

# *The Multiple Faces of Islamophobia*

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*ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL*  
VOLUME 1, NO. 1, SPRING 2012, PP. 9-33.

Published by:

Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project,  
Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley.

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# *The Multiple Faces of Islamophobia*

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Any discussion of Islamophobia today has to depart from a discussion about the cartography of power of the “world-system” for the past 518 years. If we understand the “modern world-system” as a system organized solely in terms of an international division of labor and a global inter-state system, Islamophobia would then be an epiphenomenon of the political-economy of the world-system and, in particular, of the ceaseless accumulation of capital at a world-scale. However, if we shift the geopolitics of knowledge and the body-politics of knowledge from a North oriented gaze of the World-System towards a South oriented view, we get a different picture of the global cartography of power. From a Southern perspective, the world-system is organized not only around an international division of labor and a global inter-state system, but include, not as additive elements but as constitutive of the capitalist accumulation at a world-scale, a global racial/ethnic hierarchy (Western vs. non-Western peoples), a global patriarchal hierarchy (global gender system and a global sexual system), a global religious hierarchy, a global linguistic hierarchy, a global epistemic hierarchy, etc (see Grosfoguel 2006). The “package” of entangled power hierarchies of the world-system is broader and more complex than what is frequently theorized in world-system analysis. For the sake of economizing space, when we use the term “world-system” in this essay, we refer to the “modern/colonial Westernized Christian-centric capitalist/patriarchal world-system” (Ibid). At the risk of sounding ridiculous, we prefer a long phrase like this to characterize the present heterarchical structure (multiple power hierarchies entangled to each other in complex historical ways) of the world-system, than the limited characterization of a single hierarchy called “capitalist world-system” with capital accumulation as the single logic of the system (Ibid). The latter leads to an economic reductionist understanding of the world-system, while the former leads to a more complex, non-reductive structural-historical analysis. Islamophobia as a form of racism against Muslim people is not an epiphenomenon but constitutive of the international division of labor.

The first part of the essay will discuss Islamophobia as a form of racism in a world-historical perspective. The second part is a discussion of Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism. The third part is on Islamophobia as Orientalism. The fourth part is Islamophobia as epistemic racism, while

the final part is an example of this using the case of European Islamic Philosopher and Theologian, Tariq Ramadan.

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

The challenge for our topic is to answer how was it possible that a religious difference in the pre-Modern/Colonial world turned into a racial/ethnic difference in the modern/colonial world. In the heterarchical conceptualization of the world-system used here, Islamophobia would be the subalternization and inferiorization of Islam produced by the Christian-centric religious hierarchy of the world-system since the end of the 15 century. The year 1492 is a crucial foundational year for the understanding of the present system. In this year, the Christian Spanish Monarchy reconquered Islamic Spain expelling Jews and Arabs from the Spanish Peninsula while simultaneously “discovered” the Americas and colonized indigenous peoples. The Arab and Jewish population that was left inside the Iberian Peninsula were forced to convert to Christianity. Marranos (converted Jews) and Moriscos (converted Muslims) were the terms used at the time to classify these “Christianized” populations. The whole 16<sup>th</sup> century was a century of persecution inside the Iberian Peninsula against Moriscos until its final expulsion in 1609 (Perceval 1997) and of enslavement of indigenous and African peoples in the Americas (Dussel 1994). These “internal” and “external” conquered territories and peoples not only created an international capitalist division of labor of core and periphery that overlapped with an international ethno/racial division of labor between Western and non-Western but also constituted the internal and external imagined boundaries of Europe. This related to the global racial/ethnic hierarchy of the world-system privileging European origin populations over the rest. Jews and Arabs became the non-European subaltern internal “Others” inside Europe, while indigenous people became the external “Others” of Europe (Mignolo 2000).

The first marker of “otherness” in the “Westernized Christian-Centric Capitalist/Patriarchal Modern/Colonial World-System” was around religious identity. Jews and Arabs were characterized as “people with the wrong religion” while indigenous people were constructed as “people without religion” (Maldonado-Torres 2006). In the global racial/ethnic hierarchy produced by the two major events of 1492, the “people without religion,” that is “people without God” were at the bottom of the hierarchy. While “people with the wrong religion,” that is, “people with the wrong God” occupied a different position in this hierarchy. How did “people with the wrong religion” turned into “people below the human”, that is, racially inferior people?

The struggle of Christian Spain against Islam formed part of a long imperial struggle in the Mediterranean Sea that goes back to the crusades. The Christian vs. Islam struggle articulated what Walter Mignolo (2000)

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

Indigenous peoples characterized in the late 15 century and early 16<sup>th</sup> century as “people without God” in the Christian Spanish imaginary became inferior sub-human or non-human beings. It is this inferiorization below the “human,” to the level of animals, which turned indigenous peoples in the Americas into the first racialized subject of the modern/colonial world inaugurated in 1492 (Dussel 1994). This racist imaginary was extended to new “people without God” such as sub-Saharan Africans transferred massively to the Americas as part of the European slave trade after the infamous debate between Sepulveda and Las Casas in the School of Salamanca in the 1550s. Sepulveda defended that indigenous people had no soul, therefore, were not humans and could be enslaved without representing a sin in the eyes of God. While Las Casas argued that they were savages with a soul, that is, culturally inferior, child like and, therefore, are humans to be Christianized rather than enslaved. Both represent the initial formal articulation of the two forms of racism that continued for the next five centuries to come. Sepulveda represented a biological racist discourse while Las Casas a cultural racist discourse.

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

The important issue for our topic is how this racist imaginary was extended even to people that were characterized as “people with the wrong God” in the late 15 century. As the European Empires relations with the Islamic Empires turned from an “imperial relation” into a “colonial relation” (the Spanish destruction of Al-Andalus in the late 15 century and the

subsequent domination of Moriscos in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch colonization of Indonesia in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, British colonization of India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, French and British colonization of the Middle East in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the demise and subsequent division of the Ottoman Empire among several European Empires at the end of the First World War), the notion of “people with the wrong God” in the Theological Christian imaginary of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century were inferiorized as animals in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century (Perceval 1992, 1997) and later this theological racial foundation secularized into a “scientific evolutionary hierarchical civilizational” imaginary that turned the late 15<sup>th</sup> century “people with the wrong religion” (imperial difference) into the inferior “savages and primitives” of “people without civilization” (colonial difference) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *This process represented a crucial transformation from the inferiorization of non-Christian religions (such as Islam, Judaism, etc.) to the inferiorization of the human beings practicing those religions (such as Muslims and Jews turned into Semites, that is, a race inferior to Europeans). This discursive mutation was central to the entanglement between the inferiorization of religion and the racism against non-European human beings practicing those religions. The Christian-centric global religious hierarchy and the Eurocentric global racial/ethnic hierarchy were increasingly entangled and the distinction between practicing a non-Christian religion and being racialized as an inferior human being became increasingly erased.*

#### ISLAMOPHOBIA AS A FORM OF CULTURAL RACISM

Moreover, in the last 60 years there has been a historical transformation in racist discourses. While biological racist discourses declined, cultural racism became the hegemonic form of racism in the late world-system (Grosfoguel 2003). The defeat of Nazi Germany, the anti-colonial struggles and the civil rights movements of colonial minorities inside the Western Empires created the historical and political conditions for the transition from biological racism to cultural racism. *The White elites of the world-system did not give up on their racism. They shifted the meanings and discourses of “race” as a respond to the challenges from the struggles of colonized people. Cultural racism is a form of racism where the word “race” is not even mentioned. It is focused on the cultural inferiority of a group of people. Usually it is framed in terms of the inferior habits, beliefs, behavior, or values of a group of people. It is close to biological racism in the sense that cultural racism naturalizes/essentializes the culture of the racialized/inferiorized people.* The latter are represented as fixed in a timeless space.

In the new cultural racist discourses, religion has a dominant role. The contemporary tropes about “uncivilized,” “barbarian,” “savage,” “primitive,” “underdeveloped,” “authoritarian,” and “terrorist” inferior people are today concentrated in the “other’s” religious practices and believes. By focusing on the “other’s” religion, the Europeans, Euro-

Americans and Euro-Israelis manage to escape being accused of racism. However, when we examine carefully the hegemonic rhetoric in place, the tropes are a repetition of old biological racist discourses and the people who are the target of Islamophobic discourses are the traditional colonial subjects of the Western Empires, that is, the “usual suspects”.

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

In Great Britain, Muslims are associated to Egyptians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (colonial subjects from old British colonies). Islamophobia in Britain is associated with anti-Black, anti-Arab and anti-South Asian racism. In France, Muslims are mostly North Africans (from old colonies such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, etc.). In The Netherlands, Muslims are mostly from guest workers and colonial migrants coming from Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia and Suriname. Islamophobia in The Netherlands is associated to racism against guest worker migrants and old colonial subjects. So Islamophobia as a fear or hate of Muslims is associated with anti-Arab, anti-Asian and anti-Black racisms. In Germany, Islam is associated with anti-Turk racism, while in Spain with anti-Moor racism. Similarly, in the United States, Islam is associated with African-Americans and Arabs of all ethnicities. Puerto Ricans as colonial subjects of the US empire are also suspicious subjects in the Islamophobic hysteria.<sup>1</sup> Latinos are the largest growing populations of converts to Islam in the USA. This makes them also a target of the neo-fascist policies of the US state. Moreover, after 9/11 the Bush Administration associated illegal immigrants with terrorism and national security leading to the increased militarization of the US-Mexico border.

It does not matter if the Western domestic political system is the British multicultural model or the French Republican model the fact is that none is working. Without overcoming the problem of racial discrimination, racism becomes a corrosive process that end up destroying the abstract

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

ideals of the each model. In the case of the Anglo-American world, multiculturalism and diversity operates to conceal **White Supremacy**. The racial minorities are allowed to celebrate their history, carnival and identity as long as they leave intact the white supremacy racial/ethnic hierarchy of the status quo. **The dominant system in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States is an institutionalized and concealed "White affirmative action" that benefits Whites on a daily bases and at all levels of social existence.** It is so powerful that it has become normalized to the point of not being stated as such.

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

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

At a world level, Islamophobia has been the dominant discourse used in the post-civil rights and post-independence era of dominant cultural racist discourses against Arabs. The events of 911 escalated anti-Arab racism through an Islamophobic hysteria all over the world, specifically among the dominant elites of the United States and Israel. The latter is not surprising given US and Israeli representation of Palestinians, Arabs and Islamic people in general as terrorist decades before 911 (Said 1979; 1981). The responsibility of US foreign policy is never linked to the tragic events of 911. US Cold War against the Evil Empire in Afghanistan during the 1980s financed, supported and created a global network of Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups called at the time "Freedom Fighters" that came back to hunt them on 911 (Johnson 2006). The USA was complicit in Osama Bin-Laden and Al-Queda operations as part of CIA global/imperial designs and operations against the Soviet Union back in the 1980s. However, it is easier to blame Arab people and use racist Islamophobic arguments rather than to critically examine US foreign policy for the past 50 years. The same applies to Saddam Hussein, who was a loyal US ally and fought a CIA sponsored dirty war against Iran following US imperial/global designs during the 1980s

and was later declared a U.S. enemy and falsely accused by the U.S. elites to have links to Al Qaeda in order to justify a long-planned war against Iraq (Risen 2006).

It is symptomatic that in most Western countries, Arabs are still perceived as if they were “the majority of Muslims in the world” even though they are only 1/5 of the Muslims’ total world population. This is related to the West global/imperial designs for domination and exploitation of Oil in the Middle East and Arabs resistance against it. The long term exaggerated image of Arabs as terrorist and violent in Western Media (newspapers, movies, radio, television, etc.) has been fundamental in the new wave of anti-Arab racism linked to an Islamophobic discourse through cultural racism before and after 911 (Said 1981). It is not accidental that Anti-Arab racism accounts for most Islamophobia in the West. Even Muslims from South Asia and African origin living in the West get part of the heat of the anti-Arab racism, especially in the United States (Salaita 2006).

#### *ISLAMOPHOBIA AS ORIENTALISM*

One of the cultural racist arguments used against Islamic people today is their “patriarchal and sexist abuses of women.” As part of the construction of Islamic people as inferior in relation to the West, an important argument to sustain their “uncivilized” and “violent” values/behavior is the oppression of women at the hands of men. It is ironic to hear Western patriarchal and Christian conservative fundamentalist figures talk as if they were defenders of feminism when they talk about Islam. George W. Bush main argument to invade Afghanistan was the need to liberate brown women from the atrocities of brown men. The hypocrisy of the argument is clear when the Bush Administration was actively defending Christian patriarchal fundamentalism, opposing abortion and women’s civil/social rights during the eight years of its Administration in the United States, while using a women’s rights argument against the Taliban’s to invade Afghanistan. The rhetoric of “White men as saviors of Women of color from color men’s patriarchal abuses” goes back to colonial times. It has served historically to conceal the real reasons behind the White men colonization of the non-West. We now know that the real reasons behind Bush Administration invasion of Afghanistan and Obama Administration continuity is due to its geopolitical strategic location and importance in terms of its closeness to oil and gas in South Asia. Immediately after the invasion, occupied Afghanistan provided legal permission to gas and oil transnational companies to built pipelines over its territory (Rashid 2001). Islamophobic representations of Muslim people as savages in need of Western civilizing missions is the main argument used to cover-up global/imperial military and economic designs.

Moreover, the colonization of Islam by patriarchy is not unique to Islam. We can see the same abuses against women held among Christians (Catholic and Protestants) or Jewish men. You can find as many patriarchal

and sexist arguments in Christian texts as Jewish or Muslim texts. However, the sexist and patriarchal characterization of Islam is what is represented in the press while there is almost silence about the patriarchal oppression of women sustained and practiced by Judaism and Christianity in the West. It is important to say that Islam was the first religion in the world to acknowledge women the right to divorce more than one thousand years ago. The Christian world acknowledged women the right to divorce only very recently in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Catholic Church and many countries still does not recognize it. We are saying this not to justify patriarchal abuses over women done by some Muslim men but to question the stereotypical racial representation that makes of only Muslim men the source of abuses against women around the world. This Islamophobic argument is incoherent, inconsistent and false. It only serves Western global/imperial designs.

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

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

It is important to keep in mind that Orientalist views are characterized by racist exotic and inferior essentialist representations of

Islam as frozen in time (Said 1979). These Orientalist representations of Islam after the 18<sup>th</sup> century were preceded by three hundred years of Occidentalism (the superiority of the West over the Rest) from the late 15-century until the emergence of Orientalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Mignolo 2000). The historical and political condition of possibility for Orientalism to emerge is Occidentalism.

#### ISLAMOPHOBIA AS EPISTEMIC RACISM

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

The myth about the Western males capacity to produce a knowledge that is Universal beyond time and space was fundamental to imperial/global designs. The Cartesian ego-politics of knowledge inaugurated what Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gomez called the "point zero" perspective. The "point zero" perspective is the Western myth of a point of view that assumes itself to be beyond a point of view. This myth allowed Western men to claim its knowledge to be universal, neutral, and objective. Contemporary authors like Samuel Huntington (1997) reproduces a combination of old Occidentalism with Orientalism. The superiority of the West is taken for granted and the epistemic privilege of Western identity politics from which to produce judgments of the "Other" and global/imperial designs around the world is an unquestioned presupposition.

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

Islamic critical thinkers are considered inferior to the Western/Christian thinkers. The superiority of Western epistemology allows

the West to construct with authority the Islamic “Other” as inferior people frozen in time. Epistemic racism leads to the Orientalization of Islam. This is crucial because Islamophobia as a form of racism is not exclusively a social phenomenon but is also an epistemic question. **Epistemic racism allows the West to not have to listen to the critical thinking produced by Islamic thinkers on Western global/imperial designs.** The thinking coming from non-Western locations is not considered worthy of attention except to represent it as “uncivilized,” “primitive”, “barbarian,” and “backward.” Epistemic racism allows the West to unilaterally decide what is best for Muslim people today and obstruct any possibility for a serious inter-cultural dialogue. Islamophobia as a form of racism against Muslim people is not only manifested in the labor market, education, public sphere, global war against terrorism or the global economy, but also in **the epistemological battleground about the definition of the priorities of the world today.**

Recent events such as the September 11 attack in US territory (911), the riots in Parisian “banlieues”, anti-immigrant xenophobia, the demonstrations against Danish cartoons of the Prophet, the bombing of London Metro Stations, the triumph of Hamas in the Palestinian elections, the resistance of Hezbollah to Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the bombing of Spanish suburban trains (311), and the nuclear energy conflict with Iran have been all encoded in Islamophobic language in the Western public sphere. Western politicians (with the exception of Rodriguez Zapatero in Spain) and mainstream media have been complicit if not active participants of Islamophobic reactions to the outlined events. **Epistemic racism as the most invisible form of racism,** contributes to legitimate an artillery of experts, advisers, specialists, officials, academics and theologians that keep talking with authority about Islam and Muslim people despite their absolute ignorance of the topic and their Islamophobic prejudices. This artillery of intellectuals producing Orientalist knowledge about the inferiority of Islam and its people has been going on since the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Spain (Perceval 1992) and since the 18<sup>th</sup> century in France and England (Said 1979). They contribute to the Western arrogant dismissal of Islamic thinkers.

Epistemic racism and epistemic sexism are the most hidden forms of racism and sexism in the global system we all inhabit, the “Westernized/Christianized modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system” (see Grosfoguel 2008). Social, political, and economic racisms and sexism are much more visible and recognized today than epistemological racism/sexism. However, epistemic racism is the foundational form and an old version of racism in that the inferiority of “non-Western” people as below the line of the human human (non-humans or sub-humans) is defined on their closeness to animality and the latter is defined on the basis of their inferior intelligence and, thus, lack of rationality. Epistemic racism operates through the privileging of an essentialist (“identity”) politics of “Western” male elites, that is, the hegemonic tradition of thought of Western philosophy and social theory that almost never includes “Western” Women

and never includes “non-Western” philosophers/philosophies and social scientists (males and females). In this tradition, the “West” is considered to be the only legitimate tradition of thought able to produce knowledge and the only one with access to “universality,” “rationality” and “truth.” Epistemic racism considers “non-Western” knowledge to be inferior to “Western” knowledge. Since epistemic racism is entangled with epistemic sexism, Western-centric social science is a form of epistemic racism/sexism that privilege “Western” male’s knowledge as the superior knowledge in the world today.

If we take the canon of thinkers privileged within Western academic disciplines, we can observe that without exception they privilege “Western” male thinkers and theories, above all those of European and Euro-North-American males. This hegemonic essentialist “identity politics” is so powerful and so normalized - through the discourse of “objectivity” and “neutrality” of the Cartesian “ego-politics of knowledge” in the social sciences - that it hides who speaks and from which power location they speak from, such that when we think of “identity politics” we immediately assume, as if by “common sense,” that we are talking about racialized minorities. In fact, without denying the existence of essentialist “identity politics” among racialized minorities, the hegemonic “identity politics”—that of Eurocentric male discourse—uses this identitarian, racist, sexist discourse to discard all critical interventions rooted in epistemologies and cosmologies coming from oppressed groups and “non-Western” traditions of thought (Maldonado-Torres 2008). The underlying myth of the Westernized academy is still the scientificist discourse of “objectivity” and “neutrality” which hides the “locus of enunciation” of the speaker, that is, who speaks and from what epistemic body-politics of knowledge and geopolitics of knowledge they speak from in the existing power relations at a world-scale. Through the myth of the “ego-politics of knowledge” (which in reality always speaks through a “Western” male body and a Eurocentric geopolitics of knowledge) critical voices coming from individuals and groups inferiorized and subalternized by this hegemonic epistemic racism and epistemic sexism are denied and discarded as particularistic. If epistemology has color—as African philosopher Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (1997) points out so well—and has gender/color—as African-American Sociologist Patricia Hills Collins (1991) has argued—then the Eurocentric epistemology that dominates the social sciences has both color and gender. The construction of the epistemology of “Western” males as superior and the rest of the world as inferior forms an inherent part of the epistemological racism/sexism which has prevailed in the world-system for more than 500 years.

The epistemic privilege of the “West” was consecrated and normalized through the Spanish Catholic monarchy’s destruction of Al-Andalus and the European colonial expansion since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. From renaming the world with Christian cosmology (Europe, Africa, Asia,

and later, America) and characterizing all non-Christian knowledge as a product of pagan and devil forces, to assuming in their own Eurocentric provincialism that it is only within the Greco-Roman tradition, passing through the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and Western sciences that “truth” and “universality” is achieved, the epistemic privilege of Western, Eurocentric, male “identity politics” was normalized to the point of **invisibility** as a hegemonic “identity politics.” It became the universal normalized knowledge. In this way, all “other” traditions of thought were deemed inferior (characterized in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as “barbarians,” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as “primitives,” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as “underdeveloped,” and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as “anti-democratic”). Hence, since the formation of Western Liberal Social Sciences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both epistemic racism and epistemic sexism have been constitutive of its disciplines and knowledge production. Western social sciences assume the inferiority, partiality, and the lack of objectivity in its knowledge-production of “non-Western” knowledge and the superiority of the “West.” As a result, **Western social theory is based on the experience of 5 countries (France, England, Germany, Italy and the United States) that makes only less than 12 percent of the world population.** The provincialism of Western Social Science social theory with false claims to universality, pretends to account for the social experience of the other 88 percent of the world population. In sum, Eurocentrism with its epistemic racism/sexism is a form of provincialism that is reproduced inside the social sciences today.

Against this hegemonic “identity politics” that always privileged Christian and Western beauty, knowledge, traditions, spiritualities, and cosmologies while deeming as inferior and subaltern the non-Christian and non-Western beauty, knowledge, traditions, spiritualities, and cosmologies, those subjects rendered inferior and subaltern by these hegemonic discourses developed their own “identity politics” as a reaction to the racism of the former. This process is necessary as part of a process of **self-valorization** in a racist world that renders them inferior and disqualifies their humanity. However, this process of identitarian affirmation has its limits if it leads to fundamentalist proposals that invert the binary terms of the hegemonic “Western” Males Eurocentric racist and sexist philosophical tradition of thought. For example, if it is assumed that subaltern non-Western ethnic/racial groups are superior and that the dominant Western racial/ethnic groups are inferior, they are merely inverting the terms of hegemonic Western racism without overcoming its fundamental problem, that is, the racism that renders some human beings inferior and the elevation of others to the category of superior on cultural or biological grounds (Grosfoguel 2003). Another example is that of accepting—as do some Islamic and Afrocentric fundamentalists—the hegemonic fundamentalist Eurocentric discourses that the European tradition is the only one that is naturally and inherently democratic, whereas the non-European “others” are presumed to be naturally and inherently authoritarian, denying democratic

discourses and forms of institutional democracy to the non-Western world (which are, of course, distinct from Western liberal democracy), and as a result, supporting political authoritarianism. This is what all Third World fundamentalists do when they accept the Eurocentric fundamentalist false premise that the only democratic tradition is the Western one, and, therefore, assume that democracy does not apply to their “culture” and their “societies,” defending monarchical, authoritarian and/or dictatorial forms of political authority. This merely reproduces an inverted form of Eurocentric essentialism. **The idea that “democracy” is inherently “Western” and that “non-democratic” forms are inherently “non-Western” is shared both by Eurocentric fundamentalist discourses and its varieties such as “Third Worldist” fundamentalisms.**

The “divisions” that results from these identity politics ends up reproducing in an inverted form the same essentialism and fundamentalism of the hegemonic Eurocentric discourse. If we define fundamentalism as those perspectives that assumes their own cosmology and epistemology to be superior and as the only source of truth, inferiorizing and denying equality to other epistemologies and cosmologies, then Eurocentrism is not merely a form of fundamentalism but the hegemonic fundamentalism in the world today. Those Third Worldist fundamentalisms (Afrocentric, Islamist, Indigenist, etc.) that emerge in response to the hegemonic Eurocentric fundamentalism and that the “Western” press put in the front pages of newspapers everyday are subordinated forms of Eurocentric fundamentalism insofar as they reproduced and leave intact the binary, essentialist, racial hierarchies of Eurocentric fundamentalism (Grosfoguel 2009).

In sum, a political consequence of this epistemological discussion is that a foundational basis on contemporary discussions on political Islam, on democracy and on the so-called “War on Terrorism” is “epistemic racism.” “Western” epistemic racism by inferiorizing “non-Western” epistemologies and cosmologies and by privileging “Western” epistemology as the superior form of knowledge and as the only source to define human rights, democracy, citizenship, etc. ends up disqualifying the “non-West” as unable to produce democracy, justice, human rights, scientific knowledge, etc. This is grounded in the essentialist idea that reason and philosophy lies in the “West” while non-rational thinking lies in the “rest.”

#### *ISLAMOPHOBIA AS INTELLECTUAL IRRESPONSIBILITY: THE WESTERN CASE AGAINST TARIQ RAMADAN*

It is interesting to analyze the Western reaction to a critical European Islamic thinker such as Tariq Ramadan. Ramadan, who identifies himself as a European Muslim, has been the victim of a Western campaign to distort his image and his thought in the eyes of Western audiences. In France, he is not allowed to speak in Universities<sup>2</sup> and in the United States he has been

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<sup>2</sup> During the years when Sarkozy was Minister of the Interior in France, Tariq Ramadan was banned from speaking in public Universities.

banned by Homeland Security to enter the country<sup>3</sup>. The Western media campaign against his thought characterizes him as some kind of “Islamic fundamentalist extremist” despite the fact that he is an Islamic reformer. Even Western Universities such as Notre Dame University (where he was offered the Henry R. Luce Professor of Religion, Conflict and Peace Building before being banned from the country by Homeland Security) and Oxford University in England (where he is a visiting scholar today) acknowledge the contributions of Tariq Ramadan to Islamic reform. The question is why is a reformist European Islamic thinker (critical of Islamic fundamentalism, suicide bombers, lapidation against women, terrorism, etc.) attacked and misrepresented as some kind of Islamic extremist? Hani Ramadan, the brother of Tariq, is a declared Islamic fundamentalist and despite his many books and influence, has never been the target of a huge Western negative campaign such as against Tariq.

In my view, for the West it is more difficult to swallow a moderate Islamic reformer thinker critical of both Eurocentric fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism than a declared Islamic fundamentalist thinker. The latter confirms all of the Orientalist Islamophobic prejudices that the West constructs against Islam, while the former challenges those representations. This why both the New York Times and Le Monde have dedicated front pages of their daily newspaper to the “Tariq Ramadan’s affair.”<sup>4</sup> The former due to the Homeland Security policy, while the latter way before his ban from the USA.

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

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to say that recently, in January 2010, the Obama Administration eliminated Homeland Security’s prohibition for Tariq Ramadan to enter the United States.

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

to Islamic fundamentalists and for mainstream Eurocentric Europeans to accept. Thus, the Islamophobic campaign against his thinking.

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

The rule of judgment about the work of any intellectual is based on what he/she says and writes. But if the accusation is that what she/he says and writes is false because he/she has a “double discourse”, then there is no self-defense against this accusation. Whatever the accused intellectual argues, it becomes tautologically an argument against him/herself. No matter how many times Tariq Ramadan has publicly denounced women oppression and lapidating, terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, his brother’s fundamentalist views on Islam, Saudi Arabia and Taliban fundamentalist views on Islam, suicide bombers and so on, *Le Monde* and other French intellectuals keep attacking him as a believer in these things without any evidence nor serious reading of his work and public speeches to sustain these arguments because the claim is that he has a “double discourse.” These standards of judgment are never applied to Western intellectuals. The double standard shows that Islamophobia forms part of Western epistemic racism. In sum, Islamophobia as a form of racism against Muslim people is not only manifested in the labor market, education, public sphere, global war against terrorism or the global economy, but also in the epistemological battleground about the definition of the priorities in the world today. Epistemic islamophobia is a fundamental aspect of racism against Muslims.

#### *ISLAMOPHOBIA AS EUROCENTRIC SOCIAL SCIENCES*

As I have tried to argue along this article, epistemic racism in the form of epistemic Islamophobia is a foundational and constitutive logic of the modern/colonial world and of its legitimate forms of knowledge production. European humanists and scholars since the 16<sup>th</sup> century have argued that Islamic knowledge is inferior to the West. The debate about Moriscos in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain were full of epistemic Islamophobic conceptions (Perceval 1992; 1997). After the expulsion of Moriscos in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the inferiorization of “Moros” continued under an epistemic Islamophobic discourse. Influential European thinkers in the 19<sup>th</sup>

century such as, for example, Ernst Renan "... argued that Islam was incompatible with science and philosophy" (Ernst 2003: 20-21).

Similarly, in social sciences we have concrete manifestations of epistemic Islamophobia in the work of classical social theories of Western-centric patriarchal social science such as Karl Marx and Max Weber. As Sukidi states:

*Islam, according to Weber, was the polar opposite of Calvinism. There was no double edge to predestination in Islam. Instead, as Weber stated in Protestant Ethic (ch. 4, n. 36), Islam contains a belief in predetermination, not in predestination, which concerned the fate of Muslims in this world, not the next (ibid., p. 185). The doctrine of predestination maintained by the Calvinists, which led them to work hard as a duty (vocation, calling), is not evident among Muslims. In fact, as Weber argued, 'the most important thing, the proof of the believer in predestination, played no part in Islam' (ibid.). Without the concept of predestination, Islam could not provide believers with a positive attitude to this-worldly activity. As a consequence, Muslims are condemned to fatalism. (p. 197)*

*The rationalizations of doctrine and conduct of life were alien to Islam. Weber used the belief in predestination as the key concept to explain the rationalization of doctrine and the conduct of life. In Calvinism, the belief in predestination could certainly generate an ethical rigor, legalism, and rational conduct in this-worldly activity. None of these things was present in Islam (p. 199). Accordingly, the Islamic belief in predestination did not lead toward rationalization of doctrine and the conduct of life. In fact, it turned Muslims into irrational fatalists. 'Islam,' in Weber's view, 'was diverted completely from any really rational conduct of life by the advent of the cult of saints, and finally by magic' (Sukidi 2006: 200).*

If we follow the logic of Weber to its final consequences, that is, that Muslims are irrational and fatalistic people, then no serious knowledge can come from them. What are the geopolitics of knowledge involved in Weber's epistemic racism about Muslim people? The geopolitics of knowledge is the German and French orientalist's epistemic Islamophobia that is repeated in Weber's verdict about Islam. For Weber, it is only the Christian tradition that gives rise to economic rationalism and, thus, to Western modern capitalism. Islam cannot compare to the "superiority" of Western values in that it lacks individuality, rationality and science. Rational science and, its derivative, rational technology are, according to Weber, unknown to oriental civilizations. These statements are quite problematic.

Scholars such as Saliba (2007) and Graham (2006) have demonstrated the influence of scientific developments in the Islamic World on the West, modern science and modern philosophy. Rationality was a central tenet of the Islamic civilization. While Europe was in obscurantist feudal superstition during what is known as the Middle Ages, the school of Baghdad was the world center of intellectual and scientific production and creativity. Weber's and Weberians' Orientalist views of Islam reproduce an epistemic Islamophobia where Muslims are incapable of producing science and of having rationality, despite the historical evidence.

But the same problem of epistemic Islamophobia we find in Marx and Engels. Although Marx spent two months in Algiers in 1882 recovering from a sickness, he wrote almost nothing on Islam. However, Marx had an orientalist epistemic racist view of non-Western peoples in general of which he did write extensively (Moore 1977). Moreover, his close collaborator, Frederick Engels, did write about Muslim people and repeated the same racist stereotypes that Marx used against "Oriental" people. Talking about French colonization of Algeria, Engels said:

*Upon the whole it is, in our opinion, very fortunate that the Arabian chief has been taken. The struggle of the Bedouins was a hopeless one, and though the manner in which brutal soldiers, like Bugeaud, have carried on the war is highly blamable, the conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact for the progress of civilization. The piracies of the Barbareque states, never interfered with by the English government as long as they did not disturb their ships, could not be put down but by the conquest of one of these states. And the conquest of Algeria has already forced the Beys of Tunis and Tripoli, and even the Emperor of Morocco, to enter upon the road of civilization. They were obliged to find other employment for their people than piracy... And if we may regret that the liberty of the Bedouins of the desert has been destroyed, we must not forget that these same Bedouins were a nation of robbers, — whose principal means of living consisted of making excursions either upon each other, or upon the settled villagers, taking what they found, slaughtering all those who resisted, and selling the remaining prisoners as slaves. All these nations of free barbarians look very proud, noble and glorious at a distance, but only come near them and you will find that they, as well as the more civilized nations, are ruled by the lust of gain, and only employ ruder and more cruel means. And after all, the modern bourgeois, with civilization, industry, order, and at least relative enlightenment following him, is preferable to the feudal marauding robber, with the barbarian state of society to which they belong. (Engels, French Rule in Algiers, *The Northern Star*, January 22,*

1848, in: MECW, Vol.6, pp.469-472; quoted in S. Avineri (1968). *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* (Doubleday: New York, p. 43)

Engels's option is quite clear: to support colonial expansion and bring Western Civilization even if it is bourgeois and brutal in order to overcome a "barbarian" state of affairs. The superiority of the "West over the rest" and, in particular, over Muslims is quite clear in this statement. Talking about India, the irrational fanaticism of Muslims is expressed in the following quote of Engels:

*The insurgent warfare now begins to take the character of the Bedouins of Algeria against the French; with the difference that the Hindoos are far from being so fanatical, and that they are not a nation of horsemen. (Engels: New York Daily Tribune, July 21, 1858, MECW, Vol.15, p. 583)*

If there is any doubt about Marx's shared views with Engels's on the inferiority of Muslims and "non-Western" people relative to the West, the following quote is a confirmation:

*... The question ... is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton. England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating - the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia. Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moguls, who had successively overrun India, soon became Hinduized, the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilization of their subjects. The British were the first conquerors superior, and, therefore, inaccessible to Hindu civilization... The day is not far distant when by a combination of railways and steam vessel, the distance between England and India, measured by time, will be shortened to eight days, and when that once fabulous country will thus be actually annexed to the Western World .... (Marx, "The Future Results of the British Rule in India" written on July 22, 1853, in Marx and Engels On Colonialism, page 81-83...)*

Marx did not have much hope in the proletarian spirit of the Muslim masses when he stated in relation to the Ottoman Empire's expansion to Eastern European territories the following:

*The principal power of the Turkish population in Europe, independently of the reserve always ready to be drawn from Asia, lies in the mob of Constantinople [Istanbul] and a few other large towns. It is essentially Turkish, and although it finds its principal livelihood by doing jobs for Christian capitalists, it maintains with great jealousy the imaginary superiority and real impunity for excesses which the privileges of Islam confer it as compared with Christians. It is well known that this mob in every important coup d'état has to be won over by bribes and flattery. It is this mob alone, with the exception of a few colonized districts, which offers a compact and imposing mass of Turkish population in Europe. Certainly there will be, sooner or later, an absolute necessity for freeing one of the finest parts of this continent from the rule of a mob, compared with which the mob of Imperial Rome was an assemblage of sages and heroes. ("Turkey," New York Daily Tribune, April 7, 1853, written by Engels at Marx's request, quoted in S. Avineri (1968), *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* (Doubleday: New York, p. 54)*

For Marx, similar to Weber, Muslim people from Turkish origin are a mob of ignorant people that made the mobs of the Roman Empire look like sages. He called for a struggle of liberation against the Muslim mobs. Accordingly, for Marx, Western civilization is superior and, thus, called to civilized the non-Western Muslims. In his perspective, better is the Western colonial expansion rather than leaving intact in a timeless stage a barbarian inferior people.

Marx distrusted Muslim people and was convinced of the inherently xenophobic traits in Islam and, thus, wrote apologetically about Western colonialism. Marx said:

*As the Koran treats all foreigners as foes, nobody will dare to present himself in a Mussulman country without having taken his precautions. The first European merchants, therefore, who risked the chances of commerce with such a people, contrived to secure themselves an exceptional treatment and privileges originally personal, but afterwards extended to their whole nation. Hence the origin of capitulations. ("The Outbreak of the Crimean War—Moslems, Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire," New York Daily Tribune, April 15, 1854, quoted in S. Avineri (1968), *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* (Doubleday: New York, p. 146)*

Marx said, repeating the typical epistemic racism of the orientalist vision of his time, that:

*The Koran and the Mussulman legislation emanating from it reduce the geography and ethnography of the various peoples to the simple convenient distinction of two nations and of two countries; those of the Faithful and of the Infidels. The Infidel is "harby," i.e. the enemy. Islamism proscribes the nation to the Infidels, constituting a state of permanent hostility between the Mussulman and the unbeliever. ("The Outbreak of the Crimean War—Moslems, Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire," *New York Daily Tribune*, April 15, 1854, quoted in S. Avineri (1968), *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* (Doubleday: New York, p. 144)*

These simplified, essentialist and reductionist views of Islam from a Judeo/Christian-centric, Western-centric perspective was part of the Orientalists' epistemic racism and condescending paternalism towards Islamic thought of which Marx was no exception.

Marx believed that secularism was fundamental for revolution to have a chance in Muslim lands. He said:

*...if you abolish their subjection under the Koran, by a civil emancipation, you cancel at the same time their subjection to the clergy, and provoke a revolution in their social, political and religious relations.... If you supplant the Koran by a code civil, you must Occidentalize the entire structure of Byzantine society.* ("The Outbreak of the Crimean War—Moslems, Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire," *New York Daily Tribune*, April 15, 1854, quoted in S. Avineri (1968), *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* (Doubleday: New York, p. 146)

This secularist view of Marx was a typical colonial strategy promoted by the Western Empires in order to destroy the ways of thinking and living of the colonial subjects and, thus, impede any trace of resistance. By arguing that Muslim people are subjected to the rule of a "religion," Marx projected in Islam the cosmology of the secularized Western-centric, Christian-centric view. Islam does not consider itself a "religion" in the Westernized, Christianized sense of a sphere separated from politics, economics, etc. Islam is more a cosmology that follows the notion of "Tawhid" which is a doctrine of unity, a holistic world view, that the Eurocentric Cartesian modern/colonial world view destroyed in the West and with its colonial expansion attempted to destroy in the rest of the world as well. The practice of colonial Christianization in the early modern/colonial period and secularism after the later 18<sup>th</sup> century colonial expansion was part of the "epistemicide" and "religiouscide," that is, the extermination of non-

Western spirituality and ways of knowledge implemented by Western colonial expansion. Epistemicide and “religiouscide” made possible the colonization of the minds/bodies of colonial subjects.

If Marx and Weber are social sciences’ classical theorists, Western social sciences are informed by epistemic Eurocentric and Islamophobic prejudices. To decolonize the Western social sciences, it would entail many important processes that we cannot spell out here in detail. But one of them would be to expand the canon of social theory to incorporate as a central component the contributions of decolonial European and non-European social theorists such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Salman Sayyid, Ali Shariati, Anibal Quijano, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, W.E.B. Dubois, Silvia Wynter and other social theorist thinking from the underside of modernity. To incorporate these thinkers is not a question of multiculturalism but of creating a more rigorous and pluriversal (as opposed to universal) decolonial social science. Ali Shariati in particular is an Islamic social scientist that produced important critiques of Western social theorist such as Marx and is ignored in contemporary social sciences.

Right now what we call social science is a particular, provincial (Western male tradition of thought) defining for the rest what is social science and what is valid, universal knowledge. To decolonize Westernized provincial social sciences we need to move into a global inter-epistemic horizontal dialogue among social scientists from different epistemic traditions of thought to re-found new decolonial social sciences in a pluriversal mode rather than the current universalistic mode. This is not an easy task and we cannot go into the detail of what this implies in this article. However, the transformation from universalism towards pluriversalism in the social sciences is fundamental for moving from the framework in which one defines for the rest (colonial social sciences) to a new paradigm where the production of concepts and knowledge is the result of a truly inter-epistemic horizontal universal dialogue (decolonial social sciences). This is not a call for relativism but to think of universality as pluriversality, that is, as the result of the inter-epistemic interaction in horizontal mode rather than the current universalistic social sciences of mono-epistemic imperial/colonial interaction with the rest of the world.

#### *(IN)CONCLUSION: ISLAMOPHOBIC DEBATES TODAY*

The importance of this discussion about Islamophobia is that the multiple faces it takes and its consequences in contemporary debates and public policy. The islamophobic racism as a form of epistemic racism and its derivative Eurocentric fundamentalism in social theory are manifested in discussions about human rights and democracy today. “Non-Western” epistemologies that define human rights and human dignity in different terms than the West are considered inferior to “Western” hegemonic definitions and, thus, excluded from the global conversation about these questions. If Islamic philosophy and thought are portrayed as inferior to the

West by Eurocentric thinkers and classical social theory, then the logical consequence is that they have nothing to contribute to the question of democracy and human rights and should be not only excluded from the global conversation, but repressed. The underlying Western-centric view is that Muslims can be part of the discussion as long as they stop thinking as Muslims and take the hegemonic Eurocentric liberal definition of democracy and human rights. Any Muslim that attempts to think these questions from within the Islamic tradition is immediately suspicious of fundamentalism. Islam and democracy or Islam and Human Rights are considered in the hegemonic Eurocentric “common sense” an oxymoron.

The incompatibility between Islam and democracy has as its foundation the epistemic inferiorization of the Muslim world views. Today an artillery of epistemic racist “experts” in the West talks with authority about Islam, with no serious knowledge of the Islamic tradition. The stereotypes and lies repeated over and over again in Western press and magazines ends up, like in Goebbels nazi theory of propaganda, being believed as truth. As Edward Said said not too long time ago:

*A corps of experts on the Islamic world has grown to prominence, and during a crisis they are brought out to pontificate on formulaic ideas about Islam on news programs or talk shows. There also seems to have been a strange revival of canonical, though previously discredited, Orientalist ideas about Muslim, generally non-white, people – ideas which have achieved a startling prominence at a time when racial or religious misrepresentations of every other cultural group are no longer circulated with such impunity. Malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West; what is said about Muslim mind, or character, or religion, or culture as a whole cannot now be said in **mainstream** discussion about Africans, Jews, other Orientals, or Asians.... My contention... is that most of this is unacceptable generalization of the most irresponsible sort, and could never be used for any other religious, cultural, or demographic group on earth. What we expect from the serious study of Western societies, with its complex theories, enormously variegated analyses of social structures, histories, cultural formations, and sophisticated languages of investigation, we should also expect from the study and discussion of Islamic societies in the West. (Said 1998: xi-xvi)*

The circulation of these stereotypes contributes to the portrayal of Muslims as racially inferior, violent creatures. Thus, its easy association with “terrorism” and representation as “terrorist.”

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