

9 *Muslims in the West and their attitudes to full participation in western societies: some reflections*

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The resurgence of political Islam in the mid twentieth century, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the terrorist attacks of recent decades have ignited a debate in the West that had been dormant for some time. Some western commentators, such as the Oriana Fallaci (2002), have argued that there is a fundamental divide between 'Muslim' values and 'western' values. They project an image of an Islam that is violent, fanatical and extremist, and intent on destroying western civilisation. For them, Muslims are engaged in a struggle for global dominance, control and subjugation of the religious 'Other'. Their views are reflected by numerous journalists, commentators and politicians: Le Pen in France, Jörg Haider in Austria and the late Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands; Hiryse Ali also in the Netherlands, for example. Similarly there are certain Muslims who argue that Islam and the West are on a collision course and there is no way that a coexistence is possible. While this is one view among Muslims there are others for whom such a simplistic view of coexistence is highly problematic.

Although this debate about Islam and the West is a broad one, my interest is in the Muslims living in the West. Part of this debate is the view held by many in the West that even those Muslims who are *citizens* of western states, and who have made the West their home, somehow are not prepared to coexist with the religious Other or are incapable of doing so for Islamic legal/theological reasons. Given the current alarm over Muslim terrorism (as we have seen in 9/11, Bali, Jakarta, Madrid and, more recently, London), some in the West argue that the Muslim presence in the West is a great concern. Others go even further and argue that Muslims in the West are a serious threat to western societies and that they should be countered by various decisive actions. For them, Muslims cannot be loyal citizens of a western nation-state because their loyalty is to Islam.

They are seen as a type of 'fifth column', quietly existing until the opportunity arises to challenge the secular nation-state – even violently – and to change it.

In this chapter I would like to explore one aspect of the debate in the West about Islam: how Muslims in the West think about the ability or otherwise of Muslims to coexist with non-Muslims in a western secular environment. I will use the term 'the West' in a rather restricted way to refer to a cultural-geographical entity primarily focused on western Europe, North America and Australia. I argue that Islam in the West, like Islam in the 'Muslim world', is a diverse and complex phenomenon that defies the single conception of Islam so prevalent today. I also argue that, contrary to what many believe, many Muslims in the West *are* coming to terms with western social, cultural and political environments, at least at a pragmatic level. That is, they are comfortable with modern western political and social values such as democracy, human rights, gender and religious equality, and the separation of religion and state. Of course, this shift in thinking was forced upon Muslims living in the West by circumstances and the need to survive in a new environment. Nevertheless, their adaptation was facilitated by the high degree of flexibility within the Islamic tradition, be it in law, ethics or theology, as well as by an environment in the West in which freedom of religion is important. While this is a positive development, there are disturbing trends among certain sections of Muslim communities in the West, who argue strongly that coexistence between Muslims and others in the West is both impossible and undesirable. Between the two extremes, however, there are many voices.

Islam in the West: an overview

Contrary to the popular notion that Islam in the West is a recent phenomenon mostly of the twentieth century, Islam, from its inception in the seventh century CE, has been part of the Christian West and the western psyche. Islam's interaction with the West occurred, first, through confrontation with the Christian Byzantine Empire in the seventh century; second, with the Muslim conquest of the Iberian peninsula and the subsequent 800 years of Muslim rule; third, through the Crusades of the late eleventh to the thirteenth centuries; and fourth, through the Ottoman conquests of Eastern Europe. More recently, the colonialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the

migration of large numbers of Muslims to western countries have formed large communities of Muslim minorities.

Interaction between Muslim and western societies has not always been confrontational. At times, there was mutual respect and interaction for the benefit of both sides: caliphs, sultans and emirs exchanged gifts with the emperors and kings of Europe. From the beginning, Muslims and Christians in the West engaged in trade between the Muslim world and Christian Europe despite wars and papal decrees not to engage in trade with the 'infidel' Muslims. There were diplomatic relations and the transfer of knowledge, Greek philosophy and mathematics being a famous example. In many cases, conflict and the invasion of territory was not the result of religious difference; often it was for political or economic gains. This long view of history is both useful and dangerous; useful in that we can see that crises occur and are resolved, but dangerous in that memory can lead to generalisations and also perpetuate grievances. We should not make the generalisation that the interaction between the Muslims and Christians in Europe was always negative and hostile.

Although the Muslim presence in the West is *not new*, significant permanent Muslim populations in western Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia are relatively recent, particularly in the post-colonial era. This presence is no small matter, as Timothy Savage (see below) in his research highlights, although the figures given here should be taken with some caution as reliable data are difficult to get. In Europe, it is believed, there are approximately 23 million Muslims, making up nearly 5 per cent of the population. Approximately 50 per cent of Muslims in western Europe were born there. The Muslim birth rate in Europe is, in some European countries, higher than that of non-Muslims, and as a result Muslim communities in certain European countries are significantly younger than the non-Muslim population. In France, for example, one-third of France's five million Muslims are under the age of 20, compared to 21 per cent of the French population as a whole. In Germany, one-third of Germany's four million Muslims are under the age of 18 (compared to 18 per cent of the German population) (Savage 2004: 28).

Migration and birth rate have been the major factor in the increase of Muslim population in Europe. Conversion to Islam is only a minor one, making up less than 1 per cent of all Muslims in Europe. According to Savage (2004: 28), '[f]rom this low base, however, conversions could develop as a new and potentially significant source not only of

the growth of the Muslim presence in Europe but also of its voice and visibility'. One estimate cited is that Muslims will comprise at least 20 per cent of the European population by 2050. Savage (2004: 28) even predicts that one-quarter of France's population could be Muslim by 2025. While many scholars might consider these figures to be indeed off the mark and alarmist, such figures increase the fear that the West is facing a threat to its existence. This also implies other challenges for western governments, not only in Europe but also in North America and Australia. As Savage (2004: 38–9) says: 'The increasing Muslim presence in Europe has reopened debates on several issues: the place of religion in public life, social tolerance in Europe, secularism as the only path to modernity, and Europe's very identity.' One of the ways European countries respond to this 'Muslim factor' is by 'effectively nationalizing, if not secularizing, Islam'. Savage adds, 'These governments are trying to foster nationally oriented Islams subordinate to the state as well as European norms stretching back to the Treaty of Westphalia, the Enlightenment, and Napoleonic rule.' These measures include providing imams with education in local languages and culture, building mosques with local finance to avoid investment from Arab sources, restricting the wearing of the *hijab* (Islamic headscarf), and virtually 'shoehorning Muslim organizations into structures that correspond to national objectives, such as Belgium's Central Body for the Islamic Religion' (Savage 2004: 41).

The policy, however, has so far not been highly successful, as often governments have favoured certain groups of Muslims over others, and have taken measures that have come to be too sensitive (as is the case of the headscarf in France) and thus alienated a large part of the Muslim communities. Such efforts at nationalising or secularising Islam have had a negative impact on the emergence of a fully western form of Islam. A western form of Islam must come from within the Muslim community rather than be imposed by a national government. It should be an authentic response from the Muslims themselves as the governments' involvement in matters – involving religious practice – often backfires.

Different views on the nature of Islam: Islam is not necessarily one

Much of the fear of Muslims in the West is based on the belief that Islam is an indivisible whole: that Muslims all over the world form a single, homogeneous community with the same beliefs, values, practices

and institutions. According to this view, regardless of where they come from, Muslims are all the same. That they come from many ethnic, linguistic, cultural or theological, spiritual or legal backgrounds, is often disregarded. While this view is quite popular in the West and much of the popular imagination in the West often relies on this view of Islam and Muslims, others argue for a more nuanced view. They argue that such a simplistic and essentialist notion of what Islam is, and who Muslims are, is fundamentally flawed. These critics argue against labelling all Muslims in a negative manner on the basis of the actions of certain groups among Muslims.

The reality of Islam and Muslims is quite different. Wherever Muslims live in the West, from France to the United States to Australia, their communities are diverse. No single voice or culture is dominant. What the American Muslim scholar Aminah McCloud (2003: 159) says about the United States applies to Muslims elsewhere in the West:

The American Muslim community is at once a mosaic, and a tattered quilt. Orthodox, heterodox, Sunni, Shi'i, and Sufi all make claims of Islam in the United States. Because there is no official or state-sponsored Islam, all find sanctuary and voice. Exiled princes and authors, refugees, and asylum seekers from the Muslim world jockey for a platform to represent Islam along with first, second, and third generation converts of African and European American descent. The cacophony of voice raised is dynamic, if sometimes deafening. The variety of discourses is as wide as the many ethnicities in the Muslim community.

It is also assumed that all Muslims in the West are believers: fully practising, 'committed' Muslims. Again, this view is highly misleading. Muslims are like any other religious community. There are those who are committed, practising and deeply religious. Equally there are those who are simply nominal or 'cultural' Muslims. Tariq Ramadan (1999) observes that, in Europe, probably half of Muslims are nominal Muslims. The same would most likely apply to elsewhere in the West.

Can Muslims live under non-Muslim rule? Juristic analysis of the pre-modern period

A legalistic debate on full participation of Muslims in western societies usually begins with questions along the lines of: can Muslims live under non-Muslim rule? Can a Muslim be fully Muslim without sharia?

As for Muslims living under ‘non-Muslim rule’, the Qur’an saw the Muslim presence among non-Muslims in Mecca (610–22 CE) as normal during the time of the Prophet. It was only after the Prophet established a ‘Muslim’ territory in Medina following his migration from Mecca that the Qur’an asked Meccan Muslims to migrate to Medina (Qur’an 2:218, 4:89) as a way to consolidate and strengthen the Muslim community. This instruction was not a specific command to migrate from a ‘non-Muslim’ to a ‘Muslim’ territory as such. On a number of occasions, the Qur’an indicates that what matters is not whether Muslims live in non-Muslim areas but whether in such areas they are free from oppression and persecution. The Prophet encouraged Muslims to flee persecution in Mecca and seek refuge with a Christian ruler in Abyssinia. When his teaching spread across Arabia, the Prophet accepted that individual Muslims would live among and sometimes be ‘ruled’ by pagans, and Christians under the ‘rule’ of their non-Muslim tribes.

Pronouncements in the Qur’an and the practice of the Prophet provided the basis for the classical Muslim jurists (*fuqaha*) to debate the issue of a Muslim’s residence under non-Muslim rule. Moreover, early in the development of Islamic law in the seventh and eighth centuries CE, the jurists were interpreting such texts in the light of the sociopolitical situation of their own time. The most apparent ‘fact’ at the time was the existence of a powerful caliphate ruling in the name of Islam, under which Muslims as a whole formed a community and in which Islam remained supreme. Non-Muslims were not seen as equal to Muslims and residence in non-Muslim territories was seen as problematic.

Malik (d. 769), who represents the strictest school of law with regard to Muslim residence under non-Muslim rule, stated that Muslims should not reside in non-Muslim territories. Malik also disapproved of Muslims travelling to non-Muslim lands even for business. This position was adopted by Maliki jurists and has been maintained until the early modern period, particularly in North Africa. While Maliki tended to be the strictest with regard to Muslim residence under non-Muslim rule, the other schools of law such as Shaff’i, Hanbali, Hanafi and the Shi’a were more lenient and flexible. For instance, Tabari (d. 923), a commentator on the Qur’an, believed that the ability to practise religion is the key determinant in any discussion on the permissibility of Muslim residence. For Shaff’i (d. 820), Muslims may reside

in non-Muslim territories if there is no fear that they may be enticed away from their religion. For him it was the practical dangers for one's religion that were the main consideration. The Hanafi jurist Shaybani (d. 805) argued that Muslims were not obliged to migrate from a non-Muslim to a Muslim territory. Abu Hanifa (d. 767) believed that non-Muslim territory should not be a permanent place of residence for Muslims. For Shi'a, in some cases, it might even be better to reside in a non-Muslim territory because that territory might be free from persecution and oppression. (Abou El Fadl 1994: 134–5).

Among the ideas that dominated the thinking of jurists on the question of residence was that by residing under non-Muslim rule, they would inadvertently be strengthening the 'enemy', that they might be acquiring certain undesirable values and norms from non-Muslims, and that they would be compromising the notion of the supremacy of Islam over other religions. While some form of social interaction with non-Muslims was unavoidable, a strict separation at least at a theological-legal level was seen as important, doubtless justifying such positions on selected Qur'anic and *hadith* texts that appear to emphasise the supremacy of Islam.

This politico-military dominance of Islam and Muslims suffered a battering from the eleventh century CE onwards. This is evident in the case of the Christian reconquest of Spain and the Mongol invasion of the eastern parts of the Muslim world. In both cases, Muslims came under direct non-Muslim rule on a large scale, leading to extensive debates among Muslim jurists on how Muslims in those contexts should live. Some jurists accommodated the changed reality into their thought and argued that Muslims should accept non-Muslim rule, while others, such as the Malikis in North Africa, argued for migration of Muslims from Spain to Muslim lands.

*From pre-modern debate to contemporary reality:
Muslims in a new environment*

Even though the jurists have proposed a variety of views on the issue, Muslims have been living under non-Muslim rule for centuries. But living as citizens in the West is relatively new. On the whole, Muslim *residence* in the West is largely a phenomenon of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Today, these Muslims are subject to each country's constitution and laws. Usually, no concession is given to

religious communities to govern aspects of their lives according to their religious or traditional laws (except in some aspects of family law). Citizenship requires commitment to the institutions of the State. State involvement in religious matters is minimal and usually there is a separation of church and state.

Nor is there clear guidance in Islamic law or ethics for these citizens of the West, except some general principles and a few indirect cases or precedents from which they have to construct what is appropriate for them. Thus Muslims in the West are attempting to find new answers to new problems. Many early juristic views do not seem to be particularly helpful in the present context. Given that Islamic law was developed as the supreme law in the lands where Muslims ruled, Muslim jurists did not address in sufficient detail the case of Muslims living permanently as minorities under non-Muslim rule. The natural state of affairs, from the point of view of the jurists, was Muslim rule over Muslims, and the legal system was to be based on 'Islamic law'. Any other situation was simply seen as an exception and did not warrant developing an edifice of law for such an exception.

For Muslims in the West today, however, the exception has become the norm. Muslim minorities exist in all countries in the West and the numbers are increasing. In the pre-modern period it was relatively easy for religious communities – even if they were minorities – to function as a single entity and unit under a different system of rule. This was because of the way religious communities were treated in many great empires where freedom to practise their religion under the guidance of their religious leaders was given, as was the case with the Ottoman millet system. Religious communities were considered independent entities with their own norms, rules and laws. In the modern period, the emergence of nation-states based on the idea of common citizenship has changed that situation dramatically.

Four trends of Islam in the West: participation and isolationism

Observers of Muslim presence in the West propose many ways in which one can classify, categorise and discuss Muslims in the West. I would like to identify four trends that are based on the following criteria:

- The relationship of Muslims in the West to a particular land, nation or country. I call this the 'national dimension'.

- The extent to which Muslims emphasise tradition and past interpretations of the religion (and literal reading of the sacred texts of Islam). I call this the ‘traditional dimension’.
- The extent to which Muslims are activists in projecting their particular brand of Islam and are influenced by certain twentieth-century Muslim thinkers and movements. I call this the ‘ideological dimension’.
- The extent to which Muslims have an anti-western bias or consider themselves part of western society. I call this the ‘approach-to-the-West dimension: isolationism vs. participation’.

A range of views exists among Muslims as far as their attitudes to western societies is concerned: Muslims living in the West but hostile to the West, Muslims living in the West grudgingly and with no interest in being part of western society, Muslims living in the West with some admiration for its values but undecided as to whether they want to be full members of the society, and Muslims who are ‘western’ by virtue of where they were born and live and have no difficulty in being western and Muslim.

Based on the above, we may classify Muslims in the West into four trends. The first three trends are part of the broad category of ‘isolationists’ or ‘semi-isolationists’, while the fourth trend comprises ‘participants’:

- (i) Ethno-national/traditionalist/non-ideological/isolationist;
- (ii) Transnational/semi-traditionalist/ideological/semi-isolationist;
- (iii) Transnational/traditionalist/non-ideological/isolationist;
- (iv) Indigenous/non-traditionalist/non-ideological/participant.

Most readers probably would have no difficulty in understanding the first three categories. The fourth, however, may be seen as improbable and even a contradiction in terms. Can a Muslim be fully western, American, European or Australian? I will argue, however, that it is the fourth trend that is, or is becoming, one of the most important trends in Muslim communities, mainly at a pragmatic level.

Isolationists

(i) *Ethno-national/traditionalist/non-ideological/isolationist*

This represents the form of Islam that early migrants brought to the West when they arrived in places like the United States, France, the

United Kingdom and Australia from the Middle East, north Africa, the Indian sub-continent and southeast Asia from the nineteenth century onwards. They brought with them their legal schools and local understandings of what it means to be Muslim, such as in dress and the role of women in society, and in foods and customs. In the United Kingdom, it was the cultural norms from the Indian sub-continent that predominated. In France, it was Algerian and later other north African norms. In Australia it was initially the Afghans, Turks and the Lebanese. In the United States, it was largely the norms of Arab migrants from the Middle East. Given that specific legal schools dominated the thinking of Muslims with regard to what was Islamically acceptable, the earliest settlers brought a conception of Islam that was highly legalistic and traditionalist. This legalism and traditionalism continues to dominate much of the thinking in significant Muslim circles in the West.

These traditionalists argue for a strict following of the 'authorised' interpretations of their particular legal school. Where possible, they prefer to be as faithful to the literal reading of the ethical-legal texts of Islam. This form of Islam is characterised by a huge diversity of expression as it is largely ethnically based, coloured by Islam from 'back home'. Its focus is primarily on basic rituals such as prayer and fasting, as well as on Islamic practices brought from places of origin. Many of this generation established institutions such as mosques, basic teaching facilities for religious instruction and Islamic centres, and procured facilities such as halal meat as well as space for Muslim cemeteries. They are often 'isolationist' in their attitude to the host country and have little interest in local issues: politics, economic or legal.

(ii) Transnational/semi-traditionalist/ideological/semi-isolationist

This trend was introduced into the West in the twentieth century by two groups of Muslims: the first being students from the Arab world, who were influenced by the thought of the Muslim Brotherhood, and from the Indian sub-continent, who were influenced by Jamaat-i-Islami; and the second being Muslim activists who had to flee the Arab world because of their association with the Muslim Brotherhood movement.

This form of Islam was attractive to a large number of the young, many of whom were university students, as it presented a more

'modern' and 'activist' form of the creed. For instance, those who were influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood had an activist agenda; they targeted the youth, organising study circles, emphasising the need to be involved in the development of the community and pursuing an agenda of propagation of Islam (*da'wa*). They were among the most vocal opponents of assimilation and played an important role in establishing Muslim student organisations on university campuses. In the United States since the 1970s, for instance, they have continued to play an important role in Muslim intellectual and social life to this day.

In the early 1970s their message tended to be defensive and apologetic and emphasised a distinct Muslim identity vis-à-vis the 'western'. Purists in this group viewed the West in negative terms, focusing on its alleged moral failings and emphasising the positives of Islam. Their slogan was 'Islam is a way of life'. They were antagonistic to what they considered to be modern *jahiliyya* (akin to pre-Islamic norms), whether in nationalism, communism or capitalism. They believe Islam has a solution for all problems of our time. They emphasise Islamisation of every aspect of life, from economics to politics to law. They are keen to develop institutions such as 'Islamic banks' and stress Islamic dress; in short, more Islamisation. Their message is simple and they are good at marketing their views. They believe their brand of Islam is 'modern' in outlook and compatible with modern life. These semi-traditionalists essentially follow the traditionalists but present the ethico-legal content of Islam in a modern garb. However, they do this without asking fundamental questions about the relationship that the ethico-legal content of the Qur'an may have to its socio-historical context or about the interpretations of that ethico-legal content that were made in the following generations. They package the ethico-legal content in a somewhat 'modern' idiom often within an apologetic discourse. Overtime, many in this camp moved away from their 'isolationist' rhetoric and began to argue for full 'participation'.

(iii) *Transnational/traditionalist/non-ideologicalisolationist*

One trend that is making its mark in the West is a form of Islam that appeared in the West in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. Heavily influenced by the Salafi trends that are closely connected with Hanbali-Wahhabi literalism and financed by sources in the Arabian Gulf, they made a significant foray into the West. They established a large number

of mosques and centres, media outlets, and a presence on university campuses.

This brand of Islam neglects Islam's diversity and the intellectual and creative richness of its past. The differences among Muslims, the breadth of scholarship, the philosophy, the theology, the exegesis and the enormously rich debates among Muslims are not particularly attractive to them. They want an Islam that remains unquestioned by scholarly inquiry or threatened by 'unconventional' interpretation. Simplistic answers are provided by symbols and literal interpretation rather than by intellectual inquiry. As such, these figures consider Islam to be a fixed entity, unchanging throughout history.

While not all members of this trend are hostile to the West, some have expressed radical views, with a clear indication that their purpose is to 'change' western societies. Quite often without any regard to what they can or cannot do in these societies, they argue for replacing the so-called 'man-made' laws in the West with Islamic ones – which they consider to be directly sanctioned by God. They make use of history, from the Crusades to the nineteenth-century domination of Muslims by colonial powers and the Israel-Paléatine problem, in agitating for a struggle against the West. This sub-group of radicals has few active participants but, unfortunately, with their slogans and attitude, they tend to get media attention and their rhetoric is taken by many in the West as representative of the views of the entire Muslim community.

Many of these hard-line isolationists have developed an ideology that is fanatical and extremist. As far as their view of western societies is concerned, it can be described as follows:

They see American society [for example] as immoral, sexually decadent, greedy, and exploitative of the weak at home and abroad. Philosophically, they do not appreciate the value of freedom and tolerance; ideologically, they disagree with democracy as a means of political governance. For them, democracy is an institution that legitimizes basic instincts of humanity and is an affront to divine laws. They describe the American system as *kufr* (a system against the laws of Allah or the Islamic Sharia) and reject it totally. (Khan 2003: 189)

This ideology sees a permanent conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims (in particular Christians and Jews) that has to be overcome, the establishment of an Islamic caliphate ruled by a caliph where sharia is implemented as the solution to the problems of the Muslims

today and Muslims who do not share its view as collaborators or 'modernists' whose views should be rejected. Some have resorted to militant-jihadi-style anti-western activities.

Participants

(iv) Indigenous/non-traditionalist/non-ideological/Participant

This trend among Muslims in the West is becoming quite common. It has no historical precedent, no clear-cut methodology to deal with Islamic law, no established grand narratives or writings. It is purely a product of a fusion of Islam with the West, western environment and western values. In the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia its primary language is English, in France it is French, and in Germany it is German. Its frame of reference is the local environment. It is multi-national and multicultural in its orientation.

Its adherents are actively negotiating Islam within the context of the local culture. They are developing strategies to deal with the question of integration and adaptation without assimilation. For these Muslims in the West, Australia, for example, is not a foreign country but their home. Culturally and intellectually they do not identify with their parents' or grandparents' place of origin (overseas). Any distant memory their parents may have of another distant home is irrelevant for them.

At the level of religious discourse, they are dealing with areas such as rethinking Islam; Muslim identity, Islamic norms and values in the western context, *ijtihad* and the reinterpretation of key Islamic texts, citizenship, functioning in a secular environment, and what it means to be *both* western and Muslim. Their familiarity with the institutions, culture, values, norms and history of the western country they find themselves in makes them an important intermediary between Muslims and non-Muslim mainstream western society. They are not necessarily attached to particular theologians, religious leaders or foreign imams. They do not want to be affiliated with a particular transnational movement or legal or theological school.

The influence of the western environment on the Participants is unmistakable in how these Muslims perceive 'religion'. For them, Islam is a 'private' phenomenon within the secular environment. There is no emphasis on the political dimension of Islam, such as establishing an

Islamic state or adopting Islamist slogans like 'Islam is a religion and a state'. For these Muslims in the West, Islam is centred on one's relationship with God and with other human beings. Islam is not seen as an ideological tool or a comprehensive system of law and politics, although it is important to add that these Muslims are not detached from politics; participating in the political process of their countries is seen as following the commands of the Qur'an to participate in community life and development.

This privatisation of religion, so to speak, is a significant development, in which religion has become less dominated by law, politics, ideology or local orthodoxies. Consequently, a more enlightened, liberal and indigenous Islam is in the making. Given that Muslims in this category are not bound by particular legal or theological schools of Islam, they free themselves from earlier theological-juristic opinions held by a particular school. They do not see it as necessary to be labelled Hanafi, Shāfi'i, Maliki, Salafi, Sunni or Shi'i. For them, the label 'Muslim' is sufficient.

These Muslims are also assertive in how they approach the textual traditions of Islam. They believe it is possible to read the foundation texts of Islam in translation, for example. This is a major shift from the long-held belief that one has to read the Qur'an in Arabic to understand its meaning, and that translations should not be relied upon. They are willing to accept intermediaries between the individual and the texts.

Participant Muslims reject the idea that one cannot be fully Muslim unless one is ruled by 'Islamic law', not secular law. They do not make a sharp distinction between Islamic law and secular law in their daily lives. Provided laws support notions such as justice, equity, equality and public interest, these Muslims will respect those laws as Islamic in intention or essence.

Participant Muslims argue that even in the so-called Islamic countries, for example Malaysia or Indonesia, most of the laws in force in the country are not necessarily based on the foundation texts of Islam: the Qur'an and *hadith*. Many of the laws in place are not very different from the laws in force in western countries. Although, these western laws might be labelled secular, to Participant Muslims they are not un-Islamic so long as they are in accord with Islamic values. Thus from the Participants' point of view, the distinction between so-called secular laws and Islamic laws is blurred.

Participant Muslims take abiding by the laws in the countries of which they are citizens seriously, and consider that as part of being obedient to God. Respect and obedience to the local laws (regardless of whether the authorities are Muslim or not) was also emphasised by classical Muslim jurists in their writings. Difficulties primarily arise if laws prohibit fundamental Islamic beliefs or practices such as prayer, fasting and *zakat*. In this context, even the laws that permit things like gambling, prostitution or alcohol are not considered problematic as such laws do not oblige Muslims to engage in those practices.

Relying on a range of concepts and taking into consideration their circumstances in the West, Participant Muslims reject pre-modern concepts such as *dar al-harb* and *dar al-islam*, which divide the world into 'us' and 'them', the world of Islam and the world of the infidel. They believe that such labels are obsolete in discussing today's political entities, such as nation-states, membership of which is not based on religious affiliation. Tariq Ramadan, a theoretician of what he calls 'European Islam' (Ramadan 1999), argues there are five fundamental rights that are secured in European/western societies: the right to practise Islam, the right to knowledge, the right to found organisations, the right to autonomous representation and the right to appeal to law. Where these rights exist, he argues, that place should be considered an 'abode of Islam'.

For the Participant Muslims, citizenship is a contract, the terms of which Muslims are obliged to honour, including obeying all the laws in force in the country, paying taxes and contributing to the well-being of the country. As far as social relations are concerned, Muslims must deal with all people, regardless of their faiths, on the basis of honesty, trustworthiness and justice (Ramadan 1999: 162–73).

Concluding remarks

These 'Participant' Muslims represent what I refer to as 'the emerging western tradition of Islam'. This strand of Islam is coming to terms with a range of new issues, including democracy, human rights, gender equality, secular law, freedom of expression and religion, and equality before the law. It exists in practice but it is only recently that Muslims in the West have started to develop methodological tools and principles to provide an intellectual foundation for this approach. It is a product of the fusion of Islam with the western environment, and

western liberal-democratic values. It has been most visible since the 1990s through the writings of a number of Muslim scholars based in the West, such as Ramadan (1999), Bassam Tibi (2002) and Muqtedar Khan (2003).

This 'western Islam' (or western tradition of Islam) is being driven mostly by the indigenisation of Islam in the West. It is espoused mostly by second- or third-generation Muslims, other indigenous Muslims and converts to Islam from other systems of belief. Many professional and middle-class Muslims also belong to this strand. Its frame of reference is the local environment of the West and its inspiration comes from that context. This western tradition of Islam is challenging traditional understandings of a range of important issues in order to suit the social, cultural, political and intellectual context of Muslims in the West.

In relation to Participant Muslims and with particular reference to American Muslims, the American Muslim scholar, Muqtedar Khan (2003: 176) says:

[T]he American Muslim identity . . . is rapidly emerging. Political as well as historical forces are constructing it. The interplay between American values and Islamic values and mutual reconstitution of each other is leading to a liberal understanding of Islam more in tune with dominant American values such as religious tolerance, democracy, pluralism, and multicultural and multi-religious co-existence.

Participant Muslims are contributing to Islamic thought in a significant way. Their work will most likely lead to a rethinking of existing approaches, methods and principles in jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic ethics. This work in the West should not be seen as a marginal, irrelevant exercise for Muslims. Its implications on the Muslim world are great. Although, as an intellectual discourse, it is still in the early stages, it is making its mark on the wider Muslim discourse in the area of reform of Islamic law and thought.



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