Decolonizing Psychoanalysis / Psychoanalyzing Islamophobia

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Where I Am Coming From

I am writing this essay as an Egyptian-Polish-American academic living in the United States, but who was born in Cairo, Egypt and who lived there for 25 years. Being a “hybrid” (Bhabha, 1994) gives me the pretext to criticize erratically, while keeping Edward Said’s (1983) words in mind, “even in the very midst of a battle in which one is unmistakably on one side against another, there should be criticism, because there must be critical consciousness if there are to be issues, problems, values, even lives to be fought for” (p. 28). Although I am from North Africa, paradoxically I am not naturally affiliated but rather culturally affiliated with Arabs in the Saidian sense (Said, 1983).

Ethnically diverse parents brought me up and taught me about secular spirituality. Having lived in Egypt, a Muslim-majority country, for a quarter of a century means that most of my friends are Muslims. As a nontheist (Coptic-Catholic-Buddhist) ally of Muslims, the question of Islamophobia has both moral and political significance to me.

Having said that, I am not a Lacanian psychoanalyst; I am merely engaging in what Mark Bracher (1993) calls “a socially transformative psychoanalytic cultural criticism” (p. 74). Also, I am not a scholar of Islam, and honestly I think that debates about “Islamic Reformation”—a movement that can be traced back to the 19th century (Zaid, 2004, p. 185)—should come from within.

Islamic Reformation

Some Muslims find the phrase ‘Islamic reformation’ problematic, particularly when the debates are coming from without. Hasan (2015) writes, “The truth is that Islam has already had its own reformation of sorts, in the sense of a stripping of cultural accretions
and a process of supposed ‘purification’. And … it produced … the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.” Similarly, Hamza Yusuf (2010) in his debate with Tariq Ramadan at Oxford University also argues against the “Reformation analogy” (Hasan, 2015) and argues instead for the “renovation” or “renewal” (tajdeed) of the Islamic Tradition. Both Hasan’s (2015) and Yusuf’s (2010) defense of Traditional Islam should not be quickly dismissed as a conservative regressive move; in fact, they both present us with a counterintuitive, and I may add critical, reading of ‘Islamic reformation’ as perhaps a disguised wish for violence. As Hassan (2015) writes, “it is Isis [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who claims to rape and pillage in the name of a ‘purer form’ of Islam … Those who cry so simplistically … for an Islamic reformation, should be careful what they wish for.”

Bracketing the question of political violence for the time being, since the 18th century scholars of Islam and Muslim activists have debated the place of Islam in modernity. According to Nasr Abu Zayd (2006), two general answers have been put forth: revivalism (ihya) in the 18th century and reformation (islah) in the 19th century. By the early 20th century, however—particularly after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire—reformation (islah) went from a “rethinking tradition” (Zayd, 2004, p. 8) to a conservative one, which splintered into two main movements: Islamism (al-Islam al-siyasi) and Salafism (salafiyya). In this essay, I will argue for the reestablishment of rationalism (aqlania) or reasoning (ijtihad) as a revolutionary foundation for Islamic humanism.

Certainly, the debate regarding reform will continue for the foreseeable future because, as Zaid (2004) writes, “it is not possible to speak about the Qur’an as an absolute that transcends space, time, and place. Human beings understand text through
some sort of prism that varies depending on experience—both individual and cultural experience” (p. 60).

Given what I will say later on in the essay about ‘terrorism studies’, it is worth adding that Zaid (2004) believes “the positive gains by the Islamic Reformation Movement of the nineteenth century came to a grinding halt in 1948 [with the establishment of the State of Israel]” (Zaid, 2004, p. 187). In other words, for Zaid, Islamic reformation (islah) depends on a socially just resolution for both sides of the ‘conflict’ without overlooking the evident power asymmetry: that “there is no ‘conflict,’ only the omnipresent power of the Israeli government and those who resist it” (Sheppard, 2014).

**The One and the Many**

My intuition is that even though this conference is consciously titled Islamic *Psychoanalysis / Psychoanalytic Islam*, the unconscious, hence repressed, subtitle goes something like this: *(Muslim) Analysts / (Muslim) Analysts*. In the words of Ahmed Fayek (2004), “Does the analyst’s religion play a part in his [or her] practice, and what would the analyst do with his [or her] patient’s religious beliefs?” (p. 456). To answer these two questions, Fayek (2004) distinguishes between Islam “as an ethnic identity” and Islam “as a personal belief”; the latter for him is a question of personal choice therefore uncomplicated, while the former he finds problematic since it “involves aspects of narcissism” (p. 457). A different answer to this dialectic involves a synthesis of Islam and psychoanalysis, such as Yusuf Murad’s “integrative psychology” (El Shakry, 2014). This concrete clinical problem, however, about the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims touches on a much deeper theoretical problem that can be traced back to ancient philosophy: *the One and the Many*. Even though both Islam and psychoanalysis
have one founder—Muhammad and Freud, respectively—there are as many Islams and psychoanalyses as there are Muslims and psychoanalysts.

**Radical Psychoanalysis / Islamic Humanism**

Additionally, if we hermeneutically read not only Islam as a religion but also psychoanalysis as a theology (Davis, Pound, & Crockett, 2014) then, following Marx (1843/1978, p. 54), the criticism of Islam becomes a criticism of (Shari’a) Law and the criticism of psychoanalysis becomes a criticism of (liberal) politics. Of the many psychoanalyses and Islams out there, I will focus specifically on “radical psychoanalysis” (Fox, 2011) and “Islamic humanism” (Tibi, 2012). This will necessitate my reclaiming of the controversial term ‘radical’ and the passé term ‘humanism’ in order to decolonize psychoanalysis and psychoanalyze Islamophobia. As Laura U. Marks (2012) argues, “To decolonise European philosophy we need to rediscover its Islamic (and many other) origins” (p. 52).

Radicalism, an example of “antisystemic movements”, is one of the “trinity of ideologies that emerged in the wake of the French Revolution” —the other two being: conservatism and liberalism (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 52). Radicalism, an outcome of the “world revolution” of 1848 (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 63), is a leftist alternative to the center-right paradigm plaguing most politico-economic systems in the world today.

Antisystemic movements, like radicalism, are about “progressive social change … promoted by those who would benefit by it” (Wallerstein, 2004, pp. 96-97). These are the words of Immanuel Wallerstein, whose world-systems theory is inspired by Marxism. In the words of Marx (1843/1978) himself, “Theory [as a material force] is capable of
seizing the masses … as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man [sic] the root is man [sic] himself” (p. 60, emphasis added).

The phrase ‘radical Islam’, which is popular in the United States among conservatives, denigrates both radical(ism) and Islam(ism), and so—beyond the liberal-conservative hysteria against what is dubbed by some ‘Islamo-leftism’—I am inviting us, “the Lacanian left” (Stavrakakis, 2007), to position the signifiers (‘radical’ and ‘Islam’) vis-à-vis psychoanalysis, not in relation to liberalism or conservatism, but in relation to projects like “radical democracy” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2014) and “radical reform” (Ramadan, 2009). With the dialectic radical psychoanalysis-Islamic humanism, I hope then to accomplish two things: (1) theorize decolonial psychoanalysis in order to (2) analyze Islamophobia.

Three Substitutional Metaphors

Drawing on Andrea Mura’s (2014) Lacanian discourse critique, I hypothesize that Salafism as alienation involves a pre-modern fantasy or “a stylisation of the Past”, while Islamism as separation involves a post-modern fantasy or “a utopian visualisation of the Future” (p. 117, emphasis in original). In the case of Salafism, the traditions of the ‘pious predecessors’ or the first three generations of Muslims function as the big Other dominating the Muslim subject ($) with its literalism. In the case of Islamism, the pan-Islamic caliphate functions as the objet petit a, or the Other’s desire, subjugating the Muslim subject ($) with its legalism (i.e., Shari’a Law). In terms of the “trinity of ideologies” (Wallerstein, 2004), Salafism is the rough equivalent of conservatism, while Islamism is the rough equivalent of liberalism.
On the other hand, *Islamic humanism as traversing of fantasy* involves “a trans-modern pluriversality” (Dussel, 2002, p. 50, emphasis in original), which can manifest as the decolonial Muslim’s subjectification of “the cause of his or her existence (the Other’s desire: object a)” (Fink, 1997, p. 69, emphasis in original). In other words, truly radical Muslims ($), according to the logic of transmodern pluriversality (see Figure 1), are not violent jihadists but are rather what Žižek (2014) dubs “authentic fundamentalists” because they do not resent, envy, or even care about how non-Muslims enjoy. Said differently, decolonial Muslim subjects are “characterized by a kind of pure desiring without an object: desirousness” (Fink, 1997, p. 69).

This reading of *Islamic humanism as radicalism* goes beyond Tariq Ramadan’s (2009) transformative project of “radical reform” and is certainly more in alignment with what Bassam Tibi (2012) calls “the grammar of humanism in Islam” (p. 235) or what Zayd (2004) describes as a “humanistic hermeneutics of the Qur’an” (p. 13). Islamic humanism is a rationalist tradition within Islamic philosophy associated with the *Muʿtazila* School, classical theorists like al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd, and contemporary theorists like Mohammed Arkoun, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naiʿm, Riffat Hassan, and Mohamed Abed al-Jabri. Tibi (2012) argues, rightly I should add, for the reestablishment of this inconspicuous philosophical tradition in Islam as a contender for the more popular jurisprudential approach championed by both literalists and legalists.5

Having touched upon the many Islams out there, and the one Islam I am highlighting here, one caveat remains. The following terms should not be conflated (Dar & Hamid, 2016): Salafism, Islamism (or political Islam), and Islamic terrorism (or jihadism). In
some cases, there are overlaps between these movements, but in general they are quite distinct.

**Reproductive Politics**

According to a report by Pew Research Center, published in 2010 and titled *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*, Islam is the world’s second largest religion after Christianity with “1.6 billion adherents, or 23% of the global population” (p. 7). The report estimates that between 2010 and 2050, “Muslims – a comparatively youthful population with high fertility rates – are projected to increase by 73%” (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 7, emphasis added). The report’s manifest obsession with statistics obscures a latent fantasy, which revolves around the world Muslim population’s sexual enjoyment. The report’s quantitative façade (i.e., ‘science’ as ideology) unconsciously sets into motion the indexing of the archive of Orientalism (Said, 1978/2003). This is done discursively via the reproduction of the rhetorical trope of the Muslim *other* as an exotic object of desire. This paradoxical figure—which we can label the ‘conceptual Muslim’ (borrowing from Žižek, 1997/2008)—involves an Imaginary dialectic: the other as repressive of feminine *jouissance* and the other as the embodiment of masculine *jouissance*. From the perspective of the Euro-American Imaginary, the former is cathected as the ‘veiled’ other (which must be liberated), while the latter is cathected as the ‘terrorist’ other (which must be terminated). I will say more on these Imaginary others later.

It is true that Muslims around the world collectively share many beliefs and practices, however, as individuals Muslims are heterogeneous due to Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real differences between them in terms of culture, language, class, religiosity, etc. The
2012 Pew Research Center report\(^6\) warrants this alterity, but specifically attributes the diversity of “views” held by members of the world Muslim population to regional, generational, gender, and sectarian differences without paying attention to “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality explains the double oppression of “gendered Islamophobia” (Perry, 2014) and the triple oppression that a ‘Black’ Muslim Woman may experience, not to mention \textit{class} as a fundamental layer of oppression in the Marxist sense. In addition to the intersectionality of Muslims, Islamophobia is such a complex psychosocial phenomenon that it involves the racialization of even ‘White’ Muslims and the “othering” (Spivak, 1985) of non-Muslim or “Muslim-looking” (Cashin, 2010) subjects—i.e., ‘Brown’ peoples from the Global South, particularly the continents of Africa and Asia. In other words, we must pay close attention to the subjects and objects of Islam as well as of Islamophobia, if we are to make any considerable analysis.

Given my earlier remark about the quantitative style of these two reports, or ‘\textit{science}’ \textit{as ideology}, it is relevant in this context to re-read what these texts have to say about the politicization of the world Muslim population in light of Michel Foucault’s notion of \textit{governmentality}.\(^7\) Though Foucault himself is dead, his concept of \textit{governmentality} is very much alive and eloquently describes: (1) the targeting of the world Muslim population today, (2) the Islamophobia industry (Lean, 2012), and (3) the discursive-practices of the ‘war on terror’, which legitimate (1) and (2). The politicization of the world Muslim population is a question of “reproductive politics” (Johnson-Hanks, 2006, p. 21), which has no empirical basis. Rather, as Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2006) argues, “the specter of rapidly reproducing Muslims, whose high fertility encourages
fundamentalism and enables terrorism” is a political fantasy, which has grave material consequences: “The politics of reproduction include not only the ways in which access to the means of reproduction is stratified but also the political representation of fertility for fearmongering or to force through specific policies” (p. 25).

The Binarism of the ‘War on Terror’

The dispositif of the ‘war on terror’ gains its State-centric legitimacy in the politico-media complex via a costly association (to adapt Freud), the reduction: terrorists = Muslims. This dangerous equation functions like an unconscious mantra, or quilting point, in the Symbolic field; its reductionist logic is best captured in the following falsism: Not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims. The reduction (terrorists = Muslims), and accompanying conflation (Muslims = Arabs), is foundational to the binarism of the ‘war on terror’ discourse, which in turn positions postcolonial subjects as either ‘counterterrorists’ (us) or ‘terrorists’ (them). In the words of George W. Bush (2001), “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists”. The ‘us v. them’ principle is not a paradox, according to Frantz Fanon (1961/2004), since for him colonialism “is precisely the organization of a Manichaean world, of a compartmentalized world” (p. 43).

Even though the Manichean logic of ‘just war theory’ (i.e., the slave-morality of Good v. Evil) can be easily deconstructed using Greimas’s semiotic square and critical theoretical tools from Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida, the painful truth is that binarism—a function of language and culture as argued by Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, respectively, and perhaps a feature of our evolution—is a foundational structure in any Symbolic universe. Therefore, a substantial segment of the Euro-American public accepts the
implicit Manichaeism of the ‘war on terror’ discourse as a commonsensical foundation for the myth or grand narrative about a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 1993), or a ‘holy war’ à la the Crusades, between the ‘civilized Judeo-Christian West’ and the ‘barbaric Muslim East’. Fanon (1961/2004) writes, “The colonial world is a Manichaean world” (p. 6); even in the ivory towers of academia, we do not live in a postcolonial but a neo-colonial world, which is why we must decolonize knowledge.

The logic of Manichaeism is not the logic of différance; beyond a “play of difference” (Derrida, 1968/1973, p. 281) between signs, the logic of Manichaenism is the logic of racism—“a global hierarchy of human superiority and inferiority” (Grosfoguel, Oso, & Christou, 2015, p. 636). That is why Fanon (1961/2004) argues that its logical conclusion is the dehumanization of the colonized subject (p. 7). Having said that, let us keep in mind not only the West-East dialectic of knowledge (i.e., Orientalism), but also the North-South dialectic of power (i.e., Capitalism).

There are at least two latent subject-positions, however, that are not accounted for, but which are surprisingly afforded by the Orientalist ‘war on terror’ discourse: namely, ‘not-counterterror’ and ‘not-terrorist’ (see Figure 2). These two latent subject-positions are ‘anti-terrorist’ because they question and challenge the State-centric definition of ‘terrorism’ as political violence by non-state actors against civilians. Anti-terrorism expands the definition of terrorism to political violence by non-state actors or the State against civilians (Jackson, 2007), which by implication allows for the possibility of viewing ‘counterterrorism’ as state terrorism, as Chomsky (1989/2015) has been arguing for years regarding ‘humanitarian interventionism’. This explosion of both the reductionism (i.e., terrorists = Muslims) and the dualism (i.e., terrorists v.
counterterrorists) inherent in the ‘war on terror’ discourse is the key to resisting Islamophobia. As a side note, the twins—phobos (fear) and deimos (terror)—are minor gods in ancient Greek mythology.

**The Freedom to Critique**

Marx (1843/1978) writes, “the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism” (p. 53) and “therefore, the embryonic criticism of this vale of tears of which religion is the halo” (p. 54, emphasis in original). For Marx (1843/1978), religion—which he refers to as “the opium of the people” or “the illusionary happiness of men” (p. 54, emphasis in original)—is merely an abstract symptom; the Real cause being: the oppressive material conditions in a given society. When Marx (1843/1978) writes, “Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering” (p. 54, emphasis in original), he is arguing that “universal human emancipation” is the material condition for true happiness, which is not a “Utopian dream” but the product of a “radical revolution” (p. 62, emphasis in original). If religion is not only “the opium of the people” but also “a universal obsessional neurosis” as Freud (1907) argues, then in order for Muslims and/or psychoanalysts to free themselves from their sacred illusions or fanatic beliefs they must drop their “theological narratives” in favor of an ideology critique of “political fantasies” (Toscano, 2009, p. 115). For example, Alberto Toscano (2009) shows how some Euro-American analysts use psychoanalysis as a tool for converting Muslims to secularism because they perceive the Muslim subject as having “failed its secularization” in comparison the normative ‘Judeo-Christian’ subject (p. 106). This ‘fanaticism’ on the part of some Euro-American analysts is the result of them
confusing “the methodological atheism of psychoanalysis with the normative narrative of secularism” (Toscano, 2009, p. 114).

Therefore, Euro-American psychoanalysts possess both the freedom and the responsibility of not only criticizing Islamic fanaticism, but also supporting Islamic humanism. As complex subjects, Muslims (like other divided subjects) are beyond good and evil, which Mahmood Mamdani (2004) vigorously demonstrates with his deconstruction of the master-morality prevalent in the Euro-American politico-media complex, “good Muslims are modern, secular, and Westernized, and bad Muslims are doctrinal, antimodern, and virulent” (p. 24). A related problem to Islamophobia then is its inverse, Islamophilia, which is “a generalized affection for Islam and Muslims” (Shryock, 2010, p. 9).  

The caveat of “especially as a political force” in the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of Islamophobia is quite interesting, and I am not sure as to the reasoning behind adding it. If the logic were in the spirit of the feminist adage the personal is political then surely I would agree that Muslims are a political force by virtue of being individuals, but if the implication was that all Muslims on the globe are in favor of Islamism, or political Islam, then I would be very skeptical, if not extremely critical, of such a reductive move, which casts the global Muslim population—or more than 1.6 billion people—as a monolithic group with the same (political) interests.

One should then trace the shift from the Cold War to the War on Terror—although Chomsky (1989/2015) credits Ronald Reagan (and not George W. Bush) for declaring the ‘war on terror’ upon entering into office in the early 1980s, which coincides with the rise of neoliberalism. One should also trace the shift from the Red Scare (Communism) to
the Green Scare (Islamism) around 1989, which happens to be when the Ayatollah of Iran issued a fatwa ordering Muslims around the world to kill Salman Rushdie for writing the Satanic Verses—a relevant moment in Islamophobia Studies. Additionally, one should draw connections between the two Gulf Wars by the same neoconservative administration of Bush I and Bush II in order to map out the negative spaces of decolonial resistance.

Mourad Wahba (1995) asks, “What is the social class, which supports fundamentalism?” (p. 41). His analysis points to a potential quilting point between “parasitic capitalism” and “religious fundamentalism”, which, he argues, are related “dialectically” (p. 44). In other words, whereas “enlightened capitalism” and Protestantism are related “organically” (Wahba, 1995, p. 43), the neoliberal self is in a dialectic relationship with the Islamist other (cf. Massad, 2015), which implies that changing fundamentalism will necessitate changing capitalism.

The Four Five Discourses

Now let us apply Jacques Lacan’s (2007) theory of the four—I should say five—discourses to the twin industries of “terrorism experts” (Greenwald, 2012) and Islamophobia in order to name five subject-positions and to note the impossible communication on the conscious level between agent and other as well as the impotence on the unconscious level resulting from the agent’s repressed truth and the surplus product of failed communication (see Figure 3).

The Discourse of the University

With the Discourse of the University, terror (S2 or knowledge) is the agent in communication with an other, Islam (a or surplus-jouissance). The product is the phobic
subject ($) and the truth is war (S1 or the master signifier). The Discourse of the University can be equated in this context with the terrorism studies ‘field’ (Stampnitzky, 2010), whose ‘experts’ in the 1970s invented ‘terror’ as an epistemic object and the ‘terrorist’ as an absent subject (Zulaika & Douglas, 2008); ‘terrorism studies’ was created as a means to an end, according to Brulin (2015). The goal? Setting a pro-imperialist agenda by politically influencing the Euro-American public’s perception of settler colonialism (state terrorism?). Decades of manufactured consent or propaganda in the politico-media complex have resulted in, for example, the majority of the Euro-American public today having a favorable view of Israel (‘counterterrorist’) and an unfavorable view of Palestine (‘terrorist’). The ‘terrorism experts’ industry is at the root of conflating terrorists with Orientals (Arabs and Muslims, in this case), and it is a great illustration of what Foucault (1972/1980) dubs power/knowledge. Knowledge of ‘modern terror’ necessitated retroactively producing a ‘radical Islam’ as an infinite object of power.

In other words, the link between terror and Islam is a contingency as clearly demonstrated by David Rapoport’s (2002) genealogy of “rebel terror”. The “four waves of rebel terror” according to Rapoport (2002) are: (1) an “Anarchist Wave” that started in the 1880s, (2) an “Anti-Colonial Wave” that started in the 1920s, (3) a “New Left Wave” that started in the 1960s, and (4) a “Religious Wave” that started in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution. Incidentally, Foucault romanticized the Iranian Revolution’s “more authentic, pre-modern understanding of power” (Almond, 2007, p. 161) because, as Ian Almond (2007) argues, “the Islamic Orient Foucault finds in Iran is the same Islam we find in The Antichrist and The Genealogy of Morals – the same energy, the same affirmative rejection of modernity, the same subversion of Christo-European temporality,
the same association with Greeks and Romans” (p. 41). Putting Foucault’s controversial neo-Orientalism aside, Rapoport’s (2002) genealogy of “rebel terror” begs the question: what will be the fifth wave succeeding ‘religious terrorism’? I conjecture, along with Arthur C. Clarke, that it will be cyber-terrorism. In Clarke’s (2007) words: “In the blink of an eye, electromagnetic bombs could throw civilization back 200 years. And terrorists can build them for $400.”

Of course, the signifier ‘Terror’ with a capital T can be traced back to the French Revolution, the year 1793 to be precise (Wahnich, 2012). But as Sophie Wahnich (2012) argues, “Revolutionary terror is not terrorism” (p. 136) because the “political project of the French year II [1793] aimed at a universal justice that still continues to remain a hope: that of equality among men [sic] as a reciprocity of liberty, of equality among peoples as a reciprocity of sovereignty” whereas the “violence exercised on 11 September 2001 aimed neither at equality nor liberty. Nor did the preventive war announced by the president of the United States” (p. 143).

The Discourse of the Master

With the Discourse of the Master, war (S1) is the agent in communication with an other, terror (S2). The product is Islam (a) and the truth is the phobic subject ($). The Discourse of the Master can be equated in this context with the ‘war on terror’ or State-centric discursive-practices of ‘counterterrorism’, which are legitimated by ‘terrorism experts’ in the politico-media complex.

The Discourse of the Capitalist

With the Discourse of the Capitalist, the phobic subject ($) is the agent in communication with an other, terror (S2). The product is Islam (a) and the truth is the
The Discourse of the Capitalist can be equated in this context with the “Islamophobia industry” (Lean, 2012). The Islamophobia network, according to a report by the Center for American Progress, “provided $42.6 million to Islamophobia think tanks between 2001 and 2009—funding that supports the scholars and experts” (Ali et al., 2011, p. 3). Islamophobia is a symptom of the ‘war on terror’ dispositif and the military-industrial complex at its base, which signifies the return of the repressed (i.e., ‘White’ terrorism). For this reason, many Muslims around the world feel that the ‘war on terror’ is unconsciously a war against Islam. How can they not in the context of, for example, Executive Order 13769—also known as the ‘Muslim ban’? Unfortunately, being politically correct these days is not an effective strategy for delinking the signifying chain, which reduces terrorists to Muslims and conflates Muslims with Arabs. These costly associations are the result of propaganda, or the systematic repetition and collocation of signifiers in the politico-media complex. When these costly associations are left unchallenged, they become part of our political unconscious; and this is how epistemic violence legitimates all other forms of violence.

Applying Lacan’s adaptation of Jakobson’s model regarding the two axes of language (synchronic and diachronic), we can see that the ‘war metaphor’ involves a problematic substitution, “the [war] metaphor encourages stereotyping and discrimination against members of the broad social categories to which terrorists may belong, such as Muslims, Saudi Arabians or Middle Easterners” (Kruglanski, Crenshaw, Post, & Victoroff, 2008). Kruglanski et al. (2008) suggest that “a law-enforcement metaphor” is a better substitution because “its focus on the particular perpetrators in violation of the legal code rather than on an actor vaguely defined as the ‘enemy.’ Such an emphasis is less likely to
incite discrimination against entire groups of people”. Not mentioning that militarism is empirically not the best solution to the problem of terrorism, as this central finding of a report published by RAND, which analyzed 648 terrorist groups between 1968 and 2006, shows.¹⁰

Now, I have pointed to metonymic displacement earlier in the essay when discussing the costly association between terrorists and Muslims, which must be delinked. I will explore delinking in the context of the Discourse of the Analyst.

The Discourse of the Hysteric

With the Discourse of the Hysteric, the hysteric subject ($) is the agent in communication with an other, war (S1). The product is terror (S2) and the truth is the Islam (a). The Discourse of the Hysteric can be equated in this context with revolutionary, or counter-hegemonic, strategies (e.g., secular criticism and psychoanalytic cultural criticism). The Discourse of the Hysteric hystericizes the phobic subject, but only the Discourse of the Analyst, “offers the most effective means of achieving social change by countering the psychological and social tyranny exercised through language” (p. 68) because, as Bracher (1993) argues, “to promote true revolution is to occupy the position of the analyst rather than assuming … the position of the hysteric, who demands a new master signifier … and thus winds up instituting a new order of oppression and repression” (p. 102).

The Discourse of the Analyst

Finally, with the Discourse of the Analyst, Islam (a) is the agent in communication with an other, phobic subject ($). The product is war (S1) and the truth is terror (S2). The Discourse of the Analyst can be equated in this context with what I am calling decolonial
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psychoanalysis, or a decolonized Lacanian social theory. In other words, I am proposing “a violent event” (p. 1) and “an agenda for total disorder” (p. 2) to use Fanon’s (1961/2004) descriptions of decolonization in *The Wretched of The Earth*. My proposal is inspired by Derek Hook’s (2008) *postcolonial psychoanalysis*, which according to him has “the ability to appreciate the paradoxes of the *sociality* of private desires, [and] the *intrapersonal* quality of public wants and fears” (p. 273, emphasis in original) and which is principally committed “to the political scrutiny of colonial desire, and the multiple roles it plays [in] the psychic life of colonial power” (p. 278). Although postcoloniality and decoloniality share many features, Walter Mignolo (2007) argues that “the decolonial shift … is a project of de-linking while post-colonial criticism and theory is a project of scholarly transformation within the academy” (p. 452). In simple terms, decoloniality is not restricted to the academy.

Delinking is one of the main features of decoloniality (Mignolo, 2007), and as a method it is informed by a transmodern epistemology (Dussel, 2012). Dussel (2012) addresses this “different epistemic grounding” that Mignolo (2007) refers to with his concept of transmodernity. Ramadan’s (2009) decolonial notion of “radical reform” in Islam is an example of both delinking and transmodernity in action. The *2015 Black Solidarity Statement with Palestine* and the Network Against Islamophobia—a project of Jewish Voice for Peace—are great illustrations of what Dussel (2012) calls “transversality” (p. 41)—the type of solidarity, which entails “movement from the periphery to the periphery” (p. 54).

These two pluriversal features of decoloniality (namely, delinking and transmodernity) are crucial to marry with Lacanian social theory and other critical fields,
which produce counter-discourses of resistance and occupy spaces for scholar-activism. In other words, as analysts and/or researchers we cannot afford to be neutral, and so we must morally/politically speak truth to power and stand on the right side of history—this is our social responsibility as intellectuals (Chomsky, 1967; Gramsci, 1971; Said, 1994/1996).

From postcolonial studies, I would like to highlight Said’s (1978/2003) Freudian distinction between “latent Orientalism” defined as “an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity” and “manifest Orientalism” defined as “the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth” (p. 206, emphasis in original). To use Foucault, latent Orientalism is the equivalent of power, while manifest Orientalism is the equivalent of knowledge; the former involves “a global hierarchy of human superiority and inferiority” (Grosoguel, Oso, & Christou, 2015, p. 636) and so resembles the structure of racism, while the latter involves “the systematic play of differences” (Derrida, 1968/1973, p. 286) and so resembles the structure of différance.

In addition to delinking and transmodernity, Said’s (1983) practice of “secular criticism”—cf. Marx’s (1843/1978) “irreligious criticism” (p. 53)—is another decolonial tool, which we can use to challenge all forms of oppression, be they Islamic or psychoanalytic. For Said (1983), “secular criticism deals with local and worldly situations, and … is constitutively opposed to the production of massive, hermetic systems”, which is why the essay for him “is the principal way in which to write criticism” (p. 26).
In other words, secular criticism “must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are noncoercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom” (Said, 1983, p. 29). This essay is a practice in both secular criticism and psychoanalytic cultural criticism.

Drawing on Said’s notion of secular criticism, Stathis Gourgouris (2013) is adamant to distinguish between “the metaphysics secularism” (p. 28) and secular criticism as “the practice of a certain mode of political being” (p. xv). For Gourgouris (2013) secular criticism means “to reconceptualize the space of the secular against both the limitations of secularism as institutional power [e.g., laïcité] and the new orthodoxy going by the name ‘post-secularism’” (p. xv).15

Later on in the book, Gourgouris (2013) adds, “The self-interrogative focus of secular criticism is not on how religion is secularized but on how society is (to be) desacralized” (p. 68), which he describes as “Detranscendentalizing the Secular” (p. xxiv). In the end, Gourgouris (2013) uses secular criticism for two purposes: (1) to imagine “a new radical democratic politics” (p. xx)—after all, for Said, “[s]ecular criticism is democratic criticism” (p. xv)—and (2) to critique transcendentalist politics, which he calls “heteronomous politics” (p. 46).16

On a similar note, Toscano (2009) distinguishes between two types of secularism: secularism as ‘Christian imperialism’ and secularism “as a kind of methodological atheism” (p. 117). The methodological atheism advocated by Freud, according to Toscano (2009), is in radical opposition to psychoanalysis acting as a ‘civilizing mission’ but “is not devoid of a certain meta-political discourse” (p. 117).
Secular criticism is related to critical humanism—of which Islamic humanism is a type. Critical humanism (Said, 1978/2003; Said, 2004) may sound like a contradiction in terms, particularly to the ears of poststructuralists who think of themselves as antihumanists; rather critical humanism is a dialectical practice, which Said (1993), inspired by music theory, develops in *Culture and Imperialism* as an original method called “contrapuntal reading” (p. 66). In Said’s (1978/2003) magnum opus one can see an applied bricolage of a poststructural methodology (inspired by Foucault) from the perspective of a humanist epistemology (inspired by Vico); this critical humanism is foundational for decolonial subjectivity.

Secular criticism and critical humanism are “counter-hegemonic strategies for contesting ideology” (Pannian, 2016, p. 165), and as such, they are decolonial correctives to the Eurocentrism of Slavoj Žižek’s transcendental materialist theory of subjectivity, as outlined brilliantly by Adrian Johnston (2008).

**Decolonizing Žižek**

I see a parallel here between Jacques Derrida’s (1998) deconstruction of the International Psycho-Analytic Association’s (IPA) proposed Constitution of 1977 and Hamid Dabashi’s (2013) criticism of an article by Santiago Zabala (2012) published on *Al Jazeera*’s website, wherein Zabala praises Žižek as the exemplar Saidian intellectual. By juxtaposing these two controversial essays, I hope to decolonize the transcendental materialist project as opposed to throwing the baby (Žižek) out with the bathwater (Eurocentrism).

The heated back-and-forth exchanges between Zabala/Žižek/Marder and Dabashi/Mignolo on *Al Jazeera* and elsewhere divided up the critical theory world into
two camps: Lacano-Marxists v. Decolonial Thinkers. Years later, Žižek was charged with Islamophobia for a number of controversial articles, which he wrote for *In These Times* about the Syrian refugee crisis.

I want to make the case for decolonial psychoanalysis by showing that Žižek, though a self-avowed Eurocentrist (Žižek, 1998) who is extremely critical of multiculturalism (Žižek, 1997), is not an Islamophobe; however, his recent analysis of Islamophobia leaves much to be desired, which is surprising given his careful analysis of anti-Semitism in *The Plagues of Fantasies*. In other words, by using the old Žižek against the new Žižek, I am attempting to salvage a decolonial Žižek without being blind to the traps of neo-Orientalism. Interestingly, S. Sayyid (1997/2015) writes, “The possibility of an alternative to the anti-orientalist [structural Marxist?] view is provided by the work of Slavoj Zizek” (p. 40).

In *Geopsychoanalysis*: “…and the rest of the world”, Derrida (1998) deconstructs the following statement by the IPA from its 1977 Constitution, “The Association’s main geographical areas are defined at this time as America north of the United States-Mexican border; all America south of that border; and the rest of the world” (p. 87, emphasis added). This implicitly colonial statement does not explicitly name two of “four types of territory” (p. 87) according to Derrida (1998). Europe—“the cradle of psychoanalysis” (p. 87)—is not named because it does not need to be named (i.e., it is present through its absence). How about Africa and Asia? According to Derrida (1998), these “virgin” (p. 65) territories have not undergone “worldification” (p. 66), so they remain nameless because they have not yet been colonized by psychoanalysis, so they are
“dark continents” (Khanna, 2003) where “Homo psychoanalyticus is unknown or outlawed” (Derrida, 1998, p. 87, emphasis in original).

In Can non-Europeans think?, Dabashi (2013), in a decolonial gesture similar to that of Derrida’s (1998) in Geopsychoanalysis, deconstructs the following statement by Zabala (2012):

There are many important and active philosophers today: Judith Butler in the United States, Simon Critchley in England, Victoria Camps in Spain, Jean-Luc Nancy in France, Chantal Mouffe in Belgium, Gianni Vattimo in Italy, Peter Sloterdijk in Germany and in Slovenia, Slavoj Žižek, not to mention others working in Brazil, Australia and China.

Dabashi (2013) takes issue with the Eurocentric practice of naming/worldification exhibited in the last sentence of that statement. He writes, “China and Brazil (and Australia, which is also a European extension) are cited as the location of other philosophers worthy of the designation, but none of them evidently merits a specific name to be sitting next to these eminent European philosophers” (Dabashi, 2013). The debate escalated from there to eventually turn into a defensive posturing and name-calling, particularly after Dabashi (2016) published a blog post titled Fuck You Žižek! as a reply to Žižek supposedly saying, “Fuck you, Walter Mignolo!” in a public lecture.

Putting narcissistic identifications aside, this heated exchange exposes a traumatic kernel of truth, which must be addressed. Without getting lost in the affective details of that exchange and other controversies like the one at the Left Forum last year, I would like to turn now to the accusations against Žižek that he is a bigot. Even though I believe Žižek can be more careful with his provocations, particularly when it comes to his
‘ruthless’ habit of telling ‘politically incorrect’ or ‘obscene’ jokes about women and
‘Blacks’, I generally agree with Jamil Khader’s (2016) assessment of Žižek as “an ally in
the struggle and surely not a racist Islamophobe.” My agreement stems from my reading
of some of Žižek’s writings and my viewing of many videos of his lectures. Incidentally,
I was criticized last year at a conference for citing Žižek in my essay on terrorism and
Islamophobia. In one of Žižek’s (2016) more recent books, Against The Double
Blackmail, he writes:

And yet another Leftist taboo that needs to be abandoned is that of prohibiting any
critique of Islam as a case of ‘Islamophobia’. This taboo is a true mirror-image of the
anti-immigrant populist demonization of Islam, so we should get rid of the
pathological fear of many Western liberal Leftists that they might be guilty of
Islamophobia. (p. 20)

Žižek (2016) mistakenly conflates “critique of Islam” with Islamophobia without the
slightest effort to theorize the material othering of Muslim and ‘Muslim-looking’ subjects
in Euro-America. I find this to be a major flaw on his part as a critical thinker,
particularly given his sustained analysis of anti-Semitism as a fascist fundamental fantasy
($\diamond a$). Even among secular humanists (not to be confused with ‘new atheists’)—who are
often credited with the meme that Islamophobia is “a word created by fascists, and used
by cowards, to manipulate morons”—there is a distinction between “critique of Islam”
and anti-Muslim bigotry (Cerami, 2015). Here, I agree with David Tyrer (2013) that
reducing Islamophobia to a “critique of Islam” is a form of denial.19

In addition to being defensive, Žižek (2016) uses the controversial term “Islamo-
Fascism” (p. 88; p. 110) a few times throughout his book in reference to religious
terrorism. I believe that Žižek has a moral responsibility as a public intellectual to improve upon and complexify his theorization of Islamophobia. Again, I reiterate that Žižek is not a racist Islamophobe, but as a card-carrying Eurocentric philosopher he does not seem to care about understanding Islamophobia as “postmodern racism” (Myers, 2003, p. 104).

To understand Islamophobia as postmodern racism means that it has nothing to do with Islam or even Muslims, but everything to do with the ‘conceptual Muslim’. In the end, I am convinced that if the current Žižek revisits the Žižek (1997/2008) of The Plague of Fantasies, he may be able to deconstruct (via decolonial psychoanalysis) the Islamophobic figure of the ‘conceptual Muslim’ (p. 10), who is the Imaginary other of the Euro-American neoliberal self. As an Imaginary other, the ‘conceptual Muslim’ is often ideologically represented in the politico-media complex as ‘the terrorist’. This is, of course, the classic formulation of the Master-Slave dialectic, wherein the desire for recognition is the engine for aggressiveness or what Hegel (1977) calls the “life-and-death struggle” (p. 114).

On the other hand, the ‘conceptual Muslim’ is also the big Other standing in for the Unconscious of the Symbolic order. Said differently, the radical Otherness of the Islamophobic figure of the ‘conceptual Muslim’ covers up the Real trauma at the heart of the ‘war on terror’ itself. The barred Other signifies this lack through its politics of fear and its aestheticization of violence. In other words, the barred Other capitalizes on the objet petit a of fear (the ‘conceptual Muslim’) in order to legitimize its jouissance, namely violence.
Islamophobia, understood as postmodern racism, is then not the result of a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 1993), “ignorance” (Said, 2001), “fundamentalisms” (Ali, 2003), “definitions” (Said, 2005), or “barbarisms” (Achcar, 2006), but the result of a “clash of fantasies” (Myers, 2003, p. 109) masking the inconsistency in the big Other.

Hassan Hanafi (1998) identifies the big Other as Global Capitalism when he writes, “the clash of civilizations was a cover-up for the real socio-political and economic hegemony [of the West]”. This is true of international relations, but more often than not, the big Other is the Nation because “racism is the prop needed to maintain an illusory nationalist subjectivity” (Mertz, 1995, p. 87). Today, we see a dialectical relationship between nationalism and neoliberalism, embodied in the presidency of Donald Trump and, to some extent, in the premiership of Theresa May. This paradox or contradiction is channeled through a fantasy called the ‘war on terror’. Neil Davidson (2008) writes, “Nationalism is the necessary ideological corollary of capitalism”; that explains nationalism’s production of the ‘enemy within’ and neoliberalism’s production of the ‘enemy without’.

As far as I know, there are only a handful of academic publications on Islamophobia from a decolonial psychoanalytic lens (Davids, 2009; Hollander, 2010; Tyrer, 2013), so future studies can benefit from engaging with the works of Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Octave Mannoni, Albert Memmi, and others decolonial psychoanalysts (e.g., Greedharry, 2008; Hook, 2012; Khanna, 2003; Lane, 1998; Seshadri-Crooks, 2000). But the key for us, as researchers and/or analysts, is to draw on the work of decolonial thinkers from the Global South in our social theorizing and practicing of Lacanian psychoanalysis.
On the distinction between racism and anti-Semitism, Sean Homer (2005) writes, “Whereas classical racism propounds an ideology of national superiority, whereby so-called ‘inferior’ races were enslaved, anti-Semitism involves the systematic and organized annihilation of the Jewish people” (p. 60). In some ways, I see that Islamophobia looks a lot like displaced anti-Semitism except ‘politically correct’ since anti-Muslim othering is legitimated and (hyper)normalized by the ‘war on terror’ discourse; while keeping differences in mind (cf. Bunzl, 2005), let us not forget that “[t]he ‘Muslim’ is the key figure of the Nazi extermination camp universe” (2001/2011, p. 157). According to this reading, terrorism is excessive enjoyment, for which all Muslims (and by extension, all ‘Brown’ subjects who are guilty by association) will get tortured legally in Guantanamo Bay via ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ or extra-legally like in Abu Ghraib.

In other ways, I see the similarities between Islamophobia and racism, wherein cultural markers of difference (e.g., language, accent, clothing, etc.) become the pretext for racialization, but I also see Islamophobia as a specific form of othering. Again, it is important to consider intersectionality here, such as “gendered Islamophobia” (Perry, 2014). A lot has been written on the hijab vis-à-vis Islamophobia, for example, but Barbara Perry’s (2014) remarks are worth highlighting; she writes, “It is, perhaps, no surprise then that so many attacks on Muslim women involve ripping off her hijab. To satisfy the male fantasy, she must be at least metaphorically stripped, unveiled and thus exposed” (p. 82, emphasis added). Incidentally, did we not see this same fantasy structure at work last year in regards to the controversial but short-lived ‘burkini ban’ in 15 French towns? After all, as Žižek (2006) argues in A Glance Into the Archives of Islam, the
prohibition of prohibitions “is the most oppressive of them all” because it is “a
prohibition of all actual otherness”. Perry (2014) adds that the hijab as “the central
identifier of the female Muslim body” is “the sign of seductive, yet reviled difference” (p. 82, emphasis added).

Ironically, this is an example of one of the seven ‘veils’ of fantasy, according to Žižek
(1998); namely, that fantasy has two dimensions: a stabilizing dimension (fantasy$^1$) and a
destabilizing dimension (fantasy$^2$). Žižek (1998) writes, “the effectiveness of fantasy$^2$ is
the condition for fantasy$^1$ to maintain its hold” (p. 192). Consequently, the Islamophobe
“has to disavow its inherent impossibility, the antagonism in its very heart” and this is
where the Islamophobic figure of the ‘conceptual Muslim’ fits in; its function “is
precisely to render this gap [between thinking and being] invisible” (Žižek, 1998, p. 192).

Related to this, we can recognize that nationalism and neoliberalism are two sides of the
same coin, or two dimensions of the same fantasy of the Nation or the Market “as an
organic Whole” (Žižek, 1998, p. 190), which ultimately masks intersectional struggles.
With the dangerous marriage between nationalism and neoliberalism, we are seeing an
acceleration of violence.

In the Discourse of the Analyst, the decolonial subject now assumes its own
alienation and desire, and hence, can produce its own new master signifiers (Bracher,
1993, p. 68). Let us say these new master signifiers are ‘decolonial psychoanalysis’. In
terms of decolonial subjectivity, radical psychoanalysis is nonreductionist (i.e., terrorist ≠
Muslim) and nondualist (i.e., terrorist, counterterrorist, not-terrorist, and not-
counterterrorist); in other words, the decolonial subject of radical psychoanalysis is
“complex” as opposed to “blank” or “uncomplicated” (Parker, 2007).
The phobic subject of neoliberalism may be an Islamophobe or, more generally, a terrorized object of violence; in either case, he or she is more than likely to identify with the ‘counterterrorist’ subject-position against all other positions given the hegemonic power of the ‘war on terror’ dispositif. The decolonial subject, on the other hand, can identify with one of the two ‘anti-terrorist’ (read: nonviolent) subject-positions, that is, ‘not-terrorist’ or ‘not-counterterrorist’.

The Question of Violence

I will end this essay with reflections on the question of violence. Again, if we understand terrorism as political violence against civilians, whether by non-state actors or the State, then anti-terrorism is a radical rejection of political violence. Terrorism is akin to Walter Benjamin’s (1978/1986) notion of mythic violence in Critique of Violence. Here, it is appropriate to keep in mind Benjamin’s distinction between the mythic violence “of archaic sovereignty” and “the anarchism of” divine violence (Critchley, 2009/2016).

Decolonial psychoanalysis radically rejects mythic violence, of which terrorism (or political violence) is a manifestation. Said manifestation is founded on “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 1988), which is “foundational to all violence” (Smith, 2014).

Ramón Grosfoguel and Eric Mielants (2006) argue from a decolonial perspective that Islamophobia is “epistemic racism” which they define as “the inferiorization and subalternization of non-Western knowledge” (p. 8). According to them, epistemic racism “leads to the Orientalization of Islam”, “allows the West to not have to listen to the critical thinking produced by Islamic thinkers on Western global/imperial designs”, and “allows the West to unilaterally decide what is best for Muslim people today and obstruct
any possibility for a serious inter-cultural dialogue” (p. 9). Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of “symbolic violence” is related to Spivak’s (1988) notion of “epistemic violence”. For Bourdieu (1991), “symbolic violence can only be exercised by the person who exercises it, and endured by the person who endures it, in a form which results in its misrecognition as such, in other words, which results in its recognition as legitimate” (p. 140). As ideological power, symbolic violence is the stuff as political violence is made on; in other words, symbolic violence is the orthodoxy of both political violence as domination (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 165) and “structural violence as social injustice” (Galtung, 1969, p. 171, emphasis in original). Symbolic violence is also foundational to “everyday racism” (Essed, 1991).

**Conclusion**

To conclude my essay on decolonial psychoanalysis, which can be retitled as *radical psychoanalysis and the challenge of Islamic humanism*, we (decolonial subjects) have the moral/political obligation to develop powerful counterdiscursive-practices and to actively resist Islamophobia and other forms of violence through our research, activism, and/or by any (nonviolent) means necessary. Only then can our ethic of resistance lead to a radical democratic politics and a critical aesthetics. Given the title of the conference, this call to arms is extended to both analysts and analysands, be they Muslims or non-Muslims: *decolonial subjects of the world, unite!*
Figure 1. Dussel’s (2012) "trans"-modernity

Figure 2. Totality, exteriority, affirmation of exteriority. Key:
(A) "postmodernity" (the limit of modernity and of totality);
(B) the inclusion of the other into the same (the old system); (C) the innovative interpellation before modernity; (D) the subsumption of modernity’s positivity; (E) the affirmation of the other in its exteriority;
(F) the construction (as a synthesis of C + D + E) of an innovative "trans"-modernity.
Figure 2. My modification of Greimas's semiotic square
Figure 3. Lacan’s five discourses
References

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http://www.lacan.com/zizarchives.htm


http://www.lacan.com/zizrobes.htm


Endnotes

1 Etymologically, Islamophobia means an extreme or irrational fear of Islam. There are a number of problems with this type of linguistic reductionism and I have to agree with McLaughlin’s (2010) criticism of the term. Certainly, pathologizing Islamophobes is evidence of the psych-complex’s effect on our linguistic practices. Islamophobia is not a mental disorder afflicting Islamophobes; rather Islamophobia is the systemic (i.e., Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real) othering of Muslim and ‘Muslim-looking’ subjects, predominantly in Euro-America. Contemporary Islamophobia, which can manifest as stereotyping, prejudice, and/or discrimination, is a symptom of the biopolitical “culture of terrorism” (Chomsky, 1989/1995), whose governmentality works against “intellectual independence” (p. 257).

Islamophobia—as a structural category—is oppressive not only to Muslims but also to Islamophobes. For example, ‘negative-patriotism’ or *national identity as fear of the other* is a fundamental fantasy that is inherently paradoxical because, like in the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic, the Islamophobe may wish to kill the Muslim other, yet he defines himself through not only their imaginary differences but also their Real interdependence. The fantasy of killing the Muslim other can be either traversed in the ‘war on terror’ through metaphorical condensation or repressed then displaced metonymically as Islamophobia in the Symbolic order.

In spite of the fact that the term is far from perfect, ‘Islamophobia’ does hold pragmatic value in terms of identity politics. Alternatives to the term have been proposed, such as “anti-Muslimism” (Halliday, 1999), “Muslimophobia” (Lorente, 2005), and “Islamoprejudice” (Imhoff & Recker, 2012), but none have the same cachet as ‘Islamophobia’ for scholars and activists alike. I agree with The Bridge Initiative’s (2015) argument regarding the need for an umbrella term.

Before I proceed, I must be clear on my position in relation to the Oxford English Dictionary’s (OED) widespread definition of Islamophobia as “dislike of or prejudice against Islam or Muslims, especially as a political force.” I believe that legitimate or constructive, and I should add scholarly, criticism of Islam should unquestionably be warranted in a radical democracy; the challenge on the ground is, of course, how to practice one’s freedoms of speech and expression while also being mindful and respectful toward others who are radically different from us (cf. Asad, Brown, Butler, & Mahmood, 2013). By way of elucidation, freedom is not an excuse for bigotry. In the words of Viktor Frankl (1959/1992), “freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibilities” (p. 134, emphasis added).

2 Dialectically, Islam “interiorizes and territorializes”; to put it differently, Islam “is both a matter of inner personal experience and of cultural and national identity” (Viehues-Bailey, 2015, p. 290, emphasis in original). This inside-outside tension necessitates a psychosocial approach to Islam. As a modern religion, I invite us to not fetishize Islam by regarding it as an ideology, but to conceptualize it, like Viehues-Bailey (2015) suggests, as a dispositif, which “allows us to see not only the global production circuits but also the embodied effects of the discourses of religion involved in this dispositif” (p. 271, emphasis in original). In an interview with Foucault (1980) in 1972, he defined dispositif or apparatus as:

[A] thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the element of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. (p. 194)

Using Wallerstein’s world-system theory as a jumping off point, John Obert Voll (1994) makes the case for conceptualizing Islam as “a special world-system” by arguing that:

[T]he modern capitalist world-system was not the first long-lasting world-system without a world-empire. The Islamic community had already developed such a world-system in the centuries following the collapse of the Abbasid state by the tenth century C.E. This nonimperial world-system was not based on a world-economy Instead it was a discourse-based world-system tied together by interactions based on a broad community of discourse rather than by exchange of goods. The capitalist world-system strongly influenced this Islamic world-system, but it did not destroy it. (p. 226)

These two conceptualizations (Islam as a dispositif and Islam as a special world-system) may be helpful to non-Muslims, but, as Zaid (2004) argues, “Muslim identity, more often than not, wraps itself tightly around a narrow understanding of religion. It is the Muslim, though—not Islam—who resists modernization. This resistance has not been the case for most of Islamic history” (p. 185). In other words, Islam is a “floating signifier” or a “nodal point” which becomes a “master signifier” in the post-modern project of Islamism (Mura, 2014; Sayyid, 1997/2015, pp. 46-49), and a defense mechanism in the pre-modern project of Salafism.

3 For example, Mehdi Hasan (2015) writes:

Islam isn’t Christianity. The two faiths aren’t analogous, and it is deeply ignorant, not to mention patronising, to pretend otherwise—or to try and impose a neatly linear, Eurocentric view of history on diverse Muslim-majority countries in Asia or Africa. Each religion has its own traditions and texts; each religion’s followers have been affected by geopolitics and socio-economic processes in a myriad of ways.

4 To contextualize this debate on tradition versus reform, consider for example the following two analogies from the Euro-American media in 2015 (two years after the 2013 Egyptian coup d’état): Peter Smith’s (2015) analogy between Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (president of Egypt) and Martin Luther (founder of the Protestant Reformation), and Elliott Abrams’s (2015) analogy between Sisi and Pinochet. The former analogy signifies a conservative Protestant ‘ethic’: a preference for a military junta over political Islam in the spirit of Capitalism, whereas the latter analogy actually points to a radical dissimilarity. Abrams (2015) lists four reasons as to why the former president of Chile is actually the lesser of two evils; the first and most significant reason being that in less than two years Sisi managed to kill about 2,500 people and imprison more than 40,000 people, approximately the same number of civilians that Pinochet killed (= 3,000) and imprisoned (= 40,000) over a seventeen-year period. In Rabaa al-Adawiya Square alone, more than 900 civilians were killed by the Egyptian military in the name of ‘counterterrorism’ just because they supported the first democratically elected president of Egypt, an Islamist by the name of Mohamed Morsi (Amnesty International, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2014).
5 For Tibi (2012), Islamic humanism then is:

[A] humanism with different grammars that could be the grounds for a consensus but is not a holistic concept for the entirety of humanity. Humanism is instead a concept of international morality based on cross-cultural . . . grounds. It serves as a platform for a consensus regarding basic values. To be sure, this international morality is not the self-gratifying “world ethos” coined by Western theologians. (p. 245)

6 While there is broad agreement on the core tenets of Islam [e.g., that there is only one God and that Muhammad is His Prophet], however, Muslims across the 39 countries and territories surveyed differ significantly in their levels of religious commitment, openness to multiple interpretations of their faith and acceptance of various sects and movements. (p. 7)

7 In order for us to do so, let us look at Foucault’s (2008) first definition of governmentality from his February 1st, 1978 lecture at the Collège de France as:

[T]he ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. (p. 108, emphasis added)

8 Andrew Shryock (2010) clarifies this counterintuitive notion as follows:

The “good Muslim,” as a stereotype, has common features: he tends to be a Sufi (ideally, one who reads Rumi); he is peaceful (and assures us that jihad is an inner, spiritual contest, not a struggle to “enjoin the good and forbid the wrong” through force of arms); he treats women as equals, and is committed to choice in matters of hijab wearing (and never advocates the covering of a woman’s face); if he is a she, then she is highly educated, works outside the home, is her husband’s only wife, chooses her own life (if at all only because he permits), and wears hijab. The good Muslim is also a pluralist (recalls fondly the ecumenical virtues of medieval Andalusia and is a champion of interfaith activism); he is politically moderate (an advocate of democracy, human rights, and religious freedom, an opponent of armed conflict against the U.S. and Israeli); finally, he is likely to be an African, a South Asian, or, more likely still, an Indonesian or Malaysian; he is less likely to be an Arab, but, as friends of the “good Muslim” will point out, only a small proportion of Muslims are Arab anyway. (p. 10)

9 A quick survey of modern history clearly shows that Socialism was a major anti-colonial force in the Arab world until it was crushed during the Cold War by the First World to eventually be replaced by Islamism (Hourani, 1991/2010). Ironically, the United States in the Soviet-Afghan War, or its proxy war with the Soviet Union, chose to support the mujahideens—who back then were considered ‘freedom fighters’ and not terrorists—in an effort to undermine the Second World, and the Non-Aligned Movement by extension (for an overview see Leech, 2016). I say ironically, of course, because Euro-America, as we all know, has been hoisted by its own petard—namely, Islamic terrorism.

10 Terrorist groups end for two major reasons: Members decide to adopt nonviolent tactics and join the political process (43 percent), or local law-enforcement agencies arrest or kill key members of the group (40 percent). Military force has rarely been the primary reason for the end of terrorist groups (7 percent), and few groups since 1968 have achieved victory (10 percent). (Jones & Libicki, 2008, pp. 18-19)

11 According to Mignolo (2007):

[T]he process of delinking needs a different epistemic grounding that I describe here as the geo- and body-politics of knowledge and understanding. These are epistemologies of the exteriority and of the borders. If there is no outside of capitalism and western modernity today, there are many instances of exteriority: that is, the outside created by the rhetoric of modernity (Arabic language, Islamic religion, Aymara language, Indigenous concepts of social and economic organization, etc.). The outside of modernity is precisely that which has to be conquered, colonized, superseded and converted to the principles of progress and modernity. (p. 462, emphasis in original)

12 “Trans-modernity” points toward all of those aspects that are situated “beyond” (and also “prior to”) the structures valorized by modern European/North American culture, and which are present in the great non-European cultures and have begun to move toward a pluriversal utopia. (p. 43, emphasis in original)

13 [S]omething “radical” does exist about the reform I call for. The very idea of returning to the dimension of “transformation” instead of just “adaptation” to the requirements of the modern world demonstrates an intellectual and ethical posture that is both clear and demanding . . . Islam and Muslims are expected to adapt and not to contribute and propose their own answers. A deep and constructive “criticism of modernity,” or of “postmodernity,” does not seem to be within Muslims’ scope; at most, it would be thought to reveal their wish to find pretexts to reject it, or simply, more insidiously, their attempt to “Islamize” it. Some Muslim thinkers have integrated such postulates and keep trying to show how “progressive” they are by constantly “adapting,” which, in the end, amounts to wholesale “intellectual assimilation” to the terms of the debate as stated by many Western elites. They thus confuse necessary self-criticism and the surrender of intelligence to the decrees of the prevailing order. (p. 37)

14 He writes:

For the critic, the challenge of this secular world is that it is not reducible to an explanatory or originating theory, much less to a collection of cultural generalities. There are instead a small number of perhaps unexpected characteristics of worldliness that play a role in making sense of textual experience, among them filiation of textual formation, the body and the senses of sight and hearing, repetition, and the sheer heterogeneity of detail. (Said, 1983, p. 27, emphasis added)
This worldliness that Said (1983) speaks of means that secular criticism “is always situated” and is never “value-free” because of its “closeness” to “a concrete reality about which political, moral, and social judgments have to be made, and if not only made, then exposed and demystified” (p. 26).

In defense of the ‘postsecular turn’ in feminism, Rosi Braidotti (2008) writes:

Because ‘the clash of civilizations’ is Islamophobic in character and has triggered a wave of anti-Muslim intolerance across Europe and the world, public discussions on the postsecular condition tend to concentrate almost exclusively on Islam, making it the most targeted of monotheistic religions. This reduction of the postsecular condition to the ‘Muslim issue’, in the context of a war on terror that results in the militarization of the social space, means that any unreflective brand of normative secularism runs the risk of complicity with anti-Islam racism and xenophobia. What is needed therefore is a more balanced kind of analysis and a more diversified approach that includes all the monotheistic religions and contextualizes them within shifting global power relations. (p. 4)

Some of the features of “heteronomous politics” that Gourgouris (2013) identifies include: “its technological rationalism, the cultural Ego ideal, the imperialist mission civilisatrice, [and] the instrumentalist appropriation of the other” (p. 46, emphasis in original).

As Said (1978/2003) writes in his preface to Orientalism:

I have called what I try to do ‘humanism,’ a word I continue to use stubbornly despite the scornful dismissal of the term by sophisticated post-modern critics. By humanism I mean first of all attempting to dissolve Blake’s mind-forg’d manacles so as to be able to use one’s mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding and genuine disclosure. Moreover, humanism is sustained by a sense of community with other interpreters and other societies and periods: strictly speaking, therefore, there is no such thing as an isolated humanist. (p. xvii)

The following passage from Edward Said and the Question of Subjectivity demonstrates how critical humanism can be a foundation for decolonial subjectivity:

Saidian humanism provides alternative possibilities for the constitution of a secular intellectual subject. Said recognizes that present-day Western humanity is enmeshed in the cobwebs of fabricated discourses that have been acclimatized as the truth, a situation that renders agency the most challenging of responsibilities. In response, his New Humanism [cf. Fanon (1952/2008, P. 1)] attempts to reproduce the sovereign, constitutive subject of action in the form of a representative intellectual. (Pannian, 2016, p. 125, emphasis in original)

One of the most important ways in which people have sought to deny the existence of Islamophobia is by seeking to reduce it to the banal question of religion. Thus, the argument goes that what is at stake is not the right of minorities to protection against an increasingly prevalent racism, but simply our right to criticise religious beliefs. But I am not sure this will do as a definition for Islamophobia. This logic presupposes a hard distinction between race and religion that might appear superficially compelling but which fails to account for the contingencies of a world in which even religious subjects are racialised, or the interplay between race and religion. (p. 5)

Further, Sarah Marusek (2014) argues:

Even though American empire is undoubtedly crumbling, those once vying for a new hegemony are now paradoxically sustaining its power by adopting a “terror” framework that reinforces the fascist tendencies of nationalism. When the nation is militantly defined as something exclusive, while at the same time the terrorist enemy is universalised, this only ends up factionalising the global struggle to realize a more just world, and to the benefit of the neoliberal axis of elites.

In his rebuttal to Žižek’s (2007) view of Terror as divine violence, Simon Critchely (2009/2016) claims:

The only thing that can put a halt to the logic of mythic violence … is divine violence, which is not law-making, but law-destroying … If mythic violence is extremely bloody, then divine violence is bloodless … If mythic violence is bloody power over human affairs for the sake of state power, then divine violence is the bloodless power over life for the sake of the living, for the sake of life’s sacredness … a non-violent violence.

In the words of Stuart Hall (1996):

Racism, of course, operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness. Along this frontier there arises what Gayatri Spivak calls the ‘epistemic violence’ of the discourses of the Other—of imperialism, the colonized, Orientalism, the exotic, the primitive, the anthropological and the folk-lore. Consequently the discourse of anti-racism had often been founded on a strategy of reversal and inversion, turning the ‘Manichean aesthetic’ of colonial discourse upside-down. However, as Fanon constantly reminded us, the epistemic violence is both outside and inside, and operates by a process of splitting on both sides of the division—in here as well as out here. That is why it is a question, not only of ‘black-skin’ but of ‘Black Skin, White Masks”—the internalization of the self-as-other. Just as masculinity always constructs femininity [sic] as double—simultaneously Madonna and Whore—so racism constructs [sic] the black subject: noble savage and violent avenger. And in the doubling, fear and desire double for one another and play across the structures of otherness, complicating its politics. (p. 446, emphasis in original)