

12-2006

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### Repository Citation

Mielants, Eric and Grosfuguel, Ramon, "The Long-Durée Entanglement Between Islamophobia and Racism in the Modern/ Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal World-System" (2006). *Sociology & Anthropology Faculty Publications*. 39.

<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/sociologyandanthropology-facultypubs/39>

### Published Citation

Mielants, Eric; Grosfuguel, Ramon. "The Long-Durée Entanglement Between Islamophobia and Racism in the Modern/ Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal World-System" in *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, December 2006, Vol. 5 (1), p. 1-12.

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# ***The Long-Durée Entanglement Between Islamophobia and Racism in the Modern/Colonial Capitalist/Patriarchal World-System***

## **An Introduction**

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**Abstract:** The first part of this essay discusses Islamophobia as a form of racism in a world-historical perspective. The second part is a discussion of Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism. The third part is on Islamophobia as Orientalism. The fourth part is Islamophobia as epistemic racism, while the final part is an example of this using the case of European Islamic Philosopher and Theologian, Tariq Ramadan. It is argued that Islamophobia as a form of racism against Muslim people is not only manifested in the labor market, education, public sphere, global war against terrorism, or the global economy, but also in the epistemological battleground about the definition of the priorities in the world today. The essay then briefly introduces the contributions of each scholar gathered in this issue of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* (Walter D. Mignolo, Farish A. Noor, Thomas E. Reifer, Abdulkader Tayob, Manuela Boatcă, and Madina Tlostanova) and elaborates on how they have attempted in different ways to address some of the issues raised above. The volume, of which this is an introduction, is the result of an international conference on “The Post-September 11 New Ethnic/Racial Configurations in Europe and the United States: The Case of Islamophobia” that was organized by the authors at the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme (MSH) in Paris on June 2-3, 2006.

Any discussion of Islamophobia today has to depart from a discussion about the cartography of power of the “world-system” for the past 500 years. If we under-

stand the “modern world-system” as a global inter-state system organized solely in terms of an international division of labor, Islamophobia would then be an epiphenom-

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enon of the political-economy of the world-system and, in particular, of the ceaseless accumulation of capital on a world-scale. However, if we shift the geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge from a North oriented gaze of the world-system towards a South oriented view, we get a different picture of the global cartography of power. From a Southern perspective, the world-system is organized not only as a global interstate system centered around an international division of labor, but includes, not as additive elements but as constitutive of the capitalist accumulation on a world-scale, a global racial/ethnic hierarchy (Europeans/Euro-Americans vs. non-European peoples), a global patriarchal hierarchy (global gender system and a global sexual system), a global religious hierarchy, a global linguistic hierarchy, a global epistemic hierarchy, etc. (see Grosfoguel 2006). The “package” of entangled power hierarchies of the world-system is broader and more complex than what is frequently theorized in world-system analysis. For the sake of economizing space, when we use the term “world-system” in this essay, we refer to the “modern/colonial European/Euro-American Christian-centric capitalist/patriarchal world-system.” At the risk of sounding ridiculous, we prefer a long phrase like this to characterize the present heterarchical structure (multiple power hierarchies entangled with one another in complex historical ways) of the world-system, than the limited characterization of a single hierarchy called “capitalist world-system” with capital accumulation as the single logic of the system (Ibid). The latter can lead to an economic reductionist understanding of the world-system, while the former leads to a more complex, non-reductive structural-historical analysis. Islamophobia as a form of racism against Muslim people is not an epiphenomenon, but constitutive of the international division of labor.

The first part of this essay discusses Islamophobia as a form of racism in a world-historical perspective. The second part is a

discussion of Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism. The third part is on Islamophobia as Orientalism. The fourth part is Islamophobia as epistemic racism, while the final part is an example of this using the case of European Islamic Philosopher and Theologian, Tariq Ramadan.

### **ISLAMOPHOBIA AS A FORM OF RACISM IN WORLD-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The challenge for our topic is to answer how it was possible that a religious difference in the pre-modern/colonial world turned into a racial/ethnic difference in the modern/colonial world. In the heterarchical conceptualization of the world-system used here, Islamophobia would be the subalternization and inferiorization of Islam produced by the Christian-centric religious hierarchy of the world-system since the end of the 15th century. The year 1492 is a crucial foundational year for the understanding of the present system. In this year, 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/ethnic hierarchy of the world-system, privileging populations of European origin over the rest. Jews and Arabs became the subaltern internal “Others” within Europe, while indigenous people became the external “Others” of Europe (Mignolo 2000).

The first marker of “otherness” in the “European/Euro-American Christian-Centric Capitalist/Patriarchal World-System” was around religious identity. Jews and Arabs were characterized as “people with the wrong religion” while indigenous people

were constructed as “people without religion” (Maldonado-Torres 2006). In the global racial/ethnic hierarchy produced by the two major events of 1492, the “people without religion,” that is “people without God,” were at the bottom of the hierarchy, while “people with the wrong religion,” that is, “people with the wrong God,” occupied a different position in this hierarchy. How did “people with the wrong religion” turn into “people below the human,” that is, racially inferior people?

The struggle of Christian Spain against Islam formed part of a long imperial struggle in the Mediterranean Sea that goes back to the crusades. The Christian vs. Islam struggle articulated what Walter Mignolo (2000) characterizes as the “imperial difference,” while the post-1492 Spanish vs. Indigenous struggle in the Americas articulated the “colonial difference.” The “imperial difference” after 1492 is the result of imperial relations between European empires versus Non-European Empires and we will characterize it here as the result of the “imperial relation.” The “colonial difference” is the result of colonial relations between European and non-European peoples and we will characterize it here as a result of the “colonial relation.” Historically, the expulsion of Arabs and Jews from Christian Spain in the name of “purity of blood” was a proto-racist process (not yet fully racist, although the consequences were not that different). “Purity of blood” was not used as a racial term but as a technology of power to trace the religious ancestry of the population. However, “purity of blood” did not become a fully racist perspective until much later and only after the application of the notion of the “purity of blood” to indigenous peoples in the Americas.

Indigenous peoples characterized in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century as “people without God” in the Christian Spanish imaginary became inferior sub-human or non-human beings. It is this inferiorization below the “human,” to the level of animals, which turned indigenous peoples in the

Americas into the first racialized subject of the modern/colonial world inaugurated in 1492 (Dussel 1994). This racist imaginary was extended to new “people without God” such as sub-Saharan Africans transferred massively to the Americas as part of the European slave trade after the infamous debate between Sepulveda and Las Casas in the School of Salamanca in the 1550s. Sepulveda argued that indigenous people had no soul and therefore were not humans and could be enslaved without representing a sin in the eyes of God (Wallerstein 2006). While Las Casas argued that they were savages with a soul, that is culturally inferior, child-like but ultimately humans to be Christianized rather than enslaved. Both represent the initial formal articulation of the two forms of racism that continued for the next five centuries. Sepulveda represented a biological racist discourse while Las Casas a cultural racist discourse.

Las Casas argued that “Indians” should be incorporated in the *encomienda* (a form of semi-feudal coerced labor) and called for Africans to replace them as slaves in the plantations. After all, Africans were characterized by Las Casas not only as “people without religion” but also as “people without soul.” The argument here is that the racist imaginary that was built against the indigenous people of the new world was then gradually extended to all non-European peoples starting with the African slave trade in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

The important issue for our topic is how this racist imaginary was extended even to people that were characterized as “people with the wrong God” in the late 15 century. As the European Empires’ relations with the Islamic Empires turned from an “imperial relation” into a “colonial relation” (the Dutch colonization of Indonesia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the British colonization of India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the British colonization of the Middle East in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the demise and subsequent division of the Ottoman Empire among several European empires at the end of the First World War), the

notion of “people with the wrong God” in the Theological Christian imaginary of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries was secularized into a “scientific evolutionary hierarchical civilization” imaginary that turned the late 15<sup>th</sup> century “people with the wrong religion” (imperial difference) into the inferior “savages and primitives” of “people without civilization” (colonial difference) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *The latter represented a crucial transformation from the inferiorization of non-Christian religions (such as Islam, Judaism, etc.) to the inferiorization of the human beings practicing those religions (such as Muslims and Jews). This discursive mutation was central to the entanglement between the inferiorization of religion and the racism against non-European human beings practicing those religions. The Christian-centric global religious hierarchy and the Eurocentric global racial/ethnic hierarchy were increasingly entangled and the distinction between practicing a non-Christian religion and being racialized as an inferior human became increasingly erased.*

### ISLAMOPHOBIA AS A FORM OF CULTURAL RACISM

In the last 60 years there has been a historical transformation in racist discourses. While biological racist discourses declined, cultural racism became the hegemonic form of racism in the late world-system (Grosfoguel 2003). The defeat of Nazi Germany, the anti-colonial struggles and the civil rights movements of colonial minorities inside the Western empires created the historical and political conditions for the transition from biological racism to cultural racism. The white elites of the world-system did not give up on their racism. They simply shifted the meanings and discourses of “race” in response to the challenges from the struggles of colonized people.

Cultural racism is a form of racism that does not even mention the word “race.” It is focused on the cultural inferiority of a group of people. Usually it is framed in terms of the inferior habits, beliefs, behaviors, or val-

ues of a group of people. It is close to biological racism in the sense that cultural racism naturalizes/essentializes the culture of the racialized/inferiorized people. The latter are often represented as fixed in a timeless space.

In the new cultural racist discourses, religion has a dominant role. The contemporary tropes about “uncivilized,” “barbarian,” “savage,” “primitive,” “underdeveloped,” “authoritarian,” and “terrorist” inferior people are today concentrated in the “other’s” religious practices and beliefs. By focusing on the “other’s” religion, the Europeans, Euro-Americans and Euro-Israelis manage to escape being accused of racism. However, when we carefully examine the hegemonic rhetoric in place, the tropes are a repetition of old biological racist discourses and the people who are the target of Islamophobic discourses are the traditional colonial subjects of the Western Empires, that is, the “usual suspects.”

Only within the outlined long *durée* of historical continuities together with the recent hegemony of cultural racism can we understand the relationship between Islamophobia and racism today. It is absolutely impossible to de-link the hate or fear against Muslims from racism against non-European people. Islamophobia and cultural racism are entangled and overlapping discourses. The association of Muslims with the colonial subjects of Western empires in the minds of white populations is simply a given in the core of the “modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system.” This links Islamophobia to an old colonial racism that is still alive in the world today, especially in the metropolitan centers.

In Great Britain, Muslims are associated with Egyptians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (subjects from old British colonies); thus Islamophobia in Britain is associated with anti-Black, anti-Arab and anti-South Asian racism. In France, Muslims are mostly North Africans (from old colonies such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, etc.). In The Netherlands, Muslims are mostly ‘guest

workers' and colonial migrants coming from Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia and Suriname so Islamophobia in The Netherlands is associated with racism against guest worker migrants and old colonial subjects. In Belgium, 90% of the Belgian population uses the term 'vreemdelingen' or 'étrangers' ('foreigners') to refer specifically to Moroccan, Turkish or Arab immigrants, i.e., cultural others that can be defined as Muslims (Billiet & Carton & Huys 1990:432). In Germany, Islamophobia is associated with anti-Turk racism, and in Spain with anti-Moor racism. Thus Islamophobia as a fear or hatred of Muslims is associated with anti-Arab, anti-Asian, and anti-Black racism.

Similarly, in the United States, Islam is associated with African-Americans—most notably the Nation of Islam—and Arabs of all ethnicities. Puerto Ricans as colonial subjects of the U.S. empire are suspicious subjects in the Islamophobic hysteria<sup>1</sup> and the fact that Latinos are one of the largest growing populations of converts to Islam in the U.S. is also an issue. After 9/11, many conservative politicians and American media outlets, such as commentator Lou Dobbs on CNN, associated illegal immigrants with terrorism and national security problems, encouraging, if not leading to, the increased militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border. The latter will likely only lead to more economic refugees dying in the desert.

It does not matter if the Western domestic political system is the British multicultural model or the French Republican model—neither is working. Unable to overcome the

<sup>1</sup> See the case of Jose Padilla, a Puerto Rican from Chicago, who has spent more than three years in an isolated military prison without any charges. Even though Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, the neo-fascist law of the U.S. Patriot Act allows the unlimited incarceration of U.S. citizens without legal charges and procedures in a civil court. The initial public accusation against Padilla made by U.S. authorities at the time of his arrest was that he supposedly had a document to build a domestic atomic bomb in his apartment in Chicago. The accusation is so ridiculous that they kept him incarcerated without a due procedure in the courts for several years.

problem of racial discrimination, racism becomes a corrosive process that ends up destroying the abstract ideals of each model. In the case of the Anglo-American world, multiculturalism and diversity operate to conceal white supremacy. The racial minorities are allowed to celebrate their history, traditions and identity as long as they leave intact the white supremacy's racial/ethnic hierarchy of the status quo. The dominant system in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States is an institutionalized and concealed "white affirmative action" that benefits whites on a daily basis and at all levels of social existence. It is so powerful that it has become normalized to the point of not being stated as such.

In the French Republican model, the formal system of equality operates with an institutionalized and normalized "communautarisme masculin blanc." If racial/gender/sexual minorities protest discrimination, they are accused by the "communautaristes masculin blanc" in power to be acting as "communautaristes" as if the elites in power were racial and gender blind/neutral, behaving towards everybody with a "universal principle of equality." White supremacy in France operates within the myth of a "racially blind society." "Racially-blind racism" is institutionalized and normalized in France to the point that makes discriminatory "communautarisme masculin blanc" invisible.

Islamophobia is a case in point. The so-called neutrality of the West is contradicted when Muslims affirm their practices and identities in the public sphere and when they make claims of discrimination in education or the labor market as citizens with equal rights within Western states. The veil law in France against Muslim women's use of the veil in public institutions or the incarceration without due procedure and torture of thousands of Muslims in the United States are just recent instances in a long list of grievances.

At a world level, Islamophobia has been the dominant discourse used in the post-civ-

il rights and post-independence era of dominant cultural racist discourses against Arabs. The events of 9/11 escalated anti-Arab racism through an Islamophobic hysteria all over the world, specifically among the dominant elites of the United States and Israel. The latter is not surprising given U.S. and Israeli representation of Palestinians, Arabs and Islamic people in general as terrorists decades before 9/11 (Said 1979, 1981). The responsibility of U.S. foreign policy is never linked to the tragic events of 9/11. The U.S. Cold War against the "Evil Empire" in Afghanistan during the 1980s financed, supported and created a global network of Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups, then known as "Freedom Fighters," that came back to haunt them on 9/11 (Johnson 2006). The U.S. was complicit in Osama Bin-Laden's and Al Qaeda's operations as part of the CIA's global/imperial designs and operations against the Soviet Union back in the 1980s. However, it is easier to blame Arab people and use racist Islamophobic arguments rather than to critically examine U.S. foreign policy over the past 50 years. The same applies to Saddam Hussein, who was a loyal U.S. ally and fought dirty wars, supported by the CIA, against Iran following U.S. imperial/global designs during the 1980s. Yet he was later declared a U.S. enemy and falsely accused by the U.S. elites to have links to Al Qaeda in order to justify a long-planned war against Iraq (Risen 2006).

It is symptomatic that in most Western countries, Arabs are still perceived as if they were "the majority of Muslims in the world" even though they are only 1/5 of the world's total Muslim population. This is related to Western global/imperial designs for domination and exploitation of oil in the Middle East and Arabs' resistance against it (Harvey 2003). The long term exaggerated image of Arabs as terrorists and violent in Western media (newspapers, movies, radio, television, etc.) has been fundamental to the new wave of anti-Arab racism linked to an Islamophobic discourse through cultural racism before and after 9/11 (Said 1981). It is

not accidental that Anti-Arab racism accounts for most Islamophobia in the West. Even Muslims from South Asia and African origin living in the West get part of the heat of the anti-Arab racism, especially in the United States (Salaita 2006).

## ISLAMOPHOBIA AS ORIENTALISM

One of the cultural racist arguments used against Islamic people today is their "patriarchal and sexist abuses of women." As part of the construction of Islamic people as inferior in relation to the West, an important argument to sustain their "uncivilized" and "violent" values/behavior is the oppression of women at the hands of men.

It is ironic to hear Western patriarchal and Christian conservative fundamentalist figures talk as if they were the defenders of feminism when they talk about Islam. George W. Bush's main argument to invade Afghanistan was the need to liberate brown women from the atrocities of brown men. The hypocrisy of the argument is clear when the Bush Administration has been actively defending Christian patriarchal fundamentalism, opposing abortion and women's civil/social rights during the past years in the United States, while using a women's rights argument against the Taliban's to invade Afghanistan.

The rhetoric of "white men as saviors of women of color from colored men's patriarchal abuses" actually goes back to colonial times. It has historically served to conceal the real reasons behind the colonization of the non-West. We now know that one of the real reasons behind the Bush Administration's invasion of Afghanistan was its geopolitical strategic location and importance in terms of proximity to oil and gas in South Asia and not the desire to liberate the women of the region from the barbaric practices of the Taliban. Otherwise, why didn't the U.S. do anything earlier? Immediately after the invasion, occupied Afghanistan provided legal permission to gas and oil transna-

tional companies to built pipelines over its territory (Rashid 2001). In addition, the symbolic value of a speedy military victory accomplished by superior Western firepower against Muslim fundamentalists in Afghanistan (2001), right on the Iranian border, should also not be underestimated. In the Western media, Islamophobic representations of Muslim people as savages in need of Western civilizing missions is the main narrative used to cover-up or ignore global/imperial military and economic designs.

The impact of patriarchy on a fundamentalist interpretation of religious texts is not unique to Islam. We can see similar abuses against women held among fundamentalist Christian (Catholic and Protestants) or Jewish men. You can find as many patriarchal and sexist arguments in the Bible as in the Koran. However, the sexist and patriarchal characterization of Islam is what is represented in the press while there is practically silence about the patriarchal oppression of women sustained and practiced by Judaism and Christianity in the West. It is important to note that Islam was the first religion in the world to grant women the right to divorce more than one thousand years ago. The Christian world only granted women the right to divorce in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Catholic Church and some countries still do not recognize it. This is not to justify patriarchal abuses of some Muslim men over women, but to question the stereotypical racial representation that only represents Muslim men as those who abuse women around the world.<sup>2</sup> This Islamophobic ar-

gument is incoherent, inconsistent and false. It only serves Western global/imperial designs.

Thus, what we have in the world today is not a clash of civilizations but a clash of fundamentalisms (Ali 2002) and a clash of patriarchies. The Bush administration has defended Christian fundamentalist arguments to characterize the “Islamic enemy” as a part of the old crusade wars, while Islamic fundamentalists use a similar language (Ibid). The former, in the name of civilization and progress, defends a Western form of patriarchy with the monogamist family at its center, while the latter defends a non-Western form of patriarchy with polygamy authorized as central to the family structure. However, as Islamic feminist have sustained, patriarchal versions of Islam are not inherently Islamic but represent the colonization of Islam by patriarchy (Mernisi 1987). The interpretation of the original sacred scriptures were hijacked by men throughout the history of Islam.

The same thing could be said of the Jewish and Christian sacred texts. Interpretations were controlled by patriarchal interpretations of the scriptures as the dominant perspective in these world religions. Therefore, there is no “patriarchy” as a single system in the world-system today, but “patriarchies” in the sense of several systems of gender domination of men over women. The patriarchal system that was globalized in the present world-system is to a certain degree the Western Christian form of patriarchy. Non-Western forms of patriarchy have co-existed with the West in the peripheral regions of the world-system and in many epochs of colonial history the West was complicit with them in their colonial/imperial projects. To talk as if patriarchy, as a system of gender domination, is external to the West and located in Islam is a historical Orientalist distortion that goes back to Western representations of Islam in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. European colonial expansion has exported not only capital and militarism but also patriarchy around the world, and often used as

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<sup>2</sup> Given the fact that most poverty worldwide is female poverty, and that most diseases such as HIV/AIDS are carried by women in the periphery, one can raise questions of the degree to which current economic policies and structural adjustment programs designed by Western males in Western institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, etc., cause more actual suffering for women than local patriarchies do. It is not our attempt to quantify this, but merely to point out that the latter is currently on display by the Western media while the former is not, which is anything but a coincidence.



well as reinforced local patriarchies in the periphery in the service of its imperial strategy.

It is important to keep in mind that Orientalist views are characterized by racist, exotic and inferior essentialist representations of Islam as frozen in time (Said 1979). These Orientalist representations of Islam after the 18<sup>th</sup> century were preceded by three hundred years of Occidentalism (the belief in superiority of the West over the rest) from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century until the emergence of Orientalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Mignolo 2000). The historical and political conditions for the emergence of Orientalism are located within Occidentalism.

### ISLAMOPHOBIA AS EPISTEMIC RACISM

Occidentalism created the epistemic privilege and hegemonic identity politics of the West from which to judge and produce knowledge about the "Others." The egopolitics of knowledge of Rene Descartes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century where Western men replace God as the foundation of knowledge is the foundational basis of modern Western philosophy. However as Enrique Dussel (1994), Latin American philosopher of liberation, reminds us, Descartes' *ego-cogito* ("I think, therefore I am") was preceded by 150 years of the *ego-conquiro* ("I conquer, therefore I am"). The God-eye view defended by Descartes transferred the attributes of the Christian God to Western men (the gender here is not accidental). But this was only possible from an Imperial Being, that is, from the panoptic gaze of someone who is at the center of the world because he has conquered it.

The myth about Western males' capacity to produce a knowledge that is universal beyond time and space was fundamental to imperial/global designs. The Cartesian egopolitics of knowledge inaugurated what Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gomez called the "point zero" perspective. The "point zero" perspective is the Western

myth of a point of view that assumes itself to be beyond a point of view. This myth allowed Western men to claim their knowledge to be universal, neutral, value-free and objective. Contemporary authors like Samuel Huntington (1996) reproduce a combination of old Occidentalism with Orientalism. The superiority of the West is taken for granted and the epistemic privilege of Western identity politics from which to produce judgments of the "Other" and global/imperial designs around the world is an unquestioned presupposition. Moreover, in a male dominated academic culture such as Harvard, a scholar and national defense apologist such as Huntington (2004) specifically links geopolitical concerns and security threats to 'internal' American identity issues, most notably coming from those impoverished immigrants who may have the audacity to challenge Western male privilege, socioeconomically, politically and ultimately epistemologically (Etzioni 2005).

What is the relevance of this epistemic discussion to Islamophobia? It is from Western hegemonic identity politics and epistemic privilege that the 'rest' of the epistemologies and cosmologies in the world are subalternized as myth, religion and folklore, and that the downgrading of any form of non-Western knowledge occurs. The former leads to epistemic racism, that is, the inferiorization and subalternization of non-Western knowledge, while the latter leads to Orientalism. It is also from this hegemonic epistemic location that Western thinkers produce Orientalism about Islam. The subalternization and inferiorization of Islam were not merely a downgrading of Islam as spirituality, but also as an epistemology.

Islamic critical thinkers are considered inferior to the Western/Christian thinkers. The superiority of Western epistemology allows the West to construct with authority the Islamic "Other" as an inferior people or culture frozen in time, and leads Western scholars to write entire books about what went wrong with Islam (e.g. Lewis 2002), as if problems in the Middle East or poverty in

regions inhabited by Muslims can somehow be understood by exclusively scrutinizing their religion or their region, effectively turning the 'Islamic World' into its own unit of analysis.<sup>3</sup> Epistemic racism leads to the Orientalization of Islam. This is crucial because Islamophobia as a form of racism is not exclusively a social phenomenon but also an epistemic question. Epistemic racism allows the West to not have to listen to the critical thinking produced by Islamic thinkers on Western global/imperial designs. The thinking coming from non-Western locations is not considered worthy of attention except to represent it as "uncivilized," "primitive," "barbarian," and "backward." Epistemic racism allows the West to unilaterally decide what is best for Muslim people today and obstruct any possibility for a serious inter-cultural dialogue. Islamophobia as a form of racism against Muslim people is not only manifested in the labor market, education, public sphere, global war against terrorism, or the global economy, but also in the epistemological battleground about the definition of the priorities of the world today.

Recent events such as the September 11 attacks on American soil, the riots in Parisian "banlieues," anti-immigrant xenophobia, the demonstrations against Danish cartoons of the Prophet, the bombing of London metro stations, the triumph of Hamas in the Palestinian elections, the resistance of Hezbollah to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the bombing of Spanish suburban trains (3/11), and the nuclear energy conflict with Iran, have been all encoded in Islamophobic language in the Western public sphere. Western politicians (with some exceptions such as Rodriguez Zapatero in Spain) and the mainstream media have been complicit if not active participants of Islamophobic reactions to the outlined events.

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis basically ignores European colonization of the Middle East and dismisses its impact by stating it was "comparatively brief and ended half a century ago" (2002:153).

Epistemic racism as the most invisible form of racism, contributes to legitimate an artillery of experts, advisers, specialists, officials, academics and theologians that keep talking with authority about Islam and Muslim people despite their absolute ignorance of the topic and their Islamophobic prejudices. This artillery of intellectuals producing Orientalist knowledge about the inferiority of Islam and its people has been going on since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Said 1979) and they contribute to the Western arrogant dismissal of Islamic thinkers.

### THE CASE OF TARIQ RAMADAN

It is interesting to analyze the Western reaction to a critical European Islamic thinker such as Tariq Ramadan. Ramadan, who identifies himself as a European Muslim, has been the victim of a Western campaign to distort his image and thought in the eyes of Western audiences. In France, he is not allowed to talk in the universities and in the United States he has been prevented from entering the country. The Western media campaign against his thought characterizes him as some kind of Islamic fundamentalist extremist despite the fact that he is a moderate Islamic reformer. Even Western universities such as Notre Dame University (where he was to become the Henry R. Luce Professor of Religion, Conflict and Peace Building before being denied entry to the country) and Oxford University in England (where he is a visiting scholar today) acknowledge the contributions of Ramadan to a moderate Islamic reform. The question is why a moderate reformist European Islamic thinker (critical of Islamic fundamentalism, suicide bombers, lapidation against women, terrorism, etc.) is attacked and misrepresented as some kind of Islamic extremist. Hani Ramadan, the brother of Tariq, is a declared Islamic fundamentalist and despite his many books and influence, has never been the target of a huge Western negative campaign such as Tariq.

In our view, it is more difficult for the West to swallow a moderate Islamic thinker critical of both Eurocentric fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism than a declared Islamic fundamentalist thinker. The latter confirms all of the Orientalist Islamophobic prejudices that the West constructs against Islam, while the former challenges those representations. This is why both the New York Times and Le Monde have dedicated front pages of their daily newspaper to the "Tariq Ramadan affair."<sup>4</sup>

All over Western Europe, Tariq Ramadan is very popular among Muslim European youngsters. His message to Muslim youth is that you can be European and Muslim at the same time. This challenges one of the most sacred myths of European identity politics, which is that in order to be European you have to be Christian or secular (identified with Western thought and Christian cosmology/values even if you are not a believer). Moreover, he calls Muslim youth to exercise their citizenship rights as Muslim Europeans and intervene in the public sphere making claims for equality and contributions to the society. This has been too subversive both for Islamic fundamentalists and for mainstream Eurocentric Europeans to accept (e.g. Fourest 2004; cf. Bruckner

2007), hence the Islamophobic campaign against his thinking.

Ever since he was banned from France in the mid-1990s, the French newspaper *Le Monde* has been actively attacking Ramadan as an Islamic fundamentalist that uses a "double discourse." Later, when the ban was lifted, *Le Monde's* campaign against Ramadan's "double language" nevertheless continued. What is interesting is the double standard and epistemic racism behind this accusation. Those who promote it apply different rules of judgment when dealing with a European intellectual thinking from Western tradition, than a European intellectual thinking from the Islamic tradition. An intellectual that is attacked as a promoter of a "double discourse," that is, accused that "what he/she says and writes is not really what he/she believes," has no way to defend himself/herself.

The rule of judgment about the work of any intellectual is based on what he/she says and writes. But if the accusation is that what she/he says and writes are false because he/she has a "double discourse," then there is no self-defense against this accusation. Whatever the accused intellectual argues, it becomes tautological. No matter how many times Tariq Ramadan has publicly denounced the oppression of women, terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, his brother's fundamentalist views on Islam, Saudi Arabia and Taliban fundamentalist views on Islam, suicide bombers and so on, *Le Monde* keeps attacking Tariq as a believer in these things without any evidence nor serious reading of his work and public speeches because the claim is that he has a "double discourse." These standards of judgment are never applied to Western intellectuals. The rare occasions that Muslims (and by extension Muslim intellectuals) are not presented in extremely ambiguous terms, is when they happen to be 'natives' converted to Islam such as Ayyub Axel Koehler, president of the Central Committee of Muslims in Germany, or Muslims such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2007) who have abandoned

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<sup>4</sup> Among the many articles published by *Le Monde* on Tariq Ramadan, see the front page article "Tariq Ramadan, sa famille, ses réseaux, son idéologie" (23 Décembre 2003) and the recent article "Tariq Ramadan consultant de Tony Blair" (25 Février 2006). When a newspaper dedicates the main title of the front page of one of its issues to investigate Tariq Ramadan's suspicious "double discourse," you know there is something out of proportion and exaggerated going on. The New York Times has a less active propaganda (maybe because Ramadan is less known and influential among the USA's Muslim youth) and more balanced accounts compared to *Le Monde*, but still with lots of insinuations and suspicious comments. Among many articles from the New York Times see the front page article "Mystery of the Islamic Scholar Who Was Barred by the U.S." (October 6, 2004) and "World Briefing: Europe: Switzerland: Barred Islamic Scholar Gives Up U.S. Teaching Post" (December 15, 2004).

or who consistently criticize Islam. The double standard shows that Islamophobia forms part of Western epistemic racism.

In sum, Islamophobia as a form of racism against Muslim people is not only manifested in the labor market, education, public sphere, global war against terrorism or the global economy, but also in the epistemological battleground about the definition of the priorities in the world today.

In the following contributions, each scholar has attempted in different ways to address some of the issues raised above.

Walter Mignolo, in his essay 'Islamophobia/ Hispanophobia' links the two intellectual currents and draws our attention to remarkable similarities between the two. He also challenges mainstream Eurocentrism. Fittingly, whereas a scholar such as Bernard Lewis (2002) time and again creates an artificial dichotomy between curious Europeans who wanted to accumulate more knowledge about Arabic, Islam, and the Orient in contrast to self-complacent Muslims who did not bother to interest themselves in the non-Muslim world, Mignolo forces the reader to take into account Western intolerance and colonialism towards 'infidels' as well as 'Muslim Others', an intellectual process intrinsically intertwined with a political process, the latter being the expansion of the capitalist world-system ever since the simultaneous destruction of Granada and the 'discovery' of the 'New World' in 1492.

In "How Washington's 'War on Terror' Became Everyone's Islamophobia," Farish Noor claims that Washington's unilateral declaration of the global 'War on Terror' had immediate and serious repercussions on domestic political developments in various parts of the world. In Southeast Asia in particular, he argues the 'war on terror' has had a number of negative consequences, such as allowing the region's governments to justify the use of arms, detention without trial, and the suspension of many civil liberties in the name of anti-terrorism. His central thesis is that America's obsession with anti-terror-

ism has become a further extension of American political, military, and ideological hegemony in the world.

Thomas Ehrlich Reifer, in his "Militarization, Globalization and Islamist Social Movements" looks at the increase of contemporary Muslim fundamentalisms as a multitude of reactions against specific Western (Israeli and American) foreign policies. He also addresses the need to understand these social movements in the context of recent geopolitical developments within the capitalist modern world system itself.

Abdulkader Tayob's contribution provides us with a case-study of one Western country and how the Western majority attempts to 'deal with' the presence of Muslims on its soil. In his essay, Tayob scrutinizes the debate he saw unfolding, while living in the Netherlands, over the value and meaning of Islam for Dutch society and politics in the aftermath of 9/11, and most notably how a global event such as 9/11 accelerated the call for 'integration' of Muslims.

In 'No Race to the Swift', Manuela Boatcă presents us with an analysis of how 19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalist discourse shaped the content of present conceptualizations of Western and Eastern Europe in terms of Orientalism's effects on national self-definitions. In addition, she scrutinizes discourses on Europeanization in the context of the ongoing expansion of the European Union, especially in relation to southeastern Europe, with its large Muslim populations, and the Turkish candidacy.

Finally, in 'Life in Samarkand' Madina Tlostanova provides us with insight into a potential way out of present dilemmas. Her study of cultural and ethnic hybrids in both Central Asia and the Caucasus, and the concurrent significance of Sufism in the region, in opposition to the binary logics imposed by both the Russian/Soviet Empire on the one hand and the capitalist world-system on the other hand, could very well be an alternative epistemology ignored for too long.

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