Editorial

Muslim Identity Formation in Contemporary Societies

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Identity is shaped and cultivated through a myriad of human, individual, and collective experiences, encompassing a broad range of racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, regional, historical, and socio-political realities. As one of the world's largest and most diverse religious populations, Muslims routinely preserve, negotiate, and develop their identities in accordance with their everyday contexts. This Special Issue of *Religions*, "Muslim Identity Formation in Contemporary Societies", seeks to explore new themes and trends emerging in Muslim majority, minority, and diaspora communities. It critically analyses the intellectual efforts to advance diverse understandings of Muslim identity formation in the wake of new social, cultural, political, intellectual, and technological developments.

Key works on Muslim religious identity include Cara Aitchison, Peter E. Hopkins, and Mei-po Kwan, eds. *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging* (Aitchison et al. 2007); Aaron W Hughes, *Muslim Identities: An Introduction to Islam* (Hughes 2013); Derya Iner and Salih Yucel, eds. *Muslim Identity Formation in Religiously Diverse Societies* (Iner and Yucel 2015); and a range of interdisciplinary works on Muslim identities in the West. The field has since grown to engage in debates about Islamophobia, state politics and Muslim identity construction, trans-locality and imagined communities, Muslim cosmopolitism, hybrid identities, Muslim youth cultures, the securitisation of Muslims, intersectionality, and digital Islam, to name a select few.

This Special Issue presents a global and multidisciplinary approach towards the cultivation of Muslim identities in various socio-political, cultural, and geographical cartographies. It draws on empirical case studies and research conducted on Muslim communities in Britain, France, Pakistan, Turkey, and Australia. The topics covered in this Special Issue include the identity of Deobandi ulama in contemporary Britain; Muslim perceptions of loyalty in France; the cultural identity of Jafari Shi'is in Eastern Turkey; religious attire among male Tablighi adherents in Pakistan; and the status of intra-Muslim dialogue among Australian Muslims. The authors provide a range of methodological and social scientific approaches to the study of Muslim identity through ethnographic, qualitative, phenomenological, and conceptual analysis.

The role of governments, transnational movements, and globalisation feature prominently given the global rise in Islamophobia and securitisation policies employed by many Western and Muslim-majority governments in the post-9–11 era. The authors provide profound insights into how Muslims navigate socio-political pressures and instances of Islamophobia to break stereotypes and assert their religiosity in diverse political settings. The contributions underscore and challenge important questions regarding Muslim loyalty to non-Muslim states, the treatment of Muslim minority groups by governments, the status of intra-Muslim relations, and non-discursive expressions of identity through religious attire.

The edition begins with Ahmed and Elton-Chalcraft's article on the identity of Deobandi ulama (scholars) in Britain. Using an interpretive phenomenological analysis, the authors explore the role Deobandi ulama play in challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about British Muslim identity through their religious seminaries (*dar-ul-uloom*). As the authors note, Deobandis represent the largest Islamic movement in Britian, encompassing 41% of the country's mosques. Despite their large presence, Deobandi madrasas

and its ulama have become under suspicion as breeding grounds for religious extremism following 9/11 and the 2005 London bombings. The authors challenge such assumptions, arguing that divisive politics and securitisation policies "... fabricate a polarisation of the participant's *dar-ul-uloom* identity and national identity". *Dar-ul-uloom* identity and British identity, they find, are compatible, and complications regarding their supposed conflict emanate from Britain's colonial legacy in India. Ahmed and Elton-Chalcraft conclude that "... researching and understanding the identity of ulama requires sensitivity to shared values and familiarity with the community which can perhaps only be achieved effectively through insider positionality".

Since 9/11, the loyalty of Muslims in the West, particularly in France, has been questioned. Abdessamad Belhaj examines the conception of loyalty between Muslim religious identity and French national identity. For Belhaj, loyalty/disloyalty is "essential to social structuring" regarding family, nation, community, political processes, and in-group vs. out-group belonging. Belhaj contends that little is known about reformist perceptions of loyalty. He notes that Muslim attitudes of loyalty are often viewed through the Salafi doctrine of alliance and disavowal (*al-walā' wa-l-barā'*). He provides case studies of three Muslim reformist leaders in France, Tariq Ramadan, Abdelali Mamoun, and Moncef Zenati, in how they incorporate loyalty in shaping French Muslim identities. Belhaj identifies that there is a need for reconciliation between Muslim religious identity and Frenchness. He argues that through reconciliation, the possible tension between Islam and Frenchness can be resolved by adopting the notion of "critical loyalty". While Belhaj is critical of French state policy toward Muslims, he notes that Muslim loyalties are grounded in "mutual recognition, diversity, gratitude and human brotherhood".

Mehmet Ali Sevgi examines various aspects of the lives of Turkish Ja'fari Shi'is in the city of Igdir, the eastern province of Turkey. He discusses the community dynamics to gain an in-depth understanding of the Turkish Ja'fari Shi'i identity. He explores the ways in which Turkish Shi'is negotiate their religious and cultural identity within a larger Sunni Muslim context, as well as the challenges and opportunities they face in expressing and preserving their distinctiveness. Sevgi notes that the Shi'i culture is reflected in the daily life of the city. He asserts that Ja'fari identification is multiplied and constructed across Turkish identity and Shi'i identity. Sevgi writes: "This duality in their identities (outsider as Ja'fari, insider as Turkish) and having an ambiguous meta-narrative causes the cultural identity of the Ja'faris to be one that is constantly played, moved, and constructed". The author provides important insights into the Turkish Ja'fari perception of Turkey's founder, Ataturk, and Turkey's central Sunni institution, the Diyanet.

Non-discursive attributes such as Islamic symbolism and clothing form an important aspect of religious identity. While many studies focus on the identity relationship between Muslim women and dress style, particularly the hijab, Ateeq Abdul Rauf examines the formation of identity through the religious attire of Muslim men in the Tablighi Jamaat movement in Pakistan. Following Belk's thesis on the extended self, Rauf asserts that the dressing style of Tablighi men reflects a conduit to extend oneself in religious and social contexts. Tablighi men integrate their beliefs into daily life by wearing a specific garment and turban. Their appearance forms part of their religious piety, embodying religious values and reinforcing a collective identity among adherents of Tablighi Jamaat. Rauf alludes to the movement's preaching ability and "aim to revive and relive a utopian historical past by following the sunnah style". In his words, "consumers are aided in their vision to reenact traditional Islam via clothing consumption".

The last article focuses on the question of intra-Muslim dialogue between Australian Muslims from different sects, sub-sects, and faith-based groups of Islam. Whyte and Yucel argue that intra-Muslim dialogue is gaining more noticeability among Australian Muslims working to build civic and inclusive identities. While acknowledging the diverse and vibrant nature of Australian Muslim communities, the article highlights the socio-political, organisational, and sectarian issues challenging intra-religious unity between Muslim groups. To achieve genuine and long-lasting intra-faith relations, we argue for a need to

develop organic, theologically inclusive, and contextually grounded articulations of intra-Muslim dialogue in Australia. The article proposes a mutual, holistic, and ethical dialogue through Qur'anic principals and norms emphasising unity, pluralism, and difference. We argue that greater communal, grassroots, and bottom-up mobilisation is required to promote sustained and genuine dialogue as part of a civil and tolerant Islam. The article concludes that diverse experiences of identity formation in Australia serve as an impetus for strengthening intra-Muslim relations based on previous success with inter-faith initiatives, as well as intergroup contact with non-Muslims.

The edition provides valuable observations and findings about the challenges, prospects, and unique formation of Muslim identities in contemporary societies.

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