

Title—Islamophobia and the Europeanness of the Other Europe

Journal—Patterns of Prejudice 25

Author—S. Sayyid

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Categories: Migration, Islam, Politics, Culture

Place: Europe (East Central Europe)

Time: 1980-2010

Argument Synopsis:

Sayyid's article is focused on the relationship between the emergence of Islamophobia and the 'crisis' of Europeanness. There is a tendency of most Western politicians to ignore the link between the colonial past and the present Muslim question. Sayyid argues that the colonial enterprise was intrinsic to the formation of the identity of Europe. Europeanness is 'modern' and one of the main expressions of modernity is colonial expansion, revealing the intractable connection between the colonial period and modern European identity. Sayyid notes that the article is not an ethnographic or empirical study of incidents of Islamophobia in Europe, but rather is a conceptual narrative that explores the relationship between Islamophobia and the reconfiguration of contemporary Europeanness. When Sayyid references the 'crisis' of Europeanness this refers specifically to the cultural, socio-economic, and philosophical conditions occurring as the result of the 'decentering of the West' produces a crisis of Europeanness, or alternatively white identity. Sayyid uses two complementary theoretical frameworks: discourse theory and decolonial thought. The article is situated in East Central Europe specifically, although it does attempt to address Europe at large. Sayyid attempts to contribute to the development of a theory of Islamophobia in global, as opposed to national or local, terms.

Sayyid defines Islamophobia as a form of racism in which the constitutive antagonism is directed at manifestations of Muslimness. They utilize a theorization of Islamophobia that sees it as a form of governmentality, specifically defined as the attempt to deny Muslim agency with reference to a Westernizing horizon. For Sayyid, both Muslimness and Westernization are metaphors that lack precision but are frequently deployed, often meaning different things in different contexts. Sayyid reveals four arenas where Islamophobia is performed. 1) Muslimistan, or territories where the Islamicate is socially or politically dominant such as Turkey. 2) Countries where the Muslim presence has been contemporaneous with early modern formation, such as Russia or India; Sayyid finds demands for autonomy raised by Muslims in these areas raise an existential threat by reactivating the moment of the formation of the polity. 3) Countries where the Muslim population is described as recent and entirely alien, such as the United States; Sayyid argues that demands for Muslim autonomy in these countries has become the surface of inscription for the crisis of white supremacy. 4) Countries where the actual Muslim presence is minimal or invisible, such as Latin America; the problematization of Muslim identity is vicarious based on the virtual absence of Muslims. Sayyid posits that the global colonial order established by the European project rested on the primacy of difference between Europeans and non-Europeans. Islamophobia's focus on the Islamicate is what distinguishes it from other forms of racism. The figure of the Muslim encompasses all the attributes the West seems to reject, i.e. misogyny, racism, violence etc. Essentially, Islamophobia is less about what Muslims do or what Islam is, and more about national anxieties surrounding a loss of identity.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Islamophobia as an attempt to construct European identity within a postcolonial conjuncture in which the West is decentered
- European colonial empires were racial states and the unravelling of global racial order of white supremacy has implications for what European identity is
- Theory of Islamophobia that is based on the relationship between decolonial thought and the study of the Islamicate