The treatment of Islam in political discourse in France and the United States

The role of constructed identity groups in determining how scholars and politicians interpret Islam’s relationship to citizenship, women’s rights, and terrorism

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Introduction

In both France and the United States, there is a tendency in political discourse to differentiate an “Islamic world” from a “western world.” This discursive trend is not attributable to one particular political group or one nation. Instead it comes from a centuries-old tradition of the construction of “western identity.” Edward W. Said produced an influential study of this phenomenon in his book *Orientalism*, which examines the historical development of western attitudes towards the “Orient,” the “eastern” cultures and civilizations distinguishable from “western” culture and civilizations. To understand these developing attitudes, though, Said notes one must recognize that “neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other.”

This means that western scholars who speak of the “other” in their discourse are creating this different group through their language. The study of the Orient was intended to be an examination of a different culture, but in actuality it was the practice of creating the myth of vast cultural difference between the “West” and the “East.”

The implications of this cultural differentiation between “West” and “East,” the western “we” and the eastern “them,” inform the ways in which western attitudes towards eastern cultures developed over time. When a western scholar makes observations about aspects of oriental culture, he is influenced by his own western background which, connected to a history of orientalist perceptions of “the Orient,” provides a certain framework for understanding that “other” culture. This does not mean that “western” study of “eastern” culture is inherently

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1 Said, *Orientalism*, xvii.
invaluable, as analyzing one global perspective from the framework of a different global perspective can produce unique understandings of culture and history.

However the western study of the “other” society is problematic when it does not recognize the biases and stereotypes informing its lens of analysis. The largest problem with an orientalist reading of the world is that it does not encourage critical self reflection, and thus unquestionably accepts western perspectives as the “correct” ones and any other interpretation of history and culture as “wrong.” This uncritical acceptance of the superiority of western global perspective as practiced by orientalists serves a particular purpose connected with the entire history of Oriental Studies. The differentiation of the West from the Orient in western discourse on the Orient was a purposeful political construction of the Orient and oriental people as “different” from westerners. In the era of western colonialism, orientalist understanding of the superiority of the West and the inferiority of the Orient provided a justification for western hegemony in the world. It was a way to politically frame the western imperial agenda in terms that masked the West’s power-hungry desire to gain global territory and influence.

As a result, colonial relationships were stated in terms of a “civilizing mission,” as France once expressed its reasons for colonizing North Africa, or as “the spread of democracy,” the American justification for intervening in the affairs of Middle Eastern countries.\(^2\) Both missions are presented in terms that suggest their overwhelming good intentions to “help” the people of the Orient. It is this presumptuous attitude framing the West as the superior caretaker and helper of the world and the western ideological views of morality and governance as the correct one that makes the orientalist viewpoint so dangerous. This view perpetuates the attitude within western

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nations that western society is inherently superior, rather than encouraging westerners to learn about different ways of understanding the world. And, as Ian Buruma notes in his study *Occidentalism*, a similar movement to characterize the “West” and “westerners” in a stereotypical way that differentiates “them” from “eastern people” exists within the constructed “oriental culture.” The dehumanizing occidentalist image of the West serves the same purpose for “eastern societies” that the orientalist picture of the East serves for “western societies”: it identifies the “other” and explains why “they” are different and inferior to the “us.”

In studying the French and American production of discourse on Islam it is evident that both nations are affected by the tradition of orientalism that Said describes in his book. Yet in each nation the discussion of Islam is also the product of current national political struggles and international events that distinguish contemporary discourse on Islam and “Oriental culture” from the orientalist discourse of yore. To determine how current national and international events have affected the discursive representation of Islam in France and America, this study examines how Islam is treated in relation to citizenship, women’s rights, and terrorism in both countries.

The analysis links the discourse both to historical representations of Islam and Muslims in each country and contemporary discussions of the religion and its followers. The material used to analyze this discourse includes newspaper coverage of current national and international events that were presented as relevant to understanding “Islam,” speeches and interviews of politicians in France and in America, and articles and books written by prominent intellectuals in both countries who interpret questions of Islam and its relationship to western society in their

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3 Buruma, Margalit, *Occidentalism*. (Kindle Locations 89-90)
works. This last group of primary sources uses scholar’s analytical interpretation of Islam’s place in western society to understand how contemporary intellectuals’ judgments of Islam and the West either contribute to an orientalist reading of current events or promote a more nuanced understanding of current events.

In particular the study focuses on three intellectuals whose voices stand out in the current discourse surrounding Islam in France and the United States. These are Caroline Fourest, a French scholar, Paul Berman, an American scholar, and Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss-born Muslim scholar who is vocal in discussions about Muslim life in “western societies” particularly in France but also in America. To focus on the way these three interact provides a means of understanding how discourse on Islam and the West is exchanged between France and America, as well as how non-Muslim and Muslim intellectuals approach discussion of the same national and international events in both countries. While none of these people is an absolute representative of the views of their nation or of their fellow non-Muslims or Muslims, all are influential voices whose statements form an important part of the political discourse of each nation. The ways in which they analyze each other’s discourse is as important as the discourse they personally produce. Their interactions highlight the ways in which intellectual production in France and the United States is informed by orientalist and occidentalist frameworks of understanding.

In examining these two countries in particular this study attempts to determine how and why two very different “western” countries approach the discussion of “Islam,” “Muslims,” and the “other” in a similar way. France and the U.S. are countries with vastly different historical relationships to Islam and the concept of the Orient. While France was an imperialist power with
global colonies from the 1600s, when it first colonized America, to the 1960s, when Algeria won its independence from France, America is a much younger nation with no official colonies and no historical connection to a Muslim “Oriental” nation. However America did become involved with the affairs of Middle Eastern governments in the 1900s, creating a relationship similar to France’s colonial ties to North Africa. In each situation, the involvement of France and America with the outside countries was motivated by economic interests and access to natural resources. As a result, their attitudes towards the people of those regions reflected the orientalist image of superiority Said identifies in *Orientalism*. 

Further, there is a similarity in the nations’ perception of Muslims outside of its country. What is remarkable is that in both France and America, contemporary attitudes directed towards Muslims in general, including Muslims who were citizens of each nation, are informed by the same concept of “otherness.” In this respect France and America are not alone, as a similar differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims exists in many “western nations” today. However the phenomenon is particularly striking in France and America because both nations purport to promote diversity, inclusion, and religious secularism among their citizens.

This study argues that the contemporary rhetorical movement to create a division between Muslims and non-Muslims within each country is informed by a desire to construct a united citizen body in each nation that supports the perceived “western values” of France and America. Muslims are seen as a threat to this united western ideology. This is in part due to the historical western orientalist understanding of Islam as an immutably anti-western ideology, and in part a reflection of how western reactions to certain groups of Muslims internationally have led western discourse to group all Muslims together as one. The tendency is a modern example
of an orientalist interpretation of the world: Muslims are taken to be one group because they all believe in Islam. No allowance is made for diversity within Islam, or for the possibility that Islam and Muslim understandings of it may change.

In support of the notion that Islamic ideology is inherently different and inassimilable to western ideology, discourse in both France and the United States has argued that Islam’s treatment of women proves there is an irreconcilable difference between Muslim culture and non-Muslim culture. In France, this is manifest in the debates over whether Muslim women should be allowed to wear headscarves, veils, or hijabs. The discussion centers on whether or not veiling represents Islam’s oppressive control of Muslim women, or if instead headscarves might represent Muslim women’s self-expression. The first view is a western interpretation of the practice of veiling that problematically fails to consult the Muslim women who veil themselves. The latter view indicates to some French politicians an equally troubling expression of independence in a society that values conformity. The headscarf debate in France exposes France’s complicated identity issues more than it indicates a fundamental battle between Islam and western ideology. It is notable for how veiling and women’s rights are topics used as a rallying cry for western ideologues who criticize Islam, but not as a means to better understand Muslims and Islamic culture.

In America the existence of discourse on women’s rights and Islam interestingly demonstrates how western concepts of Islam produced in France are transmitted to the United States. The American discussion of women’s rights in relation to Islam is primarily a reaction to the French insistence that Islam is a threat to the values of equality for which western civilization stands. As in France, the debate centers on what the implications of Islam’s attitude towards
women might indicate, rather than whether or not Muslim women truly feel oppressed. Both
nations’ discourses interpret the question of women’s rights in Islam for Muslim women, rather
than asking those women how they feel their religion impacts their rights as citizens of western
countries.

The final topic this study explores is the discourse on Islam and terrorism in the United
States and France. This is one of the most prevalent contemporary topics of discussion
concerning the differentiation between the “west” and “Islam.” The suggested connection
between Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism has existed in western discourse on the “other”
since the inception of Oriental Studies as orientalists characterized Muslim people and the
Islamic faith as passionate and barbaric. However in the latter half of the 20th century United
States discourse became more preoccupied with the connection between Islam and violence as a
result of rhetoric developed around the images of Middle Eastern nations.

The terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania on September
11, 2001 triggered a change in U.S. discourse from suggesting Islamism (political Islam) and
violence were connected to insisting Islamism was violent, threatening the U.S. and “Western
Civilization,” and inherently evil. In part this was a move to garner support for U.S. military
action against identified “Islamist” regimes in the Middle East. It also indicates that “Muslims”
and “Islam” were terms perceived through an orientalist lens that made it easy for westerners to
conflate fear of terrorism and specific terrorist groups with fear of all Muslims and the religion
Islam itself.
France’s contemporary adoption of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam terrorist rhetoric shows that the perceptions of Islam engendered by U.S. discourse became part of a larger western ideological understanding of Islam and the “other.” As in the U.S., a connection between Islam and terrorism had previously been drawn in French rhetoric. However the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States radicalized the discussion of terrorism and Islam, engendering discourse that further polarized the French “us” from the Muslim “them.”

The study of the discursive construction of citizenship, the perceived connection between women’s rights and oppressive Islamism, and the fear global Islamic terrorism in France and America reveals that current discourse surrounding Islam, though it ostensibly addresses the contemporary concerns of those nations, is in fact informed by orientalist views that seek to differentiate “western ideology” from the threat of “Islamic ideology.” This phenomenon is important to identify and understand because unless recognized, the current system employed to understand Islam and Muslims in “western civilization” will continue to create a division between Muslims and non-Muslims. Although discourse only suggests a differentiation, it is a powerful tool that has compelled Muslims and non-Muslims alike to believe that real ideological differences have divided them into two groups. If discourse were employed to counter and dissect these institutionalized stereotypes rather than perpetuate them, France and the U.S. would be better equipped to discuss and solve the problems of integration, racism, diversity, and multiculturalism that challenge both nations today.
I. The construction of citizenship in France

In the late twentieth century France reevaluated its citizenship laws after international and national events led the government to scrutinize closely the citizenship status of first, second and third generation Algerian immigrants. France’s colonial relationship with Algeria produced a large Franco-Algerian population in mainland France that was socially differentiated from the “native French” people but who nevertheless had strong claims to French nationality. Following Algeria’s independence and the Algerian civil war, French politicians questioned whether the allegiance of people with Algerian ancestry lay with France, their adoptive country, or Algeria, their homeland. These inquiries sought to define more firmly the meaning of “national allegiance” and citizenship in France. The prevailing conclusion was that a person could not hold true allegiance to two countries at the same time, and that therefore any French Algerians who professed social ties to Algeria must be more loyal to that African state and its politics. This attitude was formed in concurrence with an Algerian civil war that pitted the socialist, nationalist Algerian government against new militant Islamist parties. The emergence of militant Islamism abroad fueled French fears that Islamism would spread amongst French Algerians in mainland France. This engendered a new fear mongering national discourse focused on the threats posed by Islamists, Muslims, and immigrants, and at times a conflation of all three groups.

When Algeria won independence in 1962 there were already a number of Algerian immigrants living in France, some of whom had come to work there during the period of France’s rule over Algeria and others who entered France to escape the dangers of war. In the 1980s, the citizenship status of those of Algerian origin was the subject of national debate. Two articles of French citizenship law defined how immigrants were granted French citizenship:
Article 23 declared that third generation immigrants would be citizens from birth, and Article 44 stated second generation immigrants would become citizens at age 18 so long as they broke no laws and did not opt out of citizenship. However, in seeming contradiction to these Articles, second generation Algerian immigrants were defined as French “not conditionally, on attaining legal majority, according to the century-old French way of transforming second-generation immigrants into citizens, but unconditionally, at birth, in the manner reserved in France for third-generation immigrants.” This meant that second-generation Algerian immigrants were French citizens whether or not they wanted to be. They were granted citizenship by virtue of having been born in France, whereas normally that legal right was only granted to third-generation immigrants. This peculiar interpretation of citizenship law was born out of French colonial history: as Algeria was a French colony, first-generation immigrants who moved to mainland France were treated as second-generation immigrants because their parents were pseudo-French citizens, and their children were then treated as third-generation immigrants under the law.

The problem was that many did not want to be French citizens. As the civil war raged in Algeria, people of Algerian ancestry had strong feelings about the future state of their former country. Whereas for their parents mainland France had been the best of two evils, providing working opportunities that were unavailable in Algeria, for some second and third generation immigrants the emerging Algerian state seemed promising and hopeful as compared to France, where immigrants and their descendants had few opportunities and were marginalized in society. They identified more strongly with the newly free Algerian nation than with France.

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4 Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 139.
5 Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 139-140.
6 Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 140.
oppressor whose colonial policies had put them and their parents in such an impossible position in the first place. They viewed this mandatory integration as “a vengeance, a punishment” meted out by the French government, as “the acquisition of French nationality [represents] the prospect of a rupture with the home country.” Algeria too saw this law as an affront to its sovereignty, that is, France asserting its ownership over rightfully Algerian people.

Against this background the question of “rights to citizenship” first became a French political issue when Left-wing politicians in France championed for second-generation immigrants’ right to choose whether or not they wished to be French, which choice had been unfairly denied them due to this bizarre application of citizenship law. The campaign was not just to respect these people’s wishes, but also to understand and classify their motives and political affiliations. This knowledge was critical when it came to military service which was obligatory in both France and Algeria: for which country would French Algerians fight? When Algeria was a colony the question was irrelevant as it and France would be fighting on the same side, but after Algeria gained independence immigrants’ specific allegiance had to be determined.

The discourse of liberal politicians demonstrates that debates over citizenship were prompted by the concern of national allegiance. After visiting Algeria in 1981 Socialist Interior Minister Gaston Defferre concluded: "It will be necessary for us to find a solution ... The Algerians who come to France do not intend to establish themselves definitively and melt [se fondre] into French society. They are migrant workers and not immigrants.”

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7 Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 141.
8 Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 142.
not moved because of a desire to be French, but solely because they sought work. He proposed that the law be amended to require second and third generation Algerian immigrants to ask for citizenship as other immigrants do, because the way the citizenship law had been applied Algerian immigrants assumed that the first generation immigrants viewed themselves as “French” when in actuality they may not have been inspired to move by a desire to pledge allegiance to France. Though this retroactive analysis of the motivation of Algerian immigrants may seem to be irrelevant by the 1980s as many French-Algerians were already established citizens, his argument is not an unfair examination of the citizenship law. It asked that the law treat people of Algerian ancestry in the same manner as all other immigrants are treated rather than presumptively assume to understand the motivations that led Algerians to emigrate.

This examination of the citizenship laws unintentionally laid the groundwork for a different sort of nationalistic debate over what it means to be a French citizen. Right-leaning politicians in France were quick to appropriate the citizenship reform campaign but focused their criticisms on different aspects of citizenship and immigration. Their critique of the citizenship laws revolved around two key points: first, that it allowed certain immigrants to circumnavigate the proper channels for citizenship, and second, that it conferred citizenship on people who might not truly be “French at heart.”9 In this circumstance, the latter argument was surprisingly supported by the attitudes of Algerian immigrants. Many of these second-generation Algerian immigrants were very vocal about the fact that they were not “French at heart” and had no desire to ever be so. Nevertheless the Far Right’s challenge to citizenship laws was dangerous for its

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9 Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 143.
broader implications because it would change the way all future immigrants to France would be treated in the naturalization process.

What then emerged in the 1980s was a political debate over the meaning of nationalism and citizenship in France. The nationalists argued that immigrants posed a threat to the culture of the nation because their differences made them inassimilable to “French values,” including accepted cultural norms and religious beliefs. Liberal groups, though they agreed naturalized immigrants should want their French citizenship, argued in the name of the history of inclusion and integration that is essential for the Republican, Democratic political system. Yet each group drew their arguments from the history of French citizenship. For example, a 1993 article published in *Le Monde*, a liberal newspaper, explains the history of citizenship laws in France. The journalist notes that since the Revolution France had melded two concepts of citizenship acquisition, jus soli and jus sanguinis.10 The first, jus soli, is citizenship by birthright: if one’s parents are French, he will be French also. The second is citizenship granted to those who pledge allegiance to the new home country. Integrating jus sanguinis into citizenship practices had been advantageous in the 19th century because it had allowed France to strengthen its military by incorporating new men into the army.11 The journalist also notes an interesting revision of citizenship concepts in 1889 which prohibited second generation immigrants from renouncing French citizenship. This was in part motivated by similar militaristic concerns (to ensure the men stayed in the army) but also “to avoid the formation of nuclei of marginalized foreigners who threaten social peace.”12 This journalist’s historical analysis is relevant to the

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context of the new citizenship debates of the 1980s. Whereas a century before, France had welcomed potential dissidents by incorporating and assimilating them, in the later 19th century the policy was changing. The article introduces an issue that had historically been perceived as a problem with all immigrants, and was in the 1980s viewed as an issue concerning Algerian immigrants: they had already formed a “nuclei” that, if it would not certainly threaten peace, would not be easily incorporated because the immigrants themselves were not as interested in assimilation.

In this regard, the new citizenship reform would be a challenge to citizenship as it had been known: either France would remain a nation of uniformity, demanding conformity from its citizens, or it would adapt to become a pluralistic state that embraced diverse cultural attitudes. In either case forcing the incorporation of unwilling Algerians would not benefit France. The nation would have to adopt a different kind of solution from the assimilationist citizenship law of 1889.

The difference between the developing leftist and nationalist rightwing positions in the 1980s was not a question of the meaning of citizenship: all sides agreed that to be French, one must desire French citizenship, as the nation depends on its citizenry to fight for French interests militarily. Where strict nationalists differed from this line was that they argued only a certain kind of person could be French. Both groups were concerned about the implications of multiple allegiances, but the nationalists took the position that this pluralism was inherently divisive and a danger to the French state.

An analysis of the moderate rightwing newspaper *Le Point*’s presentation of the questions surrounding Algerian immigrants and citizenship presents an interesting look at the changing
attitudes towards those concepts over time. In a 1997 article “Algeria: avoid the worst case scenario,” journalist Pierre Beylau reports on the horrible massacres carried out by Islamist guerilla groups in Algeria that year during the Civil War. His analysis examines the complicated political relationship between France, with its Algerian immigrants, and Algeria, with its bitter memory of colonialism, as he suggests how France should best respond to the terrible killings. His ultimate conclusion is that “if the janissaries of Algeria have considerable defects, the Islamists who aspire to replace them are even worse. France has everything to lose by seeing them triumph.”

The concern is that should Islamists take control in Algeria, France will be in danger, though what “France has to lose” is not clearly stated. However, what is notable in this article is that journalist Beylau recognizes the many reasons why the French may not be perceived in a favorable light by Algerian nationals and by French-Algerian natives. Further, his analysis recognizes a differentiation between the many different perceptions of France and Algeria held by an array of different peoples: he writes that the French-Algerian image of Algeria is not the same as that held by the French who went in to “civilize” Algeria at the turn of the 20th century, or the same as that held by the “pieds-noirs” who were displaced during French colonial rule. He presents the many complex relationships engendered by French colonial rule. Though he makes a suggestive reference to the danger of Islamism, his rhetoric is not provocatively sensational.

Twelve years later, however, the tone and content of an article in *Le Point* presents a different analysis of the challenges facing French citizenship. In her 2009 article “Liberty, equality, identity…” Catherine Golliau asks: “Can the France of land, steeples and intellectual


debates accommodate polygamy and the veil? When many young French people speak ill of the language of Voltaire and ignore the classical culture that created the ‘French spirit’ should we review the definition of ‘Frenchness’?”

Golliau appears to be expressing wide ranging concerns in this statement. She explicitly questions the devaluation of intellectual thought amongst young people, a trend not specifically attributable to any one cause. Nevertheless, by linking that development to the problem of “accommodating polygamy and the veil,” two issues associated with Muslim immigrants, it appears she wishes to link the issues rather than address two different trends affecting the definition of “Frenchness.” The analysis that follows cites the many concepts of “French nationality” expressed by philosophers throughout the ages, each asserting some aspect of “togetherness” and “commonality.” She cites famed French philosopher Ernest Renan, whose 1882 discourse *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* offers what she terms a “landmark definition” of nationhood. He writes, “a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle” consisting of two things: “One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories, the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue the heritage that one has received undivided.”

The problem is that immigrants, who have a different “legacy of memories,” face great hurdles integrating into the “national heritage.” The second stipulation, whether or not an immigrant wants to be French, then becomes the crux determining the possibility of naturalization for an immigrant. The issue with immigration is allegiance: have Algerians, and other immigrants from other countries, moved there with the desire to “continue the French heritage,” or do they have alternative motivations? And if so, can their personal

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heritages and aspirations for the future be reconciled with those already institutionalized in
France, or would the entire concept of “Frenchness” have to change?

To answer that question, French politicians would have to come to a consensus about the
meaning of national heritage, and specifically whether or not that heritage is a fluid concept
receptive to reinterpretation. In Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany, Rogers
Brubaker argues that French nationalists saw the integration of immigrants as a corruption to
citizenship and a united nationhood. “Faced with what they perceive as the devaluation,
desacralization, denationalization, and pluralization of citizenship, nationalists defend the
traditional model of the nation-state, reasserting the value and dignity of national citizenship and
stressing the idea that state-membership presupposes nation-membership.”17 In Brubaker’s
analysis, French nationalists insisted that the Algerian (and other former colonial) immigrants
were inassimilable for three reasons: the new immigrants did not want to be assimilated,
institutions such as schools and political parties that once served to socialize and integrate
immigrants into society no longer functionally did so, and today’s immigrants were more
“culturally distant” from the French than immigrants of the past had been and therefore were
objectively less assimilable.18 This third argument has particularly troubling implications in the
ongoing French debate over Muslim integration.

The problems Brubaker identifies in 1992 when analyzing the debate during the 1980s
mirror those identifiable in political discourse today surrounding the integration of Muslims into
French society. As Golliau’s mention of “polygamy and the veil” indicates, the “otherness” of

17 Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany, 143.
18 Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany, 148.
Muslims was framed in opposition to “Frenchness.” This attitude, expressed in 2009, is particularly interesting because Muslims had been residents of France for decades, and French Muslim citizens were not a new phenomenon.

Yet somehow, over the course of the debates over Algerian immigrants in the 1980s and in the years that followed, a growing categorization of Islam as “foreign” from French culture created a polarizing differentiation between the “native” French and the immigrant population: “us” and “them.” As the articles in *Le Monde* and *Le Point* show, both leftwing and rightwing politicians found it important to categorize the “other,” though their reasons different slightly. In the liberal case, the question rested primarily on determining whether or not Muslims wanted to be a part of the established French community in order to determine how to best adapt a new concept of plurality to French citizenship. The conservative reply centered on the same question of whether or not Muslims wanted to be French, but insisted that a pluralism that accepted all of the aspects of Muslim culture would be unthinkable because it would destroy the established definition of “Frenchness.” Islam was perceived as the ultimate opposition to French political values, both because it was based in a different ideology than the traditional French values and because it was supported by Muslims who proclaimed their indifference, or sometimes hostility to, French governance. Historian Joan Wallach Scott agrees that “this dual construction, France versus its Muslims, is an operation in virtual community building” resulting from a “sustained polemic, a political *discourse.*”19 She argues that this process resulted in the emergence of Islamaphobia. She explains that discourse is “interpretation,” or “the imposition of meaning on phenomena in the world; it is mutable and contested, and so the stakes are high.”20 In its


attempts to build and define a French community the nationalist discourse defined “Frenchness” both in the terms of French history—the nation of “Voltaire” that Golliau describes—and in terms of what it is not—namely the differences that set Muslims apart, such as the veil. In Scott’s analysis, this discursive distinction is most dangerous for having engendered the belief in an inherent cultural division between Islamic societies and European ones. She contends that historically, “culture was said to be the cause of the differences between France and its Muslims,” while in fact, “this idea of culture was the effect of a very particular, historically specific political discourse.”

The concept of “culture” is another way of defining a group of people based on certain perceptions of them. France’s position as a colonizing agent in Algeria shaped French cultural descriptions of Algerians.

The French conceptualization of Muslims as culturally different, and thus inferior, relates directly to the history of western Orientalist studies and the construction of citizenship. As Edward W. Said explains in his book *Orientalism*, orientalist colonial groups were unable to disconnect their perceptions of the Orient from their own western perspective: “[Orientalist] vision…implicates definition of the object with the identity of the person defining.” Colonials could not analyze Algerian culture without applying their own worldviews. Said contends that because French colonists’ primary concern was “administering of rule in colonies,” so that “the Islamic world was viewed as a discrete series of problems,” and thus “discourse about Islam played the role essentially of justifying the national (or even a private economic) interest in the Islamic world.”

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Algerian natives was framed in terms that portrayed those natives in a way that best suited France. Thus Islam and Algeria were interpreted in terms of how France reacted to them. During the period of colonial rule, Algerians were a people who needed to be subjugated in order for France to maintain control over its colony and were thus described in terms that supported the image of them as “different” and in need of French rule. In the 1980s and the decades to follow, Algerians were perceived as a cultural threat to French life and were thus described again as the “other.” The later trend to differentiate Algerians from French citizens with true “Frenchness” was supported by earlier colonial perceptions of Algerians as a “different culture.”

The complexities surrounding the various understandings and constructions of cultural identity, “otherness,” and citizenship are demonstrated in the discourse surrounding Tariq Ramadan, a Muslim European scholar. Ramadan is an interesting figure as he serves as both a topic of debate and a figure in political debates. He was born and raised in Switzerland to Muslim parents of Egyptian origin. His faith and ancestry are often cited by his detractors because his grandfather, Hassan al-Banna, was a founder of the Muslim Brotherhood and his father, Sa’id Ramadan, was a major figure in that organization. Ramadan’s critics use these facts to suggest he has ties to Islamism. However, in the past few decades Ramadan has been labeled as “an Islamic thinker of our time,” both by those who support and those who oppose him and his statements. He is used as a representative of Muslims as a whole by western media and politicians, which transfers Ramadan from a voice in public debates to a symbol employed by others in those debates. As such his statements and views are often confusedly taken to represent the statements and views of all Muslims, because he is seen as a voice for Muslims in Europe

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and in all western societies. Numerous books and articles have been written by political intellectuals about Ramadan and his place in culture and society. In France, Caroline Fourest is one such author who criticizes Ramadan’s words, but also uses her critiques as an extensive criticism of Muslim culture and Islam. Ramadan is thus an important contemporary figure who both produces discourse and serves as a subject for discourse on Islam and Muslim life. By comparing what Ramadan has to say with how his words are analyzed by Fourest and how that analysis is employed to make statements about Islam one can examine the effect this focus on Ramadan has had on the construction of an image of Muslims in Europe and Islamic culture.

In his short Manifesto, written in July 2006, Ramadan articulates a problem that echoes Brubaker’s analysis from fourteen years earlier. He postulates that “the increasingly visible presence of millions of Muslims in their midst has made [western populations] aware that their societies have changed: cultural homogeneity is a thing of the past, the question of their own identity has become complex.”

Thus, the presence of Muslims is a challenge to the West’s perception of itself, and following Said’s reasoning, Muslims are therefore described in such a way that frames the discussion in favor of the West by promoting the superiority of western culture. Ramadan agrees that immigration is one of the main issues prompting the emergence of contemporary Islamophobic sentiments in western societies. However Ramadan offers a different perspective from the French newspapers of how recent immigration has impacted the question of “national identity.”

Ramadan argues that the influx of Muslim immigrants has highlighted “instabilities” already present in western societies. The growing presence of an immigrant population

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compounds the visibility of “social problems such as unemployment, racism and marginalization”\textsuperscript{26} that were already present. As immigrants are not yet full citizens, they can be constructed as an “other” and thus used as a scapegoat on which the citizenry can displace their problems. As these immigrants become citizens, their position in society is still tenuous since they have already been identified as “others.”

In France this explanation is complicated by the fact that the question of Algerian immigration involved both new immigrants from Africa and well established second and third-generation immigrants. The same practice of differentiating the “other” from the “French” was applied to both new immigrants and the people of Algerian descent already living in France. In a 1995 article in \textit{Le Point} titled “France: le vote des Algériens,” journalist Mireille Duteil reports on the thousands of Algeriens who turned out to vote in the elections in order to support “peace in Algeria.”\textsuperscript{27} She writes that amongst the Algerians “there were old immigrants, new residents, students, and also beurs.”\textsuperscript{28} All of the terminology Duteil employs to describe the voters is too vague and yet too specific: she calls them all “Algerians” but then admits many are citizens, which implies that now they would be better defined as “French.” She assumes that their heritage overwrites their assumed citizenship, a fact that may or may not be the case for each person who turned out to vote that day. Furthermore, she writes of what she identifies as the encouraging trend amongst “the grand majority of these Algerians from overseas, exposed to occidental democracy, fundamentalism is confused with the devil.”\textsuperscript{29} Her description of the

\textsuperscript{26} Ramadan, “Manifesto for a new ‘WE,’” July 7, 2006.

\textsuperscript{27} Duteil, «France : le vote des Algériens,» \textit{Le Point}, November 18, 1995.

\textsuperscript{28} “Beur” is a term second-generation immigrants coined to refer to themselves by inverting the syllables of “Arabe” in French.

\textsuperscript{29} Duteil, «France : le vote des Algériens,» \textit{Le Point}, November 18, 1995.
“Algerian” voters again explicitly constructs them as others: “from overseas”—not natively French—and presumes to understand and express their ideological beliefs for them. Her terminology evokes the idea of a more primitive mindset: “they” are converted to a new perception of the world only after encountering “occidental democracy,” and “they” now see fundamentalism as “like the devil.” She distinguishes “the Algerian other” from “the French” in a number of ways: they are from overseas, “they” form one unit regardless of whether they are newly arrived immigrants or established citizens of Algerian descent, and “they” have a less sophisticated world view that may be improved by the positive influence of French democracy. On top of this, Duteil adopts a patronizing tone that supposes she fully understands the complex identities and motivations of the group of voters she has wholly termed “Algerian.”

In sum, the media discourse confounding immigrants and Algerians continued for decades. Golliau’s 2009 article in *Le Point* is one example of the overextended attribution of “otherness” employed by the French media. In discussing the distinct question of how the citizen body should be defined, she identifies “the veil” and “polygamy” as issues threatening France’s “Frenchness.” This indirect accusation against veiling and marriage practices is problematic because it does not accuse a group or a person explicitly; it accuses the practice itself and assumes the reader will make an association with a certain group of people. Her article focuses on “immigrants,” yet the practices she describes are too general to ascribe only to immigrants, thus confounding cultural differences with immigration problems. As a result, topics of national debate throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s such as the headscarf affairs added the additional terminology of “Islamism” and “fundamentalism” to the confused discussion of “others” assimilating to France.
This sort of divisive terminology is precisely what supports a conflation of immigrants and Muslims into a single united “other.” The persistence of the discourse over the decades indicates a prevailing trend to separate the “other,” be they Muslim or immigrants or both, from the “French,” and then continue to blame cultural clashes on the existence of a foreign “other” even though that terminology was created by the French. In Ramadan’s view, “by perpetually accusing Muslims of not being integrated, of setting themselves apart, of setting up barriers between “them” and “us” and of shutting themselves up in a religious identity they view as exclusive, the intellectuals and politicians who warn against the “naïveté” of other politicians, against “the Islamic threat” or the “failure” of pluralist society or of multiculturalism, spread suspicion, create divisions and try to isolate the Muslims.”

He therefore concludes that politicians who accuse Muslims of not being integrated are duplicitous, because they themselves wish to protect a cultural homogeneity. They purport to be upset that Muslims do not try to integrate into western culture, and accuse them of creating an “exclusive” religious identity, when in fact these attacks themselves are a means of creating the “us” versus “them” distinction and further alienating Muslim populations. He concludes, “The policies of those who exploit fear are intended to create precisely what they claim to combat.” By foisting the blame onto the inassimilability of the “other,” political discourse delicately sidesteps the responsibility for finding a solution to integration issues. This aggressive, blame-oriented rhetoric masks the agenda of those politicians who have no interest in integrating foreign people with different ideas into the citizenry of their nation.

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What is to be made of Ramadan’s charge here that politicians “exploit fear” and “spread suspicion” of Muslims? After all, a general western consensus that Islam is “different” from established “western culture” is not the same as a consensus that Muslims are dangerous and threatening. The creation of a division in and of itself, though troubling, does not preclude compromise and understanding between the divided groups. Clearly there is a political discourse that suggests that Muslims are not only inherently different from the citizens of western societies, but a menace to western life. Brubaker hints of this with his definition of the stance of the nationalist, anti-assimilation party in the 1980s. He explains that though all parties agreed that Islam might be a challenging group to integrate, nationalists distinguished themselves with an “undifferentiated, essentialist characterization of Islam…ignoring the varieties of Islam in France, the nationalists characterize Moslem immigrants as if all were Islamic fundamentalists.”32 This highlights two concepts helpful in reading the situation today. Firstly, nationalist political groups in France have lumped all Muslims together as one homogenous entity, secondly, they have chosen to define this group by its most radical and anti-western cultural part.

Ramadan addresses the question of integration in his own essays and speeches. He accuses the extreme right of employing a “dangerous rhetoric of protecting ‘identity’ and ‘cultural homogeneity,’ of defending ‘western values,’ of imposing strict limitations on ‘foreigners.’”33 The terms he singles out exemplify the way western intellectuals create a division between western Society and Islam to preclude integration. He scorns this isolationist attitude and champions integration in his discourse. In his Manifesto, Ramadan calls out to

32 Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany, 149.
“Western Muslims” to make an impact in debates over the reconciliation of “western values” and Islam. Ramadan asks them to “not endorse the confusion that surrounds the debates related to their societies: social problems, unemployment, marginalization and immigration are not ‘religious problems’ and have nothing to do with Islam as such. It is imperative to reject the ‘Islamization’ of educational and socio-economic issues that require political, not religious, solutions.”

Ramadan’s separation of the religious and the social seeks to address the question of Muslim integration into western culture from a political standpoint, which is sensible since the social problems surrounding integration are debated in French national politics. For example, in early 2011, the initial debates leading up to the French presidential elections pitted Nicholas Sarkozy against Marine Le Pen, and one of the main topics of debate was “national identity.” In an article reflecting on these debates, Ramadan critiques several aspects of the French political system. First, he observes that the candidates have centered their discussion on the “future” of France because they are “unable to directly examine [France’s] cultural identity.” Furthermore, the terms the candidates use in this abstract discussion of identity center on the events that have been subject to political debate for years: the headscarf affairs of 2005, the accusation that “praying Muslims colonize the streets” when mosques overflow with people, the ideas of “Islam” and “secularism.” As he notes, this is a circular argument about stale, unresolved ideas that only serves to avoid discussion of what he argues are the true issues in France: “a problem distribution of power, a problem of equality and social justice, a problem of racism, married to a memory deficit.”

Political debates over the formation of “national identity” are therefore a

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fruitless pursuit, as they refuse to recognize the diversity already long established in France and acknowledge the social divisions in the nation. Ramadan’s argues that the current political discussion centers on all of the wrong issues and in fact is designed to avoid discussion of the racism and inequality which are truly the cause of division and unrest in France.

Yet despite this engagement with questions of politics and broad issues of human rights, responses to Ramadan focus on his place as a religious scholar and leader. One of the most visible, provocative, and troubling instances of this in France is the scholar Caroline Fourest’s criticisms of his statements on integration. As a political liberal she does not fall into the stereotypical image of an Islamaphobe, yet she takes great issue with Ramadan’s integration agenda. In her book *Brother Tariq: The Double-speak of Tariq Ramadan*, she examines an essay in which he wrote: “We agree to integration, but it is up to us to determine the contents… I accept the law, provided it does not force me to do something in contradiction with my religion… If, to be a good citizen, you must be a bad Muslim, the answer is no.”37 For Fourest, the problem lies in how to interpret Ramadan’s words. She writes that if “Tariq Ramadan stood for a modern, enlightened Islam” his statement on integration would be acceptable. “But,” she continues, “we know this is not the case. As it is, his way of treating Islam as superior to everything, laws included, means that he is as dangerous a reactionary as is a fundamentalist Christian who considers the Bible as infinitely superior to the Declaration of the Rights of Man.”38 She contends that while Ramadan may seem to be progressive, upon closer examination and knowing what he really “stands for” it is clear that his rhetoric is “dangerous.”

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A few things stand out in Fourest’s criticism of Ramadan. First, she practices the same rhetorical distancing of herself from Ramadan that creates the “us” and “them” distinction in politics. She argues that “we” know this is not the case—who is the “we” she addresses? Clearly herself and the reader, but who else? Her rhetoric creates a division between those on her side who view Tariq Ramadan as dangerous and duplicitous, and those who blindly take in his words at face value. Fourest’s “us” versus “them” is not the same division of “westerners” versus “Muslims,” as her “them” includes Muslims and westerners who take Ramadan at face value. However it does create a binary analysis of the world. Either one can agree with her that Ramadan is dangerous and menacing, or one must be a deluded follower. This dichotomy is too simplistic as it allows no room to accept Ramadan critically while analyzing his views. She maintains that this absoluteness of opinion is the best way to protect oneself from being “duped” by Ramadan, who she argues is manipulative. Her approach shuts down the possibility of any debate between the two, and manipulatively maneuvers anyone who takes Ramadan seriously into the “them” she scorns.

Further, Fourest argues that “his way of treating Islam as superior to everything, laws included” makes him a dangerous “reactionary.” Her contention that Ramadan treats his religion as “superior to everything” is an echo of what Said identifies as the orientalist scholar’s ascription to Islam of total control over Muslim thought, politics, and life: to the orientalist “Islam is or means everything… Life itself—politics, literature, energy, activity, growth—is an intrusion upon this… unimaginable Oriental totality.”39 Fourest grounds her argument on Ramadan’s statement that he would not compromise his religious beliefs to be a good citizen, as

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this indicates his religious beliefs overwrite all other considerations. However this hones in on
only the implications of this particular statement, ignoring the message of the body of Ramadan’s
statements on western law and his engagement with political issues beyond the scope of Islamic
identity. Rather than flouting western law and tradition that body of work favors support of
western ideals of democracy and multiculturalism. In his Manifesto, Ramadan writes: “In the
name of Western values the Muslims must fight against policies that normalize common racism
and discriminatory treatment, that stigmatize a portion of the population.” He argues that
Muslims must stand up for themselves when discriminated against for their religious beliefs. His
support of civil disobedience is a call to “refuse to have to permanently prove one’s belonging to
the society in full knowledge of one’s responsibilities as citizen, lay claim to one’s rights and
carry out a thoroughgoing critique of government policies when these policies betray the ideals
of a democratic society.” Ramadan’s affirmation that his religion comes before citizenry is, in
his views, an assertion of his rights in a democratic society. He firmly believes that policies that
restrict his ability to practice his religion as he sees fit “betray the ideals of a democratic society”
and that the laws that protect these policies are unconstitutional and should be opposed. A good
democratic citizen criticizes his government when he believes it is wrong. A government that
refuses to respect religious freedom while purporting to hold that right to worship sacred is one
that does not adhere to its own guiding principles.

Fourest takes a different view and attacks Ramadan’s integration position by examining
his use of the word “assimilation.” Her analysis focuses on a statement in which he accuses
certain Muslims of being “so open-minded that you are no longer anything at all; seeking

assimilation, you no longer take pride in what you are, because you are afraid of being judged for what you are.” From this Fourest concludes that Ramadan views “assimilation” as “the equivalent of denying one's identity.” This, in her mind, confirms that Ramadan is a Muslim before all else, and she believes that such a person could never be a true citizen of France. Her argument is reminiscent of the arguments Brubaker indentifies in France in the 1980s, though it is an odd meld of the two ideas he presents. She is completely in favor of integrating Muslims into French society and sincerely wishes to address the social and economic poverty of immigrants. Yet she wants assimilation on her terms. She agrees with the far-Right viewpoint Brubaker indentifies in his analysis by labeling Muslims as “culturally distant” from the French and thus difficult to assimilate.

Indeed Fourest is correct to assume Ramadan is criticizing those who he feels have turned their backs on their religion in order to appease western society. This does not mean he refuses to endorse integration into western society. Ramadan believes that those people he calls “so open-minded that you are no longer anything at all” are “assimilated” in the wrong way: they have simply rejected their belief system and replaced it with the norms of western culture in order to fit in more easily. It is the same distinction between active participation and passive acceptance he makes in his call on western Muslims to be good citizens of their western country. Ramadan feels these “assimilated” Muslims have confused integration into society with blindly following all of the cultural rules of that society. In his view, to become integrated is to “bring

42 Fourest, *Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan*, 171.

43 Fourest, *Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan*, 171.
constructive criticism to bear on our societies”\textsuperscript{4}\textsuperscript{44} and to engage as individuals who actively affirm the culture and policies of that society.

To achieve this end, Ramadan wishes to form a Muslim population who “express confidence in themselves, in their values, in their ability to live and to communicate with full serenity in Western societies.”\textsuperscript{45} He suggests that Muslims can strengthen democracies by casting a “critical eye” on the democratic system as a people with a firm grasp of what they expect from their government and culture. This challenge goes out to Muslims and non-Muslims alike: it is a call for everyone to participate in their democracies. While it is true that established democracies have laws which citizens must obey, it is also true that western democracy is based on the idea that each person has the right to hold individual beliefs and disagree with the policy and laws of the government. Accordingly citizens are also guaranteed the right to try to change laws they find unjust.

It seems clear that Ramadan advocates the values of democracy and active citizenship that serve as the foundation for French society, the same principles that Fourest seeks to defend from attack. Fourest’s criticism of Ramadan’s integration really centers on his method of integrating the Muslim world into the western one. In this regard, the third and most important aspect of Fourest’s criticism is that Ramadan’s Islam is not “modern and enlightened” and is therefore dangerous: she argues that his Islam is not progressive enough to coexist with western society, let alone exist as a part of that society, and clearly she does not \textit{want} it to integrate into

\begin{itemize}
  \item[]{\textsuperscript{44} Ramadan, “Manifesto for a new ‘WE,’” July 7, 2006.}
  \item[]{\textsuperscript{45} Ramadan, “Manifesto for a new ‘WE,’” July 7, 2006.}
\end{itemize}
western society. She strongly believes that Ramadan’s brand of Islam would be detrimental to western life, a claim whose import will be examined further below.

Fourest does not seem to recognize the effect of polarizing herself and Ramadan. She calls him dangerous because he is too influential, and she is ideologically opposed to his religious and social message. This is hypocritical because she herself exercises the same control over a different public. By insisting that Ramadan is radical and backward, and brainwashing Muslims, she casts suspicion on all Muslims who listen to his message, influencing westerners to distrust “them.” Furthermore, since she voices her fear that he will soon reach out to all Muslims, she incites a general fear of what “Muslims” may be inspired to feel towards the West.

None of the Fourest’s work fosters the creation of a new “we.” Instead, it inspires division and distrust. Whether or not she recognizes it, Fourest is using the political discourse of French nationalists in the 1980s. She creates a similar divide between “us” and “them,” and most importantly, she challenges Ramadan’s citizenship agenda for whether or not it requires one to be “French at heart” or “western at heart.” How does she define what is “western” and acceptable, versus what is “foreign” and threatening? It comes back to the differences in “culture” defined by Historian Joan W. Scott. Fourest’s analysis depends on an understanding of “Muslim culture” and “western culture” based in the orientalist notions of Islam rhetorically constructed during France’s time as a colonial force. Her discourse—like that of both liberals and nationalist rightwing politicians—focuses national debate on the concepts that divide “French” from “Muslim” when no such division actually exists. The construction of a “French” citizen body that excludes Muslims is in fact an attempt to avoid confronting the complexities of plural identity inherent in the continually globalizing world. The political rhetoric concerning
how integration of the “other” threatens national identity is thus a misguided debate that masks the deep issues—those of racism, economic inequality, social injustice, and the hypocritical application of values of “democracy”—that threaten to destroy the ideal France that the nation is fighting so hard to protect.
II. The construction of citizenship in the United States

National identity is an equally important concept in the United States and, though the United States did not face the same shift in immigration that prompted France to question its national identity, there are curious parallels between the development of Islamaphobia in France and America. In the United States, the most obvious change in the American perception of Islam came after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. A nationalist, anti-Muslim political agenda developed after these attacks, as politicians called for a response to what was in this case a very real threat to national identity. The rhetoric of the “war on terror” emphasized “national security” and a “war of ideology” against “terrorists,” but the roots of this campaign against a “terrorist threat”—which was too frequently conflated with a “Muslim threat”—were not solely a response to the events of 9/11. In fact the American media coverage of international events demonstrates that nationalist rhetoric defaming Muslims had been an aspect of American discourse for decades before the terrorist attacks on Washington D.C. and New York City. The fear of Islam and Muslims developed partly as a reaction to America’s years of involvement with Iran and the Gulf War of the early 1990s, as Iran and Iraq are both “Muslim nations.” This Islamaphobia, once directed primarily at Muslims and Islam outside of the United States, came to be adopted as an internal American fear. Islamaphobic attitudes were integrated into American nationalism, engendering a fear of Muslim Americans, and an exclusionalist attitude towards Muslim residents of the United States.

Clearly the circumstances surrounding the acceptance of Islam in America were different from those in France, where the overwhelming influx of Muslim African immigrants forced cultural questions between established French citizens and immigrants into the public arena. In
the US the terrorist attacks were the lightening rod event that prompted politicians and the public to question retroactively the place of Muslims in society. It is telling that the wars in the Middle East in the early 2000s were explicitly called a fight for “Democracy.” In a 2005 speech President George W. Bush explained: “Democracy takes different forms in different cultures. Yet in all cultures, successful free societies are built on certain common foundations—rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, a free economy, and freedom to worship.” Bush believed that democracy was the only political system that would guarantee an individual’s freedom, and as such should be the inalienable right of all mankind. This view itself shows the western bias of his perceptions: he unconsciously echoes “the inalienable rights of man” in John Locke’s Second Treatise on government, or Thomas’s Jefferson’s “rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness” in the Declaration of Independence. However, the purpose of the speech was to explain why continued involvement in Iraq was necessary even though a type of democracy had already been established by 2005. Bush explained that “as democracy takes hold in Iraq, the terrorists and Saddamists will continue to use violence” because of what is “at stake” in Iraq: “as democracy takes root in that country, their hateful ideology will suffer a devastating blow, and the Middle East will have a clear example of freedom and prosperity and hope.” His view demonstrates how the policymakers and politicians who managed these campaigns chose to frame the fight as an ideological battle between the US and terrorist factions. Yet why did war against specific Muslim terrorist organizations turn into a campaign against Muslims in general in political discourse?

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In part it seems the discussion of “democratic values” and who supported them consumed internal American politics, and as Muslim societies outside of the United States had been demonized by wartime rhetoric, the focus in America turned inwards to question whether Muslims in America were also a threat to “democracy.” An article published in the *New York Times* in October 2001 exemplifies the phenomenon of questioning the allegiance of American Muslims. In the piece titled “A nation challenged: American Muslims; Saudis Seek to Add U.S. Muslims to Their Sect,” reporter Blaine Harden writes: “In a costly and quietly insistent campaign to spread its state religion, Saudi Arabia has been trying for decades to induce American Muslims to become followers of the puritanical Islamic sect that sustains the power of the Saudi royal family.”\(^\text{49}\) This sensational opening is followed by an analysis of the monetary support funding the construction of mosques designed to “to stamp [the Saudi’s] austere version of Islam on the lives of Muslims in the United States.”\(^\text{50}\) Harden notes that “about 57 percent of the country's 1,200 mosques” were built in the 1970s and 1980s when Saudi Arabia was particularly wealthy from oil revenue.\(^\text{51}\) He surmises that these suggestive facts make it “difficult to assess the reach of the Saudis in influencing the religious lives of the estimated six million to seven million Muslims in this country.”\(^\text{52}\) However, Harden also cites numerous American scholars who deny that Wahhabism, the particular brand of Islam he claims the Saudis are exporting, is anywhere near the dangerous force which he depicts. Those scholars have concluded that Wahhabism is practiced by twenty-five percent of American Muslims at most as

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one professor has claimed while “other scholars say the percentage is much lower and steadily falling”—and that this form of Islam is unpopular in America because “its inflexibility is ill suited to life in the United States and to the multiethnic mix of American Muslims.” The contradictory information within the article suggests that the Saudi push to promote Wahhabism, if it truly exists, has not been successful and has little chance of becoming an influential aspect of American Muslim life. Even more problematic than Harden’s controversial and suggestive claim that it is difficult to analyze the extent to which Wahhabism has taken hold over American Muslims is the terminology he employs. He suggestively links Muslims in America to Saudi Muslims, indicating that American Muslims have strong ties to an outside group, specifically an outside group which practices an “anti-American” religion.

This implies that the study and practice of Islam could be subversive ideological training in anti-American sentiments. The most troubling aspect of this article is the timing of its publication. Harden chooses to report on the potential growth of what he cites is a “minority Islamic sect that is intolerant of other forms of Islam, unwilling to accommodate other religions and likely to create a narrow view of the world among its followers” just one month after the September 11 terrorist attacks. The suggestive language, coupled with the article’s release date, reveals an intentional attempt to promote suspicion of Muslims through media discourse.

This type of American discursive agenda affects how Muslims are viewed in the United States, as non-Muslim Americans question whether Muslims place their religion or their nationality first. Harden’s language intermixes the cultural implications of Wahhabism with


religious belief, thereby making religion, rather than culture and ideology, the main indicator of “difference.” This agenda is troubling because of the media’s important function in informing Americans’ understanding of themselves. In his book *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*, Edward W. Said explains that the American media has always served the function of incorporating diverse ideas into one American ideology. He writes: “Beginning with the Puritan ‘errand in the wilderness,’ there has existed in this country an institutionalized ideological rhetoric expressing a peculiarly American consciousness, identity, destiny and role whose function has always been to incorporate as much of America’s (and the world’s) diversity as possible, and to re-form it in a uniquely American way.”

The effect of this discourse is to create “the illusion of consensus” amongst the American citizenry, though in fact the entire production of American rhetoric, by the media and politicians, exists only to reconcile “incompatible subcultures.” However, the media can also function in the opposite way by purposely creating an illusion of division where no division or difference had existed before.

The article’s implied assertion that one idea is a potential threat to the concept of a united citizenry is a ridiculous notion because America since its founding has constructed its “united citizenry” by incorporating diverse groups into the definition of the citizen body. Yet despite its absurdity, assertions such as the one made in Harden’s article are easily accepted in American discourse because the media’s function as the constructor of an “illusion of consensus” is meant to go unnoticed by American. The purpose of the ideological rhetoric is to “set limits and

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maintain pressures” of what is acceptably American or not American, without directly obtrusively dictating guidelines for “Americanness.” It is a laissez-faire approach to defining citizenry that suggests cultural norms without strictly prescribing them.

Harden’s article also importantly introduces the notion that international understandings of Islam contribute to its differentiation of “Muslim ideology” from “western ideology” within America. His reference to Saudi oil wealth of the 1980s and 1990s touches on the complicated historical relationship between America and Middle Eastern nations that fostered such a close connection, sometimes friendly and other times hostile, between the U.S. and “Muslim” states.

One such nation is Iran. The United States had been supportive of Iran while the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was ruling the nation, but after the Iranian revolution of 1979 the relationship between the two nations changed drastically. Ayatollah Khomeini rose to power as the head of as Islamic government. The event was viewed differently in the United States than from within Iran: for the U.S. a powerful political ally was replaced by an unpredictable religious man who viewed the U.S. and American policy as a threat, not a friend. In Iran the revolution was a movement to overthrow a cruel tyrant—one supported by the United States.

The American reaction to the events in Iran demonstrates the way in which American discourse created a self-serving narrative of global events in which Americans framed the revolution and the government that developed in Iran after 1979 in terms of how it directly impacted American policy. In a 1987 article journalist George A. Nader describes his experience of hearing Ayatollah Khomeini speak in Iran during the time of the Iran-Iraq war. He writes:

“The seeing Khomeini in this setting was especially valuable for me, as a Christian whose cultural

and religious heritage varies so widely from that of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” His terminology expresses the purposeful division between himself, the American, and the Muslim Iranian leader, and pointedly refers to the “Islamic Republic” of Iran. He seems to exoticize Khomeini for his different “cultural and religious heritage” though how that heritage was suddenly different seems to be more a reflection of the changed attitude towards Iran as a result of the 1979 revolution than recognition of a strange and different cultural understanding. What has changed is not the religion or history of Iran, as it was a nation comprised of many Muslims before the revolution and its past history did not change as a result of the revolution.

Iran’s culture was very likely different from Nader’s home culture. His choice to note that difference now indicates is that the U.S. image of Iran before the revolution and that of Iran after the revolution are both constructions that suit the American perception of the nation. To this effect, Said states that the initial response to the revolution was denial: the U.S. media refused to acknowledge that dissent had existed with Iran and that a movement to overthrow the Shah reflected the will of the people. Said argues that to achieve this end, the revolution was framed as perpetrated by “religious fanatics,” rather than rational people, an argument only further supported by the development of the Iranian hostage crisis. Nader’s description of Khomeini eight years later still employs the language of “fanaticism.” Nader writes that Khomeini’s speech was a “reminder that for all the strategic importance of Iran, the motivations

\[\text{60} \text{Nader, “At Hone with The Ayatollah And His Men,”} \text{ Washington Post, May 3, 1987.}\]

\[\text{61} \text{Said,} \text{ Covering Islam,} \text{ 104.}\]

\[\text{62} \text{Said,} \text{ Covering Islam,} \text{ 106.}\]
of its leader remain intensely religious.” Religion is framed as the most important aspect of Iranian identity.

Though indeed under an Islamic government religion was very important, this did not preclude the government from serious political involvement and engagement. The religious government in Iran was a concept foreign to U.S., and general western, ideological understanding. The fact that it developed as a result of a tumultuous revolution that unseated a leader the U.S. supported led America to frame religious governance as dangerous. That allowed the U.S. to argue irrational fanatics had overthrown the government, rather than acknowledge the Iranian people’s serious grievances against the Shah and the western nation that had supported his tyrannical rule. This understanding of the Iranian revolution led to the development of an American discourse demonizing the radicalized Iranian Muslims.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was a second international event that affected the U.S. perception of the “Muslim world.” A Washington Post article exploring how the event affected Iraqi-Americans sheds light on the degree to which these citizens felt included in American society. One man speaks of his fear of the “distinct possibility” that “internments [of Iraqis] may be likely, just as the Japanese were [during World War II].” Another states: “We're seeing Americans turning against us, even though we're the same people who tried to warn the U.S. about this tyrant.”

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These responses demonstrate two effects of the American presentation of the events in Iraq. First, the hostile attitude taken towards Iraq had transformed into a hostile attitude towards Iraqis, which indicates that media portrayal did not give a complete or nuanced description of the circumstances surrounding the invasion. The anti-Iraqi sentiment is both unfair to the Iraqi-Americans, most of whom felt even more deeply than other Americans that Saddam Hussein was a “tyrant,” and was unfair to Iraqis, most of whom certainly did not support or condone Hussein. The image of his tyranny is a simplistic picture of “good” western values versus the “tyrannical” Iraqi values of Hussein. The fact that that attitude was transferred to other peoples of Iraqi descent indicates that despite their U.S. citizenship, Iraqis were easily conceived of as part of the non-western “other” when international events supported that possible interpretation of them.

Second, the reactions show how U.S. discourse on Iraq and Iraqis affected how Iraqi-Americans viewed the United States, and their place in it. The men who speak of a “fear of internment” and “Americans turning against us” illustrate that the treatment of Iraqis and Iraqi-Americans led Iraqi-Americans to feel separated from the rest of the U.S. citizen body. The man tellingly says Americans have turned against “us,” meaning his fellow Iraqi-Americans. The men also note feelings of “bitterness” towards America and anger at “American hypocrisy” in its Middle Eastern policy. Their treatment by non-Iraqi Americans as part of a vast “other” is an assumption that they hold allegiance to some group other than America. In some ways this is true: it seems the Iraqi-Americans were more aware of a non-American interpretation of global politics as a result of their connection to a community outside of the U.S. However, all this indicates is that they belonged to multiple communities, not that they did not belong to the

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American one. The discourse that made these men fear their fellow Americans served to create a
differentiation between their specific “subculture,” to borrow Said’s terminology, and the
otherwise “united” American citizenry. Though a difference exists between Iraqi-Americans and
other Americans, it is not, and should not have been, treated as a unique phenomenon. Any
single American citizen belongs to a subgroup that differentiates him or her from other
Americans in some way, whether by ancestry, race, religious creed, sex, political affiliation, or
any other defining characteristic. The singling out of Iraqi-Americans was an act that goes
against the purported mutli-culturalism of American life.

It was the events of September 11, though, that crystallized a discursive differentiation
between Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States. As Blaine Harden’s article on the threat
of “Wahhabism” shows, the fear of “fundamentalist” Muslim groups within the U.S. was a newly
serious concern for Americans. Directly after 2001, a New York Times article reflecting on the
reactions of Muslim-Americans to the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan in October 2001 indicates
the division between Muslims and non-Muslims engendered by the 9/11 attacks and the “war on
terror”: Muslims were now consulted to get “their take” as Muslims on international policy
concerning Muslim nations, highlighting their Muslim “otherness” as opposed to their
“Americanness.” In the article Imam Hassan Qazwini of Detroit speaks out against the U.S.
attacks, stating: “Just as we were outraged and hurt by the thousands of people who were killed
in New York, we are also hurt and outraged to see many hundreds of people being killed in
Afghanistan. We are terrorizing a whole nation because a few terrorists live behind them.”

His response shows not a divided allegiance, but a divided global perspective that indicates multiple

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understandings of U.S. policy. He is affected both by the 9/11 attacks as an American, and by the blunt and over-simplistic U.S. decision to attack Afghanistan in retaliation. U.S. policy had conflated terrorism with the Afghani people by adopting a retaliatory action that did not differentiate between “terrorists” and the Afghani people.

The American fear mongers who differentiate Muslims from non-Muslims both in America and abroad have tapped into a complicated issue of identity. Those who argue Islam is a political unit threatening the American system touch on the notion of a “supranational” political community threatening to supersede the authority of the national political unit.69 As specifically applied to the Muslim world, the Islamic concept of the “umma” is cited to support the argument that all Muslims belong to a community outside of the nation. Fear mongers support this concept in part by referencing the Islamic term “umma,” which designates a “historical claim that Muslims belong to the single community of the umma that…recognizes no divisions by race, class, or nationality.”70 This concept of religious community fell under the lens of global scrutiny after the September 11 terrorist attacks. In her paper Radical Islam: Threats and Opportunities, British scholar Sara Silvestri explains that “Although the ‘universal’ quality of the Islamic religious experience has often been presented as a subversive element, challenging the western socio-political status quo, the meaning of umma is in fact not dissimilar to that of ‘catholic’ (in its original Greek sense), a notion which plays a central role in the Christian tradition.”71 In its essence, “umma” refers to the broad “community of Muslims.” It is simply another term for the group of people that believes in Islam. Yet it is also correct that the term has


70 Afshar, Aitken, Franks, “Feminisms, Islamaphobia and Identities,” Political Studies, 263.

been appropriated for other uses by certain political Muslims, who wish to strike a chord of solidarity for political reasons. The idea of a tangible united global Muslim community is a powerful rhetorical tool for any leader who wishes to garner a broad Muslim following.  

The continued fixation with the “umma” in the years following September 11, 2001 and the different conclusions drawn about the idea of an “umma” by various researchers indicate that the idea of supranational citizenship has become a central concern of scholars and political leaders in the past decade. In 2004, Fred Halliday of the London School of Economics wrote *A transnational umma: reality or myth?* to examine claims made “in the four years since 9/11…in the west and in the Islamic world, about the emergence of a new ‘transnational’ and militant Islam, a community of jihadis who operate independently of states, recruit from many countries, and whose operations are not confined to any particular state.” He ultimately found that though the concept of umma was relevant to Islam as a faith and could be traced through its history, nothing about the practice of Islam historically or at present day precluded Muslims from also belonging to a national community. He also notes that the “facility of virtual and physical movement today means that many ideas, symbols, and causes are transmitted globally and near instantaneously,” and thus transnationality is hardly a surprising phenomenon, and certainly not unique to Islam. Silvestri’s study in 2007 likewise tried to debunk the prevalent misconception that there is a global “‘Muslim conspiracy’ out there to undermine and conquer the West—that there is something ‘inherently wrong,’ backward and violent with the religion of Islam and with

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Muslim believers and culture.” Her study again rejected the idea that the umma was the equivalent to an Islamist power base, but again the pressure to examine the reality of this claim still existed in current discourse. Her research connects even more firmly the concept of a global community with the notion of Islamaphobia.

In 2011, American professor Peter Mandaville examined the term umma is used in present-day discourse: “In current debates, particularly in the media and policy circles, the notion of transnational Islam has come to be largely synonymous with the global jihadist aspirations of Osama bin Laden and Al-Qa’idah.” He argues that in reality, the umma is not a globally organized community that serves as alternative to nationhood. Moreover, he cautions that this does not signal a “reaffirmation of the nation as the sole legitimate basis of political community.” His study shows the development and the continuities in the discourse over umma. In the past ten years it has remained a constant source of concern in political discourse, both because of the possibility of a global Islamist network and because of its implications for nationhood.

Many of Ramadan’s critics accuse him of having this sort of subversive global agenda. Despite the fact that he affirms that Muslims must expect each other “to respect the laws of the countries in which they reside, and to which they must be loyal,” they question whether he is in fact campaigning for multiculturalism, or if his real aim is to unite Muslims as one strong “supranational” political community. In America, perhaps even more forcefully than in France,

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the conflation of “Islam” and “Islamism” pervades political discourse. Politicians accuse Muslims of being united as a political body that seeks to undermine the American political system. This notion melds fear of the Muslim terrorists of 2001, who openly proclaimed their war against the American system, with fear of American citizenship losing its meaning if integrating Muslims changes established norms of American life. As a result, rhetoric developed that labeled Muslims as a threat to the American way of life.

As in France, in the United States it is useful to look at the conversation surrounding Tariq Ramadan as a way to understand why the integration of Muslims is so vehemently opposed. Ramadan moved from being a political voice to a subject of political debate in the US when the government famously revoked his visa to teach at Notre Dame University in 2004.79 The discourse surrounding him points to a tension, similar to that in France, between wanting to incorporate Muslims into the US community based on the nation’s principles of inclusion while at the same time fretting over the implications of Islam’s influence. Ramadan is once again implemented as a symbolic representation of everything politicians fear about Muslims.

Paul Berman is one such American scholar who passes judgment on Tariq Ramadan and his role in western society today. He finds that Ramadan “wants a share of the public space, not just a share of the private sphere. Or more than wants: he demands a share of the public space. A properly Muslim life is physical and communal and not just spiritual and internal, and it must be lived in physical space, and this will require modifications in the strictly secular system that dominates Europe today.”80 Berman does not say this is an unfair desire, or that Ramadan should not have his way—not outright. He rather applies a circular approach to analyzing Ramadan that

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shields him from seeming as aggressively anti-Ramadan as Fourest, while still managing to imply that Ramadan’s rhetoric poses a threat to America and western culture.

Berman explains to us that “[Ramadan’s] harshest critics…suspect that, in secret, Ramadan nurses the larger pop-eyed and more-than-theological Islamist aspiration—the Islamic conquest of the world, pictured as a practical campaign.”81 He then lays out all of the reasons why that fear is understandable, but concludes by reassuring his reader that “my own reading of Ramadan has never led me to suppose that he is engaged in some kind of elaborate conspiracy or is acting on a secret plan.”82 The effect of this is curious, because while Berman is insisting that he is not a fear monger accusing Ramadan of being a stealth Islamist with world-dominating ambitions, he is all the while proving himself to be a firebrand accusing Ramadan of having too close an allegiance to Islamists, of serving as a mouthpiece for Islamism, and of intending to “demand his share of the public space.” Berman may be correct that there are subtle differences between his own critiques of Ramadan and those made by others, but ultimately their arguments overlap more than they differ.

He, like Fourest, sees Ramadan’s rhetoric as a threat to the values of western culture. His method of polarizing Ramadan and “the West” is not as immediately evident as Fourest’s, in part because his book is not a specific analysis of Ramadan’s speeches as hers is. However he too works out an argument for why “we”—Americans (or westerners)—should take care to watch out for Ramadan and the “them” he represents. For Berman “it is easy to imagine that Fourest is on to something. Salafi reformism, after all—this is a movement without any kind of natural

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Salafi reformism is the branch of Islam with which Ramadan identifies. By claiming Ramadan’s religious principles are tantamount to supporting terrorism, Berman certainly takes a stance on whether or not Ramadan is a dangerous figure. Terrorism is, after all, a force outside of reason, designed to combat using fear rather than words. To associate Ramadan with terrorism is at the very least an attempt to undermine his credibility, and at worst a suggestion that he is pro-terrorist.

Two things are notable in Berman’s use of Fourest’s analysis. Initially, Berman chooses to use Fourest’s understanding of Ramadan to explain to an American audience that Ramadan is dangerous. This rhetorical tool is interesting, because Berman does not make a unique argument specific to why Ramadan endangers American life in particular, as America has a different historical and social relationship with Islam and immigration. Nevertheless Berman appropriates Fourest’s analysis to state that Ramadan is a menace. This suggests that Berman sees Ramadan as a threat to something shared in common by France and America: a general “western ideology” that does not fit in with Ramadan’s “Muslim ideology.” He implicitly defines Ramadan as a representative Muslim voice for the entire body of people who identify themselves as Muslim not just in Europe, but globally. He thereby pits himself and Fourest as the speakers for western ideology against Ramadan, the representative of Islam.

The second notable aspect of his argument is what he draws from Fourest’s analysis: what, exactly, is Fourest “on to” according to Berman? He paraphrases her impression of Ramadan’s effect on an unknown group of immigrant Muslims as such: “She pictures Ramadan delivering a lecture somewhere in Europe, and an impressionable young North African

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immigrant deciding to attend. And Fourest wonders what notions and impulses such a person might take away. Which half of Ramadan’s thinking might prove to be the persuasive [one] to such a person—the commendable half? Or the other half? The answer does not seem to her obvious.”

Berman, though he declines to present this picture of Ramadan as his own, does admit he finds it plausible. He presents a view of how Ramadan’s role might be interpreted, endorsing it without openly attributing it to himself. Again, here is a picture of Ramadan as a manipulative influence over an unawares immigrant population, with the “other half” of his message directed solely towards them. The description of the situation is paternal: these poor immigrants are “impressionable” and susceptible to “notions and impulses.” For Berman, there is no possibility that any less commendable notions an immigrant could glean from Ramadan are more reflective of the failings of western society than of some radical religious message.

In this hypothetical situation, the discontent and anger in immigrant communities is the real issue, and with their social and economic disadvantages they have good reason to be outraged. The better question is: why is there a European “us” and a North African “them?” How can we all work to close that division? Berman believes that by addressing the immigrant populations of Europe Ramadan is engendering a division between the immigrants and the westerners by promoting his Islamic beliefs, which Berman has aligned with terrorism. Berman does not confront the possibility that his broad generalizations about immigrant populations, which turn them into a homogenous “them,” and his assumption that they are susceptible to radicalism might in fact be a cause of division between westerners and Muslims.

The imagery presented by Berman runs contrary to the message Ramadan promotes in his

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“Manifesto.” Ramadan asks Muslims and non-Muslims alike to tackle social problems while leaving faith out of the question, indicating that for him it is possible to consider oneself a citizen of a nation concerned with its government and also a religious person. Berman and Fourest, by refusing to accept this is his “true” message, undermine the efficacy of Ramadan’s words. Rather than address the social problems facing Muslim immigrants in western countries, they choose to focus on a religious conspiracy. This focus is motivated by a fear that compromise and integration will destroy something about western culture and its values: either those values that make the West different politically, as Fourest contends, or the liberal values such as secularism that make western democracy function, as Berman contends. In this, they may be right: compromise will mean change, and in changing western society may lose something. However to fight against it by accusing the “other” of being the source of all problems is not the correct way to handle the problem.

Both Smith’s and Brubaker’s analyses indicate that the definition and import of “citizenship” is changing in the twenty-first century. Globalization challenges the definition of nations themselves, as these powerful entities are being forced to work together to solve global problems versus remaining focused on their individual goals and concerns. As this occurs, the idea of “citizenship” may allude to more than just allegiance to a national identity: one can be a citizen of the world, or an ethnic group, or a religious unit. As Smith notes, “just how much these conditions are really changing, and how we can and should respond, are the central issues facing the architects and bearers of American citizenship, as well as other forms of citizenship, in

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the twenty-first century.” This indeed is the question facing France, the United States, and the world today: what does it mean to belong to a community? Is national identity the most relevant way to define people today? What will be the new “we?”

Ramadan and those who analyze him are aware that the politics of identity are changing. Much of their disagreements spring from the tension of imagining the right to expect citizenship and allegiance from people as the exclusive right of nations, versus as the right of any united group—such as the religion Islam. The struggle facing the globalized world is how individuals will identify themselves, and what that means for the political world. In some ways political attacks of Islam, or of western culture, are a reaction to this, as political bodies wish to hold onto control of what is familiar. However it is not the right of any one of those groups to proclaim that their perspective is correct and that other perspectives are a threat to the “right” way of thinking, especially when dealing not just with theory but with the current circumstances affecting the lives of real people.

The movement towards globalization means that people will all have to start thinking from a perspective that honors the truth of multiple histories. That does not mean that each perspective will be correct, or that every aspect of each culture and law must be preserved. The movement towards multiculturalism does however mean that compromises must be made, and for that to be possible groups must learn to listen to each other and attempt to understand the causes of their differences and the sources of their commonalities. Exclusionary practices will only prolong distrust and misunderstanding between different cultural groups.

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III. The perception of women and Islam in France

In France, one of the main controversies engendering discourse about Islam concerns the hijab worn by Muslim women. This article of clothing was the subject of national debate during three distinct episodes in 1989, 1994, and 2004 when French politicians and the French media argued over whether hijabs should be allowed in public schools. In 2004 the French government took a definitive stance against veiling when it outlawed “the wearing of conspicuous signs of religious affiliation in public schools.”¹⁸⁷ The law ensured that headscarves, veils, and burqas would be removed before students arrived at school, and by extension guaranteed that those articles of clothing would be looked down upon in all areas of public life. French politicians thought themselves justified in this measure for a number of reasons, but above all else they claimed their campaign was a fight for women’s freedom. Though this mission likely motivated many of those who supported the ban on signs of religious affiliation in schools, the explanation misleadingly downplays the ban’s specific attack on Islam and Muslim culture in France. The ostensible justification for the law obscures the issues at stake for those instituting the “ban of religious symbols”: whether the hijab is a manifestation of Islamism and to what extent the presence of Muslim religious symbols poses a threat to non-Muslim culture in France.

The veil first surfaced as a topic of national debate in October 1989 when three girls were expelled from their school in Creil for refusing to remove their headscarves. Their headmaster, Eugène Chenière, explained that their dress was a direct threat to the French principle of “laïcité,” the approximate French equivalent of secularism, the separation of church and state, in

the United States.\textsuperscript{88} He argued that French schools should be a model for the ideals of the French nation and so should be the first place where these principles were upheld. In his view laïcité depended on the complete equality of all citizens, and as the veil served as a division between groups of girls in school, it was a threat to this unifying tenet of French governance. The veil to him thus challenged the idea of unified French citizenry because it signified a difference. The controversy died down when the highest administrative court in France, the Conseil d’Etat, ruled that “the wearing of signs of religious affiliation by students in public schools was not necessarily incompatible with the principle of laïcité, as long as these signs were not ostentatious or polemical, and as long as they didn’t constitute ‘acts of pressure, provocation, proselytism or propaganda’ that interfered with the liberties of other students.”\textsuperscript{89} The stipulations of their ruling point to two issues at the heart of the debate over headscarves and veils: first, whether wearing any religious symbol was a threat to the French concept of laïcité, and second, whether women and girls donned this concealing dress under “pressure” from others or in order to “proselytize” others. Politicians and members of the press pounced on the possible element of subversive community pressure involved in the headscarf debate.

In 1993 Chenière was elected to a deputy post for the Oise region as a member of the Raillement pour la République, a center-right political party.\textsuperscript{90} In 1994 he re-launched a campaign against “ostentatious” symbols of religious affiliation. The result: “the minister of education, François Bayrou, decreed on September 20, 1994, that ‘ostentatious’ signs of religious affiliation would henceforth be prohibited in all schools” in what would come to be known as the

\textsuperscript{88} Scott, \textit{The Politics of the Veil}, 22.

\textsuperscript{89} Scott, \textit{The Politics of the Veil}, 24-25.

“Bayrou circular.”91 This led to the expulsion of many Muslim girls who refused to take off their headscarves. This second episode in the headscarf affairs is perhaps the most interesting, because it illustrates a definite turn in the French perception of headscarves. This time, the courts disagreed as to how laïcité should best be enforced. The debates illuminate the change in public sentiment towards the headscarf and the French Muslim community.

The media coverage of these events shows the public response to l’affaire des foulards was mixed. On December 1, 1994, the French League of Human Rights, an organization advocating both the social and political rights of citizens,92 released a statement condemning the Bayrou circular for designating Islam as “the source of all problems while other faiths are tolerated in schools” in the name of secularism.93 Days later at an event held by SOS Racism former education minister Lionel Jospin, who dealt with the 1989 headscarf incident in Creil, wondered how a religious symbol could be deemed “conspicuous” and stated that a law forbidding religious apparel in school would be unconstitutional.94 However these responses were countered by many cases where the headscarf ban was supported and implemented. At l'Université Lille-II, two first-year law students were barred for refusing to remove their headscarves that December. The Dean of Faculty at the university backed her decision by stating the veil “threatened to disturb public order,”95 indicating the widespread acceptance of Bayrou’s

logic. Headscarves had been publicly branded as a threat to laïcité, and despite calls from anti-racism groups to reevaluate the legality of selectively enforcing laïcité to specifically target Muslims the “veil as a threat” perception stuck.

Aside from reporting the public reaction to the events, the media coverage also demonstrates public understandings of l’affaire des foulards through the rhetoric of the news stories themselves. In an article published in Le Monde on November 30, 1994, journalist Henri Tincq remarks that the French Muslim community had been notably silent about the Bayrou circular and further comments on what their surprising reaction indicates about the scope of the controversy’s impact. He observes that concurrent with the French debates over the legality of the decree: “the situation is deteriorating in Algeria, the west responds quickly to provocations from Sadam Houssein but ignores the plight of Bosnian Muslims,” and contends that these international factors affect the discourse surrounding Islam in France. In addition he notes that exiled Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen’s tour of France, occurring contemporaneously with the affaire des foulards, “reinforces, if involuntarily, the amalgamation of Islam and fanaticism.” He concludes that these global events related to Muslim culture bear on the way the French public and the French Muslim community perceive the debate over the veil and Islam. His examples indicate the divisive nature of the discussion: while for the non-Muslim French Nasreen’s visit might inspire fear of Islamism, to the Muslim community Western ambivalence towards Bosnia might inspire negative feelings towards the French government. Events and

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factors outside of France affect how both groups view national politics and might contribute to the polarization of Muslims and non-Muslims in the headscarf debate.

Tincq also suggests that the silence of prominent Muslim groups during these events is an attempt to reserve “political capital” to fight a larger battle: “this community, more moderate than the caricature would suggest, is well aware of the provocative policies hiding behind wearing the headscarf… [f]or them, the implementation of the Bayrou circular is less a ‘proof of firmness that avows their powerlessness,’” but rather a sign of discrimination against Muslims as “everyone understands [ostentatious symbols] is a manner of designating, without directly saying it, the headscarf and Islam, and them alone.” Though the act of banning Muslim girls from school for wearing the hijab is troubling, to attack only this issue misses the point that the affair itself is an attack on Muslims and Islam, not on “ostentatious signs.” This article identifies a few important currents in the debate: for one, that Muslims in France were aware of the need to proceed cautiously in these debates, as their growing ostracization from the French community was an unstated political phenomenon. Had the ban been more specifically “anti-Muslim” it would have in fact been easier to combat, but as it instead used the euphemism of “religious symbols,” the discourse surrounding the Bayrou circular was more complicated.

Equally important is the fact that Tincq recognizes that the French attitude towards the headscarf is problematic for French citizens in general, regardless of their religious affiliation. This perspective shows the moderate middle ground of the debate: the non-Muslims and Muslims who view the headscarf affair as an impending political disaster for the entire French community as the stated terms of debate do not reflect the actual concerns of the debate’s

participants. He wonders whether the attack on headscarves in the name laïcité is the best way to handle the “emancipation of women” as it will remand them to a “closed universe” of family and religion rather than a “secular school.” His critique represents a measured rebuke of the logic behind the Bayrou circular. Though Tincq notes the possible dangers of a “closed universe,” he also suggests that the only way to combat an excessive manifestation of religiosity, the threat of which was the official justification of the headscarf ban, would be to keep the girls in school. In other words, if these girls are under the influence of a religious force that threatens laïcité, the best way to approach the situation is to keep the dialogue open by leaving the girls in school and teaching them secular ideas. This indicates that the terms of the debate are wrong: if laïcité is truly what is at stake, the Bayrou circular is misguided. However if Bayrou is truly out to attack the Muslim community and exclude them from the non-Muslim community, the circular serves that purpose well: the discourse used to describe Bayrou’s agenda is what is wrong.

What was it about headscarves that so inflamed the French nation? Officially, the debate centered on whether or not any form of religious apparel threatened French laïcité. The term “laïcité” as it is employed today differs slightly from the American concept of “secularism” in that the French term implies the removal of religion from all government and public spheres. As such, the headscarf was viewed as a dangerous sign of individual belief in a society that did not officially recognize belief at all. Two court decisions responding to the Bayrou circular indicate the trouble French courts, and the French public, were having grappling with the concept of laïcité and Islam. In April 2005, magistrates at the Lille tribunal ruled that headscarves in and of themselves were not “ostentatious” and a threat to laïcité, but that the freedom to wear religious

signs does not permit students to don signs that by “their nature, the conditions under which they would be worn…or their ostentatious or assertive character would be an act of pressure, provocation, proselytism or propaganda.”\textsuperscript{100} The court at Lille thus echoed the terms of the 1989 Conseil d'Etat (high court) ruling that a headscarf was not in and of itself a reason to expel a student, yet even so, it still confirmed the suspensions of twenty three of the twenty six women banned from their schools on the grounds that their headscarves had acted as provocation of some sort.\textsuperscript{101} This strange logic indicates the 1989 ruling did little to advance the cause of laïcité where Muslims are concerned, as Muslim girls were still judged to have been a disturbance to the school community. Though it is legally reassuring that the headscarf was not the reason for their expulsion, the fact that they were first targeted for wearing the headscarf shows that they were singled out because of their Muslim identity. Thus though the court upheld a fair legal interpretation of laïcité, it still demonstrated a prejudice against Muslims, or at least supported the community’s prejudice against Muslims.

By contrast, that same April the Clermont-Ferrand administrative tribunal ruled the headscarf was “in and of itself ostentatious” when judging the cases of girls expelled from schools in the region.\textsuperscript{102} This decision was viewed by the reporter covering the decision for the liberal newspaper \textit{Le Monde} as one of “unprecedented severity” as it directly countered the 1989 decision. Furthermore, the decision incorporates the prejudicial perceptions coloring the judgment of the case. Specifically, the court found that the headscarf was a “sign of identification marking membership in an extremist religious affiliation with foreign ties,” an

\textsuperscript{100} Herzer, « Le foulard islamique n'est pas en soi un « signe ostentatoire, »» \textit{Le Monde}, April 15, 1995.

\textsuperscript{101} Herzer, « Le foulard islamique n'est pas en soi un « signe ostentatoire, »» \textit{Le Monde}, April 15, 1995.

\textsuperscript{102} Herzer, « A Clermont-Ferrand le foulard islamique est jugé « en soi » ostentatoire, » \textit{Le Monde}, April 8, 1995.
allegiance which according to the court was of a “particularly intolerant orientation which refuses women equality given them by the democratic institutions of France, and seeks to preclude the integration of Muslims into French culture by opposing the observance of secularism.” The court concluded that this point of view could not be allowed to “impose proselytism in schools,” and seeing as the young child had “ostensibly worn the hijab at her parents’ insistence…it could not be seen as anything but a sign constituting...an element of proselytizing.” The ruling was remarkably bold in its leap to connecting the headscarf with “extremist religious affiliation.” Through this decision, the court presumed to declare that all women and girls who wear headscarves were acting under the influence of this extremist group.

The Clermont-Ferrand ruling ignored the possibility of different motivations for wearing the headscarf. The hijab was and is for many women wearing it a personal choice, and thus to declare in a blanket statement that the hijab was a symbol of an “extremist religious affiliation with foreign ties” is far-reaching and over-simplistic. Even supposing the particular young girl in Clement-Ferrard had belonged to an “extremist” group and that therefore the court’s reasoning would have been substantiated by the evidence in the particular case at hand, the broad nature of the accusations against the headscarf suggests that in fact the court made its decision based on certain beliefs about Islam rather than the specific facts presented to it in this case.

The court’s focus on “proselytizing” highlights the fear that the hijab was perceived as disruptive not only because it publicly displayed religion in an area where religion should be absent, but also because it represented the spread of a dangerous growing religious trend. The

103 Herzberg, « A Clermont-Ferrand le foulard islamique est jugé « en soi » ostentatoire, » Le Monde, April 8, 1995.
ostensible claim that the law was enacted to fight for women’s rights, which this extremist force
was suppressing, is undermined by this focus on “proselytism” as the main concern and by the
practical results of enacting the law. As journalist Tincq noted, the law would in effect only
guarantee these girls be isolated in their home communities, a supposed hotbed of “extremism”
with “foreign ties,” rather than exposed to a secular world. If their homes were such a dangerous
place and the court truly wished to protect the girls’ interests, it would have been more effective
to reinstate them in their secular schools.

The focus on preserving French laïcité proved to be a much more heavily debated aspect
of the headscarf affair than the goal of protecting women’s rights, though the promotion of
women’s equality was often cited as the main reason why the headscarf should be banned. Both
goals, however, were supported by proponents of the headscarf ban as each was considered to be
an important tenet of French national identity. As historian Scott explains: “universalism meant
conformity to the same rules, and membership in only one ‘cult,’ the republic. Those who did not
conform in advance, who were not already ‘French,’ fell outside the purview of the universal
because, as in the body of the nation, commonality was a prerequisite for membership in the
educational community.” Using this analysis, it follows that those girls who wore veils in
schools had failed to “conform in advance,” thereby pointing out the uncomfortable fact that
universalism had not yet been realized in France. As Tincq notes in his 1994 article, France was
slow to realize that its conception of laïcité must change. He explains that the Conseil d’Etat had
for the past five years advocated that schools “tolerate” the veil unless it served as a proselytizing
agent, setting bounds for how to manage the presence of hijabs in a secularist society with the

expectation that a new understanding of culture would organically develop. This, however, did not work, as the intervening years seemed to indicate a growing polarization between Muslims and non-Muslims in France. He states that “the question of the contents [of laïcité] can no longer be avoided,” explaining that as Europe opens to more Muslim immigrants, France can no longer pretend that its cultural makeup is the same as it once was.\textsuperscript{106} While he agrees that laïcité once meant “the refusal of religions,” it would “now be better understood and accepted as a host of differences, as a condition of real ideological or religious pluralism.”\textsuperscript{107} Tincq’s analysis at the time recognizes that the prevailing attitudes governing French attitudes towards Islam are based in an ideal of laïcité that no longer exists. Rather than work towards a new understanding of secularism that addresses the presence of Muslim immigrants, the court in 1994 blamed Muslims for threatening the uniformity France’s national identity.

In the years that followed the Bayrou circular was deemed illegal in various courts across France, a movement that created its own media backlash. In 1996, the conservative newspaper \textit{Le Point} journalists Christian Jelen and Francois Dufay wrote a piece titled “Le foulard contre la Republique,” or the headscarf against the Republic. The article opens with the account of a teacher, Gisèle Pham, who “held a meeting with a Muslim mother to try to convince her that her 9 year old daughter must not wear a headscarf in class. Appalled, [Pham] saw a woman arrive wearing all black: “She wore a chador ‘in the style of the Taliban,’ her eyes were invisible.”\textsuperscript{108} This sensational opening introduces a warning of the Islamist presence in French communities and the difficulties teachers face trying to negotiate the demands of Muslim students. Though


\textsuperscript{108} Dufay, Jelen, « Le foulard contre la République, » \textit{Le Point}, July 12, 1996.
the critique may be well founded, as teachers certainly would have to deal with the repercussions of the national “headscarf affair” in their classrooms, the rhetoric used to describe the teacher’s difficult position is troublingly designed to promote a negative image of Islam.

The teacher is “appalled” by her student’s mother for her choice in wardrobe, a subtle reinforcement of the correctness of French women’s mode of dress and condemnation of “foreign” styles. She also describes the chador as “à la Taliban,” in the style of the Taliban, directly linking this woman to an extremist foreign group. Moreover, historian Michela Ardizonni contends that when “tchador” is employed in French discourse it is meant to be “reminiscent of the Iranian fanaticism”\(^\text{109}\) as opposed to the less contentious “hijab” or even “veil,” further supporting the discursive linkage to extremism. Much like the court decision in Clermont-Ferrand linking headscarves to “extremist religious affiliation with foreign ties,” the characterization of this Muslim woman is meant to evoke the dangerous connotations of her dress. By opening the article with this description of the mother, the journalists frame the discussion of the revoked headscarf ban in terms of an Islamist presence, implying that headscarves making a comeback is a victory for Islamist proselytizing forces.

The uneasy truce between Muslim and non-Muslim French citizens was again broken in 2003, when veils and headscarves were again thrust into the limelight of national politics. Nicolas Sarkozy, minister of the interior at the time, “insisted that Muslim women pose bare-headed for official identity photographs,” a measure in part justified by “concern about terrorism after the attacks of September 11 in the U.S.”\(^\text{110}\) His explanation indicates that political

\(^{109}\) Ardizzoni, “Unveiling the Veil,” *Women’s Studies*, 635.

discourse had now openly adopted the discourse of a potential “extremist” or “terrorist” threat. In response, the debate over headscarves in schools was reopened. A Socialist deputy, Jack Lang, introduced a bill to the National Assembly to outlaw signs of any religious affiliation in schools. President Jacques Chirac formed a commission headed by Bernard Stasi to explore the feasibility of such a law. In March 2004 a national “law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous signs of religious affiliation in public schools” was adopted. This action established the question of laïcité as a legal concern of the whole country for the first time.

The argument was that a headscarf served as a physical reminder of religiosity, and therefore forced religion into the public arena where it did not belong. French teachers polled in 2004 for the Le Monde and La Vie newspapers showed overwhelming support of the law: “76 % percent of junior high and high school teachers pronounced themselves in favor of the ban on the headscarf.” What is most interesting, though, is that of these in favor, “91% percent did not have a veiled girl in the school where they taught at the time, and 65% percent admitted that they had never seen a veiled girl in any school during their career.” The headscarf ban was supported by most, then, not because it was a physical disturbance, but because it was symbolically threatening. Yet while wearing headscarves in schools allegedly posed a threat to the separation of church and state, yarmulkes or Christian crosses on chains had never been perceived as a national issue. In the 1994 headscarf affair reporters commented on the same selective application of the Baryrou circular banning “ostentatious religious symbols.” Part of the

113 Killian, “From a Community of Believers to an Islam of the Heart,” Sociology of Religion, 308.
distinction may lie in the extreme visibility of a headscarf: crosses are generally worn around the neck as necklaces and yarmulkes only cover the crown of a man’s head. Neither is as immediately visually striking or physically concealing as a headscarf or veil. However this difference does not adequately explain the distinction, because in the first 1989 headscarf controversy teachers and students reached an agreement when students donned a smaller, less concealing scarf, literally dubbed “un foulard léger,”\(^ {115} \) or a “headscarf lite,” by school officials. These smaller headscarves were less conspicuous and thus supposedly less threatening to laïcité, and were accepted by officials as a suitable compromise at the time. Yet the debate over headscarves continued on for decades, indicating that regardless of their size headscarves were still seen as dangerous and divisive.

In her book *The Politics of the Veil* Scott argues that these sorts of compromises failed because they engendered the very cultural division they claimed to be working against. In her analysis any attempt to find a compromise on headscarves was doomed from the outset due to France’s history with Algeria and the racist stereotypes of Muslim Algerians that had become a part of the French national conception of both immigrants and Muslims. She notes that in French discourse concerning Algerians, “Ethnicity and religion were taken to be a single package, each negatively reinforcing the other.”\(^ {116} \) Racism in France is an unrecognized concept because laïcité, the principle that is intended to ensure all citizens are social and political equals, denies the existence of “race.” Thus any charges that it is racist to categorize all Algerians as one

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\(^ {116} \) Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, 44.
group that exhibits all the same traits can be countered by the claim that the differentiation is not racial, but cultural, and so is a matter of fact, not racism.

This French refusal to recognize that “race” is an existing difference that people use to categorize each other leads to a failure to acknowledge racist views as racist: that the grouping of all immigrants together as one unit, and the (untrue) assumption that all of those immigrants are Muslims, is plainly prejudicial stereotyping. In Scott’s analysis, the veil factors heavily into this perceived “cultural”—and in reality, racial—division: “in French eyes, the veil has long been a symbol of the irreducible difference and thus the inassimilability of Islam.”\(^{117}\) She contends that when France established their colonial presence in Algeria, African people were framed as culturally different as a justification for French rule over them. The veil was one blatant symbol of difference that separated the colonial subjects from the French ruling class.

This history contributes a great deal to the continued debate over the headscarf. Though by the turn of the twenty-first century France’s colonial relationship with Algeria had been defunct for decades, attitudes towards people of Algerian decent were colored by the colonial past. During France’s occupation of Algeria the headscarf held a specific political meaning for both the French and the Algerians. In part because it was a religious symbol, headscarves indicated a political refusal to conform to the standards of French governance and accept France’s right to rule the Algerian people.

The headscarf was seen as “anti-France” for a number of reasons. For one, the headscarf was Islamic, foreign to traditional French religious symbolism and therefore a threat to

\(^{117}\) Scott, \textit{The Politics of the Veil}, 45.
established life. The way “headscarf” was conflated with “veil”—both were condemned, but no
distinction between the two is ever made—shows the oversimplification of the imagery of a
covered Muslim woman.\footnote{Scott, \textit{The Politics of the Veil}, 34.} In her essay \textit{Unveiling the Veil: Gendered Discourses and the (In)Visibility of the Female Body in France}, Michela Ardizzoni relates the case of a student
named Leila Achaboun who, when questioned by \textit{Le Point} about wearing her veil, responded
“It’s not a veil, it’s a headscarf,” a remark that the media “quickly translated into an example of
insolence and disrespect towards French institutions.”\footnote{Ardizzoni, “Unveiling the Veil,” \textit{Women's Studies}, 635.} The girl’s response and the backlash
against it indicates, in Ardizzoni’s analysis, the politicized usage of the terms “veil” and
“headscarf.” Though the two were used interchangeably, the veil connotes covering and
suppression while headscarf is a less politically charged term. Thus Achaboun’s assertion that
her headscarf is not a veil is an assertion of her identity: she consciously chooses how she
defines her headscarf and asserts that terminology in the interview “to subvert any meaning of
subjugation and replace it with new meanings of empowerment and re-vindication of women’s
rights.”\footnote{Ardizzoni, “Unveiling the Veil,” \textit{Women's Studies}, 635.} 

\textit{Le Point}’s refusal to accept her right to name herself is a denial of her identity, both
because the paper dismisses her as childish and disrespectful, and because by disregarding her
choice to name herself the paper does not treat either her or her choice as worthy of recognition.

Both Scott and Ardizzoni demonstrate how the many names for “veils” and “scarves”
indicate that these articles of clothing were all viewed in the same light as “Muslim religious
clothing,” regardless of the vast physical differences between a “veil” and a “headscarf” and the
different connotations of those words. This oversimplification relates to Scott’s argument that
colonial history led the French to view all Muslims as one and all African immigrants as Muslims. Such stereotyping permitted French people to handle the threatening different perspective introduced by a new religious group. Rather than work to understand the complexities of Islam and the traditions that governed Algerian people, French leaders could assert that “they”—the Algerians—were all one group that behaved a certain way.

Why, though, did the headscarf in particular become a focus of anti-Muslim sentiments? As Scott explains in The Politics of the Veil, the French used the headscarf to symbolize all Muslim attitudes towards sexuality, which they found to be perplexing and dangerous. Scott finds that the French saw the veil as symbolic of the strict cultural barrier that divided men and women in Islamic society, a division they distrusted because it was so different from their own sexual morality. In her analysis, “the veil was a sexual provocation and a denial of sex, a come-on and a refusal”\(^\text{121}\) as this barrier that kept women separate and concealed only reinforced their desirability to the French colonizers. This segregation more firmly established Muslim women as “foreign” and unknown, heightening the sense of their “otherness.” Ardizzoni agrees, citing the Orientalist depictions of “Muslim veiled woman” as proof of a constructed “them.” She writes: “Orientalist paintings and writings invoked not only women’s subjugation and the backwardness of Islamic societies in keeping a radical sexual segregation, but also the mysterious and secretive—almost dangerous—erotic nature of that which is covered and concealed from the casual gaze.”\(^\text{122}\) Both authors emphasize the importance of the sexual connotations of veiling to French colonial people.

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\(^{121}\) Scott, The Politics of the Veil, 60.

\(^{122}\) Ardizzoni, “Unveiling the Veil,” Women’s Studies, 635.
The result of this construction of the myth of the veiled woman was that French colonizers felt it their duty to “liberate” these oppressed women. This goal was theoretically backed by only good intentions, as concealed women were considered to be “imprisoned” by society. However, to assume that these women were jailed by their customs was an exercise in orientalism. Scott writes that this exposes “the contradiction at the heart of the ‘civilizing mission,’ whose commitment to change and uplift could be confirmed only in juxtaposition to the permanent inferiority of those it claimed to be civilizing.”

The controversy around the veil was based on an assumption that Muslim culture was inferior to French culture and the only way to ameliorate the lives of Algerian women would be to break down the social system that had set headscarves in place.

Thus it was the French who created the politicization of the headscarf at the turn of the twentieth century. Ardizzoni notes that in the Algerian war, women shocked French soldiers and countrymen by hiding weapons under their haiks, a type of veil, literally concealing a threat to French with their clothing. After this war, no longer were women the imaginary “captives of the harem” in need of liberating from earlier Occidentalist discourse, but instead a politicized threat. Ardizzoni also recounts that after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, politicians in France began to worry about the potential Islamist political connotations of veiling. Further, in their book, Occidentalism, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit observe that in “Algeria and Morocco, after the wars of independence, the veil spread to new classes, aspiring to a higher status. But

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especially as it was adopted by the North African urban bourgeoisie, the veil also sent a signal of Islam-based nationalism, in opposition to France"\textsuperscript{127} and by extension in opposition to all forces of “westernization.” The veil became a way for Muslims to reaffirm their belief in not just religion, but a social system that differed from that promoted by France and other Western nations.

In a twist of history, it is fear of this very idea of the veil, the one the French have created for themselves, that drives the present-day debates over headscarves in France that have divided the nation and shaken its founding principles. The terms of the debate are framed in the same misguided orientalist assumption that veils are a means Islam uses to oppress women, but the underlying fear is that veils also symbolize Islamicism and will promote the spread of militant Islamic-based politics in France. The veil is considered to be a subversive threat to French political power in multiple ways. The debates are difficult to understand because the participants themselves do not recognize, or do not wish to admit, the basis of their fears. Instead, they claim that the veil is a threat to laïcité. Tariq Ramadan has been integrally involved in the debates over veiling in France, both as an active participant in the defense of the veil and as a subject of attack from those who believe the veil is a means for a Muslim patriarchy to control women. Here Ramadan is presented in two completely contradictory lights. He perceives himself to be a Muslim feminist, while Caroline Fourest paints him as a sexist, subversive Islamist threat.

Ramadan presents his feminist agenda in a 2007 interview with \textit{Salon} on his recently finished book, \textit{In the Footsteps of the Prophet}. He explains to his interviewer that after studying the life of the prophet Mohammed, he finds that the attitudes of many Muslims towards women

\textsuperscript{127} Buruma, Margalit, \textit{Occidentalism}, Kindle Locations 1409-1412.
and their place in society are “not Islamic.” Ramadan suggests that those who place too much faith in the Quran fail to see how its principles should be properly applied to the world at present. The second mistake he identifies is “confusing Arab cultures, which are historical, with the universal principles of Islam.” This is the problem of assuming that those people who purport to practice Islam represent the values and beliefs of the religion as a whole. In both cases, he identifies inappropriate interpretations and applications of the message of Islam as the main problem facing Muslims across the globe.

In this interview Ramadan specifically addresses the question of veiling. His position is that “the head scarf is an Islamic prescription but it cannot be imposed. So it’s an act of faith. We never had one woman forced to wear the head scarf during the Prophet’s life. It’s a choice.” The argument is that wearing a headscarf is something the Islamic faith suggests for women, but does not require of them. Ramadan advocates a woman’s right to choose for herself whether or not she wants to don a headscarf. He explains, “this is why I’m always saying it’s against Islamic teaching to force a woman to wear a head scarf. But it’s also against human rights to force her to take it off. It should be a free choice.”

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veiling, there are two parties undermining women’s rights: both those Muslims who forcefully impose the headscarf on women and the non-Muslims who force women to uncover their heads. He concludes: “This is why we must have an intra-community debate about veiling the face — to say this is not Islamic. There is no compulsion in these matters. We really have to respect the choice of the woman.”

Ramadan calls for a conversation within the faith to establish women’s rights to determine their own practicing of Islam. He interprets himself as a feminist voice in the debate because he affirms that women have the right to decide for themselves the manner in which they will practice their faith, and neither scholars nor misguided Muslim leaders should feel they have the right to decide for women what is or is not proper religious behavior.

The largest flaw in Ramadan’s defense of the practice of veiling is that he is a male Islamic scholar, not a female one, and so by assuming the role of a champion of women’s rights he exercises the same control over the interpretation of faith which he urges Muslims need to abandon. The problem with an “intra-community debate” is that those participating in the debate will include members of diverse cultures who hold different beliefs not just about veiling, but about a woman’s right to participate in the debate. Ramadan’s goal—to insist everyone “respect the choice of the woman”—is laudable and well-intended, but his suggested method of achieving this end is problematic. How effective will a debate be if women are not given a voice to express their faith and their beliefs for themselves? The problem of leaving women voiceless lies, however, not just within the Muslim faith. Ardizzoni notes in her research that media coverage of the events rarely included interviews with girls wearing headscarves, or opinions from adult

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It seems the question of the right to wear a veil is really the question of what rights women have in Muslim communities—are they truly free to choose not to wear a veil? In many Muslim communities within Western nations, the answer is most likely yes. Women choose to wear the veil, for religious or political reasons, of their own volition. Scott’s analysis of the veil controversies in France found that most of the young girls who inadvertently sparked controversies on veiling had chosen to wear headscarves against the wishes of their families. In the case of the Muslim school girls, the media chose to represent the issue in a way that served its own purposes. The young girls who caused the controversy were rarely interviewed by the press. The interest was not in why they had chosen to take up the veil, but what that choice might mean.

Indeed, in the research of those who questioned Muslim women about the current perception of the veil in France, it seems there are many women who share Ramadan’s stance on this issue. Scott compares several French Muslim women who have taken a position towards veiling. One woman who had chosen to take up the veil at the age of seventeen states: “If one champions a woman’s liberty, then she ought to be given the liberty to make her own choices and not be imagined as some kind of idiot manipulated by her father or brother or the Saudi state. The French are thirty years behind in their perception of the veil.” Scott, The Politics of the Veil, 146.
finds that French society has tried “to lead us to a normative vision of women’s emancipation. But it’s necessary to understand that there’s not just one form of emancipation.”

Normative is the key here—the French media and government had decided that their perception of freedom is the only correct one. French society’s general unwillingness to interview the actual women who they had labeled as “oppressed” shows that “Women’s Rights” was not the only, and perhaps was not even the primary, concern of the established French social structure in the veil debates.

Interestingly, given the same evidence, some French politicians still argue that the veil is inimical to female freedom. Caroline Fourest cites one of the same books that Scott references in her study: *L’une voilee, l’autre pas* [One Wears the Veil, the Other Doesn't] by Dounia Bouzar and Saïda Kada. In that book the two Muslim women speak about their personal impressions of the veil—Bouzar does not wear one and Kada does. Fourest disagrees with Bouzar’s claim that “becoming religious” can be “a factor that favors integration, opening the way for these youngsters to live in harmony both with their parents and with Western society.”

Fourest argues instead that the upsurge in veiling was a symptom of increased patriarchal control over Muslim women and is therefore an isolating force that breeds discord between young women and society.

Fourest states that the “deterioration in relations between boys and girls in the suburban housing developments coincided with the arrival of Islamist preachers, such as Tariq and Hani Ramadan.”

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137 Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 190.

138 Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 190.

139 Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 191.
inspired by the influence of Islamic leaders who wish to relegate women to a secondary status in society. Her analysis boils down to the assumption that Islam itself is inherently controlling and dangerous: a woman cannot be her own person within the religion, because Islam is designed to keep women from having an equal voice in society.

To support this argument she cites how Ramadan calls for the veil as a means to protect both men and women from sin. She quotes him saying “If it is women who are asked to wear the veil, it’s because the weaker of the two is not the woman; in reality, the weaker of the two is the man, and the man who looks at a woman is far more vulnerable than the reverse. The veil is a protection for the weaker of the two.”\(^\text{140}\) Fourest is sincerely offended by the notion that a woman is at fault for being too alluring, and distrusts the ultimate motive of veiling: “all of this, of course, in the name of that marvelous strength that women possess, which is always invoked as a prelude to requiring more obedience of them.”\(^\text{141}\) As a French woman with “western values,” Fourest is unconvinced by Ramadan’s call for “decency” between the sexes. She rejects his notion that a woman must be hidden away in order to keep immoral activity at bay.

Indeed, it does seem unfair to place all of the responsibility for concealment on the woman. It also seems unfair for Fourest to accuse Ramadan of being “an outdated bigot, obsessed with chastity and the risk of transgression”\(^\text{142}\) because he calls for a different recognition of moral boundaries than she does. In this regard, she takes the example of female nudity to illustrate her disagreement with Ramadan’s concept of “decency.” She recounts that

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\(^{140}\) Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 161-162.

\(^{141}\) Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 162.

\(^{142}\) Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 163.
Ramadan takes great issue with posters of nude females in the name of decency when he proclaims, “We live in a society that assaults our senses—that accentuates all that stimulates the instincts, particularly by exploiting what, for men, is the feminine dimension.”\textsuperscript{143} In this she finds an echo of the same danger Ramadan identifies of exposed women seducing men with their looks. She scorns his “prudishness” in the matter, noting that while some feminists also reject such posters, it is a “protest about sexism, rather than the absence of decency. They reject domination, not seduction.”\textsuperscript{144} Yet it seems that both Ramadan and these feminists are opposed to the same thing, framed in different terms. Fourest’s hypothetical feminists are opposed to the way men have objectified and controlled women by turning them into sex symbols. Ramadan is upset by both this control of women, which he finds indecent, and also by the way these advertisements control men by attempting to seduce them with female nudity.

The advertising industry provides a good indicator of how the portrayal of women differs in different communities. In their study “Cross-cultural differences in sexual advertising content in a transnational women’s magazine” psychologists Michelle R. Nelson and Hye-Jin Paek examined how sexuality was employed in advertising and whether or not the prevalence of sexuality in advertisements indicated “media imperialism for disseminating overt, Westernized sexuality.”\textsuperscript{145} They found two things of note: first, that the prevalence of nudity in advertising differed from country to country, and second, that in those countries where nudity was found less acceptable, restrictions were more relaxed when advertisements depicted sexualized western

\textsuperscript{143} Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 163.

\textsuperscript{144} Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 163.

\textsuperscript{145} Nelson, Paek, “Cross-cultural differences in sexual advertising content in a transnational womens magazine.” \textit{Sex Roles}. 
women, rather than indigenous ones.\footnote{Nelson, Paek, “Cross-cultural differences in sexual advertising content in a transnational womens magazine.” \textit{Sex Roles}, 374.} The first finding suggests that openness about sexuality may be even more dependent on specific cultural values than even Fourest realizes. While France and the United States are both “western nations,” the study found that “in the U.S., some people say they do not like sexy advertisements and will boycott products that feature sexuality in advertisements,” while in France “advertisements are so risqué that they are referred to as “porno-chic”.”\footnote{Nelson, Paek, “Cross-cultural differences in sexual advertising content in a transnational womens magazine.” \textit{Sex Roles}, 373.} Thus the sexual “prudishness” that Fourest accuses Ramadan of practicing is too relative to be so easily defined.

The second finding that western models are used to depict sexuality in more restrictive countries suggests that perhaps there is something to the argument of western “immoral” values pervading the global community. While it still may not be acceptable for a Malaysian woman to be photographed in a suggestive pose, it is permissible for a western woman to be depicted as a sexual object in that country.\footnote{Nelson, Paek, “Cross-cultural differences in sexual advertising content in a transnational womens magazine.” \textit{Sex Roles}, 374.} The West is thus employed as the image of sexuality and immorality. While Fourest scoffs at the notion that a poster is indecently seductive, that is exactly the point of advertisements using naked women: to draw both men and women using the power of sexual attraction. She does not admit, or cannot see, that Ramadan’s critique of western society may resonate with people for reasons independent of religious conviction.

Although Fourest has every right to disagree with Ramadan’s interpretation of nudity as indecent, her contention that his form of “decency” is a threat to the French way of life is
unjustified. She turns a disagreement into a sensational, irresolvable difference between herself and Ramadan, and insists that she and he represent the West and Islam. She argues that his restrictions are a danger because “his project is not for one individual, but for a community, and even for society as a whole, with the resulting disruption of every aspect of social life.” 149 Thus his gender agenda is a threat to the gender system of the Western world. She sees the headscarf as a manifestation of the power of his control over the social system: she cites the promotion of veiling as an instance of Ramadan’s use of “voluntary coercion” 150 on women to “turn them into effective Islamic militants.” 151 She believes that his call for “decency” is insincere, a ploy to keep Muslim women under his control so that he may subversively spread Islamicism in western society.

It may be true that Islam promotes a social system that disfavors women, and that Fourest and other women who identify with Western society will never be able to come to terms with that set of beliefs. Fourest seems to be motivated by a sincere desire to better the lives of women. Yet her arguments are undermined by an unquestioning belief in the validity of her own social standards. Ramadan too holds strong social convictions in what is appropriate for gender relations. However, unlike Fourest, he seems to be willing to compromise and learn about different cultural ideas.

The conflicting attitudes of these two individuals illustrate another problem in the rhetorical discussion of Islam. Each is taken to represent the views of their social background—

149 Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 164.
150 Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 140.
151 Fourest, Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan, 147.
Fourest speaks for French liberal feminists, and Ramadan represents the views and interests of all Muslim scholarly males. There is a belief that by analyzing how the two duke out their convictions, a victor may be named. But that is not the case. In France, what must instead happen is a cultural dialogue, much like the one Scott produces in *The Politics of the Veil*, in which Muslim women are allowed to voice their own concerns about their place in society. It is likely that if this were to happen, both some Western values and some Islamic ones would be questioned. This would accomplish the goal of proving that the issue is far more complicated than “West” versus “Islam.” Undoubtedly, there are Muslim women who identify with the sort of feminism Fourest preaches and Western women with values equally “conservative” as those Fourest attributes to Ramadan. With open conversation, the discourse surrounding women could be disentangled from paranoid nationalist discourse, instead refocusing the discussion on the important questions concerning Muslim and non-Muslim women alike.
IV. The American perception of women in Islam

In the United States, the question of how Islam affects women’s rights is not considered to be as much a matter of national concern as it is in France, no doubt in part because the cultural concepts of “laïcité” and “secularism” contribute to different ideas about religion’s place in social structure. Yet the existence of the laws in France has engendered an American discourse about whether or not Islam should be seen as a threat to women’s rights. The issue of veiling in France has been appropriated by American intellectuals as another means to question whether or not Islam is engendering a value system compatible with the western value system shared by France and America.

Paul Berman is an American political writer who has dedicated time to analyzing what the headscarf debate signifies in terms of a global Islamic threat to western values. Though the veiling debate has little direct correlation with the political issues of his own country, he presents it as a global concern for anyone who identifies with western culture and therefore an American concern.

In *The Flight of the Intellectuals*, Berman uses a segment from Ian Buruma’s February 7, 2007 *New York Times Magazine* interview of Tariq Ramadan as evidence to illustrates how Islamic leaders hold archaic notions of women’s rights. He quotes Ramadan saying: “The body must not be forgotten. Men and women are not the same. In Islamic tradition, women are seen in terms of being mothers, wives, or daughters. Now woman exists as woman.” What Berman finds relevant in this statement is Ramadan’s stress on “tradition,” which Berman views as a

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dangerous adherence to a strict interpretation of the Quran. He explains that “Islamic tradition, for Ramadan, means Islamic law, in his version of it. A religious matter, not a folk habit. A question of sacred and inviolable texts.” Berman emphasizes that “Ramadan’s version” of Islamic law harkens back to “sacred and inviolable texts” that describe a socially restrictive lifestyle, particularly for women. The suggestion is that if this is the case, Ramadan must be advocating a return to the same social structure that was in place at the time when those texts were written. However this interpretation of Ramadan’s words provides a slanted glimpse at the text of the whole interview and of Ramadan’s message in general.

What Berman does not find relevant to quote from this interview is the introduction of Ramadan’s response, which states: “When you are struggling for your rights, you can achieve a legal status. This is necessary. We must have the struggle for equal rights of women” before continuing on to insist: “But the body must not be forgotten...” This introduction impacts the meaning of Ramadan’s statement. It may be that Ramadan’s position towards women’s equality is still disagreeable to Berman and to Western ideas of women’s rights. However, stating that his position towards woman is solely that they should be seen as “being mothers, wives, or daughters” as some version of Islamic “tradition” suggests is inaccurate and misleading. Rather, Ramadan seems to be saying that in present times “woman exists as woman” and it is “necessary” to “struggle for equal rights.” Even though he says that women are not the same as men, which indeed they are not, he also advocates women’s equality to men and supports their legal rights.

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Berman’s omission of the first part of Ramadan’s statement shows Berman’s determination make the case that Ramadan supports an Islamic agenda promoting a “return” to a social order where women are denied rights and a voice, and that the veil is a symbol of this regressive attitude. Berman further states that Ramadan’s ties to Salafi Reformism proves he understands a strict literal reading of the Quran and must therefore be promoting an Islamist agenda: a return to a religious past and, by extension, to the cultural attitudes of that past. To Berman Salafi Reformism is the philosophical basis for “what is generally described as political Islamism,”¹⁵⁵ the ideology associated with the Muslim Brotherhood which Ramadan’s father and grandfather were instrumental in founding.¹⁵⁶ Berman believes Ramadan’s ideas spring out of this tradition because of his reference to “Islamic tradition” and his citation of Islamist Muslim philosophers in his writing.¹⁵⁷ Berman confines Ramadan’s beliefs and message to the same sphere as the message promoted by his forefathers, refusing to entertain the possibility that Ramadan may speak for himself. In so doing Berman displays an orientalist trait identified in Orientalism, where Said emphasizes that orientalists viewed “the Muslim’s” (i.e., Ramadan’s) “resistance to change, to mutual comprehension between East and West, to the development of men and women out of archaic, primitive classical institutions and into modernity.”¹⁵⁸ Berman’s focus on the possible connotations of Ramadan’s connection to Salafi Reformism blinds him to a fair analysis of what Ramadan’s words and actions prove him to be. Though his historical link to Salafism is interesting and perhaps relevant to understanding his current politics, Ramadan’s

¹⁵⁸ Said, Orientalism, 263.
beliefs and statements should be judged on their own merit at least as much as for their possible Salafist content. To not do so pigeonholes Ramadan as a representative of Salafi Reformism and an “Islamic ideology” and precludes the possibility that he is something besides a symbolic figure.

While Ramadan believes in a certain culture of modesty and advocates a conservative way of life, he does not insist that this is the only way to live. He may well be sexist to assume that he knows best how a woman should dress and behave in order to be properly modest, but that sexism does not make him any more of a threat to women’s rights than numerous other Western male politicians, American and otherwise, who presume to define women’s issues for them.

Yet though critics attack Ramadan for his return to an “archaic” values system, in practice Ramadan primarily references examples from Islamic history to promote women’s rights to education and their freedom to choose their own religious and social path, not to oppress them. In a 2007 interview on “The modern Muslim” Ramadan discusses how his book on the Prophet Muhammad’s life should provide an example for the treatment of Muslim women today. He explains that Muhammad was interested in “promoting peace” and that “he was really treating women as women — and not only as mothers, or sisters or daughters in Islam. Women are equal before God and have the same rights and duties.” In his historical analysis of the Prophet’s life and example, then, he has found that the religious figure considered women to be “equal” and individuals in their own right. He goes on to describe how Muhammad “respected” his daughter when “at that time, to have a daughter in this Arab tribe was quite a dishonor. It was not

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Ramadan calls upon Muslims to “come back to the Prophet’s example to understand the way he was promoting the status of women.” Rather than following a “literal reading” of the Quran he asks Muslims to “put things in context” to understand “the overall message of Islam.” Though Ramadan does turn to the lessons of history to understand how Islam should be practiced today, he by no means does so in the “fundamentalist” manner of which Berman accuses him. Ramadan’s emphasis on the “message” of Islam is a call to recognize universal values of the religion, rather than specific cultural practices. He asks Muslims to look to the Prophet’s example of good moral values—equality, respect, and courage to promote these practices—rather than follow to the letter the customs described in the Quran.

Ramadan suggests that the main problem facing both Muslims and non-Muslims is “confusing Arab cultures, which are historical, with the universal principles of Islam.” This statement can be read as revolutionary, even if unintentionally so: Ramadan is asking for a historiographic approach to understanding the development of Islam. As he explains through the example of Muhammad, there was at that time, and there continues to be, a disconnect between the rules of the society practicing a religion and the practices of the religion itself. The way a society chose to interpret Islam may not truly follow the tenets of its teachings.

To judge Islam as a whole based on the history of a subset of people who practice it does injustice to the way the religion is understood. If some people chose to use the teachings of Islam to repress women, that reflects poorly on them and on their cultural choices. That,

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however, does not necessarily mean that Islam is a religion that disregards women’s rights, or that historically those who practice Islam have treated women unfairly. It only proves that historians and researchers have chosen to take those examples as indicative of the cultural attitudes of all Muslims. This is selective historiography, and a lazy understanding of the past. Ramadan argues that “when it comes to understanding the Quran in social affairs, we need our mind and our intellect to understand the meaning of the verses in order to implement them in a new historical context.”

If this is the case, Islam has always been a religion that relies on its followers to reinterpret it for the current social context.

This reliance on interpretation makes Islam dynamic, but also susceptible to misuse by political zealots who appropriate religious rhetoric for political purposes. If the religion is constantly reevaluated there is a chance an Ulama, those who are specially trained in and regarded as authorities on the knowledge of Muslim religion and law, will interpret the tenets of the religion to support the political or social climate of the time. As Islam is such a culturally involved religion, it is likely that some religious leaders are influenced by political goals as much as religious ones. The malleability of Islamic cultural practices is at the heart of the debate over the influence of Islamism, here specifically embodied by the debate over the perception of Ramadan and his “agenda.” It is this understanding of Islam and Islamist that leads Berman to believe Ramadan is chained to a “fundamentalist” past, the same selective understanding of history that Ramadan identifies as a central problem facing Muslims today.

164 “ulema, n.”. OED Online. Oxford University Press.
Veiling in French Muslim communities was one of many ways in which “the Islamists” were actively repressing women. Berman explains: “The Islamists launched a campaign to limit the education of girls and women, and to limit their access to health care, too. In the schools, Muslim girls under the Islamist influence—a handful at first—refused to participate in gym class…because of the immodest clothes that sports require.” He continues to explain how gym class was only the first issue. Next were girls “refusing to be alone with male teachers” and refusing to be “examined or treated by male doctors.”¹⁶⁵ Berman uses these examples to demonstrate how religious beliefs may interfere with social equality. The problem, he explains, is that these girls “had no desire to see their educational and health care opportunities demurely shrink into something less than the maximum;” they only refused these opportunities because “they were under pressure to conform to the Islamist demands.”¹⁶⁶ Accordingly, Berman believes that for most women the desire to veil themselves is not a personal choice, but an action forced on them by a growing Islamist presence.

Berman fails to define accurately exactly who “the Islamists” are. He identifies Tariq Ramadan as one of them and explains why Ramadan’s history shows he is a threat to Western society. Yet his position that the fact that women choose to veil themselves proves the existence of an “Islamist presence” that forces social compliance from all Muslims is a slippery one. It assumes that Muslim women must all be acting under the repressive influence of Islamism when they choose to don the headscarf, when nothing indicates that they are any less individuals than their “western” female counterparts.

Scott poses an interesting question about cultural norms and individuality in her study of the veil in France. She states: “A girl in a headscarf was a member of a ‘community,’ but a girl in a miniskirt was expressing her individuality—was this an objective distinction, or one which rested on normative standards in the guise of neutrality?”167 A woman who chooses to wear a miniskirt is making an individual choice to express her sexuality, whereas a woman who chooses to wear a hijab is asserting a “communal identity.” In reality, both women are doing some of both things. A Muslim woman who has made the choice to cover herself expresses a personal decision which also connects to the symbolic clothing of a group of people. Likewise, a western woman who has chosen to reveal herself is making an individual choice which also connects to the symbols of sexuality propagated by western culture and media.

Regardless of whether or not either group of women is acting independently or under the influence of their community’s “normative standard,” in his conclusions Berman only fosters the development of these two imaginary social camps. By declaring as a westerner that certain societal practices are acceptable whilst others are not, he promotes himself as an authority on western life, indicating that there is in fact a “western” style of life and that there are certain ways to belong to it and other ways to be excluded from it. This division would do little to help any Muslim woman if indeed she is being pressured from an Islamist community. The best way to help women become independent would be to allow them to belong to both communities, giving them the opportunity to decide for themselves which values to adopt and which to reject. By separating Muslim women from western ones Berman only ensures their Muslim community is the only one with which they identify.

Ian Buruma is another American scholar who has taken a different approach to understanding veiling in Muslim societies. In *Occidentalism*, Buruma examines “the dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies.”\textsuperscript{168} He asks his reader to try to understand how a “Western authority” might be perceived by the “Eastern” world much in the same way that Westerners (often stereotypically) categorize the eastern or “Oriental” world.

His analysis helps to explain why Islamism and the women’s rights issues are so often connected by scholars like Berman. Buruma posits that “for political Islamists, the West is the main enemy, because it supports oppressive ‘idolatrous’ regimes, and stands in the way of creating Islamic states. Puritans hate the Western way of life, because it offends their moral sensibilities, especially when it comes to the treatment of women.”\textsuperscript{169} Buruma goes on to explain that “all political Islamists were puritans, but not all puritans were political Islamist,”\textsuperscript{170} yet the two ideas have become interchangeable. It is interesting to note that while “puritanical” values are associated with political Islamism it is possible to hold those values without being a political Islamist. To conflate the two is to assert that anyone holding a “traditional” or “puritanical” view is necessarily also trying to convert the rest of the world to that same viewpoint, which is demonstrably not true. With this confusion of views, any Muslim whose “moral sensibilities” are offended by the Western treatment of women is perceived as an Islamist, not just a religious person passing moral judgment on what he perceives to be a godless lifestyle.

\textsuperscript{168} Buruma, Margalit, *Occidentalism*, Kindle Locations 89-90.
\textsuperscript{169} Buruma, Margalit, *Occidentalism*, Kindle Locations 1385-1388.
\textsuperscript{170} Buruma, Margalit, *Occidentalism*, Kindle Locations 1385-1388.
Since Islamism is, by Buruma’s definition, always puritanical, and Berman is afraid of the puritanical or traditionalist threat, what the “puritanical” Islamic view of women is and why this might be seen to westerners as a threat to the “western way of life” demands further analysis. Buruma asks his reader to think of how an Eastern man might stereotypically view a Western woman, and for what reasons. Buruma states: “The veil, then, belongs to the Manichaean idea that flesh and the spirit are in a constant state of tension.”\textsuperscript{171} The veil in the Islamic tradition thus serves as a symbolic recognition that sexuality tempts men and woman and as a reminder that moral people will resist this temptation. This explanation is also a reminder that the religious dualism of “right” and “wrong” comes out of a religious tradition with Christian roots.\textsuperscript{172}

Buruma explains that by contrast, “the exposed women of the West are the very negation of this idea, which is why they are regarded by devout Muslims, or indeed ultra-orthodox Jews, as whores and their men as pimps. To put it hyperbolically, Western women (and their “Westernized” counterparts everywhere) are the temple prostitutes in the service of Western materialism.”\textsuperscript{173} Just as the hyper-concealed Muslim woman represents a culture of repression and jailing to Western men and women, the hyper-exposed woman of the West, such as one depicted in an American billboard or television advertisement, represents a culture of decadent disregard for morality.

In this light, the emergence of veiling amongst Muslims living in Western societies can be understood as a rejection of the moral system encouraged by the West. Buruma cites Islamic

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    \item \textsuperscript{171} Buruma, Margalit, \textit{Occidentalism}, Kindle Locations 1415-1416.
    \item \textsuperscript{172} “Manichaean, n. and adj.” OED Online. Oxford University Press.
    \item \textsuperscript{173} Buruma, Margalit, \textit{Occidentalism}, Kindle Locations 1416-1422.
  \end{itemize}
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scholar Sayyid Qutb, who said: “In all modern jahili societies, the meaning of ‘morality’ is limited to such an extent, that all those aspects which distinguish man from animal are considered beyond its sphere.” It is likely that many of the Islamic preachers who advocate strict social rules for men and women are afraid of the harmful influence of immoral Western culture. This focus on morality and prudence may seem archaic to many Westerners, but that does not necessarily make it “wrong” or “backwards,” just different from the moral codes embraced by most modern western nations. In fact, this strict attitude towards morality is far from unheard of in Western societies as well. It has much in common with many Republican political groups and many traditional Christian groups. In the “Occidentalist” perception of the West, Western men disrespect women by using them as tools of seduction. While Fourest sees this Occidentalist view as one that is terrified of sexuality, an occidentalist sees the covering of women as recognition of the dangerous power of sexuality. Veiling is a way to manage the overwhelming presence of female sexuality in a respectful way, without taking advantage of women or disrespecting them.

Western politicians who fear Islamism fear a political movement fueled by these prejudices against the west that inform some Muslims’ stereotypical perception of western life. Because some fierce “Occidentalists” are also powerful Islamist leaders, they assume anyone with prejudices against the western lifestyle belongs to an Islamist movement.

As a consequence, the political debate over headscarves, Berman’s believes that the puritanical notion of the dangers of the physical sight of women is not all that is at stake. The larger question is whether or not an Islamist presence is attacking the rights conferred on women,

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and whether restricting their physical presence restricts their ability to participate in society in the same way unveiled women do. Thus Berman argues in his text: “The purpose in proposing a law was not to crush Islam. The purpose was to transform the public schools into a zone beyond the control of an authoritarian political movement.”

He adopts the same position promoted by Fourest and the French political supporters of the headscarf ban: headscarves put laïcité at risk because they highlighted the existence of religion in a space that should have been beyond religion. Furthermore, they might have had a dangerous influence on other students, by either pressuring them into wearing headscarves themselves or by symbolically reminding them of a second community, the religious community, whose rules and customs they must also respect.

In sum, Berman insists that the 2004 French court ruling banning headscarves served “a larger purpose: to preserve and enforce one of the major achievements of modern society, not yet entirely realized, which is the extension of full rights and benefits to the half of society that is not male.”

Here Berman reveals the purported heart of his argument: that the Islamist menace—the “authoritarian political movement”—threatens to undo all of the advances to women’s liberation made by “modern society.” If Islamist ideas are expressed in a place of learning, they might unhinge the western social structure that has fought so hard to grant women their “rights and benefits.”

Paradoxically, what truly threatens to unravel all of the western advances in women’s rights is the very political debate that presumes to protect them. For Berman the issue of women’s rights provides a platform to argue that Islamic teachings are counter-modernity, and

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that an Islamist threat exists. He is firmly convinced that he is fighting in the name of women’s rights, yet if he is doing so his method of attack is misguided. Rather than examine what the veil might mean to Muslim women today, Berman focuses on the ways in which he thinks the veil might indicate an Islamist threat to Western values. He insists that the veil is a sign of the growing influence of Islamism—even though his only proof is that some of the schoolgirls who wore veils admitted to feeling intimidated into wearing them.\textsuperscript{177} This is indeed troubling, but since many other women insist they choose to wear the veil of their own volition, there is no question that the motivations behind veiling are multifarious and difficult to pinpoint.

Based on his “proof” that veiling is the work of Islamist pressures, Berman explains why Islamism poses such a danger to women’s rights by presenting select troubling facts about current political Muslim figures. He explains that Ramadan’s self-proclaimed “feminism” is undermined by his infamous failure to condemn the stoning of women in a televised debate with Nicholas Sarkozy. When questioned about the practice Ramadan there called for a “moratorium” on stoning until the Muslim community could debate how to address the issue.\textsuperscript{178} This response created an uproar in the media, which vilified Ramadan for not calling for an immediate ban on the practice of stoning.

Berman finds Ramadan’s call for a moratorium and a “true debate” on the issue of stoning disturbing not just because it implies that stoning should not be condemned outright. What bothers Berman more is the hypocrisy proposed in the “true debate.” As Berman sees it, the debate is “a proposal to leave the ultimate decisions to the worst sorts of violent and


\textsuperscript{178} Hamel, « Au Bourget, Tariq Ramadan règle ses comptes avec Sarkozy, » \textit{Le Point}, April 8, 2012.
obscurantist preachers—even if the obscurantist preachers have already demonstrated a stubborn and predictable unwillingness to engage in anything like the broad-minded consultations that Ramadan would like to see.” Ramadan insists that the issue of stoning must be addressed “from within” the Muslim community in order for a true ban on the practice to be put in place.

In theory this approach is sensible: the community itself must decide to condemn the practice. What Berman finds fault with is the practical application of the solution. Ramadan calls for a debate between current prominent scholars, and Berman believes these men are “violent and obscurantist preachers” who are bound to stick to their own narrow-minded views. He believes that this proves Ramadan is duplicitous, for despite his “philosophizing…his calls for ethical thinking, his call for ‘Islamic Ethics and Liberation’ even in the subtitle of his Radical Reform, his repeated calls for reason and dialogue and an open-minded spirit, his denunciations of bigotry and unfairness,” he places the responsibility to call for a ban on stoning women in the hands of men who have proven themselves to be either in favor of or unbothered by the practice. He believes that this is proof that Ramadan, for all of his talk about “progress” and “equality,” must actually be harboring a hidden Islamist agenda.

Another interpretation of the same set of facts is possible. Unquestionably Ramadan’s failure to condemn stoning is reprehensible. However the reason he gives for failing to speak up is that his condemning it would do nothing to stop the practice. The only people who have the authority to force others to stop are the men Ramadan wishes to bring into this “true debate.”

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campaign against the practice without their support would only ostracize Ramadan from that community of Muslim intellectuals. This may make him reprehensibly uncourageous, but it does not mean he supports the stoning of women or the men who fail to condemn it.

What is striking is how both Berman and Ramadan have entirely missed the point. In the quest to fight for women’s rights, both men suppose they have the right answer: Berman as a champion of western values and Ramadan as a champion for pluralism (both western and Islamic values.) Yet the real problem lies in the fact that any discussion of women’s rights returns to the tension between Islamism and the struggle to uphold western values. In this way Ramadan, despite his troubling stance in the debate over stoning, takes the more mature position. He at least proposes to allow women to choose their own path of self actualization. Berman believes he is fighting to allow women to choose by fighting against Islamism which he believes restricts women’s freedoms—but he time and again mistakes political disagreement with western values with Islamism, when the two are not always the same thing.

In their study of “Feminisms, Islamophobia and Identities” researchers from the Universities of York and Leeds questioned why women chose to wear the hijab and “brand themselves as Muslims” at a time when such a label makes them “open to general hostility.” They found that though “there is a simplistic assumption that Muslim women as a whole and those who wear the hijab...do so not only as a matter of faith, but also as a political endorsement of the specific Islamist political views,” when in reality “this is not the case.” What they found is that “Muslim feminists are not willing to hand over their hard earned new opportunities

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182 Afshar; Aitken; Franks, “Feminisms, Islamaphobia and Identities,” Political Studies, 262.

183 Afshar; Aitken; Franks, “Feminisms, Islamaphobia and Identities,” Political Studies, 264.
to anyone, least of all religious zealots who have a specific agenda that does not include the liberation of women.” Their research in Britain found that women raised with a British education benefitted from “the demands it makes of them to have enquiring minds” which fostered a “more individualistic approach to understanding which results in a new ‘British form of Islam’.” As both Ramadan and Berman have argued, education is essential for liberation. By forcing the headscarf debate to symbolize so many things, both have polarized and harmed Muslim women in two ways: first, by taking them out of the schools in France, and second, by labeling women using their understanding of them, as Islamists or symbols of faith and resistance, versus accepting the labels these women choose for themselves.

The most important aspect of women’s freedom is their freedom to label themselves and choose their own future, which prompts the question: which type of rhetoric has given women the space to do so? Berman’s western liberalism purports to do so by giving voice to the voiceless. He believes that the schoolgirls who admitted to feeling intimidated are representative of Muslim women as a whole, and he uses his own set of intellectual support, particularly Ayan Hirsi Ali, to support his claims. Hirsi Ali was born in Somalia, and lived in Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya until the age of 17 when she moved to Holland to avoid an arranged marriage. At the time she was a devout Muslim, though after some time spent in Europe she renounced her faith. She learned to speak Dutch and rose to be a political figure who spoke out against the way women are treated by Islam and the repressive nature of the religion. In her campaign against Islam she has been criticized as an “Enlightenment Fundamentalist” by her

184 Afshar; Aitken; Franks, “Feminisms, Islamaphobia and Identities,” Political Studies, 268.

185 Afshar; Aitken; Franks, “Feminisms, Islamaphobia and Identities,” Political Studies, 268.

186 Berman, The Flight of the Intellectuals, 244.
detractors, because her absolute rejection of Islam renounces the religion in its entirety.\textsuperscript{187} Berman notes that she “came to think that Muhammad was, in truth, a fanatic. Worse, ‘a perverse man,’ as she told an interviewer in Holland, given the prophet’s marriage to a child-bride. (‘Admittedly I let rip in that interview,’ she was later to write.) And Voltaire was a hero.”\textsuperscript{188} Her statement and his analysis of her make the epithet “Enlightenment Fundamentalist” easier to understand: she rejects Muslim life with the same vehemence that the “Islamic Fanatics” reject “western life,” and if Voltaire is her hero, it seems her ideological frame of correctness is the European Enlightenment thinkers. The term is still an unkind characterization of her, because “Fundamentalist” by nature means one who adheres to an ideology with no acceptance of modernity, and therefore to call any person a Fundamentalist implies that person is irrationally unwilling to adapt.

Hirsi Ali is an important voice weighing in on the experience of Muslim women, because as a woman raised devoutly Muslim she has experienced firsthand the negative aspects of life as a Muslim woman. Yet her critics also address an important issue with using Hirsi Ali as a representative voice of women in Islam: her view towards Islam is equally as black and white as the “worst Islamist” thinkers’ view of western society. In a review of Hirsi Ali’s book \textit{The Caged Virgin}, Guardian reporter Natasha Walter cites a passage in which Hirsi Ali writes: “Islam is strongly dominated by a sexual morality derived from tribal Arab values dating from the time the Prophet received his instructions from Allah.” Walter notes: “What sticks in the throats of many of her readers is not her feminism, but her anti-Islamism. It is not patriarchy as a whole that she

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\textsuperscript{187} Berman, \textit{The Flight of the Intellectuals}, 284.
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\textsuperscript{188} Berman, \textit{The Flight of the Intellectuals}, 245.
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is battling with, but a specific patriarchy sanctioned by a specific religion.” Hirsi Ali is thus problematic because she claims to speak for Muslim women, whether or not they agree with her (an attitude that makes Hirsi Ali an orientalist in her own right) when in fact the themes she identifies are a broader struggle against patriarchy in general. Her attack against Islam is warranted, but too narrow: patriarchal domination is not specific to Islamic culture. In fact, it is not truly dictated by Islam at all. Different Muslim communities across the globe adhere to different cultural practices, so to accuse Islam of being a repressive patriarchal system is an inaccurate generalization.

Walter importantly recognizes the way in which supporting Hirsi Ali’s interpretation of women’s place in Islam restricts the voices of those women who are Muslim and seeking to gain equal rights. Walter writes: “It is also important to remember that many women are seeking equality within, not outside Islam, and it is not as though women's oppression does not exist outside Islam.” Thus Berman’s aim in supporting Ayan Hirsi Ali’s perception of Islam and Muslim women, though probably well-intended, is a misguided attempt to support women’s rights. In making her story representative of Islam’s effect on women he glosses over the stories of other women who have chosen to wear a hijab of their own volition. He minimizes their importance in society by writing them off as the puppets of Islamism. He attributes sentiments to an entire group of people in the manner Said identifies with orientalists: he believes himself to be speaking on behalf of the “other” culture. In his fervent pursuit of western liberal rights, he disregards the existence and validity of any other value system.


Ramadan, too, fails to give women the voice they deserve in political debate. His lack of success in this respect stems from trying to work within a system that has not yet adapted to give women equal voice. When he calls on Muslim leaders to make changes in the perception of women, he can only hope to persuade the men who hold the reins of influence. Powerless to change the structure of the Muslim community, he does try to influence the community as a whole by encouraging Muslims to look to the Prophet’s example to understand how women should be treated and by calling for women’s education and pluralism. His rhetoric is flawed, but it seems he is trying to negotiate the challenges of balancing the views of those Muslims whom he believes have misinterpreted the lessons of the Quran with the liberal western views in which he also holds faith.

What ultimately must be recognized is that women’s equality in an ongoing struggle, and to downplay Muslim women’s engagement in their own decision making is to exclude them from participation in defining their own liberty. Afshar, Aitken and Franks note that the “self-ascribed identity that [women choose] to construct within the constraints of their social/political/personal circumstances may be anchored in their faith: a definition that crosses traditional divides both personally and politically.”  

Faith is an important piece of identity, but it does not indicate the same political aim for each woman who chooses to express herself by wearing a hijab. Their research found that identity is often “constructed through their lived experiences and encounters with the host society” and that this interaction enabled “‘migrant’ Muslim women to participate as active agents of change and to conceptualize the norms, mores, habits, and customs

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192 Afshar; Aitken; Franks, “Feminisms, Islamophobia and Identities,” Political Studies, 266.

193 Afshar; Aitken; Franks, “Feminisms, Islamophobia and Identities,” Political Studies, 266.
that shape their lives.” In order to become the individuals who choose which cultural ideas to embrace and which to reject, women must be allowed this interaction. This means girls need to be educated in schools, but it also means culture must accept different expressions of faith and individuality rather than pigeonholing women into “western” or “Islamist” camps based on their proclaimed faith or physical appearance.

It may be, in fact, that the women who have chosen to veil themselves are the very women with whom the western political system should be working to foster a good relationship. These women have made a strong public statement that places them outside of the comfort of anonymity in either Muslim or western society: they choose to make a point of their “hyphenated identities” and demand that this choice be respected. They may be the best example of how western education and personal convictions can be melded into a “multicultural national identity.” In the coming era of globalization, multiculturalism will be an unavoidable reality. To negotiate the change people of all different cultures and beliefs must work towards finding and embracing commonality, rather than seeking out and fostering division between a constructed “us” and “them.”

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194 Afshar; Aitken; Franks, “Feminisms, Islamaphobia and Identities,” *Political Studies*, 270.

195 Afshar; Aitken; Franks, “Feminisms, Islamaphobia and Identities,” *Political Studies*, 278.

196 Afshar; Aitken; Franks, “Feminisms, Islamaphobia and Identities,” *Political Studies*, 279.
V. The American perception of Islamic terrorism

Despite the profusion of discourse concerning Islam’s relationship to women’s rights and immigrant integration, what most troubles western intellectuals is neither of those issues. The concept of terrorism and how it is related to Islamic teachings is the predominant concern of most western Islamophobes, nowhere more so than in the United States. It is this subject which led Americans to join the global discourse on Islam and Islamism in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Though terrorism came to the forefront of the American consciousness as a direct result of the events of 9/11, the discourse connecting terror to Muslims drew its support from many sources, including the perception of women in Islamic society. The idea that Muslim women in Islamic countries were oppressed by a culture that enforced their chastity and submissiveness through fear tactics supported the American “liberating mission” in Middle Eastern affairs.\(^{197}\) This idea also connected to a centuries-old orientalist tradition of viewing Arab nations as categorically oppressive, particularly towards women.\(^ {198}\) That Islam had produced societies where women were oppressed and “fundamentalist” ideology prevailed contributed to the polarizing split between “us,” the American and western way of life, and “them,” the Muslim “terrorist” culture.

In the direct aftermath of September 11, U.S. policy partly justified its brash attack on Afghanistan, the country blamed for producing the 9/11 terrorists, by framing the Afghani government as a repressive totalitarian regime and U.S. intervention as a liberating force. In a November 17, 2001 radio address, First Lady Laura Bush stated that “the fight against terrorism


\(^{198}\) Hirschkind, “Feminism, the Taliban, and politics of counter-insurgency,” *Anthropological Quarterly*.
is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.’” As scholar Charles Hirshkind notes in a 2002 study, “Following the September 11th attacks, the burqaclad body of the Afghan woman became the visible sign of an invisible enemy that threatens not only ‘us,’ citizens of the West, but our entire civilization. This image, one foregrounded initially by the Feminist Majority campaign though later seized on by the Bush administration and the mainstream media, served as a key element in the construction of the Taliban as an enemy particularly deserving of our wrath because of their harsh treatment of women.” In his view, this was an “image” employed by the administration to explain why the U.S. needed to intervene in Afghanistan. It neatly covered up other motivations for invading Iraq and more complex understandings of Muslims and terrorism that informed U.S. policy.

Perhaps the most troubling understanding of Muslims and Afghanistan that influenced U.S. policy was the orientalist reading of the Afghani nation and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 promoted by certain prominent U.S. scholars. Bernard Lewis is one such notable intellectual whose analysis of Middle Eastern affairs is credited with influencing George W. Bush’s administration’s policy approach towards combating terrorism. In a retrospective interview conducted in 2011, Lewis connects Muslim women and terrorism by stating: “My own feeling is that the greatest defect of Islam and the main reason they fell behind the West is the treatment of women…. Think of a child that grows up in a Muslim household where the mother has no rights, where she is downtrodden and subservient. That's preparation for a life of despotism and despotism."

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200 Hirshkind, “Feminism, the Taliban, and politics of counter-insurgency,” Anthropological Quarterly

subservience. It prepares the way for an authoritarian society.”

His claim manages to phrase the connection between the oppression of Muslim women and the development of authoritarian society under the presumptive assertion that this is a “defect of Islam” as a whole. His assertion is extremely problematic because he concludes that this is a truth applicable to “Islam,” which assumes that Islam is one static, united force; and he contends that this is why “they,” presumably Muslims, “fell behind” the “west.”

Lewis thus categorizes the world as “west” versus “Islam.” Though he also states in the interview that one cannot “assume that the Anglo-American system of democracy is a sort of world rule, a world ideal,” this is to introduce his view that Muslims should be “allowed—and indeed helped and encouraged—to develop their own ways of doing things.”

Even when he admits that the western democratic system is not the only correct ideology of governance, he assumes a paternalistic tone when he states that we, the west, should “allow,” “help,” and “encourage” Muslims to form their own government. In short, this presumes that the U.S. should have a say in how Muslims choose to govern themselves, when in fact America has no such right to weigh in on the matter. This orientalist line of thinking prompted some critics to wonder at the U.S.’s policy of “liberation” during the invasion of Afghanistan and the Iraq wars that followed.

Yet Lewis’ approach was uncritically accepted at least by the rhetoric of the administration that led America into these foreign military operations. That such an unbalanced view informed U.S. policy indicates that a “western-centric” view dominated U.S. perceptions.

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and Muslims and terrorism were viewed in terms of how they interacted with the concept of the “West.”

The American preoccupation with Islamic terrorism thus came to the foreground of American discourse in direct connection with the events of September 11, 2001, though the terrorist attacks themselves did not engender an entirely novel fear of Islamic terrorism. As facts surrounding the plane hijacking emerged, so did a national discourse determined to examine terrorism and its roots. The traumatic event naturally inspired fear amongst many Americans. Interestingly, however, the discourse that first emerged was not one steeped in Islamophobia.

An illuminating article from the October 8, 2001 issue of the *New Republic* provides insights from the perspective of an American journalist just after the 9/11 terror attacks. Author Sam Tanenhaus addresses two important questions of the time: whether the terrorist attacks will lead Americans to adopt looser attitudes towards civil liberties as contemporary editorials were suggesting, and whether bigotry towards and persecution of Muslim immigrants and people of Muslim descent would emerge in American society. These are some of the concerns America is still grappling with today.

Tanenhaus is dismissive of both fears. In his estimation, the month following the attack had given Americans reason to be optimistic: though “the Bush administration has promised anti-terrorism legislation that would give Justice Department and immigration officials additional powers of search and surveillance,” the measures in practice had yet to cause Tanenhaus reason to worry. He explains: “So far the most controversial action of the Bush administration has been to double the length of time, from 24 hours to 48 hours, that law enforcement officials can detain
suspect immigrants and foreign visitors while reviewing their backgrounds,” which he admonishes is “hardly a sea change in civil rights.” The second proposal is more troubling: “Suspects can also be held indefinitely “in the event of emergency or other extraordinary circumstance,” which Tanenhaus agrees is “the kind of open-ended language that, to be sure, can lead to trouble.”205 His analysis displays an awareness and recognition of the potential dangers of changes in American policy.

He goes on to explain, however, that “it is worth remembering the context in which the new rules were written: Law enforcement officials are trying to uncover and dismantle an extensive terrorist network that very likely aims to kill many more Americans in the months and years ahead.”206 Here lie the roots of what could, and will, grow into rhetoric of fear. Tanenhaus identifies the slippery logic that led many down a road of confused understanding of the events of September 11. Americans of course supported the identification and destruction of whoever had perpetrated the attacks of 9/11. However, the “extensive terrorist network” was at this point still an unknown entity: how to define it? How to be sure every anti-American terrorist would be identified and apprehended? In this climate of uncertainty, the vague clause about “extraordinary circumstances” that Tanenhaus, and many others, found easy to support could easily be applied far into the future.

Tanenhaus also identified the generally positive treatment, as of that point, of Muslims living in America. He notes that in the wake of the murder of a Pakistani storeowner in Texas, President Bush “warned that attacks on Arabs and Muslims ‘will not stand,’” stating in a speech

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before Congress and the nation that “no one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith.” Other leading members of the administrations made similar calls for decent, respectable behavior. The FBI even launched investigations into cases of hate crimes against Muslims. Tanenhaus takes heart in the laudatory behavior of the government. American history had proven time and again that Americans could react poorly against “others” in times of conflict, such as towards perceived communists during the Cold War or Japanese during WWII, and this administration was taking steps to ensure those types of attitudes would not be tolerated.

Yet the current political climate clearly shows that the attitudes of the U.S. government and the people drastically changed in the ten years following Tanenhaus’ description of October 2001. In fact, the climate seems to have changed very soon after. As America entered an ideological war first against the “extensive terrorist network” and next against Sadam Houssein and Iraq, the discussion of the events of September 11 changed to suit the political needs of the American government. The resulting rhetoric turned towards a demonization of Islam and then of Muslims as a whole.

This shift in attitudes towards Muslims can be seen in many areas of American life. Culturally, a trend in popular literature indicates the American fascination with an “Islamic threat.” In an article published in *Foreign Policy*, Justin Vaïsse examines the genre of “Eurabia” literature—books that describe an “alarmist Europe-is-dying” future in which “low fertility rates among natives, massive immigration from Muslim countries, and the fateful encounter between

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an assertive Islamic culture and a self-effacing European one will lead to a Europe devoid of all Western identity.”²⁰⁸ Vaïsse notes that these books, though always set in Europe,

“are a largely North American phenomenon.”²⁰⁹ The reason for this is that although Americans have a small Muslim immigrant population in comparison to Europe, they have an equal or greater fear of the dangers of Islam and project their concerns onto imaginary European social landscapes.

This literature spouts outrageous “facts” and sensational claims about the effects of Muslim immigration. In *Menace in Europe* (2006) author Claire Berlinski writes: "If Europe is unable to assimilate its immigrants, if Europe is a breeding ground for anti-Americanism and Islamic radicalism -- and it is -- this is our problem," while in *The West's Last Chance* (2005) author Tony Blake claims: "The threat of the radical Islamists taking over Europe is every bit as great to the United States as was the threat of the Nazis taking over Europe in the 1940s.”²¹⁰ This rhetoric places Islamism as a political threat equal to the Nazis, echoing the WWII and Cold War anti-communism discourse Tanenhaus notes was absent in 2001. Moreover, other authors make the case that Parisian riots in 2005 were sparked by a “jihad,” rather than social and economic oppression that forced an immigrant Muslim community to live in city slums.²¹¹ This writing is firmly based in a racist demonization of Muslims that does not address their political concerns as fellow human beings, but as terrorist menaces. “Eurabia” literature reveals the social manifestation of Islamaphobia in the American public. Authors, the popular voices of the


American citizenry’s irrational fears, reflect (and perpetuate) the public’s fictionalized perception of the Muslim population in Europe, thereby affirming American’s worst fears of a growing Islamist threat.

In a similar fashion, the American media perpetuated a culture of fear mongering in their discussion of Muslims and in the ways in which the term “Muslim” was appropriated to take on shameful new connotations. In politics it is no accident that Republican politicians criticized President Obama during his campaign by harping on his connections to Islam—both real and fictional. Obama’s short residency in an Islamic country should have been an interesting but unremarkable aspect of his personal history and culture. Instead it was a fact that Republican detractors used to vilify him in the media. His opponents even sought to derail his campaign by asserting he was a Muslim, a claim that was both untrue and bizarre. In the most recent round of political campaigns for the 2012 elections, Republican presidential hopeful Herman Cain defended Murfreesboro, Tennessee’s right to ban a mosque, arguing that it would be “an infringement and an abuse of our freedom of religion” and declaring “this isn’t an innocent mosque…. This is just another way to try to gradually sneak Shariah law into our laws, and I absolutely object to that.” His claims against Islam were unsubstantiated by facts or evidence, yet he chose to campaign in this way anyway because his accusations struck a chord of agreement with many Americans. Facts about Muslims and Islam had become less important than perceptions of them.

How did a nation whose President affirmed “no one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith” become one that

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smeared a Presidential candidate by claiming he was a Muslim? How did “Muslim” become a derogatory term in America?

The demonization of Muslims can in part be attributed to the rhetoric of war hawks during the period building up to the American invasion of Iraq. As Bush’s speeches during that time show, the continuation of war in Iraq required that the American public understand it as an ideological war in support of “democratic values.” While fighting for global democracy, the war also had to be fighting against something else. In a speech given on June 28, 2005, at a time when Bush’s approval ratings were low and Americans expressed their dissatisfaction with the war in polls, the President justified the war in telling terms. He stated: “The troops here and across the world are fighting a global war on terror. The war reached our shores on September 11, 2001.”

The war in Iraq was framed as a war against terrorism four years after the terrorist attacks on America. Terrorist acts had been committed across the globe in the time since, but nothing had happened in America on the scale of the attacks of September 11. The fight, then, had to be cast as a “global war on terror.” Bush thereby both justifies the continuation of the war and explains why America has a moral responsibility to remain involved. The Eurabia authors also echo this idea in their fiction. Bush declares that “After September the 11th, I made a commitment to the American people: This nation will not wait to be attacked again. We will defend our freedom. We will take the fight to the enemy.” The implication is that in order to protect American freedom and keep terrorists from physically attacking the nation again, the U.S. must continue its fight in Iraq.

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213 Bush, June 28, 2005 speech at Ft. Bragg, NC.

214 Bush, June 28, 2005 speech at Ft. Bragg, NC.
The President further stated: “The terrorists who attacked us and the terrorists we face murder in the name of a totalitarian ideology that hates freedom, rejects tolerance and despises all dissent…. The terrorists believe that free societies are essentially corrupt and decadent and, with a few hard blows, they can force us to retreat. They are mistaken.”

The forceful terms Bush employs are designed to inspire support for the war effort: the terrorists are “totalitarians,” and they hate all “free societies,” by which Bush means western societies—another affirmation that the only way for a society to be “free” is to be democratic. While Bush aims to refer to a specific set of enemies, the rhetoric veers dangerously close to the conflation of Muslims and terrorists, and of Islam and Islamism. Bush is careful to refer to the enemy as “the terrorists” throughout the speech, but his careful word choice does little to distinguish who exactly the terrorist enemy of America is. His speech continues: “Many terrorists who kill innocent men, women and children on the streets of Baghdad are followers of the same murderous ideology that took the lives of our citizens in New York and Washington and Pennsylvania.”

The terrorists are qualified: they are the same men, or equivalent to the men, who led the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The terrorists are distinct from the “innocents,” but again these terms are subjective: perhaps they refer to distinguishable groups of people, but it is unclear how to determine who those groups are.

The success of his rhetoric depends on the emotional response of the American people. He reminds his citizenry that the terrorists America is fighting believe in the same “murderous ideology” that guided the 9/11 terrorists. America must therefore continue the fight to rid

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215 Bush, June 28, 2005 speech at Ft. Bragg, NC.
216 Bush, June 28, 2005 speech at Ft. Bragg, NC.
Baghdad of terrorists killing Iraqi citizens so that the same horrors that occurred in the United States are not perpetrated there as well. He calls on Americans to back the fight against the terrorists that attacked their country and seeks their political support to advance democracy and counter the “totalitarian” terrorists. In short the speech is a jumble of buzzwords designed to function as wartime propaganda. Perhaps they functioned too well, or perhaps the American people and the American media were equally unsure about who to designate as “terrorists” and who to designate as “innocent.” It seems the only way to distinguish between the two was in their politics: if they supported democracy, they must be innocents. If they opposed America, they must belong the group that believes “free societies are essentially corrupt and decadent,” that “hates freedom, rejects tolerance and despises all dissent,” otherwise known as the terrorists. The oversimplification erased any grey areas and discouraged any alternative ways of thinking about the war and its political aims.

Thus it became easy to label any Muslim who opposed the United States’ intervention in Iraq an enemy of America and of the American people. In that speech Bush never states that all Muslims are bad, and indeed it does not seem he believed that to be the case. However, he does believe that anyone who fights against the American political aims in Iraq is a threat, and his failure to firmly distinguish those who are anti-war or anti-American from terrorists is a dangerous rhetorical decision. This is much like the conflation of Islamist with anyone who believes in “fundamental values” in Islam developed by Buruma in *Occidentalism*. Just as anyone with “archaic” social values was considered to be an Islamist because most Islamists held those values, anyone who opposed the American system was considered to be a terrorist, or at
least an enemy to America and the west, because all of the terrorists opposed the American system.

In this confusing wartime climate, fear and political posturing both worked together to distinguish the Muslim “other” from the American “us.” This ultimately fostered an attitude of Islamophobia in the United States. As Americans tried to understand what motivated the terrorist attacks and how to understand the war, certain perceptions of the Islamic faith and Muslim people were popularized. Bush’s 2005 wartime speech tellingly describes the terrorists in the stereotypical terms that Buruma identifies in *Occidentalism*. Bush notes that the terrorists believe America is “essentially corrupt and decadent,” which echoes Buruma’s analysis of the Occidentalist stereotypical “idea of America itself, as a rootless, cosmopolitan, superficial, trivial, materialistic, racially mixed, fashion-addicted civilization.” Bush identifies this prejudicial view of western culture as a way to polarize the United States and its wartime enemy: the argument is that they see us as a horrible capitalist machine, and furthermore they “reject tolerance and despise dissent” so they will work tirelessly against our worldview because it is not theirs.

Meanwhile, Buruma identifies two ways in which this oversimplified understanding of the hatred of the West is problematic. First, he contends that the idea of Occidentalism is itself a byproduct of Western society. He writes of the September 11 attacks: “it was at once a real and a symbolic attack, on New York, on America, and on an idea of America, and the West it represents. A deliberate act of mass murder played into an ancient myth—the myth about the

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destruction of the sinful city.” Buruma contends that the symbolic attack on America tied into a history of rage against what cities represent: “Hubris, empire building, secularism, individualism, and the power and attraction of money—all these are connected to the idea of the sinful City of Man. Myths of their destruction have existed as long as men built cities in which to trade, accumulate wealth, gain knowledge, and live in comfort.” The purpose of this explanation is not to say that the terrorists were committing a justified act of defiance against “hubris,” but to refute the argument that they were motivated by a newly developed sick Islamist perception of the cloying decadence of western capitalism. The idea of cities and capitalist progress as dangerous and immoral has existed for as long as cities have existed, and the first people to rage against the “sinful city” were members of the same communities that engineered capitalist growth. Buruma cites examples ranging from the biblical destruction of the city of Babylon to the writing of Friedrich Engels to illustrate his point. To accuse Islamists of engendering a new hatred of the “capitalist machine” ignores the history of western scholars and authors who warn against the immorality and moral degradation of modern society. To polarize Islamists from westerners by claiming they oppose capitalism while westerners embrace it ignores, at the very least, the diversity in western perceptions of modernity, and also ignores that the same diversity in manners of conceptualizing modernity may exist in the “other,” nonwestern society.

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221 Buruma, Margalit, *Occidentalism*, Kindle Locations 201-203.
The second point Buruma presents is that many people hate the West for different reasons. Therefore “we cannot simply lump leftist enemies of ‘U.S. imperialism’ together with Islamist radicals. Both groups might hate the global reach of American culture and corporate power, but their political goals cannot be usefully compared.”223 This nuance is important, because it disambiguates the confused notion that anti-western views are always radical, terrorist views. Buruma emphasizes that it is important to understand how Occidentalism led the emergence of radical “revolutionary violence,”224 but even the prejudicial hatred of the West is not the sole explanation of the terrorist attacks. It is better understood as a tool used by the Islamists who encouraged their followers to terrorize western cities. Bush states in his speech that the terrorists believe Americans are weak because of their decadent lifestyle, and think “with a few hard blows, they can force us to retreat.”225 As Buruma points out, this Occidentalist notion of Americans “as soft, sickly, and sweet, a decadent civilization addicted to pleasure”226 was a view held by others at war with America or the west—for example, the Japanese in WWII and the Germans in WWI. The propaganda is a wartime tool meant to encourage soldiers in the fight against the western enemy. This does not mean that all foreign Muslims believe the West is weak or despise Americans, or that if they do hate Americans and that lifestyle, they must necessarily be working to destroy it through terrorist acts. By labeling all dissidents as potential terrorists the western forces engender the type of oppression of opinions they claim to be

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225 Bush, June 28, 2005 speech at Ft. Bragg, NC.

working against in the war for democracy. It should not be the sole right of American citizens to
disagree with the American government.

This propagandist American wartime rhetoric factors heavily into the discourse
surrounding Islamic terrorism that has developed over the past ten years. Fears of Islamism and
the implications of political Muslim movements are expressed now in a way different from any
such concerns discussed before September 11, 2001, though Islamist movements existed before
then. These terrorist attacks changed the conversation for Americans because for the first time
the nation itself was under attack. A threat that was once a theoretical global problem had
become a tangible American one.

Against this backdrop, Berman’s argument regarding why Tariq Ramadan should be
conceived of as a threat springs directly from this rhetoric of the threat of Islamist terrorism.
When analyzing the motives behind Ramadan’s discourse, Berman places great emphasis on how
Ramadan’s belief in Salafi Reformism and his family history tie him to Islamism and terrorism.
In these accusations more than anywhere else Berman declares that Ramadan is a duplicitous
man who has duped westerners into believing his stated political goals, when his history proves
that his rhetoric operates on a “fundamentalist” Islamist level as well.

Berman begins his campaign against Ramadan by explaining the multiple meanings of
Salafi Reformism. First, he notes that while Ramadan has written that Salafi Reformism aims
“to protect the Muslim identity and religious practice, to recognize the Western constitutional
structure, to become involved as a citizen at the social level, and to live with true loyalty to the
country to which one belongs,” this definition is misleading. Berman argues that it implies Salafi Reformists will “reform the ancient tenets and interpretations in accord with the principles of liberal society” while actually they have no wish to “reform” Islam itself. Instead reformists seek to establish a form of practicing Islam in concordance with participating in western society—an aim that seems pluralist and laudable.

Nonetheless, Berman reveals the truth that he feels Ramadan has not sufficiently detailed: the connection between Salafi Reformism and both Islamism and terrorism. He remarks that despite whatever religious values Ramadan seems to personally embody and encourage, his favorite Muslim philosophers are Salafi Reformists who have developed “the philosophical underpinning for what is generally described as political Islamism, in its various and sometimes quarreling subcurrents.” In Berman’s view, Ramadan’s personal stated beliefs and achievements are thus suspect, because he has developed them based in part on the philosophical view of Islamists. To further support this notion, Berman emphasizes that one of these men is Hassan al-Banna, Ramadan’s grandfather and a founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Banna belongs to what Berman terms the “mainstream variant” of Salafi Reformism, whose goal, according to Berman, is to “create…a fullscale Islamic society,” presumably the same transnational umma feared by western intellectuals. Although Berman states that Ramadan’s Salafi Reformism is an offshoot of that mainstream variant that has been “adapted to immigration,” he believes this only proves Ramadan is duplicitously concealing a plan to

develop a global umma, not that Ramadan’s interpretation of Salafi Reformism might differ from that of his grandfather and certain Islamist thinkers. Berman offers these facts as proof that Ramadan has unbreakable connections to Islamism and is undoubtedly a secret agent of Islamist rhetorical propaganda.

Berman’s attack on Salafi Reformism goes one step further and notes the connection to “political literalist Salafism,” an offshoot of this brand of Islam that follows a literal interpretation of Islamic texts. He announces that this is the subset of Islam practiced by “the terrorist campaigns that have swept across so many regions of the Muslim world and beyond.” Berman is greatly disturbed that Ramadan belongs to a branch of Islam that is so closely connected to the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood and closely related to the branch of Islam practiced by terrorists. He concludes: “The people with sane and mild demeanors attest to the moral authority of the people with giddy demeanors and grotesque ideas. This has been Tariq Ramadan’s role.” He views Ramadan’s alternative salafi reformism as mainstream salafi reformism rebranded for a western audience, allowing Ramadan to serve as a channel for radical ideas that has gone undetected in western culture.

Berman’s insistence that Ramadan’s Salafi Reformist ties demonstrate that an Islamist force is gathering support to counter the west requires closer analysis. One issue is that before 9/11, Berman would never have considered Ramadan to be a threat to the United States and to western society. Islamism, according to Berman, was already an important global force in the

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decades leading up to 9/11. During that time, though the Muslim Brotherhood was discussed and its social and political views largely dismissed by western politics, no one accused the Muslims already living in the West as being a part of a political umma actively seeking to destroy the West.

So what changed? In the climate of fear produced by the terrorist attacks of 9/11/01, and other terrorist attacks that were to come around the globe, Berman’s perception of Muslims changed. In order to explain the growing prevalence of these attacks western intellectuals were looking for a political answer to the question of what motivates terrorist attacks. The easiest answer was that a global Islamism is fostering a jihad against western culture. Suddenly the Muslims already living in the West could be seen in a suggestive new light—were they actually sleeper cells for a terrorist network? For some, the surprising nature of the terrorist attacks lent support to the plausibility of this explanation.

Professor Sara Silvestri takes on the perceptions of Salafism in her study *Radical Islam: Threats and Opportunities*. Her analysis lends some support to Berman’s understanding of the term but also challenges his conclusions. She explains that though “Salafism is often discussed as if it were a clearly defined violent and radical ideology and set of precepts,” in fact it is “a recurrent *topos* in the history of Islam, a broad approach that emphasizes the exemplary life and religiosity of the “ancestors” or “predecessors” (in Arabic, Salaf), the companions of the Prophet.”234 Thus Berman is correct: Salafism is a return to understanding the Islamic “fundaments,” what Silvestri terms the “original sources of the faith.” She notes, however, that as a “recurrent topos” of Islamic history Salafism has been understood and applied differently by

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different groups of Muslims at different periods in time. Some of these responses have been violent, others were not. She also notes that it “is important to remember that salafism is a direct product of the encounter of Muslim cultures with modernity.”

Since the inception of the religion Muslims have needed to develop a means of reinterpreting their culture and religious heritage when interactions with western ideologies have challenged it. This point is a reminder that the clash between Islam and western ideology is not new, that in fact it has always been an aspect of the religion’s culture. From a historical standpoint, the struggle occurring now is therefore also not new. Thus “Salafism can have explicit anti-Western tendencies but is not essentially irrational or anti-modern.”

I cannot be anti-modern, since Salafism is the way in which Muslims have brought Islam into modernity throughout the ages. It is a means for reconciling the teachings of the past with the changes in the present. The fact that it can be anti-western does not inherently make it an invalid or dangerous method of confronting the world.

Berman’s critique of Ramadan is not entirely misguided, but his conclusions are. It is true that Salafism can be violent and bent on opposing the West through aggressive means. However, it is also true that a Salafist can be anti-West and yet not a terrorist. Berman’s logic is much like the logic that fueled the propaganda mission of the war in Iraq: those who hate America must be the terrorists. For Berman, equally important was the connection he found between Salafism and European fascism, which he contends is another sign that brand of Islamism is a dangerous militant threat. This linkage functions as another means of pitting Salafist ideology against western ideology using a historically link to fascism, a term

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symbolically charged with “anti-western” ideological meaning. He explains that Islamic Fascism, or Islamofascism, can be explained as “a political exploitation of the old religion, thoroughly detestable, intent on imposing a more-than-ordinary despotism over everyday life.”

Islamofascism becomes just another term for “totalitarianism” or “fundamentalism,” terms already employed to describe Islamist regimes.

According to Berman, the link to “fascism” includes an historical connection between salafism and the Nazis. He explains that Hasan al-Banna “revered” the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini\(^\text{239}\) and that al-Husseini had made strategic political alliances with the Nazis during World War II to advance his own political purposes.\(^\text{240}\) This, Berman contends, led to the development of political rhetoric that united the Nazi cause with al-Husseini’s Islamist agenda, thereby uniting the Nazi and salafist groups rhetorically and to a certain degree ideologically, particularly by introducing the anti-Semitic idea of a Jewish conspiracy threatening both the Third Reich and Muslims across the globe.\(^\text{241}\)

In Berman’s analysis al-Husseini’s actions went against the tenets of Islam. He writes: al-Husseini “committed the crime of something monstrous: an infernal blurring of Islam and Nazism—a blurring that drew on authentic elements within Islam, as Islam’s harshest critics insist on pointing out. … a blurring that offended and betrayed Islam’s larger principles of tolerance and civility, as Islam’s admirers properly insist on retorting—a corrupting of Islam, a


This analysis provides multiple understandings of what al-Husseini’s alliance with Nazis meant for Islam and Muslims. On one hand it was monstrous thing for al-Husseini to have done as it blasphemes the beliefs of Islam: a “corrupting,” a “grotesquerie.” On the other hand, it “drew on authentic elements within Islam.” Berman notes that these are two interpretations “critics insist” on identifying, without claiming his allegiance to either interpretation. Yet the fact that his discussion of al-Husseini focuses on the development of “Islamofascism” makes evident that he believes al-Husseini created a new movement that drew from very real Islamic roots. This is why the Salafist connection to al-Husseini is so relevant to Berman: it confirms his belief that the parallels to fascism can be traced through to Salafist beliefs today, as al-Husseini made fascism an integral part of Salafism.

The reality about Salafi Reformism is far more nuanced. Berman’s voice is not the only one to have joined the discussion of this subject, and his conclusions, though popular with many American politicians and intellectuals, by no means represent a homogenous American stance on Islamism and terrorism. Scholar Marc Lynch replies to Berman’s statements, arguing that in fact a “historiographic” debate misses the point as it centers on days long past: the arguments motivating Haj Amin-al-Husseini, Hasan al-Banna, or their millions of followers “have little relevance to the more urgent question of how to best grapple with today’s multifaceted and rapidly evolving Islam.”

In other words, to read today’s issues through the lens of the politics that motivated those Islamic men decades ago is not an effective way to contribute to a discussion of important contemporary concerns.

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Other American intellectuals have also sounded off on the issue of Ramadan and his relationship to Salafi Reformism. Columnist Ross Douthat addressed the question in the *New York Times* piece *Imam Rauf and Moderate Islam*. He understands Berman’s position towards moderate Islamic figures as considering “anything short of an absolute commitment to Enlightenment values [to be] unacceptable…moderate Muslims must demonstrate this commitment, and prove their secular bona fides, by making a frontal assault on Islamic culture as it currently exists.”

The only way to be a convincing moderate Muslim in this light is to renounce Islam as it is currently practiced. Moreover, a “high-profile bridge-builder” like Ramadan is “much more suspect…because he tends to use different language and strike different notes depending on his audience, because he often seems to be making excuses for illiberalism in the Islamic world, because he’s less-than-forthright in his condemnations of certain kinds of extremism, and so on down the line.” Douthat argues that this school of thought is “misguided,” because ultimately “if we just lump a figure like Ramadan — or any Muslim leader who has one foot solidly in the Western mainstream but a few toes in more dangerous waters — into the same camp as Islam’s theocrats and jihadists, then we’re placing an impossible burden on Muslim believers, and setting ourselves up for an unwinnable conflict with more or less the entirety of the Muslim world.”

Douthat’s solution then is not to dismiss Ramadan and the work he does, but to acknowledge his value as a bridge while still engaging in “swift pushback” against “forays into more dubious territory.” This alternative allows westerners to question

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moderate Muslims with whom they disagree without dismissing them entirely if some of their views are sympathetic to anti-western people or causes.

Douthat’s proposed discursive treatment of moderate Muslims boils down to his closing words: “trust but also verify.” His position is fairer than Berman’s, who wishes to understand Ramadan and his discourse based on a historical understanding of his religious and family connections, rather than an analysis of Ramadan’s words. Yet Douthat also speaks of “an age of Islamist terror” in which “there’s a particular kind of scrutiny that’s appropriate to religious entrepreneurs who insist that they can represent the Islamic world to the West, and the West to the Islamic world.”248 He acknowledges the legitimacy of fearing Islamism in the current global political climate. In light of the wars and terrorist actions that have changed global perceptions of Islamism, the fear of Islam and Muslims exists. To deny that would not advance the effort to counter Islamophobia. The only way to achieve that goal is to refuse to categorize all Muslims as terrorists, and refuse to dismiss all moderate Muslims whose views do not strictly correspond with western ideology.

Douthat addresses one more point, an argument made by Jonathan Chait in the New Republic. In response to the debate over the Cordoba mosque that was to be erected near Ground Zero in NYC, Chait writes: “The question is whether [American Muslims] should be presumed to be terrorists unless proven otherwise…or whether they should be afforded the same general presumption of innocence enjoyed by other religions.”249 He seeks to spotlight the unfair persecution of Islam when any other religion is treated with trusting acceptance. Douthat points


out, though, that these two options should not exhaust the ways in which non-Muslim Americans
can approach understanding Muslim Americans. He argues that respecting Muslim Americans
shouldn’t “require pretending that all religious cultures are identical, or that the intellectual
climate in contemporary Islam is no different from the intellectual climate in Judaism or
Christianity, or that the West doesn’t have a particular reason to worry about what’s said and
done by high-profile clerics in high-profile mosques.” Though at first his statement could
seem equally applicable to the support of Berman’s argument that Muslim leaders are suspect, it
is on reflection also a practical application of “trust but also verify.” He recognizes that the
political understanding of Islam is different now than it was before 9/11/01, and that America has
been confronted with reasons to treat the “intellectual climate” and “culture” of Islam differently
from that of Christianity or Judaism, which have not been politically notable in global affairs
during that time. His assertion that the West has “a particular reason to worry” about the affairs
of high profile Mosques is true in a political sense. The problem arises when that “worry” turns
into “persecution” and when western critiques are presumed to be the only correct viewpoint
from which to view American affairs.

There is hope that the dialogue surrounding Islam is changing for the better, and that this
change will inspire a change in Americans’ understanding of Muslims in America and across the
globe. In a speech on wartime strategy given May 26, 2010, John Brennan, President Obama’s
counterterrorism advisor, explained:

Our enemy is not “terrorism” because terrorism is but a tactic. Our enemy is not “terror” because terror is a state of mind and as Americans we refuse to live in fear. Nor do we describe our enemy as “jihadists” or “Islamists” because jihad is a holy struggle, a legitimate tenant of Islam, meaning to purify oneself or one’s community, and there is nothing holy or legitimate or Islamic about murdering innocent men, women and children.

Indeed, characterizing our adversaries this way would actually be counterproductive. It would play into the false perception that they are religious leaders defending a holy cause, when in fact they are nothing more than murderers, including the murder of thousands upon thousands of Muslims.  

This statement clarifies the real threat to America—not terrorism, but “al Qaeda and violent extremism.” This speech gives hope that an awareness of the dangers of misunderstanding the “enemy” and the purpose of the “fight” is growing. Brennan continues: “Moreover, describing our enemy in religious terms would lend credence to the lie—propagated by al Qaeda and its affiliates to justify terrorism—that the United States is somehow at war against Islam. The reality, of course, is that we never have been and will never be at war with Islam. After all, Islam, like so many faiths, is part of America.” This rhetoric seeks to foster the pluralism and understanding that has struggled to survive in American politics and media.

The mischaracterization of the American enemy only fosters a division between Americans and Muslims that engenders more fear and distrust in an endlessly self-perpetuating cycle. In America, and in most western countries, the fact that many citizens are Muslim only makes matters worse: the United States divides its own citizen body by subscribing to reactionary fears, when working to understand different views would only make the country stronger and promote the very liberal western ideals Americans cherish. The language describing terrorism that developed from the United States’ orientalist understanding of Islam in

the Middle Eastern countries with which it was engaged politically and militarily fostered an image of “us” versus “them” in U.S. discourse. This only encouraged the American government and non-Muslim U.S. citizens to pursue misguided agendas, such as the “liberation” of women in Afghanistan, that ultimately exacerbated the division between and accelerated the formation of constructed “western” and “Muslim” groups. Recent movement to examine critically American perceptions of Islam, Muslims, and the definition of the “terrorist enemy” is a positive sign that America can begin to understand a more complex picture of the world than the orientalist image to which it has always subscribed.
VI. The French perception of Islamic terrorism

In many ways, the French discourse on Islamic terrorism brings the Islamophobic conversation full circle. While debates over immigrant integration and women’s rights were European-generated conversations appropriated by American intellectuals, the fear of Islamic terrorism was an issue born in America and exported to Europe. Terrorist acts had been committed by Muslim Algerian groups in the years before the terrorist attacks in America on September 11, 2001. However despite this history, although questions concerning Islam were a large part of the French political discourse preceding 9/11, whether or not Islamism constituted a terrorist threat was not one of them.

Why did this shift occur? In part it is because the terrorist attacks of 9/11 provided a new manner of understanding Islamism. Whereas previously French perceptions of Muslims focused primarily on the ways in which Islam could threaten the political and cultural systems of the nation and on how Muslim immigrants posed an inconvenient economic and social problem in French cities, after 9/11 what was once perceived as a difference in worldviews was now perceived as a subversive ideological war. No longer was the immigrant population in France viewed as a nuisance to be managed, or viewed paternalistically as a group of inherently “different,” less civilized “others.” This racist attitude was harmful enough, but in its very superiority it assumed that the threat was one a western government could handle. When actual violence became a reality, the threat was less benign.

The discourse on “Islamic terrorism” in France following the September 11 attacks in the U.S. reflects the sudden change in the perception of fear engendered by those events. In part, the attack on America was notably disconnected from other obviously apparent concerns. The perception was that for the first time, an outside group of Muslims was attacking America solely for being a western power, though in reality their motivations were a complicated mélange of things: discontent at the way western intervention in different Middle Eastern countries had negatively impacted the people of that area, inextricably mixed with Occidentalist hatred encouraged for political reasons by leaders of anti-western groups.

There was a more critical grasp of the events by certain other French intellectuals in the months following the September 11 attacks that did not blame the terrorist attacks on “fundamentalism.” In a November 2001 issue of Le Monde, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard evaluates the motivations of the 9/11 hijackers using the same terms employed by French nationalist thinkers. Baudrillard writes that “when the situation is thus monopolized by global power,” referring to a “technocratic” western hegemony over the world, “what other way is there than a terrorist transfer of situation? It is the system itself that has created the objective conditions for this brutal retaliation. By collecting all the cards for itself, it forces the Other to change the rules of the game.”254 Here, Baudrillard interestingly employs the idea of the “other,” much as other nationalist writers have done in various discussions about Muslims and Islam. However his argument is not that the other is “fundamentally different” from the West, but rather the West has constructed “the other” by creating a global society that divided the world into “us” and “them.” Viewed in this light, September 11 is the revenge of any unit, be it “species, 

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individual, or culture…who has paid with its death for the installation of a global circulation
governed by a single power.” Yet his analysis is not as simple as even a “western hegemony”
versus “all oppressed people” though he does see 9/11 as a symbolic vengeance against western
rule. Baudrillard’s statement falls in line with the claims Ian Buruma makes in *Occidentalism*
about universal hatred for the modern city; his analysis goes further to state that if the West has
created a corrupt global system dependant on oppression, violence and terror abroad, it has
created the very mentality that inspired the terrorists.

Baudrillard claims that the violent motivations of the terrorists are simply a reflection of
the “malignant desires at the heart of those who share this order’s [western civilization, including
the U.S.] benefits.” In short, he argues that, the West has only differentiated itself from the
“other” of its own construction to displace the hatred and monstrous impulses in its own identity
by attributing them to “them,” an outside source. An apt attempt to analyze the complexities of
the situation, this reading still may be an “Orientalist” interpretation of global events.
Baudrillard is correct to note that the “western hegemony” has created circumstances that
oppressed and polarized different groups in the world. His theory assumes that this effect has
made “the West” the central focus of all people the west may have oppressed. As Edward W.
Said observes in *Covering Islam*, this notion oversimplifies an entire social group by presenting
their focus as purely external, when in fact Islamic communities (and presumably any of the
“species, individuals or cultures” Baudrillard references) have both internal and external
concerns. Baudrillard’s interpretation of global terrorism is self-admittedly a western

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projection of its meaning. Though he may well be correct in identifying the motives of the terrorists, his subscription of a desired destruction of western hegemony to all non-western “others” is presumptuous and impossible to support.

This contemplative interpretation of the meaning of the September 11 events was not adopted by the French public consciousness. Instead, the prevailing nationalist analysis of the events was that these terrorists hated all western ideals due to insurmountable, “fundamental” differences between themselves and the West. This changed attitude towards Islamic terrorism is notable for the understanding of the upswing in terrorism related discourse. France had experienced terrorist attacks perpetrated by Muslim groups in the decade before September 11, 2001. On December 24, 1994 a group called le “Groupe Islamique Armé” (GIA) in France, or Armed Islamic Group, hijacked an Air France plane with the intention of crashing it into the Eiffel Tower. The plan was thwarted, but the same Algerian-based group planned “a series of bombings in France in 1995 which killed 10 people and injured more than 200 on subways in Paris, at outdoor markets, at a Jewish school, and against a high-speed train.”258 These acts were horrific and directly attacked the French homeland. Yet they did not impact the political discourse in France in the same way as the American attacks of 9/11.

This may be in part because the French attacks were a piece of a larger perceived narrative of fighting between France and Algeria. Although the two nations had not been at war since the Algerian independence war that concluded in the 1960s, Algerian politics were wrapped up in a history of French imperial politics. Thus the brutal Algerian civil war of the 1990s had understandable undertones of a historical resentment towards France. This, coupled with the

258 UN Security Council listing, “Armed Islamic Group.”
large number of Algerian immigrants in France, made the conflict between the GIA and France at the very least more complicated than simply “Islamist” versus “the West.” In the United States, no such clear, long-term connections were perceived—or at least admitted—by popular analysts.

This difference in the global context of the attacks may explain the sudden change in the discussion of terrorism and Islamism in France following 2001. Carine Bourget finds the discrepancy in reactions to the attacks troubling in her study, *9/11 and the Affair of the Muslim Headscarf* in Essays by Tahar Ben Jelloun and Abdelwahab Meddeb. She examines essays by two prominent French authors of Maghrebian origin published in 2002 to question why “the first essays by these writers about Islam both take 9/11, an attack on a foreign country, as their point of departure in a context where Islam had been making domestic headlines well before 2001.”

She argues that the timing of these essays only exacerbated the development of Islamophobia following the 9/11 attacks by lending credence to certain western ideas about Islam and the motivations guiding the terrorist attacks.

Jelloun’s *L’Islam expliqué aux enfants* was motivated by his desire to address “the media’s amalgamation of terrorists, Arabs and Muslims” in the coverage of the September 11 attacks, as it caused his daughter to react with “confusion and denial…she refuses to be associated with her Arab and Muslim heritage.” Towards this end he first explains the history of Islam in terms a child would understand, and then moves on to try to explain the development of radicalism and fanaticism. He writes that violence and fanaticism derive from poor education, and having allowed illiteracy, poverty, corruption and injustice to develop in lieu of fostering

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cultural, freedom, and life. What Bourget observes is the lack of specificity, which even though the text is aimed at children, still amounts to a generalization that “plays down the role that Western nations, including France, have played in various parts of the Muslim world to fuel extremism.”

While the text attempts to identify the true sources that have encouraged the emergence of radicalism, it in fact only labels them without explaining who is at fault for perpetuating “illiteracy, poverty, corruption and injustice” in immigrant Muslim communities.

To Bourget this is particularly striking given Jelloun’s previous essay, _Le Racisme expliqué à ma fille_, also geared towards children, which directly critiques the effects of colonialism. The variance in attitudes between the two shows how intellectuals had reacted to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Though Jelloun’s essay is well intended, it contains a subtle note of deference to the western French political system despite the fact that France had a history of racism and systematic social ostracization of Muslim immigrants. It is not that Jelloun should be condemned for supporting democracy. However the attacks of 9/11 should have had no bearing on his interpretation and explanation of racism, Islam, and fanaticism in France or the western world if his judgment of those subjects is grounded in a historical understanding of those issues. His explanation demonstrates a reactionary response to the changed perception of Islam and violence in western culture.

The French-Tunisian author Abdelwahab Meddeb’s essay is also a curious study in the response to 9/11, beginning with its title: _La Maladie de l’islam_. The implication is that Islam is

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262 Bourget, “9/11 and the affair of the Muslim Headscarf,” _French Cultural Studies_, 76.

263 Bourget, “9/11 and the affair of the Muslim Headscarf,” _French Cultural Studies_, 74-75.
inherently sick, which only supports the growing western trend of stereotyping Islam as inherently backwards and different in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Bourget cites Meddeb postulating: “Si le fanatisme fut la maladie du catholicisme, si le nazisme fut la maladie de l’Allemagne, il est sûr que l’intégrisme est la maladie de l’islam,”[264] [if fanaticism was the sickness of Catholicism, if Nazism was the sickness of Germany, it is certain that fundamentalism is the sickness of Islam.] This statement, coming in the year following 9/11, certainly seems to support the western discourse encouraging an understanding of Islam as frightening rather than fostering an understanding of the religion as a diverse one with followers prescribing to different types of views. Meddeb seems to be renouncing a personal understanding of Islam in favor of a western view of the religion.

The French Muslim authors’ responses to 9/11 reflect the increased focus in French political discourse on Islam as the begetter of terrorism engendered by the terrorist attacks. Said notes in his 1997 book that media portrayals of Islam represented “aggression as coming from Islam because that’s what Islam ‘is,’” covering Islam in a way that “obscures what ‘we’ do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature are.”[265] The responses of Meddeb and Jalloun, though trying to acknowledge the events of September 11 from a “Muslim” perspective in order to address them, succeed in encouraging an understanding of “terrorism” as a Muslim phenomenon but without exploring the many factors that led to the growth of terrorist groups and the radicalization of immigrant youths. A western history of Orientalism that

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attributed racial stereotypes to Arab people seamlessly integrated with a modern fear of specific Islamic terrorism to produce Islamophobia in western nations.

In this climate of appropriating the American “Islamist terrorist threat” attitude and terminology, the racist discourse surrounding immigration and Muslim culture gained a new level of justification. The Islamist movement that had been blamed for racial problems had been proven to exist, in the eyes of those who were looking for that proof, by the 9/11 attacks. In an essay examining the impact of 9/11 on European nations, Ksenija Vidmar Horvat contends that “the main shift… has now been from political to cultural meaning of terrorism or rather that ideological, political and military wars have been fought in cultural terms of opposing values and civilizational divides.” 266 The American assertion that the Iraq war was a “war on terrorism” supported the notion that the enemy practiced a culture of terrorism. As Islamists were the enemy, and Islam their cultural religion, Islamists were terrorists. Muslims were already an inassimilable “other,” and a suspicion that all Muslims in France were potential Islamists was already growing in light of the headscarf debates dating back to the 1980s. Accordingly, the stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists and Islam as a terrorist religion was easily adopted into French rhetoric.

The political rhetoric and the policies of the French government reflect the increased concern with Islamic terrorism in France. In December 2010, prominent National Front politician Marine Le Pen directly compared Muslims praying in the street to the Nazi occupation of France during WWII, saying “It is an occupation of sections of the territory, of districts in

which religious laws apply.” Her statement was designed to be sensational, but unfortunately her argument was very real in the minds of members of the far Right party. The implications of referring to Muslims in France as one united, invading force speaks directly to the rhetoric of the global umma of united Muslims, the concept of Islamism, and the exported concept of a “terrorist threat.” Though the National Front held racist views against many groups, Muslims included, since its inception, Le Pen’s inflammatory statement about Muslims corresponds with the idea of a “clash of civilizations” that supported the U.S.’s “war on terrorism.”

Le Pen rhetorically frames Muslims as a united invading force when she metaphorically relates them to the invading Nazis.

In an attempt to respond to the outrage from both those who agreed with Le Pen and those who did not, President Sarkozy proposed a debate on the state of secularism and Islam in France. This idea was met with hostility from the rest of his government: the prime minister argued that the French center right should stick to its own values and not pander to the extremists who subscribe to the beliefs of the National Front. The entire episode illustrates the extent to which government discourse is impacted by a concern with fundamentalist Islam. Though not all politicians believe, as Le Pen does, that all Muslims in France constitute an “occupation” of France, the effect of her discourse is to preoccupy even more moderate speakers with discussions addressing a “fundamentalist threat” rather than debating issues surrounding immigrant life that might make a difference in the social and economic divisions in the nation.

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The policies of the French government in recent years have marked an interesting response to the perceived threat of a fundamentalist Islamic influence. As Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Tyler Golson explain in *Overhauling Islam: Representation, Construction, and Cooption of "Moderate Islam" in Western Europe*, the French government adopted interesting changes in its policies towards religious groups in the wake of 9/11. In 2002 Sarkozy founded the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM), a council on Muslim religious life in France, to serve as an intermediary between the French Interior Council and Muslim people and organizations in the nation.\(^{270}\) The authors explain that the purpose of the group is twofold: to allow Muslims the chance to explain their concerns in the context of French society, thus encouraging the plural multiculturalism intellectuals like Ramadan advocate, and to function as “part of a deliberate attempt to "de-radicalize Islam" by "co-opting hard talking groups" and bringing unassimilated Muslim populations under stricter government control.”\(^{271}\) This is a novel way of approaching the issue of diversity within the nation: the government purports to be capitulating to calls for multiculturalism and understanding, while actually attempting to control the Muslim population by “co-opting” them into state-sanctioned regulations. In a sense, it is reforming French Islam to cooperate with existing French society, rather than allowing Islam and France to come to an organic compromise of how to best form a multicultural state.

Haddad and Golson maintain that the act of forming councils made up of government-selected Muslim representatives is the first step in government trying to control how Muslims in the nation form their own national identity. As they explain, “the very act of selecting and

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publicly recognizing certain Muslim voices as more or less legitimate, more or less representative of Islam's future in Europe, implies a wide range of ethical and political prejudgments that may or may not coincide with a Muslim's own preference for the relationship between Islam and the (un-Islamic) state.”

Even when it is supposedly moving towards cultural understanding, the French government exercises a controlling influence over the conversation in an attempt to dictate integration in terms that best suit the interests of the established French nation.

The timing of Sarkozy’s decision to form the CFCM—2002—also speaks to his motivation for creating that organization. Haddad and Golson contend that one of his hopes in forming the council was to create an alternative to the Union of French Islamic Organizations (UOIF). The UOIF, unlike the CFCM, is a group whose leaders have risen out of the Muslim community. This leadership is one that “maintains loose ties to transnational networks such as the Muslim Brotherhood of Munich and Switzerland, has a marked tendency to use Islamist rhetoric, and controls 250 mosques in some of the poorest and least assimilated Muslim communities in France.” In Haddad and Golson’s analysis, Sarkozy and his administration hope that the CFCM can weaken the uncontested influence of the “Islamist” UOIF and eventually displace that organization.

The French government has taken action to counter the perceived Islamist threat of its national Muslim population. Its position and rhetoric both indicate an accepted recognition

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amongst many in the government, not just the farthest right National Front party, that Islamism and the potential violence springing from a radicalized Muslim population are a serious threat to the security of the nation. After recently banning four Muslim preachers from attending a UOIF conference in France, the Interior Minister and Foreign Minister released a statement explaining: “These people's positions and statements calling for hatred and violence seriously damage republican principles and, in the current context, represent a serious threat to public order.”

The threat of a call for terrorist or violent action is the justification for keeping the speakers out of the country. Again, the rhetoric of fear of Islamic terrorism pervades the discussion of Muslim activity in France. The ministers interestingly argue that the preachers will “damage republican principles,” and “threaten public order.” The words themselves indicate too clearly the concerns of the government: to protect its security from what is seen as a possible threat of violent rhetoric, but also to protect its control over the discourse engendered within the nation, and as Haddad and Golson suggest in their analysis, to remain in control of the formation of a Muslim identity with its borders.

The Ministers’ statement particularly references one individual, Tariq Ramadan. Again, he has entered the French national debate as an example of the principles the government abhors in a Muslim leader, clearly exposing the fears that motivate the government’s position towards him. They state: "We regret that the UOIF has also chosen to invite Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss national, whose positions and statements are against the republican spirit, which does not do any service to France's Muslims.” Pursuant to their previous argument, it seems that Ramadan is

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“against the republican spirit” because in their estimation he is an Islamist who will preach an agenda counter to the message of the French government or that goes against “western values.”

In this regard, Caroline Fourest certainly agrees that Ramadan represents the worst aspects of subversive Islamism when it comes to his position on terrorism. She breaks down an opinion piece he wrote in *Le Monde* in October 2001, in response to the September 11 attacks, in which she feels his statement that “condemnation of the attacks on the United States must be unanimous” is undermined by his questioning whether or not Osama Bin Laden was truly behind the attacks. She writes, “The rest of the article is designed to show that the American government undoubtedly profited from these attacks, seizing the opportunity to curtail public liberties and launch a crusade against the Muslim world.” In her analysis Ramadan’s lackluster condemnation of violence at the very least proves he is not committed to the same anti-violent, pro-western views of the western world. She stresses how reprehensible it was for him to imply that America stood to gain from the 9/11 attacks. She also finds particularly suspect his refusal to condemn Bin Laden for the attack based on the known evidence as well as a report that he told a conference of young Muslim men that “if any state had an interest in launching the attack, it was Israel.” To Fourest this set of statements proves Ramadan’s Islamist agenda beyond a doubt: he thinks violence can be justified, he is reluctant to admit a Muslim could have been behind the attacks, and he pushes the blame on Israel.

These accusations are deeply troubling and anger inducing, and having been made just weeks after September 11 Ramadan certainly should have at least expected them to be poorly

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received by the western world. If Fourest’s analysis is correct, his statements reveal an Islamist Ramadan who is indifferent and unsympathetic to the West.

In fact, Ramadan’s editorial shows a different picture—he may have been incredibly insensitive in his timing, but though his ideas do not support the American war effort and though they do not condemn Bin Laden, he is not the monstrous person Fourest paints him to be. First, though he does indeed say that Bush would gain from a Middle Eastern war, the statement is not meant to say the United States was behind the attack. His point, as he admits, is to introduce a more cynical reading of U.S. involvement in foreign affairs and to remind the world that when the U.S. begins its investigations into the attacks it will only perpetuate its involvement in an area of the world where it has no legal claim to be involved. He points out that the legacy of the Gulf War has allowed Americans to remain omnipresent in the Middle East, and it is in this way that he implies the U.S. stands to gain from the effects of 9/11: it will give America justification for its continued presence in Middle Eastern states.

It would seem that had Ramadan known the maelstrom of criticism and accusations that would follow him for having made such remarks, he would not have presented them so openly, or so soon after the attacks. Yet his criticism came from a global perspective of American political actions that many Americans willfully ignore. He notes that the American government knew about the genocide in Rwanda and did nothing, a fact that decreases his faith in the ethics of U.S. politics. Americans remain willfully ignorant of the negative aspect of American politics, and criticize outsiders who critique America for its inaction. Ramadan was ill advised to phrase himself that way, as Fourest and Americans alike interpreted his words to mean the

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government was pleased by the deaths of its own citizens because it provided a justification for continued war. However this was not the purpose of his cynical argument. He wanted to give the attacks a global perspective instead of allowing American rhetoric to dictate the world’s understanding of the events.

Ramadan’s actual purpose in his editorial is to call preemptively for understanding and measured, cautious behavior in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. He voices concern over the American call for “une gigantesque offensive contre le terrorisme et une surveillance de tous « les suspects »” —that is, Bush’s promise to Americans and the world to mount an attack against “terrorism” and conduct “surveillance on all suspects.” Ramadan wonders who the suspects will be: “the ‘Arab faces,’ the Muslims, or [will] all militant anti-globalization activists be grouped together by the logic of generalized suspicion because they may be ‘potentially violent?’” His critique foreshadows the dawning era of Islamophobia. He worries that anyone with an Arab disposition, any Muslim, anyone against globalization will be targeted as potentially violent. His purpose in these cynical statements is to ask Americans, and westerners, to be aware of this potential danger before it comes to be.

Knowing the steps are already in motion, he also wants to forewarn Muslims of their task ahead. No longer, he says, will Muslims be able to simply promote “mutual tolerance”; they must “discuss, explain, promote partnerships built on fundamental rights, principles of pluralism,


for the social justice and equal citizenship in the Occident as in the rest of the world.”

He calls for the true multiculturalism whose foundations he suspects are already eroding in the West. He furthermore asks “western” citizens around the world to take a critical look at U.S. policies and to be supportive of America in its time of suffering without following blindly any and all of its political decisions.

Ramadan’s editorial is a complicated response to the September 11 attacks. It is certainly not pro-American, but not in the way that Fourest implies. He is against an American hegemony, its international policy that in his eyes never practices self-criticism, and does not recognize what he sees as atrocities committed in the name of its interests. Fourest’s decision to portray Ramadan as an Islamist is nonetheless misleading. He is strongly, vehemently critical of U.S. policy, but his critiques are not even anti-West. He criticizes the actions of America as a nation, other western nations for uncritically following American policymaking, and the American media for demonizing Muslims, yet he still calls for a “partnership built on fundamental rights.” It is Fourest who proves to be the monstrously duplicitous person in this exchange. Her reading of Ramadan is based in a western-centric understanding of events and of history, and she practices the exact willful ignorance of the global context of events of which Ramadan accuses westerners of in the portion of his essay that she deigns to exclude from her analysis.

It further seems that his call to refrain from accusing Bin Laden for the attacks is also mischaracterized by Fourest. Though Ramadan does explicitly question this in his essay, in context it does not seem that he does so in order to protect Bin Laden, but rather to question whether in light of all of the complicated planning involved Bin Laden was capable of carrying

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out such an attack. His demand seems to be for a more careful investigation into the facts of the event, especially as it seems that Muslims have been quickly demonized in the short time following the event.

Fourest’s last criticism, that Ramadan claims Israel had the strongest interest in launching a terrorist attack, is hard to address because no record of the statement exists. She cites that a reporter at the event heard Ramadan make that claim, a tough trail of evidence to follow. Granting that he said it, the remark is troubling, but still does not make Ramadan a terrorist monster. It may well make him a man with prejudices and biases against certain groups, which may be informed by his identification with the Palestinian Muslims. She cites a statement of his concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as evidence that he supports violence where Hamas is concerned: "I have spoken of the illegitimacy of attacking civilians, but have the hypocrisy and the cynicism of the American government-and the Arab government as well-left the Palestinians any choice?" While this plainly suggests that Ramadan is not as absolutely anti-violence as he should be, the statement also does not mean he advocates violence.

That statement provides that the American/western influence in the world has left certain Middle Eastern nations no feasible recourse besides violence. He does not condone it as the only solution; he only points out that it is at present the only solution open to those people. The exploration of Ramadan’s potential anti-Semitism, and anti-Semitism spouted by those labeled Islamists in general, would warrant another chapter (or an entire field of study). To take a slight scratch at the problem, what Ramadan’s take on these conflicts seems to demonstrate is a perspective developed through a different global understanding than the western one. This does

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not make it more correct, and his attitudes towards Israel may well be bigoted and racist, but
without recognizing the complexities of western views towards “other” groups it is impractical to
try to label Ramadan as a certain kind of man because he holds questionable views towards the
“other.” The best that can be done is admit the complexity of his understanding of the world and
of the “western” understanding of the world and try to find some truth through analyzing both.

Fourest’s analysis of Ramadan’s post-9/11 editorial was published in 2008, seven years
after the attacks and the publication of Ramadan’s opinion piece. Nonetheless, she found no
need to reevaluate her analysis of Ramadan’s position towards terrorism in the intervening years.
Has his position changed? Only, perhaps, in his militancy and the aggressiveness of his
unforgiving attitude towards American policy, though it seems in many ways he was vindicated.
In his book *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism*, published in 2010,
Ramadan addresses the question of terrorism in the current age:

> The perceived threat of terrorism is now so great that ignoring the requirement to respect
> the human rights and dignity of individuals has become acceptable: the outcome is
discrimination, the imprisonment of individuals without trial, summary or extraordinary
> renditions and even torture, which is now deemed to be legitimate because the threat is so
great. Emotions give those who think of themselves as victims the right to act outside the
> law when dealing with those they identify as their dehumanized potential killers.²⁸⁶

Ramadan seems more resigned in this text than indignant, in part perhaps because his earlier
suspicions about the trends in perceptions of Muslims have been proven correct. The tendency
to “dehumanize the other,” so long exhibited by racist western attitudes, was adopted full force
by American policy towards the potential threats in the war on terror, and the American rhetoric
of terror was accepted by the broader western world. The effect has been to extend the
perception of Americans as victims past the breaking point—yes, the attacks of 9/11 were

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unwarranted and inexcusable, but the repercussions for the global Muslim community have been immense, and inexcusably unjust. In the name of retribution and of curing the world of the pernicious Islamist disease, Muslims have been persecuted for ideological crimes they are suspected of maybe, one day, committing. Even where discrimination is not blatantly exercised, Muslims have been forced to act guilty until proven innocent by the way the media’s portrayal has affected their place in society.

Fourest’s actions in attempting to “unveil” Ramadan is a confirmation of his critique of the misrepresentative nature of western ideology. Her goal of uncovering the truth behind his statements would be valuable, and justified, if its end purpose was not to demonize the religion he practices in the name of justifying western ideology. To attack Ramadan as a man for his principles and convictions is a pursuit that can be managed in a life’s work. To attack Islam as a whole, however, is a pursuit that will take centuries to manage—and then, only Islam in a certain context and time period can ever be understood, and different scholars will have different interpretations of the “facts.” Fourest’s attempt to uncover universal truths about Islam through revealing Ramadan’s “true agenda” thus fall short.

The French discourse on the threat of Islamic terrorism, like that of the United States, was not a new focus for the nation because it connected directly to a history of “western” interpretations of Islam, the Occidentalism described by Said. The discussion of terrorism in France centers on what “Islam” is doing, or what “the terrorists” motives are, classifying them as one definitive unit when in reality their motivations are diverse and Islam means too many things to be conceptualized as one threatening influence. In the atmosphere of fear produced by the very visible and symbolic attacks on America on September 11, the desire to explain terrorism
and accuse the correct parties led to a firmer division between a perceived “western” ideology and the “other,” or “Islamic,” ideology. This trend ignored the many complex motivations of the terrorists, the multiple meanings of Islam for different people, and the fact that no firm boundary divides “West” and “Islam.” The phenomenon of creating an oversimplified characterization of the “other” exists among both orientalist politicians and occidentalists ones, further contributing to the perception of a division between “Orient” and “Occident” where in reality the terms themselves are only political constructions. Only by understanding the fallacies in both of these characterizations can all people begin to understand and confront the contemporary issues that divide cultural groups in France and throughout the world.
Conclusion

“It isn’t at all a matter of being optimistic, but rather of continuing to have faith in the ongoing and literally unending process of emancipation and enlightenment that, in my opinion, frames and gives direction to the intellectual vocation.”


The discursive differentiation between non-Muslims and Muslims is a political tool used by “western society” to protect its ideological hegemony over global affairs. French and American political discourse participates in the construction of the “West” by presenting western views as the only right views and any other views as incorrect and morally wrong. This discourse may be created consciously or unconsciously to the same effect. Thus many politicians and intellectuals uncritically subscribe to the correctness of the “western views” they propagate in their discourse, a fact that makes their participation in the construction of a western ideology all the more dangerous. Western intellectuals engage in the process of creating the “West” without reflexively questioning the validity of the western ideology they promote. This also means many western intellectuals critique non-western ideology from the same uncritical stance—they begin with the assumption that non-western thought is wrong, rather than engaging different opinions with an open mind.

In this study the analysis of the production of political discourse in France and America shows that when engaging with Islam, the overwhelming trend among scholars and intellectuals is to assume that Islamic ideology is wrong. This attitude is born out of a western orientalist framework of understanding Islam and its impact on global affairs. Rather than analyze Islam,
Muslims, and Islamic societies objectively, western scholars analyze them in terms of how they impact the West.

In the analysis of French and American newspaper articles, speeches, interviews, and analytical work concerning Islam, the unifying trend is a discursive “western” framing of Islam that is shared between the two nations. This indicates that while politicized discourse may be created in one nation, the perceived unified ideology of all “western nations” allows that discourse to be employed throughout the “western world.” An example of this is the way in which scholars Paul Berman and Caroline Fourest create an image of Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan that suits their ideological standpoint. Their discursive treatment of Ramadan exposes the ways in which a “western ideology” consciously constructs the image of the “other”: though they accuse Ramadan of duplicity, they are guilty of employing duplicitous language themselves in their portrayal of Ramadan and his beliefs. For example, they selectively cite his speeches in order to derive a particular meaning from them, and Berman employs Fourest’s criticisms of Ramadan without admitting he has adopted them as his own.

The problem with the intellectual interaction between Berman, Fourest, and Ramadan is not that the French and American scholars are critical of Ramadan and his views. A critical engagement with different opinions is exactly what scholars of all backgrounds should explore. However Berman’s and Fourest’s dialogue is one-sided. Rather than open a conversation with Ramadan to flush out his ideas, Berman and Fourest interpret him and his faults without allowing him to respond. In this Berman and Fourest demonstrate an orientalist mentality in a number of ways: they interpret Ramadan for what they imagine he stands for rather than taking his words and actions for what they show him to be, they treat his faith as an immutable force governing
his will and actions, and they frame their ideological standpoint and his as polar opposites. Commonality between their ideas and Ramadan’s is not acknowledged and developed into a meaningful new cultural understanding.

Studying the construction of western orientalist discourse is an important step in understanding and combating this phenomenon of the creation of “us” and “them.” All scholars and intellectuals who weigh in on issues of citizenship, women’s rights, and terrorism employ discourse colored by their own perceptions of the world. This is an immutable aspect of discourse itself—it is informed by whoever creates it. What this means is the only responsible way to use discourse is by engaging with it critically. In order to come to an understanding of different perspectives we must listen to and attempt to understand the discourse of others, particularly those with whom we disagree, and also to critique reflexively our own discourse with a willingness to change our views if we discover they are too narrow-minded or based on false premises.

The widespread Islamophobic sentiments in France and America exemplify the development of those fears in many corners of the “western world.” However, even as this seems to indicate an acceleration of the divisive construction of opposing identity groups—“us” versus “them,” “West” versus “Islam”—the change may also indicate a hopeful trend in expanded self awareness. The growing body of work examining Islamophobia in “western society” today suggests that in the past few decades the perspectives of many scholars and individuals in the world have changed significantly. These intellectuals are increasingly aware that globalization means “different groups” will undoubtedly have to learn to understand each other and come to cultural compromises.
The study of how nations construct the “other” for their own political purposes and the “Islamic other” in particular deserves further study because it demonstrates a disturbing misuse of history. Reporters, scholars, authors, and politicians who engage in debates over the meaning of Islam cite interpretations of the religion and its history to support their claims about its role in the modern world. There is a tendency to assume that because a historical basis has been established, the ideas presented hold extra weight. History is presented as uncontestable fact, impervious to the sorts of attacks that contemporary rhetoric must endure.

This approach is error and misunderstands the meaning and the purpose of historical studies. History is by definition a selective narrative constructed by someone. This means that a person, or group, has chosen which facts to highlight and which to ignore in order to present a certain image of the past. While a narrative with a fair and balanced understanding of the past is highly desirable, in reality that goal is not always met. The study of the Orient is a case in point. Though Oriental Studies comprises the serious scholarly work of intellectuals, it nevertheless has created a history very much affected by the conception of the Orient born of its western creators. History in and of itself is not guaranteed to be unbiased. It must be constantly scrutinized with a critical eye, as new facts and new perspectives alter the nature of “historical truth.”

History will also never be able to fully grasp the present or predict the future though some intellectuals believe that is its purpose. It can teach lessons, but in order for those lessons to be effective they must be grounded in a historical understanding or context that acknowledges as complete a picture of history as is known. An instructive history must account for the complexities of different histories. This is an interpretive responsibility that many present-day intellectuals have abandoned in favor of the simpler task of conflating political and religious
understandings to find a simple explanation. This approach adopts one possible historical interpretation as irrefutable truth.

Future studies of the relationship between a constructed “Islam” and “West” will continue to shed light on the historical motivations behind developing these two identity groups. With more research, scholars may be able to explain more compellingly to a broad audience the fallacies behind the belief that “western culture” and “Islamic culture” are two exclusive ideas. In this way, continued study of the treatment of Islam in “western” discourse will help to generate an open discussion of how Islam is misrepresented in western politics and policies and foster a clearer understanding of the commonalities between the “West” and the “other,” merging these two constructed groups into one global “we.”
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