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Decolonial Ethics as a Framework for Anti-Islamophobic Social Work Praxis

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Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha, PhD.
Associate Professor, School of Social Work
University of Victoria
mehmoona@uvic.ca

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Abstract

“Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness” (All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, 2018, p. 50). With the alarming rise of populist Islamophobic sentiments across the Global North, Islamophobia represents a significant ethical issue of our times. Social workers are implicated in this form of racism due to factors including state-driven anti-terrorist legislation that co-opt social workers in the supposed ‘war on terror,’ frontline work with children and families of newcomers with refugee status, many of whom are recent arrivals from Muslim majority countries; as well as members of the public who internalize misperceptions of Islam and Muslims. Social work ethics articulated within the liberal enlightenment traditions and found in the Canadian Association of Social Work, are also colonial in nature and therefore limited in their ability to counter Islamophobia. As a result,

this article will use decolonial ethics as the framework to analyze and articulate anti-Islamophobic social work praxis as an ethical imperative to confronting Islamophobia as a colonial legacy. In so doing, the article will include an examination of the following facets of decolonial ethics: global moral responsibility, context specific, situated within the epistemologies of subaltern communities, knowledge as partial and geo-political, pluriversalist that rejects an abstract universal approach to ethics in favor of inter-cultural relations and dialogue.

Keywords: Ethics, decolonial theories, Anti-Islamophobic praxis, social work, colonization

Introduction

“Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness” (All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, 2018, p. 50). With the alarming rise of populist Islamophobic sentiments across the Global North, Islamophobia represents a significant ethical issue of current times (Bangstad, 2022). The contemporary instance of a rise in anti-Muslim sentiments and practices can be directly traced to the war on terror that Western countries (e.g., United States, Australia, Canada) have engaged in since 9/11 and the attack on the twin towers in New York by self-proclaimed Muslim jihadists (Croft, 2006). Western countries assembled a united response to these horrific attacks by proclaiming a ‘war on terror’ which does not name a concrete enemy nor is to be conducted within a particular time frame. McKendrick and Finch (2017) term this a non-linear war as it pursues terrorists wherever they are to be found globally as well as internally within nation-state boundaries. The war on terror has resulted in foreign and domestic intercultural relations that are marked by increasing securitization measures in the West due to the introduction of anti-terrorist legislation that affords them the power to initiate acts of surveillance and aggression globally, particularly in Muslim majority countries, as well as domestically in the name of maintaining national security (Ahmad, 2020).

The effect of anti-terrorist legislation on Muslims living in Western countries has been considerable. Many Muslims across the West have reported experiencing increased levels of hostility and violence from non-Muslims. According to research reports, Muslim men have been particularly targeted by law enforcement officials and treated as suspect (Jerome & Kazim, 2019). Similarly, the donning of traditional attire such as headcaps and head scarfs (i.e., hijabs) are reported as being viewed with increased suspicion, fear, or even anger by other members of society (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011; Jerome & Kazim, 2019). There has been a general rise in Islamophobia globally (Ahmad, 2020).

Social workers, who are often employed by the State or otherwise, are not immune to the effects of a securitized state nor to the presence of Islamophobia in their daily practices. Yet, there is very little scholarship available on Islamophobia and its effects on social work practice, as a particular instance of racism in our society (Smith, 2020). Even less is available in the curriculum on social work ethics education (Beck et al., 2017). This article is one response to address the gap in scholarship; it will do so by using decoloniality as a framework to define Islamophobia as well as discuss decolonial perspectives on ethics. Decolonial perspectives on ethics will then be used as a foundation for an articulation of an anti-Islamophobic social work ethics, which is the aim of this article.

Geo-Political Nature of Decolonial Ethics

For decolonial theorists, ethics are geo-political in nature and the ethical responses to Islamophobia for social workers practicing in the Global South (i.e., countries that are geographically situated in the southern hemisphere and have a history of being colonized), are different from those that are working in the Global North. Countries in the Global North have a history of being colonial powers or settler-colonial States. In the case of the former, the ethical challenge is to overturn the epistemic hegemony of previous colonial masters, including the role of orientalism, in supporting anti-Muslim sentiments and to reclaim knowledge that guided the ethics of inter-

cultural relations prior to being crushed under the weight of capitalism and colonialism (Gaillen, 2020; Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Mbembe, 2017). In the case of the Global North, the challenge is to recognize the privileges, epistemic and material, garnered through coloniality as well as develop an understanding of the nature of oppression that Islamophobia represents. It is also critical to understand the role of other systems of knowledge including philosophy, ethics, science, religion in collaborating in the colonization project to better challenge the prevailing, epistemic and ethical, hegemony within which social workers practice (Gaillen, 2020; Mignolo, 2011).

Decolonial Ethics

Decolonial theories are concerned with challenging coloniality as a global historical and contemporary fact. While colonization was planetary in nature with the Europeans controlling most of the rest of the world, since gaining independence from colonial rule in the mid-twentieth century, coloniality continues to exist in countries of the Global South. Coloniality refers to the legacy of colonization where the colonial logic of governance and intercultural relations continues to characterise societies from the Global South who have struggled successfully to gain independence from European sovereignty or direct rule (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2011).

Grounded in decolonial theories, decolonial ethicists are preoccupied with the ethical question of how to live together in a global environment that is historically and contemporaneously characterized by uneven power relationships (coloniality) where Eurocentric thought, ethics and knowledge is an assimilative and normative force (De Lissovoy, 2010; Odysseos, 2017). Marked by ethics of global responsibility, decolonial ethicists take a cosmopolitan stance. However, unlike liberal cosmopolitanism, decolonial ethicists reject the current system of political and cultural boundaries assumed of liberal ethics. They see the current system with its organisation of space into discrete nation-states and its inter-cultural relations based on a hierarchy of race and culture, as ethically unjust and a legacy of colonial violence that is exclusionary (Mamdani, 2020).

Decolonial ethics articulate values that have their basis in alternate ontologies and epistemologies. These consist of subaltern knowledges whose indigeneity has been a target of oppression and ethical traditions that are crushed (though not eliminated) through processes of colonization (Gaillen, 2020). This does not mean that decolonial ethicists want to return to a pristine past prior to colonization. Rather, their ethics reflect a fusion between Indigenous and other critical ethical traditions that are relevant to addressing colonial injustices (Grosfugel, 2011). Decolonizing epistemologies is an important aspect of decolonial ethics as a methodology by which to formulate ethics that are alternate to Western values.

The methodology of arriving at an ethical position is through inter-cultural dialogue. This process of taking an ethical stance is very different from Western philosophical traditions where ethical principles are abstracted from imagined scenarios and applied universally to particular situations (Dunford, 2017). For example, Rawls arrived at an understanding of liberal ethics by creating a story where a few people are blind folded and put into a room. They have no knowledge of the identities or life stories of the other people in the room. Their collective task is to abstract ethical principles by which liberal societies should conduct themselves. Through a process of rational deduction Rawls arrives at the conclusion that the principles that these imagined people would necessarily identify as universally applicable would be those of liberty and equality (Rawls, 2005).

Decolonial ethicists also emphasize pluriversality, both as an ethical value as well as a means by which to arrive at an articulation of values (Mbembe, 2017). Dunford (2017) describes pluriversality as “the value of a world in which other worlds fit” (p. 11) Pluriversality therefore refers to the value of equality and difference, it is the vision of a world where differences of values are acknowledged because all are equal (Mignolo, 2011). This is opposite of Western values that privilege universality as a value through a monolithic and static understanding of ethics as expressing a single universal truth. How an articulation of ethics is arrived at, as noted previously, is not pre-determined or a given, it is through the process of inter-cultural dialogue that ethics become apparent. Thus, the methodology by which

pluriversality becomes apparent is also pluriversal (Dunford, 2017). There is not the emphasis of arriving at a consensus, but rather an acknowledgement of living with differences in ethical world views based on an acknowledgement of cultural diversities, so long as the values of a particular group does not lead to the shutting down of the moral visions of any other group (Dunford, 2017).

Islamophobia: A Decolonial Perspective

There is no one universal definition of Islamophobia, its meaning is dependent on the perspective within which it is being viewed. In the view of decolonial theorists, Islamophobia is a form of cultural racism in which religion is culturalized and essentialized to create a scapegoat to widen the majority (read Christian/European) power base (Hafez, 2018). Historically, Islamophobia represents an instance of the cultural/racial hierarchy that colonization gave rise to and has always depended on globally by which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended (Hafez, 2018). In its contemporary guise Islamophobia is viewed as reflecting a continuity with its earlier history of colonization where Muslim subjects were constructed as the cultural/racial 'other' as a rationale for colonization and economic gain (Mbembe, 2017). Grosfugel (2011) suggests that colonization and coloniality oppressed the cultures of different groups in ways that intersected with and upheld economic domination. The University of California Berkeley Centre for Race and Gender (2022) reiterates a decolonial perspective on Islamophobia:

Islamophobia is a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by the existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve "civilizational rehab" of the target communities (Muslim or otherwise). Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended (para. 6).

According to Mbembe (2017), Islamophobia merely allowed an already existing structure of colonial thinking to expand widely into the rest of the world by classifying, hierarchizing, and differentiating between people. Thus, Islamophobia is a global phenomenon marking intercultural relations throughout space and time since the advent of colonization, starting from the 15th century because of Jewish and Muslim expulsion from Europe (rationalised along cultural and racial lines); the transatlantic slave trade; the colonization of the Middle East; and the present 'war on terror' (Grosfugel, 2012; Hafez, 2020).

Therefore, a decolonial perspective of Islamophobia situates the phenomenon to a much earlier time than the advent of the war on terror but sees a continuity between contemporary anti-terrorist moves by the west and the conquest and colonization of Muslim majority countries. Moreover, a decolonial perspective critiques orientalist construction of Muslims since the beginning of colonization as inherently linked to the economic/material and political interests of the west and their desire to maintain their power base. Challenging theorists who regard Islamophobia only as a matter of prejudice or racism, decolonial theorists view anti-Muslim racism as connoting something much more substantive- as an instance of Euro/American empire building even if the empire does not constitute direct rule. Thus, they ground anti-Islamic sentiments as being constitutive of coloniality and colonialism.

Post-colonial theorists, such as Said (1978), challenge the epistemic assumptions of Islamophobia as do decolonial theorists, however decolonial scholars do not stop at analyzing the orientalist nature of the discourses by which the figure of the Muslim is constructed in the west, they go further by calling for an epistemic shift that challenges the state-centric nature of knowledge production that define global inter-cultural relations, including those between Muslims and non-Muslims. In Grosfugel's (2012) perspective, decolonial theorists need to employ a broader range of knowledge that is not limited by western canonical thought, grounded as that is in coloniality. At the same time decolonial theorists are not determinative in their analysis of the kind of ethical alternatives that should exist within decolonial

intercultural relationships outside of Islamophobia. In concert with their approach to ethics, they suggest that a critical intercultural dialogue that engages the global demos with a diversity of epistemic/ethical/political traditions on inter-cultural relations, in all our pluriversalities should define how we want to live with each other as an alternative to colonial relationships that includes Islamophobia (Grosfugel, 2012; Hafez, 2018).

Specifically in terms of Islamophobia, according to Sayyid (2014), it is for Muslims themselves to recreate epistemologies/knowledge about themselves and the way they want to live that is grounded in their own cultural and epistemological traditions so that they have a voice and a place in the world that decenters the west-even when living in the west. For Sayyid, rather than only resisting the prejudices that Muslims experience, it is by questioning and critiquing the current world system that Muslims and their allies should re-enter the concept of Islamophobia.

Islamophobia and Social Work

The impact of securitization of State practices due to the 'war on terror' has impacted social work in countries of the Global North in diverse ways depending on the specific context of each country. For example, in Australia (Yassine & Briskman, 2019) and Britain (McKendrick & Finch, 2017), state anti-terrorism legislation has led to the development of social policies that directly coopt social workers in working with the state in its efforts at identifying and preventing Muslim youth assessed by government officials as likely to be radicalised. In Britain the PREVENT and CHANNEL policies have been developed as part of the national anti-terrorist legislation aimed specifically at diverting Muslim youth who exhibit extremism away from getting radicalised. The policy defines extremism as, "Vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs" (McKendrick & Finch, 2017, p. 324).

Social workers are appointed, particularly as radicalization is viewed as a child protection issue, to counsel these youth to re-integrate them into

society. The second social policy, CHANNEL, uses existing collaboration between all local state authorities and statutory partners (such as the education and health sectors, social services, children's and youth services and offender management services). This policy also uses the police to identify, once again, those youth that are likely to be drawn to terrorism and provide a support plan to discourage youth from pursuing terrorist activities.

Australia similarly has policies such as the countering violent extremism policy which is designed to similarly identify and prevent youth from radicalisation and extremism. The Australian association of social workers has embraced this policy by participating in training programs engendered under the auspices of this policy, in developing skills for identifying and preventing youth inclined towards extremism (Yassine & Briskman, 2019). In other countries such as Canada and the U.S. anti-terrorist laws have not directly co-opted social workers into participating in the anti-terrorism program. However, the over-representation of children from refugee newcomer backgrounds from Muslim majority countries in the child care system attests to the fact that social workers are very much involved in the lives of Muslim refugee newcomers (Dumbrill, 2009; Detlaff et al., 2016; Ma, 2021; Rabiah-Mohammed et al., 2022).

The effect of Western securitized states on social work practices whether because of policy initiatives that directly co-opt social workers in the war against terrorism or otherwise is to link troubled families with terror. The conflationary rhetoric that securitized states use to rationalize intervention in the lives of Muslim citizens, that can also be found in social policy documents, such as PREVENT and CHANNEL, construct every Muslim citizen particularly Muslim youth as suspect (McKendrick & Finch, 2017). Moreover, what is considered suspicious is their alterity, their difference assumed or otherwise, from Western values that employs the language of individual rights to security to rationalise intervention (Yassine & Briskman, 2019).

Youth who show proclivities to identifying with Islam by participating in rites and ceremonies or wearing Muslim traditional wear are particularly singled out as the object of government control and intervention to make

them more like their western counterparts (Smith, 2020). In other words, assimilation into Western ways of being, that assumes Muslim values are in binary opposition to Western ones, is seen as the cure to radicalization (Rabiah-Mohammed et al., 2022). Such social policies depict a clash of civilization imagery of Muslim-Western intercultural relationships that overlook the porous nature of this imagined border. As previously noted, a central aspect of colonization and coloniality is assimilation into European values and ways of life. Thus, when social work practices are aimed at sameness whether that be in terms of attempts at deradicalization through assimilation or conformity of parenting styles to Western standards, the result is Islamophobic racist practices.

The assumption in anti-terrorist legislation and social policies that devolve from this legislation as well as the depiction of Muslims in media essentialize expressions of Muslimness as inherently inclined to violence or terrorism (Yassine & Briskman, 2019). These assumptions in social policies turn them into a tool that governs the behaviour of a particular population in the name of national security and uses fear to maintain control over a particular segment of the population (Farooqui & Kaushik, 2020). Moreover, social policies do so through a Manichean viewpoint that treats Islamic cultures as being in binary opposition to Western ones, a 'them' versus 'us' mentality which has long been a tactic of colonization (Mamdani, 2004) and rewards those Muslims that conduct themselves most like westerners. There is a clear hierarchizing of cultures and race in the way that anti-terrorist legislation and social policies construct Islam and Muslims, with Christian based western values viewed as superior (Dumbrill, 2009). The long history of inter-cultural dialogue that has infused and enriched Judeo-Islamic-Christian civilizations are ignored by social policies aimed at deradicalization.

In countries where social policies do not explicitly involve social work practitioners in anti-terrorist efforts, there is no reason to believe that the prejudices that exist about Muslims in the general population are not present in social workers. In their report Islamophobia in Canada, Kanji et al.

(2017) summarize a variety of data sources regarding public perceptions of Muslims in Canada, and provide the following statistics:

46% of Canadians have an unfavourable view of Islam – more than for any other religious tradition; fewer than half of Canadians would find it “acceptable” for one of their children to marry a Muslim – lower than for any other religious group; 56% of Canadians believe that Islam suppresses women’s rights; more than half of people living in Ontario feel mainstream Muslim doctrines promote violence; 52% of Canadians feel that Muslims can only be trusted “a little” or “not at all”; 42% of Canadians think discrimination against Muslims is “mainly their fault”; 47% of Canadians support banning headscarves in public...; 51% support government surveillance of mosques (p. 3).

Education is critical to changing common perceptions and attitudes held about Muslims. Social work education therefore can play an important role in addressing prevailing prejudices and raising self-awareness of incipient Islamophobia that may be present in social workers. For instance, Savani et al. (2020) provide one of the few examples of including Islamophobia in social work curricula, which evidences prejudices that the students hold about Islam, such as views that Muslims suppress women’s rights and that Islam actively promotes violence, at the beginning of the course shift significantly upon completion. According to Savani et al., raising awareness of unconscious and commonly held biases about Islam and providing alternative ways by which to understand Islam using Muslim points of views is very effective in changing perceptions of Islam.

On-going professional training for social workers to address Islamophobia is similarly useful. As noted by Beck et al. (2017), social workers are susceptible to the orientalist discourse that they are exposed to daily about Islam and Muslims. Therefore, raising self-awareness through appropriate training can result in anti-islamophobia social work practice. Further, recognizing the impact of state securitization on social work practices, the conflationary language it adopts of Muslim clients as suspect (McKendrick & Finch, 2017), are important elements of initiating anti-Islamophobic practices. Social workers also need training in learning how to act as allies for

Muslim social workers who are at the forefront of resisting Islamophobia when supporting Muslim clients, when confronting systemic Islamophobia within social work agencies, and from non-Muslim clients (Farooqui & Kaushik, 2020; Smith, 2020). This training is akin to learning how to act as allies to other marginalized groups experiencing exclusions based on their race, sexual orientation, or disAbility.

However, while it is important to shift social workers' prejudices and racist practices in relation to Muslims through training, it is not enough to eradicate Islamophobia as it does not change the system within which such practices are generated and perpetuated. It does not change, for example the heightened levels in which state securitization is occurring all over the Western world in its on-going war on terror. Nor does it change the nature and impact of anti-terrorist legislations and the social policies that devolve from this legislation. Similarly, while self-awareness in social workers on ways by which they are impacted by negative constructions of Muslims is important, it depends on individual social worker's initiative to unlearn these prejudices on an on-going basis.

As previously discussed, if Islamophobia is understood primarily in terms of prejudice or racist attitudes then the initiatives listed above would be sufficient. However, a decolonial perspective of Islamophobia would ask for a more substantial change in praxis than a change of attitudes and prejudices implies. The final section of this article maps out a decolonial ethics of anti-Islamophobic social work praxis.

Towards a Decolonial Ethics of Anti-Islamophobic Social Work Praxis

Social work codes of ethics are commonly articulated within a liberal theoretical framework of ethics in many post-colonial nation-states of the Global South as well as countries of the Global North (Banks, 2020). The International Federation of Social Workers' Code of Ethics (IFSW, 2018) serves as a good example of the liberal-centric nature of ethics that has been adopted by social work organisations globally. Decolonial theorists have critiqued liberal articulations of ethics on three grounds: the universalization of

liberalism as the only way to articulate ethics (Mignolo, 2011); the individualist orientation of liberal ethics (Dunford, 2017) and, the close relationship between liberalism and colonization (Arneil, 2012). Mignolo (2011) points out that Liberal ethics are presented as the only and universal way to envision social justice, recommending instead a perspective which provincializes liberal ethics as one, European, ethical tradition amongst many others globally. As noted previously, one characteristic of colonization is the assimilative force of European thought as the only universally legitimate epistemology. The normative force that liberal ethics plays in the articulation of social work values globally attests to its assimilative powers. In settler colonial societies, such as Canada where a diversity of ethical traditions is clearly present in society, the official code of ethics (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005) does not acknowledge Indigenous values as part of its official narrative.

Social work codes of ethics are individualist in orientation. For example, in the Canadian Association of Social Workers (2005) *Code of Ethics*, under the value of “Pursuit of Social Justice” (p. 5), one of the ethics articulated is, “Social workers uphold the right of people to have access to resources to meet basic human needs” (p. 5). By using the language of liberal rights, this statement does not recognize the role of the capitalist system, which always has winners and losers, nor the communitarian nature of injustices where people from the Black community, for example are more likely to live in poverty because of racism. Moreover, liberal ethics and colonization are deeply enmeshed. The ‘fathers’ of liberal political thought, Locke Hobbes and Mills, articulated their understanding of the universal rights of autonomy and equality in “explicit opposition to the idle, irrational, custom-bound ‘Indian’ who may be transformed into a citizen but only if he/she gives up his/her ‘customs’ or ‘ways’ (Arneil, 2012, p. 492). Liberal ethics have played a contributing role in the colonizing project.

A decolonial anti-Islamophobic social work ethics therefore needs to be situated in traditions other than, though in conversation with, liberal ethics. What exactly these values and ethics are will differ based on the specific context of the society in which it is being articulated. In Canada for example,

the ethics that will inform anti-Islamophobic social work praxis will first be global in nature, that is they will be preoccupied with the question of how to live with Muslims on a global level because Islam as a global phenomenon transcends nation-state boundaries. Indigenous ethics and values must also inform ethical codes of social work practices in the Global North and are also non-state-centric in nature representing a diversity of Indigenous ethical traditions and values that are transnational in character. Transnational non-liberal ethical perspectives for example, will lead to a very different discussion than liberal assumptions of inter-cultural relationships that are restricted to the space of the nation-state.

Liberal articulations of inter-cultural relations, because they are state-centric, are largely preoccupied with the question of the ethics of diversity and multiculturalism amongst different groups living within singular nation-states (Kymlicka,1996). For example, an important source of ethics in the Muslim world is the Qur'an. Verse 4:1 of the Qur'an can be paraphrased as stating a belief that all beings were created from one soul and then divided into different peoples to get to know each other. This non-racialized difference-positive ethic of inter-group relations provides an alternative that eschews the racially hierarchical state-centric foundation that characterize inter-group relations in settler-colonial societies. Therefore, intercultural relationships between non-Muslim social workers and their Muslim clients, cannot solely be defined by state-centric social welfare rights of these clients that has its basis in their legal status of citizenship. These could be challenged in favor of a decolonial, even Islamic ethics informed view of inter-relationships based on one shared humanity rather than state centered rights discourse.

Anti-Islamophobic praxis will also consider Indigenous values of land-based relations, rather than property ownership as the basis for articulating values. Islamic values, such as those grounded in non-violence (Bashara, 2021) can also be included as an alternate way of articulating ethics that are situated within a global and non-western premises. Rather than autonomy, it would be the collective nature of oppression that would be given weight in the articulation of ethics. Based on the writings of Indigenous and Muslim

scholars, rather than freedom as an individual exercise in decision-making, it would be self-determination that would come to the forefront of an anti-Islamophobic social work ethics (Moosa-Mitha, 2009; 2014). In practice this would translate into an understanding that when working with Muslim clients, on issues such as integration into Western societies, these matters have long historical antecedents rooted in coloniality that are collective in nature. Therefore, focusing on the actions of individual Muslim clients to change their behaviour will miss the mark by overlooking the systemic nature of Islamophobia that assumes individual Muslims to be responsible for their lack of acceptance by mainstream society.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (2005) *Code of Ethics* also understands equality in liberal terms largely in terms of equitable access to health services and protection under the law. As described under the section “Pursuit of Social Justice” (p. 5) the ethical principles of equality are articulated thus: “Social workers advocate for fair and equitable access to public services and benefits. Social workers advocate for equal treatment and protection under the law and challenge injustices, especially injustices that affect the vulnerable and disadvantaged” (p. 5). However, as identified previously, anti-terrorist legislation as an expression of the law is unjust to Muslims living in Canada. The law of the land is not and has historically not been protective of minorities as is evidenced by the fact of residential schools in Canada, which legally and forcibly incarcerated Indigenous children into state run schools with the intention to destroy the culture, way of life and languages of Indigenous peoples (Carrière & Thomas, 2014). It is of course important that all people have equal access to health services, but a decolonial perspective of the ethics of equality requires a more robust and radical reinterpretation of the term equality. How equality is to be defined explicitly, again, must come from inter-cultural dialogues between Muslims, other faith traditions, including Christian, as well as Indigenous and other secular and non-faith communities. For example, non-Muslim social workers who hold liberal feminist values may find it hard to relate to Muslim women wearing hijabs (head scarf) assuming these women to be under patriarchal domination. The hijab holds a diversity of significance for Muslim

women, imposing a West centric and monolithic view of the hijab is to understand equality as sameness rather than equality as connoting equal respect based on difference.

An anti-Islamophobic ethics would suggest that pluriversalism be the guiding value and approach to defining equality. As discussed earlier this would mean an orientation towards rejecting universalism that treats people as equal on the condition of sameness to an alternate imaginary where difference is centralised through a valuing of different world views as having an equal presence and status in society. A pluriversalist understanding of equality has several implications for anti-Islamophobic social work praxis. It means that social workers will be led by Muslims in having a voice in defining their values, knowledge traditions and ways of life. In doing so, Muslims will have the space to feel like they have a place in societies of the Global North rather than having the non-Muslim majority make assumptions about who Muslims really are or being regarded as less than where they may differ from Europeans in their beliefs and ways of life. As mentioned earlier, Sayyid (2014) considers the inability for Muslims to have such a voice as a significant experience of feeling colonized and experiencing a lack of belonging.

Pluriversality, which the Zapatistas define as 'being different because we are equal' (Mignolo, 2002) has the real potential of offering social workers practicing in the West to commit "epistemic disobedience" by knowing something differently not through exercises of cultural competency but by radically shifting not only what they know but how they know through a critical introspection of the process by which certain truth claims come to be known as legitimate and universal and who benefits from making these claims. In real terms then, anti-Islamophobic social work praxis requires social workers not to have to *like* the values or diverse world views by which Muslims may identify themselves, rather it will mean that they will accept a "world where many worlds fit" (Dunford, 2017, p. 11) by moving away from the gatekeeper role they often have where they assess others on the basis of conformity to Western standards. For example, social workers who hold a secular view of religion as a private matter may find their Muslim clients

views of Islam as challenging; say when Muslim clients ask for appointments that are outside of the times of obligatory prayer (*namaz*) or Muslim clients may hold strong views against alcohol consumption. Social workers need to practice cultural humility in these cases and respect the world views of these clients without necessarily changing their own.

Dunford (2017) cautions that pluriversality as a value does not mean that all world views must be acknowledged as being of equal standing. Indeed paradoxically, in the name of social justice, the limits of all worldviews being treated as equally valid would be regarded as a universal standard insofar they do not shut out or exclude other world views. Importantly, for social workers to get to know what communities mean by feeling heard or shut down, will require a complex process of inter-cultural dialogue between them and their clients. Social workers will need to be guided by their Muslim client, where both parties will learn important lessons in terms of what it means to have a voice and what makes people feel like they have been shut down (Savani et al., 2020; Smith, 2020). The world occupied by social workers and that of Muslim communities are not parallel universes, rather they are pluralistic ones precisely because of their inter-action and inter-dependence on each other in forming a sense of self that is always shifting and evolving in conversations with others. Anti-Islamophobic social work praxis therefore means not only valuing pluriversality but also adopting a pluriversal approach to understanding diversity.

Conclusion

Over the course of this article, points made have included the call for an anti-Islamophobic social work ethical praxis that decenters the West in its ethical formulation and epistemology. Decolonial definitions of Islamophobia go further than defining Islamophobia as another form of racism, to include an examination of the global and historical processes of colonization and its aftermath of which it is a result. Using historical awareness of the close relationship between liberal ethics and colonization, decolonial anti-Islamophobic social work ethics would be grounded in a multiplicity of traditions

and values. Decolonial social work ethics would also be global and collectivist in orientation. Most importantly I have argued for pluriversality both as a value and as an approach to the articulation of anti-Islamophobia social work ethics, that cannot be predetermined in advance and is always evolving through inter-cultural dialogue and relationships.

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