

Muslims and European Multiculturalism*

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Abstract

Relasi komunitas Islam global dan komunitas Barat (dalam skala tertentu dapat disebut komunitas Kristen) mengalami perubahan dari waktu ke waktu. Peristiwa 11 September 2001, ketika sejumlah pembajak pesawat beragama Islam yang menabrakkan pesawat ke gedung WTC New York, Pentagon dan upaya ke Gedung Putih yang gagal, telah mengubah relasi tersebut. Komunitas Islam, tanpa peduli dia bersalah atau tidak, sering dicurigai dan dianggap sebagai pendukung terorisme, pengajar dan penganjur praktek kekerasan yang dibalut dengan fanatisme agama.

Dengan menyadari latar belakangnya sebagai salah satu anggota komunitas Muslim yang minoritas di Eropa, penulis mengangkat kasus-kasus konkrit yang dihadapinya di Inggris dan mendorong upaya perubahan. Pertama-tama yang dianjurkan ialah mendorong adanya gerakan kesamaan atau kesetaraan (equality). Kesetaraan ini terjadi kalau masing-masing pihak menyadari hak dan kewajiban masing-masing. Komunitas Muslim yang menjadi minoritas di Eropa harus belajar mengintegrasikan diri dengan komunitas lokal, sementara komunitas lokal diharapkan untuk mendukung dan menerima keunikan kaum minoritas ini. Kesadaran-kesadaran yang terus menerus dipupuk akan mendorong peningkatan kesamaan dalam berbagai aspek kehidupan, terutama meruntuhkan diskriminasi atas dasar agama, memerlakukan semua agama secara merata dan menerima komunitas agama-agama sebagai bagian yang syah dari komunitas lokal. Ketika orang sudah saling menerima satu sama lain, keharmonisan dalam hidup bersama bukan lagi sebuah ilusi.

Key words: Moslem minority, diversity, equality movement .

In the aftermath of the events of 11 September the rhetoric associated with Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilization' is thick in the air (Huntington, 1993; reprinted in *The Sunday Times* (London), 14 October, 2001 because it was thought to be especially relevant today). Despite official protestations to the contrary, many in the West think that the underlying problem is not terrorism or even Islamic fundamentalism but Islam, i.e. a rival and inferior civilization.

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This pointing the finger at Muslims clearly will not go away and its denials - though politically important - are not believed by many Muslims throughout the world. Not just because all the countries, organisations and individuals that are being targetted by the US-led 'war against terrorism' are Muslims (eg., no one mentions the Tamil Tiger separatists in Sri Lanka, even though they pioneered the use of 'suicide bombers', not to mention the various groups that the CIA supports, as it used to support the Taliban). But also because Islam is so clearly evoked by many terrorist and *jihadi* organisations - Bin Laden is perhaps the greatest advocate of the clash of civilisation thesis. Hence the thesis poses a real danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The idea of Islam as separate from a Judeo-Christian West is, however, as false as it is influential. Islam, with its faith in the revelations of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, belongs to the same tradition as Christianity and Judaism. It is, in its monotheism, legalism and communitarianism, not to mention specific rules of life, such as dietary prohibitions, particularly close to Judaism. In the Crusades of Christendom and at other times, Jews were slaughtered by Christians and their secular descendents and protected by Muslims. The Jews remember Muslim Spain as a 'Golden Age'. Islam, indeed, then was a civilization and a genuine geopolitical rival to the West. Yet even in that period Islam and Christendom were not discrete and nor mere competitors. They borrowed and learned from each other, whether it was in relation to scholarship, philosophy and scientific enquiry, or medicine, architecture and technology. Indeed, the classical learning from Athens and Rome, which was lost to Christendom was preserved by the Arabs and came to western Europe - like the institution of the university - from Muslims (Hodgson, 1974, Makdissi, 1990). In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the critical rationalism and humanism, produced through engagement with ancient Greek texts, which lie at the heart of the Renaissance, Reformation and modern science, was born in Arab universities, even though it came to bore fruit in western Europe. That Europe came to define its civilization as a renaissance of Greece and Rome and excised the Arab contribution to its foundations and well-being is an example of racist myth-making that has much relevance to today. It is great tragedy, too, that Muslims turned their backs on this intellectual current and that Europeans appropriated it without acknowledgement. One step towards inter-civilisational dialogue and less exclusive definitions of Europe and of Islam would be if we were to excavate this history.

There is an anti-Muslim wind blowing across the European continent. One factor is a perception that Muslims are making politically exceptional, culturally unreasonable or theologically alien demands upon European states. I

would like to address this. My contention is that the claims Muslims are making in fact parallel comparable arguments about gender or ethnic equality. Seeing the issue in that context shows how inescapably European and contemporary is the logic of mainstream Muslim identity politics.

Muslims in Europe: a question of belonging

The first thing to note about the estimated 15 million people in Europe who are subjectively or objectively Muslim, is that they are not a homogeneous group. Some Muslims are devout but apolitical; some are political but do not see their politics as being 'Islamic' (indeed, may even be anti-Islamic). Some identify more with a nationality of origin, such as Turkish; others with the nationality of settlement and perhaps citizenship, such as French. Some prioritise fund-raising for mosques, others campaigns against discrimination, unemployment or Zionism. For some, the Ayatollah Khomeini is a hero and Osama bin Laden an inspiration; for others, the same may be said of Kemal Ataturk or Margaret Thatcher, who created a swathe of Asian millionaires in Britain, brought in Arab capital and was one of the first to call for NATO action to protect Muslims in Kosovo.

The category 'Muslim', then, is as internally diverse as, say, 'Christian' or 'Belgian' or 'middle-class', or any other category helpful in ordering our understanding of contemporary Europe. But just as internal diversity does not lead to the abandonment of social concepts in general, the same is true of the category, 'Muslim'.

Muslims in Europe do not form a single political bloc or class formation, although they are disproportionately among the lowest-paid, unemployed and under-employed. Muslims have, however, the most extensive and developed discourses of unity, common circumstance and common victimhood among peoples of non-EU origin, in the EU. This sense of community may be partial, may depend upon context and crisis, may coexist with other overlapping or competing commitments or aspirations; but it is an actual or latent 'Us', partly dependent upon others seeing Muslims and partly causing others to see Muslims as a 'Them'.

For many years, Muslims have been the principal victims of the bloodshed that has produced Europe's asylum seekers (think of Palestine, Somalia, Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Afghanistan) and so are vulnerable to the anti-refugee mood and policies in the EU today. This, of course, also affects Muslim residents and citizens, and the situation has been thrown into sharp relief by September 11 and its aftermath. There are many reports of harass-

ment and attacks against Muslims; and Muslims, having expressed both vulnerability and defiance, have become a focus of national concern and debate. They have found themselves bearing the brunt of a new wave of suspicion and hostility, and strongly voiced if imprecise doubts are being cast on their loyalty as citizens.

There has been widespread questioning about whether Muslims can or are willing to be integrated into European society and its political values. In particular, whether Muslims are committed to what are taken to be the core European values of freedom, tolerance, democracy, sexual equality and secularism.

Across Europe, multiculturalism—a policy suitable where groups want to maintain some level of distinction among communities—is in retreat and ‘integration’ is once again the watchword. These questions and doubts have been raised across the political spectrum, voiced by individuals ranging from Berlusconi in Italy and the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn to the British Home Secretary, David Blunkett. The Dutch, once the pioneers of a certain kind of multiculturalism, have reversed most of their earlier policies.

Certainly in the UK, many politicians, commentators – including eminent *Guardian* left of centre intellectuals such as Hugo Young and Polly Toynbee – and letter-writers and phone-callers to the media from across the political spectrum, have blamed such concern on the perceived cultural separatism and self-imposed segregation of Muslim migrants and on a ‘politically correct’ multiculturalism that has fostered fragmentation rather than integration and ‘Britishness’.

Europe: a diversity of national contexts

The same wind might be blowing across the continent, yet the landscape is not uniform. Of the three largest European countries, Germany, France and the UK, the former West Germany and France have, in both absolute and relative terms, a larger foreign-born population and population of non-European origin than the UK. Yet issues of racial discrimination, ethnic identity and multiculturalism have less prominence in those two countries than in the UK.

One aspect of this is that national debates on these topics have a lesser prominence, and that such debates are less frequently led by non-whites or non-Europeans, who are more the *objects of*, rather than *participants in*, the debates. Another aspect is the relative lack of data about ethnicity and religious communities, and consequently of research and literature. Yet this is not

a simple matter of scale. Each of the countries in the EU has a very different *conception* of what the issues are, depending upon its history, political culture and legal system.

The German experience is dominated by the idea that Germany is not a country of immigration, and so those newcomers who can show German descent are automatically granted nationality while the others are temporary guest workers or refugees: none are immigrants. Hence, out of its population of 80 million, Germany has 5 million without German citizenship. This includes about 2 million Turks and Kurds, some of whom are now third-generation Germans but who until recently were excluded from citizenship by German self-conceptions of nationality as *descent*.

In contrast, France has a history of immigration which it has proudly dealt with by a readiness to grant citizenship. But it has a republican conception of citizenship which does not allow, at least in theory, any body of citizens to be differentially identified, for example as Arab.

In Germany, if you are of Turkish descent you cannot be German. In France, you can be of any descent but if you are a French citizen you cannot be an Arab. In each case, US-style—and now UK-style—composite identities like Turkish German, Arab French or British Indian are ideologically impossible. The giving up of pre-French identities and assimilation into French culture is thought to go hand in hand with the acceptance of French citizenship. If for some reason assimilation is not fully embraced—perhaps because some people want to retain pride in their Algerian ancestry, or want to maintain ethnic solidarity in the face of current stigmatisation and discrimination—then their claim to be French and equal citizens is jeopardised.

The French conception of the republic, moreover, also has integral to it a certain radical secularism, *laïcité*, marking the political triumph over clericalism. The latter was defeated by pushing matters of faith and religion out of politics and policy into the private sphere. Islam, with its claim to regulate public as well as private life, is therefore seen as an ideological foe and the Muslim presence as alien and potentially both culturally and politically inassimilable. This is most visible in the new French policy to ban 'ostentatious' religious symbols in state schools, a measure - so clearly aimed at the use of the hijab - that is seen as drawing a 'line in the sand' in the containment of Islam.

The British experience

Against the background of these distinctive national contexts and histories, it is quite mistaken to single out Muslims as a particularly intractable and

uncooperative group characterised by extremist politics, religious obscurantism and an unwillingness to integrate. The case of Britain is the one I know in detail and can be illustrative.

In contrast to continental Europe, the British experience of 'coloured immigration', in contrast, has been seen as an Atlantocentric legacy of the slave trade. Policy and legislation were formed in the 1960s in the shadow of the US Civil Rights Movement, black power discourse and the inner-city riots in Detroit, Watts and elsewhere. It was, therefore, dominated by the idea of 'race', more specifically by the idea of a black-white dualism. It was also shaped by the imperial legacy, one aspect of which was that all colonials and citizens of the Commonwealth were 'subjects of the Crown'. As such they had rights of entry into the UK and entitlement to all the benefits enjoyed by Britons, from National Health Service treatment to social security and the vote. (The right of entry was successively curtailed from 1962 so that, while in 1960 Britain was open to the Commonwealth but closed to Europe, twenty years later the position was fully reversed.)

The relation between Muslims and the wider British society and British state has to be seen in terms of the developing agendas of racial equality and multiculturalism. Muslims have become central to these agendas even while they have contested important aspects, especially the primacy of racial identities, narrow definitions of racism and equality, and the secular bias of the discourse and policies of multiculturalism.

While there are now emergent Muslim discourses of equality, of difference and also, to use the motto of the Muslim Council of Britain, of 'the common good', they have to be understood as appropriations and modulations of habits of thought and action already formed in anti-racist and feminist discourse.

While one result of this is to throw advocates of multiculturalism into theoretical and practical disarray, another is to stimulate accusations of cultural separatism and revive a discourse of 'integration'. While we should not ignore the critics of Muslim activism, we need to recognise that at least some of the latter is a politics of 'catching up' with racial equality and feminism.

In this way, religion in Britain is assuming a renewed political importance. After a long period of hegemony, political secularism can no longer be taken for granted but is having to answer its critics; there is a growing understanding that the incorporation of Muslims has become the most important challenge of egalitarian multiculturalism.

British equality movements

The presence of new population groups in Britain made manifest certain kinds of racism, and anti-discrimination laws and policies began to be put into place from the 1960s. These provisions, initially influenced by contemporary thinking and practice in relation to anti-black racism in the United States, assume that the grounds of discrimination are 'colour' and ethnicity.

Muslim assertiveness became a feature of majority-minority relations only from around the early 1990s; and indeed, prior to this, racial equality discourse and politics were dominated by the idea that the dominant post-immigration issue was 'colour racism'. One consequence of this is that the legal and policy framework still reflects the conceptualisation and priorities of racial dualism.

Till December 2003 it was lawful to discriminate against Muslims qua Muslims because the courts do not accept that Muslims are an ethnic group (though oddly, Jews and Sikhs are recognised as ethnic groups within the meaning of the law). While initially unremarked upon, this exclusive focus on race and ethnicity, and the exclusion of Muslims but not Jews and Sikhs, has come to be a source of resentment.

Muslims did enjoy some limited indirect legal protection qua members of ethnic groups such as Pakistanis or Arabs. Over time, groups like Pakistanis have become an active constituency within British 'race relations', whereas Middle Easterners tend to classify themselves as 'white', as in the 1991 and 2001 Censuses, and on the whole have not been prominent in political activism of this sort, nor in domestic politics generally. One of the effects of this politics was to highlight race.

A key indicator of racial discrimination and inequality has been numerical under-representation, for instance in prestigious jobs and public office. Hence, people have had to be (self-)classified and counted; thus group labels, and arguments about which labels are authentic, have become a common feature of certain political discourses.

It has also become gradually apparent through these inequality measures that it is Asian Muslims and not, as expected, Afro-Caribbeans, who have emerged as the most disadvantaged and poorest groups in the country. To many Muslim activists, the misplacing of Muslims into 'race' categories and the belatedness with which the severe disadvantages of the Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have come to be recognised mean that race relations are perceived at best as an inappropriate policy niche for Muslims, and at worst as a conspiracy to prevent the emergence of a specifically Muslim sociopolitical

formation. To see how such thinking has emerged we need briefly to consider the career of the concept of 'racial equality'.

The initial development of anti-racism in Britain followed the American pattern, and indeed was directly influenced by American personalities and events. Just as in the United States the colour-blind humanism of Martin Luther King Jr came to be mixed with an emphasis on black pride, black autonomy and black nationalism as typified by Malcolm X, so too the same process occurred in the UK (both these inspirational leaders visited Britain).

Indeed, it is best to see this development of racial explicitness and positive blackness as part of a wider sociopolitical climate which is not confined to race and culture or non-white minorities. Feminism, gay pride, Québécois nationalism and the revival of a Scottish identity are some prominent examples of these new identity movements which have become an important feature in many countries, especially those in which class politics has declined in salience; the emphasis on non-territorial identities such as black, gay and women is particularly marked among anglophones.

In fact, it would be fair to say that what is often claimed today in the name of racial equality, again especially in the English-speaking world, goes beyond the claims that were made in the 1960s. Iris Young expresses well the new political climate when she describes the emergence of an ideal of equality based not just on allowing excluded groups to assimilate and live by the norms of dominant groups, but on the view that 'a positive self-definition of group difference is in fact more liberatory.'

Equality and difference: the public-private distinction

This significant shift takes us from an understanding of 'equality' in terms of individualism and cultural assimilation to a politics of recognition; to 'equality' as encompassing public ethnicity. This perception of equality means not having to hide or apologise for one's origins, family or community, and requires others to show respect for them. Public attitudes and arrangements must adapt so that this heritage is encouraged, not contemptuously expected to wither away.

These two conceptions of equality may be stated as follows:

- + the right to assimilate to the majority/dominant culture in the public sphere, with toleration of 'difference' in the private sphere;
- + the right to have one's 'difference' (minority ethnicity, etc.) recognised and supported in both the public and the private spheres.

While the former represents a liberal response to 'difference', the latter is the 'take' of the new identity politics. The two are not, however, alternative conceptions of equality in the sense that to hold one, the other must be rejected. Multiculturalism, properly construed, requires support for both conceptions. For the assumption behind the first is that participation in the public or national culture is necessary for the effective exercise of citizenship, the only obstacle to which are the exclusionary processes preventing gradual assimilation. The second conception, too, assumes that groups excluded from the national culture have their citizenship diminished as a result, and sees the remedy not in rejecting the right to assimilate, but in adding the right to widen and adapt the national culture, and the public and media symbols of national membership, to include the relevant minority ethnicities.

It can be seen, then, that the public-private distinction is crucial to the contemporary discussion of equal citizenship, and particularly to the challenge to an earlier liberal position. It is in this political and intellectual climate—namely, a climate in which what would earlier have been called 'private' matters had become sources of equality struggles—that Muslim assertiveness emerged as a domestic political phenomenon. In this respect, the advances achieved by anti-racism and feminism (with its slogan 'the personal is the political') acted as benchmarks for later political group entrants, such as Muslims. While Muslims raise distinctive concerns, the logic of their demands often mirrors those of other equality-seeking groups.

Religious equality

So, one of the current conceptions of equality is a difference-affirming equality, with related notions of respect, recognition and identity—in short, what I understand by political multiculturalism. What kinds of specific policy demands, then, are being made by or on behalf of religious groups and Muslim identity politics in particular, when these terms are deployed?

I suggest that these demands have three dimensions, which get progressively 'thicker'.

1. No religious discrimination.

The very basic demand is that religious people, no less than people defined by 'race' or gender, should not suffer discrimination in job and other opportunities. So, for example, a person who is trying to dress in accordance with their religion or who projects a religious identity (such as a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf, a hijab), should not be discriminated against in employ-

ment. While discrimination against *yarmulke*-wearing Jews and turban-wearing Sikhs is deemed to be unlawful *racial* discrimination, Muslims, unlike these other faith communities, are not deemed to be a racial or ethnic group. Nor are they protected by the legislation against religious discrimination that does exist in one part of the UK: being explicitly designed to protect Catholics, it covers only Northern Ireland.

The same argument is behind the demand for a law in Britain (as already exists in Northern Ireland) making incitement to religious hatred unlawful, to parallel the law against incitement to racial hatred. (The latter extends protection to certain forms of anti-Jewish literature, but not anti-Muslim literature.)

After some years of arguing that there was insufficient evidence of religious discrimination, the hand of the British government has been forced by Article 13 of the EU Amsterdam Treaty (1999), which includes religious discrimination in the list of the forms of discrimination that all member states are expected to eliminate. Accordingly, the government has implemented a European Commission directive to outlaw religious discrimination in employment with effect from December 2003. This is, however, only a partial 'catching-up' with the existing anti-discrimination provisions in relation to race and gender. The new legislation is confined to employment (not extended to discrimination in provision of goods and services), and will not create a duty upon employers to take steps to promote equality of opportunity.

2. Parity with native religions.

Many minority faith advocates interpret equality to mean that minority religions should get at least some of the support from the state that longer-established religions do. Muslims have led the way on this argument, and have made two particular issues politically contentious: the state funding of schools and the law of blasphemy. After some political battle, the government has agreed in recent years to fund a few (so far, four) Muslim schools, as well as a Sikh and a Seventh Day Adventist school, on the same basis enjoyed by thousands of Anglican and Catholic schools and some Methodist and Jewish schools. (In England and Wales, over a third of state-maintained primary and a sixth of secondary schools are in fact run by a religious group—but all have to deliver a centrally determined national curriculum.)

Some secularists are unhappy about this. They accept the argument for parity but believe this should be achieved by the state withdrawing its funding from all religious schools. Most Muslims reject this form of equality in which the privileged lose something but the under-privileged gain nothing. More specifi-

cally, the issue between 'equalising upwards' and 'equalising downwards' here is about the legitimacy of religion as a public institutional presence.

Muslims have failed to get the courts to interpret the existing statute on blasphemy to cover offences beyond what Christians hold sacred, but some political support exists for an offence of incitement to religious hatred, mirroring the existing one of incitement to racial hatred. The government inserted such a clause in the post-September 11 security legislation, in order to conciliate Muslims, who, among others, were opposed to the new powers of surveillance, arrest and detention. As it happened, most of the latter was made law (leading to the arrest without trial of hundreds of Muslims), but the provision on incitement to religious hatred was defeated in Parliament. It was reintroduced in a private member's bill from a Liberal Democrat, Lord Avebury, which also sought to abolish the laws governing blasphemy. Although unsuccessful, these provisions may yet return to Parliament in some form.

3. Positive inclusion of religious groups.

The demand here is that religion in general, or at least the category of 'Muslim' in particular, should be a category by which the inclusiveness of social institutions may be judged, as they increasingly are in relation to race and gender. For example, employers should have to demonstrate that they do not discriminate against Muslims by explicit monitoring of Muslims' position within the workforce, backed up by appropriate policies, targets, managerial responsibilities, work environments, staff training, advertisements, outreach and so on. Similarly, public bodies should provide appropriately sensitive policies and staff in relation to the services they provide, especially in relation to (non-Muslim) schools, social and health services; Muslim community centres or Muslim youth workers should be funded in addition to existing Asian and Caribbean community centres and Asian and black youth workers.

To take another case: the BBC currently believes it is of political importance to review and improve its personnel practices and its output of programmes, including its on-screen 'representation' of the British population, by making provision for and winning the confidence of, say, women, ethnic groups and young people. Why should it not also use religious groups as a criterion of inclusivity and have to demonstrate that it is doing the same for viewers and staff defined by religious community membership?

In short, Muslims should be treated as a legitimate group in their own right (not because they are, say, Asians), whose presence in British society has to be explicitly reflected in all walks of life and in all institutions; and whether they are so included should become one of the criteria for judging Britain as an

egalitarian, inclusive, multicultural society. There is no prospect at present of religious equality catching up with the importance that employers and other organisations give to sex or race. A potentially significant victory, however, was made when the government agreed to include a religion question in the 2001 Census. This was the first time this question had been included since 1851 and was largely unpopular outside the politically active religionists, among whom Muslims were foremost. Nevertheless, it has the potential to pave the way for widespread 'religious monitoring' in the way that the inclusion of an ethnic question in 1991 had led to the more routine use of 'ethnic monitoring'.

These policy demands no doubt seem odd within the terms of, say, the French or US 'wall of separation' between the state and religion, and may make secularists uncomfortable in Britain too. But it is clear that they virtually mirror existing anti-discrimination policy provisions in the UK.

Conclusion

The emergence of Muslim political agency has thrown British multiculturalism into theoretical and practical disarray. It has led to policy reversals in the Netherlands and elsewhere, and across Europe has strengthened intolerant, exclusive nationalism. We should in fact be moving the other way. We should be extending to Muslims existing levels of protection from discrimination and incitement to hatred, and the duties on organisations to ensure equality of opportunity, not the watered-down versions of legislation proposed by the European Commission and the UK government. In consultation with religious and other representatives, we should target more effectively the severe poverty and social exclusion of Muslims. And we should recognise Muslims as a legitimate social partner and include them in the institutional compromises of church and state, religion and politics, that characterise the evolving, moderate secularism of mainstream western Europe - resisting the wayward, radical example of France.

Ultimately, we must rethink 'Europe' and its changing nations so that Muslims are not a 'Them' but part of a plural 'Us', not mere sojourners but part of its future. A hundred years ago, the African American theorist W. E. B. Du Bois predicted that the twentieth century would be the century of the colour line; today, we seem to be set for a century of the Islam-West line. The political integration or incorporation of Muslims—remembering that there are more Muslims in the European Union than the combined populations of Finland, Ireland and Denmark put together—has not only become the most important goal of egalitarian multiculturalism but is now pivotal in shaping the security, indeed the destiny, of many peoples across the globe.