Editor's Note:
Probing Islamophobia

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Abstract: This is a journal editorial note to the proceedings of the international conference on "The Post-September 11 New Ethnic/Racial Configurations in Europe and the United States: The Case of Islamophobia" organized by Ramón Grosfoguel (U.C. Berkeley) and Eric Mielants (Fairfield Univeristy) at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris, France, on June 2-3, 2006. The editorial note argues that the charges made by critiques of the term Islamophobia (claiming that its use discourages and closes possibilities for criticism of Islamic ideas and practices) are unfounded and not cognizant of the original set of meanings clearly built into the definitional framework of the term as stated in the Runnymede Trust report published in 1997. The essay then appreciatively recognizes the contributions included in the volume in terms of setting Islamophobia in a world-historical and economically non-reductivisit conceptual framework while acknowledging the contemporary and post-September 11 attributes of Islamophobia. The essay also acknowledges the value of the collection of articles and the conference of which they were a result in recognizing, among others, the epistemic foundations of Islamophobia (and similarly Hispanophobia) as forms of racism, and the need for seeking alternative hybrid epistemologies of self- and world-historical knowledge and transformation in dialogue with critical and liberating spiritual and secular knowledges and practices as found within and across Islamic, Hispanic, Western, and other civilizational traditions.

The present issue of *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* presents the results of an international conference on "The Post-September 11 New Ethnic/Racial Configurations in Europe and the United States: The Case of Islamophobia" that Ramón Grosfoguel, Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies at U.C. Berkeley, and Eric Mielants, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Fairfield University, organized at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (MSH) in Paris, France, on June 2-3, 2006. The organizers have herein acknowledged their gratitude to the past and present Director of the MSH: Prof. Maurice Aymard and Prof. Alain d'Iribarne, noting their contributions and generous support as having been crucial to the success of the conference.

Grosfoguel and Mielants provide an excellent and thoughtful introduction to the volume as a whole and to each author's contribution in particular. Moreover, the abstracts opening each article present further summaries of the contributions made by each piece in the volume. Therefore, it would be unnecessary to present further introductory comments on the articles herein, except for making a brief effort in setting the theme of the conference and this issue of the journal in the context of the journal's overall purpose and perspective framework.

"Islamophobia" is a term that originated in the 1980s and gained wider use in response to contemporary events such as the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the advent of the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980-1988 period, the defeat of the Soviet aggression in Afghanistan by a fundamentalist religious movement aided by the U.S., the West, and their regional allies (such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia), and, later, the fall of Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc nations and the subsequent posing of Islam in global imperial politics as an alternative nemesis to the West.

The term came to be formally coined and defined, however, in a report titled *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All*,[1] published in the United Kingdom in 1997 by the Runnymede Trust, which was founded in 1968 "with the stated aim of challenging racial discrimination, influencing legislation and promoting multi-ethnicity in the UK."[2] The report was researched and written by the then newly established (in 1996) multi-ethnic and multi-religious Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, chaired by Professor Gordon Conway, and composed of eighteen members.[3] Since the events of September 11, 2001, and the significant rise in biased and discriminatory policies and behaviors toward Islam and Moslems, the term has achieved much wider circulation.

The Runnymede report defined Islamophobia and "closed views of Islam" as follows:

1. Islam [is] seen as a single monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities.
2. Islam [is] seen as separate and other—(a) not having any aims or values in common with other cultures (b) not affected by them (c) not influencing them.
3. Islam [is] seen as inferior to the West—barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist.
4. Islam [is] seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, engaged in 'a clash of civilisations'.
5. Islam [is] seen as a political ideology, used for political or military advantage.
6. Criticisms made by Islam of 'the West' [are] rejected out of hand.
7. Hostility towards Islam [is] used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.
8. Anti-Muslim hostility [is] accepted as natural and 'normal'.[4]

Non-Islamophobic and "open views of Islam," in contrast, are described by the report as follows:

1. Islam [is] seen as diverse and progressive, with internal differences, debates and development.
2. Islam [is] seen as interdependent with other faiths and cultures—(a) having certain shared values and aims (b) affected by them (c) enriching them.
3. Islam [is] seen as distinctively different, but not deficient, and as equally worthy of respect.

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[1] "Islamophobia: A Challenge to Us All (Summary)." London, UK: Runnymede Trust, p. 2. 1997. The summary and full report may be obtained from The Runnymede Trust, Suite 106, London Fruit & Wool Exchange, Brushfield St, London E1 6EP, United Kingdom. The summary can be downloaded from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Runnymede_Trust.

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Runnymede_Trust

[3] Maqsood Ahmed, Akbar Ahmed, Zaki Badawi, The Rt Revd Richard Chartres, Ian Hargreaves, Phillip Lewis, Zahida Manzoor, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, Trevor Phillips, Sebastian Poulter, Usha Prashar, Hamid Qureshi, Nasreen Rehman, Saba Risaluddin, Imam Abduljalil Sajid, Richard Stone, The Revd John (see the Runnymede report summary, p. 3).

[4] Ibid. p. 2.

4. Islam [is] seen as an actual or potential partner in joint cooperative enterprises and in the solution of shared problems.

5. Islam [is] seen as a genuine religious faith, practised sincerely by its adherents.

6. Criticisms [by Islam] of 'the West' and other cultures are considered and debated.

7. Debates and disagreements with Islam do not diminish efforts to combat discrimination and exclusion.

8. Critical views of Islam are themselves subjected to critique, lest they be inaccurate and unfair.[5]

While the definitional framework for Islamophobia as proposed by the Runnymede Trust does not imply its misuse as a vehicle for dismissing criticisms made of one or another Islamic belief, or of Islam as a whole, opponents of the term have suggested that the term lends itself to silencing "legitimate" criticisms one may raise against Islam or one or another of its varieties.[6] As a result, some have responded by accusing those who have warned against Islamophobia for being themselves tinted by various degrees of Islamophilia,[7] of lending uncritical support and wholesale admiration to Islam and blindly accepting its associated ideas and practices. Such criticisms of the term Islamophobia and

its use, however, often fail to make a distinction between the definitional coordinates of the term itself as coined in the Runnymede Trust report, and the misuse that the term (like any other term) may suffer in ideological and political debates. Clearly, the definition provided by the Runnymede Trust for Islamophobia does not exempt Islam or any of its variants from being subjected to criticism; nor does it limit the option, within a constructive dialogical framework, for those believing in and practicing Islam to present their responses to the criticisms launched against their views.

What is distinctive about the contributions to the debates on Islamophobia included in this issue of the journal is the overall view that while the term may be new in the recent historical context, its content and what it represents is not anything new when considered in the world-historical context of the emergence, development, and decline of the modern world-system. The novelty of the argument is, therefore, both in regard to the exposition of the world-historical nature of Islamophobia as well as its systemically constitutive role in the making of the modern world.

Grosfoguel and Mielants convincingly argue that Islamophobia as a form of racism, of cultural racism, of orientalism, and of "epistemic racism," is not a coincidental and epiphenomenal feature of the capitalist world-economy, but has been a central constitutive element of the modern world for centuries. This theme is more or less further

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[5] Ibid.

[6] In a letter published in 2006, in the French weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo, warning against Islamic "totalitarianism" and signed by Salman Rushdie and several others, for instance, Islamophobia has been referred to as a "wretched concept that confuses criticism of Islam as a religion and stigmatization of those who believe in it" (for a full text of the letter see http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4764730.stm). Ironically, the letter was published following the widespread global protests in the Islamic world to the publication of mocking and derogatory cartoons of the founder of Islam in Western media, purportedly as a mechanism to "test" the openness of Islam to criticism. Salman Rushdie has just been knighted by Queen Elizabeth II.

[7] "Islamophilia is a controversial term (believed to have been first used by critic of Islam Daniel Pipes) employed by some journalists, media commentators and politicians to describe unwavering and uncritical admiration of Islam and used to counteract what many believe to be spurious accusations of Islamophobia. British journalist Julie Burchill also complained of a kind of "mindless Islamophilia" that was "considerably more dangerous" than Islamophobia owing to what she claimed was a white washing of Islamic History and it's use as a way of stifling debate" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamophilia_(neologism).

amplified in other contributions in the volume, where Walter D. Mignolo illustrates how Islamophobia and Hispanophobia have paralleled one another in defining and constituting the coloniality of power characterizing the Euro-/U.S.-centered capitalist world-economy, and Manuela Boatcã sheds light on how the orientalist discourse tinged with Islamophobia had influenced the mental geographies of Western and Eastern Europe(s) long before the 1980s.

Farish Noor illustrates how Islamophobia, aided by the events of 9/11, has played a functional role in advancing the U.S. and Western imperial policies in the current period and especially in the context of south and southeast Asia, and Thomas Reifer argues that "until the present day selective discourse on Islamophobia is replaced with a nuanced understanding of Islam and the sources of Muslim rage and resentment, based on the best understanding and social scientific evidence—thereby hopefully helping to force real changes in U.S., Israeli and Western policy—the likelihood is that the so-called global war on terrorism will escalate, providing a new generation of recruits for militant Islam and leading to an ever escalating cycle of revenge from which few may escape unscathed" (p. 69).

Abdulkader Tayob, further, breaks down the myths of Islam and Moslems as a monolithic block of ideas and persons in the context of a European nation (the Netherlands), and Madina Tlostanova presents a fascinating account of the hybrid, eclectic, and flexible dynamics of Islamic weltanschauung as also and particularly found in the Central Asian landscapes of Sufi Islam—and how such minings of Islamic openness, ideological pragmatism, and creativity may also yield, non-Hispanophobically, significant global and cross-cultural overlaps with the traditions of border thinking and praxes as found in other cultures such as in the life and works of the spiritual activist Gloria E. Anzaldúa.

Concluding her article, and calling for innovations in fostering alternative social

transformative paradigms in dialogue with the knowledges and wisdoms produced in Central Asian landscapes of Islam, Tlostanova writes:

> The problem remains, however, that at this point the alterative thinking models are still not properly consolidated in spite of such exemplary events as the World Social Forum. What is needed is the development of coalitions of such border thinkers and trans-cultural multiply colonized locales on a global scale, which in spite of such technical means of globalization as the internet, still remains a problem to be solved. Moreover, they lack not just financial support, but also a sufficient global knowledge and global drive in themselves to be able to include into their sphere such paradigmatic others as Azeris or Uzbeks to name just two. … Still, let us hope that in the future there will be more exceptions to this rule that will eventually change the rule itself, as one important step in making this world a better place for us all. (p. 117)

Grosfoguel and Mielants, in turn, also close their introduction by drawing attention to this important insight—as underlined by Tlostanova, emerging from their conference and publication efforts—that to counter Islamophobia it is not just sufficient to oppose and expose it, but to pose alternative, non-Islamophobic, and non-racist epistemic frameworks where alternative inclusive visions of a better world can be cross-culturally and cross-paradigmatically cultivated and practiced. "… [I]n 'Life in Samarkand'" Grosfoguel and Mielants write,

> Madina Tlostanova provides us with insight into a potential way out of present dilemmas. Her study of cultural and ethnic hybrids in both

Central Asia and the Caucasus, and the concurrent significance of Sufism in the region, in opposition to the binary logics imposed by both the Russian/Soviet Empire on the one hand and the capitalist world-system on the other hand, could very well be an alternative epistemology ignored for too long. (p. 11)

Perhaps one way to seek alternative epistemologies to global knowledge and transformation would be to scrutinize the modality of antisystemic behavior gripping much of social movements in the modern historical period, and seek innovative "othersystemic"[8] and utopystic[9] ways out of the global crisis that are more concerned with building the alternative worlds in the here and now than posing them as goals to be achieved in the future. The world to be known and transformed is not just 'out there' but 'in here' as well, in the intricate modes of thinking, feeling, sensing, relating, processing, and acting to which all of us have been more or less habituated as a result of the blind workings of what Grosfoguel and Mielants aptly call the "modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system." The Anzaldúan proposal for the simultaneity of self and global transformation, her innovative alchemy of self and world transformation as a way out of the global crisis, has intimate affinities with the Sufi and esoteric spiritual ways of changing the world through radical self-knowledge and inner transformation. For sure, Sufi ways of change may also learn from our world social forums in

not limiting the scope of knowing and transformative behavior to the intrapersonal landscapes—expanding the realm of selfhood to that of the collective global community.

Beyond Islamophobia and Islamophilia, the sociology of self-knowledge as advanced in this journal will hopefully draw attention to the voices and traditions of esotericism and mysticism, including those in Islam, that have for millennia also agonized over the human condition and sought ways of bringing the alienated human "reeds" (as Rumi would have it) together as parts of a common humanity. Islamophobes cannot ignore the voices of Rumi, of Hafiz, of Jami, of Sa'di, and of Khayyam, among many others arising from the landscapes of esoteric Islam, voices that for millennia have attracted the love and admiration and inspiration of the world to the poignancy of their logic and epistemology, and the poetic nature of their transformative praxes across generations.

It is perhaps not too coincidental, then, to find the world-historically framed, hybridly constructed, spiritually open, economically non-reductive, and critically hopeful voices of the MSH conference participants presented in the pages of the present journal, as part of its integrative research agenda in utopia, mysticism, and science and as adorned with the name and the spirit of Omar Khayyam—helping to further incarnate the modalities of critical thinking, personal and global/cosmic self-reflexivity, and spiritual openness that characterized Khayyam's Islamic weltanschauung, as evident in this quatrain attributed to him:

قومی متفکـــــــــرند اندر رهِ دین
قومی به گُمان فتـــــاده در راهِ یقین
می ترســـم از آنکه بانگ آید روزی
کای بیخبران! راه نه آن است و نه این

One crowd in religion ponder their way.
One crowd in science supposedly stray.
I fear one morning the town-crier shouts:
"The way's not this, nor that! O gone astray!"

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[8] Cf. Mohammad H. Tamdgidi, "Open the *Antisystemic Movements*: The Book, the Concept, and the Reality." *Review* (Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center), XXIV, 2, summer, 299-336.
[9] Tamdgidi, Mohammad H. 2006. "Anzaldúa's Sociological Imagination: Comparative Applied Insights into Utopystic and Quantal Sociology." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*. v. IV, Special Issue (Summer), 265-285. See also my forthcoming *Advancing Utopistics: The Three Component Parts and Errors of Marxism* (Paradigm Publishers, 2007).