Muslims on the Americanization Path?

Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad
John L. Esposito,
Editors

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Contents

Contributors: vii
Introduction: Muslims in America or American Muslims 3
John L. Esposito

PART I The American Path Option: Between Tradition and Reality

1 The Dynamics of Islamic Identity in North America 19
Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad

2 Striking a Balance: Islamic Legal Discourses on Muslim Minorities 47
Khaled Abou El Fadl

3 The Fiqh Councilor in North America 65
Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo

4 Muslims and Identity Politics in America 87
Mohommed A. Muqtedar Khan

PART II North American Pluralism and the Challenge of the Veil

5 The *Hijab* and Religious Liberty: Anti-Discrimination Law and Muslim Women in the United States 105
Kathleen Moore

6 Muslim Women in Canada: Their Role and Status as Revealed in the *Hijab* Controversy 129
Esmail Shakeri

7 American Women Choosing Islam 145
Carol Anway

PART III Americans on the Islamization Path? The African-American Experience

8 Identity and Destiny: The Formative Views of the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam 163
Ernest Allen, Jr.

9 African-American Muslims and the Question of Identity: Between Traditional Islam, African Heritage, and the American Way 215
Yusuf Nuruddin

10 Understanding the Multi-Ethnic Dilemma of African-American Muslims 263
Robert Dannin

PART IV Americanization and the Preservation of Cultural Identity

11 Muslims and the American Press 285
Greg Noakes

12 Economic Security and Muslim Identity: A Study of the Immigrant Community in Durham, North Carolina 301
Elise Goldwasser

13 Approaches to Mosque Design in North America 317
Omar Khalidi

Selected Bibliography 335

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Introduction

Muslims in America or American Muslims?

JOHN L. ESPOSITO

Islam is the fastest growing religion in America and in Europe. There are, for example, more Muslims in America than in Kuwait, Qatar, and Libya. It has been common to speak of Islam *and* the West, but today any consideration of that topic must include Islam *in* the West. Islam is the second largest religion in France, the third in Britain, Germany, and North America. Even if Muslim immigration and the rate of conversion were not to grow, birth rate alone ensures that in the first part of the twenty-first century, Islam will replace Judaism as the second largest religion in the United States.

Integral to the experience of Muslims, like all religious or ethnic minorities in America, is how to deal with the question of integration or assimilation. The majority of Americans have yet to realize that Muslims are "us," but many Muslims have not solved the problem of the relationship of their faith to national identity either: will they remain Muslims in America or become American Muslims? The identity of the community, or more specifically, the need to form a new identity in America, raises many questions. Can Muslims become part and parcel of a pluralistic American society without sacrificing or losing their identity? Can Muslims be Muslims in a non-Muslim state that is not governed by Islamic law? Is the American legal system capable of allowing for particular Muslim religious and cultural differences within the Constitution's broader universal claims? Do the secular and/or Judeo-Christian values of American society make this impossible? Is there a contradiction between demanding equal rights and access and insisting on maintaining a distinctively separate identity?

The American Path Option: Between Tradition and Reality

Although the Muslims of America are indeed on the path to Americanization, what that means and what it will yield remain uncertain. The variety of Muslim experiences in America covered in this volume exemplify some of the major themes in the development of Muslim communities today: the push and pull, tension and conflict, between tradition and change; the reconciliation of religious, political, and social identity; the relations of law to society; the role of religion in cultural identity.

The Muslims of America are far from homogeneous in their composition and in their attitudes and practices. Islam in America is a mosaic of many ethnic, racial, and national groups. The majority are first- or second-generation immigrants or African-American converts. Their problems, like those of other religious minorities, center on assimilation or integration and the preservation and practice of religious faith in an American society informed by Judeo-Christian or secular values, the relationship of religious tradition to the demands of current realities, and gaining a place in American politics and culture. The situation is complicated by the historical relationship between Islam and Christianity, especially between the West and Muslim societies, which includes everything from memories of the Crusades and European colonialism to what many perceive as the distorted image of Islam projected by Orientalist scholarship and the media, and finally to the hegemony and anti-Islamic policies of the West, in particular the United States.

Yvonne Y. Haddad, in "The Dynamics of Islamic Identity in North America," analyzes questions of language, community, and faith in the American immigrant experience, the significant differences within the Muslim community and the problems encountered in an American society often brought up on stereotypes that breed fear and distrust. Islam in North America reflects the diverse backgrounds of the community from immigrants in pursuit of political, religious, or economic freedom to native-born African-Americans seeking social justice. The identity of immigrants has been shaped by the Muslim societies in which they were raised and by their interaction with American society and with Muslims from other traditions. Haddad suggests that, living as a minority in a dominant culture often hostile to Islam, Muslims are often alienated and powerless. They are confused and challenged by an America in which, despite separation of church and state, Christian values are assumed to be integral to American identity and values. The tendency to contrast American "national culture" with Islamic values further complicates the process of assimilation.

Finally, the idea inculcated by the media in the post-cold war period that Islam has supplanted the Soviet Union as the threat to its survival and the tendency to equate Islam with extremism and terrorism, combined with the American policy tilt toward Israel and its inconsistent record not only in

the Middle East but also in Bosnia and Chechnya further disillusion and alienate many.

Haddad contends that some Islamic leaders have encouraged immigrants to return to their homelands and work for the establishment of Islamic governments. Others also discourage assimilation, but advocate the creation of Islamic communities within the broader non-Islamic society. Still others encourage engagement and peaceful coexistence, emphasizing the common religious and social values and interests between Islam and Christianity. While the isolationists practice their faith privately and worry about losing their children to the attractions of Western culture, the socially engaged build institutions (mosques, schools, professional and social associations) to establish a place for Islam in the American religious and cultural landscape. But the majority dissociate themselves from the issue of Islam's presence in North America. In contrast, African-American Muslims are visible and active in asserting their Muslim identity when they focus on the problems facing inner-city America in particular: racism, poverty, crime, violence, and drugs. These differences among and within Muslim communities raise questions of interpretation, law, and cultural identity.

The primary question facing Muslims in America is whether or not they can live Muslim lives in a non-Muslim territory. Especially for immigrants raised in Muslim-majority countries, this is a particularly vexing question. In "Striking a Balance: Islamic Legal Discourses on Muslim Minorities," Khaled Abou El Fadl examines how Muslim minorities are dealt with in Islamic law and discourse. Muslim jurists had in the past encouraged Muslims to migrate from non-Muslim areas, lest they inadvertently contribute to the strength and prosperity of non-Muslim states. But, although ideally Muslims should live in a Muslim territory, Islamic jurisprudence does allow for them to live outside the Dar al-Islam provided they can fulfill their religious obligations without hindrance.

Some religious leaders have counseled emigration from non-Muslim territories back to Muslim lands, others have defined the conditions under which Muslims can live permanently as loyal citizens in non-Muslim lands and still preserve their faith and identity. They continue to differ, debating questions such as whether they should vote, whether they are bound by Islamic (divine) or secular (man-made) laws, and whether they should participate with non-Muslim neighbors in community life and fully accept and defend a non-Muslim homeland.

Islamic law provides the ideal blueprint for society, delineating what can and can not be done. Formulated in the early centuries of Islamic history, classical law provided guidance to Muslim courts and individual believers down through the centuries. Since the late nineteenth century, however, Islamic reformers have called for a bold reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) of Islamic law to address the challenges of modern life. But the weight of tradition remains formidable. A popular belief is that, the early Muslim jurists having defined and delineated the parameters of Islamic law, the obligation of

the community was simply to follow it—the door that led to further interpretation had been closed. This static notion of Islamic law was promoted by many among the ulama (religious scholars) and remained convincing until it was vanquished by rapid and significant systemic change. Then prescient Muslim intellectuals realized that such dramatically changed circumstances required fresh responses. Across the Muslim world, a minority of Islamic reformers called for a bold reinterpretation of Islamic theology and law. The majority of the ulama who, despite Islam's lack of clergy, had appropriated the trappings of a clerical class, including distinctive dress and the claim that they were the true guardians and interpreters of Islam, adamantly clung to the doctrines of the past (*taqlid*).

The problems of Muslims living both in America and Europe have been compounded by the challenges of life as a Muslim minority in a non-Muslim country, and this in turn presented a challenge to human and textual resources. In "The Fiqh Councilor in North America," Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo shows how the Muslims of North America have had to broaden the definition of the scholar qualified to reinterpret Islamic law (*mujtahid*) and the mufti (scholar qualified to give definitive rulings on specific issues) as well as the law itself in order adequately to address the new realities of life in North America.

As in many parts of the Muslim world, so in North America Muslims have realized that the complexities of modern life often require disciplinary skills that are beyond the limits of a single individual. Thus, for example, medical ethics requires expert knowledge not only of religious texts but also of the sciences and, perhaps, economics as well. In addition, the realities of life in the West are often quite different, indeed alien to, those of traditional Muslim societies. Many in North America have concluded that legal decisions can only be rendered by those who have had firsthand experience of this new world. As with imams, so too with legal scholars, the Muslims of North America have had to develop an indigenous core of experts since they could no longer simply import personnel and interpretations from the old country.

The Fiqh Council of North America was established to provide just such an indigenous Muslim response. A group of scholars representing a cross-section of expertise was constituted to respond to the questions posed by Muslims in North America. DeLorenzo gives examples of some of the questions that have arisen in areas ranging from economics and medicine to marriage and the family and the responses of American muftis. Economic problems have centered on how to deal with interest in banking, mortgages, insurance, car loans, and the like. Islamic organizations face questions such as how to invest their funds; Muslim stockbrokers and financial advisers have had to convince clients that their services are Islamically acceptable. Lawyers and their clients face similar issues regarding property, estates, and pension plans. As in many parts of the Muslim world, gender issues have included problems in marriage, dower and divorce compensation, inherit-

ance and bequests. Unique to the Muslim-minority experience in the West, however, has been the decision not to recognize as Islamically valid a marriage or divorce that has not gone through the secular courts.

For many decades the Muslims of America have remained relatively invisible, but by now they constitute a significant minority whose concerns can be effectively addressed through the political system. But to what extent can or should Muslims participate in the political system of a non-Muslim state in which Islamic law plays no part? Can Muslims vote? Can they fight and die in defending their new country? What if they are called upon to fight and kill fellow Muslims on behalf of a non-Muslim state?

In "Muslims and Identity Politics in America," Mohommed A. Muqtedar Khan analyzes this struggle in terms of the identity politics of self and the internal other (other nationalities and sects) and the self and the external other (non-Muslims). He demonstrates the extent to which identity issues and identity politics prevent American Muslims from interacting and cooperating across national and sectarian lines. This phenomenon is reflected in professional associations, universities, and mosques where national and sectarian backgrounds can determine attendance and participation at lectures and in other programs. These divisions carry over into politics where many are more united and involved in political developments in their countries of origin than those in the United States. As a result national American Muslim organizations often have to struggle to survive financially and to achieve any sense of common platform and strategy. In contrast, American-born Muslims who have grown up divorced from the socialization of the Muslim world's politics tend to be more open, inclusive and less sectarian than their immigrant forebears.

Many American Muslims remain keenly involved in international Muslim politics (Palestine, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya). Their disenchantment with United States policy stems from what some regard as the American "double standard" in its promotion of democracy and use of sanctions. This American anti-Islamic attitude can be seen not only abroad but in anti-terrorist legislation and media coverage of Islam and Muslims at home. Thus, while freedom and prosperity attract many Muslims to America, American foreign policy towards the Middle East and the media's demonization of Islam often alienate them once they arrive. However, Khan argues, just as Muslims in Muslim countries in the twentieth century have come to identify both with Islam and their national identity, so too in the next generation, many more will subscribe to an Islamic as well as an American identity, as African Americans have already done.

Differences of national origin remain strong because of continued ties and involvement with politics back home, and these often hinder cooperation among American Muslims. Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran or Pakistan and Bangladesh are echoed in America and demonstrate the extent to which sectarian and national differences continue to divide American Muslims.

North American Pluralism and the Challenge of the Veil

The contested issue of the status of women has often been symbolized in the wearing of the *hijab* in Muslim countries and in the West. It became a political issue in more secular Muslim countries, such as Tunisia and Turkey, because it was regarded a sign of a "fundamentalist threat." It has also been at the center of some controversy in Europe and North America as a threat to the secular state. In a celebrated case, the French government banned its wearing by school children. The ensuing debate saw France, in the name of preserving its secular government, declare that, if Muslims were to become good French citizens, they must integrate not just assimilate. France rejected multiculturalism for integration. (Ironically, when French scholars needed a term for Islamic activists, Islamists, or fundamentalists, they hit upon "integrism" as the proper term for the union of religion and politics in Islamist ideology.)

In both the United States and Canada, multi-cultural societies that pride themselves on maintaining an individual's freedom of choice and religion, Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab have experienced discrimination. Kathleen Moore and Esmail Shakeri provide studies that describe the many facets of this issue. The hijab debate encompasses not only questions about the status and role of Muslim women, but also about the rights of members of religious-minority communities to define their identity vis-à-vis the dominant majority community.

In the United States, which prides itself both on maintaining the separation of church and state and on its positive valuation of diversity, Muslim women who wear hijab have encountered problems in the workplace and in the courts. In "The Veil and Religious Liberty: Anti-Discrimination Law and Muslim Women in the United States," Moore takes issue with those who have maintained that judicial interpretations of the religion clauses in the U.S. Constitution have been more generous than they once were toward the religious practices of minorities. Recent appellate-court decisions, she maintains, involving Orthodox and Hasidic Jews, Native American Indians and Sikhs, and Muslims have often appeared to belie the liberal guarantee of nondiscrimination and equal protection.

Muslims in America often find themselves in the position of other religious minorities who argue that the state's application of the same rules to all citizens must be balanced by the state's refraining from interfering in "private" social spheres where individuals should be free to practice their faith with its religious and cultural differences. Moore's study of the American Muslim experience, specifically as regards religious discrimination cases involving veiled women in the workplace, explores the question of whether there are judicially defined limits within which cultural and legal pluralism can develop in American society. Based on this study of employment

cases involving religious discrimination, Moore argues that American constitutional law as currently constructed is incapable of solving the problem of the observant Muslim who wears the veil in a secular state.

Given global migration patterns, the remarkable number of Muslim minority communities that have come into existence, and the rapid growth of Islam in Europe and America, issues of law and religion will become increasingly significant both in and of themselves and because they will reflect or inform the attitudes of the broader society. In the twenty-first century, Moore maintains that the successful resolution of workplace discrimination requires broader political and social changes and not just changes in the law. Many of these changes are examined in the Canadian context by Esmail Shakeri in "Muslim Women in Canada: Their Role and Status as Revealed in the *Hijab* Controversy," where debate over wearing the hijab has also surfaced. There controversy centered on the attempt by the school board in Montreal to ban wearing the hijab in school. However, as Shakeri demonstrates, much of the public discourse was influenced by what the hijab symbolized or represented to many of its opponents (Western feminists, journalists, academics, politicians) for whom Islam is an alien, oppressive, extremist, or terrorist religion. The Canadian debate reflects the tensions between text or norm and context, both Muslim and Western values and social conditions, educated Canadian-born Muslim and non-Muslim (Western feminist) women; a policy of integration vs. assimilation; accommodationism and isolationism; majority norms and minority rights; the veil as a symbol of the oppression and subservience of women vs. freedom and liberation.

Problems facing Muslim women in North America involve not only immigrant or first- and second-generation Muslim women, but also the growing number of American converts. That Islam is the fastest growing religion in America is due in part to the number of American women who have embraced Islam in recent years. They face the same problems of faith and identity, of dress and employment, but in their case it is often compounded by the reactions of their families, neighbors, and friends. In "American Women Choosing Islam," Carol Anway, who has studied (mainly Christian) women who convert to Islam in the United States and Canada, discusses the results of a study of these converts. Anway analyzes why they converted, their family background, religious quest, and the impact of their conversions on their lives as well as their parents and relatives. For many, Islam provided answers to the doubts they experienced as Christians. Far from questioning the compatibility of Islam with American values, these converts often found a congruence between their new faith and traditional American ideals, including commitment to family, community, education, and discipline, though they often also found themselves caught up in the process of integrating their Western heritage with new beliefs and cultural practices.

The African-American Experience

A significant number of Muslims in America are African Americans, who are among the oldest members of the American community. While all Muslims in America may be called Muslim or refer to their religion as Islam, the experience of African-American Muslims has been very different from that of Muslims who were born and raised in Muslim countries or in an immigrant Muslim milieu. Most are descendants of slaves, were raised as Christians, and are members of a community whose religious and political identity has been affected by the struggle for freedom and equality.

The earliest African-American Muslim communities were in fact a response and reaction to the "negro, black, or African-American" experience. Early leaders such as Noble Drew Ali and W. D. Fard, with their syncretic version of "Islam" (the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam), emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, but perhaps most influential was Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. The spiritual descendants of Elijah Muhammad, from Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X to Warith Din Muhammad (Elijah Muhammad's son) and Louis Farrakhan, epitomize the diverse currents that account for much of the African-American Muslim experience. Today, they are in the midst of a period of transition from what some have called proto-Islam to more traditional or mainstream Islam as African-American Muslims continue to struggle with issues of faith, identity, and destiny, including the relationship of their adopted faith to Christianity, to race, to black liberation, to traditional Islam, to their African heritage, and to American citizenship. At the same time, their interaction with immigrant Muslim communities challenges the ability of Muslim Americans to transcend the divisions of race and ethnicity.

Three studies provide critical perspectives on the history and development of the African-American Muslim identity, its formative experience, its relationship to traditional Islam, its African heritage, and the American experience, and the dilemmas of co-existence in a multi-ethnic context.

Understanding the origins and causes of the conversion of African Americans to Islam is provided in "Identity and Destiny: The Formative Views of the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam," in which Ernest Allen compares the influences and beliefs of the Moorish Science Temple of America and the Nation of Islam. While there were theological differences between them, the fundamental existential questions were the same: Why do black people suffer? How can this suffering be brought to an end? Both offered a paradigm that emphasized the (material as well as spiritual) here-and-now and not just the hereafter, and both preached individual initiative and responsibility, family life, hard work, and frugality. The Bible, Qur'an, Freemasonry, theosophy, the Ahmadiyya movement, and especially the creative imaginations of their founders joined to form a world view that offered a sense of history, identity, meaning, and value to their followers.

African-Americans are heirs to a triple cultural heritage: African, Islamic, and Western. Yusuf Nuruddin in "African-American Muslims and the Question of Identity: Between Traditional Islam, African Heritage, and the American Way," discusses how they are the source both of alienation and integration, and of conflicting ideologies (nationalism/separatism and integration/assimilation), manifested today in the tension between Westernization, re-Africanization, and re-Islamization. Nuruddin demonstrates the relationship between the African-American nationalism espoused by a small but vocal minority and African-American Islamic movements which, as Ernest Allen indicated, sought to restore or revive a "lost" culture.

While most discussions of the origins of African-American Islam or of Islam in the African-American community focus on the role of early charismatic figures and their syncretistic, heterodox forms of Islam, Yusuf Nuruddin argues that what he regards as more orthodox Islamic influences preceded these heterodox movements, among them Marcus Garvey, Edward Wilmot, Noble Drew Ali, and the Ahmadiyya, who provided a bridge between black cultural nationalism and (Islamic) pan-Africanism to the black supremacist Nation of Islam.

First came the black nationalist/separatists; then the radical (though not anti-nationalist) Islamic separatists, the ostensible followers of Sunni Islam who call for jihad against all unbelievers—African-American Muslims who did not agree with them and European-American Christians alike. Next were those who adopted a more assimilationist, ecumenical outlook, such as Warith Din Muhammad, and finally a number of responses, including Louis Farrakhan and others, who are trying to reclaim leadership from both Islamic separatists and assimilationists by reasserting the separatist legacy of the Nation of Islam and, at the same time, aligning themselves with a more traditional or orthodox Islam. At the same time, a variety of secular cultural nationalists, including American and continental African authors and artists, have launched an Afrocentric crusade against all variations of Islam.

Nuruddin then discusses the debate that rages today among major African-American and African scholars and artists over Afrocentricity vis-à-vis Islam. Some wish to continue to recognize and integrate their triple heritage and legacy; others reject the legacy of both Western and Islamic culture. The problems are compounded when there are interactions between the African-American and immigrant Muslim communities or international Islamic organizations like the World Muslim League (Rabita al-Alam al-Islami). They reveal the continued tension and at times conflict between faith and race/ethnic identity, between the normative universality of Islam and the realities of Muslim communities.

Robert Dannin, in "Understanding the Multi-Ethnic Dilemma of African-American Muslims," analyzes the impact of multi-ethnic Muslim communities on African-American Muslims, drawing his examples from international politics (the Gulf war) as well as local mosques. Thus, for example, when the Saudi-based and -funded Rabita sought worldwide consensus for

the Saudi-American coalition against Iraq, the initial show of unity among African-American Muslims was shattered when Operation Desert Shield became Desert Storm in 1990. Warith Din Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan assumed polar opposite positions based upon religious and ethnic considerations, and, as Dannin notes, those divisions remain.

African-American Muslims, however, share a common challenge with immigrant Muslims and Muslims worldwide: How is one to be Muslim and African-American simultaneously? Despite the shared beliefs and rituals that unite Muslims, the transnational unity of Islam disintegrates in the face of ethnic, linguistic, and nationalist differences and conflicts. The result, Dannin argues, is an endless crisis of identity. On major religious holy days or the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Islam appears to be multiracial and multi-ethnic; but inter-racial and inter-ethnic tensions remain common at the local level, in mosques and in community politics. This dilemma is seen quite vividly in relations between new Muslims of African descent and new American Muslims of Middle Eastern and South Asian backgrounds. Their interaction or lack of it is often based on ethnic (e.g., African-American vs. Arab) and cultural differences, especially religious attitudes, values, and practices that a particular group regards as religious doctrine.

Americanization and the Preservation of Cultural Identity

Despite the fact that Islam is the third largest religion in the United States and that by now most American Muslims have been born and raised in the United States, the American media continue to view Islam through the prism of the Iranian revolution, regarding it as a retrogressive religion given to extremism and terrorism. Greg Noakes, in “Muslims and the American Press,” analyzes the quality of media coverage and the reasons for the tendency to misunderstand and distort the nature and function of Islam. Noakes maintains that the media’s propensity for the “sensational,” the explosive headline events, acts of violence, and religious extremism capture the headlines at the expense of the faith and practice of the vast majority of Muslims. The contentious terminology used to describe events and movements in the Muslim world, terms like “fundamentalism” and “ethnic cleansing,” add to the problem, as does the focus on idiosyncratic or retrograde cultural practices such as female circumcision and the slave trade.

Noakes finds that key among the factors affecting coverage are political sensibilities (vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict, Kashmir, Bosnia, for example), the realities of domestic lobbies and advertising revenue, and the limited number of expert analysts in the media and the ideological/political biases of the few who exist. While these factors can be countered, he

maintains, deep-seated differences and biases are more intractable: "It is clearly impossible to put an end to fourteen centuries of mutual fear and distrust overnight." Noakes argues that this distrust combined with a basic ignorance of Islam and Muslims among Americans affects the media's ability to cover Islam and Muslims adequately. The situation is compounded by the tendency of the media to focus on the explosive or violent act, to give primacy to those events that impinge on American interests and overlook or minimally cover equally significant ones that do not, the shrinking resources of especially the print media, and the tendency of many reporters and editors not to regard religion (unless it involves acts of terrorism) as hard news.

The failures or limitations of American media reporting on Islam and Muslims have an impact on the sensibilities and sensitivities of American Muslims. Although critical of the media, Noakes also challenges the American Muslim community to recognize that complaint must be accompanied by action, from protest and participation (e.g., becoming professional journalists) to self-criticism and a recognition that positive coverage of Muslims will be seriously affected so long as religious violence and terrorism do occur in the name of Islam.

For the majority of Muslims in America, the multi-ethnic experience has reinforced the extent to which economic security and Muslim identity are interrelated. Elise Goldwasser's "Economic Security and Muslim Identity: A Study of the Immigrant Community in Durham, North Carolina," examines the impact of economic and social factors on the development of the Islamic community there, which reflects the unity and diversity of the American Muslim (and for that matter, the broader Muslim) experience. Many in the Eritrian community which has gathered there struggle to survive, handicapped by lack of English and marketable skills. At the same time another group of highly educated English-speaking Muslims enjoys prosperity. As Goldwasser demonstrates, although both groups are united in their commitment to the Islamic faith, they differ in their application of Islam to everyday life. Unlike the Eritrian laborers, the prosperous Muslims can easily preserve their Islamic identity and accommodate its practices from prayer and fasting to medical treatment and burial. They have been able both to accept and at times to resist the dominant non-Islamic culture.

Goldwasser maintains that financial security is the key variable to these differences in response to American culture. The economically less secure Eritrians opt for cultural assimilation; the Muslim professionals choose not to assimilate to a culture they regard as too materialistic, sexually permissive, and violent. Drawing on specific examples, she describes the challenges and responses of the Muslims in Durham to issues of faith, family, and professional life.

Few things symbolize Islam and the Muslim community more than the mosque, the center for community prayer throughout the ages. Today, mosques also reveal the very issues of faith and identity faced by many

Muslim communities: the relationship of tradition to change and to religious and multi-ethnic identities. Omar Khalidi, in "Approaches to Mosque Design in North America," discusses the history of immigrant mosque building. Especially in the beginning, the mosque was whatever building was available; since the primary purpose of immigration then was economic and the immigrant's stay presumably temporary, limited resources required creative, unorthodox responses to a temporary need. More recently new mosques have been built by more prosperous communities; these buildings are often as totally foreign to North America's religious and cultural landscape as Islam itself. In the architecture of Muslim countries mosque design is integrated and coherent; in North America it displays a range from the derivative to innovative. Mosque buildings in North America often provide not only a prayer hall but a school, community and conference rooms, library, and recreational center.

Khalidi compares and contrasts a number of mosques and Islamic centers built in the last two or three decades to highlight some of the underlying questions of identity and aesthetics: can one effectively transplant a Middle Eastern pattern onto an American landscape? How and where have the old or traditional and the new been blended successfully? Failures result when mosques are not appropriate to site or context; lack of respect for the role of the professional architect among immigrants has not helped. Imitative and unimaginative buildings passing for "authentic" Islamic architecture have cropped up in the United States from coast to coast. Khalidi's discussion of the differences of opinion that arose between an advisory committee of immigrant Muslims and a committee of consultants (mostly non-Muslim architects and scholars of Islamic architecture) who were appointed to decide on a design for an Islamic cultural center in Manhattan underscore the relationship between architectural production and the cultural politics of identity.

Khalidi's descriptions of several mosques highlight the range of identity responses from the transplanting of traditional designs to the creation of a contemporary, entirely North American mosque architectures. The older communities tended to construct architecturally nondescript buildings that would not attract attention; more recent immigrant communities like to stick to a design that is either traditional in a particular Muslim country, or a stereotyped "typical" traditional mosque; more adventurous communities are willing to try something new. From the vantage point of what will best meet the needs of Muslims, Khalidi concludes that the design should fulfill Islamic requirements but minimize ethno-national cliches, and find a fit between tradition and the local environment. This kind of solution will best meet the needs and demands of the next generation of American Muslims.

Muslim communities have existed for more than fourteen centuries. Islamic history has demonstrated an enormous diversity of cultural adaptations as Islam has interacted with other cultures and peoples from North Africa to Southeast Asia. While in the past the vast majority of Muslims lived

in Muslim societies, today record numbers of refugees and immigrants live as minorities in non-Muslim countries. As a result old religious and cultural paradigms have had to yield to new realities. The threadbare distinction between Islam and the West is no longer useful.

For observant Muslims, the challenges loom large. Some may choose to live in denial that they are permanent residents or citizens of the West. Others will choose to jettison their tradition and totally assimilate into the local society. For still others, the more complex way will be to blaze a new trail, redefining faith and identity within contemporary contexts and realities, a subtle process, not of assimilation, but of selective cultural accommodation. The challenges for Muslims on the path to Americanization will continue to be primarily those of identity, pluralism, and participation as they continue to define and redefine their faith and identity as a Muslim minority in and of the West.

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PART I

THE AMERICAN PATH OPTION

Between Tradition and Reality

1

The Dynamics of Islamic Identity in North America

YVONNE YAZBECK HADDAD

The immigration of Muslims to Europe and North America during this century has ushered in a new era in the relationship between Islam and the West, conditioned in part by the Muslim experience of "the West" in the form of European colonialism until mid-century and "American neo-colonialism" since the 1950s. As a result the dynamic between the two is seen by Muslims as being that between conqueror and conquered, powerful and powerless, dominant and weak. This has also influenced the ways in which Muslims have formed questions of identity as they strive to negotiate a secure place for themselves and their children in Western societies.

This chapter will attempt a preliminary exploration of the dynamics shaping Islamic identity in North America. It will look at the elements that formed the variety of identities prior to emigration, the immigrant experience in America, and the options immigrants find as they struggle to make their home in an environment that they as Muslims find hostile.

The American experience has provided the Muslims with a variety of encounters and challenges and presented them with a bewildering array of options as they struggle to adapt to life in the United States. At first glance their experience may be seen as similar to that of other immigrants, raising the familiar questions of what of the old identity should be salvaged, what given up, and what renegotiated or invented as the community seeks to find a niche for itself. A closer look shows that there are some profound differences. While some of what they experience can be ascribed to changing times or political considerations, increasingly many see their marginalized situation as deliberate and specific, the product of longstanding tendencies in American society to fear and distrust Islam. Thus, while Muslims may be facing the same problems earlier generations of immigrants had encoun-

tered—what language to teach their children or how to implant and perpetuate the faith of the forebears—they are also burdened with the question of whether their children and grandchildren will be accepted in the United States, and whether Islam can ever be recognized as a source of enlightenment, a positive force contributing to a multicultural, pluralistic America.

The Question of Muslim Identity

One of the most important characteristics of the Muslim community in North America is its diversity.[1] It includes immigrants who chose to move to the United States for economic, political, and religious reasons from over sixty nations of various ethnic, racial, linguistic, tribal, and national identities.[2] It also includes émigrés and refugees forced out of their homeland, who still retain allegiance to it and are reluctant to relinquish the intention of returning to it to help restore the order they left behind.[3] It also includes a large number of converts, both African American and white, who through the act of conversion have opted out of the dominant American cultural identity,[4] and a significant number of Muslims whose forebears immigrated between the 1870s and World War II and who are in varying degrees already integrated and assimilated.[5] The majority of Muslims in America today, however, are foreign born, socialized and educated overseas, and come from nation states whose identity has been fashioned by European colonialism.

Since the creation of the nation state, the question of identity has been part of nation building and has received a great deal of attention in Muslim states carved out of chunks of imploding and crumbling empires. Following the European model, these nation states focused their efforts on creating a loyal constituency out of the diverse populations that constituted the former empires with their different linguistic, tribal, ethnic, sectarian and religious allegiances. The intellectuals in these states believed that finding the proper vision, ideology, constitution, or constellation of ideas could initiate modernization and development, propelling these nation states into parity with the West.[6]

These ideologies have varied, depending on prevailing circumstances, with each producing a generation committed to a different vision guaranteed to provide the salvation and modernization of their nation. The immigrants to the United States who came throughout this century, therefore, have not only reflected diverse national identities, but in many cases have also promoted allegiances to different ideologies that they believed held the key to revitalization of their home countries. At the turn of the century, the elites in various Muslim countries placed their trust in nationalist ideologies. They drew on an identity of shared history, language, and culture in order to create a shared vision and commitment to helping bring about independence from colonial hegemony. This gave way in the middle of the century to support for socialism as various regimes looked to its implementation for rapid

development. Socialism transcended national identities and emphasized a specific economic and social doctrine. Beginning in the mid 1970s, the ideology that has been most attractive has been Islamism, an ideology based on the hope of restoring the transnational Islamic empire, grounded in Islamic history and law. Its vision is of a shared destiny to be initiated through representative government administered by Islamic elites committed to providing economic and social justice.

An interesting development in the mid-twentieth century is the increasing importance of the United States as a center for Muslim intellectual reflection and ferment. Having replaced Europe as the dominant power in the Third World, the United States began to attract to its universities a large number of students seeking technical and professional training. The American government, confident of the validity of the American way of life and seeking to fashion the leadership of the Third World, encouraged the education of foreign nationals in the benefits of capitalism and the evils of Marxism. Many of the graduates of American universities then decided to stay in the United States. In the process, American campuses as well as some of the mosques and Islamic centers associated with them became the locus for reflection on and experimentation with a variety of Islamic world views. In the United States, Muslim students from many nations have been able to forge links of friendship and common purpose, providing the nucleus for an international network of leaders committed to the creation of an Islamic state or an Islamic world order.

At the other end of the spectrum is a different set of American institutions that have become major centers of Muslim reflection and identity, namely the prisons of America, both state and federal facilities. They continue to be an important locus of the African-American conversion to Islam that began in the early decades of this century. While there are no statistics on the number of converts or the scope and effectiveness of conversion in the penal system, some scholars estimate that by the second decade of the twenty-first century the majority of African-American males will have converted to Islam.[7] While students from abroad living on American campuses often discover Islam and turn to the task of reshaping Islamic societies worldwide, prison alumni focus their efforts at home, helping reshape America from the bottom up. They seek the redemption of African-American society through the teaching of responsibility, family values, and accountability. In the process they are hoping to save their children from a future of violence and the drug-infested ghettos of America.[8]

The earliest immigrants to found mosques before the Second World War and, for the most part, their children and grandchildren appear to have fitted comfortably into America. They tried both to fit into the new culture and to interpret it in ways that tended to emphasize the respect Islam had for Jesus and his mother Mary and to quote verses from the Qur'an emphasizing the commonalities between the two faiths. To the immigrants who have come since 1960, however, this kind of accommodation seems too high

a price to pay. They are critical of their coreligionists who appear to have diluted the importance of Islamic traditions, rituals, and distinguishing characteristics, going so far as to refer to the mosque as "our church," to the Qur'an as "our Bible," and to the imam as "our minister."

The more recent immigrants are neither poor nor uneducated; on the contrary, they represent the best-educated elite of the Muslim world who see themselves as helping develop America's leadership in medicine, technology, and education. They have been influenced by a different socialization process, and while they appreciate, enjoy, and have helped create America's technology, they want no part in what they see as its concomitant social and spiritual problems. Confident that Islam has a solution to America's ills, they have no patience for the kind of accommodation that they see as compromising the true Islamic way. As the executive secretary of the Council of Masajid in North America put it:

> In spite of the most spectacular progress in science and technology, man still finds himself in the wilderness of despair. One thing that has constantly eluded his grasp is happiness and peace of mind. Even technology, which is his creation, at times threatens to destroy him and to blot out all his works, as if he never lived on this earth. . . . Man finds himself in a "blind alley" and there are no exits in it. Should he abandon all hope and resign himself to perish in a nuclear-chemical-biological conflict? Islam's answer is an emphatic NO! For a Muslim there can be no surrender to despair.[9]

Muslim Identity in the American Context

Perceived by some Muslim leaders as "the mother of all issues" (*umm al-masa'il*), the question of Muslim identity and its meaning and ramifications in the context of the United States has been the focus of several national conferences sponsored by the Islamic Society of North America, as well as the topic of numerous lectures, sermons, and books by Muslims in North America (both immigrant and convert) and foreign intellectuals who choose to reflect on the subject. The quest for a relevant Muslim identity is part of the American experience, as each generation of immigrants has brought a certain sense of self which appears to undergo constant revision and redefinition in the context of the American melting (boiling?) pot. This identity is influenced by what the immigrants bring with them as well as their American experience: how America defines itself as well as American foreign policy in various Muslim countries, the place the immigrants choose to settle, how they are treated in their new environment, the diversity of the community with which they associate, their involvement in organized religion, their relations with older generations of immigrants and/or African-American Muslims, and involvement in interfaith activities. In the last decade and a half, it has also been profoundly influenced by what Muslims feel is a hos-

tile American environment in which they are being held accountable for the activities of others overseas.

America, although a nation of immigrants, is nonetheless not particularly fond of them, no matter where they come from or what they believe in. It expects its social institutions, whether the workplace, the armed services, the schools, the churches, or the courts, to assimilate these strangers and forge them into Americans. Overall, those of European heritage have had a better chance of assimilation than people of Asian origin, who were entirely excluded from the mix until the repeal of the Asian Exclusion Act.[10] There is in any case a general American tendency to view the survival of immigrant foreign culture as a relic of the past that must inevitably give way to assimilation and modernization as defined by the Protestant ethos that is claimed to be the foundation of America.

Efforts in the nineteenth century to create an America which was Protestant by choice rather than by mandate made life particularly difficult for atheists, Jews, and Catholics. By the middle of the twentieth century, the United States found it convenient to reinvent itself as a triple melting pot, a mix of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews with no apparent place for other religions. In recent years, Americans increasingly have begun to use the term "Judeo-Christian" to define themselves, a "politically correct" term that for some appears to draw an obvious and tight line of religious acceptance around two major religions, regarding others as transient, permanently marginalized, or destined to disappear into the larger groups.

What is defined as the Judeo-Christian tradition can appear to those of other faiths as an exclusive club, the monopoly of two groups that regard others as outside the polity or subsume them only when they conform to the policies and desires of the dominant groups. It is part of America's heritage as a country founded on the pious hope for a righteous society to see itself as being against those who it believes do not share that vision. Thus, throughout the history of America different groups have played the role of outsider, non-participant, even enemy, in response to which Americans can reaffirm their identity as a nation standing for the right and the good. Currently, Muslims appear to be the victims of the apparent need to create such an enemy, one that can be defined as the antithesis of the national character and a threat to the righteous order.

This reality plays an important role in the shaping of American Muslim identity. The identity of the community and the awareness that it constitutes a powerless minority are enhanced in the American milieu. Muslims believe that the professed separation of religion and state is violated every time a leader affirms that America is a Judeo-Christian country. They ask why it is acceptable for an American president to call for the implementation of Christian values while denouncing all efforts to build a moral and just Islamic society. And they wonder why America seems to support the concept of a "Jewish state" in Israel while Muslims are urged to be civilized and renounce their "extremist" hope for an "Islamic state." Furthermore,

Muslims are keenly aware that American social life is organized to a great degree around churches and other religious organizations. They watch the parade of religious programs on television which call for commitment to Christian values and wonder why Americans affirm the necessity of pluralism, of secularism, and of national identity only when they address Muslims.

At the same time the American principle of the separation of church and state is welcomed, since it provides for toleration of a variety of religious institutions and identities. Muslims as a minority find that the guarantee of freedom of religion provides opportunities for new experiments and developments in ideas, institution building, and propagation, unequaled in the countries from which they came. By the same token, those committed to an Islamist perception of reality, members of the Muslim Brotherhood and their sympathizers, adhere to the belief that it is God's intent that government should be regulated by the religious decrees of the Qurʾan, that there should be no separation between religion and state, and that the only government sanctioned by God for such a task is one devoted to Islam.[11]

Also influential in defining Islamic identity in North America have been the vicissitudes of American foreign policy towards Arab and Islamic countries during the last forty years, policies that continue to trouble and alienate the majority of Muslim citizens. The dramatic acceleration of interaction between American society and the Muslim world does not appear to have had any significant positive influence on policy makers, who continue to ignore Muslim sensibilities especially in regard to such things as American support for the state of Israel, despite the latter's documented violation of the civil, political, and human rights of its Christian and Muslim citizens; American support for India, despite its record of violently suppressing the right of Kashmir's population to self determination; and American reluctance to support what are perceived as the just causes of people in Azerbaijan, Bosnia, and Chechnya, among others. Proclamations by the State Department of its advocacy of human rights, pluralism, and minority rights as an important foundation of American policy in the world are increasingly viewed by Muslims as hypocritical.

"Target Islam"[12]

There is a growing concern among Muslims both in America and overseas regarding American tolerance for negative depictions of Islam and Muslims.[13] Anti-Muslim sentiment generally increases in the wake of what Muslims believe to be the unbalanced coverage given events overseas by the American press. Media treatment of the hostage-taking in Iran in 1979 and the TWA hijacking in Lebanon in 1985, for example, seem to have brought out deep-seated prejudices in American society. More recently, the press had a heyday with the World Trade Center bombing and some in its corps insisted

that the Oklahoma City bombing showed the modus operandi of Middle Eastern terrorists even after investigation proved it to be the work of Christian Americans.[14]

As a consequence of such biased coverage, Muslims have reported a series of attacks on mosques and other Islamic institutions. In addition to the vengeful acts of some isolated Americans inflamed by media reports about Islam, Muslims fear the more organized hostile activities of certain groups. Most obvious, perhaps, is the Jewish Defense League (JDL),[15] an American urban terrorist organization which, according to FBI reports, is the second most violent group in the United States. The JDL threatened several American mosques and other Islamic targets in 1985, and is suspected of having bombed the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) offices on the West Coast which killed Alex Odeh.[16] More recent hate crimes by other groups include the bombing of a mosque in Texas and the burning of mosques in Indiana and California.

The negativism toward Islamists comes from various sources. Only one group, the Christian right, is motivated by religious conviction. Others engaged in negative propaganda include officials of the American government seeking support from various sectors of American society. What seems to be an anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, anti-Islam wave sweeping across the United States accelerated beginning in 1980, encouraged by President Reagan's confrontational style and his Manichaean world view.[17] Since then, some American leaders have increasingly described Muslims as outside the "national character" or the "shared American culture," with the insinuation that their values are not mainstream. Questions are raised about whether their religious practices and cultural preferences are compatible with the American way of life, especially when it comes to dress, roles for women, sexuality, child rearing, use of free time and alcohol, attitudes toward gambling, education, private hygiene, occupation, and scruples about financial transactions that involve interest. Muslims protest that these attitudes not only deprive them of power and status but also deny them a voice and a presence.

Casting Islamists as the enemy of humanity, tolerance, and civilization is also a theme in the chorus repeated daily by officials of Arab governments seeking legitimacy and American support against opposition political groups in their own countries. These opposition groups are generally looking to democratize the authoritarian political regimes that rule in various Muslim states and to hold the corrupt officials accountable to the people. Often they are trying to implement a more equitable and just social and economic order that aims at ameliorating the conditions that exist in these states; they are concerned with the welfare of the people rather than the profit of the Western corporations. They believe that the kind of government they want cannot be created unless it is formed by those initiated into the Islamic consciousness and committed to implementing an Islamist world view.

Among those who see "Islamic extremism" as the enemy are members of the Israeli government and their American defenders.[18] Since the fall of the

Soviet empire, Islamist literature has taken note of the intensified and sustained emphasis on the supposed threat of Islam in the speeches of Israeli leaders in their effort to portray Israel as the guardian of American and Western interests in the Middle East and to maintain the high subsidies given to it by the United States.[19] The Islamist press notes that Muslims have been depicted as a cancer that should be combated by the combined forces of the Clinton administration and Israel.[20] Also perpetuating the image of Islam as the enemy are so-called experts on foreign policy who need a threat in order to sell their expertise. Observing that the fall of the Soviet empire eliminated the enemy against which the United States could place itself, they eagerly pointed to the threat of Islam as filling that vacuum.[21]

Americans, conditioned to respond to a world they feel is threatened by malevolent forces that they are somehow mandated to overcome, are quick to see Islam as the next challenge which must be met. For some, the opposition to Islam is subtler. Recent pieces on the editorial pages of our newspapers suggest that Americans should distinguish between good Muslims and bad Muslims, condemning the Islamists and cooperating with the moderates. The moderates are identified as people like Taslima Nasreen and Salman Rushdie, both of whom are seen as apostates by many Muslims. While some may find this an improvement over wholesale condemnation, it is nonetheless difficult for many to accept. As one Muslim put it: "It used to be that the only good Arab was a dead Arab; now it has shifted to the only good Muslim is the one who wants to assassinate his religion."

While Muslims in America have ample reason to fear "Judeo-Christian" prejudice incited as a result of events overseas, they are also concerned about deliberate falsifications of Islam that are perpetrated by those who appear to have declared Islam to be an "enemy faith." The community is also afraid of becoming a target of Christian missionary assaults by church groups who seek to induct Muslims into the Christian faith through conversion. The demonization of Islam is also perpetrated by Christian fundamentalists who have revised their theology to include Muslims among the villains hastening Armageddon and bringing about the imminent end of time when Jesus will come to initiate the rapture. Muslims are depicted on Christian television programs as war mongers, bent on destroying Israel.[22]

While some segments of the American press have managed to create the image of the Muslim as the consummate terrorist, Muslims surveying the history and experience of the Muslim community worldwide often see themselves as the victims of circumstance as well as conspiratorial forces of hatred. They trace this victimization back to the Crusades and the Reconquista, through the age of imperialism, and see it reinforced in contemporary events such as

> the brutal massacres at Sabra and Shatila Refugee Camps in Lebanon, the one-sided Gulf War in which Muslims were pitted against Muslims, the continued repression of the Palestinians in the face of Arab

> disunity, the indiscriminate slaughter and torture of Bosnian Muslims by Serbians, the persecution of Kashmiris and the Hindu savagery against Muslims in India, the slaughter of Rohingas in Burma, the Civil War and famine in Somalia, the demolition of the Babri Mosque in India, Soviet aggression and internal strife in post-Communist Afghanistan, turbulence in Central Asia, the Kurdish problem, and the suppression of democracy in Algeria, to name only a few.[23]

Muslims as Minorities

A new genre of Islamist literature has developed over the second half of this century by popular authors such as Abu al-Aʿla al-Mawdudi[24] of Pakistan and Sayyid Qutb[25] of Egypt that has had some influence on Muslims trying to find their identity in the American context. Both addressed Muslims living in Islamic nations deemed secular, but who were committed to the vision of the Islamist future and willing to work for the realization of Islamic government. They encouraged Muslims who felt themselves to be persecuted because of their political stance not to remain living in oppressive environments but to emigrate to a more congenial place, enhance their Islamic consciousness, and organize in order to return to their homelands to overthrow un-Islamic nationalist and socialist governments. This vision tapped into the powerful imagery of the struggle of the early believers in Medina under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad.

The focus of al-Mawdudi's attention was the community of Muslims living in India. He insisted that minorities deserve to suffer the consequences of belonging to a minority faith and that they must expect to be mistreated and marginalized.[26] In order to guarantee their security and the freedom to practice their faith, Muslims should find areas governed by Islam to live in. Although they may venture into other regions of the world as diplomats or traders, if their right to practice their faith is threatened, they should return to a Muslim country. Qutb focused on Nasserist Egypt and encouraged Islamists to separate themselves, raise their Islamic consciousness, and return to eradicate un-Islamic governments that have assumed power over the Muslims. He viewed Islam as a divine imperative cast in the world to topple all man-made institutions and governments.[27]

Younger Islamists in non-Muslim societies, aware of the changing circumstances of life for a growing number of Muslims who find themselves needing to emigrate in search of a livelihood, have proposed other solutions. Moroccan Islamist Ali Kettani, for example, insists that Islam seeks the health and well being of the community, conditions that can only be guaranteed by social and political empowerment.[28] Muslims therefore must not accept minority status as a permanent condition in which they accommodate and acquiesce to those in power since that will perpetuate their weakness. They must perceive their "minorityness"[29] as a challenge to be transcended.