

New York University Abu Dhabi

# Final Portfolio

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Contemporary Debates about Islam

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## Cover letter

The progress I have made over this semester was very significant, especially after completing my research paper. The most challenging aspect about writing for me throughout the semester was to make a solid thesis statement that governs the whole essay. In order to achieve this, I learned to get frequent feedback about my thesis from my peers and writing instructor as much as possible so that I don't waste time writing an ineffective paper. I struggled to write a thesis until 12 hours before the deadline for Essay 2, but learning from my weakness, for Essay 3, I managed to settle with an arguable, personal thesis days before the deadline, and was able to plan my essay.

I continue to use the introduction, counter argument, and conclusion structure, which I find to be very useful in organizing my ideas. Making a comprehensive outline before writing by draft has generally helped me do this. At the same time, I feel that I have become more used to the structuring of the argument to a point that I could divert from their style to suit my argument. The process of writing a research paper, as a result, gave me refined confidence into tackling more essays for my future core and colloquium courses.

I was very satisfied to be able to use the class texts, "Covering Islam", and "What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam" for my research paper. Reading those texts in addition to the class discussion reading we were given have not only improved my knowledge on Islam and its people, but also the arguments involved behind contemporary debates of Islam.

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Contemporary Debates about Islam

1 September 2016

### Exercise 1.1 Behind the mind of the counter-Jihadist

As a reaction to 9/11, Robert Spencer published *Islam Unveiled*, which was the first book he wrote. He proclaimed that he was an expert on Islam and Qur'an. According to his book, he considers Islam to be inherently violent as it "has the enemy (us) and the scriptural justification (in the Qur'an" to keep pushing until they win" (Spencer 37). This is questionable however, as he graduated UNC with a master's degree specializing in Christianity (Lamb: " Q & A with Robert Spencer" Lamb."). He did have a strong interest in studying Islam, especially since his grandparents, who escaped from Muslim Turkey as Christians, told him about Islam when he was a child. Under this context, in order to assert that Islam is an inherently violent religion, Spencer counters opinions of major politicians and news media with his interpretation of Islam especially the Qur'an. At the same time, he actually does not achieve the standard of an academic writing due to various flaws in his writing. An excerpt of his publication will be examined for this.

In the excerpt, Spencer sets up a "They say, I say" structure. By setting up this conversation-like structure, he attempts to create a sense of balanced argument between his assertion and the general view of politicians, media, and scholars introduced in the excerpt. Specifically, for "They say", Spencer groups politicians such as Bush, Blair, and Clinton, news media such as CNN, and prominent scholar of

Islam such as Karen Armstrong into one group that opposes his opinion. He portrays them as those who claim Islamic jihadists as “a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam” (Spencer 7). Additionally, he criticizes them for portraying Islam as a peace-loving religion equivalent to Christianity (Spencer 8). By doing so, he more effectively emphasizes how Islam is fundamentally different from Christianity, therefore advancing his argument.

As part of “I say”, Spencer attempts to argue how Islam is not a peaceful religion that the “they” group claims to be. For example, he argues how there is a range of Muslim reaction to 9/11, from moderates being neutral (even some praying with President Bush) to those supporting 9/11 (Spencer 15). In terms of interpreting Qur’an’s verse on “Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them... (Sura 9:73)”, he explains that there are moderates interpreting war to be figurative reference to debates and apologetics to others interpreting it to be actual war of force (Spencer 18). For both the reaction to 9/11 and the verse’s interpretation, he gives more emphasis on the radical groups. Ideally, he should have included a clear thesis within in the introduction of the excerpt, as his actual opinion toward Islam and 9/11 only becomes clear with the last sentence of the excerpt (Spencer 37).

What makes his writing more ineffective though, despite the use of “They say, I say”, is that his writing lacks of academic integrity. One example is cherry picking. He quotes the Qur’an to portray Islam to be naturally violent, but there are actually other verses from Qur’an that condemns all warfare as an “awesome evil” (Armstrong: “Balancing the Prophet”), which he does not mention. According to the excerpt, he also tries to generalize that most Muslims are jihadists where “moderate Islam is essentially powerless to stop it” (Spencer 37), but this is not backed up by

any statistical evidence. Thirdly, some of his references are irrelevant. In the excerpt, Spencer portrayed Nobel Prize winner V. S. Naipul as an expert on Islam and Quran. However, V.S. Naipul won the Nobel Prize for his novels set in Trinidad and Tobago and autobiographies based on travels and life and not for any particular Islamic studies ("Sir V. S. Naipaul." 2016).

In conclusion, Spencer's publication effectively asserts his view, but with lack of academic integrity, as there are some fundamental flaws. His upbringing and background can explain why Spencer was still motivated enough to publish the writing despite these flaws. From writings like this, one can see how asserting personal opinion in form of academic writing can lead to many pitfalls.

Word Count: 657

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Contemporary Debates about Islam

28 January 2020

### Exercise 1.2 Secularism and Modernism Transcending Nations

In the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, a key question relating to a the rising global conflict into prominence; why the Muslims hate the West. Just a year before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Bernard Lewis gave a Jefferson Lecture, one of the most prestigious honors given by the U.S. government, titled “The Roots of Muslim Rage” (“The Jefferson Lecture” NEH). The lecture was aimed for audience interested in learning more about possible consequences of Muslim countries’ sentiment toward the West and America. As a professor specializing in history of Islam, he attempted to convince the audience that among many possible reasons for Muslims directing rage toward America, secularism and modernism are the most fundamental causes.

Lewis’ lecture is divided into four parts. As his introduction for the lecture, he makes many references to Thomas Jefferson’s remarks on the separation of Church and State (47). Although his stance on the Muslim rage is unclear from most part of the lecture, the fact that his lecture is backed up by the U.S. government and his reference to Jefferson and John Tyler in the end of the lecture suggests he is at least leaning toward supporting the American secularism and modernism. In fact, Lewis was a key advisor of foreign policies in the Middle East for the Bush administration, which is not necessarily supportive of American liberal’s argument that Muslim rage

is caused because of Imperialism by the West and American support of Israel for example. Even before the beginning of the main section of lecture, it is implicitly apparent that Lewis is maybe arguing for American value of secularism and modernism.

In order to legitimize his arguments, he introduces the nature of Muslim rage, and then considers possible reasons for that given by those who are suggested to be liberals on the issue. According to Lewis, Muslims perceived Christians as rivals since their inception, as Christianity, like Islam, is monotheistic and spreading worldwide. This let him set up a sense of rivalry between Christendom, which is equivalent to the West for Muslims according to him, and Muslim countries over the last 1,400 years (48). Next, he notes how Muslims are in a period of antagonizing the West after successive stages of defeat in the last few centuries (49). The defeats specifically were the loss of Muslim domination in the world, non-Muslim cultural and political influence within their countries, and finally challenges by the west to emancipate women and rebellious children (49). From these, Lewis argues that as the conflict between Christendom and the Muslim countries can be taken as long-lasting rivalries, it is natural for them to direct their anger and frustration toward the winning rival.

The main argument of liberals is that Western Imperialism and American support of Israel victimized the Muslim countries, which makes the West responsible for the rage. Lewis attempts to argue against these “familiar accusations” (52). Lewis explains how Anti-Americanism in general has not been exclusively a Muslim issue, which allows him to argue how American wealth and power themselves did not hugely contribute to Muslim rage. For example, German intellectuals such as Rianer Maria Rilke, Ernst Junger, and Martin Heidegger criticized America for lacking

culture, unlike the spiritual, vital, and authentic Germans (52). Also, Marxism developed as an embodiment of denunciation of European and American capitalism. Thirdly, he mentions hates directed from those in third world countries to the West which intervened their lives, which is compared to “non-Western Adam and Eve”. He argues that more recent events such as American cultural and economic invasion after World War II had a bigger role in creating Muslim’s jealousy and envy toward America’s modernism-derived wealth and power.

Lewis suggests that liberal associates Muslim’s anti-Americanism with American support for Israel (52). He opposes to this argument by comparing how the Soviet Union also supported Israel during certain time periods and is not receiving significant hatred from Muslims (52). In fact Soviet historically controlled more Muslims domestically compared to the U.S (56). To make sense of this peculiarity, Lewis discusses how the Soviet Union and Muslim countries’ similarity in state depending on religion and the Communist nation’s military pressure keeps the Muslims countries from hating the Soviet Union (52).

After making these possible causes for Muslim rage seem peripheral to his discussion, he finally moves on to arguing how exactly secularism and modernism led to the hate. In terms of secularism, he argues that the fact that the secular West and America overpowering them creates humility to them, making Muslims hate them for having them think whether depending on Islam as a state is effective. In terms of modernism, he argues that “the introduction of Western commercial, financial, and industrial methods” only brought wealth to Westerners living in Muslim countries and actually bought poverty to many of the Muslim population (59). Lewis argues that because America is a symbol of Western domination in terms of soft power, Muslims direct their hate to America more than to European countries. Thus he claims that

“the Muslim rage is a modern form of a reaction toward Judeo-Christian powers, and therefore equates the conflict to a clash of culture.

In conclusion, as suggested from the introduction, Lewis' support on American secularism and modernism becomes explicit in the concluding paragraph. With the two roots of Muslim rage in mind, he predicts an inevitable hard struggle between the West and Muslim countries (60). Furthermore, he says, "...we may hope that they will ...understand and respect, even if they do not choose to adopt for themselves, our Western perception of the proper relationship between religion and politics (60). He further explains this "Western perception" using an excerpt from John Tyler's speech, which suggests that "total separation of Church and State" is crucial not only for America, but for any other countries as that system will free people's mind "as the light" (60).

Word count: 966

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### Exercise 1.3 Objective Summary: “Roots of Muslim Rage”

One of the striking features in the geopolitical landscape of the last 30 years, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, is what distinguished historian, Bernard Lewis, in an influential 1990 article, characterizes as the deep “resentment” and “bitterness” that the Muslim world harbors towards the West — most particularly the USA (Lewis 47). Several theories and explanations abound as to the origins of this supposed animosity. Some “familiar accusations”, as Lewis puts it, are the “policies and actions pursued and taken by individual Western governments”, specifically “American support for Israel” and “support for hated regimes” seen as “impious” “corrupt” and “tyrannical” (52). Other “accusations” cite “sexism, racism, and imperialism, institutionalized in patriarchy and slavery, tyranny and exploitation” (53). Unconvinced by these accounts, Lewis argues that the “roots of Muslim rage” are instead grounded in (1) fundamental beliefs about the all-encompassing role of religion in Muslim society; (2) a particular narrative about the historical decline of Muslim power and the subsequent rise of the West; and (3) a supposed Muslim response to the “alien, infidel, and incomprehensible forces” of Western civilization that threaten to subvert Muslim rule and disrupt Muslim society (49).

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#### Exercise 1.4 Clash of Politics

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, intellectuals have been analyzing a new phase of world political conflicts (Huntington 22). In 1993, Samuel Huntington, who served more than half a century at Harvard as a political scientist, published the article, “The Clash of Civilizations?” on Foreign Affairs magazine, as a response to several hypotheses about what the new phase will be. These hypotheses included, “onset of globalism, tribalism, and the dissipation of the state” and particularly Francis Fukuyama’s “ ‘end of history’ ideas” (Said “The Clash of Ignorance”). Aimed for academics and foreign policy makers, he responds:

The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural (Huntington 22).

Although his argument is agreeable in terms of several decades into the future where each of the “7 civilizations” becomes more economically, culturally, and politically monolithic, clashes in the world since the last quarter of century still reflects political (which includes economical and cultural) motives of countries within each of the civilizations more than the civilizations’ cultural differences.

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### Essay 1 Draft 1: Freedom of Being Different

The renewed interest in Muslim countries following 9/11 raised a key question of why Muslim countries lost its global dominance and its repression of Islamists. Bernard Lewis, a prominent Orientalist, rephrased this question as the title of his 2002 Atlantic Monthly Article, “What Went Wrong?” (Lewis 43). According to Lewis, some blame Western Imperialism created by “British and French paramountcy in much of the Arab world”, some others blame, “...the inflexibility and ubiquity of the Islamic clergy”, and others blame “...the abandonment of the divine heritage of Islam” (Lewis 43-45). Lewis offers an alternative view in the article, claiming that while there are “more successful Westernizers”, “...the Muslim civilization, once a mighty enterprise, has fallen low” due to, “lack of freedom- freedom of the mind...[,] economy...[,] women... [, and] citizens” (43, 45). Although lack of freedom is a factor in causing underdevelopment in Muslim countries, Lewis overstates his claim by treating Muslim countries as monolithic civilization, by making non-Western civilizations seem inferior compared to Western civilization, and by omitting details about specific Arab countries(43).

The article is divided into two sections, where Lewis sets up a conversation between the Muslims who blame their loss of power on foreign factors and himself

who blames Muslims' domestic policies. The first section is about how Muslim countries have fallen behind other civilizations despite their attempts to rise back into prominence. For example, in the article's first paragraph, Lewis sets up a context of Muslim countries being in a "bad" condition, in which, "Muslim's public and even his private life" is being invaded (Lewis 43). This creates a sense of loss for Muslims, which itself is already a generalization of the situation, especially with the use of the phrase "all the lands of Islam". Despite mentioning Muslim countries in general, he does not actually prove any particular countries being unsuccessful. He then adds that Muslim modernizers have historically failed regaining Muslim countries' power militarily, economically, and politically (Lewis 43). He does hint that he is talking about Middle Eastern Muslim countries in particular by mention some countries' unhealthy dependence on oil. However, he never refers to specific countries for evidence throughout the article. Therefore, his argument of "underlying much of the Muslim world's travail may be a simple lack of freedom" in the subtitle, does not get sufficient concrete support.

Another problematic assumption that Lewis makes throughout the article is that Western democracy is superior to Muslim countries' Islam-based governance. Already in the first part of the article, he acknowledges that "Western ingenuity and industry" would take advantage of oil resources in the Middle East and even condemn this practice later on as they would not want "the world economy at the mercy of a clique of capricious [Muslim] autocrats". He assumes that the West, particularly America, is more able and influential when it comes to world affairs. It is especially an inaccurate image for him to make that "the West" politically, economically, and socially freer than Muslim countries, which he claims are left with "a string of shabby tyrannies, ranging from traditional autocracies to dictatorships." (Lewis 43).

Lewis not only creates a sense of Western superiority by comparing them to Muslim countries, but also to other non-West civilizations. In the context of the supposed fall of Muslim countries he paints them to be “falling back in a lengthening line of more successful Westernizers”, particularly Japan, Korea, and China. Lewis even portrays them as “followers” of the West and “the proud heirs of ancient civilizations”, creating a sense that becoming more like the West is a progress.

After creating a sense of Muslim decline, Lewis moves onto the discussion of “what went wrong” with Muslim’s attempt to regain their glory. According to him, the Muslims have several explanations, all of which he disagrees to, as he suggests that the Muslims are blaming other’s for their misfortunes. One explanation by the Muslims he suggests is how non-Muslim empires, especially the Mongols, destroyed the Muslim civilization and power. Another explanation is that countries within Muslim civilizations are to blame, as this was a notion derived from nationalism. The third explanation is the British and French colonialism, which Lewis actually admits that the Middle East have “good reasons for such blame”. However, he argues back that “the Anglo-French interlude was comparatively brief, and ended half a century ago”, downplaying the notion. Thus, Lewis is laying the blame game for Muslims. There is already a problem with his lack of supporting evidence and details, but the fact that he assumes the West to have superior economical and political ideology is especially adds to his shortcoming. (Lewis 44)

It is clear that Lewis asserts Muslims’ explanation on the assumption that they want to escape from blaming themselves, even if it means using Western ideology such as nationalism as mentioned, and now, anti-Semitism. He claims that Muslims, as a reaction to the “humiliating” establishment of Israel, started to also blame Israel for the Muslim decline since 1948, even though they were traditionally more tolerant

of Jews than the West. This is another example of where Lewis is treating the West to be better than other countries. He claims that “Jew in traditional Islamic societies experienced the normal constraints and occasional hazards of minority status.” Lewis also attempts to compare Muslim’s anti-Semitism to that of Nazis. A problem with this claim is that he actually does not show which Muslim groups in particular are following Nazi-based anti-Semitism. Without any substantial support, Lewis is making a substance-less, bland statement.

Nevertheless, Lewis transitions to the second section in which he suggests the Muslims to blame their flaws in Islam-based domestic affairs. This time, he highlights two movements in Muslim countries that blames themselves for “what went wrong”: the Islam fundamentalist and Secularist movement. The former blames the Muslim decline for adopting Western policies over the course of history, and the latter blames the lack of freedom of Muslim states in adapting to society changing over time (Lewis 45).

Lewis seems to approve the Muslim Secularist, as he then focuses on how lack of freedom has led to Muslim decline, and this is where Lewis’ personal stance toward “What went wrong” becomes more explicit. He associates secularism with freedom, as he asserts that in Muslim society, women are deprived of equal rights, which meant loss of “talents and energies” of women and children were raised by “illiterate and downtrodden mothers”. However, if these were the case, it would be hard to explain why the Muslim empires have been able to overpower the West for many centuries. In fact many of the Western countries only came to implement gender equality in the last century or two. Another point he makes is that autocracy in some Muslim countries “have preserved the Nazi-Fascist style of dictatorial government and indoctrination”. Nazi-Fascists were not the only autocrats in history,

and therefore it is peculiar why he compares that specific group to Middle Eastern governments (Lewis 45).

Ultimately, in the last two paragraphs of the article, Lewis urges Muslims to accept their apparently flawed system of autocratic, religious, and female-relegating society, and adopt western democracy. Lewis suggests that if the Muslim countries do not admit their own weakness and gain more freedom, their troubles would continue, and that the West would even start to largely associate them to “suicide bombers”. This is a large leap in his argument, and it is wrong for him to put responsibilities on Muslims for Westerners thinking of them as terrorists. It is the ignorance of Westerners like American that leads them to generalizing a billion of Muslim population into dogmatic, anger-fueled belligerents (Lewis 45).

In conclusion, Lewis’ argument does navigate various answers for “what went wrong”, but overgeneralizes lack of freedom over the whole Muslim countries. Lewis tries to convince the readers more out of emotional phrases than substantial facts that actually support his claims. Despite what Lewis suggests in the end, it is not an imperative for Muslim countries to copy Western democracy, rather than having both the West and the Muslim countries accept their differences and coexist.

Word count: 1329

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Contemporary Debates about Islam

28 January 2020

### Essay 1 Final Draft: Freedom of Being Different

The renewed interest in Muslim countries following 9/11 raised a key question of why Muslim countries lost its global dominance and its repression of Islamists.

Bernard Lewis, a prominent Orientalist historian, rephrased this question as the title of his 2002 Atlantic Monthly Article, “What Went Wrong?” (Lewis 43). According to

Lewis, some blame Western Imperialism created by “British and French paramountcy in much of the Arab world”, some others blame, “...the inflexibility and ubiquity of the Islamic clergy”, and others blame “...the abandonment of the divine heritage of Islam” (Lewis 43-45). Lewis offers an alternative view in the article, claiming that

while there are “more successful Westernizers [such as Japan and South Korea]”, “...the Muslim civilization, once a mighty enterprise, has fallen low” due to, “lack of freedom- freedom of the mind...[,] economy...[,] women... [, and] citizens” (43, 45).

Although lack of freedom is one of the reasons in causing underdevelopment in Muslim countries, Lewis overstates his claim by treating Muslim countries as amonolithic civilization, by assuming them and other non-Western civilizations to be inferior to Western civilization, and by misrepresenting Arab Muslim countries (43).

Firstly, the way Lewis generalizes not only Middle Eastern countries, but also the Muslim countries is neglecting Muslim diversity regardless of them having different political, economic, or social system. For example, he indeed claims that “

... things had gone badly wrong in the Middle East- and, indeed, in all the lands of Islam” (43). By using the word “all”, he does not allow any exceptions to be put forth in his argument. However, there are Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan, which seem to be irrelevant to the discussion. In fact, he seldom refers to a particular country when putting forth his arguments. For instance, Lewis conflates modernization movements from various countries into “military, economic, and political [reform or revolution in which] ... the results achieved were, to say the least, disappointing.” (43). He also portrays Islamic governments to be, “ranging from traditional autocracies to dictatorships” (43). Although this may be true, it does not necessarily mean that they are “...modern only in their apparatus of repression and indoctrination” (43). Moreover, he claims the Muslim to be playing a “blame game” for any external factors that they argue to have led to their decline. It is difficult for him to argue that weakness within the Muslim civilization was solely responsible for their decline, rather than citing various factors especially the Western dominance over the Middle East. These apparently shed the USA and the West, which could be amply criticized for their long lasting “political domination, economic penetration, and cultural influence” over the Middle East, in a positive light as if they had an all-round success (44).

Secondly, to make it easier for him to argue that freedom is integral to a successful civilization, Lewis portrays Western civilizations to be superior to non-Western, especially Middle Eastern Muslim countries. Already in the first part of the article, he asserts that oil in the Middle East “...was discovered, extracted and put to use by Western ingenuity and industry” (43), claiming that the West were more able. This does not necessarily mean that the Middle Eastern countries are inferior to the West in every aspect. Also, in terms of other non-West civilizations, Lewis paints



Muslim countries to be “falling back in a lengthening line of more successful Westernizers”, particularly Japan and South Korea (43). Lewis even portrays them as “followers” of the West and “the proud heirs of ancient civilizations”, creating a sense that becoming more like the West is a progress and at the same time mocking them (43). Furthermore, he claims that Muslims, as a reaction to the “humiliating” establishment of Israel, started to also blame Israel for the Muslim decline since 1948, even though they were traditionally more tolerant of Jews than the West (44). This is another example of where Lewis is considering the West to be better than other countries. He claims that “Jews in traditional Islamic societies experienced the normal constraints and occasional hazards of minority status” (44). Lewis, through the process of legitimizing American and Western success, is disrespecting various civilizations.

As expected, Lewis approves of Muslims nations that have internalized Western values. This is why he portrays Muslim modernists and secularists such as Atatürk as a rare exception to the restrictive Muslim world (45). He associates secularism with freedom, as he asserts that in Muslim society, women are deprived of equal rights, which meant loss of “talents and energies” of women and children were raised by “illiterate and downtrodden mothers”. However it would nevertheless be difficult to explain why the Muslim empires have been able to overpower the West for many centuries, as many of the Western countries were not as free as the Muslim world until recently, especially in terms of female empowerment, which mostly took off during the last century. Lewis therefore seems to overplay the role of freedom in the West and America by showing how some Muslims are following them.

Lastly, the way Lewis compares the Arab Muslim countries to extremist groups is misleading. Lewis compared the countries to Nazis in two ways, and one

was by likening Muslim's anti-Semitism to that of Nazis (44). A problem with this claim is that he actually does not identify which Muslim groups in particular are following Nazi-based anti-Semitism. Another point he makes is that autocracy in some Muslim countries "have preserved the Nazi-Fascist style of dictatorial government and indoctrination through a vast security apparatus and a single all-powerful party" (45). Muslim countries do not resemble Nazi-Fascists in a sense that they do not commit genocide such as the Holocaust, which is arguably what Nazis would most intensely be associated with. Thirdly, using "suicide bombers" as a forthcoming metaphor for unchanging Muslim countries is a large leap in his argument. It is wrong for him to put responsibilities on Muslims for Westerners thinking of them as terrorists, rather than blaming on the Western people's ignorance of the Muslim world (45). These misleadingly create an impression that the Muslims can be equalized to violent extremists, which makes it easier for Lewis to argue that their society is failing.

In conclusion, this essay does not argue that the Muslim world is underdeveloped due to Western Imperialism. Neither does it take the view that Muslim countries are not entirely responsible for their decline in power. Instead, it sets forth the position that Lewis should not single out the reasons for Muslim decline to lack of freedom. This is not to advocate the immediate ban of restriction of freedom in the Middle East, but to assert the respect for difference between civilizations. Fundamentally, what matters is to have civilizations learn how to coexist despite differences. There are both short and long term implication in learning more about different civilizations. In the short term, the West particularly the USA in a political level would have to cease being a global police, and begin to accept diplomacy through different culture, instead of penetrating their own values to make

others accept them. In the longer term most Americans and Westerners would become knowledgeable enough to accept different ways for civilizations to achieve success. If we are to get this right, we must first be willing to accept inequality of power between the West and non-Western civilization and how we must support the unsuccessful nation to thrive again, not criticize that they are inherently weak. Ultimately what is at stake here is our willingness to prosper together.

Word count: 1235

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### Exercise 2.1 Inequality from Banning Burqa

2010 saw a movement in banning to wear a burqa in public in several Western European countries such as Spain, France, Belgium, and Germany (Nussbaum 1). Particularly for France, philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy supports the movement as he argues in a Huffington Post article published early that year named “Why I support a Ban on Burqas”. He is disturbed by others stating that allowing women to wear burka in public is not a threat. According to him, burka “communicates the subjugation, the subservience, the crushing and the defeat of women” (Lévy 1). While Lévy does argue the importance of upholding French secular values against Muslims, he fails to realize that discrimination of Muslim women wearing burkas is making him a hypocrite for not criticizing subjugation of women in the West, as argued by another philosopher named Martha Nussbaum in her 2010 article from The New York Times titled, “Veiled Threats?” (Lévy 1) (Nussbaum 4).

Lévy wrote his article with an assumption that burqa is a symbol of female oppression, but Nussbaum disagrees. For example, Lévy suggests that Muslim women are accepting command by “malicious husbands, abusive fathers, and local tyrants” to wear burqas (1). This argument, according to Nussbaum, does not consider how “symbols of male supremacy that treat women as objects” are also prevalent in the West (the USA and Western European countries) (4). That said, it might be

reasonably contended that unlike women in the West, those in Muslim countries are indeed coerced to wear the burqa. Even if that was the case, Nussbaum contends that banning burqa for such reason should also mean banning other supposedly coerced practices such as “nude dancing” and “fraternities” which are associated with violence on women (4). Furthermore, the fact that Lévy is labeling burqa as a symbol of oppression, for Nussbaum, is discrimination that would “fail to pass even the weaker Lockean test” (3). Perhaps Lévy needed to argue as such in order to protect secular French value.

Although Lévy reverses how France pursues equality by limiting religious observance, Nussbaum sees how that method creates discrimination for minorities (3). For instance, Lévy argues for a protection of “the right to freely criticize them [Muslims], the right to make fun of their dogmas or beliefs, the right to be a non-believer, the right to blasphemy and apostasy”. However, the limitation of this approach, as noted by Nussbaum, is that “laws in a democracy are always made by [in this case secular French] majorities... and may turn out to be very unfair to minorities” such as Muslim women. Nussbaum believes “... that the accommodationist principle (allowing exception for limiting religious observance) is more adequate than Locke’s principle, as it reaches subtle forms of discrimination that are ubiquitous in majoritarian democratic life” (3). Lévy may respond to this argument that these rights were all “acquired at too great a cost for us [French]”, and Nussbaum herself admits that creating too many exceptions could create chaos (Lévy 1) (Nussbaum 3). This however, does not change Nussbaum’s stance on going against the ban of burqas, as she claims such action to be discriminatory (5). Banning a burqa therefore goes against the French value of achieving equality in its people.

In conclusion, this essay does not argue that Lévy's claim is invalid. Instead it asserts how strictly limiting religious observance would not necessarily achieve equality in society. Fundamentally, what matters is how to accommodate diverse people in our common endeavor to achieve equality in society. In the short term, this would mean accepting religious observance in public for secular countries. In the longer term, this would mean the change in Western people's mindset to be able to see restriction of rights not only in Muslim culture, but also in their own. Ultimately, what is at stake here is our and especially Lévy's flexibility in accommodating those different from us.

Word count: 624

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### Exercise 2.2 How free are we?

The Charlie Hebdo Shooting on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015 was an act of radical-Islamist terrorism against a satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* for depicting, as a sizeable portion of their criticism on religions, an Islamist dominance of France and Europe in the future, consequently repressing their freedom (“Terror in Paris” 1). The Economists argued about enforcing freedom of speech in its January 9<sup>th</sup> article, “Terror in Paris”, countering arguments such as that of French politicians that Charlie Hebdo’s publication should be deterred, as it is an “... Islamophobic scaremongering” that leads to “manifest provocation” (Jacques Chirac, qtd .in “Terror in Paris” 2). The Economists, in the article, argues how the right to offend, as part of freedom of speech, should be protected without “...limits, self-imposed or otherwise” (1). As mentioned by Teju Cole, although the claim itself is valid, it is questionable to what extent Western societies such as France actually realize seamless freedom of speech, especially after considering the West’s commendation of Charlie Hebdo both for upholding freedom of speech and for offending Muslims, the West’s lack of attention and solidarity in facing “horrific carnage [of freedom] around the world”, and the West’s lack of attention in their own governments rejecting certain speeches such as “heresies against state power” (1 - 4).

The article's argument that people in the west should almost unconditionally support "#jesuischarlie" is a conflation of two distinct matters (Cole 3). For example, the article supports "the right [of Charlie Hebdo] to single out ... [Islam] if it wanted to.", which is one argument, whereas the other, which should have been considered in the article, was whether or not French and other Western society should praise Charlie Hebdo's publication as a commendable act of offending others (2). A form of support such as "#jesuischarlie" not only condemned the Islamist repression of speech but also celebrated and disseminated Islamophobia contained in the magazine, under the pretext that it was in the wake of the murders (3). Granted, it could be said that people in these society aided Charlie Hebdo as for them it meant " Liberty was indeed under attack (2). Nevertheless, it is questionable if Charlie Hebdo deserved receiving a "large sums of money in the wake of the attacks- a hundred thousand pounds from the Guardian Media Group and three hundred thousand dollars Google ", as that both "condemns their brutal murders" and "condones their ideology" (3). The attack on Charlie Hebdo should not be mistaken as a fundamental crisis in free speech, and therefore should not necessarily eclipse attention of other significant infringement of freedom in the world that were not triggered by the victims offending a religion.

Word count: 424

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Oct. 2016.

## Essay 2 Selecting texts

Hi Professor Karmani,

I chose Martha Nussbaum's "Veiled Threats" as my lens essay and Nancy J.

Hirschmann's "Eastern Veiling, Western Freedom?" as my target text.

The two texts are similar in how both authors are feminists, assessing how the veiling of women should be treated in terms of "(upholding) the notion of freedom", quoted by Hirschmann, or similarly put by Nussbaum, in terms of "(upholding people's) search for life's ultimate meaning... conscience". Nussbaum is against the banning of the veil, and Hirschmann implies the same conclusion, even going one step further by urging "feminists from all contexts be able to make critical evaluations of different kinds of freedom and oppression (488)". That additional step leads to my working thesis, which is how despite the text's similarities, the lens text is inadequate in shining a new light to the target text, as the target text also analyzes how the veiling is interpreted under non-Western sense of values.

Out of the three possible target texts, I liked the aforementioned text as Hirschmann tried to make balanced argument about the issue, which related to "Veiled Threats". I probably understand and like the philosophy-rich framework behind "Veiled Threats" more than those of the other two lens texts.

On a side note, I might have considered choosing Malik's "Enemies of Free Speech", if the lens text were either "Terror in Paris" or "Unmournable Bodies", as they are all about the same issue.

Word count: 237

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\* I may have forced my argument.

### Essay 2 Draft: Threats to Western Freedom?

Modern Europe has been seeing developments discussing the ban of Muslim veils in public (Nussbaum 1). The key question here is what the Western perception of the veil entails in their upholding of 'freedom'. In her *Review of Politics* article, "Eastern Veiling, Western Freedom?" Nancy J. Hirschmann addresses to Westerners feminists and non-feminists who regard the veil as "the ultimate symbol, if not tool, of gender oppression in Islamic cultures" (461), criticizing their misunderstandings and analyzing how their conceptualization came arose from a long history of societal debt by patriarchal norms (461). While there is certainly merit in arguing that feminists should be able to critically evaluate "different kinds of freedom and oppression" in order achieve "feminist account of freedom", Hirschmann's overall argument hinges on a framework that is rather theoretical (488). This is not to say that what she proposes is not unachievable. A helpful framework that addresses some of these real-life concerns can be found Nussbaum's New York Times article, "Veiled Threats?". Nussbaum argues that the West, as a society that respects freedom of conscience, must accommodate different religious observances. Drawing on the ideas of Nussbaum, I will argue that conceptualizing freedom unbounded from patriarchal values is more difficult and less effective then achieving freedom through Nussbaum's accommodationist approach, as it avoids making assumptions about

other cultures in the name of “global feminism”, it addresses some of the common human rights issue the world faces, and it can be applied more flexibly to diverse countries.

Hirschmann assumes that the Western conception of freedom cannot be applied to other countries. One example of this is where she believes in the West’s “fairly” universal reaction to the practice of veiling. Just like how the veil holds diverse meaning in Muslim countries, reaction depends on each Western country (466). In Nussbaum’s case, although there is an assumption that “all human beings are equal bearers of human dignity” (Nussbaum 1), Hirschmann admits that that level of conception of freedom is fairly universal. This is because Nussbaum treats the veil along with the issue of protecting basic human rights of freedom, whereas Hirschmann conflating the veil into a gender-based issue. Also, Hirschmann urges Western scholars the need to be self-critical (465), which is not plausible as even she suggests that most of them are inherently limited within a Western feminist lens. In this case, it is more manageable to conceptualize freedom under a well-established accommodationist principle by Roger Williams, as supported by Nussbaum (Nussbaum 2). The implication of Hirschmann’s theoretical concept of freedom across the globe is therefore strenuous in its actual application.

Word count: around 420

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11 July 2010. Web. 09 Oct. 2016.

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### Essay 2 Final Draft: Freedom to What Extent?

In 2005, a Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published twelve caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed, including an image of him “[...] wearing a turban in the form of a bomb” (Malik 40). This is now known as the Danish cartoons controversy, as Islam prohibits depiction of the Prophet, provoking a debate in Europe about to what extent should free speech be limited. According to Kenan Malik, a prominent English theorist, high-profile individuals condemned the publication, notably Bill Clinton, as “totally outrageous cartoons against Islam”, and “Franco Frattini, EU Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security”, claimed that “these kinds of drawing[s] can add to the growing Islamophobia in Europe (Malik 42). On the other hand, those who support the publication, particularly Flemming Rose, an editor of the newspaper, notes that members of “the modern secular society [...] must be ready to put up with insults, mockery, and ridicule” (41), where “Muslims have as much right to offend, to abuse [...]” Rose’s “[...] beliefs, as he has to offend theirs” (48). Malik argues in his *Index on Censorship* article, “Enemies of Free Speech”, that *Jyllands-Posten* “ostensibly defend free speech, but do so only in tribal terms “ and its critics “...ostensibly defend liberties, and Muslims, but only by constraining free speech” (53). He further argues that to achieve freedom of speech, the West’s “[d]ouble standards need to be confronted, not by extending restrictions but by extending speech” (50). While there is certainly merit in arguing that freedom of speech should



be revamped by “extending speech”, Malik’s overall argument hinges on a framework that focuses on protecting freedom of speech more than offending minorities such as Muslims (50). Following his argument will not effectively help society achieve “free speech, [...] liberty, [...] our essential humanness”. This is not to say that free speech should be restricted but to stress that extension of speech should be controlled in a way that does not unintentionally persecute Muslims. A helpful framework that addresses some of these real-life concerns can be found in Nussbaum’s *New York Times* article, “Veiled Threats?”. Nussbaum’s article compares two approaches to achieving freedom. One approach is to make laws, “... that do not penalize religious belief...[and are] non-discriminatory” (Nussbaum 2). The other, which she supports as the “accommodationist principle”, exempts religious minorities from “laws [that] are always made by majorities” (2). Crucially, Nussbaum frames the discussion as an address to unintentionally but inherently discriminative society. Drawing on the ideas of Nussbaum, I will argue that society should “treat people with equal respect”, which can be done by encouraging freedom of religious conscience and practice along with “extending speech” (Nussbaum 1)(Malik 50). This respect is necessary in order to protect minorities, particularly Muslims, who are subject to discrimination by the people, politics, and media in Western society.

“Extending speech” is crucial in contemporary Western society, where the majority tend to discriminate the Muslims, giving no room for them to speak up on behalf of their right (50). This is because the West, according to Malik, has a “double standard” in defending free speech. For instance, he suggests that Jyllands-Posten’s refusal “[...] to publish cartoons about Jesus by the caricaturist Christoffer Zieler” is hypocritical. What this means is that the newspaper takes advantage of freedom of speech in order to stir Islamophobia, but rejects criticism of Christianity. Nussbaum

suggests that this is one way “[...] laws [,freedom of speech in this case, ] in a democracy [...] naturally embody[ies] majority ideas of convenience [...] they may turn out to be very unfair to minorities”. This is why freedom of speech should be extended in a way that eliminates this double standard.

Malik’s argument differs from that of Nussbaum when it comes to how minority voices should be treated though. Malik argues that special consideration for Muslim’s “[...] own religious feelings [...] ” is not significant (41). He claims that Muslims in this case this demand “[...] is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech” (41). However, Nussbaum claims that “when people are forced to affirm convictions that they may not hold, the faculty with which people search for life’s ultimate meaning- frequently called ‘conscience’ ...[...]can be seriously damaged”. The Muslim’s faculty is damaged in this case as Malik’s argument implies that since the Prophet can be depicted in the name of free speech, Muslims should be able to accept people who depict the Prophet. This faculty can be protected since the Muslims do have the right to believe that the Prophet should not be depicted. Protection of this faculty, according to Nussbaum, will make sure that both those who support Jyllands-Posten and those who are part of the Muslim minority, “are equal bearers of human dignity”, which is what she claims to be the cornerstone of Western “[...] political philosophy” (1).

Political discrimination against Muslims is another signal that society should extend free speech. Under Nussbaum’s argument, another time when conscience “[...] can be seriously damaged ...[is] when people are prevented from outward observances required by their beliefs” (1). Malik mentions several cases where this happened, “[f]rom Geert Wilder’s campaign to outlaw the Quran, to Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s support for the Swiss ban on the building of minarets, to Martin Amis’s ‘thought

experiment' on how ' the Muslim community will have to suffer until it get its house in order'" (Malik 50). This is because by calling the state to ban the minority's religious practices, the Western society is not ensuring that "[...] human beings are equal bearers of human dignity" (Nussbaum 1).

However, "extending speech" is not enough. Granted, Malik has a point in arguing that we should not concede to minorities' demand in limiting offensive speeches. It may be true that without exchange of conflicting speeches, in the long run, the West would not come to tolerate different religion in a sense of appreciating diversity but in a sense of staying ignorant about other religions. Nevertheless, what Malik proposes would not encourage freedom of religious conscience, preventing society to accommodate minorities and thus creating inequality in their freedom of speech. His argument only applies to speech and not actual religious observances, which Nussbaum claims in her article as an integral aspect of creating "[...] a society committed to equal liberty" (Nussbaum 5).

Finally, the media is discriminating minorities by misrepresenting them, which should also be addressed by both "extending speech" and encouraging freedom of religious conscience and practice. This is the case since misrepresentation of minorities occur, according to Malik, due to "[t]he idea of a 'clash of civilizations' ", where "[...] the views of radical Islamists represented that of all Muslims[...]" for both those hostile to Islam and "[...] the fiercest critics of the 'clash of civilizations' thesis" (Malik 51). The nature of both sides of this debate believing in radical Islamists comes from them misinterpreting "[...] what is often in reality a debate within the [Muslim] community [... as] offensive to the [Muslim] community itself." (52). Malik does not call for a society " that keeps quiet and refrain from saying things that others may not care to hear" but call for a society that "[...] tolerate things

for which we do not care”, which can be done only by respecting each other’s freedom of religious conscience and practice. Only by doing so, society can come to tolerate differences in a constructive sense.

Malik has a point in arguing that “extending speech” is the main component in solving media’s misrepresentation of minorities (50). Nevertheless, this would not be enough as neglecting freedom of religious conscience and practice may perpetuate media to keep misrepresenting minority groups. For example, it is wrong for society to let Danish media avoid picking up “[...] voices such as Simsek’s”, who “[...] were happy to see the publication of the cartoons”, just because the media are not violating freedom of speech. In this case, the “respect to conscience” for Muslim minority is clearly being ignored (Nussbaum 1). Only by creating an atmosphere that encourages media to pick up various spectrum of argument in the Muslim minority, can society begin to dissolve “[t]he idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’ (51).

In conclusion, this essay does not argue that society should not extend speech freedom of speech (50). Neither does it hold that Western liberal democracy is inherently flawed. Instead it sets forth the position that to apply freedom of speech in a way that effectively assures that people’s dignity is treated “[...] with equal respect” in a society where prejudice and double standards are prevalent, freedom of conscience and practices must also be assured (Nussbaum 1). Fundamentally, what matters is that people ensure each other’s free speech, liberty, and essential humanness, as claimed by Malik (53). In the short term, this would mean making sure that the majority’s freedom of speech is not preserved by the expense of minorities’ right, but by also ensuring minorities’ freedom of speech. In the longer term, this must be done with equal respect to each other. If we are to get this right, we must be willing to tolerate our difference and avoid being controlled by the double standards

and prejudice that is seen in society today. Ultimately what is at stake here is our ability to work together as “equal bearers of human dignity” (Nussbaum 1).

Word count: 1506

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## Exercise 3.1 Writing an Outline

Hi Professor, I'm interested in researching about how Orientalist attitude is reflected in major American news media when it comes to portraying 9/11.

As an American, I wanted my research topic to be related to debates about Islam in America. Although I easily came up with topic such as Islamophobia in the U.S., given that this topic is not always discussed in a context of academic debate. This is why Orientalism, as a field of research, seemed to be suitable for me. I am interested in learning more about Orientalism as doing so might be useful during spring semester next year, where I am planning to take a colloquium in "Colonialism and Post-colonialism".

Anna, during the Sunday writing tutorial, advised me to elaborate the research topic in a way would not be inherently biased based on my assumption that Orientalism favors the West. Out of some suggestions she made, I chose to research about how Orientalist attitude, if any, has influenced America, particularly its major media. By doing so, I can become more critical at analyzing information provided by the media. Certainly, I was neither studying about Orientalism nor its effect on society before taking this writing seminar, so I think I will gain considerably from this research topic. I chose 9/11, as there are comprehensive news articles about the event that I can access to relatively easily.

As far as I have discussed with Anna, I am planning to read the introduction for Edward Said's, "Orientalism", refer to the course text, "Covering Islam" also by Said, and 9/11-related online commentaries from CNN and Fox News Channel (which I perceive respectively as liberal-leaning and conservative-leaning news outlets). I am thinking of using commentaries (or something like them) below, as they are about analyzing 9/11's consequences:

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/08/opinions/september-11-al-qaeda-spectacular-miscalculation-bergen/>

<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2016/09/09/newt-gingrich-911-anniversary-15-years-strategic-defeat-dishonesty-and-humiliation.html>



Exercise 3.2 Identifying a Primary text

Hi Professor Karmani,

I have two potential texts, which are "Orientalism" and "Covering Islam", both written by Edward Said. I am currently reading both texts' introduction, which would most likely be the section of the book that I will use as a primary text.

As I have mentioned in class, my topic is on Orientalism and to what extent it can be seen in American politics or media. I will most likely be focusing on how either Obama, Hillary, or Trump's political statements reflect Orientalism to a varying extent, and see what implication that has to America as a society

## Exercise 3.3 Committing to a primary text

Hi Professor Karmani,

I've decided to commit to the introductory section (page 1 to 28) of *Orientalism* by Edward W. Said. I have chosen this text because I will refer to this text to define what I mean by Orientalist discourse in my essay.

This text is a response to the post-WWII American academia, media, and government's Orientalist discourse in interacting with the "Arab/Islam" (as well as that of pre-war British and French), which Said personally is distraught by.

He is arguing against the way the West takes advantage of Orientalism, which he defines as a Western "...corporate institution... for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient". I believe that this is a useful concept in framing American political discourse against Islam and the Middle East.

In this text, the writer's central argument is that there is a "formidable [Orientalist] structure of cultural domination and ...[that there are] dangers of employing this structure upon [Americans] themselves and others [Muslims in Arab]"

What I find most striking about this text is how the author claims that Orientalism is naturally influenced by politics and culture (page 12).

Another aspect that I find striking is how the author criticizes the methodology which Orientalist academics used to reach their conclusions.

While I agree that Orientalist discourse can be seen in American academic and media, both of which he respectively goes in depth in "Orientalism" and "Covering Islam", I am not sure to what extent this discourse applies to recent American politics, especially Hillary Clinton's and Donald Trump's discourse on Islam and the Middle East.

For this essay, I want to argue that while Clinton and Trump have different policies toward the Middle East, they both formed Orientalist discourses during the 2016 general election cycle.

I hope to provide evidence that both candidate's rhetoric against the Middle East, although Trump's being more explicit and derogatory, have similar nuance when deconstructed.

I believe that this will shed light on how major American political parties have a consensus in making " 'Islam' as a kind of scapegoat for everything we do not happen to like about the world's political, social, and economical patterns" (said p. lv of *Covering Islam's Introduction to vintage edition*"), and the need for the American voters to recognize Orientalist discourse as a bias that American politics has toward the Middle East.

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### Essay 3 Draft 1: His Inconvenient Truth Unveiled

There has been an extensive study of Islam in America after World War II, succeeding studies about it done previously in Great Britain and France (Said 17). The study has significantly influenced the relationship between American and the Islam, especially after globally influential events such as the Iranian revolution and U.S. embassy hostage crisis and 9/11. Among some prominent scholars in the study, there is Karen Armstrong, an Islamic historian, defends the Quran's compatibility with gender equality by claiming, "the emancipation of women was a project dear to the Prophet's heart" (73). However, there is Robert Spencer, a Islamic and Middle East Historian, who is actively questions Islam's compatibility with "the West". In one of his chapters in his 2002 book "Islam Unveiled", titled "Does Islam Respect Women?", he argues against historians who defend Islam from being labeled as misogynist religion. For example His main argument is that despite historians like Armstrong interpreting the Quran in a way that make it compatible within Western definition of gender equality, the Quran is inherently treating men as superiors and women as inferiors. While there is certainly merit in arguing that the gender inequality is not totally achieved in Islamic countries, Spencer's overall argument hinges on a frame work that inherently demonize Islam. Summarily, he extensively cites the Quran, major hadiths and historical examples to demonstrate this, but in a

way that neglects the context of these sources by conflating diverse population in the Islamic countries and “the West”, manipulating the sources, and citing inaccurate evidences. This is not to say that his debate is not of value, but to stress that his arguments are invalid. A helpful framework that addresses Spencer’s heavy bias can be found in the work of “Orientalism” and “Covering Islam”, both written by Edward Said, a Palestinian-American Historian. He argues that American historians (such as Spencer) perpetuates “Orientalism”, which he defines as a Western “[...]corporate institution [... ] for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (2). Said also points out that they can conflate Islam to a monolithic entity, despite the diversity of people in the Muslim world. Crucially, Said frames the discussion as a “formidable [Orientalist] structure of cultural domination and ...[that there are] dangers of employing this structure upon [Americans] themselves and others [Muslims in Arab]” Drawing on Said’s framework, I will argue in this essay that, through analyzing his chapter’s subtopics on “What the hadiths say (75)”, “Domestic servitude (78)”, “Polygamy (80)”, “Divorce (84)”, “Female circumcision (87)”, and “A different understanding of rape (88)”, Robert Spencer hold little objective view in criticizing Islam on women, and that perpetuating such Orientalist discourse poses danger to the readers who are not necessarily knowledgeable enough to recognize his logical flaws and reject his seemingly persuasive argument (Said 287).

“What the hadiths say (75)”,

“Domestic servitude (78)”,

“Polygamy (80)”,

“Divorce (84)”,

“Female circumcision (87)”,

“ A different understanding of rape (88)”,

In conclusion...

We can see how, as writer Dany Doueiri suggests, Spencer inherently assumes in the Quran and Hadith driving evil actions attributed to Islam by the West (129).

Word count: around 500

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(To be made)

review of islam unveiled by Doueiri:

[http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837331?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837331?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

orientalism

covering islam

islam unveiled

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### Essay 3 Final Draft: His Ignorant Side Unveiled

There has been an extensive study on Islam and Muslims in the American media since World War II, (Said 17, xi). The study has significantly influenced the relationship between America and the Islam, especially after historical events such as the Iranian revolution, the Iran hostage crisis, and 9/11. Among some prominent scholars in the study, there is John L. Esposito, a professor of Islamic studies who claims in his book “What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam” that “Many of the questions [about Islam], which have come from people in very diverse audiences, reflect a predisposition to believe that there is something profoundly wrong with Islam and Muslims” (xv). Likewise, Karen Armstrong, an Islamic historian, defends the Quran’s compatibility with pursuing gender equality in political, social, and economical status, by claiming, “the emancipation of women was a project dear to the Prophet’s heart” (Spencer 73). However, Robert Spencer, an Islamic and Middle East Historian, actively questions Islam’s compatibility with “the West”. In one of the chapters of his 2002 book “Islam Unveiled”, titled “ Does Islam Respect Women?”, he argues against historians who defend Islam from being labeled as misogynist religion. His main argument is that despite historians such as Armstrong interpreting the Quran in a way that makes it compatible within Western definition of gender equality, the Quran is “[...] susceptible to being hijacked [...] by chauvinists [... as]



Muslims lack a mechanism for bringing what they consider to be the words of Almighty God into line with modern circumstances” (73). While there is certainly merit in arguing that some verses in the Qur’an and Hadith suggest oppression of women, Spencer’s overall argument hinges on a framework that is grounded on Islam and Muslim’s inherent suppression of women’s rights. This is not to say that Christianity and Judaism prize gender equality less than Islam, but to stress that Muslims respect women as much as Christians and Jews do. A helpful framework that addresses Spencer’s criticism of Islam and Muslims can be found in the work of “Orientalism” and “Covering Islam”, both written by Edward Said, a Palestinian-American Historian. He argues that American historians such as Spencer perpetuates “Orientalism”, which he defines as a Western “[...]corporate institution [...] for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient [which covers Asia in general but more specifically Islamic countries in this case]” (2). Said also points out that Orientalists like him intentionally conflate Islam as well as “the West”, which is comprised mainly of Christianity and Judaism, into a monolithic entity. The diversity of people in the Muslim world is being crudely ignored. Crucially, Said frames the discussion as a “formidable [Orientalist] structure of cultural domination and ...[that there are] dangers of employing this structure upon [Americans] themselves and others [Muslims in Arab]”. Drawing on Said’s framework, I will argue in this essay that, based on quotations in the Quran and Hadith that support gender equality, the adaptation of the Quran and Hadith to modern societies, and the promotion of gender equality by various Muslim population, the majority of houses in Islam and Muslims of great diversity do respect women.

Contrary to what Spencer argues about Islam being against women, the Quran and Hadith contains verses that support gender equality. First, Spencer cites Sura

2:228, 4:34, and 2:223 respectively that “[...] ‘men have a status above women’ [...] ‘Men have authority over women because God has made one superior to the other’ [...] ‘Women are your fields; go, then, into your fields whence you please’”.

However, there are more important verses in the Quran that happens to treat women as equals. For example, Esposito cites a different version of 4:34, which translate to: “Men have responsibility for and priority for women[...]” where ‘priority refers to “[...] men’s socioeconomic responsibilities for women” (98). Granted, Spencer does have a point in claiming that oppression of women is associated with Islam. However the lack of women’s rights, according to Esposito may be caused more significantly by other factors such as lack of education, literacy, and economic developments in some Islamic countries, especially for women (102). He further claims that, “Nowhere in the Quran does it say that all men are superior to, preferred over, or better than all women” (98). Also, Said points out that the approach similar to Spencer in citing these two sources and therefore making “[...]the average reader come[...] to see Islam and[...]” gender inequality as “[...]essentially the same thing[...]” is a kind of generalization that “[...] is the most irresponsible sort, and could never be used for religious, cultural, or demographic group [...]”(xvi, xv). There is no evil intention in the Quran and Hadith that dictates female oppression especially when historical context is taken into account.

Historically, Islam pushed gender equality, although Spencer does not focus on this in his text. Spencer claims that Muhamma...d exemplified lack of female rights in Islam as he had multiple wives (82). However, his intention could have been to accommodate husband-less wife though polygamy in order to protect them (Esposito 16). Furthermore, “in pre-Islamic Arabia[...] women were considered inferior, had no rights, and were treated like servants (Esposito 112)”. “[...]he revelation of Islam

raised the status of women by prohibiting female infanticide, abolishing women's status as property, and establishing women's legal capacity" (Esposito 97). Spencer does point out another rule in Sura 2:282 which suggests that one male witness in a court can only be compensated by two female witnesses (75). However, Esposito argues that contemporary scholars have interpreted this as a way for women to be able deal with men who have advantages in court case due to a patriarchal environment. It can be said that it was more due to the patriarchal framework that Islam was operated in which led to current cases of female oppression. Spencer must be aware of these recent scholarly debate, which means that the one-sided argument he presented in his text is "cynically designed and promoted to exploit [...] fear" of his novice readers (Said xxvi).

Although Spencer claims that the Quran and Hadith are not being adapted to current society like how Christianity and Judaism are, most interpretation of the texts shows otherwise. For example, Spencer claims that the tolerance of polygamy as an absurdity that "encourages seeing women as commodities" since polygamy is not tolerated in the West (84). This does not necessarily mean that polygamy automatically "[...] can't be good" (Said xxx). For Spencer to deem so could be considered as his "[...] total inability to grant that the Islamic peoples are entitled to their own cultural, political, and historical practices[...]" (Said xxx). In fact, Esposito argues that Quran 4:13 and 4:129 "[...] together prohibit polygamy and that the true "Quranic ideal is monogamy." During the seventh century when the Quran was written, Arabia "[...] was the scene of frequent tribal wars and combat (Esposito 112). "When men were killed in battle, it was almost impossible for their widows and orphans, or unmarried sisters or nieces, to survive without their male protector (Esposito 112)." It is true that some Islam scholars interpreting the Quran and hadith

do not ensure mutual relationship, and that a small minority of Islamic countries suppress women's rights (Esposito 101). However, this is the case as most of these interpretations were created in pre-twenty-first century patriarchal environments, where recent Islam scholars, including females, have "brought numerous significant reforms for women's rights in both the public and the private spheres" (Esposito 101). In that sense, the way Spencer tries to distinguish Islam from Christianity and Judaism, even though gender inequality is a universal problem, seems to be unfair. It is more natural to think of gender inequality leading to institutions that facilitate it, rather than relying on an Orientalist attitude which asserts that Qurans and hadiths are the root causes of the problem.

Another criticism that Spencer makes it seem unique for Islam, rather than being a global problem, is on domestic violence towards women. The way Spencer argues that Muslim scholars of various spectrum "acknowledges' that husbands have the right to beat their wives is misleading about Muslim scholars, especially when he cites Sura 4:34 which notes that "Good women are obedient[...]" (78). In reality, there are both verses in Quran interpretations of Sura 4:34 that "[...] 'obedience' refers to the woman's attitude toward God, not toward her husband". It is true that some Islam scholars interpret the Quran to have some sort of violence against women. However, this kind of argument is mainly from "conservative and fundamentalist forces of Muslim interpreters [...]", not the consensus of Muslims of wide spectrum (Esposito 100, Spencer 75). Moreover, the implication of criticisms such as his, which according to Said is a process of "first demoniz[ing] and dehumanize[ing] Muslims" and then comparing them to Americans sets of values, is a tendency of the media to make "connection between Arabs, Muslims..." and violence, in this case violence against women (xiv). Taking Said's words, it is questionable of Spencer to claim that

the particular interpretation of the Quran and the Hadith applies to Muslims, all billions “ of them, from Morocco to Uzbekistan [...] ” (xix).

Finally, contrary to how Spencer questions about Muslims contributing to gender equality, a variety of Muslims do support gender equality. Although he claims that “certainly some Muslims have taken to misogyny with gusto”, Islam has the capacity to respect women, and Muslims are certainly pushing for gender equality. Consider the 2007 Gallup World Poll, which shows that “[...] majorities of Muslims, some in the most conservative Muslim societies, support women’s equal rights” (Esposito 102). How gender equality is treated and debated about is different in each of the various Islamic countries. Certainly, Spencer is hinting from the title of his chapter “Does Islam Respect Women?” that in general, “Muslims lack” respect toward women. Said criticizes attitude similar to how Spencer’s as a portrayal of “the whole of Islam as basically outside the known, familiar, acceptable world that ‘we’ inhabit” with “the fraudulent use of etymology to make huge cultural points about an entire set of peoples” (xxx). Also, Spencer is making similar argument as what Said criticizes of Bernard Lewis as a (xv) “the mere use of the label ‘Islam’ [...] being a form of attack [...] ‘Islam’ defines a relatively small portion of what actually takes place in the Islamic world ”. Thus it is unconvincing of him to persuade the Orientalist notion that Muslims in general are against gender inequality.

Another point Spencer uses for his argument against Muslim men are taking advantage of rules about divorce in the Quran, which seemingly favor men over women, but this is also up for a complex argument. Although Spencer admits “[...] that the West’s present-day record on this issue [of divorce] is dismal”, he persists to claim that “[...] Islam cannot take the moral high ground here [...]” (Spencer 85). There is not just religious but more importantly the long history of economical,

political, and social factors that contributes to such trends. In the case of divorce favoring men, according to Esposito, the trend “[...] originate not from Islam but from patriarchy, which is still a strong force in many societies.” (117). Granted, there is truth to him arguing that “To achieve a divorce, all a man has to do is pronounce his wife with the famous triple declaration: “You are divorced, you are divorced, you are divorced” (85). However, he neglected to mention the “[...] requirement given in the Quran that in order to make his divorce irrevocable a husband must pronounce “I divorce you”[...] three times[...] once each successive month for a period of three months”, which will invalidate what he claimed as a nature of Islam’s divorce rule (Esposito 117). Based on how Spencer seems to ignore certain aspects of debate about Islam and women, Dany Doueiri, Spencer’s critic, criticize Spencer for asserting a premise in his book that “[...] the evil actions, unethical practices, intolerant behavior and promiscuous conduct that Muslims commit and believe in [...] are inspired and ordained by unquestionably legitimate Islamic sources, abundantly found in the Qur’an, the authentic Hadith collections, and the writings of Mainstream Muslim scholars across the centuries (129).” Thus, Islam has the capacity to have fair procedure for divorce, and what Spencer is exhibiting with his argument is an intentional ignorance of diverse argument within the Islamic community for the sake of keeping his argument seemingly persuasive.

In conclusion, this essay does not argue that Islam respects women better than any other religion. Neither does it hold that the Quran and hadith is free of chauvinist notions. Instead it sets forth a position that Islam, just like Christianity and Judaism and most other religion and especially followers of the religions themselves, strive to achieve wellbeing of people regardless of their gender. This is not to advocate that all cultural and legal practices in Islamic countries uncritically, but to maintain that they

are in the progressing of promoting more female rights, which is encouraged by the Quran and recent hadiths. Fundamentally, what matters is not solely about how the Islamic texts are being interpreted, but rather on how effectively the interpretation contributes to gender equality. Nonetheless, the abundance of American discourse in criticizing Islamic women's rights have both short and long term implications. In the short term, America needs to abandon what might be their " consensus on 'Islam" as a kind of scape-goat for everything we do not happen to like about the world's political, social, and economical patterns' " as noted by Said (lv). Said further argues that "Today's climate favors [...] Islam to be a menace" and this argument can be an insight on why Orientalist arguments like that of Spencer's, despite its uncritical argument, is popular or at least controversial in America (xx). In the longer term, the American populace will need to become more knowledgeable the complexity of issue in Islamic female rights in order to reduce American's Orientalist-based prejudice toward Islam and Muslims. If we are to get this right, we must also accept difference between different cultures, appreciating how that difference arose from different economical, social, and political context. Ultimately what is at stake here is that improving society's respect toward women is a priority not only in Islamic countries, but also in every other nation.

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