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# Politicizing Muslims: Constructing a 'Moderate' Islam

Lamiya Khandaker

Connecticut College, lkhandak@conncoll.edu

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The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

**Politicizing Muslims:  
The Construction of a 'Moderate' Islam**

An Honors Thesis Presented by  
**Lamiya Khandaker**

To the Department of Global Islamic Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement for  
Honors in the Major Field

Connecticut College  
New London  
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When I first arrived at Connecticut College as a freshman, I believed I had it all figured out, because that is the kind of person that I am—I am confident about my opinions, until I am not. I thought I would double major in Political Science and Philosophy, and have a law school acceptance by now. Instead, I will be attending Harvard Divinity School to obtain a Masters of Theological Studies (MTS) degree in Religious Studies, and could not be more content with where my life is headed.

I preface with this because my first encounter with my academic advisor, Professor Uddin, made me re-think the direction I wanted my life to go in. I took my first class with her back in my spring semester of sophomore year, and then another, and then another, until she was in my life every semester since. It is because of her influence that made me realize I want to pursue work—both scholarly and activist—to improve the conditions of my people and others. I thought of the idea, the making of ‘moderate’ Islam, as an independent research back in the summer of 2016. After countless phone calls and back-and-forths with Professor Uddin, this eventually transpired into my honors thesis.

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*“And lower unto them the wing of submission and humility through mercy, and say: ‘My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was small.’” (Quran, 17:24)*

*To my parents, Roxana and Mohammed Khandaker*

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## Introduction

Following the attacks on the twin towers, a new discourse surrounding Muslims took precedence among politicians, academics, and media. The term ‘moderate’ became key in identifying Muslims properly assimilated within Western culture. The moderate Muslim is presented as a Muslim who moderately practices the faith, and believes in liberal and secular values. The ‘moderate’ Muslim is good. They are Americanized, loyal, and tolerant. It is assumed that exposure to European Enlightenment values create the moderate Muslim. If it were not for exposure to secular liberalism, Muslims would remain intolerant and conservative like the imagined Muslims back home in the East living under theocratic societies. Furthermore, the moderate Muslim counters the extremist Muslim. The good moderate Muslim is positioned against those Muslims whose Islamic values are incompatible with Western civilization: the bad fundamentalist, jihadist, Islamist, extremist, and conservative Muslim. Essentially, the term serves to provide an authoritative definition on what constitutes the “right Islam.” Moderation, however, remains contested—after all, what is moderation? Who gets to decide?

My first chapter, “Perceptions of the ‘Immoderate’ Muslim,” focuses on negative images associated with Muslims, and particularly Muslims abroad. The construction of the ‘immoderate,’ and ‘foreign’ Muslim ‘other,’ are the images we usually see on our TV screens, the news, and Hollywood movies—images of burka-clad women, violent men, stoning, and other brutal practices. Islam is depicted as essentially terroristic, oppressive, and intolerant. As of recent, ISIS provides the latest composite image of Islam and its threat. Edward Said argues that these constant images, and the language around it, are a facet of *orientalism*—the stereotyping and ‘other-izing’ of non-Western societies as inherently inferior, backward, and barbaric.

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Orientalist depictions are not merely constructed stereotypes in the mind, but an entire system in which these generalizations become marketed as “facts” and “knowledge.” The Orientalist—one who studies the “other,” thinks that they know more about the culture, traditions, and morals of these “inferior” societies more than these societies know about themselves. Furthermore, only the Orientalist can be “objective.” Although Edward Said’s analysis predates 9/11, the attack on the twin towers ushered a new wave of *Islam*-racist orientalism, in which stereotypes of the past have become reinforced in the present.

The chapter delves into the “objective” knowledge production that goes into creating images of the ‘foreign’ Muslim through the use of polling and data; the perceptions people have of Western Muslims versus non-Western Muslims in regard to ‘moderation’; misconceptions of *Shari’a* and the history of *Shari’a* in the “Muslim world”; and how colonialism affected the application of *Shari’a* in Muslim countries. I demonstrate that perceptions of the ‘immoderate’ Muslim are developed around the mainstream fear of *Shari’a* among Westerners. Positive attitudes towards *Shari’a* among Muslims coupled with orientalist images of Muslims abroad enforce representations of the ‘immoderate’ Muslim. However, the history of *Shari’a* throughout the Muslim world, its intended meaning, and its recent developments reveal that Western imperialist interventions in the “Muslim world” have led to the very negative orientalist images of Muslims today. Moreover, Muslims living in the West have internalized these orientalist portrayals of Muslims abroad, leading to a phenomenon of ‘Western Muslim exceptionalism’—in which Muslims in the West believe that they contain a more ‘moderate’ understanding of Islam. This leads to the pivotal question and central focus of my thesis on what it even means to be a ‘moderate’ Muslim.



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Chapter two, “Debating the Moderate Muslim,” delves into the various understandings of ‘moderation’ provided between the secular West and influential practicing Muslims. The chapter begins with Western philosophies and theories on secularism and modernization that influence Western notions of the religion’s role in society, how it should be regulated, and how it may be applied to Muslims. Moderation in Western society is a reflection of secular, modern, and liberal beliefs and values. However, a closer study of secularism reveals that the shape secularism takes is informed by social and political environments in which it is cultivated. There is an assumption, that moderation can only be the result of a single process of secular modernization. However, this “one shoe-size fits all” oversimplifies the critical nuances found in the history, culture, and socio-economic-politics of each society, and assumes that there exists only one way for societies to develop the “right” way. Even though this notion has been debunked by scholars, this attitude still remains common among the Western consciousness. Therefore, the ‘moderate’ discourse in Western Europe and the US centers on the ability of Muslims to secularize and liberalize themselves. In this chapter I will demonstrate the different arguments put forth for ‘moderation,’ its reasoning, and its consequences.

Influential practicing Muslims, on the other hand, have a different understanding of moderation. For most, ‘moderation’ entails a careful balance of faith between dogmatic secularism and religious extremism. This does not suggest that being a devout follower of Islam remains mutually exclusive from assimilating into Western society—rather the opposite. ‘Moderate’ Muslims, by the standard of devout Muslims, is the Western expression of Islam in which Muslims can integrate Western values into Islam without compromising Islam’s integrity. However, this chapter demonstrates that the seemingly compromising nature between Western and Muslim interpretations of ‘moderation’ is not an accurate depiction of reality. Devout and

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integrated Western Muslims are still stigmatized and accused of potential extremism because of their criticisms of Western foreign and domestic politics, despite their integration into Western society. False pretenses suggest that ‘moderation’ is simply about the non-violent, tolerant, and Western-integrated practice of faith. However, a deeper investigation into the ‘moderate’ discourse reveals that ‘moderation’ is a Western political construct to label Muslims loyal to Western political interests while disparaging Muslims who criticize Western politics. This requires an analysis into the active policies that allows this construction to take place.

The third chapter, “Making the ‘Moderate’ Muslim,” looks into the systematic construction of ‘moderate’ Muslims through a combination of state policies, popular rhetoric, and non-state activism rooted in *Islam*-racism. Through a rhetoric of national security, state policies have actively targeted Muslims who “look Muslim” and practice conservatively. Devout Muslims, albeit positive contributors to society and well-integrated, are silenced from fear as their very existence is viewed with suspicion. A well-regulated and well-funded network of *Islam*-racist organizations, think-tanks, politicians, activists, and token Muslim spokespeople further maintain and legitimize the stigmas associated with practicing Muslims. The work these groups engage in purposefully conflate mainstream Muslims with extremists, and emphasize the importance of ‘moderate’ Muslim cooperation with the state to actively fight against “Islamic radicalism.” Muslims who fail to show patriotic loyalty towards their American or European homes are viewed as part of the problem, and any form of criticism of Western intervention in the “Muslim world” by Muslims is an immediate red-flag on their ‘moderation.’

Through these chapters, I show that the ‘moderate’ Muslim rhetoric is problematic as it is rooted in a particular political agenda. To describe Muslims as ‘moderate’ further aids in their stigmatization, and takes away their political agency to criticize the West without an assault on

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their religion or identity. Muslims who condemn policies of the U.S. and Western European powers are easily labeled as *Islamists*—a disparaging term to describe followers of a political Islam, in which their politics are influenced by their ‘backward’ religion. It remains unacceptable for Muslims to hold political opinions critical of the state without being labeled national security threats, unless Muslims are ‘moderate’ by Western standards. However, to be a ‘moderate’ Muslim is also being a political Muslim albeit, one that accepts Western political interests, Western hegemony, and Western values of neo-liberal capitalism.

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## Chapter 1: Perceptions of the ‘Immoderate’ *Foreign Muslim*

In a world with a rapidly growing Muslim population predicted to surpass 2.8 billion by the year 2050<sup>1</sup>, how can we come to terms with the attitudes and perceptions of a vastly diverse population of 1.6 billion current adherents of Islam spanning across all continents? As the West enters a new phase of conflict with ideologies contrary to its own, it remains pertinent to understand the role of Islam and Muslims in relation to modern day neo-liberalism, secularism and extremism. American political scientist, Samuel Huntington, theorized that the next progression of conflict following the Cold War will not be from economic or ideological differences, but rather a clash of eight major civilizations vying for cultural and religious supremacy over the world’s resources.<sup>2</sup> Huntington believes that regions will rescind the process of Westernization and fall back into their respective cultural identities, exacerbating a kind of civilizational identity politics that will erupt at “fault lines.”<sup>3</sup> Although Huntington’s argument has been widely discredited and criticized for its simplicity and dismissal of complex intersectional identities, the attitude towards Islam as a monolithic civilization that remains inherently antithetical to the West, pervades the minds of many and has been politically influential in the West. Many Western societies have adopted the belief that Islam in non-

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<sup>1</sup> Chappell, Bill. "World's Muslim Population Will Surpass Christians This Century, Pew Says." NPR, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Huntington, Samuel. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (1993), p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.29. Huntington argues that eight major civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African, will become more culturally conscious with globalization and greater interaction, pitting non-Western cultures against the West. Conflicts will become more regional as each region will represent certain cultural and religious values. Fault lines refers to the points of demarcation separating one civilizational culture from another. Lacking complete nuance, Huntington fails to expand on the complexities behind culture, identity, and transmigration completely Orientalizing non-Western traditions. Furthermore, he focuses more on cultural differences as a point of contention, while dismissing economic inequalities, aggressions on state sovereignty, human rights abuses and neo-liberal imperialism.

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Westernized societies is a backward, intolerant and ‘immoderate’ ideology that threatens modernity and human rights.

### **How Numbers Construct Images: Shari’a, Polling, and the Bad Foreign Muslims**

In 2015, the Pew Research Center, a reputable research fact-tank based in Washington D.C, published a report detailing various attitudes of Muslims around the world on multiple issues, titled “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society.”<sup>4</sup> The report gathered data from participants from about 39 Muslim-majority countries (out of the estimated 50 Muslim-majority countries) from six different regions of the world (including Southeastern Europe, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Middle East-North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa), not including the millions of Muslims living in non-Muslim majority states such as India, China, France, the United Kingdom, Mexico or Latin America. The data reflects the opinions of Muslims in favor and not in favor of *Shari’a* law on subjects ranging from homosexuality, corporal punishment, women’s rights, religious freedom, and violence. As one of the more popularly cited reports by various blogs, research and news media—the Pew Research Center’s data manages to reinforce stereotypical images of a foreign Islam at odds with the modern world.

The report finds that a substantial number of Muslims remain deeply committed to their faith, believe in the implementation of *Shari’a* in politics and society, believe that women are obliged to always obey their husbands, and view certain behaviors such as homosexuality, drinking, and prostitution as immoral. However, the report also indicates that certain patterns in attitudes are based on regional differences. For example, more secular regions influenced by the Communist USSR, such as Southeastern Europe and Central Asia, are more likely to hold

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<sup>4</sup> *The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*. The Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C, 2015.

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“moderate” attitudes regarding religion, than South Asia, the Middle East or Sub-Saharan Africa. While the Pew data shows that those in favor of *Shari’a* law in all regions hold slightly more conservative attitudes on certain issues, it also shows a diversity of opinions in how *Shari’a* is understood and how it should be implemented.

A closer analysis and critique of this data, however, reveals that the Pew statistics do not paint an accurate and holistic picture of Muslims’ relationship to Islam. A superficial reading of this research can allow for politically motivated websites like *Breitbart*<sup>5</sup> or *The Religion of Peace*<sup>6</sup> to further perpetrate negative perceptions of Muslims and Islam as dangerously ideological and violent by cherry-picking generalized statistics that stand out, while ignoring others. One example of a popularly cited statistic is when the Pew report asked participants in favor of *Shari’a* how they want *Shari’a* implemented; the report framed this question to their audience as: “What do Sharia Supporters Want?” According to the median percent of respondents,<sup>7</sup> a majority of South Asian (81% and 76% respectively) and Middle Eastern respondents (57% and 56%) favored severe corporal punishment and the death penalty for apostasy. The other regions (Southeast Asia, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe) held much lower median percentages. The median percent neither reflects the general attitudes of all people in countries surveyed in the given region, nor does it reflect the circumstances of how respondents believe *Shari’a* should be applied. Therefore, these numbers provide an insufficient correlation between those who support *Shari’a* and supposed intolerant beliefs. Moreover, the

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<sup>5</sup> Hale, Virginia. “Survey Reveals Aggressive Pro-Shari’a Attitudes in Countries Providing Major Source of EU Immigrants.” *Breitbart*, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> “Muslim Opinion Polls.” *The Religion of Peace*. Accessed February 05, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> *The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*. “The median is the middle number in a list of numbers sorted from highest to lowest. On many questions in this report, medians are reported for groups of countries to help readers see regional patterns,” p. 23

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framing of this question suggests that Muslims who favor *Shari'a* only understand its implementation as a system of penal code, further perpetuating misunderstandings of *Shari'a*.

On the outset, it seems as if these polls conducted by research fact-tanks, like the Pew Center, allow for people to develop informed understandings of what Islam means to Muslims. However, the contrary remains true. These numbers and data measure a superficial count of opinions towards particularly designed questions originating from common negative tropes that cater to a largely Western audience. They do not provide nuanced understandings of what *Shari'a* is, what the socio-political climate of the country being surveyed is, what the historical development of Islam in the region (culturally and politically) has been, what the education levels of the respondents are, nor how specific interpretations of Islam have influenced the country (i.e. state sponsored religion, independent religious institutions, or religious political parties [*Islamists*]). The polling of Muslims seldom question Muslim attitudes towards education, healthcare, welfare, warfare, nationalism, government corruption, their concept of human rights, their community and family values, or how they perceive their contributive roles to society.

Through data, think tanks, and preconceived notions rooted in *orientalism*,<sup>8</sup> Muslims in non-Western countries are perceived as a highly conservative and intolerant people with immoderate attitudes towards liberal notions of human rights and Western concepts of secular tolerance. Attitudes toward foreign Muslims are no longer formed through simple bias, but are

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Said deconstructed *orientalism*, an academic field studying the characteristics and cultures of “Eastern civilizations,” as a problematic and inherently racist mode of study that *otherizes*, *romanticizes* and *exoticizes* peoples that do not fit Western standards of what is considered normal. By producing scholarship and knowledge about peoples from the “Orient,” the West imposes their own ideas and understandings of Oriental culture as “facts” that ultimately dehumanize and inferior-ize peoples associated with Oriental culture because of their supposed backwardness and barbarity. Orientalism has provided the basis for justifying colonization, imperialism and Western foreign policy. Refer to: Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

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believed to be legitimized through measured numbers “proving” that Islam and the West are ultimately incompatible. Orientalists, Western Conservatives, and dogmatic secularists such as Bernard Lewis<sup>9</sup>, Daniel Pipes<sup>10</sup> and Dr. Zuhdi Jasser<sup>11</sup>, feed off these very statistics that further alienate Muslims globally from the West, to further certain political agendas.

### **Constructing the Good Muslim, Bad Muslim**

Mahmood Mamdani, a distinguished political scientist at Columbia University, in his work titled *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, focuses on the politically constructed narratives that polarize Western Muslims from non-Western Muslims, indicating that the former is viewed more positively than the latter. Mamdani argues that the good-Muslim, bad-Muslim discourse originates from Bernard Lewis during his time as a policy advisor to the Bush administration. Lewis believes that pitting Muslims against each other would solve the “crisis of Islam,”<sup>12</sup> by allowing westernized Muslims to fix the internal problems of ‘backward’ foreign Muslims, rather than having the United States or Western governments overtly intervene in the affairs of Islamic societies.

Premised from Said’s *Orientalism*, Mamdani describes Lewis’s discourse as a product of “Culture Talk.” Culture Talk is a flawed understanding of culture in political and territorial

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Lewis is a British-American academic of Oriental Studies that has authored of several books arguing that Islam is a flawed ideology and incompatible with Western values. Some titles include: *What Went Wrong?*, *The Crisis of Islam*, and *Islam and the West*.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Pipes, founder of the conservative think-tank the Middle East Forum, is an American commentator on the Middle East and Islam. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), an advocacy center for underrepresented groups, Pipes is a designated Islamophobe who actively speaks against Islam as a violent ideology.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, the founder of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD), is a politically conservative Muslim advocate for secularism, and actively against any ideologies concerning politicized Islam.

<sup>12</sup> Lewis argues that the main crisis with Islam is in their fundamental belief in submission to God’s will, preventing their ability to progress and flourish in the modernized secular world. Their inherent mindset makes Muslims more prone to government by dictatorship and tyranny because Muslims are naturally a submissive people. For him, Islam is the reason for many of the ‘Muslim world’s’ problems. Refer to: Lewis, Bernard. *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2004.



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terms, assuming that culture is an ideology when associated with a tangible place, despite the fact that “it does not make sense to think of culture in political—and therefore, territorial terms. States are territorial; culture is not.”<sup>13</sup> Oftentimes, Conservative groups and fringe right-wing Islamophobic organizations fixate on the idea of Islam as a foreign country and territorial enemy of the West. In addition to the concept of a physical barrier between the two, there is also a perceived moral barrier creating these “imagined communities.”<sup>14</sup>

Zareena Grewal defines this imagined community as “moral geographies [that] are constituted by a set of ethical and political assertions about a piece of land that produce a shared, conceptual map among the lands’ inhabitants.”<sup>15</sup> The commonly used phrase, “the Muslim-world” encourages the idea that there exists an entire geographical region in contrast to Western civilization, further perpetuating theories like that of Huntington’s. Mahmood asks, however, whether “it makes sense to write political histories of Islam that read like histories of places like the Middle East? Or to write political histories of states in the Middle East as if these were no more than political histories of Islam there?”<sup>16</sup> He proposes that “we need to think of culture in terms that are both historical and non-territorial.”<sup>17</sup> It would be a fool’s errand to assume that Islam remains foreign to the West, erasing the hundreds of years of history of Islam in Europe, and the history Western influence in Islamic regions.<sup>18</sup> In other words, Islam and its cultural influences must be understood with more flexibility taking into account elements of socio-

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<sup>13</sup> Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, 2004, p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Grewal, Zareena. *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 2014, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Mamdani, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012) and Hodgson, G.S. Marshall. *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974).

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political and historical developments, without reducing ‘Islamicate’<sup>19</sup> societies as simple byproducts of Islam as a rigid and spatially located ideology.

When discussing the current political state of affairs and the fringe Muslim extremist groups carrying out violent attacks, politicians like Donald Trump, and media outlets like Fox News, purposefully engage in rhetoric that specifically describe political violence as *Islamic* terrorism. There is an implicit claim being made here; that violence committed by Muslims is rooted in a theological violence influenced by an immoderate and backward foreign culture. Consequently, these attitudes detrimentally affect significant segments of the population as they translate into governmental policies. For instance, Trump’s executive order titled, “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” explicitly states its purpose in protecting Americans from “would-be terrorists” that are “foreign nationals” from seven “high risk” Muslim-majority countries.<sup>20</sup> The executive order arguably remains a Muslim ban despite encoded language stating otherwise. CBS News estimates that about half of the country (45%)<sup>21</sup> supports Trump’s executive order, accepting the idea that Muslims abroad are bad Muslims prone to violence.

Mamdani argues that the perception of *Islamic* violence as inherently distinct from political violence exists because the West justifies and legitimizes its own political violence because it serves as a prerequisite to progress as an end goal; and, therefore, “political violence in modern society that does not fit the story of progress tends to get discussed in theological

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<sup>19</sup> A term invented by Marshall Hodgson so as not to conflate what is *Islamic* with what is *Islamicate*. *Islamic* refers to that which is influenced by Islam’s religious principles. *Islamicate* refers to regions that are predominantly Muslim or ruled by Muslims, but what occurs within them (i.e. innovations, arts, culture, laws) are not necessarily influenced by Islamic religious principles.

<sup>20</sup> “Full Executive Order Text: Trump’s Action Limiting Refugees into the U.S.” New York Times. January 27, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> “Americans Sharply Divide Along Partisan Lines Over Travel Ban, Trump: CBS News Poll.” CBS News. February 03, 2017.

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terms.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, any violence committed by Muslims must be considered illegitimate. Because Islam is perceived as backwards, any violence committed by Muslim groups by default is understood as action stemming from a flawed theology, and not as having its roots in socio-political frustrations and marginalization. Thus, the foreign non-Western Muslim is perceived as non-progressive, extreme, and prone to violence in contrast to the “good Muslim.” According to neo-liberal Democrats and Republicans, from George W. Bush to Hillary Clinton, “good Muslims” are Western, American, and remain actively engaged in the fight against terrorism.<sup>23</sup> They are loyal, patriotic, and “moderate.” How do we know this? After all, *according to* the Pew Research Center, American Muslims are more likely to be tolerant, pluralistic and non-violent.<sup>24</sup> Selective data and polling has effectively imprinted problematic and divisive attitudes perpetuating tropes of the ‘moderate good Muslim’ against the ‘foreign bad Muslim.’

### **Western Muslim Exceptionalism: Moderate American Muslims vs. Muslims Abroad**

“I went to the West and saw Islam, but no Muslims; I got back to the East and saw Muslims, but not Islam,” said the greatly respected Egyptian Islamic jurist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Muhammad Abdu, after returning from France in 1888.<sup>25</sup> Referring to concepts of Western freedoms and human rights, Abdu spoke to a feeling still shared by many 129 years later. Negative stereotypes against Islam perpetrated by Western institutions make one wonder: what do Westernized Muslims think of Muslims abroad? Do they think differently? Are they loyal to

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<sup>22</sup> Mamdani, p.47

<sup>23</sup> See Beckwith, Ryan Teague. "Read Clinton's Speech Criticizing Trump's Muslim Ban." Time. June 14, 2016, and Bush, George W. "Remarks at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Service." The American Presidency Project. September 14, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> See Lipka, Michael. "Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the world." Pew Research Center. July 22, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Hassan, Ahmed. "Democracy, Religion and Moral Values: A Road Map toward Political Transformation in Egypt." Foreign Policy Journal, 2016.

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the United States or to “their Islam,”<sup>26</sup> as Bernard Lewis would suggest? Muslims in the West, specifically in the US, exemplify the bridge between Islamic and Western identities. Yet, the question many grapple with is how “authentic” Western Muslims remain to each identity? To attempt to answer this question would be to assume that Westernized Muslims share homogenous opinions and socio-economic-political circumstances rendering their experiences all the same, which is not the case. Furthermore, it would be a flawed endeavor to equate the experiences of French, Russian, British, and American Muslims as one. It would be incorrect to assume that all American Muslims, in their massive diversity, engage in static understandings of Islam. Despite the vast assortment of Muslims, however, many American Muslims commonly fall for the idea of a Western Muslim exceptionalism, believing that the Islam of Muslims abroad is rife with backward cultural baggage.<sup>27</sup>

In a private survey of my own making, I polled a random anonymous group through social media to fill out responses of their definition of “moderate Muslim.” I followed up with more questions on why they chose their answers in detail, whether they thought American Muslims were more “moderate” than non-Western Muslims, and what their personal backgrounds were. Using SurveyMonkey, I generated this survey and collected responses over the course of one week during the summer of 2015. The survey was made public on my social media account, and shared with many acquaintances outside of my own friends and family circle. Respondents were both American citizens and international, Muslim and non-Muslim. Out of 156 responses, I noticed a consistent pattern among many survey respondents regarding their perceptions towards non-Western Muslims. Despite the small sample size, there were three

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<sup>26</sup> In reference to the notion of Islam as an “other” spatial location.

<sup>27</sup> See Ewing, Katherine Pratt. *Being and Belonging: Muslims in the United States since 9/11*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008 and Corbett, Rosemary R. *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service, and the "Ground Zero Mosque" Controversy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

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common themes: (1) non-Western Muslims are not exposed to pluralism as in the West, (2) non-Western Muslims conflate conservative culture with religion, and (3) the lack of freedom among non-Western cultures prevents a “moderately authentic” version of Islam. For example, the following represent responses with similar sentiments echoed in many other responses:<sup>28</sup>

**Respondent 61:** “A moderate Muslim is one who authentically and fully practices Islam.”  
“Non-western Muslims are very weird, they are not exposed to other ideas like other religions.”

**Respondent 102:** “A moderate Muslim is one who authentically and fully practices Islam.”  
“They [Western] Muslims follow the religion with less of a cultural baggage than those back home.”

**Respondent 128:** “A moderate Muslim is one who authentically and fully practices Islam.”  
“Non-western cultures usually interfere with the religion, thus adding or taking away from the religion until it isn’t what it’s supposed to be. In the West, you actually have to think about if you want to follow or not due to the other paths that are available and it becomes genuine that way, and more moderate as it is authentic.”

It is important to note that while some American Muslims feel as if they have exclusive authority over an authentic and corrupt-free Islam, many American Muslim ideas regarding “foreign Islam” result more from perceived environmental factors. For example, cultural influences, lack of diversity, and lack of freedom are to blame, instead of Islam itself. Cultural influence refers to the lack of liberal and secular values commonly associated with the West; non-Western cultures are typically associated with conservatism and backwardness as Said argues in *Orientalism*. The lack of diversity is mistakenly believed to be the perceived lack of “religious” diversity in homogenous Muslim-majority regions, even though religious and sectarian differences have existed in the entirety of history throughout Islamic civilizations.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps it is the notion that Muslims in Muslim-majority societies see less of a need to engage with other pluralistic faiths given their majority privilege in society. However, majority religious

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<sup>28</sup> Khandaker, Lamiya. “The Moderate American Muslim,” SurveyMonkey. August, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> See Hodgson, G.S. Marshall. *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974).

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exclusivism exists as a global phenomenon, which includes the West. A significant portion of American Christians are conservative and intolerant in their attitudes towards religious minorities;<sup>30</sup> therefore, this phenomenon is not merely a Muslim problem, but one of lack of *access* to diversity. It is no surprise then, that many Muslim-majority African countries, have greater percentages of interfaith interactions due to large integrated Christian populations in those countries.<sup>31</sup>

Does the absence of freedoms in many non-Western, specifically Muslim-majority, societies explain a Muslim problem? Many American Muslims lament the authoritarianism and suppression of individual rights of their or their parents' countries of origin. Is this a problem of Islam's influence in "regions" associated with it? Is this due to lack of westernization? And are Orientalists like Lewis correct in their assessment of Islam's predisposition to tyranny and submissiveness? These narratives are often framed as the problem with societies influenced by Islam in the Western consciousness. Answering each of these questions requires its own chapter, let alone its own book, and I tackle some of these later. However, there does exist a general frustration among westernized Muslims, that "foreign Islam" interferes with traditions of "non-Western culture" as respondent 128 describes, thus allowing for the belief that Islam in the West remains more "authentic" and "moderate," reminiscent of the sentiments earlier mentioned of the Islamic jurist, Muhammad Abdu.

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<sup>30</sup> See Shibly Telham's, "American Attitudes towards Islam and Muslims." Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, 2016 and Lipka, Michael. "U.S Religious Groups and their Political Leanings." The Pew Research Center, 2016. 76% of Republicans hold unfavorable attitudes towards Muslims and Evangelical Christians significantly lean toward the Republican Party.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 6: "Interfaith Relations" in *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*. The Pew Research Center.

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Although American Muslims have adopted this notion of Western Muslim exceptionalism, American Muslims like many Orientalists, also implicitly subscribe to the idea that “authentic” Islam is found in its birthplace—the “Orient.” As confusing as it may be, the relationship between American Muslims and Islam reveals the paradoxical and complicated nature of these two identities. On one hand, there exists the belief that Islamic wisdom is stored in ancient archives in the Islamic “moral geography,” yet, on the other, the freedoms offered by the United States and Western societies allow for an ideal environment for “authentic” Islamic flourishing. Zareena Grewal inquires this dynamic in her book, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, as a phenomenon experienced primarily by young American Muslims. She offers more nuanced ways to think about questions that American Muslims grapple with: “What makes Islam belong to a place? Can Islam be an American religion without being compromised, diluted, disfigured, and assimilated?”<sup>32</sup>

Despite these conundrums, there is a general acceptance among American Muslims that “Islam is something fundamentally distinct from any human culture. It has become a priority for young Muslims to separate cultural baggage from the Islam they practice, whatever the source of that baggage,”<sup>33</sup> which remains prevalent for many diasporic and immigrant Muslims who can only conceptualize Islam through the cultures of their native lands;<sup>34</sup> thus, reinforcing tropes of ‘the *other* foreign Muslim’. Nonetheless, young Muslims also believe that “national and cultural identities can complement and reinforce Islamic aspects of the self,”<sup>35</sup> allowing for a Western *experience* of Islam without Western values dictating Islam. But, Grewal’s research paints an

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<sup>32</sup> Grewal, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ewing, p. 91.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

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alternate picture. There simultaneously exists a contradiction where young American, and Western Muslims are traveling to the Middle East to learn Islam the “proper” way.

The quest for “authenticity” remains largely a question of “authority;” who has the authority to define Islam?<sup>36</sup> While Islam has always remained a non-hierarchical and egalitarian religion, religious guidance from learned and pious scholars has always existed until the breakdown of independent religious academic institutions. This vacuum leads to the insecurity of many Western Muslims today, actively seeking an interpretation befitting to the needs of modern Muslims in the Western world. On one hand, foreign Muslims are not ‘moderate’ enough, and on the other, Western Islam is missing legitimacy. This vacuum, consequently opens up room for many contending interpretations within the West. This is the *conundrum* plaguing Muslims living in the West. Desiring both moderation and authenticity, Western Muslims have taken the burden upon themselves to reinterpret an authoritative understanding of Islam as a result of their acceptance of Western exceptionalism.

“For many Muslim American student-travelers, their search for an authentic Islam in the Middle East is a search for a way to be whole, to be an ‘authentic Muslim,’ by traveling ‘back’ in space and time.”<sup>37</sup> W.E.B DuBois referred to this dilemma as the “double-consciousness”—the feeling of our identities as separate entities, rather than a unified one. Like a tourist bringing back exotic souvenirs from abroad, going “back” to the lands of Eastern wisdom, and bringing back “knowledge” to the modern Western world, is part of the process of authenticating Islam in the West, so that it can serve as a global paragon for Muslims in the non-West, where their Islam is corrupted by conservative cultural traditions.

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<sup>36</sup> Grewal, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Grewal, p. 61.



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## Classical *Shari'a*: A Flexible History

When Muslims are accused of backwardness for adhering to their ‘draconian’ ways of *Shari'a* law, many Muslims will nostalgically think back to the Islamic Golden Age—a period of civilizational advancement for Muslims under the Islamic caliphates, compared to their Christian counterpart empires still stuck in the Dark Ages. A period of scientific achievement, rich investments in the arts and architecture, and a thriving economy,<sup>38</sup> the glorious Islamic past provides both comfort and a defense for Western Muslims that the applicability of *Shari'a* law is not an impediment to progress. But the images of Saudi Arabia’s beheadings, stoning, and chopping off of the hands define *Shari'a* for many Westerners. It is viewed as merely a barbaric penal code sanctioned by Islam against those who do not strictly follow its doctrines. These images are constantly reinforced in our minds—from our younger days watching scenes of chopping off hands in *Aladdin*, to now watching hit drama series of Middle Eastern terrorists in shows like *Tyrant*, *Homeland*, and *24* and the constant terror-cycle of corporate news. So when Muslims show their desire for a *Shari'a*-based system in foreign countries in polls and surveys, the correlation between barbarity and foreignness becomes stronger. For most Muslims, however, *Shari'a* is defined as “the path that leads one closest to God,” through one’s personal and social conduct. How is it that historically *Shari'a* has coincided with Islamic progress, but is now viewed as oppressive and regressive?

The concept of *Shari'a*, throughout Islamic Caliphate history, has always remained rather intricate and flexible prior to the disastrous effects of Western colonialism leading to its current rigid implementation. Contrary to popular perceptions, *Shari'a* has never been a single corpus of

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<sup>38</sup> See Marshall Hodgson’s, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974) and Menocal, Maria Rosa. *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012).

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law strictly enforced by Islamic governments. Conceptually, *Shari'a*, is the “straight path” (*sirat al-mustakim*)<sup>39</sup> that leads one directly to God. In other words, *Shari'a* allows one to attain paradise in the afterlife (*akhirah*), based on the way he or she lives on the temporal earth (*dunya*). However, *Shari'a* is not an explicitly written code of conduct; rather, it is implicitly derived from the Qur'an, *Hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet and his Companions), and *Sunna* (the ways of the Prophet). No individual can completely claim to comprehend or authoritatively declare what *Shari'a* is. This is because *Shari'a* by its very essence is divine, and its intentions and secrets can only be known by God; “*Shari'a* is the eternal, immutable, and unchanging law as it exists in God’s mind. In essence, the *Shari'a* is the ideal law as it ought to be in the Divine realm, and as such it is by definition unknown to human beings on this earth,”<sup>40</sup> because human beings cannot read God’s mind. Nonetheless, learned religious scholars can engage in a process of *fiqh*<sup>41</sup>--Islamic jurisprudence which attempts to understand *Shari'a* through a full mental immersion in scripture—and, actively seek answers to questions related to worldly affairs. “As such, *fiqh* is not itself Divine, because it is the product of human efforts...By definition, *fiqh* is human and therefore subject to error, alterable, and contingent.”<sup>42</sup>

The development of *Shari'a* into Islamic jurisprudence occurred sometime after Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh)<sup>43</sup> death. Jurisprudence as it existed in the classical age of Islam, is not how it existed under the Prophet’s early community. Rather, *Shari'a* under the first community of Muslims, existed in the form of pious and reputable leaders who made decisions that they felt were most appropriate for the community, using the Qur'an and *Hadith* as their sources of

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<sup>39</sup> From the opening chapter in the Qur'an, Surah al-Fatiha.

<sup>40</sup> El-Fadl, Khaled A. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from Extremists*, 2005, p. 150.

<sup>41</sup> Means comprehension or knowledge through jurisprudence.

<sup>42</sup> El-Fadl, p.150.

<sup>43</sup> (Pbuh) stands for “peace be upon him.” Muslims use the abbreviated form out of respect.

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inspiration. Based more on personal judgement than codified law, the *Shari'a* existed as a discursive community engaged in debate over Islamic ethics for righteous behavior. Concepts of consensus (*ijma*) and community well-being (*maslaha*) defined how *Shari'a* was to be implemented.

In the classical age of Islam, Islamic Jurisprudence progressed as a result of writing down different legal opinions, which later developed into scholarly religious institutions dedicated to the religious sciences. Jurisprudence is the procedure of extracting laws and knowledge from Islamic scripture. “In the first couple centuries of Islam, well over thirty schools of legal thought existed, organized along lines of methodological and interpretative differences...all considered equally legitimate and orthodox.”<sup>44</sup> For example, the *Muta'zilites*, place emphasis on rationalism and logic influenced by ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, when approaching *Shari'a*.<sup>45</sup> More “orthodox” schools, on the other hand, like the *Shafi'i*, *Hanbali*, and *Maliki* schools, place greater emphasis on *hadiths*,<sup>46</sup> yet, may differ on whether to read them literally or metaphorically. The process of deriving *Shar'i* legal decisions for different circumstances typically involves the following:<sup>47</sup>

1. God reveals the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (practice of Muhammad pbuh).
2. The *ulama* (learned religious scholars) engage in the practice of *ijtihad* (inquiry) to derive meaning from *hadiths* and the Qur'an.
3. The *ulama* engage in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and derive a ruling, taking *maslaha* (community well-being) into account.

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<sup>44</sup> El-Fadl, p.32.

<sup>45</sup> See Jonathan Brown's, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Hodgson, p. 338 and Jasser Auda's, *Maqasid al-Shariah: A Beginner's Guide* (2008).

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4. A *fatwa* (non-legally binding advisory decision) is delivered by a learned *mufti* (a local religious leader), which may or may not be taken into account by the respected parties.
  5. A *qadi* (court judge) issues a binding legal decision regarding matters in court.

Because so many different methodologies exist for deriving a religious ruling, *Shari'a* remained relatively fluid in its application. Religious rulings ranged from family law to economic transactions. One such example of a popularly examined subject in Islamic Jurisprudential history involves the permissibility of birth control and contraception. Although modern forms of contraception did not exist during the classical age, scholars from as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century have engaged in this debate. The discussion surrounding contraception, usually took form regarding the permissibility of practicing *coitus interruptus*, also known as withdrawal.

The 12<sup>th</sup> century Shafi'i jurist, Ghazali, ruled that no basis existed for prohibiting contraception, and derived his opinion from a *hadith* in which the Prophet (pbuh) was known to permit *coitus interruptus* because there is no stopping God's will from putting life into the womb.<sup>48</sup> On the contrary, the Spaniard 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century jurist Hazm from the Zahiri School ruled that withdrawal, and all forms of birth control is forbidden based on an unclear *hadith* in which the Prophet may have referred to it as "hidden infanticide," therefore, abrogating the practice in its entirety.<sup>49</sup> Another opinion from the Hanbali School, suggests that birth control is acceptable or necessary in certain occasions based on the notion of a woman's right to her own body and her right to pleasure during sexual intercourse. Extracting their ruling from a *hadith* in which "the Prophet (pbuh) forbade the practice of *coitus interruptus* with a free woman except

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<sup>48</sup> Musallam, B.F. *Sex and Society in Islam*, 1983, p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> Musallam, B.F., p. 18.

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with her permission,”<sup>50</sup> Hanbalis argue that only women should be able to decide on the use of contraception, as motherhood remains a woman’s right, and withdrawal disrupts a woman’s pleasure during intercourse which can cause either harm or discomfort to them. Only one example of many, the issue of contraception offers a number of opinions, all equally valid, none absolutely enforced.

“In the classical age the state could not produce *Shari’a* law; only the jurists could do so. Laws passed by the state were considered regulatory rules not included as part of *Shari’a* law.”<sup>51</sup> The initial role of the Caliph was considered to be both a religious and political role; one who took charge of administrative duties influenced by Islamic ethics following the death of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). For instance, collecting *zakat* (charity) and distributing them based on Islamic principles of social welfare, leading communal prayer, or ruling on family matters. However, political schisms ensuing from disagreements over who contained legitimacy as the next Caliph, politicized the nature of the role, occasioning a diminished role as religious caliphs over time. As a result, the primary responsibilities of the Caliph focused on carrying out administrative functions, while separate religious courts maintained *Shari’a* in society. Therefore, religious institutions existed outside of the state’s domain. Under the Umayyads and subsequent caliphates, state-sanctioned religious institutions were heavily looked down upon by religious scholars, who adamantly argued against the influence of secular state administrations in religious affairs. Not only did the two remain separate, but religious and state institutions often clashed with each other. Both commoners and the *ulama* (religious scholars) criticized the political motives of states and religious leaders who catered to state-interests. For instance, state-

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<sup>50</sup> Musallam, B.F., p. 28.

<sup>51</sup> El Fadl, p. 32.

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sanctioned *qadis* (judges) were viewed as corrupt sell-outs opting for wealth and influence over non-partisan piety.<sup>52</sup> Arguably, *fiqh* remained a relatively democratic and vibrant discursive practice that aimed to build an Islamic society inspired by *Shari'a* ethics, while maintaining a degree of separation from the state.

### **Post-Colonial *Shari'a*: A Rigid Present**

As evidently shown, the endeavor to actualize *Shari'a* under Islamic caliphates, existed as an amenable system, separate from the state, and 'progressive'<sup>53</sup> in its implementation of religious law. However, "this whole complex edifice that supplied religious authority in Islam started to crumble with the entry of Western colonialism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,"<sup>54</sup> drastically impacting much of the "Muslim world" today. Any understanding of *Shari'a* in the modern age, instantly paints images of intolerant conservatism and burka-clad women, instilling a fear of *Shari'a* and foreign Muslims among Westerners. This begs the question: why do modern Muslim-majority countries implement such a different system of *Shari'a* compared to the past?

Abou El-Fadl and other Islamic scholars have demonstrated that the current non-traditional implementation of *Shari'a* results from Western colonial interventions in the political and religious institutions of Muslims, which have compromised the role of "*Shari'a* in Muslim society" as jurists eventually "lost their privileged position in society,"<sup>55</sup> and European lawmakers promoted Western-style codes of law. The expansion of Western colonialism in the Middle East and South Asia prompted incompatible changes to traditional styles of life that were

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<sup>52</sup> See Hodgson's "Ch. 3: The Shar'i Islamic Vision, c. 750-945," *The Venture of Islam: The Classical Age of Islam*, pp. 315-358.

<sup>53</sup> Progressive refers to the constant engagement of *Shari'a* with social developments of society, rather than a fixed system.

<sup>54</sup> El Fadl, 35.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

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developing differently from the West’s definition of “modern” and “enlightened.” The fall of the Mughal dynasty and Ottoman Empire ushered a new era of *Shari’a* law—one which became systematized, rigid and conservative.

Over time, European imperialists promoted Western Enlightenment values among colonial subjects within the colonized Middle East, and produced an elite class of Western-educated Arab professionals.<sup>56</sup> Many of these new Muslim-Arab professionals influenced by Western-style law schools, and ideologies of ethno-nationalisms founded much of the modern-day politicized versions of *Shari’a* witnessed in many Muslim societies. As a matter of fact, most modern Islamist movement leaders, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, *Hamas*, or *Hezbollah* are composed of Western-educated scientists and engineers with no formal training in classical Islamic Jurisprudence.<sup>57</sup> Yet, their desire for sovereignty from Western-controlled dictatorships, and Western imperialism provoked new understandings of Islam from the lens of liberation movements. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood, a political movement that attempts to integrate elements of Western-style democracy with *Shari’a*-inspired principles, has long fought against dictatorships in the Middle East, notably in Egypt under Hosni Mubarak’s presidency. The systematic merging of *Shari’a* into the political ideologies of these groups is a relatively new phenomenon, rooted in Western legal systems. Although most Westerners and Western media portray these groups as “radical Islamists” who follow backward and politicized interpretations of Islam, they are arguably byproducts of modernization, and anything-but “backward,” as *Shari’a* existed as an entirely different concept historically.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> El Fadl, p.38.

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Most Islamist groups, however, operate outside of state structures either as political parties or fringe political movements suppressed by the state. Therefore, their codification of *Shari'a* enmeshed with their political ideologies represent a different circumstance from the codification of *Shari'a* by states. Western colonialism of Muslim lands, political-economic interests with conservative religious elites, orientalist beliefs about Muslim subjects, and imposition of Western-style legal systems have all contributed to the current institutionalization of state-sponsored *Shari'a*.

### ***Saudi Arabian Shari'a: A Western Sponsored Wahhabism***

Today, *Shari'a* is mistakenly equated with the laws found in countries like Saudi Arabia. Infamously known for its suppression of women's rights, corporal punishment, and hyper-patriarchy, *Shari'a* law by Saudi Arabian standards has an incredibly poor reputation with Westerners. Inspired by the interpretation of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, an 18<sup>th</sup> century puritanical commentator, Saudi Arabian *Shari'a* promotes a strictly literalist interpretation of Islam rejecting other ideas including “mysticism, the doctrine of intercession, rationalism, and Shi'ism as well as many practices considered heretical innovations.”<sup>58</sup> Despite the antithesis between the Wahhabi creed and Western values, the establishment of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia, and negative understandings of *Shari'a*, are indirectly a result of British and American interventions.

Abd al-Wahhab's interpretation of Islam vehemently denounced the vibrant scholarly institutions found in traditional<sup>59</sup> Islamic jurisprudence. He argued that Islam has become corrupt

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<sup>58</sup> El Fadl, p.45.

<sup>59</sup> The word “traditional” is typically associated with conservatism and old ways. In this case, “traditional” refers to the more progressive and flexible practice of interpreting *Shari'a* under previous Islamic caliphates.



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because of the introduction of “too many” innovations, and he “often engaged in rhetorical tirades against prominent medieval and contemporaneous jurists, whom he considered heretical.”<sup>60</sup> His teachings were based on a puritanical understanding of Islam which disallowed “any rationalism or frivolity” and “emphasized that there was no middle of the road for a Muslim;” a Muslim was not considered Muslim if they did not adhere to his standards of Islam.<sup>61</sup> His interpretation stated that any interaction with non-Muslims was considered heretical, and any adoption of non-Muslim culture was idolatry.<sup>62</sup> On one hand, Abd al-Wahhab deplored nationalism; on the other, Abd al-Wahhab heavily drew from “the particulars of Bedouin culture to be the one and only true Islam” and “obligatory upon all Muslims,”<sup>63</sup> conflating Islamic authenticity with Arab supremacy. Ironically, despite the Wahhabi denunciation of non-Muslim allies, “Wahhabis were incited and supported by English colonialists to rebel against the Ottomans,”<sup>64</sup> to expedite the fall of the Muslim empire for European economic interests in the Middle East. The British promised political sovereignty to Arab states after decades of Turkish rule, appealing to their desires of pan-Arab unity and freedom.<sup>65</sup> Ironically, Wahhabism currently sustains itself through its dependent alliance with the West, despite its ideology denouncing relations with non-Muslims.

The alliance between Western powers and the Saudi Arabian ruling elite has successfully allowed for the institutionalization of *Shari'a*. The fall of the Ottoman Empire allowed the British to establish colonial mandates in several Middle East states in the Gulf region and institute political leaders of their own choice. One such individual, Ibn Saud, “was one of several

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<sup>60</sup> El Fadl, p.47.

<sup>61</sup> El Fadl, p.48.

<sup>62</sup> El Fadl, p.49.

<sup>63</sup> El Fadl, p.52.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> See Mitchell, Timothy. “McJihad: Islam in the U.S Global Order,” 2002.

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local warlords competing to control the Arabian Peninsula.”<sup>66</sup> Returning from exile “in the British protectorate of Kuwait,”<sup>67</sup> Saud formed an alliance with the “strongest military force from the *ikhwan*, an egalitarian movement attempting to replace the increasingly threatened life of Arabian tribal nomadism,” while also depended heavily on British funds.<sup>68</sup> By no means was Saud devout or pious, but many argue that he was an opportunist who wanted power. After attaining influence and relative control over the region, Saud eventually let go of the *ikhwan* alliance due to their conflicting motives with British interests; his contingency on British money provided him with enough resources to violently crush an *ikhwan* rebellion, completely dissolving them of their power.<sup>69</sup>

Westerners may mistakenly assume orientalist stereotypes that the strictly literal interpretation of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia reflects a tribal nomadic setting,<sup>70</sup> as Timothy Mitchell describes in “McJihad: Islam in the U.S Global Order.” On the contrary, “Wahhabi ulama had always viewed the nomads as bearers of religious ignorance, *jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic ignorance), and thus as raw material for conversion to Islam.”<sup>71</sup> The Wahhabi *ikhwan* movement, arguably, originated as a religio-political movement “of Arabia’s settled population against Bedouin domination of trade routes and ‘protection taxes.’”<sup>72</sup> Using religious language, these movements attempted to enforce a rigid law on mobile Bedouin populations to preserve Arab supremacy in the region. Saud’s alliance with the West, allowed these movements, and by extension Wahhabi Islam, influence in spreading their religious ideology. British sponsorship of

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<sup>66</sup> Mitchell, p.9.

<sup>67</sup> Mitchell, p.8.

<sup>68</sup> Mitchell, p.9.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Commins, David. “Chapter 3: Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud and the Taming of the Wahhabi Zeal” in *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 2009, p. 80.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Commins references Al-Fahad, ‘The *imama* vs the *iqal*,’ pp. 42-43

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Ibn Saud, and Ibn Saud's alliance with Wahhabi clerics to subdue nomadic groups has led to a triangular power dynamic, in which Western money sustains Wahhabi influence in the region.

In addition to the British extending their colonial outreach in the Middle East for control over economic resources, American oil companies also ventured into "the Orient." As a matter of fact, "in the same year that Ibn Saud defeated the *Ikhwan*, he began negotiations with the Standard Oil Company of California (SoCal)" and switched "from British to American protection."<sup>73</sup> However, the open-door relationship allowing Western imposition into Arab affairs, elicited negative reactions from Saudi Arabians; "to win acceptance for this foreign support, [Saud] made a compromise with the religious establishment. The Wahhabi leadership would tolerate the role of the foreign oil company, and in return their program to convert Arabia to the teachings and discipline of *tawhid*<sup>74</sup> would be funded with the proceeds from the oil."<sup>75</sup> Thus laid the groundwork for American-Saudi relations. On one hand, the Saudi monarch maintains its political power through its alliance with the West; on the other, the political monarch gives exclusive domain to the Wahhabi clerical elite over all religious matters, stifling dissent, and codifying a singular interpretation of *Shari'a*.

Although Western corporate politics indirectly promote this interpretation of Islam in Saudi Arabia, tropes of intolerant and barbaric Islam often originate from Saudi Arabian practices. The double standard of Western righteousness over its own record of democracy and human rights, while condemning Islam for its supposed brute nature reveals the hypocrisy of Western orientalism. By propping up undemocratically elected individuals and sponsoring oil

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<sup>73</sup> Mitchell, p.10.

<sup>74</sup> A strict Islamic tenet affirming the absolute oneness and unity of God.

<sup>75</sup> Mitchell, p. 10.

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monarchies who exploit religious-fanaticism as its clerical class, the West is complicit in supporting the very “brute Islam” that it condemns. Islam in Saudi Arabia is not representative of all Muslims. Nor is it representative of the desires of Saudi Arabian citizens themselves. Rather, the interpretation of Islam in Saudi Arabia has resulted from political interferences, and has managed to become the face of Islam globally. Moreover, Western interference in Muslim affairs is not exclusive to Saudi Arabia. Multiple instances of this has occurred, and continue to occur. South Asia represents an example of the direct interference of the West in the Islamic affairs of the region.

### ***South Asia: A British Legal System of Shari'a***

According to the Pew Research Center, one of the more conservative regions with a high median percentage of Muslims who favor severe corporal punishment for criminals, apostates and immoral behaviors among *Shari'a* supporters, happens to be South Asia. A region long known for its relative “third-worldism,” and slow social development, it may be no wonder to most why conservative Islamic attitudes substantially influence the geography. What most may not know, however, is that “in India, as elsewhere, it was the colonial administrators and scholars who, driven by their stereotypes as well as by their needs, helped make Islam a rigid-law centered entity in the lives and minds of colonized peoples.”<sup>76</sup> British colonialism heavily influenced how *Shari'a* was to be implemented on the Indian subcontinent.

The East Indian Company, a British occupying force of merchants and governors interested in trading commodities and gaining access over Indian resources, played a direct role in shaping religious law in South Asia. In an attempt to appear “helpful,” by taking the religion

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<sup>76</sup> Giunchi, Elisa. “The Reinvention of ‘Sharī’a’ Under the British Raj: In Search of Authenticity and Certainty. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 4 (2010), p. 1123.

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of the indigenous locals into consideration, British officers believed that they were most fit to establish an ordered system based on Western models in India. British Orientalists believed that their knowledge of indigenous populations superseded the knowledge indigenous people had regarding their own customs. As a result, “the East India Company’s officers selected among varied religious texts a set of norms and tried to apply them consistently”<sup>77</sup> as a single code of law. What the British failed to understand, was the complexity of South Asian religious laws and values; what had been a long practice of engaging with religious laws in a flexible and circumstantial manner, transformed over time into a more British style of enforcing a uniform set of laws.

The Mughal Empire in India, prior to British colonization, had an intricate relationship with *Shari’a*, which allowed for a much more liberal society compared to the current conservatism witnessed today. “At the time of the Delhi sultanates, and then under the Mughals, the application of *Shari’a* was an important form of legitimacy for the rulers, as well as a way of justifying a social hierarchy at the top of which was the knowledge of *adab*—the rules of good conduct.”<sup>78</sup> These sultanates, “through a formal abidance to Islam,” respected the integrity of *Shari’a*, by establishing separate and independent Islamic institutions that were administered by the *ulama* and pious leaders, and did not themselves enforce “the details of Islamic law.”<sup>79</sup> Enforcing religious laws and settling disputes occurred on a case-by-case basis, and many times did not transpire in religious courts. Instead, many “disputes concerning members of a religious community were often mediated by individuals belonging to other communities.”<sup>80</sup> *Shari’a* was implemented for “only particular serious breaches of public order or crimes involving prominent

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<sup>77</sup> Giunchi, p. 1119

<sup>78</sup> Giunchi, p. 1121.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

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persons who lived in urban areas,”<sup>81</sup> and even then, each case was dealt with differently, taking both majority and dissenting opinions of jurists into account.

British officers found local customs of executing religious law rather chaotic, indisciplined and “arbitrary.” However, “the attitudes of the judges was not a result of their arbitrariness, or of the arbitrariness of the rulers...but was in keeping with what was proposed by the jurists themselves.”<sup>82</sup> The nature of Islamic jurisprudence under Islamic rule has always remained relatively adjustable because human beings are complex, and, therefore, Islamic law and Islamic justice are too. Before British imposition, India adopted the Hanafi interpretation for Islamic law, which originated in eighth-century Iraq by Abu Hanifah. It is known for its relative open-mindedness and, “uses reason, logic, opinion (*ray*), analogy (*qiyas*), and preference (*istihsan*) in the formulation of laws. Legal doctrines are relatively liberal, particularly with respect to personal freedom and women's rights in contracting marriages.”<sup>83</sup> Unlike the image of conservative Muslim societies today, sex crimes and homosexuality in South Asia, were almost impossible to convict, and many times overlooked if it did not meet the insurmountable evidential requirements necessary for a verdict by Islam’s standards. Nevertheless, this all changed with British interference.

Orientalist narratives informed European colonialists’ understandings of indigenous people living in non-Western territory. This meant that “between the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Europe produced an ahistorical vision of the Orient in which the peoples observed were attributed immutable specificities, rather than defined as the product of historical

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Giunchi, p. 1122.

<sup>83</sup> "Hanafi School of Law." Oxford Islamic Studies Online.

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circumstances.”<sup>84</sup> Indian Muslims, and even Hindus, were viewed as an unruly group of people, stuck in outdated ways. They were not viewed in terms of their complex social realities, or as peoples who progressed too, albeit differently from Europeans. As a result, Islamic law was viewed as a “fixed, timeless entity that in the course of time had been submerged by traditions.”<sup>85</sup> For this reason, British officers decided to take it upon themselves to “modernize” the “oriental” people by introducing Western-styles of civil codes rooted in a uniform legal system.

British law-makers mistakenly assumed that local indigenous populations were deeply rooted in textual religion as sources of societal order. In an attempt to ‘modernize’ the Orient, according to British standards, while also remaining true to indigenous customs, British colonialists worked on reforming religious legislation to create a more standard and codified set of rules.<sup>86</sup> By forming relationships with religious elites, consulting “district and appeals courts experts on sacred matters,” and gathering “norms contained in religious texts,”<sup>87</sup> while dismissing dissenting or contradictory opinions, British law-makers compiled standardized versions of Islamic law, which have remained unprecedented under Islamic rule. They asked maulvis, religious Muslim scholars, to provide single and concise answers regarding Islamic practices, and overlooked “the many subtleties of *fiqh* (jurisprudence).”<sup>88</sup> Other methods of composing a rigid *Shari’a* law included translating “Oriental” texts into English, and writing guides on how to execute Islamic law. For example, “in 1783, Charles Hamilton completed the translation from Persian into English, which was published in 1791.” Shortly after, William

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<sup>84</sup> Giunchi, p. 1124.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Giunchi, p. 1125.

<sup>87</sup> Giunchi, p. 1126.

<sup>88</sup> Giunchi, p. 1127.

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Jones and Neil Baillie translated texts on Islamic inheritance law.<sup>89</sup> William Hays Macnaghten's manual, *Principles and Precedents of Muhammadan Law*, "as well as those written later on by prominent justices such as Ameer Ali, Abdur Rahman, and Tyanji, admitted that texts of Islamic jurisprudence contained differing opinions, but tended in their expositions to gloss over areas of contradiction, in order to simplify and systematize the discussion."<sup>90</sup>

Not only did British law-makers emulate Western models of law when reforming religious legislation in India, but also made sure that the laws themselves were "not to differ excessively from the English law and values of the time."<sup>91</sup> This was most evident in the British-influenced criminalization of homosexuality, and Western standards of dealing with sexual misconducts like adultery. For instance, the "punishment of stoning for the crime of adultery was banned, flogging restricted, and women were exempted from it; but, all those expedients contained in fiqh...that made it practically impossible to convict someone of *zina* (adultery) were not taken into consideration."<sup>92</sup> According to the *Shari'a*, four witnesses with honest reputations are required to see the explicit sexual act take place in order for a guilty conviction. If any witnesses are found to be lying, maliciously spreading fabrications, or uncertain of what they claim, then the witnesses are to be punished. This often discourages individuals from accusing others of crime, out of fear from lack of confidence and suspicion. However, with the introduction of British legal standards, "the number of persons convicted of *zina* grew drastically,"<sup>93</sup> unlike the previous Islamic system which allowed for more leeway.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Giunchi, p. 1128.

<sup>91</sup> Giunchi, p. 1126.

<sup>92</sup> Giunchi, p. 1131.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



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Colonialism in South Asia shifted local customs and religious laws in ways that have not existed in the region before. *Shari'a*, which was once flexible, became institutionalized and consequently, marginalized dissent. Orientalism justified the “white man’s burden” to intervene in the affairs of indigenous cultures, when no intervention was needed. By creating images of the backward Indian Muslim, and imposing Western standards onto a non-Western culture, the English managed to distort the spiritual and progressive essence of *Shari'a* into an unbending legal system. Narrow-minded conservatism in South Asia today can, debatably, be attributed to the long-term effects of European colonialism and Western hegemony.

Saudi Arabia and South Asia represent only two such examples of Western intervention that led to the institutionalization of *Shari'a*. When going “back” to traditional engagements with *Shari'a* under Islamic empires, it is evident that religious institutions were places of vibrant debates and discussions that have shaped society’s relationship with Islam. Muslims flourished, science progressed, education was encouraged, and knowledge was accessible. This is not to paint a rosy picture of the history of Islamic caliphates, as internal problems have always existed. Yet, it remains necessary to understand which phases of history affect which changes, rather than understanding changes as natural occurrences of certain cultures. Learned scholars in Islamic Jurisprudence did not necessarily disappear with the fall of the Ottoman and Mughal Empires, and with the intrusions of Europe. However, the political marriages formed between religion and state produced new variants of *Shari'a* that have privileged hegemonic and rigid interpretations by elite classes assuming complete power and control (like Saudi Arabia). It is important to keep historical contextualization in mind when referring to the relationship between Muslims and Islam. What *Shari'a* means to Muslims, may not be what the West imagines as *Shari'a*.

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## Conclusion

Western media, academia, and culture implicitly further the process of “otherization” of non-westernized Muslims in ways that enforce the “good Muslim, bad Muslim” dichotomy. Bias polling, and lack of clear definitions allow for a careful construction of the “foreign Muslim” in ways that reinforce orientalist stereotypes of the “backward and barbaric Muslim,” which have supported colonial administrations in lands where Muslims lived. The ‘bad Muslim’ supports *Shari’a* law (as conjured through the experiences of colonialism), falls back on images that Westerners mistakenly associate with “tradition,” is conservatively narrow-minded regarding social issues, and relies too heavily on non-Western “cultural baggage”—all of which are the makings of a potential violent extremist. On the other hand, “good” Muslims, are properly westernized. They follow Western norms, believe in a notion of secularism that means “moderate” and “modern.” ‘Good Muslims’ integrate within Western society and adopt Western values into their religious beliefs, and therefore, exhibit more moderation. While these generalizations are incredibly flawed, simplistic, and grounded in politics, they are also argued as indisputable facts through numbers and polling today. Numbers and polling, however, only reflect limited information that is not representative of an entire truth, and lack important complexities. Society assumes that claims substantiated with mathematical evidence is sufficient enough to be proven as facts; but even statistics and polling remain filled with bias. Composing surveys and data require linguistic decisions, what people are popularly invested in, and preconceived notions already in place regarding the given topic. In this case, surveys regarding Muslims will focus in on their attitudes towards *Shari’a*, violence and women’s rights, because these are popular perceptions already associated with Islam. As Edward Said said,

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There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces.<sup>94</sup>

However, orientalism is not merely a phenomenon exhibited by Western non-Muslims, but Western Muslims too. Many Western Muslims believe that Muslims abroad represent an ‘immoderate’ and inauthentic Islam. Western Muslim Exceptionalism suggests that Islam in the West is more ‘moderate’ and progressive because Western liberalism allows for an open-minded space—one which provides room for an “authentic Islam” to flourish. This is especially critical, as many Western Muslims grapple with a religious vacuum and express confusion with what an “authentic Islam” could even look like. On one hand, many young, Western-Muslim millennials believe that the “traditional’ Islam of their parents is narrow-minded and corrupt with non-modern cultural influences. On the other, many young, Western-Muslim millennials are also actively seeking out an “authentic” Islam, by traveling “back in time” to the Middle East as a source of archival knowledge and divine wisdom, as evident in Zareena Grewal’s research. The ‘good’ Muslim and ‘bad’ Muslim polarization is perpetuated by both Muslims and non-Muslims, due to the former’s desire to peacefully integrate in a society that often engages in Islamophobic rhetoric. Fear of Islam, fear of *Shari’a*, and fear of devout Muslims shape the discourse surrounding Muslims in the West.

*Shari’a* usually remains a point of reference when distinguishing which Muslims remain a threat to the West—those who support “Islamic” law are conflated with backward terrorists like ISIS or Al-Qaeda, and Western-born Muslims who join ISIS then reinforce conceptions of “Islamic” violence. *Shari’a* is viewed as a totalitarian system that suppresses dissent and

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<sup>94</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 19-20

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freedom, and encourages intolerance and violence; whether the misogynistic Middle-East, or homophobic South Asia, Muslim-majority countries have a negative reputation with the West for their religion-influenced political system. Yet, the West largely remains unaware that its own foreign policies have shaped *Shari'a* in ways that have not existed under more progressive Islamic states prior to colonialism. The modern-day perception of *Shari'a* in non-Western and Muslim-majority countries affects the image of Muslims abroad in Western eyes.

Today, many Muslims, comedians, politicians, media, and lay people have adopted the term “moderate” in their discourse as a way to distinguish which Muslims are socially acceptable and which are not. By differentiating themselves from foreign and conservative Muslims, ‘moderate’ Muslims are able to prove their “goodness,” and trustworthiness to the West. The term itself implies that moderating one’s Islam is the only way to safeguard against “Islamic” extremism because Islam, by nature, must be inspiring intolerant dogmatism. If Muslims do not identify themselves as ‘moderate,’ then there may be a chance that Muslims will fall back to fundamental and literal teachings of the Qur’an, and potentially become future extremists—as the Islamophobia discourse dictates. Although the term is thrown around loosely, this begs the question: what does ‘moderate’ even mean?

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## Chapter 2: Debating the ‘Moderate’ Muslim

There is a general belief in the Western mainstream that Islam in America is more ‘moderate’ than Islam in non-Western countries because American Muslims are better integrated into a Western value system.<sup>95</sup> There exists this assumption that growing westernization equates to more ‘moderation.’ Rooted in European values from the Enlightenment era, many theorists have argued that liberalism and secularism are necessary prerequisites for *modernization*, also known as Modernization Theory. Simultaneously, there is an implicit association between modernization and ‘moderation.’ According to dictionary definitions of the term, a “moderate” is: calm and mild; opposing any extremes; and, associated with the middle-ground. Society generally equates ‘backwardness’ and non-modern traditions with some form of extremism (i.e. the way one dresses, prays, and chooses to eat a certain way). Therefore, a Western mindset will agree that ‘moderate’ Muslims are Muslims who are modern by Western standards, meaning Muslims who believe in integrating liberal and secular values<sup>96</sup> into Islam. On the flipside, many Muslims living in the West argue that Islam is, by its very nature, moderate. For Muslims, Islam remains its own value system, contains its own conception of human and social rights, and does not require Western values for its moderation, even though, the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive either—essentially, moderation is a balance between narrow-minded conservatism, and a complete free-reign liberalism. However, this all begs the question: Who gets to decide the

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<sup>95</sup> This claim is based on a trend I noticed in the responses of non-Muslims from, Khandaker, Lamiya. “The Moderate American Muslim,” SurveyMonkey. See also “The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other.” The Pew Research Center, 2006. The report demonstrates how Muslims in the West hold more favorable attitudes towards the West unlike Muslims in Muslim-majority countries. The report, unfortunately does not distinguish attitudes of non-Muslims towards Western Muslims versus non-Western Muslims, but it can be inferred that westernization makes a difference in perceptions.

<sup>96</sup> Liberal and secular here do not refer to a political leaning or a complete absence of religion. They refer to Western political philosophies of liberalism and secularism which posit that society should witness a separation of church and state, and that governments should guarantee particular human rights, freedom and individualism.

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parameters for what constitutes as ‘moderation?’ And why are there so many different understandings of the term ‘moderate?’

### **Problematizing Modernization Theory as the Prerequisite for Moderation**

Several problems exist with the notion that westernization equals a linear development towards ‘moderation.’ This claim goes back to a common 20<sup>th</sup> century theory that posits that as society progresses and secularizes, then society will also become more liberal, more “moderate,” and less religious.<sup>97</sup> Known as Modernization Theory, there are two assumptions that are implied here: (1) that there is only one way to become “modern,” and (2) that moderation is correlated to less religiosity. Because Western political philosophy was born out of European Enlightenment reasoning, the foundational premise of these theories is rooted in the concept of human reason’s transcendental nature. Governments, political systems, and morals are based on the human ability to rationalize what is best for the human condition. Secularism and liberalism are believed to be foundations for “modern” Western political societies as the former separates church and state, and the latter proposes social equality, individual freedom, and inalienable human rights. Modernization Theory does not necessarily argue that religion will vanish from the human consciousness; but, it assumes that religion will have less effect in the public sphere, will become more relegated to the private sphere as individual spirituality, and religious institutions will lose power.

Despite the argument put forth by Modernization Theory, we see the exact opposite taking root in American society. American society remains as religious as ever, despite being a modern Western nation rooted in principles of secularism and liberalism. While it remains

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<sup>97</sup> Heffner, Robert. “Multiple Modernities: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in a Globalizing Age,” 1998, p. 85.

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counterintuitive, Robert Heffner, an anthropologist of religion, argues that secularism in America manifested differently from how older theorists perceived secularism would play out. Rather than making American society less religious, secularism has allowed for American society to be more religiously diverse rather than being dominated by one religious institution. This means that American society allows for greater religious expression among multiple faith groups, instead of enforcing a singular religious expression, due to its separation of church and state.<sup>98</sup> As a result, religiosity in the United States has remained relatively steady, or increased even more among already-religious individuals. In contrast, many European societies have seen drastic decreases in religiosity and affiliations with religious institutions as European society becomes more secular. Does this mean that the US is less ‘moderate’ than other Western societies?

José Casanova, a sociologist of religion in Georgetown University, aptly deconstructs Modernization Theory for its inadequacy. He argues for a rethinking of secularization, as having multiple meanings, manifestations, and purposes depending on the historical, political, social and cultural developments of societies.<sup>99</sup> Western European countries and the United States have very different foundational histories that have shaped the developments of their respective modernizations. In European history, “there was a collision between religion and the differentiated secular spheres—that is, between Catholic Christianity and modern science, modern capitalism, and the modern state.”<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the marriage of religious institutions with the state led to violent religious outbursts between conflicting Christian sects in Europe. As a result, “modern secularism emerged in the seventeenth century as a political solution intended

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<sup>98</sup> See Heffner’s, “Multiple Modernities: Christianity, Islam and Hinduism in a Globalizing Age.”

<sup>99</sup> Casanova, Jose. “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,” 2006.

<sup>100</sup> Casanova, p. 11.

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to end the European Wars of Religion by establishing a lowest common denominator among the doctrines of conflicting Christian sects and by defining a political ethic altogether independent of religious doctrines.”<sup>101</sup> Enlightenment thinkers, scholars, activists and academics viewed organized religion as an impediment to social progress, as the Church enforced religious laws too rigidly and divisively. Enlightenment philosophy relied heavily on human rationalism as the answer to all problems. Additionally, human rationalism could provide answers to scientific inquiries with evidence, when institutional religion could not. As a result, the “secularist genealogy of modernity was constructed as a triumphant emancipation of reason, freedom, and worldly pursuits from the constraints of religion; and practically every ‘progressive’ European social movement...was informed by secularism.”<sup>102</sup> The direct clash of religious and secular spheres have created a kind of ‘religious disenchantment’ in European society. Modernization Theory, therefore, makes sense when applied to this particular case. American society, on the other hand, experiences modernization differently.

“In the Anglo-Protestant cultural area...and particularly in the United States, there was “collusion” between religion and the secular differentiated spheres.”<sup>103</sup> Due to the American separation of Church and State, and the lack of religious institutional hierarchy in Anglo-Protestantism, “there is little historical evidence of any tension between American Protestantism and capitalism and very little manifest tension between science and religion in the U.S. prior to the Darwinian crisis at the end of the nineteenth century.”<sup>104</sup> Because the state cannot advocate for a particular religious dogma, Enlightenment values of human reason and freedom find a place in American society. The Constitution, supposedly, serves to protect the free exercise of religion

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<sup>101</sup> Mahmood, Saba “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” (2006), p. 324.

<sup>102</sup> Casanova, p. 11.

<sup>103</sup> Casanova, p. 12.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid



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from state interference, therefore, creating a strong foundation for non-state sponsored religious activity. Unlike Europe, religious and secular spheres do not have a similar history of clashing. As a matter of fact, both spheres have been able to flourish. Religious groups generally have had ample opportunities to practice as they want, with state protection, and without state favoritism, (with a few exceptions).<sup>105</sup> The freedom to practice religion in American society, therefore, has led to either an increase or relative stability, in religious expressions. Albeit secular, Modernization Theory falls short in its application to American society, and even European society as religion still exists there.

The discussion on modernization, however, remains important for our purposes because despite being a problematic theory, “it is the tendency to link processes of secularization to processes of modernization.”<sup>106</sup> Many case studies prove Modernization theory to be overly simplistic. For instance, “there can be modern societies like the US, which are secular while deeply religious, and there can be *pre-modern* societies like China<sup>107</sup>, which from our Euro-centric religious perspectives look deeply secular and irreligious.”<sup>108</sup> To further complicate things, Pakistan and Indonesia can be considered modern and religious, yet not secular. Until now, we see an inconsistency in theoretical terms that result more from pre-conceived notions, than from actual reality. Just as different Western countries do not develop in the same linear progression, the same cannot be expected of non-Western societies. Secularization cannot be thought of as the precursor to modernization, as different societies and different traditions will

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<sup>105</sup> Indigenous Native American traditions still face religious discrimination from the state, and Mormons have gone through struggle in the 1800s. However, the point refers more to major Anglo religious traditions.

<sup>106</sup> Casanova, p. 15.

<sup>107</sup> Casanova, most likely, refers to pre-modern here in reference to China’s undemocratic, one-party political system.

<sup>108</sup> Casanova, p. 13.

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“modernize” on their own terms. Moreover, this introduces questions of what it even means to be modern. It is evident that ideas surrounding modernization and secularism remain faulty.

Despite all this, one of the main criticisms Orientalists hold towards Islam is that Muslims do not secularize, resulting in their backwardness. Heffner calls this understanding of ‘Muslim exceptionalism’ the idea that Muslims fail at modernizing because “Muslims have been able to invoke their great tradition of religious scholar jurists (*ulama*) and law (*shari’a*) as symbols of nationhood.”<sup>109</sup> In other words, Muslims who hold on to their own traditions too strongly, and too patriotically, are unable to ‘modernize,’ progress, or be considered moderate. But as already pointed out, it would be a false endeavor to correlate secularism with modernization, and modernization with moderation, as each of these ideas are not inextricably bound to each other through limited relationships. Nonetheless, there remains a Western investment in the discourse on Muslim backwardness.<sup>110</sup> Since principles associated with modernity are marketed as universal values with foundations rooted in human rationalism, secular-liberalist ideologies have dominated the global discourse as the supposed “right” standard for laws and characteristics of all cultural societies. In fact, Saba Mahmood, a distinguished social-cultural anthropologist, argues that secular neo-liberalism has become the driving force to impose a Western-hegemonic will on to various cultural and ethnic communities, ironically, to the point of taking away religious freedoms and committing human rights abuses.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Heffner, p. 90.

<sup>110</sup> See Yvonne Hadad’s, “Overhauling Islam. Representation, Construction, and Cooptation of ‘Moderate Islam’ in Western Europe, (2007).

<sup>111</sup> See Saba Mahmood’s, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” (2006).

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## **Secular Moderation: A Western Political Construct**

Secular modernization is not a prerequisite for ‘moderation.’ However, if secularism offers a kind of universalism, in which political institutions remain separate from religious ones, would it be correct to assert that secularism is an essential component for Muslim ‘moderation?’ After all, Muslim extremists believe in integrating conservative and intolerant interpretations of Islam exercised through the political state. Many Westerners believe that secularism serves as the antidote to extremism, as it once helped end religious violence in Europe. But does secularism actually lead to the tolerance it claims, or is it an ideological dogma itself? While secularism has allowed for Western societies to solve problems unique to its own, Western societies now employ an ideological secularism on other cultures to further its own neoliberal-capitalist and political motives. ‘Moderate’ Islam exists as a discourse because Western states have geopolitical investments in the ‘Muslim’ world. Therefore, it is necessary to deconstruct notions and motives of the ‘secular,’ and put aside assumptions of its harmlessness.

Secularism advocates for a separation between religious and political rules, freedom from religious rule, and a political rule inspired by humanist ethics. Developed by Roman, Greek, and European philosophers, secularism venerates unrestricted-thinking, and individualism free from institutional rigidity. Secularism contains multiple manifestations, and looks different in different places. For instance, secularism in France advocates for the complete disappearance of any religious symbols in the public sphere, while secularism in the United States protects religious pluralism in the public sphere. Despite the various secular expressions found in Western polities, it is important to question the nature of this philosophy and whether it holds true to the values it proposes. Does secularism truly guarantee individual liberty? Saba Mahmood argues that “secularism” as we conceptually idealize it, does not actually exist. In other words, Western

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secular dogmatism, while espousing individual liberty, imposes its own ethics and principles as universal norms, to the point of taking cultural agency away from other groups. Western societies utilize secular policies to implicitly regulate religion and the degree to which they are publicly practiced, despite the belief that secularism entails a governmental separation of church and state.<sup>112</sup> Whereas religious institutions once dictated state affairs, the opposite now holds true as secular states influence religious institutions. Ultimately, “secularity entails a judgement about, and appreciation for, what religion should be in the modern world.”<sup>113</sup> Historically, this is evident in the “Jewish Question” that flustered Europe leading to state interventions in reforming Jewish communities to be more secularly assimilated.<sup>114</sup> Currently, we witness this phenomenon as the state and media propagate discourses about ‘moderate’ Muslims.

Constructing notions of the ‘moderate’ Muslim, has turned into an effective political tool for the state to create loyal citizens. Because Islam is seen under the scope of US national security, “the United States has embarked upon an ambitious theological campaign aimed at shaping the sensibilities of ordinary Muslims whom the State Department deems to be too dangerously inclined toward fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.”<sup>115</sup> ‘Fundamentalist’ interpretations could be understood by the State Department as any form of politics or beliefs in opposition to Western values of secularism, liberalism, capitalism and foreign policy. Muslims who criticize Western hegemonic policies, both in domestic and international spheres, are often

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<sup>112</sup> Mahmood, p. 328-329.

<sup>113</sup> Mahmood, Saba. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, 2015, p. 181.

<sup>114</sup> See Samuels, Maurice. *The Right to Difference: French Universalism and the Jews* (2016), Ellie Schainker’s *Confessions of the Shtetl: Jewish Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817-1906*, (2016), and Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union*, (2016). Throughout European history, minority Jewish communities were stereotyped as backward, traditional, insular, inherently corrupt, dirty, and money-launderers. These stereotypes affected European policies towards Jews leading to two kinds of approaches: (1) overt anti-Semitism, or (2) reforming Jews to fit into European standards of ‘modern.’ Through conversion and secularization, European states actively sought to reform their Jewish minorities utilizing a similar discourse witnessed today when discussing Muslims.

<sup>115</sup> Mahmood, p. 329.

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labeled with a proclivity towards extremism. However, “in this elaborate undertaking, the U.S. government has found an indigenous ally in the form of moderate or liberal Muslims who, in the opinion of State Department planners, are most open to a ‘Western vision of civilization, political order, and society.’”<sup>116</sup> ‘Moderate’ Muslims are patriotic and loyal. They balance extremism and carry more authority than non-Muslims. They are the pioneers of a ‘modern Islam.’ Therefore, it is important for the United States and other Western governments to sponsor ‘moderate’ Muslims as exceptional contributors in the fight against terrorism.

The RAND Corporation, a policy think-tank offering research and advisory decisions to the United States Armed Forces financed by the US Government and various private-sectors,<sup>117</sup> often publishes reports on the need to encourage ‘moderate’ interpretations of Islam rooted in democratic and secular values. A 2003 report published by RAND titled, *Civil Democratic Islam*, warns the government about more ‘traditional’ Muslims.<sup>118</sup> “According to the report, the traditionalists believe that the Quran is the actual word of god, and their ‘goal is to preserve orthodox norms and values and conservative behavior.’ They do so by observing Islamic rituals closely ...and consulting the Quran, the Prophetic tradition (hadith), and the Islamic juristic scholarship to seek guidance on matters of daily conduct.”<sup>119</sup> Their inability to accept Islam as simply a historical event, and succumb to human reason over Qur’anic mandates makes more traditional Muslims potential threats to national security as they will favor Islam over Western interests. While most of the world’s Muslim population remains traditional and non-violent, they are still deemed as potential long-term threats to secularism.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> “About RAND: History.” Rand Corporation.

<sup>118</sup> Benard, Cheryl. *Civil and Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, Strategies*, 2003.

<sup>119</sup> Mahmood, p. 323-333.

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While the report, “is forced to acknowledge . . . that in regard to sociopolitical issues the traditionalists ‘do not usually favor violence and terrorism,’ represent an ‘essentially moderate position,’ . . . ‘proactively seek interfaith dialogue,’ and even espouse ‘a relatively progressive stance on many social issues,’”<sup>120</sup> it still vilifies Muslims for their “incompatibility with Western Enlightenment values.”<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the tendency of Muslims to share similar criticisms of Western foreign policy with that of extremists, leads the report to implicitly conclude that Muslims as a whole are prone to extremism as well. As a matter of fact, the report states that traditional Muslims are more dangerous than extremists—a claim made with no sufficient evidence. Whereas, the latter is an obvious short-term enemy, the former is a more disguised threat to Western values because “modern democracy rests on the values of the Enlightenment [and] traditionalism opposes these values. . . . Traditionalism is antithetical to the basic requirements of a modern democratic mind-set: critical thinking, creative problem solving, individual liberty, secularism.”<sup>122</sup>

RAND also offers a solution to the problem it identifies— ‘moderate’ Muslims. In 2007, the think-tank published a report titled *Building Moderate Muslim Networks*, which defined ‘moderate’ Muslims, detailed methodologies for building alliances with them, and discussed the importance of the roles they play. According to this report, “‘moderate Muslims’ believe in democracy, secularism, freedom, gender equality, an almost complete jettison of the *Shariah* and, most of all, a rejection of all ‘illegitimate violence.’”<sup>123</sup> The report suggests that ‘moderate’ Muslims are depoliticized in their attitudes, and accept the foreign policies of the US, Israel and its allies without question. It is evident from this report that ‘moderation’ should be used as a tool

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Benard, Cheryl, p. 33.

<sup>123</sup> Brown, Jonathan. “Moderate Islam” & Muslim American Leadership: Reflections before the Deluge,” 2017.

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to construct a certain kind of Muslim through state interference. Governments need to seek out certain ‘types’ of Muslims who can easily be molded into patriotic agents. Cultivating ‘moderate’ Muslims require targeting certain “classes or schools of thought” usually from the following: secularists, liberals, “moderate traditionalist ulama. Sufis...young religious scholars, community activists and moderate journalists.”<sup>124</sup>

Western discourse assumes that secularization will allow for the de-politicization of Islam and prevent extremism. Secularizing Islam will allow it to be a religion and not the political ideology many believe it to be. The irony, however, exists in that Western secularism is used, not to depoliticize, but to re-politicize Muslims into citizens that share the same political interests in maintaining Western exceptionalism within the global power structure. Although it may be assumed that less religiosity correlates to more moderation, the intent behind the moderate discourse has little to do with religiosity, and more to do with the politics of Western policies. “For example, a devout Muslim, fervent in observance of all personal rituals but not participating in political affairs, would be a ‘moderate,’ whereas a marginally practicing Muslim with the zeal to voice opposition to the injustice perpetrated by [American] extremists,’ America would be classified as a ‘radical.’”<sup>125</sup> The West may speak of human rights, individual freedom, and progressivism as core Western values which need to be universalized by all cultures, including Muslims. However, the discourse that aims to demonize Islam for backwardness, inherent extremism, lack of democracy and enlightenment, only serves to advance Western neo-liberal hegemony, in which the United States and its allies seek to maintain its power in influencing world affairs. ‘Moderate’ as defined by Western institutions allows for a popularized

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Khan, Muqtedar. *Debating Moderate Islam: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West*, 2007, p. 43.

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public discourse that actively divides Muslims internally, ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ in order to justify Western foreign policies in the so-called “Muslim World.”

### **‘Moderate’ as Defined by Muslims: An Internalization of Western Discourse**

While neoliberal political interests have constructed the notion of ‘moderate’ Islam, many Muslims also engage in the effort to reclaim and redefine the concept of ‘moderation.’ While the majority of Muslims in the world identify with a more traditional Islam rooted in the Qur’an and *Sunnah*, many Western Muslims have undertaken the ‘moderate’ Islam discourse when speaking of the traditions of ‘some’ Muslims. Albeit defined differently from the West’s, the moderate discourse used among Muslims speaks to the power of authority exuded in this term. To be able to definitively establish a legitimate definition of ‘moderation,’ is defining power, authority, and authenticity over Islam.

It is important to acknowledge that the ‘moderate’ discourse, even among Muslims, varies widely whether along sectarian lines, on “religious and political terms... [and] from conservatives to liberal reformers.”<sup>126</sup> However, traditionally religious Muslims integrated in the West generally contain similar understandings of moderation among each other. The highly respected Islamic scholar from Mauritania, Shaykh<sup>127</sup> Abdullah bin Bayyah, (well-known for his mentorship of America’s most famous Shaykh, Hamza Yusuf), described the very essence of Islam as a “*deen* of moderation.”<sup>128</sup> *Deen* roughly translates to religion from Arabic, but more so, it refers to a spiritually holistic way of living. He attributes this understanding of Islam to *hadiths* spoken by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself: “The Messenger of Allah (saw) said,

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<sup>126</sup> Khan, Muqtedar, p. 27. John L. Esposito weighs in on his understanding of Muslim moderation.

<sup>127</sup> ‘Shaykh’ refers to a learned leader within the Muslim community.

<sup>128</sup> Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah. “Transcript for Muslims Living in Non-Muslim Lands,” 1999.



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‘Those people who go into matters too deeply will be destroyed’ ... ‘Those people’ are people involved in ‘*tatarruf*’ or extremism.” Additionally, the Prophet “warned against extremism” as it causes one to lose their sense of balance and rationale.<sup>129</sup> Theologically speaking, moderation is understood as a natural quality of Islam, providing balance from the extremes of a heedless secularity, and over-zealous and violent religiosity.

Moderation is consistently used to describe attributes of Islam’s traditional history, its tolerance of difference, and promotion of peace. For traditional Muslims, it is repetitive to juxtapose ‘moderate’ and ‘Islam.’ It makes little sense to treat the former as a qualifying adjective to the latter, since moderation is already viewed as a foundational quality of Islam. Furthermore, traditional Muslims would argue that ‘radical’ Islam does not exist, but extremist interpretations may. Does this also suggest that a ‘moderate’ interpretation of Islam indicates lighter engagement with it? How do traditional Muslims understand their moderation?

***Khaled Abou El-Fadl: Traditional Islamic Jurist and Academic***

The Qatari-born-American-Muslim academic at UCLA, Khaled Abou El-Fadl, dedicates an entire book dissecting the differences between ‘moderate’ and ‘extremist’ understandings of Islam. In his well-known work, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from Extremists*, El-Fadl offers his own clear definition of each group. El-Fadl, widely known for his work on Islamic law, identifies with traditional methods of engagement with Islam rooted in Islamic jurisprudence. He strongly rejects Wahhabi strains of Islam, denouncing it for ‘puritan’ tendencies, and advocates for more open-minded approaches to Islam through the perspective of morals, values, and human rights.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

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El-Fadl argues that a natural divide or “schism” between ‘moderate’ and ‘extremist’ Muslims already exists, in which the former makes up the “silent majority”<sup>130</sup> of the global Muslim population. The differences between these two, lie not in their political loyalty or criticism towards the West, but in the extent of their flexibility or rigidity in their worldviews and the degree of literalism in their understanding of Islam. He describes this as more of a range than simply polarized categorizations. It is not necessarily that Muslims are either “moderate” or “extremist,” but more so, that Muslims fall somewhere in the middle of a spectrum between two extremes, “with the majority leaning towards moderation.”<sup>131</sup> El-Fadl deliberately chooses to leave secularists, Sufis, and sectarian differences out of his proposed definition, and focuses on what he believes to be the defining difference of most Muslims—their methodological engagement with foundational sources.

El-Fadl carefully chooses the terms to represent his definition of Muslim differences—for him, *moderate* and *puritan* allow for more authenticity in what he wishes to describe. He clarifies that moderate encompasses many groups—the “*modernists, progressives, and reformers,*” orthodox Muslims, and traditional Muslims. ‘Moderate’ serves as an umbrella term for a variety of religiosities among Muslims, as long as their worldviews are grounded in a certain level of open-mindedness, flexibility and pluralism. On the other hand, ‘puritan’ accurately describes the opposite camp from ‘moderates,’ in that “the distinguishing characteristic of this group is the absolutist and uncompromising nature of its beliefs.”<sup>132</sup> ‘Extremist’ implies the use of ideological violence as a methodology of interaction, whereas ‘puritan’ serves as the overarching term for anyone who remains “intolerant of competing points

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<sup>130</sup> El-Fadl, p. 6.

<sup>131</sup> El-Fadl, p. 15.

<sup>132</sup> El-Fadl, p. 18.

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of view and considers pluralist realities to be a form of contamination of the unadulterated truth.”<sup>133</sup> Puritans comprise of, what is commonly known as, “*fundamentalists, militants, extremists, radicals, fanatics, jihadists*, and even simply *Islamists*,”<sup>134</sup> according to him.

However, he also problematizes equating ‘fundamentalism’ with ‘extremism,’ as many Muslims would argue that that moderate attitudes are *fundamentals* of Islam.

El-Fadl subsequently breaks down the key differences between ‘moderate’ and ‘puritan’ Muslims in their different perspectives toward the purpose of religion, the nature of law and morality, approaches to history and modernity, democracy and human rights, interacting with non-Muslims, salvation, violence and women’s rights. Although Muslims have a vast diversity of opinions on each of these issues, the main distinction categorizing Muslims as either relatively moderate or puritan, stems from their willingness to debate, accept multiple opinions, and use reason and individual agency; “Moderates believe that God entrusted humans with the power of reason and the ability to ascertain between right and wrong,”<sup>135</sup> while referring to the guidelines of the *Shari’a*, understood through the discursive process of *fiqh*.<sup>136</sup> “Puritans, on the other hand, do not believe that the trust placed in human beings was so vast and indistinct. God gave human beings the law, which in most instances is specific and detailed, and trusted them to enforce it.”<sup>137</sup> For puritans, there exists little discourse and reasoning when engaging with the *Shari’a*, as it is viewed as a precise code of living not up for deeper philosophical engagement.

Moreover, El-Fadl insists that not only are these fundamental differences between Muslims, but that Muslims are also reluctant to “recognize the existence of the schism within the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> El-Fadl, p. 276.

<sup>136</sup> Refer back to Chapter 1 of thesis, in the subsection on *Shari’a*, on the process of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).

<sup>137</sup> El-Fadl, p. 277.

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faith.”<sup>138</sup> He attributes this “reluctance” to the “powerful influence of the dogma of unity in modern Islamic thought,” which demands that “Muslims should regard themselves as a single person.”<sup>139</sup> El-Fadl identifies this as a problem, as moderate Muslims should be able to separate themselves from puritans who impose an unyielding and hegemonic worldview of Islam, which ends up disrupting the peace of diversity. Although El-Fadl takes a more divisive approach when addressing problems internal to the Muslim community, he has also criticized Western policies and dogmatic secularism. In fact, he, himself, has been accused of being a “stealth Islamist” and closet “militant,” for his political views.

El-Fadl’s engagement with, and definition of, moderate Muslims, arguably results from the discourse already perpetrated by Western media. He attempts to detail what entails ‘moderation’ through a deeply theological lens, and refrains from describing political attitudes that may be held by these groups. Instead, he subtly points out the hypocrisy of puritan groups for their relatively cozy relationship with Western interests (for example, Saudi Arabia) and the adoption of modern technology and modern nation-state conceptions by puritan groups to further their own political agendas. Ultimately, El-Fadl indirectly challenges secular notions of ‘moderation,’ while constructing a theological ‘moderate’ Islam integrated, specifically, within Western culture.

### ***Imam Feisal Abdu Rauf: Sufi Imam and Community Activist***

Feisal Abdul Rauf, a Kuwaiti-American Sufi imam and community leader, is most popularly known for his efforts to build the Park 51 Community Center, also known as the infamous ‘Ground-Zero Mosque.’ Rauf’s work revolves around improving interfaith community

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<sup>138</sup> El-Fadl, p. 14.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

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relations among Muslims, and bridging the ‘Muslim world’ with the West. He has expressed on multiple occasions, his effort to foster a “moderate Islam through American idioms.”<sup>140</sup>

Rosemary Corbett, the author of *Making Moderate Islam*, details the life and work of Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, his mistakes and endeavors in trying to project an American-Muslim dream mirrored from a Protestant-style of engagement with religion. For Rauf, ‘moderate’ Islam entails letting go of cultural baggage from back home, and integrating values of neo-liberal democratic capitalism in the ethos of Western Muslims.

Rauf and his wife, Daisy Khan’s understanding of ‘moderate’ Islam can be found in their project initiatives, the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA) and the Cordoba Initiative. Both Rauf and Khan identify as Sufi Muslims, and recognize their brand of Sufism as ‘apolitical’ that focuses on the arts and culture. It is interesting to note, that Sufism contains a wide appeal among Westerners as it is often culturally appropriated, divorced from Islam, and seen as ‘exotic mysticism.’<sup>141</sup> “Indeed, the ostensible difference between Sufis and ordinary Muslims, who are supposedly more rigid in their practices and interpretations, has long been part of Sufism’s appeal.”<sup>142</sup> For this reason, the United States, amid the Cold War, “sought client states” and specifically Sufis, because of the “orientalist idea that Sufis are particularly pliable and opposed to ‘fundamentalists,’”<sup>143</sup> as a part of their foreign policy strategies. Orientalist notions incorrectly associate Sufism with a type of secular universalism; one that stereotypes Sufism as romantic and poetic that values intoxication, love, and lust. It is of no wonder that the best-selling poems in America is the Muslim poet, Rumi.<sup>144</sup> However, the themes often evoked

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<sup>140</sup> Corbett, Rosemary. *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service, and “The Ground Zero Mosque” Controversy*, 2016, p. 5.

<sup>141</sup> See Carl Ernst’s *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, 1997.

<sup>142</sup> Corbett, p. 71.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Ciabattari, Jane. “Why is Rumi the Best-Selling Poet in the US?” BBC, 2014.

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in Sufi poetry reflect a deep love and connection to *Allah*, usually referred to as the ‘mysterious lover,’ to the point of spiritual intoxication.

Yet, the growing interest towards Sufism in the United States has allowed for American political interests to form coalitions with the ‘moderate’ Muslims they find acceptable, to advance neo-liberal and capitalist interests. For instance, “Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, the US representative of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi Order, who founded the Islamic Supreme Council of America in 1998—reinforced the tendency among State Department officials to identify Sufis as peaceful, apolitical, and moderate, and to view all other Muslims as possible extremists.”<sup>145</sup> Although, Rauf and Khan do not necessarily support this particular narrative, their work seeks to construct a depoliticized Islam streamlined through Sufi spirituality. Their understanding of Islam allows them to connect on a deeper, spiritual, and universal level rooted in notions of peaceful religious pluralism. In fact, the very goal of ASMA, is ‘to strengthen a culturally American expression of Islam based on tolerance and on cultural and religious harmony and to foster an environment in which Muslims can thrive within a pluralistic society without compromising their essential values and beliefs.’<sup>146</sup> The organization trains young Muslims “to be spokespersons for a ‘tolerant, harmonious, authentic Islam,’ which means ‘encouraging them to identify with the *essentials* of the Islamic faith *that cut across cultural boundaries*.”<sup>147</sup> Ironically, Rauf and Khan criticize ‘immigrant’ Islam that is attached to cultural baggage; while calling for a distinctly American brand of Islam for Muslims. The paradox exists in the very political nature of Rauf’s and Khan’s work, despite their claims of de-politicization.

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<sup>145</sup> Corbett, p. 88.

<sup>146</sup> Corbett, p. 97.

<sup>147</sup> Corbett, p. 98.

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Rauf and Khan, both from highly educated and elite backgrounds, value the idea of the American dream, Protestant ethics of hard work, capitalism, and individualism. Their definition of moderation very much stems from values found in the free-market, little government intervention, and privatized religiosity available to the public. Rauf and Khan tend to attract more affluent Muslim members and converts within their congregation, many who are “frequently unaware that tensions over resources even existed between Muslim communities in the United States and (like many affluent Muslims) tend to view calls to address disparity as immoderate and as the *cause* of political controversies.”<sup>148</sup> The political-theology of Rauf and Khan fail to address racial and socio-economic inequality. In many respects, the politics of race and class would be considered extreme for this Sufi group, as it focuses on the politics of material wealth and identity. Despite Rauf and Khan’s genuine belief in Muslim advancement through capitalist means, free-market trade relationships between the Muslim world and the West to bridge differences, and a uniquely American expression of Islam as the ‘moderate’ Islam, they still have not managed to successfully gain the trust of Western political leadership. Their loyalty and patriotism towards Western values have not quelled Islamophobia. For all the ‘moderate Islam’ that Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf and Daisy Khan advocate, their projects have still met harsh criticism, as evident in the failure of building the so-called ‘Ground-Zero Mosque.’<sup>149</sup>

### ***Muqtedar Khan: Traditional-Liberal Political Scientist***

Muqtedar Khan, political scientist on the Middle East, and professor at the University of Delaware, identifies as a ‘traditional’ Muslim for matters on religion, yet politically liberal on social issues. Khan authored *Debating Moderate Islam*, a discursive work in which multiple

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<sup>148</sup> Corbett, 142.

<sup>149</sup> Weiss, Lois. “Apartments, Islamic museum to be built on site of failed Ground Zero Mosque,” 2016.

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scholars debate and define the nature of ‘moderate’ Islam. Khan echoes much of the democratic establishment rhetoric on moderate Islam. His Clinton and Obama-esque conception on the role that ‘moderate’ Muslims serve in the West reinforces the trope that good Muslims must fight bad ones by aiding the state’s security apparatus. For him, the nature of ‘moderate’ Muslims can be found in the acceptance of secular-democratic institutions and pluralist societies. ‘Moderate’ Islam traces its roots back to the traditional practice of Islamic jurisprudence when multiple opinions on Islamic law flourished. Today, traditional Islam should look like a democratic and pluralistic society, where no single worldview dominates the public sphere.

Khan acknowledges the general distaste Muslims have towards labels such as “moderate,” as it may indicate one who has “politically sold out to the ‘other’ side.”<sup>150</sup> The common sentiment among most Muslims is that “there is no such thing as moderate or radical Islam; that there is ‘only one Islam’—the true Islam, and all other expressions are falsehoods espoused by the hypocrites or the apostates.”<sup>151</sup> Khan, however, considers this dogmatic and narrow-minded, as it assumes that the individual making these claims believe that their interpretation of Islam remains the only authentic one. According to him, moderate Muslims are “reflective, self-critical, pro-democracy, pro-human rights, and closet secularists. Their secularism is American in nature,” in that “they believe in the separation of church and state, but not like the French, who prefer to exile religion from the public sphere.”<sup>152</sup> Moderates may vary in their religiosity, but the defining factor of moderation is in one’s basic attitude towards democracy. It is for this reason that moderate Muslims should collaborate with the state, against extremists who are mired in their anti-democratic dogma.

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<sup>150</sup> Khan, Muqtedar. *Debating Moderate Islam: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West*, 2007, p. 40.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Khan, p. 52.



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Khan argues that ‘moderate’ Muslims carry more potential in fighting against the War on Terror, than they are accredited with. Their “assets” include “human intelligence, cultural insights, linguistic skills, experience, and awareness of the diversity within the Islamic groups and movements.”<sup>153</sup> Moderate Muslims have the ability to “rescue Islam and innocent Muslims” from the negative influences of “rogue Islamists,” counter anti-US propaganda, undermine the legitimacy of extremism, and “provide an alternative understanding of political and global realities to prevent the perception that the war on terror is a war on Islam.”<sup>154</sup> Although Khan plays into the stereotypical rhetoric that Muslims are inextricably linked to extremism—whether they are a part of it, or actively fighting against it—he too, has criticized aspects of American foreign policy. His intentions are derived from his desire to bridge the gap between Muslims and the West, and to “fix” the errors of American foreign policy with the “Muslim world,” in order to solve problems of violent extremism.

Despite Khan’s genuine goals for working towards peace, democracy and human rights, his criticism of Israeli and American foreign policies, have also led to false accusations against him as a closet extremist and ‘white-washer’ of *Shari’a*.<sup>155</sup> Khan has chosen to embrace the ‘moderate’ Muslim discourse instead of rejecting it, as he sees value in distinguishing moderates from extremists. For him, ‘moderate’ Islam is a gateway to establishing a prosperous relationship between Muslims and the West during a time of distrust and violence. It is important for him to critique religious extremism just as it is necessary to analyze the mistakes of Western foreign policy. Khan demonstrates that Muslims can be proponents of democracy, human rights, pluralism and the West, while retaining their religious beliefs. Unlike Abdul Rauf, Khan does not

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<sup>153</sup> Khan, p. 8.

<sup>154</sup> Khan, pp. 6-9.

<sup>155</sup> Spencer, Robert. “How Feisal Abdul Rauf and Muqtedar Khan Whitewash Sharia,” 2010.

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outwardly promote neo-liberal free-market capitalism as the benchmark for moderation, but they both reflect on the notion of religiosity and American political and philosophical values as not being mutually exclusive from one another.

***Tariq Ramadan: Salafi, Academic, Philosopher, and Writer***

Tariq Ramadan, perhaps one of the most revolutionary Islamic intellectuals of this time, a scholar, writer, and philosopher on liberation theology, is an example of someone who promotes a unique ‘Western Muslim’ identity while thoroughly challenging Western systems of inequality, oppression, capitalism, and imperialism. While known as one of Europe’s most influential Muslim philosophers, and also the grand-son of Hassan al-Banna (one of the central founders of the Muslim Brotherhood), Ramadan’s position is rooted in controversy. Although, the Muslim Brotherhood, historically, has rejected all forms of Western influence in Islamic practice and institutions, Ramadan’s goal has been to “develop a Muslim personality in the West.” He envisions this through a balance of Islamic tradition and modern reform, by looking to the origins of Islam for “what is unchangeable (*thabit*) and what is subject to change (*mutaghayir*)”<sup>156</sup> in the religion.

Ramadan does not explicitly propose a ‘moderate’ Islam, unlike the other Muslim personalities mentioned. However, he believes that cultivating a distinct Western Muslim identity remains key to addressing some of the internal problems faced by Muslims living in the West. For as long as Western Muslims assume their minority status, their identity, politics, concerns, and needs will remain marginalized. Cultivating this identity is not necessarily a construction of moderation, but instead it is the formation of an effective relationship which

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<sup>156</sup> Ramadan, Tariq. *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 2004, p.9.

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allows for a more empowered Muslim voice in global affairs. Additionally, Ramadan sees no qualms with a “Western Islam,” as it does not remain distinct from *Islamic* Islam. By this he means, that “there is [only] one, Islam, and the fundamental principles that define it are those to which all Muslims adhere, even though there may be, clothed in Islamic principles, an important margin allowed for evolution, transformation, and adaptation to various social and cultural environments.”<sup>157</sup> Islam in “Black Africa, North Africa and Asia”<sup>158</sup> may look culturally different from one another, but still exercise core Islamic values that remain universally undisputed by Muslims; for instance, the oneness of God. Simultaneously, the Western expression of Islam, while necessary for Muslims living in the West, is not essential to the development of ‘moderate’ Islam.

Ramadan contends that the moderate discourse today is reductive. Similar to El-Fadl’s argument, he outlines how Islamic scholars and theologians have historically always engaged in a rhetoric of moderation when making any legal decision. Choosing the path of moderation, or the middle of two extremes, has formed much of the backbone of Islamic jurisprudence. However, in Western societies today, “the practice of day-to-day visibility of religion is close to zero (even in the United States, where religion as a cultural and moral reference point is relatively strong),”<sup>159</sup> and to, therefore, “speak of daily prayers, fasting...prohibitions and dress codes is often seen automatically as verging on excess.”<sup>160</sup> In this respect, Western notions of moderation differ from that of practicing Muslims, as for the former, moderation reflects the invisibility of religion. Ramadan believes that “moderation is multi-dimensional,” and cannot be

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<sup>157</sup> Ramadan, p. 9.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ramadan, Tariq. “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim.” New Statesman, 2010.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

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“expressed only with reference to the West or to ‘non-Muslims.’”<sup>161</sup> Different societies have different conceptions of what is ‘moderate’ by their own cultural standards.

Furthermore, Ramadan also criticizes the simplicity behind the usage of the term. For him, there are two modes of ‘moderation:’ the religious sphere, and the political sphere. Standards of moderation cannot equally be applied to both, as religious moderation and political moderation consist of entirely different things—different conditions, contexts, circumstances, and resources. As already mentioned, religious moderation is dependent upon cultural norms and contexts. Political moderation, on the other hand, remains highly subjective: while terrorism against civilian populations in Western cities is considered extreme, colonial occupation in Muslim countries, state violence and the usage of drones are not.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, disconnect between religious practice and political attitudes exist as well; “There are innumerable cases of political personalities, intellectuals and civil society activists who are indeed Muslims with liberal views and practices (in regards to religion), but who publicly support the most hardline dictatorial regimes and/or the most violent resistance groups everywhere from Algeria to France.”<sup>163</sup> And so, ‘moderate’ is not only reductive as it simplifies the diversity of theology, law and politics, but “moderation in religion cannot be correlated with its supposed political equivalent,” even though “there is a tendency to conflate these categories.”<sup>164</sup>

Although Ramadan does not define ‘moderation,’ as he believes any definition is a futile attempt at limiting diversity of opinions, he believes that “religious moderation, however it is defined, is perfectly compatible with a radical, non-violent, democratic political stance that

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

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rejects all forms of domination, exploitation, and oppression.”<sup>165</sup> He defines his personal religious orientation as that of a *Salafi*-reformerist—one who adheres to an unmediated reading of the Qur’an and *Sunna*, refers back to the practices of the Muslims of the first generations, and also uses reason and personal *ijtihad*<sup>166</sup> to develop practices that are contextual to the current social environment. Unlike *Salafi*-literalists, also akin to *Wahhabis*, who reject the system of jurisprudence and rely on selective and literalist readings directly from religious scriptures, reformists opt for a balance between tradition and modernity, classical methodology and personal reason. Ramadan may not explicitly call this “moderate,” but in many respects, his way of thinking suggests that this is how he conceives of ‘moderation’ in his own practice. Unfortunately, Ramadan too, like many well-intentioned practicing Muslim personalities, has been a suspect of harboring extremist sentiments and carrying a national security threat by the American government.

### ***Wrapping-Up the Debate***

Debating on ‘moderation’ has become integral for Western Muslim personalities. Many of them, however, hold widely different views regarding the ‘moderate’ discourse; but, the common thread is their conception of ‘moderation’ from the lens of integration and citizenship without compromising Islamic religious or moral values. El-Fadl’s theological differentiation of ‘moderates’ from ‘puritans,’ Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf’s ‘moderate’ American Islam rooted in Protestant ethics of democratic-capitalism, Muqtedar Khan’s politically secular-and-liberal, yet practicing Muslim ‘moderate,’ or Tariq Ramadan’s anti-imperialist, yet democratic ‘moderate,’

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Refer back to Chapter 1. *Ijtihad* can be described as ‘mental gymnastics’ and grappling with religious scripture to derive rulings.

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all suggest ways of being Muslim in the West. There is a value in trying to define ‘moderation’ among practicing Muslims, as it opposes the more Western-secular definition of it. It allows for Muslims to practice Islam as they want, and counter any stigma associated with Islamic practices. Defining ‘moderation’ by standards set by Muslims, allows for active political participation in Western society without fear of religious discrimination. For each of the individuals mentioned, ‘moderation’ is a way to appeal to the West and gain trust, by differentiating one’s self from a more ‘foreign’ Islam. Despite the well-intentioned attempts to bridge Islam and the West from each Muslim personality mentioned, none have been completely successful in gaining the trust of Western politicians. Their acceptance of liberal Western values such as human rights, yet criticism of Western policies in the Middle East and Israel, have all led to accusations of extremism against them. It is evident, that ‘moderation’ is inextricably tied to the Western political landscape.

### **Conclusion**

So, what is moderation? And who gets to decide? Modernization theory assumes that as society progresses and modernizes, society will become less religious, more secular and more ‘moderate.’ Not only has this been disproven, but it also simplifies notions of the secular. Casanova, among many other theorists, argue that secularism manifests differently in diverse societies, as do concepts of modernity. Modernity is not a linear development with a set standard of prerequisites. It would be incorrect to assume that moderation occurs from the sole result of liberalism and secularism. Despite these misconceptions, these concepts have become internalized among Westerners. As a result, many assume that non-Westernized traditions are

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backward, illiberal, immoderate, and sometimes barbaric. Unfortunately, Islamic traditions have been defined under this category of “non-Western backwardness.”

Defining ‘moderation,’ however, has become politicized. There is a political investment in this term, because it has the power to legitimize Islam among Westerners, and construct Muslims according to Western standards. Since 9/11, Islam has consistently been seen in relation to terrorism and extremism. These associations, while unreasonable, have become prevalent in the West, to the point where introducing ‘moderate’ Islam has become a necessity for Western political interests to counter the ‘Islamic’ extremism. Extremism is associated with any political activity by Muslims that criticize Western politics. While most people would argue that extremism requires violence, there exists a fear in the West, that critical Muslims are prone to extremism, or ‘closet’ extremists. This has not only made being Muslim in the West more difficult, but it subconsciously coerces Muslims to be and act in ways to gain Western trust. As a result, Muslims have also absorbed the ‘moderate’ discourse. Muslim personalities attempt to reclaim this term in order to safeguard Islamic values and Western citizenship. The debate over authoritatively defining ‘moderation’ has become a discursive battlefield—one that questions Islam’s presence in the West, and one that separates Muslims from the non-West.

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## Chapter 3: Western Policies and the Makings of the

### ‘Moderate’ Muslim

*Islam needs to reform, and it needs to start with the ‘moderate’ Muslims.* This sentiment can be found in the rhetoric of many liberal personalities, atheists and secular Muslims, including Bill Maher, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Asra Nomani, and Zuhdi Jasser. These individuals often argue in public media that Islam is inherently problematic with extremist tendencies, and the only way to solve this “issue” is to create a more ‘moderate’ interpretation of Islam grounded in Western values of liberalism and secularism—in other words, to understand Islam not literally as “God’s word,” but as a historical byproduct of social-political-and-economic consequences.<sup>167</sup> As argued in the previous chapter, the word, ‘moderate,’ serves as a tool of legitimacy and authority over Islam. Because the term implies an inherent ‘goodness’—*everything in moderation*—both ‘traditional’ Muslims and Western secularists engage in this discourse of the “moderate,” for reasons that advance each group’s own interests.

No current religious group discusses their faith or identity as one that is ‘moderate’ except for Muslims. For other religious groups, it is implied that extremists fall outside of the typical practices of religion. However, Muslims and non-Muslims feel compelled to use the term ‘moderate,’ when describing ‘non-extremist’ Muslims. Devout practicing Muslims for instance, will assert that Islam by nature *is* ‘moderate’<sup>168</sup> and flexible, as witnessed in Islamic jurisprudential history and Islam’s Golden Age. On the other hand, secular-liberal personalities,

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<sup>167</sup> This is the language used in a report released by the National Security Division of the Rand Corporation. See Cheryl Benard, *Civil and Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, Strategies* (Pittsburgh: Rand Corporation, 2003)

<sup>168</sup> See Manzoor, Sarfraz. “Can We Drop the Term ‘Moderate Muslim? It’s Meaningless.” *The Guardian*. 16 March, 2015 and Shireen Younus, “I Am Not a Moderate Muslim.” *The Harvard Crimson*. 10 Feb, 2017.



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like Bill Maher, want ‘moderate’ Muslims to disavow parts of their faith that do not align with liberal values.<sup>169</sup> Feminists, like Asra Nomani, and atheists, like Ayaan Hirsi Ali, want moderate Muslims to reform Islam through more secular interpretations because of their aversion to the conservative cultures they personally grew up in.<sup>170</sup> Secular Muslim spokespeople like Zuhdi Jasser, call for Western intervention to secularize Muslim societies and dismantle all forms of Islamist<sup>171</sup> politics.<sup>172</sup> Politicians ask ‘moderate’ Muslims to affirm their political loyalties to the state,<sup>173</sup> and law enforcement recruits ‘moderates’ to spy on conservative Muslims in the name of national security.<sup>174</sup> Whether echoed through secular Muslim reformers or non-Muslim liberals, it is a fact, that many Western governments actively engage in policies to reform Islam to further neo-liberal interests. Consequently, lay Muslims absorb the political rhetoric initiated by the West because of their desire to live peacefully in a plural society where they are not viewed as a threat.

The previous chapter details various discourses over what ‘moderation’ entails; but what are the policies that actively lead to its fruition? Is it merely constructed rhetoric? Alternatively, are there tangible policies that coerce a particular kind of ‘moderation?’ Intimidation, Islamophobia, and policies in the name of secularism and national security have fostered, not

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<sup>169</sup> See “Bill Maher: Overtime ‘Where are the Moderate Muslims?’” Youtube video, 2:11. Posted May 18, 2015 and “Real Time with Bill Maher: Islam and Free Speech (HBO).” Youtube video, 6:35. Posted Oct 31, 2014.

<sup>170</sup> See “Ayaan Hirsi Ali: Islam Needs Reform.” Youtube video, 8:06. Posted March 30, 2008 and “Bill Maher: Liberals Not Helping ‘Reform Islam’ with Guest Speaker Asra Nomani.” Youtube video, 6:35. Posted Feb 25, 2017.

<sup>171</sup> Commentary: ‘Islamist’ politics refers to any form of politics that is inspired by Islam, its principles or ethics. Oftentimes, Islamist politics is conflated with ‘jihadist’ politics, terrorism or extremism. However, Islamist politics can vary in scope and ideology, and does not necessarily advocate for violence.

<sup>172</sup> “About AIFD.” American Islamic Forum for Democracy website.

<sup>173</sup> See Wilkie, Christina and Elise Foley. “Donald Trump Proposes Ideological Test For Entry To The United States.” Huffington Post. Aug 16, 2016 and Nusairat, Tuqa. “Bill Clinton’s Loyalty Test for Muslim Americans.” Foreign Policy. July 28, 2016.

<sup>174</sup> See Glionna, John. “U.S Muslim Leaders Say FBI Pressuring People to Become Informants.” LA Times. Nov 3, 2014.

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only the creation of the “moderate” Muslim, but also the legitimation of the Western worldview onto non-Western lands.

### **Institutional ‘*Islamo-Racism*’**

Following the decline of Soviet Russia, post-Cold War, many Soviet-allied geopolitically positioned Muslim nations in the Middle East, had been left stranded in a new international system dominated by American and Western interests. This “splintering” had cast “Muslim nations who had mastered the game of survival by playing the US against the Soviet Union, wondering about their future,”<sup>175</sup> their security, and freedoms. The Iranian Revolution of 1979<sup>176</sup> coupled with the ‘Salman Rushdie Affair’ in 1989,<sup>177</sup> plus the absence of a global power in opposition to the US, ushered a new era on the war against ‘Islamic’ extremism. The new global climate and Western foreign policies regarding Muslim-majority countries not only “brought about dramatic changes in the comfort zone of Muslims,” but also led Muslims “to feel targeted by the Western media as intolerant and unfit for citizenship in the United States.”<sup>178</sup> Contrary to the popular belief, that discrimination against Muslims was catalyzed by 9/11 and the War on Terror, *Islamo-racist* policies, arguably, began following the reshaping of the new order of international politics following the end of the Cold War.

Many Muslims will argue that *Islamo-Racism* began with the Western colonialism of Muslim lands following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. What was supposed to

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<sup>175</sup> Haddad, Yvonne. *Becoming American*, (2011), p. 54.

<sup>176</sup> The Iranian Revolution (1978-1979) was a popular uprising in Iran against the Western-backed dictator, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, leading to the establishment of the current state system, the Islamic Republic.

<sup>177</sup> The “Salman Rushdie Affair” refers to the publishing of “The Satanic Verses,” a fictional novel written by the British-Indian author, Salman Rushdie, who alleges the Prophet Muhammad (saw) uttered verses revealed by Satan. This novel caused public upheaval, controversy and violent threats among discontented Muslims globally accusing Rushdie of spreading blasphemous libel. The Salman Rushdie Affair fostered debates over Muslim intolerance towards free expression.

<sup>178</sup> Haddad, Yvonne, p. 54.

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signal a new phase of sovereignty among predominantly Muslim Arab nations, turned out to be a new phase of Western mandate systems, partitions, and artificially “carving out” Middle Eastern states into political provinces in unprecedented ways.<sup>179</sup> At times, “Western expansion into Muslim territories is...depicted as having a religious agenda carried out by colonial bureaucrats and Christian missionaries...who sought to liberate Muslims from Islam.”<sup>180</sup> Western colonialism was viewed as an invasion of Muslim lands to defame Islam, by promoting “ethnic and sectarian divisions as part of the policy to divide and rule,” and instilling Western notions of superiority.<sup>181</sup> The invasion of Muslim lands and stirring ethnic conflict may be categorized as overt racism through colonial aggression; but what does modern-day institutional *Islamo*-racism look like?

*Islamo*-racism is premised upon the idea that the racialization of Muslims and their perceived image (hijab and burka-clad women, stereotypical brown features on angry-looking Arab men, etc) are linked to their inherent backwardness. The Muslim people are an inferior, intolerant, and dangerous people; this orientalizing of Muslims contributes to prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination against them—but, how can discrimination against Islam, a religious tradition, be considered racism? Moustafa Bayoumi, an English professor at Brooklyn College, in his award-winning book, *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror*, shares the story of Ahmed Hassan, one of the first cases of an Arab-Muslim immigrant petitioning for naturalization. The judge, Arthur J. Tuttle, “based his determination of Hassan’s whiteness not principally on the color of his skin, but primarily on the fact that he was an Arab and Islam is the dominant religion among Arabs,” thus assuming his Islam would prevent him

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<sup>179</sup> See “The Middle East and the West: WWI and Beyond,” NPR (2004).

<sup>180</sup> Hadad, p. 41.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

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from assimilation. While Arabs had no racial classification at this time, the Naturalization Act (1790-1952) “had limited citizenship to ‘free white persons, but without exactly defining what makes a white person.’”<sup>182</sup> These instances, found in both history and the present, indicate that “religion determines race.”<sup>183</sup> While racism is often perceived as an overt system of discrimination and violence, institutional racism manifests differently in the form of discriminatory state policies under the guise of upholding national security and culture. Some elements of modern-day institutional *Islamo*-racism can be found in Western immigration and security policies, racial profiling, and political rhetoric.

Although *Islamo*-racism has existed throughout the orientalized European version of history towards their Eastern counterpart, the post 9/11 discourse undoubtedly reflects the increasingly evident policies of state-sanctioned *Islamo*-racism within Western societies. As a matter of fact, *Islamo*-racism fuels the discourse surrounding ‘moderate’ Islam, as it forces a new state-sanctioned Muslim identity in order to wither away traces of “Muslim-ness” that the state finds threatening. For instance, the Bush administration, following the twin tower attacks, “made it clear that it expected ‘moderate’ governments to implement other measures to ensure American interests,” including but not limited to, “curbing free speech” considered “‘inflammatory’ if it was directed against American or Israeli policies.”<sup>184</sup> Officials within the administration, from Paul Wolfowitz, the U.S deputy secretary of defense to Daniel Pipes, Conservative commentator on the Middle East, “weighed in on how to promote moderate Islam.”<sup>185</sup> Wolfowitz suggested the US act as an invisible third party sponsoring the ‘moderate’ Muslim voice (and by ‘moderate’ Muslim voice, he means Muslims who show unequivocal

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<sup>182</sup> Bayoumi, p. 48.

<sup>183</sup> Bayoumi, Moustafa. *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror*, 2015, p. 50.

<sup>184</sup> Hadad, p. 83.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

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support for American policies of national interest) in leading the battle among all Muslims. By their definition, a ‘moderate’ Muslim is one who would have supported the overall campaign to fight “terror” in Muslim regions—this “terror,” also known as, illegitimate excuses to invade lands for geopolitical dominance and resources.

In an encounter narrated by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad in her book, *Becoming American*, President Bush allegedly, “sent personal messages to Islamic scholars, including Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, asking them to ‘delete those verses and sayings’” seen as “‘inappropriate from the Qur’an.’”<sup>186</sup> Additionally, “‘President Bush pushed far off his crusade, thinking Islamic education must stop.’”<sup>187</sup> For a majority of Muslims in the world, the Qur’an is the inimitable and unchallenged word of God, which stands throughout time. To have the courage to ask Islamic scholars to remove certain verses according to what an American President believes is appropriate, speaks to the level of disconnect between Muslims and Western governments. While Bush may not be representative of all Western individuals, his status as a world leader (at that time) shows the cognitive dissonance of the West’s values and relationship with Islam. On one hand, it advocates for both freedom of religion, and on the other, a state-promoted ‘moderate’ Islam; as Bush called Islam a “religion of peace,” but also asked to make moderations to Islam.

### ***Islamo-Racist Security Measures***

Some institutional Islamo-racist policies under the Bush Administration include the USA PATRIOT Act, enhanced security measures, and the Anti-Terrorism Act—all which have legalized infringing on the civil liberties of Arabs and Muslims on American soil. The PATRIOT

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<sup>186</sup> Haddad, p. 81. Haddad quotes Wajih Abu Zikri in a piece published by *Al-Akhbar* newspaper based in Cairo, Egypt,

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

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Act (Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) had “lifted all legal protection of liberty for Muslims and Arabs..., [and] sanctioned the monitoring and surveillance of Muslims without notification.”<sup>188</sup> The Anti-Terrorism Act “had sanctioned the incarceration of Arabs and Muslims with ‘secret’ evidence,” and most times, with no evidence at all.<sup>189</sup> Not only did this indiscriminately target Arabs, Muslims, and those who looked Arab or Muslim, but it also led to their indefinite detention, and torture in offshore American prisons like Guantanamo Bay. These instances have broken families apart, silenced Muslim communities into fear, and formed suppressed outrage. The fear of being spied upon, expressing political opinions, being at the wrong place at the wrong time, or having one’s child influenced by a controversial crowd are all internalized fears among most Muslim families, especially immigrant Muslim families, living in the West. However, “this paradigm hasn’t changed under Obama.”<sup>190</sup> In fact, “the surveillance structures that stand atop have expanded, and the explicit derision of Islam expressed by Bush, and perfected by Donald Trump, are sugar-coated with tolerant language, Ramadan dinners, and belated mosque visits.”<sup>191</sup>

Other instances of *Islam*-racism are found within the law enforcement. The long-standing tension between Muslims and NYPD demonstrate internalized orientalism of the state, and the effects of top-down policies from the state into local police force. In 2007, the NYPD published a public report titled “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat.”<sup>192</sup> Although, the report has been purged, and no longer remains the standard criteria for determining the process of radicalization, it reflects the internalization of *Islam*-racism among law

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<sup>188</sup> Haddad, “The Quest for ‘Moderate’ Islam, 2004. Lecture.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Beydoun, Khaled. “The Myth of the ‘Moderate’ Muslim,” 2016.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat.” NYPD Report, 2007.

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enforcement and their oversimplifications of Islam, religiosity and Salafism. According to the report, certain ‘behavioral changes’ among Muslim youth can apparently determine their likeliness towards radicalism. The report specifically targets Muslims who identify with a more Salafi strain; Salafis, a more socially-conservative group, typically approach Islam with a more egalitarian lens believing that anyone can understand the Qur’an without requiring jurists as mediators, and seek to practice Islam traced back to the practices of the Prophet and his Companions in a more literal way. The NYPD report refers to this as “Jihadi-Salafi ideology,” and argues that this particular strain is the catalyzing factor that influences one to carry out acts of terror.<sup>193</sup> Although the report acknowledges a superficial difference between non-violent Salafis and ‘Jihadist-Salafis,’ the language used in the report, nonetheless, oversimplifies “signs of radicalization” and blurs the image of practicing Muslims with ‘Jihadist-Salafis.’ It also marks an interest in general Salafism, as the first step towards radicalism, therefore, implying (1) there is, supposedly, an exact scientific process that leads to radicalization, and (2) that Muslims who have an internal desire to uphold a religious community (most Muslims, whether Salafi or not), abide by Prophetic standards, and create a more unified Muslim community are inherently threats.

By NYPD standards, “key indicators” that an individual is progressing along the “radicalization continuum” are directly correlated to how religious one is becoming. Taken directly from the report, these include, but are not limited to:<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

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- Progression or gravitation towards Salafi Islam
  - Regular Attendance at a Salafi mosque
  - Becoming alienated from one's 'former' life; affiliating with like-minded individuals
  - Joining or forming a group of like-minded individuals in a quest to strengthen one's dedication to Salafi Islam
  - Giving up cigarettes, drinking, gambling, and urban hip-hop gangster clothes
  - Wearing traditional Islamic clothing, growing a beard
  - Becoming involved in social activism and community issues.

Not only is this list absurd, but it targets anyone who seems to change their life around, express more piety, and involve themselves in community activism (as if any of these are negative actions). It enforces the belief that attaching one's self deeply to Islam, or any form of political or social activity is viewed as threatening. This report conflates exploring one's faith and religiosity with radicalization, and incorrectly assumes that any political identity rooted in Islamic values is equivalent to extremist beliefs.

### *Islamic Garb as a Terror Threat*

As of recent, the highest European Court ruled that it is legal for employers to ban hijabs from the workplace—a controversial political decision that will make it more difficult for observant Muslim women to find jobs.<sup>195</sup> This decision comes after a series of controversies that have taken place throughout Europe, and the infamous “burkini ban” in France—an incident that prompted French law enforcement to force a woman to remove her burkini publicly on a beach, resulting in her humiliation.<sup>196</sup> Although, French courts have ruled the ban unconstitutional, France's mayors refuse to overturn their rulings, citing security threats as their motivating

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<sup>195</sup> Bilefsky, Dan. “Ban on Headscarves at Work is Legal, EU Court Rules.” New York Times, 2017.

<sup>196</sup> McKenzie, Sheena. “French Mayors Maintain Burkini Bans Despite Court Ruling.” CNN, 2016.



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reason, and their “response to growing terror concerns.”<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, top French officials including the current Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, called the burkini a “symbol of the enslavement of women.”<sup>198</sup> These two incidents, coupled with France’s hijab ban from public institutions illustrate the secular state’s aggressive social policies to regulate religious expression in the public sphere, and forcibly assimilate Muslim minorities to secular culture at the expense of their personal freedoms, otherwise arguing that Muslims and Islam remain a threat to national security if they adhere to their traditional customs.

Joan Wallach Scott, an American historian who focuses on France, delves into the controversy regarding Islamic garb in her work, *The Politics of the Veil*. She analyzes French opinions, politics, and philosophies that maintain justifications for banning the veil, and argues that these sentiments are rooted in orientalist racism. According to French officials, “the veil is an emblem of radical Islamist politics... the symbol of the clash of cultures... [And] Islam’s resistance to modernity.”<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, assimilating to French standards of physical appearance is the only way to be a proper French citizen, and maintain French unity and equality. Wearing the veil symbolizes a break from mainstream French culture; a sign of difference, and therefore, inequality. Unlike American values of multiculturalism, Scott highlights that the French find multiculturalism divisive and chaotic.<sup>200</sup> French universalism posits a single national identity, culture, and customs, and vehemently denounces any group affiliation outside of French nationalism. One can argue, that their secularism is the equivalent of their state enforced religion.

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<sup>197</sup> A burkini is Islamic swimwear that covers a woman’s entire body.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Scott, Joan. *The Politics of the Veil*, 2010, p. 2-4.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

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One of the first instances of *Islam*-racist policies targeting veiled Muslim women in France occurred in 1989, known as the *affaires des foulards*, when three Muslim girls refused to take off their headscarves at their middle school when asked by school officials.<sup>201</sup> During this time, the Salman Rushdie Affair and Arab militant movements garnered international attention—therefore, the headscarf was immediately associated with ties to jihadist movements through a symbolic solidarity. As ludicrous as it sounds, middle-school-aged Muslim girls were viewed as terror threats for wearing the hijab, and distracted from receiving a proper education. Moreover, headscarf controversies similar to this flare up every few years in France, and are usually correlated to periods of international tension with Middle Eastern regions.

Scott argues that the politicization of the veil can be traced back to the Algerian wars of independence from French colonization. The development of the veil as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance originated with the re-veiling of non-religious women who played an active role in the fight against the occupying French power. Throughout colonial history, women in Algeria and other Muslim colonies were viewed through an orientalist lens as veiled, oppressed, and hypersexual. Gender segregation and covered women frustrated French colonists as these women remained hidden and inaccessible to Frenchmen. Erotic depictions of the harem were conjured in the minds of colonists, as places filled with highly sexual and sensual activity, promiscuous and exotic women. Even though Frenchmen were never exposed to the reality of these all-women spaces, they managed to capitalize on these stereotypes in the form of fictional story-telling, post-cards for tourists, and scholarship. Muslim and Arab women plagued the fantasies and fetishes of French settlers—access to Algerian prostitutes were, therefore, viewed as treasures won in colonial conquest. Over time, secularizing and unveiling Algerian women

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, pp. 20-35.

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were viewed by the French as liberating them from the stronghold of the barbaric wretches of Islam—a win for the white French man’s moral ego. It is only natural, that when the anti-colonial resistance in Algeria began to surge with the re-veiling of women, the French ego was shattered. Veiling during the independence wars was seen as resistance to Westernization and colonialism. Frantz Fanon, a prominent French-Algerian revolutionary and psychologist most famously known for his radical work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, describes this phenomenon as the following:

In the beginning, the veil was a mechanism of resistance, but its value for the social group remained very strong. The veil was worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier *was bent on unveiling Algeria*.<sup>202</sup>

Controversies surrounding the hijab ban have a deeply entrenched history rooted in Western foreign policies of intervention. Veiled women are viewed as the carriers of tradition, and threats to the secular polity. Even though a small minority of Muslim women in France wear the hijab, the assault on their civil liberties is indicative of state coercion in constructing the appropriate citizen—the acceptable Muslim, and assimilated patriot. The “French law banning the display of religious symbols (particularly the veil) in public schools may be taken as another example of how a self-avowed secular state has come to define what religious and nonreligious attire is in the public domain (something normatively considered a matter of personal choice within liberalism).”<sup>203</sup> These inconsistencies are not without motive. While France may argue that these policies are applied equally among all religious groups, and not targeting Muslims specifically, there exists a history of European governments actively involved in policies attempting to reform Islam. “European governments since the early 1990s have been engaged in

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>203</sup> Saba Mahmood, p. 325.

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a process of ‘domesticating’ Islam by attempting to sever its transnational ties and selectively encourage a state-sanctioned form of Islamic identity. The government-sponsored institutionalization and cooption of previously decentralized, transnational Islamic institutions is, in effect, a way of imprinting European values and norms on a resistant Muslim population.”<sup>204</sup>

### **Manufacturing *Islamo*-Racist Rhetoric**

Although institutional *Islamo*-racism can manifest through policies that directly target the livelihoods and personal liberties of Muslims or Arabs, manufacturing *Islamo*-racist rhetoric serves as a key component in legitimizing certain attitudes towards Muslims. Repeated public rhetoric among influential individuals in civil society organizations, has the power to shape narratives as factual and authoritative, thereby moving public discourse. Politicians choose their words carefully to construct stories and histories about their nations, construct villains through tactful terminology, and create “facts” based on their worldviews. The power of rhetoric, as studied by many political scientists, has the ability to demonize or glorify entire groups based on the subjective view of the nation’s interest. Noam Chomsky, renowned linguist, argues that corporate news fuels propaganda in democracies by leaving particular pieces of information out, and focusing on bits it believes to generate more profit—in other words, corporate “propaganda is to democracy what violence is to a dictatorship.”<sup>205</sup> It may not come as a surprise then, that manufacturing Islamophobic and *Islamo*-racist rhetoric consists of more than a 57-million-dollar industry.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Hadad, Yvonne. "Overhauling Islam: Representation, Construction, and Cooption of "Moderate Islam" in Western Europe," 2007, p. 498.

<sup>205</sup> See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, 1988.

<sup>206</sup> “Fear, Inc. The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America.” Center for American Progress, 2015.

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Developing *Islam*-racist rhetoric is composed of an intricate system filled with donors, non-profit organizations, celebrity spokespeople and the secular ‘moderate’ Muslims desired by Western political interests. In other words, this system can be described as “a maneuvering rank-and-file, inside and outside of government, who are further embedding the very "good versus bad" Muslim binary that has long plagued Muslims in America, and diminished their citizenship and how Muslim identity is seen and understood.”<sup>207</sup> FearInc, a website dedicated to researching the “Islamophobia network,” following money trails, and identifying prominent Islamophobic individuals and their connections to one another, has released a report detailing the methodical construction of Islamophobic rhetoric.

According to the report, the Islamophobia network is maintained through top funders, comprised mainly of eight wealthy donors since 2001, donating to organizations invested in the “Muslim binary.” These organizations claim to be fighting against “Islamic extremism,” while simultaneously engaging in rhetoric that conflates traditionally practicing Muslims with radicalism. For instance, the Clarion Project, although led by a group of executives with a Muslim background, also perpetuate similar sentiments regarding Islamic garb and the hijab as expressed by the French government, calling it a form of oppression and extremism, thereby, enforcing a specific Western secular brand of Islam. Oftentimes, these organizations (i.e. the Clarion Project, the Middle East Forum, the David Horowitz Freedom Center, the Center for Security Policy, etc.) work in conjunction with one another, disseminate each other’s material, and financially support one another.<sup>208</sup> Prominent Conservative individuals, or “misinformation experts,” propagate the information created by these organizations as spokespeople. These

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<sup>207</sup> Beydoun, Khaled. “The Myth of the ‘Moderate’ Muslim,” 2016.

<sup>208</sup> “Fear, Inc. The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America.”

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individuals include Daniel Pipes, David Horowitz, David Yerushalmi, Frank Gaffney, Robert Spencer, and Steven Emerson—many of whom, have worked under the Bush administration, and others as policy advisors.

This network of organizations and individuals further takes form in top-down misinformation circulation, seeping into an “echo chamber” that publicizes the propaganda through foundations, validators, activists, right-wing religious groups, and allies to solidify the “Muslim binary.”<sup>209</sup> Well-known foundations and faces consist of JihadWatch, ACT! For American Education, the American-Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD), Stop Islamization of America, Pamela Geller, Brigitte Gabriel, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Zuhr Jasser, and more. Some of the prominent politicians associated with these individuals and groups include former representatives Michelle Bachman, Peter King, Governor Bobby Jindal, and Rep. Louie Gohmert. In addition, some of the influential media outlets are Fox News, the Christian Broadcasting Network, the Washington Times, the National Review, Sean Hannity, Mark Savage, etc. All familiar faces, whether on television, college campuses, or policy advisory boards, this network helps implement negative correlations between practicing Muslims and extremism, and aids in the execution of *Islam*-racist policies.

Daniel Pipes, one of the leading misinformation experts on Islam and the Middle East, was appointed by Bush to provide a set of criteria on what constitutes a moderate Muslim. According to his ‘rubric,’ “Muslims have to renounce certain teachings of their faith.”<sup>210</sup> However, he also asserts that Islamic laws are similar to Talmudic laws found in Israel, “a state he generally defends as modern, democratic, and secular.”<sup>211</sup> This then causes one to wonder:

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Hadad, *Becoming American*, p. 86.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

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why Muslims and not Jews? Arguably, Israel's more-than-close alliance with the United States, Western political interests, and geo-political policing of Arab Middle-Eastern nations, have created a double standard between perceptions of Muslims and perceptions of Jews. However, a look into the history of anti-Semitism in Europe shows that Jews too, have experienced similar treatment with state-sponsored investments into constructing the 'appropriate Jew,' and manufacturing Judeophobia by fabricating notions of Jewish extremism found to be inherent among traditional Jews.<sup>212</sup> These patterns in history that are replicated in modern day show that Western political powers can fashion any religious group into their own image under the pretense of national security.

*Islamo-racist* rhetoric spreads fear and prejudice, among both Muslims and non-Muslims living in the West. Muslims learn to internalize orientalist tropes regarding their own group, and conflate spiritual and faithful aspects of the religion with politicized elements like oppression and extremism. For instance, the hijab—a head covering that historically has symbolized modesty, humbleness, and connectedness to God by taming one's ego, beauty, and materialism of the self—has come to represent the oppression of women, the active symbol of anti-Westernism, and the enablement of extremist views. Seeking a Muslim community of devout followers who desire to implement *Shari'a*—the path that leads one closest to God—into their personal lives, has come to resemble totalitarianism, tyranny, and barbarity. *Islamo-racist* rhetoric, has managed to create an alternate reality of *alternative facts*, grounded in misinformation and political agendas.

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<sup>212</sup> See Ellie Schainker's, *Confessions of the Shtetl*.

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## The Token ‘Moderate’ Muslims of the West

The Rand Corporation’s report, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks*,<sup>213</sup> develops a blueprint strategy for how Western governments should go about fostering ‘moderation’ among Muslims. The report takes a Cold-War approach to the issue, only this time, replacing Communist ideology, with that of ‘radical Islam.’ During the Cold War, the US government funneled money into fostering “democratic intellectual movements”<sup>214</sup> in strategic geopolitically positioned regions of the world to counter Communist influence. The report suggests that a similar approach should be taken by the US to oppose radicalism—by building up ‘moderate’ Muslim networks to counter extremist ideologies. It implies giving particular ‘moderate’ Muslims a thorough platform, proper funds, and the ability to adequately disseminate propaganda that promotes American political interests under the guise of “democratic education...pluralistic values from Islamic texts and traditions, moderate media, gender equality, etc.” This “effective implementation...requires the creation of an institutional structure within the US government to guide, oversee, and monitor the effort.”<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, the language of the report distinguishes “true moderates from extremists camouflaged as moderates.”<sup>216</sup> This suggests that one can only be “moderate” according to Western definitions.

The Rand report targets five groups as “potential building blocks” for the ‘moderate’ Muslim network. Those who are: “liberal and secular Muslim academics and intellectuals; young, moderate religious scholars; community activists; women’s groups engaged in gender equality campaigns; and moderate journalists and writers.”<sup>217</sup> On the surface-level, it seems as if

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<sup>213</sup> “Rand Proposes Blueprint for Building Moderate Muslim Networks.” RAND, 2007.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.



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these groups are engaged in progressive work for the betterment of society. Conversely, these groups are the same ones who profit off the *Islam*-racist network. Never mind the fact that most traditionally practicing Muslims also believe in women’s rights, human rights, non-violent activism, and progressive ideas. However, oftentimes, token secular Muslim personalities, including Zuhdi Jasser, Asra Nomani, Ayaan Hirsi Ali (ex-Muslim), Irshad Manji, and the like, are used as Muslim authorities on the religion—insiders who give the movement to further Western interests legitimacy, by using a specific rhetoric of democracy and radicalism, good Muslim and bad. “These Muslim moderates, who are functionally wed to the notion that extremism is exclusive to Islam, and radicalization limited to Muslim actors, are the ‘terror-hating’ Muslim Americans that Hillary Clinton called out to on April 26.”<sup>218</sup>

Even though each of these figures contain Muslim backgrounds and particular experiences with Islam, they, by no means, are scholars of the religion or its historical contexts. Some, like Irshad Manji, refer to themselves as Muslim reformists who challenge Islam through *ijtihad*. Manji refers to *ijtihad* as an individual feat of intellectual freedom of interpretation, without relying on sources outside of the Qur’an. Individuals like her, often use Islamic terminology and methodology in a superficial manner, to push for a Western-liberal reading of the religion, while simultaneously disparaging traditionally practicing Muslims, women who wear hijab, etc. They also paint issues found among Muslims as inherently “Muslim” problems, rather than problems rooted in socio-economic and political conditions—therefore, their “reformist” title.

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<sup>218</sup> Beydoun, Khaled. “The Myth of the ‘Moderate’ Muslim.” April 26, 2016 refers to a speech Hillary Clinton gave during the presidential primaries.

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Reforming Islam implies that Islam needs to reform because it is, by its very nature, problematic; that parts of the Qur'an—a revelation believed to be the inherent word of God by a majority of Muslims—need to be either taken out, or re-interpreted entirely different from the original language it is written in. Reforming Islam suggests that Muslims need to stop practicing their faith, and adopt a Western-approved practice—because the West is best and contains an objective authority on truth and morals. This self-internalized orientalism among token Muslim personalities is detrimental as it further fragments the Muslim community, based on politicized differences. Token Muslim personalities are usually tied to right-wing political groups—the same conservative groups who do not themselves identify as liberal nor advocate for an equal application of human rights among all groups, as these token Muslim personalities criticize Islam for. This cognitive dissonance, and inconsistency demonstrates that “secular” and “liberal” ‘moderate’ Muslims, serve a political purpose, more so, than a religious reformation of spirituality.

Zuhdi Jasser, the founder of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD) and co-founder of the Muslim Reform Movement (MRM) describes his work as “engaging in a war of ideas against the ideology of political Islam.”<sup>219</sup> Although he specializes in medicine and cardiology, he is referred to as an authority on Muslim affairs by the government, and on multiple corporate news channels including Fox, CNN, CBS, MSNBC, etc. An outspoken supporter of Israel, and devout patriot of the United States, Jasser is vehemently against the idea of Muslims holding any political views influenced by their religious traditions. He has coopted terminology of right-wing pundits, and stereotypes most Muslims to be “Islamists,” or followers of a dangerous political Islam shared by extremists. This is problematic for several reasons, as it,

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<sup>219</sup> See AIFD website.

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again, conflates practicing Muslims with political opinions critical of Western foreign policies with violent extremists. His organization enforces the idea that Muslims, although incredibly marginalized and stigmatized, are the only perpetrators of violence, cannot be victims of state violence, and should only hold political views in support of the state. Ironically, Jasser sees no problem with human rights abuses from Israel's political Judaism, or the religiously inspired politics of Western Conservatives. On one hand, Jasser claims he is no scholar of Islam, *Shari'a*, or jurisprudence. On the other, he has no qualms with criticizing *Shari'a*, and distorts *ijtihad* (jurisprudence) for his own goals. Jasser believes that followers of Islam should be apolitical, and focus on spirituality. However, his support for the Republican Party, advisory decisions to Homeland Security and alliance with right-wing politicians and political organizations attest that Jasser is as much of a political Muslim as an "Islamist"—the only difference lies in their politics.

Token Muslims, like Jasser, give a legitimate face to institutional *Islam*-racism. By utilizing individuals who carry a Muslim title, it is assumed that they are authoritative spokespeople on Islam's traditions. Their educational background and level of Islamic scholarship are seldom taken into account. Instead, their personal experiences—either strict parents, conservative culture, or interactions with certain individuals—completely shape their narratives on Islam and lead to the generalization of over 1.6 billion people as a monolith. Most Muslims, whether 'moderate' by practicing Muslim standards or by Western standards, overwhelmingly denounce violence extremism and terrorism. Nonetheless, practicing Muslims, Muslims who pray five times a day, grow their beard, attend masjid, wear hijab, and remain critical of politics are viewed with suspicion, danger, and associated with terrorism. The difference between these groups lie not in their condemnation of violent extremism, but in their relationship to American politics. Denouncing American foreign policy and state discrimination

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creates an atmosphere of resentment among a marginalized community—Western policy-makers are more fearful of this resentment, than reforming their policies that lead to the creation of prejudice, bigotry, and extremism. When token Muslims exist, Western *Islam*-racism is justified.

### **Conclusion**

Manufacturing the good, ‘moderate’ Muslim is rooted in institutional *Islam*-racism. *Islam*-racism can manifest in a multitude of ways—from hate crimes, state violence, discriminatory policies, rhetoric, and media. *Islam*-racism has the effect of silencing communities, and coercing individuals into fitting a particular mold—the mold of the appropriate, acceptable, and patriotic Muslim citizen. Making the ‘moderate’ Muslim through a system of intricate networks leads to two things: (1) an inauthentic depiction of what a Muslim should be like according to a particular framework, and (2) the normalization of *Islam*-racism. Moreover, making the ‘moderate’ Muslim is constructed through a specific language of national security, extremism, human rights, and women’s rights. It is a system of double standards and inconsistent values. The West speaks of women’s rights, yet, Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab are considered threats. Simultaneously, secularism posits freedom of expression, yet, certain religious expressions are found questionable and subject to extra scrutiny and security.

Why is manufacturing the ‘moderate’ Muslim a desired concept? Most Muslims denounce extremism, but the West still stigmatizes Muslims for practicing their traditions and holding political views. Contrary to common perception, ‘moderation’ is not simply about extremism, even though it falls back on extremism as its primary argument. Making the ‘moderate’ Muslim is creating, what is falsely advertised as, an apolitical Muslim—one who

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does not use religiously inspired values to inform politics; but, one who also loudly advocates for secular principles of American democracy and capitalism disguised under values of “human rights, women’s rights, and freedom.” It is worth noting that the talk of human rights and freedom, while usually spoken in universal terms, remains subjective in its actual application. Any criticism against Western or Israeli human rights abuses and intervention in democratic sovereignty is a “stark illustration of how liberal multiculturalism can accommodate tolerance, but cannot tolerate affirmations of humanity that impede the practice of US and Israeli exceptionalism.”<sup>220</sup> Making the ‘moderate’ Muslim is making a politicized Muslim; one who is politically pro-Western neo-liberalism.

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<sup>220</sup> Steven Salaita. Facebook. January 25, 2017. Accessed April 24, 2017.

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## Conclusion

What is a ‘moderate’ Muslim? Should we even use the term ‘moderate?’ What images come to mind? For some, ‘moderation’ is as simple as practicing religion non-violently, and tolerating the differences of others. For others, ‘moderation’ lies in the careful balance of faith between extremes. For more powerful actors, ‘moderation’ is about the political loyalties and values Muslims hold towards the West—after all, *only* extremists are the ones who hold resentful attitudes against Western intervention. I do not propose my own definition of ‘moderation,’ as I believe it will contribute to an already problematic discourse. However, it has been my goal to muddy the waters, to challenge a common rhetoric, and to create cognizance of popular language riddled with political undertones becoming a normal and seemingly harmless part of the mainstream.

More importantly, my main objective in writing this thesis is to expose how this discourse: (1) remains harmful to the Muslim community globally as it proves to be divisive, (2) creates attitudes of Western exceptionalism among Muslims, (3) disparages Muslims for criticizing abuses perpetrated by Western governments, and (4) legitimizes Western hegemony as a global force for good, without serious reflection on the impact of being occupying powers that has led to more global violence. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the recent outbreak in Syria, Libya, and Yemen relate to the construction and deconstruction of Muslim political identities. Although these conflicts contain multiple elements that result in the failure of Western foreign policy, it remains necessary to examine popular and orientalist rhetoric that normalize Western violence in the “Muslim world,” as it is one of the many contributing factors to conflict in the “Muslim World.” Constructing the ‘moderate’ Muslim is a part of this orientalist rhetoric.

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Moreover, these interventions typically require some stamp of approval among ‘moderate’ Muslims (as defined by states), and fuel violent religious divisions among Muslims along political fault lines.

Some may wonder: why the Muslims? After all, no one refers to ‘good’ Christians and Jews as ‘moderate.’ On the contrary, state-sponsored constructions of appropriate religious identities are not a new phenomenon. Throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century European history with the Jews, state anti-Semitism, and popular orientalist rhetoric have led to the stigmatization of “traditional Jews” unless they completely assimilated to the values of their host country. Jews were once considered inherently barbaric, regressive, corrupt, and violent which legitimized anti-Semitic violence on their communities, and discriminatory state policies barring them from receiving uplifting opportunities. “The Jewish Question” stumbled the French as they were reordering their society along the lines of French universalism. Assimilating European Jews through dominant Christian norms became the marker of ‘moderate’ Judaism. As once, constructing ‘moderate’ Judaism to satisfy European political interests existed, a similar case can now be seen implemented towards Muslims living in the West. Today, the Middle East piques Western political interests—filled with natural resources, political strongholds, and consumers of American weaponry. What better ally to have, than the ‘moderate’ Muslim?

Notions of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslim have more to do with mere proclivities for violence. Many times, peacefully integrated and practicing Muslims are conflated with extremists because of embedded orientalist images that exist in Western society. But why do ‘moderate’ Muslims who fit Western standards of moderation, absorb orientalist tropes regarding their own traditions? Do they accept their position in the pecking order? Being a part of the accepted definition of ‘moderate’, undoubtedly, places one higher up in a social hierarchy of

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power. ‘Moderate’ Muslims attain political and social clout among more influential individuals at the expense of selling out the ‘traditional’ Islam of members within their own communities. In a nation that boasts of equality and human rights for all, are we *truly* equal? Are Muslims considered equal if they do not compromise on their identity and politics for the sake of Western political interests?

It is my hope that this small blueprint allows for us to question our notions of right and wrong, of good and bad, of moderation and extremism. If we are not to repeat the same mistakes found in history, in which the systematic marginalization of vulnerable groups has contributed to massive global conflicts (i.e. the Holocaust), then let us begin with our analysis of language, propaganda, and state interests. One component that I pay little attention to in my thesis is how the discourse surrounding ‘moderation’ changes under the newly elected Trump administration. As we enter a new phase in world politics with a general shift towards Western right-wing-leaning leaders, we need to rethink the policies affecting Muslims, and the reconstruction of their political identities.



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