

Exploring the religious and cultural dynamics and understanding of the islamic re...

[Religion](#), [Islam](#)



Exploring the religious and cultural dynamics and understanding of the Islamic Religion in a global Geopolitical environment Maryn Devry University Cultural Diversity in Professions Professor Kazsuk Elizabeth February 19, 2012 Scenario 4 Topic: Exploring the religious and cultural dynamics and understanding of the Islamic Religion in a global geopolitical environment. Islam is a religion with well over 1.5 billion followers and believers worldwide. It is intensely practiced in East and North Africa, and largely in the Middle East, in central Asia and in Indonesia. Islam means submission under the will of "Allah" or God. It is also deeply means living in peace, safety and security. It is more than a religion. It is also seen as cultural, political ideas, and artistic orientation. Islam's core values are explicit: there is only one God and the religion is defined by the Holy Koran (Esposito, 2002). According to the Islamic teachings, religion blended with social life, promoted as a political system encompasses Islamism. Islam as a religion believes there are many prophets of Allah one of whom is Mohammed, their follower. Righteousness, love and caring for all believers especially the poor and the weak in society are some of the core practices. In brief, Islam is defined out of five pillars that every Muslim believe in and practice accordingly. These are: Shahda, meaning there is only one God and Muhammad is his messenger; the Salat, meaning believers must pray five times a day facing the direction of the east in Mecca; Zakat, meaning charity, which is a prescription practiced differently in Islam; Sawm-fasting during the month of Ramadan; and hajj-pilgrimage to Mecca, which is strongly recommended that every successful Muslim must visit the Holy land in mecca in good health and economic success (Caner & Caner, 2002). There

is no doubt that Islamic religion originated from the Middle East in the Arabian Peninsula and North African region with Egypt being the largest Muslim population in Africa (Esposito, 1999; Ahmed, 2001), since the beginning of the practice of Islam and advancement of human civilization. As a result of man's pursuit of inventions, discoveries, trade and migration, the practice and impact of Islamic and its cultures have become the second largest religious, socio-cultural and political systems in the world. There are over one billion Muslims in the world today, and significantly, over 20 million of them live in the west (United States and Western Europe). According to Ahmed (2001) there are about at least fifty Muslim nations globally after the six additions from the former Soviet republics. Indonesia alone has about 205 million (88%) of the country's total population and 13% of the total world's Muslim population, and Pakistan and India competing for the second highest 178 and 177 million Muslims respectively in the world. The trend keeps increasing in countries such as Bangladesh with 149 million Muslims and in African, Egypt and Nigeria been the dominant with 80 and 76 million Muslims respectively (Pew-Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010).

According to John L. Esposito, almost from the beginning of Islam in the early 600s, Muslims split into two main groups: the Sunnite Muslims and the Shiite Muslims. The largest group is the Sunnites, who believe that leadership passes to caliphs (leaders of the Islamic community) selected from the Prophet Muhammad's tribe. The Shiites, however, believe the true leaders of Islam must descend from the family of Ali who was Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. There are yet other sub sects and extremist groups like the infamous Al Qaida. Despite some differences in practices between the sects,

all Muslims uphold the Five Pillars of Faith (basic requirements of the Islamic religion) In United States , Most people did not know much about the either the Islamic religion nor the overwhelming number of Muslims that dwelled and practiced in our country thinking Islam was a religion from elsewhere until the September 11, 2001 attack which awoke many of people of the reality of ingrown terrorists. Politically, American Muslims were both pro-larger government and socially conservative. For example, 70% of American Muslims prefer a bigger government providing more services. Despite their social conservatism, 71% of American Muslims express a preference for the Democratic Party. Research survey also shows that nearly three quarters of respondents believed that American society rewards them for hard work regardless of their religious background. Islam religion is very different in America in the sense that, it is separate from any political, social or economic or cultural institution. Until the September 11, 2001 attack, the shoe bomber attack and the other subsequent attacks which brought American Muslims under radar, most Muslims lived and went by their business in America without problems. America is largely seen as a Christian nation and all our ideals are formulated based on Christian views but our constitution also permits freedom of all religion. Efforts such as Title VII have been helpful to many Muslims who faced overt discrimination and harassment after the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. Recent cases involving religious discrimination have also been brought by employees who were terminated for harassment of those who do not share their religious beliefs or who were terminated because their religious beliefs conflicted with their company's diversity program. In Great Britain,

Muslim population are almost all people who immigrated to Britain in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, or their descendants. During the first quarter of the 20th century it was estimated that there were around 10, 000 Muslims in Britain. Now there are between 1 and 2 million British Muslims (2% - 4% of the population), and over half of them were born in Britain. Like America, Britain has religious freedom which allows all regions including Islam to practice freely. In recent years Islamic extremists have attempted many times to impose their Shariah laws in British communities that were densely populated by Muslims. Attempt to impose Shariah laws in Britain's public schools, posting signs like " Islam will dominate the world" and others that read " Britain Soldiers will burn in hell are a few of the Islamic controversies that has reasonably alerted UK and US to instill tougher laws to protect against future attacks by these home grown Islamic extremists who seem relentless. In most of the Middle Eastern countries like Iran Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco and a few others, Islam is more than a religion. It is a lifestyle, a culture, politics as well as religion and any attempt to separate one from the other results in hush punishment, even death. These countries are predominantly Islamic and not much religious freedom is tolerated. Lebanon happens to practice most diverse form of the Islamic religion having all the sects and sub sects. Islam in Lebanon is divided between four Muslim sects; Shias, Sunnis, Alawites, and Ismailis including the Druze. Muslims account for 59. 7% of the total population of Lebanon, where 39% are Christians. The Lebanese population is Sunni, concentrated largely in coastal cities. Shi'is - about 25% of the total population of Lebanon - lives mostly in the northern area of the Beqaa Valley and southern Lebanon. A religious

data in 1985 suggests that the number of Muslims has risen, with 75% compared with Christians at 25%. By the 1980s Shi'is became a large confessional group in Lebanon, leading to demands for better educational and employment opportunities and redistribution of power based on actual numbers. There is a hierarchy among these sects where some have more advantage and therefore dominate the other sects within the same religion. The state religion in Pakistan is Islam, which is practiced by about 95-98% of the 187, 343, 000 people of the nation. The remaining 2-5% practice Christianity, Hinduism and other religions. Muslims here are divided into two major sects: the majority of them practice Sunni Islam, while the Shias are a minority who make up an estimated 5-20%. In India however, Islam is the second-most practiced religion after Hinduism, with more than 13.4% of the country's population of over 138 million. Officially, India has the third largest Muslim population after Indonesia and Pakistan. Like most Islamic Countries other religions are not much tolerated in either Pakistan or India as cultures and politics are established around Islam Hinduism/Islamism respectively. At a global level, Islamic religion constitutes a significant geopolitical and cultural constituency in terms of demographic dynamics, especially in Indonesia which is the largest Muslim population in the world compared to other well-known countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. As previously stated, Islam is the dominant religion in Indonesia, which also has a larger Muslim population than any other country in the world, with approximately 202.9 million identified as Muslim (88.2% of the total population) as of 2009. Majority adhere to the Sunni Muslim tradition mainly of the Shafi'i madhab, although some follow other

branches of non-Sunni Islam, predominantly Shia and Ahmadiyya. In general, the Muslim community in Indonesia can be categorized in terms of two orientations: " modernists," who closely adhere to orthodox theology while embracing modern learning; and " traditionalists," who tend to follow the interpretations of local religious leaders (predominantly in Java) and religious teachers at Islamic boarding schools. While not being a theocratic country, it is not secular either, as the Indonesian state has officially defined what constitutes 'religion' , namely, " agama" and made an obligation for every citizen to be affiliated to one or the other of the officially recognized agama: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, with Confucianism being a controversial case. It is obvious though through politics and culture that the minority religions have to tolerate and live with all things Islam. Contrary to Christianity and Judaism which allow freedom of other religions in their territories, the rigidity and intolerance for other religions in all predominantly Islamic countries are hard to overlook. What surprises me the most is the fact that the same religion which spares no time punishing people of other religion just for practicing their faith would go to every length to gain religious freedom in other countries and after they are tolerated, the same religious people would turn against the very country that tolerated them. Religious intolerance like mentioned above and prejudices that has existed for so long a time are barriers that impede understanding and negatively impact positive interaction between religions especially among Christian and Muslims. The impact of Islamic religion in our world today has emerged strongly in many countries from the Middle East, through Africa, Europe, United States and Asia. For example, in China today, there

are nearly 20 million Muslims and that is greater than all Muslims in Saudi Arabia (Esposito, 1999. P. 433). The implication of this revelation is that the religion continues to contribute socially, economically, culturally and politically to local, national, regional and international issues ranging from security, politics though technology. The human society has become diverse to such an extent that religious and cultural relativity and practices are very common in all human institutions. There are more similarities in religious core values among Islam, Christianity and Jewish than differences. In Christianity, there is a strong believe in grace, hope, faith, love, justice, joy, service and peace, glorification of God, integrity, loyalty, excellence, adaptability and innovation and culture. Jewish people also believe in community, sharing, family and children, prayers, privacy and strong believers of God as their pillar of human community. Any person who avoids society inclines to wickedness. These revelations indicate that all religions have fundamentally common core values such as believing in God, prayers, love for one another, caring, respect, peace and harmony. If all religious beliefs could focus on the similarities instead of the differences then the world would be heading to a less confusing, less judgmental and less war but rather more peaceful unity among all people. It is of uttermost importance that all mankind uphold the universal human right principles enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights resolution 217 A(III) of 10 December 1948, which states that all human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental The study has helped me to understand and to appreciate some in-depth rich meanings, principles, cultures, ideas, politics and value systems that prevail in the Islamic religion and seemingly

some public misconception about its teaching, values, and goals in many societies today practice or live with Muslims and how they have been able to develop religious and cultural tolerance and acceptance in their day to day activities (Nasr, 2010). In addition, the study has helped me to explore some of the cultural relationships and differences among Islam, Christianity and Judaism and other religious practices (Caner & Caner, 2002). In summing up, there is the saying that goes like " if we do not know where we came from, at least we must know where we are going". This is very important in our contemporary global development efforts where peace, prosperity and diversity have become major measures of sustainable development. Living together in rich diversified and integrated global society where the universal values of respect, human rights, justice, freedom of speech and expression, protection of minority groups and ethnicity, equity, fairness, social networking and participation as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of December 1948, as well as nations and regional constitutions and charters should be embraced. References Ahmed, A. S. (2002). Islam Today: A short introduction to the Muslim World. I. B. Taurus Publishers, London. Caner, E. M. & Caner, E. F. (2002). An insider's look at Muslim life and beliefs: Unveiling Islam. Kregel Publications. Esposito, J. L., (2002). What Everybody Needs to Know about Islam: Answers to frequently asked questions, from one of the America's leading experts. Oxford University Press. Esposito, J. L. (1999). The Oxford History of Islam. Oxford University Press. Goldstein, R. N. E. (2006). Gonzo Judaism. A bold path for reviewing and ancient faith. St. Martin's Press, New York. Nasr, S. H. (2010). Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the west, threatened by

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