

# Islam, Muslims, and the Coloniality of Being: Reframing the Debate on Race and Religion in Modernity

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*I think (others do not think, or do not think properly),  
therefore I am (others are-not, lack being,  
should not exist or are dispensable)  
(Maldonado-Torres 2007:252)*

## Abstract

This article aims to more thoroughly intersect the figure of the Muslim into the framework of the coloniality of being, and into the narrative of race and religion in modernity. Two areas of concern are investigated: First, how Islamophobia aided in forming the coloniality of being in ways that decolonial scholarship – namely that of leading Latin American decolonial thinker, Nelson Maldonado-Torres – is seemingly unaware of or downplays, and second, how a rereading of a number of the key events and figures that define a decolonial discourse on race and religion, such as the Valladolid debates (1550-1551) and the figure of Christopher Columbus, help to more rigorously conceptualize the figure of the Muslim in relation to the coloniality of being.

**Keywords:** Coloniality, decoloniality, Islam, Muslims, Islamophobia, ontology, critical Muslim studies, race, religion, modernity

## Introduction

In his article, *On the coloniality of being*, Latin American decolonial thinker, Nelson Maldonado-Torres develops a framework for analyzing racial figures in modernity who have experienced what he describes as the darker side of being (Maldonado-Torres 2007:244). Maldonado-Torres theorizes a concept

of ontology for racialized peoples in modernity that shows that there are those without ontology or, as he argues, they exist as non-beings and sub-human 'Others' who dwell in a 'zone of nonbeing' (Maldonado-Torres 2007:254). In his work, Maldonado-Torres locates his discussion largely around the racialized experiences of black and Indian/indigenous<sup>1</sup> peoples. He is a Puerto-Rican American scholar who teaches at the University of Rutgers in New Jersey and is a well-known theorist in the field of decolonial studies. His work is important to engage with, as it shares motifs with the wider decolonial studies canon, while at the same time being novel in its contributions to understanding the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality discourse.

A number of Latin American and Caribbean decolonial thinkers (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Grosfoguel 2011; Mignolo 2009, 2012; Gordon 2009, 2011; Wynter 1994, 2003) have contributed to the discussion on the coloniality of being in relation to the Black and Indigenous by emphasizing that the rise of the modern colonial world-system is fundamentally linked to the moment of 1492 CE and the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in which Europe cemented its conquest of the Americas and control over the transatlantic slave trade. While they have done substantial archival work in revealing the depths to which Eurocentric knowledge and power have racially marked the ontologies of certain non-Europeans, the field is not without its inadequacies. One gap in their knowledge production is how coloniality was formed in relation to the Muslims and Muslim Question.

The aim in this article is to better intersect the figure of the Muslim into the framework of the coloniality of being, as well as the narrative of race and religion in modernity. The work of Maldonado-Torres is important in this regard in that 1) his arguments are part of a wider tendency of Latin American and Caribbean decolonial thinkers to unintentionally center their own geopolitical commitments, at times, at the expense of others, such as the Muslims and Muslim Question, and 2) his contributions aid in better integrating the Muslims into the coloniality framework and in creating a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between race and religion. In this article, two areas of concern are investigated: First, how Islamophobia aided in forming the coloniality of being in ways that Maldonado-Torres and other

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<sup>1</sup> In this work, I will refer to the indigenous/native peoples of the Americas by the names 'Indian' and 'Indigenous', as these are common proper names in both the Anglo- and Latin-speaking contexts on the continent.

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decolonial thinkers are either seemingly unaware of or downplay, and second, how a rereading of a number of the key events and figures that define the decolonial discourse on race and religion, such as the Valladolid debates and the figure of Christopher Columbus, help to better conceptualize how active the figure of the Muslims was in the imagination and real lives of Europeans who created the coloniality of being. Ultimately, these areas of concern are explored in order to expand the understanding of the relationship between race and religion in modernity, especially with regards to Islam and Muslims.

### **Coloniality and the Muslim Question**

What is meant by coloniality is not to be confused with colonialism. Colonialism is the full or partial control of the sovereignty of one nation or people by another, mainly by means of economic and political conquest, exploitation, genocide, and/or settlement. Coloniality, on the other hand, refers to long-term patterns of power that emerge as a result of modern colonialism, capitalism, and slavery that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, knowledge production, and more beyond, the strict limits of colonial administrations (Maldonado-Torres 2007:143):

[Coloniality] is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects, we breathe coloniality all the time and every day (Maldonado-Torres 2007:243).

Another key aspect of coloniality is that it deals with a specific spatio-temporal period. A number of Latin American and Caribbean decolonial thinkers (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Grosfoguel 2011; Mignolo 2009, 2012; Gordon 2009, 2011; Wynter 1994, 2003) emphasize that coloniality is fundamentally linked to the moment of 1492 CE and the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in which the European conquest of the Americas and transatlantic slave trade were key in the birth and cementing of coloniality. Therefore, coloniality does not refer to other time periods or geographies, such as the medieval Islamic world or classical Chinese civilization, but specifically to the historical rise of the Western civilization over the non-Western world in modernity, during the

past five hundred years. This means that race, while being intertwined with other systems of power such as capitalism or patriarchy, became the primary organizing principle of the modern/colonial world-system.<sup>2</sup>

Latin American and Caribbean decolonial thinkers<sup>3</sup> have created a framework for understanding the *longue durée* framework of modern/colonial power relations between the West and the Rest, specifically with regards to race and religion. The discourse of these thinkers is not without its gaps in knowledge though. By focusing mainly on the formation of the modern/colonial world through the lens of an Atlantic Ocean-centric exchange between Europe, the Americas, and Africa, decolonial discourse has not fully integrated all aspects of enduring power relations worldwide, whether during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, before, or after. For example, there is relatively little discourse from decolonial thinkers concerning the issue of the Brahmanist caste system in South Asia. Casteism is a several thousand-year-old system, predating the European conquest in the region that socially organizes South Asian societies in ways that many argue are more principle than Eurocentric racism (Ambedkar 2016; Bandyopadhyay 2004). How does one understand the discourse of coloniality when many in South Asia argue that the caste system, which predates coloniality by over a thousand years, is not more primal than modern racism as an organizing principle in the South Asian substrata of the modern/colonial world-system? Answering this question is not the subject of this study, but it does point to a gap in knowledge regarding how to understand coloniality beyond the Atlantic-centric approach of Latin American thinkers.

Another example of a gap in knowledge in how to understand coloniality before and beyond the Atlantic-centered approach, is the Muslim Question. The Muslim Question is described by the decolonial Muslim thinker, Salman Sayyid, in the following way:

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<sup>2</sup> While it is true that slavery, colonialism, war, and conquest were common across civilizations and imperial polities in the ancient and medieval worlds of the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa, it is not true that they were all fundamentally organized by race, and they were not globalized into a world-system that was socio-culturally and economically common in European and non-European countries, the West, and the Rest (Sayyid 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Note that my usage of the term ‘decolonial thinkers’ is distinguished from that of ‘postcolonial thinkers’. For a more thorough understanding of the difference between postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, see Grosfoguel (2011).

The Muslim Question (with its echoes of the Jewish Question and the Eastern question before it) refers to a series of interrogations and speculations in which Islam and/or Muslims exist as a difficulty that needs to be addressed. Thus, the Muslim Question is a mode of enquiry that opens a space for interventions: cultural, governmental and epistemological. How a fifth of this planet's population comports itself in the world depends on its answers. The Muslim Question encompasses the difficulties associated with the emergence of a distinct political identity that appears to be transgressive of norms, conventions and structures that underpin the contemporary world (Sayyid 2014:3).

Sayyid argues further that the Muslim Question largely concerns the place and space of the Muslim in relation to the modern/colonial world-system, coloniality, and the process of decolonization (Sayyid 2014:13). Junaid Rana also explicitly positions himself in dealing with the Muslim Question in his work on the racialization of the Muslim (Rana 2011:27). Defining what is meant by the figure and signifier of the Muslim is key for the purposes of this article. Rana understands 'the Muslim' as a unity of analysis that is central to the examination of Islamicate societies, cultures, and communities. For Rana, '[t]he Muslim...is a diverse figure that is differentiated by its national, transnational, sectarian, ethnic, racial, gendered, and classed meanings. The Muslim is a transmigratory, global figure that enters and exits multiple terrains; thus, we can speak of the Muslim in Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa, and elsewhere' (Rana 2011:29).

While some Latin American decolonial thinkers like Maldonado-Torres comment on the impact of the Crusades (1000-1300 CE), the conquest of Al-Andalus (1492 CE), and the destruction of the Islamicate civilization post-1492 on the formation of coloniality, they focus more on the experience of the Americas and Africa – and at times, deemphasize the importance and persistence of the Muslim Question in the formation of modernity/coloniality. They argue that, when Europeans arrived in the Americas, they experienced a sharp and unprecedented shift in terms of world-systemic power relations. Yet, there is a need to question whether this 'paradigm of war'<sup>4</sup> – initialized

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<sup>4</sup> Maldonado-Torres frames modernity/coloniality as a 'paradigm of war' and largely theorizes this concept in his work, *Against War* (Maldonado-Torres 2008).

by European intellectuals and conquerors such as Juan Ginés de Sepulveda and Christopher Columbus – can be more thoroughly theorized by extending its conceptualization through a deeper and more nuanced engagement with the Muslim Question.

In questioning and reframing the narrative of modernity/coloniality, we will be asking: Was the formation of the Atlantic world between the Americas, Europe, and Africa not also informed by previous and ongoing power relations and structures elsewhere? Did the Spanish, other Europeans and, by extension, modernity/coloniality more broadly begin with a type of ‘baggage’ that aided in laying the conditions for defining and redefining the Black and Indigenous? How can an analysis of the Muslims and Muslim Question broaden the scope for understanding the coloniality of being?

In the following sections, I will argue that first, the preexisting intersubjectivity that Europe marshalled in its arguments and policies regarding the Indigenous and Black were largely based on their ontological engagements with the Muslims and Islamic world, and second, that the Muslim Question never dies down but transforms and intensifies in old and new ways as the wave of modernity/coloniality expands toward and away from the Atlantic Ocean.

## **Islamophobia in the Old and New Worlds**

What does the Muslim – as a seemingly religious category and figure – have to do with the story of modern racism, and how has Islamophobia played a role in forming modern systems of race, religion, and coloniality? Both Rana (2011) and Maldonado-Torres (2014) underscore that the foundations of modern Eurocentric racism – as opposed to other forms of ethnic or racial hierarchies in other space-time periods (i.e. Classical Greece, Medieval Islamic World, Pre-modern Aztec Civilization, etc.) – are genealogically linked to the medieval Iberian Peninsula and the figures of the Muslims and Jews. The Muslims and Jews in the medieval Iberian Peninsula were marked as beings with *raza* (*race*) which, in medieval Spanish and Castilian, meant ‘blemish’ or ‘defect’, and had to do with biological notions of purity of blood (*limpieza de sangre*) (Rana 2011:35). Those with *raza* had impure blood and were regarded as dirty, monstrous, and inferior beings, placed within *castas* (castes) and hierarchies of being that demarcated between people at the top

with pure Hispanic and Catholic genealogies above those with a mixed or ‘tainted’ heritage. This *raza* system marked bodies of Jewish and Muslim heritage, including bodies of *conversos* and *moriscos*<sup>5</sup> who had converted due to the Reconquista and Inquisition, as sites outside of the body politics of Hispanic Catholic feudal states (and later the nation-state of Spain), making them susceptible to war, enslavement, colonization, and ethnic cleansing (Rana 2011:35). Many studies have been done to demonstrate the anti-Jewish character of the Reconquista and Inquisition, but scholarship until recently has been largely quiet on the anti-Muslim character of these events – even though Muslims, given their size, were the main and larger target (cf. Rana 2011:31-33).<sup>6</sup>

To stay silent on the Muslim Question in relation to the conquest of Al-Andalus, the Reconquista, and the Inquisition while only mentioning what happened to the Jews, is akin to only describing the racial discrimination faced by Indians (i.e. people of South Asian descent) in the context of European colonized South Africa – both prior to and during the period of formal apartheid – without any reference to black Africans. While Indians in South Africa did indeed suffer during this period, it was the Blacks in their numbers and majority presence who were the primary target of white supremacist racism.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, without denying the existence and interconnected nature of anti-Semitism that affected the Jews in the Iberian Peninsula, Muslims in Al-Andalus and the Iberian Peninsula were the main and larger targets of Hispanic racism, and Islamophobia was the larger and main organizing principle at play.

Before proceeding, some clarification on Islamophobia is required. Islamophobia, as one strand of racial-religious difference, among others (i.e.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Conversos’ meant crypto Jews, or ‘new Christians’ of Jewish heritage, and ‘moriscos’ meant crypto Muslims, or ‘new Christians’ of Muslim heritage (cf. Ingram 2016).

<sup>6</sup> The field of Morisco studies has recently begun to fill in this gap, but its influence and size is far from matching the level of influence studies of Jews as the Iberian Peninsula has received. See the work of Kevin Ingram on *Converso and Morisco Studies* (2016) for more information on this emerging field.

<sup>7</sup> See Singh (2005) for more insight into the dynamics between racialized groups such as the Indians and black Africans in South Africa during and after the formal juridical apartheid.

anti-blackness, anti-indigeneity, anti-Semitism, etc.)<sup>8</sup> is a relatively new term that gained prominence in struggles during the 1970s and 1980s in Europe, in which Muslim migrants were addressing a system of racial exclusion that they were facing in various European countries (Rana 2011:29). Given long-term antagonisms between the West and Islamic civilizations due to such histories as the Crusades, Reconquista, and Inquisition (1492 CE), and modern European imperialism and expansion (post-1492 CE), the figure of the Muslim has been negatively marked as a sub-human ‘Other’ in relation to the Western self. Islamophobia, beyond the literal etymological meaning of ‘fear of Islam’, has become established as a term that means ‘anti-Muslim racism’ and ‘anti-Muslimness’, which collapses numerous groups under the single category of ‘Muslim’ (Rana 2011:30; Sayyid & Vakil 2010). Racism and Islamophobia can be understood as reflexive processes that change across time and place according to racism’s needs, and as processes which are relational as opposed to occurring in silos (Rana 2011:30). The intersection of race and religion within the systems of modern racism is complex, and there are differing approaches to understand how religion and race have interacted to create modern racisms and Islamophobia.

The conversation concerning the similarities and differences between religious and racial difference, and theological and anthropological exclusion are important, as they highlight the ways in which modern racism has been constituted. After all, it is from this interaction between the Old and New World that the *raza* of Andalusian Muslims and Jews is transferred onto the Indian, black, and rest of the non-European world through the European conquest, colonialism, and slavery in modernity. Maldonado-Torres, in his conceptualization of the progression of the racial and religious difference between the Old and New Worlds, makes a sharp distinction between what he calls the ‘religious difference’ of the Old World and the ‘anthropological difference’ of the New World (Maldonado-Torres 2014:651).

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<sup>8</sup> Placing Islamophobia in relation to other forms of modern racism is not intended to diminish differences. Several scholars have noted the peculiarities of anti-blackness, anti-Asian, or anti-indigenous forms of racism through academic disciplines like the Critical Race Theory, Ethnic Studies, Black Studies, and Indigenous Studies. In this work, I attempt to demonstrate some of the unique aspects of Islamophobia as well as its relationality to other forms of racism that place peoples into ontological hierarchies.



For Maldonado-Torres, there is a sharp shift that occurs between the Old World's 'religious polemic' between the Christendom and Islamdom, and Spain's 'racist' encounters with the Indian and black people (Maldonado-Torres 2014:646). His argument centers around the idea that Columbus and the conquistadors did not only view Indians as people with the 'wrong religion', as they did with the Muslims and Jews in the Old World, but as people with 'no religion' who were 'soulless'. For Maldonado-Torres, this shift to a people with 'no religion' and 'no soul' means that the Indians were treated in a fundamentally new way that made for an unprecedented break from relations to the 'Other' in the Old World (Maldonado-Torres 2014:646).

While there were indeed new discourses and approaches to the 'Other' that emerged in the New World, Maldonado-Torres' reading of the situation as a sharp break which 'created something entirely new' (Maldonado-Torres 2014:646) is not completely accurate. The exchange between forms of difference and exclusion from the Iberian Andalusian world to the Americas was more a process of including new 'Others' in a pre-existing pot of 'Others', similar to a process of inclusion, extension or even sedimentation as others have argued (Mastnak 2002; Majid 2009; Ali 2017), rather than a supremely different and unprecedented event. Several aspects of Maldonado-Torres' reading of the foundational moment of coloniality will be addressed in the following section, namely first, his understanding of the religious and secular in relation to the racialization of Muslims and other non-Europeans, and second, his reading of several important intellectual figures and debates during that time, such as the Valladolid debates and European conquistador, Christopher Columbus. This article proposes an alternative postsecular theo-anthropological<sup>9</sup> reading of modern racism which better understands the continuities and changes between the Old and New Worlds and formation of the coloniality of being.

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<sup>9</sup> By using the term 'theoanthropological', I refer to the combination of theology and anthropology in the formulation and examination of racial ontological hierarchies in modernity. I argue that both theological and anthropological dimensions of the religion-race nexus are nearly inseparable when related to the coloniality of being.

## **The Religious and Secular in the Racialization of the Muslims**

A major issue in Maldonado-Torres' work is the seemingly secular approach that he assumes with such binaries as the religious versus racial, and theological versus anthropological, when dealing with the racialization of the Muslims. This approach, to understanding the formation of modern racism, is one that is not uncommon in other analyses of the race/religion question. As Rana has commented, many scholars of race assume a secular framework that deemphasizes a religious difference as a simpler form of cultural prejudice or irrational religious discrimination, thereby dislocating it from an analysis of systemic power, ontology, and race in the pre-modernized world (Rana 2011:30). Maldonado-Torres seems to be complicit in this secular approach when he deemphasizes and mischaracterizes religious differences to simple battles between 'truth and falsehood' and as sharply different from the racial system in the Americas. In the abstract of Maldonado-Torres' *Religion, conquest and race in the foundations of the modern/colonial world*, we start to observe the emergence of his secular framework:

This article explores the entanglements between the emergence of the anthropological conception of religion and the logic of race in the modern/colonial world. This entanglement is also one between traditional religious categories such as Christian, Muslim, and Jew, and modern ethno-racial designations such as white, indigenous, and black that point to a co-implication between race and what we call religion in modernity (Maldonado-Torres 2014:636).

In this abstract we already see a binary between 'tradition' and 'modernity', and 'religion' and 'race' when describing both the 'traditional religious' and 'modern ethno-racial' differences. Scholars such as Talal Asad (2003) and Saba Mahmood (2005) have demonstrated that the binary between 'tradition' and 'modernity' broadly and especially in relation to the Muslims, is problematic in that it assumes that (superior) secular modernity itself is not a product of the (inferior) religious tradition that came before it. In reality, modernity and postmodernity continue to be fully animated by the logic of its Western religious and secular traditions – past and present. In certain ways, Maldonado-Torres appears to be congruous with the likes of Asad and Mahmood, by attempting to show the interrelated nature between tradition

and modernity, as well as race and religion in his article. Yet, when examined more closely, we see how he nevertheless internalizes secular assumptions about race which are not well substantiated, especially in relation to the Muslims and formation of the Indians.

Maldonado-Torres provides a historiography that locates the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE with a ‘fight for empire’, fueled by the ideology of expanding ‘the true religion’ of Christianity (Maldonado-Torres 2014:642). This project had global ambitions which became increasingly intolerant, specifically from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. From then, the clergy of Christendom increasingly conceptualized their identity as a unitary whole with Rome at its center and regarded themselves as needing to defend and cleanse the Christendom from ‘heretics’, ‘pagans’, and ‘infidels’ that agitated their internal and external borders. From this point onward, it was of the utmost importance to affirm their differences with those who did not fit their views of the world. The church of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century attempted to create an expansive utopia which would culminate when *Christianitis* (Christianity) became the *Universitalitis* (universal) across the globe (Maldonado-Torres 2014:642). Maldonado-Torres comments on how the polemics and politics of the medieval Western Christendom throughout the Crusades intensified and gradually politically centralized preexisting anxieties and a general hatred toward the Jews, Saracens, Moors, pagans, and heretics. According to Maldonado-Torres, these attitudes and practices dealt with notions of non-Christians lacking rationality, regarded as less than human, and inevitably as enslavable (Maldonado-Torres 2014:642-646).

Notably absent from Maldonado-Torres’ analysis is that these systems of otherization in medieval Christendom also largely dealt with notions of color, phenotype, physiognomy, and ethnic hierarchy that went beyond religious differences. As Sophia Arjana (2015:28) demonstrates in her study of monsters in the classical and medieval Western world, skin tone, ethnicity, and biology were central to describing Western Christendom’s ‘Others’, long before modernity: ‘Christian identity was based on what was *perceived* to be normative, and because black skin functioned as a symbol of sin and evil, light-colored skin was privileged...Anxieties around ethnicity and bodily differences were imprinted on non-Christian bodies, in particular, on Jews, Muslims and Africans’ (Arjana 2015:28; original emphasis).

In Arjana's book, *Muslims in the Western imagination* (Arjana 2015), she provides a panoramic view of the non-human creatures and monstrosity that outlined the epistemic and cognitive mapping of Western Christendom: From the ancient figure of the Arab and black Saracen (which predates Islam), to medieval Jewish-Muslim blood-sucking vampire baby-eaters, hook-nosed big-lipped purple Ethiopian demons, the greedy Lucifer worshipping and sexually deviant well-endowed Prophet Muhammad (as *homo totus lubricus* or a sexual monster), Christ-killing Muslims, Jewish and pagan *cynocephalie* (a dog or jackal-headed monster), and numerous other distorted male and female sub-humanized monstrous non-beings (Abbasi 2016a:243). While Arjana focuses mainly on how ethnic/racial divides created male Muslim and other non-European monsters, she also underscores the sexist and trans-/homophobic nature of Europe's monstrous approach to the land and life of the Islamicate and wider non-European world. She unsettles the rape fantasies of white colonizers toward females of color and land, and the way that Europeans demonized polygamy and queered Muslims and other non-Europeans as sexually deviant for their body affirming sensualities. Arjana bases these findings on an impressive and comprehensive archive of primary sources in classical and medieval Christendom that ranges from artwork, theatre, and poetry, to theological treatises and legal documents (Abbasi 2016a:243). She concludes that medievalism continues to have aesthetic, political, and sociocultural agency that survives into post-modernity (Arjana 2015:20).

Similarly, Cedric Robinson argues that the formation of racial capitalism in modernity was directly informed by pre-existing ethnic/racial hierarchies *within* the feudal society in Christendom and Europe (Robinson 2000:9-28). Commenting on Robinson's work, Robin Kelley writes: 'The first European proletarians were *racial* subjects (Irish, Jews, Roma or Gypsies, Slavs, etc.) and they were victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism, and slavery *within Europe*. Indeed, Robinson suggested that racialization within Europe was very much a *colonial* process involving invasion, settlement, expropriation, and racial hierarchy' (Kelly 2017; original emphasis).

Robinson underscores that migrant, colonial, and slave labor from the Christendom's internal 'Others' also directly informed the way it approached its external 'Others' in the non-West during Europe's expansion in modernity. For Robinson, racial hierarchies within and outside of Europe directly

informed each other in the rise of modernity and racial capitalism (Robinson 2000:25-26). Pagden also underscores how Europeans, such as the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish scholar, Bartolome de las Casas compared the Indians to the ‘Others’ of the Christendom’s ‘primitive’ past – such as the ancient Celts and Iberians – as well as to peasantry across early modern Europe as synonymous examples of barbarity and incivility (Pagden 1982:122, 130).

In contrast to Arjana and Robinson, who argue that the medieval episteme of Western Christendom already contained within itself logics of color/ethnic hierarchy that made people sub-human through ontological and economic mechanisms, Maldonado-Torres makes a sharp distinction between the pre-modern racist logic based on religion (Muslim, Jew, pagan, etc.) and the modern racist logic based on ethnicity/color (Indian, Black). He calls the former ‘religious difference’ and the latter ‘anthropological difference’, and claims that the former was more a questioning of religious and political loyalty that kept one’s humanity relatively unquestioned while the latter was a fundamental questioning of the humanity of the ‘Other’ (Maldonado-Torres 2014:646). He also argues that the notion of *limpieza de sangre* that was applied to Muslims and Jews, would ‘only reveal one as a personal traitor or enemy, but not as a member of another species or as a formal exception from the human’ (Maldonado-Torres 2014:646).

In making these claims, Maldonado-Torres not only contradicts his own arguments elsewhere in the paper,<sup>10</sup> but maintains a secular assumption about what religious difference means in the racialization processes. The downplaying of religious difference as somehow less impactful than secular difference masks the violence of religious differences in processes of racialization. A postsecular<sup>11</sup> understanding of Islamophobia or anti-Semitism would recognize that religious discrimination is not simply a form of disagreement with the ‘Other’s’ beliefs, practices, and loyalty to theo-political

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<sup>10</sup> Maldonado-Torres (2014:642-646) repeatedly mentions that the ‘racist mentality’ that excluded Muslims and Jews was a way of ‘questioning their humanity’, yet argues in the end that this type of logic is sharply distinct from the logic applied to Indians and Blacks.

<sup>11</sup> Following Habermas (2008), what I mean by postsecular here refers to the suspension of the assumption that secular logic is the only legitimate form of knowledge or legitimate standard for comparison. With this I mean, broadly speaking, that secular and religious mentalities must be understood without a hidden secular logic, teleologically guiding the conversation.

projects, but is a more radical questioning of the naturalized essence of the said group's ontology (Rana 2011:30). In the same way, a questioning of secular differences such as color, ethnicity, or phenotype can be linked to questioning one's essence and being. The questioning of one's religious difference can lead to placing one within a species scheme of monsters, dogs, vampires, and all the other non-human creatures.

## **Revisiting People without Souls and Religion**

Maldonado-Torres' main argument that the conquest of the Americas 'created something entirely new' (Maldonado-Torres 2014:646), is largely based on two main claims: First, following Quijano that Indians were 'soulless' or 'people without souls', which is assumed to be novel in the formation of modern ontological hierarchies and the colonality of being (Maldonado-Torres 2014:652; 2007:244), and second, the Indigenous were not simply those with the 'wrong religion' like the religious difference of Old World Muslims and Jews, but with 'no religion', based on the anthropological difference of the New World (Maldonado-Torres 2014:637-640).

With regards to the first claim, the argument that Indians were without souls is not novel. Maldonado-Torres cites Pagden who argues that Indians were placed in a category of soulless people.<sup>12</sup> According to Pagden, '[s]ome later writers, most notably Paracelsus, another doctor, Andrea Cesalpino, and the French Huguenot Isaac de la Peyrere held that such humanoids as nymphs, satyrs, pygmies and wild men (a category which included Amerindians) might be soulless men descended from another "Adam" or created spontaneously from the earth' (Pagden 1982:22).

Paracelsus' classification of the Indians as soulless humans forms part of a long history of teratological studies in medieval Christendom. As mentioned above, Arjana shows how these classifications of monsters and abnormal creatures were part of the wider *doxa* of Western Christians that marked the ontological and human line along the borders of the Latin Christendom. Even Pagden mentions how this discussion was part of

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<sup>12</sup> This conclusion from Pagden is derived from a primary Latin source by Paracelsus, who was a 16<sup>th</sup>-century European Christian scholar and physician. The source can be found in Paracelsus' *Liber de nymphis, sylphis, pygmaeis et salamandris et de caeteris spiritibus* (Paracelsus 1960).

preexisting Aristotelian arguments about placing people at various levels of the Hellenic Great Chain of Being. In this case, Pagden mentions that the characterizing of Amerindians as soulless, placed them at the level of insects, which were under both animals and humans (Pagden 1982:23). What Maldonado-Torres and other decolonial thinkers are not sensitive to contextualize, is that Paracletus' classification was not novel, and that it was part of the wider *mappaemundi* of medieval Christendom. As Arjana shows in her work, the Muslims (as well as many other 'deviants' in the medieval world), were similarly classified as 'giants', 'nymphs', and a whole gamut of sub-human monstrous races, and therefore were soulless too.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to the second claim, Maldonado-Torres' argument that the category of 'no religion' is a fundamental break from the past, is historically not well-founded and overlooks the dominant framework that was used in relation to categorizing the Indians as ontologically inferior. This was, in fact, a continuation of the Christendom's theoanthropological difference and not something entirely new. First, Maldonado-Torres, following Smith, does not adequately demonstrate that the concept of 'no religion' was paradigmatically used in European ethnographies of the Indian post-discovery. He does cite several primary sources like Columbus, who describes the Indians as having *ninguna secta* (no sect).<sup>14</sup> Yet, the only source provided, which explicitly states that Columbus identified a people as having 'no religion', is actually a statement made about the native inhabitants of the Canary Islands.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Arjana's Chapter 2, *Medieval Muslim monsters* (Arjana 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Maldonado-Torres argues that 'sect' is synonymous with 'religion', based on another writing of Columbus in which the two terms appear together in a sentence (Maldonado-Torres 2014:639). Following Smith, he takes the liberty to translate their meanings as synonymous during that time period. The issue of 'sect' and 'religion' meaning the same or similar thing will be discussed later in this article.

<sup>15</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup>-century English alchemist and translator, Richard Eden translated a portion of German cartographer Sebastian Munster's *Cosmographia* from Latin to English. The *Cosmographia* is an early German language description of their known world (Hadfield 2004). Eden's translated work is entitled *Treatyse of the Newe India* (Munster 1966) and contains the following quote regarding Columbus' visit to the Canary Islands, 'At Columbus first coming thether, the inhabitants went naked, without shame, religion or "knowledge of God"' (Smith 2004: 269). It is recorded that Columbus' statement was made in regards to his first

There is one primary source that Maldonado-Torres cites in which ‘no religion’ is actually used to describe the Indians, as opposed to *secta* or later translations from English. Maldonado-Torres (2014:637) cites the Spanish conquistador and chronicler of Peru, Pedro de Cieza de León in his *Crónica del Perú* (De León 1553), who claims that the indigenous people of the Northern Andes ‘had no religion whatsoever, from what we understood’.<sup>16</sup> Maldonado-Torres does note, in a fashion similar to that of European ethnographies of the Muslims, such as those that I shared from Arjana’s work above, that the indigenous Inca peoples were viewed as beasts and that Europeans viewed the Incan peasantry as less superior than the Incan kings who knew the more sophisticated ‘doctrines and teachings’ of their people (Maldonado-Torres 2014:639). Here, too, we observe a divide that Europeans used on their own people when describing European peasantry as barbaric for being illiterate and less civilized than upper classes, and even comparing the European peasantry to Indians (Pagden 1982:130).

While citing questionable and too few historical examples of the ‘no religion’ concept, Maldonado-Torres also contradicts himself by stating that ‘no religion’ is a new category in relation to the Indians. He provides an example of ‘no religion’ being used from the medieval Islamic context by the famous Arab Jewish philosopher, Maimonides when describing civilizational and ontological hierarchies of humans (Maldonado-Torres 2014:640). Weltecke argues in her analysis of the concepts of atheism and unbelief in the central and late medieval world, that Plato had argued that ‘atheists’ were such a danger to society that their removal by death was the only appropriate remedy. The concept of rejecting a belief in a supernatural order, miracles,

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encounter with the natives of the Canary Islands towards the end of a section entitled, *Of the Iland of Medera, and the fortunate Ilādes, otherwyse called the Ilandes of Canaria* in Eden’s *Treatyse* translation (Munster 1966:n.p.). There are two things to consider here: First, if this was Columbus’ ‘first coming thether’, that means that he encountered the Canary natives prior to encountering the New World, as Columbus’ first visit to the Canary Islands was on his first voyage to find a westward route to India (Bedini 1992:93). Second, regardless of when this statement might have occurred, it was made in relation to the natives of the Canary Islands and not the New World, meaning the category of ‘no religion’ was being made about people outside the New World at that time.

<sup>16</sup> ‘No guardan religión alguna, a lo que entendemos, ni tampoco se les halló casa de adoración’ (De León 2005:83).

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divine revelation, or an afterlife was institutionalized in epistemic paradigms in medieval Christendom, as people were charged with it using various distinct yet interrelated terms, such as ‘heretic’, ‘blasphemer’, or ‘infidel’ (Weltecke 2008:102).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Maldonado-Torres argues that those ‘without religion’ were deemed a *tabula rasa* whose lack of rationality made them subject-less objects to be converted, conquered, and tailored to Spanish needs (Maldonado-Torres 2014:639). Yet, in effect, this was not starkly different from the Old World logic of viewing non-Christians as those without rationality and therefore bestial objects to be crusaded against, converted, and tailored to the Christendom’s needs, as Maldonado-Torres himself argues (Maldonado-Torres 2014:642-645).

In relation to the challenge of defining terms and concepts anachronistically, let us, for a moment take the concept of ‘no religion’ as something novel, as Maldonado-Torres argues. He engages in an act of translation when he states that *secta* is synonymous with religion during Columbus’ life. If we are to do further comparisons to the term ‘religion’ to see if it has synonyms, does Maldonado-Torres’ conception of ‘no religion’, being a completely novel term, sustain itself as something completely unrelatable? How might comparing ‘religion’ to other concepts at that time further place it within Christendom’s preexisting theoanthropological paradigm and hierarchies of ontological difference? An etymological search of the meaning of the terms ‘faith’, ‘belief’, ‘religion’, ‘sect’, ‘heretic’, and ‘infidel’<sup>18</sup> in medieval Latin Christendom demonstrates that, while there were specific meanings for these respective terms, which changed across time and place, they nevertheless remained within a theoanthropological paradigm in which their meanings were also similar and co-determinous. The term ‘infidel’, for example, within the context of medieval Christendom, meant ‘unfaithful’ or ‘no faith’. Further, the meaning of ‘faith’ correlated to that of

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<sup>17</sup> I would like to add that this phenomenon also happened in Islamdom. Islamic categories such as *mulhid* or *zindiq*, being translated as ‘atheist’ or ‘one who negates religion’, were widespread in medieval Islamdom. See Sarah Stroumsa (1999) for an analysis of how different Islamic sects and thinkers dealt with accusations of being *mulhid* and *zindiq* for their views or opposition to another sect’s conception of orthodoxy.

<sup>18</sup> All medieval meanings for the terms mentioned above – ‘faith’, ‘belief’, ‘religion’, ‘sect’, ‘heretic’, and ‘infidel’ – were sourced from the Online Etymological Dictionary (n.d.).

‘belief’, and one with a ‘sect’ was defined as one with beliefs and faith in medieval Western Catholicism. If one had no sect, may we then translate that as one not having belief or faith as well? If ‘sect’ would mean religion, then will having no religion mean that one has no faith, or that that person is an infidel?<sup>19</sup> Even if we take the category of ‘no religion’ to be a new category in the encounter with the Indians, it nonetheless holds a very similar meaning in relation to preexisting theoanthropological concepts and terms for defining otherness in Latin Christendom. As Pagden, Mastnak, and many medievalist authors would likely affirm, the Indians were thoroughly intertwined in the web of heretics, blasphemers, infidels, and barbarians of the Old World, even if there did happen to be a minority discourse of them having ‘no religion’.

## **Towards a Postsecular Theoanthropological Understanding of Race and Religion**

There are two aspects of Maldonado-Torres’ religious versus anthropological schema that need to be considered in light of reframing the coloniality of the being in relation to the Muslim Question. First, to only recognize the ontological exclusion of Muslims and Jews as theological difference, fails to appreciate that there was an anthropological basis for their exclusion as well. As the work of both Arjana and Robinson points out, through the centuries there were many documents in law, theology, and the arts that characterized non-Christians through a number of ethnographical lenses outside of religion and also firmly through an anthropocentric lens. On the reverse end, only viewing the ontological exclusion of the indigenous and black people as an anthropological difference, fails to include the theological basis for their exclusion. Part of Maldonado-Torres’ main argument itself is based on a *theological* difference between a supposed ‘religion’ and ‘no religion’, yet it seems to overlook that this is a theological difference, while framing it solely as anthropological.

The divide between the Europeans and Indians cannot be fully appreciated without including theological differences in this conversation. As Asad has argued, concepts of anthropology, biology, and scientific analysis are not only signifiers reserved for the secular modern Western context (Asad

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<sup>19</sup> Mastnak (2002) argues that the Muslims were the *infidels par excellence* during the crusades.

2003), but they have existed across civilizations and cultures prior to modernity in ways similar and different to the modern world. Just as theology and religion are not exclusive to the ‘traditional’ past, religion continues after the medieval ages even as it directly informs secular ‘theology’ and notions of the human. While the white male Christian God of the past seems to have been the center of the racial-religious cosmos in Old World Western Christendom, the New World eventually gives rise to the Western secular man as the *imago dei* and phallic arch of the modern/colonial world system. In both instances, anthropology and theology are interlinked and contribute to the development of the ontological exclusion in similar and different ways during the rise of the West over the Rest.

Second, Maldonado-Torres’ overemphasis on the ‘religious’ in the pre-modern world is a secular approach to understanding the past and obfuscates that what was happening was not a battle of religious ‘truth and falsehood’, but a much more complex civilizational attitude that included within itself the logics of religion and race.<sup>20</sup> The civilizational logic of Western Christendom regarded itself as superior to the rest of the world *prior* to modernity, as Maldonado-Torres’ conversation on the desire for *Christianitis* to become *Universitalatis* above shows. On that civilizational epistemic basis, Christendom launched the Crusades (Mastnak 2002:119),<sup>21</sup> Reconquis-

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<sup>20</sup> Civilizational theories existed across the Mediterranean in Christendom and Islamdom in both similar and different ways. For example, geoclimatic theories about Mediterranean cultures being the most ‘temperate’ and therefore most civilized, were inherited in Islamicate and Latin Christian societies from ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman sources. These geoclimate theories viewed those to the extreme north and south of this Mediterranean-centered world as less civilized and barbaric, and included ethnographies based on religion, race, and politics as markers for being more or less civilized (Robinson 2011:74-75). It is important to contextualize theories of race and ontological superiority/inferiority in different epochs, as they do not all flatten out as exactly the same, nor completely different and incomparable.

<sup>21</sup> In opposition to Mastnak, Maldonado-Torres (2014:644) claims that the Christendom’s negative view of Muslims was a defensive response to the Muslim imperial growth in the Latin West. Mastnak would likely argue that Maldonado-Torres overlooks the fact that there was no coherent notion of a Muslim enemy or threat until the Latin Christendom sought on its own accord to create peace inside its geopolitical borders, by consolidating a more exclusive white/Christian

ta, Inquisition, colonization of the New World, and mass enslavement of black Africans among activities in other locations in modernity.<sup>22</sup> A postsecular approach to understanding racism and religion would go beyond the Eurocentric epistemic paradigm that views racial markers based on religion as less significant or less violent than racism based on secular markers (color, ethnicity, nation, etc.). It is clear that both religious and secular forms of racial exclusion have influenced each other and have greatly contributed to forming the coloniality of being.

## **Columbus, Las Casas, and the Transfer of Islamophobia in Conquest**

Maldonado-Torres's conceptualization of Columbus is not sensitive enough towards the ways in which the Muslims lay actively and libidinally dormant in the Columbian enterprise for racist conquest and ontological 'Otherness'. Maldonado-Torres mentions that, central to Columbus' mission was the 'universal victory of Christianity' and that Columbus also planned to help with the finance of a crusade to rescue Jerusalem from Muslim hands. Yet, his analysis delves no deeper into this intersection between Columbus' anti-Muslim drive and how it influenced his encounter with the Indians. He employs the separation between the 'religious' Old World and 'racial' New World to state that those with the wrong religion are to be refuted, while those with no religion are 'discovered, indoctrinated, perpetually enslaved and colonized' (Maldonado-Torres 2014:646). His bifurcation of religious

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identity against that of a non-white/Christian political enemy who was to be fought outside its political ontological borders (Mastnak 2002).

<sup>22</sup> This is not to deny that civilizational superiority is anything new in history. Nearly all civilizations or universalist imperial formations in history – Islamic, Aztec, Mayan, Chinese, Indian, Buddhist, Bantu, etc. – carry with them certain types of exclusionary logics. It is not an argument to postulate that they are all identical either. Yet, the specificity of the pre-modern Western Christendom's civilizational logic is important because it directly informed the rise of modern Europe. To properly know how modernity/coloniality was formed, these projects cannot be approached as completely separate but as a continuation of the medieval spirit. This is important to highlight, given that epistemic paradigms from the medieval Christendom continue to play an important role in modern paradigms of the Western-led war and conquest.

and racial logics is put into question during the very transition that conquistadors made from the Old to the New World by the fact that arguably some of the first slaves brought to the Americas were *moros blancos* (literally white Muslims) on Spanish ships, departing from the former Al-Andalus (Cook 2016:47). The figure of the Muslim with regards to the crusading spirit of Columbus and Spanish conquistadors more broadly, must be underscored to fully grasp how this paradigm of war interacted with and treated the Indigenous. As much as Maldonado-Torres attempts to disassociate or differentiate the Old World from the New, the reality in the process was an extension and sedimentation of Old World politics and conceptions of ontological otherness as much as it was the development of a historical novelty.

In addition to material and imperial gain, Abbas Hamdani argues that Columbus' plan to conquer the New World must be seen as a continuation of the anti-Islamic crusades from the Middle Ages. The Italian Columbus had already fought Muslim armies in the Mediterranean for a number of years prior to the Iberian Visigoth crown funding his mission to find a Western access to India (Hamdani 1979). One of the main psychosocial and material motivations of both Columbus and the Spanish Crown was to unite Western and Eastern Christians in order to capture the *casa santa* of Jerusalem and defeat the Islamicate Caliphates in-between (Hamdani 1981:323). According to the objectives of the Portuguese, Prince Henry the Navigator, the Spanish/Portuguese motivations at the time were not only commodities such as gold, ivory, slaves, or spices, but also largely a politico-military attempt to overcome the might and threat of the Muslim civilizational 'Other'. We should also consider the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Ottomans as laying the foundations on the Eastern front of the Western Christendom to revive crusading efforts to find Western access to India in the early modern period (Hamdani 1981:324-325). The pressure from the Ottomans in the East, and the Spanish enchantment with the wealth of the New World, quickly intensified into a racist capitalist effort to procure gold, ivory, and spices, as well as Indian and African life and land. The point here is to emphasize the deep-seated psychological and cosmological drive to shape the world against Islam and other 'monsters', which then turned into a white supremacist, capitalist exploit of nearly all of the life and land of Latin America, Africa, and Asia in modernity, in addition to the exploitation of labor, life, and land within Europe's metropolises and proletariat.

## Valladolid Debates and the Muslims

The anti-Muslim character of the Valladolid debates is another aspect that has been largely unexplored by Latin American decolonial thinkers. The Valladolid debates were scholarly exchanges among Iberian Catholic priests which discussed the humanity of the indigenous peoples of the New World. The debates were framed around the question of the indigenous people's humanity and the question of just war. During the debates, Ginés de Sepulveda argued against Bartolome de las Casas, stating that the Spanish had the obligation to engage in a just war against inferior peoples who would not adopt the superior Christian religion and culture (Maldonado-Torres 2007:246). Maldonado-Torres relates the Valladolid debates only to the humanity of the Indians being questioned, and how the attitude and forms of relating to the Indians had been established by Spanish conquerors in the Americas long before these debates crystalized (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 246). Mastnak remarks that there is an overarching absence of the discussion of the Muslims in scholarship on the discovery of the New World and specifically the Valladolid debates (Mastnak 1994:128). He addresses the Muslim Question in the context of the Valladolid debates by showing that the figure of the Turk 'functioned as an organizing principle in the internal economy of Las Casas' and Ginés de Sepulveda's reasoning' (Mastnak 1994: 140).

On the one hand, Las Casas was the liberal humanitarian 'good guy' who argued for the rights of the Indians by claiming that they should not be conquered and enslaved but converted peacefully to Catholicism. On the other, Ginés de Sepulveda was the conservative imperialist 'bad guy' who argued that the Indians were an uncivilized people who deserved to be conquered and enslaved (Mastnak 1994:135-136). Las Casas argues for the rights of the Indians, stating that they are *different* from the Turks, meaning that Las Casas affirms that the Muslims should be subject to an eternal just war, enslavement, and conquest. Ginés de Sepulveda, on the other hand, fully extends European attitudes against the Turks to the Indians (Mastnak 1994:127). Las Casas rejects the idea of the conquest of the Indians and affirms it against the Moors in Africa and Asia (Ginés de Sepulveda 1994:144). Mastnak describes Las Casas' arguments against the Indians as 'mild', compared to that of the Turks, especially when Las Casas would cast anti-Muslim derogatory names at Ginés de Sepulveda calling him a 'Moham-

medan’ because of his support of ‘death and terror’ against the Indians – ‘death and terror’ being Islamophobically associated with the practices of Muslims (Mastnak 1994:141, 144). In effect, it is clear that Ginés de Sepulveda’s harsher argument wins out, as mass genocide, enslavement, and necropolitical behavior was carried out against the Indians in the Americas. What is important here is that the figure of the Muslims and anti-Muslim logics and behavior was central to forming the very definition of the Indians.

Mastnak further argues that the *conquista* of the Americas should be seen as a continuation of the *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula, and as part of Spain’s ‘perennial crusade’ against Muslims and other ‘infidels’ (Mastnak 1994:139). A number of scholars (Majid 2009; Arjana 2015; Rana 2011) have argued that in many ways the Indians were seen as ‘New Moors’ by the Spanish and Portuguese. I have argued elsewhere (Abbasi 2016b), that there was a wholesale transfer of Islamophobic systems and practices from the Iberian Peninsula to the New World: From intellectual debates before 1492 and up to Valladolid, to education and evangelization processes used on Moriscos and Indians by transnational Catholic orders such as the Jesuits, to torture technologies, the names of Indian sites of worship being identified as mosques and synagogues, indigenous cities being named after cities in the Islamic world (i.e., a Mayan capital identified as ‘Great Cairo’), the names of crusader saints such as St James being changed from *Santiago Matamoros* (Saint of Moor killers) to *Santiago Mataindios* (Saint of Indian killers), to arts and theatre that staged the Christian conquest of Rhodes and Jerusalem where Indians played the role of conquered Muslims,<sup>23</sup> and even economic systems such as the encomienda system which had previously been used on cheap Morisco and Muslim labor in the Iberian peninsula before being established in the Americas (Cardinal & Mégret 2017).

## **Islamophobia, Black Muslims, and Africa**

While it is clear that Islamophobia directly informed anti-indigenous racism, it also influenced modern Eurocentric notions of the black African and

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<sup>23</sup> In addition to my article (Abbasi 2016), Mastnak also notes the occurrences of these play reenactments (Mastnak 1994:140).

modern anti-black racism.<sup>24</sup> Mastnak notes that African countries and islands were originally regarded as instrumental for crusading warfare against Muslims. From the early to the late 1500s, Portuguese expeditions established the first European settlements on the West African coast due to the economic desire for trade, but also the psychosocial militaristic urge to continue crusading and to find routes to conquer Muslims and recapture the Holy Land. All of this happened before Las Casas and other Europeans suggested exporting *negro* slaves to the Americas in order to spare the Indians heavy labor (Mastnak 1994:127). Maldonado-Torres also comments on how black Africans were largely categorized as Moors or Muslims from the perspective of Europeans. The term *moro*, being etymologically linked to the Latin term *morus*, means ‘black’. The Latin and Greek *maurus/mauros* were used since the classical period to refer to the dark-skinned peoples of Mauritania or Northwest Africa (Maldonado-Torres 2014:650). While Maldonado-Torres does mention the connection between blackness and Muslimness through the term *moro*, he does not further conceptualize the connection.

Islamophobia was in many ways one of the main and primal motivations in Europe’s Age of Discovery and Expansion<sup>25</sup> in Africa, and its

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<sup>24</sup> Maldonado-Torres, following Wynter and other Caribbean decolonial thinkers, notes that anti-black prejudice existed prior to modernity in Latin Christendom, Jewish discourses and in the Muslim world. Maldonado-Torres distinguishes between a pre-modern anti-black prejudice in various societies and a modern anti-black racism, in that for the first time in history, modern anti-black racism now becomes a *global*, rather than an interregional organizing principle (Maldonado-Torres 2014:655-656). For a more thorough understanding of the various dynamics involved in analyzing anti-blackness in the pre-modern and modern Muslim world, see Abbasi (2020).

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Hall (2007:281) argues that there are two main events which caused Europe to break from its continental shell and expand: The first was the early Portuguese explorations of the African coast (1430-1498), and the second was Columbus’ voyages to the New World. I would like to add a third, which was the Portuguese explorer, Vasco de Gama’s rounding of the Cape of Good Hope, voyages across the Indian Ocean, and arrival in South Asia in 1498 (cf. Cliff 2013). What is unique about these three events, is that Islamophobia was one of the main drives in each. In each instance of the three aforementioned European expansions, the explorers, colonizers, and their missions were guided by a desire of commerce, conquest, and to overcome the Muslims as a political enemy and exploit them in order for the Western Christians to fulfill their spiritual destinies,



effects have often been discluded from the experience of not only Blacks from the African continent but of those enslaved and taken to the Americas. Slyviane Diouf writes how the papal bulls of Nicholas V in 1454 and Calixtus III in 1456 justified Portugal's slave trade on the West African coast as a crusade for Christianity (Diouf 2013:34). Cook writes that, as early as 1501, the Spanish Crown released decrees prohibiting the travel or passage of Muslims (and Jews) to the New World, whether as slaves or freed people, so that they would not disturb the proselytization of the Indians (Cook 2016:56). Diouf adds that a royal decree issued on May 11, 1526 specifically forbade black Africans, coming from Muslim countries in Africa. This was followed by at least five different decrees outlawing the introduction of Muslims to Spanish colonies within the next 50 years (Diouf 2013:36).

While there is evidence that non-black African Muslims – such as Moriscos, North Africans, or even Turkish Muslims (Cook 2016:50) – were enslaved or bonded to labor in the Americas, black African Muslims were the majority of Muslims in the New World. The effectiveness of these bans is a different question, and in most cases, the colonial authorities failed as people to find ways to circumvent them legally and illegally. What is clear is that people of Muslim heritage were regarded as a threat, and that Islam and Muslims were viewed as a cultural, ontological, and political challenge to the formation of an exclusivist Catholic body politic in Spanish and Portuguese territories in the New World and Africa. Muslims were viewed as sources of inspiration for other nations to rebellion, and it was feared that Muslims would take Islam to the Indians (Diouf 2013:37).<sup>26</sup> Rana argues that it is at this crossroads of Muslimness and Blackness in early modernity that antecedents are set for the Semitic-Hamitic hypothesis in late modernity. Under this hypothesis, Semites as an ethnological category comprise Arabs and Jews, while 'Hamite' refers to those of African 'Negroid' descent (Rana 2011:37). The racist Semitic-Hamitic hypothesis of late modernity (18<sup>th</sup> cen-

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economic imperialism, and salvific goals of reconquering the Holy Land (Cliff 2013; Hall 2007:283; Hamdani 1979; 1981).

<sup>26</sup> There were a number of jihads fought by enslaved African Muslims in the Latin American colonies, such as by the West African descent Male peoples in Brazil and Muslims involved in the Haitian Revolution (1804) (Diouf 2013:50, 217, 263; cf. also Reis 1995).

ture) only crystallized after centuries of crusades and exploitation of black and Muslim bodies on a planetary scale.

## **Conclusion**

With these historical facts in mind, Mastnak argues that the discovery of a New World did not simply turn medieval Europe into ‘Old Europe’. There was rather a prominent presence of the Middle Ages in the conquest of the Americas and the rise of the Atlantic world. Further, Mastnak (1994:138), in contrast to Maldonado-Torres, suggests:

The basic structure of the argument regarding the extra-European worlds and peoples, canonically formulated in the mid-thirteenth century, was not shaken by the discovery of America. *The discovery was not a break with the past*. The immediate impact of the *descubrimiento* [discovery] on Europe was all but revolutionizing. Elliott has convincingly argued that, ‘at least so far as fundamental political transformations are concerned...[t]he refusal of states to accept the continuance of any form of subordination to a supra-national ecclesiastical authority; the absolutist tendencies of sixteenth-century princes; the development of new theories and practices to regulate relations between independent sovereign states – all these developments are entirely conceivable in a Europe which remained in total ignorance of the existence of America’ (original emphasis).

Mastnak’s claim that the discovery was ‘not a break with the past’ and that the rise of resistance to feudal structures in Christendom and the formation of modern global inter-state systems could have happened without the encounter with or knowledge of the Americas is provocative. While I do not subscribe to such a view, it is necessary to put this view in conversation with Maldonado-Torres who argues that the discover of the New World is one that is marked by a totally different and sharp break from the past.

My own view lays between the two. Systems of race, religion, and power that existed prior to the rise of the Atlantic-centered world, directly affected and profoundly informed modernity/coloniality, specifically with regards to the Muslims and systems of Islamophobia. At the same time, the

conquest of the Americas and rise of transatlantic slave trade were unique formations that recalibrated formations of power and being that settled themselves into pre-existing ones, just as they transformed pre-existing ones in novel ways.

In conclusion, ontological notions of who was considered human or not according to the exclusionary logic of the early Christendom (early modernity) and then Europe (late modernity), did not initially change much *theoretically* between the Old and New Worlds, especially in early modernity (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century). Eventually, what did change over a period of several centuries in modernity was the material and epistemic effects of global power relations and how theories of ontological exclusion were *applied* materially. This shift throughout modernity/coloniality did not happen rapidly. It was only over the *longue durée* of five centuries of eventual Western hegemony, post-15<sup>th</sup> century that coloniality sedimented in ways that changed relations of power from being relatively *symmetric* between ‘competing’ pre-modern empires to *asymmetric* relations of power between the West and the Rest. For Maldonado-Torres, this change in power in modernity/coloniality would be reflected on the ontological level through the gradual normalization of the coloniality of being. In relation to the Muslims, Maldonado-Torres specifically, and the decolonial discourse more broadly must better integrate how Islamophobia in a large part laid the conditions of possibility for the rise of the modern/colonial world-system. In expanding upon and complementing the Latin American Atlantic-centered approach to understanding the coloniality of being through the Muslim Question, the decolonial discourse on race and religion broadens its historiographical canon, horizons, and tools of social analysis.

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