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“The Challenge of Globalization to Islamic Culture”

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Introduction

News about the Muslim world has been on the first pages of prominent newspapers since the first Gulf war, and especially after the September 11th. It is hard to remember a single year of peace in the Middle East. Despite the overwhelmingly accepted theory that “democracies do not fight each other”, Muslim nations are extremely hesitant to embrace democratic values. It has been proved by different research that Muslim people have favorable views towards political aspects of democracy, such as elections or freedom of speech. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Muslims reject the cultural aspects of democracy such as legalization or at least protection of LGBT communities. As globalization is the driving force for the spread of democratic values, Muslim politicians, scholars and people have adopted harsh anti-globalist policies, particularly in the cultural aspect of globalization. Though Western countries often try to introduce democratic values in Muslim countries, they are often eclipsed by continuous wars, revolutions or terrorist attacks. It is generally believed that Muslim countries are hostile towards such democratic values as gender equality or recognition of LGBT identities. Though globalization has had some positive impact on Muslim culture, it is predominantly perceived as a threat to Muslim values.

In my research I try to find whether Muslim nations can embrace globalization without harming their religious values. The hypotheses of the research is “Muslim values are incompatible with the universal culture being shaped by globalization”.

To test the hypothesis I have to answer the following research questions:

- ✘ Is globalization a threat to Muslim values?

✘ What leads Muslim scholars, militants, and general public to believe that globalization is harmful to their religious values?

Methodology

I have used different research tools such as

- ✓ Content analysis of texts, interviews and speeches of famous Muslim scholars, thinkers and politicians.
- ✓ Meta-analysis of statistical data from different research centers.
- ✓ A focus group with 6 Iranians.
- ✓ Analysis of the texts of the Quran and the Hadith

Globalization

Globalization has become a major field of research in social sciences during the last two decades. Though there is no single definition of the phenomenon, I will cite some widely accepted definitions. David Held and Anthony McGrew define globalization in the following way: “Globalization denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of transcontinental flows and patterns of social interaction”. Roland Robertson, who is one of the important contributors of the theory of globalization, defines it as “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole”.¹

Globalization is an ongoing phenomenon that brings the world together as a result of intense transnational economic, cultural or technological interactions. Globalization is not a new phenomenon. It has undergone different stages. The first round of the modern era globalization dates back from mid 1800s, when the telegraph, railroad, and telephone were invented, to 1914 which was hampered by the World War 1, the October Revolution and the Great Depression. This era of globalization made the world from size “large” to “medium”. The system that emerged after WW2 was the “Cold War” that lasted until 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall. The end of the Cold War indicated the new era of globalization. The new era of globalization is

¹ David Held and Anthony McGrew cited by Movius, Lauren. “Cultural Globalization and Challenges to Traditional Communication Theories”. University of Southern California, 2002.

different from the first one by its intensity caused by huge technological advancements. This era of globalization made the world from size “medium” to size “small”.²

There are two approaches towards globalization: hyper-globalists and skeptics. Hyper-globalists believe that a single world economy has emerged that integrates the major economic regions of the world. Market integration and technological innovations have created conditions for de-nationalization strategic economic spheres so that global financial forces have more influence on distribution of wealth than the states. As economic activities go beyond national borders, states have little leverage for political regulations. Hence, they have no option rather than comply with global economic forces. The main argument of the hyper-globalists is that the state is no longer the principal base of power and authority but rather is an inferior actor on the global arena³.

Skeptics, by contrast, argue that there is nothing new or unprecedented. The steep rise in international flows is conducted within well-defined national economies. They dismiss the idea of a global market stressing that there are different competing with each other⁴. This approach derives its conclusions from analysis of political economy and data about foreign investment, money flows and other financial activities. The crucial argument made by skeptics is that the current economic interconnectedness and interdependence are not new phenomena. According to the interpretation of skeptics such as Paul Hirst or Grahame Thompson at the end of the 20th century the world was as much economically interdependent as it was at the end of the 20th

² Juergensmeyer, Mark. “Thinking Globally: A Global Studies Reader”. University of California Press, 2014.

³ Jonathan Michie. “The Handbook of Globalization”. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2003.

⁴ Ibid

century. They also contest the idea that the nation state has become defunct. Instead, they argue that instead of globalization regionalization is taking place.⁵

The hyper-globalist school of globalization seems to underestimate the role of the state, while skeptics seem to overestimate it. Most scholars such as Moravchik⁶ or Haas⁷ agree upon the idea that though the state no longer has a monopoly of authority over its territory and people, they continue to play a vital role in world politics.

Globalization is a multidimensional phenomenon which has its impact not only on economics or politics but also on culture. As a result of rapid developments in information and communications technologies, emergence of powerful MNCs and TNCs and improved transportation local cultures appear under the threat of eroding. Scholars agree that a single world culture is being created, but many of them such as Ritzer or Latouche argue that this culture will be the American culture. Mattelart, Schiller and many others see globalization as a cultural imperialism. Those who argue that globalization is a synonym for Americanization mention US dominance in the fields of media and information technologies. This gives the US an opportunity to export considerably more TV programs than any other country. Americanization is also often referred as “McDonaldization”. By using this term George Ritzer wanted to emphasize the US dominance in the fast food sector, which can also be applied to other consumer items, such as Coca Cola⁸. Critics of globalization also indicate that global culture is not only consumer items or TV programs. According to Hopper Western values and ideologies also rapidly penetrate into non-Western countries, particularly the concept of

⁵ Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson cited by Andrew Jones. “Dictionary of Globalization”. Polity, 2006.

⁶ Andrew Moravcsik . “Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach”, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31 (4), 1993.

⁷ Ernst Haas, “Turbulent Fields and the Theory of Regional Integration”. *International Organization*, Vol. 30, 1976.

⁸ Mattelart, Schiller, Latouche and Ritzer mentioned in Hopper Paul, “Understanding Cultural Globalization”. Polity Press, 2007.

individualism. This way of thinking is reinforced by the fact that Western countries attempt to spread the notion of human rights upon non-Western countries with the help of their dominance in economy and institution dealing with global governance, such as the UN. This kind of policy is carried out by the West irrespective of the fact that non-Western societies, especially the Muslim ones, are more religious, state-centric and community-based.⁹

There are controversial predictions about the future of globalization. Some thinkers believe that globalization will lead to harmonization of the world, while others have more skeptical views. Samuel Huntington argues that after the end of Cold War global politics started to be reconfigured along cultural lines. Ideological or class conflicts, he predicts, will give way to civilizational conflicts. There are several definitions of the word “civilization”, but culture is the common theme in every definition. A civilization is the peak of the cultural grouping of people. In other words, civilizations are the biggest “we” within which we feel culturally at home. Huntington distinguishes between the following major contemporary civilizations: Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, and Latin American. Religion, as a part of culture, is the central defining characteristic of civilizations. According to Christopher Dawson, “the great religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations rest”.¹⁰

⁹ Hopper Paul, “Understanding Cultural Globalization”. Polity Press, 2007.

¹⁰ Hantington, Samuel. “Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order”. Simon & Schuster, 1996

The Islamic perception of globalization

Globalization has similar effects in different parts of the world, but the reaction to it varies from region to region. The Muslim world is more sensitive to changes. Thus, they often react in a more violent way. In this section I will examine the main peculiarities of Muslim perception of globalization and try to evaluate whether globalization really has negative impact on Muslim values, culture and identity.

Elite perception of globalization and Western values:

Fauzi Najjar argues that Arab intellectuals are divided into two parts. The majority of the intellectuals is greatly worried about the implications of globalization and propagates resistance to it, while minority groups, secularist by nature, are also concerned about culture and identity, but claim that globalization is inevitable and it is impossible to evade its effects. Hence, it should be better if Arabs embrace globalization and derive its benefits. The general consensus among these two groups is that globalization is identical to Americanization. The first group of Muslim writers, thinkers and journalists express similar views about globalization. Abd al-Ilah Balqaziz, Said al-Lawind, the secretary-general of the Muslim World League, Dr. Abdallah al-Turki, Boutros Boutros Ghali, former UN secretary-general and many others see globalization as Western, particularly, American driven phenomenon aimed to spread its culture all over the world and create a one culture world by destroying the political power of states, nationalities and peoples. Dr. Fuad Zakariya, an Egyptian professor of philosophy, Jurj Tarabishi, a

prominent Syrian writer, and some other Muslim intellectuals disagree with the first group claiming that bad sides of globalization have been exaggerated and advocate embracing globalization, as it will have more benefits than disadvantages. Besides, they claim those anti-globalists' arguments are based on rhetoric and have no scholarly foundations.¹¹

To understand more clearly the Muslim perception of the West generally and globalization, particularly, the approaches of the two most outspoken Muslim leaders of the extreme wing, who were very powerful during their height of popularity are worth to examine. One of them is the leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, and the other is the ex-leader founder of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda, Osama ben-Laden. Representing of Shiite and Sunnite branches of Islam respectively, they both propagated Islamic unity and condemned sectarian wars. Ayatollah Khomeini viewed Western influence as an invasion that did not stall with the Western political and military retreat after the WW2. He saw the next forty years of the Cold War era as the continuation of Western dominance under the pretext of political ideology and economic control and in the form of American-led globalization. He regarded the Iranian revolution as a direct repercussion of the “American intervention” and the repression of Islam over the last decades¹². Osama bin Laden has also often expressed similar ideas. Osama bin Laden has often referred in his statements to the above mentioned problems. He particularly accused the West for looting their lands, stealing their natural resources, simply because of the influence the West exerted through their economic and military power. He labels the West as “the biggest thieves ever witnessed in the history of the world”. Bin Laden also harshly

¹¹ Fauzi Najjar, “THE ARABS, ISLAM and GLOBALIZATION”. MIDDLE EAST POLICY, VOL. 12. PP. 91-106. 2005.

¹² Interview with Ayatollah Khomeini by Hamid Algar on December 29, 1978.

criticized the West for disseminating Western ideology and thereby spoiling the souls of Muslim nations.¹³

Anoushiravan Ehteshami cites prominent Islamic scholars such as Salim al-Awwa who describes globalization as offensive. Thus, he argues, endorsing globalization and engaging with it is like promoting Western cultural values and their dominance. Other Islamic scholars with great popularity, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, have pushed a similar line, comparing globalization with imperialism whose mission is not only to encourage consumerism and ‘looseness’ of mores among the community of believers, but also to destroy Muslims’ values and beliefs.¹⁴

Mohamed el-Shibiny argues that historically struggles between nations have been for the purpose of exploitation of human or natural resources of other nations. After occupation, in most cases, the colonialist country would try to lay down strategies for hegemony over the cultures of the invaded countries. However, after the UN and other international organizations were established conquering other lands has become much more difficult. Nevertheless, new strategies have been devised by powerful civilizations to dominate Third-World cultures without deploying troops. Technical and financial assistance, as well as economic tools are perceived as a weapon in the hands of developed countries to extend influence.¹⁵ A good example of how the West, in this case the EU, tried to extend its influence via its economic power. Starting from 1990s the EU and the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) negotiated a Free Trade Area between the two regions, but the negotiations came to a deadlock in 2008 when the

¹³ *FBIS report, "Compilation of Usama Bin Ladin Statements: 1994-January 2004"*.

¹⁴ Salim al-Awwa cited in Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Globalization and Geopolitics in the Middle East: Old Games, New Rules". Routledge, 2007.

¹⁵ Mohamed El-Shibiny, "The Threat of Globalization to Arab Islamic Culture: The Dynamics of World Peace". Dorrance Publishing, 2005.

GCC unilaterally withdrew from negotiations. The research done during this period showed that the GCC would benefit greatly from the deal, while the EU would end with some minor losses. This shows that the EU had political goals to be achieved. The reason for GCC to withdraw from negotiations was that in the final stage the EU introduces some clauses for democracy and respect for human rights, which, according to the GCC, had nothing to do with trade.¹⁶

Public perception of globalization and Western values:

To understand whether there is or there is no divide between the West and the Muslim world in terms of value system, it is necessary to observe the public attitude of Muslims towards the Western values. For that purpose I have examined surveys conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), World Values Survey, Pew Research Center and Gallup poll center.

The PIPA conducted surveys based on in-home interviews in Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia during 2006-2007.¹⁷ The number of respondents was between 1000 and 1300. The most interesting findings are introduced below.

¹⁶ Rym Ayadi, Salim Gadi. "EU-GCC Trade and Investment Relations: What Prospect of an FTA between the Two Regions?" SHARAKA, 2013

¹⁷ Kull, Steven. "Muslim Public Opinion in US Policy, Attack on Civilians and Al-Qaeda". PIPA, University of Maryland, 2007.

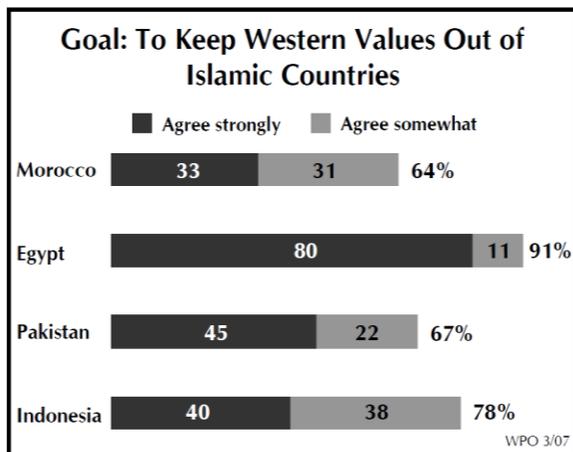


Table 1

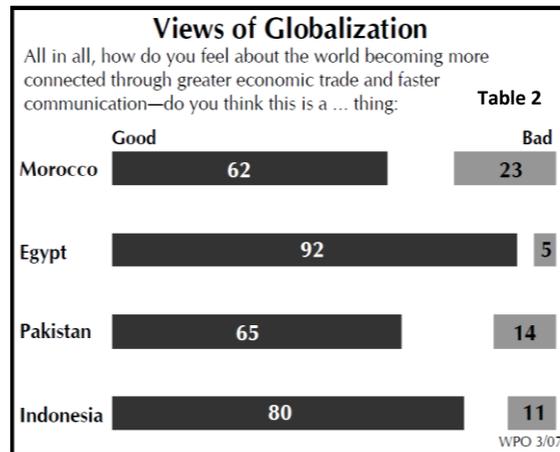


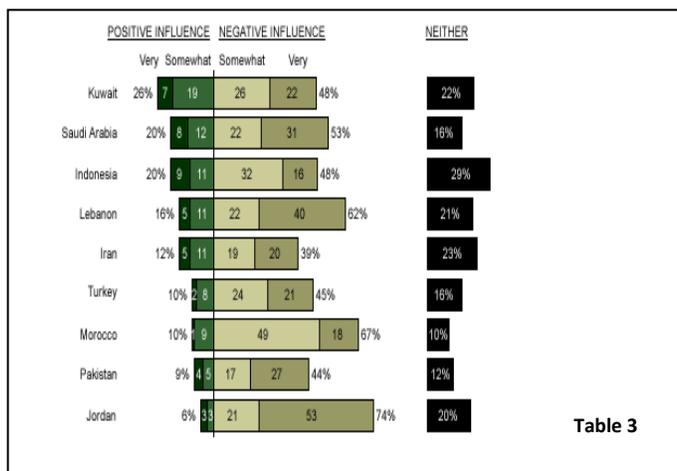
Table 2

Table 1 and 2 clearly indicate that economic aspects of globalization are not perceived as a threat but the overwhelming majority believes that Western values should remain out of Islamic countries.

According to the survey conducted by Gallup poll in 2002¹⁸ the societies of Muslim majority countries see Western values system as having a negative impact in their own value system.

They perceive the West as vulgar and immoral in terms of libertine attitudes towards sex, vulgarity and nudity in films and music.

The analysis of 150 thousand surveys¹⁹ conducted in 70 countries during 1995-1996 and 2000-2002 reveal that Western



¹⁸ The Gallup poll. "Poll of the Islamic World: Perceptions of Western Culture". 2002. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/5458/poll-islamic-world-perceptions-western-culture.aspx>

¹⁹ World Values Survey. "Attitudes toward sex, not democracy, divide the West and Islam". 2003. Retrieved from <http://ns.umich.edu/Releases/2003/Feb03/r022503.html>

and Muslim people have identical views about political issues. For example, 61% of both societies disagree that there should be a powerful man who decides everything without holding elections. 86% and 87% of Western and Muslim societies respectively agree that democracy may have some shortcomings but a better system does not exist. The division between the two societies becomes evident when human rights issues are on the agenda. For example, 53% of Westerners expressed some degree of tolerance towards homosexuality compared to 12% in the Muslim societies.

The analysis of this section shows that both Muslim elite and the public are worried about the negative impacts of the West on their culture. They see the West, especially the US as a power that tries to weaken and divide the Muslim world. Interestingly, the Muslim opinion on economic globalization and democracy is positive.

Western films, media, consumer goods and entertainment

Abu Sadat Nurullah cites Stone's argument that globalization has created a conflict between Islam and secularized Western pop culture when Islamic values are being replaced by material pleasures. According to Tatabichi cultural imperialism and blind imitation of the Western culture puts Islam under threat. Tomlinson believes that a global market is being shaped which creates a "cross-border civilization" where consumer tastes and preferences prevail over local cultures. Harf and Lombardi indicate some Western products such as "Levis" jeans, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Nike, Puma etc, arguing that these companies have created a new materialistic world culture²⁰.

Nurullah labels Western values as a "value free culture" which allows any kind of personality to enjoy an "easy access" to that culture. He condemns the West for little restrictions on (pornographic) scenes on Western TV programs, magazines, websites and movies. This, he believes, leads to commercialisation of pornographic materials which has particularly a bad impact on the upbringing of the younger generation. He argues that global media is under the influence or control of the West. Thus, these media agencies, such as BBC, CNN or Newscorp, determine what others should watch and learn. As Muslim countries have no compatible media of their own, hegemony of the Western media replaces the local, traditional Islamic culture. Nurullah complains not only about the dominance of the Western media, but also criticizes it

²⁰ Nurullah Abu Sadat. "Globalization as a Challenge to Islamic Cultural Identity". *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Sciences*, 2008.

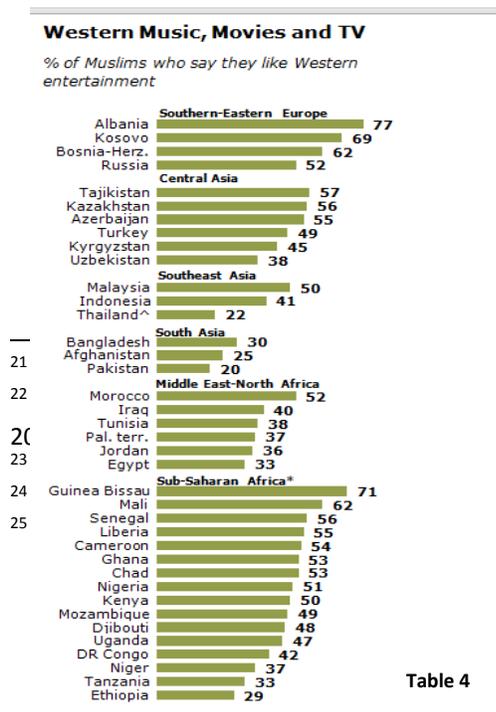
for negatively portraying the Islamic culture. He mentions Hollywood films, where Muslims are often portrayed as terrorists or backward people.²¹

Badawi emphasizes the role of media in shaping people's lifestyles. Saying lifestyle Badawi understands anything: From eating manners to relations between family members. In this regard, Badawi claims that the global media has contributed the Western culture to invade other societies. Badawi is concerned over the "hi/hello culture" which has been embraced by many Muslims. He claims that it has no emotional attachment in this way of greeting. Instead, he propogates Muslims to return to their original way of greeting: Asallamu Alaikum, which means "peace be upon you".²²

Schleifer²³, Power and Mazumdar²⁴ indicate some TV programs which are also popular in the Muslim world which possess sexual content and are dangerous for Islamic culture. These programs include "Sex and the City", where the heroine spends time with a man who video-records all their erotic actions, "Baywatch", demonstrating half-naked girls resting in the beach, or "Friends", where displaying the life of young males and females, propagating free relations between sexes, praising extra-marital sexual activities and homosexuality. Particularly "Ellen"

and "Sin City" are condemned for presenting gay and lesbian relationships.

According to Jameelah²⁵ many Muslims have abandoned their real identity under the influence of



on Social and Cultural Life: An Islamic Response?" F. A. RAHMAN, "Upon Society". Kuala Lumpur, 2002.
 "Good Goes Global". Newsweek, Vol. 135, 2000.
 "Theory and Practice". Lahore, 1978.

Western heavy metal, hard rock and impure music. He points out that even some Arabic music are full of obscene elements. He sees the ban on heavy instrumental music, “that detracts the minds away from the remembrance of Allah and eventually leads to lewdness”, as a counter measure to secure the Islamic traditional culture.

Muslim public attitude towards Western pop culture is, on the whole, identical to that of scholars. The Pew Research Center²⁶ conducted surveys with Muslims in 38 countries with samples varying from 700 to 1.500 respondents. The results show that in most cases the number of people who like Western entertainment is below 50%. Only in some Muslim

countries which are located in Europe, like Albania or Bosnia Herzegovina, in post-Soviet states, or sub-Saharan Africa, the number is above 50%. Another interesting finding by the same research center shows that often Muslim people, who have answered that they like Western pop culture, think that it harms their morality. For example, 51% of the respondents in the MENA region, who like Western pop culture, feel that it is harmful to their morality.

Even Among Muslims Who Like Western Pop Culture, Many Say It Harms Morality

Median % of Muslims who say Western music, movies and TV hurt morality in their country



Table 5

Conclusion

²⁶ Pew Research Center. “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Science and Popular Culture”. 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-science-and-popular-culture/>

Based on the arguments of Muslim scholars and data from research it can be argued that Islamic culture is vulnerable to Western pop culture. The content of the films, magazines and programs often contain such materials that sharply contradict to Islamic traditional teachings such as prohibition of extra marital sexual relationships, homosexuality or demonstration of half-naked women. As I will show in the next chapters, homosexuality and extra marital sexual relationships are strongly condemned by Quranic texts, while women symbolize purity and sacrosanct love in Islam. Muslim scholars condemn representatives of Muslim culture for incorporating alien cultural elements in their songs or films. Thus, the spread of Western pop culture, as well as the imitation of that culture in some Muslim countries pose a direct challenge to Islamic values.

Gender Issue and Globalization

Human rights issues are the most sensitive for the Islamic world. Anoushiravan Ehteshami sees the greatest dividing line between Islam and globalization around the Islamic understanding of manhood and honor/chastity. For a Muslim man honor and manhood are an important part of their identity and values. Women here symbolize virtue, durability, sacrosanct love and purity. In such societies where gender affiliation has an important role in shaping inter-personal relations, globalization may beget threats for such aspects of life that were under male-

domination before, such as family control or labor division²⁷. The author, based on research about women and globalization done in the Arab Middle East, has come to the conclusion that globalization not only challenges the male dominated areas of control, but also contests the Islamic principles of social relations. These factors, especially the second one, motivate the Islamist forces to act as guardians of Islamic values. The values that the Islamist forces feel should be protected are mainly family and motherhood.

Even in comparatively open and thriving Arab societies, such as Kuwait, economic reforms caused by globalization have created obstacles for women's rights. Women in these societies complain that, because of the new realities in their societies, women working outside their houses have become targets of extreme propaganda aimed to force them to quit their jobs. This kind of propaganda, which accuses working mothers for neglecting the family and children, tries to create such a public opinion where women are to blame for everything: starting from rising alcohol consumption to even disunity in the Kuwaiti society. These accusations have caused the emergence of slogans of a continuous campaign to encourage national unity by Islamization the state, calling openly on male-controlled system and values deeply rooted in the local religion and culture. Similar processes take place in almost any Muslim country. For example in Tunisia, which is also a relatively open country, Islamists have attacked gender relations. Al-Nahda, the country's most influential Islamist party, has criticized the state for its insignificant counter measures against globalization. It advocates a form of society, which would restrict, rather than expand women's role in the labor market. Al-Nahda's preachings are

²⁷ Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Globalization and Geopolitics in the Middle East: Old Games, New Rules". Routledge, 2007.

similar to those disseminated virtually in any part of the Middle East: “women properly belong in the home, raising children and safeguarding the family”²⁸.

Yet, women do comprise a significant and active part of the labor force in practically every country of the region. Even in Saudi Arabia, where discrimination against women is said to be one of the highest; women already have an important role in the social activities of the country. To put short, the transformations in the Muslim world caused by globalization have engendered tensions between women and religious communities. On the one hand, Muslim women see globalization as a means to break down the obstacles for getting education and employment or making an individual choice. On the other hand, traditionalists and Islamist activists regard it as a Western lifestyle which is inconsistent with Islamic values. They call for a hierarchical ethical order where men dictate the roles of women²⁹.

However, it would be a mistake to think that the region’s feminists have much in common with their Western counterparts. Although secular feminist forces, struggling for equality, are quite strong in the MENA region, parallel to them there are very strong Islamic oriented feminists. In many Muslim countries, as in Saudi Arabia or Iran, one can find women who struggle for rights trying to break the male dominated paradigm. Yet, these women are neatly dressed in full hijab in accordance with Islamic values³⁰.

Ehteshami calls this struggle a “battle of sexes”, in which the male driven understanding of identity and cultural values have been threatened by globalization. Across the Muslim world the penetration of universal rights have questioned the legitimacy of male dominated social-cultural systems which have developed to defend the dominant position of men as the

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

guardians of the society and the faith. This socio-cultural division of the sexes is at the core of Islamic cultural practices, and globalization is a direct challenge to them.³¹

Saleema Kauser and Hayfaa Tlaiss argue that intense economic, political and social transformations have taken place in the Arab societies during the last two decades. One of these key changes has been the trend of liberalizing markets by opening up their economies for foreign investments which have increased the necessity for professionals and skillful labor. This has transformed the structure of the labor force by breaking many taboos about the nature of women's employment and paved the way for improvements in economic, political, and social status of women in a number of Arab states. Women's overall position in Arab nations has improved, particularly in terms of education and participation in economic activities. In order to promote gender equality in labor market some Arab states have attempted to improve education for women.³²

The 2007 regional gender report in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) indicates that though between 1990 and 2004 women's share of the total workforce increased by 19% in the region compared to 3% globally, women's employment rate is less than 33% in this region which is the lowest in the world, as opposed to the world average of 56%.³³

Sally Baden mentions that there is a general interpretation of Islam among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars that Islam ascribes a low status to women in comparison with men and treats them differently. Moreover, the exclusion of women from the public sphere is often ascribed to

³¹ Ibid

³² The assumptions are made based on the statistics of World Bank, as well as studies by Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010, 2011; Jamali, Safieddine, and Daouk, 2006; Jamali, 2005, Kattara, 2005; Abd El Latif, 1988, Metcalfe, 2006; Salloum, 2003; Abdalla, 1996

³³ Saleema Kauser and Hayfaa Tlaiss, "The Arab Women Manager: Participation, Barriers, and Future Prospects" *Journal of International Business and Economy* 35-56, 2011.

the Islamic law. Traditional religious teachings preach women to be obedient to their men and their primary responsibility is to take care of children and the family. Other activities are not prohibited if they are not conducted at the expense of household responsibilities³⁴.

Women's participation in political and socio-economic life is hampered by a number of activities such as sex segregation and the reproductive role ascribed to women in Islam. Patriarchal structures and religious institutions influence gender ideology and are important sources of information about how to shape and conduct family life. Conservative religious groups encourage a traditional family arrangement in which women are expected to focus on family life rather than working outside the house³⁵.

However, several writers have challenged this approach claiming that Islam has served as a tool by male-controlled societal structures to legitimize discrimination against women. It is the patriarchal explanation of Islam that classifies women as subordinate to the male. Islam does not prohibit women to receive an education or pursuing a career. On the contrary, Islam prescribes both men and women equal duties and responsibilities in their religious, ethical and civil rights. Islam advocates that every Muslim should acquire knowledge to comprehend and appreciate the true spirit of Islam and does not distinguish between men and women in terms of rights to acquiring education. However, the method of interpretation of Islamic decrees across Arab states has had a significant contribution to defining attitudes toward women's involvement in the public sphere. The majority of Arab women report that masculine approaches are highly influential within the culture, which shape the inter gender relations. More importantly, the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic decrees makes the impression that

³⁴ Sally Baden, "The position of women in Islamic countries: Possibilities, constraints and strategies for change". Bridge, report N4, 1992.

³⁵ Ibid

Islam provides the socio-cultural explanation for inequality between the sexes. The feminist scholars find that Islamic teachings guarantee equal access of Arab women to economic opportunities, but social realities distort the image of women portraying them mostly negatively. The feminists believe that Arab women are victim of discrimination due to traditions, customs and social practices deep rooted in the society that are not Islamic.³⁶

Women Muslim scholars, such as Mounira Charrad or Valentine Moghadam, often called feminist Muslim scholars; tend to portray Islam in a more positive way, arguing that women's unequal status and rights are not connected with Islam. To show that Islam is not oppressive, they bring other factors that can cause subordination of women, such as the patriarchal social relations that pre-existed Islam or economy based on oil extraction. Many of the scholars³⁷ who study women's role in Muslim countries have examined the Quran, the Sunna and the Hadith and found that women's secondary role in the society is not caused by the holy texts. So they criticize the conservatives and radical Muslims for misinterpreting the Islamic texts. The conclusions of their studies is that Islam is ethical and egalitarian and according to Moghadam, Islam is "no more or less patriarchal than other major religions, especially Hinduism and the other two Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity, all of which share the view of woman as wife and mother". From this standpoint, it is the patriarchal readings rather than Islam that discriminates women.³⁸

Leila Ahmed explains how and where from "patriarchalization" penetrated the Arab societies. She points out that both pre and early Islamic Arabian societies were quite egalitarian towards

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Fatima Mernissi, Leila Ahmed, Ziba Mir Hosseini, Barbara Stowasser, Asma Barlas, Riffat Hassan, Margot Badran, and Amina Wadud

³⁸ Offenbauer, Priscilla. "Women in Islamic Societies: A Selected Review of Social Scientific Literature". A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2005.

women. But this changed with the expansion of Islam to Iraq and Syria where Islam encountered with Byzantine Christianity and Sasanian Zoroastrianism. In other words, Ahmed refers to patriarchal traditions as foreign influences. She insists that Muslim women can (re)create egalitarian gender relations without any Western support.³⁹

Discussion

To understand whether the Islamic law really prohibits, encourages or is neutral in regard of women's role in the society I have compared Iranian women with other Muslim states, especially with its main rival Saudi Arabia. The striking differences are the following. First, in Saudi Arabia women were not allowed to vote until 2011 and they can be elected only in 2015, while in Iran women's suffrage began in 1963. Moreover, in 2010, Iranian women held 3% of ministerial positions and 5% of parliament seats. Second, both Iran and Saudi Arabia women's enrollment in higher educational institutions than that of men, but education doesn't always lead to employment. In Iran, for example, in the last several years women enroll in universities twice as more than men do. However, only 32% of Iranian women participate in the labor force, about half the average of advanced economies. In Saudi Arabia the level of women participation in the workforce is even lower, at 21%. Another difference is that in Saudi Arabia women are prohibited from driving cars, which is not the case in Iran.

Given the abovementioned examples, it is clear that Islam could hardly be reason of the restrictions. It is evident that Islamic law could not have prohibited driving cars as cars did not

³⁹ Ahmed, Leila. "Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate". Yale University Press, 1992.

exist in the 7th century. In addition, “the Traditions of the Prophet” tell us that Mohamed’s wife used to ride a camel, a means of transportation of that time. Moreover, several sections can be found in the Quran which emphasize the spiritual equality of men and women, and the obligation of both men and women to meet the religious obligations of Islam. However, as a consequence of their different natures, the Quran ascribes different social roles to men and women. In a family life, women's role in the domestic sphere is highlighted, and other activities are permitted only if they are not conducted at the expense of family obligations. Providing and protecting the family is the obligation of men, as God has created them stronger. Ascribing different social roles to men and women does not yet mean that Islam forbids women to work. As in many other non-Islamic parts of the world women are responsible for domestic sphere, yet they often manage to combine it with successful career.

I conducted a focus group with six male Iranians in a hotel for who had come to Armenia to spend their Nowruz holiday. The discussion was mainly about gay rights and women rights. Though the entire group harshly criticized anything connected with gay rights, they had favorable attitude towards women rights. They agreed that men and women have different roles in Islam as in other religions, but they did not regard it as subordination. All of them had positive opinion about women working outside, but with some exceptions. For example, women should not take positions which deal with state management, as they are more emotional than men and can at some points sacrifice national interests. To show that there is no discrimination, one of them pointed out that men do not expect women to become shepherds. To the question, if married women in Iran can freely participate in the labor market, they

answered that it depends on the marriage contract⁴⁰, but in Iran today it is hardly possible to find a woman that gets married without including that point in the contract.

As the Quran is one of the sources of Islamic law, it is important to see if the roots of inequalities are hidden in the text. Here I will examine the laws for inheritance and marriage. In Muslim societies the laws arranging the division of inheritance, like other spheres, are taken from the Quran. Examining the verses dealing with inheritance we can find that women often get equal share to the men and in some cases even more. Professor Sheikh Muhammad Said Ramadan al Buti⁴¹ has given the following clarifications about the gender and inheritance issues:

It is widely believed that women have unequal rights with men regarding property inheritance. This perception is shaped by the following decree. “To the male, a portion equal to that of two females”. In reality, this is a fragmented part of the following verse. “God (thus) directs you as regards your Children's (Inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females”. This means, that the law refers exclusively to children. For other circumstances there are specific laws, where generally the size of the share does not depend on the sex. The following example, “For parents, a sixth share of the inheritance to each, if the deceased left children”, shows that here male and female get 1/6th share each. In some other cases women even get more than men. For example, if the deceased has a brother, a wife, and two girls, then the wife takes 1/8th of the heritage, both girls share 2/3rd between themselves and the rest goes to the brother, who is the uncle of the girls.

⁴⁰ An Islamic marriage contract is a formal, binding document. The contract can regulate any aspect of the couple's life. For example, the woman can forbid the husband to marry a second woman, or demand a right to work when some living standards are not met by the husband.

⁴¹ Al-Buti is currently director of the Department of Faiths and Religions (Al-`Aqâ' id wal-Adyân) at the University of Damascus. A member of the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research in `Amman, he is also a member of the High Council of Oxford Academy. (is this a plagiarism?)

Based on the examination of Quranic verses it is obvious that the rule “to the male, a portion equal to that of two females” is not an enduring rule which is applied to any case a man and a woman share inheritance.⁴²

The laws of the Quran regulating marriages are also worth mentioning. According to it, women are expected to be obedient to men; instead they can expect their husbands to provide with a life style they used to live before the marriage. In addition to financial support, men are also responsible for protecting their wives. If the wife is not obedient, the husband has the right to beat her.⁴³

Here, as we can see, there is much room for different interpretations. First, I would like to draw attention on the word “obedient”. The Quran does not elaborate to what extent a wife should be obedient to her husband. Should she commit a suicide if ordered by her husband? Being obedient for a wife to her husband is not only an Islamic value, but also Christian, as during the wedding ceremony the priest asks the bride if she will be obedient to her husband all her life, if the answer is “yes”, then the priest asks the bridegroom if he will protect his wife all his life. Christian women believers, as compared with Muslim believers, have much more opportunities and freedoms, though both of them are to be obedient. From here we can conclude, that the word “obedient” has vague meaning that can be and is interpreted differently in different societies.

Second, that I would like to draw attention to is that according to the Quran husbands must secure a life style for their wives to which they used to before the marriage. But what if the husband, due to socio-economic problems, does not manage to support his wife? Can, in that

⁴² Al-Buti cited in Gihane Tabet, “Women in Personal Status Laws: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria”. UNESCO, Gender Research N4, 2005.

⁴³ Ibid.

case, the wife be not “obedient”? Can she seek for a job regardless of her husband’s disagreement? The Quran does not give answers to all these questions, which give the people who are responsible for interpreting the Quran an opportunity to maneuver and interpret the way they wish.

Conclusion

To conclude this section, it is obvious that the subordinate role of women is not entirely based on the text of Quran, though the Quran treats men and women differently. It is rather the result of its interpretation, which is mainly done by patriarchal structures that, for centuries, have greatly overestimated the role of men and underestimated that of the women to preserve their anteriority in the society. In this regard, globalization can somehow challenge the long rooted traditions of the Muslim nations, but these traditions have little in common with the religion. Hence, globalization does not challenge the Islamic culture and identity on the basis of gender issues.

The fact that Islam has been differently interpreted in different states is not questioned even by Muslim leaders. Shiite and its Alewi offshoot of Islam are referred as moderate branches of Islam, while Sunnite and its various sub offshoots are referred as more extreme branches of Islam. This can also explain the great differences between Shiite Iran and Sunnite Saudi Arabia. All these contribute to the idea of the thinkers that Islam has been exploited by patriarchal societal structures to legitimize discrimination against women and to place women in subordinate roles. In this context, globalization has had a positive impact on Muslim states,

which little by little abandon the patriarchal views. Nevertheless, in contrast to Ehteshami's statement, gender inequality is not a priority question for Muslim women in most countries. To my question to a good friend of mine from Iran if she dislikes wearing head scarf, the answer was the following; "I dislike wearing a headscarf as much as you dislike wearing your trousers. Why do the people of the so called free world think about our human rights more than we do?"

LGBT and Islam

It is very important to observe moral values embedded in Islamic texts⁴⁴ when examining the relations between the West and Islam.⁴⁵ The world polity theory argues that due to globalization all states have to/will accept world culture which includes LGBT rights⁴⁶. As a result of globalization of sexuality LGBT rights have been recognized in many corners of the world. But parallel to the legitimation of the LGBT rights throughout the world, the Muslim world has taken the opposite direction of oppressing those communities more and more severely. As an illustration, Ahmed Qassim Al-Ghamd⁴⁷, the current head of Saudi Arabia's

Commission for Promotion of Virtue has ordered the religious police to end with homosexuality unless "Western morays infiltrate our beloved Islamic nation."⁴⁸

Religion has a significant role in shaping attitudes towards homosexuality. Unsurprisingly, most scholars of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, which are monotheistic religions, regard homosexuality as a sin. Hence, they find it unacceptable. Nevertheless, Islam is the one that is the most intolerant towards this issue⁴⁹. The reason of the intolerance might be hidden in the Holy Books. Though the Bible condemns homosexuality, it does not allow its adherents to punish them by their own, while the Quran (Sharia) ascribes certain punishments for committing sins. Human Rights Watch portrays religion and traditional values as obstacles for

⁴⁴ Holly Quran and Hadith

⁴⁵ Saying Islam I refer to the Muslim majority territories, as religious identity prevails over national identity.

⁴⁶ Lechner, Frank. "The Globalization Reader". Wiley Blackwell, 2011.

⁴⁷ Surprisingly, Al-Ghamd has been criticized by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia for being too moderate over gender issues.

⁴⁸ El Menyawi, Hassan. "The Great Reversal: How Nations in the Muslim World Went from Tolerating Same Sex Practices to Repressing LGB People, 1750—2010". New York University, 2011.

⁴⁹ Rehman, Javaid and Polymenopoulou, Eleni. "Is Green a Part of the Rainbow? Sharia, Homosexuality and LGBT Rights in the Muslim World". Fordham International Law Journal, Vol. 37, 2013.

promoting human rights. For LGBT communities the argument of “traditional values” can not only limit human rights but also be used to completely negate them⁵⁰.

Pew Research Center conducted 38. 000 face to face interviews with Muslims in 39 countries.

The countries are classified into six regions: Southern and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and

North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia. The research reveals the Muslim attitude towards such phenomena as prostitution, homosexuality, abortion alcohol consumption etc., as well as their attitude towards God⁵¹.

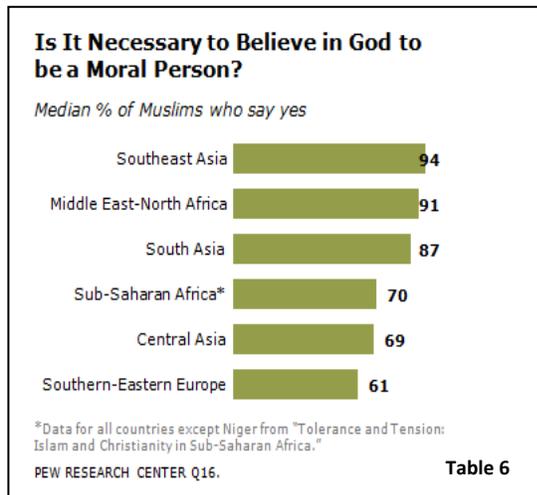


Table 6 shows that Muslims all over the world, especially in South East Asia, MENA and

South Asia agree that in order to be moral one must believe in God.

Wide Agreement that Certain Behaviors are Morally Wrong
Median % of Muslims who say each behavior is morally wrong

	Prostitution	Homosexuality	Suicide	Sex outside marriage	Drinking alcohol	Abortion	Euthanasia
Southern-Eastern Europe	90	83	83	67	62	71	64
Central Asia	89	85	80	85	66	61	62
Southeast Asia	94	95	95	94	93	93	88
South Asia	84	79	80	87	82	64	68
Middle East-North Africa	95	93	82	94	84	72	75
Sub-Saharan Africa*	91	91	89	78	82	88	80

*Data for all countries except Niger from "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa."
PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q84d, Q84e, Q84f, Q84g, Q84h, Q84i and Q84j.

Table 7

Table 7 shows that there are some behaviors that are perceived to be immoral by Muslim people. The examination of the two tables enhances the above statement of the Human Right

Watch about the clash between religion and human rights. It reveals that South East Asia and MENA, where religion is mostly associated with morality, demonstrate a higher degree of

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch. World Report, 2013.

⁵¹ Pew Research Center. “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society”. 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/>

disapproval of the mentioned phenomenon. According to the graph, homosexuality, together with prostitution, is one of the mostly condemned phenomenon. But here it should also be mentioned that the results of the survey, especially concerning homosexuality can contain some limitations, as Muslim people living in a Muslim state might not trust the researchers and give wrong answers. In order to decrease the possible limitation, I have examined another poll conducted in 2006 with 500 British Muslims via telephone. This survey found that none of the respondents believed that homosexual acts could be morally acceptable⁵². This shows that Muslim people, both in Europe and their homeland view homosexuality as immoral.

Javaid Rehman and Eleni Polymenopoulou argue that the strong support for the application of punishment derives from the analysis of the sources of Quran and Sunna. However, they believe that the Quran does not provide any terms that can be taken for homosexuality, though there are some terms that are associated with homosexual activities. Consequently, if there are no references to homosexuality, there cannot be any criteria for punishment. The juristic interpretation of homosexuality and punishment for it derive from the story of the Prophet Lot (Lut).⁵³

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah

According to the Bible, Old Testament, the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were famous for excessive sins, largely sex perversion⁵⁴. According to the story two angels arrived at the city of Gomor, but no one knew that they were angels. Lot invited them to his house to have dinner and spend the night there. When the people of Sodom learned about the guests, all male residents surrounded the

⁵² Riazat, Butt. "Muslims in Britain have zero tolerance of homosexuality". The Guardian, May 7, 2009.

⁵³ See foot note 49

⁵⁴ Genesis, chs. 13, 14. "The Story Of Abraham: Abraham And Lot".

house and demanded that Lot gave the men to them so that they could have sex with them. Lot offered his two daughters instead, but was rejected. When these people tried to enter the house by force, the angels made them blind so that they could not see the door. The angels told Lot that the Lord had sent them to destroy the city and told Lot to leave the city as soon as possible. In the morning the city was destroyed by a rain of fiery stones⁵⁵.

However, there are some scholars who try to show that the Quran does not prohibit homosexuality. Hassan El Menyawi claims that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was not connected with homosexuality. Instead, Hassan argues that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were punished because they wanted to rape the strangers (non-consensual sex), ignoring Prophet Lot's pleas. Besides, Hassan enhances his argument by showing that male same-sex sexual acts could not be the reason of the Lord's wrath, which led to the destruction of the two cities, because Lot's wife, together with other female residents of the cities, were punished either. By this argument the author wants to stress that Lot's wife was punished for immorality of idolatry, which does not necessarily lead to homosexual acts⁵⁶.

Hassan further argues that those people who wanted to rape the angels, had wives. He came to this assumption based on the following Quranic text: "Of all the creatures in the wide world, do you approach males and leave what mates God has created for you? Indeed you are people transgressing all limits!"⁵⁷ This means that the men were not homosexuals as they were engaged with the opposite sex. The God's wrath, Hassan continues, derived not from the same-sex acts between the men, but rather from engaging in any sexual relationship beyond one's spouse.

⁵⁵ Genesis 19. "Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed".

⁵⁶ Menyawi, Hassan. "Same-Sex Marriage in Islamic Law". Wake Forest Journal of Law & Policy. Vol. 2:2, 2010.

⁵⁷ Qur'ān 26:165–66.

Discussion

The arguments supporting homosexuality are not, in contrast to gender equality, strong enough. First, Hassan El Menyawi argues that there were other reasons for destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. It is clearly mentioned (Genesis, chp. 13, 14) that the cities were famous for excessive sins. This statement neither rejects nor confirms the possibility of homosexuality to be the reason of God's wrath. Instead, throughout the Quran there are many other verses that obviously condemn the act of homosexuality such as "If two men among you are guilty of lewdness, punish them both. If they repent and amend, Leave them alone; for Allah is Oft-returning, Most Merciful."^{58 59}

A sharp contradiction arises about the punishment for homosexuality. On the one hand, while the Quran advocates punishing the sinners; it is clear that it does not refer to capital punishment, as in case of repenting they should be left alone⁶⁰. On the other hand, some of the Hadiths prescribe death penalty for the same act, such as "The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: If you find anyone doing as Lot's people did, kill the one who does it, and the one to whom it is done"⁶¹.

Some Muslim scholars have questioned the reliability of the Hadiths (words and deeds of the Prophet). They reject any extra-Quran text based on the fact that they were written after the death of Prophet Muhammad⁶². Rashad Khalifa, one of the most outspoken Quranists, claims that the Hadith and Sunna are satanic inventions aimed to misguide the people of Muhammad. In his

⁵⁸ Quran (4:16).

⁵⁹ For a larger list of verses condemning homosexuality see appendix

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Hadith: Book 38, Number 4447

⁶² Musa, Aisha. "The Quranists". Florida International University, Religion Compass, Vol. 4. 2010.

book “Quran, Hadith and Islam” the author brings numerous examples where the God orders to follow only the Quran⁶³. Even if Khalifa’s argumentations are not strong enough, and the Hadith is a legitimate Islamic source of justice, it remains unclear which book’s commands should prevail over the other one.

Conclusion

As a conclusion of the section I argue that the LGBTIQ rights are incompatible with Islam. The arguments of the authors who try to harmonize Islam with LGBTIQ rights base only on the argument that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah can have a double explanation which is not enough to argue that homosexuality is not a sin in Islam, particularly if further verses clearly eliminate the ambiguity. Nevertheless, the punishment for conducting an act of homosexuality gives reasons for doubting its legitimacy due to the contradiction between the Quran and the Hadith.

⁶³ Khalifa, Rashad. “Quran, Hadith and Islam”. Smashwords Edition, 2010.

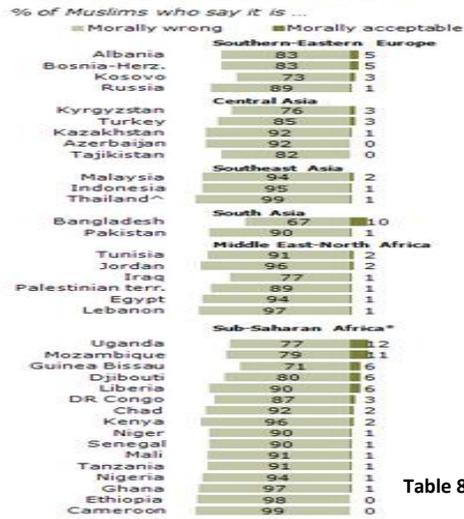
The Importance of the LGBT Rights

The Case of Turkey

Some scholars argue that though Muslim countries are much more intolerable towards sexual

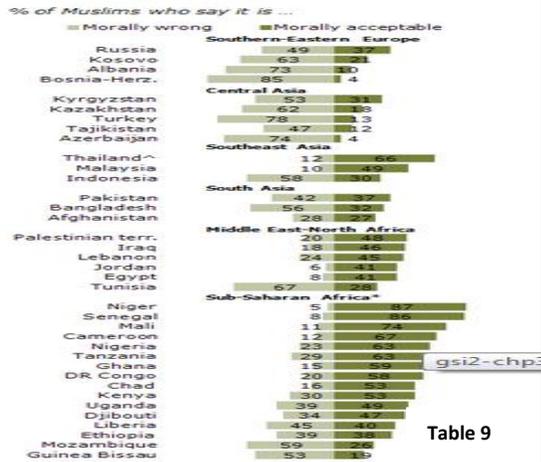
minorities, globalization will force them to change their attitude towards the LGBT community. The fact that the Iranian theocratic government little by little gives more and more freedoms to its citizens was also stated by the participants of the focus group. Nevertheless, they strongly believed that it would not reach to legalization of LGBT community.

Is Homosexual Behavior Moral?



In order to evaluate the importance of LGBT rights in Muslim countries I have compared table 8 and table 9, where mainly the same states are presented. The tables are taken from the Pew Research Center⁶⁴.

Is Polygamy Moral?



To the question whether homosexual behavior is moral (Table 8) maximum 12 % (Uganda) have given a positive answer. The rest rank from 0%

⁶⁴ Pew Research Center. "The World's Muslims: Morality." 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-morality/>

to 6%. To the question whether polygamy can be considered moral (Table 9) considerably more people answered that it is immoral. The Quran allows men to marry up to four women. The verse goes the following way “If you fear that you cannot treat orphans with fairness, then you may marry such women (widowed) as seem good to you: two, three or four of them. But if you fear that you cannot do justice, marry one only”⁶⁵. Table 9 shows that many Muslims regard polygamy as immoral irrespective of the holy teaching. This means that Muslim people sometimes decide on their own what is good and what is bad. From here it can be deduced that the issue of homosexuality is very important for Muslims as, in this domain, they extensively follow the Islamic rule.

Turkey is often brought as an example of a Muslim state that is tolerant to sexual minorities. According to Göksel the 2000s are perceived as years of recognition of LGBT communities in Turkey. Turkey was the first Muslim country where a gay pride was held and the pride grows each year. NGOs and CSOs (civil society organizations), such as KAOS-GL, Pink Life, or Lambda Istanbul, with overt LGBT agendas started to be officially registered since 2000⁶⁶, though some of them were later banned under the pretext of harming morality. Media has also started to pay more attention to the issue. But does this mean that Turkey has become tolerant to LGBT?

First, homosexual relations were legalized during the Ottoman era, in 1858, and Turkey has no laws that marginalize LGBT identities⁶⁷. But many analysts, including Göksel, believe that Turkey’s shift to extensive recognition of LGBT rights is the result of a political decision to

⁶⁵ Qur’an, 4:3.

⁶⁶ Göksel Diba Nigar, “Gay Rights: Where is Turkey Heading?” The German Marshall Fund, 2013.

⁶⁷ Gisselbrecht Tania, “EU-Turkey Dialogue”. Bridging Europe, Initiative Working Paper, No. 4, 2014.

join the EU. But the shift has encountered a fierce backlash from intellectuals, conservative journalists, politicians and organized groups. The state ignores the rights of LGBT community and even often makes speeches full of hatred. An example is the speech of the minister for women and family, Selma Kavaf, who labeled homosexuality as a biological disorder which ought to be treated. Neither she nor any representative of the ruling party did not retract the comments. Only from 2008 to 2012 thirty transsexuals have been murdered in Turkey⁶⁸.

Different research have been conducted to find Turkish public attitude towards LGBT. The results show that their attitude by and large is identical to other Muslim states. For example, a survey found out that only 11% of the respondents thought that homosexual acts should not be criminalized⁶⁹. Another survey conducted by World Value Survey found that more than 84% of the respondents did not want to have gay neighbors⁷⁰.

The above mentioned facts show that the widespread perception that Turkey has become a gay friendly country is very fragile. Though the state has granted some freedoms to the LGBT community it is very early to claim that Turkey has become the first Muslim state recognizing LGBT identities. As the reforms were accession driven, many people believe that Turkey will adopt anti-gay policies if it shifts its political orientation away from the EU to the Islamic world.

The surveys, speeches of the ruling party members and the number of hate driven murders show that the reforms are superficial as they have not managed to secure the LGBT community member

⁶⁸ See foot note 67

⁶⁹ KONDA and Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SPoD) survey, 2012

⁷⁰ 2011 World Values Survey

Conclusion

In this paper I examined the impact of globalization on Muslim culture and identity. It is obvious that globalization has both positive and negative impact on Muslim value system. I came to the conclusion that globalization has had positive impact on gender equality. During the last decades women in Muslim countries have started to enjoy more freedoms and opportunities. Though still the majority of Muslim politicians and scholars find it incompatible with Islamic teachings, I argue that it is the patriarchal interpretation of Islam. The non-patriarchal interpretation, which includes Islamic feminists and some other scholars, has shown that Islam regards both men and women as equal members of the society, though it ascribes different roles to different sexes.

The issue of LGBT community is the most sensitive for Muslims. They find it as a sharp contradiction to Islamic laws. Like supporters of gender equality, there are also some scholars and researchers who try to show that Islam does not contradict to LGBT rights. But their argumentations are weak as they are based overwhelmingly on one particular case. I conclude that LGBT rights are incompatible with Islam and the recognition of their rights challenges Islamic values.

But arguing that LGBT rights are in contradiction with Islam does not still imply that the harsh anti-gay policies are in line with Islam. There is a greatly contentious issue regarding the punishment of homosexuals. I showed that there is a sharp contradiction between the Quran and the Hadith over punishment. The Quran does not prescribe any concrete punishment; it is evident that capital punishment does not derive from the Quran. On the contrary, the Quran advocates forgiving the sinner if he has repented. The Hadith, by contrast, prescribes death

penalty for homosexuality. The reliability of the Hadith has been questioned by many Muslim scholars, who advocate accepting the Quran as the only source of the Islamic law. Taking into account the unresolved contradiction between the two sources of Islamic law I argue that death penalty can itself be considered a fundamental violation of the Islamic rule. Hence, I argue that death penalty should be abolished, at least temporarily, unless the adherents of both approaches come to a single decision over the issue.

Finally I showed that importing and imitating Western media and pop culture has a negative effect on Muslim values, as they often approve life-styles that are condemned by Islam.

Combining the facts I argue that globalization can undermine the foundations of Islam if it penetrates the Muslim world rapidly and completely. But as for the current level, it has had a considerable positive impact on Muslim culture and the abolition of death penalty can be the second step.

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