

Essentializing Muslim Identity

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**Abstract**

The subject of Islam and Muslims has been thrust into the global spotlight by recent geopolitical events and media attention. This has illustrated the phenomenon of essentialism as it relates to understanding Muslim identity in a number of contexts. Essentialism is the act of naming or defining someone/something in absolute terms according to one's limited understanding of the other. Ultimately, essentialism is problematic because it is interpretively violent and stifles dialogue before it can even take place. How does essentialism affect dialogue across the "Us-Them" or "West-Islam" binaries? How is essentialism related to Orientalism? In what ways do all of these considerations bear on the structure of Muslim identity at the conscious and unconscious levels? Such questions are what drive this research. This exploratory analysis is informed by the theoretical work of Max Weber, Hans Georg-Gadamer, and Amartya Sen. In-depth interviews conducted with Muslims in Memphis highlight key ways in which Muslims understand themselves and how they think they are understood by others. The findings from this study suggest that the tendency to essentialize Islam and Muslims can be attributed in part to a lack of shared experience between Muslims and non-Muslims.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The question of identity has long been a complex and provocative one in academic circles. It has been discussed with intellectual rigor from academics and researched in many fields including psychology, biology, philosophy, history, and sociology. Given the term's increasing use throughout academia, one would expect the term's use to vary. According to Brubaker, "For a variety of reasons, the term *identity* proved highly resonant in the 1960s, diffusing quickly across disciplinary and national boundaries, establishing itself in the journalistic as well as the academic lexicon, and permeating the language of social and political practice as well as that of social and political analysis."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the subject of Islam and Muslims has also been a topic of intense academic discussion for some time, particularly in the Orientalist tradition led by thinkers like Edward Said, Maxime Rodinson, and Bernard Lewis. Such discussion has become far more pressing and relevant in light of the events of 9/11, the Islamic center debate at Ground Zero, the recent Congressional hearings on radicalization and Islamophobia, and the implications of said events to the understanding of Islam and Muslims at large.

The questions considered in this research attempt to draw on the literature discussing these subjects in light of the phenomenon of essentialism. The investigative scope of this research will be framed by the theoretical contributions of Max Weber, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Amartya Sen. The reader should keep this in mind. The purpose of this study is to re-conceptualize the terminology deemed most crucial for making sense of essentialism and understanding Muslim identity. The main research question is: "How does essentialism relate to understanding Muslim identity?" Now, this initial question is rather broad, to be sure. However, there are secondary questions related to this first question that will specify and guide analysis of the source material as concepts are outlined. Some secondary questions will include: "How does the occidental and oriental binary play into the essentialism of Muslim identity?" and "How does essentialism relate to interpretation?" The research

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<sup>1</sup>Brubaker, Rogers and Frederick Cooper. "Beyond Identity." *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Feb., 2000), 1.

will also delve into secularism and modernity, but not in tremendous detail. They will only be discussed in very broad terms as they pertain to essentialism.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

There are two main sections of this paper: one theoretical and the other empirical. The theoretical section is primarily a literature review of the main concepts to be discussed with respect to the main and secondary research questions. The three concepts are essentialism, Orientalism, and interpretation. After extensive discussion of these concepts, the empirical data will be discussed. This data is qualitative, consisting of 15 semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Questions asked of participants followed the interview schedule (see Appendix #1) though additional questions were asked when relevant to the dependent variables based on the respondent's answers. The approach of this research is idiographic as opposed to nomothetic. A nomothetic approach would concern generalizing causes of essentializing Islam and Muslims. As this is an exploratory, introductory research, the more appropriate method, idiographic was chosen. This method privileges an in-depth explanation and presentation of the interviews conducted, codified to provide themes relevant to each respondent. The methodology maps onto the concept of interpretation to be discussed later in that it is giving voice for those who have been historically de-voiced.

## **III. CONCEPTUALIZATION**

Before engaging in discussion of these questions, Max Weber's notion of "ideal types" will be addressed. This notion is important with respect to formulating and using large-scale concepts that attempt to address essentialism. The concept of "ideal types" holds that the conceptual categories that will develop as the study progresses are just that: categories used to make analytical sense of the subject at hand; they are not definitive, static posits that close the question of identity expression and the themes that may or may not emerge in the process of engaging the literature and qualitative data. "Ideal types" recognize the limitations of language in expressing the meaning of a phenomenon. At the

same time, ideal types do not discount the value of concepts for the purpose of research and understanding. In defining these concepts under the umbrella of typology, it is clear that they are stipulative. That is, the definitions will be argued for on the basis of their providing a means to facilitate understanding. For instance, if “secularism,” is defined in a particular way, this does not mean that said definition is all that secularism is or all that it can or will be. Rather, the intent is to elucidate an understanding of the terminology and how it will be used in the research. William Shepard speaks to this point: “On one hand, such labels have undoubtedly often functioned as obstacles to understanding the actual people and tendencies involved, in part because they are frequently used without explicit definition, in part because they lump together widely different phenomena, and in part because they often convey an implicit bias or value judgment.”<sup>2</sup> (1987). This is a very useful explanation in guiding our understanding of typologies and the potential benefits and drawbacks.

**a. ESSENTIALISM**

What is essentialism? As the anchoring concept of this research, it requires considerable attention. The phenomenon of essentialism concerns imposing a highly specific, rigid categorization on a given group that limits the potential for actualization of that group. “The term essentialism as applied to cross-cultural knowledge normally stresses the over simplifying aspect of the cognitive process of constructing a Self-Other polarity.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, one uses particular language that either explicitly denies alterity to the one named or implicitly does the same through unreflective use of language. Granted, the very notion of defining or naming anything necessitates the denying of alterity. One can look at a basic example to make the point clearer; when one says: “I am a playing chess,” the proposition “I am not playing checkers,” is entailed, because the terms “chess” and “checkers” are

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<sup>2</sup>Shepard, William E. “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol. 19, No.3 (Aug., 1987) Cambridge University Press, 307.

<sup>3</sup>Salvatore, Armando. “Beyond Orientalism? Max Weber and the Displacements of "Essentialism" in the Study of Islam.” *Arabic*. T. 43, Fasc. 3 (Sep., 1996) BRILL, 459.

mutually exclusive. Likewise, if one says: “I am looking at a dog,” the proposition “I am not looking at a cat,” is entailed, because the terms “dog” and “cat” are mutually exclusive. I am denying chess the possibility, as it were, to be defined in *precisely* the same way as checkers is; likewise for dogs and cats. This illustrates the “denial” aspect of language. The fact that there are similarities between chess and checkers or dogs and cats does not preclude the fact of denial at some level that use of language necessitates. That said, the problem with essentialism is not primarily concerned with this unavoidable feature of linguistic expression. Essentialism if applied to an individual (i.e.; a Muslim) takes on a very different form than when applied to a structure (i.e.; Islam). In many respects, essentialism is necessary in the process of defining anything. Language necessitates the use of certain words/phrases that one associates with a given phenomenon, individual, or structure that one is trying to express. This necessity, however, is not the problem. Rather, the problem concerns when the act of naming leads to an inaccurate or problematic definition or is defined under suspect motivations. Does the naming stem from a genuine willingness to understand or is it ethnocentrism in action? How is the ethnocentrism of the namer manifest in defining the named? These are the questions that must be asked in analyzing whether or not essentialism is taking place and potentially re-constructing the definition so as to minimize or even eliminate the essentialist elements. The Orientalist tradition is of particular importance in exploring essentialism.

## **b. ORIENTALISM**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Orientalism as “...the representation of the Orient (esp. the Middle East) in Western academic writing, art, or literature; *spec.* this representation perceived as stereotyped or exoticizing and therefore embodying a colonialistic attitude.”<sup>4</sup> Broadly speaking, the “Occidental” refers to the “West” and the “Oriental” refers to the “East.” For the purpose of this paper, this just means the Near East / Middle East.

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<sup>4</sup>Oxford English Dictionary

Orientalism as a discourse is predicated on binary logic. Its basis lacks contextualization of the multifarious differences in political, religious, and social identities of those living in the Middle East and thereby reifies the perceived differences into the overarching categories that exist in academic literature today. According to Sered, “The depictions of ‘the Arab’ as irrational, menacing, untrustworthy, anti-Western, dishonest, and--perhaps most importantly--prototypical, are ideas into which Orientalist scholarship has evolved. These notions are trusted as foundations for both ideologies and policies developed by the Occident.”<sup>5</sup> Now, an entire debate can take place on whether or not Orientalism as a discipline does or does not incorporate an imperialist or colonialist ethos, but that is not the point of exploring the concept. The point is that a wide canon of scholarship surrounding Islam and Muslims had been conducted prior to the more recent geopolitical events of the past 10 or so years that have made Islam and Muslims more familiar in society at large. This is important for two reasons. Firstly: Orientalist literature provides contemporary material to analyze which, *if* there is any truth to the field’s representation as colonialist, would almost certainly include some cases of essentialism. Secondly: most of the literature to be explored was published before Islam was put on the “metaphorical map” by 9/11. The relative prevalence of essentialism post 9/11 so greatly exceeds that of pre 9/11 that it behooves us to make use of the research conducted before the incident insofar as it pertains to contemporary concerns. One scholar laments that unfortunately, “...the idea of dialogue was struck a deadly blow in America on September 11, 2001, when the four hijacked planes killed thousands of innocent people and destroyed the lives of many more... the news and discussions in the media were broad-cast under the heading ‘America under Attack.’<sup>6</sup> That is not to say that 9/11 was the catalyst for essentialist attitudes regarding Muslim identity. Rather, 9/11 is more properly considered as an acute historical moment that illustrates a chronic essentialism which predates that historical moment. Also of relevance is the fact that most of those engaged in this intellectual tradition were from a

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<sup>5</sup>Sered, Danielle. “Orientalism.”

<sup>6</sup>Akbar, Ahmed. “Ibn Khaldun's Understanding of Civilizations and the Dilemmas of Islam and the West Today.” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Winter, 2002). Middle East Institute, 22.

Western background. Of concern is “how the motivational and epistemological perspective of the Western student of Islam influences the final hermeneutical product.” comments Armando Salvatore.<sup>7</sup> In other words, how does the cultural foregrounding and ethnocentrism of the Western student affect discourse surrounding Islam and related phenomena? Consideration of the student’s academic and personal influences as well as his/her disposition informs the conceptual outcome of his/her study of Islam.

Let us take Weber as an example of what was just mentioned. In considering his relation to Orientalism, it is well known that he was factually inaccurate with respect to very crucial matters about Islam, namely in his misanalysis of it as a non-salvation religion. Ira M. Lapidus makes very important contextual points about historical and biographical inaccuracies that are present in Weber's remarks on Islam. However, the fact that such inaccuracies exist is not reason to entirely disregard Weber's considerations. Rather, the typological approach and conceptual framework can be extracted from his comments and re-applied in light of more complete and accurate formulations on Islamic history and religious rites.<sup>8</sup> In the years since Weber's incomplete sociology of Islam and given the increased knowledge of Islam and more nuanced scholarship, “...present-day scholars tend to pay more attention to the diversity to be found in Islam and are often averse to formulating broad generalization.”<sup>9</sup> The problem of Weber's generalizations stems from a lack of accurate information pertaining to Islam and his tendency to regurgitate Orientalist formulations of Islamic concepts without critically assessing them. It is not difficult to see why Weber was deeply affected by the standard and essentialist Oriental discourse which views Islam as developmentally stagnant and a militant ideology. The years after the Crusade marked the decline of the Islamic civilization at large. Many nations which once stood tall and

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<sup>7</sup> Salvatore, Armando. “Beyond Orientalism? Max Weber and the Displacements of "Essentialism" in the Study of Islam,” 464.

<sup>8</sup> Lapidus, Ira M., “The Institutionalization of Early Islamic Societies,” in *Max Weber and Islam*, ed. Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schluchter, 139.

<sup>9</sup> Peters, Rudolph. “Paradise or Hell?” in *Max Weber and Islam*, ed. Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schluchter, 207.

had both military and economy strength were now fragmented and politically untenable. It would not be such an intellectual blight and even a slap in the face if Weber and others had, perhaps, been more explicit in recognizing the contributions of Islamic civilization.

By the same token, however, the Muslim world can be seen as fostering essentialist attitudes of the West due to the decline in the Islamic civilization at large since the Crusades and shift of power to Christendom. The defeat of Andalus (Muslim Spain), waning influence of Muslim countries, and eventual fall of the Ottoman Empire inflicted physical and emotional wounds on them that are still scarred. Much of the intellectual and political influence of Islam began to decline. It was easy for those who were opposed to Islam's spread to demonize it given their historical location and the battles that preceded them. The partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, the dividing up of Ash-Sham – the region of present-day Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Jordan – and the ongoing political and military struggle in modern-day Israel over the West Bank and Gaza all contribute to this. Such issues are so fixed in the hearts and minds of Muslims in both the Orient and the Occident that it may be difficult for some Muslims to separate the notion of being a white, middle class, Western Christian with being imperialistic and hating Islam. This poses a roadblock to discussion because the one who essentializes presumes that there is no more to the one defined than one's definition. A Muslim who essentializes “the other,” might say such a person is “by definition” imperialistic. Because of essentializing attitudes, the Muslim is placed squarely in the metaphorical box of “terrorism” and “fundamentalism” while the Westerner is relegated to the position of “imperialist” and “racist.” As a result, dialogue cannot be achieved when those being defined on either side of the equation are essentialized.

Interestingly, Salvatore argues that essentialism is unavoidable. It is “an inescapable feature of modern intellectual constructions, even of an ‘a priori’ of modern cognizance at whatever level of

analysis and abstraction it locates itself.”<sup>10</sup> What Salvatore means is that essentialism as a fact of labeling and categorizing the other is done from the rational need to make sense of the other. In the process of making sense of the other, humans must utilize language, which necessarily denies alterity as was mentioned. Certain elements perceived to be part of the one labeled are then picked and incorporated into the definition. The problem then is that externalization of these terms allows hidden biases to take root in the discourse. They take on an objective reality once they are said and persist through unreflective use. If Muslims are continually referred to as terrorists in the media, that notion will take hold and “become real” meaning be easier to accept because it has been reified and re-presented over and over. The problem, then, is non-reflexive essentializing. That is to say, essentialism that occurs without the Self’s conscious awareness of the effects of history operating through its projected cultural assumptions. This is referred to by Gadamer as effective historical consciousness. Merely being knowledgeable about Orientalism and the historical contact between the West and Islam is not enough. Rather, one must be aware of how that history exists in the present through us as individuals. This alone is not enough to counter essentialism, however.

Note the general response after 9/11. There were – and still are – those who believe those attacks were perpetrated by *Muslims* “over there” trying to attack *us* “over here.” The unprovoked, blameless West is caught off guard and thousands of citizens are killed by an irrational, shameful group claiming to fight in-the-name-of-Islam. The binary is then established, or, in this case, reinforced. This “Us-Them” split might then be thought of as – and has been presented as – a “West-Islam” binary. Essentialism is directly related to such a binary, for it “...is indispensable to making a modern distinction, where the distinction...requires a game of exclusion in universal terms, of confrontation with an ultimate type of otherness. The making of one’s own universal reference has to be made

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<sup>10</sup>Salvatore, Armando. “Beyond Orientalism? Max Weber and the Displacements of “Essentialism” in the Study of Islam,” 471.

through a negative reference to *another* universe.”<sup>11</sup> The naming of Islam as the enemy not only implies that it is wholly incompatible with the West, but also that the very values presumed to be part of Islam by the one essentializing it are categorically counter to anything that is considered a value in the West. If the West is considered *pro*-democracy, *pro*-freedom, *pro*-capitalism, and *pro*-women’s rights, then Islam is considered *anti*-democracy, *anti*-freedom, *anti*-capitalism, and *anti*-women’s rights. That is not to say there isn’t a distinction between to be made between the West and Islam, for there are certainly differences between them. The issue concerns the establishment of absolutist categories and definitions that are predicated on otherness. Islam is defined as such not because it has been identified that way through rigorous scholarship, statistical analysis, theological understanding, interpretive competence, or any other possibly credible means of coming to know what values Islam and its adherents espouse. Rather, the very fact of it being something-other-than-the-West is grounds enough to define it in the aforementioned reductionist ways according to essentialism. It is far easier to establish the otherness of either the West or Islam if the values of “the other” are posited as categorically opposite the values of the binary counterpart, here: the West.

Before engaging in discussion of essentialism on an individual level, it is crucial to explore some of the macro-level forces that drive the phenomenon in the context of Islam and the West. In considering historical contact between the West and Islam, the Crusades comes to mind. Here, justification for the efforts of Christendom to attack the Muslim lands – particularly Andalus – in part were dependent on essentialized characteristics. Is there any sense in which this attitude was channeled in the present-day tussle between Islam and the West we see now? “Other constructions are still defensive, not broadly instrumentalized and still tightly dependent on the protection of a Self defined

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<sup>11</sup> Salvatore, Armando. “Beyond Orientalism? Max Weber and the Displacements of “Essentialism” in the Study of Islam,” 458.

by the past.”<sup>12</sup> This suggests that essentialism is not merely about intellectual and (potentially) physical violence. It may also be a tool to help the namer reinforce his Self-concept. The logic would go something like the following: Consider the phrase “X” to mean “Islam is anti-capitalism” and “Y” to mean “the West is pro-capitalism” In the case of offensive essentialism (OE), the argument is “If Y, then X.” In defensive essentialism (DE), the argument is “If X then Y” The difference is nuanced and deserves further elaboration. In DE, the essentialist justifies and reinforces his Self-image based on the opposing value of the Other, as opposed to the other way around as was discussed earlier. A person might claim: “Since *they* suppress women, and I am not like *them*, I must be the kind of person that elevates women.” The essentializer reassures his identity by simplifying and reifying the idea that those others who he believes suppress women are ‘other’ than himself. He sees no similarity because he has not been exposed to it via shared experience. He wants to be comfortable in his belief that he elevates women. What better way to do so than to attribute the exact opposite trait to the other? OE, by contrast, hinges on defining the other from the basis of one’s own self-definition.

What of the ethic of Muslim identity in terms of religion? “The analysis of the internal relationship between the religious ethic and conduct is only the first step in working out the contrasts between the Islamic and Occidental civilizations.”<sup>13</sup> notes Schluchter. This ethic is important to consider with respect to the Islam-West binary as it operates within Muslims living in the West. Refer back to the essentialist binary for a moment: the fact of the categories' universality, whether intentionally applied or otherwise, has persisted because of its absolute degree of exclusion. To be one is necessarily to not be the other according to this formulation; to be Western is to not be Muslim and to be Muslim is to not be Western. What of those Muslims who reside in the West? They are, in many respects, living contradictions to this essentialist binary. They are largely able to navigate the Muslim

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<sup>12</sup>Salvatore, Armando. “Beyond Orientalism? Max Weber and the Displacements of “Essentialism” in the Study of Islam,” 459.

<sup>13</sup>Schluchter, Wolfgang. “Hindrances to Modernity” in *Max Weber and Islam*, ed. Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schluchter, 81.

part of their identity in contexts that are not privy to Islamic ethics or values. Though Muslim identities are shaped in vastly different ways in secular societies, they are nonetheless classified as Muslim and persist on a day to day basis. What is meant here is that there is a spectrum of possibilities for Muslim identity that cannot be limited strictly to Islamic values given the various contexts in which Muslims live, whether secular or not. Amartya Sen remarks “A person’s religion need not be his or her all-encompassing and exclusive identity. In particular, Islam, as a religion, does not obliterate responsible choice for Muslims in many spheres of life.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the identity of a person who is Muslim is not restricted to being Muslim. Those who essentialize, however, tend to restrict Muslim identity to just that. In doing so, they not only apply a reductionist notion of what Islam is, but they also discount the gender, ethnicity, and race that also make up a Muslim’s identity. A Muslim is never just a Muslim. Sen continues, noting: “For example, a Bangladeshi Muslim is not only a Muslim but also a Bengali and a Bangladeshi, typically quite proud of the Bengali language, literature, and music, not to mention the other identities he or she may have connected with class, gender, occupation, politics, aesthetic taste, and so on.”<sup>15</sup> More is discussed with respect to this in Suggestions for Future Research.

Before delving into the proverbial can of worms that is secularism and modernity in Muslim society, it is important to differentiate the two in very specific terms. William Shepard's typology is of use here. He explicitly references the importance of considering these concepts as Weberian ideal types because they “help to minimize the dangers of labeling.”<sup>16</sup> He defines a secularist as subscribing “...to any view that would openly follow an ideology other than Islam in most areas of public life.”<sup>17</sup> There is of course the consideration of degrees with respect to this formulation. The more “extreme” the secularism is, the more Islam is replaced as a Muslim’s reference in conducting his/her public affairs. Modernity, on the other hand, is contrasted with secularism and “...insists that Islam does provide an

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<sup>14</sup>Sen, Amartya. “Identity and Violence,” 14.

<sup>15</sup>Sen, Amartya. “Identity and Violence,” 15.

<sup>16</sup>Shepard, William E. “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology,” 307.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, 309.

adequate ideological base for public life.”<sup>18</sup> If we look at secularization with respect to Muslim identity, we find a number of different positions across the globe. Some scholars and mainstream Muslims want to reject secularism altogether, in part because “...the increasing secularization speaks to the post-Industrial trend of Muslim societies moving increasingly away from the Shari`ah to secular law. Law derived from revelation had been increasingly removed from public life; religious knowledge had steadily lost ground in education; more and more Muslims had come forward who were Islamic by culture but made “rational” calculations about their lives.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, if secularism is understood as resulting in more and more Muslims moving away from the religious values that may be tied to their identity as Muslims, one would expect opposition to be present. However, it is not the case that secularism necessitates a shift away from religion that indicates a compromising of values.

Modernity, on the other hand, would posit that Islam is a sufficient guide not just for one's religious needs, but one's social needs as well. That is to say, it is something of applying Islamic law in a pluralistic context. It is crucial that we not confuse the two. There may be certain elements of an Islamic modernist that are secular and vice-versa. These typologies, as mentioned before, are open to change and are amenable. Even as stipulated, they are not mutually exclusive categories. They come in degrees and there is explicit overlap in some cases. Take for instance Turkey. Though the country is secular by law, many of its denizens would be considered modernist because they still take Islam to be the primary guide for their personal lives in both the public and private spheres. One might say they are modernist Muslim citizens couched in a secular context. The organization called the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, by contrast, is a formal social institution that espoused the notion of what Shephard calls “Islamic totalism” and “Islamism.” I believe these formulations are useful and Shepard is right to talk of them in terms of degrees. That is to say, he defines them in terms of the tendency for one to view Islam as this or that. In the case of totalism, he states: “the tendency to view Islam not

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid, 311.

<sup>19</sup>Robinson, Francis, “Secularization, Weber, and Islam,” in *Max Weber and Islam*, ed. Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schluchter, 231.

merely as a religion in the narrow sense of theological belief, private prayer, and ritual worship, but also as a total way of life.”<sup>20</sup> Though this is very similar to modernism, it is distinct in that totalism concerns one's perception of Islam's essential characteristics. In the case of modernism, one takes Islam as one's reference for social action and being. Some totalists are modernists and some modernists are totalists. The so-called Muslim Brotherhood incorporates elements of both.

In any case, both secularism and modernism are interrelated; the Islamic world in particular has undergone tremendous social change in light of the two, from the creation of nationalist movements such as those in Turkey and Indonesia to facilitate and maintain secular states to the establishment of traditional orders intended to counter the ideological tide of secularization with modernism, such as the Deobandis of India and the Sufi mystics of Senegal. Further still, these changes have and are affecting the types of analysis of the Muslim world done by those outside of it. Toby Huff speaks to some of these considerations. “There have also been indigenous efforts to move particular Muslim countries in a secular direction, one that incorporated what Muslim leaders perceived to be positives aspects of modernization. Turkey is the most notable example of this, but Egypt as well began taking this path in the twentieth century, and, some would say, earlier.”<sup>21</sup>

If we go back to Shepard's definition of secular on a spectrum in terms of one's application of ideologies other than Islam to one's life, much can be uncovered. At the same time, his typology may be problematic in considering the notion of permissibility in Islamic law, which is called “mubah” in Arabic. Though a custom or norm may not be explicitly sanctioned by Islamic law, so long as it does not contradict the Shari`ah, it would be considered allowed. For instance, a Muslim might wear Western style dress, but as long as he/she covers those parts of his/her body that is required by the Islamic law, there is no infraction made. So here, one is wearing what might be considered “non-

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<sup>20</sup>Shepard, William E. “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology,” 308.

<sup>21</sup>Toby E. Huff, “Introduction,” in *Max Weber and Islam*, ed. Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schluchter, 23.

religious” or “secular” clothing, and yet not be necessarily going against the dictates of Islamic law. This is a case in which a person might be deemed both secular and modern, given the definitions provided. We can still use Shepard's typology, but we ought to take into account these cases that don't fit the formulation exactly and takes into account real lived expression of their meanings. The point about ideal-types is again of relevance. The ideas of secular and modern is not static and varies in how such ideas are expressed in concrete lived experience of Muslims worldwide.

Some academics disagree on this point. Akeel Bilgari comments “The term 'secularism' today, whatever its origins and history of use, describes only a political doctrine, a doctrine about how citizens, even citizens who are devout people, agree to live and try and flourish in a polity that is not governed by religious principles and practices. This of course means that they may have to give up strict adherence to some elements of their religion.”<sup>22</sup> The aforementioned example about dress-style suggests otherwise. To provide another counter-example: if one also considers the eating habits embodied in the lifestyle of Islam’s Prophet Muhammad, one notes he tended to eat and drink very little. In relation, what is normally consumed in the West on a day-to-day basis is much more than that. To abide by the eating habits of the Prophet is considered recommended, but not an obligation. If one defines strict adherence as referring to just that which is an obligation, there doesn't seem to be an inherent contradiction between being devout and living in a secular society. One can eat to one's fill and still be a devout Muslim. To be charitable to the author, however, we may define strict adherence to include these optional, recommended matters in the religion. Indeed, one would find it difficult to truly thrive and flourish in a pluralistic society if one attempted to always wear traditional Islamic dress in a business setting, for instance, simply because of the sheer alien-ness of such dress. Even if one were not barred from wearing such clothing altogether, the choice to do so has implications for how the 'normalcy' of Muslims as a minority reflects on the majority.

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<sup>22</sup>Bilgrami, Akeel. *The Clash within Civilizations*, 89.

Another scholar offers an interesting look: “Curiously enough, and in spite of Muslim opinion, American secularism is indeed good news for Muslims in the USA. The bad news is the expanding arena of American socio-sexual libertarianism, which has resulted in greater divergence in values... it is social libertarianism that has eroded what American values have in common with Islamic values.”<sup>23</sup> Here, secularism paves a way for Muslims to express themselves religiously without fear of chastisement because this expression is available to all minorities according to the dictates of law and the normative social order. At the same time, it provides a door to a degree of minimum ethical restraint that is alien to Muslim values. This is an interesting paradox, to be sure. On the one hand, secularism enables Muslims to practice, while simultaneously putting them in contact with behaviors that may be perceived as more alien than those espoused by the Christian Right, a number of which conform to “standard” Islamic doctrine, such as the stance on homosexuality and pre-marital sex. Secularism enables Muslims to practice freely because according to a secular society, no one religion has the right to dominate or suppress another religion’s practice. With Islam being a minority religion, this notion prevents religions with more followers from imposing their theological outlook onto minorities such as Muslims. At the same time, without a fixed set of normative morals, there is room for behaviors to stray further and further away from Muslim values. This is the dual-nature of secularism.

Another, more recent example is that of the niqab ban in France. The grounds for denying it's wearing is that it is deemed incompatible with French secular values and is perceived as an affront to women's rights. Though the niqab is considered optional religiously by orthodoxy, it is still an important aspect of identity for some Muslim women for one reason or another. As subjects in a democratic society, one could argue that they are free to wear the niqab for whatever reason they see fit. These are just some brief examples in which secularism and orthodoxy clash. To couch this in terms of essentialism: it would appear that they “must” clash. However, this is problematic. To presume that a

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<sup>23</sup>Mazrui, Ali. “Islam and the United States: Streams of Convergence, Strands of Divergence,” 800.

clash is inevitable, as is famously championed by Samuel Huntington in his *Clash of Civilizations* is to presume the binary logic of Orientalism as truth. There is relatively little questioning that has been done to challenge the presence or absence of legitimacy in the Orientalist project. However, Edward Said in his timeless work *Orientalism* does challenge the standard discourse of Orientalism and heavily critiques the binary logic therein. He posits that the West and East are not ontologically stable. Rather, they are both made of up human effort. Partly affirmation of the Self and partly denial of the other. It is an ongoing process on the micro and macro levels that cannot be reduced to a static binary.<sup>24</sup>

Consider for a moment the term “globalization” – defined here broadly as the phenomenon of increased socio-cultural transparency via communication, travel, and other means of information exchange – with respect to secularism. If one recalls the Orientalist tendency to view Islam as developmentally stagnant, it is not difficult to see why or how the essentialist attitudes of Muslims against the West have been fostered. “Most people in the West are unaware of Europe's cultural and intellectual debt to Islam. Muslims take this indifference as a deliberate slight. It provides the background to why they view with suspicion developments in our time. It allows them to simplify global issues and interpret a series of recent developments on the surface unconnected, as a well-laid plan by the West to humiliate and even subjugate them.”<sup>25</sup> There is also the tendency to associate globalization with Westernization itself. This increases the possibility and likelihood of Muslims adopting anti-Western sentiment, further fueling the essentialist binary. Muslims “...appear to be challenged by certain cultural and intellectual aspects of globalization because many appear to equate globalization with Westernization. In this, they echo many Western analysts who also equate the two. Indeed Anthony Giddens argues modernity itself, the very engine driving globalization, is a "Western project." Thomas Friedman narrows globalization down further to "Americanization.” Again, essentialism is present. If secularism is being spread via globalization, and globalization is equated with

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<sup>24</sup>Said, Edward. *Orientalism*.

<sup>25</sup>Akbar, Ahmed. “Ibn Khaldun's Understanding of Civilizations and the Dilemmas of Islam and the West Today.” 28

Westernization, then opposing the West means opposing secularization. To oppose secularization is to oppose non-religious forces that “by definition” do not comply with Islam. That is to say, these non-religious forces are perceived by some Muslims of the East to be incompatible with Islam in their essence. By extension, in the minds of many Muslims, opposing the West means supporting one's ability to practice Islam to the fullest and protect one's Muslim identity. This is the essentialist phenomenon we see as practiced in the Occident.

**c. INTERPRETATION**

There is an important point that remains un-discussed with respect to essentialist attitudes: interpretation. At the core of essentialism, as it is presented in this discussion, is the concept of interpretation. Interpretation is the medium of human experience. As subjects living in an external world, we are vehicles through which said world is understood. Our cultural foregrounding is our lens. Consciousness of this is foremost in challenging essentialism's problematic aspects. To lack awareness of this fact is to lack the humility required for interpretive competence. Interpretive competence is the willingness to recognize one's limited knowledge of the other due to a lack of shared experience. It is practicing humility in the Self-Other relationship. Humility here is not meant strictly in the colloquial sense of the word as “not being arrogant” but it includes a spirit of deference that recognizes the humanity and subjectivity of the one to whom one is relating in the moment of experience. Recognition is not the same as acceptance. This is mentioned because some may be wary of this because they feel practicing interpretive competence threatens their own subjectivity. On the contrary, one's subjectivity is elevated by awareness of the other and facilitates understanding of oneself that is otherwise unavailable. Hermeneutics – the study of interpretation – is rooted in ontology, or a way of being in the world. A crucial feature of being human is to interpret the external world around us. We do this constantly, so this is fundamental to make sense of with respect to essentialism. Gadamer's formulation of the “I” and “Thou” – which corresponds to the “Self” and “Other” respectively – is used to illustrate

ontology along with his analysis of the modes of discourse (see Appendix #2). Interpretive competence is contrasted with interpretive violence. One practicing interpretive violence is not concerned with ‘the other’ even on a basic level of acknowledging his/her subjectivity. Interpretive violence is essentialism practiced on the individual level.

Gadamer's magnum opus *Truth and Method* speaks to the idea of effective historical consciousness. This is a general awareness of the fact that cultural forces operate through us as individuals. History speaks through us. In this context of this research, Orientalism speaks through us. That is not to say that one can necessary pinpoint which forces inform one's understanding at any given moment, but rather awareness that they do inform our understanding at all times at some level. This relates to essentialism in a very explicit way because the history of Orientalist discourse exists in the hearts and minds of “Western” individuals. Orientalism is *structural* essentialism, so it may be expressed through individuals *interpersonally* when they speak to or about Muslims. To reiterate an earlier point, this is not an exclusive indictment of the West essentializing Islam. Individuals on both sides of this binary are guilty of this interpretively violent discourse. However, the focus for the purpose of this research is specifically how essentialism operates with respect to Islam and Muslims generally. One might say, then, that essentialism is interpretively violent to ‘the other,’ but what does that mean?

Interpretive violence is reflective. The ‘other’ as object serves as a mirror for the subjectivity of the self. The only thing the ‘self’ hears is what one says. These ideas are constantly being bounced back to the Self and are thus reified. They gain authority on the basis that they have been spoken and heard by the Self rather than verified through shared experience. For instance, a Westerner may only be concerned with reinforcing his current idea of what it means to be Muslim rather than broadening that idea by engaging with the other. His idea of a Muslim may be that the Muslim is backwards, prone to physical violence, a chauvinist, etc. When he speaks or even thinks about these ideas, they remain static. He only sees in the mirror (objectified other) what he wants to see rather than what is actually

there. Interpretive competence, or ontology, is reflexive. Speaking to the other as subject is like walking an endless path. Just as one spends time reflecting during the course of such a walk, one also develops insight along with the ‘other’ as subject by spending time with him/her on the figurative path to understanding that has no end. One’s understanding can always increase.

#### **IV. RESEARCH DESIGN**

A qualitative approach was chosen as the means of appropriating data in this exploratory research due to the high validity it yields in relation to the information sought: the “meaning” of Muslim identity. 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Muslims of varying backgrounds. All of the interviews were conducted in person and lasted between 25 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes in length. Given that the researcher was an insider in the Muslim community, purposive sampling was utilized in order to account for variance in ethnicity and age. Snowball sampling was also incorporated so that the bias of the researcher’s own personal network would not skew the validity of the data. Initial respondents were selected by the respondent personally, while others were recruited via word-of-mouth. This method helped establish a degree of trust and credibility with interviewees prior to the interview in order to facilitate more openness in the interview itself. There is no hypothesis established for the data to be tested again, as this is not a deductive study. Rather, this research is inductive and seeks to categorize and present the respondent’s answers by framing them in terms of the concepts previously discussed. Orientalism historically de-voiced Muslims. The research itself is a part of a larger counter-narrative intended to counter that history by allowing Muslims to speak for themselves in their own words. Before addressing specifics of the findings with respect to the interviews, a brief outline of the respondents is presented.

The chart below gives some basic information about each respondent. As this research is inductive, no suggestions have been presented indicating predictions about the 3 dependent variables based on the ethnicity, gender, whether the respondent was born Muslim or converted, or was born in

America or immigrated to America. However, since this research is exploratory, such data was sought in order to see if any patterns emerged among the dependent variables that might be attributed to the aforementioned demographic distinctions. Though no such pattern was found in the data, this research still provides a useful approach that might be utilized in future research that is more extensive and inclusive. There were 10 male respondents and 5 female respondents. 6 respondents were born in America while 9 immigrated to America. 9 ethnicities were represented among all 15 respondents.

Though this is by no means representative of the Muslim population in America, this diverse population was selected in order to appropriate a number of varying cultural foregroundings and make sense of them in relation to the dependent variables. These variables include MSI (Muslim Self-Identification), MOI (Muslim Other-Identification), and MGP (Muslim Generalized-Perception). (see Appendix #4). In the process of coding MSI, a distinction between sacred and profane was used. If respondents exclusively referenced ritual acts of worship such as reading the Qur'an, praying, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, etc. that are specific to Islam in answering questions #6 and 7 (see Appendix #1) they were classified with S for "Sacred." If respondents talked about practices that are not specific to Islam such as raising one's family, being kind to others, etc. they were classified with P for "Profane." Respondents that mentioned both were classified as "both." For MOI, the coding concerned question 10 only and not question 9 (see Appendix #1), as the researcher found question #9 too difficult to code accurately based on the phrasing of the question and the responses. Respondents were decidedly mixed on this issue. Furthermore, the question had to be reworded in a number of cases due to a lack of clarity of what was meant by "well-integrated." MGP is the primary dependent variable of this study and is represented in terms of whether the respondent considers how non-Muslims tend to view Islam and Muslims on a spectrum of positive to negative. (see Appendix #1, question #13)

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>C/BM</b>	<b>I/N</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>MSI</b>	<b>MOI</b>	<b>MGP</b>
<b>R 1</b>	M	BM	I	Pakistani	P	G	E to O
<b>R 2</b>	M	BM	I	Pakistani	P	R	E to O
<b>R 3</b>	F	BM	I	Ethiopian	Both	G	O to V
<b>R 4</b>	M	C	N	American	P	R	E to O
<b>R 5</b>	F	BM	I	Palestinian	S	Both	E
<b>R 6</b>	M	C	N	Puerto Rican	S	R	E
<b>R 7</b>	M	BM	I	Jordanian	Both	G	V
<b>R 8</b>	F	C	I	Russian	Both	R	E to V
<b>R 9</b>	M	BM	I	Ethiopian	Both	R	V
<b>R 10</b>	F	BM	I	Ethiopian	Both	G	V
<b>R 11</b>	M	C	N	American	S	R	V
<b>R 12</b>	M	BM	N	American/Bangladeshi	Both	R	V
<b>R 13</b>	F	BM	I	Somalian	---	G	---
<b>R 14</b>	M	C	N	American	S	Both	V
<b>R 15</b>	M	C	N	American	Both	R	---

### **Chart Key**

[C] = Convert / [BM] = Born Muslim / [I] = Immigrant / [N] = Native

[MSI] – S = Sacred / P = Profane

[MOI] – G = Integrated / R = Not Integrated

[MGP] – O = Positive / E = Neutral / V = Negative

[---] – Indicates that the respondent's answer was unclear and could not be coded

### **Dependent Variables**

[MSI] = Muslim Self-Identification – Individual's understanding of him/herself as Muslim

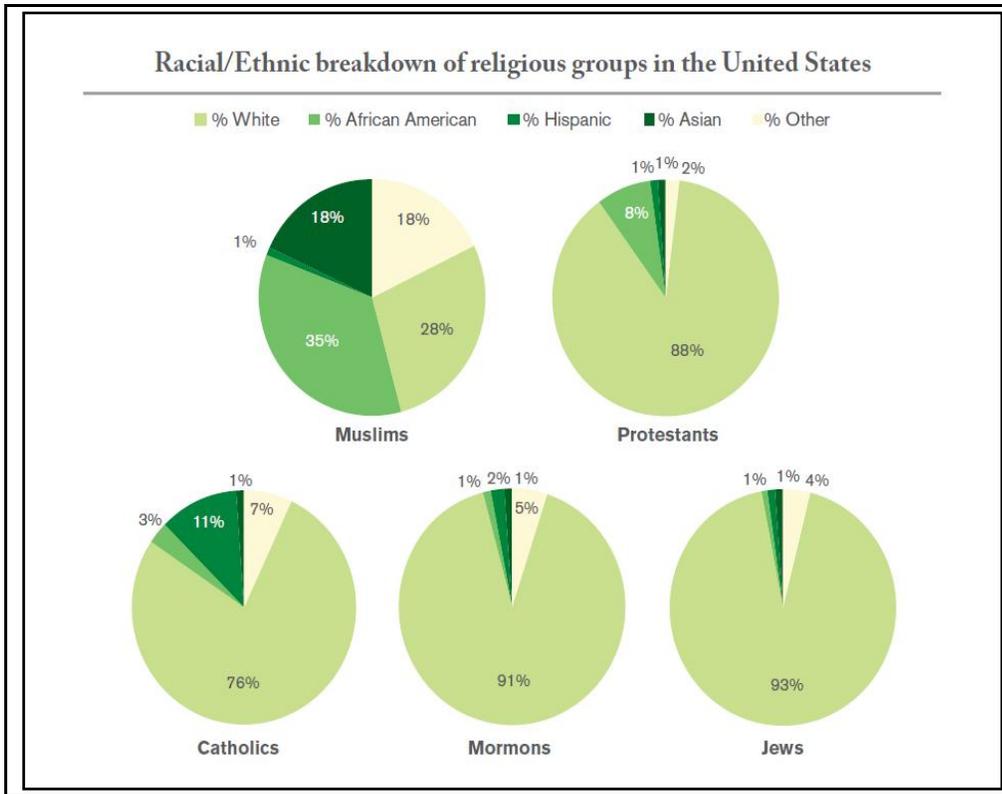
[MOI] = Muslim Other-Identification – Individual's understanding of other Muslims

[MGP] = Muslim Generalized-Perception – Individual's understanding of non-Muslims' perception of Muslims

### **Independent Variables**

Muslim/Non-Muslim Contact

It is important to outline some key data that will be useful in providing a snapshot of Muslim American identity nationwide. These data indicate a number of factors that will help the reader contextualize the findings of the interviews. Specifically, the data are crucial in illustrating the potential relationship between the interviewees' responses and considerations of essentialism and interpretation as discussed in the paper's theoretical section.



Source: *Muslim Americans: A National Portrait* (© Gallup Poll 2009)

The Muslim population in America is considerably more diverse than any of the other religious communities surveyed in Gallup’s poll. This is an important point with respect to how essentialism plays out within the Muslim community itself. Consideration of Muslim interaction across ethnicities was arguably the most difficult point to address in the study, both in terms of the expressing the question and appropriating/codifying each respondent’s answers. (see Appendix #1, questions 9/10). This illustrates an inductive, ground-up approach that can develop a body of terms and themes that can be appropriated in future research that can then take a deductive approach based on said terms and themes. [See Suggestions for Future Research]

Attitudes Toward Muslims According to Personal Acquaintance with Muslims			
	Know a Muslim	Don't know a Muslim	Difference
Favor special ID for Muslims	24	50	-26
Would not want Muslim as a neighbor	10	31	-21
Favor special security checks at airports for Muslims	30	49	-19
Nervous if Muslim man were on same flight	20	38	-18
Muslims not loyal to the U.S.	30	45	-15
Muslims too extreme in religious beliefs	36	50	-14
Have some feelings of prejudice against Muslims	32	45	-13
Muslims sympathetic to al-Qaeda	29	38	-9
Muslims not respectful of other religions	35	44	-9
Nervous if Muslim woman on same flight	15	20	-5
Muslims not committed to religious beliefs	6	7	-1
Muslims not respectful of women	52	52	0

Source: *Anti-Muslim Sentiments Fairly Commonplace* (© Gallup Inc. 2006)

The above chart indicates percentages of those who assented to the corresponding categories. The negative attitudes towards Muslims correlate with a lack of interaction with Muslims. That is to say: respondents who did not know a Muslim were more likely to hold anti-Muslim sentiments than those who did know at least one Muslim. The high percentage points of difference throughout the categories listed above is evidence of that tendency. The higher the percentage of difference the more beneficial (at least potentially) shared experience is. What does this mean? It means that face-to-face interaction is an avenue to further explore as a means of counteracting the violence of essentialism. In the process of making an absolutist claim about individuals one does not have experience of, one is effectively silencing them before they even speak. One is denying 'the Other' his or her subjectivity. The perceived idea of what Islam is becomes mapped onto what adherents of Islam, Muslims, are perceived to necessarily be. This issue of necessity is important, because essentialism is not merely stereotyping. Stereotyping, in this context, might concern someone witnessing, whether directly through shared experience or indirectly through some information channel, that some Muslim men are disrespectful of women for example. Then, one generalizes and comes to the conclusion that most or all Muslim men are disrespectful of women. This is different from essentialism in that an essentialist

perspective might view that Islam as a religion condones disrespecting women because Islam is “other-than” the West – another example of offensive essentialism as indicated previously. Essentialism is structured to devoice the other and make “it” strictly an object. The voice of the other represents his/her subjectivity. Without that voice, the other’s subjectivity is rendered moot. If ‘the other’ is not allowed to speak at all – Mode 1 – or is not listened to – Mode 2 – then interpretive violence will persist and understanding will remain absent from the interpersonal interaction.

This might also indicate a difference in how non-Muslims view Muslims as opposed to Islam. In the interview schedule (see Appendix #1, question #13) respondents were asked about non-Muslims' perspective(s) on Islam. There is a subtle, yet important distinction, however, in specifying Islam as opposed to Muslims. Dalia Mogahed, executive director of Abu Dhabi's Gallup Center, notes:

“Of the faiths Gallup asked Americans about, Islam elicits the most negative views. A slight majority of Americans (53%) say their opinion of the faith is either “not too favorable” (22%) or “not favorable at all” (31%). When asked about their level of knowledge about Islam, many Americans tell Gallup they have either “very little knowledge” (40%) or “none at all” (23%). The study also reveals that Americans view Islam more negatively than they view Muslims.” (2009)

Given that essentialism hinges on formulating absolute categories, it is much easier to essentialize Islam as monolithic rather than Muslim identity. This is so because any individual person could be a Muslim, potentially. There is more ostensible openness and variability in the concept of what might constitute “Muslim identity” as opposed to what might constitute “Islam.” Since Islam is easier to essentialize, it makes sense that more that negative views will be held about it as a religion on the structural level than its adherents, Muslims, as individuals on the interpersonal level.

#### **a. MUSLIM GENERALIZED PERCEPTION**

As is evident from the responses and summarization of the data above, the responses when coded didn’t fit neatly into an easily translatable table that could measure or indicate the degree to which essentialism was taking place, whether it was Muslims essentializing themselves, Muslims

essentializing other Muslims, or non-Muslims essentializing Muslims. It is important to remember that this is an inductive empirical study. The point is not for to check the data and see if it matches with a hypothesis proposed prior to the conduction of the study. Rather, the data is used to construct a theory from the ground up. While no generalizations can be made due to the study's limited scope and lack of proportional representation, it is valuable because it gives a voice to those that have historically been de-voiced. Orientalism has been speaking on behalf of Muslims in sweeping terms, yet the discipline is Following are some key quotes that indicates a pattern in respondents' answers. R12 stated that "If a person knew a practicing Muslim, they would know that what they see on the TV is false." R3 noted "To get to know what Islam means; it is not something you can just look at; you have to have a conversation. R15 posited: "Non-Muslims get everything they know about Islam from [the] media. A person could believe what they want to about Muslims rather than what their mind attests to." The common denominator in all of these responses is directly related to MGP. A lack of shared experience with a Muslim is conducive to the essentializing of Muslim identity. (see Appendix #3, Figure 3 for national data on Muslim/non-Muslim contact)

## **V. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This exploratory piece can only address so much with a handful of interviews and the relatively limited theoretical scope. However, research concerning essentialism is primary in many respects, and deserves significantly more attention and exposition on in future studies. Some considerations to further discussion surrounding essentialism's relation to secularism, modernity, and other highly complex, pressing issues as they pertain to Muslim identity are as follows: for instance, in practice, secularism and modernity are related to the ability of the minority group to fit in with the majority normative order, particularly a religious minority. With respect to Muslims identity, *accommodation* and *competition* might be considered as vehicles of relation between Muslims and the mainstream.

It might also be useful to relate these “social-cohesion” concepts to David Riesman's<sup>26</sup> character types in future studies. That is not to suggest that each character-type corresponds with a particular cohesion concept. However, discussing how certain character types might be conducive to one cohesion concept over another and how such a character type might operate in light of essentialist attitudes is of import. An anomic person might identify with 'competition' – such a person avoids the dominant culture for the sake of avoiding that culture. Such a person does not conform to the norms of society and does not judge him/herself according to those norms. However, according to competition, the group avoids the dominant culture because it is at odds or perceived to be at odds with its own culture. The common denominator here is that of avoiding the dominant culture completely. The adjusted person may identify with 'accommodation'; that is, the group or individual conforms to the society for the sake of conforming and the benefits to be reaped therein, even if it means ignoring one's own values. One takes the norms of society as a basis for determining one's self-worth. These are just a few considerations to extend the critique of essentialist characterizations of Islam and Muslim identity. More extensive empirical research must be conducted by and among Muslims and non-Muslims alike in the West that seek to highlight specific reasons for why these attitudes may be held, what socio-economic conditions may lead to them, etc. By addressing essentialism both theoretically and empirically, an interpretive space can be cleared to facilitate more holistic understanding of what it can potentially mean to be Muslim on an ontological level, thereby countering essentialist tendencies.

Lastly, the codes presented in the research design can serve as a basis for deductive research that can be generalized to see how these themes are present in the Muslim community on a macro level. Furthermore, research can be conducted to investigate the possibility of correlations between being the “type” of Muslim one is – a convert/born-Muslims and/or immigrant/native and the tendency to be essentialized or essentialize in particular contexts.

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<sup>26</sup>David Riesman was an American Sociologist. His most recognized work, *The Lonely Crowd*, is the main reference for the concept of “character types” and their potential consideration for future research concerning Muslim identity in America.

## VI. CONCLUSION

It has been shown that essentialism, though largely unavoidable, is usually problematic. It is a result of oversimplification and, in many cases, intellectual laziness. It is also interpretively violent. It can occur even if one is well intentioned via one's taken for granted cultural assumptions. Non-reflexive use of language can also lead to an essentializing attitude. This is embodied by Mode 1 and Mode 2 discourse. Whether one is or is not well-intentioned is not the point. Ultimately, essentialism problematizes understanding Muslim identity and Islam. This lack of understanding, more broadly speaking, is a hindrance to progressive discourse and dialogue – Mode 3 – between the West and Islam structurally and non-Muslims and Muslims interpersonally that is so desperately needed today. Sen acutely points out that “Our shared humanity gets savagely challenged when our differences are narrowed into one devised system of uniquely powerful categorization.”<sup>27</sup> Outlining essentialism and providing a framework for being able to identify it is only a first theoretical and practical step towards addressing these and other complex issues related to the Western and Muslim worlds. Facilitation of shared experiences across the binary logic of essentialism that challenge static notions of Islam and the West both seems to be the antidote to this interpretively violent way-of-being.

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<sup>27</sup>Sen, Amartya. “Violence and Identity,” 17.

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## Appendix #1: Interview Schedule

1. How many family members are in your household? How many are Muslim? How many were born in America?
2. Are you currently attending school? Please give the number of students in each of your classes. How many are Muslim? Non-Muslim?
3. What is your highest completed level of education? (High school or less / Some college / College or higher)
4. Are you employed? If so, how many people do you work with? How many are Muslim? Non-Muslim? How many hours do you work per week?
5. How many non-religious social events do you attend per month? What about religious social events?
6. In what ways do you practice your religion on a regular basis?
7. What does being Muslim mean for you? Why?
8. Please describe the quality of your interaction with Muslims outside of your ethnicity. What factors contributes to the quality of that interaction?
  - Very positive – Positive – Neutral – Negative – Very Negative – Don't Know
9. What do you think being Muslim means for the typical Muslim you know?
10. Are Muslims of ethnicities other than your own well-integrated to the community? Why or why not?
11. How many hours a week do you interact with non-Muslims? Where do you interact with them?
12. Please describe the quality of your interaction with non-Muslims. What factors contribute to that quality?
  - Very positive – Positive – Neutral – Negative – Very Negative – Don't Know
13. Considering typical non-Muslims you have known, not any specific person nor the worst or the best, please describe their outlook on Muslims. What factors contribute to that outlook?
  - Very positive – Positive – Neutral – Negative – Very Negative – Don't Know
14. Please describe the degree of knowledge about Islam held by the typical Muslim that you have known, not any specific person nor the worst or the best. What factors contribute to that degree of knowledge?
  - Very knowledgeable – Knowledgeable – Ignorant – Very Ignorant – Don't Know
15. Please describe the degree of knowledge about Islam held by the typical non-Muslim that you have known, not any specific person nor the worst or the best. What factors contribute to that degree of knowledge?
  - Very knowledgeable – Knowledgeable – Ignorant – Very Ignorant – Don't Know

**Appendix #2: Gadamer's Modes of Discourse**



**Mode 1 - Interpretively Violent/Reflective**

The 'Other' is not considered at all in the interaction. The 'other' is merely an object. (i.e.; genocide)



**Mode 2 - Interpretively Violent/Reflective**

The 'Other' is allowed to speak, but is still treated as an object. The 'other' is heard, but not listened to. (i.e.; political debate).



**Mode 3 - Interpretively Competent/Reflexive**

The 'Other' is treated as a fellow subject. The 'Self' is deferential and listens with and speaks with the 'other.' (i.e.; dialogue)

### Appendix #3: Religious Perception

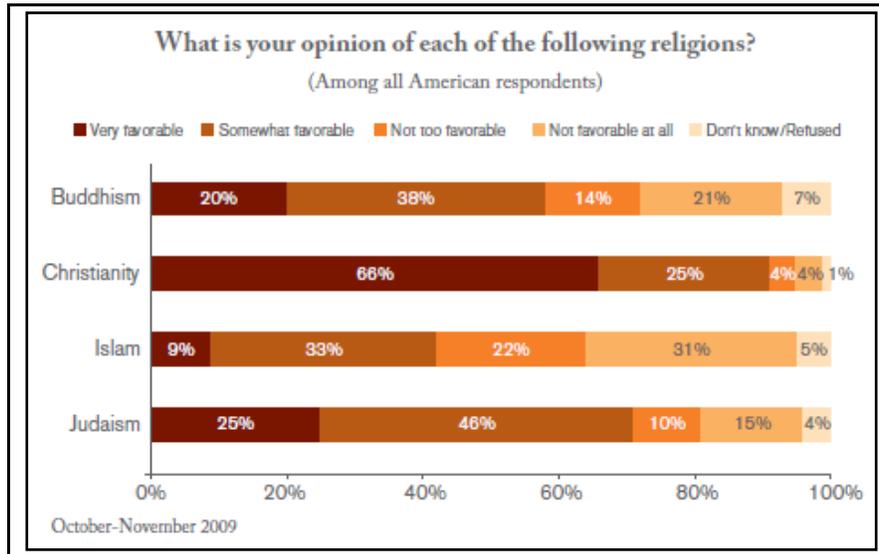


Figure 1

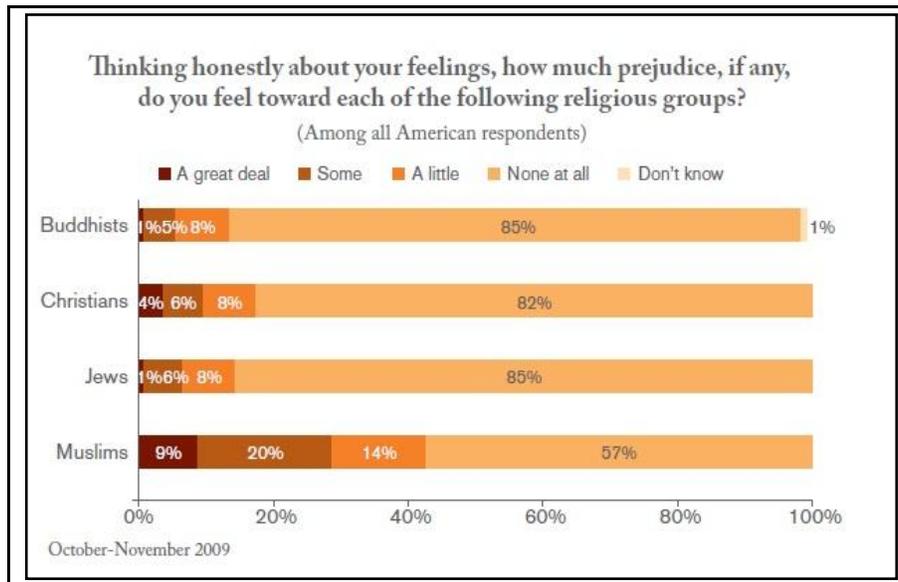


Figure 2

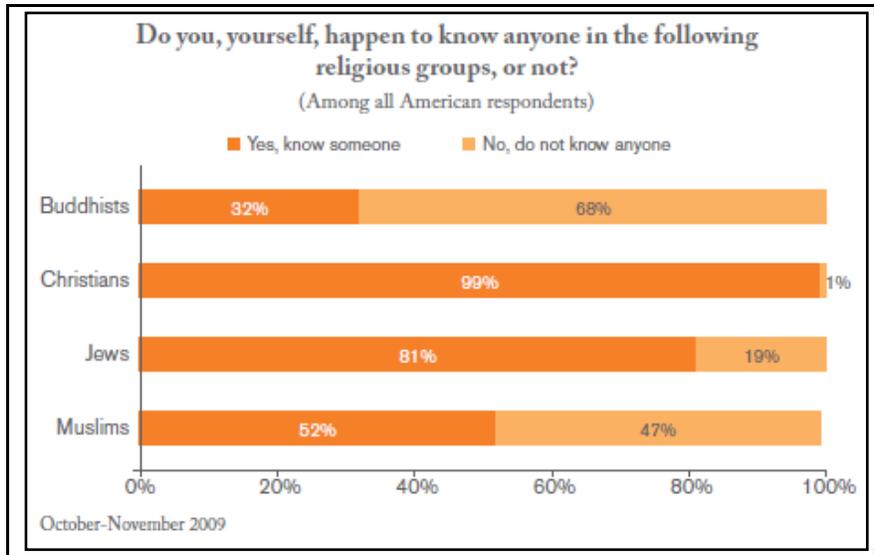


Figure 3

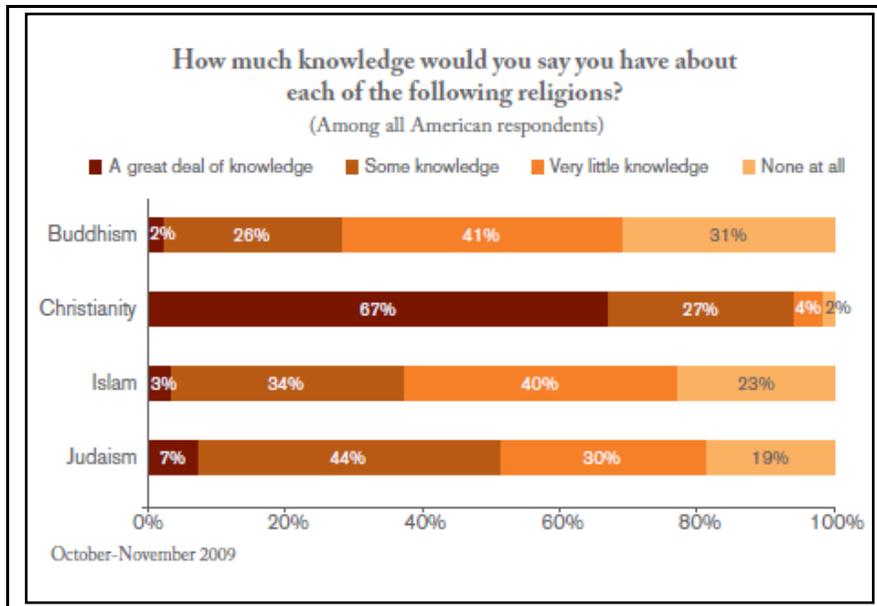


Figure 4

**Appendix #4: Self-Other Binary**

<p><b>Self</b></p>	<p>MSI = Muslim Self Identification</p> <p>Individual's understanding of him/herself as Muslim</p>	<p><b>Self</b></p>
<p><b>Self</b></p>	<p>MOI = Muslim Other Identification</p> <p>Individual's understanding of other Muslims</p>	<p><b>Other</b></p>
<p><b>“Other”</b></p>	<p>MGP = Muslim Generalized Perception</p> <p>Individual's understanding of non-Muslims' perception of Muslims</p>	<p><b>Self</b></p>