



Socio-political Fabric of Muslim Societies: A Theoretical Approach to Frame 'Islam' in Empirical World

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Abstract

Culture and national character of modern nations are predominantly derived from the religious formation of that society. Determining the significance of religion for the societies turns out to be more complex and less definite. Transitions of worldwide religion, politics, trade and customs persuaded Muslims to integrate a cascade of changes in regional political power relations, formation of state, legal institutions, norms, rituals and even religious ideas. The realms of religion and politics are tightly intertwined with each-other in a number of ways. Though one is rather related to the private sphere of life and the other is to that of the public sphere, but both have a great impact on each other. New religious movement and political progress, in some part of the world, have become two sides of the same coin. Nonetheless, the role of religion remains an essential perspective to explain the social conditions of the people of heterogeneous advanced societies. This research offers a general interpretation of a constantly evolving complex of theological, cultural, social and religious traditions in Muslim societies.

Key words: Islam, Society, Politics, Muslim, Beliefs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islam is passing fourteen hundred years on this earth among the people and continues to play a significant role in the lives and living of people of all around the world. One-fifth of the world's total population is Muslim that is about 1.6 billion people. They are the majority in about 50 countries and territories that are clustered in Asia and Africa (Haub & Kaneda, 2012). The predominant sects of Muslims are either Sunni or Shi'a and they are being exposed to a lot many dissimilar traditions and customs. Hence, the Islamic norms and values that are essentially important for the stability of one sect, may a matter of dispute among different sects. Islam has been blended with a range of different traditions and resulted in various political formations. The role 'Islam' in politics is basically concerned with establishing Islamic law in the state, and on a few occasions, with a latent intention of opposing globalization. However, when, tenets of Islamic Sharia collaborate with foreign political ideologies, an intricate social system like moral Islamism, national Islamism and global Islamism emerges. Further, modern-day political ideologies like pluralism, parliamentary democracy and fundamentalism have been assimilated with Islamic ideologies of ruling a state and resulted in a different scenario. Some states like Saudi Arabia, are an Islamic state, where use of Sharia law or the Quran as a form of legislation. On the other hand, some states such as Malaysia declared Islam as their state religion, and others like Turkey regard themselves as a secular state. Additionally, there are states like Indonesia, neither adopted a state religion, declared an Islamic state, nor declared a secular state.

The collaboration of religion and politics is unique to Islam and different Muslim societies may endeavor diverse aspects of Islam. There was no Islamic state before and there is no mention of such concept in the Quran. The religious establishment has made subordinate to temporal authority after the death of the Prophet. No two Islamic states are alike, they are all conditioned by the national contexts within which they originate and operate. Such as Saudi Arabia is an anti-constitutional monarchy and Iran is a constitutional republic. Both of these states are modern constructs, Islam does not prescribe any particular model of rule, whether authoritarian, democratic or structural. Egypt and Pakistan are the states confronting ideological and pragmatic Islamism. Pakistan nurtured Islamists more committed to democracy than that of Egypt. The present day scenario is, Egypt becomes more radical and Pakistan more moderate. Turkey and Indonesia are states with Muslim democracies. There are Islamist national resistance movements in Hamas and Hezbollah. Successful economic globalization occurs in both Turkey and Indonesia, where their export-oriented economies have facilitated the rise of an Islamist bourgeoisie. It can also be seen that governing body of some Muslim countries, such as in Senegal, is the religious entrepreneurs who tends to commodify religious affiliation, while other nations, like Sudan may follow strict *Sufi* traditions. Sometimes urbanization of some cities, like Tauba incorporates Islamic symbols, institutions and *Sufi* order to it.

The reasons behind these diversities are not always the national contexts, where the longed established tradition and customs plays the sheer role, there are some global phenomena like colonialism, democratic transition and globalization contribute to amplify the diverse. Rapid technological advancement has made the network of communication immensely strong, and for that one incident of any part of the world, either for or against, Islam, whether large or small, can have a tremendous impact on the Muslims of other part of the world. Additionally, recent socio-political affairs around the globe, such as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Iranian revolution, the abolition of the caliphate, effects of the two World Wars in the Middle East, democratization of Islamic countries, authoritarian state policies in the Arabian Peninsula, the Palestine-Israel conflicts, twin-tower attacked and the broader trends of modernized lifestyle immensely contributing the already diversified societies into more varied forms. Some may seek a moral regeneration among

Muslims, some may want to make the nation, on the basis of *Sharia*, and some may aim at creating, through violent actions, a worldwide Muslim polity or a unified moral society under Islamic domination and re-established caliphate. There is 'school of thought', known as "Salafism", which surfaced after the Second World War, particularly as a reaction to the spread of European ideas. They intended to uncover the "roots of modernity" within Muslim civilization (Gilles, 2006). The Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia is a form of Salafism as it holds a strong position against the Shiites. The majority of the population of Iraq, in contrast, are Shiites and Kurds who would not support the triumph of the jihadi Salafis. Thus, framing the common traits of diverse Muslim societies in the present world condition would be a dauntingly complex work.

Developing a standpoint and outlining common traits about Muslim societies would be a compelling task as because it need to answer how Islam offers an established systematic pattern of beliefs and behavior that contribute in solidarity of the people of Muslim societies, along with the contrary of how Islam give birth of conflict and enforce social change, and how Islam shape the pattern of regular everyday behavior. Implying scientific tools and methods to study Muslim societies would be linking core theoretical investigation to empirical situation. This would primarily inspect the paramount impact of religion in the present global affairs. There are some emerging paradigms that focus on the specific dimensions and discrepancies of religiosity of contemporary "Muslim society". The first and foremost task would be defining 'Muslim Society', analyze common features of the societies of this kind around the world in relation to the theoretical perspective of social sciences. This study empirically examines the effect of Islam on socio-political context. The primary concern is how the tenets of Islam as a religion and social-cultural constituent, shapes the organized pattern of political actions people undertake in different countries around the world. Any act claimed to be performed in the name of religion, need to be considered in religious perspective of social sciences. The heart of this investigation is the ideas and theories of social theorists who examine the consequences of religious beliefs, practices and organization in a given society. Perspectives on Muslim societies would aim to understand the functions Islam as a religion serves the inequality and other problems it can reinforce and perpetuate, and the role it plays in our daily lives (Emerson, Monahan, & Mirola, 2011). In studying Muslim Societies, from a social science perspective, it does not make any attempt to set out an assess to validate any of religious beliefs, neither does it involved in comparing conflicting religious dogmas of different sects.

2. DISCUSSION

A Muslim society very simply can be defined as the sum total of relationships among its constituent Muslims. Nonetheless, 'Muslim society' may offer several meanings as it encompasses political, social, spiritual, religious a demographic facets into it. Muslim Society can be defined as (i) a set of people whose interpersonal relationships are persistently guided by *Sharia*, (ii) a large social group sharing the same Islamic values, norms and ideas, (iii) a political territory typically ruled by Islamic state and dominant Islamic tenets, (iv) a geographical location where majority of the people are Muslims, and (v) a society characterized by patterns of social relations between individuals who share a distinctive Islamic culture and institutions. A large Muslim society often is collaborative in nature that enables its fellow members to benefit in ways that would not otherwise be possible on an individual basis. Hence, it may demonstrate stratification and dominance patterns in subgroups, and evince a subculture consists of like-minded people governed by their own norms and values within a dominant, larger society. More broadly, within the social science framework, a Muslim society may be illustrated as a political, economic, social, or cultural infrastructure, made up of wide-ranging Islamic rules and regulations, yet distinct from another Muslim society. It can also be made up of the objective relationships Muslim have with the material world and with non-Muslims, rather than other Muslims who are living in the familiar social environment.

The complexity of the multiformity of Muslim societies, in point of fact, put forward a prospect to apply several perspectives to frame the diversity into a cohesive explanation. Studying religion from a social science point requires outlining the core ideas of eminent theories in sociology, anthropology and psychology. Sociologists Emile Durkheim (1912) specified the function of religion as it offers beliefs and rituals and work as a source of comfort in times of distress and enhances social interaction in places of worship, while Karl Marx (1844) indicated that religion directs the deprived and underprivileged to accept their fate and helps the privileged to maintain the existing system of social inequality. Max Weber (1904), another sociologist argued that people believed in and acted upon the existence of God that made them involved in a system of religious actions, which seems relatively rational to them. Anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1871) indicated that culture and religion tend to grow more sophisticated via monotheist religions, while James George Frazer (1890) indicated that magic augmented to religion and religion augmented to science. Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (1965) showed, witchcraft and oracles played a significant role in solving disputes and thus admit that religion has an intellectual explanatory aspect. Clifford Geertz (1973) added, religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence. Psychologist Sigmund Freud (1913) indicated that religion is a largely unconscious neurotic response to repression, while Rudolf Otto (1917) outlined that religion emerges from experiences like 'terrifying mystery' and 'awe inspiring, fascinating mystery'.

First, religion is a reflection of the concern for society as it is "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim 1965 [1912]: 62). Religion concerns with both belief and rituals; it is the collectively attended rituals that develop and strengthen a sense of group solidarity (Durkheim 1965 [1912]). Religion provides the idea of the sacred that *reinforces the group interests* and allows individuals to *escape from the ordinary facets of everyday life and transcendent towards higher realms of experience*. Their collective beliefs play a critical role in the management of social disruption and transition (Durkheim 1965 [1912]). This is quite evident in the African region, where the proliferation of Sufism is rampant. Although, the countries in the Middle East, where the religion Islam originated, are skeptical about Sufi orders, African nations emphasize the role of a spiritual guide and

possessing supernatural power (Hussein, 2008). Islamic Sufism plays a pivotal function in the formation of the constitution of Ghana and Nigeria. Colonialism can be held responsible for the lack of successful constitutionalism in Africa. In fact, African populations were inclined to admit authoritarian and totalitarian government, because they believe that this is the way things should be (An-Na'im 2006: 91). The role of *Sufi* traditions to the development of modern constitutionalism facilitates nations like Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda to deal with post colonial crises.

Second, religion is an *expression of material realities and economic injustice*, and problems in religion ultimately reflect problems in society (Marx, 1884). Religion is used by oppressors to make people feel better about the distress they experience due to being poor and exploited. It frequently acts to support the position of the powerful within society, whilst providing some comfort to the powerless. This is virtually manifested in Niore, a city in the south-west of Senegal (Soares, 2005). Pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial stages of West African Muslim societies played a pivotal role in the formation of Islamic constitutional governance (Amselle, 1998; Şaul, 2001). Increasing commodification and personalization of religion plays the most crucial role in the formation of authority the city. The people of this town consider the authority as the holy men or saints who act as a medium for the divine recompense and people seeks benefits from them by providing certain gifts. There evolve a class of religious entrepreneurs, who is competing within themselves to get a favor to win a political struggle or large business venture, sometimes a simple recognition of piety or some assistance with personal problems (Launay, 1992). Religious affiliation has become more important than developing a spiritual individualized personality. The New technologies of print, photography, video and sound recording plays a crucial role for a proliferation of the economy. This is also a cause for the acceleration of spiritual diversification and the formation of multilingual and Multifocal Islamic culture.

Third, Religion *shapes a person's 'image of the world'* that guides his interests which eventually lead his action (Weber, 1958). It made the involved people experiencing extraordinary powers, "the "charisma," present in those entities so endowed. This "charisma" also implies the presence of a system of relationships between these people and God. This social relationship involves certain dimensions that include a belief in one or several of a wide-ranging variety of supernatural powers, that are evidenced in a variety of *charismatic manifestations*, articulated through *symbolic expressions*, responded to in a variety of forms, under *the guidance of various types of leaders*, in a variety of patterns of relationships significantly determined by the patterned behavior of the lay people of the community (Christiano et al, 2002:6). Evidently, a Muslim society is the totalistic explanations of history drawn from Islamic theology, cultural formation and has a political aims to win the power over people. Most cases, political ideologies in Islam are monolithic and intrinsically violent. The contemporary Islamists contend that the state should be the instrument of sharia (Ayoob, 2008; 14). Political objectives and foreign policies of the west often disgrace Islamic symbols and traditions. , and work as prompt fundamentalism. Public figures like Abu Ala Maududi, Hassan al-Banna, Hassan Nasrallah, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad work as a charismatic leader and inspire millions of young Muslims across the world to develop fundamentalist ideologies.

Fourth, when a society evolves and reaches a new form of structure, there *retains certain customs that may not be necessarily useful for the new structure* (Taylor, 1837). "Processes, customs, and opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved." (Taylor, 1871:7). There was a vast range of interaction took place initially between the Muslim merchants and Hindu rulers in Southeast Asia during the thirteenth century. The most significant interactions were between traders who were Hadhrami Arabs, Ottomans, Persians, Indian Muslims and Chinese, Malays, Javanese, Bugis non-Muslims in Asia. The commerce was the vehicle for the changes in religious institutions and practices. Thus, Islamization is depicted as a conversion process that took place in the encounters between traders, teachers, and holy men with the inhabitants of Southeast Asia over six centuries. Arabic language and Muslim laws played a crucial role in the process. The same can be true for Senegal, where the mystical dimension of Islam (Sufism) and the process of urbanization collaborate together. Muslim agents, French administrative divisions, agricultural practices and railroads essentially contributed to the development of the city by adaptation of Islamic symbols and institutions. The City reflects Sufi concepts because the agents of urbanization, the people, forces and institutions that bring about the process itself are formed by the Sufism (Ross, 2006).

Fifth, *Magic* was a general attempt to control nature and when it failed a new attempted was made by propitiating the spirits or gods, which *eventually constitutes religion* (Frazer, 1890). In Frazer's word, "a savage hardly conceives the distinction commonly drawn by more advanced peoples between the natural and the supernatural. The world is to a great extent worked by supernatural agents, that is, by personal beings acting on impulses and motives like his own, liable like him to be moved by appeals to their pity, their hope, and their fears" (Frazer, 1890:10). Besides the unity of God, Islam also tolerates the existence of other supernatural spirits and their manifestation in real life. These manifestations of bewitchment include alteration in physiques, nuisances, and problem in marital lives, nightmares, hallucinations, lethargy and even infertility (Bali, 2004). There are some rites in three different communities (Kangkong, Kardau, Bagan) of Malaysia and those rites are related to the planting and harvesting of crops, the opening of new residential sites and the protection of the villages from evil (S. Husin Ali, 1985). In those three areas, there were four magicians whose functions were sorcery, the healing of the sick and the tracing of lost property and all four of them also perform rites connected with protective and productive activities. Mostly their areas of magical activities were confined within their own village and some adjacent ones. Today, there is hardly any rites associated with productive activities exist particularly in Bagan. A few still practiced the productive rites in Kerdau but there were no preventive rite carried out after 1962 (Ali, 1985). In the villages of Malaysia, magicians still practices the rites that are associated with curative activities. In fact, there are hardly any magical practices associated with rubber throughout the country. These disappearances of rites are primarily caused by the process of modernization taking place in the early sixties in Malaysia. "Economic, technological and educational changes that are seeping into the rural society are slowly weakening some of the bases on which magic thrives" (Ali, 1985: 300).

Sixth, religion cannot be understood without the social context and the role played by *Witchcraft and oracles* in solving disputes in that particular society (Evans-Pritchard, 1965). The faith in witchcraft and oracles is *logical in the social context*. Once some fundamental tenets of witchcrafts were accepted, it gets some social importance and a faith develops around an elaborate system of explanations of a particular state of affairs, explanations or excuses against disproving evidence. Evidently, traditional magic prevails to some extent in the areas of Malaysia, where the main economic activity is rice growing and not in the rubber economy. The production of rubber is not as susceptible to factors like droughts, pests and diseases that are beyond the control of peasant's understanding about the crops as is rice. "There is a tradition of magic, associated with rice, production, which peasants resort to in order to overcome natural difficulties, but this, however, does not exist in the case of rubber" (Ali, 1985: 300). Rice is closely linked with the traditional Malay way of life while rubber is a modern crop linked with modern technology. Although the uses of modern science and technology in agriculture and medicine have spread into some remotest villages, there remains the attempt to turn to supernatural powers after having failed with science or vice versa. At the time of great emergency, turning towards the traditional beliefs continues till today; this is particularly evident in the occurrence of 'May Thirteen Incident', an ethnic riot that broke out due to aggressive New Economic Policies as such. There was a sudden upsurge in the faith towards Islam and Magic. The Malays from different educational backgrounds began to turn to the magicians who claimed the power to make people invincible. Several magicians, in this regard came to the forefront and a high involvement in different rituals emerged for or against to destroy their invisibility.

Seventh, religion, as a system of symbols, formulates concepts of a general order of existence with an *impression of reality* and functions to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting disposition to *motivate people* in religious sensibility (Geertz, 1973). It is a "social institution, worship a social activity, and faith a social force". Religion is fundamentally a *cultural construct social process* that has the *ability to transform* the quality of human life by reorientation of intellectuality and emotions. Religiosity collectively evolves, socially transmits, and culturally objectifies patterns of meaning of human existence. This assertion can elucidate the phenomenon of social mobilization in Islam and explain who gets radicalized and why. The 'jihadi salafis' or 'strivers for pious predecessors' are a faction of the insurgency who wants to interrupt the U.S foreign policy of fighting against terrorism (Hafez, 2007). Their goal is to establish an Islamic state. It is not the economic deprivation, but brainwashing, naïveté, ignorance, lack of family responsibility and sexual frustration as the underlying causes of terrorism and indicates four aspects of the radicalization process of Jihad; (1) moral outrage, (2) a perception of Islam under siege, (3) the resonance of moral outrage with personal experience and, (4) mobilization by the networks (Sageman, 2008). There is an importance of radical ideology. They capitalize on the injustice faced by the Arab and the Muslim world to legitimize their activities and rationalize suicide bombing as a way to inflict great damage on the enemy. "Jihadists forge the myth of heroic martyrdom to motivate militants and newcomers to jihad to sacrifice themselves for heavenly rewards and to ease the shame of humiliation" (Hafez, 2007: 20). Their hatred of the Shiite, as they consider the Shiite as the 'al-rafidah' or the rejecters of Islam, play an important role. The impact is not very consistent because of their target, lethality and psychological potency. Often the primary aim is to demoralize the people of the targeted country and enhance their appeal.

Eighth, religion is largely an *unconscious neurotic response* to repression primarily due to the *demands perpetuated* by civilized societies. It is a result of human mind and its compulsive behavior manifests itself as "an individual religiosity" (Freud, 1939). "Religion is an attempt to get control over the sensory world, in which we are placed, by *means of the wish-world* which we have developed inside us as a result of biological and psychological necessities. [...] If one attempts to assign to religion its place in man's evolution, it seems not so much to be a lasting acquisition, as a parallel to the neurosis which the civilized individual must pass through on his way from childhood to maturity" (Freud, 1939). "Civilization has little to fear from educated people and brain-workers" in whom religious beliefs are being replaced by secular motives; but he acknowledges the existence of "the great mass of the uneducated and oppressed" who may commit murder if not told that God forbids it, and who must be "held down most severely" unless "the relationship between civilization and religion" undergoes "a fundamental revision" (Freud, 1961: 39). This idea can explain martyrdom in Islam. The medieval development of martyrdom and the local cultural influences play a critical role in shaping the concept of martyrdom in different Muslim countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and some centers of Africa (David Cook, 2007). There are several associated motives with martyrdom, for example, apocalypse, expiation, the final exhortation through the martyr's death and his remembrance in different Islamic cultures. These motives, in fact, came as a reaction of the situation that is the widespread belief in a worldwide conspiracy against Islam and the establishment of the state of Israel. Most of the Jihadis are from Arab states or Europe who have faced unemployment, gone through a process of criminalization, weak family ties or friendship, a feeling of being hunted or no longer welcomed by their home or guest countries. All the modern anti-Islamic occurrences led the jihad movement to develop both an apologetic jihad and an operation of martyrdom that is suicide attack.

Ninth, religious experiences arise from a special, *non-rational* faculty of the human mind cannot be explained in terms of cognitive doctrines or ethical principles rather this *experience is a mysterious phenomena* (Otto, 1917). No rational theory can explicate this sense of wonderment. Religious experiences comprise the three elements mystery, awe and fascination are very closely interconnected form an irreducible synthetic whole (Otto, 1917). This paradoxical combination of 'fear' and 'attraction' is the very essence of religious consciousness. This is why, feelings about the Holy and other emotional experiences are significantly different. There are similarities of the religious expressions out of the common sense in various traditions and there remains a parallel form of dynamics of every religion as well (Otto, 1932). Apparently, the desire for stronger family values, commitment to social justice, aspiration for women's rights and negatively stereotyping the Muslim by the non-Muslim Swedes and U.S. citizens led some women to become Muslims (McGinty, 2006). Women relate their own self image with that of the surroundings that they feel part of but which in return does not reckon them as their part. Thus, they are experiencing a disparity between their self-images as Muslim. These Swedish women still like to identify themselves as "Swedish" because, to them "Swedishness" means modernity, equality and social justice. They embody alternative identities that sometimes go against the societal norms, especially about the dress-code.

3. CONCLUSION

Prominent social thinkers of all ages have shown their sheer interest in religion and its effects on society. On one side of an argument, there is a focus on how Islam as a religion gives meaning and purpose to life, reinforcing social unity and stability, serving as an agent of social control of behavior, promoting physical and psychological well-being, and motivating people to work for positive social change. On the other side, the center of attention would be how Islam promotes social inequality and social conflict, and leads towards hostility and violence. There some others who focus on the ways in which individuals interpret their experiences as being Muslim. Any new religious movement and political progress in Islam have some impacts on civic, social and political institutions, but its focus always remains on living a present good life and having a better after life. Islam offers the sense of omnipresence of divinity that requires the non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling. The progress of Islam was not a one-way movement, but a flow of people and ideas in several directions that assimilated ideas from other religious traditions as well. Although, there is a vast development in applying Islamic law to govern the civil society, there are several ideological formations - parliamentary democracy, pluralism and fundamentalism, in a single religion and the result of dissimilar ideologies are diverse, sometimes very unusual. Where a pluralistic, tolerant and cosmopolitan ideology that can unite the monotheistic commonalities shared by the different faiths, there fundamentalism many amplify religious and political conflicts and devastation. There is a difference in sectarian Islam, the Sunni, proto-Shi'ite, Kharijite, and Sufi martyrotogies and all have a distinct historical process of their formation. The Qur'anic doctrine and Hadith and demonstrates various forms of martyrdom that are not necessarily leading towards death, for example, dying from fever, being eaten by any wild animal, being killed by an autocratic ruler or being bitten by a toxic creature. The husbands who treat their wives and children correctly or the women who go on a righteous hajj can also be martyrs. The recent period of 'independent state consolidation' shows a rather aggressive way is integrated in the process of Islamization that reinforces the multidirectional and global connection between the Muslims who are living different part of the world and have the different cultural tradition as well.

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