Topographies of Hate: Islamophobia in Cyberia

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Abstract

Islamophobia's occurrence in any particular country has little do with the presence of Muslim; it is possible to be Islamophobic when there are virtually no Muslim around. This because the lack of Muslims is filled by the surplus of Islamophobic representations. This surplus of representations is now increasingly reliant on the internet. There are many studies reporting on Islamophobia on the internet, classifying the negative representations, the targeted acts of aggressive online behaviour (trolling) against Muslims. These studies are basically taxonomies, and they share this feature with general literature on Islamophobia, which is concerned with reporting instances of Islamophobia empirically with little time spent on its theorisation. Such an understanding of Islamophobia implies that it is simply dismissed as being a matter of prejudice, bias, and closed views. A Critical Muslim Studies understanding of Islamophobia developed initially in the collected volume Thinking Through Islamophobia (2010), and then subsequent publications shift the focus away positivism to decolonial discourse theory. Using decolonial discourse theory, this study will how online Islamophobia is not just a distortion of Islam, or hatred of Muslims but rather it main vectors for denying Muslim political consciousness.

Keywords: Critical Muslim Studies, cyberspace, the internet, Islamophobia, spatialization.

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Introduction

This paper is divided into three parts. The first part is directed towards the theorisation of Islamophobia, the second part focuses on the spatialization of power, and final part is an exploration of Cyberia as a zone of Islamophobia. My approach is explorative and can be summarised as a decolonial discourse theory: as such it is aligned with genological, anti-foundationalist premises, which take seriously the argument that Orientalism is the 'normal science' of the paradigm of a globally entrenched and embedded form of knowledge production that labours under the designation of human or social sciences. This argument presents a specific challenge to the analysis and comprehension of phenomena that are located on the edge of the constitutive divide of the social sciences that is between the West and the Rest. The Islamicate has in last half century has increasingly come to stand-in for the Rest, and hence, phenomena that are identified as being associated with Islam or Muslims, raise a number of epistemological and methodological questions which can no longer simply be brushed aside as being unimportant, or that can be dealt with by fine-tuning the configurations of Eurocentric social sciences. If nothing else, the recognition that Orientalism is normal science and not a transparent description of the world as it is, opens the possibility for interventions and suggestions that challenge the axiomatic status of social sciences as currently configured as systems for the production of knowledge. The decolonial nature of this approach focuses on the way in which claims for universalism cannot be sustained. The imperatives of decolonial discourse theory arise from the necessity of interrogating essentialism in the production of knowledge and the de-historicization that it implies. The critique of essentialism and critique of universalism is brought together as part of the project of recontextualization of social sciences in the wake of the challenge to the metaphysics of presence that ground the production of knowledge and whose philosophical roots were bound up with the articulation of global Western hegemonic identity. The analysis of Islamophobia demonstrates with great perspicacity the challenge of understanding phenomena on the very edge of what Orientalism as normal science can fathom.

Theorizing Islamophobia

Orientalism is a discursive formation that governs the production of authoritative statements that constitute a distinct Orient as the site against which the implied plenitude of the West is contrasted and given coherence. It is important to analyse the transition from Orientalism to

Islamophobia, and this cannot be done at the level of mere representation, since a discourse contains performative, 'material' as well as linguistic and descriptive elements. Orientalism occurs in different registers (i.e. academic, cinematic, journalistic, novelistic etc.). The 'Orient' of Orientalism can be found in video games, television series, policy documents and of course, the internet. Orientalism and Islamophobia are not interchangeable. The 'Orient' constituted by Orientalism is not identical with the Islamosphere. Islamophobia may be Orientalist but not all forms of Orientalism are Islamophobic. The picture is further obscured by the way in which Edward Said's preface to the 1985 edition of Orientalism contains one of the earlier instances of the use of the terms Islamophobia. The question arises: is a world saturated with Orientalism also a world overflowing with Islamophobia?

Islamophobia is a form of racism. Racism is not just the belief that humans are divided into 'races', nor is it just the ideology that holds one race is superior, and the rest are inferior, rather it is a type of governmentality. Racism as governmentality means that what is decisive is how populations are ordered, disciplined and regulated. The practice of governmentality is entirely permeated by the cultural. The history of racism is replete with examples which demonstrate again and again how what was somatic, phenotypical (or if you prefer biological) is over-determined by the cultural. A discourse theoretical approach could not conclude anything different: all social relations are discursive.

What distinguishes Islamophobia from other forms of racism would appear to be the way in which the central antagonism is directed at manifestations of Muslim identity. These manifestations may vary depending on the local and regional context. They may include a range of actions (including violence against property and persons, verbal abuse micro-aggressions, demonization both common and expert) that seek to deny Muslim agency. The focus on Muslims, however, does not mean, that Islamophobia should be redescribed as Muslimphobia or some such circumlocution. The criticism of the concept of Islamophobia has three main aspects. There are those who criticize the term, since they deny the existence of the phenomena itself. They do so because they have what they consider to be secular sensibility and feel that any subjectivity that smacks of religious affiliation is superficial and retrograde, or because, they assert that Muslims are aggressors and Islamophobia is a means of invalidating defence against 'Islamic aggression'. This position is summed up by the oft-heard claim that Islamophobia is not a phobia because a phobia is irrational and fear of Muslims and Islam is justified by the actions of Muslims and the set

of ideas and values purportedly associated with Islam. Secondly, there are those who criticise this concept because, while they accept there is the phenomenon of hostility towards Islam and Muslims, they feel that Islamophobia has too many unfortunate connotations of mental illness. The problem with this criticism is that it is working with the idea of language in whereby etymology determines semantic content. Etymology, however, can tell a history of a word, not its current or authentic meaning, since the meaning of terms arises from their use. There is no perfect correspondence between signifier and signified which would exclude all possible forms of contestation or confusion. Finally, they are those who criticise the term because by linking Islam to discrimination against Muslims, the concept seems to make it difficult to critically engage with a religion without that criticism being seen as an extension of racism. In other words, these critics would prefer to be able to denounce attacks on Muslims but still be able to critique Islam. The ability to differentiate between Muslims and Islam is, precisely, what these critics believe is obscured by the term Islamophobia. The problem with this line of argument is that it seems to neglect the difficulties in maintaining the distinction between 'race' and religion that this very argument wants to push. For example, throwing a pig's head through a shop – only make sense because of the significance of the associations that Islam (and Judaism) have with the idea of pigs as being unclean. An attack on a mosque is religious, but what about an attack on halal butchery? Is ripping the hijab of Muslim women an attack on Islam or the Muslim? As these examples illustrate, the difference between Islam and Muslims in the context of Islamophobia is insufficient to differentiate the term.

The theorisation of Islamophobia that I will be using is one that sees the phenomena in historical rather than perennial terms. There is not much point in describing the Quraysh's opposition to the Prophet (pbuh) as Islamophobic. Rather, Islamophobia is an attempt to deny Muslim agency by disciplining it with reference to a Westernizing horizon. By Westernizing horizon, I mean the assemblage of practices, protocols and values which project the future in terms of either explicit (i.e. named) or implicit (the West is not actively named but displaced) Westernization. The idea, simply put, is that Islamophobia arises in situations in which the demands for Muslim autonomy are interrupting the future destination of a society. The political significance of demands for Muslim autonomy vary from context to context; it is, however, possible to identify four major theatres in which a set of repertoires are generated problematizing Muslimness.

The Topography of Islamophobia

The global spread of Islamophobia is not merely a consequence of the infrastructure of surveillance and securitization put in place under the rubric of the war on terror; it is also a function of the way in which the relational logic of racism manifests itself. A topographical analysis is necessary not only to escape the tyranny of nationalist historiography and methodologies but also to take the global range of Islamophobia seriously. The question is: what is the relationship between the multiple occurrences of Islamophobia in a variety of settings?

One position would be to see Islamophobia as having one source from where it spreads. This source could be a global[1] 'Islamophobia industry' (Lean, 2012). The alternative view would be to see Islamophobia occurring independently reflecting local factors. In some ways, this debate echoes the discussion between David Theo Goldberg (2009) and Frank Dikötter (2008) on the question of the Western origins of racism or multiple origins.[2] The approach to Islamophobia consistent with Critical Muslim Studies is to recognise that rejection of essentialism in the understanding of Islamophobia does not mean only a rejection of perennials but also the rejection of an attempt to use anti-essentialism to dissipate the very category of Islamophobia itself. Islamophobia must be analysed through the family resemblance of its occurrences, rather than the uncovering of an essence in either its formation or articulation.

It is possible to identify a number of distinct topographies- circuits in which chains of particular Islamophobic tropes could circulate with greater or lesser ease (Sayyid, 2010, pp. 1-10). There are four such theatres which exercise a degree of 'strategic selectivity' in relation to the articulation of various iterations of Islamophobia.[3] The first theatre of Islamophobia is that of Muslimistan, that is territories in which the Islamicate is socially or politically dominant (Sayyid, 2010, pp. 1-10). In these countries, the quest for Muslim autonomy and the exercise of Muslim agency present a direct challenge to the political authority of most regimes. The political order in Muslimistan is dominated by Kemalism, and in these cases, Muslim

[1]. I am suggesting that Nathan Lean argues for one source of Islamophobia– but his analysis is a useful description of the role of calculation, and co-ordination in the production of Islamophobia. It an important corrective to the belief that Islamophobia is spontaneous and almost instinctive response among people. There is little doubt there is organisation that structures Islamophobia, the existence of an organisation and commitment is not however, a sufficient for the success. The questions remain why is the Islamophobia industry is able find consumers for its products.

[2]. See Ian Law (2016) for discussion of Goldberg and Dikotter. Law goes on to make the case for polyracism as being analogous to multiple modernities.

[3]. Bob Jessop describes strategic selectivity as "how a given structure may privilege some actors, some identities, some strategies, some spatial and temporal horizons, some actions over others; and the ways, if any, in which actors (individual and/or collective) take account of this differential privileging through 'strategic-context' analysis when choosing a course of action." https://bobjessop.org/2014/06/16/the-strategic-selectivity-of-the-state-reflections-on-a-theme-of-poulantzas/

agency is overdetermined by quests for the unravelling of absolutism and greater accountability. Kemalism refers not only to the project of transformation ushered by the authoritarian rule of Mustafa Kemal in the wake of the destruction of the Ottoman order, but also similar attempts to Westernise Islamicate societies by seeing modernisation as synonymous with Westernization. For example, other iterations of Kemalism include the regimes associated with Reza Khan, Nasser, Suharto (Sayyid, 2015). Secondly, there is the theatre formed by countries in which the Muslim presence is contemporaneous with the early modern formation of these polities. In these cases, the demands for autonomy by Muslims raise an existential threat by reactivating the moment of the formation of these polities. Countries like Russia, India, Thailand, China are an example of this second theatre of Islamophobia. The third theatre of Islamophobia is dominated by countries in which the Muslim presence is described as recent and alien; these countries are mainly Western plutocracies. The Muslim demands for autonomy have become the surface of inscription for the crisis of white supremacy. Muslims and 'immigrants' have become equivalent. Trump's travel ban is a testimony to this logic: it reproduces the popular misconception that Islam is external to the United States arriving in the country only in recent years as immigrants. The historical record is clear that the first Muslims arrived in what became the United States before its formation. It estimated that approximately one-third to a half of all those Africans having been captured and enslaved and transported to the America, were Muslims (Diouf, 1998). The fourth theatre of Islamophobia is one in which the actual Muslim presence is minimal or invisible. In this context Islamophobia as problematization of Muslim identity is vicariously based on the virtual absence of Muslims. Many of the countries of Latin America and parts of Africa and north-east Asia can be included in this group.

These four arenas provide the four distinct contexts for the problematization of Muslim identity and how Islamophobia may be deployed. Islamophobia cannot simply be over-determined by the problem of immigrants and their integration into host societies. The tendency, especially pronounced in Western plutocracies, to see immigrants and Muslims as effectively equivalent should not prevent us from seeing the other logics in which Muslims often become metaphors for invaders and traitors. These four theatres define configurations of space providing distinct topographies where series of overlapping tropes are mobilised in the performance of Islamophobia.[1] These theatres are transnational; they are unified not by spatial contiguity but performative

[1]. See Sayyid and Vakil (2010) for discussion of these four theatres of Islamophobia.

resemblances. In other words, Islamophobia is not a national but global phenomenon. It may be experienced locally, some of its infrastructures may be enabled nationally, but it is articulated globally. It operates through these four theatres, providing the 'structural selectivity' by which types of tropes are harnessed in specific narratives. Like other forms of racism, there is a 'family resemblance' in the categories by which Islamophobia is enunciated and experienced.

Is there a case for adding to these four theatres of Islamophobia, a fifth one: cyberspace? To address this question, it is necessary to look at the relationship between the virtual and the physical as well between place and power. There have been attempts to analyse cyberspace through disciplines such as international relations (Choucri, 2012), but in general, the study of the 'sociological' aspect of cyberspace has been analysed mainly through media studies, or studies of technology and its effect on habitus. The political dimension of cyberspace has focused on its potential as a venue for social protest or other forms of social engagement. In these studies, cyberspace is generally represented as a platform upon which social relations occur, it is an extension of sphere of interactions into a domain in which there is distinct difference between the physical and virtual worlds in terms of the overcoming of geographical constraints of location, the possibility of obscuring the link between actions and agents. In contrast to the view of cyberspace as infrastructure that facilities the emergent forms of social interaction and association in this paper the focus will be on cyberspace and the spatialization of power. Despite the centrality, the question of the spatialization of power remains relatively under theorised as it is taken for granted- the stage upon which social relations are performed but not the performance itself. The internet, in its various permutations, is primarily seen as a medium of communication rather surface of inscription. Much of the current literature which accounts for the circulation of Islamophobia on the internet is a form of media analysis in which world wide web is merely another form of mass communications, and Islamophobia can be captured in terms of the description of images, stereotypes and such like, that produce negative images of Islam and Muslims and foster and fuel the hostility towards Muslims. The position I want to take is different: I want to see Cyberia as a fifth theatre, rather than just a communications medium, I want to examine cyberspace spatially.

A Fifth Theatre of Islamophobia?

The world we live in is visualised in terms of a geography bequeathed to us by Early Modern and Enlightenment cartography, and established

by the exercise of an Euroepan imperium and its construction of a world order of metropolitian nation-states and colonies. In this world system, primary and legitimate actors were European states organized around cultivation of core nationalities (French, British, Dutch…). The dismantling of the European colonial empires meant the idea of nation-states become global, but only few nationalities were considered to be epistemological privileged. These epistemological privileged states became the leading producers of knowledge. As Ramon Grofoguel points out the global cannon is based on work of writers from six European countries. Eurocentrism is simultaneously national, racial and global. Social relations that do not morph around the nation-state are marginal. Thus, a national/nationalist methodology elaborates social relations as being contained within boundaries of basically an Enlightenment cartography. By using the example of Muslims as a globalized population that is not contained within any nation-state, we will explore the continuities and discontinuities between social relations mediated through virtual space and social relations spatialized geographically.

The spatial dimension of social relations has historically been conceived in terms of attempts to overcome distance. The range of social relations is contained by the ability to transcend space through the development of transportation and communications. The process of territorialisation describes the way in which organised human endeavour creates a container for the exercise of a myriad of social interactions.[1] The boundaries of this container are determined by the interplay between environment, logistical technologies and strategic awareness. Hunter-gather bands, agrarian villages, cultic associations, polities, trade routes and networks; construct a different form of territorialisation in which activity in the interior is marked as different in the expenditure of resources than activity in the exterior. Thus, space occurs as a void which needs to be overcome through a web of social relations, and this web is borne on an assemblage of technologies of communications and transportation (alphabetic scripts, organised commissariats, ocean-going vessels, railways etc.). Modes of transmission create territories by overcoming space.[2] In other words, human communities transform the spatial dimension of power into enclosed spaces (Buzan & Little, 2000). The spatial dimension of human interactions can be analysed not only through the institution of the state, but also through various forms of the spatialization of power, including the bounded experience of hunter-

[1]. See Buzan and Little (2000) for analysis of various forms of what they describe as 'international systems' populated by units such as hunter-gather bands, city states, and empires.

[2]. The literature on this topic is vast, but an astute reader will recognise the influence of Braudel, Michael Mann, Anthony Giddens, and James Scott.

gatherer bands, nomads and other forms of human association. The staging of the political has a spatial dimension.

The Spatial Turn

This organisation of space, however, is not merely a site for the enactment of social relations but rather a fundamental element in the constitution of "systems of interaction" (Soja, 1980; Giddens, 1984, p. 368). Space, then, is not a description of the physical surface occupied by individuals, families, and communities; it is not just terrain for political struggles: palaces and assemblies, public squares, and sacred ground, containers for the performance of social ontologies, but rather the condition of possibility for the exercise of power. Physical space is experienced through discursive spatialization not simply as a pre-existing immutable reality that is simply a background to human activity. The exercise of power is not limited to the idea of a cyberpolitics in which cyberspace is conceptualized as a new distinctive arena of contestation where the struggle for "who gets what, when, and how", takes place (Choucri, 2012, p. 4). This paper is concerned not with a cyberpolitics but rather with the political, in which, the exercise of power is constitutive of the social. Space is not natural but historically and culturally contingent, the product of social interactions which restrain and enable behaviour and beliefs. As Massey suggests that we understand space as: "Space" is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global… all social (and indeed physical) phenomena/activities/relations have a spatial form and a relative spatial location" (Massey, 1992, p. 80). The spatial turn within the humanities and social sciences abandons the belief in space as a natural container in favour of investigations in the discursive articulation of space (Massey, 1992; Kosmin, 2014, pp. 5-6). The process by which land and sea were spatialized are so deeply sedimented that we can be forgiven experiencing them as part of a natural geological reality. It is for this reason that it is the introduction of the spatialization of the skies after the first world, which provides a useful analogy with the emergence of cyberspace.[1]

Airpower and emergence of cyberspace

In 1921, Giulio Douhet (2009), an Italian general published *The Command of the Air.* This book in its various editions, is considered to be

[1]. Greathouse (2014, p. 32) makes a similar argument regarding the relevance of airpower theorist to theorization of cyber warfare, since unlike classical theoreticians of war since "the ideas of airpower theory can be directly translated to cyber war in that they contain issues predicated on technology and the idea of movement that is not limited by geography which is a critical difference between classical military theorists and the issues related to cyber war."

the first significant theorisation of the air power. Douhet had served in the First World War with the Italian Army fighting the Austro-Hungarian forces, saw the potential for the use of warplanes as strategic rather than tactical weapons. In other words, he was critical of the way in which air planes had been used until then either for reconnaissance or as 'flying artillery' to attack small enemy formations in concert with ground forces (Douhet, 2009, p. 3). Instead, he argued that aeroplanes should be used in large 'aerial fleets' to attack enemy cities behind the front lines occupied by land forces (Douhet, 2009, p. 24). This strategic bombing would break the will of the enemy of population and modern war, which needed to mobilise a large percentage of its male citizenry, could not be sustained without popular support. Douhet's call for independent air forces capable of bombing enemy cities into submission depended on his spatialization of the sky. That is, the sky became a surface of represention for the exercise of military engagement. The sky unlike the land provided a pure geometric plane. In which t aircraft could move in any direction; the sky was an even surface without physical constraints or means for channelling movement across it. Unlike armies, which are dependent on rail and road transport, or fleets which were only able to move through connected bodies of water of sufficient depth and scale, a mass formation of aeroplanes would have no such restrictions. It would be able to attack enemy infrastructure, industry and population centres without topographical hindrance. Douhet realized that the aeroplanes' ability to move across the sky at speed, would lead to the transformation of the battlefield. The distinction between civilians and soldiers would collapse, military action would no longer be restricted to the frontline where rival organised large armed units contend. Total wars would be fought by the total mobilisation of all the resources of society. The introduction of airpower would expand the battlefield so that it would embrace the entire length and breadth of the warring states, without any sheltered spaces where peaceful life could continue unaffected. Douhet's theorisation of air power, saw the spatialization of the sky and the emergence of total war as spatial and social phenomena.

The example of the way in which the sky was spatialized shows how space is discursively articulated and how such articulations have effects which are not merely descriptive but constitutive. By conceiving the sky as part of the spatialization of the battlefield, Douhet and other theoreticians of air power were instrumental in advocating new institutional forms (e.g. independent air forces), new strategies and new conceptions of distance and threat. The addition of air power to the land and sea war-fighting dimensions was not an incremental transformation

but revolutionary shift, the influence of which went beyond the sphere of war-making. Airpower transformed the idea of territorial circumspection which had been central to the development of early modern states in Eurasia. By spatializing the skies, the state becomes a three-dimensional entity. The demarcation and regulation of the skies, expanded the range of operations of the state. The sky was not simply medium for the exercise of air power; it becomes part of the discursive activity of statecraft, i.e. the continuous efforts necessary for making and maintaining a state (Devetak, 1995, pp. 31-33) The discourses of around cyberspace, are often constituted in opposition to the authority of state (e.g. phenomenon of hacktivism). The liberalism in the imaginaries of cyberspace has several implications for the analysis of Islamophobia in Cyberia.

Imaginaries of Cyberspace

By conceptualising Cyberia not as a medium but as space, it allows us to present the problem of Islamophobia not the politics of representation but rather as the formation of a political order. Spatial imaginaries in the West find it very difficult to evade the lure of Orientalism. The various representations of cyberspace demonstrate the way in which the spatial in different forms was articulated by tropes culled from the history of Orientalist imaginings. Descriptions of the meaning of cyberspace have reflected broader cultural disposition among Western plutocracies about the relationship between technology and humanity. Such articulations have significance for the Western enterprise, since, technological reasoning has been one main marker by which the West differentiated itself from the Rest. An approach which technology which saw in a positive light has been tempered by the realization that technology may undermine the human. The Western cultures also identified themselves as being societies in which the human could be the most humane. Thus, the tension between technology and humanity had a resonance in Western societies. This tension between technological and the human are reflected in main interpretations of the meaning of cyberspace. A complex set of interpretations can be summarized for our purposes as a dialectic between the potential of cyberspace to deliver totalitarianism or liberation. This dialectic can be seen in the shifts in perception about the internet in recent years.

The early hopes for the cyberspace were that it would constitute a new global republic in which dense communications across national boundaries would further deepen the development of global civil society able to check the arbitrary authority of nation-states. The

fantasy of Athenian polis informed some of these accounts. This fantasy was strengthened by the way in which it aligned with liberal beliefs in individuals bound by rational conversations able to transcend all accretions of culture, religion, ideology and the exercise of autonomy. The collapse in distance transformed the problem of scale: it allowed for the exposing the idea of minorities as an accounting exercise rather than actualities. In other, words minorities were disclosed as an effect of boundary drawing. Boundaries which cyberspace had the potential to unravel. This is often presented as compression of time-space: the world becoming smaller, but it could as easily be conceived as the expansion of our world. The range of intimacies become bound by a conception of proximity that was global. Everyone could be local. This localisation seemed to make it possible to see the internet as a democratic space, outside the control of any Leviathan. In this view, 'a wild west motif' signified cyberspace as a place of freedom were 'hacktivists' emerge as the vanguard of the 'anti-globalization movement (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, p. 33).[1] Rather than information technologies being used to deliver a totalitarianism, there is this view of cyberspace was a site where it was possible to resist globalisation, commodification and homogenization.

The vision of cyberspace as a country t anti-Leviathan, however, was checked by the revelations of Wiki-leaks. Wiki-leaks, seemed to demonstrate that the idea that Big Brother was not watching us, or rather that the belief that in Cyberspace there was no possibility of a Big Brother was a naive at best and at worst delusional. It was clear that the United States and some of its allies forced the private co-operations who peddled the dream of individual freedom as being the defining feature of the internet to create a crypto-infrastructure of surveillance and regulation. Cyberia was only a Hollywood version of the ancient Greek polis, which completely ignored the exclusionary nature of the Greek conception of democracy, as well as for polities like Sparta-apartheid states where the equality of the Herrenvolk was maintained by systematic torture and oppression of the helot masses. Big Brother was watching us, but he was just less bombastic about it, and like the citizens of Oceania we did not have the imagination to understand our circumstances. The investigations associated with wiki-leaks seemed re-insert cyberspace into a familiar narrative of state formation and resistance.

The ability of the state to exercise power and regulate and discipline its population was circumscribed by topography.[2] One of the claims

[1]. For details of the discussion of the Wild West motif in cyberspace see Jordan and Taylor (2004).

[2]. See Scott (2010) study of Zomia- as the region beyond the reach of states in South-East Asian lowlands, for a detailed example of the way in which topography helped disrupt the territoriality of political centres.

made on behalf of digitalisation was that it would overcome topography. Wiki-leaks provided evidence that under surface of the vision of the internet as free space open to all forms of creativity and beyond the reach of political authority, powerful states had begun to establish mechanisms for exerting their control over cyberspace. Cyberspace was more centralized than it was believed. Traditionally, centralization was a key feature of the state. Territorial centralisation; however, meant that the remit of a central political authority was unevenly distributed among different social sectors and spaces. Upland and densely forested regions were often able to become a refuge for outsiders often described as 'bandits' (from the point of view of the state). The gradual replacement of welfare liberal democracies by national surveillance plutocracies demonstrates the way in which state expansion has carried out a granular colonisation of life-worlds. The virtual monopolies some of the American companies came to exercise over the internet, also suggested Big Brother may exist not as a state actor but as a corporate chief executive. The idea of cyberspace as an engine of human emancipation and expression became undermined by the way in which strucutres of the internet were increasingly configured for profit maximisation and thus were able to channel and commodify individual creativity.

This dialectic between centralising force of the state and emancipatory force of hacktivism reproduces at the level of cyberspace, the logic of liberalism. Liberalism is not a just a political creed, but rather a family of philosophical orientations which enjoy hegemonic global status. What unites liberalism is a set of commitments which foreground rationalism, and individualism as being the core building blocks of social formations and interactions. The primacy of the rational individual disavows the role of antagonism in the formation of identities and believes that the political can be domesticated by the exercise of rational debate (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 10-11). Liberalism fails to recognise itself as being political– that is borne out of conflict and does not recognise its history that has been compatible with racialised authoritarianism. Three of the countries who are seen as representatives of liberalism where racial states (the British Empire, the French Empire and the United States). As several studies have demonstrated liberalism belief in the limited role of the state, and the rights of the individual were compatible with racial-colonial rule (Sayyid, 2014, pp. 17-29), Western colonial rule was not a contradiction of liberalism but is validation (Mehta, 1999). The emergence of racism in its various iterations including Islamophobia in cyberspace does not belie the logic of liberalism, rather it one of the gateways to the establishment of racial order in cyberspace. The question is how to

account for the way in which the republic of cyberspace has become infused with Islamophobia. Islamophobia circulates not because they are organisations and individuals who are able to share their hostility towards Muslims in the physical sphere in Cyberia. Islamophobia in cyberspace is not a shadow or parallel to the existence of antagonism towards the Islamicate in the 'real' world. Islamophobia arises from the discursive articulation of Cyberia as space. To make good on this claim I want to draw attention to the work being done on the republic of letters (e.g. Goodman, 1994; Al-Musawi, 2015). The republic of letters is a better-suited analogy to the cyberspace than that which sees the advent of the internet as an enhanced media platform.

"The republic of letters was an intellectual network" (Goodman, 1994, pp. 14-15) enabled by the technologies of the printing press and postal system that came to occupy a central position in the constitution of the public sphere in France from the 17th century onwards.[1] The Enlightenment republic of letters was centred in France, but the network it generated began to connect European men of letters, academic institutions, salons and periodicals, beyond the borders of the French monarchy. These physically dispersed men of letters developed a consciousness that they constituted a distinct political community that was cosmopolitan in its orientation. The web that bound the republic of letters was woven through an "epistolary commerce" (Goodman, 1994, p. 17), which established the standing of its citizens and contribute their social capital. The republic of letters was bound not by common ideas as such but rather the circulation of correspondence which forged a sense of dispersed and fragmented sociability. Many of the participants of in the Enlightenment republic of letters were involved in theorizing and advocating colonial-racial domination. The trans-national (or to be more precise the trans-polity) republic of letters was instrumental in forging white supremacy as a global enterprise. It allowed for the possibility of Europeaness when confronted with non-Europeaness to transcend its internal rivalries and erect a colour line that held firm until the carnage of First World War (1914-1918) and October revolution of 1917. Islamophobia has emerged as means of restoring white supremacy in an increasingly post-Western world order. Cyberspace is one domain where the post-Western diversity of the planet has yet to penetrate. It is a space where white privilege is still hegemonic. This hegemony is arising not merely from the frequency of circulation of Islamophobic memes but also the structure of cyberspace that is akin to a republic of letters.

[1]. The idea of a republic of letters has been expanded to include an Islamicate medieval republic of letters by Al-Musawi (2015), which demonstrates that printing press was not a necessary precondition for the establishment of the republic of letters.

A new world order has been established around the logic of the "war on terror". Central to this order is the regulation and subordination of expressions of Muslimness.

The emergence of parts of cyberspace as Islamophobic republic of letters is due to three main factors which have changed the international order. Firstly, the end of the Cold War meant not only the end of the possibility of a Soviet/communist alternative to Western/capitalist hegemony, but it also dismantled the very idea of the "Third World". The Third World was not only a geopolitical category in which it was possible for issues of concern to the global South to gain leverage by skilful manoeuvring between US-led camp and Soviet camp. It was also aphilosophical and cultural base from which to launch an epistemological challenge to the enduring Eurocentrism. The Third World provided an transnational infrastructure of resistance and included men and women not only from the ex-colonies but also, to , some extentfrom the ranks of the marginalized and dispossessed in the developed world. The convergence of anti-colonial struggles with anti-racist struggles (pioneered by civil rights in the U.S)., was crucial. The critique of Orientalism was enabled by existence of these networks and associations which organized around the Third World (Sayyid, 2016). This abandonment of a possible alternative to Western hegemony empowered the belief that the universal was wrapped in the clothes of Europeaness. The end of the Soviet alternative however, can be seen philosophically as part of the de-centring of the West, since even the Soviet Union was a geopolitical rival at deeper cultural and philosophical level it is considered to be part of the heritage of the European enlightenment. The apparent victory in the Cold War only exposed the way in which the world was becoming post-Western, that is, a world in which colonial-racial order was eroding.

This leads to the second factor is that Western elites have not emotionally adapted to the post-Western world. This is why, so many of them have rushed to embrace policies that seek colonial solutions to what are postcolonial predicaments. Thus, the antagonism towards Islam and Muslims is a means of shoring up the West's sense of its own destiny. The choice of Islam and Muslim as the antagonistic-other, i.e. as the figure that subsumes the traumatic kernel that prevents the West from being a fully realized harmonious and prosperous whole, is not purely arbitrary. The figure of the Muslim encompasses all the attributes of what the West likes to think it is not: misogynist, racist, violent etc. That is, Western narratives of itself are reliant on articulating the Muslim as the figure which represents the very impossibility of the West being

equal to itself. The incapability of the West to live up to its own version of what it should be is explained by the scandal of the Muslim presence– both geographically and temporally (Sayyid, 2016). The crisis of social cohesion in the West has become explicable by reference to the existence of a Muslim presence which prevents the full closure of these societies around core liberal values. The failure of liberal values is externalized to the surface of Muslim bodies rather than something intrinsic to liberalism itself.[1] This externalization cannot cause but bewilderment, grief, and unsettlement as well as resistance from Muslims. At the heart of Islamophobia was an anxiety about the loss of white privilege.

The final factor that I want to draw attention to is the crisis of Islamism itself. Islamism has been successful in asserting itself throughout the Islamosphere; it has broken the secularist-nationalist hegemony. However, it has not been able to provide an alternative pathway to establishing a stable infrastructure which could replace the loss of the "Third World" network. Islamism has had to operate through civil society as, with a handful of exceptions, state structures have remained hostile to it and have been active in efforts to depoliticize issues by enveloping them into an agenda of moralization, and consequently, Islamist capacity for analytical and strategical reflections is stunted.[2] The assertion of Muslim agency was presented as direct cause of loss of White privilege. The equibalance articulated by Islamophobes between multiculturalism and Muslims pointed to the way in which a loss of white privilege was narrated through the presence of Muslims.

The above three developments have converged to create the conditions for the articulation of cyberspace as Islamophobic. The Islamophobia on the internet is not, not however just a product of the content that is posted, it is embedded in architecture of Cyberia itself. Similar to the way in which republic of letters was a structural entity which dispersed was still able to project itself coherently. This coherence was borne not of an agreement but the very cultural, social and political conditions that made the republic of letters possible.

The articulation of cyberspace is not that of a neutral domain or sphere in which the planet becomes conscious of itself. Confining our analysis to content on social media that produces Islamophobia, obscures the existence of a republic of letters. Cyberia is not an even synchronic plane in which hosts hundreds of millions of interactions unencumbered by spatial configurations and concerns. Cyberia is home to Islamophobic "republic of letters". This republic does not simply

[1]. Parts of this passage appeared in an op ed for Anadolu Agency see Sayyid (2016).

[2]. Parts of this passage is taken form my opted for Anadolu Agency see Sayyid (2016).

set-up on cyberspace, it is central to process of its formation and perpetuation. This republic of letters is developing a set of vocabularies and behaviours that give expression to idea of Cyberia as a 'country' in which whiteness is privileged and enforced. Alternatively, to put it more precisely it is space that contains regions in which expression of white supremacy is unchecked, by advances of civil rights and anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles. These virtual white ethno-states are steeped in Islamophobia, since, Islamophobia is the glue that holds together their desires for return of racial and gendered hierarchies.

Attempts to end Islamophobia require not only prohibitive actions but the ability to imagine cyberspace a new.

Conclusion

Cyberia took root in the interregnum between the Cold War and the Global War on Terror, a period in which Islamophobia began to be recognised as the re-occupation of racism within a cosmopolitan neo-liberal world which was represented as fundamentally post-racial. Conceptions of cyberspace simply reproduced liberalism's myopia on a different technological platform. Cyberspace was both of the world and apart from it. It apartness was not only due to its ability to transcend constraints of association and communication, its incorporeal character. Its apartness was also reflected that it looked like a country which was white, male and entitled. In other words, cyberspace was the mirror of a liberal cosmopolis. A place in which the political was displaced. A land without history (since it was considered to be so new) was a land unable to recognise the violent hierarchies that were integral to its formation and continuation. Cyberia as being apart from the real world full of people of colour, people without technology, people without a future. Cyberia was a country which in which the struggles of the anti-colonial and anti-racist movements had been recuperated into the logic of global neo-liberalism and de-politicised and hence dis-armed. Cyberia was a country where anti-racial etiquette so painfully established could be undone and dismissed as 'political correctness gone mad'. It was a country, where white young men could enact out their fantasies of racial superiority which were becoming harder to sustain in other public spaces (schools, colleges, work). Islamophobia is intrinsic to the formation of Cyberia as an area of Whiteness. The analysis of Islamophobia in cyberspace which deploys the tools of media studies and sees cyberspace as just another medium, cannot understand the foundational role of Islamophobia plays in its formation of Cyberia as a white republic of letters.

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