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**No Muslims Allowed?
An analysis of the State of Pluralism in the
West**

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PARECER DE DISSERTAÇÃO

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O Orientador



Abstract

This dissertation analyses the political and legal reactions that Muslim communities are currently experiencing in contemporary Western countries against the backdrop of shifting and narrowing definitions of pluralism and democracy. The objective is to emphasize that the real threat to liberal democracies around the world is not only Islamic extremism, but also the continuation of policy-making decisions anchored on a misunderstanding of Islam and of Muslims in the West. As such, this work examines the political and cultural mood of several countries in Europe and North America, analyses the current social realities for Muslims in the West, explores the concept of human rights in Islamic sources, and considers various opinions – including Muslim voices – on the relationship between Islam and the West. The aim is to escape the divisive dialogue that pits one ‘civilization’ against another, and contribute to a conversation that understands the urgent need for solutions to the escalating tensions being experienced today.

Résumé

Cette dissertation analyse les réactions politiques et juridiques vécues actuellement par les communautés musulmanes dans les pays occidentaux contemporains, face au retour en arrière et aux limitations qui marquent les définitions de pluralisme et de démocratie. L'objectif est de souligner que la menace réelle aux démocraties libérales dans le monde n'est pas seulement l'Islamisme radical, mais aussi la continuation d'un processus de décision enraciné dans une incompréhension de l'Islam et des musulmans en Occident. À ce titre, ce travail examine l'atmosphère politique et culturelle de différents pays européens et nord-américains, analyse les réalités sociales actuelles des musulmans en Occident, explore le concept de droits de l'Homme au sein des sources islamiques, et considère diverses opinions — y compris des voix musulmanes — à propos des relations entre l'Islam et l'Occident. Le but est ici d'échapper à un dialogue basé sur la division, opposant une "civilisation" à une autre, et de contribuer à lancer une conversation qui comprenne la nécessité de solutions à l'escalade de tensions vécue aujourd'hui.

Resumo

Esta dissertação estuda as reacções políticas e jurídicas vividas pelas comunidades islâmicas nos países ocidentais contemporâneos, frente ao retrocesso e ao estreitamento das definições de pluralismo e democracia. O objectivo é de sublinhar que a ameaça real às democracias liberais no mundo não é apenas o radicalismo islâmico, mas também a continuação de processos decisoriais enraizados na incompreensão do Islão e dos muçulmanos pelo Ocidente. Como tal, este trabalho examina o ambiente político e cultural de vários países na Europa e na América do Norte, aprofunda as realidades sociais actuais dos muçulmanos no Ocidente, explora o conceito de direitos humanos nas fontes islâmicas, e considera várias opiniões — incluindo vozes muçulmanas — sobre as relações entre o Islão e o Ocidente. O objectivo é de escapar a um diálogo marcado pela divisão que aponta uma "civilização" contra uma outra, e contribuir para um entendimento que possa incluir a necessidade urgente de soluções à escalada de tensões presenciada nos nossos dias.

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“Above all, critical thought does not submit to state power or to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another approved enemy.”

- Edward Said

Introduction

There are strangers in the land. Foreigners who do not speak our language and who collectively pose a threat to our values and the essence of our democracy. They are mobilized and destructive. They are radical, ideological, and often, their political convictions are anchored on misleading claims. Their principles are divisive and archaic in nature. These strangers are growing in numbers. They defend a breed of religiosity that fails to acknowledge the pluralism of modern societies. They rely on a fluctuating defense of human rights, to justify of course, the promotion of whichever interest is at stake. Despite honourable speeches and public comments, their policies lead to a hierarchy of social classes, and multiple definitions of permitted citizenship. They interpret their religious and political texts incorrectly. They believe an invasion is coming and that they are the protectors of a civilization under siege. These strangers have names. They are the anti-immigration political parties of Western Europe. They are the neo-conservative movements in North America. They are the misinformed voices in Western media. They are the populist politicians that govern using fear. And, they are the scholars and writers that are entirely comfortable promoting academic racism in the name of defending a flawed version of democracy.

Democracies all over the Western world are struggling to manage their pluralistic environments in the midst of a continued Islamic presence. This dissertation will defend the view that the actions being taken by Western governments and its citizens in response to a wide range of concerns are undemocratic, irresponsible, and ultimately counterproductive. These so-called solutions are being manifested through legal and political means: headscarf, veil and burqa bans, the limiting of religion in public spaces, referendums on building minarets, disputes over locations of mosques, Quran-burning controversies, and legislation threatening the delivery of government services. While these policies aim to satisfy and reduce the anxiety of the general public, in reality, they do not tackle the authentic and legitimate threat that does exist – which is the use of violence by extreme religious fundamentalists. This work will defend the position that the current policies being adopted in the West are simply

eliminating the symptoms of the Islamic religious fundamentalist movement that is in no way in keeping with the great majority of Muslims in the West.

Earlier research (Pipes, 1990) reminds us that from the battle of Ajnadayn in 634 until the Suez crisis in 1956, misunderstanding, military hostility, and violence have always defined the crux of the Christian-Muslim relationship. Despite this history, today – more than at any other time – the place of Islam within Western democratic societies has become a central political issue. Questions concerning how much of Islam will be tolerated are being asked and challenged from different segments of the population. As Martin Luther King once explained, “An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal” (University of Pennsylvania, 2010). Eliminating the visibility of Islam – a religion and culture that is severely misunderstood – does not make Western societies anymore safer, democratic, or just.

It is time for a discussion to take place free from the marginal opinions that exist at both extremes. This conversation is in desperate need of progressive, sensible, and responsible voices that reject the politics of fear and emotional claims that only hijack the work of those who aim to find authentic solutions. This dissertation is an attempt to contribute to that international discussion and will be organized as follows:

The first chapter is meant to provide the context for the entire dissertation. It aims to highlight the global events that I believe are shaping the reactionist policies of countries of the West.

The second chapter will take a look at the political mood in the West and will underline the existing manifestation (purposefully or not) of creating the Muslim “other.”

The third chapter is an attempt to describe what Islam is, focusing on breaking apart the flawed perception of Islam as a violent, monolithic, and regressive entity.

The fourth chapter tackles the issue of human rights in the Islamic context. The intention here is to challenge the idea that secular societies are the only vehicles to attain human rights.

Chapter five discusses the concepts of democracy, tolerance and pluralism; it is a criticism on how several Western countries are contributing to fluctuating definitions

of those terms. In essence, this is the chapter where the policies or decisions taken by governments and citizens are separated and highlighted.

Chapter six provides insights from numerous individuals – both Muslim and non-Muslim – giving voice to the spectrum of opinion from around the world on Muslim issues.

Finally, the last chapter discusses potential solutions to questions arising from multiculturalism, immigration, and pluralism in the West. The answers, I argue, are to be found on a rejection of Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilization” theory.

I conclude with a call to embrace a fresh and more profound international conversation – one that, when dealing with the question of Islam, promotes genuine commonalities instead of stressing our differences.

If we set aside all the nonsensical academic and political noise, the question with regard to Muslims living in Western countries becomes: do we, in the West, want to continue to build a diverse and pluralistic society? If the answer is no, there are consequences to building such a society, and I contend this direction is counter to the fundamental values and principles of democracy. However, if the answer is yes – which seems to be the general consensus – then there cannot be a set of political, social, and legal requirements for one minority group and not others.

If secularism is going to be a core and unchanging value in our societies, then the link between religion and state needs to be eliminated for all religions, and not just the ones that make us uncomfortable. If we are going to defend any form of secularism then the religions that are constitutionally ingrained in the countries of the West needs to be divorced from the public space and purse. If defending women’s rights is deemed important, then we should be removing all the societal barriers that limit Western women from contributing equally to business, politics and the general social order. More importantly, we should ensure that we are paying Western women the same wage and salary that we pay men for equivalent jobs.

Finally, it needs to be recognized that culture is fluid – it is always changing and adapting. Immigration is constant and nowadays is even necessary for some Western countries to remain competitive. The global village is upon us. Muslims, like other religions and cultures are already a part of Western life. The times call for a more

profound conversation – a second Enlightenment – that aims to find solutions that accommodate all kinds of differences in contemporary societies.

Definitions

One of the unfortunate outcomes of academia is the reality that discourse at times can create dichotomies that do not actually exist or exaggerate the ones that do. I believe this is the case with the usage of the terms “Islam” and the “West.” Although opinions vary among scholars on the place of “Islam” within democracies of the “West,” there is an inclination for writers on this subject to separate the two traditions. The trouble here is that in the quest for simplicity and organized academic thought, writers and politicians have effectively – whether on purpose or not – divided some of the world’s religions and cultures using artificial understandings. Whether it is due to academic lethargy or an attempt to illustrate differences in the simplest form possible, a forged reality has been created. This is something that is often ignored and in effect adds an additional burden in the effort to deconstruct flawed and socially created concepts of *otherness*. As Barrie Wharton (2008, p.46) suggests, “a serious deficiency in many contemporary studies of the role of Muslim communities in the new Europe is the tendency to generalize and use an overly simplified approach in the definitions applied both to the Muslim community in Europe and to Europe itself.” It is for this reason that it is important to explain my perspective and my point of reference when using some of these loaded and complex terms.

The West

Although the term is often used to represent liberal democracies around the world, the use of this term in this dissertation will only refer to countries in (mainly) Western Europe and in North America. I agree with Mr. Wharton in that the treatment of Western societies as a single entity is a concept that poses serious problems in regard to the inclusion of Muslim communities within it. The countries that make up the West (in this case North American and Western European states) do not all share the same values, policies, or laws. They are individual countries with unique identities and varying differences in the way they manage their people within their borders. Despite

their differences, it must be acknowledged that these countries are knotted in a relationship that involves trade, currency, and religion (among others). Therefore, when I refer to “the West,” these are primarily the two regions of the world in which I am attempting to analyze.

Muslims

For the purposes of this dissertation, when a reference is made to Muslims, I intend to include all Muslims: radical fundamentalists, moderates, Muslims who deem themselves non-religious and everyone else in between. While I acknowledge the significant differences between the two main sects (Shiites and Sunnis) and other forms of Muslim religious identity, it is not the aim here to explore those cleavages.

According to a 2007 study undertaken by the PEW Research Center (PEW) on the global mapping of Muslims, there are 1.5 billion in the world spread across all livable continents. While at times I make reference to Muslims in a general sense, the main focus of this dissertation is the treatment of Muslims in the West. In other words, when commenting on Muslims (in the context of international policies and government decisions), I am mainly referring to the over 50 million Muslims in Western Europe and North America. Although comprehensions of the realities that exist within Muslim-majority countries (in the Middle East and in Asia) are central to fully understanding the prevailing global challenges and debates that exist within this subject, I am consciously choosing to concentrate solely on Muslims living in the West.

Islam

The definition of “Islam” is often vague, depending on the scholar, politician, journalist or individual involved. As Campanini (2004, p.1) has written, “Islam is of course a religion. That seems to be an obvious, even banal remark ... [but] using the word religion to define Islam is, if not a mistake, at least rather imprecise.” In this dissertation references to Islam should not be assumed to encompass a religious connotation only. In addition to the prominent role of religion, Islam will refer to a culture (or community of people), a political ideology, and a way of life.

It should also be highlighted that divisions *within* Islam are genuine and important to this international conversation. Ignoring this reality is to reinforce, as Rahman (2009, p.39) asserts “a view of the world in which messy, multiple and interpenetrating histories and identities are pressed into the service of binaries that distort rather than illuminate the political landscape.” Often, political discourse on this subject promotes a rupture between the “advanced, modern, democratic West” and the “regressive, tribal, and non-secular Islam.” That divide is flawed and overstated because it encourages a perception of “good” and “bad” citizens and as Rahman (2009, p.39) points out “fails to account for the ways in which both theoretical discourses attempt to address common questions and dilemmas of politics.” The concept that Western citizens are progressive and modern and that Muslims need to be separated along “moderate” and “radical” lines is a fabricated dichotomy and is in no way endorsed in this dissertation.

Islamic World

In attempting to describe the breadth of the Islamic world, Tariq Ramadan (2007) writes, “From West to North Africa, from Asia to Europe and North America, stretches a rich variety of cultures that make it possible for individuals to respect the principles of Islam while adopting lifestyles, tastes, artistic expression, and feelings that belong quite specifically to one particular culture or another.” Keeping in mind that the foremost concern of this dissertation is the treatment of Muslims in the West, it is important to highlight the extent of Islam throughout the world. Clearly, the different realities for Muslims in different parts of the world contribute to the vital, yet often ignored *Islamic spectrum* that exists globally.

Islamophobia

As defined in several sources (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2004), Islamophobia is the “hatred or fear of Islam or of Muslims, especially as a political force.” Islamophobia corresponds to sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia in areas related to gender, race, sexual orientation and nationality.

Pluralism

The term pluralism is a major part of this work. It is a term that is used in the title of this dissertation and it is a trait that I suggest should be attributed to western democracies. The Canadian Oxford dictionary (2004) defines it as, “a form of society in which the members of minority groups maintain their independent cultural traditions” and where “the toleration or acceptance of a diversity of opinions, values, and theories” is defended. In this dissertation, I contend that the quest for pluralism is a failing concept within several liberal democracies. This, in my opinion is a dangerous social and political trend being experienced around the globe.

Methodology

The review of various different forms of literature serves as the principal foundation for my research. The literature studied for the completion of this dissertation consists of: a wide range of texts, scholarly books, journal articles, official and non-official government documents, press reports from around the world, and speeches. The accumulation of all these materials has led to a review of a variety of opinions on questions concerning Muslims in the West.

Literature Review

To gain a better understanding of the diverse opinions of Islam’s place in the world and the spectrum of opinions concerning its challenges and potentials, I draw on the writings of numerous authors: a variety of individuals spanning the full breath of the political spectrum. Some of the prevalent Muslim voices that I reference are: Tariq Ramadan, Aayan Hirsi Ali, Salim Mansur, and Irshad Manji. I also consider non-Muslim voices such as Michael Radu and Christopher Caldwell. In addition to academic journal articles and books, I also extract opinions from several online news sources across the world. The attempt here was to open myself up to a wide range of outlooks and beliefs and cement my own opinions with this academic and political diversity in mind. I feel this deep analysis has strengthened my understanding of the

questions and concerns facing Muslims in the West, and it has contributed to a much more balanced dissertation.

Theories

Some of the theories that this dissertation uses and explores are: democracy, human rights, pluralism, patriarchy, and immigration theory. These are all in some form or another referred to and drawn upon to either challenge concepts or to defend my convictions. Furthermore, Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" theory (see Figure 1) which is often used in international relations discourse and used to defend the belief that the West and Islam are in a continuous war is entirely rejected in this dissertation.

Time Period

The relationship between the West and Islam is one that spans many decades and has gone through numerous trials and tribulations. Historians suggest that the relationship between both traditions have not always hostile. Some writers have indicated that Islam and the West at times have tolerated each other and in some cases have worked together, especially in areas of trade and commerce. Despite Islam's rich history, this dissertation is concerned with the post-9/11 reality Muslims face. It is crucial to acknowledge the historical interaction between both traditions, but the criticisms I make about policy decisions governments and citizens are making are based on current or recent developments. The historic context will be mentioned at several points in this dissertation, but it is not the intent to undertake a detailed analysis of this storied relationship.

Chapter 1. The Context: A Changing World?

“Democracy is a tedious process, often flawed, requiring patient work for improvement and a lot of luck. Democracy is a journey, rarely a destination to step down and call it over”

Salim Mansur

1.1. A Humble Lesson for a Canadian Student

After nearly 20 years of living in Canada — a place that prides itself on diversity and the fact that the entire world lives within its borders – I believed I was sufficiently culturally well-adjusted and prepared to study the complexities of cultural interactions between peoples. It was my sincere belief that because I had always been accustomed to living among different cultures, languages, and religions there was very little else to learn. I was wrong.

It is not unusual to be served coffee by a woman wearing a headscarf and I, like numerous other Canadians, don't mind that at all. Several of my co-workers, with whom I have daily – in fact – hourly interactions, are of Muslim descent. Not once have I feared for my safety or have felt they were foisting their views on me. I have literally sat on multiple restaurant patios, been a part of discussions at political boardroom tables, and involved in international policy meetings (in Canada, the USA, Portugal, and the Netherlands to name a few) and have witnessed the peaceful co-existence of the West and Islam. I have lost count of the amount of times I have sat beside women dressed in a full burqa on the subway, on the streetcar, or the bus. In essence, every single day, I am provided with a real life portrayal of the Canadian mosaic. The quilt of nations, peacefully living side by side is not just an idea. It is a daily reality for me, and many other Canadians.

In an effort to be entirely transparent, it should be noted that I am a hyphenated Canadian (Portuguese-Canadian), educated within the Catholic tradition. My post-secondary experience afforded me the opportunity to attend two Canadian universities in two very different Canadian provinces (the University of Western Ontario and

McGill University in Ontario and Quebec respectively). I have travelled across Canada, the United States, Mexico, and several countries in Europe. I acknowledge that I am influenced by a mix of Canadian and American popular culture. I am also a gay male, who struggles each day to gain the understanding and support of my traditional and Catholic parents. I value a democratic and pluralistic society where differences in opinion are not just tolerated but embraced. Individual human rights, to me, are not merely a desirable concept; they are a reality that each society should be working towards regardless of their point of reference. I believe in the separation of state and religion, although I acknowledge I am a product of a “public” school system in a Canadian province that still provides fully subsidized Catholic education to its citizens, and I was one of those citizens. I drink alcohol, eat pork, and I think condoms are an essential preventative tool that should be promoted all over the world, including Africa.

What I mentioned above are not prerequisites for a “Western” citizen, but they should serve as critical indicators of what my opinions and convictions are founded. Admittedly, I have never stepped foot inside an Islamic country, although I would love to in the near future. Evidently, my point of reference (politically, culturally and socially) is a “Western” one; yet, my experiences in Canada and through my education, have enabled me to develop an international perspective to living. In other words, I do not defend the belief that the conventional thinking cultivated in the West is the only way to solve international predicaments. More importantly, the challenges and struggles I have faced without question influence my view on minority-majority state of affairs. To me, the language and fear used to deny rights to any sexual, cultural, or religious minority is not significantly different from the current instruments being used against Muslims.

1.2. The Muslims are coming?

Events that shocked the world have been reported internationally since the beginning of the 21st century:

New York City, USA. September 11, 2001. Nineteen al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial passenger jet airliners, and

intentionally flew two planes into the World Trade Center buildings in downtown Manhattan. Death toll believed to be at 2,996 people. Fifteen of the hijackers were from Saudi Arabia, two from the United Arab Emirates, one from Egypt, one from Lebanon. All were of Muslim descent. The world changed forever.

"This crusade - this war on terrorism - is going to take a while. And the American people must be patient. I'm going to be patient."
- President George W. Bush

Madrid, Spain. March 11, 2004. Bombers detonated 10 backpack bombs on four crowded commuter trains using cell phones. In total, 191 people were killed, 1,700 others wounded. A group of Moroccan, Syrian, and Algerian Muslims and two Guardia Civil and Spanish police informants were suspected of being responsible for the attacks. The world changed again.

"There is no justification whatsoever behind which the authors of this bestial crime can hide. This is violence without object, without sense against which the entire international community has to mobilise itself. All the peoples of Europe are now close to Spain."
- European Commission President Romano Prodi

London, England. July 7, 2005. A series of coordinated suicide attacks occurred inside London's tube system during the morning rush hour. Three bombs exploded within 50 seconds of each other, and a fourth exploded an hour later on a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square. 56 people died, including the four bombers, and around 700 others were injured. The bombings were carried out by four Muslim men, three of British Pakistani and one of British Jamaican descent. A changing world changed again.

"We will not win until we shake ourselves free of the wretched capitulation to the propaganda of the enemy that somehow we are the ones responsible."
- Tony Blair, Sept. 2006

Moscow, Russia. March 29, 2010. Two women detonated bombs at two separate subway stations during the morning rush hour. At least 40 people were killed, and over 100 injured. Preliminary investigations suggested that the violent actions were perpetrated by the Islamist Chechen separatists of the Caucasus Emirate. A few days after the bombings, Chechen rebel leader confirmed suspicions by claiming responsibility for ordering the attacks in a video released on the internet. The world continued to change.

“We will continue the fight against terrorism unswervingly and to the end.”

- *Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev*

The terror experienced in the West brought upon by Islamic fundamentalists is first and foremost devastating. It is also demoralizing for the peace and coexistence of cultures, religions, and ethnicities across the world. It is becoming clear that these events have influenced national governments in rethinking their relationship with the Islamic world. More so, these events have exaggerated the differences and the dangers associated with Muslims living within the borders of countries in the West. Together, the perception of a growing Muslim influence in Western Europe and North America and the recent experiences of Muslim terror, is leading citizens and political leaders to question democratic concepts such as pluralism and multiculturalism.

Political parties with anti-immigration policies are gaining support across Europe, and bans on hijabs, burqas, and even minarets are popping up all over Europe. In the midst of a widespread debate, saturated with dire misunderstandings and disseminated inaccurate information, Muslims and non-Muslim citizens are being pitted against each other. At the centre of these national policies, political speeches, and passionate protests is one fundamental question that is often overlooked. When dealing with the Islamic “question,” is the West ready to abandon the same democratic principles that have become synonymous with contemporary societies?

To begin with, there is a great deal of speculation on the "growth" of the Islamic world – especially in Western countries. These warnings are usually issued from parties

of the far-right in Europe and in North America. They have garnered tremendous attention recently but sadly, they ignore the fact that the Islamic World remains essentially stable geographically. As the Pew Forum study shows with the periodic analysis of countries where Muslim populations are more than one million, Muslims are far from reaching population levels that suggest an imminent geographic takeover of the West (see Figure 2).

It is clear from the chart on Figure 2 that the global Muslim population is highly concentrated in the three regions: Asia-Pacific (61.9%), the Middle East-North Africa (20.1%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (15.3%). In total, those three regions are home to 97.3% of the entire global Muslim population. Therefore, the claims of an overwhelming increase of Muslim migration into the West are in fact artificial thinking. In fact, despite the recent opening of the Euro zone, the Old Continent is currently experiencing lower levels of immigration. In total, the report analysed 232 countries and territories and in only 43 countries (an overwhelming majority in the Middle East region) do Muslims make up the majority of its citizens. Put differently, there are 1.5 billion Muslims in the world, and approximately 1.3 billion of those Muslims inhabit countries in the Asia-Pacific or the Middle East-North Africa regions.

In terms of the United States, the results in the 2007 (PEW) study suggest that this “growth” is somewhat of a fabrication as well. When the percentage of Muslims in the USA today is compared to 2001 and 1998 figures, there seems to be some consistency. 0.5 percent of the overall American population in 1998 was believed to be Muslim. That number remained the same in 2001, and rose slightly to 0.6 percent in 2007. Although some other studies suggest minor differences, the fact remains that in all studies within the PEW report, the overall Muslim population in America has remained below 1 percent in the last 12 years. In fact, when we analysis specific years of Muslim immigration to the USA, we see a small drop between the years 1990-1999 (21 percent) and 2000-2007 (18 percent). The sad reality is that despite these numbers, we are being led to believe that “the Muslims are coming.”

Let us dissect this further. If we are to accept that “the West” is made up of countries in the Americas and all of Europe, excluding Russia (which is a very generous assumption), the combined Muslim population of both those continents total

approximately 27 million inhabitants. That is a mere 27 million Western Muslims spread across 100 countries and territories (an average of just over 270,000 per country). In other words, the ‘uncontrollable’ Muslim invasion that countries of the West are being cautioned to guard against amounts to an average per country of three capacity crowds at Wembley Stadium in London, England. Politicians and scholars who have made it their mission to advance an anti-Muslim agenda should be held accountable for their promotion of deceptive policies and fabricated academia.

1.3. Western Muslims: Middle Class, Mainstream and Mostly Secular

A recent article was published entitled *Britain has nothing to fear from Islam*. The (NewStatesman, 2010) article highlighted a Cardiff University study that showed “more than two-thirds of the stories about Muslims published in the press since 2000 identified them either as a source of problems or as a threat.” Often, Muslim critics and those who promote legislative bans use the sensational press to confirm their condemnation of Muslim communities. We are made to believe that Muslims are incapable of integration into Western societies, Islam is anti-human rights, and Muslim women are all oppressed. The same article points out: “there is a widespread lack of knowledge about the central tenants of the faith itself” and the basic fabric of Muslim life in the West. Fear, ignorance, and a vast misunderstanding of Muslims are a toxic combination. The figures in this section are taken from the most recent PEW studies, which along with several other reports, help us dissect the myths and misconceptions that are widely publicized about the Muslims communities in the West.

Muslims on American and French society

One of the motivations for the passionate protests in New York City on the building of Islamic community centers and places of worship is due to the opinion that Muslims do not want to be integrated into American society. There is also a perception in France that Muslims are only concerned about maintaining their own culture and religion and do not want to integrate. According to several PEW studies, this is not the majority’s view. When American Muslims were asked about their views on American

society, 71 percent of Muslims (compared to 64 percent of the general public) agreed that if one works hard enough, it is possible to get ahead. When asked to rate their overall fulfillment with the state of nation, 38 percent of Muslims (compared to 32 percent of the general public) said they were “satisfied.” In contrast, 54 percent of Muslims admitted to being dissatisfied (compared to 61 percent of the general public). Additionally, when asked if they think of themselves as Muslim first or American, 47 percent of Muslim Americans admitted to thinking of themselves as Muslim first. In France, the rate was similar at 46 percent. In fact, the highest response was in Britain where a full 81 percent of British Muslim citizens think of themselves as Muslim first and British second. This is no surprise considering Britain’s multicultural policies encourage citizens to “become part of a mosaic” as opposed to the “melting pot” mentality in the USA and France.

American Muslims on Religion

Various countries in the West have or are in the midst of passing bans on burqas and niqabs usually defending their actions in the name of secularism. It is the general belief that Islam poses a threat to secular democracies, and governments need to act in order to contain that danger. When American Muslims were asked if they prayed everyday 61 percent of them answered yes. When Christians in the USA were asked, 70 percent answered yes. Perhaps even more telling is the fact that when asked if mosques or churches should be allowed to express views on political and social issues, 43 percent of American Muslims said yes, while 54 percent of Christian said yes to the same question. The argument that Muslims have a difficult time in separating state and church (or mosque) seems to be challenged with these results. Secularism is often spoken of in parallel to islam in the West. This poll suggests that if any religion threatens secularism in America, it is Christianity and not Islam.

American Muslims on Citizenship

If gaining citizenship in America is believed to be one of the core principles of democracy and a marker of integration, American Muslims are doing quite well. A full

77 percent of Muslims in America have taken up citizenship. This figure contradicts the notion that Muslims are complacent immigrants, unwilling to take up citizenship.

Western Muslims on Suicide Bombings

It is clear that since September 11, 2011 suicide bombings have become synonymous with Islamic terrorist activity in the West, in several communities in the Middle East, and elsewhere around the world. There are almost weekly reports on Western media channels that focus on radical Muslims and suicide bombings. So much so that citizens in the West begin to form a natural association between Islam and violence. Is it a surprise then that the West has such a defective knowledge of Islam? If Jihad is an inherent belief for Muslims, then how do we explain that fact that 78 percent of American Muslims believe that suicide bombings should never be justified? In Europe, 64 percent of French Muslims, 69 percent of Muslims in Spain, 70 percent of British Muslims and 83 percent of German Muslims believe the same to be true. In all cases above, a large majority of Muslims condemn the use of violence and believe that it should never be justified. For any politician or academic to suggest that Islam, as a whole is innately cruel is to promote a false sense of reality.

American Muslims on Social Issues

Like many other religious individuals, Muslims tend to be more conservative on social issues such as homosexuality. A full majority, 61 percent of Muslim Americans believe homosexuality should be discouraged compared to 38 percent of the general public. In a country that is currently undergoing a nation-wide debate on same sex marriage, this number is not at all surprising. In fact, it would be entirely unjust to single out the Muslim communities in the USA when Americans in general have yet to demonstrate to the world that they are ready to provide equal rights in marriage and in the military to their own citizens. It needs to be noted however that some of the worst gay rights abuses occur in Muslim communities around the world. In terms of government aid to the poor, 73 percent of American Muslims believe that the government should be doing more (compared to 63 percent of general public). If we

consider that the third pillar of Islam is Zakat (paying an alms or charity to benefit the poor), this figure becomes less of a surprise.

American Muslims on Education and Income

In terms of education and income, the figures between American Muslims and the general public are almost identical. When we add up all three categories (some college, college grad and graduate study) and compare the total numbers, there is not much of a difference. American Muslims have a total of 47 percent of individuals who have gone on to do more than high school, while the general American public is at 54 percent. This should give some indication that Muslims in America are comfortable with using America's educational institutions. In regards to incomes, 26 percent of American Muslim households ear at least \$75,000 compared to 28 percent of the general public who make the same amount or higher. This flies in the face of many who suggest that Muslim immigrants drain the welfare system and fail to integrate in workplaces.

Income Disparities in the USA, France, Spain, and Germany

The most troubling numbers in the PEW study are the income disparities between Muslims and the general public in several countries in the West. When we take a look at the percentage of Muslims who sit at the bottom of the pay scales compared to the general public, the figures are staggering. In the USA, 35 percent of Muslim Americans make less than \$30,000 compared to 33 percent of the general public. This is somewhat comparable. The real disparity is in Western Europe. In France, 45 percent of French Muslims make less than 17,500 Euros compared to only 27 percent of the general French public. That is a difference of 18 percentage points. In Spain, 73 percent of Spanish Muslims make less than \$14,500 Euros compared to 50 percent of the general public. That is an astonishing difference of 23 percentage points. Finally, in Germany, 53 percent of German Muslims earn less than 18,000 Euros compared to 35 percent of the general public. The difference in Germany is a significant 18 percentage points. This undoubtedly raises several questions. If other countries in the West are taking in Muslims from similar countries, is it the case that

Europe is just simply failing its immigrants? Is there a systematic problem in Europe that does not exist in the United States? These numbers definitely warrant a further discussion outside the realm of this dissertation, and should be considered in the context of this debate.

Overall, it is important that progressive individuals highlight figures such as these. Academics and politicians that attempt to depict Muslims as a threat to Western civilization hardly utilize such compelling evidence. Instead, they are more concerned with populist arguments of nationalism, national security, and false feminism to advance their political agendas. Unfortunately, right now, we are seeing anger as the dominate force behind several national policy decisions. Simplicity, with or without validity, is translating into electoral success. Fear is proving to be a lot easier to spread than hope. Progressive individuals need to take account of this trend and make their voices heard.

1.4. Getting beyond Reductionist Thinking

It is clear that an international discussion is taking place today that has the capacity to influence the manner in which communities view and live with one another in the future. Equally important is the fact that the peace and security of the global community is at risk. The world's thinking has changed since September 11th, which was a devastating and emotional setback for many around the globe. International citizens are still – to some measure – reacting to that event and to other terrorist attacks that have taken place across the West. In spite of this, it needs to be made clear that the West's relationship with Islam did not begin on that shocking September day, and we should stop pretending like it did.

The distress in the West towards Muslims and the challenges they are allegedly posing are multiple. First, there is a compelling international safety concern with the rise in radical and violent Islamic movements all over the Muslim world. Next, with the increasing flow of migrants from different parts of the world, questions of cultural integration and assimilation are becoming more prevalent. Finally, debate is beginning to materialize around the concepts of rights and freedoms. *“They chose to come to our*

country; therefore, they should adapt to our values.” “Their religion and way of life is outdated and against the rights of women.” “I do not have any issue with them wanting to practice their religion, but they should do it in the privacy of their own homes.” “This is not about religious freedoms, Islam is an ideology.” Comments such as these are widespread and only serve to reinforce a flawed monolithic concept of Islam. Furthermore, it is this level of reductionism that is used by political parties, government leaders, media, academics, and ordinary citizens to justify the contempt for Muslims and the challenges they allegedly produce.

This dissertation aims at going beyond the West versus Islam dichotomy, to see past the embellished stories and examples that depict both traditions on a collision course. There is no doubt that a clash is occurring, but it is not between Islam and the West; I argue a different divide exists – involving extremists and pluralists within both traditions. In other words, the struggle is fundamentally between various religious and cultural radicals who view the integration of Muslims as an unattainable objective, and individuals who believe peaceful coexistence between religions and cultures is an achievable reality already occurring.

Of course, there are some genuine concerns that exist in Europe, North America and in other parts of the world in regards to immigration and multiculturalism. Although these are important concepts to examine, they will not be a major part of the analysis in this dissertation. Indeed, some of these concerns stem from Islamic fundamentalists who have threatened and continue to endanger citizens both in and outside the Muslim world. Again, while these are worthy discussions, a complete analysis of these matters is not the aim of this dissertation. Even so, there remains a dire need for opposing sides to take responsibility for the current tension, educate the masses, and reconcile the differences. Continuing this debate is necessary; however, contributing to a false division and framing an inevitable, irreversible, and irreconcilable clash of cultures is both dishonest and obstructive to finding solutions.

Chapter 2. Dawn of a New Century

“From the Baghavad Gita to the Torah and Gospel, from Dostoevsky to Baudelaire, the human horizon remains the same.”

Tariq Ramadan

2.1. The Closing of the Western Mind

Increasingly, decisions being made by today's Western governments are running counter to pluralistic and democratic principles. In addition, politicians and academics are advancing the misguided notion that there is more that divides Islam and the West than unites the two. As is written in Rahman (2009, p.38), “The presupposition of two uniform and identifiable entities whose boundaries are clearly demarcated from one another carves up the world in ways that erase fissures within each category and the mutual historical indebtedness between them.” We live in a curious time. It has become conventional for democracies to wage wars in societies deemed to be less organized and less humane with the hopes of transplanting value systems that are often held up as universal standards. Yet, ironically, in our own neighbourhoods, and within our own borders, we are often incapable of defending the rights of some of our own citizens. In the quest to define (and in some cases salvage) our Western identities, we have allowed ourselves to create different classes of citizenship, where it has become appropriate to question someone's loyalty to the state based on a flawed notion of what it is to be a good citizen.

Muslims are increasingly being painted as the enemy within and Islam as an ideology akin to the communist “Red Menace” of 1950s America. For instance, as Ferry Biedermann (2010) recently mentions in Foreign Policy that Geert Wilders, a Dutch MP and a vocal opponent of Islam has called for a “head rag tax” on women wearing headscarves. He favours banning the Quran, “wants to close Muslim schools but not equivalent Christian or Jewish ones,” he wants to force immigrants to sign “assimilation contracts” and wants to include the “Judeo-Christian character of the state in the constitution.” It is a shame that today's decisions made by politically exploitative

governments and fearful citizens, will likely contribute to tomorrow's regret and apologies. Previous decades of mistreatment and abuse of blacks, Irish Catholics, Jews, Japanese, and Chinese (to name a few) in countries like the USA, Canada, and in Western Europe should be a clear warning sign for our generation to reverse course on the so-called "Islamic problem." And while it seems that we are indeed on course to repeat the errors of previous generations, the opportunity to halt our latest emerging wave of fear and intolerance has not yet been lost.

History, as Malik (2009, p.207) tells us "can show us how little we ever had to fear from the simultaneous flourishing in our society of different and powerful forms of the religious life." Robert Azzi reminds us (Nieman Reports, 2007) that in the wake of 9/11, America had a critical choice: "either demonize and attempt to disenfranchise from the global community one-sixth of humanity known as Muslims, or respond, engage, educate, and forge partnerships," with the majority of Muslims who are moderate, peace-loving and could have been essential partners in destroying the criminals that executed these violent acts. While it must be noted that in words, President Bush, in the immediate days after 9/11, did not blame the entire Muslim population for the actions of a select few fundamentalists, indeed, his administration still chose the first path. In other words, it chose quick revenge over a long-term solution, anger rather than dialogue. Ultimately, America chose to ignore our shared history, and arguably, go to war against Islam.

Much has been said about the two US-led wars currently taking place in the Middle East: Afghanistan and Iraq. The American presence (and that of their allies) in those two conflicts contributes to an ongoing international political debate. It is not my intention to analyze the reasons or arguments as to why there is a coalition of democratic countries currently at war with Muslim-majority states in the Middle East. Rather, the aim here is to initiate a debate on the validity (or idiocy) of the collective reaction by the West to address Muslim issues within and outside their borders. I would argue that in several instances, Western democracies (byway of government policies and decisions made by national citizens) have begun a dangerous and destructive process. This course of action, in almost every circumstance, is opposed to fundamental democratic principles and will continue to alienate Muslims all over the world. More

importantly, by fashioning immigration policy in a way as to stem the tide of Muslim immigrants and to create a national security concern based on the presence of Muslims in Western countries, Western democracies are creating a crisis of identity for themselves. These “Islamic issues” and the responses to them are anchored in the defective idea that coexistence with the new feigned enemy is both impossible and unsafe if Islam as it exists today does not change, or is not defeated. As Biedermann (Foreign Affairs, 2010) reports, Geert Wilders believes that the situation in Europe is so dire that “deporting millions of European Muslims may be necessary.” This is complete nonsense and runs counter to the strength of Western democracies borne out of the vibrant mix of cultures and ideas. Generations of citizens still alive today have already witnessed the consequences of political convictions such as these. We, as a collective, made the promise that actions would be taken to “never again” repeat the errors of our past. But comments such as Wilders’ suggest that humanity is on the brink of breaking that promise yet again.

2.2. Creating a New ‘Other’

Despite the advances in recognizing human equality, prejudice and bigotry still exist. When we compare today’s situation to earlier instances of prejudice (Betz and Meret 2009) remind us that “the anti-Islamic arguments advanced today by Western European political parties bear a striking resemblance to the rhetoric employed by American nativists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” Defending a land against social, political, and economic evils are concepts that remain very much a part of current political language. Islamic integration into Western societies and the presumed threat Muslims pose to secularism are at the crux of contemporary political and cultural discourse. As a whole, the “enemy” may be different, but the language, fear, and justifications used to divide and subdue minority communities are nothing new.

Earlier research by John Higham (1955, p.4) found that “some influence originating abroad threaten[s] the very life of the nation from within.” This declaration was uttered not in 2010 Holland or France but in 1835 as a warning to Americans

against the foreign intruder of the day: Catholics in the United States in the 1830s whose presence was deemed to be incompatible with American society and diametrically opposed to its customs and values. A government in a state of anxiety combined with a paranoid public, led to the drastic misunderstanding of those who were deemed to be different. Thus, the Catholic alien was created. Higham (1955, p.5) further explains, “Many social and religious factors contributed powerfully to anti-Catholic feeling.” The same of course is true today, except Muslims and Islam are the predicament, the threat to the nation. In hindsight, however, is almost unthinkable in present day America to imagine that Catholics were once considered the biggest threat to the American way of life. While they have integrated successfully into American society, another “other” has filled the vacuum of fear: the Muslim.

Manufacturing fear and the practice of creating “the other” is regrettably not a novel concept. In Richard Bulliet (2005, pp.5), there is a reference made to the established strain of Protestant American thought that “pronounces against Islam the same self-righteous and unequivocal sentence of ‘otherness’ that American Protestants once visited upon Catholics and Jews.” Human indignity towards those who the majority has yet to comprehend is a cyclical syndrome in the composition of human affairs. The Catholics, Jews, African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, and several other groupings of individuals have had to, and continue to be labeled and judged unfairly. The “enemy” may continually change but the *modus operandi* used to create the *other* remains the same. Today, in many European and North American countries, Muslims are just the latest threat from “abroad,” the newest menace to “civilized” society. At the centre of this socially and politically constructed confrontation is Europe, in a state of anxiety, scrambling to fix a problem their leaders have largely created.

As indicated in chapter one, the suggestion that there is a drastic increase in Muslim immigration into the West is overstated. Nonetheless, these assumptions are leading to patchy legislative efforts, usually defended with carefully crafted nationalistic language, in order to tame unfounded concerns of a Muslim invasion. In general, the concerns are often anchored on worries about national security, equality rights, and the idea that “Islam” is incompatible with “Western” values. The official government

response may differ amongst European countries, but the accepted and acceptable idea of a “Muslim problem” is spreading throughout the continent. However, once analyzed fully, none of the aforementioned concerns are capable of standing up to criticism. In essence, Western countries find themselves in the middle of a manufactured crisis for their cultural and ethnic survival, based on the flawed suspicion that they are under siege by an adversary with a nefarious plan to conquer the entire continent.

Prior to further discussion, it needs to be stated that Europe and North America, like Islam, is not a homogeneous entity, and it is incorrect to assume all of the West is going through the same political or cultural experience with regard to the supposed influx of Muslim immigrants. Moreover, it would be erroneous to assume that an all-encompassing identity exists when it comes to aims and attitudes towards Islam (Wharton, 2008). These points are often disregarded or oversimplified and one of the reasons why so much confusion and misunderstanding exists.

Today, Muslim women and men are choosing or have chosen, to make a life for themselves in mostly secular and open Western societies. Our Muslim neighbours should be seen as partners, not strangers, with the capacity to contribute and enrich our communities in which that parallel previous generations of immigrants. Instead of fearing for our supposed national security (usually used as justification for undermining citizens’ rights) or protecting ourselves from a socially constructed “other” (with the perceived capacity to alter “our values”), it would be prudent for Western governments to commit to genuine intercultural and interfaith dialogue aimed at building a respectful coexistence. This renewed relationship first and foremost needs to be built upon a mutual understanding of each citizen’s rights and responsibilities in a liberal democracy. More importantly, the will for a difficult and critical conversation needs to be cultivated among different generations, without settling on divisive, flawed, and politically-driven outcomes.

The process of rendering another as dangerous and different, without legitimate motives, is a form of prejudice. Clearly, the September 11th attacks in New York City and the July 7th attacks in London (among other events) have scared new generations of citizens into believing that Muslims in general are a problem. It is becoming apparent, as Bulliet (2005, pp.4) points out that “ill-disguised contempt for Islam looms in the

background of today's increasingly vitriolic debates about Islam and the West." In spite of this, liberal democratic citizens owe it to themselves to unlearn and learn again, to engage in conversations, and to challenge their politicians, media, and fellow citizens when Islam is misrepresented. The concern here is not that governments are imposing legislation that is not supported by a majority of their citizens (sadly, there is vast support for regressive policies against Muslims across the Western world). The real concern is that governments, political parties and individuals are contributing to the toxic dialogue currently sweeping through most of the countries in the West. When politicians like Geert Wilders promise that "New York, rooted in Dutch tolerance, will never become New Mecca" (Foreign Affairs, 2010), he is purposely and recklessly sowing the seeds of division. National policies that are anchored in such fear and demagoguery, unable to understand the 'other' is a reductionist governing method with no proper place in today's culturally intertwined world.

The dawn of a new century is upon us. In various countries across the world Muslims now make up a vastly important part of the national fabric. Some of these Muslims have helped build and define Western democracies. Some arrived and were put to work. Their children are now studying in our public institutions. They vote. They even fight in the armies of their adopted countries. *They* are very much a part of *us*. The challenge ahead is figuring out a way to live peacefully, while maneuvering through divisive and complex issues of identity, religion, politics, and citizenship. Previous generations have attempted to do the same. Society building is, after all, the ultimate human experiment, and it is incumbent upon us all to not revisit the mistakes of our past.

Chapter 3. Paralyzed in Fear: the Policies of the West

“One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.”

Martin Luther King

3.1. Fluctuating definitions of Democracy

There are (at least) two ways to look at democracy in the West. The first is a view of democracy where it does not matter what language one speaks or what God one worships. It is a democracy where allegiance to the constitution trumps ethnic differences, language barriers and religious divides. It is one anchored in the concept of equality and pluralism, where even the newest arrivals to its shores are no less worthy of protection and rights than those fortunate to have been born within its borders. In this democracy, every law abiding citizen is a good citizen.

There is another way to look at democracy as well; one whose advocates consider it the best and only way to govern. This democracy speaks English, French, Dutch, German, Spanish, and Portuguese but rarely Chinese or Arabic. In this version of democracy, human rights rule and human injustices are not tolerated unless, of course, they suit a particular economic or political interest. This democracy promotes diversity and defends the notion that everyone is welcome, except those deemed different, dangerous, and incapable of conforming to manufactured realities. This version of democracy espouses a belief in equality, yet it consciously creates different classes of citizenship and rights. Although the first version is often what is promoted or advertised, it remains an ideal, not a reality. The latter version of democracy, the form we live with day to day, exists as a result of government policies and legislation oftentimes passively or blindly supported by an ill-informed citizenry.

In this chapter, I highlight some of the decisions made by democratic countries (in some cases governments, in other cases by citizens themselves) that serve as the basis for my criticism in this dissertation. The countries and the situations presented here assist in highlighting the risk associated with defending principles that are

practiced in an inconsistent manner. It is my contention that, if democratic countries are to remain a force for good in the world, they must first ensure that when faced with complex societal issues, they adopt a fair and constant approach that safeguards the principles of democracy. The countries mentioned in this chapter, in differing degrees, have all failed this test of consistency.

Perhaps it is pertinent, at this juncture, to clarify a few points. Contrary to the opinions expressed by several writers and scholars, I do not defend the idea that Lisa Richards also criticizes (FrontPage Magazine, 2010) that “the Islamic shrouding of women [is] beautifully liberating.” In other words, I am uncomfortable fully defending the promotion of the archaic and regressive tradition of women wearing burqas and niqabs. The practice, it has been suggested, originates from ancient pre-Islamic tribes and it is widely acknowledged, even by Muslims, that the Quran does not obligate Muslim women to wear the burqa. That point, although important to the current debate, is somewhat redundant because even if the Quran necessitated the wearing of such garments, my subsequent convictions would not change. The point here though is to propose that, in a democratic society, it is not my place (nor of any government) to dictate to women what they should or should not be wearing in public spaces or in the privacy of their own homes. In the same vein, I would argue that the use of makeup and high heel shoes can also be viewed as undignified to women. In both situations (the use of makeup and veiling oneself), I believe that the women’s “choice” is, in fact, a response to male demands and expectations. The difference between these two examples is largely our quick criticism of one form of unfamiliar prejudice and our familiarity with what many might view as simply another, perhaps more insidious, form of chauvinism.

In regards to governments and citizens making decisions on the “acceptable” amount of Islam within Western cultures, I am against the practice of adopting legislation being created to restrict what citizens are allowed to wear in public spaces. In fact, I would even entertain the concept that religion should not be outlawed in public spaces. If a country chooses to do so, all religions should therefore be subjected to the same allowances and restrictions. Outside a small number of exceptions, Western governments and its people should be criticized for making decisions that are flawed

and have an air of Islamophobia. Eliminating or reducing the presence of religion in the public space and the fairly quiet reaction in Europe to Muslim-related bans leads to prejudices that Europe is historically familiar with.

When dealing with Muslims in Western societies, the focus for governments should be on integration, not restrictions. Banning a veiled Muslim woman from public education does not contribute to a more harmonious society. In fact, it does the complete opposite. Decisions such as these have the capacity to force Muslim women back into the home and create a feeling of lost citizenship. The only situations where governments should feel compelled to restrict any citizen's rights (including Muslims) are when their religious (or individual) rights truly challenge the bedrock of a society's democracy (e.g., identification for voting purposes), run counter to a country's justice system (e.g., the right of a citizen to confront his accuser), or if there is a valid security concern (e.g., clearly identifying individuals boarding a plane). These exceptions should be applied to every citizen in a democracy, and not just to those we deem to be a threat. As Dr. Judith Martin, a religious studies professor points out (Beyerle 2010), "The role of good government is to promote integrity and understanding... either we're going to be a dialogue of civilizations or a clash of civilizations." Unfortunately, the countries below are leading us towards the latter.

3.2. France: No Place for Religion in the Public Space

I begin with France because for several reasons, France is a unique case in Europe in regards to church-state relations. In France, the private and public spheres are supposed to be separated, and while religion is encouraged in the former realm, it is highly and legally frowned upon in the latter. Muslims in France (as in many other countries) affirm that their Islamic dress represents their freedom of religion, yet French officials have made clear that niqabs and veils are not welcome. The veil and burqa issue and its presence in public spaces in France has been an enduring debate which its populace has had to endure. The prevailing view of Islam's place in French society is made clear by President Nicolas Sarkozy: "We cannot accept to have in our country women who are prisoners behind netting, cut off from all social life, deprived of

identity” (Telegraph, 2009). While on the surface, comments such as these seem virtuous, they are reductionist in nature, and are articulated without fully understanding the spectrum of Islamic religious customs.

What differentiates France from many other states in terms of its commitment to secularism (or in the French case, *laïcité*) is that no religion is “accepted” in public spaces. In 2004, “France banned Muslim headscarves and other ostentatious religious symbols from classrooms,” including the Christian crucifix (Globe and Mail, 2010). While in principle this seems entirely fair and consistent, the reality is that France’s two major religions (Christianity and Islam) are not treated the same. It seems reasonable to assume that if laicite is to be considered just, an evenhanded approach should be applied. As was shown in a BBC (2010) story, while “no public money can go [towards Islamic places of worship], millions of euros are spent every year on maintaining [Christian] buildings” that are supposed to be kept separate from public functions. The reason for this “is that under the 100-year-old law that founded modern French secularism, the state offered to take over the Catholic churches’ existing buildings, while cutting all others’ ties” (BBC, 2010). It is this sliding scale of secularism that is detrimental to fairly treating religious communities within liberal democracies. Although I am not fully supportive of “hard” secularism, it would be more fair (in France) to apply the same restrictive laws to all religions, instead of arbitrarily choosing which religion is worthy of public funds or government and legal support.

On September 14th 2010, the French Senate voted 246 to 1 in favour of a ban on Muslim women wearing burqas “everywhere from post offices to streets... including those worn by tourists from the Middle East and elsewhere” (CBC, 2010). The approval of this ban by the French Senate comes after the “proposed law was passed overwhelmingly by the National Assembly on July 13th 2010” (CBC, 2010). It is no surprise that the government is defending the law by suggesting it is aimed at “ensuring gender equality, women’s dignity and security, as well as upholding France’s secular values and way of life” (CBC News, 2010). As (Beyerle, 2010) indicates, some much needed context is needed here: “Of France’s 65 million residents, five to six million are estimated to be Muslim... of those, around 2,000 [women] wear full veils.” In context, therefore, it seems utterly absurd to consider that 2,000 women (out of 65 million

individuals in France) have the capacity to destroy France's well established secular way of life. Put differently, approximately 0.003 percent – less than one full percent – of France's overall population is the grand threat that jeopardizes national security in France.

In addition to the national security argument, President Sarkozy and other French intellectuals and politicians have also defended the burqa ban on the premise that doing so defends women's rights. Moreover, anyone against such a ban is essentially endorsing the continued persecution of Muslim women who are being kept hostage behind their veils. This bogus feminism needs to be challenged. Yes, it is true that some Muslim men force their wives into wearing such garments, and threaten them with violence and shame if they do not comply with their demands. However, it needs to be acknowledged that there are also some women who freely choose to wear the veil or burqa. As Kiraz Janicke suggests (FrontPage Magazine, 2010), "if you accept that the state has the right to ban the burqa, then you also accept that it has the right to force women to wear it... it's about a woman's right to choose." I would argue it actually goes beyond that.

If governments in the West – in this case France – are so adamant about defend women's rights, then why is there not an equally robust movement to ensure that women are paid the same amount for similar jobs? If French officials are truly concerned with upholding secularist values, then all religions need to be separated from the public space and purse. If France feels it necessary to legalize bans of the veil in order to "defend" the rights of less than 2,000 veiled women (a fraction of whom may legitimately be oppressed), perhaps the same group of politicians should consider expending at least as much energy to publicly advocate for the 25,000 annual female victims of male rape.

3.3. Denmark: The Cartoon Controversy

Even though it has been suggested that only a handful of women in Denmark wear burkas, Denmark has and continues to contribute to the political and public debate on Islamic matters. Unlike other countries though, it has not been limitations on dress

code that has been at issue, but rather the limits of freedom of speech that has made Denmark a flashpoint in this debate.

In late 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, “including one in which he is shown wearing a turban shaped as a bomb with a burning fuse” (New York Times, 2006). The newspaper was attempting to ignite discussion on freedom of speech, and contribute to the overall debate on Islamic issues. In January of 2010, as the New York Times reported, “A 28-year-old Somalia man was armed with an ax and a knife when he tried to enter the home of the artist, Kurt Westergaard” (New York Times, 2010). The attack on Mr. Westergaard, was directly linked to the fact that one of his renderings was among the 12 published back in 2005.

The international reaction to the newspaper cartoons and to the events that followed was mixed (even within the Muslim world). On one side, there were adamant supporters of the newspaper who championed the view that civil society is anchored on the freedom of speech and of the press along with the ability to criticize religions and engage in uncomfortable debates. On the opposite side of the debate there were those who believed that freedom of speech has its limits and that civil society also required respect for individual citizens and religions. There were also individuals in the middle of the debate, and others whose views on the matter fell somewhere along the spectrum.

This one incident, for months, and still even today, triggers much discussion about the extent in which freedom of speech should prevail in a secular democratic society. In some cases, it serves as a springboard for discussions that usually depict Muslims as unreasonable and incapable of dealing with criticism about their own religion. Ayaan Hrsi Ali (2002, pp.160), who is not shy to criticize her former religion asks: “why are Westerners so insecure about everything that is so wonderful about the West: political freedom; free press; and freedom of expression.” These types of questions are usually the basis for arguments that portray Islam as a pre-modern civilization incapable of dealing with modern affairs. The reality is that individuals, who are on the far-right politically, often hide behind the veil of freedom of speech in order to advance blatantly racist views. To be fair, it is also the case that religious radicals often take advantage of generous religious freedoms in the West to promote a

version of their religion that is sometimes counter to customs practiced in Western democracies.

3.4. Contemplating Bans in Belgium, Spain, and Italy

As Europe's social fabric continues to fray, traditionally homogeneous states are beginning to face the reality that their countries are now becoming more diverse. Europeans are witnessing a "visible increase in socio-political activity and demands for representation amongst second-generation European Muslims," and (Wharton, 2008) suggests this is provoking tremendous anxiety throughout Europe (and the West) while also placing a spotlight on the question of the role that Muslims will play in their adopted lands. The answer to this question will differ depending on the European (or Western) state, its citizens, and its political leaders; however, there is some evidence that a united front is being established in order to minimize or eliminate Muslim visibility in the West.

In April of 2010, Belgium became the first country in Europe to "ban women from wearing the full Islamic face veil in public" (BBC News, 2010). The law was passed with every Member of Parliament voting for the ban, except two who abstained. Although political representatives seem united on the issue, there were and still are many in Belgium and around the world that see this as setting a dangerous precedent. This ban does not help assimilate or integrate Muslim immigrants. In fact, as the Muslim Executive of Belgium has suggested it may "lead to women who do wear the full veil to be trapped in their homes" (BBC News, 2010). Laws passed in this manner, although framed in women's rights language neglect to take into account the consequences that may arise. To reiterate (Beyerle, 2010), the implementation of these laws shows a drastic "misunderstanding of the Islamic lifestyle" across Europe.

In June of 2010, Spain joined Belgium in the attempt to ban the burqa. "In a significant escalation of Spain's debate over how to handle radical Islam," as was written in many newspapers across the world, "the [Spanish] Senate narrowly and unexpectedly approved a motion to ban Muslim women from wearing in public the burqa or other garments that cover the whole body" (New York Times, 2010). Again,

as is the case with other countries and similar laws, the passing of this ban was framed in women's rights language. It should come as no surprise then that the motion adopted by the senators "calls on Spain to outlaw any usage, custom or discriminatory practice that limits the freedom of women" (New York Times, 2010). It should also be noted that the ban was "drafted and led by politicians from the main center-right opposition People's Party" (New York Times, 2010) in Spain. The situation in Spain differs from other countries because the government has yet to follow the senate's vote. Therefore, there is still time for Spain to ignore or, at the very least, modify the language of the ban passed by the Spanish Senate.

In Italy, it was reported that "a woman visiting a post office in Novara, northwestern Italy, [was] stopped by police for wearing an Islamic veil covering her face... and would have to pay a 500-euro fine" (BBC News, 2010). At the time of this writing, it is not illegal in Italy to wear a burqa, however "Novara brought in a by-law in January [of 2010] banning clothing preventing immediate identification in public" (BBC News, 2010). In addition to this, an October 2010 online news story (Pisa, 2010) reported that "the Italian government [rule] in favour of a proposed legislation to ban women from wearing the burqa." As with other countries that are contemplating such moves or that have similar laws in place, the Italian Interior Ministry is defending this on the basis of national security. It is also noteworthy to mention that the legislation is being "proposed by Members of Parliament from the anti-immigration Northern league party, a member of Prime Minister Berlusconi's ruling right-wing coalition." The same online report suggests that Italy is believed to have slightly over a million Muslims, "but most Muslim women do not wear any kind of face veils." Once again, similar to France, we are being made to believe that the miniscule percentage of Muslim women in Italy who wear a veil is a legitimate threat to national security.

3.5. Netherlands: Freedom of Speech on trial?

The Netherlands is also well on its way to ban the burqa. In September of 2010, a political coalition was formed marking a watershed in Dutch politics. Geert Wilders, the leader of the anti-Islam Freedom Party agreed to lend his support in parliament to

the “minority government of conservative Liberals and the smaller Christian Democrats. In return Wilders has been given freedom to pursue ... [his] several openly anti-Muslim initiatives, including a burqa ban and closer monitoring of Islamic schools” (Biedermann, 2010). It is no secret that Wilders leads the Dutch charge to limit the Islamic presence in the Netherlands. It is well-known that he and his supporters on the far-right hold the belief, as publicly documented (CTV, 2010) that “Muslims threaten European values by wearing head scarves and more conservative dress that fully covers body and head, such as the burka, the chador and the niqab.” Clearly, his comments are meant to instill fear into European citizens, with his goal being all out war on Islam in Europe.

Regardless of one’s political affiliations, it should be concerning that in today’s liberal democracies there is an appetite for political leadership that advocates for a “head rag tax” (promoted by Geert Wilders) on women wearing headscarves, or that favours banning the Quran. Political leaders need to be challenged when they are publically advocating for closure of Muslim schools but not equivalent Christian or Jewish ones, or when the suggestion is made that immigrants should be forced to sign assimilation contracts. In the same vein, anyone who deems it acceptable to deport millions of European Muslims out of the continent should be vehemently opposed (Foreign Policy, 2010). This last point is especially disturbing, and sounds appallingly similar to the anti-Jewish rhetoric that spread across Germany in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. All of the aforementioned policy proposals have been publicly promoted by Mr. Wilders, and he is gradually making Islamophobia an accepted element of political discourse in the Netherlands.

Unfortunately, radical and fundamentalist leaders such as Mr. Wilders are succeeding in generating and leading the attack on Muslim fundamentalists. The regrettable reality is that while they are attempting to send a message to the small percentage of extreme radicals within the Muslim faith (which admittedly do exist), they are actually waging a war on all (mostly moderate and law-abiding) Muslims. The “enemy” may now be different, but the process of “othering” is the same. Individuals like Mr. Wilders are taking Europe and other countries of the West back to Europe’s darkest days – ones we promised ourselves we would “never again” let happen.

3.6. Switzerland: the Minaret Ban

The Muslim presence in Switzerland has been described by Michael Petrou (Macleans, 2010) as minimal. Swiss Muslims only make up about five percent of the entire Swiss population, they are deemed to be some of the most integrated Muslims in all of Europe, and there are only four minarets –the steeple-like spires that often adorn mosques where Muslims pray. Switzerland has not suffered an Islamist terror attack, and women in veils and niqabs are uncommon in the country. That is why when more than 57 percent of participating voters (in a national referendum) approved a ban on minarets in December of 2009, it was regarded as “arguably the most illiberal and bigoted legislation Europe has seen in years” (Macleans, 2010). Undoubtedly, the Swiss vote intensified a continental debate as Europeans continue to struggle with the fact that their populations are changing.

In view of the shifting demographic dynamics of Europe’s population, and the questions of identity several Western European countries are facing, it is of little surprise that a ban like this would come to fruition in the Old Continent. “The Minarets are an excuse,” suggests a University of Padua professor, “the issue is Islam” (Macleans, 2010). This referendum vote was led by the conservative Swiss People’s Party, who are known for having anti-immigration policies, some of which have been the topic of public relations campaigns in the past. The xenophobic venom that typically accompanies political leaders and parties that champion populist policies such as this one are becoming more frequent in today’s Europe and in other liberal democratic countries. There seems to be a sense building, simply by observing the political realities in Canada and in the United States, that the “white fantasy” of journalists, academics, and politicians as Malik (2009, p.211) describes, allows them “the right ability to regulate the ethnic and religious parameters” of societies around the world. These policies, which often lead to the removal or watering down of fundamental human rights, are being promoted and advanced through a false prism of freedom of speech and nationalistic tendencies. They are gaining political support and

there is a real concern here. Regrettably, mainstreaming hate is not contained to the European continent.

3.7. USA: The Ground Zero ‘Mosque’ and the Burning of Qurans

Two recent events in the United States have had the international community watching closely. In New York City, a public outcry erupted over the plans to build a multi-level Islamic Community Center (which will include a prayer room on the upper floors) several blocks from the site of the World Trade Center attacks on 9/11, referred to as Ground Zero. Secondly, in the lead up to the ninth anniversary of the attacks, a Gainesville, Florida pastor announced plans to host an international “Burn a Quran Day.” The pastor eventually decided to cancel the event, but not before world leaders weighed in on the event and pleaded for its cancellation. President Barak Obama, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the Pope, and many other voices united in their condemnation. These two events, on their own, proved to be a real concern for government and religious officials inside the US and many around the world and have ignited a national conversation, led by religious Conservatives and neo-Conservatives that are fueling fears nationwide. Moreover, it is heightening Muslim anger in Islamic countries, giving rise to unpopular American sentiment in countries where US soldiers are currently stationed.

Reactions to both these events have been divided. Clearly, in a country like the United States, it is not surprising that there are advocates and opponents vocalizing their beliefs on both sides of the ideological spectrum. It is also understandable that reaction to American events often elicits international opinions. As he has stated publicly (Toronto Sun, 2010), Salim Mansur, a Muslim and a political science professor in Canada describes the American opposition to the “Ground Zero mosque” as the first determined pushback by Americans who are “fully awakening since 9/11 to Islamists and the hard reality of the clash of civilizations.” In his opinion, the opposition to the building of the Islamic community centre is good news, and many agree. In a general sense, the reasons given usually range from the location of this particular community centre to flat out racism. Many critics frequently mention how insensitive it is to build a

Muslim place of worship so close to a place where Muslims were the perpetrators of one of the most devastating tragedies in American history. Mention of the fact that there existed a Muslim prayer room in the World Trade Center complex prior to the attacks seems to escape the debate here. Despite every American's constitutional right to own property, many still believe the community centre should be moved. Others disagree, as do I.

In a Time Magazine story, the New York City mayor reminded its residents of the reality many seem to be forgetting in this debate. Mayor Bloomberg stated (TIME, 2010) that: "Muslims were among those murdered on 9/11 and that our Muslim neighbors grieved with us as New Yorkers and as Americans." In the same public speech, Bloomberg articulated his belief that to deny Muslims the right to build a place of worship is to "betray (American) values and play into [the] enemies' hands if [Americans] were to treat Muslims differently than anyone else" (TIME, 2010). It should also be mentioned that an unclear and irresolute stance from the White House is not helpful. In reference to the building of the Islamic Community Centre at Ground Zero, President Barak Obama softened his public position within hours of coming out as a champion for religious freedom and the constitutional rights of American Muslims.

The aim here is not to scrutinize specific comments made by political figure heads in response to these international stories that are often fuelled by hyper-reactive American (and Western) media sources. Although understanding that component of the debate is pertinent to the discussion as well. The vital aspect here is to recognize the divisions that exist when Americans are asked to think and make decisions regarding the presence of Islam within their society. It is the candid responses and, at times, purely racist and uninformed opinions of some, that pose a threat to constructive inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogues. These events have allowed America's religious cleavages to resurface, exposing the existence of an equally dangerous and similarly fundamentalist religious (Christian) sect in various parts of the United States. There are drastic consequences to the current actions and political rhetoric of ultra conservative individuals who want to limit the Muslim presence in the USA: it marginalizes American Muslim communities, it contributes to an unbalanced national conversation

on immigration, and it raises questions of fundamental individual rights and tests the appetite for Americans to defend those ideals.

3.8. Canada: No face? No Government Services!

Canada, a country that has become accustomed to accepting newcomers and has been traditionally praised for its success in integrating people of different cultures and backgrounds is also beginning to show some resistance to the visibility of Islam within its borders. It is clear that the “Islamic question” has begun to untangle the long-established support for multiculturalism in Canada, or at least certain forms of it. Canada (specifically the majority French-speaking Province of Quebec) has recently deemed it necessary to legislate the manner in which Muslims and government institutions interact with each other. In Quebec, as in the European countries discussed above, the government has attempted to defend the proposed policy direction using notions of national security, women’s human rights, and protecting Canadian secularism. This has ignited a national conversation on the place of Islam within the Canadian fabric. A recent national poll shows that a majority of Canadians are in favour of adopting legislation (similar to France) that would ban the burqa in all provinces in Canada.

In March of 2010, the province of Quebec (the French speaking province in Canada) “tabled unprecedented legislation requiring Muslim women to show their faces in all government locations, including schools, hospitals and daycares” (Globe and Mail, 2010). Bill 94, entitled “An Act to establish guidelines governing accommodation requests within the Administration and certain institutions”, is aimed at representing the vehicle through which the Quebec government would like to uphold “gender equality and secularism – the values that unite Quebecers (Globe and Mail, 2010).” Few government officials will speak about the fact that several Muslim women have been expelled from public educational institutions and now taking the government to court. The political imperative here is to portray the Premier of Quebec as a progressive politician concerned with women’s rights and to promote this legislation as Quebec-made and reflective of Quebec and Canadian values (Globe and Mail, 2010). Instead of

calling this what it truly is, a reflexive and populous proposed law, Canadians are being made to believe that this policy is being introduced in good faith.

The reality is this: fewer than 25 women in Quebec (out of a population of nearly 8 million) wear the full face veil (Globe and Mail, 2010). Clearly, this issue is more about politics and perception than it is about a progressive government policy. If the government of Quebec was serious about gender equality it would admit and correct the fact that Quebec women still get paid less than their male counterparts in several sectors across the province. If it were concerned with integration issues, it would admit that French nationalists (separatists who want out of the Canadian federation) have in the past and arguably still are today a bigger threat to the cohesion of Quebec's society. This of course, would require political courage and the facility to speak to the true (and more urgent) challenges facing Quebecers and Canadians.

As is often the case in Canada, the policies that one province advances are not necessarily supported by the others. Ontario, Quebec's neighbouring province and Canada's largest and most populous province, speaks to that division. On October 13th of 2010, the Ontario Appeals Court ruled that face coverings worn by Muslim women must be taken off if fairness is at stake in a court case, but judges must also respect religious rights (Globe and Mail, 2010). The court decision stated that "trial judges must search for a sensible compromise that will respect the complainant's religious needs while, at the same time, allowing the defence to assess [his or her] demeanor during testimony" (Globe and Mail, 2010). In terms of Muslim integration and Islam's relationship with democratic institutions, this Ontario ruling takes a different direction than Quebec's proposed legislation. The essence of this ruling – the need to find a sensible compromise – provides an alternative guiding principle to the aforementioned countries and the state of affairs that are taking shape across the West.

3.9. Symptoms versus Substance

In this confrontation between two ostensibly incompatible worlds, I consider the initiatives being undertaken by Liberal democratic countries as a method to render Muslims, and Islam itself, invisible. In fact, the choices that are being made are not

leading us to a safer world; rather, they are contributing to an increasingly toxic atmosphere everywhere. We are witnessing an increase in alienated Muslim communities, fractured international relations, the fueling of the religiously radical Islamic cause, and contributing to the creation of this generation's new poor.

The ripple effects of Islamophobia currently being experienced in many Western countries is concerning. It is becoming popular to endorse constructs of nationhood, defend exaggerated claims of national and international security, and have governments promote a false sincerity when it comes to defending Muslim women's rights. All of the reasons above are being used to defend policies aimed at taming the "Islamic problem." I argue that in an effort to manage the coexistence of different cultures, languages and religions, democracies around the world have set sail on a journey that is counter to the very foundations of their pluralistic identities. Put simply, defending the current policies in the West intended to cope with the integration of Muslims is a mistake and we need to change course. The practice of academics and politicians dividing each other into "the apologist left" or "the racist right" needs to end. This dichotomy is a sideshow to the actual issues that exist. There is a dire need for us to pause, reflect, and reconsider the decisions taken and being advanced by various countries and political parties around the world. The lessons learned from the injustices of the past need to guide us today and into the future. The treatment of Muslims today is an affront to the principles of equality and pluralism. How have we, in the West, managed to distort the honourable democratic message while asserting a willingness to defend it?

At present, there is much being said – both academically and politically – about the relationship between Islam and the West. Instead of contributing to the discourse that concerns itself simply with perpetuating the supposed "clash of civilizations," the aim in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation is to promote a dialogue that goes beyond reductionist arguments and explores the consequences of misunderstanding Muslims in the West. The objective is to show the diversity of Islam and to highlight the various voices and convictions throughout the various Islamic communities around the world. To reassert my position, a legislative and political resolution that merely takes on the symptoms of Islamic extremism is insufficient. In other words, while I

personally may not necessarily agree with the concept of the niqab or burqa, it needs to be emphasized that banning such garments in the West is counter-productive to building healthy and functional pluralistic societies. Next, restricting the building of mosques or minarets is simply unacceptable in liberal democracies that preach fairness and equity. National referendums, mass protests, and political movements defending this restriction robs citizens the freedom to build and practice their faith in whichever house of worship they choose. Finally, the various actions of countries in the West influence communities around the world. It needs to be recognized that some of our decisions – both historically and in present day – effectively fuel the dangerous Islamic radical cause. As a whole, if the aim is to eliminate terrorism, this will not be accomplished endorsing the policies and strategies of the aforementioned countries. The “solutions” being proposed by governments and their citizens, in reaction to this question of coexistence, are a grave mistake.

If integration of Muslims is the objective, countries that make up the West need to have an honest moment of reassessment and admit that we are on the wrong track. Successful anti-terrorism strategies and the prolongation of diverse and nonviolent pluralistic societies will depend on going beyond veil bans, harmonious speeches, and the limiting of religion in public spaces. In fact, continuing to be silent and refusing to contest the policies of countries who are advocating this course of action, will lead us all in the opposite direction. As Mona Elthawy (Washington Post, 2009) suggests, “until Europe confronts long-simmering questions about how it treats immigrants – Muslims and others – the continent will continue to convulse with embarrassing right-wing eruptions that strip it of any right to preach to anyone on human rights and liberties.” It is time to do away with policies that are anchored on the failing conception that violence is something inherent in Islam, rendering any Muslim a potential terrorist (Meer & Modood, 2009). Progressive citizens in the West need to demand a more profound analysis of ourselves and those we deem to be different. A worthy starting point would be an attempt to get to know who Muslims are and what Islam really is.

Chapter 4. The Islamic Spectrum

“To give an automatic priority to the Islamic identity of a Muslim person in order to understand his or her role in the civil society, or in the literary world, or in creative work in arts and science, can result in profound misunderstanding.”

Amartya Sen

4.1. What is Islam?

Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is not a monolithic faith. There exist multiple sects and varying strains of Islamic religious life. The same variations exist among the millions of Jews and Christians around the world. Muslims are immensely diverse and do not all share the same level of devotion or practice in the same manner or degree. Additionally, it needs to be recognized that Islam is not merely a religion. As previously mentioned, Campanini (2004, p.1) asserts that “Islam is of course a religion. That seems to be an obvious, even banal remark... [but] using the word religion to define Islam is, if not a mistake, at least rather imprecise.” Essentially what Campanini is attempting to portray is the multiplicity of Islam, and that the word – if interpreted correctly – carries with it numerous aspects of Islamic society. To contribute further to his point, he later also defines Islam as “the legal practice of the five pillars,” and that Islam serves as a legal measuring stick that judges actions in social and public Islamic life. Shepard (1996, p.33) encapsulates the essence of Islam more fully by describing Islam as “the religion that unifies the act of worship and social act, dogma and law, spirit and matter, economic and essential values, this and the next life, earth and heaven.”

Much is said about Islam and Muslims nowadays. It is not uncommon to have politicians and media sources describe and criticize Islam as if it were one entity. But consolidating all Muslims into one rigid religious family or ethnic group is paralyzing to any debate. It needs to be acknowledged that any academic or political argument founded on this forged amalgamation of individuals is not only ignorant, but completely adverse to a sensible dialogue.

Another aspect concerning Islam (similar to Christianity and Judaism) is the realization that there is an unshakeable belief in Allah, “the essential personal name of God,” as Mawdudi (1992, p.51) points out. The idea of God as a higher being and the belief in his all powerful nature is a fundamental element of Islamic teachings. It is suggested by some that humanity, at its core, is flawed and always in need of guidance. No human, no matter the goodness that he or she achieves, can reach the level of divinity. There is a strong belief within the Islamic tradition that argues the world and all its wonders and tragedies revolve around God’s law. That is to say, that everything on earth is connected, and at the centre of the stars, the sun, the water, the vast lands of the earth, the flowers, and animals rests one entity and that entity is Allah. As Mawdudi (1992, p.5) puts it, “this powerful, all pervasive law, which governs all that comprises the universe, from the tiniest specks of dust to the magnificent galaxies of the heavens, is the law of God, the creator and Ruler of the universe.” It is this unwavering faith in the unity of God, and Islam’s perceived ability to unite all religions that Mawdudi defines as “Tawhid.” Put more simply, it is this intense, constantly nurtured relationship that constitutes the primary and the first formal pillar of the Muslim faith.

In contrast, Islam reserves an expression which defines someone who refuses to live life surrendering to Allah and who disregards the first pillar of Islam. This word is *kufir*. Mawdudi helps us define this term as something that “literally means ‘to cover up’ or ‘to conceal’... the man who denies God is called *Kufir* because he conceals by his disbelief what is inherent in his nature and embalmed in his own soul” (1992, p.8). In Mawdudi’s piece, there are large sections devoted to the discussion of the term *Kufir*. It is described throughout as “a form of ignorance,” and its negative perception comes from the fact that it is not just mere tyranny, but a “rebellion, ingratitude, and infidelity” against God and Muslims in general. In analyzing the word, it seems that this is the worst sin man can commit against God, and a complete betrayal to Muslims everywhere. In fact, when speaking about the afterlife, it is suggested that Muslims who are labeled *kufir* are prematurely judged and destined for torment. As Mawdudi (1992, p.10) says, a life of pain and suffering awaits those who commit *kufir* and when placed before God, “every tissue of [one’s] being will [be denounced before] God who, as the fountain of justice, will punish as [is deserved].” In the words of Mawdudi

(1992, p.10), any Muslim that denies the existence of Allah or fails to entirely surrender to the prescribed Muslim way of life will encounter “dark alleys of utter failure, both here and hereafter.”

As has been discussed above, the profession of faith to Allah is the first and the most important of the five pillars of Islam. The other four pillars are also seen as crucial elements in becoming a desirable Muslim and they are considerably less complex than the first. As Campanini (2004, p.3) indicates, “The most important of the five pillars is the belief that there is no other god than God and Muhammad is his Messenger (in the formula of the Arabic *shahada*).” The remaining four pillars in their Arabic tongue are as follows: Salat, Zakat, Sawm, and Hajj. Salat, the second pillar is the term used for performing ritual prayers in the proper way five times a day. The third pillar is Zakat, paying an alms or charity to benefit the poor and the needy. The fourth pillar is Sawm, the term attributed to the fasting that must occur during the month of Ramadan. Finally, the last pillar of Islam is Hajj, the prescribed pilgrimage to Mecca. Although much more could be attributed to the remaining pillars, its analysis is not the aim of this dissertation. The important aspect here is to note that traditional Islam has specific duties and concrete recommendations that a responsible Muslim must follow. In total, the existence of Islam’s five pillars are not often disputed, although it needs to be noted that they are practiced and followed with varying degrees across Muslim communities around the world.

Although the five pillars of Islam play a monumental role in defining Islamic life, the bedrock of Islam is in fact the Quran. The Quran serves as a religious guide for millions of believers around the world, not just in the Middle East. As Campanini (2004, p.1) explains, “the Quran is the sacred book of Islam... referred to on a daily basis by believers, primarily as a religious guide, but also in everyday colloquial expressions.” It would be inaccurate though to simply describe Islam’s sacred book as solely a religious guide. Campanini (2004, p.8) further explains, “the Quran constitutes the expressive space of *din* (religion), the linguistic system in which *din* is worked out. It enables us to talk about theology, prophecy, eschatology and ethical moral and political principles.” From this, it can be concluded that the Quran is not simply a

religious handbook, but a multipurpose manual that serves to guide Muslims in all major aspects of their daily lives.

4.2. The Diversity of Islam

Below are some stories and outspoken opinions – and there are plenty more – to underscore a major point in my dissertation: Muslims, all over the world, by no stretch of the imagination, constitute one voice. In addition to the political differences among Muslims described above, there are of course a variety of Muslim sects – Shiias and Shiites being the two largest – and there even exist different schools of thoughts within the two major Islamic factions. In other words, Muslims in and outside of the West, are far from unified in opinion about their faith and beliefs, with conflicting prescriptions as to what direction Islam, as a religion and culture, should take.

In the prestigious Egyptian Al-Azhar Mosque, there is a leading cleric by the name Abdel Muti al-Bayyumi. This cleric, who suggests he is not alone in his thinking, has publicly supported the French government for recently instituting a ban on the niqab. He is on record (Middle East Online, 2010) stating, “I want to send a message to Muslims in France and Europe. The niqab has no basis in Islam.” Comments such as this one, made by a Muslim cleric, have been reiterated by non-Muslim politicians and individuals in order to express their distaste with the presence of niqab and burqas in several countries of the West. No matter how true this idea may be, banning different forms of Islamic attire does not expedite the process of building a safer society.

At the University of Western Ontario, in Canada, Salim Mansur, a professor of Muslim origin suggests (Fulford, 2009), that “the beast within Islam has been prowling for a very long time,” and in his own book (Mansur, 2009) calls on countries in the West to join in a common effort to crush Islamist terrorists and those who shelter them. Without specifically saying the words, Professor Mansur is advocating for a collective commitment to continue the war on Islam.

Hamed Abdel-Samad, a political scientist and author of *The Downfall of the Islamic World* is openly and highly critical of Islam. He currently lives in Germany, but he grew up in Egypt as the son of an imam. In a recent interview (Spiegel, 2010) he

declared that “Islam has no convincing answers to the challenges of the 21st century. It is in intellectual, moral and cultural decline – a doomed religion, without self-awareness and without any options to act.” Mr. Samad, in the same interview compared Islam “to a drug” and admits that he “converted from faith to knowledge” a long time ago.

Irshad Manji, a Canadian authour and now a professor at New York University thinks the solution to the “Muslim question” rests not with fixing something that is inherent in the faith; rather, it is Muslims themselves who need to change. She is the authour of *The Trouble With Islam Today*, and in it calls on Muslims to question the insularity of their faith, the harsh treatment of women.” In a previous interview (Macleans, 2003), Manji stated that “when people are told that you must pray at assigned times of the day, wash prescribed parts of your body and face, and recite only selected verses, you don't have to think.” Manji, a Muslim who is also openly lesbian, is considered a Muslim reformer who is never shy about criticizing Islam’s shortcomings.

The aim here is to shift and expand the dialogue on Islam. Instead of contributing to the unreasonable logic that Islam is one culture, or one religion, we need to accustom ourselves to placing Islam and Muslims in general along a spectrum.

4.3. Merging of “Civilizations”?

To assist in my quest to bridge two purportedly incompatible traditions, the work of Richard Bulliet serves as an appropriate starting point. In his book, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, Bulliet (2004, p.vii) accurately reminds us that despite the hostility that has often divided them, “Islam and the West have common roots and share much of their history. Their confrontation today arises not from essential differences, but from a long and willful determination to deny their kinship.” Sensible individuals will acknowledge this historic connection. One only needs to read the Old Testament in the Bible, study the trade and commerce relationships of past centuries, or examine the origins of Algebra to realize that Islam has been a contributing partner to the evolution of Western societies. This current struggle for kinship that Mr. Bulliet so adequately speaks of is troubling. The question that needs to be answered is: if Islamic

societies have historically existed alongside Western cultures, why is it that we are still asking questions concerning peaceful coexistence?

It is not rare to hear and read tremendous amounts of criticism towards Islam and Muslims in general, especially in our post-9/11 world. Most of this post 9/11 commentary is based on a selective historical analysis, which states that Islamic cultures in the past and still today function as violent and brute societies. Opponents of Islam often point to the countless amounts of violent historical events that serve as the foundation for Islamic anti-democratic governments throughout the Islamic world. However, *Dialogue with Orthodox Islam* (2009) reminds us that what many fail to recognize or admit is that the violent coups were often supported by outside powers, and that colonialism has played a major role in the evolution of Islamic societies. It is common for critics of Islam to condemn it as a whole, without accurately reflecting on the interference and immense errors caused by “Western” states that now, self identify as politically, morally and culturally superior. States that constitute “the West” must begin to take some responsibility for the condition in which the Islamic world now sees itself in. Rather than framing Islam as the uncontrollable and inherently violent *other*, perhaps it would be a good start to admit that the longstanding and recently renewed ‘war on Islam’ is in part perpetuated by Western policies and often works to advance the extremist Islamic agenda.

Richard Bulliet (2004, p.5) points out that “civilizations that are destined to clash cannot seek together a common future.” Bulliet makes an impressive argument as to why the supposed clash between Islam and the West should be viewed as false when he goes on to write about the concept of an Islamo-Christian civilization. He points out that “fourteen of the thirty-four European countries were at one time or another wholly or partially ruled by Muslims,” and that “Europeans for centuries carried on a lively commerce with the Muslims on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean.” This historical interaction, even with the stories of violence, brotherhood and struggle ties Europe and Islam closer than some would like to admit. Analyzing Islamic culture and history through this lens, and accepting the concept that Islamic faith and values can be pinpointed along a continuum, suddenly makes Islam less foreign.

In other words, the *other*, that countries and politicians of the West oftentimes want Islam and Muslims to be is, at its core, much like and already a part of *us*. This realization is perhaps not an easy truth to accept, or easy to explain, but if taken seriously, it has the capacity to drastically lower the tensions in international conflicts. The problem is that we have yet to reach this point of understanding and it is going to take an incredible amount of will – both politically and culturally – to start chipping away at the false image of Islam as solely violent and radical. Islam, as was indicated above, does not speak with one voice, but it should be noted that neither does the “West.” It is for this reason that the similarities and not the differences between all cultures and countries should be the factors leading us into the next phase of international cooperation.

Similar to other religions, Islam’s followers are not a homogeneous group situated solely in the Middle East (see Figure 2). As well, not every Muslim is against the secularism that is found in many parts of the Western hemisphere. In fact, there are Muslim countries today, such as Turkey and Indonesia that are making tremendous efforts to keep their societies democratic. As the Pew Report suggests, Muslims reside in every inhabitable continent and their religious customs and levels of faith range in intensity and belief. This is similar to followers of the Jewish, Christian, and most other faiths. The proposition that Islamic culture can be easily summed up and described in a uniform manner is simply flawed. Moreover, the idea that governments can continue to pass misguided and unbalanced laws in an attempt to tame the small minority of fundamentalists within Islam is a dangerous endeavour. Islam is as diverse as any other culture or any of the other major world religions. In fact, Islam has played a crucial role in shaping today’s Western societies.

The notion that Islam and the West cannot coexist peacefully is a socially constructed concept that ignores their common history. It ignores the fact that Bulliet (2004, p.6) so adequately highlights in that “historians are well aware of the enormous contributions of Muslim thinkers to the pool of late Medieval philosophical and scientific thought that European Christians and Jews later drew upon to create the modern West.” For politicians and academics to suggest otherwise requires the promotion of a selective, ignorant, and dangerous version of history.

Chapter 5. The Great Disconnect: Islam and Human Rights

“If the Quran is properly read and rightly understood in keeping with the spirit of the age in which Muslims reside, then Islam may be reconciled with modernity and democracy respectively.”

Irshad Manji

5.1. Defending Human Rights: an International Responsibility

There is nothing relative about human dignity. Treating another human being with fairness and respect is not a concept that was conceived of by the Western World, and it is certainly not a conviction that suddenly originated in 1948 with the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Any individual who overlooks this fact is ignoring centuries of human history and struggle. The principles of freedom, fairness and equality have guided generations of citizens in various societies with a variety of religious convictions. In fact (Ramcharan, 2008, p.2) illustrates that “elements of the rights idea, such as law and justice, can be traced to ancient civilizations, such as ancient Egypt, India, Mesopotamia, Sumeria, and Persia.” To suggest that democracies of the West serve as examples of countries who uphold human rights principles is reasonable (although there are various instances, recently and in the past, where the opposite could be argued). To suggest, however, that Western democratic methods and practices are the only vehicle to achieve adequate human rights standards would be false and irresponsible. To be clear, secularism (as promoted in several Western countries) does not guarantee tolerance.

Religion and human rights are often discussed (especially in the Islamic context) as two separate, mutually incompatible entities that are incapable of collaborating with one another. Human rights discourse often portrays this dichotomy through the universal versus cultural relativist arguments. A reason usually given as to why human rights can never be universally realized is the notion that cultures and people differ; therefore, a common code of behavior is incapable of existing. This argument is worthy of some attention and debate, but it is essentially flawed. The concept of human rights

is entrenched in many of the world's dominant religions, including Islam; therefore, a universal recognition of adequate treatment of humans already exists. In the Islamic case, as Ramcharan (2008, p.14) signals, "the role of justice, the sanctity of life, personal safety, freedom, mercy, compassion, and respect for all human beings," are pillars of Islam and emphasized in the Quran. Certainly, injustices of all kinds are prevalent in several Muslim-majority countries. However, Salim Mansur (2009, p.47) reminds us "illiberal variety tainted with anti-Semitism that drowned Europe in blood and ashes twice in a generation corrupted the faith tradition of the Arabs and pushed them into the sort of hostility that went against the words of the Quran." To engage in a dialogue that stresses the human rights challenges within Muslim countries is sensible. To portray Muslims as inherently violent and to suggest that Islam is intrinsically opposed to human rights practices would be an injustice in itself. The discrimination of humans is occurring in countries all over the world – including secular and non-Muslim societies. To criticize one specific tradition for their struggles with human rights is an invitation to condemn all traditions that fail to provide the adequate level of equality to their citizens.

Suffering has always been a part of the human experience, committed under the banner of a variety of religions and ideologies. In no way should this negate the need for a *universal appreciation* of human rights. This means whether the point of reference is religiously based (as in most Muslim countries) or governed by secular law (as in most Western countries), universal human rights should prevail. The only variation that should exist is in the application of these fundamental rights. The human rights debate is a comprehensive and vast realm of international academia, and there are numerous voices and opinions that adequately portray the substantial intellectual and political rifts. That is why for the purpose of this chapter, I will focus only on minority rights within the Islamic context.

I will first endeavour to dissect Islam fairly, exploring the terms of the debate in its diversity and many forms — including what can be called the *Islamic spectrum*. Here, I will attempt to get around the simplistic and blemished perception of Islam as a violent and militant society. At the same time, I will take a look at the criticisms placed on Islam in their treatment of women, homosexuals, and non-Muslims. It is here where

I will defend the universal human rights perspective, and argue that the cultural relativist argument should not be applied to the Islamic case. More importantly, I will point out that Islamic holy texts provide ample evidence of universal rights protections. Therefore, while I defend the Universalist position, it is not my view that all societies need to use the same doctrines to achieve the desired objective of equality for all humans. The second task of this chapter will be to defend the view that Islam not only can be, but should be part of the human rights dialogue. In addition to legal and political means, religion needs to be contextualized, debated intelligently, and seen as a vehicle towards the realization of human rights. The objective is not to criticize Islam aimlessly; arriving at solutions is the necessity.

5.2. Universalism and Cultural Relativism

The international community faces a fundamental predicament: how do we, collectively, move towards a more united and just society while respecting the authority of state sovereignty? The conundrum is a serious one, especially in the context of the Islamic question. Writers such as An-Na'im (2000, p.96) remind us that "there is no reliable international mechanism for enforcing human rights standards against the will of national governments," thus, he places the responsibility for the protection of human rights solely on national governments and grassroots organizations within respective states. Others, such as Ramcharan have a more internationalist view on the question of intervention. Though Ramcharan (2008, p.159) agrees that individual states "should have an adequate and effective national protection system that is capable of spreading a culture of human rights and stepping in where protection is needed," he grants a tremendous amount of power to the international community and tasks them with the duty to step in and correct human rights abuses. This is made clear when Ramcharan (2008, p.159) suggests that, "when protection fails, the international community is entitled to step in and supplement the national protection system or substitute for it if necessary." It is not the aim of this dissertation to arrive at an answer to this precise issue, however, the mention is critical in depicting the difficulty in promoting international intervention in the Islamic context. Political or military

intervention in the name of protecting human rights abuses is not a simple task, nor is it a universally agreed upon concept. Nonetheless, the differences in opinion regarding the issue of state intervention can be seen as a microcosm of the larger human rights debate.

In addition to the question of state intervention is the question of *universal* human rights. Put simply, does a universal moral compass exist? Should all states be obligated to follow a specific set of human rights codes? Do differences in tradition, culture and religion grant the right for states to limit rights to their citizens? While there is a compelling case for the cultural relativist position, this dissertation will defend the universal human rights position with one important caveat. I am of the mind that there indeed exists a common code of ethics; however, there too should be recognition that diverse methods of implementation can be present.

Many agree with Ramcharan (2008, p.1) in that “the human rights idea, faithfully implemented, can help ameliorate the human condition and lay the foundation for a more peaceful, prosperous, and equitable future.” This is not a Western construct or a passage borrowed from any specific holy book. One of the major arguments against the universal position is often rooted in the creation of the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR). Many writers, including An-Na’im (2000, p.96) contest that, “the concept of human rights as defined in the UNDHR is essentially a universalization of the idea of fundamental constitutional rights as developed by Western countries.” On a side note, Manji (2005, p.170) highlights the fact that “Saudi Arabia has never adopted the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights.” It is no surprise then that those who championed the human rights idea in 1948 were mainly from the West; however, the year 1948 was not the dawn of the human rights ethos. Clearly, the UNDHR played a major role in redefining how the international community reacted to last century’s world wars. It was a time that was defined by horrific injustices that left many countries financially and humanly devastated. Erasing those wrongs was at the core of the UDHR; however, it is important to acknowledge that the concept of fairness for humans existed well before the United Nations 1948 declaration, and throughout various parts of our globe.

Throughout history, different governments and states, including those considered a part of the West, have limited and denied human rights to its citizens. This denial of rights has occurred in the past and continues to be prevalent even today. For example, it is common to have governments justify the temporary suspension of basic human rights in modern day North America and Europe on the assumption that it enhances national security. Individuals have taken note and, I argue, have taken advantage of this vulnerability that exists within Western democracies. Despite the pervasiveness of human rights violations all over the world, by no means should this suggest that the human rights idea is not a shared ideal. More importantly, no one region or tradition should feel entitled to the development of human rights because like Ramcharan (2008, p.3) asserts, “all societies have seen struggles for what is known as human rights, and the seeds of the human rights idea are scattered in different parts of the world.” It is this universal struggle for fairness that unites, and it should be this struggle that legitimizes an understanding of the human rights idea. The notion of human rights is not static, in fact, Ramcharan (2008, pp.3) indicates that “the development of human rights is a rolling process, and ideas have been developed across different lands.” Combined, the struggle of humans from all corners of the globe, and the cross-cultural dialogue and lessons learned from different societies should be what carries forward the universal message of human rights. The more difficult question is how?

5.3. Secularism: the Solution?

In a well-written article, Karima Bennoune (2007) suggests that there is a real need to have a clear division between the functioning of a state and of its religious institutions. Many other writers speak of this division – and more accurately lack of division – as the prime obstacle to the realization of human rights around the world. In other words, religious states struggle to honour human rights to their citizens because they are unwilling to embrace secularist ideals. As an attempt to get around the universalist versus relativist argument, An-Na'im attempts to defend the idea that religion, and more specifically, Islam, should be a part of the human rights discussions.

Instead of defending the typical assumption that only secular states are capable of defending universal human rights, As suggested several times in his article, (An-Na'im 2000) contends that human rights must be legitimated in the context of multiple religious traditions because of the importance of varying perspectives for the vast majority of people around the world. As Tariq Ramadan (2004, p.101) mentions, "human rights exist in Islam, but they are, nevertheless, part of a holistic vision which orientates their scope." However uncompromising this concept may seem, it needs to become a point of conversation within the human rights debate in the West. I contend that secularism is not the only vehicle capable of steering a society towards the achievement of human rights. Once this uncomfortable truth becomes a more accepted understanding in the secular West, the quicker a genuine multi-faith and multi-national dialogue can lead to solutions.

Consider the following: Canada has and continues to undergo challenges in treating their aboriginal communities with the same level of dignity as all other Canadians. The United States of America's treatment of illegal Mexican "aliens" is shameful. Similarly, in the Sahin vs. Turkey case a 24-year-old woman then in her fifth year of studies in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Bursa challenged the school's code of ethics which Bennoune (2007, p.377) states "students whose heads are covered and students (including overseas students) with beards must not be admitted to lectures, courses or tutorials." This small sampling from Canada, the USA, and Turkey – all three defenders of secularism – shows the challenges even secular states face with limiting or upholding basic human rights. Therefore, it is not just the separation of state from religion that ensures human rights can flourish. In fact, as seen above, secularism can also be a hurdle for full equality.

In total, it should be recognized that despite its tremendous challenges, individuals whose beliefs are cemented on civil, common, and religious principles are all capable of defending the human rights ideal. A renewed trust in our neighbours is needed, including those with prominent religious convictions. The capacity for human virtue needs to be cultivated. In the same vein, religious individuals have little to fear from human rights, in fact, human rights only strengthen the ability for faith communities to practice their chosen faith.

In other words, while secularism can facilitate the flourishing of universal human rights, it cannot be taken to be the only way. Rather than proliferating the belief that religion in and of itself disables societies from granting its citizens equality, a more sincere dialogue should be taking place. It is particular interpretations of holy books that perpetuate these inequalities. In the Quran, as in other religious documents, there is a clearly stated understanding of human dignity and justice, as I will discuss below. Ramcharan (2008, p.14) lends credence to that assertion when he tells us, “the religious and cultural traditions of the five major religions uphold in common certain basic moral and ethical values for the promotion of which man must be enabled to exercise his rights and perform his duties in a mutuality of relationships.” To take this argument further, Ramcharan (2008, pp.14-15) states:

“Buddism advocated the principles of universal brotherhood and equality...Confucian philosophy emphasized the importance of an ethical life on earth as well as harmony an cooperation from all persons, honoring their duty and responsibility toward others... Judaism emphasized the shared fatherhood for all people and the fundamental importance of the creation of human beings as members of one family and as individuals endowed with worth... In Christianity, Jesus taught the value of all human beings in the sight of God and advocated love and compassion as well as charity, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, and caring for the oppressed.”

Despite their apparent differences, one thing is clear, in all of the major religions of the world the concept of fairness and equity are paramount. Each religion, as different as they are, advocate for principles that are similar to the principles defended in human rights declarations of the past half century. In other words, there are unmistakable similarities in “rights language” and this language is anchored in religious, rational, and legal contexts.

I purposely left Islam out of the major quote above, not because it does not demonstrate the same concept of human rights as the aforementioned religions, but because I wanted to highlight it specifically. The aim here is to place Islam inside the human rights debate despite its alleged failings and sweeping misunderstandings. In fact Islam, like the other religions of the world, demonstrates much appreciation for

elements of human rights. This can be seen when Ramcharan (2008, p.14) states that “Islam emphasized the common humanity and equality of all of mankind. The Quran emphasized the role of justice, the sanctity of life, personal safety, freedom, mercy, compassion, and respect for all human beings” (Ramcharan, 2008, p.14). This is a big departure from the falsehoods continually repeated by media sources, various academics, and demagogue politicians who cave into false populism. With that said, it is the interpretation, by individuals within several religious sects and traditions that have taken their faith’s intrinsic values and completely turned them on their head. Again, religion itself is not the cause of human rights abuses but rather interpretation of religious texts; therefore, Islam, like other religions, should not be perceived as an obstacle to equity and fairness. Cultural adjustments and educating the public are both necessary to ensure we begin to build a bridge of understanding between traditions. Reform to that end is occurring, albeit slowly. The solution begins with the acceptance that Islam, and Muslims of all stripes, should and can be part of the universal human rights equation.

5.4. The Issue of Islam and Women’s Rights

In the Christian Holy Bible, specifically in Deuteronomy 17:5 states, “Then shalt thou bring forth to thy gates that man or that woman, who have committed that wicked thing, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die”. Deuteronomy 17:5 is just one of a copious number of phrases in the Bible that are filled with hate and violence. In his article discussing Islam and human rights, Heiner Bielefeldt (1995) suggests that, like Christianity and other religions, Islam is a complex reality harboring various, and frequently conflicting, interpretations of its central normative demands. In order to understand this diversity and complexity, it is essential to understand the role of the Quran.

The Quran is at the centre of Islamic societies and is a holy book that serves multiple purposes, including suggestions on how women are to be treated. The Quran is not simply a religious guide, but a multipurpose guide that serves to guide Muslims in their daily lives. As Campanini (2004, p. 55) states, “the Quran has normative features,

and is not only a religious book but also a system of rules.” This is why substantial attention is given to the Quran from non-Muslim scholars in order to dissect the rationale for the violence shown by Islamic extremists. In the same manner, Islamic radicals use the Quran to justify the bloodshed and carnage they inflict on minorities and others alike. In addition to all this, the Arabic language itself stands as a challenge to the interpretation of Quranic texts, given its various linguistic styles and dialects.

In one of his works, Baderin (2007, p.2) effectively recalls a quote by Nelson Mandela which reads: “If you talk to a man [or woman] in a language he [or she] understands, that goes to his [or her] head. If you talk to him [or her] in his [or her] own language, that goes to his [or her] heart.” This quote begs two questions. The first is can Islam be a part of the universal human rights ideal? And secondly, is it necessary to use the *language* of Islam in order to rationalize human rights in Muslim-majority countries? I believe the answer to both of these questions is a resounding yes. Yes, Islam can be part of the struggle for universal human rights, as already indicated in previous sections of this chapter. And yes, the tenets of Islam will have to be better understood in order to get around the perception that Islam is regressive and incapable of realizing human rights. To be clear, I am not advocating for a relativist perspective in regards to Islam and women’s rights. Instead, I believe that Islam (along with other religious and cultural communities) have always had the values of fairness and equality instilled within its teachings. What is needed today is not Muslim isolation; rather, moderate voices need to help promote and reinterpret Muslim doctrines and advance the idea of human rights that is infused in Islam’s holy texts.

Islam, in and of itself, is not the problem when it comes to realizing human rights, it is the interpretations and beliefs that are (incorrectly and immorally) endorsed by individual Muslims. The same predicament exists with all other religions and its followers. Nonetheless, “a careful purview of current social, cultural, political and legal developments in Muslim states [...] reveals different degrees of Islamic influence in both the private and public spheres of those States, which directly or indirectly affects human rights issues” (Baderin, 2007). Let us begin with the wardrobe of Muslim women (including the hijab, the burqa, and the niqab), which is currently a controversial and a major political issue in Western democracies around the world.

Writers like Fatima Mernissi have at one point or another criticized Islam and the use of the hijab by contesting it is only through male domination and manipulation of the Quran that Quranic verses dealing with the hijab led to the denial of women's movement in public, and the concomitant denial of their rights and freedoms (Barlow & Akbarzadeh, 2006). Others, such as Barbara Stowasser also put forward a similar argument. In fact, Barlow and Akbarzadeh (2006) contend that "a chronological factor appears to have prevailed in the medieval thinking [...] in that with the progression of time ulama opinion within a particular madhhab could prescribe the female face as part of the obligatory *hijab* in increasingly absolute and categorical terms."

Canadian writer Irshad Manji (2005, p.169) in describing the plight of Muslim women in Saudi Arabia says that no other country "requires women by law to cover their faces. No other country in the world has the hubris to treat its female citizens as clones of Prophet Muhammad's wives – the only women obliged by the Quran to wear veils." It is clear that numerous Muslim and non-Muslim scholars agree that the hijab (along with other Muslim clothing) is not prescribed in the Quran. However, despite this, democracies should not be limiting and legally banning a women's right to choose what she wears. This epic collision of individual expression, freedom of religion, and the effort to protect women from oppression are all part of the "veil" debate that is sweeping across Western Europe and North America. Notwithstanding the complexities on all sides (which will be covered in subsequent sections of this dissertation), Tariq Ramadan (2009, p.98) perhaps puts it best when he argues: "compelling a woman to wear a headscarf is against Islam, and compelling her to remove it is against human rights." I wholeheartedly agree.

Beyond the veil debate, there lies another important criticism of the Quran and Islamic tendencies towards their women. In Shaheen Sardar Ali's (1998) theoretical framework in regards to women's rights, he admits that, "in verse 4:34 of the Quran, men are permitted to lightly beat women who are disobedient. There is no comparable injunction regarding a disobedient man." This admission brings about two important questions. The first is, why does the Quran bestow notions of equality between the sexes yet, in the same holy text, men are encouraged to beat their wives? As Manji (2005, pp.49-50) suggests, Muslims need to own up to the fact that the Quran's message

is inconsistent. For example, “compassion and contempt exist side by side. Look at [the Muslim take] on women. Hopeful and hateful verses stand only lines away from each other.” The second question is, considering that there is no prescribed punishment for men who are disobedient, is this not a suggestion that Muslim men are given a more prominent gender role?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali believes she has the answer. In her book *The Caged Virgin*, in order to illustrate the deplorable treatment of women in Islamic societies, Hrsi Ali compares the famous political philosopher J.S. Mill to the Prophet Muhammad. Hirsi Ali (2006, p.xiii) writes:

“Both were understandably interested in the role of women, but there is a vast difference between Muhammad and Mill. For instance, Mill considered his beloved wife an intellectual equal; Muhammad was a polygamist and wrote that men have authourity over women because God made one superior to the other.”

Hirsi Ali (2006, p. xiii) goes onto to claim that Mill was a model for “calm reason in the face of contentious issues [and he] argued that if freedom is good for men, it is good for women,” a concept that Hirsi Ali suggests is opposed to Islamic teachings.

Without question, Manji and Hirsi Ali are entirely correct to suggest that Islam has a dismal record when it comes to protecting and promoting the rights of women. However, Hirsi Ali’s intellectual limitation is Manji’s strength: Manji acknowledges the diversity within Islam, and more importantly the legitimate continuum of opinion on the issue of women and the Quran. To begin, not all women in Muslim-dominated countries are subjected to the same human rights reality. I mention this, not to censor or play down the plight of Muslim women inside Islamic countries, but to provide a fair representation of Islam.

To help demonstrate this spectrum, Jeri Altneu Sechzer (2004, p.263) points out that, “the status of Islamic women differs among the various Islamic countries, each with its own view and considerations about women.” Finally, as is usually the trouble with religion, interpretation of texts has proven to be a vital challenge. In his book *No god but God*, Reza Aslan (2006, p.60) directly contradicts Hirsi Ali when he suggests that, “nowhere was Muhammad’s struggle for economic redistribution and social

egalitarianism more evident than in the rights and privileges he bestowed upon the women in his community.” Aslan (2006, p.60) goes on to say that in addition to the “unbiblical conviction that men and women were created together and simultaneously from a single cell [...] the Quran goes to great lengths to emphasize the equality of the sexes in the eyes of God.” Clearly, reaching an agreement on interpretations of Islamic text is a complicated endeavour. In the end, as is usually the case with the religiously misled and the culturally manipulated violent radicals, Islamic scholars do not always read the Quran in the same manner.

5.5. Tariq Ramadan: Different Rationales, Similar Principles

“Islam and the West are incompatible”; “there is no concept of human rights in Islam.”; “Islam is an ideology, not a religion.” Comments such as these are common in academia, political speak, and in numerous media sources around the world. These convictions have been repeated by demagogues, politicians, scholars, individuals in the West, and even by Muslims themselves. Often, these comments are made with a superficial analysis of Islamic scriptures. Is it possible for the West and Islam to coexist peacefully or is Islam inherently opposed to human rights? There is clearly no shortage in opinion to these questions. Tariq Ramadan believes the former, and furthermore, he believes the democratic ideals of tolerance, pluralism, and debate is embedded in the holy texts of Islam.

Unfortunately, current political discourse on the aforementioned concepts is usually framed in binary positions. Politicians and academics are absorbed in perpetual confrontation, and the apparent irreconcilable positions are required in order to advance the impression that Muslims pose a threat to civil society. The truth is that arguments reinforced by different points of reference, predictably, will result in conflicting views. When perceptions are anchored on nationalistic and bigoted principles, it becomes a struggle to find a compromising space. In regards to issues concerning Islam and the West, the opposing views that are so often underscored, do not necessarily reflect natural divisions or inherent clashes between two civilizations, despite what some may suggest. In fact, the challenge in understanding one another may very well stem from

the mutual failure to comprehend the potentiality and limitations of the other; including the acceptance that tolerance can be found in traditions that are rooted on both rationality and divine order. It is with this notion in mind that makes Tariq Ramadan's reforms and arguments become all the more significant.

The realms of “the religious and the rational, the sacred and the profane are defined differently” Ramadan (2009, pp.79) suggests, “and they do not have the same limits, and they are articulated very specifically from one tradition to another.” It is clear that the Islamic relationship between the divine and the human makes it difficult for secular individuals to see Islam as worthy partners in the human rights dialogue. It has become accepted to believe that in order for someone to be able to defend the concepts of tolerance and pluralism, an individual is required to strip him/herself of his or her own faith. This is unhelpful. While religious convictions of all forms – including Islam – have been known to justify the eradication of human rights, this does not mean that the concept of equality and the need for deliberation do not exist within Islam. In effect, Ramadan asserts that these ideals are intrinsic Islamic principles, entrenched in the religious sources that are integral to the Muslim being. If one submits to God, as Ramadan (2009, p.82) points out, it does not mean one should concede and take comfort in the idea that “ready-made solutions [is the desired method] to settle collective affairs.” In other words, although Islamic holy texts provide prescriptions to settle social affairs, the texts are fluid and flexible enough to adapt to the specific environment and issue at hand. To substantiate his position, Ramadan points to the need for deliberation and debate as is shown in the Islamic notion of ‘shura,’ (the space which allows Islam the management of pluralism). Furthermore, Ramadan (2009, p.81) reminds us that “it appears in several instances in the Quran,” essentially rendering Islam a faith that values dialogue and deliberation to solve constantly evolving social predicaments.

Pointing to several passages in the Quran, and among the teachings of early Islamic scholars (where there exists an encouragement and a requirement for deliberation), Ramadan makes it clear that debate and consultation are Islamic obligations. To deny this fact, is to choose a hollow version of Islam. The aim here is to clearly show Islam as a tradition that shares similar democratic principles as the

West. One of the differences that Ramadan highlights is that in the West, these values come to fruition on the consensus that the separation between the individual and religious edict is a necessary prerequisite. By contrast, in Islam, these values are validated by divine proclamation. According to Ramadan, if Muslims are experiencing more inequality in Muslim-majority countries, it is not because the Quran rejects human rights. Rather, it is because Muslim leaders deliberately choose to misinterpret texts in order to advance their own political or religious agendas. This is important because it explains the misunderstanding at the core of artificial ‘clashes’ being promoted by writers and politicians who have more of an appetite for division, rather than finding solutions. The differences as Ramadan (2009, p.100) highlights, may be substantial, “but they must not lead us to conclude the impossibility of dialogue between the two civilizations.” An honest foundation, with the aim being the acceptance of one another, requires an admission that the great disconnect that exists between politicians and their voters, the East and the West, Muslims and non-Muslims, is rooted in human ignorance, and not in assumed ruptures between civilizations.

5.6. Religion and Human Rights: a Mutual Necessity

As I have previously indicated, and Barlow and Akbarzadeh (2006) concur, “the problematic position of women in Muslim societies is a result of male-dominated (mis)interpretation of the holy texts of Islam, rather than of the essence of Islam itself.” Evidently, there are examples of women being mistreated in Islamic states. That is an obvious statement. The conclusion I want to assert is quite simple. A universal recognition of human rights needs to exist, but this can only exist if we have the courage to acknowledge the essence of Islam and the role it has on its people. Again, it is not Islam that is the problem, but rather a regressive and patriarchic interpretation of holy texts – a human error in judgment. Thus, Muslims should not be forced to make a false choice. There is no need (if the human rights dialogue is properly promoted) to choose between religion and human rights. The reality is that Islamic societies – all of them – are capable of much better. In the same vein, there is no reason why the citizens of the West cannot attain the rational facility to realize that the Islamic way of life, a sacred

community of tradition and history is not one to fear. As Louis Henkin perfectly concludes in the article written by An-Na'im (2000, p.101), "In the world of today, and tomorrow, religion and religions are transnational, and every religion is somewhere a minority." Generally speaking, every religion relies on human rights for freedom of thought, conscience, worship, practice, and for tolerance. Religions need the human rights idea in order to protect them against arbitrary, abusive political power, and they need some level of international human rights to secure all of this protection.

Chapter 6. Dissenting Voices

“The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity.”

William Butler Yeates

6.1. Tariq Ramadan: Bridging Islam and the West

It is quite remarkable how far and how much uninformed opinions about a person's character and their convictions can spread. For those who are engaged in Islamic studies (at any level) who have actually taken the time to read the views of Tariq Ramadan, it should become clear that the man is a much needed voice in this divisive international debate. Those who call his points of view “controversial” and “contentious” may garner attention but they do not do justice to his well thought out arguments. Rather, their response seems calculated to promote a movement whose sole purpose is to divide, conquer, and silence Muslim communities in the West and undermine the forces seeking to find greater understanding.

Certainly, Tariq Ramadan is a prominent voice within and outside Muslim communities on topics that concern the Islamic world. His family history and background are enough to make even the most optimistic international writer on Islamic issues question his motives. But, to arrive at conclusions based simply on statements that are taken out of context, purposely framed in neo-conservative rhetoric (where fear is of more value than substance), or to fail to acknowledge Ramadan's important voice within the full spectrum of the Islamic dialogue, is unbecoming of intellectual debate. Tariq Ramadan, as Andrew March (2007, p.399) describes him, is “on one hand, a scion of political Islam – the grandson of Hasan al-Banna, the Egyptian founder of the Muslim brotherhood. On the other hand, he is an outspoken advocate of the notion that European Muslims can be both European and Muslim in equal measure.” In a debate that frequently takes place at the margins of extremism, the time calls for the moderate Muslim voices to speak up and be heard. It is often suggested that Islam and Europe – and by extension, the entire Western world – cannot reconcile their differences in

regards to ideas of human rights, modernity, and social order. Ramadan disagrees. He believes, and his writings suggest that Islam and the West are indeed compatible and that this conception needs to be supported and promoted. As the distinguished scholar Olivier Roy asserts, Tariq Ramadan is endeavouring to lead the charge in a thoughtful effort to modernize Islam for a complex liberal age (Berman, 2007), and this type of reform should be considered encouraging.

As in other religions, Islam can blame the misinterpretation of its holy texts as one of the reasons for a swelling conservative and fundamentalist movement internally hijacking its faith. But Ramadan (2009, pp.19) states that a “Muslim is obligated to respect the Divine Order which has willed time, history, and diversity” and he calls for Muslims to take an introspective look at their faith by reinterpreting the language of the Quran for our times. More so, he suggests that Muslims need to acknowledge that the Prophet (through Islam’s two main sources), always intended for fluidity and discussion to be part of Islam’s progression. In other words, Ramadan does not believe that changing Islam is a requirement; rather it is Muslims themselves that need to change. As Berman (2007) illustrates, this “reasoned but traditionalist approach to Islam based on values that are as universal as those of the European Enlightenment” is what distinguishes Ramadan from most other Islamic thinkers and scholars. It is clear, he goes onto say that “his values are neither secular, nor always liberal, [but] they offer an alternative to violence, which is, in the end, reason enough to engage with him, critically, but without fear.” I am not suggesting that Ramadan be granted blind support, but for those concerned with finding solutions to Muslim integration, his is a voice not to be ignored.

Using the Quran and the Sunna (Islam’s two main religious and legal sources) as his foundation, Ramadan’s writings confront questions relating to the concepts of jihad and tolerance. He also discusses the integral relationship between God and men, and how that relationship has and will continue to contribute to a grave misunderstanding (by those in the West) of the Islamic faith. In his work, he asserts that democracy and pluralism are as much a part of the Islamic reality as they are in the West. Ramadan also underlines the Prophet’s use of debate and reason, and why deliberation has and always should be a part of Islam’s spirit. Finally, Ramadan refuses to concede to

Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations,' instead claiming that there is a clash within civilizations occurring – both within Islam and in countries of the West – where factions of individuals are pulling apart and challenging traditional systems of beliefs. These are all questions and concepts that Ramadan concerns himself with, and they make up a bulk of the substance in his writings.

6.2. Tariq Ramadan: Understanding the Islamic Jihad

In Ramadan's *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, in reference to the term jihad, Ramadan (2009, pp.59) asks "how can a concept, which is loaded with the most intense spirituality, become the most negative symbol of religious expression?" I believe the answer to that question is twofold. The first reason is the unfortunate truth that Muslim men and women have, and continue to engage in dramatic violence around the world. Put differently, Islamic extremists have misinterpreted one of the core elements of their religion, and have resorted to violence in order to confront their grievances, thinking this is the way Prophet Muhammad intended to resolve conflict. The second reason has nothing to do with Muslims or Islam.

Another motivation for the confusion around the term *jihad* is directly linked to the deliberate attempt by conservative individuals in the West and Islamic fundamentalists (who interestingly enough are speaking the same language) to promote a version of Islam that is reductionist in nature. Not only is this version baseless and flawed, but it creates a substantial misunderstanding of Islamic tenets for communities in the West. Moreover, it generates fear, which is essential in fueling the negative, isolationist, and in some cases xenophobic reactions and policies of Western governments.

There is no doubt that in the past and even today, some Muslims believe that violent conflict is the only solution to international discords. Muslims are not alone in this thinking. One only needs to make reference to the Christian crusades of the past to realize that other religions have at one point or another, throughout history, used and justified violence in the name of religious ideals. I mention this not to apologize for Islamic fundamentalists who are clearly choosing (knowingly or not) to read their holy

scriptures in an exceedingly narrow manner. I bring up the violent past of Christians to give some much needed perspective to this issue. To be clear, the Muslims who strap bombs to their chests in the name of Allah today are equally as guilty of mass murder as the Christians who fought in the name of God in the past. The aim here is to get past this level of dialogue and advance another version of jihad – one that is true to the Quran and what the Prophet Muhammad advocated.

A more encompassing definition and understanding of jihad is that in which Ramadan and other writers (such as Irshad Manji) have put forward. “Tension is natural,” Ramadan (2009, p.61) explains, “and the conflict of the inward is properly human.” Ramadan goes on to recount from a *hadith* (a report of the sayings or actions of Muhammad or his companions), that when the Prophet was coming back from an expedition against the Muslims’ enemies he suggested that a distinction needed to be made between different levels or forms of jihad. The difference being that “war [is] a lesser jihad in comparison to the greater jihad which is the effort of inward purification and of a human being’s spiritualization before his Creator.” Surely, one can take this passage and suggest that in some form, no matter how small it may be, the Prophet is advocating war and violence, and that here lies the fundamental problem with Islam today. Ramadan admits conflict is a human reality, but points out the Prophet placed more value in diversity and managing the differences in society through peaceful means. Therefore, according to Ramadan, the real jihad is that of an internal struggle, without the necessary promotion of violence. If we, in the West, are going to judge and spread the false idea that Islam is an inherently violent religion because its holy book endorses it, then perhaps it is time we pay attention to our current and former political leaders to hear their rationale for the wars of the past and of those we are involved in today.

We cannot criticize ‘the other’ without looking within ourselves and at our own record first. More importantly, we cannot hold an entire religion responsible for the actions of some individuals who have chosen to alter interpretations to suit their interests. If the Quran offers the necessary latitude for various interpretations then modern citizens should have the capacity to admit that taking legal and political action with a limited understanding of a people is not the proper way forward. In other words,

passing legislation that limits Muslim rights in the West is counterproductive if we have a limited understanding of the consequences of those decisions. The duty to educate and encourage change, however, must not fall on one side alone. Muslims, no matter where they live in the world, need to own up to the actions of their fellow brothers and sisters; and democratic citizens of the West need to gain the courage to stand up and oppose policies that are founded on erroneous and divisive thinking.

6.3. Tariq Ramadan: The Inescapable Relationship between God and Man

The dogmatic shackles of secular absolutism are just as dangerous as unyielding religious convictions. No progress, whether it is measured by national dialogue or international policies, can happen if politicians, scholars, and citizens are unwilling to get past their walls of certitude and misunderstanding. Policy makers need to realize the reality that to be Muslim is to feel Muslim in the soul, the heart, and in daily actions. Being Muslim is a life-long process, and the Quran is at the heart of that journey. As Tariq Ramadan (2009, pp.22) points out, “submission” (which is the literal translation of Islam), from the very moment when faith is expressed, is the acknowledgement of an essential order: “to submit is to accept the freedom to be human and [to be] responsible before the Creator.” Put more simply, every decision for a Muslim cannot be made without God being considered. This is the main reason for the confrontation currently taking place in the West and in trying to deal with the “Islamic problem.”

Many in the West do not comprehend that point of reference, and even more, believe that Islam’s core is immoral, destructive, and incompatible with Western values. While there are certainly Muslims who confirm the West’s suspicions and misconceptions through violent behaviour, a vast majority of Muslims recognize that to associate aggression with Islamic principles is fundamentally non-Islamic. As it states in the Quran, “God changes not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves” (Quran, 13:11). In the quest for human reconciliation and the peaceful coexistence of two supposed opposites, it should be recognized that Islam is not the problem but rather individual Muslims. Put differently, Islam is not an impediment to a

functioning pluralistic society; it is the decisions made by some Muslims who are wrongfully conflating bloodshed with blind faith.

Moreover, contrary to popular opinion in the West, less religion does not necessarily equate to modernity, and modernity is not necessarily a synonym for the West, secularism, or democracy. There exist Muslim-majority states that function as democracies (such as Turkey and Indonesia), and there are liberal democracies that still have religion instilled in their constitutions (most of Western Europe). It is commonplace, in academic and political debate, to have scholars and politicians suggest that Islamic citizens are experiencing inferior rights compared to those citizens of the West. The reason for this, it is suggested, is due to Islamic states having been incapable of shedding their religious beliefs. Ramadan (2009, pp.75) points out:

“Things are very clear: either the political has a link with the religious, and in this case, we are dealing with a theocratic organization, the dogmatic drifts of which have already been shown in history. Or, the political is separated from the divine point of reference and, hence, there opens the horizon of the state of law, which is founded on rationality, the perfection of which can be found in the democratic model.”

A few comments need to be made at this juncture. To start, Ramadan’s quote above serves as the foundation for many individual’s arguments in the West. In his writing, he neither endorses it, nor disagrees with it. He simply challenges the universal practicality of the notion, and suggests political, social and cultural progress hinges on moving away from such binary thinking. Secondly, there needs to be recognition that human rights violations are indeed being committed against Muslims (and non-Muslims) in and by Islamic states in the name of God. In the same vein, secularism does not guarantee against human rights violations. There needs to be an admission that citizens in the West (including Western Muslims) have and continue to experience human rights violations. Whether these infringements are committed in the name of a God or the state, they are equally intolerable. Lastly, western democracies cannot all be viewed as modern simply because they have been founded or exist now on a non-religious ethos. Surely, several democracies of the West (after the Enlightenment), have

modernized themselves to the point where they function and govern themselves on the basis of rational and legal thinking as opposed to a religious order. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to remember that references to religious tradition are present in a many Western countries' constitutions (Ramadan, 2009), and religion, in the Western world, has not been fully eliminated from the public space or purse.

Notwithstanding Ramadan's sometimes vague and carefully crafted language, he is unlike most other Islamic writers and thinkers. As Andrew March (2007, p.411) explains, "many Islamic scholars reject participation in European political systems either on the grounds that it is sinful to collude in un-Islamic legislative and political power, or that it is preferable not to add to the strength of non-Muslim societies." Conversely, Ramadan is adamant that Muslims outside of Islamic states should indeed participate in their communities. In *To Be a European Muslim*, Ramadan (1999, p.134) even suggests that "Muslims should be allowed to commit themselves within society and to act in favour of human solidarity." This leads to the promotion that Muslims can and should become engaged in social, political, and economic activities in their adopted lands. A look across the breadth of Islamic writing indicates that Ramadan's assertions are a sharp departure from other traditional ways of thinking, and for this, he is an individual fully capable of bridging this divide.

6.4. Khali Gibran: Using Poetry to Challenge Conventional Thinking

As stated here numerous times, Muslims, like adherents of other religious groups, differ widely in their opinions and practices. It most certainly is less common and more dangerous in the Islamic world to disagree with the majority, especially on religious issues. However, there exists a spectrum of Muslim faith and an array of thinkers that differ from traditional Islam, which is often ignored. It is unfortunate that the masses have bought into the numerous criticisms and cultural wars that politicians and academics have invented by simply framing all of Islam as the "beast" that needs to be tamed. While Campanini (2004, p.107) reminds us that "The Quran is the point of unavoidable departure," this does not mean that history has not seen its share of Islamic writers and thinkers who have challenged traditional Islam.

One of those writers who frays from traditional Islamic teachings is Khali Gibran, an Islamic writer who often wrote about traditional Islam, secularism, religion itself, and different aspects of society. In one of his poems entitled “The Good God and the Evil God,” he questions whether there is such a thing as a good God. In spite of the accepted view that belief in one God is essential to become a responsible Muslim, the short poem introduces us to two gods who have a brief conversation, acknowledging to each other that lately they have lately been mistaken for one another. As stated above, the belief in one God is essential to becoming a responsible Muslim. This poem, among others during Gibran’s lifetime, speaks to the process and the struggle associated with breaking away from radical Islam, and this demonstrates that there exist Islamic writers and academics that do not prescribe to traditional Islamic teachings. In another one of Gibran’s poems entitled “The New Pleasure,” the concept of dualism is further explored. In this piece, a devil and an angel occurs and they discuss a newfound pleasure. The poem ends with both exclaiming: “It is a sin! – the other – it is a virtue!” Gibran’s dualistic writings would be considered unacceptable, even outright sinful back at the time of his writing and arguably still today.

The Quran, according to Muslims, sets out direct pronouncements on what is right and wrong. A belief counter to that found in Muslim scriptures is, in the strictest sense, is seen as an offence to Allah and to Muhammad’s teachings. Gibran, through his writings, undoubtedly challenged Muslims’ way of thinking and interpretation of the holy book as well as their culture. Although, just two short examples are analyzed here, they show a clear break from the accepted norm in Islamic scriptures, and Gibran is far from being the sole dissenting voice.

6.5. Ayaan Hirsi Ali: the Problem is Islam

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Somali-born, self-described ex-Muslim, and a former member of the Dutch Parliament. She has an extraordinary story to tell. Already, in her short lifetime, she has had to deal with female circumcision, has had to escape the influence of her family, has lived in several oppressive states in the Middle East, she continues to receive death threats both in the West and in the Islamic world for her

vocal opposition to Islamic practices. Because of these experiences, and understandably so, Hirsi Ali views Islam in a considerably negative light and is considered an extreme, even marginal, voice within the Islamic debate. According to Hirsi Ali, there is no room for negotiating with Islam because, she feels, it is a rigid and static religion. In her book, *The Caged Virgin*, Hirsi Ali (2006, p.166) refers to the Quran as “a book that can inspire one man to put his forehead on the ground in piety and rouse another to war.” After reading several of her books, articles, and hearing her in online and television interviews, criticism of her views as extreme seem warranted.

Hirsi Ali appears unable to reconcile her experiences with the reality that Islam – its people, its faith, and its interpretations – function along a wide spectrum. More importantly, it seems that she has lost the hope for a compromise between Islam and the West. For Hirsi Ali, it really is quite simple: Islam is evil, patriarchal, and primitive, and the West owes nothing to it. While I believe her voice is an important one, it is my view that her conclusions are unfortunately cemented by emotional responses to her own harrowing plight rather than a yearning for reconciliation. My criticism of Hirsi Ali is not rooted on her brash promotion of an inflexible Islam (although I disagree with that too); rather, it is that she endorses the continued notion of a cultural war.

Hirsi Ali is not entirely blind to her own theoretical shortcomings; however, she forges ahead with her relentless, outspoken, and sweeping disapproval of Islam. To begin, she sympathizes with some of the segments of Islam that want to break free from oppression. Hirsi Ali (2006, p.175) writes, “I empathize with the bearded man and the veiled girl because I know what that fear feels like.” She even, at times, is capable of admitting that the violence – committed by Muslim hands towards the West – is a drastic misinterpretation of the holy Islamic texts. Hirsi Ali (2006, p.173) writes, “the Holy book was relative –not absolute, not the literal syllables pronounced by god, but a historical record.” Her convictions are important and should not be discounted because her voice contributes to the spectrum of Muslim opinion and proves that thinking – in the Islamic context – is not monolithic.

My main issue with Hirsi Ali is the fact that her only solution is war – a cultural one. She ascribes to the same school of thinking as late Harvard professor Samuel Huntington and his “Clash of Civilizations.” It is the persistence shown by Hirsi Ali

(similar to Huntington) to ignore the vast diversity that exists within the Islam that limits the influence of her convictions. Despite this ignorance, Hirsi Ali (2006, p.157) does admit that “the vast and overwhelming majority of Muslims here and abroad are decent and law-abiding people.” This is correct, and in fact, these Muslims – the law abiding citizens she speaks of – already are a part of and contribute daily to Western civilization. They are doctors and police officers who keep our democracies healthy and safe. They are public servants, politicians, and voters who contribute to our democratic institutions. They are mothers and fathers who walk their children each morning to publicly funded schools. More importantly, they are citizens with multiple identities – Canadian, American, French, German, or British – as well as Islamic. Every day, these decent Muslims remind us why the divisive Islamic and Western dichotomy is artificial and disingenuous.

Research done at George Washington University by (Lynch, 2010) suggests that “real moral courage does not come from penning angry polemics without regard for real-world consequences.” Hirsi Ali must recognize the consequences of her convictions. Surely, she is correct, there is indeed a need to confront Islamic extremists. By supporting a theory like Huntington’s, however, she is advocating for a war that refuses to take into account the diverse realities and varied opinions of individuals within any given civilization. As Hirsi Ali (2006, p.156) herself rightfully suggests, “In a democracy there is no right not to be offended.” What she seemingly fails to admit and understand is that democracy functions best when policies and laws are anchored on veritable assessments of the individual, and not on a falsified perception of an entire group.

6.6. Irshad Manji: the Problem is Muslims, not Islam

Canadian writer, journalist, and self-proclaimed rebel Irshad Manji, author of *The Trouble with Islam Today* offers a slightly different take than Hrsi Ali. Irshad Manji is just as vocal and upset with Islam as Hrsi Ali. In fact, at one point in her book, Manji (2005, p. 173) describes Islam as “a Spartan faith – scalped of its intellectual pedigree and relentlessly engaged in holy war,” but a much needed rationality seems to

accompany the understandable anger in Manji's writings. While both writers denounce the Islamic faith and bring to light its destructive aspects, Manji appears to be more reasoned. This could be attributed to the fact that Manji – like Ramadan – advocates for Islamic reform. Additionally, Manji (2005, p.150) – unlike Hirsi Ali – understands that “an argument deserves counter-argument,” which naturally serves as an invitation for dialogue and debate, rather than simple one-sided criticism of the issues at hand.

To no one's surprise, there are numerous pages in her work dedicated to underscoring the hypocrisies and atrocities within her own faith. Despite several of these candid admissions, Manji (2005, p.3) makes clear that “this doesn't mean I refuse to be Muslim; it simply means I refuse to join an army of automatons in the name of Allah.” This serves as another differentiation from Hrsi Ali. Overall, Irshad Manji calls for an honest conversation between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is her aim to contribute to the quiet revolution currently taking place within Islam and join the moderate Muslim voices who promote a flexible Islam that can be adapted for good.

In her work, Manji (2005, p. 36) exposes the rigid treatment of the others within Islam – women, Jews, Christians, slaves, and homosexuals. Confidently, Manji (2005, p. 31) reminds us that if we “pick a Muslim country, any Muslim country, the most brutal humiliations will grab [us] by the vitals.” She cites honour killings, the stoning of women, slavery, violence, political corruption, and imprisonment as daily realities for Muslims in Islamic states. According to Manji, it is no secret that the above abuse is occurring in countries such as Pakistan, Mali, Indonesia, Mauritania, Sudan, Jordan, Sudan, and Yemen (to name just a few), abuse and human rights violations that are often ignored. The reason why many of these injustices are taking place within Islamic states is because governments and citizens in general are promoting a version of Islam that Manji bluntly describes as a “desert Islam” (Manji, 2005). Equality cannot exist because standing up to authority, in some cases, would be a suicidal act. As Manji (2005, p. 153) points out, “this is a tribal structure in which dissent is seen as treason.” To be fair, Manji admits that today's Islam is diverse and was not always this radical.

Long are the days where Islam led the world in astronomy, math, medicine and so many other areas of society (Manji, 2005). Although the past plays a critical part of Manji's dissection of Islam, it is the present and the future that concerns her most. Yes,

the fact that “Shias can’t be represented in a Saudi court” (Manji, 2005, p.168) is incredibly troubling. Certainly, it should be a concern for the international community that the *muttawa* (religious police) in Afghanistan arrest and then execute women for what is often deemed accepted behaviours and customs in Western societies. Surely, as Manji (2005, p.168) indicates, Islamic governments should be held accountable for failing to comply with the “1990 Islamic human rights charter signed in Cairo by Muslim countries.” And, without a doubt, American citizens should be appalled when an Arabic-language textbook distributed to Muslim students in the United States reads: “the unbelievers, idolaters, and others like them must be hated and despised... we must stay away from them and create barriers between us and them” (Manji, 2005, p. 171). In order to move forward, and past these tribal ways of governing and teaching (in the name of God), the responsibility for the aforementioned policies and decisions must rest squarely on Muslim shoulders. As a matter of fact she suggests “it’s Muslims who manufacture consent in Allah’s name. The decisions we make on the basis of the Quran aren’t dictated by God; we make them of our free human will” (Manji, 2005, p.39). This sense of intellectual honesty and the need to take responsibility is a central plank in Manji’s writings. These are critical elements that Manji hopes will lead to a different, more accommodating version of Islam.

6.7. Non-Muslim Voices: the Power of Islamophobia

Europe and North America are currently witnessing a rise in anti-immigrant and nationalistic voices on the far-right of the political spectrum. This trend of ultra-conservatism in the West is gaining support by riding a wave of open, unapologetic xenophobia, and patriotic rhetoric. Seemingly, the more divisive, racist, and inward-looking one’s politics are the more support one garners. Western media is contributing to this movement by confirming that the politics of fear and division are more newsworthy than policies that aim to unite.

It is no surprise that academia, similar to politics, comprises an array of views. In respect to the debate on Islam, there is no shortage of Huntington-like writers who maintain that civilizations are at war and that reconciliation is unattainable. It is these

conservative writers who often have what I call: historical amnesia. In other words, their arguments are based on selective narrations of history with a tendency to emphasize the negative and the most conflict-ridden accounts, while disregarding facts that may be counter to their claims.

Christopher Caldwell, the author of *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* is one of those conservative writers. He is guilty of what Wright (2010) describes as a tendency “to latch onto evidence consistent with [his] worldview and ignore[s] or downplay[s] contrary evidence.” Regardless of one’s views, it should be clear by now that there exist varying opinions and voices in the Islamic debate. Caldwell’s ignorance and blindness to that notion is well-established in his book. Caldwell (2009, p.286) maintains “the moderation of Islam is a hope, not a fact.” In the same vein, Caldwell also goes on to suggest that to see moderation within the Islamic debate is to leap to false conclusions. It is the habit of writers like Caldwell to see and describe the world in a rigid and static form. For this reason, they fail in fully understanding the reality of the conversation they endeavour to contribute to. Even with admissions such as: “less than one percent of British Muslims were engaged in terrorism in some way, at home, or abroad” (Caldwell, 2009, p. 273), there is still a hesitation to present a proper academic balance, or give particular facts the weight they deserve. By choosing not to accurately portray their criticisms and convictions, conservative writers like Caldwell end up doing a sizeable disservice to intellectual debate. Moreover, it is chilling to realize that misleading, slanted academic commentary is so often influential in contributing to national policies.

Caldwell presents several important ideas on the debate of Islam’s place in the West. Beyond the rare yet spectacular stories about pastors wanting to burn Qurans in the US or Muslim protests in the Middle East where cries of “death to America” are shouted, there do exist some matters that are worthy of genuine discussions in Western democracies. One of these subjects is multiculturalism. More specifically, there is a real concern around the need to integrate or assimilate newcomers. There are even some politicians and writers who refuse to entertain the above question and suggest that countries of the West need to halt immigration in order to preserve the essence of their national identities. Caldwell, using a variety of protectionist writers, seems to be an

advocate for the tightening up of national borders. Using the German jurist Udo di Fabio's writings, Caldwell (2009, p.106) warns that "the language of multiculturalism and diversity opens the gates to a new Middle Ages, in which the model is not the human individual but the harmonious ordering of groups." Comments such as these are used to build a case for Caldwell's belief in the gradual erosion of Western identities, and the increasing "power" alien inhabitants (read: Muslims) are acquiring in their adopted lands.

Caldwell, along with other writers, is part of multiple movements in the West making a case for the "true victims" of multiculturalism – the angry white man. At the core of Caldwell's (2009, p.182) argument is the suggestion that "when newcomers, in the name of a revealed religion, reject the European civilization built around bureaucratized rationalism, Europeans are bound to feel either insulted or shown up." Often, conservative writers place an overwhelming emphasis on national (and Western) values. Of course, these values differ from writer to writer depending on which interest is being protected. At times, pluralism and tolerance are included in these shifting value systems. Although, on the surface this seems relatively progressive, it needs to be highlighted that for writers such as Caldwell, the ideas of pluralism and tolerance in a democracy only exists if the "other" is deemed acceptable and reasonable. In other words, as long as the foreigner or "alien" does not disturb or pose a challenge to conventional ways of life, then they are welcomed. This type of pluralism is not democratic. To suggest, as Caldwell (2009, p.338) does, that it is tolerable to "have a hyphenated identity if you insist on it – but you had better know which side of the hyphen bread is buttered on," smells of a colonial past, a past where most progressive societies turned their backs on decades ago.

One of the first steps towards a broken society is the acceptance that misunderstanding each other is a suitable way of living. Michael Radu is the author of *Europe's Ghost: Tolerance, Jihadism, and the Crisis in the West* and another one of those traditionalist voices who finds comfort in building a democracy anchored on dishonest assessments of individuals. In his attempt to substantiate intolerance towards the Muslim communities in the West, Radu (2010, p.491) refers to unfavourable views towards homosexuality, "polygamy, genital mutilation, [and] anti-abortion" in the

Muslim tradition as reasons why decent men and women should “question the realism of accepting Islam as just another religion to be respected and tolerated in our midst.” There is, of course, no mention of the second class status women face within the Catholic tradition. Conveniently, Radu does not mention that females are not allowed to become priests, or the fact that homosexuals are prohibited from marrying in Catholic churches. Radu also fails to mention that women in the Jewish Orthodox tradition are not considered equal when it comes to prayer, some religious ceremonies, and the fact that women cannot become rabbis. It is clear that Radu, in reference to Islam, believes that it is shameful that some Muslim women are not treated equally. He seems to freely champion the rights of women when Islam is being criticized, but fails to see the intolerance and prejudice of other religions. Inconsistent criticism has no place in academia. Furthermore, a sliding scale of intolerance where there is an approval of one form of bigotry being deemed less than another has no place in functional democracies.

The hypocrisy of conservative scholars is peculiar. Radu (2010, p.26) for example in his writings admits that “the devotion to their faith of Muslims in Europe varies according to their national origin, the colonial past of their country of origin, the reasons for having emigrated, and their class and educational background.” This is a clear indication that even among conservatives, there is an admission that Muslims are not a homogeneous group. Yet, in the same chapter, Radu (2010, p.27) goes onto to suggest that “the Muslim reluctance to accept European values and customs in Europe makes for a dangerous cultural admixture.” To summarize, on one hand there is recognition of an Islamic spectrum, and then in the same breath, there is a warning that Muslims do not integrate and are a hazard to European unity.

The reality – which is ignored by Radu – is that there are millions of European Muslims who have not only integrated into European (and other Western) societies, they are second and third generation French, Australians, Germans, Canadians, Spanish (just to name a few) whose children were born in Europe or North America, and whose day-to-day life closely resembles that of their neighbours. Of course there is also a segment of any immigrant population, including Muslims, who struggle to make the transition to Western life, but to put forward the inflexible idea that “democracy itself is anti-Islamic, because of Islam’s tenet that the laws of God supersede the laws of man”

(Radu, 2010, p.30), is exposing a hefty gap between perception and reality.

It is insufficient to acknowledge the breadth of the Muslim tradition and then sit idly by while discriminatory movements capitalize on issues involving Muslims in democracies all over the world. I contest it is politically and academically irresponsible to signal the alarm and isolate the Muslim community by passing laws in countries of the West that reject the diversity and fluidity of the Muslim faith. As Tony Blair, through work done by Warner (2010), reminds us, “this is not a battle between Islam and the West. It is a battle between those with a modern view of the world in which people of different faiths peacefully coexist and those in whatever religion who don’t.” Writers like Michael Radu and Christopher Caldwell are not really defenders of modernity, nor are they champions of democracy. They are remarkably similar to the Islamic radicals (who they themselves warn us against): destructive to the unity of pluralistic, sensible, and tolerant societies all over our world.

Chapter 7. Rethinking the Way Forward

“To each of you we have given a law and a pattern of life. If Allah had pleased He could surely have made you one people (professing one faith). But He wished to try and test you by that which He gave you. So try to excel in good deeds. To Him will you return in the end, when He will tell you of what you were at variance.”

Quran, 5:48

7.1. Creating a ‘New We’

Tariq Ramadan believes he has a measured response to the West’s current struggle with its continued Islamic presence: creating a new ‘we.’ Arguably, Ramadan is one of the most prominent academic Muslim voices at the moment who is an outspoken advocate of the notion that European Muslims can be both European and Muslim in equal measure. Ramadan is correct. It is the understanding and acceptance that immigrants, religious communities, and minorities of all stripes live with dual allegiances and multiple identities. In the quest to defend pluralism in the West, it needs to be noted that laws that are passed without this concept as a foundation, will ultimately never breed solutions.

The study done by PEW (2007, p.26) shows that when asked if there is a conflict in being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society, only 32 percent of American Muslims said yes. In Europe, 36 percent of German Muslims, 28 percent of French Muslims, and 25 percent of Spanish Muslims thought there was some difficulty in being both a devout Muslim a responsible modern citizen. Although some may suggest that these numbers are somewhat high, it needs to be noted that a vast majority of Muslims in the USA, Germany, France, and Spain believe that the mixing of one’s faith and their duty to the state is achievable. This of course is counter to the tremendous amount of academic literature and public debate that oftentimes argues that Islam and the West cannot reconcile their differences in regards to ideas on human rights, modernity, and social order. Ramadan (as am I) is convinced that Islam and Western democracies are indeed compatible, and according to the PEW study, it seems that most Muslims in the West also agree.

As highlighted in a brief article (Ramadan, 2010), “the dust from the collapse of the twin towers had hardly settled on 11 September 2001 when the febrile search began for moderate Muslims, people who would provide answers [and] who would distance themselves from this outrage.” It is this middle ground in which Ramadan attempts to occupy. In regards to Islam’s increasingly fragile relationship with the West, he is careful to not suggest total isolation, nor complete integration of the two worlds.

Notwithstanding Ramadan’s sometimes vague and carefully crafted language, he is unlike most other Islamic writers and thinkers. Considering that numerous Islamic scholars reject participation within European (and Western) political systems, either on the grounds that it is sinful, or that it is preferable not to add to the strength of non-Muslim societies. Conversely, Ramadan is adamant that Muslims outside of Islamic states should indeed participate in their adopted communities; in fact, he has even suggested that Muslims should be allowed to commit themselves within society and to act in favour of human solidarity wherever they reside (March, 2007). For this reason, Ramadan becomes an important voice in the often divided discussions regarding the “Islamic question” inside Western democracies.

Rather than advocating for full integration or complete isolation within Western societies – which would enrage Muslims on both ends of the spectrum – Ramadan has and continues to advocate for a middle way. This middle way is a space where Muslims are encouraged to maintain their faith and cultural attributes while embracing and respecting their sometimes new and multiple (Western) identities. International dialogue and political reactions to the presence of Muslims in the West usually occurs at opposing extremes. In other words politicians, international media and numerous scholars scrutinize the “Islamic problem” and have provided solutions by suggesting one of two options: ‘strict’ or ‘soft’ secularism (Soper and Fetzer, 2007). The former suggests that Muslims be fully integrated into their “new” societies without maintaining their religious practices or customs, oftentimes creating a sense of exclusion. The latter attempts to build a society where Muslims and other religious and cultural minorities are carefully weaved into the fabric and policy framework of the given country. Ramadan attempts to tie these two dichotomies together, proposing that Islamic communities can, should be, and already are, devoted Muslims and loyal citizens of the

West simultaneously. In a debate that is so often discussed at its margins, Ramadan needs to be commended for articulating a vision that concentrates on integration and solutions rather than division. This is the appropriate way forward.

7.2. The Consequences of Misunderstanding Islam in the West

University of Bristol political science professor Tariq Modood warns that we need to review the kind of society that we are becoming in order to ensure that we do not, through unthinking prejudice, confine religious people and especially Muslims to the margins. Much is said about the differences in cultures and religions, and the late Harvard professor Samuel Huntington has even gone as far as to divide these differences into civilizations. But Islam, as highlighted in previous sections in this dissertation is like other religions in its diversity and complexity. Islam, once more, is not a monolithic religion or culture and this truth should lead us to a more enlightened awareness and judgment of our Muslim neighbours.

Although some decisions being taken by governments in liberal democratic countries are gaining political approval in their respective jurisdictions, I argue that it is in effect hindering the peace process in the Middle East, dismantling international relations, and fueling the extremist Islamic agenda. More importantly, it is creating a toxic environment at home and putting pluralism at risk by pitting religions and cultures against one another. Our decisions are without a doubt contributing to the alienation of Muslim communities, and the perpetuation of our generation's new poor.

Once we, as an electorate deem it tolerable to deny one specific religion their right to worship in private, we lose the justification to defend any religion from doing the same. In 1963, Martin Luther King wrote that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" and that we, as a society, are "caught in an escapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny" (University of Pennsylvania, 2010). That is why western democracies should concentrate on eliminating the root problems posed by Islamic extremists – the real threat to democracy – as opposed to simply reducing symptoms and creating our own injustices.

7.3. Proposed Solutions: a Five-Point Strategy

1. *Stricter Penalties for Perpetrators of Oppression*

The use of legal and political authority concerned with the ban of veils, burqas, and niqabs across the West has one main function: it attempts to reduce the symptoms of Islamism. Many supporters of these types of bans often highlight women's rights as one of their rationales. It is often presumed that Muslim women are forced into wearing various types of Islamic garment to promote a hard-line version of Islam. While it is true that several women are forced into representing an archaic version of Islam which has little to do with the Quran or the Islamic faith, it needs to be stated that banning these practices in the West does little to create a more peaceful coexistence.

A more vigorous defence of women's rights is needed. As if forcing Muslim women to unveil is suppose to make a country safer? Do we really think that inhibiting education and kicking women out of our public institutions is a declaration of our faith in women? None of these approaches actually eliminate Islamic radical thinking, which is the real crisis here. That is why countries of the West should be legally and politically pressuring the husbands, those hiding behind the veils of their wives, in order to cease outdated and intolerant practices. Although, I have criticized France's ban on the burqa, it does have a provision in the law that resembles what I have just described. The French law includes husbands, fathers, and anyone convicted of forcing someone to wear the burka. Those committing the proposed offense will face a year in prison and a 15,000 Euro fine. This is a good start, but I believe that the fines and penalties should be even more stringent, and these penalties should be applied to religious leaders who perpetuate hate within our borders.

In addition, we should support the creation of organized, anonymous, secure organizations (or mechanisms) for Muslim females (wives, mothers, or children) to come forward and report abuse of any kind. In total, an ideal solution would consist of dropping the burqa ban and vigorously protect Muslim women from oppressive household dominance. This would send a clear signal; that the West respects the right for women to choose their wardrobe and faith (no matter how a woman chooses to

interpret it). This would also lend credence to the idea that religious faith and civic duty do not have to exist separately.

2. *Increasing Resources and Funds for Muslim Integration Policies in the West*

There needs to be an acceptance that immigration is an inescapable reality for the West. Many of today's Western democracies are no longer naturally growing their populations. Birth rates are declining and immigration will be needed in order to keep up with emerging economies in Asia, India, and elsewhere in the world. Put simply, we in the West will need to rely on immigration to ensure our societies function and thrive. In addition to this economic line of reasoning, there also exists a compassionate and humanitarian line of reasoning for the continuation of accepting newcomers into our borders. This includes Muslim immigration.

This is why there needs to be a reengagement of progressive minds. An open and honest discussion needs to take place, with the end result being a practical and reasonable plan on how we are going to continue building pluralistic societies in the West. Simply closing our borders to Muslims or any other minority that are believed to be a "threat" to our democracies is insufficient. Instead French, Dutch, Canadian, and American (to name a few) citizens should demand that their governments concentrate on integration rather than alienation. An appropriate start would be a renewed commitment to empower Muslim immigrants.

For example, there should be deliberate investments made to English as second language classes (or the dominate language) in the jurisdiction in question. Encouraging Muslim newcomers to speak "our" language is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do. In fact, this point should be reinforced as a requirement for citizenship. In other words, no newcomer is granted citizenship unless he or she is able to illustrate an understanding one of the working languages of the country. If this requires instituting this requirement as part of the overall citizenship test, then so be it. Put simply, immigrants should not feel that they can enter our borders, enjoy the freedoms and the social programs that are afforded them, without the capacity to communicate with the general public. Individual rights should be granted only when there is a commitment by immigrants to fulfill their civic duties. If there is an

obligation that Western states keep our borders open, then asking Muslim newcomers to speak the working language is not an unreasonable demand.

Secondly, political parties should feel compelled to reach out to minority communities (including Muslim communities) and relearn what the concerns and challenges are. An even more valuable measure would be to encourage and support Muslim candidates in elections. This would not only enable the voices of those often unheard to be represented in various levels of government, but it would promote the idea that Muslims of all stripes have the capacity to participate and influence our democratic institutions. Additionally, it facilitates the opportunity for the government's message to be articulated among the various linguistic communities. Integration needs to be seen as a reciprocal relationship, and the obligation to make it work rests with government and Muslim newcomers.

Next, a strong multicultural media presence needs to be supported. In other words, public dollars should be invested in news broadcasts and Muslim television or radio programming for the multiple Islamic communities within a given democracy. As Nelson Mandela once alluded to: if you talk to a person in a language he (or she) understands, that goes to his (or her) head. If you talk to him (or her) in his (or her) own language, that goes to his (or her) heart" (Baderin, 2007). If we, as democracies, are serious about spreading a message of harmony and freedom, we should be doing it in languages all our citizens comprehend.

3. *A Vigorous Defence of Islamic Women*

If integration is to become the ideal compromise between host societies and incoming immigrants, the successful integration of Muslim women needs to become a priority. It is simply not enough to assume that women with any religious affiliations will accept the idea of a godless society. However controversial it may be, affirmative action for Islamic women may have to become an option. At the very least, it needs to be a conversation progressive politicians need to undertake. Recently, during the Keith Davey Forum on Public Affairs at the University of Toronto, American Professor Jean Elishtain affirmed her belief that strong secularism was counter to civic society, counter

to the US constitution, and counter to common sense. Professor Elishtain is correct. We, in the West, need to stop imagining a democracy where the public space is free from religious expression. Our policies, as was highlighted in Chapter three, reflect that flawed and hazardous thinking.

The answer to successfully integrating Muslims in the West needs to be grounded on the level of achievement of our Muslim women. In fact, Irshad Manji (2005, p. 176) believes that “God-conscious, female-fueled capitalism might be the way to start Islam’s liberal reformation.” Manji suggests that we not only assist the Muslim women in the West, but in Islamic communities across the Middle East. Trade, as Manji (2005, p. 176) suggests “has always helped grease the wheels of good relations among Muslims, Jews, and Christians.” Supporting female entrepreneurs could assist in liberating Muslim women and turn honour into dignity.

The degree in which this suggestion is taken up is up to each individual country. Clearly, it is not feasible to expect that every country make the same commitment and decisions to advance the positions of Muslim women within or outside their borders. Is there an opportunity for Western democracies to come together and form an alternative “coalition of the willing” tasked with bettering the lives of Islamic women? Yes, but this will take political courage and creative thinking. It should not be deemed unreasonable to have private and multinational corporations partner up with governments to assert their willingness to change the plight of women in some of the most depraved situations on earth. While some governments may refuse to extend the help to women outside of their borders, I truly believe renewed and bold leadership is needed concerning the status of Muslim women already holding citizenship in countries of the West.

4. *Promoting the Importance of Education and Voting*

This involves three basic points on the right to education. One, it should be made mandatory that all children attend school until the age of 18 (or until high school is completed). Of course, at times, this is not possible; however, there should be an insistence that children stay in school as long as possible. Secondly, several western

democracies need to rethink their investment in post-secondary education. A student's financial capabilities should never be a hindrance to entering college or university. While some democracies fully subsidize student's post-secondary education, others have systems that are overly expensive. There needs to be a fair and feasible solution taking into account each country's situation. The result should be a much less restrictive education system, and one that rewards potential as opposed to economic status. Finally, in terms of education, democracies need to do a better job at recognizing foreign accreditation. In a country such as Canada, for example, there is no reason why foreign trained doctors are being forced to drive taxi cabs. Considering and implementing the aforementioned changes to the education systems within our democracies would represent an authentic investment in all our citizens, including immigrant populations.

Next, citizenship should never be viewed as simply a right but a privilege anchored on the belief that with rights come responsibilities. Beyond the already well-established obligations to obey national laws and pay taxes, countries of the West should obligate all its citizens to vote. Voting is the bedrock of democracy. To negate that privilege is to reject the principles of democracy. There currently exists a debate on whether forcing someone to vote is an adequate and responsible way forward. That discussion is important, and warrants some deliberation, albeit outside this dissertation. Despite the various opinions and concerns, I defend the position that all citizens should be mandated to vote in all levels of government.

This proposal is already instituted in several democracies around the world. It is simply irresponsible to spend billions of dollars in wars abroad defending democracy, when our own populations have dismal records of voting in our own elections. To summarize, successful integration requires the implementation of our own version of the five pillars: immigrants should be required to learn how to speak an official language, host countries should involve themselves in political outreach, public support for ethnic media needs to be promoted, education should be considered a right, and mandatory voting should be seen as a commitment to renewing one's citizenship.

5. *Supporting Voices that Preach a Balanced Version of Islam*

The fifth point I purpose is to defend and encourage courageous voices to come forward and speak the truth about Islam. One of the unfortunate realities of the Islamic world is that oftentimes, Muslim thinkers, academics, poets, artists, and regular citizens are not afforded the freedom of speech that we enjoy here in the West. Whether these voices consist of Muslim dissents such as Ayaan Hrsi-Ali, or mature voices such as Tariq Ramadan, the spectrum of opinion is vast and a space for free thinking and debate needs to be championed.

There should be however a limit on the spread of fear and arguments anchored on a false sense of reality in the West. Free speech should never be confused with organized and well-articulated hate speech. While I am a spirited defender of free-thinking and academic exploration, we should never allow academic racism and political bigotry to go uncontested. The benefit of living in countries in the West is that we have a functional rule of law that is capable of distinguishing between different forms of speech. For example, individuals like MP Geert Wilders and Nicolai Sennels are often criticized for the poison they attempt to spread. While I am hesitant to silence an individual, it is my opinion, that the arguments put forth by these gentlemen lack authentic political judgment and academic credibility. It is indeed discouraging to see national courts involved in dissecting what is justifiable political or academic opinion; however, this option should never be eradicated. Instead, progressive voices should find the intestinal fortitude to challenge, rise up, and confront religious segregation and cultural division with as much vigor as those who promote hate. To be silent on issues that matter to the human condition is to contribute to the fraying of our common fabric.

Conclusion

The arguments put forth in this dissertation oppose those presented by several anti-immigration and right-wing European and North American politicians that attempt to portray Islam as a threat to Western identity. I defend the view that politicians – of various stripes – are manipulating their populations by promoting a Muslim “enemy” in order to deal with Europe’s (and to a certain extent the West’s) identity crisis. The decisions made as of late have been carried forward in a rather coordinated manner, aimed to foster social, cultural and political cohesion in the new Europe, and by extension, the entire Western world. In specific reference to Muslims in the West who are believed to be slowly changing the makeup of the continent, Tariq Ramadan (2009, p.123) points out that “hardly a Western society has been spared its own searing questions of ‘identity’ or its ‘integration’-related tensions.” As immigration continues to reshape Western populations, many countries unfortunately are beginning to believe that exclusion is a necessary solution in order to salvage the Western identity.

Canadian author, Marshall McLuhan, at one point championed the idea of a “global village” in which the movement of people and information from around the world would be faster and easier due to rapid advancements in technology. If we are to accept this theory, questions and concerns of co-existence will inevitably be raised and debated. These debates have occurred throughout our history and have often led to significant injustices. As suggested by Gil Andijar (2009), the tendency in “the West” to eliminate “different” ways of life has not ended with colonialism or the holocaust. I firmly believe that this tendency continues today with the policy directions of several Western countries in the banning of headscarves, burqas, minarets, and limiting or eliminating the presence of Islam in the public space.

Today, Muslim women and men are choosing to, or have chosen to, make a life for themselves in rather secular and fairly open societies of the West. Muslims in Europe should be seen as partners with the capacity to contribute and enrich communities across numerous continents. Instead of fearing for our supposed national security (usually used as justification for reducing citizens’ rights) or protecting ourselves from a socially constructed “Other” (with the perceived capacity to alter “our

values”), it would be prudent if Western governments committed to genuine intercultural and interfaith dialogue aimed at building a respectful coexistence. In fact, in November of 2010 in a Huffington Post article (Albright, 2010), 19 former foreign ministers co-authored a public article entitled “Islam and the West: Reaching Intercultural Understanding.” Progressive and responsible voices (like the 19 former ministers) need to stand up and make themselves heard and counted. This understanding first and foremost needs to be built upon a mutual recognition of each citizen’s rights and responsibilities within a liberal democracy. More importantly, the will for a difficult and critical conversation needs to be cultivated among different generations, without settling on divisive, flawed and politically popular solutions.

The process of rendering another as dangerous and different, without legitimate motives, is indeed a form of prejudice. The September 11th attacks in the United States and the subsequent attacks in Spain, England, and Russia have scared new generations of citizens into believing that our Muslim neighbours are inadequate citizens. In spite of this, we all owe it to ourselves to unlearn and learn again, to engage in conversations, and to challenge ourselves. It may very well be the case that the desperate cries from public intellectuals and politicians – suggesting that our world is in a “war between cultures” or engaged in a “clash of civilizations” – are beginning to sound louder. However, continuing to argue from the margins will not bring about the change we all crave. We must never fall prey to the notion that religions and borders can stop the free exchange of ideas, pluralism, and democracy. The honourable and sensible answer to the Muslim immigration questions being asked today involves, first and foremost, a political and societal willingness to successfully integrate Muslim communities in the various liberal democracies around the world. Moving forward in this manner would not only be a just response, but it can serve as the ultimate attestation of what a functional, fair, and pluralistic civilization has the capacity to become.

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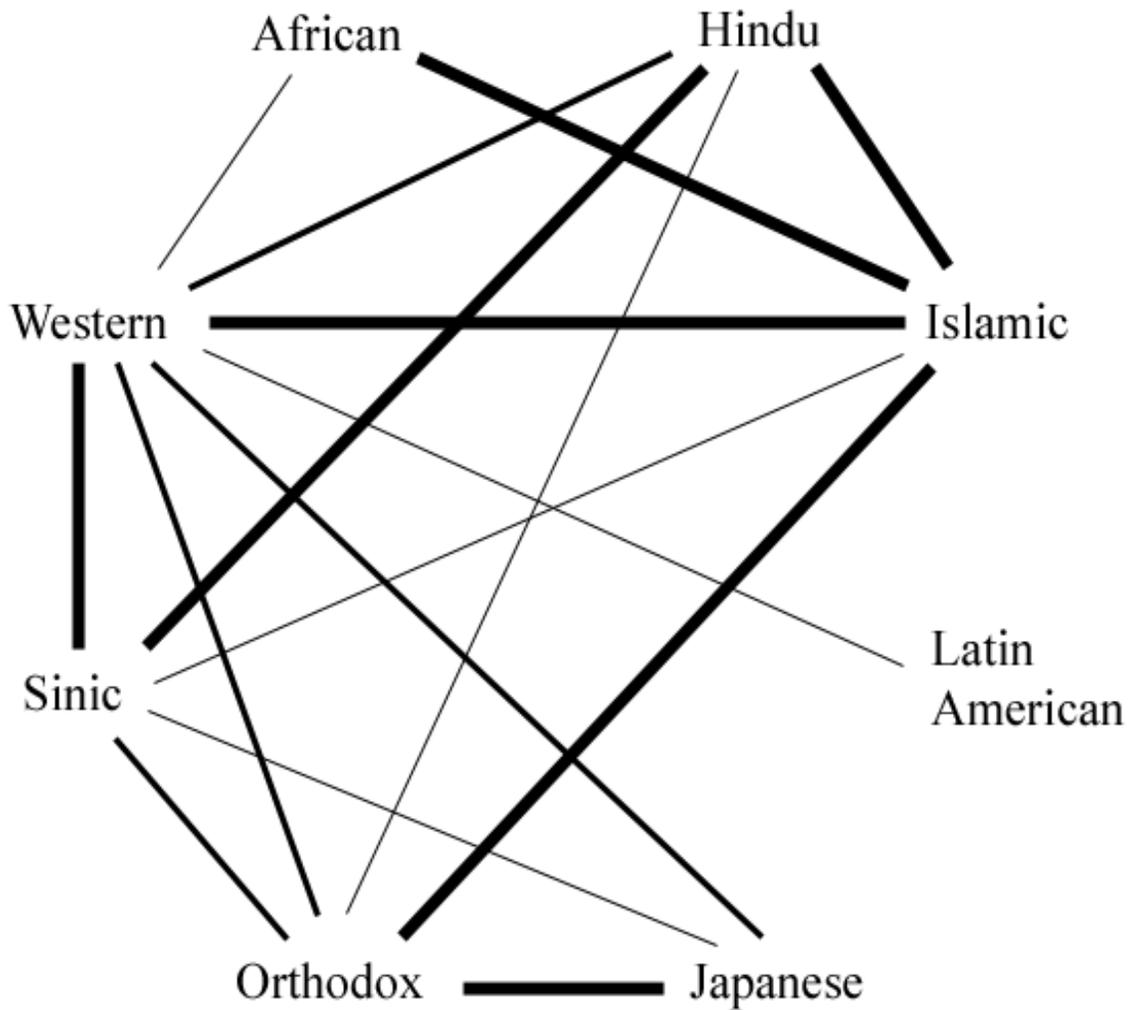
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Annex

Figure 1: Diagram of Huntington's Clash of Civilizations

"Emerging alignments" of civilizations, per Samuel Huntington's theory in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996).



Greater line thickness represents more conflict in the civilizational relationship.

Figure 2: chart of countries with more than 1 million Muslim inhabitants

COUNTRY/REGION (with > 1 million Muslims)	Estimated 2009 Muslim Population	% of World Muslim Population (ALL countries in region) 61.90%
ASIA-PACIFIC		
Afghanistan	28,072,000	1.8
Azerbaijan	8,765,000	0.6
Bangladesh	145,312,000	9.3
Burma (Myanmar)	1,889,000	0.1
China	21,667,000	1.4
India	160,945,000	10.3
Indonesia	202,867,000	12.9
Iran	73,777,000	4.7
Kazakhstan	8,822,000	0.6
Kyrgyzstan	4,734,000	0.3
Malaysia	16,581,000	1.1
Nepal	1,231,000	0.1
Pakistan	174,082,000	11.1
Philippines	4,654,000	0.3
Sri Lanka	1,711,000	0.1
Tajikistan	5,848,000	0.4
Thailand	3,930,000	0.3
Turkey	73,619,000	4.7
Turkmenistan	4,757,000	0.3
Uzbekistan	26,469,000	1.7
MIDDLE EAST-NORTH AFRICA		
		(ALL countries in region) 20.10%
Algeria	34,199,000	2.2
Egypt	78,513,000	5
Iraq	30,428,000	2
Israel	1,194,000	0.1
Jordan	6,202,000	0.4
Kuwait	2,824,000	<1
Lebanon	2,504,000	0.2
Libya	6,203,000	0.4
Morocco	31,993,000	2
Oman	2,494,000	0.2
Palestinian territories	4,173,000	<1
Qatar	1,092,000	0.1
Saudi Arabia	24,949,000	2
Sudan	30,121,000	1.9
Syria	20,196,000	1.3
Tunisia	10,216,000	0.7
United Arab Emirates	3,504,000	0.2
Yemen	23,363,000	1.5

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA		(ALL countries in region) 15.30%
Benin	2,182,000	0.1
Burkina Faso	9,292,000	0.6
Cameroon	3,498,000	0.2
Chad	6,257,000	0.4
Eritrea	1,854,000	0.1
Ethiopia	28,063,000	1.8
Gambia	1,625,000	<1
Ghana	3,787,000	0.2
Guinea	8,502,000	0.5
Ivory Coast	7,745,000	0.5
Kenya	2,793,000	0.2
Malawi	1,955,000	0.1
Mali	12,040,000	0.8
Mauritania	3,261,000	0.2
Mozambique	5,224,000	0.3
Niger	15,075,000	1
Nigeria	78,056,000	5
Senegal	12,028,000	0.8
Sierra Leone	4,059,000	0.3
Somalia	8,995,000	0.6
Tanzania	13,218,000	0.8
Uganda	3,958,000	0.3
EUROPE		(ALL countries in region) 2.40%
Albania	2,522,000	0.2
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1,522,000	<1
France	3,554,000	<1
Germany	4,026,000	<1
Kosovo	1,999,000	0.1
Russia	16,482,000	1
United Kingdom	1,647,000	0.1
AMERICAS		(ALL countries in region) 0.30%
United States	2,454,000	0.2

PEW Study (2009)

Figure 3: Measuring Democracy in Muslim-majority countries
(Points accumulated¹ by Muslim-majority countries)

Country (by % of Global Muslim Population)	Democracy (2008)	Freedom of Press (2010)	Civil Liberties (2008)	Human Development Index (2010)	Total Points
Indonesia	9	10	8	6	33
Pakistan	6	3	7	4	20
India	10	9	10	5	34
Bangladesh	7	8	9	3	27
Egypt	4	7	5	7	23
Nigeria	3	4	3	2	12
Turkey	8	5	7	8	28
Iran	2	1	2	9	14
Iraq	5	6	5	1	17
Saudi Arabia	1	2	1	10	14

¹Rankings taken from: 2008 Economist Intelligent Unit's Index of Democracy and Civil Liberties, Freedom House's 2010 measurement of Freedom of the Press, and the UNDP's 2010 Global Report measuring the Human Development Index. The higher a country ranked on the global scale the higher the mark given on this chart. (10 for the highest, 1 for the lowest)

Figure 4: “The Islamic Spectrum”

Rankings of “Most Democratic/Most Desirable” Muslim-Majority Countries to live in

Best average² score

1. India
2. Indonesia
3. Turkey
4. Bangladesh
5. Egypt
6. Pakistan
7. Iraq
8. Iran
9. Saudi Arabia
10. Nigeria

² Average score of all four categories taken from Figure 3 (above) indicates the ranking for most democratic/most desirable Muslim countries to live in.