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Citizenship in Muslim-Majority States

by Dr. Karim, Karim H.[1]

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Present-day ideas about citizenship date from the 18th century, although political theorists have been writing about the concept for over two thousand years. The contemporary idea of the citizen developed in relationship with that of the modern state as it developed in Europe and was spread around the world. Colonialism and the dominance of Western perspectives were instrumental in establishing these notions as the global norm. Not only is the entire world divided into distinct states, citizenship has become a primary frame within which the rights of the individual human being are identified.

Discussions on citizenship in traditional Muslim discourse were carried out in the context of developing a harmonious and virtuous society. A pre-eminent tenth-century philosopher, Al-Farabi, drew from the work of Plato to describe the role of the citizen in the Muslim polity. He wrote that when the citizen of the virtuous city performs his civic duties properly ñhe acquires, by these actions, the good states of the soul.ò This world view saw civic action, piety and spiritual progress as being linked together.

Traditional Muslim civilisation was characterised by civil societies that had a relative degree of autonomy from rulers. Public institutions such as schools and hospitals were often funded through charitable foundations; even legislation was developed and administered by a relatively independent judiciary. Regulations for commerce were

[1] Dr. Karim H. Karim: is the Director of Carleton Universityôs School of Journalism and Communication and is an Associate Professor, Ottawa, Canada. He is the author of the critically-acclaimed and award-winning book *Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence* (Montreal: Black Rose, 2003) and the editor of *The Media of Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2003).

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maintained by guilds. Citizenship was exercised not through individual action but through membership in these various (non-governmental) organisations. These societal arrangements have almost completely disappeared in the aftermath of colonialism and the rise of authoritarian governments.

Contemporary Muslim-majority states (i.e. those whose population is more than fifty percent Muslim) generally tend to have ambiguous positions regarding citizenship. The concept is often viewed through the framework of ethnicity. Definition of citizenship through *jus sanguinis* (ties of blood) rather than *jus soli* (ties of soil) tend to be predominant. Therefore, links with emigrants remain strong even after they have left the homeland ï this keeps the diaspora connected to the country of origin even after decades of absence. Even though a person may have acquired citizenship in another state, the government of the home state continues to view him or her as continuing to be subject to its laws. It is often very difficult to renounce oneôs original citizenship in a Muslim-majority country.

Citizenship norms are under stress in many Muslim-majority states. Authoritarian political environments tend to limit the liberties of the subjects of contemporary Muslim-majority states. Characteristics of individualism, equality, ability to participate in the public sphere, political freedoms, and a well-supported regime of rights tend to exist on shaky grounds. They are at times viewed as being ñWesternò in origin and unsuited to Muslim societies.

The ideal of the global Muslim community (*ummah*) is a key factor in the transnational personal and societal identification of Muslims. There is a very strong belief that the more than one billion adherents of Islam around the world constitute one ñnation.ò This concept usually overlaps with and often contradicts that of the citizen as an individual living within the boundaries of a specific state. In reality, the idea of *ummah* is frequently disregarded in the treatment of migrant populations from other countries, regardless of whether are Muslim or not. On the other hand, it does occasionally affect the conceptualization of non-Muslim minorities as nationals of Muslim-majority states.

Nevertheless, the concept of the *ummah* as the global Muslim nation remains resilient. As Western conceptions of the citizen undergo evolution, there appears to be some possibility of convergence with this Muslim idea. The emerging notion of multilayered citizenship in the European Union (local, national and continental) appears to provide some possibility for the opening of a new dialogue on this issue at the international level. It will be crucial in these discussions to identify the rights of minorities as well as the recognition of the transnations of diasporas.

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