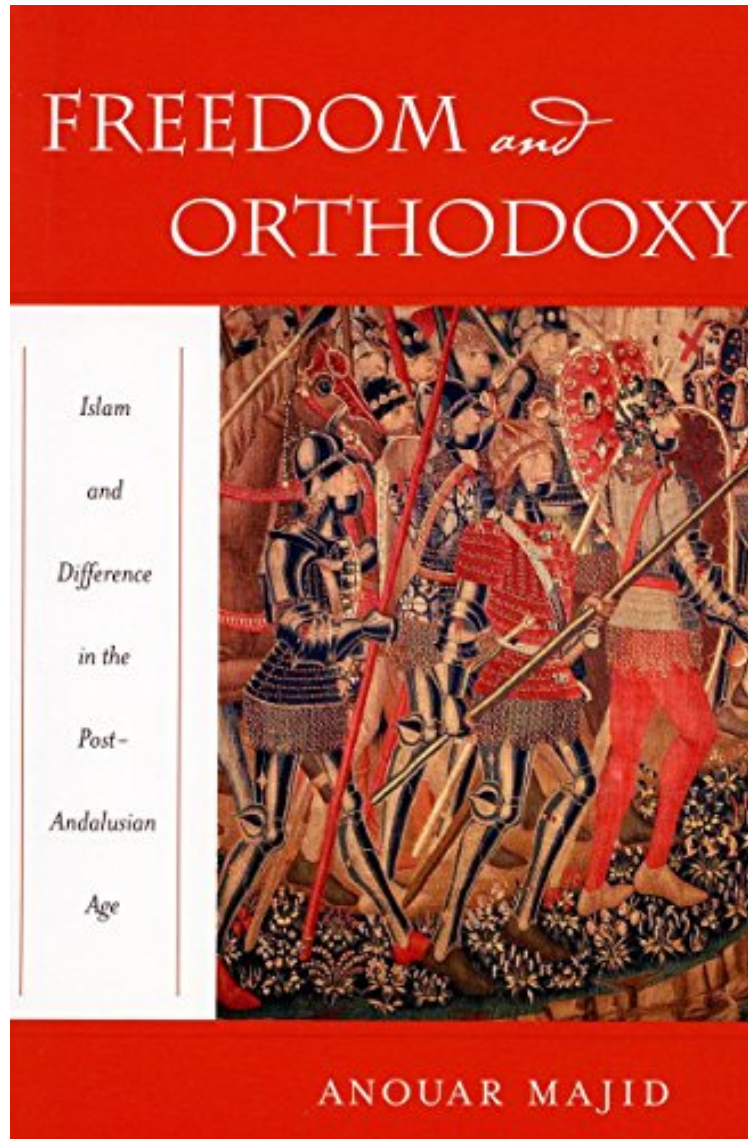


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Freedom and Orthodoxy: Islam and Difference in the Post-Andalusian Age

Anouar Majid

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Anouar Majid : Freedom and Orthodoxy: Islam and Difference in the Post-Andalusian Age before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Freedom and Orthodoxy: Islam and Difference in the Post-Andalusian Age:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. In Pursuit of Conviviality By A. J. Freedom and Orthodoxy provides

a concise and incisive critique of post-Andalusian history that reveals the brutal and exploitative relations that were generated between Western colonialist powers and their non-Western counterparts. Those readers that are familiar with Eric Wolf's masterful *Europe and the People without History* will find many intersecting threads with Professor Majid's stunning book. I believe that what separates Majid's book from Wolf's (besides length) is more attention to and development of super-structural or ideological factors that contributed to the ascendance of the West. Majid's starting point is the polymorphic nature of cultural relations that characterized much of Andalusian Spain prior to 1492. Despite a certain degree of tensions between Christians, Jews, and Muslims during this period, "Jews and Christians were able to develop their own arts and philosophies - and thus strengthen their own distinct identities - from within this flexible cultural mix." (22) The defeat of the last Islamic kingdom in Spain in 1492 marked the beginning of a tremendous shift in power between the Christian cultures in the West (primarily Spain and England) and other cultures and religions to the east and to the New World. It is no accident that Columbus embarked on his journey in 1492 and that it was funded by Spain. Now, of course, we know that Columbus sailed the wrong direction, but what he found when he 'discovered' the new continent was an opportunity, not just to exploit new sources of wealth, but also to Christianize newly discovered 'Muslims'. Majid develops a similarity matrix which demonstrates that the natives of the Western hemisphere were equated in the minds of the conquerors with the Muslims, Arabs, and Indians to the East. Majid argues that an 'Other' was created. It was mandated that this 'Other' convert to Christianity or else be subject to various punishments and justifiable exploitation. The double-bind inherent in the situation was that these people could never live up to the standards set for them because of races, languages, customs, and other cultural forms of being in the world. Professor Majid details the cruelty, stupidity, and injustice that these 'Others' were dealt with that makes the atrocities even more appalling to the sensibilities of relatively rational people today. In chapter three, Majid discusses the experience of the Native Americans at the hands of (primarily) English settlers in North America. This story is equally savage, but the mechanism of oppression shifts from one that is primarily based on religion in the case of the Spanish conquerors to one that is primarily based on the secular principles of economic theory of capitalism practiced by the English colonialists. Majid brings out into clear relief the contradictions in the writings of the founding fathers about the pursuit of liberty and the equality of men and the actual practices of the colonialist settlers. One gets the sense that he would like to hold us to our word. The question that Majid poses early in the book and which haunts the analysis from start to finish is whether this scenario could have been different or, alternatively, since the time for that is past, whether different cultures with their various religions and political and social organizations could co-exist in peace today. He sees the main problem as the universalizing of a given ideational system that excludes and demonizes alternative cultures and religions. This condition, in combination with the power to exercise dominion over the 'Other', leads, well, to domination. The book is primarily historical in analytical approach: Todorov's *The Conquest of America*, Barbara Fuchs' *Mimesis and Empire*, and Eric Hobsbawm's 'Age of ...' quartet are among frequently utilized sources. One incisive analytical source, which was not translated into English at the time, is Sophie Bessis' *Western Supremacy: the Triumph of an Idea*. Majid orchestrates his analysis with the help of these and other sources, many from the time of the conquests. Some of these texts show the deeply divided attitudes amongst the members of the oppressing parties. For example, *The Devastation of the Indies* by de Las Casas shows that some Spaniards were strongly opposed to the conquest of Latin America. Franciscan monks, such as de Sahagun, who studied the exploited cultures at length and up close, also expressed support for multi-cultural poly-vocality. These authors were condemned by the Spanish authorities, as Talavera had been, for supporting the independence of Moorish customs. The Reconquista, which stipulated that alien lands should be taken under Christian domain, laid down the law on such matters. In regard to the natives of North America, Majid utilizes the novels of several modern Native American authors, including Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, which paint fascinating portraits of Native American life in the aftermath of the colonialist siege. Chief Sitting Bull, famous for having General Custer killed at the Little Big Horn, put it simply: "The love of money is a disease among them." (123) It is difficult to convey the devastating power of Majid's lucid and cogent analysis. So one is almost surprised to discover that he thinks things could be otherwise. He attempts to outline some possible steps in that direction in the last chapter, which is entitled, *Provincialisms Now*. (I take it that he intends that title to imply opposition to 'Apocalypse Now' - which he, in my opinion, rightly believes to be the alternative. The architects of the American Revolution are amongst the principal guides he offers to follow here. Other guides include Terry Eagleton, Isaiah Berlin, and John Gray, whose book, *The Two Faces of Liberalism*, calls for an end for the homogenizing influences of globalization, the creation of a one size fits all universal ur-culture. The question is what can we do to facilitate the generation, acceptance, and even celebration of cultural differences? I think if one were to look around, we can see examples of both homogenizing and heterogenizing processes. I can get food items at the grocery store from other lands that I never even knew existed before a few years ago. There are also shows on TV and internet sources that will help me figure out what to do with these items in the kitchen. On the other hand, why do Volvos, BMWs, Hondas, Chevys, and Fords - one can identify a number of makes from each of these models, just to name a few - all look alike? I think we know the answer. The internet itself seems to be a prime example of contradictory forces. While I was reading Majid's book, I was also reading another by the neuroscientist Rodolfo Llinas, *I of the Vortex*. In the last chapter of that book, Llinas asks

whether there could be such a thing as a collective mind. He asks whether the internet is that collective mind. He says no, not yet, but he's worried that someday it might be. In other words, 'collective mind' might not be a good thing. He fondly remembers when traveling as a youngster how he "loved to see the richness of differences in cultures, beliefs, and viewpoints". (Llinas 257) He goes on to say that this doesn't seem to be the case so much today. Children in different parts of the world increasingly desire the same products (as per my automobile example above.) Llinas expresses anxiety over the possibility that the internet will lead to the homogenization of thought which will lead toward an inability to discern individual identity and possibly to the homogenization of society. He describes some facts of brain dynamics that lend themselves to tendencies to develop homogeneous preferences. Being a biologist, Llinas understands the value of diversity, since this is what evolution depends upon. He sees a species threatening danger lurking here. On the other hand, a friend of mine that is an ecologist and who is deeply involved in the study of environmental issues and the remediation of environmental ills, is encouraged by the fact that protest movements spring up spontaneously without leadership from above and that this makes it difficult to identify and contain such movements. The question then is whether the internet is the newest version of Hobbes' Leviathan or a many-headed gorgon? Anyway, Anwar Majid's book, though it takes us on a journey that begins with historical events that date to 1492, is a book that is relevant to the type of world that we will create for ourselves in the future. Provincialisms now, or sooner rather than too late, might be a useful option to consider. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By gld_9A creative historical, comparative, and conceptual assessment of Islam and modernity.

This book argues that the "clash of civilizations" that is supposed to be a feature of the post-Cold War environment is not necessarily caused by the dogma of world religions or cultural incompatibilities but by the inflexible and hegemonic universalisms that have characterized world history since 1492 a cultural outlook that Majid terms post-Andalusianism. The all-encompassing worldviews of Euro-American ideologies have resulted in the retreat of Islam and other non-European traditions into dangerous orthodoxies and a growing climate of suspicion, fear, and terror. Freedom and Orthodoxy offers an alternative to perennial discord, suggesting that the world needs a philosophy of the "provincial," one that reattaches individuals and societies to their heritages and memories but connects them to the rest of the world in solid, non-alienating, meaningful ways. For this to happen, Majid contends, globalization must be reimagined as a network of human solidarities and rigorous conversations across the world's multiple cultures, not as a mechanical process of economic expansionism.

" . . . Majid presents an all-encompassing view of significant aspects of history and suggests new conceptual avenues that may enable the world (including Muslims and non-Muslims) to move toward peace and harmony." (Middle East Journal)"This is an impressive book, written by an unrelenting scholar. The book is very well researched in terms of facts, very analytical, systematic and compelling in its arguments and above all unassailably profound, even passionate, in its substance." (The Muslim World)" . . . Majid's book is an ambitious work that weaves back and forth between writings by contemporary scholars, journalists, and political pundits, to great sweeping reviews of post-1492 world history centering on Europe, the American Revolution, and the treatment of indigenous peoples by Spanish and English colonists." (Itinerario)"Freedom and Orthodoxy is a brilliant apology for dismantling the hegemonic and false pretensions of western universalism in favor of a world in which local groups are allowed to construe their own strategies for cultural, political, and economic flourishing Majid expands and deepens his historical and philosophical analysis, exhorts both Muslims and westerners to search their souls, remove the roots of their own cherished certainties that exclude the Other (i.e., fundamentalisms), and engage in the path of creative dialog." American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences" In Freedom and Orthodoxy, Majid presents a strong argument for demolishing of what he sees as 'the homogenizing tendencies' (religious, cultural, and economic) of Western universalism . . . Majid shows an impressive understanding of the critical moments and issues of the twentieth century world . . . " (Joseph Wandera Journal for Islamic Studies) From the Inside Flap This book argues that the clash of civilizations that is supposed to be a feature of the post-Cold War environment is not necessarily caused by the dogma of world religions or cultural incompatibilities but by the inflexible and hegemonic universalisms that have characterized world history since 1492 a cultural outlook that Majid terms post-Andalusianism. The all-encompassing worldviews of Euro-American ideologies have resulted in the retreat of Islam and other non-European traditions into dangerous orthodoxies and a growing climate of suspicion, fear, and terror. Freedom and Orthodoxy offers an alternative to perennial discord, suggesting that the world needs a philosophy of the provincial, one that reattaches individuals and societies to their heritages and memories but connects them to the rest of the world in solid, non-alienating, meaningful ways. For this to happen, Majid contends, globalization must be reimagined as a network of human solidarities and rigorous conversations across the world's multiple cultures, not as a mechanical process of economic expansionism.