**Assignment 3**

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**Current Social, Moral and Political Challenges of Muslims and their Solutions in the Light of Islamic Teachings**

**“Differences of Muslim Ummah and West”**

**Introduction**

Islamic societies are looked at by Westerners as backward, oppressed by religion, and inhumanely governed (Mazrui, A. A., 1997). Islam is not just a religion, and certainly not a fundamentalist political movement. It is a civilization, and a way of life that teaches love, compassion and tolerance. However, there are fundamentally some challenges that Muslims have to face while living in western countries. Moreover, there is a small group of people who act differently and portray Islam as religion of extremism, intolerance, hatred, hostility, prejudice and fear/threats. Because of all this it appears as if differences of Muslim Ummah and West are increasing day by day.

In the following section first of all some of the findings in terms of different challenges will be described. This will be followed by a discussion on these challenges and the last section will narrate some recommendations in terms of solutions to these problems.

**Findings and Discussion**

In this section first of all we will describe our findings in respect of issues regarding all the three challenges (i.e. social, moral and political) that are part of the main topic and in the context of our further selected topic where we have investigated differences of Muslim Ummah and the west. It may be noted that we have raised these issues especially when Muslims are required to live in western countries.

**Findings**

***Social Challenges:***

* ***Food and Drink***
  + **Food:** Islam has certain requirements that need decision regarding what's acceptable and not acceptable as food.
  + **Drink:** Islam's prohibition on alcohol sometimes make many work-related social events rather challenging.
* ***Dress and Clothing*** 
  + **Modest clothing:** In western countries business dress for women frequently includes knee-length skirts for instance.
  + **Hijaab:** Women wearing the veil has caused all kinds of issues and is indeed banned in a few countries (e.g. France) for certain careers (e.g. teaching)
  + **Growing a beard:** Many professions (e.g. police, army) require employees to be clean-shaven, but there is a clear encouragement in Islam to grow one's beard.
* ***Social Interaction***
  + **Gender issues:** There are many issues around interaction of men and women in Islam: being alone with someone of the opposite gender, touching / hugging /shaking hands / kissing and social mixing of opposite genders.
  + **Parties:** Parties are a special form of hell for Muslims, they mix many of the above problems -- they celebrate secularized religious celebrations, they involve many interactions with the opposite gender, they involve the consumption of alcohol.

***Moral Challenges:***

* ***Acts of worship***
  + **Doing ablutions:** The "foot in the sink" is an old problem Muslims often face in the workplace while preparing for prayers.
  + **Performing daily prayers:** Performing daily prayers in one of the pillars of Islam. For this one only needs a quiet room for 10 minutes 3 times a day. But this sometimes becomes extremely difficult and embracing.
  + **Performing Friday prayers:** Disappearing for 2 hours every Friday isn't always easy.
  + **Fasting:** Telling your colleagues you can't have lunch with them for an entire month, and to argue with others for whole month is not always easy.
  + **Hajj:** This needs some time off from work and to return with shaven head is not always very acceptable.
  + **Eid:** You need to take *today* off or tomorrow and what do you mean by this you don't know.
* ***Finance***
  + **Dealing with Interest:** Islam has some detailed requirements for avoiding interest. This can affect someone's career options, but also the details of how they get paid, and superannuation.
  + **Gambling/Risk:** Many social events revolve around gambling.
  + **Complex financial instruments:** Companies sometimes offer remuneration in the form of options, derivatives, bonuses etc.

***Political Challenges:***

* ***Islamophobia*** 
  + **Irrational fear of Muslims:** In most of the western countries there is an environment of so-called “Islamophobia”. This exerts unnecessary pressure on Muslims, need to defend those acts for which they are not responsible.
  + **Blame Game:** Muslims are always on the receiving end when even some event occurs in the west and they have to face unprecedented blames.
  + **Blasphemy issues:** This relates to the action or offence of speaking sacrilegiously about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by some westerner in the name of freedom of speech. It becomes very difficult to hear different views by westerners regarding this sensitive matter.

**Discussion**

Muslim ummah forms one-fourth of world’s population and this number is increasing day by day. But still Muslims, especially living in western countries, face the above mentioned challenges. The cause of this situation is prejudice of the west. The roots of this prejudice are very old. A major result of it was crusades. Currently this western chauvinism increases after the event of 9/11. After 9/11 the living conditions for Muslims in the western world especially in America became very hard. They have to live under the label of “universal suspect”( Nosseir, M., 2017). Their every action is carefully watched.

In west, life becomes very materialistic. They have separated their religion and daily life activities. On the contrary, for Muslims their religion and daily life activities are one thing. This is because of the fact that Islam is not only a religion but it gives Muslims complete code of life. Islam does not only deal with religious aspects but socially, politically and economic aspects as well.

A Muslim has to perform prayers five times a day. Before prayer it is necessary to perform ‘waddu’ or ablution. As it is said in Quran:

**O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles. (5:6)**

The problem for a Muslim living in a western country is that western working places are not designed for these kinds of activities. If someone do ablution there, all the place get wet which is an extremely non civilized act in western society. Secondly, it is very hard to find a place where a Muslim can offer prayer during working hours and if somebody has seen him while he is praying he often react as if he has seen a ghost.

Meat is an essential part of diet for a healthy life. In West Muslims face a major problem that from where to get *Halal* meat? There are very few Muslims meat shops. To resolve the issue sometime Muslims have to buy *kosher* ([Qadhi](https://muslimmatters.org/author/yasir-qadhi/" \o "Posts by Dr. Yasir Qadhi), Y.,2012) meat from Jewish shops. Furthermore, on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha, it is extremely difficult to do *Qurbani* there, as by law animals can’t be slaughtered at homes.

Alcohal is haram in Islam. In Quran, Allah says:

**"They question thee about strong drinks and games of chance. Say: In both is great sin, and (some) utility for men; but the sin of them is greater than their usefulness."[2:219]**

Ibn 'Umar reported the Messenger of Allah as saying,

**"Every intoxicant is Khamr and very intoxicant is haram (forbidden)."**

On the contrary, drinking alcohol is a norm in western society. All official dinners are not completed without alcohol. For a Muslim employee it is impossible to participate in such dinners and avoiding them may result in firing from job. Moreover, in Islam not only drinking is haram but selling, purchasing and handling is also prohibited. So for a Muslim shelf-stacker it is difficult to continue his job.

In Islam *purdah* is a necessary part of Muslim women. Allah says:

**“O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way). That will be better, that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allaah is Ever Oft‑Forgiving, Most Merciful” [33:59]**

But in most of the western countries veil is ban on public places. In some countries scarf is also ban in schools. In various working environments women are discriminated because of their veil. Often in high level meeting knee length skirt is the dress code for female employees. All these situations are unacceptable for Muslims.

Another social problem that Muslims encountered commonly in western society is the mixing of gender. In Quran Allah says:

**Say to the believing men that: they should cast down their glances and guard their private parts (by being chaste). This is better for them.Say to the believing women that: they should cast down their glances and guard their private parts (by being chaste)…” [24:30&31]**

That means mixing of opposite sex is prohibited in Islam. But in west, handshaking with opposite gender is a common practice and it is considered uncivilized if one refused to handshake.

Lastly, one the most recent nuisance is the emergence of a new terminology the so-called “Islamophobia”. This is all based on false propaganda, bad intentions and hypocrisy of a very small presence of western extremist elements. They propagate Islam as religion of hatred, intolerance, hostility, prejudice and fear/threats (Iqbal, Z., 2010). Furthermore, they spread Islam as a religion of great danger to other religions (Iqbal, Z., 2010). In essence, they portray Muslims as ‘alien and foreign to western society’ (Lowe 1985, pp.55-62). This factor becomes one of the root cause of increasing distance between Muslim Ummah and the West.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the above discussion, it is clear that Muslims faces multifaceted challenges due to the differences of Muslim ummah and west. Muslims are constantly struggling to intermix with other nation as Islam teaches them to live with harmony and peace. But the narrow-mindedness of the west opposes this effort.

To improve this situation Muslims need to double their efforts. In the following some steps are recommended:

1. Muslims should themselves improve the understanding of the teachings of Islam so that they are able to uproot any extremist element within the Ummah.
2. Muslim should propagate the true picture of Islamic teachings to broad-minded west communities so that they can understand that Muslims are the ordinary inhabitants of this Earth like them. For this newest technologies like social media can be exploited collectively and spread the soft view of Islam and its teachings.
3. It is important the organization such as OIC take initiative to eradicate such problems faced by Muslim Ummah.
4. Muslims countries should try to eliminate their inside differences and try to bring peace among their own ranks.
5. Muslims are required to improve their conduct while living in western countries always try to improve the image of Islam and Muslims.

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