I would like respond to Salam El-Marayati’s editorial "Major Hasan and the Quran" (Op-ed, Dec. 9). Wahhabism’s offensive rhetoric toward Muslim scholars of various schools of thought and its disregard for Islamic intellectual history has been a pervasive problem in Muslim societies for two centuries. I hope Muslim communities will reevaluate such interpretations and consider the perspectives of the countless scholars who disagreed with Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab and his like.

There are indeed sane Muslim leaders (Imams) who hold extremist and intolerant views. They largely subscribe to Wahhabism. These individuals should be held accountable for their opinions and boycotted if they refuse to apologize for denigrating others. There is evidence that Major Hasan was zealous and misguided, but he may not belong to this category of people.

As a student of Islamic history and theology, I can recall a widely-accepted teaching of the Prophet Muhammad that three types of people are considered unaccountable for their actions: "a child until he reaches puberty; an insane man until he comes to his senses; and the one who sleeps until he wakes." This teaching is utilized in Islamic jurisprudence to determine the inculpability of one who commits a crime or fails to fulfill an obligation. A medieval Muslim jurist would provide witnesses or evidence to prove a person suffered from a mental illness that excused him of liability in such cases. Obviously, the American judicial system functions similarly in always establishing the mental competency of defendants before pursuing a conviction.

The mental state of Major Hasan during his outrageous rampage is of central importance. I would be saddened if the religious views of someone who lost their mind became the central theme of a discussion concerning the liability of their actions. If he was mentally incompetent during this act, then the court should find him not guilty by reason of insanity.

I am concerned that individuals will misinterpret Hasan's use of "Allahu Akbar" as an indication he was mentally competent at the time of the murders. If one were to visit a mental hospital, one will find many examples of schizophrenic Muslims who repeat the call to prayer or other litany at the top of their lungs every few minutes, because they believe it's time for daily worship (which is only five times a day).

Is it necessary for such a person to "take responsibility," seek "repentance," and "beg for forgiveness" for actions which they would not have committed had their mental faculties remained intact? I think it would be arrogant and unjust to request a mentally-ill individual to do any of the things Mr. El-Marayati has suggested, especially the callous proposal to disregard legal advice or due process and simply "confess" to 32 counts of premeditated murder. One should not be so quick to assume Hasan's mental competency during the time of his crime - as our judicial system and any jurist of Islamic law would require a psychological evaluation before any conviction. El-Marayati also wishes Hasan to disregard his right as a citizen to receive a fair trial with proper defense. However, for a mentally-ill defendant to confess full responsibility for his actions and refuse any defense would be a direct contradiction to the very scripture with which El-Marayati discusses: "Cast not yourselves into destruction with your own hands." (Quran 2:193).

There are many defendants with mental deficiencies who enter the judicial system and are ill-advised in their defense. Let's not encourage Hasan to become yet another example.

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