EDITED BY JAMES DINGLEY AND MARCELLO MOLLICA

UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

RADICALISM AND TERRORISM IN RELIGION EXPLORED VIA SIX CASE STUDIES

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James Dingley • Marcello Mollica
Editors

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Radicalism and Terrorism in Religion Explored
via Six Case Studies

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Religious Independence of Chinese Muslim East Turkestan "Uyghur"

Chiara Olivieri

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to briefly outline the characteristics of the identity and independence claims of East Turkistan, officially the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang. This analysis is focused within a post- and decolonial studies perspective that attempts to illustrate how Chinese

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State rhetoric is trying to counter this (according to Uyghur activists) "national liberation struggle" and hide its suppression of it under the label of a "war on terror".

The chapter tries to analyse this area by applying a new study perspective to it. The mechanism can be called "Orientalist" in that China applies to a part of its population, perpetuating the use of colonial strategies with the objective of establishing a political, social, and, ultimately, discursive identity control on a group of its people. The Muslim community in China, of which Uyghurs constitute a major part, in fact, represents a special case within the Chinese *umma* (community of the faithful as defined in Islam). China is a non-Muslim country that hosts more than 20 million Muslim believers (about the same number as, e.g. can be found in Saudi Arabia, where they represent 97% of population):

> Coloniality, hidden under the rhetoric of modernity, necessarily generates the irreducible energy of humiliated, vilified, forgotten and marginalized human beings.[1] (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007, p. 27)

The unitary national ideal, promoted by the Chinese government, is thus seen as imposing an epistemological universalism as a State-building strategy and therefore follows a clear "imperial/colonial global plan"[2] (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007, p. 70).

BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

First of all it would be appropriate to give some contextual setting within China, which is considered the world's most populous country. A recent census found about 1320 million people living in an area of 9.561 million km², occupying about one-fifth of the total area of Asia, and including a heterogeneous population of different languages, ethnic groups and religions (Babtain 2013, p. 24). According to the country's Regional Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the country

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[1] "*La colonialidad, escondida bajo la retórica de la modernidad, genera necesariamente la energía irreductible de seres humanos humillados, vilipendiados, olvidados y marginados*". From this point on, all the translations of the quotes are mine. However, for greater transparency and to make the languages of the Global South visible, I have chosen to cite, in footnotes, the texts in their original language.

[2] "*Diseño global imperial/colonial*".

defines itself as a "multi-national country". This definition is the confluence of two different national construction projects; on the one hand, China followed the Soviet model, which guarantees some autonomy to ethnic groups, allowing or penalising certain expressions of cultural diversity depending on the political programme that at any time the central government was conducting (Han and Mylonas 2014, p. 149).

However, China is also deeply imbued with European ideas and models, for example, Marxism, trying to apply them to their own nation-state. Thus the Chinese government requires that all ethnic groups and regions adopt the national language (standard Chinese), abandoning their own traditional ones.[3] The Constitution of 1954, in fact, whilst recognising the formation of regional governments for different ethnic groups, excludes for any of them the right to secede.

As Lipman (1990, p. 65) remarks:

> China's largest ethnic group, who call themselves Hans and who are usually called the Chinese by us.

The Han Chinese have built, throughout the country's history, an identity narrative that recognises themselves as "Chinese" and this narrative has been imposed and adopted by Europe, where it has gained continued legitimacy. This narrative has now been reimported and imposed on all the other ethnic groups, justifying the "homogenisation" of all other identities under the Han seal. It has generated what many scholars now call a "Han Chinese Way" (Han and Mylonas 2014, p. 150). This implies the imposition of the values and models of the majority ethnic group (Han), applied equally to all other ethnic minorities, ignoring in many cases their significant differences and characteristics. This measure of *Hanisation* materialises itself, for example, in the abolition of bilingual education programmes for monolingual Han ones and the promotion of Han group migration into ethnic minority communities to "foster" their development. In addition the religion of the majority of Han Chinese is a mix of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.

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[3] To deepen understanding on the issue of multilingualism of China and the government's response to this issue, cf. Liang, S. (2015). *Language Attitudes and Identities in Multilingual China. A Linguistic Ethnography*. Springer.

In the case of the Uyghur community, culturally Islamic (Millward 2018a), this *Han-isation* has been used in order to make the region of Xinjiang physically, culturally, and demographically closer to China in cultural and political terms. An important Chinese concern has been that the Han people settled in Xinjiang (estimated to have grown by 40% in the last 70 years; Poston et al. 2010, p. 31) could act to counter the dominant Muslim influence in the region, perceived as a potential threat to Chinese integrity.

First, to put the above in some perspective, it is necessary to understand the geographic and historical context of the Xinjiang region. Located in the north-western corner of China, the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang consists of a vast sparsely populated area, mainly composed of arid geographic depressions and very high mountains.

Due to its position in the geography of central Asia, the Xinjiang region has enjoyed close relations with diverse populations and societies, and has been the scene of great artistic, commercial, and cultural contacts, being an enclave of the Silk Road for over 2000 years. Contacts between Uyghurs and Islam started at the beginning of the ninth century, when an increasing number of individuals began to convert to the religion of the Prophet Mohammed. The process of "Islamisation" accelerated, and the major cities of the region quickly became great centres of Islam, such as Kashgar. According to the World Uyghur Congress:

> Art, sciences, music and literature flourished as Islamic religious institutions nurtured the pursuit of an advanced culture. In this period, hundreds of world-renowned Uyghur scholars emerged. Thousands of valuable books were written.[4]

The Uyghur language, in addition, shows considerable Persian influence, including numerous Persian loan-words.

The independent Uyghur Kingdom, namely, the Seyyid Kingdom, was conquered by the Manchu dynasty in 1759, and included in the Chinese Empire until 1864 when, after a great number of revolts and independence claims, Uyghur people established the Yetteshahar State, which survived until 1876, when Manchus officially annexed the territory to the

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[4]World Uyghur Congress. 2015. *East Turkestan* [Online]. Available: http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?page_id=29681 [Accessed 15 Dec 2016].

Empire and gave it the name of "Xinjiang".[5] The name means "New Frontier" in Chinese, which reflects the remoteness (in Han terms) of this region from Eastern China, which has historically been the cradle of power for successive Chinese dynasties and also the government of the Chinese Communist Party since 1949 (from now on, CCP). The Uyghurs, the indigenous, predominantly Muslim population, call this region *Sharqi Turkistan* (East Turkestan).

This difference in names also serves to illustrate the tensions involved in the communist development programme in the region, which is also part of a broader State strategy of integration and border control. Thus for decades, the CCP has invested significantly in regional infrastructures, expanding and enhancing trade and industry and large-scale agriculture as part of a strategy leading to greater integration into a "greater China". In addition, this process has been accompanied by the mass migration of Han Chinese to the territory of Xinjiang, ostensibly to assist in regional development, but also to impose Han linguistic use, despite the constitutional guarantees of linguistic freedom for minority nationalities. Also, de facto, the government has imposed the institutionalisation of the Chinese language not just in education, but in employment too. This actually forces Uyghurs to place themselves in Chinese-medium classes in order to be competitive and survive in the labour market and urban milieu (Finley 2013, p. 261). This strategy, though, can (and should) be read as part of a political programme that we could call "internal colonialism" in the country, as it has been accompanied not only by massive extraction of natural resources, but by what one can define as a metabolic extraction of human resources. As a consequence of the imposition of Chinese culture (language, cultural heritage, official history) over the Uyghur, the result of these policies is, de facto, the "epistemicide" of Uyghur culture (Santos 2010a; Finley 2013).

One could argue that such "extraction" has certainly led to considerable economic expansion and rising living standards in the region as a direct consequence of the development strategy of the CCP. However, despite these improvements, it is noteworthy that the Uyghur population has continued to experience higher poverty levels than that of their Han fellow countrymen, who alone seem to have benefited from the higher

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[5] World Uyghur Congress. 2015. *East Turkestan* [Online]. Available: http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?page_id=29681 [Accessed 15 Dec 2016].

profits and incomes due to the economic opportunities provided by State policies (Castets 2003). Further, over recent decades, there have been numerous protests and acts of rebellion by the Uyghur population against State policies and government measures which can also be classified as repressive towards traditional Uyghur culture. Further, government responses to the protests have been various and, in many cases, violent.

Nowadays, the region of Xinjiang counts around 23,000 mosques,[6] and Islam remains one of the pillars of the social, economic, and private life of Uyghur people (Finley 2013, p. 101). Dietary laws and restrictions imposed by the Koran are largely observed within Uyghur communities, forming an important part of their identity claims. Moreover, government policy has also involved restrictive measures on religious freedom and practices, which have impacted on Uyghur identity and helped stoke an Islamic revival in Xinjiang. This revival is considered, by experts, for example, Finley (2013), as a form of reaction phenomenon which drinks from the historical and cultural roots of the Uyghur people, and imposes itself, as a distinctive Islamic element of its identity.

One response within the Uyghur community has been the creation of stereotyped images of Han to mark a difference between the "non-Muslim population" and those who follow Islamic rules. Hans have been identified as "*haram* animals" (a great insult for Uyghurs), because of the alimentary diet of the Hans; "dirty", because of their different of hygiene standards; and "ill-mannered", due to Hans custom of breaking wind, spitting, or blowing the contents of their nose onto the ground in public spaces (Finley 2013, pp. 101–107).

Roy Bin Wong (1997, p. 172) says that the late imperial (eighth to ninth century) construction of a "Chinese" identity (which often meant, in fact, a homogenisation and hence a suppression of diversity) was achieved through a careful political project of control of the population's cultural practices. The "construction" during that period was so powerful that the formation of alternative identities, with which to mobilise a people in opposition to other Chinese, was unimaginable. At this stage one must observe an important point that has major implications for our understanding of the Uyghur problem: the Xinjiang region belonged to the Chinese Empire only intermittently, alternating periods of autonomy

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[6] IslamiChina. *Mosques in China* [Online]. Available: http://www.islamichina.com/mosques-masjid-in-china-.html [Accessed 15 Dec 2016].

with others of inclusion or submission. This has left an identity question hanging over the region, which from the outset has heavily impacted on establishing a fixed relationship with China in both imperial and republican times. Xinjiang's failure to establish itself as an independent State can be put down to a multitude of historical-political reasons. However, the failure to develop as an independent State does not imply the inability to construct a recognisable ethnic identity, which now clearly does exist.

In the early years of its rule the CCP promoted a tolerant policy towards minority nationalities, and in 1955, it established the autonomous region of Xinjiang.[7] Concurrently, there was a general "left turn" in CCP policy, which led to the CCP, in 1956, implementing a series of measures that tended towards "integrationist" policies. For integration read "assimilation", which, in the words of Amílcar Cabral (2011a), was nothing more than an attempt, more or less violent, to deny the culture of the people. The aim of "integration" was the assimilation of all ethnic groups into the Chinese nation, under the egalitarian ideals espoused by communism, referred to as the Movement of Hundred Flowers[8] (1956–1957). The negative response to this movement by minority nationality elites led to a major purge of them by the government, which was especially violent in the Xinjiang region.

This integration was part of a growing political radicalisation under Chairman Mao Zedong during the period of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, and represented the apex of his process of forced integration of minorities. One important example of this radicalisation was that during these decades, Muslims, against their religion, were forced to raise pigs and eat their flesh (Allès 2014, p. 137).

In general the object of all the various post-imperial governments was the construction of an integrated State of China by utilising local elites

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[7] "*The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region was formally established on October 1, 1955. Five autonomous prefectures and six autonomous counties were set up in the following months. Ethnic minority autonomy became a reality*" 2014. The Uygur ethnic minority [Online]. Available: http://www.china.org.cn/e-groups/shaoshu/shao-2-uygur.htm [Accessed 02 Mar 2015].

[8] Also called "Hundred Flowers Campaign". During these years Chairman Mao and his government promoted free expression by the intellectuals of his views on party policy under the slogan "Let a hundred flowers and a hundred schools open". The criticisms came, however, against the expectations of Chairman Mao, and were so numerous and severe that in July 1957, the campaign, which had suddenly become a real programme of violent and repressive anti-rightist measures, was abolished.

and popular groups to enforce the State will. At the same time that the State tried to operate via local elites and groups, using their own local strength and influence, it also tried to ensure that the latter did not acquire enough political power to challenge that of the central government (Wong 1997, p. 163).

Another major catalyst for the development of repressive and violent measures against Muslim minority nationalities in China was also found in the gradual breakdown of Sino-Soviet relations. The Uyghurs, who until then had enjoyed some regional autonomy, unlike the five Muslim republics of the USSR, did not have an external "national home"—but only, ideally, a "spiritual home", represented by Turkey (Israeli 2010, p. 91). Consequently, the only other support for Uyghur claims came exclusively from the Soviet Union as part of its geopolitical strategic approach to curbing the development of Chinese communist power in Asia. In fact good relations between the two communist States had previously existed and had helped lead to the development of the region, which was economically important due to the presence of rich mineral resources. After the end of World War II and into the 1950s these resources were successfully exploited by the Soviet Union with the assistance of the Chinese. The Chinese even helped in the creation of a Cyrillic-Uyghur alphabet, used to facilitate better communications between Russians and local workers in the development of the region.

Only after the breakdown of Sino-Soviet relations in the late 1950s did the policy of the USSR in relation to the Xinjiang region change fundamentally, when they encouraged a process of Uyghur migration to Soviet territory, which led to a mass migration there in 1962. It also resulted in the Soviets openly supporting actions organised by Uyghurs against the Chinese. But this was still regarded as part of an ethnic dispute in relation to ideological drives for Chinese (communist) homogeneity and inter-regional power politics. It was not primarily regarded as a religious issue; however, it has now taken on that hue due to the post-2001 "Islamic terror threat".

Islamophobia and Terrorism

Religion as an Identity Marker

The question about Chinese Muslim communities as part of a real global danger (Islamic threat) is therefore comparatively recent. It has only been presented as such since the New York, World Trade Centre attacks in

2001, after which global public opinion either switched to or was encouraged to see an Islamic threat. However, as Lipman (1990) observes in the case of China, this also fitted in with pre-conceived Christian attitudes towards Islam. He criticises the Christian missionaries who settled in China during the Qing era (1644–1911) for their creation of a stereotypical view of Chinese Muslims as part of a historical Christian mental framework:

> Muslims were a familiar enemy, closer in doctrine to Christians than most citizens of China but inevitably antagonistic to the teachings of Christian truth. (Lipman 1990, p. 67)

It cannot be denied, as Rohan Gunaratna, Arabinda Acharya, and Wang Pengxin (2010) make clear, that the rise of an indigenous Uyghur resistance movement accused of terrorism in the Xinjiang region represents a threat to Chinese State security and stability. Concurrently, one cannot over-emphasise that there are real reasons occasionally for a violent insurgency against Chinese integration, which is supported by part of the Uyghur population. It is not enough to accuse the insurgents of religious extremism; one must also acknowledge the systematic violation of individual human rights and the ethnic claims of the population. Also, the government's attempts to methodically try and eradicate the visibility of minority identities and religion (Chinese communist philosophy being very secular) must be understood, as will be seen in the next paragraph. But China must respond to any real threat posed by insurgent groups and it has to realistically confront any serious terrorist threat. However, in doing so it should be transparent and respond in a legitimate manner if it is to retain its authority in facing up to the international community, their own Chinese citizens, especially the Uyghurs, who may often become innocent victims of State persecutions (Acharya et al. 2010).

According to the World Uyghur Congress, the major international organisation in defence of Uyghur rights, which represents the collective interest of Uyghurs:

> The Chinese government is directing a crushing campaign of religious repression against the Uyghurs. According to a report released by Human Rights Watch and Human Rights in China on April 11, 2005, "the worldwide campaign against terrorism has given Beijing the perfect excuse to crack down harder than ever in East Turkestan. Other Chinese enjoy a

growing freedom of worship, but Uyghurs, like Tibetans find that their religion is being used as a tool of control." Most recently the Chinese authorities have also tightened curbs on Uyghurs, banning any government official, state employees, Party members, children, and in some cases women from entering the mosques. At present, the number of mosques in East Turkestan is not sufficient to meet the needs of the Muslims. Building of new mosques has been prohibited. There are no private religious schools and private religious instruction is banned. There is a shortage of well-educated clerics, Korans and Islamic publications.[9]

As often observed by the Arab-Islamic world and as already mentioned above, too often the "West" characterises the image of Islam as representing that of a minority, an image driven via a certain type of coverage.[10] Thus news concerning the Uyghur demonstrations over such things as claims for self-determination, protests against repressive government measures regarding autonomy and religion, requests for improvements in working conditions, or over mining accidents are portrayed by the official media in terms of violence. Visual images of violent clashes are used to construct a narrative that represents the Uyghurs in ways that tend to justify the repressive measures operated by the government against them. The possibility that members of the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation may have found refuge in the Xinjiang region is easily conveyed, and the fear of this infecting all Islamic populations within China can prove an obstacle to Chinese tolerance of Islam.[11] And these fears are reinforced in many non-Chinese countries which also desire or sympathise with a far greater and

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[9] World Uyghur Congress. 2015. *Current Issues Affecting the Uyghur Community* [Online]. Available: http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?page_id=29698 [Accessed 15 Dec 2016].

[10] For more information on the debate about Orientalism that has developed, in recent decades, especially in the Arab-Islamic world, cf. Abu Zayd, N. Ḥ. 2009. *The Koran and the future of Islam,* Barcelona, Herder; Laroui, A. 1978. *La Crise des arabes intellectuels: traditionalisme ou historicisme?,* Paris, La Découverte.

[11] Also as Lipman relates, another little-known but curious story that magnifies the image of "terrifying others" that distinguishes the Chinese Muslims, is that they often, within their own mosques, founded real martial arts schools that reinforce the narrative China has of their intimately violent nature. We refer here mostly to Hui Chinese, and it seems appropriate to provide this example to show that, despite being considered less "conflictive" or "dangerous" than their Uyghur coreligionists, such constructed discriminant narratives on minority nationality also affect a population that "constituted an especially threatening minority for they maintained separate, exclusive communities, calendars and lives despite their strong physical and cultural resemblance to the Hans" (Lipman 1990, p. 78).

more rigorous monitoring of Muslim communities in China at home and abroad. Concurrently this leads to clashes with some of the world's largest international and rights organisations, which condemn China's policies on Muslims and ethnic minorities, regarding them as non-compliant with human rights.

Therefore, China's position in regard to the Uyghurs, future policies, and measures are far from settled as the Chinese government tries to balance security fears and national integration with rights criticisms and obligations. The current situation thus opens up an intractable problem with few apparent solutions. The Uyghurs see their own culture institutionally threatened and oppressed by the government; this includes language homogenisation, religious prohibitions and repression, politic subalternisation, and human and territorial resources exploitation. On the other hand the Chinese government is forced to keep order and control the revolts that might jeopardise national stability, whilst also trying to maintain a semblance of normality. It needs to do this both to avoid accusations of violations of human rights and to preserve their trade relations with Muslim countries (Israeli 2010, p. 92), essential to meet the need for domestic energy supplies.[12] Yet, Muslim countries themselves tend to ignore the demands of their fellow Chinese Muslims, whose problems are virtually non-existent within the Arab-Islamic political and intellectual landscape. As Gramsci (2011, pp. 3–4) observed in another era:

> Indifference plays an important role in history. It plays a passive role, but it does play a role. […] What happens, the evil that touches everyone, the possible good that an heroic act (of universal value) can generate, doesn't happen due to the initiative of the few working, but to the indifference, absenteeism of the many.[13]

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[12] This is the case, for example, of the conflicts of a seemingly religious nature that have divided China and its major economic partner, Iran, namely, the demands of Xinjiang Autonomous Region Uyghur population in China, supported by the Tehran government, and the repression of these by Beijing. However, these conflicts have always been moderated by the real economic interests of both powers: China's support for the development of Iran's nuclear programme, the existing energy cooperation between the two countries.

[13] "*L'indifferenza opera potentemente nella storia. Opera passivamente, ma opera. […] Ciò che succede, il male che si abbatte su tutti, il possibile bene che un atto eroico (di valore universale) può generare non è tanto dovuto all'iniziativa dei pochi che operano, quanto all'indifferenza, all'assenteismo dei molti*".

So:

> [W]ould-be rulers seeking to mobilise resources and exert control face other individuals and groups who seek either to compete for resources and control or to limit the ruler's access to resources and his span of control. (Wong 1997, pp. 74–75)

Thus, government measures include the appropriation of the religious spaces of the Uyghur people. As Radio Free Asia reports, there have been cases of government control over the actions of the imams themselves and religious leadership in the region. According to a Radio Free Asia report:

> Since 2006, the government has paid monthly salaries of 80, 120, or 230 yuan (U.S. $12, $18, or $34) per month to imams throughout the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region […] In exchange, the government is asking imams to seek common ground between socialism and Islam and to guide the public to obey state regulations.[14]

It appears clear, thus, that religious identity of Uyghurs is also being manipulated and instrumentally used by the government in order to establish control over the population. And a major justification for this is the creation of a "Uyghur Islamic problem" or an "institutional Islamophobia" by the government as instruments to justify its measures.

Islamophobia: Definition and Sphere of Action

To precisely establish the origin of the term "Islamophobia" is a complicated task, but "contrary to what many authors have claimed, the term Islamophobia is not new. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of authors detected the presence in Europe of an attitude towards Islam and the Muslims that some of them designated with that term"[15] (Bravo López 2011a, p. 192). In addition, our goal is not to make a historical or philological study of

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[14] Radio Free Asia. 2010. *Politics Intrude in Mosque. A Chinese propaganda event in a religious space offends Uyghurs* [Online]. Available: http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/party-08032010162324.html [Accessed 15 Dec 2016].

[15] "*Contrariamente a lo que muchos autores han afirmado el término islamofobia no es nuevo. Entre finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX una serie de autores detectaron la presencia en*

this term, but rather to analyse the material implications of this phenomenon today, and more particularly, how it is embodied in the social and political substrata of China in relation to Muslim and national identities of the country.

The question that is central to this section and critical to our analysis concerns the possibility of a real relationship between religion and the mechanisms of inferiority by which members of these religious communities suffer via the actions of ruling elites, to which they do not belong. In particular, one needs to ascertain if the processes of repression that applies to Muslims in China are the result of a sense that Islam is rejected per se or whether, instead, it is more related to political, ethnic, or racial issues of religion and religious identity is merely a symbolic representation.

As Grosfoguel (2010, 2011) observes, in the social sciences, we can find concrete manifestations of epistemic Islamophobia in the work of patriarchal Occident-centric social scientists, such as Karl Marx and Max Weber in their social theories. However, according to Bravo López (2011a), the recent history of the term Islamophobia begins in the United Kingdom. At some point during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the term began to be used to denote rejection and discrimination against Muslims. However, especially in the post-2001 period, with the subsequent attacks in Spain, Britain, and Indonesia (Bovingdon 2010, p. 2), the term became a regularly utilised one not only in academic world but in public sphere too.

From these origins Islamophobia could be considered as a kind of misinterpretation of Islamic traditions, guided by bad faith and a concern to select those traditions that can best fit in with a colonial pre-conception of Islam (Bravo López 2011b, p. 561). However, the practical implications of Islamophobia make it necessary to reflect deeper on its use and meaning, as Bravo López observes:

> [N]or do degrading or humiliating representations of Islam and the Prophet constitute Islamophobia *per se*. Islamophobia is, on the other hand, the motivation underpinning these types of misrepresentation of Islam and its prophet. (Bravo López 2011b, p. 561)

Europa de una actitud con respecto al islam y los musulmanes que algunos de ellos designaron con ese término".

Consequently it is the process of projecting feelings of fear and loathing onto the religion, onto those who are its most obvious incarnation, namely Muslims. It thus becomes a process, therefore, of the "inferiorisation" of a human category carried out in order to extract a political project of domination (Hajjat and Mohammed 2013, p. 25). Or:

> Islamophobia would not therefore consist of a merely critical or negative attitude towards Islam. Islamophobia would be an attitude towards Islam based on the belief that Islam and Muslims as the incarnation thereof is an implacable and absolute enemy. […] Islamophobes consider Muslims their enemies because they identify them with a religion that they perceive as an enemy, rather than identifying them in 'racial' or ethnic terms. Consequently, discussing and criticizing Islamophobia consists of denying or relativizing the importance of the Islamic religion in each of the accusations levelled by the Islamophobes against Islam and the Muslims. (Bravo López 2011b, p. 563)

This speech perfectly encapsulates a Eurocentric outlook, in which the "Christian" world is identified, according to suspect historical reasons, with civilisation, progress, and modernity. And, according to this reasoning, the opposition that naturally arises from this perspective is that the

> "Muslim" is identified with barbarism, incivility and a "prehistoric" stage of development. Indeed, to talk about Islamophobia, it is essential to consider the discussion on the "cartography of the power of the World System that has been established in the last five hundred years."[16] (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006, p. 1)

This view has not been supported and perpetuated solely by European political elites, but has enjoyed the support, as mentioned above, of critical intellectuals of the calibre of Max Weber and Karl Marx himself (Grosfoguel 2010, pp. 32–36), who recognised the undoubted superiority of European/Western civilisation. They saw colonisation as a process of destruction of native cultures and structures and the subsequent creation of new structures shaped on European models and that this might be the only developmental path for the "barbarian" and "violent" peoples of Islam:

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[16] "*Cartografía del poder del Sistema Mundo que se ha establecido en los últimos quinientos años*".

The Koran and the Mussulman legislation emanating from it reduce the geography and ethnography of the various peoples to the simple and convenient distinction of two nations and of two countries; those of the Faithful and of the Infidels. The Infidel is '*harby*', that is, the enemy. Islamism proscribes the nation of the Infidels, constituting a state of permanent hostility between the Mussulman and the unbeliever. (Marx 1854)[17]

These theories, although they have been thought and expressed to adapt to European and Global North contexts, can easily be transferred to our sphere of interest. The construction of narratives and stereotyped discourses on certain subjects is functional, in China or Europe, as in any place where power needs to legitimise itself at the expense of the "other". Since the days of Chairman Mao Zedong's government, the imposition of State atheism has been part of a process of homogenisation of the country and its population. This involved an institutionalised rupture with the "traditional", viewed as imperial, archaic, and immovable, history of China. After the end of the Great Cultural Revolution, a period of enormous cultural and religious loss in the country, and even more so since the 1980s, the Chinese State, has attempted some restoration of Islam in the country. Aided by subsidies from the Islamic Association of China and some Muslim countries, for example, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Pakistan, China has attempted to restore aspects of Islam, although more from an aesthetic "Islamic" perspective. This has led to the reopening of ancient mosques and the construction of new religious buildings, but more with the aim of reflecting in their architecture the "foreign" origin of its adherents and its belonging to the Islamic world (Allès 2008, p. 96). These measures tended to mark another distance, another "abyssal line" between the "Chinese" and the "foreign". According to the opinion of the World Uyghur Congress:

The Chinese communist reign in East Turkestan can be considered the darkest chapters in the history of Uyghurs and East Turkestan. Under the current conditions, the very existence of Uyghur nation is under threat. The Chinese communist government has been carrying out a vicious campaign against Uyghurs and other indigenous people of East Turkestan in order to

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[17] Mark, K. 1854. On the History of the Eastern Question. *New York Daily Tribune* [Online]. Available: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/newspapers/new-york-tribune.htm [Accessed 06 Dec 2016].

permanently annex the lands of East Turkestan. Despite all the brutal and destructive campaigns by the Chinese government against the identity and existence, the Uyghurs and other indigenous people of East Turkestan refuse to be subjugated by China and are carrying on resistance torch, handed down to them by their ancestors, against Chinese occupation.[18]

Despite this alleged Islamic reopening and due to the economic, political, and geostrategic position of the Uyghurs (the central position of the Xinjiang region in Asia and its abundance of natural resources, fundamental to China's economic and industrial development), fundamental attitudes remain. Thus the construction of "subalternising" speeches and measures to repress identity manifestations of the Uyghur people continues to be part of the political programmes of the CCP. The feeling of "fear" conveyed by official Chinese discourses aims not just to create defensive mechanisms in order to unify the public opinion against a common enemy, but also to justify domination. It exploits the political will to develop policies, based on the legitimacy of a conflict, necessary to raze the "enemy".

It is clear, therefore, in China's Uyghur case that Islam as such plays a relatively low role or has insignificant value in itself in the construction of an Islamophobic discourse, which hides geopolitical and economic reasons more relevant to the government. Here religious creed acquires a secondary role, subject to issues of ethno-political, social, and economic needs as a key factor in establishing a global hegemonic hierarchy. As Bravo López (2011b, p. 569) rightly states, the same can be said about the relationship between Islamophobia and racism or cultural racism. There may be some elements of Islamophobia to be considered in some cases, but are sine qua non elements for its existence.

Indeed, Islamophobia can be confused with a form of racism or new racism because sometimes it is directed against minorities who are, indeed, racially categorised. But it is the perception of Islam as a threat itself which may cause the "racialisation" and radicalisation of Muslim identity or the theological threat posed by Islam to, for example, Christianity (just as in the case of Europe/Global North) or, in our study case, to the foundations of "Chinese" society advocated by the CCP. It is the need to identify

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[18] World Uyghur Congress. 2015. *East Turkestan* [Online]. Available: http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?page_id=29681 [Accessed 15 Dec 2016].

a threat, to identify Islam as embodied in Muslims as a threat, which results in converting Muslim identity into another involuntary identity. The Muslim will become identified, not by his own beliefs, but by his origin, by his ancestry, by a series of ethno-cultural traits and economic interests:

> The term 'Islamophobia' should be applied only to denote a hostile attitude towards Islam and Muslims based on the image of Islam as the enemy and as a vital, irrefutable and absolute threat to 'our' well-being and even to 'our' existence, irrespective of how Muslims are identified, whether on the basis of religious or ethnic criteria. (Bravo López 2011b, p. 570)

> Initially, it is a social experience, it is an experience lived directly by alleged Muslims. Not just openly Islamophobic acts, but being reduced to its status as an alleged Muslim […] It is a form of religious alteration, in which the discourses or behaviours of an individual are determined by his or her religious affiliation. It is, also, hostile speeches to Muslims as a group. With, behind it, the question of the legitimacy of their presence on the territory.[19] (Géraud 2013, p. 2)

Given these premises, therefore, it seems appropriate to register Islamophobia in the landscape of what Grosfoguel called "epistemic racisms"; Euro-American/Global North mentality, in its global epistemic domination draft, has launched a process of elimination or, in its absence, institutionalised "inferiorisation" of every single epistemology and cosmology which failed to meet its canons and hegemonic programmes, so that the "other" forms of knowledge were relegated to the territory of the non-rational and, therefore, inferior and subordinate (Grosfoguel 2010, p. 32):

> Islamophobia ultimately resembles a diffuse and permanent risk that places a heavy burden on Muslims. The heart of the tested Islamophobia is part of a general atmosphere of hostility, in the form of acts of low intensity, not always intelligible. The test of Islamophobia produces situations of permanent illegitimacy fuelled by a climate of suspicion. […] It tightens social relations, barriers, forges handicaps that, for some, add to other social diffi-

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[19] "*Au départ, c'est une expérience sociale, c'est une expérience vécue directement par des présumés musulmans. Pas seulement des actes ouvertement islamophobes, mais le fait d'être ramené à son statut de présumé musulman […] C'est une forme d'altérisation religieuse, où l'on va considérer que les discours ou les comportements d'un individu sont déterminés par son appartenance religieuse. Ce sont aussi des discours hostiles aux musulmans en tant que groupe. Avec, derrière, la question de la légitimité de leur présence sur le territoire*".

culties such as being a woman, belonging to a "visible minority", having a modest social status, a low level of education or residing in a disqualified and underserved territory. Islamophobia thus represents an additional weight in the mechanics of "negative discrimination".[20] (Hajjat and Mohammed 2013, p. 30)

At present, and moving in practical terms, this approach involves a series of measures to repress and discriminate against a human group, based on two counts: (1) its supposed inferiority and (2) its alleged dangerousness.

Regarding (1), in Section "The 'Chinese' Identity vs. Subaltern Identities", I will dwell longer on discussions about the ontological "inferiorisation" derived from the programmatic and hegemonic epistemic racism of the empowered on subalterns (Olivieri 2016). However, it seems important in influencing certain concepts (2) which have gained significant importance today, and have become part of our everyday and instrumentally misconstrued vocabulary. Concepts such as fundamentalism, Islamic/Islamist, and terrorism have become functional for the construction of subordinating identity discourses.

MINORITY NATIONALITIES AND MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS: SOCIO-LINGUISTIC CLARIFICATIONS

This section will look at the various issues concerning Muslim identities in China and how they are related to the concepts of minority nationality, ethnicity, race, community, and nation in China. In addition to the obvious anthropological difficulty of defining these terms, there is also the additional and not insignificant problem, to consider, of how these cate-

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[20] "*L'islamophobie s'apparente finalement à un risque diffus et permanent qui exerce une forte contrainte sur les musulman-e-s. Le cœur de l'islamophobie éprouvée s'inscrit dans un climat général d'hostilité, sous la forme d'actes de basse intensité, pas toujours intelligibles. L'épreuve de l'islamophobie produit des situations d'illégitimité permanente alimentées par un climat de suspicion. [...] Elle crispe les relations sociales, dresse des barrières, forge des handicaps qui, pour certains, s'ajoutent à d'autres difficultés sociales comme le fait d'être une femme, d'appartenir à une minorité 'visible', d'avoir un statut social modeste, un faible niveau de formation ou de résider dans un territoire disqualifié et mal desservi. L'islamophobie représente ainsi un poids supplémentaire dans la mécanique de la 'discrimination négative'*".

gories can be applied in the specific case of China and the specific terminology used for them in this context.

Confusingly *Minzu* (民族) is the Chinese word used to define many of the above-mentioned words as part of a single concept. The definition of *Minzu* given in dictionaries[21] is as follows:

> [N]ationality, nation, people, race: from an historical point of view this relates the state of evolution in which we can find all kinds of human community at different stages of social development.

And also:

> The name given to those related by natural causes (ethnic) groups. Designation of groups that share the same blood, life, language, religion and customs.

> The polysemy and ambiguities of the notion of *minzu* is the result of multiple intertextualities between the Japanese (*minzoku*), various versions of the concept of nation in different European languages (firstly German, but also English, French and Russian with *natsiya* and *narodnost*), and Chinese translations, besides being the consequence of the re-invention and transformation of the meanings of *minzu* within the Chinese intellectual and political space according to various political and ideological orientations of the speakers. (Villard 2010, p. 313)

From a historical perspective, this term is closely related to insurgent nationalism in China; that is, with the birth of a strong anti-Manchu sentiment in the late nineteenth century, which translated into the modern Western concept of "nation" and which was heavily conflated with the notion of "race". Further, in post-1949 communist politics *minzu* began to acquire some of the Soviet Union's matrix of connotations, that is, referring to "national issues" within the limits of the State.[22]

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[21] Zdic.net. 2015. 民族 [Online]. Available: http://www.zdic.net/c/1/143/313472.htm [Accessed 05 Dec 2016].

[22] Villard (2010, p. 314) quotes Stalin's (*Works*, pp. 380–382) definition of "nation" to explain this statement: "A nation is a historically constituted, sable community of people, formed on the basis of common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture [...]. A nation is not merely a historical category, but a historical category belonging to a definite epoch, the epoch of rising capitalism".

In the case of China, and due to its multi-ethnic constitution even before the founding of the PRC, the phrase *shaoshu minzu* (少数民族) was constructed to refer to the "minority nationalities" that made up the Chinese State:

> A nation other than the largest ethnic group in a multi-ethnic country, such as China, other than the Han.[23]

This included:

> Non-Han communities within the Chinese space, including refugees from various countries and foreign residents in the concessions. (Villard 2010, p. 314)

Hence, the names of *Huizu* (回族) for the *Hui* minority nationality, *weiwu'erzu* (维吾尔族) for the *Uyghur*, and *Hanzu* (汉族) for the *Han* nationality. Here, however, there occurs a major problem with important definitional implications. It is not unusual in China for the latter term, *hanzu*, to be used as a synonym for the Chinese *Zhonghua Minzu*, that is, a citizen of the Chinese nation.

The socio-political implications of this issue are far from irrelevant. First, the self-identification of the *Han* nationality with the whole of China, understood as a political and geographical entity, automatically exiled the other officially recognised nationalities from full national inclusion in the Chinese State. It also established a hierarchical relationship in which, effectively, only one of the nationalities, in its own right, was able to play a leadership role within the State. This:

> [P]articular status to the Han nationality … finds its origin in the nineteenth-century nationalist invention of the category of the Han as a majority ethnic/racial community in China. (Villard 2010, p. 316)

If, therefore, Zhongguo, China, is the result of the union of the 56 *minzu* (nationalities) that compose it, what relationship, then, does that establish between the *Hanzu—Han* nationality—and other minority *shaoshu minzu*—minority nationalities? What legitimises the complete appro-

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[23] Zdic.net. 2015. 少数民族 [Online]. Available: http://www.zdic.net/c/1/37/85116.htm [Accessed 05 Dec 2016].

priation of China's identity by the *Hans* to the exclusion of all other identities? Merely looking at the demographics alone, this involves ignoring all the political, hegemonic, and epistemological implications of a reality, that is, a multi-ethnic national identity mix, which represents an extremely complex situation when fully articulated.

In addition, if we add the problem of multiple language groups, the situation becomes even more complex. The official language of China is called Putonghua (普通话), that is, "common language",[24] and it was regarded, in its creation, by its supporters in the Chinese intellectual elite as the result of a natural and non-coercive linguistic amalgamation process. They regarded it as a kind of Bakhtinian hybridisation[25] of multiple languages either currently or historically present on Chinese territory (Villard 2010, p. 315), although this was a somewhat utopian view of realities. It also created another (linguistic) border between the "Chinese" and "inner Others" which led to an alternative national-linguistic discourse amongst the "Others" as to their identity. The Chinese/Han identity now imposes itself upon a multi-national reality as a single unitary block, deprived of all the national differences that actually compose it.

Han alone now acts as the normalised, legitimate, and actual carrier of all properly "Chinese" values and as Anserson's (1991) "imagined community". This is a community whose legitimate members do not actually know each other and they can only imagine others as the product of an ideal, a social situation, a geographic location, or a series of common physical, cultural, or statistical features.

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[24] At the beginning of the twentieth century, inspired by some phonetic elements from a local variant of what might be called "Beijing dialect" and elements from other language versions (dialects) of the territory of China, the standard pronunciation for the Chinese language was developed and defined. This standard pronunciation, named *Putonghua*, was born with the intent to officially establish a lingua franca through which all citizens of the Chinese State would be able to communicate with each other regardless from their native spoken languages. For more in-depth information about the subject, cf. Ping, C. 1999. *Modern Chinese. History and Sociolinguistics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

[25] Bakhtin (1981) defines, in this theory, dialogic "hybridization" as an instrument of permeability and freedom of languages to favour the communicative pragmatics between expressions of different times or contemporary cultural values, differentiated by heterogeneous contextual nuances or different idiomatic matrices, that is, by their heteroglossia.

The "Chinese" Identity Versus Subaltern Identities

With the emergence of post-colonial (Said 1990; Bhabha 2002, 2010; Spivak 1988) and decolonial (modernity/coloniality—Mignolo 2008; Mignolo et al. 2009; Grosfoguel 2004, 2010, 2012; Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006; Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007; Dussel 2004; epistemologies of the South—Santos 2010a, b and Santos and Meneses 2014) studies, the need to reformulate certain aspects of recent history under a new perspective arose. Post-colonialists proposed to do this via studying the way official histories were created, with the purpose of proposing an alternative project of State formation, one that reflects a plurality of histories. These were often "invisibilised" in projects of nation-state creation developed by those powers that Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2011) recently called the Global North, bearers of "Western" and "moderniser" values. To do this the most important post-colonial intellectuals proposed to give voice to a number of actors/subjects (the small voices of history proposed by Guha 2009) that until then had been relegated to the non-scientific field of "memories", due to their anti-nationalist character and therefore often accused of terrorism. The post-colonial discourse, therefore, can be applied not only to explain the field of construction of subaltern and "inferiorised" identities, but to the construction of knowledge that leads to the exclusion or systematic omission of all kinds of "epistemic Otherness", that is, other knowledge.

In the case of China, the construction of conflicting and "faced-to-each-other" identities[26] is a strongly widespread phenomenon, which has also acquired, in recent decades, an institutional character that does nothing but aggravate an exceptionally important situation, due to the conformation of political, ethnic, and cultural life.

Ethnically and Racially "Inferiorised" Identities

'Race' and 'ethnicity' sometimes have been treated as referring to the same things, sometimes as referring to very different things, sometimes as referring to subcategories of each other […] Social science has tended […] to

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[26] In order to delve more deeply into the very interesting topic of the construction of hybrid identities in China and how they are naturally blended in "mestisation" and producing their own particular results, cf. Lipman, J. 1996. Hyphenated Chinese: Sino-Muslim Identities in Modern China. *In:* Hershatter, G. et al. (eds.) *Remapping China. Fissures in Historical Terrain, Stanford: Stanford University Press*, 97–112.

accept uncritically a convention that says race has to do with physical differ-ence and ethnicity has to do with cultural differences. (Cornell and Hartmann 2005, pp. 25–26)

If we accept this as a working premise, ignoring the generalisations contained within it, we can use it to develop our analysis of our two minor-ity Muslim nationalities in China. First, one must differentiate the *Hui* nationality, ethnically separated from the *Hans*, by their moral and reli-gious values, art, and other cultural attributes. Here, the *Uyghur* national-ity, whose people, besides being linguistically, culturally, and religiously different, also appear somatically different from the *Hans*, because they come from the Turkic-Altaic ethnic group. In fact, the physical features of the Uyghur people resemble more closely those of the populations of Central and Minor Asia, whose ethnic lineage they effectively belong to.

However, it is necessary to consider that these categories only provide the pretext for the establishment of transnational relations ultimately dic-tated by processes of social construction, that is, in most cases in this area—social exclusion, piloted by empowered Han groups. This process alone, according to post-colonial theory, is what makes them "real" cate-gories, defined by Cornell and Hartmann as "built social categories", based on assumed primordial predications regarding certain differences between people:

> Race is largely the product of the assignment to others of biological differ-ence: powerful groups, wishing to draw a boundary between themselves and others, define those others as racially distinct. (Cornell and Hartmann 2005, p. 28)

It is necessary here to highlight how much modern research emphasises the arbitrariness of the processes in which differences are designated and used as tools of ontological categorisation and consequently of legitimisa-tion in a process of hierarchical categorisation. However, religion is a very specific categorisation in itself, although it may only be politically relevant when operationalised by political actors, as in the case of China and its racialisation/differentiation of Uyghur people for their religious beliefs. According to Barfield (2000, p. 519), the word "race" involves a set of contradictory, highly ideologically charged meanings, as well as implying a material reality to socially constructed hierarchical relationships. By includ-ing certain individuals in particular and defined "races", therefore, an

empowered group specifies the position of subaltern groups, thus keeping intact their power status and reaffirming their authority over others.

Consequently a racial categorisation involves processes of moral and attitudinal assessment, establishing an "abyssal line" between "able" and "inept", "moral" and "immoral", and ultimately "human-being" and "non-human-being". Meanwhile, ethnicity implies something different:

> Ethnicity is largely (although not exclusively) a product of self-assertions of collective identity and blood ties, based on descent or homeland: the community claims such an identity for itself, asserting its own distinctiveness or people-hood. (Cornell and Hartmann 2005, p. 28)

Following this definition, then, ethnic categorisation is distinguished by proceeding primarily from the people in a self-identified group as a sign of identity and belonging to it. This follows a process of self-perception as an imagined community that shares the same primordial and cultural origin but which is flexible and open to multiplicity and hybridisation. This is a consequence of centuries of coexistence and amalgamation of different cultures and patrons and with other categories. These terms and ideas were originally used in anthropology to refer to people, presumably belonging to the same society, who shared the same culture and, especially, the same language, which they transmitted relatively unchanged from generation to generation (Barfield 2000, p. 328). As Barth further proposed (1976, p. 14), the limits of an ethnic group constitute themselves as "self-identification", where people choose to use a few cultural attributes, often dress, language, housing, or the general lifestyle, as "signs or overt signs" of its uniqueness. Ethnic categories, though:

> [A]re largely the product of subordinate or minority group agency and activity, while racial categories typically are imposed by a dominant group on a less powerful one, with self-categorisation as an unspoken by-product of this process. (Cornell and Hartmann 2005, p. 33)

From our perspective, in trying to apply these explanations to Chinese national problems, one must highlight again the inherently constructed and social character of these different categories. And the way the two minority nationalities of our interest are included in these categories, ethnic and group/race, are products of a government programme of social inclusion/exclusion. This is both deliberate and inadvertent, as the natural

consequence of social, economic, and geopolitical policies and discrimination dictated by ignorance and fear of the other. Most recently, this has involved using the misnomer "war on terror", with its implications of an Islamic threat, which has become one of the most important agenda items within international community politics.

The categories of "race" and "ethnic group" are in fact, in the Chinese context, not to be understood in Eurocentric terms, but acquire different socio-political meanings depending on the government's economic and political needs and policies. This takes one back to the creation of identity discourses that serve to create a net separation line between the "I" (*Han*) and "others" (*Hui/Uyghur*), who are ontologically different and, therefore, inferior. This is a strategy that the Chinese government has employed, throughout its history, adopting different methods in different times. In some instances it has promoted institutional processes of "Sinicisation", in others, banning identity and cultural demonstrations of the targeted nationalities. Expression of identity, consequently, begins by reflecting a legitimate cultural aspiration but suddenly becomes an instrument of war when it is denied for the sake of a superordinate metropolitan one (Maalouf 2009, p. 40).

In our two cases, transnational relations between *Han/Hui* and *Han/Uyghur* national identities would appear consistent with the different national definitions given above. The *Hui* identity is regarded as ethnically separate from the *Han*—in terms of culture, religion, origin, customs, and social shaping. Yet, concurrently, it is integrated into the multi-ethnic, or pan-ethnic, society of China that has been, as stated above, appropriated by the Han majority group. However, the symbolic identity signs of the *Hui* people, from external features such as beards to clothing, eating habits, or grouping in neighbourhood communities, pose no barrier to social interaction with the wider nation. Nor do their more intimate and private practices, for example, Islamic morals, practices and religious functions, or hygiene restrictions, constitute an obstacle to social interaction with the majority population. Yet, they are regarded by China as "transgressors of basic taboos rejected by the majority society" (Barth 1976, p. 39).

As mentioned above, though, the establishment by the Chinese government of a narrative about the "Muslim-others", and the emphasis on the religious nature of, de facto, political and economic claims on the Uyghurs, creates an "Islamic" problem for itself. Meanwhile, the violence of restrictive politics on religious and cultural freedom generates the radicalisation of religious identity signs in the population.

However, *Han* identity has built itself in relation to what it is not; it has fixed the "other" to non-identify with, to describe itself negatively. In short, it follows the structure of binary opposition proposed by the structuralist theory of Saussure, and followed and developed by Lévi-Strauss—the need to determine what constitutes our own being, to define our own identity, characteristics and place in the world in which we live, that is, the need to have some knowledge of our culture and ourselves, always has to be ratified by an act of differentiation (Zhang 1988, p. 113). To this end, the definitions acquire a key role here. The government has strategically tried to influence the collective consciousness not just of the Chinese citizens, but also of the international community and sow instrumental images for its legitimacy, self-assertion, and the safeguarding of its hegemonic position. The portrayal of minorities in China, described as an "exoticised, and even eroticised" collective (Gladney 1994, p. 94), is functional for the construction of a majority identity, and for the conformation of the State itself as a unitary and powerful block. The traditions and identity of the Uyghur Muslim minority are therefore employed instrumentally by the State as an "attractive" and "primitive" folkloric element with which to undermine and thus be able to dominate the people who recognise themselves in it.

The "periphery" is thus a world that needs to be "Sinicisated" (read, "Hanisated"), incapable of "civilising" or "developing" by itself, so that the State sees its intervention legitimised. This idea also has the clear objective of subjugating the "Other" through a hegemonic discourse based on a knowledge/power dichotomy. Also, there is the ontological and epistemic opposition between (to reuse Hegelian categories) "China" (mature subject, strong, rational, masculine, dynamic, active) and "minority" (weak object, irrational, feminine, static, passive and at the same time exploiting the "terrorism narratives" of violent and dangerous).

As part of the Han homogeneity project the Chinese have spoken of and designated *Uyghurs* as "others". In doing this the government has not only used its *Han/Uyghur* dichotomy as a tool to unify the identity of the *Han* majority but also used the religious (Islam) dimension to integrate its opposition to minority nationalisms into a framework as part of the supposed "war on terror"—the aim being to manufacture an Islamic/terrorist threat, identified with minority ethnic identity demands, around which to unite and mobilise the Chinese people. This is furthered through a strategy of manipulation of public opinion, and the manufacture of scapegoats for the social problems and instability within the country (Kanat 2012).

From this it is hoped that any repressive measures taken by the State will then be accepted in the guise of counter-terrorism and security (Kanat 2012, p. 519). This produces a situation Maalouf (2009, p. 41) describes well, that when we assign one community the role of the lamb and another the wolf, what we are doing, even without knowing it in advance, is granting impunity to the crimes of one of the parties.

"War on Terror" as a Strategy of Institutional Repression

As already mentioned, historically the inclusion of East Turkistan within the confines of the Chinese nation-state has been a process not without difficulties. Government policies in the region have included mass migration of Han communities to Xinjiang "as a tool of control" (Bovingdon 2010, p. 78), which "clearly aimed at permanently altering the ethnic balance in the province and predictably angered the Turkish" (Bovingdon 2010, p. 36).

Policies have also included the forced cultural assimilation, continuous ethnic discrimination, and even violent limitations of religious freedoms (Kanat 2012). These have led to the creation of a sense of separation and hostility between the two populations, as well as a feeling of rejection by the "ontological other" perceived as an enemy.

A practical example of these repressive policies is seen in the religious repression that, even today, the State applies (in many cases violently) against the Uyghur minority. One current of this relates to the festival of *Ramaḍān*, which is celebrated by Muslims in China as well as throughout the rest of the world and is an important festival to Muslims. For some years now Uyghur communities have been complaining about an increasingly repressive attitude by the State towards the festival. If reports in the Chinese newspapers can be confirmed, the government itself would appear to be prohibiting Muslim officials, students, and citizens of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region from respecting the fasting period. This is done by either official communications (i.e. prohibitions) or actions that would preclude the normal development of religious activities, for example, closing eating establishments during night-time hours when the Ramadan fast is suspended (fasting is only required during daylight hours; Florcruz 2015, pp. 4–5). In addition further examples of governmental restrictive measures towards religious manifestations of Uyghur identity include the following:

> [A]uthorities frequently require religious groups to submit texts for exami-
> nation before they may be used for worship, [as well as] regional regulations
> forbidding mosque attendance for those under 18 years old. (Radio Free
> Asia 2010)

The Uyghur community sees in these measures a provocation that only
entails an increase in the (already important) tensions that exist between
the majority and the Muslim ethnicity.[27] And this in turn manufactures a
greater sense of Uyghur separateness and sense of Islamic identity.

Given that "[d]emocracy and freedom are notions too general and
widespread to constitute real objects of a conflict"[28] (Agamben 1990,
p. 58) and a critical analysis of the Uyghur demands, one can identify the
struggle between State and non-State as another facet of the "abyssal
line"[29] (to quote Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 2010a, b) between the
civilised and the "terrorist". Discrimination is a set of diffuse, rarely
explicit, and brutal constraints that cause victims to develop multiple strat-
egies, to "do with", that is, to build an experience that allows them not

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[27] For further and deeper information on the human rights violations committed by China
in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, it is advisable to consult the annual report prepared by
the World Uyghur Congress, which was published last March. Cf. World Uyghur Congress.
2015. *2014 Report on Human Rights Violations in East Turkestan* [Online]. Available:
http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/wp-content/uploads/WUC-report-2014.pdf
[Accessed 26 Jun 2015].

[28] "*Democrazia e libertà sono nozioni troppo generiche e diffuse per costituire oggetto reale di
un conflitto*".

[29] To synthesise the concept of "abyssal line", which is one of the bases of the epistemology
of Boaventura de Sousa Santos and his school of thought, the best is to quote the very theo-
riser of this concept and suggest to whom it may interest to check all the bibliography that
Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses, among the others, have published
about it. "Radical lines divide social reality into two universes, the 'this side of the line' uni-
verse and the 'other side of the line' universe. The division is such that 'the other side of the
line' disappears as reality, becomes non-existent, and in fact is produced as non-existent.
Non-existent does not exist in any form relevant or understandable to be. What is produced
as non-existent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the universe of what the accepted
conception of inclusion regards as its other. Fundamentally, what most characterises the
abysmal thought is, therefore, the impossibility of the presence of the two sides of the line.
This side of the line prevails insofar as it narrows the field of relevant reality. Beyond this,
there is only non-existence, invisibility, non-dialectical absence" (Santos 2010a, b,
pp. 29–30).

only to live as well as possible but also never to be assigned an identity that invalidates them[30] (Hajjat and Mohammed 2013, p. 31).

Recent events around the world and in China have, unfortunately, propitiated the spread of concepts such as terrorism and Islamist fundamentalism as prisms through which to interpret ethno-religious relations. This occurs as a consequence of current institutional media dissemination of information that colours all contemporary events with a lamentable ferocity, often presenting all events relating to Islam through the context of a "war on terror". Political demonstration, workers organising and militancy, students protests, the media includes everything in the same category, justifying itself in the eyes of the population and the international community. However, the spread of these concepts is seen by many as part of a programme of disinformation and dissemination on a large scale. These utilise generalist and largely unfounded prejudices that lead to a global sense of what we have defined as Islamophobia. In practice, this feeling, it is argued, is nothing more than a form of cultural racialism, "a form of racism that does not even mention the word 'race'" (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006, p. 4), and is based on moral judgements that create a relationship of domination/inferiority.

Consequently accusations of fundamentalism and terrorism have become weapons for the legitimisation of an Eurocentric programme by the Chinese government to enforce cohesion and political and epistemological hegemony against an enemy the West can commonly identify with, that is, Islam and Muslim peoples:

> If we define fundamentalism as those perspectives that assume their own cosmology and epistemology to be superior and as the only source of truth, inferiorising and denying equality to other epistemologies and cosmologies, then Eurocentrism is not merely a form of fundamentalism but the hegemonic fundamentalism in the world today. (Grosfoguel 2010)

Following this definition, therefore, the term "fundamentalism" takes on connotations of political domination dictated by the desire to extol a model of "normal" behaviour against another, in this case the Islamic one, considered dangerous and violent.

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[30] "*La discrimination se présente comme un ensemble de contraintes diffuses, rarement explicites et brutales, qui amènent les victimes à développer de multiples stratégies, à 'faire avec', c'est-à-dire à 'construire une expérience qui leur permette non seulement de vivre le mieux possible, mais aussi de ne jamais se laisser assigner une identité qui les invalide*".

In this regard, it seems vitally important to unlink the subjects of our investigation of a colonial and hegemonic vision that is, in our opinion, regrettably widespread. According to Grosfoguel (2010, p. 32):

> Epistemic racism in the form of epistemic Islamophobia is a foundational and constitutive logic of the modern/colonial world and of its legitimate forms of knowledge production.

In our case, we are faced with applying this definition in two different fields of application, first: we tried to free Chinese Islam from its inclusion in the Arab-Islamic world as dictated by colonial political and epistemological geographic discourse. Here we aim to demonstrate the existence of an exclusively Chinese-led discourse with its own characteristics that give it individual identity and ontological dignity in its own right.

Next, we tried to unravel the political implications of the Chinese nation-state Islamophobia and the subsequent accusations of terrorism by those social and political movements opposing the Uyghur people. The claims for autonomy and independence by the majority of Uyghur population are, ultimately, the product of a State-organised repression that hides under the more dignified, at least in the eyes of the international community, mask of an anti-(Islam) terrorism struggle:

> China's use of the war on terror was intended to halt international criticism of its repressive policies toward the Uyghur people, later it turned out to be a full-scale domestic campaign against terrorism. (Kanat 2012)

Religion, here, as Amin Maalouf (2009) states, tends to be nothing more than a "cement to ethnic groups at war",[31] as we have tried to show so far.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has not been to sponsor or justify national claims or, equally, to approve of the violent actions that some extremist fringes of the population have conducted against the State. Our purpose has simply been to critically investigate the often-perverse mechanisms by

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[31] "*Ciment à des ethnies en guerre*".

which the Chinese government has tied issues of internal transnational relations regarding its Muslim minority national identities into wider international discourses of Islamophobia. In so doing it has constructed a real "Islamic problem" to justify its own need of control over the region. Also, situations such as Uyghur-China relations are very vulnerable to racialist categorisation and the stigmatisation of certain social groups (Muslims, *in primis*), but this often belies both an objective analysis of relevant problems and intellectual honesty.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.