

CHAPTER 5



Religious Tests

MUSLIM IMMIGRATION AND THE WEST

I. G.

In this essay, I defend at least strict restrictions—but not necessarily blanket bans—on immigration from Muslim-majority countries (hence, “Muslim countries” and “Muslim societies”). The absence of such restrictions poses a threat to Western democracies. I don’t defend deportations or any other abridgment of the rights of Muslim residents or citizens in the West for such acts would set legal precedents that will harm democracy instead of protecting it. I also don’t address the question of refugees from Muslim countries. I concede that the West, especially the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel, who spearheaded recent unjust wars in the Middle East, probably have a special obligation to provide asylum to refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, and Yemen, where Western governments are partly responsible for the ongoing humanitarian crises. However, I doubt that these obligations would extend to granting those refugees immigrant status, or any other form of permanent settlement.

1. My Story

I am a former Muslim living in the United States. I was born and raised in a Sunni town in Turkey, a Muslim country, where I witnessed quite a few horrors justified by reference to Islam. On more than a few occasions, I was at the center of these horrors. For instance, from the first to the twelfth grade, I was beaten dozens of times for refusing to recite passages from the Quran in Arabic (a language I neither speak nor understand), refusing to pray on top of a teacher’s desk, chewing gum and drinking water in public during the month of Ramadan, and refusing to rise to my feet for mandatory public prayer before eating at the school cafeteria. These didn’t happen behind closed doors when no one was looking. They all happened in front of students, teachers, and school administrators in public schools.

Most of my batterers would describe themselves as “moderate Muslims.” So would the overwhelming majority of the bystanders who watched as I was shamed, beaten, and spat at repeatedly for my childish rebellions against Islam. Admittedly, I’m one of the lucky ones. I experienced some pain; I got a few bruises. The most serious trouble, at least so far, was a skull fracture and concussion. I suffered it at the hands of a mob who decided that the best way of convincing me that Allah the Merciful exists would be to repeatedly connect my head with a steel cabinet until I was persuaded to look at the issue their way.

From age six, when I had my first doubts about God and organized religion, until the time I landed in a university community, where blasphemers weren’t beaten on the spot, I experienced an almost constant and sometimes overwhelming mix of fear and desperation. On many occasions, I am ashamed to admit, fear stopped me from speaking what I knew to be the truth. Other times, my impulse to speak against superstition and lies got me into serious trouble (and let’s hope the publication of this chapter isn’t one such case). However, though these experiences made my youth very stressful, I would like to believe that they also gave me the wisdom to know that they can’t break your spirit unless you let them. For that important lesson alone I should thank my Muslim tormentors, moderate or not.

Others weren’t so lucky, however. My child eyes also had the dubious distinction of having seen a lynch mob who gleefully cheered, “Sharia will come, persecution will end!” as their victims burned to death and the police did nothing. What was the crime of the condemned unlucky, you ask? It was “insulting Islam” by simply coming out as atheists, agnostics, and heretical religious minorities.

2. Ideology and Violence

I recently saw a meme that separates the Muslims of the world into two groups. On the one hand, there are those who live in Muslim societies such as Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Gaza, and Yemen. These Muslims, the meme said, are unhappy. On the other hand, there are those Muslims who live in non-Muslim societies such as Germany, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These Muslims, the meme claimed, are joyfully happy, the implication being that the predominance of Islam in a society makes even its Muslims miserable.

A European friend forwarded the meme to me, wondering why Turkey wasn’t among the societies listed. He also thought, contrary to what the meme implied, that Islam isn’t at fault in the misery of Muslims of the Muslim world. He thought that poverty, wars, and colonialism were to blame.

I am fairly certain that Turkey belongs squarely in the list of countries where a Muslim majority lives in misery. This despite the fact that Turkey isn’t particularly poor;¹ Turkey hasn’t been in a major war since 1922, and Turkey has never been colonized by anyone. That is, unless you count my Turkic Muslim ancestors who took it by force from its Christian inhabitants. If there are any colonists-by-progeny in Turkey today, they’re the Muslims themselves.

Turkish or not, though, Muslims aren’t all religious fanatics who will murder those who “insult” their religion by disagreeing with it. But this doesn’t matter.

A sizable minority of Turkish Muslims will commit or at least cheer on violence for Islam,² and the majority will look the other way, mumbling something about it all being up to God's will. And whether they're poor, war-ridden, colonized, or not, Muslim communities somehow keep reproducing these fanatics, as well as their mumbling enablers, in every generation. That's what's wrong with Islam. The trouble with Islam isn't that it makes every Muslim a raging jihadist who will yell in Arabic as he decapitates a Japanese journalist.³ Here lies the real problem: As Islam spreads in a society, so does flourish a *culture of fear* in which religious violence is a familiar—and even expected—part of the day-to-day social reality.

The difficulty of coming to terms with this fact and looking for an intellectually honest explanation thereof is one of the greatest challenges facing the Western left, of which I find myself an odd member nowadays. I do understand where my fellow lefties are coming from: They believe that on a fundamental level, all humanity is redeemable, or at least the unsalvageable baddies are few and distributed by Mother Nature more or less evenly between all races, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, religions, and what not. They know that "ordinary" folks are capable of doing bad things too, but they do them mostly because of environmental factors—not essentially corrupt inner selves. That's why they tend to reel back from essentialist characterizations of any group. That's why when they see our president ranting about Muslims on Twitter, they want to yell at him, "Not all Muslims are like that, you racist piece of #\$\$%@!"

Of course they aren't. Not even *most* Muslims are like that. Most Muslims, like most non-Muslims, wouldn't hurt anyone intentionally. If anything, most Muslims are themselves victims of the culture of fear in which they're inadvertent participants or bystanders. But that's the banality of evil, the story of every community in history where atrocities were committed in the name of an ideology. Did most Communist Party members in Stalin's Soviet Union torture and kill political prisoners? Did most Nazi Party members in World War II, or even most SS men, murder civilians? Did most Chinese communists participate in ceremonial public humiliation and abuse of Mao's political rivals? Did most of Charlie Company, who were told that there are no civilians in My Lai and no cost is too great to fight off communism, participate in the massacre of five hundred civilians? If you do believe that they did, you're wrong. They didn't. Most of them looked the other way, mumbled some excuses, and avoided getting involved.

Yet, that fact somehow fails to make me feel at ease when I think about the prospects of having more self-identifying Stalinists join my community. I don't worry that the average Stalinist would want to put a bullet in my petit-bourgeois head when I express skepticism about the Party's ability to bring about a classless utopia. Instead, I worry about what these ideologies can do to the individual and—ultimately—to the society. They tend to weaken our sympathy for the other by rationalizing his suffering. They selectively remove our respect for and recognition of universal human dignity. They desensitize us to the crimes committed in their name. That's why if there are sufficiently many people who ascribe to such ideologies in my community, inevitably there will be a few who are willing to take violent action for their beliefs. Most won't commit or even condone

violence, but their weakened sympathy and diminished respect for the victims of their ideology will make them more likely to look the other way, mumble some excuses, and avoid getting involved when they see someone battering a defiant child or setting a building on fire in the name of their creed. This deadly combination is what's scary about today's Islam.

One might find the comparison to Stalinism, Nazism, and Maoism silly and repugnant. But my point isn't to suggest that there's some moral equivalency between these ideologies and Islam. Indisputably, Nazism is worse, *much* worse. Rather, my point is that it isn't necessarily bigotry to appeal to ideological factors when explaining the atrocities committed by a minority within an ideological group. Appealing to ideology as an explanation for violence isn't necessarily stereotyping all members of the group who espouse that ideology. We know how terribly powerful the bystander effect could be even without an ideological rationalization for non-intervention. My experience tells me that Islam makes it worse.

So, worrying that Islam is a religion that breeds violence isn't necessarily some essentialist overgeneralization of the violent dispositions of the few to all. Ideology—just like poverty, wars, and colonialism—is a component of the individual's environment and it should be taken into account when trying to understand violence. If war turns some into violent psychopaths, and some others into cowardly or apathetic bystanders who can't or won't lift a finger to stop those psychopaths, that's a great argument against war. I submit that if we substituted "Islam" for "war," the previous sentence would still be true.

This is why it's futile to resort to the tired retort, "Not all Muslims are like that; it's just a handful of extremists." Indeed, there are *many* "good" Muslims for every "bad" Muslim. But a good proportion of those "good" Muslims are the members of the silent majority whose cowardice or indifference give the "bad" Muslims free license to terrorize in the name of Islam. I recognize the fact that there are some heroic followers of Islam who overcome the bystander effect and try to put an end to the culture of fear. However, the record speaks for itself. As heroic as they may be, the voices of these individuals—a few of them dear friends—are drowned out by the roaring violence or the deafening silence of the rest.

If we allow Muslim immigration to shift the demographics of secular democracies of the West significantly, we will be effectively expanding that license to terrorize in the name of Islam to our own communities. The self-appointed "Sharia police" in the United Kingdom⁴ and Germany,⁵ the massive surge of sexual assault incidents in Cologne on New Year's Eve,⁶ as well as the "home-grown" terrorist attacks in Paris⁷ and Brussels,⁸ are signs that a significant demographic shift is already underway in Western Europe. The United States should learn from the failed European experiment with large-scale Muslim immigration and severely restrict immigration from Muslim countries.

3. Alternative Explanations

That there's a correlation between Muslim presence and violence doesn't entail the causal link I claim, of course. However, we aren't talking about a clearly accidental correlation, such as the one between the decline of oceanic piracy and

the rise of global temperatures.⁹ The perpetrators of violence themselves say that they resort to violence *because* their faith commands it. People are, of course, sometimes wrong about why they do what they do. But self-report *is defeasible evidence* of a causal link between beliefs and actions. That means, we do have evidence for a causal link between Islam and violence. Anyone who disputes the link, therefore, must produce a reasonable alternative explanation of the correlation that either rebuts or overpowers that evidence.

This is where most of my lefty friends will interject with an explanation that blames the correlation on the social and economic marginalization of Muslims in the West, and the provocations Muslims feel due to Western imperialism and military aggression. The idea is, if any other religious demographic faced the same treatment, they would react the same way.

Let's consider these alternative explanations individually. First, social marginalization: Not only is there no evidence of this, but on the contrary, most Western countries are remarkably welcoming to Muslims and their culture. In Germany, for instance, the Federal Republic mandates that every public school employs interpreters on call who can speak main immigrant languages (i.e., Arabic, Turkish, Urdu, and Kurdish). German schools also teach Islam as a major world religion.¹⁰ Immigrant children are offered cultural integration classes and German as a second language,¹¹ while most of them can also continue studying their native languages throughout their education. On the streets, the situation is the same. In major German cities, for instance, virtually every other corner features a kebab restaurant or a shisha house. And Germany is happy to bring in even more Muslims, as is evident from the fact that they have already accepted over half a million Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghani asylum seekers.

Germany, however, is the norm in the Western Europe, not the exception. From the Netherlands, the very birthplace of religious freedom, to the Holy See, the home of the largest Christian church in the world, Muslims are tolerated—even celebrated—by those very Westerners who are unfairly accused of marginalizing them.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Muslim faith is protected by the Canadian and American constitutions. The rights these documents establish and guarantee, however, don't exist merely on paper. Thousands of Muslim cultural centers and mosques operate freely and openly seek converts under the protection of the law. This is in stark contrast to the intolerance for other religions in virtually all Muslim countries, where being a Christian pastor or missionary is either prohibited by law¹² or is legal in theory but extremely dangerous in practice.¹³

Of course, I am not denying the reality that some Muslims in the West might face discrimination or be targeted with violence¹⁴ because of their religious identity. However, if we hold Western societies to the same standards as everyone else, we should conclude on the whole they're remarkably accommodating to Muslims, and much more so than Muslim societies are accommodating to non-Muslims.

As for the West's imperialism and unjust wars being provocations, I won't try to defend either, as they're indefensible. However, I will raise a question: If

imperialism and unjust war are provocations that naturally result in violent retaliation against civilians, then where's the Vietnamese Al-Qaeda, Korean ISIS, or Japanese Boko Haram? In the Vietnam War, by most estimates over 1 million Vietnamese civilians were killed by the United States and its allies.¹⁵ During the Korean War, close to 2 million Korean civilians were killed, many of them as a result of bombardment by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).¹⁶ But perhaps the Japanese case is the most striking of all: In World War II, the U.S. Air Force firebombed almost all major Japanese cities, in addition to dropping two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, incinerating close to half a million civilians.¹⁷ As these atrocities were taking place on the other side of the Pacific, over a hundred thousand law-abiding U.S. citizens and residents were locked up in concentration camps in the United States, for no reason other than their Japanese ancestry. The survivors of these crimes against humanity had every reason to hate the West. Yet somehow the sizeable Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese immigrant communities in the United States or elsewhere don't seem provoked at all to wage holy wars of revenge against the Western world, and they seem perfectly happy to adapt, to integrate, to live and let live.

So, neither of these alternative explanations can account for the increased incidence of violence in societies with Muslim presence. Therefore, however unpleasant we might find it, the conclusion that Islam and violence are causally linked is the plausible one to draw from the evidence.

4. Is Fear of Islam Irrational?

At this point, someone might argue that, despite my conviction and hope to the contrary, my fear of Islam is an overreaction born out of my trauma. But this possibility doesn't justify dismissing the argument I'm making here. We wouldn't say such things casually to a survivor of other horrors, especially after they make a case that what happened to them isn't a fluke but the result of a systemic problem. The burden of proof to show that I am overreacting is on my critics, and a psychological explanation of the origin of my fear isn't a refutation of the case I am making.

I am not essentializing Islam either, for I don't think that Islam has a "true and immutable nature." Religions are social constructs consisting of diverse—and often conflicting—ideas and practices. Nor am I making any pessimistic long-term predictions about Muslim societies. Religions evolve, and so shall Islam. But that's the long run. As the famous economist Keynes rightly points out, the "long run is a misleading guide to current affairs. *In the long run we are all dead.*"¹⁸ My primary concern is with the ways Islam manifests itself here and now, and what it can reasonably be expected to become within my lifetime. This is why it's no good to say "Christianity has been violent, too."¹⁹ Pointing at the evidently violent history of Christianity is a good response to those who romanticize Christianity. However, I am not one of those. So, the response misses my point: Islam breeds violence today, *here and now*. And it does so more than Christianity *currently* does.²⁰

Muslim countries, *relatively speaking and on average*, have significantly more religious violence per capita than those dominated by other major religions represented in the West.²¹ But we aren't looking at a mere difference in degree: This is one of the occasions in which a difference in degree creates a difference in kind. The situation is a bit like traffic. If everyone obeys the rules, traffic tends to flow easily. Road networks are designed with built-in redundancy, so they tolerate the occasional driver who tailgates, speeds, changes lanes unnecessarily, or causes a collision. Things might slow down, but cars will still move. However, if more and more drivers disregard the rules, eventually traffic will undergo what physicists call a "phase transition": a sudden and qualitative change from a fluid state to a viscous state. In layman's terms, there will be a traffic jam.

Ideological violence is comparable to traffic violations. Have only a little bit of it, and things will carry on as usual. Keep adding more, and eventually there will be a sudden and dramatic transition in the political climate. That's why at some point, more ideological violence becomes *more than just more*. After some threshold, which is hard to specify because societies are much more complex than road networks, more ideological violence would inevitably have a paralyzing effect on public discourse and a terrorizing effect on the individual psyche.

However, there are two aggravating factors relevant to ideological violence that aren't represented by the traffic analogy. First, violence begets violence, not only by inviting retaliation but also by inspiring copycats, and one-uppers. There's some disturbing evidence, for instance, that some school shootings in the United States are in part caused by previous school shootings.²² That's why ideological violence might snowball once it reaches a critical threshold.

Furthermore, there's more to the transformative effect of ideological violence than its frequency. It's a particularly horrifying phenomenon, and its psychological impact should be considered when we interpret the significance of the risk of falling victim to it. The fact that there are many fewer incidents of Islamic violence than deaths from other causes is hardly consolation. What makes Islam today an existential threat against Western democracies isn't that huge numbers are killed in its name. It's instead that the violent minority of Muslims (more than the radical factions of any other major religion today) *effectively terrorizes the dissenter*. Nothing has a more chilling effect on speech than someone being murdered because he criticized an ideology. When that happens—and it happens frequently enough where I am from²³—democracy simply can't survive.

A further cause for worry is the difficulty of reacting calmly to increased ideological violence. Many of us, left or right, are rightly worried about the post-9/11 erosion of the Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable searches and government intrusion. What can be reasonably expected to happen to the rest of the Bill of Rights if and when there's a religiously inspired suicide bombing or mass shooting in the United States every week? Neither the U.S. Constitution, nor any other form of liberal democracy, can continue to exist under such pressure.

5. Conclusion

Contrary to the impression I might have inadvertently made, I am not interested in demonizing Islam or Muslims. Islam manifests itself in different ways, many of which are benign or even admirable. But some of its manifestations are less than benign. People are beaten,²⁴ tortured,²⁵ executed,²⁶ gunned down,²⁷ hacked into pieces,²⁸ and slaughtered like animals,²⁹ all in the name of Islam, and at a rate that you don't see from any other major religion today. When I look at the narratives of Islamic violence from all around the world, it's hard to resist connecting the dots: Where Islam goes in significant numbers, we start seeing acts of violence committed in its name at a rate and severity that is a threat to the very possibility of liberal democracy. Given that cultural integration is tough and religions often take centuries and bloody conflicts to evolve, supporting mass or open immigration from Muslim countries would be gambling with the fate of Western civilization itself.

So from where I stand, as a former Muslim and an oddball lefty, Islam appears to be an ideology that tolerates and even encourages the few who will resort to violence in its name, and silences the vast majority of its remaining followers. I also think I understand those who aren't comfortable with the idea of large-scale Muslim immigration to the West. They aren't bigots—or, at least, most aren't. It isn't a race or some religious stereotype that they fear. What they fear, I think, is what I fear: a future in which Islam might gain a foothold in their relatively tolerant and admirably free communities, overwhelm their psychological defenses and democratic institutions, and turn them into earthly hellholes like my hometown.

Who can blame them? Not me.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does I. G. advocate for as an immigration policy in Western societies?
2. I. G. claims that there is a causal link between Islam and political violence. What evidence does he provide for this claim?
3. I. G. discusses and rejects a number of alternative explanations for the apparent correlation between Islam and political violence. What are they?
4. What does it mean to “essentialize” a religion?
5. What's the point of the analogy between political violence and traffic?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does I. G.'s personal narrative influence your evaluation of his argument?
2. Does I. G. essentialize Islam? Provide support for your response.
3. How might immigration restrictions based on religious beliefs *hurt* Western societies?
4. I. G. warns against “supporting mass or open immigration from Muslim countries.” Do you think there's a viable middle ground between this and his proposed “strict restrictions”? Would it necessarily involve religion-based exclusions?

Case 1

The Pew Research Center conducted a survey of Muslims in the United States in 2017. Two of the survey respondents are quoted here:

"I believe Mr. Donald Trump is a very good president and he can do a lot to the economy because he spent his life as a businessman and engineer, but for politics, he did kind of strong decisions that tended to be unfair, like when he said that seven Muslim countries are not supposed to enter the United States and stuff like this. You can't treat all the people with the same guilt. Get the people who caused the trouble and prosecute them. It makes you look not that great to the whole world."—*Muslim man over 60*

"I am not even sure how I feel. I wish he would just shut up. I thought he would be for the better good of the country. Is it him? Is it the media? I will say I was always Republican and never voted any other way and now I am saying, 'What is going on?' I am the first to say we should be careful who to let in the country, but there is a more diplomatic way to do it. For an educated man he is not making educated decisions. And I have family from outside this country. My husband is from Iran. So do I think we should be careful with Iran. My husband has been here since 1985. . . . I don't think it is wrong for the government to be careful, but a lot of innocent people are being hurt by this. There are family members I might not be able to see again. They would come every year and now I cannot see them. I believe in protecting our country but the way he is going about it is not the best way."—*Muslim woman in her 40s*

Which of the respondents' statements do you think are the most morally relevant, particularly in light of I. G.'s arguments? What new dimensions, if any, do they bring to the conversation published here?

<http://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/the-muslim-american-experience-in-the-trump-era/>

ON THE ROAD TO LOSING OURSELVES: RELIGION-BASED IMMIGRATION TESTS SABA FATIMA

Donald J. Trump [referring to himself in third person] is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what the hell is going on.

—DONALD TRUMP (December 2015)³⁰

I'll tell you the whole history of it. So when [Trump] first announced it, he said, "Muslim ban." He called me up. He said, "Put a commission together. Show me the right way to do it legally."

—RUDY GIULIANI (January 2017)³¹

1. Introduction

Days after the December 2, 2015, San Bernardino shooting, then-presidential-nominee Donald Trump issued a statement calling for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." In the fuller version of this

statement, Trump expressed blanket distrust of all Muslims. Any policy that is born out of such hatred and ignorance is bound to spread more hate, as well as be vindictive and ineffective. While the statement was appreciated and cheered on by many Americans, it instilled dread in others. From the perspective of some, it was a signal that Muslims are something to be feared. Since then, President Donald Trump has switched strategies and his administration has worked through several iterations of the travel ban, such that the latest version does not explicitly discriminate on the basis of religion and has passed the test of the courts.

In this piece, however, I will not argue specifically about the current executive order in effect or about what is and what is not constitutional. This is because we have had many laws that passed the legal tests of their time, such as slavery, Jim Crow, the internment of Japanese Americans, and violations of LGBTQ rights. However, we came to realize that these violations were colossally unethical and immoral, and subsequently disavowed them. We know too well that laws of the land do not always correspond with the ethical and moral principles we ought to follow. It's also clear that the burden of our ethical misdirection is borne by the most vulnerable in our society. Here, then, I simply want to address some of the ethical and moral concerns that surround the issue of instituting a religion-based test for the purposes of immigration.

2. The Impracticality of It All

I begin by discussing a pragmatic concern: Would a religion-based immigration test serve any useful purpose?

Immigration to the United States of America is a process that is lengthy, expensive, and complicated. There are several different kinds of visas that a person can obtain to enter the United States. Many of these—for example, visitor visas, student visas, ambassador visas—cannot be transferred to immigrant status. And in order to qualify for such visas, the person must prove intent to *not* immigrate. Other visas do allow a person to transfer status from temporary visitor to permanent resident, most notably the H1B visa (given to skilled labor). However, the process is slow and cumbersome: You have to apply for such visas, wait the relevant period of time before applying for the transfer, wait for the transfer itself, and complete a great deal of documentation along the way. There are also visas given to people who are migrating to the United States with the intent to permanently settle (for example, spouses or children of American citizens), but these are increasingly difficult to get. Finally, the process of seeking asylum is perhaps the most complicated and fraught with bureaucracy. The vetting process for refugees is quite extensive: It takes an average of two years from the time a family applies for refugee status to the time that they are actually approved for it. They not only are investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for terrorism ties, but also go through a vetting process by the United Nations. This does not include the time that it might take them to get to a refugee camp from their area of conflict or the time it takes for them to become citizens.

But *all* the above processes also undergo extensive investigation on part of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Each step of the process

requires the immigrants and the refugees to show proof of everything that they claim in their file. The application can take anywhere from two years to as long as a decade. This can be followed by several years of probation, and then another set of paperwork and fees with more documentation, until a person finally becomes a citizen. This is all to say that the current system is definitely in need of improvement, in that it needs clearer guidelines, a faster and more streamlined system, electronic modernization, a shorter path to citizenship, etc. Instead, imposing a religious test adds another cog in the already cumbersome system—a cog, as argued below, that serves absolutely no utility and is completely ineffective. The system in place is already quite thorough and exhaustive.

There are two ways such a test could be implemented. There could be an explicit test where we inquire about specific religious beliefs, or there could be an implicit one, where we might use some non-religious consideration as a proxy for religious identities and/or commitments.

If we consider the first option, it would be extremely hard to figure out exactly how we could laser focus on particular Islamic beliefs or practice. This is because religion is amorphous as it weaves in intricate and inseparable ways with people's lives, and it would be difficult to separate problematic aspects of the religious belief or practice as a distinct entity. For example, let us examine beliefs about *jihad*. *Jihad* means to strive in the way of God, and is primarily understood by most Muslims to mean that one ought to strive to better oneself against one's own flaws. It also refers to striving through one's actions (e.g., giving charity) or words (e.g., writing works that inspire peace) to make this world a more just and compassionate place because those are the sorts of actions that would help one gain nearness to God. And, of course, it also refers to striving against oppression and injustice, in some cases, by means of war. *Jihad* refers to all of these notions and much more, and for many, it is an inseparable part of what it might mean for someone to be Muslim. There is no distinct aspect of *jihad* that one can pick apart, because all these notions are interconnected and inseparable and play varying parts in how one might practice one's faith.

However, for the sake of this essay, let us imagine a world where we could figure out which theological elements of Islam we found most objectionable to our pluralistic society. Furthermore, imagine that we could formulate a set of questions that cross-examined applicants about those elements of their religion during the immigration process, perhaps something akin to the existing question on the Naturalization Form N-400: "Have you ever been a member of or in any way associated (either directly or indirectly) with the Communist Party?" Suppose further that we were to add another interview to the process that focused solely on asking applicants about their religious beliefs. Even if we were able to do all this, there is no system of enforcement that could assure us that applicants are responding with sincerity.

Faith is something that is entirely too personal to be evaluated by a bureaucracy. For the most vulnerable among the applicants, even if they did not have anything to hide, they would be likely to alter their responses to fit the narrative they think that others want to hear from them, all so that they can escape

immediate and life-threatening violence. And of course, people who are intent on committing acts of terrorism in the name of Islam would lie about their malevolent intent. More importantly, interview portions of the immigration process already ask applicants questions that are pertinent to national security, and the USCIS already conducts extensive investigations into each applicant's background before and after these interviews. The process is far from perfect, often relying on the discretion of immigration officers, but the fundamental point here is that introducing a religion-based test is not going to add anything useful or constructive to the existing bureaucratic process; it simply adds more bureaucracy.

Now let us consider an implicit test, like the one that was upheld by the Supreme Court in June 2018, where nationals of seven countries, five of which are predominantly Muslim, are barred entry to the United States. In this particular case, critics would argue that the Trump administration may be using nationality to keep out Muslim terrorists. The problem is that nationality is not a good predictor of who is likely to be a terrorist. For example, as of writing this in 2019, none of the countries cited in the executive order have had any citizens that have ever committed a terrorist attack on U.S. soil. In fact, the current executive order, titled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," would not have prevented the male shooter in San Bernardino, as he was born in Chicago. Ultimately, any implicit test would rely on creating a racialized, fictitious Muslim identity that non-Muslim Americans are made to fear. I discuss this in the next section.

For now, it is important to note that the very idea of having a religion-based immigration test, whether it'd be an explicit or an implicit one, simply does not make practical sense.

3. Fostering Islamophobia

If a religious test within the immigration process only adds to an already cumbersome bureaucratic system and cannot be effectively administered to serve the objective of identifying and keeping out terrorists, what then would be the purpose of having such a test? It would seem plausible to say that such a test is designed to foster Islamophobia. But even if one is charitable and agrees that this is not the actual intent of instituting such a test, it is still its inevitable outcome.

Historically, the United States has engaged in deterring immigration of certain religious sects. For example, in the early 1600s, the Virginia charter specifically expressed disdain for Catholics and required immigrants to swear allegiance to the Church of England. Similarly, a Massachusetts law³² imposed fines on ships that brought Quaker immigrants to its shore. Such restrictions were based on unfounded fear of the "other" and xenophobic notions of what these religions constituted. They were the state's way of controlling who it deemed undesirable based on discriminatory standards. We should learn from our mistakes and not fall into prejudice yet again, based on our latest set of fears about the unknown.

Today, some Americans seem to fear and hate Islam and Muslims. Much of the rhetoric that surrounds Islam seems misinformed at best and intentionally malicious at worst. For example, former national security advisor Michael Flynn was reported as saying: "Islam is a political ideology masked behind a religion, using religion as an advantage against us . . . Sharia, the law of Islam, OK? Sharia is the law. Just like our Constitution is our law."³³ Rhetoric such as this appeals to our fear about the threat that Islam poses as a religion to our values and national security. Flynn here implies that Islam is not a religion in the same ways that Christianity and Judaism are, but that it is a malignant cancer bent on destroying our country.³⁴

It is true that sharia refers to laws that ought to guide actions, but sharia for Muslims encompasses laws about a great number of things; for example, how to offer one's prayers, fast, or give charity. In fact, much of sharia is about how one ought to act as an individual. That is to say, sharia at its core is about day-to-day behavioral guidance. Any Muslim who observes any aspect of their faith or partakes in any ritual is following sharia. Sharia *also* guides war and has a rich tradition of reflection on just war theory. Often terrorists have little background in theology, and if they attempted to understand Islamic scholarship on war and social justice, it might make them realize that their actions cannot be rooted in the mainstream understanding of Islamic beliefs practiced by the vast majority of the global Muslim population. Prominent Islamic scholars across various sects and religious schools of thought routinely condemn terrorist tactics and underscore how such actions are antithetical to Islamic beliefs. Sharia can be an all-encompassing guide—just as encompassing and comprehensive as the rich Christian or Judaic traditions on war and social justice.

Furthermore, according to a study, Muslims who attend a mosque are less likely to radicalize. On the contrary, religious affiliation may actually be a good thing for promoting civic participation.³⁵ Thus, comments such as Flynn's only inflame the American tendency to fear Muslims. If we were to institute a test on all incoming immigrants to see whether they subscribe to a violent ideology, it would foster and sustain an environment of hate toward Muslims. Much like our mistakes in the past, a religion-based immigration test would rely on misconceptions and xenophobic notions of who Muslims are.

An immigration test based on religious beliefs assumes an essentialist view of Islam. As Mahmood Mamdani writes in his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, we should avoid what he terms *culture talk*. That is, we should not assume that cultures have a tangible essence that we can point to and attempt to explain politics in terms of the imaginary image of that culture. Instead, we should recognize that cultures change and adapt in various social and political contexts. It is quite easy to succumb to casting terrorism in simplistic terms of religion—person *x* is a Muslim, hence they hold belief *y*, and that is why they did *z*—rather than the complex historical and political conditions that contextualize our current predicament. No religion-based test can capture what is a quite complex issue. All it would do is reduce a rich and diverse population to a caricature of violence.

Once we have established an irrational fear of an entire group of people, it is easier to acquiesce to conditions that are discriminatory, cruel, and inhumane. Such a culture of fear fosters anti-Muslim racism, where the fictitious “Muslim” category is arbitrarily formed within the racist imagination. Random subjective markers, such as brown skin color, different clothing styles, beards, hijabs, accents, etc. form an illogical category in the minds of the anti-Muslim racist and ensures that we treat our Muslim citizens as perpetual outsiders. This is because if we follow the faulty logic that there is something about Islam that makes it violent, then any Muslim—and thus all Muslims—are potential terrorists. Muslims, including Muslim Americans and Muslim immigrants, would then be forced to split off parts of ourselves that might appear to others as unpatriotic.³⁶

Instituting a test based on religious beliefs would not only create intolerance of those who appear Muslim within America, but would also lead to inhumane immigration policies. Currently, civilians in countries such as Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan are experiencing extremely dire conditions at the hands of the very terrorists that we, as Americans, want to fight. Syria is the largest humanitarian crisis of our time, with millions displaced, fleeing the brutal combination of a horrific dictator, ISIL attacks, a civil war, and a lot of foreign interference. Barring entry to people who most need to flee from such gruesome violence is beyond cruel. Again, we must remember our past when we, as Americans, turned ships of fleeing Holocaust survivors away because of the pervasive anti-Semitism of the time. We must not be complicit in history repeating itself and vehemently fight back any measure that fosters Islamophobia with the consequences of instituting cold-hearted policies.

4. Surveillance of Thought

So far, I have argued that a religion-based immigration test is impractical and fosters Islamophobia. Now I want to now look at the problematic aspects of the broader issue of government-instituted thought policing.

Suppose we live in a country where there is a mass shooting every two weeks. We don’t know when and where the next one might happen, but after each one, our nation is traumatized. We grieve for our fellow country folk who died in the latest tragedy and fear for our loved ones being the next victims. After looking at the data, we figured out that most of our mass shooters are white males, born and raised in our society. We have reasoned that it is because these mass murderers ascribe to a combination of toxic masculinity and white supremacy. We recognize that in this hypothetical society, there are many good white men out there and most do not subscribe to such radical ideologies, yet the evidence appears undeniable. We then decide that the best course of action is to have all white males in our nation’s high schools, universities, and workforce between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five undergo an extensive vetting process to ensure that they are not potentially our next shooter. We call each white male in at our registration sites throughout the country, register them into a database of white men, photograph and fingerprint them, and then question them at length about their beliefs regarding equality between genders, the racist and sexist norms they

might subscribe to, and the role models they follow. We also screen their past to make sure it's not indicative of racial and gender bias. Men who raise concerns are then subject to greater scrutiny and surveillance from the government. If this sounds preposterous, then so should the idea of government-administered ideological tests. They are both forms of thought policing.

It's true that we have different obligations to citizens than we do to non-citizens, and the hypothetical scenario above concerns citizens. And perhaps it's true that we should be able to screen those who come into our country. However, as argued in the previous sections, an immigration test is not a practical or effective way to keep out dangerous folks. Second, given the incredible importance that Americans have attached to the principles of religious freedom and being innocent until proven guilty, we should be worried about any screening process—effective or ineffective—that conflicts with them. And surely any screening process that fosters Islamophobia, as this one would, conflicts with them. Third, we should remember that whenever the United States has instituted ideological policing in the past, it has almost always been to characterize certain populations as traitorous. An immigration test that's administered to immigrant Muslims is bound to shift the perception of Muslim American citizens in that way. In this section, I focus on the notion of thought policing itself, and the harms it can perpetuate.

There have been times in history when we have investigated people based on their beliefs, most notably during the McCarthy era in the 1950s. Senator Joseph McCarthy was convinced that communist and Soviet spies had infiltrated various American institutions and that these people needed to be investigated by a committee (with the rather unbelievable name “the House Un-American Activities Committee”). He not only accused respected high-level officials—such as General George Marshall—of being communists, but also went after artists, musicians, people in Hollywood, and writers of the time. Many of them were Jewish. He also accused people of being gay (at a time when gay sex was illegal, and homosexuality was seen as a psychological illness) and attempted to use the full force of the state's apparatus to determine which individuals were detrimental to U.S. security and moral values. Today, that period of American history is remembered as a shameful one, where folks were interrogated based on unsubstantiated and reckless allegations. It led to a nationwide witch hunt based on a supposed “Red Menace” that not only fostered a fear of communist subversion but also contributed to widespread anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

In 2011, Representative Peter T. King of New York, who was then the chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee in Congress, began an inquiry into “the radicalization” of the Muslim American community—literally placing a person's faith on trial. Many called King's hearings McCarthy-style inquisitions that would put law-abiding Muslim Americans and their religious convictions on the stand.³⁷ According to the Muslim Congressman Keith Ellison's testimony during the hearings, much of the FBI's intelligence over the years has come from Muslim Americans and these hearings would hold an entire community accountable for the actions of a few individuals.³⁸

A government-backed inquiry into ideological beliefs is a dangerous precedent to follow, especially when it comes to communities that are already stigmatized and vulnerable within the larger society. Once a tool for surveilling people's ideologies is put in place, its parameters can evolve to suit the needs of the state and what it deems as threatening. The primary purpose of a state apparatus then becomes to preserve itself rather than to serve the people. There was a time when the U.S. government considered civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights movements as active threats to the state. The state did not see these movements for what they were, quintessentially American values in action; instead, they viewed them as a threat to the country. The FBI had infiltrated aspects of each of these movements, just as the FBI had recently infiltrated mosques and Muslim student associations. This sort of micro-policing leads not just to the suppression of free speech, but also to a hostile relationship between the state and its people. Additionally, it makes minorities into outsiders. If a persecuted community challenges the state to do its job better, instead of being viewed as patriotic and politically participatory citizens, they can be considered an enemy of the state. Opposition to war, to police brutality, etc. may then be viewed as unpatriotic, rather than pushing America to be its best.

Furthermore, thought policing religion via the state is antithetical to American values. There are many abhorrent beliefs that we tolerate in the name of protecting religious liberty. We certainly know of U.S. Christian religious communities that shun and discriminate against the LGBTQ community, or that do not extend religious leadership roles to women, or religious communities that refuse life-saving treatment to their minors in the name of religion, or those that blame natural catastrophe on the moral failures of those suffering, etc. Certainly, such stances are harmful to a large subset of our society, resulting in hate crimes, moral judgment, death, and/or the amount of donations that the victims of a particular disaster receive. However, the government does not employ a test to ensure that only the "correct" or "non-harmful" interpretation of the religion is disseminated in our society.

There is a practical reason why we do not police people's thoughts and a philosophical reason as well. Practically speaking, we already have laws that protect society against harms of various sorts. We even have criminal charges for planning to commit harm. However, we do not police the thoughts of folks who believe that gays are destined to hell, even though homophobia results in a high number of hate crimes. The philosophical reason for not policing people for their beliefs is that our thoughts belong to us. No one else can really have access to them in the same way we do, nor should we be compelled to reveal our innermost thoughts without wanting to do so on our own terms. If and when a person begins to plan a crime, and the government has credible evidence of such planning, it already has the laws on the books to arrest and charge that person. Mere affiliation with the second largest practiced religion in world is not sufficient grounds for the government to destroy such a dearly held human value and mandate access to the beliefs of some of the most vulnerable, those fleeing war and genocide.

5. Conclusion

A religion-based immigration test would be an instance of thought policing, something that has historically been deployed by the state to further marginalize already persecuted communities. A thought policing mandate would destroy a dearly held value of having privacy of thought, and we already have laws that protect us against folks planning hateful crimes.

It is undeniable that an immigration test based on religion would be extremely hard to implement, and even if we figured out a way to execute it, it would only add more bureaucracy to an already inefficient immigration system. It would be completely ineffective in identifying terrorists; rather, it would make many Muslim immigrants ashamed and keen to hide a fundamental aspect of who they are. But it would not only impact immigrants, as non-Muslim Americans will absorb the notion that there is something inherently problematic about Muslims, creating a hostile environment toward their fellow Muslim American citizens. Most importantly, it would make us complicit in making desperate refugees, fleeing from immediate danger, even more vulnerable.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. For Fatima, what makes religion-based immigration tests impractical?
2. What distinction does Fatima make between explicit and implicit tests? What are the problems with each type?
3. How, in Fatima's view, do immigration tests based on religious beliefs promote anti-Muslim racism?
4. How are immigration tests based on religious beliefs a form of "thought policing"?
5. Ultimately, what practical and philosophical reasons does Fatima offer in support of her view that the government shouldn't investigate people based on their beliefs?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Fatima notes that it's plausible that religion-based immigration tests are designed to foster fear of and hatred toward the targeted religious group, but notes there could be a more charitable interpretation of such tests. What would that interpretation be?
2. Fatima suggests that using culture to explain politics can have the effect of oversimplifying people's understanding of the political situation in question and reducing religious and other cultural groups to false caricatures. Is it *ever* useful to explain political phenomena in terms of culture and/or religion? If so, when?
3. What is "preposterous" about using ideological tests to identify potential mass shooters? Do you think this is a good analogy for immigration tests based on religious beliefs?
4. Fatima asserts that people's beliefs—their thoughts—shouldn't be subject to investigation by the government. What kinds of criteria, if any, should governments use to screen people who wish to immigrate?

Case 2

On June 26, 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the travel ban under discussion in the introduction of Fatima's essay. Justice Breyer, joined by Justice Kagan, issued a dissenting opinion in which he posited that the legality of the president's executive order turns on whether it was indeed driven by hostility toward Muslims. Arguably, the morality of the order turns on the same question. Justice Breyer wrote:

The question before us is whether Proclamation No. 9645 is lawful. If its promulgation or content was significantly affected by religious animus against Muslims, it would violate the relevant statute or the First Amendment itself. . . . If, however, its sole *ratio decidendi* was one of national security, then it would be unlikely to violate either the statute or the Constitution. Which is it? Members of the Court principally disagree about the answer to this question, i.e., about whether or the extent to which religious animus played a significant role in the Proclamation's promulgation or content.*

What kind of information would you need to answer Breyer's question—that is, to determine whether Trump's executive order was primarily motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment? (Consider events leading up to and following the implementation of the order).

*https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/17pdf/17-965_h315.pdf

REPLY TO FATIMA

I. G.

Professor Fatima and I agree about several issues. First, we can't determine which aspect or version of Islam is to blame for the acts we call "Islamic terrorism." Moreover, even if we could, it would be impossible to find out who subscribes to it. That's why the only feasible religious tests are country bans and strict quotas. More importantly, Fatima and I agree about the ideals at stake: freedom of thought and religion. We are both concerned that preventing the followers of one specific religion from immigrating is in tension with the separation of church and state, constitutes government intrusion into private lives, and borders on thought surveillance.

This is where agreement ends, however: Fatima appears to think that we face an easy choice between liberty and tyranny. We don't. Thanks to radical Muslims, the West must choose between a state of terror perpetrated by self-appointed sharia police, and preemption of such terror by not letting in more potential terrorizers. I submit that the latter is the lesser of two evils.

South Park illustrates the reality of this dilemma. In one of its episodes, Jesus embarks on a violent rampage and kills several Iraqis to save Santa from captivity. In another, Mosaic Jews worship a bloodthirsty deity. Yet, the only episodes censored and pulled in its 287-episode history are the two that briefly showed the likeness of Muhammad (without any negative commentary).³⁹ Why? Answer: fear of violent retaliation. American entertainers can freely say that Catholic clergy are rapists who worship Spider Queen Lolth, they can call Joseph Smith a fraud

and his followers dumb, and they can show the Virgin Mary's anus spraying the pope's face with blood. But if someone airs a neutral image of Muhammad for two seconds, we must start worrying about cars getting turned over, buildings burning down, and people dying.

It could have been worse. In Europe, where Muslims make up about 4% of the population, folks don't worry about retaliation; *they expect it*. Directed a film criticizing Islam? You will be pulled down from your bicycle on an Amsterdam street and slaughtered while begging for your life.⁴⁰ Printed a Muhammed cartoon? You will be gunned down with assault rifles.⁴¹

When such things happen often enough, "secular" authorities will happily start censoring speech in the name of "religious tolerance," as they did in the case of Olympic gymnast Louis Smith, who made a video mocking Muslims and was suspended for two months.⁴² "Since when did the British start enforcing blasphemy laws?" you might ask. Answer: since Muslims moved in *en masse*.

So, the choice isn't between liberty and tyranny: It's between a society terrorized by Islam and a society shielded from it. We should close the door while we still can.

Fatima sees closing the door as futile, claiming that Trump's "Muslim ban" "would not have prevented the male shooter in San Bernardino, as he was born in Chicago." This is misleading because *the other shooter was born in Pakistan*. It's also illogical because the Chicago-born shooter's parents are Pakistani immigrants. When evaluating the effects of immigration policy we should ask what can be expected, not only from the first generation, but also from the next.

So, we should try to find a way of preventing parents such as Mr. Farook's from entering the United States, and for reasons Fatima herself eloquently articulated, the only feasible courses of action are bans or strict quotas. Which one should it be?

At first glance, quotas appear superior. Religiosity is inversely correlated with intelligence⁴³ and certain types of education.⁴⁴ The United States can use this to "skim the cognitive cream" of Muslim societies, letting in only those with exceptional intelligence and skills. This would greatly limit the total influx and decrease the overall religiosity of incomers. It would also benefit the United States, for the group in question tends to be hardworking, cultured, and law-abiding. Notice, this is close to what the United States is doing already. All that's new in this proposal is making high cognitive standards the exclusive criterion. Yet, a complete ban would be easier to implement. More importantly, it could also benefit Muslim societies themselves. By not stealing their best and brightest, we would let the Muslim world improve.

The life of John Snow (no, not the one in *Game of Thrones*) is an illustration of this benefit. Snow was a British physician who discovered what causes cholera. He lived before the germ theory was taken seriously. The popular belief at the time was that "bad air" caused cholera. Unlike his contemporaries, Snow suspected that the real cause was contaminated drinking water. He presented his idea to the Royal Society where he was met with ridicule, dismissal, and hostility. But Snow kept fighting. He documented hundreds of cases; interviewed

countless patients and relatives; examined water wells, septic pits, and street pumps; and put together a scientific masterpiece proving that it was the water. Still, the old guard resisted and sabotaged him. Despite his hard work and genius, Snow enjoyed recognition only posthumously. But thanks to the uphill battle he fought against ignorance and superstition, London was the first city in the world to eradicate cholera.

Now the key question: “Would John Snow have stayed in his home country and fought his battle if he could have immigrated to a better, freer land, one where his work was supported rather than mocked?” I am not sure that he would have. I wouldn’t have. I didn’t.

I would love to believe that humanity’s progress is the handiwork of the common man. In reality, however, great advances are owed almost entirely to the gifted and industrious few. Societies that lose their Avicennas, Spinozas, and Snows remain in darkness. Perhaps that’s what’s wrong with Muslim societies today: Those like Fatima and me, and too many others more intelligent and creative than we are, sailed beyond the sunset and the baths of all the Western stars. Perhaps we should stay home and fight for our liberty, and for yours.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. In I. G.’s view, what sets Islam apart from the other religions he mentions?
2. According to I. G., what is at stake if the United States does not implement a religion-based immigration policy that targets Muslims? How does this differ from Fatima’s view?
3. Why, according to I. G., might a complete restriction of immigration from Muslim societies be better than a strict quota?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. I. G. posits that “not letting in more potential terrorizers” is the lesser of two evil options. What is evil about this option, in his view? In yours? Or is there perhaps nothing evil about it? What do you think of this way of framing the dilemma?
2. I. G. writes, “[W]e can’t determine which aspect or version of Islam is to blame for the acts we call ‘Islamic terrorism.’” To what extent do you think Islam or some aspect of it is to blame? What other factors, if any, should be taken into consideration when thinking about the causes and context of violent extremism?
3. According to I. G., admitting exceptionally intelligent and skilled people from Muslim societies to the United States would be beneficial for the United States. Perhaps it would also demonstrate respect for their desires and improve their quality of life. Do you think “letting the Muslim world improve” is a more important or otherwise better goal? Why or why not?
4. Is I. G. ignoring the possible negative effects of immigration restrictions on Western countries?

REPLY TO I. G.
SABA FATIMA

I must begin by condemning the treatment that I. G. was subjected to by his tormentors. Child abuse never has any justification. I also agree with I. G. that one ought not to dismiss another's argument simply because it is rooted in personal experience or is motivated by emotions. In fact, I would go even further and say that personal experiences offer us a phenomenological account, invaluable testimony, and nuanced narrative of how oppression works, all of which cannot be garnered from an outsider report of events. So I commend and thank I. G. in having the courage to share some of his experiences to shine a light on this particular sort of trauma.

I. G.'s main argument is that Islam produces "a culture of fear," such that most practitioners of the religion remain silent, and hence become complicit in the atrocities that a minority of Muslims commit. Thus we should limit Muslim immigration into this country.

Let me start by noting that other mainstream religions have been used to incite violence. The United States has a brutal history, where Christianity was used to justify slavery and subjugation of an entire people for over a century. Slaves were forced to give up their religions, which included Islam.⁴⁵ Fast-forward into the nineteenth and twentieth century, and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) drew its foundation from Protestant Christianity, burning crosses on the lawns of blacks and their white allies to instill fear. For Klan members, they embodied "one hundred percent American values," "but the Klan's unity was narrowly limited to those people they thought qualified as truly American—only white Protestants."⁴⁶ The amount and intensity of violence perpetrated by the KKK in the United States, up until the 1970s, cannot be understated. Even now, there has been a resurgence of white nationalist groups that draw their foundations from the KKK.⁴⁷ Does this mean that white versions of the Protestant faith are ideologically racist?

If we step outside of the United States, we observe that in China, up to a million Uighurs are being held in detention camps so that the government can cleanse the captives of Islam. The Uighurs are a Turkic Muslim minority in China. They are currently being detained for displaying any religious affiliation to Islam and are subjected to "physical and verbal abuse by guards; grinding routines of singing, lectures and self-criticism meetings; and the gnawing anxiety of not knowing when they would be released."⁴⁸ Should we screen immigrating Chinese persons on this basis?

Similarly, Buddhist-majority Myanmar has been conducting its own ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims, creating the "world's fastest-growing humanitarian crisis."⁴⁹ Meanwhile, many Buddhist spiritual leaders and practitioners refuse to accept that there is even a crisis to begin with, while others look the other way. Should we have a test for Buddhists entering the country?

I give all these examples involving various religions to show that religion-based violence and oppression is neither something that is unique to Islam nor more likely than any other ideology to produce violence and a culture of fear.

In fact, the common thread in many of these acts of violence is authoritarianism. An authoritarian regime or structure is one where there is a strong central power that for the most part eclipses individual rights, limits free association of individuals, and arbitrarily exercises power without regard to accountability to constitutional law or to the subjects it governs. Modern-day China under Xi-Li, or Turkey under Islamist Erdoğan (or, for that matter, Turkey under *secularist* Atatürk⁵⁰), or North Korea under Kim Jong-un, or the Philippines under Duterte, would all be examples of authoritarian regimes. Only one of these examples involves a Muslim-majority country, yet many folks living under these regimes would attest to the sort of violence that I. G. describes in his essay. Authoritarian structures generally rely on intimidation, repression, corruption, and, most importantly, suppression of dissent via propagandist tactics. They also instill a culture of fear in their subjects that subdues them and prevents them from speaking out. Subjects of authoritarian regimes fear that they could be the next target of the power structure.

I would claim here that violence is precipitated by various factors, such as authoritarianism, colonialism, racism, xenophobia, misogyny, etc. All these systems of oppression act upon various aspects of our identities differently, depending on where we are situated. Islam is one such aspect of identity in many people's lives. A very tiny minority of Muslims find justification for violence in Islam, while the vast majority of Muslims find Islam to be a motivation for their daily acts of kindness and living a conscientious life on this earth. Something similar is true for any major religion, despite the examples mentioned above.

These points aside, my main worry about I. G.'s argument is that it relies on a purity test to determine who can enter the United States. If we follow I. G.'s logic of keeping out someone because of where they are from and what their religion is, we end up with a mythical "pure" notion of the United States, where we keep out all those we find undesirable. But as we know through history, our conception of who we consider desirable and undesirable shifts with our racist and xenophobic biases. Furthermore, with an immigration test such as this, it is not simply that we blame people for their beliefs—which, as I argued in my main piece, is nearly impossible to do—but rather we blame them for the sins of "their" people. We indict them as a collective and ignore the atrocities being inflicted on them at the hands of the very terrorists we claim to fight against. Having an immigration test based on religion subjects individuals to gatekeeping based on our misconceptions of their group identity. Such an immigration test is bound to lead us further down the path of xenophobia and racism.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. To what does Fatima attribute the violence that I. G. argues is produced by Islam?
2. Fatima uses the examples of detention and persecution of Muslim groups in China and Myanmar to illustrate what point?
3. What does Fatima mean when she says that I. G.'s argument relies on a "purity test to determine who can enter the United States"?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Does Fatima identify any points of agreement between her perspective and I. G.'s? Can you identify any?
2. To what extent do you think the immigration policies I. G. supports would "lead us further down the path of xenophobia and racism"? Why?

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19. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/14/if-islam-is-a-religion-of-violence-so-is-christianity/>
20. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/450-of-452-suicide-attacks-in-2015-were-by-muslim-extremists-study-shows/>

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