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Islamophobia and postcolonialism: continuity, Orientalism and Muslim consciousness

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ABSTRACT In this article, Meer tentatively delineates three ways in which he understands that the concept of Islamophobia 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 but different in that it focuses in particular on the utility of Orientalist critique for the concept of Islamophobia. The third concerns an account of Muslim consciousness, in so far as it is argued that 'the making of Muslims' is signalled by the emergence of the concept of Islamophobia, part, as one view has it, of a wider 'decentring' of the West. Meer argues that this 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 settlements, not least the ways in which approaches to anti-discrimination are configured. This is a story that is observable within imperfect liberal democratic frameworks that contain some institutional levers through which to challenge Islamophobia.

KEYWORDS citizenship, identity, Islamophobia, Muslim consciousness, Orientalism, postcolonialism

> *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: representation*.
>
> —Edward W. Said[1]

'History has many cunning passages', explains the elderly speaker in T. S. Eliot's *Gerontion*,[2] while reflecting back on Europe after the First World War from his perspective as someone who had lived most his life in the nineteenth century. It was an observation with relevance far beyond Europe's borders. In the period Eliot 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

1 Edward W. Said, 'Orientalism and after', in Gauri Viswanathan (ed.), *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said* (London: Bloomsbury 2005), 208–32 (220).

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

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Marshal Edmund Allenby entered through the Jaffa Gate in December 1917, dismounting together with his officers as a mark of respect, he is alleged to have remarked: 'The wars of the crusaders are now complete.'[3] Whether or not these *precise* words were spoken,[4] the sentiment was consistent with the contemporary view of 'empire builders as quasi-crusaders returning to complete the work their ancestors had begun'.[5] 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".'[6]

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'? [7] This is an especially valid question because for many observers Said is positioned as 'a seminal source in the literature on Islamophobia'.[8] Yet, as the opening epigraph makes clear, Said did not characterize his work as a defence of Islam or of Muslims. Does this matter? More broadly, and as the title of this article asks, is Islamophobia itself best understood as a postcolonial concept?

3 Quoted in Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799–1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2005), 17.

4 Jonathan Phillips, *Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades* (New York and London: Random House 2010).

5 Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*, 2nd edn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2005), 19.

6 Ibid., 303. There are various, slightly divergent accounts of this. Another comes from Tariq 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': Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (London: Verso 2002), 42.

7 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon 1978), 59.

8 Brian Klug, 'Islamophobia: a concept comes of age', *Ethnicities*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2012, 665–81 (670). See also Leon Moosavi, 'Orientalism at home: Islamophobia in the representations of Islam and Muslims by the New Labour government', *Ethnicities* (online), 7 March 2014, doi: 10.1177/1468796814525379; Kate Zebiri, 'Orientalist themes in contemporary British Islamophobia', in John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (eds), *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press 2011), 173–90; Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press 2011); Steve Salaita, *The Uncultured Wars: Arabs, Muslims and the Poverty of Liberal Thought. New Essays* (London and New York: Zed Books 2009); and Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (London: I. B. Tauris 2002).

My 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 focuses in particular on the utility of Orientalist critique for the Islamophobia concept. The third concerns an account of Muslim subjecthood, in the sense that the emergence of the category of Islamophobia signals 'the making of Muslims',[9] possibly as part of a wider 'decentring' of western hegemony.[10]

Islamophobia as continuity

In many respects the first aspect, continuity, 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 Runneymede Trust's 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 1990s'.[11] A similar reading might be reflected in Raymond Taras's view that 'the *supposed* historical incompatibility of European and Islamic values … is central to Islamophobia'.[12] It is, more broadly, a common characterization even though others may commence the story later. Ramón Grosfoguel and Eric Mielants, for example, start with the *Reconquista* but nonetheless sum up Islamic-Western encounters in comparable teleological terms:

> The year 1492 is a crucial foundational 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,

9 AbdoolKarim Vakil, 'Is the Islam in Islamophobia the same as the Islam in anti-Islam; or, when is it Islamophobia time?', in Salman Sayyid and AbdoolKarim Vakil (eds), *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* (London: C. Hurst 2010), 23–43 (43).

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

11 Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (London: Runnymede Trust 1997), 5.

12 Raymond Taras, *Xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2012), 419 (emphasis added). Of course Taras is not necessarily endorsing this reading. See also Marwan Muhammad, 'Islamophobia: a deep-rooted phenomenon', *Arches*, vol. 4, no. 7, 2010, 96–102.

> privileging populations of European origin over the rest. Jews and Arabs became the subaltern internal 'Others' within Europe …[13]

While these accounts serve to challenge those who insist on a Muslim 'propensity towards violent conflict',[14] what is striking is how they share in the 'myth of confrontation', in so far they see early encounters as determining a pattern of history in which future encounters are cast.[15] While is it certainly true that our understanding of how racialized categories have saturated cultural and political portrayals of Muslims needs to commence earlier than the conventional story of Atlantocentric racial formation,[16] 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 other matters. 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 I hope does not need to be reproduced here.[17] To use literatures other than one's own, I could summarize my position as being consistent with at least this part of AbdoolKarim Vakil's discussion of Islamophobia:

> 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

13 Ramón Grosfoguel and Eric Mielants, 'The long-durée entanglement between Islamophobia and racism in the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system: an introduction', *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2006, 1–12 (2).

14 Samuel P. Huntingdon, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1996), 258. Much of course can be traced to Bernard Lewis's characterization of Muslim complaints during the Rushdie Affair as 'the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage': Bernard Lewis, 'The roots of Muslim rage', *Atlantic*, September 1990.

15 Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation:Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London and New York: I. B. Taurus 1996).

16 Nasar Meer, 'Racialization and religion: race, culture and difference in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, 385–98.

17 Nasar Meer (ed.), *Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Anstisemtism and Islamophobia* (London: Routledge 2014); Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, 'Refutations of racism in the "Muslim question"', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 43, no. 3–4, 2009, 335–54; Nasar Meer and Tehseen Noorani, 'A sociological comparison of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain', *Sociological Review*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2008, 195–219; Nasar Meer, '"Get off your knees": print media public intellectuals and Muslims in Britain', *Journalism Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2006, 35–59.

> 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 …[18]

With this in mind, I would like to continue to elaborate my tripartite account of how postcolonialism is informing the concept of Islamophobia, in the knowledge that there remain significant disputes over the use of the concept among its advocates (and of course its detractors). It is precisely because I recognize that there is by no means consensus that I welcome this opportunity to reach across different literatures and engage with other strands of thought that have helped the Islamophobia concept 'come of age'.[19] Having rested the first (of the 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-civilizational contest at the other, I next turn to a more nuanced discussion of how postcolonialism is being made use of. I then relate this to the second way in which postcolonialism and Islamophobia are intertwined, namely, through *Orientalism*, before moving on 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 I will in turn relate to Islamophobia. For example, Barnor Hesse and Salman Sayyid complain that hitherto 'the postcolonial analytic has tended to focus on politics as practices of cultural representation' that have 'left unattended transnational questions of political power'.[20] These authors have therefore sought to reframe postcolonial enquiry in their critique.[21] In contrast, Marcel Maussen and Veit Bader have set aside the discursive features of postcolonialism to focus on regimes of governance as these relate to Muslims in postcolonial settings.[22] Yet it is certainly the case that, while scholarship on postcolonialism takes in a number of foci, it principally turns on the

18 AbdoolKarim Vakil, 'Who's afraid of Islamophobia?', in Sayyid and Vakil (eds), *Thinking Through Islamphobia*, 271–8 (276).

19 Klug, 'Islamophobia', 666.

20 Barnor Hesse and Salman Sayyid, 'Narrating the postcolonial political and the immigrant imaginary', in Nasreen Ali, Virinder S. Kalra and Salman Sayyid (eds), *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain* (London: C. Hurst 2006), 13–31 (16).

21 Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*; Salman Sayyid, 'Beyond Westphalia: nations and diasporas—the case of the Muslim *umma*', in Barnor Hesse (ed.), *Un/settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions* (London: Zed Books 2000), 33–50.

22 Marcel Maussen and Veit Bader, 'Introduction', in Marcel Maussen, Veit Bader and Annelies Moors (eds), *Colonial and Post-Colonial Governance of Islam: Continuities and Ruptures* (Amsterdam: IMISCO, University of Amsterdam Press 2011), 9–26 (12).

interaction between political and cultural relations forged *during* colonialism, and that can be observed in the *aftermath* of decolonization. This is why the appellation 'post' can be misleading, for the challenge that postcolonial enquiry 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 that marks the 'beginning of the modern era'[23]), 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 as subsequent colonial rule took different forms. From the short-term plunder of the Spanish conquistadors, the brutal indentured labour of the Congolese by the Belgians, to the creation of a compliant British imperial Raj, as well as the settler societies and colonies of North America and Australasia, all offer very different examples. Britain alone, at its height before the First World War, claimed jurisdiction over 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 navel, capacities. A fuller explanation rests in how the British Empire *administered* its rule through 'varying constitutional and political arrangements' across a range of territories, and that were 'connected by a diverse set of strategic, cultural or historical links, rather than by allegiance to Crown or mother country' alone.[24] One outcome of this was that even after decolonization the implications of these 'interconnections lived on and in some ways intensified'.[25] As a concept, therefore, there is a continuing dialogue between colonialism and postcolonialism.

Knowing how one feature connects to the other, however, rests on a more theoretical understanding of the relationship between knowledge,

23 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. from the French by Richard Howard (New York: Harper Perennial 1992), 5.

24 Joel Krieger, 'After empire', in Matthew Flinders, Andrew Gamble, Colin Hay and Michael Kenny (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of British Politics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2009), 590.

25 Ibid. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin point to the repositories of elites that were created or elevated under colonialism, and who renewed and reproduced themselves following independence. This is alongside how social cleavages and hierarchies constructed during colonialism blossomed instead of being deconstructed: 'General introduction', in Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (eds), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 1–4 (2). In Sayyid's (1997) account Islamism is a challenge to these vestiges of colonialism.

representation and politics. This is what makes postcolonialism such a ubiquitous theoretical concept, precisely because it spans 'a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises'.[26] Two important issues that it focuses on are, first, institutions (such as government departments and administrative bureaucracies) and, second, what we might call the semiotic field (discourse and text). How postcolonial theorists understand the interaction between the two is crucial. One influential elaboration is Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, 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.[27] A chief illustration was Whig MP Thomas Babington Macaulay's famous 'Minute of 1835' that argued for the common teaching of English in British India to cultivate an intermediate 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.[28]

In Viswanathan's terms,

> texts all but effaced the sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European 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 … [29]

Islamophobia as Orientalism

In grappling with the relationship in colonial India between knowledge production and power, Viswanathan's thesis is possibly a surrogate for

26 Stephen Slemon, 'The scramble for post-colonialism', in Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (eds), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 45–52 (45).

27 Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press 1989).

28 Thomas Macaulay, 'Minute on Indian education', in Ashcroft, Griffin and Tiffin (eds), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 428–30 (428–9).

29 Gauri Viswanathan, 'The beginnings of English literary study in British India', in Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (eds), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, 431–7 (436).

similar activity in a wider set of contexts, as first noted in Said's *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'.[30] Though at times an obscure activity, the distillation of what Said understands as the key property in the depiction of the Orient in prevailing approaches 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 enquiry, the description of the task he sets himself is worth quoting at length (note that the following 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' 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 a 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).[31]

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 'cultural mechanisms for the expression of colonial ideas and values'.[32] It is sometimes stated therefore that Said is applying Foucault, but 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 legitimizing power or authority (which he keenly observed being exercised in conceptions of 'madness', 'sexuality', 'punishment' and so on), highlighting the degree to which the conditions behind a specific 'problem' often lay in its textual assumptions. This is outlined, among other places, in *The History of Sexuality*, in which Foucault argues that power is a diffuse activity that emanates from every point in the

30 Said, *Orientalism*, 12–13.

31 Ibid. (emphases in the original).

32 Les Back and John Solomos, 'Colonialism, race and the other: introduction', in Les Back and John Solomos (eds), *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge 2009), 323–5 (32)4.

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'.[33] The power to represent is therefore everywhere and nowhere, 'exercised' by everyone and no one. It is probably for these reasons that Said did not source his account to 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 very weak and, to my way of thinking, uninteresting.[34]

Either way, one implication of Said's account is that European scholarship that has been 'elaborated within the confines of Western modernity' retains its ethnocentric anchorage.[35] 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'.[36] As Robert Young writes:

> European thought since the Renaissance would be as unthinkable without the 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 encapsulated in Fanon's observation: 'Europe is literally the creation of the Third World.'[37]

A counter-Orientalist challenge, however, needs to do more than just reverse the complaint, and argue, for example, that there is something inherent to European civilization that has historically prevented it from incorporating difference into visions of common life. This is partly what Turner has suggested, in his observation that European languages do not possess a word that inverts the term 'xenophobia' (from the Greek *xenos* meaning stranger), that is, *xenophilia* (a fondness for the stranger). This leads him to the view that,

33 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. from the French by Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane 1979), 93.

34 Said, 'Orientalism and after', 214 (emphasis in the original).

35 Couze Venn, *The Postcolonial Challenge: Towards Alternative Worlds* (London: Sage 2006), 3.

36 Robert Young, 'Colonialism and humanism', in James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds), *'Race', Culture and Difference* (London: Sage 1992), 243–51 (243).

37 Ibid.

apparently, 'there is little linguistic possibility for the love of strangers'.[38] To develop a generalizing theory, supplemented with some biblical references, would seem an implausible means of elaborating an account of western civilization. But it is precisely the type of Orientalist analysis that is to be found in accounts 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'.[39] 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 civilization, such that postcolonial enquiry continues to relate these historical and contemporary implications.

Said's thesis has been widely embraced in the humanities 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 Islamophobia.[40] In some respects this exemplifies Said's description of a 'travelling theory' that extends beyond its initial purview and, in one case, finds expression in the Runneymede Trust's eight statements characteristic of Islamophobic mindsets.[41] Yet Said's thesis cannot be reduced entirely, as Salman Sayyid 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

38 Bryan S. Turner, 'New and old xenophobia: the crisis of liberal multiculturalism', in Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri (eds), *Islam and Political Violence: Muslim Diaspora and Radicalism in the West* (London: I. B. Taurus 2007), 65–86 (66).

39 Armando Salvatore, 'The sociology of Islam: precedents and perspectives', *Sociology of Islam*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, 7–13 (8).

40 Ziauddin Sardar, 'Racism, identity and Muslims in the West', in Syed Z. Abedin and Ziauddin Sardar (eds), *Muslim Minorities in the West* (London: Grey Seal 1995), 1–17; Poole, *Reporting Islam*; Morey and Yaqin, *Framing Muslim*; Kate Zebiri, 'The redeployment of Orientalist themes in contemporary Islamophobia', *Studies in Contemporary Islam*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, 4–44; Dag Tuastad, 'Neo-Orientalism and the new barbarism thesis: aspects of symbolic violence in the Middle East conflict(s)', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2003, 591–9; Mohammad Samiei, 'Neo-Orientalism? The relationship between the West and Islam in our globalised world', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 7, 2010, 1145–60.

41 Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia*, 4. The eight statements are: 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 Chris Allen's excellent discussion of the Runnymede Report in Chris Allen, *Islamophobia* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate 2010).

what space exists for the "other".'[42] 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 Muhammad 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' than either the Christian majority denominations and other religious minorities.[43] Whatever the contested international relations this episode comprised, it is undeniable that, at local levels in the West, it highlighted narrow ways in which discrimination was being configured. As Tariq Modood put it:

> 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] is 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.[44]

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', which 'often do change over time, usually slowly but sometimes rather suddenly'.[45] Another way of putting this is to state that, while 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 affording them equal opportunity, dignity and confidence. As such it represents a field in which 'political and social rights, and cultural obligations [can be] contested',[46] often with the aim of overcoming narrow ethnocultural 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, 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' accordingly.[47]

42 Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, 33.

43 Muhammad Anwar, 'Muslims in Western Europe', in Jørgen S. Nielsen (ed.), *Religion and Citizenship in Europe and the Arab World* (London: Grey Seal 1992), 71–92 (79).

44 Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press 2005), 121–2.

45 John Rawls, 'Justice as fairness: political not metaphysical', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1985, 223–51 (242).

46 Paul Statham, 'Political mobilisation by minorities in Britain: negative feedback of "race relations"?', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1999, 597–626 (599).

47 James Tully, 'The illiberal liberal: Brian Barry's polemical attack on multiculturalism', in Paul Kelly (ed.), *Multiculturalism Reconsidered: Culture and Equality and Its Critics* (Cambridge: Polity 2002), 102–13 (102).

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: the Muslim complaint was expressed as a new ethno-religious challenge to 'exclusion from the existing equality framework'.[48] For example, in Britain, case law had established precedents for 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*,[49] 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 denominator is religion and religious culture'.[50] The decisive rationale common to this and further rulings is that Muslims' heterogeneity disqualifies their inclusion as a single ethnic or racial grouping.[51] The creation of consultative and representative Muslim forums, such as the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs and then later the Muslim Council of Britain, persistently identified this disparity, and used it as a basis for mobilization. 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 frameworks that contain institutional levers for the pursuit of equality and diversity. This requires an account of how Muslim identities can form the basis of political expression, what has been termed 'Muslim consciousness'.[52]

The notion of a 'Muslim subject' in Europe is by no means uncontested, inviting long-established charges of essentialism and reification. It would

48 Tariq Modood, 'Ethnicity and religion', in Flinders, Gamble, Hay and Kenny (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of British Politics*, 484–99 (485).

49 Employment Appeal Tribunal, EAT/6/88, 10 May 1988 [unreported].

50 Quoted in Kuljeet S. Dobe and Sukhwinder S. Chhokar, 'Muslims, ethnicity and the law', *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2000, 369–86 (382).

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

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

therefore be helpful to unpack these terms by asking some obvious questions about what Islam denotes and what *being* Muslim entails. Olivier Roy's account in *Globalised Islam* begins in this way. 'Who do we call Muslim?':

> 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 civilisation? A set of norms and values that can be adapted to different cultures? An inherited legacy based on a common origin?[53]

Since a robust account of Islamic history, civilization 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 Muhammad? 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 'Islam is a way of life'? And can we distinguish Islam as a name of a religion from the adjective 'Islamic' or the noun 'Muslim'? To begin to answer these questions abstractly, Ahmet Karamustafa encourages us to approach the conception of Islam by viewing it as a 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.[54]

With this heavy emphasis on 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 key ideas' represents.

> 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).[55]

53 Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: C. Hurst 2004), 21.
54 Ahmet Karamustafa, 'Islam: a civilizational project in progress', in Omid Safi (ed.), *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld 2004), 98–110 (108).
55 Ibid.

On a day-to-day basis we can find these ideas articulated in Islamic rituals. Muslims are reminded through the practice of the pillars of Islam—*shahada* (declaration of faith), *salat* (daily prayer), *zakat* (charity), *sawm* (fasting during Ramadan) and *hajj* (pilgrimage)—that deeply spiritual actions are not devoid of politics. In this way Islam—comprising the beliefs, values, rights and duties emphasized by Karamustafa—is lived rather than simply practised. As Dilwar Hussain 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.[56]

Is this, then, the most appropriate definition of what being a Muslim entails, namely, 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, I argue that the relationship between Islam and a Muslim identity might be analogous to the relationship between the categorization of one's sex and one's gendered identity.[57] That is, one may be biologically female or male in a narrow sense of the terms, but one may be a woman or a 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.

In contrast to the scriptural conception, Muslim identity can arguably be viewed as a political formation. Compared to a purely theological variety, this political category might be a further description of operationalizing Muslim identity because it includes opportunities for self-definition (such as formally

56 Dilwar Hussain, 'Can Islam make us British', in Madeleine Bunting (ed.), *Islam, Race and Being British* (London: Guardian/Barrow Cadbury Trust 2005), 37–42 (39).

57 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*, Judith Butler 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 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': since this challenges biological accounts of sexual binaries, it is recognized that Butler would both support *and* problematize the above analogy. That is, while she may support it by agreeing with the contested nature of 'gender', she might also problematize it by rejecting 'sex' as something given, rather than produced: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge 1990).

on the census or on 'ethnic' monitoring forms,[58] or informally in public and media discourse). Equally, it can facilitate the description of oneself as 'Muslim' and take the multiple (overlapping or synthesized) and subjective elements into account independently or intertwined with objective behavioural commitment to the religious practices outlined earlier. This political space for self-definition is integral to the process of categorization: on a census form or other prescriptive source, in which a category is operationalized and imposed externally, that category need not constitute the making of a group identity. As Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann 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.'[59]

The point is to recognize the pragmatic possibilities that emerge in the Muslim response to Islamophobia: to register how Muslim anti-Islamophobia includes the awareness that the element of choice is not a total one. By this I mean 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 on to people who may choose to deny passively or reject actively their Muslim identity because, consistent with the right of self-dissociation, such a rejection of Muslim identification (or adoption of a different self-definition) should be recognized where a claim upon it is made. *What is instead being argued is that, when a Muslim identity is mobilized, 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 is achieved, often through the creation of Muslim groupings that both innovate within—or are modelled on—corporatist organizational bodies created by other, especially Jewish, faith groups. (For example, the Muslim Council of Britain and the Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland both draw on pre-existing Jewish bodies and organizations. Meanwhile, the Conseil français du culte musulman draws on the Consistoire de juifs de France.) What is interesting is the extent to which each has been framed within agendas of countering Islamophobia through democratic participation, and 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 in which Muslims are not mere objects of regulation or governance, but instead are audible and potentially transformative.

58 Peter Aspinall, 'Should a question on "religion" be asked in the 2001 British Census? A public policy case in favour', *Social Policy & Administration*, vol. 34, no. 5, 2000, 584–600.

59 Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Pine Forge Press 1998), 20.

Situating Islamophobia and postcolonialism

In this article I have tentatively delineated three ways in which postcolonialism is being used to inform the concept of Islamophobia. 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 but is different in that it focuses in particular on the utility 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' is signalled by the emergence of the concept of Islamophobia,[60] part, as one view has it, of a wider 'decentring' of the West.[61] 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 frameworks that can contain institutional levers (through which to pursue equality and diversity) that challenge Islamophobia.

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60 Vakil, 'Is the Islam in Islamophobia the same as the Islam in anti-Islam', 43.
61 Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*.