegiance to Crown or mother country'²⁷ alone. One outcome of this was that even after decolonization the implications of these 'interconnections lived on and in some ways intensified'²⁸. As a concept, therefore, there is a continuing dialogue between colonialism and postcolonialism, one that foregrounds 'issues of power and significance, and even of timing [why did some Western powers come to prominence at certain times]... technologies of production and social control, of centres and margins: of metropolitan hubs like London and Paris, and peripheries and margins – like the colonies'²⁹.

Knowing how one feature connects to the other, however, rests on a more theoretical understanding of the relationship between knowledge, representation, and politics. This is

²⁷ Krieger, J. (2009) 'After Empire', in: M. Flinders, A. Gamble, C. Hay and M. Kenny (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of British Politics*. New York: OUP. Page: 590.

²⁸ Ibid. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (1995: 2) point to the repositories of elites that were created or elevated under colonialism, and who have renewed and reproduced themselves following independence. This is alongside how social cleavages and hierarchies constructed during colonialism have blossomed instead of being deconstructed. In Sayyid's (1997) account Islamism is a challenge to these vestiges of colonialism.

²⁹ Hawley, J. C. (2011) 'The Bittersweet Taste of Exile, as Muse', in: M. David and J. Munoz-Basols (eds) *Defining and Re-Defining Diaspora*. Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press. Page 195.

what makes postcolonialism such a ubiquitous theoretical concept, precisely because it spans ‘a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises’³⁰. Two important issues that it focuses on are, firstly, institutions (e.g., government departments and administrative bureaucracies) and, secondly, what we might call the semiotic field (e.g., discourse and text). How postcolonial theorists understand the interaction between the two is crucial. One influential elaboration is Viswanathan’s³¹ *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and the British Rule in India*, and which proposes that the teaching of English literature in colonial India facilitated a type of social order in which the objectives of rule were obscured. A chief illustration was Whig MP Thomas Babington Macaulay’s famous ‘Minute of 1835’, which argued for the common teach of English in British India to cultivate an intermediaries class between Indian colonial subjects and their British rulers:

In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia, --communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.³²

In Viswanathan’s terms, ‘texts all but effaced the sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European

³⁰ Slemon, S. (1995) ‘Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World War’, in: B. Ashcroft., G. Griffith., and H. Tiffin (1995) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge. Page. 45

³¹ Viswanathan, G. (1995) ‘The beginnings of the English literary tradition in India’, in: B. Ashcroft., G. Griffith., and H. Tiffin (1995) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.

³² Minute by the Honourable T. B. Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835. Available here: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/meacac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html Viewed 26 June 2014

world dominance. Making the Englishman known to the natives through the products of his mental labour served a valuable purpose in that it removed him from the plane of ongoing colonialist activity'.³³

Islamophobia as Orientalism

In grappling with the relationship in colonial India between knowledge production and power, Viswanathan's thesis is possibly a surrogate of a similar activity spanning a wider set of contexts, pioneered in Said's³⁴ *Orientalism*. Said's core thesis is that, through a body of scholarship, a 'style of thought' as he put it, European (and more broadly western) scholarship has reflected 'a distribution of geopolitical awareness' expressed in 'aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts'.³⁵ Said's thesis is at times an obscure activity, but in distilling what he understands as key properties in the depiction of the Orient in prevailing approaches, what Said is trying to show is that *Orientalism* relies on a transaction between semiotic systems and political systems. Given how influential, indeed seminal, Said's account has been for the postcolonial inquiry, the description of the activity he sets himself is worth quoting at length (note that the following paragraph is a single sentence):

[Orientalism] is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made of two halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of 'interests'

³³ Viswanathan, G. (1995) 'The beginnings of the English literary tradition in India', in: B. Ashcroft., G. Griffith., and H. Tiffin (1995) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge Ibid. 436

³⁴ Said, E. (1995 [1978]) 'Orientalism', in B. Ashcroft, G. Griffith and H. Tiffin (1995) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.

³⁵ Ibid. 91

which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, and values), power moral (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do).³⁶

If there is a common thread that runs through these components of Orientalism, it is the relationship between knowledge and power, and the extent to which orientalist scholarship became a ‘cultural mechanisms for the expression of colonial ideas and values’³⁷. It is sometimes stated therefore that Said is applying Foucault, yet this is something that Said himself robustly rejected. One can certainly see commonality in their respective approaches. Foucault was concerned with signposting shifts in moral, ethical and, ultimately, historical notions of legitimising power or authority (which he keenly observed as being exercised in conceptions of ‘madness’, ‘sexuality’, ‘punishment’ etc), highlighting the degree to which the conditions behind a specific ‘problem’ often lie in its textual assumptions. This is outlined, amongst other places, in *The History of Sexuality* where he argues that power is a diffuse activity that emanates from every point in the social field, so is not a monolithic force, ‘an institution, and nor a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a given society’³⁸. The power to represent is therefore everywhere and nowhere, ‘exercised’ by everybody and nobody. It is probably

³⁶ Said, E. (1995 [1978]) ‘Orientalism’, in B. Ashcroft, G. Griffith and H. Tiffin (1995) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge. Page 91.

³⁷ Back, L. and Solomos, J. (2009) *Theories of Race and Racism*. Routledge. Page: 324

³⁸ Foucault, M. (1979) *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: an introduction*. London: Allen Lane. Page 93.

for these reasons that Said did not source his account Foucault, and indeed argued that he would have produced a more limited account if he had. In his own words:

The discovery I made about Foucault...was that, despite the fact that he seemed to be a theorist of power, obviously, and kept referring to resistance, he was really the *scribe* of power. He was really writing about the victory of power. I found very little in his work, especially after the second half of *Discipline and Punish*...so I completely lost interest. The later stuff on the subject I just found really weak and, to my way of thinking, uninteresting³⁹.

Eitherway, one implication from Said's account is that European scholarship that has been 'elaborated within the confines of Western modernity'⁴⁰ retains its ethnocentric anchorage. The objective of this complaint is not to devalue western scholarship; it is instead to seek an understanding of its relationship to colonialism, and the ways in which 'they are already deeply implicated within each other'⁴¹. As Young continues:

European thought since the Renaissance would be unthinkable without impact of colonialism as the history of the world since the Renaissance would be inconceivable without the effects of Europeanization. So it is not an issue of removing colonial thinking from European thought, of purging it... It is rather a question of repositioning European systems of knowledge so as to demonstrate the long history of their operation as the effect of their colonial other, a reversal captured in Fanon's observation: 'Europe is literally the creation of the Third World'.⁴²

A counter-Orientalist challenge, however, needs to do more than just reverse the complaint, for example argue that there is something inherent to European civilisations that has historically prevented it from incorporating difference into common life. This indeed is precisely what Turner has suggested, in his observation that European

³⁹ Said, E. (2005) *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said*. London: Bloomsbury. Page 214.

⁴⁰ Venn, C. (2003) *The Postcolonial Challenge*. London: Sage. Page 3

⁴¹ Young, R. (1992) 'Colonialism and Humanism', in: J. Donald and A. Rattansi (eds) (1992) *'Race', culture and difference*. London: Sage. Page 243.

⁴² Ibid.

languages do not possess a word that inverts the term xenophobia (from the Greek word *xenos* meaning stranger), that is *xenophilia* (a fondness for the stranger). This leads him to the view that ‘it appears there is little linguistic possibility for the love of strangers’.⁴³ To develop a generalising theory, supplemented with some biblical references, would seem an implausible means of elaborating an account of Western civilisation. But it is precisely the type of Orientalist analysis that is to be found on account of Muslim societies, where there is a ‘reluctance to attribute a transformative potential to non-Western social formations, with a corresponding devaluation of their religious and more broadly cultural traditions’.⁴⁴ Such dialectical relationships continue therefore to offer a rich repository for genealogical excavation, and return us to Said’s observation that the ‘Orient’ is more than adjacent to Europe, and so also the place of Europe’s civilisation, such that postcolonial inquiry continues to relate these historical and contemporary implications.

Said’s thesis has been widely embraced in the human and social sciences, and what is especially relevant here is that Said and Orientalism are often *translated* into Islamophobia across literatures that span the recent proliferation of writing on Islamophobia⁴⁵. In some respects this exemplifies Said’s description of a ‘travelling

⁴³ Turner, B. (2007) ‘New and old xenophobia: the crisis of liberal multiculturalism’, in S. Akbarzadeh and F. Mansouri (eds) *Islam and Political Violence – Muslim Diaspora and Radicalism in the West*. London: I.B. Taurus. Page 66.

⁴⁴ Salvatore, A. (2013) ‘The sociology of Islam: precedents and perspectives’, *Sociology of Islam*, 1 (1): 7–13. Page: 8.

⁴⁵ Sardar, Z. (1995) ‘Racism, Identity and Muslims in the West’, in: Z. A. Seyed and Z. Sardar (eds) *Muslim Minorities in the West*. London: Grey Seal; Poole, E. (2002) *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. London: I. B. Taurus; Morey, P. and Yaqin, A. (2011) *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representations After 9/11*. London: Harvard University Press; Zebri, K. (2008) ‘The Redeployment of Orientalist Themes in

theory' which extends beyond its initial purview, and in one case finds expression in the Runnymede Trust's⁴⁶ eight statements of Islamophobic mindsets.⁴⁷ Yet Said's thesis cannot be reduced entirely, as Sayyid⁴⁸ argues, to matters 'of scholarship and other textual problems'. He continues, 'what is at stake is not whether scholars are bad or dishonest, it is not a question of bias; a problem of *Orientalism* is the problem of what space exists for the 'other''. An important example here emerges from the experiences of the Rushdie Affair. While the literature on this episode is immense, my core observation is that the publication of a novel that disparaged both the genesis of Islam and the biography of the Prophet Mohammed gave rise to a *political expression* by Muslims who felt that 'as citizens they [were no less] entitled to equality of treatment and respect for their customs and religion'⁴⁹ than either the Christian majority denominations and other religious minorities.

Contemporary Islamophobia', *Studies in Contemporary Islam*, 10 (1), 4–44; Tuastad, D. (2003) 'Neo-Orientalism and the new barbarism thesis: Aspects of symbolic violence in the Middle East conflict(s)', *Third World Quarterly*, 24: 4, 591-599;

Samiei, M. (2010) 'Neo-Orientalism? The relationship between the west and Islam in our globalised world', *Third World Quarterly*, 31 (7): 1145–60.

⁴⁶ Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (CBMI) (1997) *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*. London: Trentham Books. Page: 4

⁴⁷ They comprised (1) Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change; (2) Islam is seen as separate and 'other'. It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them; (3) Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist; (4) Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a 'clash of civilizations'; (5) Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage; (6) Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand; (7) Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society; (8) Anti-Muslim hostility is seen as natural or normal. See Allen's (2010) excellent discussion of the Runnymede Report. Allen, C. (2010) *Islamophobia*. London: Ashgate

⁴⁸ Sayyid, B. S. (1997) *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentricism and the Emergence of Islamism*. London: Zed Books. Page 33

⁴⁹ Anwar, M. (1992) 'Muslims in Western Europe', in: J. Nielsen (Ed.) *Religion and Citizenship in Europe and the Arab World*. London: Gray Seal. Page 9.

Whatever the contested international relations this episode comprised, it is undeniable that at local levels in the West, the episode highlighted narrow ways in which discrimination was being configured. As Modood⁵⁰ asked: ‘Is not the reaction to *The Satanic Verses* an indication that the honour of the Prophet or the *imani ghairat* [attachment to and love of the faith] as central to the Muslim psyche as the Holocaust and racial slavery to others? [...] Muslims will argue that, historically, vilification of the Prophet and of their faith is central to how the West has expressed hatred for them and has led to violence and expulsion on a large scale’.

What this Muslim assertiveness appeals to is a type of citizenship that evolves through dialogue and contestation, something that is capable of updating ‘our conceptions of the good’⁵¹ which ‘often do change over time, usually slowly but sometimes rather suddenly’.⁵² Another way of putting this is to state that whilst citizenship takes a legal form, it also operates socially through the reciprocal balance of rights and responsibilities that confer upon its bearers a civic status that affords those bearers equal opportunity, dignity and confidence. As such it represents a field in which ‘political and social rights, and cultural obligations [can be] contested’⁵³, often with the aim of overcoming narrow ethno-cultural components that make formal citizenship *exclusive in practice*. This is why the idea of multicultural citizenship is a partial outgrowth of liberalism in that it relies on ‘a third generation norm of legitimacy, namely respect for reasonable cultural diversity,

⁵⁰ Modood, T. (2005 [1993]) *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain*. University of Edinburgh Press. Page 121-2

⁵¹ Rawls, J. (1985) ‘Justice as fairness: political not metaphysical’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 14, 223-51. Page 242

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Statham, P. (1999) ‘Political mobilisation by minorities in Britain: A negative feedback of ‘race relations’?’ *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 25 (4), pp. 597–626. Page 599.

which needs to be considered on a par with the [first and second generation] norms of freedom and equality, and so to modify policies of “free and equal treatment” accordingly⁵⁴. In this regard, descriptions of Muslim consciousness must share the terrain with scholarship *beyond* the postcolonial tradition. This is because multicultural citizenship, for example, expresses a story of how Muslims have contested and sought revisions to existing citizenship settlement, not least the ways in which approaches to anti-discrimination are configured; something that is observable within imperfect liberal democratic settlements that contain institutional levers through which to challenge Islamophobia. This requires some elaboration.

Muslim Consciousness

As the above discussion illustrates, the issues raised by the Rushdie affair were much wider than the complaint of blasphemy, for the Muslim complaint was expressed as a new ethno-religious challenge to ‘exclusion from the existing equality framework’ (Modood, 2009: 485). For example, in Britain case law in had established precedents in the application of Race Relations legislation to some religious minority groups, namely Sikhs and Jews, but explicitly excluded Muslims. In the case of *Nyazi v Rymans Ltd*⁵⁵ the industrial tribunal found in favour of the *employer* after it held that ‘Muslims include people of many nations and colours, who speak many languages and whose only common

⁵⁴ Tully, J., (2002) ‘The illiberal liberal’, in: P. Kelly, ed. *Multiculturalism Reconsidered*. Cambridge: Polity. Page 102.

⁵⁵ Employment Appeal Tribunal, 10 May 1988 [unreported].

denominator is religion and religious culture'⁵⁶. The decisive rationale common to this and further rulings is that Muslim heterogeneity disqualifies their inclusion as a single ethnic or racial grouping⁵⁷. The creation of consultative and representative Muslim forums, such as the UK Action committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) and then later the Muslim council of Britain (MCB), persistently identified this disparity, and used it as a basis for mobilisation. This example is especially interesting for it contains a story of how Muslims have contested and sought revisions to existing anti-discrimination settlements in a future oriented fashion, and have done so within imperfect liberal democratic settlements that contain institutional levers to pursue equality and diversity. This requires an account of how Muslim identities can form the basis of political expression, what has been termed 'Muslim consciousness'⁵⁸.

The notion of a 'Muslim subject' in Europe is by no means uncontested, inviting long-established charges of essentialism and reification. It would therefore be helpful to unpack these terms by asking some obvious questions about what Islam denotes and what *being* Muslim entails. Oliver Roy's⁵⁹ account of *Globalised Islam* begins in this way. 'Who do we call Muslim?', he asks:

A mosque-goer, the child of Muslim parents, somebody with a specific ethnic background (an Arab, a Pakistani), or one who shares with another a specific culture? What is Islam? A set of beliefs based on a revealed book, a culture linked to historical

⁵⁶ Quoted in Dobe, S. and Chhokar, S. S. (2000) 'Muslims, ethnicity and the law', *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law*, 4, 369-86. Page 382.

⁵⁷ See CRE v. Precision Engineering [1991] COIT 4106/91 and Malik v. Bertram Personnel Group [1990] DCLD 7 4343/90.

⁵⁸ Meer, N. (2010) *Citizenship, Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism: The Rise of Muslim Consciousness*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

⁵⁹ Roy, O. (2004) *Globalised Islam: The Search for the New Ummah*. London: Hurst and Co.

civilisation? A set of norms and values that can be adapted to different cultures? An inherited legacy based on a common origin?⁶⁰

Since a robust account of Islamic history, civilisation and comparative ethnic relations is beyond the scope of this article, and definitive and categorical definitions are neither sought nor - it will be argued - a reflection of how Muslim consciousness should be understood, a more modest and relevant exposition could begin by exploring what we mean when we talk about Islam. Is it solely a religion whose first prophet was Adam and last prophet was Mohammed; is it a state of peace achieved through surrender to God, or is it a political and cultural movement? What is meant by the phrase that 'Islam is a way of life'? And can we distinguish Islam as a name of a religion, from the adjective 'Islamic', the noun 'Muslim'? To begin to answer these questions abstractly, Karamustafa⁶¹ encourages us to approach our conception of Islam by viewing it as a civilisational project comprising

...a sprawling civilizational edifice under continuous construction and renovation in accordance with multiple blueprints (these are the numerous Islamic cultures at local, regional, and national levels encompassing innumerable individual, familial, ethnic, racial, and gender identities) all generated from a nucleus of key ideas and practices ultimately linked to the historical legacy of the Prophet Mohammed.

With this enormous stress upon heterogeneity, how - *in tangible terms* - can we derive an understanding of Muslim identity? Karamustafa suggests that we should begin by focusing on what this nucleus of ideas represents

⁶⁰ Ibid. 21

⁶¹ Karamustafa A (2004) Islam: A civilizational project in progress. In: Safi O (ed.) *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender and Pluralism*. Oxford: Oneworld, 111–128. Page 108.

Minimally...we can assume a set of beliefs (a version each of monotheism, prophecy, genesis, and eschatology) that underwrite a set of values (dignity of human life, individual and collective rights and duties, the necessity of ethical human conduct – in short, a comprehensive moral program), in turn reflected in a set of concrete human acts (ranging from the necessity of greeting others to acts of humility like prayer).⁶²

On a day-to-day basis we can find these ideas articulated in Islamic rituals and practices, where Muslims are reminded through the practice of the pillars of Islam - *Iman* (articles of faith), *salat* (daily prayer), *zakat* (charity), *sawm* (fasting during Ramadan) and *hajj* (pilgrimage) - that actions that are deeply spiritual are not devoid of politics. In this way Islam - comprising the beliefs, values, rights and duties emphasised by Karamustafa - is lived rather than simply practiced. As Hussain⁶³ notes:

The congregational prayer is often held as an example of a community in harmony with believers standing in rows and functioning with one body. Fasting and charity sensitise the believers to those who lead less fortunate lives and make the war against global poverty a vivid reality. The pilgrimage symbolises equality and the breaking of barriers between nations, classes and tongues.

Is this, then, the most appropriate definition of what being a Muslim entails, i.e. that participation is necessitated in some or all of the above practices if one is to consider oneself a Muslim? The argument presented here is that this is not the case. Instead, is argued that the relationship between Islam and a Muslim identity might be analogous to the relationship between the categorisation of one's sex and one's gendered identity.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Hussain, D. (2005) 'Can Islam make us British', in M. Bunting (Ed.) *Islam, Race and Being British*. London: Guardian Books. Page: 39

⁶⁴ It should be stressed that this distinction is problematic, but is adopted as a heuristic device to develop this particular point. For example, in her landmark *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) argues that any coherence achieved within categories of sex, gender, and sexuality does in fact reflect a culturally constructed mirage of coherence that is achieved through the repetition of what she calls 'stylised acts'. She argues that, in their repetition, these acts establish the appearance of

That is, one may be biologically female or male in a narrow sense of the definition, but one may be a woman or man in multiple, overlapping and discontinuous ways. This is not a perfect analogy, particularly since one's sex reflects something that emerges on a continuum that can be either - or both - internally defined or externally ascribed, but it potentially allows a range of factors other than religion (such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, and agnosticism) to shape Muslim identities.

What is being argued is that in contrast to the scriptural conception, we could view Muslim identity as a political formation. Compared to the purely theological variety, this political category might be further description of operationalising Muslim identity because it includes opportunities for self-definition (such as formally on the census or on 'ethnic' monitoring forms⁶⁵ or informally in public and media discourse). Equally, it can facilitate the description of oneself as 'Muslim' and take the multiple (overlapping or synthesised) and subjective elements into account independently or intertwined with objective behavioural congruence to the religious practices outlined earlier. This political space for self-definition is integral within this process of categorisations, however, just as on a census form or other prescriptive sources, when a category is

what she describes as an essential or ontological 'core' gender. This leads Butler to consider one's 'sex' – along with one's 'gender' and 'sexuality' – as being 'performative', and since this challenges biological accounts of sexual binaries, it is recognised that Butler would both support *and* problematise the above analogy. That is, whilst she may support it by agreeing with the contested nature of 'gender', she might also problematise it by rejecting 'sex' as something given – rather than produced. Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.

⁶⁵ Aspinall, P. J. (2000) 'Should a question on "religion" be asked in the 2001 British Census? A public policy case in favour', *Social Policy & Administration*, 34 (5). pp. 584-600

operationalised and imposed externally, it need not constitute the making of a group identity. As Cornell and Hartman⁶⁶ argue

...others may assign us an ethnic identity, but what they establish by doing so is an ethnic category. It is our own claim to that identity that makes us an ethnic group. The ethnic category is externally defined, but the ethnic group is internally defined.

The point is to recognise the pragmatic possibilities that emerge in the Muslim response to Islamophobia; to register how Muslim anti-Islamophobia includes the recognition that the element of choice is not a total one. By this it is meant that although one may imagine a Muslim identity in different ways, when one is born into a Muslim family one becomes a Muslim. This is not to impose an identity or a way of being onto people who may choose to passively deny or actively reject their Muslim identity because, consistent with the right of self-dissociation, this rejection of Muslim identification (or adoption of a different self-definition) should be recognised where a claim upon it is made. *What is instead being argued is that when a Muslim identity is mobilised, it should not be dismissed because it is an identity of personal choice, but rather understood as a mode of classification according to the particular kinds of claims Muslims make for themselves.* In this respect, contesting Islamophobia has often been the conduit through which Muslim consciousness has to fruition, often through the creation of Muslim groupings that both innovate with - or are modelled on - corporatist organisations created by other, especially Jewish, faith groups (e.g. the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and the Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland (ZMD) both draw upon the precedents of Jewish bodies and organizations. Meanwhile the Conseil Francais du Culte Musulman draws

⁶⁶ Cornell, S. and Hartmann, D. (1998) *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press (a Sage Publications company). Page 20.

upon the Consistoire for Jews). What is interesting is the extent to which each has been framed within agendas of countering Islamophobia through democratic participation, stakeholder representation and consultation, rather than as clerical or religious bodies *per se*. Liberal democratic settlements have therefore included spaces levered open by Muslim consciousness, and where Muslims are not mere objects of regulation of governance, but instead are audible and potentially transformative.

Conclusions

In this article I have tentatively delineated three ways in which postcolonialism is being used to inform the Islamophobia concept. The first functions as *continuity*, in so far as it is claimed that historical colonial dynamics are reproduced in contemporary postcolonial environments, broadly conceived. The second involves *translation*. This is related to the first means but is different, and centres on the utility in particular of Orientalist critique for the Islamophobia concept. The third concerns an account of Muslim consciousness, in so far as it is argued that ‘the making of Muslims’⁶⁷ is signalled by the emergence of the concept of Islamophobia; in one view as part of a wider ‘decentring’ of the West.⁶⁸ I argue that the third framing rests on terrain that is also populated by scholarship beyond the postcolonial tradition. This is because it expresses a story of how Muslims have contested and sought revisions to existing anti-discrimination settlements, something that is observable within imperfect liberal democratic settlements

⁶⁷ Vakil, A.K. (2010) ‘Is the Islam in Islamophobia the Same as the Islam in Anti-Islam; Or, When is it Islamophobia Time?’, in: A. K. Vakil and S. Sayyid (eds) *Thinking Through Islamophobia*. Hurst & Co. p. 43.

⁶⁸ Sayyid, S. (1997) *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentricism and the Emergence of Islamism*. London: Zed Books.

that contain institutional levers (through which to pursue equality and diversity) that challenge Islamophobia.