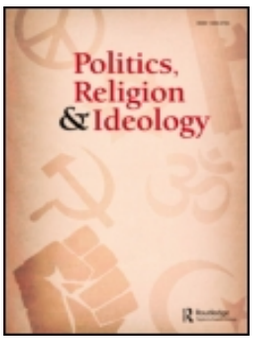

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# INTRODUCTION

# Islamophobia, European Modernity and Contemporary Illiberalism

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The term 'Islamophobia' has been gaining quite a prominence over recent years.[1] It has been used increasingly to refer to the rejection and discrimination from which the Muslim population in European societies has been suffering over two decades or so. The phenomenon in itself is far from new; but it was aggravated by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the discourse of securitization these encouraged and consolidated. Consequently, the politics of fear came to dominate all public discussions. Since the onset of the global financial crisis, these politics seem to have acquired greater magnitude. A conservative British politician, Baroness Warsi, famously stated in 2011 that hostility to Islam had passed 'the dinner table test'.[2] Yet, the notion of Islamophobia (as well as those of liberalism and secularism connected to it; see below) is considerably elusive. Those who favour its employment find it analytically useful whereas those who don't regard it as no more than polemical.[3] Among those who find it particularly helpful are scholars who use it in the diverse contexts of race relations, working class experience, postcoloniality, intellectual and media discourses as well as past and contemporary politics, such as the volumes by Junaid Rana,[4] Esposito and Kalin,[5] and Gottschalk and Greenberg.[6]

This special issue of *Politics, Religion and Ideology* seeks to contribute to the academic debate on European Islamophobia by focusing on the paradox that characterizes the discourses used today to discuss the 'Muslim Question' in Europe: European identity presumably defined by its liberalism is invoked to justify *illiberal* attitudes. In some countries such attitudes have led to the introduction of juridical initiatives that curtail the religious rights

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[1]On the history of this term and its contemporary usage, see Chris Allen, *Islamophobia* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); also see Marwan Muhammad, 'Islamophobia: A Deep-rooted Phenomenon', *Arches Quarterly*, 4:7 (Winter 2010), pp. 96–101.

[2]Jon Kelly, 'What is Baroness Warsi's "Dinner Table Test"?', *BBC*, 20 January 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12240315 (accessed 20 February 2013).

[3]Salman Sayyid, 'Thinking Through Islamophobia' in Salman Sayyid and Abdool Karim Vakil (eds) *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 1.

[4]Junaid Rana, *Terrifying Muslims: Race and Labor in the South Asian Diaspora* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).

[5]John Espositio and Ibrahim Kalin (eds) *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[6]Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).

of Muslims in Europe. The contributions put together in this issue offer a diversity of perspectives on the trajectories of this paradox, illustrating the complexity of the very concept of Islamophobia and its multiple manifestations.

In most writings and public pronouncements, the term Islamophobia is taken to be a contemporary neologism; it is often traced back to the 1997 British report of the Runnymede Trust. However, some scholars chart a different genealogy of this term going as far back as nearly a century to the French imperial order.[7] One account shows it to have been most prominently used in its modern meaning first in French (*islamophobie*) toward the penultimate days of World War I. Using it in 1918 in their book *The Life of Muhammad – the Prophet of Allah*, Etienne Dinet (who embraced Islam in 1913 and took the name Naser-ed-din) and Sliman Ben Ibrahim consistently employed it for nearly two decades in their many works. What is at stake here, however, is not only a temporal or chronological issue but also a conceptual one. The efficacy or otherwise of a term is not predicated solely upon *when* it was used first, but also *how* it was and is used. That is, whether or not it has the analytical capacity and heuristic strength to explain and describe that which it names. Dinet and Ibrahim used it to underline Europe's hostility to Islam discussing as they did the roles of Islamophobes such as 'Gladstone, Cromer, Balfour, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and missionaries of all stripes'.[8] They critiqued what they called 'the pseudo-scientific Islamophobia' of the orientalists and the 'clerical Islamophobia' of the missionaries. Significantly, their book on the life of the Prophet was dedicated 'to the memory of Muslims who died for France'. Whilst pledging their loyalty to the French state, they also critiqued France's failure to recognize the sacrifice of Muslims and to acknowledge the right of all Algerians to partake of full French citizenship. Recognising the hegemonic political formation which Dinet and Ibrahim named as Islamophobia has an important bearing in contemporary times as well. Is the recent (January 2013) French military intervention in Mali to fight 'terrorism' totally unhooked from Islamophobia? Clearly, it is not. Precisely at the same time the military intervention was decided, the French president François Hollande ordered national security to be brought to its highest level, something that was not without effect on his popularity levels.[9] This would tend to suggest that the west's ceaseless search for culturally 'good' Muslims and its crackdown on politically 'bad' Muslims, as Mamdani noted early on, needs serious re-examination.[10]

Many contributions in this issue touch upon the contradictions of French Republicanism, contradictions anchored in history and the decisions made by the state elites at the end of the nineteenth century to pursue colonial expansion whilst proclaiming fidelity to the tryptich of 'liberty, equality, fraternity'. The early twentieth century saw traditional Christian missionary attitudes being put at the service of colonial domination and these attitudes are still evident in contemporary European forms of hostility towards Muslims, as is apparent in the case of Denmark discussed here by Mark Sedgwick. The early twentieth century, however, also saw in France the emergence of a particularly strong form of political secularism whose presumed cultural uniqueness is conveyed through the use of the French term *laïcité*. The laws defining the place of religion in French society are touched upon in a

[7]Abdool Karim Vakil 'When is it Islamophobia Time' in Salman Sayyid and Abdool Karim Vakil (eds) *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 33–41.
[8] Abdool Karim Vakil, op. cit., pp. 39–40.
[9]France 24 International News, 'France Orders Tighter Security in the Wake of Mali Intervention', 13 January 2013, http://www.france24.com/en/20130112-france-hollande-orders-tighter-security-mali-operation; Bloomberg, 'Hollande Popularity Gains After Mali Intervention, Poll Shows', 29 January 2012, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-01-29/hollande-popularity-gains-after-mali-intervention-poll-shows.html.
[10]Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Book, 2004).

number of articles to highlight the way anti-Muslim illiberalism also draws on the self-perception and imaginary of the secular character of European societies, imaginary that has become associated with the notion of European identity in a way that subsumes their national identities. New forms of legislations have been debated and introduced across Belgium, France and Germany – Robert Gould's contribution discusses them at length in a comparative framework – with a view to preserving national cultures presumably threatened by Muslim experiences of religious faith. Interestingly, Gould observes that whereas in the case of Germany and France it is the state which supposedly stands threatened by the Muslims' presence, in the case of Belgium the stress is put less on the state and more on society and its values. This can perhaps be related to the contemporary weakness of the Belgian nation state threatened by Flemish secession. The articles in this issue thus engage with the political form that unfolded in Europe and came to dominate the world: the nation state.

Whilst all contributions engage with the diversity of political cultures engendered by the various European states and characterized by different modes of secularity, many also stress the existence of a common cultural logic behind European Islamophobia or what Sedgwick prefers to call anti-Muslim activism. Armando Salvatore and Irfan Ahmad seek to explain this common mechanism and logic that stresses the *longue durée* of European modernization and asserts that Islamophobia was a constitutive element of liberalism. Whilst Salvatore stresses the process of cultural immunization that concealed the survival of the Christian tradition in the self-definition of a new, secular form of society, Ahmad coins the expression *domophilia* – love for home identified with a cultural-territorial nation state – to examine the reconfiguration of the religious quest for a spiritual home into nationalist devotion to the secular nation state and highlights the violence implicit in European liberalism.

Other contributions place emphasis on the recent transformation of the European nation states as a result of both the European project of integration and globalization. Whilst Sedgwick highlights the role played by neo-nationalist politics in the spread of anti-Muslim attitudes, Doyle shifts the analytical gaze to the vital role played by elites in promoting a definition of European identity that has accentuated the de-politicization of European national societies and inspired initiatives to find a political purpose through a fetishist attachment to liberal values. This quest for a political project on the basis of an ideological reading of European history has re-activated hostility towards Islam through the illusion that the defence of liberal values can alone recreate a social cohesion lost over previous decades. Douglas Pratt's paper focuses on the success of the Swiss referendum banning the construction of minarets. The peculiarities of the Swiss political system enabled minority anti-Islamic activism to seize the initiative simply because it activated people to vote. Notwithstanding the negative image of Islam in the Swiss media and politics, Pratt optimistically predicts that the law banning minarets might be changed – through legal initiative, or under pressure from international public opinion – in future because such precedence exists in relation to the ban on the rights of Catholics to establish new dioceses.

In this special issue we have collected contributions which make a fine, productive balance between empirically grounded studies on the one hand and theoretical reflections on the other. These two sets of contributions shed light on one another. As a whole, the issue draws attention to the fact that the phenomenon of Islamophobia is inextricably bound up with the limited, skewed understanding that Europeans have of their own historical formations, and of their related cultural coordinates and political matrix. Their understanding of Islam is likewise limited and skewed, as pointed out by Jacques Derrida who, shortly before his death, underlined 'the need to deconstruct the European intellectual

construct of Islam'.[11] While Salvatore and Doyle share a similar understanding of the history of secularity, they offer different assessments of its place in the history of European modernity up to the present. Whereas Salvatore's approach inscribes itself in the tradition of Foucault with its specific interpretation of secularity as an epistemic category central to the advent of modern governmentality, Doyle stresses the limitations of the very notion of governmentality and instead highlights the importance or the contemporary sociocultural context which has enabled Islamophobia. In particular, she discusses how the demotic forms of politics manifest, among others, in the labour movement was gradually eroded from above under the banner of the project of European unification, giving rise to new politics of populism. She gainfully connects this transformation in European politics – which she analyses as part of a de-politicisation also induced by new forms of individualism – with the acceleration of the processes of globalization. Mapping the simultaneous catalogues of nation and civilization, Ahmad reads Islamophobia differently. Comparing Islamophobia in India and Europe, he maintains that while in India Muslims for over two centuries have been made to serve as both historical symbolic and empirical 'Other' of the nation, in the west Muslims also became an empirical, non-distant 'Other', but only after World War II, with their migration as cheap, docile labour from the colonies. Analysing the long-term transformation of the world though colonization and associated forms of nationalism, he suggests that the anxiety about the putative lack of integration by Muslims in Europe is possibly reminiscent of the chosen segregation Europeans themselves practised in their vast colonies.

That the fear which Islam inspires among Europeans is that of Europe's own past of illiberal violence and religious fanaticism has forcefully been made by Werbner.[12] This fear reactivated by the so-called 'Islamic terrorism' became that of those 'enemies' hiding within European societies and bent on destroying the permissive liberal society. As various media reports and government documents show, many terrorists linked to various attacks were born or educated in Europe. In his sociologically rich contribution based on extensive fieldwork in various prisons of France, Farhad Khosrokhavar shows how the imprisoned radical Muslims – the percentage of Muslims in jail is unusually higher than their national percentage – lead their lives in jails. With great skills, he details how a combination of factors such as infrastructural inadequacies, the prejudices of the prison authorities as perceived by the jailed radicals, their enhanced sense of religiosity during confinement and the relations they forge with one another may strengthen their radicalization and provide them with a context in which they can bring others to espouse their violent interpretation of Islam, a phenomenon noted in the article by Virginie Andre and Shandon Harris-Hogan devoted to the recent terrorist attacks committed by Mohamed Merah.

Andre and Harris-Hogan examine the changing face of violent radicalization in France from the perspective of the biographical trajectory of Merah, his relationships to his parents and siblings, as well as his transnational connections. This focus on the microcosm of family is very important. It must however also be situated within the macrocosm of geo-political objectives: the rise of Algerian terrorism followed the cancellation by the military of the 1992 elections, cancellation approved, *inter alia,* by the French government. The article highlights the role of family as the locus within which the complex interaction of socio-economic marginalization and cultural alienation has bred feelings of victimization that provide a fertile ground for the Jihadist ideology. It ends on the

[11]Mustpha Cherif, *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), p. 38.

[12]P. Werbner 'Islamophobia: Incitement to Religious Hatred – Legislating for a New Fear?', *Anthropology Today*, 21:1 (2005), pp. 5–9.

central paradox characterizing Merah's destiny: he was both a son of the French Republic and its enemy.

In this respect, his trajectory manifested the same aspirations to subjective autonomy shared by all French Muslim youth, aspirations which contributed to the revival of Muslim piety apparent in French society. Andre and Harris-Hogan's article thus connects with the point made in different ways by Khosrokhavar and Doyle regarding the incapacity of French society to understand the significance of the new forms of piety embraced by many young French Muslims in the form of non-violent Salafism. This form of Salafism, discussed by Khosrokhvar as *Sheikhi* Salafism as opposed to Jihadi Salafits, functions today in France very much like forms of puritanical Christian evangelism, creating self-sufficient communities that cut themselves off deliberately from the rest of society. Here lies another paradox: this purist version of Islam, which has been taken by French authorities to be totally synonymous with violent radicalization, has in fact changed the face of Muslim faith, in a way that has contained the potential for the legitimate grievances of Muslims to translate into support for the Jihadist cause. The novelty of Salafism in French society, however, has fuelled the politics of fear that have added to the wounded subjective aspirations of many French young Muslims.

The question of subjective autonomy is central to the discussion of Islamophobia. All the articles in this issue share a common awareness of the way contemporary European Islamophobia reveals the failure of European liberal modernity to live up to its promises when it comes to affording Muslims the conditions of subjective autonomy. Whilst they offer different interpretations of the causes behind this failure they exhibit a similar concern for the consequences of the ideological understanding of liberalism now gaining prominence across Europe. As John Gray reminds us, European liberal values were first and foremost the historical *modus vivendi* within which European religious differences were reconciled.[13] Treating them as a superior source of truth defining a single best way of life can only engender the reappearance of violence in a continent that praised itself on having transcended it.

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**Notes on Contributors**

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[13]John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

Ahmad is the author of *Islamism and Democracy in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), which was shortlisted for the 2011 International Convention of Asian Scholars Book Prize for the best study in the field of social sciences. His articles have appeared in *Anthropological Theory*, *Citizenship Studies*, *Global Networks*, *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Modern Asian Studies* and *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. He is on the editorial committee of *South Asia* and is an associate editor of the journal *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*. He is finishing a book manuscript on the theory and practice of critique in modernity and Islamic tradition.

**Natalie J. Doyle** is Senior Lecturer in French and European Studies at Monash University, Melbourne, and Deputy Director of the Monash European and EU Centre. She is interested in the place of religion in modern European culture and issues of European identity, especially with respect to the self-definition of the European Union. She is also engaging with the instrumentalization of Islamophobia in the current European political crisis. Recent publications include 'Lessons from France: Popularist Anxiety and Veiled Fears of Islam (*Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 22:4 (2011), pp. 475–489) and 'Autonomy and Modern Liberal Democracy: From Castoriadis to Gauchet' (*European Journal of Social Theory*, 15:3 (2012), pp. 331–347).