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Empire, Islam and the postcolonial

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Introduction

One of the most persistent criticisms of postcolonialism is that it promotes an antipathy to imperialism that tends to focus on the experience of European colonial empires and neglects other, non-western instances of imperial hubris. The articulation of Islam and empire has not been subject to sustained postcolonial investigation; rather, the relationship between Muslims and imperialism has tended to be represented in terms of Muslim subjugation to European colonial rule. Postcolonial critics have largely avoided the discussion of Islamicate imperialism (Hodgson 1974).[2] There are good reasons for this. First, the most recent experience of Islamicate communities has been that of being European colonial subjects. By 1900, three out of four Muslims were living in European empires, while there were only four significant polities – the Ottoman domains, Persia, Morocco and Afghanistan – outside of European control (Schulze 2000: 23, 25). Most of Muslimistan was affected by European colonial rule, and in this respect the Muslim story is not very different from stories of other non-western societies.[3] Islamicate societies share a set of experiences common to what used to be described as the Third World: colonisation, unequal exchanges, institutionalisation of cultural

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2   Hodgson (1974: 58) introduced the term 'Islamicate' to refer to social phenomena that were informed by Islam but were not reducible to it.
3   Muslimistan refers to countries 'dominated (either informally or informally) socially and culturally by the Islamicate' (Sayyid 2010: 3) .

inferiority, anti-colonial struggles, formal independence. It is easy to conclude from this that the dominant relationship between Islam and empire has been that of Muslim subjugation. In addition, postcolonial studies has largely been focused on the European colonial enterprise and its remaking of the world; other, prior imperial formations have not been at the forefront of postcolonial analysis.

To put Islam and empire into conversation with the postcolonial is, at best, an ambivalent gesture. Such a conversation can be read as part of the heroically democratising process by which the western canon has become less Eurocentric and more ecumenical; by which marginalised histories have been reclaimed and recovered; and by which the story of the West has come to feature characters who interrupt its privileged whiteness, marking out western plutocracies as intrinsically multicultural and post-racial in an increasingly interconnected world. According to this post-racial narrative, racialised differences in the West have only a cosmetic significance; racism proper is more likely to be located among non-western communities including non-western immigrants to western countries (Sayyid and Hesse 2008). This narrative often sets up a contrast between Islam and the West as the primary axis structuring contemporary social and cultural relations. The contrast between the imagined benevolence of western imperialism (past and present) and the attributed aridity of Islamicate imperialism restores the legitimacy of the western imperium, building a case for the necessity and desirability of continued American-led military action in the age of the 'war on terror', and institutionalising the series of so-called 'humanitarian interventions' that have taken place in the aftermath of the Cold War (Cooper 2004).[4] On first reading, Muslims appear to be subjects of European colonialism or – what often amounts to the same thing – to require western regulation and protection; on the second, they appear as potential or actual imperialist heirs of rapacious and predatory empires. In this paper, I want to explore this tension between subaltern and imperial readings of Islam and empire as these are disclosed in a postcolonial context.

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4   Robert Cooper, a senior diplomat advisor to the Blair government, was one of the early advocates of humanitarian intervention and other forms of liberal imperialism in the 1990s. The incongruity of such a position became explicit when Cooper found himself defending the Bahraini police against widespread protests against the Bahraini government during the so-called 'Arab Spring'. See Cooper (2004) for a case for liberal imperialism.

Double decolonisation

There are many different ways of describing the postcolonial context in which the contemporary politics of Islam has emerged; for the purposes of this chapter, I want to emphasise two relatively recent developments that have eroded the 'violent hierarchy' between the West and the non-West, which constituted the colonial order. The first of these developments revolves around anti-colonial national liberation struggles, which did much to make European colonial regimes ungovernable by mobilising sustained armed resistance. The second concerns the various civil rights struggles that have undermined the domestic status quo in western plutocracies. These two struggles can be viewed together as two fronts of a single conflict in which western primacy and white privilege – always intimately linked – have been weakened and challenged. Both these developments benefited from the re-ordering of the international environment in the aftermath of the Second World War. The Cold War, by turning the planet into an arena for overtly ideological competition between two contending systems of belief and economic organisation, provided both anti-colonial and civil rights struggles to potentially outflank their local opponents, by widening their resistance beyond parameters set by the colonial order. One of the hallmarks of the colonial enframing of the world was the way in which it sought to establish a hermetically sealed border between the West and the rest, metropole and periphery, nation and empire. This border allowed figures as diverse as John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson, Alexis Tocqueville and Lord Cromer to behave inconsistently, knowing that the contradictions of their own thoughts and actions could be rescued by recognising the different logics that operated in the colonial divide. To give an example, Lord Cromer championed women's empowerment in Egypt by campaigning against the veil, and then became President of the National League Opposing Woman Suffrage in England. Similarly, it was an ontological gap between the West and the rest that allowed Alexis Tocqueville to praise religiosity in America and condemn it in Algeria (Richter 1963; see also Pitts 2000). Of course, these figures and many others like them were complex, as human beings are, and their lives showed the inconsistencies and slippages that are common to humanity. The point is not that they were hypocritical or cynical – they may or may not have been – but rather that these inconsistencies rested upon an assumption that

empire and nation denoted not only two distinct political structures but rather two separate universes, so that it was quite possible to talk up democracy in Britain and France while ignoring the fact that a majority of the subjects of the British and French governments lacked basic political rights.

Given the division between nation and empire that constituted western colonial order, it is not surprising that what Mignolo (2000) has described as the 'decolonial shift' occurred as the confluence of two struggles: civil rights and anti-colonial. This double decolonisation of the international order, and of the domestic spaces sustained by that order, was made possible because of the way in which the mutual hostilities of the Cold War provided an ideological umbrella under which it was possible to challenge western supremacist discourse. The national liberation wars helped to speed up the dismantling of the European empires in Asia and Africa, while at the same time the ideological challenge posed by the Soviet Union created spaces that subaltern groups within western plutocracies could use to support their demands for civil rights (Krenn 1998; see also Tyner and Kruse 2004).[5] The shift from the Cold War to the 'war on terror' has, however, consolidated the way in which the anti-colonial and civil rights struggles have recently become disaggregated. This consolidation is marked by the way in which western plutocracies increasingly represent themselves as being anti-racist, anti-patriarchal and even anti-homophobic as compared to non-western communities, in particular those now organised around the signifier of Islam. In the age of the 'war on terror', Islam and its cognates provide a link between the domestic lack of social cohesion and external threats to national security. The tropes of rogue states and 'home-grown' terrorists populate the discourse of the 'war on terror'.

Islam raises questions, then, that have geopolitical implications (rogue states and terrorist bands), cultural connotations (the balance between secularism and minority needs), and epistemological consequences (e.g. those encapsulated in the question: can the history of the

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5   Krenn pointed to how Soviet Union propaganda focused on 'the Negro question', using the subjugation of African Americans as an indictment of the USA itself. Similarly, African-American politicians have attempted to take the plight of African Americans to the UN, thus blurring the distinction between domestic and foreign policies.

world still be told as a scaled-up history of the West?). Meanwhile, the relationship between Islam and empire has shifted from an academic to a general cultural concern; for not only does the historical idea of an Islamicate empire provide a populist example of 'bad empire' to be contrasted with 'good' ones such as those of Britain and by extension the US (see Ferguson 2004), but the aims of present-day Muslim minorities and movements can also be deciphered from a highly selective reading of Islamicate empires in the past. The image of a Saracen with a scimitar in one hand and the Qur'an in the other is a staple of orientalism past and present. This image is often linked to the assumption that the spread of Islam was uniquely due to military dominance – an assumption that establishes the essentially violent character of the Muslim enterprise (past and present).

Currently, the most sustained and elaborate recycling of this image and its associated themes is found in what can be broadly described as neo-conservatism.[6] Neo-conservatism came to the fore as a project aimed at perpetuating the unipolar moment that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the unravelling of the Cold War. Neo-conservatives saw a historic opportunity in the fall of the Soviet Empire to consolidate a Pax Americana that would forestall the possibility of any geopolitical rival emerging to challenge the United States (McGowan 2007: 124). In this vision of an everlasting American future for the world, neo-conservatives were responding to the process of double decolonisation. According to neo-conservative narratives, Islam (sometimes extremist Islam) is a totalitarian ideology set upon world domination and the reduction of all non-Muslims to a subjugated status (Burleigh 2008; Gray 2003). The 'bad empire' of Islam (in its various incarnations) sits alongside attempts to emphasise the moral superiority of the 'good empire' of Britain (or other more recent western imperial formations). In its attempt to privilege the British empire and, by extension, to justify American global hegemony, neo-conservative discourse displaces the postcolonial critique of imperialism onto imperial Islam, either explicitly or more implicitly (e.g. by arguing that the imperial sins of Islam are far greater than those of western empires, or that Atlantic slavery was a lesser evil than Saharan slavery, or that 'Muslim racism' is more racist than western

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6   Many of those who are described as neo-conservatives prefer the designation neo-Reaganite.

racism).[7] There is, however, good reason to see in the Islamicate empires an imperialism that has its own specificity, and I will recount some of those specific features below.

Imperial Islam

The beginnings of Islamicate empire are generally seen as lying in the organisation of a state centred on Medina in the 620s. The Medina state was able to unify the Arabian Peninsula for the first (and to this day only) time through a process of military campaigns and diplomatic manouevres. This unification meant that Muslim armies came into conflict with the Roman and Persian empires, as the Arabian Peninsula was no longer a buffer zone patrolled by contending nomadic bands in pay of Roman or Persian authorities. The challenge of the Medina state, however, was not purely geopolitical; it was also philosophical. By the time of the emergence of the Islamic state, the Mediterranean basin and Iranian plateau had been dominated not only by empires but the very idea of empire as a world state for millennia (Fowden 1993). The Roman and Persian empires were not just predominant in the region but their predominance had been sedimented over centuries: they presented themselves as heirs to an imperial legacy that transcended its current dynastic configurations. The Persian imperial heritage has plausibly been traced from the imperial formations of the Assyrians of the sixth century BCE through the Babylonians, Achaemenids, Parthians and Sassanids. In some cases, the homage to previous empires was self-conscious (e.g. the Sassanids presenting themselves as direct legitimate heirs to the Achaemenids), while in other cases it was implicit, for example the use of purple as a signifier of imperial dignity (Aro and Whiting 2000). The Roman empire was philosophically grounded in the Roman republican tradition but was also linked via *Imitatio Alexandri* to Persian imperial tropologies. Given the prestige of these empires and the pedigree of their imperial heritages, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that the 'barbarian' states on their periphery would aspire to become part of these imperial grand narratives. The Islamicate polity could have easily slipped into the niches carved out by

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7   A number of generally unreliable accounts circulate on the internet in which the victims of imperial Islam are numbered in their hundreds of millions as an attempt to illustrate the uniquely violent character of Islam and its adherents. Given the generalised awareness of the millions of deaths attributed to European colonialism, to make the case that Islam was particularly violent requires figures that top these. Of course, it goes without saying that such calculation of death and destruction is extremely difficult given our lack of documentation on demography in the distant past.

ancient imperial legacies; but to a large extent the Islamicate state did not do this, nor did the order that Muslim forces forged just rework existing imperial traditions.[8] This was remarkable since the Islamicate states' neighbours had one of the longest sustained traditions of imperial formations. The articulation of Islam and empire, however, did not simply produce another iteration of prevailing imperial traditions; it marked nothing less than the enunciation of a new semantic universe.

The emergence of empire founded by Muslim armies interrupted the dependence on the previously standard model of imperial narratives. In approximately one hundred years (from roughly 630 to 750), the Islamicate state conducted a series of military campaigns on a continental scale that would yield, up to that point, the largest empire in the world. Muslims conquered territories from Sind to Spain; in the process, they shattered the Persian empire and captured the richest provinces of the Roman empire. In purely spatial terms, the territory captured by Muslim armies was approximately 11 million square kilometres, making it twice the size of the previous largest empire (Taagepera 1978). The speed and the scale of the conquest signalled a dramatic jump in empire-building capacities. Not only did Muslim arms lay low empires that had been around for half a millennium; they did so without necessarily having any significant technological, fiscal or demographic advantage over their enemies. The 'miracle' of Muslim military success has been explained either as divine verdict (either in favour of the Muslims or against their enemies), or in more prosaic terms as the consequence of an implausible demographic explosion in the arid Arabian Peninsula, or as the will to plunder. As Fred McGraw Donner (1981) has argued, however, all these explanations tend to discount the highly organised and disciplined structure of the Muslim conquests, the relative numerical weakness of their armies in relation to those of their opponents, and the absence of any significant superiority in weaponry. The success of the Muslim armies was ideological: that is, it was based on construction of a Muslim political identity that could not be reduced to an Arab ethnicity or nomadic positionality.

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8   This is not to deny that the imperial traditions of the Roman and Persian empires had an influence on Islamicate empires in subsequent centuries, or that the unfolding of the venture of Islam was not inflected through local traditions, but rather that the Muslims saw themselves as separate from previous empires. Contrast this with the jostling for imperial investiture among the Germanic successor states of the Roman empire.

The construction of a distinct Muslim identity is crucial to any understanding of the hundred-year jihad. In the name of Islam, armies were organised, defeats were endured, and victories sustained. The seasoned generals of the Roman and Persian empires, who had tried-and-trusted methods of dealing with nomadic border incursions, had nothing in their strategic repertoire to deal with Muslim armies that were largely immune to being bought off or being played off one faction against another. As Walter Kaegi observed, 'No Byzantine manual of statecraft or warfare offered advice on how to handle the appearance of a major prophet amidst the peoples who surrounded the empire' (2003: 230). They had no answer either to the way in which Muslim armies proved able to coordinate their actions across great distances with a relatively unified command structure, given the communications technology available at the time. Muslim identity was reinforced by conquest and by subsequent occupations that saw not the garrisoning of ancient cities but the establishment of nearby garrison towns. This strategy helped limit the assimilation of Muslim identity into the rich, textured cultures of the Roman and Persian empires. It is not necessary here to follow the various permutations of the Islamicate polity and the multiple ways in which its centrifugal and centripetal tensions played themselves out regionally, dynastically and denominationally. Nor is it necessary to argue that the semantic order inaugurated by the hundred-year jihad did not subsequently begin to be creolised, or to see in this process of creolisation the recovery of a national essence underlying Islamisation, for example the re-affirmation of a previously subjugated Persian or Indian identity. Rather, the Islamicate empires could be identified, despite all these internal differences and nuances, as those imperial formations in which the articulation of Islam as a master signifier was hegemonic.

Michael Doyle defined empire as 'a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective sovereignty of another political society … Imperialism is simply the process of establishing or maintaining an empire' (1986: 45). Thus, the assessment of whether a particular entity is an empire or not turns, like most significant political projects, on the question of identity. To put this differently, an empire implies that the society is not the same as the state. England following the Norman Conquest was an empire to the extent that

Norman elites were distinct from the society over which they ruled. Doyle acknowledged this, seeing in what he calls the 'Caracallan threshold' the moment at which an empire transforms itself into a nation. This term refers to an edict of the Roman Emperor Caracalla in 212 CE that granted citizenship to all free adults, thereby formally ending the distinction between the privileged citizens of Rome and free (i.e. non-enslaved) subjects of the Roman Empire.[9] The difference between the metropolitan elite and peripheral subject population became to all intents and purposes eroded, so that the divisions between rulers and ruled did not refer to different ethnically marked populations. Islam not only legitimated Muslim conquests; it also constructed the identity of Muslims as the primary form of identification. Non-Muslim adult men, excluding priests and rabbis, were liable to pay a poll tax (justified by their exclusion from military service). This economic discrimination was matched by its social equivalent. For the most part, Muslim armies did not conquer autonomous communities with full political rights; rather they conquered communities that were part of other empires, communities that were under authoritarian rule. Becoming Muslim was an option that remained open to the subject population. There was no need to undergo an apprenticeship, nor was there any specific barrier due to nationality or linguistic competence. Thus Islam, which supplied the Muslims with armies, discipline, endurance and immunity from being subverted by their enemies, also made it difficult for Muslim rulers to erect effective barriers that would prevent their subjects from crossing the Caracallan threshold. The universalism and egalitarianism of Islam weakened the ability of Muslim rulers to sustain a permanent and rigid state of imperial privilege vis–à-vis conquered peoples. Crossing the Caracallan threshold means weakening the sense of 'foreignness between rulers and ruled' that is characteristic of imperial formations (Morris 2009: 132). The longevity of empires can be related to the ability of imperial formations to allow their subjects to become 'citizens'. The Islamicate empires became engines for turning non-Muslims into Muslims, although the process was not swift, and the reasons

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9   This edict, however, was a culmination of practices that distinguished the Roman state from its near contemporaries including democratic Athens: Rome had been periodically willing to enfranchise populations it had defeated. As a consequence, Roman military expansion also led to expanded Roman citizenry, contrasting with the shortage of labour power that crippled the abilities of states like Sparta and Athens to maintain their imperial advantage. See Ian Morris's (2009) comparative analysis of the 'Greater Athenian state'. As Morris pointed out, the restrictive citizenship of some of the Hellenic city-states significantly constrained their demographic resources.

for individuals to become Muslims were no doubt overdetermined by a variety of factors.[10] The empires produced by the venture of Islam were ones in which (relative to historical precedents and contemporaries) the extractive impulse of imperial rule was tempered by the ever-present possibility of subjugated populations becoming Muslims (Parsons 2010).

Racism and citizenship

One of the features of European colonial empires, in contrast to Islamicate enterprises, was that it remained difficult for non-European subjects to become citizens of the empires. As a consequence, European colonial empires tended to be experienced as a form of distant authoritarian rule by the majority of the peoples they governed. The colour line that underwrote colonial order appeared permanent and rigid. Unlike the Roman, Chinese or Islamicate empires (during most of their iterations) the ability of subjects of European colonial rule to become part of a 'ruling upper class culture' was heavily restricted (Mann 1988: 143). The authoritarianism of the colonial order existed despite claims made by imperialists and their supporters that European empires, because of their Enlightenment heritage, were uniquely capable of modernising (i.e. civilising) their non-western subjects. The trouble was that however much the 'natives' were civilised they were never civilised enough to become co-partners of the imperial enterprise. The emergence of racism as a distinct form of governmentality owed much to the challenge that Spanish rulers were confronted with following the elimination of the last sovereign Muslim polity in the Iberian Peninsula (Venn 2006: 62–72). The Spanish authorities, confronted with a large population of Muslims and Jews who had been compelled to convert, instituted strategies of surveillance that had largely been absent from the large Eurasian empires. Attempts to police Muslim and Jewish conversions as being authentic or not, and the politicisation of the population due to the conflict between the forces of the Reformation and those of the Counter-Reformation, produced innovations in techniques of surveillance and the extension of their scope beyond elite society to the general populace. The fragmentation of Christendom along confessional lines went hand in hand with the development of the early modern state with its panoply of

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10 See Bulliet's (1979) pioneering studies on the process of Islamisation of the territories governed by Muslims. Bulliet suggested that for nearly 200 years the majority of people that Muslims ruled in Syria and Persia were non-Muslims. Conquest did not lead to immediate conversions (or reversions) to Islam.

administrative regulations and interventions. In the process, a means of conceptualising the social emerged that came to be characterised by the regulation and disciplining of non-Europeanness with reference to Europeanness (Hesse 2011). As Barnor Hesse argues, race can

> be understood as having been historically and geographically constructed by European colonial derived regimes as a governing practice to distinguish between 'whiteness/Europeaness' and 'non-Europeaness/non-whiteness' in terms of regulations, affinities, spaces and discourses in modernity's colonies. In this racially constitutive and governmental sense populations colonized outside Europe were recruited, interpellated and allocated to these assemblages of territory, corporeality, culture, politics, religion, and obliged under law and practice to comport themselves within the social contours of their designated assemblage of race. (2011: 164)

The establishment of race as a regulatory practice based on the hierarchy between Europeanness and non-Europeanness provided the European colonial empires with a political identity that resolved one of the perennial problems confronting empire builders: that of the proconsul who 'goes native' (Mann 1988: 141–143). In the history of European colonialism, there are very few examples of European governors identifying with their colonial subjects to the extent that they were ready to break their identification with Europeanness.[11] Thus, the development of race erected a barrier to the Caracallan threshold; it meant effectively that the European colonial order was a racist order and that European empires were racial states. The intertwining of the racial state and the modern state was forged in the crucible of the early modern European empires, which came to contain the two distinct spatial entities: the homeland and the conquered lands. Racialised differences came to be deployed as a means of enhancing the solidarity of imperial nations and of preventing their non-European subjugated populations from eroding the privileges of empire (Goldberg and Quayson 2002).

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11 There is an argument that the independence movements of the Americas did draw a distinction between themselves and Europe; however, they continued to privilege Europeanness vis-à-vis both the indigenous and enslaved African populations of the western hemisphere.

The Islamicate empires, with due caveats for the cruelty and venality that can be found in all human endeavours, were not structured around a logic of racialisation. This does not mean these empires lacked a privileged elite, nor does it mean there was no humiliation or violation of the subject populations, but it does mean that reading all imperial iterations through the prism of the European colonial enterprise is not particularly helpful. This is not to say that European colonialism was more vicious or more exploitative than other imperial structures – such accusations and counter-accusations are generally sterile – simply that empires founded in the wake of Europe's appropriation of the Americas were organised by different logics than previous empires. One of these logics was a deployment of race as the primary ontology of the social. It is important here to have a proper understanding of the empirical 'messiness' of deployment: confusion between philosophers and historians of a certain ilk arises on precisely on this issue. Any generalisation that ranges over 500 years (at least) and covers a number of large political entities (British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and Russian empires, just to name the most prominent in the story of European colonialism) is bound to be messy. There will always be evidence of good-natured colonial administrators who were not 'racist' (whatever that may mean, and it is often unclear what it does mean in such accounts) or who actually loved the indigenous colonial subjects and cared for them, but this does not mean that the logic of racism was absent from European colonial formations. European imperial formations were crucibles of both colonialism and racism. In fact, it would be difficult to separate the two, for racism as a category was coined to describe the practices pioneered by Nazis in Germany in the 1930s in relation to Jews and Roma. The pioneering nature of Nazis in this regard was not in terms of innovative practices, since all these practices had all previously been present in the colonial empires of Britain, France and the Netherlands; rather it was the application of policies of segregation, intimidation and humiliation to populations present within Europe that earned the sobriquet of racism. Thus, the split between racism and colonialism came to echo the split between the West and the non-West. It was this racial logic, as much as the irruption of capitalism, the dawn of modernity and the shift from continental to oceanic power, that was one of the key differences between European colonial empires that emerged in the post-Columbian universe and earlier empires. The Islamicate empires shared a series of overlapping features with other pre-modern imperial structures.

The articulation of Islam and empire was a historical relationship, not an essential or necessary one. As such, it is not straightforward to read from the experience of European colonial empires and Islamicate empires.

Islam and the postcolonial

One of the main effects of postcolonial critiques of European colonial enterprises has been to see similar logics and cruelties at work in all imperial formations, thus making all empires worthy of condemnation (Parsons 2010). Given the way in which Muslim political projects sit upon the cusp of this double decolonisation, the historical critique of Islamicate empires joins the contemporary polemics of the place of Islam and Muslims in the world. The record of the various heirs to the first Islamicate empire has become part of the attempt to see a violent essence at the heart of Islam. In particular, the Ottoman and Timurid (Mughal) empires are often presented today as examples of the baleful influence of Islam, while the lack of development in the Balkans is frequently attributed to the retardation imposed by 500 years of Ottoman rule (Agoston 2007: 75). Similarly, the Muslim conquest of large parts of South Asia is very often presented as a major distortion of the intrinsic nature of the 'original native' societies of the region. Europe and South Asia are possibly the two regions most affected by Islamicate encounters that did not succumb to complete Islamisation. The consolidation and formation of Indian and European identity is heavily based on the contrast with Islam. This may account for the way in which Islam can be mobilised as the antipode in opposition to which Europeanness and Indianness can be articulated without great effort, and Islamicate imperial formations can be presented correspondingly as exercises in alien rule.

Many Muslims today strive to disassociate themselves from Islam's imperial past by arguing for the disarticulation of Islam from its spatialisation of power. To a large extent, these views echo postcolonial-inspired critiques of imperialism. Either there is a refusal to accept that Islam was an imperial formation or, if it was, then it is declared that it was no different from European colonial empires: in other words, that it was also characterised by a racialised form of governmentality. The historical instances of Islamicate empires haunt the contemporary world through assertions that demands by local Muslim communities for justice or for

inclusion in the conversation of the nation are the thin end of the wedge that will result in the Muslim conquest of the West; this threat of a jihad to come is then used to mobilise support for a series of preventive crusades against nebulous 'Islamic' rogues and terror networks. The age of the 'war on terror' has opened up debates about a new configuration of the state that echoes more closely the imperial claims of the past rather than declarations of national sovereignty. Under the guise of humanitarian interventions and preventive war, however, we have seen the ostensible breakdown of the doctrine of national sovereignty and the possibility of a postcolonial (and post-racial) imperium. Since at least the Iranian Revolution, the United States and its allies have become increasingly involved in low-level 'counter-insurgency' operations in much of Muslimistan. This postcolonial gunboat diplomacy initially saw the deployment of US military power to discipline and regulate activities within Muslimistan.[12] The launching of the 'war on terror' has since transformed this postcolonial gunboat diplomacy into full-scale colonial-style campaigns, including the US-led military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, while operations against or in the territories of Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, Iran and Syria have resulted in the virtual re-colonisation of parts of Muslimistan.[13] It is in this 'new imperial' context that the articulation of Islam and empire is currently disclosed.

Living in the time of the 'war on terror' – a war whose continuity is marked not only by its persistence beyond the governments that initiated it, but also by its banal institutionalisation in the international system – it is possible to discern the contours of empire represented not so much in terms of an opposition to the multitude, but rather as an opposition to terror. This terror is incarnated in the bodies of Muslims, whose very appearance (both in terms of what they look like and that they are present) becomes problematic. The introduction of legislation banning Muslim woman from wearing headscarves, to debates about 'ethnic profiling' of

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12 The United States established Central Command in 1983 to coordinate military operations in the 'crescent of crisis', a region identified by President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski as stretching along the shores of the Indian Ocean, and one in which fragile states were threatened with destabilisation by elements hostile to western values. See *Time Magazine* (1979).

13 See Chandrasekaran (2007) for descriptions of the high life of officials of the American Provisional Coalition Authority in occupied Baghdad. One of the most interesting things about Chadrasekaran's account is the similarities between the American occupation and earlier European colonial administrations in the way these officials comported themselves in relation to the 'natives'.

potential terrorists in relation to how Muslim they look, are simply outward symptoms of a deeper unease, which cannot be simply reduced to the tangle of geopolitical, cultural and epistemological factors that frame Muslims. At heart of this war against terror is neither a simple struggle against rogue states or violent extremists but rather it is an attempt to erase the contingency of the western enterprise. The European colonial empires were central to the process by which western cultural practices became hegemonic in the world. The appeal of the West, its centrality in the world, were products not of its intrinsic qualities (e.g. claims of prosperity, democracy and stability) but rather of its power over other empires. The world we live in was forged by the European colonial order. The effect of this exercise of collective imperium on a planetary scale was to demonstrate the contingency of all non-western formations. Thus it is easier for us to conduct a thought experiment like the one carried by Graham Fuller, once Vice-Chairman of the National Intelligence Council at the Central Intelligence Agency, who speculated in a recent book on a world without Islam. Fuller argued that many of the tensions and conflicts that are perceived to exist between the Islamicate and western (European) worlds would still exist even if there were no Islam, since the cause of these conflicts is the *longue durée* of geopolitics and not the nature of religious or ideological sentiment inherent in Islam itself. Islam, according to Fuller, cannot explain tensions in the Middle East (2010: 300); rather, it appears supplemental to the contemporary world. In other words, Fuller is able to imagine a world without Islam because Islam has a relationship with the contemporary world in which its contingency is fully disclosed. In contrast, it is perhaps not surprising one of the most famous musings about a world in which Islam was necessary and absolute comes from the pen of Edward Gibbon, writing in the eighteenth century when European colonial power could be defeated and challenged by non-western regimes. Gibbons famously mused that the consequences of a Muslim victory at the battle of Tours (732 CE) would be the Islamisation of northern Europe and the emergence of Oxford as a bastion of Quranic teaching. Islam's role as a counter-factual foil to the story of Europe's rise to global ascendancy is not merely a matter of historical whimsy, but a very real possibility. For the Age of Europe ushered in by the European colonial empires often involved a direct challenge to Muslim authorities. European colonialism directly replaced or subverted Muslim rule in large parts of Asia and Africa. Colonialism replaced an Islamicate world system that stretched

right across the Afro-Eurasian super-continent. This replacement was both *epistemological*, with the unraveling of the power/knowledge complexes that were part of the Islamicate order, and *political* in so far as Muslim elites found their position undermined by the imposition of European rule. Thus, Islam emerges in contrast to Christendom in the formation of pre-modern identifications of Europe, and re-emerges as one major opponent of European colonialism, and now it appears as the cosmological enemy at the centre of the war on terror. Despite many periods of *convivencia* and overlapping similarities between Islam and the West, the hegemonic sense of western identity often evokes a contrast with Islam and its cognates, which continually hints at the possibility of an alternative universe in which the contingency of Europe is revealed.

The postcolonial condition suggests that the relationship between Europe and the present is not necessary; it could have been otherwise and, even if we cannot imagine what a world without the European colonial venture would look like, we can still imagine that such an outcome might be possible. The haunting of the West by Islam hints precisely at such a possibility. Islam's articulation with empire suggests the possibility of an alternative world order in which Christendom/Europe are peripheral and threatened. The history of Islam and empire points to the contingency at the heart of the western enterprise.

Empires have been the dominant form of the spatialisation of power in human history (Mann 1988). Beginning perhaps with Sargon's Akkadian hegemony and moving on to Assyria's elaboration of imperial techniques of governance and their Persian, Sinic, Indic and Greco-Roman iterations, empire has dominated the political order of the cited cultures and agrarian economies of the Eurasian landmass (Mann 1988). The outburst of nationalism among people claiming a European heritage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries helped dismantle the continental empires of the Hohenzollerns, the Hapsburgs and the Ottomans. The nationalist revolts of non-European peoples culminated in the twentieth century in the dismantling of the oceanic empires of Britain, France and Holland. These struggles, which seem to have consigned the imperial form of spatialisation of power to the past, have undoubtedly helped to consolidate postcolonial studies as a means of understanding the complex imbrications

between empire, nation and identity. Postcolonial approaches have focused mainly on European colonial empires and the legacy they bequeathed to the contemporary world. The nature of this legacy has become more complicated with the advent of the 'war on terror', which has made it possible to see the complex mutations by which empire persists even in an era when the temper of the times is postcolonial. The articulations of Islam and empire thus play on the tensions of a postcolonial imperial present as well as an Islamicate imperial past. In between these tensions a promise of a decolonial future glimmers.

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