AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE DAILY SHOW AND THE "GOOD MUSLIM"/"BAD MUSLIM" DISTINCTION: AN INVESTIGATION OF LIBERAL DISCOURSES ON ISLAM

by
TIMOTHY N. EDDY

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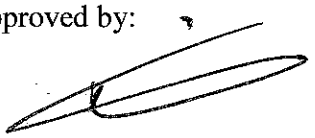

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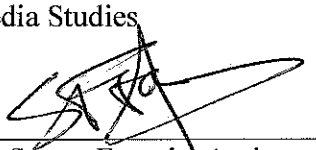

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Major: Political Studies

Title: The Daily Show and the "Good Muslim"/"Bad Muslim" Distinction: an Investigation of Liberal Discourses on Islam

Many scholars, foremost among them Mahmood Mamdani, have identified an emerging hegemonic western discourse: the "Good Muslim" (GM)/"Bad Muslim" (BM) distinction. By distinguishing between those Muslims who are liberal, secular, and peaceful and those who are violent, anti-modern, and fundamentalist, prominent politicians, pundits, and media elite have avoided the trappings of a bigoted essentialist discourse that views Islam as a monolithic civilization condemned to violence and backwardness. Is this the limit of mainstream progressive discourses on Islam? Because *The Daily Show* (*TDS*) is considered to represent the liberal/progressive position within mainstream American politics, it seems like a logical place to launch such an investigation. This project will conduct a discursive analysis of *TDS*'s coverage of Islam in an attempt to analyze the discursive terrain in which it participates. This analysis concludes that *TDS*, despite espousing a clearly non-interventionist foreign policy stance on the Muslim world, rearticulates many of the tropes and discourses that feed into the GM/BM distinction.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Writing in 1997 about the American media's portrayal of Islam, Edward Said argued, "The misrepresentations and distortions committed in the portrayal of Islam today argue neither a genuine desire to understand nor a willingness to listen and see what there is to see and listen to."[1] Since Said's indictment of the media, we have witnessed the 9/11 attacks; the explosion of suicide bombings in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere; the rise of Islamic State; and the horrors of a brutal civil war in Syria. No doubt aggravating an already unsympathetic public opinion of Islam, these events have placed Islam front and center in the conversation over the root causes of violence and conflict in the Islamic world. These events have triggered a proliferation of voices insisting that Islam is inherently incompatible with democracy, modernity, and inherently hostile to the West. The problem of representing Islam, critiqued forcefully by Said in 1978, seems to remain and, in some cases, in even more powerful forms in 2015.

If the discursive terrain on Islam seems to remain polluted, *The Daily Show*'s (*TDS*) form of political satire might be the best media format to shift the existing public debates to a more sensible national conversation. The growing disenchantment with mainstream news has led many to move to new programming formats for their news. A 2012 Pew Research poll found that "news comedy programs – the Daily Show and Colbert Report – attract the

[1] Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (New York: Random House, 1997), xlvii.

largest percentages of young people."[2] Considered by many to be partisan and ideological, channels like *CNN*, *Fox News*, and *MSNBC* have pushed viewers to seek more honest reporting and professional journalism. *TDS* has become "for many Americans the most trusted name in news. Not the most trusted name in comedy, but news."[3] Not only has *TDS* been praised for its more responsible form of journalism, but Jon Stewart has also been celebrated "as the voice of US liberalism, the one who will give the definitive progressive take on a story."[4] Given its increasing influence in shaping the liberal/progressive position in American politics, *TDS*, then, seems like a logical starting point for an investigation of where liberal/progressive discourses currently stand on issues in the Muslim world.

What are the more progressive approaches to discussing issues such as the relationship between Islam and violence, patriarchy, dictatorship, and various other pathologies in the Muslim world? And does *TDS* open new discursive space beyond the prevailing discourses? The desire to distinguish between types of Muslims—friend versus enemy, peaceful versus violent, secular versus fundamentalist—has served over the past two decades as perhaps the most common progressive American discourse about Islam. In a country that prides itself on having achieved the most diverse and multicultural society in the world, political leaders on both sides of the partisan divide have been careful not to paint Islam with one broad stroke. After 9/11, George W. Bush reminded the American

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[2] "In Changing News Landscape, Even Television is Vulnerable," *Pew Research Center*, September 27, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/in-changing-news-landscape-even-television-is-vulnerable/.

[3] Jamie Kilstein and Allison Kilkenny, "The Day Jon Stewart Quit: Why the Daily Show isn't the satire America needs," *Salon*, October 18, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2014/10/18/the_day_jon_stewart_quit_why_the_daily_show_isnt_the_satire_america_needs/

[4] Hadley Freeman, "Jon Stewart: why I quit the Daily Show," *The Guardian*, April 18, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/apr/18/jon-stewart-why-i-quit-the-daily-show.

public, "the enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them."[5] Likewise, Barack Obama called for quarantining the extremists with the help of Muslim partners: "America will defend itself, respectful of the sovereignty of nations and the rule of law. And we will do so in partnership with Muslim communities which are also threatened. The sooner the extremists are isolated and unwelcome in Muslim communities, the sooner we will all be safer."[6]

Since 9/11, there has been a lot of talk about a civil war in Islam, an idea that has colonized the thinking of a wide spectrum of the American public. This civil war is between liberal Muslims who are said to have a peaceful interpretation of the Quran and irrational, violent, fundamentalist Muslims. The prevailing discourse on Islam, then, does not use an essentialist template that treats Islam as a monolithic force that is inherently violent and anti-modern. The optimist position is now that there are forces within Islam that seek to act and behave like liberal western subjects, and it ought to be the West's job to empower these subjects in their war against the intolerant forms of Islam. Or, in the formulation of Mahmood Mamdani, there are "Good Muslims" (GM) and "Bad Muslims" (BM), and they are at war with each other.

One of the contradictory elements of this discourse is the manner in which it brings the partisan liberal—i.e., someone who might identify as anti-war and oppose hawkish right-wing foreign policies—and partisan conservative—i.e., someone who supports an

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[5] George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," September 20, 2001, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920–8.html.

[6] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on a New Beginning," *White House*, June 4, 2009. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09

aggressive, neoconservative foreign policy vision—together in one common discursive terrain, as the above statements from Bush and Obama suggest. Because it brings together liberals and conservatives under one umbrella, one would expect also that it suffers from some internal contradictions: should we approach an analysis of violence in the Islamic world as primarily a cultural phenomenon, thereby occluding the political and economic struggles that define many of the actors in this geographical space? Is it even appropriate to speak of an Islamic world as a monolithic geographical space, and what do we lose in our analysis by taking this as a starting point in our investigation? What assumptions about secular, liberal, and western values are problematic yet play a key role in activating such a discourse as the GM/BM? I will argue that this new, anti-essentialist discourse faces its own limitations in expanding discussions about Islam and violence, Islam and modernity, Islam and democracy, that still leaves us with an ineffective way of debating these issues.

To what extent, then, does *TDS* participate in this GM/BM discourse? Does *TDS* move beyond the preferred liberal registers? This project will attempt to answer these questions as follows: first, I will trace a genealogy of the GM/BM distinction in order to excavate the overlapping discursive spaces that made this type of discourse make sense. The genealogy will serve two purposes for this study. It will enable us to identify the various strands of the GM/BM distinction that *TDS* draws on (or moves beyond); and it will highlight the latent interventionist impulse of the GM/BM. I will then move on to a discursive and textual analysis of key moments in which *TDS* examines topics related to Islam. A justification of the sample size and rationale for choosing those elements will be provided in that chapter. After providing a careful analysis of the broader discursive and cultural landscape in which *TDS* is participating, I will examine the extent to which the

show draws on GM/BM registers and the extent to which it moves beyond the GM/BM to carve out a new discursive space. Finally, I finish with a conclusion that suggests a new epistemology for shifting the dialogue on Islam to a more productive discussion.

This project started as a quest for more reasonable forms of discourse about Islam and through *TDS* only discovered the limits of moving this debate beyond right-wing essentialism and Islamophobia. Because of the particular context in which *TDS* is operating—as primarily a response to right-wing rhetoric and also operating within the corporate media model itself—the approach it takes to Islam is inevitably constrained. But this is not to ignore the meaningful ways in which *TDS* does in fact shift the debate, if only slightly, by introducing its audience to forms of resistance and struggles existing within Islam. Unfortunately, these struggles, while not entirely occluded, are embedded in and subsumed by the GM/BM discursive structure.

A. Definition of terms

The central theoretical framework around which this analysis will pivot is Mahmood Mamdani's "Good Muslim/Bad Muslim." The Good Muslim/Bad Muslim distinction, Mamdani argues, grew out of the post-Cold War period in the context of an increasingly cultural interpretation of terrorism and violence in the Muslim world, whereby scholars in the West distinguished between a moderate type of Muslim—secular, modern,

western—and a radical type of Muslim—anti-modern, anti-secular, and violent in its opposition to American power.[7]

On the one hand, this project will explore discourses coming from actors who are said to represent the progressive left in the U.S., and the competing discourses that emerge from the American right. These categories of left and right, which often confuse more than they clarify, deserve some attention. When entering this terrain, I am motioning toward a specifically discursive space within American politics that has witnessed a rise in strength and effectiveness of conservative media platforms and the reshaping of American politics in a way that has weakened the progressive left in politics. Many have decried the mainstream media's unwillingness to pressure Barack Obama for failing to fulfill his progressive agenda, and more generally for the absence of progressive voices in mainstream American politics.[8] I plan to look at actors that represent these positions; the present question, then, is what would a progressive/left discourse on Islam look like?

On the other hand, this project is interested in Liberalism as a set of values, ideas, and ideology that champions individual autonomy, equality before the law, separation of church and state, and the "western civilization" that produces these values. These values, I will argue, play an important role in unifying the American right and progressive left in its discourses on Islam. Likewise, if a central problem with the discourse under investigation is the question of representing the Islamic world, what do we mean by this geographical

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[7] Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: American, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 15-16.

[8] Glenn Greenwald, "Progressive media claims it will be tougher on Obama now," *The Guardian*, December 3, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/03/progressive-media-obama-criticisms.

space? I adopt the term "Muslim world" and "Islamic world" not as an endorsement of the term itself as a useful analytical category for discussing 1.6 billion people who inhabit areas as diverse as Morocco, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Turkey, but simply as a means of engaging in this debate on the prevailing terms of use. This project will suggest throughout that such an idea as the Muslim or Islamic world is inherently problematic as a starting point for an investigation of questions related to this diverse geographical space. It also raises questions about who is allowed to represent this world, an additionally problematic proposition.

B. Literature Review

This research project engages questions spanning a large set of literature—from postcolonial studies to media studies. This section will offer an overview of the relevant literature and situate this project within the broader scholarship.

Media Studies

Many scholars of communication and mass media have written extensively about the changing landscapes of news and entertainment, media consumption, and the emergence of political satire within this changing landscape. Most scholars have come to recognize the emergence of what Amanda Lotz has termed a "post-network era"—a shift away from the dominance of several network channels to a media landscape offering many different media and models for presenting news.[9] Additionally, many scholars have offered scathing critiques of the political economy of the network era and the conglomeration that defines this era, in which the media, rather than challenging the government and holding it

[9] Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

accountable, broadcasts messages that benefit the powerful corporate interests that control the major networks.[10] Satire has grown out of the post-network era and increasing disenchantment with traditional network television, and is perceived as providing an alternative to corporate media, one that offers more accurate and truthful analyses of political affairs.[11] Jeffrey Jones argues that American political satire emerged as an alternative to pundit-based political talk shows. In contrast to *Cross Fire* and the *O'Reilly Factor*, for instance, political satire "offer[s] a measure of honesty that combats the fakery that dominates both politics and entertainment."[12]

Literature assessing the portrayal of Islam in traditional media sources—network news, film, television series—has typically issued poor marks for the media's performance. Said's *Covering Islam*, for example, levelled a fierce attack on the media for its vast mischaracterizations of Islam.[13] Some scholars have found that films sometimes offer a more favorable perspective of Muslims, perspectives that often resemble the GM/BM distinction. For instance, Melanie McAlister's analysis of *The Siege* (1998) discovered that the film offers sympathetic vignettes of Arab/Muslims living in New York: "Frank, the number two person on the counterterrorism team, is a practicing Muslim, a U.S. citizen born in Lebanon, and a proud family man. He is located within a much larger immigrant community, people who have made the United States their home, and the film explores this

[10] Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).
[11] Geoffrey Baym, *From Cronkite to Colbert: The Evolution of Broadcast News* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2010).
[12] Jeffrey Jones, *Entertaining Politics* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 61.
[13] Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (New York: Random House, 1997).

community fondly and in some detail."[14] Likewise, Evelyn Alsutany found that after 9/11, films and television series would usually balance any negative stereotype of Muslims with a character offering a more positive image of Muslims. If scholars have generally been disappointed with traditional forms of media's representation of Islam, and *TDS* is considered to offer an alternative to traditional forms of media, then can we expect the show to move beyond the GM/BM distinction? *TDS* is operating within a particular cultural context, the post-9/11 era, which will inevitably shape the show's approach to these questions. Many scholars have documented the rise of Islamophobia in post 9/11; Carl Ernst and Deepa Kumar, for instance, have argued that intolerant attitudes towards Muslims have a rich history in the West, yet after 9/11 intolerance took on new and more aggressive forms. As Ernst points out, most Americans prior to 9/11 had little knowledge of Islam, and after 2001 American consciousness thought about Islam in terms of its relationship with violence and aggression towards the West.[15] *TDS* enters the conversation within this cultural context; does *TDS* focus primarily on countering these the more vitriolic Islamophobic rhetoric, and gesture towards a more sensible discussion? Or does *TDS* also attempt to move beyond the GM/BM—the prevailing liberal discourse?

Post-Colonial Studies

The question of representing the Muslim the world was most famously critiqued in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said attacked the academy for producing scholarship on an imagined geographical space labeled the Orient that was mendacious and served powerful

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[14] Melanie McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 262.

[15] Carl Ernst, ed., *Islamophobia in America: the Anatomy of Intolerance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

colonial and imperialist institutions. "What gave the Oriental's world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts," wrote Said, "but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West…Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world."[16] Western academic institutions, with their vast apparatuses of knowledge production, sit in a position of power that allows them to create an Oriental subject and define it. If Said attacked the prevailing scholarship on the Orient, others, like Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood launched an investigation into the western assumptions underpinning these discourses. Rather than investigating the increasingly banal point that the Orient is misrepresented, Asad and Mahmood asked why. This paper will intervene at both levels of investigation: identifying the Saidian moments of the *TDS*'s deconstruction of Islamophobic rhetoric, but also investigating the assumptions underlying *TDS*'s own constructive moments. How does *TDS* represent Islam, and what are the discourses that it reproduces when representing Islam?

This study is particularly interested in investigating the limits of the GM/BM discourses. Mamdani located the limits of the GM/BM distinction in its occlusion of historical and political analyses of the question of Islam and violence. I will attempt to carry the problematization of GM/BM a step further, which the brief genealogy below will assist in accomplishing. It will also enable me to consider more deeply how this type of discourse helps to activate certain interventionist discourses. Thus, even if *TDS* postures as

[16] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 40.

anti-interventionist, if it adopts GM/BM tropes, it would suggest that *TDS* is in fact participating in discursive space amenable to imperialist agendas.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF GENEALOGY OF THE "GOOD MUSLIM"/"BAD MUSLIM" DISTINCTION

On the October 3, 2014 episode of *Real Time with Bill Maher*, actor Ben Affleck lashed out against what he perceived to be influential political comedian and New Atheist Bill Maher's "gross, racist, intolerant" rhetoric on Islam.[17] This backlash came a week after Maher insisted that Americans amplify their criticism of Islam and stand up for liberal values "that a lot of the Muslim world stands against,"[18] calls couched in what religious scholar Reza Aslan and others referred to as "simply bigotry."[19] Many self-proclaimed liberal, progressive Americans lauded Affleck's bold rejection of Maher's (and fellow New Atheist Sam Harris's) essentializing epithets about Islam. Yet, as each side clarified its argument, it seemed as though they were arguing the same position. Harris and Maher reminded the audience that liberal-minded Muslims do exist in the Muslim world, and the West ought to empower dissidents who share western values—precisely Affleck's and fellow panelist Nicholas Kristof's point. As Harris pointed out a few days after the exchange, "Kristof made the point that there are brave Muslims who are risking their lives to condemn 'extremism' in the Muslim community. Of course there are, and I celebrate these people too. But he seemed completely unaware that he was making my point for

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[17] Real Time with Bill Maher, "Ben Affleck, Sam Harris, and Bill Maher Debate Radical Islam," *Real Time with Bill Maher* video, 10:08, October 3, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vln9D81eO60

[18] Real Time with Bill Maher, "Fellate Show," *Real Time with Bill Maher* video, 5:43, September 26, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDFrNQAjDYA

[19] Reza Aslan, "Bill Maher isn't the only one who misunderstands religion," *New York Times*, Op-Ed, October 8, 2014.

me."[20] That is, both sides seemed to adopt the GM/BM distinction as the most appropriate way to think about the relationship between Islam and violence, Islam and modernity.

How did we end up talking about Islam this way? How did we reach such a powerful, hegemonic discourse about Islam, one that brings together public figures who tend to otherwise disagree with one another? This chapter will trace a brief genealogy of the GM/BM distinction in order to illustrate the various discourses that made it possible for actors from opposite sides of the political spectrum to come together in a common discursive terrain. What will emerge from this discussion is that the GM/BM distinction allowed liberals and conservatives alike to talk about Islam in a non-essentialist manner but remain at the same time interventionist. Because this paper is especially interested in the GM/BM's relationship to foreign policy discourses, this chapter will begin by investigating similarities in foreign policy discourses between liberals and conservatives. I will suggest that the reason why liberals and conservatives have similar outlooks is intimately linked to shared GM/BM discourses.

A. Bipartisan Support for Interventionism

Affleck's comments are part of a broader trend of rejecting essentialist rhetoric on Islam. This attempt at opening novel discursive space took on new energy after Barack Obama's speech in Cairo in June 2009. The *New York Times* could report in the days following his speech that,

[20] Sam Harris, "Can Liberalism be Saved from Itself?" *Sam Harris Blog*, October 7, 2014, http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/can-liberalism-be-saved-from-itself

> Again and again, Muslim listeners said they were struck by how skillfully Mr. Obama appropriated religious, cultural and historical references in ways other American presidents had not. He included four quotations from the Koran and used Arabic greetings… His speech was also embraced for what it did not do: use the word terrorism, broadly seen here as shorthand for an attack on Islam.[21]

Yet both Obama and Bush employed the GM/BM trope, and quite regularly. Six years later, many have decried Obama's expansion of some of the worst Bush era policies,[22] leading us to wonder, like in the Maher-Affleck debate, whether core assumptions unite disparate actors in a common approach to Islam regardless of their public disposition on the matter.

Indeed, Republicans and Democrats have often agreed over the substance and style of American policy generally and in the Muslim world specifically. The 2012 Presidential foreign policy debate was remarkable not for its contentious disagreements but instead for Mitt Romney's willingness to adopt nearly all of Barack Obama's positions. As *Foreign Affairs* editor Gideon Rose pointed out, "the basic template for American foreign policy has been relatively constant for almost seven decades now and needs only tweaking and updating, not fundamental revision."[23] These similarities become even more apparent in the post-Cold War period when we narrow the focus to two foreign policy groups in particular—liberal interventionists and neoconservative hawks. According to Sean Kay, there is "virtual agreement in Washington between liberal interventionists and neo-conservative hawks — and the result is a lack of any alternative worldview in the upper

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[21] Michael Slackman, "Varying Responses to Speech in Mideast Highlight Divisions," *New York Times*, June 4, 2009.
[22] Jeremy Scahill, "Liberal Support allowed Obama to Expand Bush's Interrogation Program," *Nation in the News*, April 24, 2013, http://www.thenation.com/blog/174041/jeremy-scahill-liberal-support-allowed-obama-expand-bushs-interrogation-program#
[23] Gideon Rose, "'The Obamians: The Struggle Inside the White House to Redefine American Power,' by James Mann," *The Washington Post*, Op-Ed, June 15, 2012.

echelons of U.S. foreign policy."[24] Liberal interventionists—from Madeleine Albright to Samantha Power to Susan Rice—advocate the use of American power to protect vulnerable populations from genocide or persecution from brutal dictators. Power intervened in this debate over humanitarian intervention most forcefully with her book *A Problem from Hell*, in which she investigated (and criticized) the reasons for U.S. reluctance historically to assist victims of grave human rights abuses.[25] Albright, who has portrayed herself as having been the strongest affirmative voice in the Clinton administration for U.S. military intervention in Rwanda, famously expressed a sentiment held widely by liberal interventionists: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us. I know that the American men and women in uniform are always prepared to sacrifice for freedom, democracy and the American way of life."[26]

I would argue that liberal interventionists and neoconservative hawks share a common goal of remaking societies and social engineering, and these interventionist projects are most efficiently achieved with the assistance of local agency; this is the manner by which GM/BM finds itself being incorporated into foreign policy discourses. That is, the GM/BM distinction opens the possibility of local agents to assist in the larger agenda of liberal interventionists and neoconservatives to transform Muslim societies. At a superficial

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[24] Sean Kay, quoted in Michael Cohen, "Can't We All Just Not Get Along," *Foreign Policy*, June 22, 2012. Retrieved from http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/06/22/cant-we-all-just-not-get-along-2/

[25] Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

[26] Madeleine Albright, "Interview on the 'Today Show' with Matt Lauer," *ABC*, February 19, 1998. Retrieved from http://www.state.gov/1997-2001-NOPDFS/statements/1998/980219a.html

level, there exists seemingly profound differences between the liberal interventionist and neoconservative hawks. David Bosco has argued that "Liberal interventionists share the desire to spread freedom and the conviction that outsiders can help do so, but they also care deeply about building international architecture (almost always) and respecting international rules (usually)."[27] But a core unifying principle overshadows these apparent differences: the belief in the capability of America, equipped not only with superior values but also the strongest military force in the world, to be a transformational force in the world. This transformative mission manifests itself in a variety of ways: using military force in service to regime change, nation-building, and humanitarian intervention, to name but a few. Indeed, agreement over these principles have often led to agreement on otherwise divisive foreign policy issues. For instance, the 2003 war in Iraq, though a divisive issue after the war turned into a quagmire, actually had strong bipartisan support for regime change and nation-building. George W. Bush's Democratic opponentin the 2000 presidential election, Al Gore, held positions that were in many ways more hawkish than Bush's. One must not forget Gore's stance on regime change and nation-building in the Middle East, articulated in a September 2002 speech: "I felt betrayed by the first Bush administration's hasty departure from the battlefield, even as Saddam began to renew his persecution of the Kurds of the North and the Shiites of the South – groups we had encouraged to rise up against Saddam." Indeed, Gore's opposition to Bush's war in Iraq was not because of a rejection of the neoconservative zeal for regime change and nation-

[27] David Bosco, "What divides liberal interventionists and neoconservative hawks," *Foreign Policy*, April 9, 2012. Retrieved from http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/04/09/what-divides-neocons-and-liberal-interventionists/

building but precisely the lack thereof: "During one of the campaign debates in 2000 when then Governor Bush was asked if America should engage in any sort of 'nation building' in the aftermath of a war in which we have involved our troops, he stated the purist expression of what is now a Bush doctrine: 'I don't think so. I think what we need to do is convince people who live in the lands they live in to build the nations. Maybe I'm missing something here. We're going to have a kind of nation building corps in America? Absolutely not.'" Gore reminds us that a commitment to rebuild and transform defeated nations is central to any successful war:

> The events of the last 85 years provide ample evidence that our approach to winning the peace that follows war is almost as important as winning the war itself. The absence of enlightened nation building after World War I led directly to the conditions which made Germany vulnerable to fascism and the rise to Adolph Hitler and made all of Europe vulnerable to his evil designs. By contrast the enlightened vision embodied in the Marshall plan, NATO, and the other nation building efforts in the aftermath of World War II led directly to the conditions that fostered prosperity and peace for most the years since this city gave birth to the United Nations.
>
> Two decades ago, when the Soviet Union claimed the right to launch a pre-emptive war in Afghanistan, we properly encouraged and then supported the resistance movement which, a decade later, succeeded in defeating the Soviet Army's efforts. Unfortunately, when the Russians left, we abandoned the Afghans and the lack of any coherent nation building program led directly to the conditions which fostered Al Qaeda terrorist bases and Osama Bin Laden's plotting against the World Trade Center. Incredibly, after defeating the Taliban rather easily, and despite pledges from President Bush that we would never again abandon Afghanistan we have done precisely that.[28]

The difference between Bush's and Gore's position on a war in Iraq, then, was primarily a strategic difference over how to win the war on terrorism. Gore extended an implicit

[28] Al Gore, "Iraq and the War on Terrorism," *Commonwealth Club of California*, September 23, 2002. Retrieved from http://www.gwu.edu/~action/2004/gore/gore092302sp.html

agreement with Bush over the desirability of what would later prove to be a strong neoconservative appetite for nation-building and regional transformation.

Support among liberal interventionists and neoconservative hawks for core principles of nation-building, regime change, and the use of military force to spread democratic institutions, then, have spawned a remarkably consistent and uncontentious vision of deploying American power in the Muslim world among supposedly disparate American political agendas. But these positions related to the use of American military power do not exhaust the similar discourses recuperated by these two groups. In fact, these groups converge on similar perspectives of the Muslim world and the Muslim subject's role in America's foreign policy objectives. Consider, for example, the debate surrounding the humanitarian crisis in Syria post-2011. Not only did most liberal interventionists and neoconservative hawks alike advocate use of American force in Syria, but the perspectives on who ought to be the beneficiary of American intervention was revealing. One of the central questions that opponents of intervention have raised is whether the Free Syrian Army (FSA) is comprised of moderate, liberal Syrians who share American values and interests. Many supporters of intervention have freely admitted, as former American ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford has, that there are bad apples in the FSA: "Over the past two years, I met fighters from the Free Syrian Army many times. These men were not angels: Many were former regime officers; all had military experience. In a memorable meeting last November, we exchanged barbs for hours, but they made clear that they did not accept Al Qaeda's philosophy."[29] But Ford and others (Anne-Marie Slaughter,

[29] Robert Ford, "Arm Syria's Opposition," *New York Times*, Op-Ed, June 10, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/11/opinion/ford-arm-syrias-opposition.html

Samantha Power) have made the case that the longer the U.S. waits to intervene, the more tainted and infiltrated the opposition will become. According to this narrative, the Arab uprisings started as liberal, pro-democratic revolutions but were ultimately hijacked by religious fanatics, from Egypt to Syria. Thus, the question of intervention not only revolves around the projection of American power, but more importantly who will benefit from, and aid America in, the projection of that power. The U.S. cannot fight religious extremists alone, the argument goes; it needs indigenous support from those sharing American values.

I would argue that the GM/BM discourse, by distinguishing between liberal, moderate, rational Muslims on the one hand and anti-liberal, anti-modern, irrational, violent Muslims on the other, reintroduces the question of agency within a broader foreign policy discourses about America's transformative capabilities. GM/BM entered foreign policy discourses, then, as part of a broader discursive shift towards the end of the Cold War that moved away from the idea of Islamic civilization—and culture more broadly—as contained and static. The end of the Cold War revived liberal foreign policy doctrines—particularly those related to reforming the state and individual—that had been challenged by realists during the Cold War. Around the same time, essentialist discourses about a static Islamic culture fell out of favor, and the question of culture as malleable emerged. These two discursive trends opened up a space for the question of reform in Islam to make sense, that is, the question of transforming BM into GM. Discourses about democracy and development in the Muslim world, occurring both in and outside the Muslim world, then made it possible for Americans to speak about a liberal remaking of the world in general, but in the Muslim world in particular where these very issues were being debate.

B. Liberal Remaking of the World

The immediate context for the emergence of the GM/BM distinction is the political moment at the end of the Cold War that catapulted America into a unipolar position in world affairs and altered Americans' conception of its role in world affairs. The infusion of western triumphalism into western discourses offered a new sense of optimism about the trajectory of history, and it created a new desire to transform Islam and find local agents in the Muslim world to help realize this project. The end of the Cold War revived the sense of a liberal mission to transform the world after decades of setbacks to its ideology.

The transformative impulse in American foreign policy suffered many challenges during the Cold War. Writing in 2002, prominent realist John Mearsheimer argued, "Realism, with its emphasis on security competition and war among great powers, has dominated the study of international relations over the past fifty years."[30] Realists like Mearsheimer often identify Kenneth Waltz and Hans Morgenthau as the two most important realist writers in the early years of realist thought. Before WWII, realism—indeed, international relations as a discipline—did not exist. Social science disciplines that dealt with issues of war and peace—later the domain of international relations—focused before WWII primarily on reforming the individual and the state, views manifested most clearly in the dominant American foreign policy approach, Wilsonian liberalism. Morgenthau's *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (1946) and Waltz's *Man, the State, and War* (1954), published after the cataclysmic events of WWII, argued for a shift away from

[30] John J. Mearsheimer, "Realism, the Real World, and the Academy," in Michael Brecher and Frank P. Harvey, eds., *Realism and Institutionalism in International Studies* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 23.

Wilsonian liberalism because of its failure to prevent another world war. Both Morgenthau and Waltz rejected the prevailing prescriptions for peace, particularly the behavioral scientists' belief in Enlightenment optimism about the possibility of perfecting man and society. Dwelling on human nature as the primary datum from which to analyze the causes of war and peace, for Waltz, was futile. "One may label human nature the basic or primary cause of war," Waltz writes, "but it is, according to those whom we consider here, a cause that human contrivance cannot affect."[31] Just as Mearsheimer opposed the Iraq War based on, among other reasons, his opposition to state-building and doubt over whether the U.S. had the capacity to achieve social engineering in Iraq, Waltz and the structural realists would have rejected attempts to reform Islam and BM into GM.

Structural realists, then, relegate culture, values, and domestic institutions to a concern secondary to balance of power, military capabilities, and stability in international relations. Indeed, they reject the very idea of reforming the individual or state in a manner that could affect issues of war and peace. Before the Cold War, the most prominent American actors in the Middle East subscribed to the idea of the U.S. as a transformative force in the Middle East. The belief in the ability to "transform the Middle East animated the activities of 19th century Americans who operated in the region."[32] Likewise, the King-Crane Commission report of 1919, which offered recommendations on the post-WWI settlement in the Middle East, "articulated the belief that the Middle East had to undergo a fundamental transformation."[33] After WWII, these views were constrained by the

[31] Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 29.
[32] Matthew Jacob, *Imagining the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011): p. 141.
[33] Ibid., 144.

realpolitik priorities of Cold War containment doctrine. For the greater part of the 1950s, the Dwight Eisenhower administration (1953-1961) ignored the transformative American mission in favor of military assistance and collective security arrangements in the Middle East.[34] Not until the late 1950s and early 1960s did the transformative tradition reemerge in the form of modernization theory, but under heavy realist constraints.

Embracing the belief that the Middle East and North Africa was embarking on a social, political, and economic revolution, modernization theorists like Walt Rostow and Daniel Lerner developed policy recommendations that would significantly inform America's attempts to participate in this transformation. One of the main reasons modernization theorists gained so much influence in policy in the 1960s had to do with their ability to work within the constraints of realist Cold War concerns; that is, they dispelled the fear that revolutionary change in the Middle East would inevitably steer those countries into the Soviet camp. They proposed a way to bring about controlled change.[35]

By the late 1960s, once modernization theory had failed to fulfill its objectives, with Israel's efficient routing of three Arab armies in 1967 serving as the most potent symbol of the failure of Arab societies to modernize, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research issued a report explaining why modernization had failed in the Arab world:

> According to the authors of the document, it was necessary to understand Arabs' inability to modernize as part of the region's international political significance, a point driven home by the June 1967 war. Islam once again assumed a prominent role, allegedly exerting undue influence in cultural, economic, political, and social affairs and serving as a limiting factor on Arab efforts to modernize by sanctioning both authoritarian and atomistic forces across the region.[36]

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[34] Ibid., 164.
[35] Michael Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 176.
[36] Jacob, *Imagining the Middle East*, 172.

In 1976, Bernard Lewis expressed a widespread concern about the cultural constraints to modernization in the Muslim world. In lamenting the persistence of pre-modern cultural attributes in Muslim countries, Lewis expressed particular concern for the reemergence of Islam in the public sphere:

> Islam is still the most effective form of consensus in Muslim countries, the basic group identity among the masses…One can already see the contrast between the present regimes and those of the small, alienated, Western-educated elite which governed until a few decades ago. As regimes come closer to the populace, even if their verbiage is left-wing and ideological, they become more Islamic.[37]

Importantly, many Arab critics of Nasserism, on the one hand, and the resurgence of Islam on the other, arrived at the same analysis. In his polemic against the political revolution of Nasserism and the refusal of Islam to disappear from the public sphere, Sadik al-Azm delivered one of the most damning critiques of Arab society. Al-Azm decried the persistence of religious thinking in Arab societies. He witnessed an Arab world that was static—he witnessed a lethargic, unproductive Damascus during Ramadan led aimlessly by the Asiatic state so familiar in Marx's characterization of the Asiatic mode of production—committed to "traditional religious thinking" and without the slightest capacity to apply scientific methods to the study of history and economics.[38] The Arab world eschews science in favor of mythology, al-Azm informs us, lacking any of the modern tools to move forward. Disappointed that the Arab world had not followed the Western secular path, and disturbed by the anti-progressive role of religion in the public sphere, al-Azm expressed no

[37] Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam," *Commentary*, January 1976. Retrieved from https://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/the-return-of-islam/
[38] Sadik al-Azm, *Self-Criticism after the Defeat* (London: Saqi Books, 2011), 68.

surprise as to why the Arab states had lost a war against a modern, western Israeli army—in no less than six days.

Thus, the failure of modernization theory coincided with the failure of Nasserism, and the factor most alarming to actors both in the West and in the Arab world was the perceived resurgence of Islam. Not only did the U.S. lose enthusiasm for transforming the Middle East, achieved during the Cold War only as a result of persistent modernization theorists' agitation against the constraints of Cold War realpolitik; both local and western actors had to grapple with the question of the "return of Islam."

If Cold War realism and the failure of modernization theory dampened a commitment to the American mission of transformation, at least one of those constraints—the Cold War—was lifted in 1989. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, international relations scholar and liberal theorist John Ikenberry could proudly declare, "Today, in the aftermath of the Cold War, the…chief elements of liberal grand strategy are again re-emerging in a clearer light." Ikenberry informs us that the "realities of the Cold War…overpowered the thinking of American officials…and after 1947 the doctrine of containment…cast liberal internationalism into the shadow again."[39] Liberal international relations scholars and ideologues celebrated the return of a liberal transformative impulse that had, throughout American history, existed as a "hidden strategy,"[40] now liberated from the realist constraints of the Cold War. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union led many scholars to declare the death of the structural realist paradigm and the triumph of the liberal

[39] John Ikenberry, "Why Export Democracy?: the 'Hidden Grant Strategy' of American Foreign Policy'" *The Wilson Quarterly*, 23.2 (1999), 57.
[40] Ibid.

theoretical framework. Realists like Mearsheimer and Waltz now took a defensive posture against the claim that "realism is obsolete."[41] The reigning international relations theory was liberalism, energized by a triumphalism of liberal theory that predicted—and supported—the spread of democratic institutions and free markets. Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* was perhaps the most famous iteration of the triumphalism of western liberalism in the post-Cold War period. This idea first appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 1989, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Fukuyama bathed his readers in heady optimism: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."[42]

Would the second factor—Islam's return to the public sphere—limit enthusiasm for reforming countries in the Muslim world? Was Islam too much of an inhibiting factor in the path to modernity? Charles Krauthammer, expressing the neoconservative attitude reflected in the Project for a New American Century, said in the months leading up to the Iraq invasion: "[The Iraq war] is about reforming the Arab world. I think we don't know the answer to the question of whether the Arab-Islamic world is inherently allergic to democracy. The assumption is that it is—but I don't know if anyone can answer that question today…the attempt will begin with Iraq."[43] The question, for political liberal and political conservative alike, was how to find a reliable partner in the Muslim world to help

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[41] Kenneth Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security*, 25.1 (2000), 5.
[42] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *The National Interest*, (Summer 1989), 2.
[43] Charles Krauthammer, "Time to Come Ashore," *The National Interest*, December 11, 2002. Retrieved from http://nationalinterest.org/article/time-to-come-ashore-2196

engineer the desired developmental change and expedite the historical process. Changes in essentialist discourses about the static nature of culture helped to enable this quest for Muslim agency.

C. Culture Talk

By the end of the Cold War a discursive space opened up a renewed the zeal for and confidence in the U.S.'s ability to transform societies. Was there a corresponding discursive space that would allow for discussions of Islam's ability to reform? The history of Orientalist scholarship, according to Edward Said around the time of the publication of *Orientalism* in 1978, would suggest there was not. Of the various condemnations of Orientalist tropes presented in *Orientalism*, the most relevant for our purposes is the conception of the Islamic world as an ahistorical civilization constrained by a static culture. Orientalist scholars viewed Islam as antithetical to modernity and progress. The Muslim subject was, according to these scholars, contained by his retrograde Islamic (and tribal, Arab, etc.) culture. The view of the Orient as an ahistorical, static civilization was reflected in the methodological approaches in the academy:

> Academic Orientalists for the most part were interested in the classical period of whatever language or society it was that they studied. Not until quite late in the century, with the single major exception of Napoleon's Institut d'Egypte, was much attention given to the academic study of the modern, or actual, Orient…the Orient studied was a textual universe by and large…When a learned Orientalist traveled in the country of his specialization, it was always with unshakeable abstract maxims about the 'civilization' he had studied; rarely were Orientalists interested in studying anything except proving he validity of these musty 'truths' by applying them, without great success, to uncomprehending, hence degenerate, natives.[44]

[44] Said, *Orientalism*, 52.

A profound understanding of the Orient was available to those who employed methodologies like philology; the hadiths, the Quran, and 8th-century jurisprudence offered all of the substantive knowledge one would need to know about the modern day Orient. Essentialist discourses emerged out of a long tradition of orientalist scholarship, which took as its starting point the existence of a unified, monolithic, and static Islamic civilization. By identifying the essential characteristics of Islam through the study of philology and medieval Islamic texts, orientalist scholars believed they could offer a sophisticated understanding of a geographical space they referred to as the Orient.

While Orientalist scholars commonly explained the lack of economic and political progress in the Muslim world as a result of religious and cultural phenomenon, the "return of religion," followed in short succession by the rise of political Islam and terrorism in the 1980s, reinforced this tendency to talk about progress in the Muslim world in terms of culture. The Iranian revolution, suicide bombings by Hezbollah and later by Palestinian movements, and the rise of al-Qaeda, all raised the question of the relationship between Islam and violence. Images of Iranians chanting "Death to America!" and suicide attacks against Western targets in Beirut led scholars to ask whether Islam endorsed violence. Observers employed culture to explain the violence of Muslim subjects. "Culture Talk," as Mahmood Mamdani has characterized it, "assumes that people's public behavior, particularly their political behavior, can be read from their habits and customs, whether religious or traditional."[45] To the extent that Muslims could exercise agency, then, they could do it only in the most destructive fashion: "Premodern peoples are said to have no

[45] Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 19-20.

creative ability and anti-modern fundamentalists are said to have a profound ability to be destructive."[46]

Indeed, Culture Talk offered an easy explanation for complex problems: "[culture] is mobilized to explain everything from Palestinian suicide bombers to Osama bin Laden's world designs, mass death in Rwanda and Sudan, and the failure of democracy to take hold in the immediate aftermath of Saddam Hussein's Iraq."[47] The most famous iteration of Culture Talk, Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, perpetuated not only the view of Islam as a static, pre-modern culture, but now one in conflict with the West. "In the post-Cold War world," Huntington writes, "the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural."[48] This approach to understanding conflict and violence became especially popular after 9/11—celebrated by many as a vindication of Huntington's thesis—when commentators, politicians, and public opinion viewed the attacks as a cultural conflict between Islam and the West. This cosmic cultural struggle was rearticulated by George W. Bush shortly after 9/11. "They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government," Bush explained to the American public. "They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."[49]

But in the post-Cold War period, with discursive trends like multiculturalism on the upswing,[50] essentialist discourses did not suffice as an effective way to advance political

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[46] Ibid., 19.
[47] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 19.
[48] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 21.
[49] George W. Bush, "Address to Joint Session of Congress," *White House*, September 18, 2001.
[50] See McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 270-80.

agendas related to Islam. As Mamdani has argued, it is not Huntington but Bernard Lewis who offered a more effective conceptual framework for post-Cold War political discourses on Islam: "It is Bernard Lewis who has provided the more durable version of Culture Talk." Past discourses did not allow for local agency, but Lewis's formulation opens the door to this possibility by introducing the idea of a "clash within civilizations." For Lewis,

> The movement nowadays called fundamentalism is not the only Islamic tradition. There are others, more tolerant, more open, that helped to inspire the great achievements of Islamic civilization in the past, and we may hope that these other traditions will in time prevail. But before this issue is decided there will be a hard struggle, in which we of the West can do little or nothing.[51]

Lewis continues, "The war against modernity…is directed against the whole process of change that has taken place in the Islamic world in the past century or more and has transformed the political, economic, social, and even cultural structures of Muslim countries."[52] By acknowledging a historical process at work in the Muslim world, by identifying multiple traditions in the Islamic world, Lewis broaches the possibility of the malleability of culture, and the possibility of reform within Islam. Although he would later support the 2003 Iraq war on the grounds that it would expedite this historical process, the earlier Lewis proposed allowing Islam to run its natural historical course of conflict between "tolerant, more open" liberal Muslims and anti-modern fundamentalists without western intervention. In this conflict, the "West can do little or nothing."

It became popular now to speak optimistically about bringing democracy and free markets to regions viewed previously as impervious to the wave of democratization

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[51] Bernard Lewis, "Roots of Muslim Rage," Atlantic Monthly, September 1, 1990, 59. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/09/the-roots-of-muslim-rage/304643/
[52] Ibid.

sweeping through Eastern Europe and Asia in the late 1980s and 1990s. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice captured this attitude in 2005, as the Bush administration was preparing Iraq for democratic elections:

> But I also reject the notion that because democracy is hard and because there are risks associated with democratization that you avoid trying. The question I would ask skeptical people is, 'Okay, then, what is the answer? Is it continued authoritarianism?' Well, that hasn't gotten us very far, particularly in the Middle East, where all it's done is breed opposition outside of legitimate channels, so that you get extremism instead. It clearly isn't the case that the United States of America ought to argue that, 'Well, those people just aren't ready for democracy.' Is that the answer to 'there might be risks associated with democracy?'[53]

Neoliberal projects also seized the end of the Cold War as an opportunity to press the idea of the malleability of culture. In her discussion of the neoconservative *Dialogue Project*, Jodi Melamed highlights the emphasis that the project places on rejecting interpretations of culture as static and anti-modern. According to the *Dialogue Project*,

> Unfortunately, whether consciously or unconsciously, many in the West have become complicit in imposing the Islamist discourse on international relations. Among the expert and policy communities, people have adopted a language and a mindset that encompass concepts such as 'Western cultural imperialism' and 'cultural relativism'-- deploring the former as they applaud the latter. In this way, the worst claims of Islamist rhetoric are accepted as fact, and this apologist thinking imposes on the peoples of the Muslim majority countries a repressive form of cultural determinism.[54]

For Melamed, "Apparently what unites these two positions [the Islamists and the postmodernists] is a 'cultural relativism' which 'encourage[s] a conception of culture and ethnic heritage as essentially static and closed, and which see the change that results from

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[53] Condoleeza Rice, "A Conversation with Condoleeza Rice," *The American Interest*, 1.1 (September 2005).
[54] Quoted in Jodi Melamed, "Reading Tehran in Lolita: Seizing Literary Value for Neoliberal Multiculturalism," in Grace Kyungwon Hong, Roderick A. Ferguson, Judith Halberstam, Lisa Lowe, Eds., *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 23

cultural interaction as a culturally corrosive and unwelcome development.'"[55] The neoliberal multiculturalist camp, which sought a network of global citizens, rejected a cultural relativist position that would ignore reform and transforming Muslim subjects into westernized, liberal, Enlightenment subjects. The older ways of discussing Islam as a static and contained civilization would no longer suffice for actors in the West looking for local agency in service to certain interventionist agendas, including a global network of neoliberal citizens. The United Nations, as we will see now, joined this group of actors in revising the way they would view development and progress in the Muslim world.

D. United Nations Discourses after Cold War

As with the malleability of culture and the reemergence of a liberal vision of remaking the world, so too did the United Nations (UN) carve out a discursive space amenable to the idea of Muslim agency. The end of the Cold War ushered in new discourses related to the role of the UN in promoting cultural, social, and political change in underdeveloped countries. The post-Cold War period witnessed a shift from a narrow, technical focus of UN operations to a broader program of systemic changes. As Michael Barnett argues, "There was a shift in the purpose of humanitarianism, expanding from symptoms to root causes and becoming avowedly political in the process."[56] The UN

[55] Ibid.
[56] Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: a History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 167.

became increasingly concerned with the totality of society, not simply narrow technical issues that had defined its missions prior to the end of the Cold War.

The belief in the malleability of Islamic civilization that emerged after the Cold War also appeared in UN discourses, particularly with the Millennium Development Goals that 22 Arab states signed onto in 2000. This discourse emerged most significantly in the United Nations Development Programme reports on human development in the Arab world. The UNDP 2002 report found that "Although income poverty is low compared to other parts of the world, the Arab region is hobbled by a different kind of poverty - poverty of capabilities and poverty of opportunities. These have their roots in three deficits: freedom, women's empowerment, and knowledge."[57] This report indicates a desire for reform in the Arab world far more significant than prior to the end of the Cold War. It suggests a program of achieving economic growth through a much broader program of political and social change. The executive summary of the UNDP in the Arab world report informs us that an expansive program of development

> involves tackling human capabilities and knowledge. It also involves promoting systems of good governance, those that promote, support and sustain human well-being, based on expanding human capabilities, choices, opportunities and freedoms (economic and social as well as political), especially for the currently poorest and most marginalized members of society. The empowerment of women must be fully addressed throughout.[58]

The UNDP issued the report quoted above in 2002, just as the Bush administration was organizing its campaign to mobilize support for war against Iraq. The objectives of the report aligned with arguments made by neoconservative hawks and liberal interventionists

[57] "Arab Human Development Report," United Nations Development Programme, 2002, 1. Retrieved from http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/contents/2002/execsum-02e.pdf
[58] Ibid., 1-2.

about the need for American intervention in the Arab world to trigger the desired political and social change needed to reform Arab and Islamic societies. One of the biggest champions of the report, Thomas Friedman, read the UNDP's newly-defined mission as the most appropriate response to dealing with the anti-modern, violent forces in the region:

> It's time to stop kidding ourselves. Getting rid of the Osamas, Saddams and Arafats is necessary to change this situation, but it's hardly sufficient. We also need to roll up our sleeves and help the Arabs address all the problems out back. The bad news is that they've dug themselves a mighty deep hole there. The good news, as this report shows, is that we have liberal Arab partners for change. It's time we teamed up with them, and not just with the bums who got them into this mess."[59]

Most significantly, Friedman celebrated the existence of reformers who would serve as "partners" of the U.S. and UN as it embarked on the project of turning BM into GM. The discourses that fed into the GM/BM distinction, then, came not only from the West but also from within Islam. Not only did this report demonstrate that GMs exist within the Muslim world, but also that there was a debate occurring within Islam. As we shall see shortly, that debate was also occurring among Muslims about democratization.

E. Democratization in the Muslim World

Outlined above was the idea that the central theory that framed area studies experts' and policymakers' approach to the Arab/Muslim world in the 1960s, modernization theory, lost supporters, primarily because of the perceived backwards culture of Arab and Islamic

[59] Thomas Friedman, "Arabs at the Crossroads," *New York Times*, July 3, 2002. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/03/opinion/arabs-at-the-crossroads.html

societies. As Marc Lynch put it, "whatever the premises of these various postmodernization arguments are, they all suggest that modernization theory in its global version was unlikely to be realized in an Arab world in which particularistic religious, ethnic, or tribal identities seemingly reigned supreme."[60] After the Cold War, a new form of debate about development emerged both in the West and the Muslim world, namely whether democracy could emerge and survive in Islamic countries.

The trappings of postmodernization theorists—those who subscribed to the idea that the Arab/Muslim world is immune to change because of cultural factors—lost popularity by the late 1980s with the emergence of a new paradigm, the "transition paradigm." The debate surrounding development shifted from concerns about modernization to theories about elite-led democratization. In 1986 Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter argued that transitions to democracy often occurred as a result of pacts between moderate and radicals that would institutionalize a transition from authoritarian rule to democratic governance.[61] Thus, O'Donnell and Schmitter introduced a model by which political scientists could reintroduce local agency to the conceptual framework. The "transition paradigm" fed into the desire by western triumphalists to locate local agents of change.

This opened a door to new discourses about Islam and democracy and U.S. democracy promotion in the Muslim world. Within the zealous triumphalism detailed above, a greater focus on democracy promotion emerged. During the Cold War, democracy promotion took a back seat to realpolitik interests—including support for despotic regimes

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[60] Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 33.

[61] Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

from Suharto in Indonesia to the Somoza family in Nicaragua. Rather than focus on the spread of democratic institutions, American policymakers focused on modernization and stability. By the early 1990s, these discourses shifted. Samuel Huntington's "Third Wave of Democratization" thesis, published in 1990, played a central role in this debate. Huntington identified a third wave of democracy expansion from 1975 to 1990 that included the transition of 30 countries from authoritarian regimes to liberal democracy. Huntington recognized, however, the Middle East as the most conspicuous exception: "Islamic countries stretching from Morocco to Indonesia, which except for Turkey and perhaps Pakistan had nondemocratic regimes."[62] Indeed, many publications like *Journal of Democracy* and Freedom House began to investigate the reasons behind "Muslim exceptionalism," especially after 9/11, when the "freedom deficit" in the Muslim world appeared to threaten American security. *Freedom House*'s 2001-02 "Freedom in the World" report concluded "there is a dramatic, expanding gap in the levels of freedom and democracy between Islamic countries and the rest of the world."[63] *Freedom House* president Adrian Karatnycky added that "There is a growing chasm between the Islamic community and the rest of world. While most Western and non-western countries are moving towards greater levels of freedom, the Islamic world is lagging behind."[64] An obsession emerged around the issue of Islam and democracy; to what extent are they compatible, and to what extent are there liberal partners for the democratization project in the Muslim world? Alfred Stepan and Graeme Robertson, among others, shifted the focus

[62] Samuel Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 2.2 (1990), 20.
[63] Freedom House, "New Study Details Islamic World's Democratic Deficit," December 18, 2001. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-study-details-islamic-worlds-democracy-deficit#.VIzOZhv9nIU
[64] Ibid.

of the debate from religious cultural factors to ethnic cultural factors in an article titled "An 'Arab' More Than a 'Muslim' Gap."[65] Because the Muslim world can boast strong electoral democracies such as Turkey and Indonesia, the authors argue, it makes more sense to conceive of this "democracy gap" in terms of an Arab problem, not a Muslim one.[66]

Indeed, many scholars and intellectuals rejected the idea, suggested in *Freedom House*'s report, that Islam and democracy are incompatible. Several progressive scholars moved the debate beyond the essentialist discourse of *Freedom House*. For instance, liberal religious scholar John Esposito identified the existence of a robust debate about liberal principles within the Muslim world, noting,

> Many prominent Islamic intellectuals and groups, however, argue that Islam and democracy are compatible. Some extend the argument to affirm that under the conditions of the contemporary world, democracy can be considered a requirement of Islam. In these discussions, Muslim scholars bring historically important concepts from within the Islamic tradition together with the basic concepts of democracy as understood in the modern world.[67]

Interestingly, even Huntington's scholarship opened the door to a non-cultural explanation of the dearth of democratic regimes in the Muslim world. "The two most decisive factors affecting the future consolidation and expansion of democracy," Huntington predicted, "will be economic development and political leadership."[68] The idea of economic development in the Arab/Muslim world—which, as we saw in the previous section, factored heavily into the UN's post-Cold War discourses on the Muslim world—played a central role in U.S. foreign policy discourses. But it worked in a way that brought liberals

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[65] Alfred Stepan and Graeme B. Robertson, "An 'Arab' More Than a 'Muslim' Electoral Gap," *Journal of Democracy*, 14 (2003), 30–44.
[66] Ibid.
[67] John Esposito and John Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2.
[68] Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," 33.

and conservatives alike together on the idea that there ought to be a fundamental transformation of the Middle East. Thus, the democracy promotion discourses converged with the liberal mission of transforming the world to produce a bipartisan discourse in favor of a fundamental transformation of the Middle East.

F. Conclusion

This brief genealogy has sought to illustrate that a new discursive space, the GM/BM distinction, emerged as a confluence of several overlapping discourses around the end of the Cold War. As essentialist discourses fell out of favor in an era of rising popularity of multicultural discourses, liberals and conservatives alike found the GM/BM distinction a more effective way to project American power in the Middle East. The GM/BM served this agenda effectively because it drew on various discourses that advocated the use of American military power in transforming Islam and BM into GM, but also because it now made sense to even ask this question. A quest for Muslim agency became increasingly popular. Previous essentialist discourses assumed a static Islamic culture incapable of progress, but Lewis's variant of Culture Talk revised this view, and it was subsequently incorporated into UN discourses and democracy promotion discourses. Furthermore, a new form of political critique coming from the Muslim world adopted many of these same discourses by advocating reform. Thus, post-Cold War discourses shifted away from essentialist registers, but in a way that still served interventionist interests.

CHAPTER III

THE DAILY SHOW AND ISLAM

To what extent, then, does *TDS* draw on the GM/BM register? Does it carve out a new discursive space on Islam, or does it simply rearticulate tropes from the GM/BM distinction? This chapter will begin by advancing several arguments situating *TDS*'s political comedy in the context of a post-network era: first, I will argue that *TDS* tries to carve out a moderate center of rational, sensible discourse; second, I will outline the cultural context in which the show emerged; and finally, I will argue that this context would lead us to expect that *TDS* performs a deconstruction of Islamophobic rhetoric. This chapter will then conduct a discursive and textual analysis of several key moments of the show's coverage of Islam. Beyond just deconstructing certain discourses related to Islam, the show also engages in constructive moments in which it invites certain Muslim voices into its moderate center. I do not wish to claim that the moments under investigation represent a comprehensive understanding of *TDS*'s coverage of Islam—although, if my arguments about the logic of *TDS*'s centrist politics are sound, it would not be surprising to witness the themes recounted below to be recycled frequently, much in the same way we might accept the internal logic of Said's thesis on Orientalist scholarship without Said presenting an exhaustive analysis of Orientalist scholars. Instead, however, I plan to highlight and analyze critically instances of prevailing discourses and *TDS*'s rearticulation of certain tropes belonging to the GM/BM distinction. A careful analysis of these instances of

GM/BM discourses will allow me to examine critically the limits of the discursive space in which *TDS* participates.

A. TDS's Moderate Center in a Post-Network Era

Political satire has become increasingly successful in the context of polarized partisan debates by triangulating to an imagined moderate center. Charles Schutz argues, "To a great extent, the successful reception of the humor depends on its audience's agreement on the standard. Then comic rationality reminds of common values; it does not declare revolutionary standard of politics."[69] He continues by pointing out that it in fact serves to "counteract the ideological fanaticism of contemporary politics."[70] Jon Stewart recognizes this element of his show when he says, "I represent the distracted center. My comedy is not the comedy of the neurotic. It comes from the center. But it comes from feeling displaced from society because you're in the center. We're the group of fairness, common sense, and moderation. We're clearly the disenfranchised center…because we're not in charge."[71] *TDS*, then, pitches its humor to an audience that is disenchanted with the dominant post-network media on the one hand and the political debate they give voice to, which has, in *TDS*'s calculation, moved further to the extremes in an era that values ratings over objective journalism. This mission statement of sorts will help inform our analysis of the Muslim world because, as we shall see, in trying to carve out a space of rational,

[69] Charles Schutz, Quoted in Jeffrey Jones, *Entertaining Politics*, 120.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Tad Friend, "Is it Funny Yet?" *The New Yorker*, February 11, 2002, 28.

moderate debate for its seemingly alienated and disenfranchised audience, *TDS* devotes considerable time to exposing and ridiculing those actors and institutions that fall outside the realm of moderate, responsible discourse.

Schutz referred to political satire's fixation with exposing the "ideological fanatics." Similarly, Jeffrey Jones argues,

> Whether we are describing the Republican witch hunt against President Clinton's sexual indiscretions, the right-wing orthodoxy that dominated the presidency of George W. Bush, or the ratings dominance of right-wing pundits on cable television such as Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity, what is clear is that … [*TDS* has] ... located such ideological fanaticism as the targets of their humorous attacks.[72]

Although *TDS* might attack the American left in ample supply, much of its critique focuses on the American right. Based on its far more extensive reporting of the "ideological fanaticism" of the right, it appears that *TDS* situates itself primarily as a critic of conservative intolerance, extremism, and ignorance. Thus, political satire like *TDS* emerges first and foremost as a reaction to the rise of conservative politics and their radio talk show mouthpieces, a potent political movement known for its intolerance (religious and racial, primarily), its smear-tactic campaigns, and its vitriolic rhetoric. The well-known chronicler of American conservatism, Rick Perlstein, has through three books painted a portrait of the American Right that from the early days of Pat Buchanan, Richard Nixon, and Barry Goldwater has employed hyperbolic, vitriolic rhetoric and reactionary politics to rise to prominence in American politics.[73] Buchanan would stoke the polarizing rhetoric of Nixon by encouraging him "to savage an opponent, feed the public's anger," and to play on the

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[72] Jones, *Entertaining Politics*, 238.

[73] See Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); and *The Invisible Bridge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

racial fears of the Anglo-Saxon majority.[74] While some politicians like George Wallace would more explicitly exploit the racial politics of segregation, Nixon employed a more subtle version of racial politics that would play on conservative white fears both of desegregation and the radical politics of the New Left. In his famous 1969 "Silent Majority" speech, Nixon promised "as President of the United States, I would be untrue to my oath of office to be dictated by the minority who hold that point of view and who try to impose it on the nation by mounting demonstrations in the street... So tonight, to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans, I ask for your support."[75] Although Nixon did not appeal explicitly to race, the Republican Party seized the "Silent Majority" idea to mobilize a primarily white, conservative electorate into politics. Indeed, the destruction of the New Deal coalition in the South and incorporation of a large swath of the white southern electorate into the Republican Party was enabled through "culture wars" racism.[76]

At the political level, then, we can read in right-wing politician's Newt Gingrich opposition the Cordoba Initiative's Park 54 Community Center—or, as it is pejoratively known, the "Ground Zero Mosque"—based on his selective understanding of the historical record of Muslim aggression against Christianity, as an attempt to accrue political capital by using an essentialist discourse embedded in a larger political strategy of appealing to conservative Anglo-Saxon fears of Islam, much in the same way Nixon's "Silent Majority" speech appealed to conservative Anglo-Saxon fears of blacks and radicals. Although

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[74] George Packer, "The Uses of Division," *New Yorker*, August 11, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/11/uses-division

[75] Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the Vietnam War," November 3, 1969.

[76] George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 83-114.

intolerance of Islam has a long history in the U.S., after 9/11 this attitude was cultivated by the efforts of an Islamophobia industry. The Center for American Progress attributed the increase of Islamophobia in the past 20 years to five individuals and organizations: Daniel Pipes, Steve Emerson, Robert Spencer, Frank Gaffney, and Daniel Yerushalmi. Recipients of nearly $40 million in the past ten years, these individuals disseminate Islamophobic propaganda that bloggers, websites, and, often, *Fox News*, reproduce and further disseminate.[77]

The amplification of Islamophobic propaganda by mainly non-specialist laypersons hints at another dynamic at work in right-wing discourses about Islam: conservative populism. In addition to racial politics, out of Nixon's speech was born a populist political strategy. "With one rhetorical stroke," writes the Matthew Lassiter, "Nixon identified a new populist category that redefined how political groups strive for influence," and this paradigm continues to inform the way in which right-wing groups like the Tea Party aim to mobilize support.[78] The incorporation of conservative populism and racial politics into the political force of the right merged with the talk show radio phenomenon in the 1990s. Indeed, conservative talk shows hosts like Rush Limbaugh were the first to revolutionize and seize the new platform, followed much later by liberal talk show platforms like the *Rachel Maddow Show*. "Talk radio formats became the godsend of AM stations nationwide as listeners and participants revived a flailing industry with populist political talk," Jones writes. "Talk radio host Rush Limbaugh led the way, but a bevy of conservative copycats

[77] Wajahat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir, "Fear Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America," *Center for American Progress*, August 26, 2011.
[78] Matthew Lassiter, "Who Speaks for the Silent Majority?" *New York Times*, Op-Ed, November 2, 2011.

were also spawned nationwide by Limbaugh's success, such as Ken Hamblin, G. Gordon Liddy, and Sean Hannity."[79] Conservative talk show hosts employed a populist strategy by challenging political experts and pundits and giving a voice to the layperson through call-ins and other forms of active participation in the show. This populist strategy challenged the very concept of "expertise" that had defined previous political news shows, which usually revolved around Washington insiders and panel discussions with pundits and political experts. This form of populism is oft-repeated by the right in its attacks on the "liberal media" and "east-coast liberals," and critique of college universities as liberal propaganda machines.

A conservative media apparatus that caters to laypersons and draws upon an Islamophobia industry rather than "experts" for its analysis of Islam sets *TDS* up to cast conservative rhetoric as playing to the lowest common denominator of reactionary demagoguery. An important element of the rise of the right as a force in American politics is not simply the discourses they employ—racialized, hyperbolic, extreme, non-expert—but more significantly their ability to dictate public debate. Many commentators, like George Lakoff, have highlighted the effectiveness of conservatives to control the terms of political debate. In *Don't Think of an Elephant!*, Lakoff argues that Republicans effectively frame the terms of debate on issues like abortion by coining such phrases as "pro-life," rendering their opponents "pro-death."[80] Other scholars, like Thomas Frank, have highlighted how a pro-business, anti-welfare political party has succeeded in winning parts of the electorate

[79] Jones, *Entertaining Politics*, 43.
[80] George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant* (White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004).

that seem to be voting against its economic self-interest by electing Republicans.[81] Relatedly, the failure of a progressive left to participate effectively in electoral politics and to organize a political apparatus capable of competing with the religious right's mobilization of the electorate has led to a rightward shift in public debate. As Stewart himself said, "My biggest objection to Fox News, I say, is not the scaremongering, it's the way it's reshaped the Republican Party. It will misrepresent social and economic issues, and promote the more extreme elements of the party, politicians such as Sarah Palin and Mike Huckabee, in a way that is hugely detrimental to American politics."[82] As we shall see, *TDS* is not only concerned with the troubling rhetoric that characterizes the right, but also deeply concerned by its role in shaping the public sphere and terms of debate.

Finally, it might be worth mentioning at this point that *TDS* has achieved its reputation as a political commentary primarily in the context of American politics. Jon Stewart took over *TDS* in 1999, just in time to cast Al Gore as robotic and George W. Bush as intellectually handicapped during the 2000 presidential campaign trail. "The election," Jeffrey Jones writes, "became prime fodder for their comedic efforts."[83] Although it might seem too self-evident to point out that *TDS* emerged and sustained itself primarily through the ridicule of American politics, for our purposes, it is worth pointing out that despite *TDS*'s abundant coverage of Islam and the Middle East, *TDS* discourses center on American politics. Therefore, even when *TDS* is discussing Islam and the Middle East, the discussion is tethered to discourses of American politics. Thus, based on the above

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[81] Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007).
[82] Hadley Freeman, "Jon Stewart: Why I quit the Daily Show," The Guardian, April 18, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/apr/18/jon-stewart-why-i-quit-the-daily-show
[83] Jones, *Entertaining Politics*, 108.

discussion, we would expect a significant amount of *TDS* coverage on Islam to attack racist, essentialist discourses from the right. Just as the show targets the racial politics of the right, and the perceived extremism and "ideological fanaticism" of the right, so too should we expect *TDS* to critique the essentialist, racist discourses on Islam. Much as the GM/BM distinction represented an effort by some to move past the older, unfashionable essentialist discourses, so too does *TDS* try to move to a more sensible discourse on Islam.

B. Deconstructing Essentialist Discourses

In the previous chapter, I argued that the GM/BM distinction offered a way to move beyond the essentialist discourses that bordered on racist. Essentialist discourses, drawn from the Orientalist tradition, generated several tropes and themes. These discourses typically identified an Islamic civilization that was defined by a static essence, one that had remained substantively the same since the birth of Islam in the 7th century. It stripped Muslims of any form of agency, and depicted the Arab/Muslim/Oriental subject as backwards, anti-modern, religiously extremist, and prone to violence. In this section, I will argue that *TDS* offers *deconstructive* moments in which it critiques these essentialist discourses, generally articulated by the American right. *TDS* then falls in line with a general trend after the Cold War, namely that essentialist discourses on Islam were no longer viable options for speaking about the Muslim world. In doing so, *TDS* carves out a moderate center for responsible, tolerant discourse that excludes voices it deems intolerant/extremist. And, as we shall see, these voices come not only from the American right, but also religious extremists in the Muslim world.

This section will draw in large measure from 2008 forward for several reasons. First, there was a shift in America's foreign policy, at least rhetorically, that shifted away from the neoconservative vision of the use of unilateral American military force in the Middle East, thereby reducing the material related to U.S.-centric critiques of American foreign policy blunders like the Iraq War. Prior to 2008, *TDS* embedded a lot of its coverage of Islam in jokes about the Bush administration's contradictions and perceived incompetence. In a recurring segment title, "Mess O' Potamia," *TDS* highlighted the catastrophic effects of the U.S.'s war in Iraq, and this theme of incompetence was often reinforced by inviting guests like Ali Allawi and Fareed Zakaria who, celebrated as experts by Stewart, were applauded for providing nuanced knowledge of a region that the Bush administration failed to understand. For instance, after running a "Mess O' Potamia" segment, Stewart invited senior adviser to the prime minister of Iraq Ali Allawi on the episode for a two part interview, during which Stewart says, "You would have thought that in all our research about weapons of mass destruction, we would have heard something about [the underground Shia militias]." He continues, "This book is incredibly informative, I wish you had written it before the war…a lot of the book is about the background of the country, that for someone who was picking some place to invade, would've been nice if you had a 'Let's Go Iraq.'"[84] Staying true to the primary focus of *TDS*, American politics, Stewart employed the trope of Bush administration incompetence regularly, so that when the show explores some of the nuance of Iraq and other Muslim countries, it does so with the intention of exposing how little American politicians know about the region. Secondly,

[84] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Ali Allawi," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 8:23, April 18, 2007, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/e12ixu/ali-a--allawi-pt--1

this increase in coverage of Islam was undoubtedly tied to the vacuum that Bush's exit from the public arena presented. Barack Obama, many have pointed out, is a more difficult target than Bush. As the first black president, any jokes would have to be sensitive to race, and he does not commit as many gaffes as Bush did while in office.[85] Additionally, the Republican Party has moved so far to the right since 2009 that their rhetoric on Islam serves as an easy target.[86] As the extremism of the right becomes a larger national issue, we would expect to encounter that rightward shift in the context of Islamophobia.

Thus, with a focus more on the extremist right and a shift from incompetent foreign policy issues to the Islamophobia of the right, we would expect to encounter *TDS* deconstructing unpopular essentialist discourses of the right. The following examples, then, will offer a glimpse at how *TDS* deconstructs essentialist discourses and casts them as unproductive and therefore unsuitable for the public sphere. For instance, a December 13, 2011 segment titled "Kabulvision" addresses a controversy manufactured by right-wing Christian conservatives over *The Learning Channel* (TLC) program "All-American Muslim." After running a clip of Fox News anchor Megan Kelly presenting the controversy, Stewart exclaims, "Who gives a jihadi terror network a show?! I say, assuming that is it, since there's a controversy?" *TDS* runs a clip of a dry, mundane monologue of an "All-American Muslim" character, after which it returns to Stewart in a slumber.

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[85] Oliver Morrison, "Waiting for the Conservative Jon Stewart," *Atlantic Monthly*, February 14, 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/why-theres-no-conservative-jon-stewart/385480/

[86] Jill Pelore, "The Long Division*," The New Yorker*, December 2, 2013, argues: "The Republican Party has moved to the right and, to a much lesser degree, the Democratic Party has moved to the left. In 1964, the ideological position advocated by Barry Goldwater was nearly beyond the realm of the G.O.P. imagination; by 1980, Goldwater Republicanism was Reagan Republicanism; Newt Gingrich's 1994 Contract with America was well to the right of Reagan; and, in 2012, Mitt Romney ran to the right of the breakdown lane."

Awakening from his slumber, Stewart says, "That wouldn't have been interesting to hear even if that guy was building a bomb while he was talking." In an effort to understand how the show might have been interpreted as offensive, *TDS* presents Florida Family Association (FFA) director David Caton, who explains in an interview with Megan Kelly, "It is the absence of the radical side of the Imam's proposition of Sharia law that is offensive."

Implicit in the Kabulvision segment's aversion to Islamophobia entering the public sphere is the way in which *TDS* casts FFA's views as ridiculous and therefore undeserving of a major media network's (Fox News's) platform. Jon Stewart expresses shock that such a perspective about "All-American Muslim" could exist, let alone receive national attention. In the following segment, *TDS* reports that Lowe's Hardware store pulled its advertising from *TLC* in response to the faux controversy, to which Stewart expresses equal horror. Central to this segment, then, is not just *TDS*'s take on FFA's Islamophobia, but more importantly *TDS*'s stance on its entry into and effectiveness in steering public debate.[87]

Indeed, *TDS* regularly dismisses as ridiculous that these extremist voices are allowed a public forum. *TDS* employed a similarly flippant attitude to the press coverage surrounding Pastor Terry Jones's attempts to organize Quran burnings on the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. In a segment titled "Islamophobiapalooza," Stewart assumes, "of course the media was very circumspect about whether or not they should even be covering these provocative acts perpetrated by propagandizing paramaniac

[87] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Kabulvision," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 5:14, December 113, 2011, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/dm6in7/kabulvision.

proselytizers." *TDS* then cuts to Cenk Uygur on MSNBC: "This guy is clown of the earth, we shouldn't be having a conversation about what he is and is not going to do. We can't address all these whackjobs. But there's a second side of all this…"[88] *MSNBC* ignores calls to be "circumspect" by cutting off Uygur to go to a live press conference with Terry Jones. *TDS*, however, takes on the responsibility of casting these voices as unfit for the public sphere. Terry Jones may be able, according to the principles of free speech, to bring these voices to the public sphere, but should he? And should the mainstream press cover it? *TDS* aspires to a more enlightened ethics of public debate, one that does not include Islamophobic gestures and rhetoric.

In exploring this theme, *TDS* carries the ridicule a bit further to the industry of Islamophobia and its impact on public opinion in a segment titled, "No Zone Rangers." It revolves around Fox News's reporting of misinformation propagated by self-proclaimed "terrorism expert" (the title that appeared on the screen during his Fox News interview) Steve Emerson (one of the five influential Islamophobic individuals identified by Center for American Progress). Fox News was forced to apologize for their segment on "No-Go Zones," in which Emerson erroneously claimed that Muslim-only enclaves ruled by Sharia law exist in Western Europe, including Birmingham, England, which is "totally Muslim." In an exploration of how widespread this idea of No-Go Zones has spread among American Christian consciousness, Aasif Mandvi filed a report on the passing of a law in Alabama that would ban Sharia law. In a focus group discussion with Mandvi, six supporters of the law expressed their fear that Islam threatened the character of America as a Christian

[88] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Islamophobiapalooza," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 8:55, September 13, 2010, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/5ykf4p/islamophobiapalooza.

nation. In response, Mandvi mocks their ignorance of the First Amendment's statute against an official state religion. This segment therefore illustrates not only the extent to which Emerson's erroneous ideas shape public opinion, but also highlights this discursive trend's pernicious violation of a multicultural ethics that the American Constitution seeks to protect.[89]

To deconstruct the rhetoric of the ill-informed pundits, politicians, and television talking heads, *TDS* often invites guests with specialized knowledge of Islam—usually Muslims or immigrants from Muslim nations—to set the record straight. For instance, around the time of the "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy, *TDS* had professor and former Ambassador Akbar Ahmed on the show to discuss Islam in America. "Obviously, we in America are very familiar with Islam," Stewart tells Ahmed. "We know it as a singular movement hellbent on the violent destruction of America. You say it's not that simple…talk to me." Ahmed responds to Stewart's premise of American ignorance and Islamophobia with an appeal to the multicultural ideals enshrined in America's founding period: "[The Founding Father's] vision was of a genuinely pluralistic society. And those Americans who are now attacking Islam as a terrorist religion or religion of evil, they need to go back to their Founding Fathers."[90] What these segments have in common, and the larger discourse in which *TDS* seems to be participating, is a disenchantment with a post-9/11 phenomenon of a powerful right propagating misinformation and racist beliefs about Muslims that then gain traction among an ill-informed public; *TDS* ridicules what it

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[89] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "The Zones Rangers," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 7:37, January 20, 2015, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/vho4ny/the-zone-rangers.
[90] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Interview with Akbar Ahmed," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 6:55, August 5, 2010, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/k1i8jr/akbar-ahmed

perceives as the provincial attitudes and populist politics that give rise to such rhetoric. In deconstructing the right-wing discourses on Islam, *TDS* challenges its audience to consider the production of knowledge on Islam and move towards a more nuanced and tolerant view of Islam.

TDS aspires to a tolerant American society by rejecting the underlying assumption of Emerson's and FFA's discourse that violates this ethic, namely that Islam is an inherent threat to American institutions and values. Neither Emerson nor FFA attempt to distinguish between law-abiding Muslim-Americans and Muslim extremists, but instead wage an openly racist, essentialist assault on Islam. *TDS* rejects this culture wars racism in favor of a more tolerant American society. In doing so, *TDS* gestures towards a more multicultural, inclusive society, taking part in a broader discursive trend, outlined in the previous section, of multiculturalism. As Duggan has argued,

> From the Clinton administration's serious efforts to recruit racial minorities and women into high level government service, and to reduce the range of exclusions of sexual minorities, to the G.W. Bush administration's more clearly token gestures of inclusion, the rhetoric of 'official' neoliberal politics shifted during the 1990s from 'culture wars' alliances, to a superficial 'multiculturalism' compatible with the global aspirations of U.S. business interests.[91]

As previous discussions have hinted at, a central problem of GM/BM discourses and its variants is the problem of occluding other forms of struggle not deemed important by multicultural and tolerant discourses. The question, then, is whether *TDS* enters the debate on Islamophobia at a noncontroversial, "superficial multiculturalism," or does it seek to open up a greater space of inclusion for a greater range of voices and struggles in Islam? As Lisa Duggan argues, the superficial nature of "neoliberal multiculturalism" limits the range

[91] Lisa Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 44.

of issues that the progressives will advocate, excluding, for instance, advocacy of economic equality in exchange for a narrower platform of gay political equality.[92] This multicultural disposition appears as part of an attack on the Islamophobic rhetoric and racial politics of the right, and in doing so, it excludes a broad set of discourses. If *TDS* were not to go beyond this type of deconstructive approach, one would expect it to stay within the narrow boundaries of multicultural discourses. Of course, the show provides far more expansive coverage of Islam and is related discourses, to which we will turn now.

In order to stake a credible claim to the moderate center, *TDS* chooses not to ignore the unreasonableness of some of the more extremist elements in the Muslim world. Terry Jones might be outside the boundaries of acceptable public discourse, but so are the riots that erupted in the Muslim world in response to his actions. In order to facilitate a sensible conversation about the Quran-burning controversy, *TDS* invites representatives from the Christian and Muslim faiths—Team Jesus and Team Mohammed (played by Wyatt Cenac and Aasif Mandvi, respectively)—to engage in inter-civilizational dialogue. Cenac and Mandvi employ tolerant registers embedded in discourses of their mutual irrationality, violence, and liberal deficits. Each expresses understanding for the Other's behavior; Cenac tells Mandvi that he thinks Muslims have every right to respond "forcefully and violently," and with a clip of riots in the Muslim world running, Mandvi says, "This is us freaking out at the thought of someone thousands of miles away, or at least 12 Terry Jones mustache lengths away, maybe burning a Quran. We're not rational." Cenac grants the benefit of doubt to Mandvi: "But be irrational! You earned it; you have to avenge thousands of years

[92] Ibid., xx.

of subjugation by undermining the West and supplanting the Constitution by imposing Sharia Law." To this exchange, Stewart interjects: "I feel like you should both tone it down. Because you're inciting religious violence, and I know that's not—are you trying to incite religious violence?"[93]

The issue of tolerance in this segment forms a key criteria by which *TDS* includes and excludes certain discourses. Just as Goode and Jones and *Fox News* express varying levels of intolerance of the other, so, too, does Mandvi's character. In maintaining the moderate, sensible center, then, *TDS* seeks to exclude those religious voices that render public discourse irrational and extreme. Here as in other moments in the show, *TDS* condemns the irresponsible fashion by which religion enters the public sphere, adopting certain tenets of the secularization thesis—which assumes (and posits as normative) that societies will move in a linear direction that sheds religion from the public sphere and relegates it exclusively to the private—as a mode of understanding the role of religion in society. Accordingly, "Only religions that have accepted the assumptions of liberal discourse are being commended, in which *tolerance* [emphasis mine] is sought on the basis of a distinctive relation between law and morality."[94] *TDS* implies through the Team Jesus and Team Mohammed conversation that religion can play a role in public sphere, but not through the vehicle of the fanatic voice. As Talal Asad puts it, "some enlightened intellectuals are prepared to allow deprivatized religion entry into the public sphere for the purpose of addressing the 'moral conscience' of its audience—but on condition that it leave

[93] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Team Jesus versus Team Mohammed: Religious Conflict," The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video, 4:01, September 13, 2010, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/yajft7/team-mohammed-vs--team-jesus---religious-conflict

[94] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 183.

its coercive powers outside the door and rely only on its powers of persuasion."[95] *TDS* allows religion entry into the public sphere on condition that the spokespersons adhere to standards of rationality and tolerance. By depicting both actors as apocalyptic zealots with diametrically opposed agendas, and by associating Team Mohammed with riots in the Muslim world, *TDS* renders their discourse absurd and through the voice of Stewart levies explicit condemnation of their irrational behavior. In fact, bringing Team Mohammed and Team Jesus together on stage to engage in civil discourse about these controversial issues appears to the audience as a test to see if they "have accepted the assumptions of liberal discourse" and tolerance. Despite their tolerant disposition, they fail the test of rational discourse and fail to realize the irreconcilability of their maximalist visions, leaving Stewart to lament, "You guys just don't get it, do you?"[96]

If the secularization thesis that *TDS* appears to subscribe to allows religious voices a space in the public sphere, what would they look like? In an August 16, 2010 segment titled "Mosquerade" the Republican opposition to the "Ground Zero Mosque" is under investigation. Stewart inquires about the alleged "radical" politics of Imam Faisal Abdul Rauf, the director of the Cordoba Initiative, the organization heading the launch of an Islamic center four blocks from Ground Zero. After asking "how do we know he's a radical and not a moderate?" *TDS* runs clips of Glenn Beck reporting on a statement made by Rauf shortly after 9/11: "What did this moderate say just a few days after 9/11? Of course, what all moderates would say: 'I wouldn't say that the United States deserved what happened,

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[95] Ibid., 187.

[96] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Team Jesus versus Team Mohammed: Religious Conflict," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 4:01, September 13, 2010, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/yajft7/team-mohammed-vs--team-jesus---religious-conflict

but United States policies were an accessory to the crime that happened.'" Stewart then asks: "What kind of scheming, American-hating, extremist monster would say something so evil?" *TDS* then cuts to Glenn Beck articulating Rauf's argument—nearly verbatim—just a few weeks earlier. Throughout the segment, Stewart ridicules *Fox News* for making the ludicrous claim that Rauf's comments are radical, and in juxtaposing Beck's statements with Rauf's after passionately condemning them, suggests that perhaps it is Beck who is in fact the radical and Rauf the moderate.

One of the themes underpinning this segment, as in segments discussed above, is the condemnation of Republican intolerance of the American-Muslim community. The intolerant, in this case Glenn Beck and *Fox News*, refuse to adhere to an ethics that demands toleration of people of a different religion or race. More importantly, however, it is Rauf that emerges from the segment as the moderate; *TDS* enters these issues of essentialist and bigoted discourses at the level of a tolerance partisan, and "For such sworn enemies of intolerance, fanaticism is something to be exorcised in order to move from an intransigent politics of conviction to a pluralist ethics of responsibility."[97] The moderate center, then, is not only a multicultural center, but one that requires its diverse speakers to engage in a tolerant discourse.

If *TDS* aspires to an ethics of tolerance, it runs into trouble when it engages in discourses that have shades of civilizational talk. The Culture Talk detailed in the previous chapter—i.e., viewing political conflicts in terms of culture—raises some questions when merged with tolerance discourses, questions that *TDS* may not wish to raise but does so

[97] Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: on uses of an idea* (London: Verso, 2010), xxiii.

inadvertently through the confluence of these two discourses. The two clearest examples of *TDS* engaging in Culture Talk came after the 9/11 attacks and Charlie Hebdo attacks. In the opening segment of the first show after 9/11, Stewart delivered an emotional monologue in which he said,

> We feel that the show in general is a privilege. The idea that we can sit in the back of the country and make wise cracks, which is really what we do, we sit in the back and we throw spit balls. But never forgetting the fact that it's a luxury in this country that allows us to do that, a country that allows for open satire. And I know that sounds basic, and it sounds as though it goes without saying, but that's what this whole situation is really about, the difference between closed and open, the difference between free and burdened, and we don't take that for granted here by any stretch of the imagination.[98]

Stewart also introduced a patriotic slant so characteristic of the immediate aftermath of 9/11. In citing the heroism of first-call responders, he said "that's extraordinary, and that's why we've already won, they can't—it's light, it's democracy, we've already won, they can't shut that down. They live in chaos, and chaos cannot sustain itself." Explicit in his statements is a cultural understanding of the conflict between the West and Islam, arguing that the "whole situation is really about, the difference between open and closed," and that "their" situation of chaos is unsustainable. Although *TDS* has long taken an anti-war stance and inveighed against American foreign policy in the Middle East, here Stewart opens the door, perhaps inadvertently, to the question of tolerating "their chaos" as long as it threatens free and open western societies.

Of course, Stewart delivered this monologue in the context of a national tragedy and at a time when Bill Maher lost his show on *ABC*, an event that sent a very strong message

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[98] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "September 11, 2001," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 8:49, September 20, 2001, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/1q93jy/september-11--2001.

about the limits of acceptable discourse after 9/11. However, Stewart repeated a similar performance 14 years later in response to the Charlie Hebdo attacks. With the familiar sentimental demeanor, he invoked similar themes as he did in his 9/11 speech:

> I know very people who go into comedy you know as an act of courage, mainly because it shouldn't have to be that, it shouldn't be an act of courage. It should be taken as established law. But those guys at Charlie Hebdo had it, and they were killed for their cartoons. A stark reminder that for the most part the legislatures and journalists that we ridicule are not in any way the enemy, for however frustrating or outraged the back and forth can become it's still back and forth amongst those on, uh, let's call it 'Team Civilization' and this type of violence only clarifies this type of reality.[99]

With the explicit reference to the "enemy," and gathering a coherent "Team Civilization," *TDS* recuperates some of the more troubling aspects of Culture Talk. The problem with this type of culture talk is it opens the question of whether one ought to tolerate an intolerant society. While the right may not approach discussions of Islam with particular tact or political correctness, *TDS* does not fully reject their proposition that a problem does indeed exist in Islam. *TDS* occasionally adopts an argument that seems to be explaining to the Muslim world that certain bad apples are making it difficult for the U.S. to tolerate Islam. In a segment titled, "You're Not Helping—Iran's Crisis with Modernity"—a title that elicits certain essentialist tropes about the conflict between religion and modernity—Stewart begins by asserting, "Much has been made about the West's misunderstanding of Islam, but there are elements within the Islamic world which have much to answer for as well."[100] After running clips casting Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a

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[99] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "The Charlie Hebdo Tragedy," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 2:01, January 7, 2015, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/3tfake/the-charlie-hebdo-tragedy.

[100] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "You're not Helping—Iran's Crisis with Modernity," The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video, 3:06, September 8, 2010, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/olhtxs/you-re-not-helping---iran-s-crisis-of-modernity.

relatively reasonable individual requesting the West to sit down as equals at a negotiating table, Stewart asks, "So why are we isolating Iran?" *TDS* then reveals a clip detailing Iran's recent sentencing of an adulteress to death by stoning. "We may have our problems, Iran," Stewart says, "but we know the proper place for an adulterer." Stewart finishes the segment with this address to Iran: "It comes down to this Iran, you have a choice to make: do you want the world to be comfortable with you having nuclear weapons, or are you going to keep stoning people…because you're not allowed to be that modern and that primitive at the same time."[101] By beginning the segment stating that some in the Muslim world have much to answer for and ending the segment with references to modern versus primitive behavior, Stewart leaves the audience to consider whether the West's isolation of Iran from the international community is in fact a legitimate response. On the issue of Iran, then, *TDS* might vociferously attack the right's incendiary, hawkish rhetoric towards Iran, but in this case appears ambivalent about whether the West should tolerate Iran's intolerable behavior. Here, however, *TDS* does not entirely ignore Iran's self-proclaimed anti-imperialist political struggle by referencing Ahmadinejad's resentment of the unequal power relations between the U.S. and Iran. Indeed, *TDS* has acknowledged the political grievances of Iran on many occasions, including offering reference to the 1953 coup d'etat and U.S. support for the Shah.

That leads us to the second issue with liberal tolerance discourses, namely the depoliticization of struggles. As Wendy Brown has pointed out, "Depoliticization involves construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict, which all require

[101] Ibid.

political analysis and political solutions, as personal and individual, on the one hand, or as natural, religious, or cultural on the other."[102] Much like the limits of neoliberal multiculturalism, the discourses of tolerance occlude some important debates and are easily incorporated into imperialist agendas. So the question, then, is whether *TDS* expands beyond these discursive structures to include in its moderate public sphere voices that address a deeper analysis of political and economic struggles in the Muslim world?

As the many cases in which *TDS* raises the issue of political and anti-imperialist struggles regarding Iran suggests, there seems, then, to be an acknowledgement of the political factors underlying conflicts in the Muslim world. As highlighted in the previous section, the culture wars and right-wing racial politics serve as a recurring target of *TDS*'s deconstructive moments, but so too does the hawkish record of the right. Interestingly, though, *TDS* often pits the extremists on both sides of the American conflicts in the Middle East against each other, highlighting not just the reckless use of American power in the Middle East but also the extremist rhetoric from the region that enables neoconservatives. For instance, in a segment titled "Pricks of Persia," Stewart urges Iran to tone down its incendiary rhetoric about closing the Strait of Hormuz, because, Stewart warns them, the crazy Republicans are eager to find a justification to bomb you. *TDS* cuts to a clip of Santorum expressing hope that the U.S. was involved in the assassination of Iranian scientists, which, Santorum hopes, would then escalate the conflict with Iran to a status of hot war.[103]

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[102] Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 15.

[103] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Pricks of Persia," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 7:28, January 10, 2012, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/skmqqn/pricks-of-persia.

In a segment about John Boehner's decision to invite Netanyahu to speak before Congress about the Iranian nuclear negotiations, Stewart explains to his audience that in order to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough, President Obama and President Rouhani must "overcome the distrust of their own country's hardliners." An image then appears on the screen with Iranian politicians' beards juxtaposed on John Boehner and Mitch McConnell, portraying Republican hawks as the fanatical counterpart of Iran's hardliners.[104] This theme continued throughout the controversy, particularly when *TDS* took aim at the 47 Republican senators who signed an open letter of warning to Tehran. "Iran! Don't sign a deal with Obama," Stewart warns Tehran. "You can't trust him! Iran, be careful, he might be a Muslim!" The content of letter, *TDS* reveals, issues this warning to the Iranian government: "President Obama will leave office in January 2017, while most of us will remain in office well beyond then—perhaps decades." Stewart continued, "Oh, they're not warning Iran about Obama. They're warning Iran about themselves…You'll never sneak this shit past us, we're fuckin cuckoo! We're cuckoo bananas!" Breaking out in song and dance, "We're the world's most deliberative body, yet we're nuts!" Stewart then addresses Ayatollah Ali Khameini directly: "Yeah that's right Ayatollah, in a democracy, presidents come and go, but senators stay in power forever. No matter how old or dangerous or spiteful they are, there's nothing anyone can do about moving them, but I guess dictators wouldn't understand that."[105] The Republican Party is portrayed as intransigent, dictatorial, and unreasonable, a secular counterpart to Iran's theocracy.

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[104] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Hebrew International," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 5:30, February 2, 2015, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/j3u83r/hebrew-international.
[105] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Under Miner," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 7:44, March 10, 2015, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/ial564/under-miner

As would be expected, *TDS* does not confer much legitimacy upon Iran's self-proclaimed anti-imperialist struggle, and finds their type of resistance an unproductive voice in the moderate public sphere, much in the same way *TDS* ridicules the aims and objectives of groups like ISIS and al Qaeda. But the question for us is not necessarily whether *TDS* ridicules this type of struggle, but rather which struggles *TDS* deems worthy of joining the public sphere. *TDS*'s coverage of the 2009 Iranian elections hints at how *TDS* approaches this question of political struggle. In a week-long dispatch titled "Behind the Veil," Jason Jones traveled to Tehran for the week to interview Iranians. These segments were embedded in a larger heady optimism about the reformist Green Movement. Each of the segments employed frightening images of "evil clerics" and titles like "Axis of Evil" in a facetious manner juxtaposed with conversations with moderate, reasonable-minded Iranians. Throughout the three-part series, Jones carries all of the loaded, racist assumptions of Iranians into his encounters with the Iranian public, only to be surprised that those assumptions are not true. After receiving an invitation into an Iranian household, he enters cautiously, but by the end, he creates a bond with the children by playing video games. In his final day in Tehran, Jones spends time interviewing the youth of Iran. As Jones's fears of Iranian evil dissipates, he open up to his Iranian guests by teaching them football and attending a rap artist's studio. In articulating a theme implicit throughout the segments, Jones says, "Despite their government's best efforts, the youth are connected to the world with Facebook and Twitter."[106] This deconstructive moment leaves the audience with the

[106] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Jason Jones: Behind the Veil—Minarets of Menace," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 6:51, June 24, 2009, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/kge06n/jason-jones--behind-the-veil---minarets-of-menace-revisited

impression that an essential conflict in the Muslim world is between a group of modern, reform-minded, western-oriented Muslims and the governments of the region. It attempts to replace the clash of civilizations with a clash within civilizations by revealing the far more significant division: liberal versus fanatical, reformists versus tyranny. After interviewing an Iranian opposition politician who decried the absurdity of identifying any common interests between Iran, Iraq and North Korea, Jones treated us to Maziar Bahari's "radical unreasonableness." "One side says death to America and the other side says Axis of Evil—basically, both sides are idiots," Bahari tells us.[107] Indeed, *TDS* agrees—both sides are idiots—and it is not the American right or the Iranian government or any other actor deemed outside the public sphere by *TDS* that will propose the proper form of struggle. It is, in fact, subjects like Bahari.

C. The Constructive Moment

The previous sections outlined the manner in which *TDS* gestures towards moving beyond essentialist discourses in deconstructing right-wing rhetoric on Islam and carving out a public sphere of responsible, moderate debate. This public sphere includes neoliberal multicultural and tolerance discourses, and the last section hinted at the type of Muslim subject that might be included in *TDS*'s moderate sphere, like Imam Rauf. In this section, I will argue that *TDS* goes beyond excluding actors from this public sphere; in fact, it forms a

[107]The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Jason Jones: Behind the Veil—Persians of Interests," The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video, 4:56, June 22, 2009, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/2knite/jason-jones--behind-the-veil---persians-of-interest

fairly coherent set of criteria about what voices ought be included in the public sphere. In doing so, it broadens the contours of this public sphere with several discursive ethics in addition to tolerance and multiculturalism to include not just modes of discourse, but particular political values such as liberal democracy and using the power of speech to resist authoritarianism.

TDS postured often as neutral commentator of post-2009 events in the Muslim world, falling in line with the image of a hands-off Obama foreign policy (this context will be discussed in more detail below). By inviting Muslim guests on its show, *TDS* enabled its guests to play—albeit perhaps not intentionally or with an agenda—politics of knowledge and identity by presenting an autobiographical narrative of a particular struggle in the Muslim world. Rather than *TDS* speaking on their behalf, Muslim guests like Bassem Youssef, Maziar Bahari, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, all spoke as ambassadors of the Muslim world, and spoke as someone with specialized knowledge of the region by virtue of their position and identity. As we will see, they all also fit within the criteria of inclusion in the moderate center that *TDS* has carved out. The genealogy traced in the previous chapter discussed the role of neoliberal politics rejecting the idea of culture as deterministic. This section will discuss the role of "neoliberal multiculturalism" informing *TDS*'s search for a moderate center of Muslim subjects who fit a certain set of criteria. As we have seen, *TDS* has rejected the cultural essentialism of right-wing politics and now searches invites guests who fit within the neoliberal multiculturalism in which, according to Melamed, "terms of privilege accrue to individuals and groups—attributes such as multicultural, reasonable, feminist, and lawabiding—making them appear fit for neoliberal subjectivity, while others are stigmatized as monocultural, irrational, regressive, patriarchal, or criminal and ruled

out."[108] This is not to say that Bazari's or Youssef's struggle is not real or important, only that it redacts the historicity of Islam "to bits of moralistic knowledge that align easily with neoliberal ideological codes for what counts as 'free/unfree,' 'fair/unfair,' and 'good Muslim/bad Muslim.'"[109] Their struggles are sometimes—but not always, to *TDS*'s credit—removed from important historical, political and economic contexts and inserted into a transcendent dialectical struggle between good and evil, authoritarian versus liberal/reformist, moderate versus extremists, peaceful versus violent/terrorist.

Part of the reason for this criteria of inclusion, perhaps, has to do with Jon Stewart's personal stance on and personal relationship with dissidents in the region. In 2013, Stewart directed the film *Rosewater*, motivated in large part by his personal involvement in the story. Maziar Bahari had been incarcerated and tortured for 65 days in part because of his interview with Jason Jones (referenced above). This event had a profound impact on the way *TDS* covered Iranian politics:

> If Stewart ever needed proof that his show has an impact, he got it in pretty much the worst way possible in October 2009, when he discovered that Iranian guards had arrested Maziar Bahari shortly after he gave an interview to The Daily Show in Iran. "And not just Maziar, but everybody we interviewed there had been arrested. So, being American, we thought, 'This must be all about us!'" he says.
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> The Daily Show spoke to the prisoners' families and asked what they could do to help, and the response was unanimous: keep talking about the arrests on the show. So Stewart did. Ironically, the reason The Daily Show had gone to Iran in the first place was to undermine Bush's description of the region as "the axis of evil": Stewart wanted America to see a country populated by "people with families who are wonderful."

[108] Jodi Melamed, "Reading Tehran in Lolita," 15.
[109] Ibid.

The original intent of its coverage of Iran—deconstructive moments detailed above shattering the "Axis-of-evil" image—now shifted to a much more critical lens of the Iranian government. In this way, *TDS* played the role of activist, advocating on behalf of dissidents in Iran. Bahari appeared on *TDS* after being released from prison, and the theme of authoritarianism versus democracy played a central role in his conversation with Stewart. At the beginning of the interview, Stewart says, "We hear so much about the banality of evil, but not the stupidity of evil."[110] After explaining the absurdity of his charges of consorting with a spy (Jason Jones) and the equally ridiculous questions asked during his interrogation, Bazari expresses a sentiment similar to Stewart's: "Whenever you take things to the extreme, you see the humor in it and you see the stupidity in it." The significance of this interview lies primarily in the mutual fight as "comrades-in-pencils" of Stewart and Maziar; that is, two journalists or comedians speaking humor to power, and using the spoken and written word as a way to speak truth to power. They see themselves as being united in a common fight. By virtue of this, Stewart extends his support to Maziar, not only in his particular predicament, but more broadly in his fight against authoritarianism.

Previously, I hinted at the post-2008 period (coinciding with the rise of Barack Obama in national politics) as the most appropriate time period for locating GM/BM discourses in TDS. Several developments in particular shaped the way in which TDS defined the public sphere and informed its decision about whom to include in this space. First and foremost was the outbreak of the Arab uprisings. The Arab uprisings were

[110] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Maziar Bahari," The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video, 8:00, November 30, 2009, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/n56c1l/maziar-bahari.

powerful in western imagination for both destroying and propagating certain narratives about the Arab/Muslim world. As Jean-Marie Guehenno put it, "The Arab revolutions are beginning to destroy the cliché of an Arab world incapable of democratic transformation. But another caricature is replacing it: according to the new narrative, the crowds in Cairo, Benghazi or Damascus, mobilized by Facebook and Twitter, are the latest illustration of the spread of Western democratic ideals."[111] The Arab uprisings, or as optimistic western observers labeled the evens, the "Arab Spring," created a wave of optimism about liberal Muslim agency. But perhaps because of this optimism, most observers were unable to see the events as anything other than liberal, secular, democratic uprisings. In fact, the absence of Al Qaeda in steering the events of 2011 led many observers to perceive the uprisings as primarily liberal, secular uprisings demanding a new liberal political order. As Jon Stewart himself declared during an episode about the death of Osama bin Laden, the Arab Spring and the death of bin Laden served as a clear indicator of the irrelevance of Al Qaeda in steering pro-democratic secular uprisings.

But 2009, not 2011, is the most logical starting point for this analysis. Few observers perceived the Green Movement-led demonstrations in Tehran as the initial event of a "Muslim Spring." As *TDS*'s coverage of these events (discussed above) suggests, there existed a similar sense of heady optimism about Tehran in 2009 as there was about Tunis and Cairo in 2011. What is important about the narrative of "pro-democracy" uprisings in Tehran is that it coincided with the accession of Barack Obama to the executive office. With the rise of Obama to the presidency, and after eight years of failed nation-building

[111] Jean-Marie Guehenno, "The Arab Spring is 2011, not 1989," *New York Times*, Op-Ed, April 21, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/22/opinion/22iht-edguehenno22.html?_r=0

campaigns by the Bush administration, commentators from both the right and the left started to forecast the decline of American hegemony globally and in the Middle East in particular. In his book, *Obama and the Middle East: the End of America's Moment?*, Fawaz Gerges argued that "America's ability to act unilaterally and hegemonically has come to an end," and this new reality would play a large role in dictating U.S. policy toward the region.[112] The zealousness of the neoconservative agenda to reshape the Middle East at the barrel of a gun had now passed, and many intellectuals in the foreign policy establishment were clamoring for a more realist, sensible, foreign policy. Obama's "Address to the Muslim world" at Al-Azhar University in June 2009, while not laying out any specific policy agenda, set the tone for a new American posture towards the Middle East. "I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world," Obama assured his audience. Later he would distance himself from the Bush administration's policy of regime change, saying, "let me be clear: No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation by any other."[113] Obama later took actions that would suggest that his administration sought not just a rhetorical change in foreign policy towards the Muslim world, but also a substantive difference. Despite the escalation of some of the worst Bush-era policies, like drone strikes, Obama promised to withdraw troops from Iraq and soften the rhetoric towards Iran; as such, public discourses began to shift from discussions about American dominance of the region to a relationship

[112] Fawaz Gerges, *Obama and the Middle East: the End of America's Moment?* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 23.
[113] Barack Obama, "Remarks by Barack Obama on a New Beginning," White House, Cairo, Egypt, June 4, 2009. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09

which allowed for greater autonomy in their affairs. Thus, Ryan Lizza of *The New Yorker* could write, "Obama believed that America needed to rebuild its reputation, extricate itself from the Middle East and Afghanistan, and turn its attention toward Asia and China's unchecked influence in the region."[114]

Because the U.S. was perceived as taking a hands-off approach to such tumultuous events as the Arab uprisings, many who saw the events as liberal, democratic uprisings also celebrated Obama's decision to allow the peoples of the Middle East to chart their path. The U.S. relationship with MENA changed most significantly beginning in 2011 with the Arab uprisings. In an address to the State Department, Obama argued that demands for "self-determination"—a word he used repeatedly throughout the speech—had come as a result of indigenous demands for change: "It's not America that put people into the streets of Tunis or Cairo -– it was the people themselves who launched these movements, and it's the people themselves that must ultimately determine their outcome."[115] After the early Arab Spring soured—with the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power in Egypt and the Syrian uprising imploding into civil war—the debate crystallized into a demand by liberal interventionists and neoconservatives, on the one hand, calling for greater U.S. involvement in the political developments of the region, and non-interventionists and realists on the other hand calling for U.S. restraint. Thus, on the one hand, neoconservatives like Charles Krauthammer condemned Obama's dereliction of "leadership,"[116] while Aaron David

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[114] Ryan Lizza, "How the Arab Spring Remade Obama's Foreign Policy," *New Yorker*, May 2, 2011. Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/02/the-consequentialist

[115] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa," State Department, May 19, 2011. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa

[116] Charles Krauthammer, "No peace in our time," *Washington Post*, Op-Ed, March 19, 2015.

Miller argued "The Arab Spring was not primarily an American story. The United States' capacity to shape events was always quite limited."[117] *TDS* intervened in this debate between interventionists and non-interventionists as early as the 2009 Iranian elections and consistently through the Arab uprisings, as in a June 2009 interview with Reza Aslan in which Jon Stewart asked, "How can we make this [the Iranian elections] about us?...It seems somewhat narcissistic, to think that either way, the momentum of this movement and the courage of the people going into the streets, and the intensity of what they're doing, goes on beyond whether we voice our support or don't voice our support." Aslan responded by saying, "All I can say, is thank god for Barack Obama."[118]

While *TDS* could easily assign blame to the Republicans for creating a "Mess O' Potamia," now discourses emerged about the Muslim world taking responsibility for its own problems. Calls increased for demanding Muslim leaders to assume responsibility for a range of conflicts—most visibly the Syrian civil war and the advance of ISIS—that the U.S. neither wished to nor was able to dictate. One powerful expression of this sentiment in the realm of popular culture has come from Bill Maher. He has advocated a strategy of nonengagement from the U.S., arguing "Here's what I keep saying every week, why can't the people from the region take care of this without us?...Why can't they put some boots on the ground?" In adopting the Bernard Lewis hands-off approach, Maher argues,

> The best thing we could do is stay out of it. Can't you see they're having a war between themselves… but maybe if America wasn't in the middle of this battle that they need to have. They need to have a battle, apparently between the Sunnis and the Shiites, just the way the Catholics and the Protestants did in the 16th century, and

[117] Aaron David Miller, "For America, An Arab Winter," *Wilson Quarterly*, (Summer 2011), 36-42.
[118] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Reza Aslan," The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video, 8:50, June 24, 2009, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/953fo4/reza-aslan

> between the Muslims who want to live in the 21st century and the Muslims who want to live in the 7th century.[119]

A leading proponent of this perspective, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, appeared on *TDS* in March 2015 to explain why Islam needs a reformation. In response, Stewart asked, "If I'm remembering the Reformation correctly—and it's been awhile—aren't we having that now? The Reformation was Martin Luther wanted a purer form of Christianity, and so when he put that up there, it created a hundred years of violence and mayhem. Isn't that the process that we are going through right now?" While challenging Hirsi Ali on some of her more essentialist claims—that the problem is inherently in Islam, not political, social, or economic conditions in the Muslim world—Stewart appears to accept the narrative of a civil war, or reformation, at work in the Muslim world. Thus, *TDS* participates in a post-2008 set of discourses that posit a structurally different relationship between America and the Muslim world, one in which the Muslim world has agency and is using that agency to steer its own historical development, and with the collapse of peaceful revolutions into violent conflict, the possibility of a civil war at work between Good Muslims and Bad Muslims. These discourses enhance the likelihood of Muslim agency, for better or worse, in a post-American era in MENA, and, as we saw above, assumes that the U.S. is no longer a powerful actor shaping these events.

These dynamics were at work when King Abdullah II of Jordan appeared on *TDS* in 2012 for a three-part interview. As civil war was escalating in Syria, instability in Iraq and Libya continuing, and the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power in Egypt, Stewart and

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[119] Real Time with Bill Maher, "Overtime," *Real Time with Bill Maher* video, 11:23, March 20, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJFX-6xrhdI

Abdullah spent a significant time trying to locate the right model and leadership for moving the region on a path to liberal democracy. Revisiting the idea that the leadership would undoubtedly have to be local and indigenous, Stewart said, "We like to think, arrogantly so, that we are in control of this process. The arguments we have are: 'how could let the Brotherhood come to power in Egypt, Obama?' As if Obama could go, 'yeah, I should have rigged that differently.' We have a sense that we can somehow control these events." Predictably, the villain in the narrative of the Arab uprisings was the Muslim Brotherhood. According to Abdullah, "as young men and women aspired to political reform, those who were more organized like the Muslim Brotherhood sort of hijacked the movement." Stewart and Abdullah would later discuss how Jordan planned to moderate or marginalize the extremist religious elements like the Muslim Brotherhood and empower moderate, pro-democratic forces. After Abdullah explained that the next four years will be critical for Jordan's transition to a democracy comprised of coherent parties that join the democratic process of elections and forming governing coalitions, Stewart responded, "What seems nice about all of this, what seems like a nice opportunity there, is the ability of the Jordanian people to tell their own story...Tunisia, Egypt, Iran all seem to have that story, that pride."[120]

If *TDS* wanted to make the story of struggle in Islam not about the U.S., what voices appeared on the show to provide this story? As with Bazari, sometimes Stewart had a close relationship and identified with particular forms of peaceful opposition to authoritarian regimes. We see this poignantly in Stewart's relationship with Bassem Youssef. During an

[120] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "King Abdullah II of Jordan," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 6:12, September 25, 2012, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/ar2432/king-abdullah-ii-of-jordan-pt--1.

episode amidst the turmoil that beset Egypt during the Muslim Brotherhood's stay in power, *TDS* reported on the incarceration of Youssef. After running a clip from *Al Jazeera* reporting on Youssef's arrest, Stewart quipped the following: "Oh good! Who's that guy? I bet he's a terrorist, or what has he been sabotaging Egypt's infrastructure? Or harassing Egyptian women on the street? Or unemploying Egyptian people? What does he do?" When it is revealed that Youssef is a satirist who pokes fun at Mohammed Morsi, Stewart responds, "Wait, he's *our* Bassem Youssef?" Despite *TDS*'s ridicule of U.S. intransigence towards the Muslim Brotherhood in previous episodes, Stewart frames this issue squarely as an issue of authoritarianism versus liberal free speech. The entire segment is premised on an expression of solidarity for Youssef, including several explicit remarks about how Stewart does the same thing as Youssef but in America. Stewart makes several direct addresses to Morsi on behalf of Youssef, including, "Listen, Bassem is my friend, my brother." So the segment operates not only at an abstract level of mobilizing affinity for an Egyptian that embodies a liberal ethics of political opposition, but also at a personal kinship level that mobilizes the empathy of a liberal American public. These rhetorical devices are carried further after *TDS* runs a clip detailing the crimes committed by Youssef, including "insulting both the president and Islam," to which Stewart responds, "That's illegal? Seriously that's illegal in Egypt? Because if insulting the president and religion were a crime here, *Fox News* go bye-bye." Stewart continues the segment by lecturing Morsi on the merits of free speech, and he ends on an especially electric moment for the crowd on the courage of liberal Egyptian activists: "By the way, without Bassem, and all those bloggers

and journalists and brave protesters, who took to Tahrir Square to voice dissent, you, President Morsi, would not be in a position to repress them."[121]

On September 24, 2014, Syrian National Coalition (SNC) President Hadi al-Bahra appeared on *TDS* for an extended interview. A national debate had for years been pivoting around the question of whether the U.S. should offer military support for "moderate rebels" in Syria. Al-Bahra appeared on the show, one can easily predict, to continue the SNC's campaign of turning American public opinion in favor of armed intervention, a hard sell for a public worn out by over a decade of failed wars in the Muslim world. It is no surprise, then, that al-Bahra employed a rhetoric dressed in the language of "freedom" and "democracy" to persuade an American audience of the merit of his cause. Interesting, however, is Stewart's rhetorical position:

> Stewart: The entire region… is trapped between these despots and terrorists. You have autocracies and you have these Islamist groups that are bringing terror and it seems like there is a large majority in the middle who are caught between this fight.
>
> Bahra: No for us as Syrian people we seek democracy and freedom for all…Syria is open, moderate society.
>
> Stewart: That's my point, I think, that it's a moderate people, but they're stuck between extremists and authoritarian.
>
> Bahra: you can't move against history, it's headed in that direction.[122]

Like Youssef and Bazari, al-Bahra fulfills several of the criteria of inclusion in *TDS*'s moderate center: he represents a politics that is seen as moderate (something the

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[121] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Morsi 'Viva Hate' Egyptian Democracy," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 6:21, April 1, 2013, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/n1recx/morsi--viva-hate----egyptian-democracy.

[122] The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, "Hadi al-Bahra," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* video, 7:55, September 29, 2014, http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/n66u8u/exclusive---hadi-al-bahra-extended-interview-pt--1.

Stewart identifies as the majority position in Arab societies); he speaks the language of democracy and freedom; and he is fighting for a noble cause against extremists and authoritarian regimes. Here, the categories both he and Stewart use to identify the struggles underway in the Muslim world—moderate versus extremist, democracy versus authoritarianism—occlude an enormous amount of struggles at play in Syria and elsewhere. This is not to say that Stewart should invite ISIS leaders to appear on his show, but rather to consider the limitations imposed by the narrowness of *TDS*'s public sphere.

One topic on which *TDS* has pushed the envelope significantly is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and therefore we see a limited expansion of coverage of other forms of resistance taking place in the Muslim world. But the only type of resistance deemed appropriate for *TDS*'s moderate center, is the peaceful activism represented by Palestinian Authority MP Moustafa Barghouti, who appeared on *TDS* alongside American Jewish activist Anna Saltzer. Stewart introduced Barghouti as "Democratic Palestinian leader," suggesting to his audience that Barghouti is not like the Muslim leaders that *TDS* regularly lampoons. The structure of the interview, a Palestinian leader sitting side-by-side with an American-Jewish activist, immediately indicates to the audience that this is a Palestinian who has accepted the terms of civilized debate and tolerance that *TDS* claims at key aspects of the moderate center. "We are struggling for freedom, for justice, so it's natural to have people like Anna with us," Barghouti explains to the audience. Later, we would witness an expansion of *TDS*'s criticism of Israel, particularly after the 2014 assault on Gaza and Netanyahu's attempts to derail the Iranian nuclear deal. But the interview with Barghouti reveals to a certain extent the limits of expanding the debate about Israel-Palestine: he had to appear with a Jewish activist so that *TDS* did not appear one-sided and could appease an

audience that might consider Barghouti a controversial voice. In fact, an audience member repeatedly shouted "liar" throughout the interview, indicating rather explicitly the pressure applied to anyone criticizing Israel.

D. Limits of TDS's coverage

A few months after announcing his retirement from *TDS*, Jon Stewart explained to *The Guardian* his reasons for leaving: "Honestly, it was a combination of the limitations of my brain and a format that is geared towards following an increasingly redundant process, which is our political process."[123] *TDS* advanced the national dialogue on Islam and American foreign policy towards that region by consistently rejecting interventionism, particularly the Iraq war, and deconstructing essentialist rhetoric. One can imagine, however, the "limitations" of the "format" played an important role in defining how far *TDS* might go in expanding the discourse on Islam. First, the format was intimately tied to the American media and political process, thereby tethering *TDS*'s commentary on Islam to American discourses. This limited the extent to which *TDS* could explore issues in the Muslim world and intervene in those debates. In an era in which mainstream networks have gutted their foreign bureaus, leading to poor coverage of conflict zones, particularly in MENA, *TDS* relished the opportunity to lampoon the mainstream press's poor coverage of Islam. Rather than necessarily pushing the debate forward on important issues in the region, *TDS* takes the position that actually none of us understands the region. Rather than positing

[123] Hadley Freeman, "Jon Stewart: why I quit The Daily Show," *The Guardian*, April 18, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/apr/18/jon-stewart-why-i-quit-the-daily-show.

a nuanced understanding of the region, the show leaves us with the impression that America has fundamental misconceptions about the region, and therefore should not intervene.

Second, if *TDS* did in fact posit a positive understanding of the region, as I argue in the "constructive moment" section, then it did so in a way that was relatable to an American audience. In writing about *Rosewater*, Hadley Freeman wrote, "The film got decent reviews, but made only $3m – it turns out not that many Americans want to see a film about an Iranian prisoner. For once, perhaps, Stewart was just that little bit too progressive, something he has joked about on The Daily Show, mock weeping."[124] There are limits to what a comedy show can present about Islam to an American audience, but perhaps Stewart believed that the Iranian dissident, the Egyptian satirist, and the moderate Syrian rebel embodied struggles that an American audience could appreciate: agitating against authoritarian regimes and religious extremists for a more liberal society.

TDS operates under several additional constraints, which deserve attention here. By participating in this debate under the constraints of the corporate model, there is a limit to the discursive boundaries. But also, in responding to existing discourses, *TDS* encounters what Said referred to as the situational constraints: "In this sense, all interpretations are what might be called situational…[they are] related to what other interpreters have said, either by confirming them, or disputing them, or continuing them."[125] In moving the debate forward, *TDS* felt it incumbent upon them to dispute right-wing discourses, and to a large extent they continued the existing GM/BM distinction. But they also hinted at other forms

[124] Ibid.
[125] Said, *Covering Islam*, 163.

of discursive approaches to Islam, giving us hope that in fact *TDS* did start a dialogue in the mainstream American conversation about other ways of representing Islam.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This project began with a quest for more liberal, responsible discourses on Islam in the mainstream of American politics. A logical place to start, based on its reputation, was *The Daily Show*. Its reputation as practicing a more effective form of journalism—in spite of it being a fake news show—performing superior political critique, and exposing the mendacity of American politics, all suggested that at the very least *TDS* would deconstruct some of the more pernicious discourses on Islam. And, after conducting a discursive and textual analysis of content related to Islam, it seems apparent that *TDS* does indeed accomplish this. But this project was also about testing the limits of liberal discourses on Islam, and it would seem that *TDS* did in fact expose some of the limits in opening new discursive space on Islam. The prevailing liberal discourse on Islam is the GM/BM distinction, so the question was, to what extent does this discourse push the boundaries of debate on Islam? And to what extent does *TDS* adopt this register?

The answer to the first question: quite limited. The GM/BM distinction succeeds in rallying supporters from broad political identities in a common discourse by drawing on several overlapping discourses that allow for an anti-essentialist interpretation of Islam while at the same time enabling imperialist agendas—in fact, broadening the scope and efficiency of imperialist agendas by introducing local agency to the question. The American mission to transform societies and engage in social engineering around the world is one of the deepest imperialist impulses in American history, and the end of the Cold War

liberated this impulse from the realist constraints of the previous 50 years. This, in and of itself, did not make a question about liberal, secular, Muslim agency make sense, though. The GM/BM could only make sense with a corresponding departure from essentialist discourses. Culture as static no longer sufficed in talking about Islam, and new discourses about Muslim agency and debates about democracy and Islam, both in the West and within Islam, energized this search for local agency.

The answer to the second question: yes, *TDS* rearticulated many of the themes of the GM/BM distinction. It sought to move past essentialist discourses by deconstructing them as they were articulated by right-wing organizations. In doing so, *TDS* began to carve out a sphere of moderate public discourse that, in the constructive moments, it invited Good Muslim subjects to participate in. Certainly, *TDS* introduced slight variations on the GM/BM distinction—*TDS* did gestures towards other forms of struggle in the Muslim world—but by and large it stuck to the template outlined in the preceding chapters.

Would a different methodological approach have yielded different findings? This paper did not cover in depth *TDS*'s critique of the Iraq War, drone strikes, or torture, and if it had, perhaps the picture would have been slightly different. But that is also a central point of the contradiction of the GM/BM: namely, that even liberals who oppose the most illiberal American policies towards the Muslim world often adopt discourses that are recuperated by power structures hoping to expand their influence into the Muslim world, even if the people articulating these views did not intend it.

How might we move the debate forward? *TDS*'s discourse was promising in that it did highlight some of the struggles being fought in the Muslim world. Unfortunately, those were all struggles that fit a certain template: liberal, democratic, peaceful. The occlusion of

other struggles—against the structures of inequality in neoliberal and neo-imperial orders—leaves *TDS*'s audience with a lack of analytical tools one would need to engage in a healthier discussion about Islam. The GM/BM distinction flattens to a great extent any discussion about Islam, forgoing textures and layers of investigation about violence and resistance in the Muslim world that is necessary for any approach to studying the region.

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