



Istanbul Zaim University

Islamophobia, Geopolitics and the Clash of Civilizations

Anne Norton

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Center for Islam and Global Affairs

Islamophobia and Muslim Minorities Studies [IMMS] 1

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Foreword

Over the last two centuries, different political actors around the world—from the United States to China, and from Russia to Israel—have used Islamophobia to expand or consolidate their political power. Indeed, the geopolitics of Islamophobia refers not only to its political-economic dimensions, but also to its functional use as part of various strategic imperatives and tools employed by regional and global powers to advance colonialist objectives, empire expansion, or narrow self-interests. It is therefore of vital importance to imbue into the public mind (particularly among the young generations) the notion that Islamophobia is not just about religious prejudices or social exclusion, but more importantly, is an essential feature of the global racial hierarchy that may be adapted in different contexts in order to assert control or achieve superior power, control, and wealth.

The two contributions published in this booklet were part of the second Islamophobia conference organized by CIGA in 2019. The conference explored the impact of Islamophobia on culture, society, politics, and international relations. In her paper, Anne Norton revisits the Clash of Civilizations theory in the ruins of the American empire. She tries to contextualize Islamophobia as a manifestation of the fading American empire by answering important questions in the context of its collapse such as: What does it mean to live in the ruins of empire? What do empires ruin? What ruins do empires leave behind? What survives in the ruins of empire, and what can be made of it?

Salman Sayyid discusses the Geopolitics of Islamophobia. He argues that the geopolitics of Islamophobia is about how the world has been configured into a one in which the Muslim presence is hostile to its perpetuation and thus presents it with a real challenge.

These outstanding scholars give thought provoking and piercing presentations that would hopefully allow for more stimulating debates and discussions by students, intellectuals, and experts about this important topic.

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I. The Clash of Civilizations Revisited: Work in the Ruins of Empire Anne Norton

Those who advance the idea of a “clash of civilizations” envision two monolithic cultural traditions, armed, powerful, and imperial in their reach and influence. There are many errors in this imaginary. I am concerned with the forms those empires take in the present, with the burdens they impose, the prices they exact, with what they foreclose, and with the possibilities they open. In what follows I will take up the question of what empire ruins: the destructive wars of contemporary, Islamophobic, imperialism, the colonization of minds. This entails a consideration of what it means to live in the ruins of those wars: questions of occupation, survival, steadfastness, and reclamation. I will then turn to what can be recovered from the ruins of the past: material projects like the recovery of Ottoman beauty; the learning of Muslim philosophers, and imperial promises that went unfulfilled. My project is to consider not only what has been lost and damaged, but what one can build -what has been built- from the ruins.

The idea of a clash of civilizations was most influentially advanced by the late Samuel Huntington.¹ He followed in the footsteps of a much longer tradition of discourse that set Islam against a West that was marked as the homeland for author and audience.² The iconic clash

¹ Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (Simon and Schuster, New York, NY: 1996).

² Among the most interesting of these was the exchange between Ernst Renan and Jamal al din al Afghani. Renan delivered a speech on Islam and Science framed as a comparison of Islam and the West. Ernst Rénan, “Islam and Science: a Lecture presented at La Sorbonne 29 March 1883” to which Jamal al din al Afghani responded. Trans. Sally P. Ragep; Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, “Lecture on Teaching and Learning and Answer to Renan” <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/book/islam-9780195154672/islam-9780195154672-chapter-11>.

See also Monica M. Ringer and A. Holly Shissler, “The Al-Afghani-Renan Debate, Reconsidered,” *Iran Nameh*, 30:3 (Fall 2015), XXVIII-XLV; Margaret Kohn, “Afhānī on Empire, Islam, and Civilization”, *Political Theory*

was that between Islam and the West: whether the West was the Enlightenment, Christendom, the Judæo-Christian tradition, or secular liberalism. As I have written elsewhere, these narratives took their form not from knowledge of Islam or the Muslim world, but from the West's anxieties about itself.

Those who advance the idea of a clash of civilizations envision a conflict of two cultural traditions ranged against each other. Each is monolithic, each is sealed off from the other. Both are armed, both are imperial in their reach and influence.

There are many errors in this imaginary. The terrain of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" is far more complex than the partisans of conflict acknowledge. Civilizations seen as opposed overlap in time and space, or share a common terrain in peace over a long *durée*. Each civilization is not a simple unity but a complex of differences, conflicts and alternative possibilities. At any moment, in any country, one can see an array of positions and possibilities. In any great city, one can see historical moments and diverse cultural traditions layered with each other. In Istanbul, one need only walk into the shadows of Aya Sofia.

There are many empires -and they are not all European. There are the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Spanish, the British and the French; the Chinese empires, the Mongol Empire, the Tamil empire, the Persians and the Mughals. In the new world, there were the Mayans, the Aztecs and the Incas, and the Comanche empire. Many of the empires of the West are not what Huntington would have regarded as Western at all. Elements of the cultures of African empires live in the New World of the West, brought by slavery, enduring in the interstices. The empires of Islam, like those of the West, are many: the *Umma* of the Prophet and the rightly guided, the Abbassids and the Ummayyads, the Fatimids, the Mughal and the Ottoman Empires.

Vol. 37, No. 3 (June 2009), pp. 398-422, and Nelly Lahoud, "Some of these work within the clash of civilizations while others interrogate and subvert it. Saving Muslims from Islam: Renan and al Afghani" in "Islamic Responses to Europe at the Dawn of Colonialism", published by the Belfer Center (a conservative institution at Harvard University) October 2008, <https://www.belfercenter.org/node/89466>.

As this list makes clear, the empires of the West are not always European.³ Europe itself is not always and everywhere European. The empires of Islam are European -and more broadly, Western, as well as Asian and African. Empire is not merely a matter of territorial extension. It is also the colonization of the mind and the rule of popular practice.

There are many of these empires in the classic style, and not one is monolithic. It is in the nature of empires to embrace diversity. They encompass that diversity and it alters them, in ways they choose and ways they try to reject; in ways they embrace, and ways that remain hidden from them. In Britain, chicken tikka joins tea and kedgeree as an iconic British food; Muslim and Hindu and Rastafarian academics join the faculties of British universities. Germany sees the rise of the far right, yes, but it also takes pride in its Turkish-German filmmakers and writers.

In thinking of imperialism, it is appropriate to count not only the classical empires of the European expansion, but also the unacknowledged empires of the Soviet Union and the United States, the ideological empires of the Cold War. At their worst, these were little more than newer, stronger, less bounded regimes impelled by a desire for simple imperial dominion. At their best, they offered liberation -but their best was more dangerous than their worst. Both the Free World and the Communist International held to universalist ideologies. Both were the inheritors of European revolutions that -like the empires of Islam at their best- opposed authoritarian rule. They were avowedly, if not actually, committed to egalitarianism. Both the Free World and the Communist International regarded themselves as emancipatory and hailed any extension of allegiance or influence as a victory for the forces of liberation. Neither deferred to customary boundaries or territorial limits. Fueled by the universalist ideologies of the Enlightenment, the diverse variants of these imperial forces believed -they still believe- that what is best for all human beings could be known by reason, without consulting the human beings concerned. Unfortunately, they were too much inclined

³ I discuss this at greater length in On the Muslim Question (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2013) “Where Is Europe?” 143-163.

to trust their own mastery of reason. As the Cold War faded, this tendency to presume knowledge of the interests and will of others remained strong. The formerly Soviet East saw a revival of Christianity.

Both West and East have been vulnerable to Islamophobia, during and after the Cold War. The geopolitical effects of this showed themselves in the Soviet Union (and later, the Russian Federation) in the persecution of Muslims in Dagestan and Chechnya, and war in Afghanistan. The United States continues to fight wars -undeclared and properly unconstitutional- in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and continues to license and support Israeli brutality. Successive American governments, perhaps shamed by, and certainly resistant to, accusations of religious bigotry, denied the charge and pointed to alliances with Muslim nations, though rarely the most admirable. In these times, an alliance with Saudi Arabia can hardly be regarded as exculpatory. Both the *Umma* and America have a tradition of principled opposition to kings. That would be a firmer and more defensible common ground.

Perhaps the most powerful of the empires in our time is the empire of capital. This may be the only empire that one joins by choice - but is there an alternative? Perhaps this is, in Pierre Bourdieu's term, the choice of necessity, and one joins not as a result of consent but of seduction.⁴ Perhaps the power of this imperial form shows itself in the acceptance of money as a measure of value. Perhaps commodities become "what we cannot not want" in Gayatri Spivak's famous phrase. Capital and capitalism are dangerous in their ubiquity, in the invisibility of their political power, in their corrupting effects on political subjects (as Ibn Khaldun noted long ago), and in their destructive effects on the democratic.⁵

There may be one more empire to be considered here. Perhaps it is an empire, perhaps it is a danger taking an imperial form: Islamophobia

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1984).

⁵ Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, trans. Franz Rosenthal, See also Robert Irwin, Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2018, pp.143-152.

itself. Perhaps this is a particular threat, directed by one or another or segments of all the other imperial forms, against Islam. Perhaps Islamophobia is itself an element of a larger form of domination: of white supremacy, or the ethno-nationalist state system.

However we classify it, Islamophobia is a virtual empire: thriving and spreading on the internet, making itself seem larger than it is. Islamophobia can also lie hidden and protected until it attacks. It is responsible for great massacres like that in New Zealand but, perhaps even more devastatingly, for the many attacks that are not noticed. The oppressive force of Islamophobia shows its shameful power in the constant fear of ordinary people going about their business.⁶

All of these empires establish dominions, create hierarchies, foster inequalities -both abroad and at home. All seek to colonize the past, producing histories that lead inexorably to their dominion. All colonize the mind. All produce, in their material accretions and the thought that animates them, aesthetics consonant with their ambitions. All of these empires build a material presence around them, that like the accretions of a great mollusk, survives when the life within it has gone. All anchor their authority in objects. Monuments, buildings, houses, forms of dress, arts, are all cathected with empire, with nostalgia for the imperial past. All present the imperial past as admirable: aesthetically, technologically, politically, morally. All call the viewers to hold the memory of that past as their own. These efforts are varied and contested at every stage.

Empires come into being and pass away not only through arms, technology and wealth. They are challenged by education, proselytizing (both political and religious) and the propagation of alien aesthetics. These, however, are not the unidirectional and hegemonic enterprises they are often taken for. Religious faith, political commitments, language and culture are not so easily displaced by war or conquest. They may survive efforts at intellectual colonization. Indeed, cultural change does not only go according to the will of the colonizers. The colonizers will

⁶Mustafa Bayoumi, [How Does It Feel to be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America](#) (New York, NY: Penguin 2009). There are many fine works on this subject. I think Mustafa Bayoumi is especially effective at capturing lived experience.

inevitably find more than the resources and power they sought in their colonies. They find themselves with new tastes and new ideas that they find there. They may also find themselves persuaded by the arguments and faith of those they rule. The empires have opened, and will open more fully, to the learning of the once-colonized. The religions of the once-colonized have found not merely a place, but a home, in the West.

What does it mean then, to live in the ruins of empire? What do empires ruin? What ruins do empires leave behind? What survives in the ruins of empire, and what can be made of it?

Consider what empires ruin. First, and most importantly, empires lay waste to the democratic. People do not, with rare exceptions, join empires by choice. The conquered certainly do not, but the conquering soldiers and settlers are often conscripted as well. The great -and continuing- anticolonial revolutions aim first to reclaim the right of people to rule themselves.

What does it mean to live in the ruins of empire? Often, it means that people live within state boundaries that were created by empires; with and within the arbitrary maps of imperial conquest and colonial administration. Living within the ruins of empire also means living within a state system that privileges ethnicity. The effects of British and French imperialism in reifying (and occasionally interpellating) ethnic identities has been extensively studied. The efforts of Woodrow Wilson and like-minded partisans saw the Westphalian system overlaid with a conception of legitimate nationality that privileges ethnic identity. It is not surprising that the man who resegregated the American capital during his Presidency, should have advanced the ethno-nationalist state in his internationalist diplomacy. Wilson is often praised as a champion of peace, national self-determination and cosmopolitanism, but the system he advanced encouraged secession, ethnic cleansing and racial prejudice. The right of a people to have a state of their own was grounded not in their consent but in fictions of blood. Wilson and his allies conceived the League of Nations and ethno-nationalist states in part as a means of encouraging anticolonial national self-determination, but this response to empire did much harm as well.

Living in the ruins of empire has meant living in and with intellectual systems often blind to contributions beyond Europe. This is a loss to the world which is only gradually and partially being repaired. The Muslim world is building on a knowledge -of the Qur'an, of Muslim theology, of philosophy and practice, that European empires, the Cold War, and capitalism tended to disdain. That knowledge is, however, not only for Muslims, but for all the world. Islam instructs believers to carry that learning outwards, to call to the world.

I have learned that much Islamophobia is founded in ignorance. Ignorance breeds fear. The ignorant and fearful strike out blindly, and with violence, in all directions. They are a danger to Muslims, to their own people, even to themselves. Islamophobes attack Muslims indiscriminately, attacking men, women and children, who have done them no harm. As they are often profoundly ignorant, they may also attack a Sikh in a turban, or a Hindu who looks Muslim to them. They see enemies everywhere, fearing Muslims who might enter the United States through Mexico. They spread rumors, conspiracy theories and outright lies. Their hatred corrupts politics. In the harm they do, they corrupt their own souls.

Ignorance and hatred can be difficult to dislodge, but learning can overcome them. The spread of Muslim learning is essential to combatting Islamophobia. The ignorant may have their ignorance, and their fear, lifted from them. Politics can be corrected and cleansed. Allies opposed to Islamophobia can speak more effectively in solidarity with Muslims. We can all become more learned and more just.

Living in the ruins of empire has also been to live with systems of property that are intimately allied -historically and structurally- with imperialism. The Companies -the East India Company, the Dutch West India Company, the Royal African Company, the Levant Company, the Barbary Company, the Virginia Company, the Hudson's Bay Company, were the advance guard of imperialism.⁷ These -and many others- played

⁷ There is, happily, a burgeoning literature on empire and imperialism. Rather than simply reiterating the critical importance of the work of scholars including Edward Said, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Eric Hobsbawm, Partha Chatterjee, Uday Mehta, Aziz Rana,

a critical role in imperial expansion. They have easily identified heirs in companies like British Petroleum and Aramco. The role of corporations, from at least the 18th century to the present, in securing the continued power of now defeated imperial rulers is well-recognized. They did more lasting damage than this. The Companies and the imperial powers carried their systems of law and property with them. They imposed these systems on those they ruled. They displaced traditional, alternative modes of property. Formerly colonized peoples around the world -especially the indigenous- are presently engaged in the recovery of the commons and the recovery of conceptions and practices of property that imperial powers left in ruins. Islamic law, thought and practice have much to contribute to this aspect of the overcoming of empire. One can learn much from the writing of the practice of *zakat*, from the institution of the *waqf*, and from many Muslim writers on conceptions of economic dignity.⁸ My students, Muslim and non-Muslim, read these works with curiosity and admiration, and are changed by them. When Muslim and non-Muslim study Muslim texts together Islamophobia is defeated.

Living in the ruins of empire has imposed many burdens, but is has called forth virtues as well. One must recognize Palestinian steadfastness against the persistence of the colonial; the courage of ordinary Muslims in the face of massacres, yes, but also their courage in facing everyday Islamophobia. Living in the ruins of empire requires courage, reflection and judgment. Those in the ruins of empire must interrogate the intellectual and cultural systems they have inherited and judge what they wish to make their own. They may reclaim, adopt, adapt, but they must do so mindfully. This requires reflection. It also requires

Mahmoud Mamdani, I would like to draw attention to a few recent and important works on specific aspects of empire: Adom Getachew, World-making After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press 2019), Murad Idris, War For Peace: Genealogies of a Violent Idea in Western and Islamic Thought (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2019), Robert Vitalis, White World Order, Black Power Politics (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2015). These works look at the intellectual world-making integral to empires and imperialism from Kant to the present.

⁸ I have been especially impressed by Sayyid Qutb, Social Justice and Islam, trans. John Hardie (Oneonta NY: Islamic Publications International 2000)

courage. The struggles -in force and thought- against empire depend on the capacity to overcome fear. Courage is the virtue that makes democracy possible, for democrats are required to accept difference, face change with equanimity, and walk among their enemies unafraid.

What can be recovered from the ruins of empire? Lost things: lost languages, lost practices, lost knowledge. There are also lost possibilities to be recovered and reclaimed. There are institutions that might take a different route in this, different, time. After empire, it must be possible to think differently about sovereignty. The rejection of empire should entail the affirmation of consent, and the right of the people to rule themselves. Building in the ruins of empire should also make it possible to think differently about the state. A people might choose more or less centralization, different degrees of autonomy at different sites. The Ottoman Empire was -and remains- renowned for its capacity to acknowledge and accept difference in the state. Could this be made new for a new time? Recent years have seen the recovery and revival of the Ottoman past in public space and popular culture. Certainly the millet system and other Ottoman political structures are possibilities that remain within Turkey's cultural and political repertoire -and in the repertoire of the nations the Ottomans once ruled.

The Islamic empires offer profound resources to the many parts of the world that have known their rule. I most admire the ideas of the *Umma* and *ijma* as elements of a conception of sovereignty, Muslim institutions of constitution and consultation, and the possibility of crafting an empire of consent and conviction.

One could also ask what remains of Rome? Of Byzantium? Here in the heart of Turkey, in Istanbul, the questions are always present. What did the Ottomans make of these ruins? What has Turkey made of these? What could be made of these in the future? This is not for me to say, rather it is for Turks to do. There are rich resources here.

As this suggests, people may find valuable resources in the ruins both of the empires they regard as their own and of those whose rule they regard as alien. People can renew not only their ancestral empires, but

appropriate elements of those they fought: even those that defeated them: In this way, using “the master’s tools” they can redeem a past of injustice and defeat. That phrase, “the master’s tools”, comes from a famous essay by the poet Audre Lorde, and it contains a warning.⁹ The full statement is “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Lorde argues that there are presumptions and tendencies that shape analytic systems, frames, and other tools that may limit the ability to use them to reshape the world in a more just form. She is, without question, correct in this. Most of us who study forms of oppression have long ago discovered that conventional academic and political tools serve us less well than they serve those in power. We can, however, reshape the tools.

How are we to counter Islamophobia? Perhaps it is already defeated. Perhaps this is the desperate struggle of those who know they have lost. We should not presume that the unjust will always triumph, that the world falls inevitably toward evil. We should have more trust in the possibility that the good can triumph. Yet even if this were so, even if there were no hope, there are too many lives at stake to defer this struggle.

Around the world, there is evidence that people are making use of what they have learned from empire. Ibn Khaldun taught that solidarity, *asabiyya*, is the beginning of power. Practicing, cultivating solidarity, both among Muslims and with allies, empowers the struggle against Islamophobia. We saw a vivid example of this at Standing Rock. There the indigenous Lakota made a stand against oil companies who sought to extend a pipeline across treaty lands. They declared that they were defending the environment, especially water, and places sacred to their tribe. MPower, an organization of young Muslims, issued videos expressing their solidarity with Standing Rock.¹⁰ They found common

⁹ Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf

¹⁰The MPower Change video is posted on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1073191862794358>. See also Carol Kuruvilla, “Muslims Stand In Solidarity With Indigenous People Fighting For Sacred Land”

ground in the call to “defend the sacred.” The words and actions of Jacinda Ardern after the massacre in two Christchurch mosques called all New Zealanders to solidarity in support of New Zealand Islam. The sound of the call to prayer, played over radio, television, and the internet, called the nation to unite against Islamophobia.

Civilizations are not monoliths confronting each other. Each civilization contains unities, but also conflicts and alternatives. Each offers different forms of life, different possibilities. There is always the possibility of common ground. In place of the clash of civilizations, look for the places where they fuse and intertwine. Borderlands are often places of war, but one can find common ground there as well. There are fruitful differences too: ideas, practices, objects, that can be used, borrowed, changed, learned, enjoyed. Learning to love difference -not indiscriminately, but wisely, with judgment and will, is critical to the mobilization of potential allies and to defeating potential enemies.

Thinking about difference well and wisely is fundamental to both a Muslim and an Ottoman heritage. The great philosopher al Farabi thought the love of difference was an attribute of the democratic. Al Farabi is often seen as a disciple of Plato, but he overturns Plato in his rejection of kings, his portrayal of the virtues and desirability of difference, and his faith in the possibilities of democracy for good.¹¹

There is a long history in Istanbul, in Turkey, of living with difference and living with it well: in Rome, Byzantium, under the Ottomans and in the present. Even that dangerous internationalisms of the Cold War might be remade, ruled by a greater sense of justice. All of these offer approaches to accommodating different ethnicities, different political perspectives, different forms of life. All offer histories and the ruined elements of institutions that protect minorities. The past of seizing new lands and alphabets; incorporating new people and ideas, opens to new possibilities.

Huffington Post October 6, 2016 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/muslim-dakota-access-pipeline_n_57f3d75ee4b0d0e1a9a9ea8b

¹¹ *Al Farabi: The Political Works*, trans. and ed. Charles Butterworth. I discuss the democratic character of al Farabi’s work in *On the Muslim Question*, 133-134.

For these reasons, this place -this center, in this University, in this city, in this country- between Europe and Asia, with this history, may be the best site to confront Islamophobia. I wish us every success in this struggle.

II. The Geopolitics of Islamophobia

Salman Sayyid

I am going to try and talk about two main things really. Sometimes I get this sense I write something in the evening, and I wake up in the morning and I think who wrote this rubbish – who fortunately turns out to be me. The reason I am sharing this story with you, and I am hoping that some of you share this, is that I feel like this way about the title of this talk in many ways. The title started by feeling like a good idea, I would talk about the geopolitics of Islamophobia, and the more I thought about it, the more I realized that my title was actually an oxymoron. That geopolitics and Islamophobia don't really go together. So I had two options; I could admit my mistake and sit down quietly or I could do what good academics do and tell you that it is a part of an elaborate scheme and connect them together and voila at the end of it you will see how these two things work together, this is what I will do.

Talking about geopolitics is very easy and it is also very hard. It is very easy because it is something that everyone does as soon as they see some kind of conflict in the world, we will have people talking about how someone is going to move this and that, there, and do this and that and the end the metaphors for geopolitics often are like board games, it's like the game of chess. But to think about geopolitics in this sense I would argue it's not really a board game because in a board game two things are constant. Firstly, the surface of the board game is fixed, in chess the 64 squares with alternating dark and light, and secondly, there are fixed numbers, 16 pieces per player. All you have to do is to maneuver around them. Similarly, in the game "Risk" you have the map of the world divided into different continents and you move your pieces around. But the idea is that somehow you are working with constants or continuities. Now this is not that dissimilar to the initial idea of what geopolitics is. For instance, one of the earlier writers and founders of geopolitics, Halford Mackinder, wrote a famous essay in 1904 called "The Geographical pivot of history" with the argument that the history of the world can be told through the way in which geography determines

historical flows. Basically, his idea is that we have something what he calls the “pivot area” which is largely landlocked and is the center of the world – anyone who controls the pivot area is able to exercise control over the rest of the planet and basically you have then around the pivot area various other areas. The reason why this is important is that this sort of talk has been the subject of much geopolitical reflections and thinking. So often since 1945, American policy has been based on the idea of trying to contain that pivot area by building rings around it as a way of controlling history.

The problem with all of this is that there is no room for anything else than geography. If you look at Mackinder’s essay, he spends most of time giving a historical survey talking about different political entities that occupy the pivot area over time. If you take more closely a look at the time you notice that for example – whether this is as Kissinger says – it does not matter anymore that it is no longer the Soviet Union that occupies the pivot area, now we have the Russian Federation, but the logic of history is still the same. So, there is no difference, the Russian Empire is the same. And if there was a Chinese-Japanese takeover of the pivot area, it would still be the same. So, in the end all history is completely determined by these geopolitical constants.

The reason why this becomes a problem is that because the interactions between politics and space are based around these continuities and they kind of determine what kind of politics are possible around this arrangement. If you believe, as I do, that basically what we are talking about when discussing politics is a kind of retrospective reconstruction of rationality rather than something that was already planned out, then this idea of these continuities becomes contested and challenging. What may look continuous to us now and seems like an elaborate plan rather than that. What we are often seeing is an attempt to disguise contingency through these retrospective reconstructions of rationality.

When it comes to Islamophobia, where does Islamophobia exist? if you think about it, Islamophobia is not considered to be something just hard-wired to geography, it sits on top, it is an epiphenomenon. As it is

epiphenomenal, it should not really have geopolitics in that way. There may be main narratives that try to explain the causes Islamophobia. The first one is economic, in which Islamophobia is really a cover for working out of capital or some other economic presence. So, the way in which Islamophobia is either the excuse for the military industrial complex, or for wars of oil. What is just driving it, is economic logic and Islamophobia is just simply the veneer which enables and justifies that. The second one I call the apologist account of Islamophobia, and that is that the real cause of Islamophobia are the Muslims. It has two variations: one is that the real cause of Islamophobia is the behavior of Muslims. If Muslims behaved like good Muslims, people would not hate them. The problem with that is however that if we look at for example the Rohingya, what did they do that deserves their elimination, that deserves the fact that they were deprived of citizenship, of ability to have children and so on, simply by the fact that they are Rohingya. Similarly, we could say with the Uighur in China where you have an almost Orwellian state that is short of putting actually chips into people's skins, you basically have a whole kind of technology being used to surveil and produce a system, a digital Gulag with all the internet violence of it. But the apologist account starts by saying that the real issue is for Muslims to blame themselves somehow, that they need to explain and account for their behavior, and if their behavior would be modified if they would be prone to extremism, to violence etc., we would not be having these problems. Again, the apologist account is still on the surface here, Islamophobia is now re-located to the interior of individuals but it is still a problem here. The third account is a reactive one, in which Islamophobia is seen as being justified by others for the violence and terrorism by Muslims. So, in a way the apologist account which is an interior one and the reactive one work together. But all three of these accounts see Islamophobia simply as a symptom, it is not the problem itself, but simply a symptom of something else, that is, on the surface of things.

Where is Islamophobia? Here is a group of countries we could debate whether they are Islamophobic or not, we could debate whether some countries have governments that have Islamophobic policies, in

others you have both government and the society being Islamophobic, and occasionally you find countries that just are Islamophobic, but their governments are not. In this range of countries, we have countries that have different kind of economic levels, and also countries that have majority Muslim populations and some which have significant Muslim minority populations. How can they all be Islamophobic?

In every single case, there is the figure of the Muslim. It is not about the empirical, the real Muslim, but it is about what the Muslim represents. Here are some of the common themes that Muslims represent; terrorists, extremists, invaders, immigrants, misogynists, racists, islamofascists, and so on. None of these attributes are exclusive and they play out in different ways. But there is a family resemblance to them. That is how one of the ways in which Islamophobia is manifested, these are not just labels, they contain with them practices. For example, if you think that Muslims are terrorists, it does not only mean going around the school yard calling a Muslim child a terrorist or whatever, it is actually a whole panoply of state practices that emerge from that: how you are regulated, how you are observed, how you are screened or not screened because of that. There is a whole machinery that is invented. Similarly, if you think about the idea of the Muslim invader; the most recent alarming element of that was when 50 Muslims were killed in Christchurch. I would argue that the figure of the Muslim unifies all of these components of Islamophobia; all of the different places where Islamophobia appears is because they trade upon a discourse in which the figure of the Muslim is central. What the figure of the Muslim means, is a reminder of the contingency of this world. Muslims remind us that this world has a history and that there is a future. Every single case, the Muslim figure seems to be the grit, the thing that makes the country impossible to be itself. China, Burma, Bangladesh and many more have in common that the idea of the Muslim is unsettling.

If geopolitics is about geography, what could be more geographical than the world? Perhaps what we need to think about is the idea of the world as being made, and in that sense when Islamophobia appeared to this conjuncture is a way to hold on to a world that is no

longer possible to project into the future. In other words, what I am suggesting to you, is that Islamophobia is a response to the vulnerability of the world that can be changed. And that has many tokens, of which one is the most explicit is what unifies nearly all neo-conservatives and white revanchism, is the idea of the Muslim and Islamization. What is seen as a loss of white privilege is seen as not justice that actually a way of life. This is why all the discussions around white revanchism is about restating the whiteness, white nation and order, there is an idea of restoration. What about Burma, what about India or China? However, whiteness does not promote a phenotype, it becomes a way of life. If you look at the discourses in China or in India, what is being told is that Muslims are preventing the modernization of these countries, they are halting the progress of these nations.

If you want to talk about geopolitics as a game – do not. But if you must, then remember that this is a game that moves as you play. In which case it means that both the pieces and the board can change and will change through the interactions that occur in that game. In which case I would argue that what we have in geopolitics of Islamophobia is really the constitution of a grammar of world order. Of how the world sits together, and what we have then is not just geography, but the ability to read maps itself and before the cartography there is a sense of grammar. So, in a sense what the geopolitics of Islamophobia is really about is how that world has been configured into a world in which the Muslim presence is hostile to its perpetuation and that is the real challenge.

Biographies of Contributors



Anne Norton is the Stacey and Henry Jackson President's Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *On the Muslim Question*; *95 Theses on Politics*; *Culture and Method*, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*; *Bloodrites of the Poststructuralists*; *Republic of Signs*; *Reflections on Political Identity*; and *Alternative Americas: A Reading of Antebellum Political Culture*. She is part of the Bridge Initiative against Islamophobia and founding co-editor of *Theory & Event*. She was educated at the University of Chicago and has also taught at the University of Chicago, the University of Notre Dame, Princeton University and the University of Texas, and has held fellowships at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women and the University Center for Human Values at Princeton. She has working projects on radical democracy, the problem of property, racial inequality, and the remains of empire.



Salman Sayed is a Professor at the University of Leeds, where he holds a Chair in Social Theory and Decolonial Thought and is the Head of the School of Sociology and Social Policy. He is also a Senior Research Associate at Al-Sharq Forum. Previously, Sayyid was Professor and the inaugural director of the International Centre for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding, in Australia. As the centre's director, Sayyid made a film entitled "Everything You Wanted To Know about Muslims But Were Afraid to Ask." He has held academic positions in London, Manchester and Adelaide. Professor Sayyid is a political theorist, whose work engages with critical theory and the politics and culture of the

Global South. Sayyid's work is recognized for its innovative and transformative impact. His studies of the political Islam, Islamophobia and racism, have been highly influential, and translated into half dozen languages. Some of his major publications include: "A Fundamental Fear", "A Postcolonial People" (co-edited), "Thinking Through Islamophobia" (co-edited with Abdoolkarim Vakil) and "Recalling The Caliphate." Currently, Sayyid is leading a major inter-disciplinary research program based on a dialogue between decolonial thought and political theory. As part of this research agenda, Sayyid founded a new international peer-reviewed academic journal *ReOrient: The Journal of Critical Muslim Studies*. He is frequent contributor to national and international media.

The Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA)
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