Western Muslim Integration[1]

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Are Western Muslims integrating? *Can* Western Muslims integrate? Over the past 20 years, significant attention has been invested in examinations stimulated by the extensive public commentary addressing such questions. This brief review aims to demystify the examination of Western Muslims' integration in the interest of re-embedding this subject matter in the broader scholarship about immigration and settlement. Within this expanding field of study, Western Muslims can (and should) be examined at the community level, where specific ethno-cultural groups represent but case studies among hundreds of Western Muslim communities that differ in their immigration context, countries of origin, sects, and ethno-cultural backgrounds. Simultaneously, the collection of statistical data should be used to test hypotheses that are developed in studies of such communities. The dialogue between qualitative and quantitative approaches provides research openings to more rigorously push the state of knowledge in this area, and I describe some of these openings below.

In pursuing these openings, we must be wary of reproducing Western Muslims' otherwise exceptional treatment in the public sphere and careful not to dignify baseless claims about Muslims that assume *a priori* that Islamic religiosity influences the attitudes of individuals and communities in ways that are different from other religions, and to embed examinations of contemporary Muslims in larger debates about integration. Through a cursory survey of key integration indicators, we see that Western Muslims and their descendants are actually integrating into destination societies the way others did before them.

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The Fallacies of Activist and Politician-led Discourses

Over the past 20 years, there has been a steady flow of well-publicized theses that question whether Muslim communities can and are integrating into Western societies. This discussion has been a favorite of tabloids, but it is frequently adopted by politicians and elevated into more rigorous periodicals and documentaries attracted to sensational claims about Islam's "competing loyalty" and "real meaning." For some observers, Muslims supposedly raise their faith's obligations above civic duties in a way that makes Muslim and Western existences irreconcilable and puts social cohesion and the governance of democratic destination states at severe risk.[2]

Second generation European and North American Muslims have by now experienced entire childhoods and adolescences in Scottish, Swedish and Saskatchewan schools, absorbing local media content, speaking national languages, and interacting with other Western Muslims and non-Muslims. Equipped with advancing tools of global communication like satellite television, video conferencing, and internet-based social networks, young Muslims may be more accurately thought of as hybrids who connect multiple (perhaps contradictory) sociopolitical attributes across different identity forms (Gest 2010: 100-110). This should cause us to question the treatment of second and third generations of Muslim immigrants as foreigners with fundamental cultural differences. In this way, Muslims are not only treated as somehow apart from other immigrant communities (as highlighted above); there is also a tendency to "trap" in the immigrant frame people who have actually been outside of it for one or more generations.[3]

Skeptics mesmerized by religious differences interpret Muslim individuals' integration through a lens so tainted by the contemporary obsession with Islam that they fail to see how Islam is powerfully contextualized and itself transformed by the variable sociopolitical environments in which Western Muslims are situated. Indeed, Muslim diversity has been shown to increase in response to integration (Open Society Foundation 2009). Alas, journalist Christopher Caldwell (2009), for example, chooses not to examine Western Muslims as minority communities subject to the same structural limitations, disadvantages and interdependencies as other populations. And even some scholars such as Peter Skerry (2010) attempt to promote greater awareness of certain broadly-defined entrenched cultural differences between Muslims and Westerners.

The goal of this brief exposé of the dominant Muslim-suspicious political and activist discourse is to underscore the importance of researching the integration of immigrant-origin Muslim communities in the context of similar immigrant origin communities, or as one case among many experiencing

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certain social and political phenomena. Only doing so allows adequate control for whether an Islamic identity or faith affects an individual's processes of integration.[4]

The Context of Integration

The literature about immigrants' adaptation is diverse, reflecting different normative and positive understandings about integration. At its core, integration is about the equilibrium of adaptation between migrants and natives. While some scholars and observers believe integration requires the assimilation of newcomers to the requirements of local culture, others contend that both immigrants and natives are obligated to adjust their preferences to reach a mutually acceptable set of relations. Still others argue that immigrants' adaptation is more necessary in some spheres of interaction than others. Brubaker (2001: 534) argues that although the concept of "assimilation" is 'discredited' and 'analytically disreputable,' it remains useful to analyze neighboring communities' enduring differences. Multiculturalists are more concerned about the space afforded for difference between neighboring communities, and the ways that the local state and native population adapt to the presence and needs of newcomers. Empirical examinations have found variation in the approaches of different states with different migrant communities (prominently, Joppke 1999, 2007; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Favell 2001; Baubock 2003; Ireland 2004; Koopmans et al. 2005; Messina 2007; Maxwell 2010). It is therefore essential to consider the different realms and periods of assimilation for different populations, rather than just "how much" assimilation is taking place (Brubaker 2001). Western Muslims are not independent of these histories. In fact, their presence has altered their courses, as governments have in some cases designed policy to respond to popular fear of demographic and normative change.

Integration is ultimately not only a matter of immigrants' assimilation anyway. Majority communities adapt as well.[5] While immigration to a new place confronts the migrant with new norms, preferences and socio-civic requirements, migrants' alternative worldviews also compel destination societies to determine what is acceptable and can be accommodated in their polity (see Meer 2012). The process of assimilation is therefore first structured by the rules and customs that a government and society must decide to enforce. In other words, the destination state must decide what migrants must assimilate *to*. This process entails substantial (though frequently superficial) reflection about what it means to be British, what is required to thrive as a Spaniard, or what qualifications one must meet to participate as a German. From another perspective, it is a question of what

unites a national community, what a citizenry has in common. Since the ubiquitous proliferation of internet and satellite communication, national communities have been exposed to an infinite number of foreign cultural resources that dilute the uniqueness of any one place. Along with global immigration, this process of deterritorialization has stimulated efforts (especially in Europe) to excavate, 'museumize' and sanctify the purported pillars of national cultures from the past—memorializing elements that often have little enduring significance for the purposes of distinction. In so doing, this search unearths histories of cultural conflict long since moderated by time or tolerance. However, it is in this context of cultural reconstruction that migrants, governments and societies have approached their counterpart—each approach itself an act of adaptation.

Understanding the role played by each of these three sectors—government, native society, and migrants themselves—sensitizes the researcher to the impact they hold on conventional integration indicators. Some indicators of integration are subject to government facilitation. Naturalization is not only a product of immigrants' desire to meet a set of qualifications; it is highly contingent on the nature of those qualifications, as they are set by legislators and ministries. Several European states have acted to condition naturalization or other forms of immigrants' legal entitlement on meeting qualifications customized to make it harder for those holding "Muslim" values or characteristics from accessing them. Bloemraad (2006) and a report by Meyers and Pitkin (2011) reveal how citizenship attainment is highly influenced by variable regimes across states. (Also see Hainmueller and Hangartner 2011.) Political participation rates by immigrants are not merely a reflection of immigrants' desire to engage civically; they depend on their eligibility to vote, unionize or protest, as set by the state. It is subject to the recruitment strategies of political parties, the institutionalized rules of representation, and the facilitation of claims-making associations (Koopmans and Statham 2001, Abdulkader Sinno's article below). Language acquisition, a condition of naturalization in many states, is subject to immigrants' duration of residency and willpower, but also to support offered by the government (Stanat and Christensen 2006). States differ in their readiness to subsidize and regulate classes, provide learning materials, make courses culturally inoffensive, and set attainable levels of proficiency.

Other indicators of integration are to a meaningful extent subject to third-party, societal influence. Feelings of "belonging," as solicited by many immigrant public opinion surveys, may be viewed as a reflection of the extent of immigrants' assimilation. However, they tend to be profoundly connected to

immigrants' experiences and interactions with native citizens of the destination state. Taylor (1994: 25) writes that "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others—and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves." Employment rates among immigrants are regularly interpreted as a reflection of immigrants' work ethic and contribution to the destination state's economy. However, job acquisition is very much subject to employer discrimination and exploitation (Open Society Foundation 2009: 109-132). This subjectivity in societal (but also governmental) treatment is influenced by public discourses, which may favor or discriminate against a given community. Indeed, fear motivates or validates double standards that distort the dynamics of integration for both natives and immigrants.

Finally, other forms of integration are largely subject to the volition of immigrants themselves, less structured by policy or third-party treatment than the indicators discussed above. Fertility rates—often drastically different between the states of origin and destination—are a useful way to observe whether immigrant groups are adapting to destination state family structures. Sociocultural values are frequently solicited by immigrant public opinion surveys in the interest of assessing convergence or divergence between native and immigrant worldviews. National identification is also regularly measured by surveys concerned with immigrants' identity construction. While some instruments assume a false mutually exclusive relationship between religious, cultural and national affiliations by asking respondents to choose between them, better instruments simply ask whether or how strongly immigrants' identify with their destination nationality.

I do not mention Islam or Western Muslims in the discussion above because these indicators and processes of integration are relevant to all immigrants, not only Muslims. A persistent difficulty in much of the qualitative and quantitative research about Western Muslims is that assessments of their integration are neither contextualized among other immigrant communities nor concerned with key debates in the prevailing integration literature about political incorporation, citizenship, or transnationalism. The differences that (diverse) Muslim perspectives pose to (equally diverse) Western trends in social politics do not exempt Muslim immigrants' process of integration from the considerations above. Indeed, what makes Western Muslim communities such fascinating case studies is the ways that the dynamics of their identity and their securitized social position evoke grander debates about integration—not the way Muslims make these debates suddenly moot.

So Different Anyway?

Importantly, when examining many of the above indicators of integration, we find that Muslims are actually adapting to Western societies quite well. In fact, focusing exclusively on the indicators that are the least subject to variable government and third-party treatment, the evidence suggests that Western Muslims have already adapted in significant ways. In a 2011 report by the Pew Research Center, demographers show that Muslim women in twenty-fiveEuropean countries currently have an average of 2.2 children each (Pew 2011: 132). While this rate is still above the European non-Muslim average of 1.5 children per woman, it is significantly lower than the fertility rates for women in most European Muslim immigrants' countries of origin. The fertility gap between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe is expected to further narrow. By 2025 or 2030, the average fertility rate for Muslim women in the 25 countries for which data are available is expected to drop to 2.0 children per woman, while the average fertility rate for non- Muslim women is projected to increase slightly, to 1.6 children per woman. This exhibits increasing convergence between European Muslims and non-Muslims.

There also is a strong moderation effect in individuals' values and trends in Western Muslims' national identification. In a recent study, Inglehart and Norris (2009) find that the basic socio-political values of Muslims in European countries fall about midway between those prevailing in their country of origin and their country of destination. The authors choose not to disaggregate their data according to generational differences, but it is reasonable to hypothesize that there would be even greater value convergence between non-Muslim Europeans and latter generation Muslim migrants who were born, raised and educated in Europe. Among American Muslims, the Pew Research Center (2007: 32-34) finds that 63% see no conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society. Asked about whether American Muslims should assimilate, 43% of the Pew sample says new arrivals should "mostly adopt American customs and ways of life." While 26% believe Muslims should "mostly try to remain distinct from the larger American society," another 16% volunteer that new immigrants should try to do both. From a social perspective, 51% of the sample reports having relatively few Muslims in their inner friendship circle.

With regard to national identification, 47% of American Muslims interviewed by the Pew Research Center (*ibid.*) said they think of themselves first as a Muslim—comparable to the 42% of American Christians who said they think of themselves as Christians first when surveyed in 2006. In Europe, the Gallup Coexist Index (2009: 19) shows that British, French, and German Muslims are more likely than the general populations in those three countries to identify strongly with their faith. However, Muslims surveyed are also as likely (if not

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more likely, as in the United Kingdom) than the general public to identify strongly with their countries of residence. It is worth noting that this finding is based on an extensive survey that (unlike Pew) does not require respondents to choose between their nationality and religion. Thus, in the spheres of integration less subject to government or third party interference, there is substantial evidence that Western Muslims are adapting and reflecting trends that otherwise characterize non-Muslim Westerners.

Trajectories for Future Research

Thoughtful, probing, qualitative work has done the most to advance the field so far. It remains important to underscore new ways Muslims are diversifying, thereby contesting monolithic public images. It also remains valuable to ask questions that interrogate the stratification and exclusion characterizing the integration of many Muslim communities. The availability of quantitative data, such as the statistics drawn on above, is a recent development in the study of Western Muslim communities' integration. Interest in this minority group has mostly motivated qualitative investigation because of the rarity of survey samples large enough to analyze. A large number of scholars have accordingly attempted to address key philosophical and empirical questions about Muslim adaptation by using in-depth interviews, focus groups, ethnography, and even scriptural analysis. As interest in Muslim public opinion has increased in the past decade, surveys and other quantitative instruments have slowly moved from examining sentiments about terrorism and the interpretation of scripture to measuring more mainstream matters of immigrant settlement. Despite this promising evolution, there is still a paucity of quantitative and experimental studies that assess testable hypotheses. Nearly all of the advanced statistical studies and survey works cited either do not consider Muslim minorities within the broader comparative context of non-Muslim immigrant groups (such as Inglehart and Norris 2009), do not account for non-religiosity (such as Pew 2007), or fail to test established hypotheses from scholarly fieldwork (such as Gallup 2009; 2011). The current frontier of discovery thus exists where quantitative instruments are employed to address contentious debates unearthed by rigorous qualitative investigation. There is a backlog of such qualitative work that has remained largely un-tested for generalization.

In this way, future research could seek to embed Western Muslims' integration in some of the key research questions that are threaded through immigration studies today: What is the effect of country of origin on immigrants' capacity and inclination to engage politically? Why do Muslims from the same country of origin integrate in different ways in different states? What are the varieties of Western Muslim religiosity and what are their effects on social, economic

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and political integration? How have transnational networks affected the evolution of immigrant public opinion and political behavior? As this brief review evinces, Muslims are subject to the same pressures, incentives, and desires as other immigrants. And in many respects, they are responding with adaptation patterns that mirror trends observable among immigrants of other faiths and nationalities. The differences posed by Islam and Muslims' alternative cultural preferences should therefore enrich this larger discussion, rather than make it suddenly immaterial.

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End Notes

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[2]See Leiken (2011), Joppke (2010), and Statham et al (2005). For a more incendiary account, see Caldwell (2009).

[3]Muslim converts, an important group that frequently produces figures that represent the interests of Western Muslims, are not immigrants at all.

[4]Several scholars have already done that. Early work by researchers like Pnina Werbner (e.g. 1991), Mohammad Anwar (e.g. 1991), Yvonne Haddad (e.g. 1997), Steven Vertovec (e.g. 1994), and Favell (e.g. 1998) analyzed "Asian," "minority" and "ethnic" politics and social trends by comparing a variety of ethnic immigrant groups. Since then, Haddad (2011) has continued to argue that American Muslims are indeed going through the same cycle of integration and acceptance as other groups before them. Similarly, Amaney Jamal (2005) examines trends in mosque participation and group consciousness specific to South Asian, Arab and non-immigrant African American Muslims. Recently, the Gallup Muslim American Survey (2011) compares responses from American Muslims to those of American Mormons, Jews, Catholics, Protestant and the non-Religious. And, focusing on Europe, books by Garbaye (2006), Laurence and Vaisse (2006) and Laurence (2011) place Muslim experiences in a more institutionalist and/or comparative framework.

[5]Issues of Muslim minority integration are particularly salient in states where Muslim individuals comprise more than a quarter of the incoming migrant population (Holland, Belgium, France, Norway, Sweden, Greece and the United Kingdom), and in others with some of the largest projected increases in the number of Muslim residents (Switzerland, Austria, Italy and Spain). See Pew Research Center (2011).

[6]Importantly, 18% of American Muslims surveyed identified as both "American" and "Muslim" equally (compared to 7% of American Christians). This reflects the hybridized nature of Muslim identities.