

Multiculturalism, Identity and the Liberation of Reason in the

Quran

Bridging the Gap

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Religion

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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Abstract

My thesis deals with religion, democracy and differences. My interests are primarily philosophical and theoretical, and I intend to contextualize my research with reference to Canadian issues and debates. This thesis addresses the challenges posed to the normative ideal of multiculturalism. In particular, I intend to discuss the difficulties of adopting normative ideals that meet the democratic principles of political equality and inclusiveness while at the same time promoting tolerance toward minorities in order to sustain their distinctiveness.

In dealing with the complex relationship between religion, democracy and differences. I highlight the limitations of multiculturalism and propose a theory of liberation of reason, entitled the theory of *Daf'* (Repel), in order to address the myriad challenges spawned by this complex intermingling of political and cultural identities within liberal democratic societies. The theory of *Daf'* in the context of a deliberative model of democracy complements the normative ideal of multiculturalism.

Acknowledgments

Let me preface my thesis by expressing my deepest gratitude to all those who assisted me in my research project. I would like to recognize in particular:

My advisor, Dr. Kenneth Mackendrick for his great support, insightful guidance and for enriching my intellectual struggle through provocative questions and conversations.

My defense committee, Dr. Kenneth Mackendrick, Dr. Elizabeth Alexandrin and Steven Lecce for their insightful feedback and critique and for easing my task.

The University of Manitoba for giving me a great opportunity to pursue my intellectual research project.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The ethnic composition of Western societies has changed significantly in the last decades. This is because the traditional sources of immigrants from European countries are being joined by significant numbers of immigrants from other countries, particularly Asian and African countries. The new ethnic composition has led to the establishment of pluralistic societies creating a complex relationship between the rights of the people and the public good. This has prompted philosophical and political theorists to ask questions: How does an individual or a community maintain itself within a pluralistic society? What is the proper sphere for religion? What are the difficulties of theorizing identity and citizenship within a democratic society? What is the civic role of religion?

North American and European Muslims in particular are separated by their diverse ethnicity and cultures but are united by their religion and their new Western home. They need to cope with the complexity of their presence. As Muslims from different ethnicities, they are faced with a crisis of identity: “who are we?” And as citizens of a secular society, they are confronted with the challenge of integration: “what should be our involvement in such society?”

In response to this complex relationship between religion, cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism, great critical thinkers (Michel Foucault, John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, etc.) have continuously addressed the tensions within democratic and pluralistic societies. They argue for different normative models of democracy, and they approach the ongoing conflict between liberalism, religion and democracy in novel ways. Despite their articulated contribution and its significance in promoting harmonious mosaic societies, one

essential question is left underexplored: the foundational posture of freedom in religion in light of modern secularism. By this, I mean the search for the conditions that leads to the liberation of religion from within religion itself.

Such liberation, if proven, opens new avenues of thought and investigation on how to approach religious diversity and how to address the tensions and contradictions within the democratic multiethnic societies. Furthermore, it opens up new horizons of meaning and leads to an emancipatory shift in the intellectual and political spheres in the realm of democracy and differences.

In liberal societies, the democratic process allows multiple visions of good to compete. Democracy provides citizens with equal opportunity to form an active body to identify, to defend and to discuss the larger interests of the society based on their understanding of the concepts of good and value. This active body can take the form of political parties, social groups, media outlets, community organizations, and the like. Constructing polities that preserve and promote this democratic venture is a complex matter, especially in a multiethnic society. Take as an example Canada; it has involved the federation of three distinct nations: English, French and Aboriginal. This difference at the level of plural identity required legal and constitutional considerations to sustain citizenship rights, especially self-government rights claimed by the Aboriginal nations and the Québécois. Canada is also a polyethnic state through immigration. It is the home for people from Europe, India, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

In theory, the mix expands the spectrum of the debate: Should the ideal of democracy accommodate difference? If so, to what extent? Can a model of democracy rest on an universal citizenship identity that transcends group affiliation? If so, at what cost? In practice, the mixture

within the society leads to tension, and in some cases the court is involved to settle disputes between different claimants who believe that their rights are violated (for example, the Kirpan case, which will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter). In light of the ongoing debate over the complex relationship between democracy and difference, there is a pressing need to highlight the conditions that can lead to democratic inclusion, social harmony and political justice.

Many thinkers and philosophers addressed issues pertaining to the place of religion in civic societies. In this thesis, I engage with the writings of Tariq Ramadan, Charles Taylor and Seyla Benhabib to suggest that religion, particularly the Islamic religion, places heavy emphasis on argumentation for the purpose of assessing the validity of truth claims. In doing so, religion propels people to think beyond their personal convictions, gives them an opportunity for self-reflection and engages them in public conversation. My perception of religion as a driving force for self-examination and public contestation rests on the claim that religion and reason¹ complement each other. To this end, I refer to the Quran to demonstrate that religion aims at the liberation of reason, which in turn, allows a re-form of religion. I call this reciprocal interaction between religion and reason the theory of *Daf'* (Repel).

I am interested in Ramadan's account on the reconcilability of Islam with Western liberalism. Ramadan pleads for a "New We" to replace the discourse of "We" versus "them." Ramadan's "New We" is an invitation to Western civic societies to interact with another universe of reference, Islam, in order to address matters of mutual concern. This invitation for

¹ By reason, I mean critical thinking and convincing argumentation.

public conversation requires an inclusive model of democracy that gives religion a role to play in civic societies. Hence, comes Taylor's politics of recognition and his call for reasonable accommodation. Taylor is concerned with group rights to maintain their identities. He also stresses the need for Western societies to outreach to minorities and to consider their worldviews on subjects of mutual interest.² From this perspective, Ramadan's invitation to engage with Islam is echoed by Taylor's call to outreach minorities.

Both, Ramadan and Taylor are seeking the salvation of religion from the containment of an exclusive understanding of secularism. From their perspective, a secular society does not have one central point of reference from which all matters can be decided. Therefore, religion should be one option among others. In my view, religion is a vital option and has the potential to circumvent the challenges posed to democratic societies, but it needs to liberate itself. This liberation is necessary because it allows members of a particular religion to re-think their tradition in light of their current conditions and consequently engage in public conversations to discuss matters of interest to the collectivity. The theory of *Daf* proposed earlier is one way to liberate religion. This theory rests on a reciprocal interaction with reason. It is interested, therefore, in a model of democracy that privileges public contestations. Hence, the need for Benhabib's model of democracy.

Benhabib is concerned with a universal model of deliberative democracy that transcends cultural and religious affiliations. I find this deliberative model of democracy³ the most

² In Chapter 3, I will explain further Taylor's call to outreach minorities and to consider their worldviews.

³ Alternatives include for example, multiculturalism, liberal and republican views. Multiculturalism, as a descriptive and normative ideal of democracy, will be discussed in the third chapter. The democratic liberal view pushes private interests against government's administrative employment of political power for collective goals. On the republican view however, politics exercises a constitutive function over individual personal interests for the process of society as a whole. See Jurgen Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference*:

appealing model that sets the stage for an inclusive plural democratic polity and consequently allows people to run their own affairs. When deliberation is inclusive and conducted in a fair way, it has the potential to create the optimal conditions for multiple visions of models of justice and models of good life to compete, yet at the same time, it sets the ingredients for self-examination, which enables one to think beyond personal or group affiliations and convictions.

Ramadan, a professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford University, is a Muslim thinker and theologian. He writes extensively about Islamic revival and the issues of Muslims in the West. The word “West” in Ramadan’s writing is used to refer either to thinkers originating from Western countries or to secular states, in particular Western European countries, the United States and Canada. An overview of his writings proposes that he intends to provide an Islamic model of thinking as a competitor to the Western secularized model. The former is grounded on the Quran, while the latter distances itself from any sacred scriptures. Furthermore, he attempts to develop universal perspectives of certain aspects of the Islamic religion, which can be the theoretical framework of political sociology.

Like many Muslim scholars and thinkers, Ramadan insists on the need to re-interpret the Quran, the primary source of reference for Muslims, in light of modern science in order to rise to the challenges of modernity. Unlike many others, he explicitly suggests that the undertaking of such interpretation is an inclusive quest that needs to involve Muslims and non-Muslim scholars alike. Ramadan is convinced that Islam is a religion subjected to periodic renewal. This renewal consists of a new reading of the Quran in a way that suits the conditions of modern time but does

Contesting the Boundaries of the Political, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 21.

not change or compromise Islamic fundamentals, such as the belief in the articles of faith or the pillars of Islam. The renewal of the Islamic religion is Ramadan's "Radical Reform," which cannot be accomplished if Muslims distance themselves from the scientific revolution of our time, or if they restrict the interpretation of the Quran to their fellow Muslims.

The outcomes of Ramadan's Radical Reform suggests that Islam is a religion of the West and the principles of the Islamic religion reconcile with secularism. Moreover, Muslims no longer have religious or identity problems with the secular West. They are equal citizens of their Western country who live with multiple identities of their religious, cultural and political communities. From this perspective, Ramadan wants to expand the circle of democratic inclusion while recognizing identity differences.

I find Ramadan's overall discourse on the reconcilability of Islam and Western secularism very convincing, especially his political view that secularism does not aim at the elimination of religion, but at its coexistence as equal body in a plural public space. However, some aspects of Ramadan's discourse are somewhat vague and in some cases contradictory. For example, and as I will demonstrate further in the first chapter, Ramadan approaches Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian writings in a critical fashion, but his approach to the Islamic sources of reference is firmly anchored in theological Islamic world view. In other words, he is a critical reader when addressing Western references, but an apologetic theologian when interpreting certain Islamic references. Nonetheless, his discourse does not suggest that he is an ethnocentrist, as he does not claim that Islamic values and practices are better than Western secularism.

While Ramadan wants to expand the circle of democratic inclusion through a reconciliatory discourse, Taylor, a professor of philosophy at McGill University, is a communitarian who demands the preservation of cultural identities within the liberal democratic society through political recognition. Taylor suggests multiculturalism as a normative ideal of democracy to maintain the mesh of the society, to propel cultural fluidity and to allow for more universe of references to compete.

Taylor's main purpose is to salvage religion from the containment of an exclusive understanding of secularism. In Taylor's analysis, the term "secular" was developed within Latin Christendom⁴. It was one term of a dyad and applied to a kind of time – profane time seen in relation to the eternal or higher time. With the French Revolution, the meaning of secularism has evolved to mean liberty, equality and fraternity. Liberty refers to the freedom of belief, including the freedom not to believe. Equality includes the neutrality of the state and the equal treatment of people irrespective of their faith. Fraternity is about the collective process of citizens to determine the goals of their society and the way to realise these goals.

Having discussed the history of the development of the meaning of the term secular, Taylor identifies three kinds of secularism from the time of Reformation onwards. In the first stage, secularism is branded with the withdrawal of the religious world-view from the public sphere. The scientific revolution played crucial role in keeping the universe of religion in the margin. The second stage is characterized by the decline of the practice of religion. This results in the withdrawal of individuals from the community. The focus has shifted from seeking

⁴ For more details on the meaning and the development of the word secularism see Charles Taylor, "What is Secularism," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship*, ed. Geoffrey Brahm Levey And Tariq Modood Forward by Charles Taylor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xi-xxii.

guidance from external sources to making personal choices. The third and the most recent stage is the return of religion, not as the norm or the guide on how to live our life, but as one option among others. This is because the society does not have one central point of reference from which we can decide our matters at individual or collective levels.

In this age of secularism, Taylor's emphasis on the right of minorities to preserve their culture and brings cultural identity issues to the forefront of political discourse. Culture is not about individual practices or fragmented elements. It is the total way of life, common customs shared by a group of individuals. Culture includes behavior, belief, attitude, values and ideals shared by the members of a group or a population. The pattern of culture is transmitted from one generation to the next through language. Hence, language in Taylor's view is not a mere way of communication but the function of building together customs and the medium to create meanings so one knows what, when and how to do things. For example, humans eat because they have too. But what, when and how to eat are learned and vary from one culture to the other. For instance, a baked ham is a delicious dish in certain societies, but for others, including Muslims, the meat of a pig is forbidden.

Taylor does not support every single practice or value of every culture, especially if they are discriminatory. For example, Taylor cannot support the Sicilian snatch-and-run type of marriage⁵. However, he proposes tolerance for those cultural practices and values that do not

⁵ Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember describes this cultural practice as follows: "A person who wishes to marry cannot completely disregard the customary patterns of courtship. If a man saw a woman on the street and decided to marry her, he could conceivably choose a quicker and more direct form of action than the usual dating procedure. He could get on a horse, ride to the woman's home, snatch her up in his arms, and gallop away with her. In Sicily, until the last few decades such a couple would have been considered legally married, even if the woman had never met the man before or had no intention of marrying. But in our society, any man who acted in such fashion would be arrested and jailed for kidnapping and would probably have his sanity challenged. Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, *Anthropology* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 180.

compromise individuals' rights or infringe their liberties. This tolerance takes the form of reasonable accommodation, which can be attained preferably through dialogue but by legal means if necessary.

Despite Taylor's attempt to bridge the gap between individual and group rights, I argue that multiculturalism, as a normative ideal, cannot escape moral judgments about certain cultural practices and values. Hence, I will demonstrate in chapter three that cultural relativism cannot reconcile with the concept of individual rights and freedom.

Whereas Taylor and Ramadan are untiring advocates of democratic inclusion to maintain the distinctiveness of cultural identities, Benhabib, a professor of Political Science and Philosophy at Yale University, defends a universal model of polity that transcends group affiliations. Her writing ranges from discussions of communicative ethics, to democracy and difference, to identity, gender, citizenship and immigration. I find her critique of multiculturalism very compelling. However, I am more interested in her deliberative model of democracy because it creates opportunities for cultural self-examination and collective intergroup justice.

Benhabib connects the change of the contemporary conditions with the emergence of new forms of identity politics. These new forms intensify the tension between the universal principles of rights and liberties and the particularities of nationality, ethnicity and religion. The polity that aims at social homogenization under universal principles is subverted by the polity that rests on the recognitions of the distinctiveness of cultural identities. In order to address the tension

created by these two types of polities, Benhabib proposes a deliberative model of democracy that maximises cultural contestation in, and through, the institutions and associations of civil society.

Benhabib supports the struggles for recognizing identity and cultural differences to the degree to which they are movements for democratic inclusion. She objects, however, to the characterization of culture as a “whole” for two main reasons: first, because, she does not perceive cultures as pure distinct entities that can be identified as meaningfully discrete wholes. Instead, she thinks of culture as individual elements of “complex human practices of signification and representation, of organization and attributes, which are internally riven by conflicting narratives.”⁶ From this perspective, cultural customs and ideas can be described objectively. Therefore, they can be understood in the context of the society’s problems and opportunities, which then allow for moral judgments of the actions and values of any given cultural group. The second reason for objecting to the characterization of culture as a whole is her view is that such characterization fosters alienation in the society and in some cases discrimination against certain members of cultural groups, particularly women and children. This alienation and discrimination will be addressed further in the third and fourth chapter.

In Benhabib’s analysis, the intent to maintain the distinctiveness of culture cannot be reconciled with the concept of individual rights and freedom. The view of culture as contested creation of meanings and practices however, reconciles with a universal perspective of human rights. Such view and Benhabib’s deliberative model of democracy complements each other.

⁶ Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), ix.

In order to identify the conditions that lead to cultural self-aspiration, self-examination and addresses the tension and contradictions created by differences, I appeal to rational argumentation, as rooted in the Quran, to allow critique of reason. I see this critique as necessary if we ought to emancipate individuals from the barriers that may imprison their conception of good and values in limited cultural or religious world-views. I call this rational argumentation the theory of *Daf'* (Repel).

The theory of Repel I defend does not intend to replace sacred scriptures or cultures with reason, but it insists on giving reason the leading role in order to assess our ideals critically beyond cultural and religious convictions and affiliation. Thus, Repel is a small, yet, a steady step towards an emancipatory journey from within religion.

There are some similarities between my theory of Repel and Ramadan's Radical Reform. Both of them are perspectives on revolutionary change rooted in a religious world-view. They use the Quran as the main point of reference to address the challenges posed to democracy by the mixture of political identities within the society. There is however, significant difference between the two perspectives; Ramadan approaches the Quran as a book of reference from which we need to decode principles and framework for political sociology. From this perspective, the Quran is a book of legislation. In contrast, I approach the Quran as a book that calls upon its readers to revert to their faculties to reason freely and independently. In this way, the Quran is a book of emancipation.

The two competing approaches yield two contrasting images of citizens, particularly Muslim citizens. According to Ramadan's view, Muslims have the status of obedient fellows because of their constant referral to the Quran as a book of legislation. My view however,

suggests that Muslims are independent free thinkers who resort to reason to decide their own fate. The Quran in this view is theologically revolutionary and politically constitutive.

This thesis is constructed in four chapters. Chapter 1 and 2 are perspectives on how to address the challenges posed to the theory and practice of liberal democratic society while maintaining cultural identities. Chapter 1 highlights Ramadan's discourse on the reconcilability of Islam with Western liberalism. He proposes a model of thinking firmly grounded in the Quran to affirm that a path of liberation is rooted in the sacred scripture. Thus, Ramadan pleads for the right of Muslims, as citizens of their Western secular countries, to maintain their identity while propelling democratic inclusion. Chapter 2 addresses Taylor's normative model of democracy, namely multiculturalism. This model gives minorities and cultural groups a political framework in which they can maintain and nurture their cultural identity without fear of marginalization or assimilation. I draw referential examples from Ramadan's double approaches to Western and Islamic writing as well as Canadian cases to highlight the theoretical and practical limitation of Ramadan and Taylor's proposals respectively.

Chapter 3 identifies the conditions out of which we can bring changes in the way we address our differences as citizens of liberal democratic society in a more efficient way. I call this "The Theory of *Daf*" (Repel)." This theory rests on rational argumentations, which allows people to express and defend their views, yet at the same time, it permits reflexive investigation to undergo self-examination and provides various perspectives on how to address matters of mutual concerns.

I turn in chapter 4 to provide a framework in which the theory of Repel can be practiced and investigated. To this end, I propose Benhabib's deliberative model of democracy as a vital venture on how to address the differences while promoting democratic inclusion.

My conclusion briefly highlights the tension between the principles of democracy, such as the principles of self-determination, equality and inclusiveness, and civic ideals, like civic nationalism. This highlight intends to stimulate a new discussion on the binding problems of a cosmopolitan community and expands the research on Islam, democracy and differences as a productive of democratic contestation.

Chapter 2

Islam: A Religion of the West

Is Islam the main rival of the West? Does Islam constitute a threat to the gain of Western societies? Can Muslims of Western countries remain *equally* loyal to their Islamic religion and their ‘host’ countries?

This chapter sums up Ramadan’s view on the reconcilability of Islam with Western liberalisation. To Ramadan, Islam is a Western religion, a religion of the West where Muslims are no longer the received citizens. Western Muslims respect the law, adopt the nationality and practice their social, cultural and political life in a pluralistic society. In Ramadan’s view, Western Islam is not about negating the West or an attempt “to Islamize its modernity”.⁷ But, rather, it’s about living one’s religion in a plural society.⁸

The discourse on the reconcilability of Islam and Western liberalization is Ramadan’s lifelong project. Through this discourse, Ramadan intends to build bridges of understanding between two universes of reference: Western and Islamic civilizations. His aim is to demonstrate in theory and in practice that despite the fundamental difference between these two universes of reference, Western and Islamic civilizations coexisted but more important can always coexist together in harmony. Muslim citizens of Western countries can be both, Muslims and Western at the same time, ““to live together” within contemporary pluralistic, multicultural societies where various religions coexist.”⁹

⁷ Tariq Ramadan, *What I Believe* (New York: Oxford University Press), 19.

⁸ For more details on Ramadan’s political views, see Kaul Volker, “Dialogue on Politics and Religion,” in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36, (2010): 505-515.

⁹ Tariq Ramadan, 20.

The project of Ramadan originated earlier than 9/11 and it did not come as a response to the claim of the “clash of civilizations” put forth by Samuel Huntington in mid 1990s.

Ramadan’s project springs from his fundamental belief about “the compatibility of values and the possibility for individuals and citizens of different cultures to coexist positively (and not just pacifically).”¹⁰

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part explains the universal status of the Quran put forth by Ramadan. It suggests that a dynamic reading of the Quran reveals its timeless principles which then can be the reference for Muslims in their Western societies. This dynamic reading of the Quran acknowledges the multiplicity of personal identities.

The second part, highlights Ramadan’s assessment of the fundamental characters of Western and Islamic thought. He concludes that within Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian, the relationship between God and man is marked by inaccessible harmony, an ongoing tension between the absolute power of God and the fierce will of man to gain freedom. This tension led to accept the incomprehensibility of the Divine or the liberation of oneself by means of rejection. In contrast to Western thought, Ramadan argues that the harmony highlights the relationship between God and man and Muslim thinkers did not need to look for their liberation outside the sacred.

It is worth noting that Ramadan’s purpose for drawing a comparison between the two thoughts is not to assess which one is better than the other. Instead, he wants the reader to understand the main characters of two universes of reference, Islam and the West, so one can

¹⁰ Ibid., 21.

better understand them. To Ramadan, the path for liberation in Western thought is in their “rejection” of the sacred while the Muslims sees their liberation in the sacred.

The last part of the chapter is my critique of Ramadan. In this part, I suggest that Ramadan’s assessment of Islamic thought requires further discussion as the tension between the Divine and man exists within Islamic thought, though in a muted tone.

The Universal Status of the Quran

Ramadan engages philosophically and politically from within Islamic theology and jurisprudence in order to envision an effective blend of Islamic religion and Western societies. This blend recognizes the reconcilability of Islam and the West and puts forth a discourse on how Islam can be a Western religion and therefore how a Muslim can be both Muslim and Western; “My aim is to show in theory and in practice , that one can be fully Muslim and Western and that beyond our different affiliations we share many common principles and values through which it is possible to “live together” within contemporary pluralistic, multicultural societies where various religions coexist.”¹¹

Ramadan argues that Islam has a universal status. The basis of this argument is his view that the Quran, the primary source of the Islamic religion, is the Word of God intends for all times and all places. It is “an absolute word that gives and takes meaning beyond the events and contingencies of history.”¹² Its revealed verses were relative answers to dated historical events

¹¹ Ibid., 20.

¹² Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenge of Modernity*, Translated by Said Amghar (Kano: The Islamic Foundation, 2001), 12.

and also represented the eternal meaning of the formulation required to address any given situation anytime, anywhere.

To further support his claim, Ramadan brings into focus the vested question of the vitality of the Quran for all times: How is it possible to accept the claim of the suitability of the Quran and its timeless dimension if the very status of the Quran as the absolute Word of God is not questioned? According to Ramadan, the highly successful argument in the West is the claim that Islam and Muslims cannot evolve if they do not question “the Quran’s status as the absolute word of God and undertake a historical-critical reading and exegesis.”¹³ Without questioning the very status of the Quran, Muslims are not able to reform their religion and practices and consequently Islam cannot be updated.

Ramadan gives a twofold answer to this pressing question:

The eternal Word of God was revealed within a specific history, over twenty-three years, and if some texts or injunctions transcend the human history that receives them, some other verses cannot be understood without putting them within a particular time sequence. Human intelligence alone, then, can determine the contents of the timeless principle drawn from the text, while necessarily taking into account its relation to the social and historical context of its enunciation.¹⁴

For Ramadan, the status of the Quran, though an absolute Word of God, pleads for a dynamic mode of interpretation. On the one hand this dynamic mode calls upon the readers to highlight the texts that should be interpreted in their historical context, and which therefore, cannot be applied outside their circumstances. On the other hand, it engages them in a quest to identify the texts from which they can draw timeless principles which therefore can be solidified

¹³ Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press), 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

into a paradigm. Furthermore, by assigning “human intelligence”¹⁵ the task of differentiating between the static and the dynamic types of the Quran texts, Ramadan rejects an entirely literal or dogmatic approach to the Quran. Instead he appeals for a flux, critical, up-to-date reading that portrays the Quran as a Book for all times.

Who should be involved in this dynamic approach to the Quran?

While Ramadan intends to contextualize the universalism of Islam, he stresses the need to widen the circle of the expert readers and interpreters when adhering to a dynamic approach to the Quran. From his perspective, it is imperative that “the women and men who have studied the experimental and human sciences and who are attentive to the issue of ethic in the use and practice of their function must absolutely be integrated into the debate about the formulation of ethical principles in the contemporary world.”¹⁶

The Quranic text in Ramadan’s view, is a “reminder to mankind so that they revert back to original faith in God and so that they assume an acceptable moral behavior.”¹⁷ As it will be explained further in the second part of this chapter, Ramadan affirms the presence of a pact between God, the Creator and humankind who declared his submission. From Ramadan’s perspective, deep-down in each conscious human being exists an intuition that reminds him of their pact.

Ramadan notices that most of the Quran is about faith in the oneness of God. Out of 6,238 verses of the Quran about 228 verses deal with general legislation (constitutional law, penal and civil code, economic order ...). The reason behind the limited number of verses related

¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁷ Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenge of modernity*, 12.

to legislation is to give rise to the spirituality so humankind can revert back to his God-given nature and submit to Him. Furthermore, the Quran assigns human being the role of *Kilafa*, “When your Lord told the angels I am putting a successor” [Quran: 2:20]. So a human being can see himself as a responsible being entrusted by His God to carry on his mission while on earth. This mission is sums up in belief and work of piety as stated in chapter 103: “by the fading day, man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness.”

With such a Quranic world-view about God, the purpose of life and the role of human being on earth, a Muslim, the one who submit and remember her/his pact with his Creator, will have no difficulty to carry on his mission as *caliphate* wherever she/he is. The belief and the work of piety cannot be limited to one particular place. Consequently Ramadan does not see any issue with Western Muslims who would like to keep their faith and engage in work of piety. Muslims of Western countries are not different than Muslims of Islamic countries. Their challenge is to keep their Islamic identities in a society that does not share with them their view. To overcome their challenge Ramadan suggests that one has to recognize her/his multiple identities.

Identity on the Move

Ramadan sternly proclaims that each individual has multiple identities that are constantly on the move, “I state firmly that we have multiple moving identities.”¹⁸ In his view, each individual needs to accept, nurture and develop her or his identities in order to bring “greater

¹⁸ Ramada, *What I Believe*, 5.

harmony to the multicultural citizenship.”¹⁹ He argues that there are different dimensions within which one will have to define oneself differently. From his perspective, the question of identity depends on the realm at stake or the field of activity, therefore the individual puts forward one identity or the other. For instance, Ramadan introduces himself as “Swiss by nationality, Egyptian by memory, Muslim by religion, European by culture, universalistic by principle, Moroccan and Mauritian by adoption.”²⁰ He stresses that he lives with these multiple identities without problem and gives precedence to one identity over the other depending on the context or occasion.

To further illustrate his claim, Ramadan reports the example of a vegetarian poet. If he is invited as a guest to dinner, he is not expected to introduce himself as a poet. If, however, he is attending a poet circle, this is not time to speak about himself as vegetarian and that is not contradictory.

By emphasising the multiplicity of personal identities and identifying each identity by its particular source, dimension, realm or occasion, Ramadan stridently rejects the question of identity if it contrasts different dimensions that do not belong to the same realm. For example, asking whether one is primarily Muslim or Canadian or American or European is, in Ramadan’s view, a meaningless question because it “opposes two different identities and affiliations that do not belong to the same realm”²¹ since one is related to religion while the other is about nationality. He explains that in the realm of religion or philosophy, which addresses questions about the meaning of life, a human being is first an atheist, a Buddhist, a Jew, a Christian or a

¹⁹ Ibid., 13.

²⁰ Ibid., 38.

²¹ Ibid., 36.

Muslim. The nationality of the individual cannot answer the existential question. However, the nationality of the individual, comes first if she or he wants to be involved in national affairs such as casting a vote for a candidate at an election. Based on this analysis, Ramadan affirms that the multiple identities of an individual cannot be suppressed or reduced to one single dimension that tells everything about oneself or takes supremacy over every other.

Having asserted the notion of multiple identities, Ramadan aims at breaking a deadlock with the public and political discourse that defines one's identity "by reaction, by differentiation, in opposition to what one is not, or even against others."²² He explains that such reductive definition stems from the tension caused by the rapid political and social change of Western societies. He adds that in times of crisis, this tension leads to "rejection, racism and latent or passionate conflicts of identity, culture or "civilization."²³

To further explain his viewpoint, Ramadan holds that the upshot of globalization, migration and exile is a new outlook fraught with fear and anxiety. The public response is the need to re-define one's identity in this new environment in which one may feel foreign. Ramadan acknowledges that such response is natural but he warns that it cannot be the ground to define one's identity because it is a mere re-action. He states that "When so many people around us, in our society, no longer resemble us and appear so differently, we naturally feel the need to redefine ourselves. Similarly, the experience of being uprooted, of economic and political exile, leads to this quest for identity at the core of an environment that is not naturally ours. The

²² Ibid., 35.

²³ Ibid., 37.

reaction is understandable but what should be stressed here is that it is above all a *re*-action to a presence or an environment felt as foreign.”²⁴

This reaction and its attempt to confine the individual to one single identity underlines a more serious problem related to the issue of loyalty. In Ramadan’s view, the explicit question about one’s identity implicitly raises the question about loyalty; since “one can only have one identity, one can only have one loyalty.”²⁵ As such if, for example, religion shapes one’s identity, then one’s loyalty is for her or his religion. This leads to public distrust because the confidence in one fellow citizen becomes dented by their loyalty to their religion which might be at odds with the principles or the laws of the country that unites all citizens.

In order to dispel the suspicious attitude that may lead to questioning one’s loyalty, Ramadan holds that awareness of one’s fluctuating multiple identities is the remedy for alleviating public distrust and building confidence in each other. This awareness, he clarifies, requires knowledge of oneself and of others for the purpose of reconciling with the new outlook of the society. Ramadan proposes education, dialogue, the day-to-day real life encounters and initiations, to break barriers and open prospects when tackling common issues, as practical venues to demonstrate the effectiveness of this much needed awareness . In this way, the personal multiple identities are perceived as an asset and become a tool for contribution. Ramadan suggests that through this self-awareness and this kind of engagement one “can trust and be trusted and thus assess the other’s loyalty.”²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 35.

²⁵ Ibid., 36.

²⁶ Ibid., 38.

Furthermore, Ramadan maintains that the issue of loyalty is more about principles such as the principles of justice, dignity and equality. From his perspective, these principles unite the individual's identities. Therefore loyalty cannot be extended blindly to anyone who may compromise those principles, be 'our own kind,'²⁷ our government or the mainstream society. Instead, he stresses the need to "develop critical loyalty toward our Muslim (or other) fellow believers and oppose their ideas and actions when they betray those very principles, stigmatize the other, produce racism, or justify dictatorship, terrorist attacks or the murder of innocent."²⁸ The principles of justice, dignity and freedom must "be used unselectively and critically."²⁹

Ramadan cites two general examples in this regard; one related to one's government and the other is related to one's fellow believers. He considers critical loyalty to one's government requires criticism and demonstrations against it when it undertakes an unjust war or associates with dictators. Similarly, he notes that critical loyalty to one's fellow believers means "opposing their ideas and actions when they betray those very principles, stigmatize the other, produce racism, or justify dictatorship, terrorist attacks, or the murder of innocents."³⁰

Specific examples on having critical loyalty are also cited by Ramadan. Of these, he recognizes those who refuse to give up Jews when their government asked them to do so, those who refuse to fight in Vietnam and were jailed, those who opposed the instrumentalization of Islamic religion to produce an autocratic systems, as in Saudi Arabia, and those who oppose the

²⁷ Ramadan uses these words to refer to the "umma" (Muslim faith and spiritual community). See Ramadan, *What I Believe*, 39.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁰ Ramadan, *Ibid.*, 39.

instrumentalization of modernization to justify dictatorship, as in Tunisia. Ramadan sets these instances as examples on demonstrating critical loyalty.

Consequently, Ramadan firmly asserts that Islamic religion, as source of identity, does not pose an identitarian crisis for Muslim citizens of Western societies. He argues that Muslim citizens live with multiple identities of their religious, cultural and political communities and do not feel constrain to choose among them.”³¹

The Uniform Thinking

Ramadan examines the work of a number of Western thinkers³² to conclude that within the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian points of references, the relationship between God and man is marked by restless tension, conflict and the tragic which, then amount to doubt and rejection of the Divine. He suggests that the history of ideas convincingly demonstrates the uniform thinking of Western scholars when addressing the question faith and the meaning of life. “From the tortures of the believing conscience of Kierkegaard to the categorical rejection of Transcendence of Nietzsche; from the dialectical and historical materialism(s) of Marx to the absurd philosophy of Camus or the existentialism of Sartre; from the phenomenology of Husserl to contemporary analytic philosophy, existential doubt is omnipresent either to consecrate Faith or to repudiate God.”³³

In Ramadan’s report on the Greek mythology of the Titans, Prometheus tried to deceive Zeus, the mighty king of gods, in order to protect men. Later, Prometheus steals fire from heaven

³¹ See Kaul Volker “Dialogue on Politics and Religion.”

³² Ramadan lists a large number of Western thinkers and their ideas to support his claim. Notably, he refers to the idea of separation of powers in Socratic dialectic and Aristotelian syllogism. The relativity of morality in the practice of politics as presented by Machiavelli. The All or Nothing in the absurd philosophy of Camus. In this paper I will limit the list to three scholars, Victor Hugo, Rimbaud and Nietzsche, to present his point.

³³ Ramadan, *Islam the West and the Challenge of Modernity*, 219.

for the benefit of men and suffers the pain of binding and eternal punishment; Zeus sentenced Prometheus to eternal torment for the theft of fire. He was bound to a rock and condemned to have his liver devoured by an eagle. The myth in Ramadan's report suggests that "Prometheus sacrificed himself for men by defying the gods. He is the first transgression and the first chastisement."³⁴

Ramadan highlights two contrasting interpretations of this event by two early Greek thinkers, Hesiod and Aeschylus. For Hesiod, Prometheus had consecrated the intervention of evil in the world. Therefore, he is not a benefactor of humanity but the responsible for its decay. To Aeschylus, Prometheus gives fire to men and delivers them from the fear of death through his opposition to his master, Zeus, in order to offer men the greatness and peace of the soul. As such Prometheus is a civilizing hero, one of the greatest heroes. It is of little importance for Ramadan to discuss which interpretation is more appealing. The point he makes here is to stress that tension coloured the relationship between man and the Divine from early time. The myth of Prometheus was interpreted in two completely opposing ways but deep down both ways "acknowledge the reality of conflict, challenge and tension."³⁵

Centuries after the era of Hesiod and Aeschylus, and specifically from the Renaissance onwards, the expression of tension between men and the Divine accentuates and becomes more evident in the writing and the thinking of Western scholars. Ramadan analyses their work to demonstrate that the symbolic figure of Prometheus is "the guide and liberator in face of Divine authority that subjugates wills."³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., 204.

³⁵ Ibid., 204.

³⁶ Ibid., 205.

For instance, Ramadan quotes³⁷ Victor Hugo, in *Le sens d'Esschyle*, when describing the potential march ahead of humanity towards progress. The quote reads:

*In the immense shadow of the Caucasus
Since centuries, through dreaming,
Led by men of ecstasy,
Humankind marches ahead,
Marches on earth, passes through,
Goes, at night, in space,
In infinity, in the bounded,
In the azure, in the irritated tide,
In the glimmer of Prometheus,
The bound liberator!*

In Victor Hugo's words, the march ahead of humanity is carried in the glimmer of Prometheus. In Ramadan's reading of this quote, the figure of the titan represents "the expression illustrating best the rejection of an imposed Divine order and the affirmation of human autonomy and greatness, traverses the ages and fashions the complex and strained relation which exists between God (in the Christian re-reading) and men."³⁸

The reference to Greek tradition highlights the writing of the French existentialist Rimbaud. In his letter to Paul Demeney he expresses the new liberation, this time, against the Christian idea of bondage and Salvation:

The poet, therefore, is really a stealer of fire. He is entrusted by humanity, and even by animals, he should make feel, touch and listen to his invention ... The poet will define the quantity of the unknown awakening in his time in the universal soul. He will give more than the expression of his thought, more than the notation of his march towards progress! ... This future will be materialist ... Deep down, it will still be a little Greek Poetry."

³⁷ Ibid., 205.

³⁸ Ibid., 206.

Ramadan's analysis to this letter suggests that Rimbaud, who defined himself as the one who suffers and has rebelled, prefers Venus over Jesus and is willing to be "free in love rather than being bound in the culpability of faith."³⁹ The expression of existential malaise, Ramadan notes, is more intimate in Rimbaud's letter than it was under the pen of Victor Hugo. Nonetheless, Ramadan concludes that the problem raised by Hugo or Rimbaud "is exactly of the same nature and has its source in the conflict which is naturally borne out in the encounter between the absolute power of God (or His Church) and the fierce will to assert man his freedom."⁴⁰

The Prometheus of modern time is, in Ramadan's deconstruction, portrayed by Nietzsche in his triple metamorphoses of the subjugated camel, the claiming lion and the innocent child as well as in the story of the madman who announces the death of God. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche speaks of a camel who grows tired of bearing the burden of his master. It trudges out in the desert in an attempt to carry its own burdens. It becomes a lion who has the ferocity and the strength to say no to its master and demand its own freedom. The lion, however, can only fight and cannot create values. So to be truly free, the lion becomes a child for only the child can see the world with new eyes. Based on Ramadan's reading, innocence and the creative force of the 'will to be' pave the way for the new man. Accordingly, the innocent child, Ramadan affirms, "cannot but lead to the murder of God,"⁴¹ And if Prometheus, the great friend of man in Nietzsche's expression, has only stolen the fire, the innocent child has transmuted the values.

³⁹ Ibid., 207.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 208.

⁴¹ Ibid., 208.

Ramadan relies on this brief survey of the work of a number of Western scholars confirms that within the Greco-Roman points of reference tension, conflict and tragic are the main characters that best describe the kind of relationship that men entertains with the Divine.

Similarly, within the Judeo-Christian points of reference, tension and tragic are at the heart of the faith and the myth of Prometheus, in Ramadan's view, finds an echo in the Biblical figure of Abraham who has to sacrifice his son. Abraham has to undergo a tragic trial of faith to prove his love for God by sacrificing his beloved son. Ramadan quotes the story of Abraham and refers to the interpretations of Christian scholars as well as existentialists to re-confirm that tension, within the Judeo-Christian's thought is at the heart of faith. Genesis reads:

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said to him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now my thy son, thine only son Isaac, offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of ... And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here I am my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

In this passage Ramadan notices that tension is extreme to the point that Abraham, plunged in solitude, hid from his son the truth and kept the burden on his own. This tragic trial, as Ramadan puts it forward, sums up the destiny of men who have to face the irrational Divine and who are left without choice but to submit and accept the incomprehensible or rebel and reject the Divine. To further support his claim Ramadan refers to Kierkegaard,⁴² whom he introduces as an existentialist, a Protestant philosopher and theologian. According to Ramadan, Kierkegaard

⁴² In his book, *Fear and Trembling*.

perceives the story of Abraham as the story that “carries, itself, Christianity’s fundamental message concerning the existence of man who is subject to the sense of sin, suffering, anguish and fear. Faith is, at best, the assumed test of anguish and inward conflict.”⁴³

It is of little importance for Ramadan to question the soundness of any interpretations pertaining to the Biblical figure of Abraham or the Greek myth of Prometheus. Ramadan wants the reader to notice “the decisive presence, in the text of Aeschylus and then in the Bible but more clearly in the mentalities beginning from the Renaissance, of a tension between the domain of the sacred and the profane.”⁴⁴ In the final assessment, Ramadan asserts that the Graeco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian traditions are marked by an inaccessible harmony between man and the Divine. The Western thought imposes one, and only one, reading to the question of life: “to live is tantamount to accepting distress or liberating oneself by means of rejection.”⁴⁵ The Western mentalities, in Ramadan’s assessment, do not offer any other alternative.

The March Ahead with Back Steps

In showing the Promethean traits of the “Western rebellion”, Albert Camus refers to the Hindu pariah, the Inca warrior, the primitive man from Central Africa and a member of the first Christian communities, but says nothing of the Islamic world which is nearer to him than central Africa or India. Camus wanted to demonstrate divergence by citing different examples but this will not change the fact, as per Ramadan, that there is no Prometheus, nor a figure similar to him in Islamic points of reference. Even the story of Abraham,⁴⁶ though speaks of a trial of having to

⁴³ Ramadan, *Islam the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 212.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁴⁶ The story is reported in the Quran as follow: “When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Abraham said, ‘My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?’ He said, ‘Father, do as you are commanded and, God willing, you will find me steadfast.’ When they had both submitted to God, he had laid his

sacrifice one's beloved son in order to give witness of one's faith, does not entail tragic experience. In Ramadan's word, the story of Abraham gives particular flavour to the rapport between man and the Divine, Allah. "there is no solitude, no figure of style and no struggle between the two loves, "both have submitted"; the son's patience echoes the intimate fidelity of the father. The trial of faith, is far from tragic tension, one of patience and acceptance."⁴⁷

To further support his claim, Ramadan refers back to the first verses of the Quran revealed to Prophet Muhammad and asserts that far from tension and tragic, Islamic faith is about harmony between Allah and humankind. From the very first verses of the Quran, knowledge is the path to the Divine. In his book *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, Ramadan connects revelation with knowledge⁴⁸ when reporting the first encounter between the Prophet Muhammad and Angel Gabriel.

In Ramadan's report on the Islamic tradition, Muhammad was alone in the cave of *Hira* searching for the truth⁴⁹ when suddenly the Angel Gabriel appeared to him and ordered: "Read!" Muhammad answered: "I am not of those who read." The angel held him so tightly that he could hardly bear it and again ordered: "Read!" Muhammad repeated: "I am not of those who read!" The angel held him tightly again and repeated the order for the third time: "Read!" The same

son down on the side of his face, We called out to him, 'Abraham, you have fulfilled the dream.' This is how We reward those who do good-it was a test to prove [their true characters]- We ransomed his son with a momentous sacrifice, and let him be praised by succeeding generations: Peace be upon Abraham! "Quran, 37: 102-9.

⁴⁷ Ramadan, *Islam the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 213.

⁴⁸ Chapter 4 of the book is called, "Revelation, knowledge". Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 28.

⁴⁹ Three years before he reaches the age of 40 Prophet Muhammad used to spend nights in the cave of *Hira* during the month of Ramadan. By the age of 40, he received the first revelation through angel Gabriel while in the cave. Why did the Prophet Muhammad used to stay alone in the cave? To Ramadan, Prophet Muhammad was searching the truth. This claim puts forth by Ramadan begs the question as why the Prophet has limited his search for the truth during the month of Ramadan only? Further, it is worth noting that neither Quran nor Sunnah, the two main sources of the Islamic religions, gives account on the reason behind the solitude of the Prophet in the cave. Further, the traditional interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah did not speak or give much information either.

answer was repeated: “I am not of those who read!” The angel, maintaining his hold, recited: “Read in the name of your Lord [*Rabb*, “Educator⁵⁰”], Who created humankind out of a clinging clot. Read, and your Lord is most bountiful, He who taught by means of pen, taught humankind that which they did not know.” [Quran, 95:1-5]

These first five verses revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, who could neither read nor write, aimed, from Ramadan’s perspective, to turn the Prophet’s attention towards knowledge. When the Prophet relied on his own faculties re-affirming that he is not one of those who read, God called him to read “in the name of your Lord.” This call, in Ramadan’s analysis, is meant to draw a link between faith in God and knowledge. Ramadan reads the first Quranic revelation as a declaration of God’s recognition to knowledge and science, “Between the Creator and humankind, there is faith that relies and feeds on the knowledge granted to people by the Most bountiful (*Al-Akram*) to allow them to answer His call and turn to Him.”⁵¹

To further develop his claim, Ramadan resorts to the idea of *fitra*, natural aspiration towards God, mentioned in the Islamic sources, the Quran and hadith. Ramadan draws from the following Quran the presence of a pact that existed between God and humankind in the first times of creation. In this pact, God gathered all human beings and made them testify to his Divinity:

When your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and they replied, ‘Yes, we bear witness.’ So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘We were not aware of this.’ [Quran, 7:172]

⁵⁰ The Arabic word used in the Quran is *Rabb*, which is translated as Lord. The word “Educator” is added by Ramadan and cannot be found in the famous translation of the Quran. It seems that Ramadan would like to further connect revelation and faith with knowledge by attributing the name ‘Educator’ to Allah!

⁵¹ Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 31.

Based on this verse, Ramadan holds that an intuition and acknowledgment of the presence of the Creator exist at the heart of each man's conscience. This instinctive aspiration towards the Divine constitutes the essence of the idea of *fitra* stated in the following Quran and hadith:

So [Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition God instilled in mankind-there is no altering God's creation- and this is the right religion, though most people do not realize it. [Quran, 30:30]

Every new-born child is born in the state of fitra, it is the parents that makes him Jew, Christian or Zoroastrian. [Hadith reported by Bukhari and Muslim].⁵²

The concept of *fitra* is crucial in the analysis of Ramadan. It constitutes the fundamental character of the Islamic religion. To Ramadan, the revelation brought by Prophet Muhammad is a wake up call for man to honour his pact with his Creator. The revelation wants to give "life to the light that lies asleep in each person's heart, one that forgetfulness put down and suffocated. Here [Ramadan adds], there is no question of an original sin, an eternal fault or a challenge to the Creator. The one who does not believe, the infidel (*kafir*), is the one is no longer faithful to the original pact, the one whose memory is sleepy and whose sight is veiled."⁵³

By referring to the two sources of the Islamic religion, Quran and hadith, Ramadan links the meaning of the word Islam, to submit, with its fundamental trait and defines it a call for men to refer back to his God-given nature embedded in his conscience. As such, within Islamic points

⁵² See Fuwad Abdul Baqi, *Al-Lu'lu' wal-Marjan* (Riyadh-Saudi Arabia: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 1995), Hadith no. 1702.

⁵³ Ramadan, *Islam the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 225.

of reference, Ramadan affirms, that there is no conflict, a challenge or a tragic experience. The harmony between God and men existed from their first encounter through revelation.

Next to the Islamic sources, Ramadan surveys the work of Muslim thinkers to conclude with certainty that the character of Prometheus is completely absent in the line of Islamic thought, “we do not find in the great Muslim thinkers any indications of a thought similar to an Aeschylarian kind of interpretation concerning the rapport between man and the Divine. The question, which was posited very early on, is rather of the compatibility of the Greek theses, essentially the Aristotelian and Islamic.”⁵⁴

From Ramadan’s point of view, the well-known Muslim thinkers and philosophers such as Abu Ya’qub al-Kindi, Abu Nasr al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) translated, explained, discussed and opposed the Greek ideas yet at the same time remained linked to their Islamic references. Their quest for deepening their knowledge and understanding was not meant and did not lead to a conflict with God or living a tragic experience or experiencing a tension of doubt about the being and his Creator. Even in the case of Al-Ghazali who conceived doubt on the rational level found the healing process in the experience of the light of the heart that kept him faithful to his God. For Ramadan, “to think is not at all struggling to liberate oneself from God, it is rather coming closer to Him.”⁵⁵ In short, Ramadan insists that “there is no need for philosophy or methodology other than the points of reference and the practices that have always taken place amidst Muslims since the first dawn of Revelation.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 217.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 217.

Critique

After examining the work of Ramadan, I suggest that his work, though distinct in its form, is not new in its substance. Furthermore, Ramadan performed his work and built his bridges of understanding within the framework of the traditional Muslim mentality but was not able, in my view, to provide comprehensively account on Islamic world-view regarding critical subjects such as politics.

In what follows, I would like to demonstrate Ramadan's inconsistency in approaching Islamic and Western literatures and the ambiguity pertaining to his political thought. First example, I will re-examine the denial of tragic trials, tension and doubt within Islamic points references put forth by Ramadan. I want to show that Ramadan was more critical of Western thought compared to Islamic thought. Second example is about the neutrality of state in the Quran. In this example I will highlight the ambiguity in Ramadan's account on this subject.

Furthermore, I would like to clearly state that by no means does my critique intend to discredit Ramadan's work. His contribution to the Islamic and Western literature, his call for an open debate that may appease the malaise of modernity as well as his insistence on the need to reform and renew Islamic religion is salutary. In short, Ramadan maintains the hope for peaceful coexistence of different religions in pluralist societies.

Same Trial Two Labels

Ramadan speaks at length about the Western negative attitude towards the Divine. Within the Greaco-Roman and Judeo Christian tradition, Ramadan sees nothing about the report

pertaining to God and man except tension, conflict, doubt and tragic trials. In my view, a quick overview of Western thought about the subject may support Ramadan's claim.

From the opposition of Prometheus to his mighty god, Zeus, to the sorrowful end of Jesus, crying with loud voice saying: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"⁵⁷ From the march ahead of the humanity in the glimmer of Prometheus in Victor Hugo's pen to the antagonistic response to the Judeo-Christian world-view in Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra* and finally from the separation between State and Church to the marginalization of religion and its removal from public sphere it will be difficult to deny the negative attitude in the Western thought towards the sacred.

In contrast to this inaccessible harmony between God and men, Ramadan completely denies the experience of tension or conflict or tragic trial within the Islamic tradition. Instead he argues that Muslim thought never ventured out of the "sacred space." Instead, it has developed within the sacred. While I concur with Ramadan's view that the sacred, the Quran specifically, was the driving force behind the birth and the development of Islamic civilization, which contributed to the awakening of the European societies at least during the middle ages, I argue that Ramadan's denial of tragic trial, tension and conflict requires further discussion. In what follows I would like to draw from the Quran as well as from Ramadan's writing to contest Ramadan's claim.

The idea of trial cannot be overemphasized in the Islamic tradition. It is the fundamental assessment for any individual who claims faith, "Do people think they will be left alone after saying 'We believe' without being put to test?" [Quran, 28:2]. The severity of the test left the

⁵⁷ Mark, 15:34 (American Bible Society).

prophets of Allah, who in Ramadan view should be the individual with the strongest faith, in an extremely difficult situation:

When the messengers lost all hope and realized that they had been dismissed as liar, Our help came to them: We saved whoever We pleased, but Our punishment will not turn away from guilty people. [Quran, 12:110]

Do you [believe] suppose that you will enter the Garden without first having suffered like those who passes away before you? They were afflicted by misfortune and hardship, and they were so shaken that even [their] messenger and the believers with them cried, When will God's help arrive?' Truly God's help is near. [Quran, 2:214]

The verses speak for themselves; God's help is near, yet even the messenger of God cannot feel it, the messengers lost all hope, they realize they were dismissed, they were afflicted by misfortune and hardship, they were shaken and every believer should realize that no one enters the Garden without suffering. If this cannot be tragic trial then what is?

Chapter 12 in the Quran, entitled Joseph, has more than one hundred verses. This chapter illustrates the story of prophet Joseph as nothing but a set of continues, nonstop, vivid trials; it starts with the trial of envy between Joseph and his brothers, which led to the trial of loneliness, when Joseph was left alone in the well, which in turn resulted in the trial of slavery when Joseph was treated as slave, next it takes us to the trial beauty and Joseph's refusal to betray his master advanced him to the trial of prison. After seven consecutive years, the sentenced is dismissed and Joseph will face the trial of power when he became the treasure of Egypt and finally, he will put in another when after all these years he encounters his brothers, the responsible for all these trials. The chapter conclude with the verse quoted above [Quran, 12: 110]

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is being held by Muslims as the symbol of purity, the Quran, 5:75, describes her as *Siddiqa*, a truthful and virtuous woman. Yet in the face of her own trial she said: “I wish I had been dead and forgone long before all this.” [Quran, 19: 23]

In the hadith, identified as the second source of the Islamic religion, Muslims are recommended to recite all or part of chapter 18, named ‘the Cave,’ every single Friday. Why? Like the chapter of Joseph, this chapter speaks about three different trials a believer may face. These are, the trial of maintaining one’s faith in a polytheistic society that does not tolerate monotheism, the trial of knowledge, as in the case of prophet Moses who thought he was the most learned man of his time, and finally the trial of power.

In addition to the above verses, Ramadan in his own writing speaks the doubt and the suffering of the Prophet Muhammad himself. After the prophet received the first Quran, the revelations stopped for a period of time. The hadith describes the situation as follow:

Revelation stopped for some time, so the Prophet was hurt; his sorrow was such that on several occasions, he left home to go and throw himself from a steep mountain. But each time he reached the stop of the mountain to throw himself into the chasm, the Angel Gabriel would appear to him and say:” O Muhammad, you are truly God’s Messenger.” Those words would calm his heart and bring peace to his soul.”⁵⁸

Let’s examine Ramadan’s interpreted to this event. In Ramadan words⁵⁹, the period during which the revelation stopped “caused the Prophet *great doubt and suffering.*” For Ramadan, Prophet Muhammad was undergoing “the same experience as Abraham: in the ordeal of his silence, he doubted himself ... This trial of silence was an initiation shaping the Messenger’s spiritual quest.” In his interpretation to trial of the Biblical Abraham, Ramadan

⁵⁸ Al-Bukhari, 99:1, See, Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

sees the shadow of Prometheus because Abraham confined himself in solitude. In contrast, Ramadan sees no Prometheus in the Quranic Abraham and the Prophet Muhammad. To Ramadan, the trial of Abraham was that of the tragic. But the trial of the Quranic Abraham is a trial of patience, acceptance and submission. As to the trial of the Prophet Muhammad who, in Ramadan's words "doubts himself," he conceives it as a trial of silence. In my view, Ramadan's labeling of each of the trials are combative but not substantive. They are meant to build a case but not to thoroughly examine thoughts.

Ramadan may argue⁶⁰ that the severity of trial within Islamic tradition didn't lead one to reject God or rebel as in the case of some Western thinkers. The answer is probably yes, but deep down, the problem of religion might be the same; one has to accept the incomprehensible of the Divine. In the Islamic religion, one has to believe in Allah as One who "does whatever He will" [Quran, 85: 16] and One who "is not questioned about what he does," [Quran, 21:23]. According to these verses, there seems to be limits to the questions we can ask.

Muslims scholars affirms that *All* God's actions without exception reflect justice and wisdom because they stem from Allah, the All Just, the All Wise. But when it comes to questioning certain issues such as the reason behind praying certain number of prayers, there is no answer but to accept the ritual as is because the prayers falls under the incomprehensible ritual. In my view, the main difference between Western and the Islamic mentalities is that the former would like to ask questions even if it leads to rejection while the latter would like to limit their query to the comprehensible part of the sacred.

⁶⁰ I am assuming this argument based on Ramadan's claim that for Muslim savants and philosophers "searching, deepening their knowledge and understanding had never meant entering into conflict with God or living the tension of doubt about Being and His presence." Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 217.

The Neutrality of the State in the Quran

Ramadan examines the Islamic tradition with the framework set by the “traditional Muslim mentality.” He divides religion into two parts; one part is regarded as immutable, such as the tenets of faith, the pillars of Islam, the principles of Islam (protection of wealth, protection of nature ...), its injunctions, its prohibitions and its recommendations. The other part of the religion is called the Changing which consist of the models and the forms in manifesting the principles of religion. For example,⁶¹ modesty is prescribed to Muslims, as such it is an immutable principle. The way to express this modesty however, is changing. Consequently, limiting the expression of modesty to the way the Prophet and his Companions used to dress will be a rigid interpretation and will produce excessive and dangerous legal judgment.

Before discussing the neutrality of state in the Quran, I would like to point out that the concept of immutability and changing might be very subjective and the question of the authority to distinguish between the two categories is at high stake. For instance, Ramadan firmly hold that *zakat* is a pillar of Islam and therefore it must be practice irrespective of time and place. Further Ramadan perceives *zakat* “a tax on possessions and property,”⁶² the right of the poor and “the responsibility of any established society.”⁶³ The question to be raised here is: why *zakat* has to remain an immutable aspect of religion for Muslims of Western countries in which the tax system is established for the welfare of the citizens?

Moreover, in 2005 Ramadan launched a call for a moratorium on the death penalty. In his book, *Radical Reform*, Ramadan spoke at length⁶⁴ about the rejection of his call and the negative

⁶¹ See Ramadan. *Radical Reform*, 20.

⁶² Ramadan. *Islam, the West and the Challenge of Modernity*, 139.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁴ Ramadan, *Radical Reform*, 274.

reaction from the Muslim scholars but said little or nothing on why the moratorium should be in effect; is it because the Muslim world lacked justice in their own Islamic country or because the *hudud* are part of the Changing? Should the moratorium be extended to include all *hudud*, (Islamic penal code) or should it be limited to death penalty? I could not find clear answer on this subject in the work at hand.

Is the neutrality⁶⁵ of the state well-grounded in the Quran? It might be difficult to find clear answer in Ramadan's work. In fact, Ramadan presents the Quran as an open book and speaks about sharia as an open body. He affirms that Sharia is the way for faithfulness to Islam's objective such as protection of life, dignity, justice, equality, peace ... He argues that Muslim scholars of the past did their part to keep Islamic religion up-to-date. He finds supports for his claim in the development of the science of the High Objective of the Islamic Sharia during the eleventh century, and convincingly argued that current Muslims cannot rely on certain objectives set hundreds of years ago to read or interpret their religion.

In his political view, Ramadan argues that secularism does not aim at the disappearance of religion but at its coexistence as equal in a pluralistic society. He insists on the concept of equal citizenship and refuses specific laws for Muslims. He "pleads for a common legal system and the equal treatment of Muslims. Existing laws should not be changed in order to discriminate Muslims, as was the case with the headscarf ban in state schools in France, nor should they be interpreted against legally legitimate claims of Muslims, such as the demand to build mosques visible from afar."⁶⁶ However, there is not much to say, on whether the Quran, a book of

⁶⁵ The neutrality of the state here means the right of individuals to pursue their own conception of good life without interference from the external, the Quran.

⁶⁶ Volker, "Dialogue on Politics and Religion," 509.

guidance, will remain neutral *vis a vis* actions that are regarded both a sin and a crime such as alcoholic drinking, or sex out of marriage. As an example, let us examine the view point of Ramadan on homosexuality.

Ramadan affirms that Islam “does not promote homosexuality.”⁶⁷ Nonetheless, he clarifies that “their [homosexual groups] sexuality does not prevent me from respecting who they are ... Though I have reservation about homosexual couples marrying or adopting children, I do not hesitate to fight against the homophobic discourse or measures of which they may be victims and to get involved in all common causes by their side.”⁶⁸ In liberal democratic societies, the rights for homosexual groups is secured by the laws of the state. Will a state ruled by the Quran, which does not promote sexuality, tolerate sexual orientation? Will the sympathy showed by Ramadan in his previous statement is sufficient to let the homosexual individuals feel equal citizen before the law of the Quranic state? Again, there is ambiguity in Ramadan’s answer.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter sums up Ramadan’s account on the reconcilability of Islam with Western liberalization. Ramadan argues that the Quran, the primary source of Islamic religion, has a universal status and Muslims of Western countries do not have an identitarian crisis. Instead, they live by the multiple identities without feeling restrain to choose between them. Ramadan intends to build bridged of understanding between two universes of reference, Islam and the West. He surveyed the Greaco-Roman, Judeo-Christian as well as Islamic points of

⁶⁷ Ramadan. *What I Believe*, 103.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

reference to draw two different path for human liberation, the Western path sees liberation outside the sacred while the Islamic path sees it within the sacred space. In my critique to Ramadan, I wanted to draw further attention to the need to openly discuss contested issue pertaining to the Quran-world view which I hope can strengthen Ramadan's bridges and make them stand on a strong foundation.

Chapter 3

The Limitation of the Normative Ideal of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy. It is about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity. Toleration is the main idea that characterises multiculturalist thought. Toleration pleads for the recognition and the reasonable accommodation of the multiculturalist claims of minorities.

The term multiculturalism is used as an umbrella concept to characterize a wide range of right-claims involving religion, language, ethnicity or race. It is an overlaying notion to describe the moral and political rights claimed by a minority group or an individual member of such group. The claimed right aims at allowing these minorities or their members the right to act or not to act in a certain way in virtue of their religious belief, racial or cultural commitments.

In order to respond to such claimed rights, multiculturalists suggest reasonable cultural accommodation as a normative ideal and as a set of policies for Western pluralistic societies. Cultural accommodation may include exemption from generally applicable law such as the entitlement of leave for major religious observance. Or, it may involve assistance to do certain things that majority can do unassisted as in the case of multilingual ballots or taking a driving test⁶⁹ or funding religiously based schools. Cultural accommodation may also extend to granting limited self-government rights to a particular group as in the case of Quebec.

⁶⁹ In the province of Manitoba, knowledge and road tests are available in English and French. Knowledge tests for Class 5 Licences specifically are available in more than 20 languages. "Class Licences," Manitoba Public Insurance, <http://www.mpi.mb.ca>, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www.mpi.mb.ca/en/PDFs/ClassLicenceSystemBrochure.pdf>

In certain situations, the right-holder of the claimed right is the group. In this case, cultural claims may directly restrict the freedom of non-members like the restrictions on the use of the English language in Quebec schools under the mandate of protecting Quebec culture. In other cases, the freedom of individual members is limited in order to protect the claimed group rules. For example, Indian women and their descendants lose their Indian status if they marry outside the group.

Is multiculturalism the normative ideal for the Western pluralistic societies? Does open secularism provide a harmonious accommodation to cultural claims? Should community life and collective goals take primacy over individual rights and liberties? Can the limitation of individual freedom and rights be justified? In what kind of polities can multiculturalism find ground?

This chapter addresses Charles Taylor's thought on multiculturalism as a normative ideal for a liberal pluralistic society. In exploring the ideal of multiculturalism, I provide a brief overview on the notion of identity that justifies the idea of multiculturalism. After elaborating on the justification of multiculturalism, I highlight the implication of multiculturalism in two different forms of liberalisms; first, a liberalism that commits itself to individual rights; and second, a liberalism that recognizes a society with collective goals. The last part of the chapter is a critique to multiculturalism in its formative prescription on how a society should organize itself.

Justification of Multiculturalism: The Evolution of the Idea of Identity

In Taylor's thought, the concept of multiculturalism is wedded with the politics of recognition. Theoretically, this means that the identity of minority groups and/or the identity of its members must be politically recognized. Practically, this means the political system should allow the creation of a set of harmonious measures in order to accommodate cultural claims so long such claims are reasonable. This politics of recognition is justified on the basis that culture plays a crucial role in forming and nurturing one's identity. In what follows, I want to focus on development of the notion of recognition and identity and the link between the two of them as analyzed by Taylor. The political means with which one has to be recognized and the extent of cultural recognition will be discussed after.

Taylor traces back the discourse of recognition and identity to the eighteenth century era. Two events occurred back then led to the development of the concept of recognition and identity. The first is the collapse of the social hierarchies. The second is the new individualistic dimension in which identity is being understood.

Prior to the eighteenth century, members of the same society are ranked according to their social status or authority. In this social hierarchy, the term 'honor' is used to distinguish and actually to favor some citizens over the others. The term is intrinsically linked to inequalities. By the eighteenth century, the trend was to get away from the hierarchy and its conception. The social hierarchies collapsed and against the notion of honor, the concept of dignity starts to develop. This concept recognizes the dignity of human being irrespective of individual social status, authority, gender, race or the like. From a political perspective, the recognition of citizen

dignity is regarded as the most suited concept “and the only one compatible with a democratic society.”⁷⁰

The point Taylor makes from this brief review is to frame the concept of dignity in a democracy that recognizes various forms of equal recognition. Taylor regards the concept of dignity as one form of equal recognition among others. From his perspective, a democratic society accommodates different forms of equal recognition including that of the equal status of cultures; “Democracy has ushered in a politics of equal recognition, which has taken various forms over the years, and has now returned in the form of demands for the equal status of cultures and of genders.”⁷¹ To substantiate his point, Taylor notes the use of “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” or “Miss,” and lately “Ms.” against “Lord” or “Lady” when calling people. Taylor points out that this trend suggests that democracy demands equal forms of recognition on a constant basis.

From Identity to Authenticity

While the notion of honor was superseded and replaced by the concept of dignity, the discussion on recognition evolves, in light of the new understanding of individual identity, into a more recent discourse of authenticity. This new discourse examines the meaning of an individualized identity; a unique identity of being true to oneself and to its own particular way of being.

⁷⁰ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 27.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

Taylor explains that the backdrop of this discourse of authenticity is the trend in the understanding of the concept of morality. Historically, right and wrong were treated as a matter of dry calculation concerned with divine reward or punishment. In the eighteenth-century, the source and the standards of morality are displaced from the divine to the inner self. The argument for this is the notion that human beings are embedded with a moral sense, “an intuitive feeling for what is right and wrong.”⁷² Hence, right and wrong are no longer matters of dry calculation but a personal voice anchored in feeling.

The new understanding of morality marks a significant shift in the understanding of our being. At the existential level, it suggests that the source we need to connect ourselves with in order to discover and therefore fully feel our being is not God, but it is a deep voice within us, a voice of nature, to use Rousseau’s expression. The new idea of morality gives each person an original way of being human. Hence, the recognition of multiple ways of being and feeling human. In this new conception of good life, there is no need to imitate someone else’s life or to refer to particular doctrines to attain the fulfilment of being. Instead, I need to find the model by which I want to live within myself. This means to be true to myself and achieve authenticity or self-fulfilment is tantamount to be true to my own originality which no one can articulate or discover except me. Taylor affirms that the discovery of this original way of being “cannot be socially derived, but must be inwardly generated.”⁷³

It is worth noting however that Taylor doesn’t exclude religion, specifically Christianity, from the journey towards achieving the ideal of authenticity. Taylor carefully speaks about religion as a possible way to connect with the inner self during the discovering journey. He notes

⁷² Ibid., 28.

⁷³ Ibid., 32.

that though the source we have to connect with is deep within the self yet this source, he adds, “doesn’t exclude our being related to God or the Idea; it can be considered our proper way of relating to them. In a sense, it can be seen as just a continuation and intensification of the development inaugurated by Saint Augustine, who saw the road to God as passing through our own self-awareness.”⁷⁴ Taylor’s main point here is to salvage religion from the negative effects of modern secularism which sidelined religion and confined it in private sphere.

Whereas the existential aspect of the ideal of authenticity accords morality to the individual’s inner nature, Taylor holds that in this intimate sphere, the understanding of the formation of identity and the self takes place in a continuous dialogue and struggle with the significant others. The discovery of identity cannot be achieved in isolation, but it is attained through an inner dialogue with those we consider important to us, such as our parents. This inner dialogue remains our life-companion even if the significant others disappear from our lives, “the conversation with them continuous within us as long as we live.”⁷⁵ It is through this inner conversation that Taylor connects identity with recognition.

To further demonstrate the close connection between identity and recognition, Taylor attributes the inner conversation to “language,” which he identifies as a crucial feature of the human condition. Language in this concept is understood in a broad sense. It is a mode of expressions covering not only the words we speak but also the language of art, of gesture, of love and the like. These various modes of expression are learned and gained through exchange with the others. The primary idea of this, is the claim that human mind is not monological but dialogical; human mind needs the other to acquire the rich human language of expression. It is

⁷⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 33.

through the acquisition of this language of expression that one becomes full human agent, capable of understanding and therefore defining oneself. Hence, identity, in Taylor's understanding, depends exclusively on the dialogical relations with others. This relationship diverts the idea of the discovery of identity and hence the achievement of authenticity from the individual's intimate sphere to public sphere, where the politics of recognition plays a bigger role.

What concerns Taylor about relationships is not a mere recognition of an identity, but the conditions in which identity can be formed or malformed through the course of interaction with significant others. These conditions, which depend on the others, are responsible for giving or withholding recognition. Failure to create optimum conditions leads to misrecognition which shows not just a lack of due respect, but more important "it can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred."⁷⁶ Harm can take different forms, including oppression and internalizing a picture of inferiority of oneself. As such, due recognition, Taylor's affirms, "is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need."⁷⁷

In short, Taylor assigns the inner-self the ability to discover its own way of being through an open dialogue with significant others but holds these others responsible for the notion of recognition and misrecognition. On the social and political plane, this stresses the need for the creation of the conditions which equally allow each person to form her/his identity and consequently attain self-fulfilment. Taylor does not limit recognition to an individual's identity, but he extends it to cultural group as a whole. This is because culture plays a crucial role in forming and nurturing individual identity through the course of that inner dialogical

⁷⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 26.

conversation. Hence, Taylor pleads for a politics of equal recognition, or a democracy that recognizes the identity of an individual or a group. In the next part, I highlight Taylor's examination of the politics of equal recognition.

Liberalism and the Paradigm of Multiculturalism

The translation of the ideal of equal recognition into a practical political system is Taylor's query. Through the examination of two different plausible meanings of the politics of equal recognition, Taylor describes the framework of the type of liberalism under which an individual or a minority group could be recognized. This liberalism recognizes the unique identity of an individual or a group and their distinctness that characterize them from everyone else. In Taylor's view, this type of liberalism is the most appealing paradigm for a liberal democratic society.

Taylor identifies two different kinds of liberalism; liberalism (1) characterized by the politics of equal dignity⁷⁸ and liberalism (2) which pleads for the politics of difference. Liberalism (1) commits itself to individual rights. It insists that each individual should be free to choose and pursue her/his own conception of good life. Consequently, liberalism (1) pleads for the neutrality of the state, without culture, religious project, or any sort of collective objectives beyond personal freedom. This type of liberalism is based on the idea that all humans are equally worthy of respect and should therefore be treated in a difference-blind fashion. Hence, liberalism (1) is about equalization of rights and entitlement.

⁷⁸ Taylor uses the word "politic of equal dignity," "politics of equal respect" and "liberalism of equal dignity" interchangeably.

In contrast to liberalism (1), liberalism (2) rejects the idea that the individual is prior to the community. Taylor argues that the well-being of the society should not be reduced to the contribution of citizens to individual well-being. Accordingly, liberalism (2) stresses the need for the recognition of collective goals, such as maintaining one's culture. This recognition is expected to be translated into some kind of commitment from the part of the state to ensure the protection as well as the cherishing of particular nation, culture or religion, so long the basic rights of the citizens who would like to pursue their own conception of good life is also protected.

A review of Taylor's assessment to the two kinds of liberalism suggests that liberalism (2) extends the demands of equal recognition beyond an acknowledgment of an identical basket of equal rights and immunities to involve the recognition of the distinct identity of an individual or a group. Taylor claims that the liberalism of equal dignity and the liberalism of difference overlaps. The latter is the point of entry of the former. In other words, the politics of difference grows organically out of the politics of equal dignity. It presents a continuation of the politics of equal dignity. This continuity however is not perceived and the distinct identity of minority group is not recognized because the politics of difference is ignored, glossed over and assimilated into the mainstream dominant identity of the majority. Taylor wants to highlight the deficiency of the liberalism of equal dignity by holding it responsible for the alienation of minorities and the negation of their identities⁷⁹:

The reproach the second⁸⁰ makes to the first⁸¹ is just that it negates identity by forcing people into a homogeneous mold that is untrue to them. This would be bad enough if the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁸⁰ The politics of difference.

⁸¹ The politics of equal dignity.

mold were itself neutral-nobody's mold in particular. But the complaint generally goes further. The claim is that the supposedly neutral set of difference-blind principles of the politics of equal dignity is in fact a reflection of one hegemonic culture. As it turns out, then, only the minority or suppressed cultures are being forced to take alien form. Consequently, the supposedly fair and difference-blind society is not only inhuman (because suppressing identities) but also, in a subtle and unconscious way, itself highly discriminatory.

Taylor's critique to liberalism (1) focuses on the failure to recognize that minority groups have cultural identity and that this cultural identity is of great value for its members and of deep importance for the well-being of Western pluralistic societies. The recognition of cultural identity is crucial for its members because it gives them a sense of belonging to a community and an anchor for self-esteem. The liberalism of difference is an advantage for the ethnically diverse society because such liberalism allows alternative forms of social organization and life styles to peacefully co-exist and intermingle as social experiments. Thus, it helps promote peace and harmony within citizens.

Moreover, the recognition of cultural identity gives the liberal mind an opportunity to learn to reach out more to the different other and consequently provides for the enrichment and the well-being of the greater society. Take as an example the notion of freedom of expression. Western societies have blasphemy laws but "it goes without saying that there should be full freedom of publication."⁸² Nonetheless, and as the ethnic composition of Western society has changed significantly, the statement "this is how we do things here,"⁸³ may become an awkward reply when justifying a controversial expression. In Taylor's view, Western culturally diverse societies highlights two major challenges posed by the notion of freedom of expression which

⁸² Charles Taylor, "The Rushdie Controversy," in *Public Culture* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1989), 118.

⁸³ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 63.

cannot be addressed effectively by the simple reply “this is how we do things here.” The first challenge is the absence of a universal definition of freedom of expression and the second is the presence of visible minorities who may feel marginalized and/or insulted in the name of freedom of expression. Taylor highlights the challenges saying (emphasize added):

*There isn't a universal definition of freedom of expression because there isn't a single world of culture. We are going to have to live with this pluralism for some time. That means accepting solution for one country which don't apply in others. The acute problem arises from the fact that international migration is making *all societies less culturally uniform*. There are large Muslim minorities in “Christendom”. We are going to *need some inspired adhocery* in years to come.*⁸⁴

The absence of an agreed upon definition of freedom of expression among nations highlights the contentious aspect of the debate. Meanwhile, the social fabric of Western society requires a discourse that takes into consideration the potential sense of marginalization of minority groups.

Furthermore, Taylor notes that minority groups are not just the received members of the society who need reasonable accommodation, but they “are citizens and also belong to the culture that calls into question our philosophical boundaries.”⁸⁵ The self- enclosure of the Western mind can address the challenges posed by certain culture up to a certain limit. The development of a constructive discourse requires a will to consider other views outside Western thoughts⁸⁶:

Rushdie’s book is comforting to the Western liberal mind, which shares one feature with that of the Ayatollah Khomeini, the belief that there is nothing outside their world-view

⁸⁴ Taylor, “The Rushdie Controversy,” 121.

⁸⁵ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 63.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

which needs deeper understanding, just as perverse reflection of the obviously right. To live in this difficult world, the western liberal mind will have to learn to reach out more.

The example of the notion freedom of expression, as highlighted by Taylor, suggests that cultural recognition open spaces for dialogue between the members of the main dominant culture and minority groups. This dialogue sets the ground for potential harmonious measures and endorses open liberal and secular society.

Against the liberalism of difference, the liberalism of equal dignity which commits itself in the strongest possible way to individual liberties leads to the misrecognition of cultural identity, which then inflict harm on minority groups. The members of the unrecognized cultures will feel deracinated, empty and may amount to cultural perishing. Taylor affirms that misrecognition “shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred.”⁸⁷

Challenges and Harmonious Measures

The politics of recognition pleads for a hospitable liberalism. Taylor wants this liberalism to acknowledge cultural survival as a legitimate goal so the different cultures can intermingle with each other peacefully. In order for this hospitable liberalism to be established, multiculturalists need to identify the extent to which different cultural groups are to be recognized. And also need to determine an appropriate mechanism by which cultural-related conflicts should be resolved. For example, individual and group rights are bound to clash. Under

⁸⁷ Ibid., 26.

such circumstances, the two claimed rights could not indefinitely stifle. One has to give. Who should give? And who makes the decision?

In Taylor's thought, each culture serves simultaneously as a guide for its own members and as a potential asset for the diverse society. Culture is a guide for its own members because it provides them with a blue print for living. The design for this living needs to be enacted. As a result, the abstract cultural image will be translated into actual conduct displayed by the members of that particular culture. The outcome is a social structure in the form of interrelated organizations that help the members maintain their culturally unique goals. Further, the distinctive social structure requires an ethnic community to maintain a set of separate social organizations to uphold and to cherish its cultural ideals. Such organizations include schools, places of worship, grocery stores and the like. For Taylor, a hospitable liberalism should allow the establishment of such distinctive structure until it is institutionally complete. Under such multicultural society, minority groups have the maximum opportunity of successfully and effectively transmitting their distinctive cultural heritage from one generation to the next. If liberalism fails to allow the creation of distinctive cultural structures, the minority group finds itself at end of the other spectrum, which is assimilation. The minority groups may then lose both their cultural ideals that provide them with a way of achieving a sense of who they are, and their social structures capable of enacting their cultural heritage. In Taylor's view, such loss renders the western liberal society inhumane.

In addition to being a guide to its own members, Taylor presumes that multiculturalism might be of benefit for the greater society, "all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human

beings.”⁸⁸ Provided that the validity of this presumption is demonstrated concretely, Taylor assumes that society should appreciate the distinction and relationship between cultures and their various social structures. Subsequently, each cultural group projects its own distinctive social experiment in a presumably harmonious fashion, hence creating its own horizon. These projections and the consequent layers of various horizons move the diverse society to a broader horizon. The task then is to model an effective blend of the multilayered horizons, or to examine the “fusion of horizons,” to use Gadamer’s terminology. For Taylor, the presumption⁸⁹ is worth exploring because if it is accurate, culture will constitute the necessary ingredients for social and political conception. Hence, cultures are potential key engines that move the diverse society forward. Drawing on Gadamer’s idea of “fusion of horizons,” Taylor highlights the promising outcomes of the future horizon (emphasize added): “The fusion of horizons” operates through our developing new vocabularies of comparison, by means of which we can articulate these contrasts. So that if and when we ultimately find substantive support for our initial presumption⁹⁰, *it is on the basis of an understanding of what constitutes worth that we couldn’t possibly have had at the beginning. We have reached the judgment partly through transforming our standards.*”⁹¹

From Taylor’s perspective, the importance of culture for its own people and its potential contribution to the greater society is an affirmation that multiculturalism is a necessary feature of a democratic society whose citizens do not share the same ethnic or cultural origin. This politics of multiculturalism should be featured in a hospitable liberalism that acknowledges cultural

⁸⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁸⁹ The presumption is the claim that ‘all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings,’ which was stated before.

⁹⁰ The presumption just stated in footnote 21.

⁹¹ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”, 67.

survival as a legitimate goal. This liberalism is doable, viable and the possible challenges in establishing a liberal society with collective goals can be overcome:

A society with strong collective goals can be liberal, on this view, provided it is also capable of respecting diversity, especially when dealing with those who do not share its common goals; and provided it can offer adequate safeguards for fundamental rights. There will undoubtedly be tensions and difficulties in pursuing these objectives together, but such a pursuit is not impossible, and the problems are not in principle greater than those encountered by any liberal society that has to combine, for example, liberty and equality, or prosperity and justice.”⁹²

The intricacies of a liberal society with collective culturally-base goals are numerous. They include but are not limited to, conflicts between majority culture and minority culture, the difficulties posed by the close encounter of minority groups with each other, and the basic tension between group control and individual freedom.

To face up to the intricacies, Taylor suggests recourse to a legal route and citizen route as proper channels to address any given conflict. The legal route allows collective ends or cultural claims a judicial review. The holder of the claimed rights must legally process their case to confirm its validity, “Under the legal route, requests must conform to formal codified procedures that parties bring against each other and that ultimately determine a winner and a loser. Indeed, the court imposes decisions most of the time.”⁹³

An example of the legal route is summed up by the *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys (CSMB) or the Kirpan*⁹⁴ case. On March 2, 2006, the Supreme Court of

⁹² Ibid., 59-60.

⁹³ Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, *Building the future: A Time for Reconciliation Abridged Report* (Québec: Bibliothèque et Archives national du Québec, 2008), 52.

⁹⁴ I retrieved the information about this case from the Centre for Constitutional Studies, an establishment founded in 1987 as a result of the collaborative efforts of the Departments of History and Political Science and the faculty of

Canada (SCC) ruled, first, that a total ban on wearing a kirpan, a Sikh ceremonial dagger, to school violated an individual's freedom of religion protected by section 2(a) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom* and, second, that this ban on religious expression was not reasonable or justifiable, as is required under section 1. The SCC's verdict overturned the Quebec Court of Appeal's decision that had banned an elementary Sikh student from wearing his kirpan at school who, as a result of the ban, had withdrawn from public school and attended a private school in order to continue wearing his kirpan. The case was the culmination of a long legal battle of Balvir Singh Multani and his son Gurbaj Singh Multani against a Quebec school division (CSMB) and the Attorney General of Quebec.

In 2001, a twelve-year old student, Gurbaj Singh Multani, dropped his kirpan while playing in school yard. The kirpan is a metal dagger with a curved blade and is expected to be worn by devout Sikh male at all times. After learning of the incident, the school board notified Gurbaj's parents that they are allowed to send their son to school wearing kirpan if it is safely sealed inside his clothing. The kirpan had to be placed in a scabbard with a flap sewn securely shut so that it could not voluntarily or accidentally be removed from the scabbard and used as a weapon. The Multanis agreed to these conditions, however, the governing board (CSMB) revoked the compromise because it violated the school's Code of Conduct, which prohibited the carrying of a weapon and dangerous objects at school. The Sikh student was ultimately forbidden from wearing a kirpan to school. According to the Multanis, this ban posed irreconcilable friction with their faith. They felt they have no option but to withdraw their son from public school system and take the matter to the court.

In May 2002, the Superior Court of Quebec weighed the safety concerns of the school board with the student's religious freedom and ruled the student could wear his kirpan under stipulated conditions (it had to be carried in a wooden case, wrapped in fabric and sewn into his clothing). The court felt it has reconciled the safety concerns with religious freedom granted by the Charter. In March 2004, the Quebec Court of Appeal, the highest Quebec court, overturned this judgment and ruled in favor of the board. According to Court, the potential security posed by the student's wearing of the kirpan was more pressing than his freedom to wear a Sikh symbol.

The Multannis successfully appealed this decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. At the heart of the case was the characterization of the kirpan; is it rightly viewed primarily as a weapon or as a religious symbol. The SCC disagreed that there was a need to address the characterization of the kirpan as weapon. Instead, the issue was to demonstrate the sincere personal subjective belief in the religious significance of the kirpan. Since the student chooses to leave the school rather than attend without a kirpan, the SCC was satisfied that the board's ban was more than a trivial interference with the student's religious rights. While acknowledging that freedom of religion can be limited when a person's freedom to act in accordance with his or her beliefs may cause harm or may interfere with the right of others, the SCC ruled unanimously that the commission failed to justify a total ban and hence allow the wearing of the kirpan under certain restrictions.

The kirpan case exemplifies the length of legal process and the complicated nature of rights claims. In this particular case, the argumentation over a religious symbol has at least three different dimensions, first, a quarrel with two fundamental rights, namely safety and religious freedom, second, a debate on the existence of a possible accommodation that reasonably reconciles safety with religious right, and, third, the examination of concrete proof to affirm the

sincerity of the individual in practicing the religion. Moreover, the concerned holders of the claimed rights, the Sikh parents and CSMB, fail to contextualize an object (a religious symbol or a weapon), failed to set a common ground for their dispute (safety versus religious freedom) and fail to deliberately negotiate a settlement. The court was the only solution to resolve this perplexing case.

From Taylor's perspective, the legal route should be avoided as much as possible. However, in some situations, as in this long-winded case of kirpan, the legal path becomes the only solution. Taylor strongly favors recourse to the citizen route, a less formal path that relies on negotiation to find a middle ground compromise. The objective of this path is to work out "a solution that satisfies both parties and it corresponds to *concerted adjustment*."⁹⁵ He stresses that resorting to citizen route and exhausting all options to achieve a concreted adjustment is healthier for a liberal multiculturalist society. There are several obvious reasons to favor this path: a) the citizens learn to manage their differences and disagreement; b) the citizen path avoids plugging their disputed case in lengthy costly court proceeding, which end with a winner and a loser; and c) the values underlying the citizen route (dialogue, exchange and so on) are more reflective of a healthy engaging pluralistic society:⁹⁶

It is in the interveners' interest to engage in negotiations that simultaneously emphasize a contextual, deliberative and reflexive approach. The contextual dimension takes into account the unique nature of individual situations. Through the deliberative dimension, the interveners engage in dialogue and the reflexive dimension allows them to engage in self-criticism and mend their ways when necessary.

⁹⁵ Bouchard and Taylor, *Building the future*, 52.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

The call upon concerned citizens entangled in conflicts to resolve their differences through negotiation stipulates certain restrictions. Taylor notes that “the duty of accommodation is not limitless. For duty of accommodation to exist, discrimination as conceived by the charters must first be present.”⁹⁷ This criterion is meant to “exclude from the realm of reasonable accommodation any request not based on a recognized discriminatory ground.”⁹⁸ Examples of rejected requests include the establishment of a permanent prayer room in a public institution such as universities, the washing of feet in sinks, or requests that would lead to the modification of the program of study and thus violate the Education Act.

In contrast, requests with discriminatory ground should be granted accommodation. For example, in the field of education, there are demands pertaining to linguistic diversity and others related to religious diversity. A harmonious practice for the former is to grant students with limited language skills additional time to take exam. Concerted adjustment of the latter is to allow absence for major religious diversity, the wearing under certain conditions of headscarves, the reorganization of school work for children weakened by the daily fast of Ramadan, and permission for adolescent girls to wear loose clothing instead of shorts in physical education classes.

In Taylor’s view, the liberal multiculturalist society does not undergo an accommodation crisis that may deepen the difference between majority and minority groups or exhaust the state resources. The legal route and the citizen route are, in his opinion, effective mechanisms capable of addressing any claim in a fair way. He warns however, that a widespread perception of

⁹⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁸ Taylor refers to the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedom to give examples of recognized discriminatory ground. The ground are mainly circumstantial, such as pregnancy or marital status, or permanent traits such as sex, skin colour or disability, or sociocultural traits such as religion, language and so on. Ibid., 26.

cultural claims may lead the majority, or part of it, to hold negative view on minorities. Minority groups may be perceived as a burden or as a costly surplus because of their constant requests for reasonable accommodation. For instance in the Greater Montréal alone there are 1000 establishments serving 1 million students. If only 1% of these students submit a request for accommodation, this would be equivalent to 10 000 requests per year. This would undoubtedly exhaust the government resources and may put other services or programs in jeopardy. Theoretically, this is possible but practically, it does not reflect reality. Taylor affirms that “according to the data available to us, this figure⁹⁹ assuredly exceeds by far the actual situation, even according to the broadest estimate.”¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, Taylor stresses the need to distinguish between perception and facts. In other words, he wants concerned citizens to reconstruct the facts pertaining to the contentious issue before drawing a personal value judgment. Perceptions can be deceptive and thus cannot set the ground for a constructive dialogue or an objective opinion. The Mont-Saint-Grégoire sugarhouse is one incident¹⁰¹ that better illustrates the difference between perception and fact. The widespread perception speaks of a number of Muslims who arrived at the sugarhouse and demanded that the menu be altered to conform to their religious standards. As a result, all other customers were obliged to consume pea soup without ham and pork-free beans. In the afternoon, the same Muslims went to the crowded dance hall and interrupted the festivities so they can perform their prayer. The customers in the dance hall felt expelled from the Sugarhouse.

Whereas, the widespread perception depicts the members of this minority group to be disruptive and authoritarian, the reconstructed facts gives a different account to the story. One

⁹⁹ The 10 000 requests per year.

¹⁰⁰ Bouchard and Taylor, *Building the future*, 28.

¹⁰¹ For more incidents of this type, see Bouchard and Taylor, *Building the future*, 18.

week before the outing, a representative of a Muslim Association met with the owner of the Sugarhouse to discuss certain changes to the menu, which would apply solely to the members of the Muslim group. The modified menu excluded pork meat but included halal sausage and salami provided and paid for by the Islamic association who reserved one out of the four dining rooms. On the event day, after the meal, the 40 Muslim members of the association moved several tables and chairs in the room reserved for them for a short prayer. The manager of the Sugar house wanted to free up the room as soon as possible for another function and proposed to the group to pray in the dance hall instead which can accommodate about 650 people and was almost empty. Several young women were dancing to popular music. The management of the sugarhouse interrupted the music so that the Muslim customers could pray. The prayer was concluded in about 10 minutes and the music then resumed. According to the management itself, no one was expelled from or asked to leave the dance hall.

To sum up, Taylor holds that a pluralistic society with collective goals can be liberal. He suggests hospitable liberalism to allow cultures' survival and cherishing. The main characteristic of the hospitable liberalism is the recognition that each culture has potential contribution for the greater diverse society. The citizen route and the legal route are the mechanism by which the liberal multiculturalist society addresses the claims of cultural and thus decides if there is a room for reasonable accommodation and concremented adjustment or not. In what follows I would like to provide a brief critique to the ideal of multiculturalism, namely, its limitation as an effective response to cultural diversity.

Critique

Problem of Definition: Cultural Relativism and Cultural Retention

Multiculturalism elicits a number of major concerns. In what follow I want to provide some important theoretical criticism and concrete examples from Canadian context as a key referent for challenging Taylor's assumption that multiculturalism should be the normative ideal for the pluralistic society. To pursue my critique I will highlight the problem of definition of multiculturalism and the consequent attempt to escape cultural relativism and cultural retention.

There is no consensus on the definition of the word "multiculturalism." Possible reasons for this could be that the word has not been around long enough to identify the notion for which it stands. Multiculturalism is a term whose "boundaries are not easy to establish."¹⁰² It has "experienced an explosion of interest since 1995, and is still very much in development."¹⁰³ The term has "different meanings in different contexts."¹⁰⁴ Social sciences encyclopaedias published in the late 1960s do not include multiculturalism in their entries.¹⁰⁵ More recent encyclopaedias give a vague, general definition. In some entries, the word multiculturalism is defined as: "the political accommodation of minorities"¹⁰⁶; in others it is "a political or social philosophy that promotes cultural diversity."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Payne Michael, ed., *A Dictionary for Cultural and Critical Theory* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 353.

¹⁰³ Fitzpatrick Tony, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Social Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2006), volume 2, 887.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Volume 2, 887.

¹⁰⁵ Roulo F. Magsino, "Multiculturalism in Schools: Is Multiculturalism Education Possible and Justifiable?" in *Contemporary Canadian Educational Issues*, eds. Lance W. Roberts and Rodney A. Clifton, ed., (Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Canada, 1995), 254. The author, Magsino, noted that in *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (1977) is unique in making the following entries:

Multicultural 1. in which more than two cultures are represented.

Multiculturalism the presence of more than two cultures in a community or political unit. *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁰⁶ Ritzer George, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Singapore: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), Volume VI, 3105.

¹⁰⁷ *The World Book Encyclopedia* (RR Donnelley, Willard, Ohio, 2012), M 13, 919-20.

Moreover, the idea of multiculturalism occurs in literature with descriptive and normative denotations. “Descriptively, multiculturalism characterizes society as culturally or ethnically heterogeneous. Normatively, it implies valuing the co-existence of many cultures within society, whether in terms of generalized attitude and behaviour or governing policy.”¹⁰⁸

The term multiculturalism has also an emotional connotations and it sounds more like a political slogan. In fact, multiculturalism was used as a manipulative device to advance political interests. For example, Preston Manning, the first leader of the Reform Party of Canada, objected the superficiality of his rival, a spokesman for the Liberal Party, for delivering a speech in which he claims that “the entire Ukrainian vote of that area¹⁰⁹ could be purchased simply by inviting Ukrainian dancers to perform at a Liberal convention and offering a few leaders a grant to form a cultural society or build a cultural centre.”¹¹⁰ Manning considers the speaker’s remark insulting and demeaning. Instead he proposed a ‘fair’ treatment to Canadians of no French or English origin, and that is to be “Canadian,” preserving one’s cultural background is a personal choice. Manning explains that the position of his party is based in part on the view of Professor Rays Khan, head of the political science department at the University of Winnipeg back then, who said¹¹¹:

People, regardless of their origin, do not emigrate to preserve their culture and nurture their ethnic distinctiveness. If they wished to do that, they would stay where there were because the environment is more conducive to the perpetuation of one’s culture and ethnicity. Immigrants come here to become Canadian ... Whether or not I preserve my cultural background is my personal choice; whether or not an ethnic group preserves its cultural background is the group’s choice. The state has no business in either.

¹⁰⁸ Magisno, “Multiculturalism in Schools,” 255.

¹⁰⁹ Edmonton East.

¹¹⁰ Preston Manning, *The New Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan Canada, 1992), 39.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 316.

Note first that in the claim that “Immigrants come here to become Canadian,” there is an attempt to throw all immigrants in a melting pot. As immigrants “melted” into the mix, they become “Canadian” and consequently appreciate the “three great commandments of Western culture”¹¹² that attracted them to their new home. The three commandments are: “know Thyself, from Socrates and the Greeks; Control Thyself, from Moses, the great Hebrew lawgiver, and the Roman lawmakers like Cato; and Give Thyself, the greatest commandment of Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition.”¹¹³

The use of multiculturalism as a political manipulative device is obvious. Despite this reality, Taylor did not provide a definition for the word multiculturalism, nor did he favor one. Instead, he regards the politics of multiculturalism as a feature of a democratic society. Culture is at the heart Taylor’s politics of multiculturalism. In his analysis, culture is treated from two different perspectives. The first, speaks about culture as a holistic recognizable entity, “all should enjoy the presumption that their “traditional” culture has value.”¹¹⁴ The second perspective introduces culture as a multilayered body that needs an examination by means of citizen route or legal route before granting it recognition.

The first holistic perspective suggests that our belief and our ways of knowing are a function of culture. A people’s way of life determines the total perspective with which they view things. As a result, the members of the particular community develop a communal access to the elements of their culture. They could thus uniquely understand and appreciate their belief system and their practices. In contrast, non-members, who are outsiders, are unable to understand them

¹¹² Preston was referring to a speech delivered by a woman addressing issues in Canadian politics. He found the speech impressive and memorable, *Ibid.*, 39

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹¹⁴ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 68.

and thus cannot evaluate their belief system or their practices. On account of such inability, non-members have no choice but to accept the validity of knowledge claims and practices of each culture.

Furthermore, treating culture as a holistic body has an ethical dimension too. It relates to the guidelines governing human conduct and internalizing codifying human values. In this way, values are relative. As such, an intercultural assessment of respective values and system of belief is not possible. In short, to have different cultures is tantamount to have different values. The concept of good and bad, right and wrong must be ascertained from cultural perspective only. Hence, we are forced to recognize the validity of each system as is.

Culture from this holistic perspective is quite problematic. By granting culture the credential of the formation of individual identity, as Taylor did, one runs the risk of contributing to the malformation of individual identity instead. In fact, Taylor is contradicting himself in speaking about culture as a holistic body. On the one hand, he presents culture as an ideal for its members, the main source for the dialogical conversation in its journey to attain self-fulfilment, but on the other hand he affirms that fundamental liberties are protected by the Charter of Rights, which can strike some practical cultural manifestation. This clearly means that cultures are not immune to the law and some of the cultural practices can always be forbidden. Hence, one cannot value culture as a whole before making distinction between those cultural practices that might be tolerated by the Charter from those who are not.

Whereas this first aspect of multiculturalism reveals serious concerns, the second perspective however is less problematic because it speaks about culture as a series of contested claims which can be reasonably accommodated through citizen route or legal path. Nonetheless, even from this

perspective, Taylor's view on culture as a guide for its own members and as a potential contributor for the greater society still requires further discussion. In my view, Taylor's politics of recognition should have call for a distinction between those forms of culture that are acceptable from those forms which are not, so cultural groups realize the extent to which their cultures can be recognized. In other words, Taylor's mechanism to address cultural claims should not have been limited to a friendly citizen route and a bitter legal proceeding only. Such mechanism is a mediation or an arbitration between a given minority group and the greater society.

Moreover, Taylor's mechanism should be extended to include remedies to address intra-cultural problems (as well as inter-cultural tension). In this way, members of a cultural group will not grow up in a controlled cultural environment, which might be hostile to their fundamental freedom and liberties. The examples to be listed in the next paragraphs highlight the severity of intra-cultural, inter-cultural conflicts and re-affirm the shortcoming of the politics of multiculturalism.

Taking into consideration the two different aspects of multiculturalism, there could be various meanings to the idea of multiculturalism. I will limit my examination to three plausible meanings to further highlight the problem of definition and consequently underscore the limitation of Taylor's politics of multiculturalism. I call each of the three definitions; multiculturalism 1, multiculturalism 2, and multiculturalism 3.

Multiculturalism 1, could mean "the belief that each culture has values which are no better or no worse than those of any other, and therefore one should be equally accepting all of them."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Irvan DeFaveri, "Multiculturalism and Education" in *Contemporary Canadian Educational Issues*, eds. Lance W. Roberts and Rodney A. Clifton, ed., (Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Canada, 1995), 273.

This definition suggests that *all cultures are equally valid*, it avoids invidious comparison, and one may find it appealing. This definition however is problematic because it attempts to escape relativism that it claims to apply across all cultures. On the one hand, it claims that all values are culture-bound, consequently all cultures must be equally respected and accepted. Yet at the same time, it is a fact that certain cultures upheld claims of superiority, or the superiority of its followers, over all other cultures. This is clearly inconsistent. Take as example, the monotheistic tradition, like the Abrahamic faith. Ironically, each faith group of the Abrahamic faith tradition considers themselves better than all others. In Judaism, the Jews are the “chosen people,” in Christianity, the Christians are the “people of God,” while in Islam, Muslims are the “best nation evolved for mankind.” The way each cultural group perceive themselves can harbour resentment. Taylor notes: “many French people find it hard to see their country as containing an important Muslim component, so long have they related to it as an essentially catholic.”¹¹⁶ Historically, the belief in one’s superiority over the different-others is expressed in form of intolerance and atrocities. The killing of Beothuk Indians for sport represented a bankrupt morality of the killers while documenting the negative side of culture¹¹⁷:

The Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland were hunted and killed for sport by armed Europeans expressing their cultural values. The Beothuk are now extinct. Jaenen tells us that “multiculturalism has long and well-established historical roots in Canada” (1989). He does, however, admit that “we are not necessarily proud of our entire historical records.”

¹¹⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age* (USA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 828.

¹¹⁷ DeFaveri, “Multiculturalism and Education,” 274.

The time should be past for speaking about multiculturalism in a vague way. As noted earlier, what is urgently needed now is to distinguish between those forms of multiculturalism which are accepted from those which are not.

Another form of multiculturalism-Multiculturalism 2, is about “claims that any culture should have the legal right to perpetuate its own traditions and conventions among its population, as long as it does not interfere with what is being done in any other culture.”¹¹⁸ According to this view, any recognizable culture should be allowed to perpetuate itself with legal protection. This form of multiculturalism avoids the absurdity and shortcomings of multiculturalism 1, yet, it presents serious difficulties of a different kind. In fact, the list of cultural practices that may be perpetuated and will be found illegal by the law of the land, for example the Charter of Rights, is quite long. The Quran gives man the right to marry up to four wives if he treated them fairly, but a woman cannot have multiple husbands. In some cultures, honour killing is justified. Female genital mutilation is allowed by some Arab-African traditions. Certain cultures display institutionalized inequality. In his descriptive account of the Hutterites, John Friesen, an advocate of multiculturalism, note that “women are believed to be inferior to men ... and they [the women] seem quite prepared to accept [this].”¹¹⁹ There will be no doubt that the actions based on the belief that women are inferior to men will be found illegal if brought before the court.

Further, it is ironic to see the laws of the land, as the means by which cultural integrity is protected, discarded by cultural group for the virtue of cultural values. Taylor gives fundamental importance to the Charter of Rights, yet he wants to give equal respect to all cultural groups

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 274.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 274.

when some of these groups do not treat all their members equally. This absurdity represents a clear deficiency in the politics of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism 3, “avoids all reference to legal consideration and rests solely on the moral claim that any existing culture should be allowed to perpetuate its distinctive beliefs among its own people. If their mores, conventions and tradition modes of acting clash with the law, it is the law that should be changed.”¹²⁰ This form of multiculturalism insists on the moral claim that nothing should be imposed upon the members of one culture by another. While this may regulate the relationship between various cultures, it does not, however, address the conflict between individual liberty and group right. These kinds of conflicts are hardly less devastating than the problems posed by multiculturalism 1 and multiculturalism 2. To this end, I strongly agree¹²¹ with the claim that individual freedom does not mesh with cultural retention. This is because the former is so individualistic constructed while the latter requires group control.

Taylor holds that “everyone should be recognized for his or her unique identity.”¹²² This identity is partly shaped by culture which, according to Taylor, requires equal recognition. If this is the case, Taylor must admit the possibility that group control for the assertion of group rights may conflict with individual rights to authorship or self-fulfilment. I would like to illustrate this by 1985 article of the Indian Act which displays a violation of the Charter of Rights. In her critique to Taylor’s multiculturalism, Benhabib said: “some first Nations recognize the right of the males of the tribe to outmarry and to transfer citizenship rights to their spouses, the same does not hold for the women who outmarry. These practices were established by the Indian Act

¹²⁰ Ibid., 275.

¹²¹ Habermas, among others, holds this view. See Jurgen Habermas, “Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State,” in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 107- 48.

¹²² Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 53.

of 1876 ... As a result, Indian women suffered from discrimination on the basis of their sex and marital status ... This asymmetry in the inheritance of citizenship rights contradicts the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom of 1982, which grants women equal civil and political status with men.”¹²³ In this particular example, the unique identity of Indian women who marry outside the group are dashed. The climax of the politics of multiculturalism needs retreat.

Taylor may argue that a member of a cultural group is free to challenge what she/he may think a discriminatory practice by legal proceeding. For instance, the Indian Act that passed into law in 1985 and led to gender discrimination for decades was modified by British Columbia Court of Appeal’s 2009 decision. The Court found the Act in violation with the Charter. As a result, the Canadian government amended the Indian Act in 2010 in order to comply with the Court’s decision.¹²⁴ Based on this argument, individual right is protected in theory as well as in practice.

The counter argument for this is the controversial “notwithstanding clause” set out in section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This clause allows parliament and legislatures to override certain portion of the Charter and consequently override court decisions for a period of time subjected to renewal.¹²⁵ The laws passed in Quebec in the field of language, particularly the Quebec provision to outlaw any commercial signage in any language other than French, is an example. Though the Supreme Court of Canada¹²⁶ did strike down this provision, Taylor confirms that “Incidentally, the signage provisions are still in force in Quebec, because of

¹²³ Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 54.

¹²⁴ For more details on this decision, see the Parliament of Canada website, <http://www.parl.gc.ca>, accessed July 10, 2013, http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/LegislativeSummaries/bills_ls.asp?ls=C3&Parl=40&Ses=3#a8.

¹²⁵ <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/bp194-e.htm#txt1>.

¹²⁶ This happened in 15 December 1988. See: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/bp194-e.htm#txt1>.

a provision of the Charter that in certain cases allows legislatures to override judgments of the courts for a restricted period.”¹²⁷ In this case, the right of non-French Quebecer is left to the discretion of political legislators. In other words, in a society with collective goals, as in Quebec, the right of the group takes precedence over other groups. While Taylor may justify this on the basis that “Quebec could never accommodate itself without surrounding its identity,”¹²⁸ he has to acknowledge however that the hospitable liberalism he argued for excludes minority groups, the non-French-Quebecers, who live in a minority society, Quebec as one Canadian province. The inhospitality of this kind of multiculturalism deepens the difference between the members of the society as they will be divided into the host citizens and the received citizens.

In my opinion, it is essential to think of the individual as free-human being before thinking of him as a member of a cultural group who seeks to dictate on its member how should they live. Giving supremacy to collective goals at the expenses of individual rights creates barriers to attaining self-fulfillment, and thus may contribute to the formation of identity.

Conclusion

This chapter examines Taylor’s thought on multiculturalism. The word Multiculturalism has different connotations with no particular definition prevailing. The term has a factual description and a normative prescription of how society should be organized. This latter

¹²⁷ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 53. The Parliament of Canada clarifies that the restricted period of time is limited to 5 years or less subjected to renewal. Section 33 (3) of the Charter reads: “provides that each exercise of the notwithstanding power has a lifespan of five years or less, after which it expires, unless Parliament or the legislature re-enacts it under section 33(4) for a further period of five years or less.”

In 1993, when the notwithstanding clause reached the end of its five-year life, the Quebec National Assembly lifted the ban on English language signs and amended the law to require only that French be “markedly predominant.” See: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/bp194-e.htm#txt1>.

¹²⁸ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 60.

denotation is described as ‘the politics of recognition’, or ‘the politics of difference’ in Taylor’s writings. Multiculturalism in its descriptive meaning is generally accepted and is less problematic. For centuries, societies have contained people of different religions, ethnic backgrounds and conceptions of good life, though to different degrees. Multiculturalism in its normative meaning is Taylor’s response to cultural and religious diversity. He argues that political philosophy needs to rethink its assumption of a unitary citizenship and its claim that public sphere is neutral. The justification of multiculturalism as a normative ideal rests on the claim that minority groups would gain better understanding and confidence in themselves if they concentrate their effort on their own culture of origin instead of “melting” in the mainstream society. The normative claims of multiculturalism focus on respecting cultural differences and accommodating multiplicity of perspectives. A hospitable liberalism is the paradigm for the multicultural society, a society with collective goals. Taylor suggests a citizen route, if possible, and a legal route, if necessary, as the mechanisms by which conflicts can be resolved. My critique of Taylor’s ideal of multiculturalism focuses on the problem of definition of the word multiculturalism and the attempt to escape cultural relativism and cultural retention. Reference to several cultural practices and court cases meant to demonstrate the limitation of the politics of multiculturalism and its inevitable clash with individual rights.

Chapter 4

The Theory of Daf': An Islamic Perspective of Liberalism

Liberalism¹²⁹ places “heavy emphasis on freedom, equality and opportunity.”¹³⁰ Its exact meaning “varies with time, place, and circumstance, and with who is using the term.”¹³¹ In general, liberalism involves openness to change and the right to pursue one’s own conception of a good life.¹³² The word religion however, conjures up an idea of submission.¹³³ It places greater emphasis on tradition and order that runs the risk of impinging individual rights and freedoms.¹³⁴ From this perspective, the concept of liberalism seems to have no merit in the realm of religion.

This chapter examines the meaning of liberalism from an Islamic perspective. I refer to the Quran¹³⁵ to demonstrate that liberalism is about creative thinking and rational argumentation. This examination seems to reconcile two opposing concepts. For instance, the etymological meaning of the term Islam is submission. The essence of the Islamic religion is the recognition of the supremacy of the Quran as the ultimate author of Muslim action. Hence, one can argue that belief in the Quran as the paramount authority impedes the desire to seek new conceptions of a

¹²⁹ It is important to note that I am not using the word “liberalism” to refer to a political theory or social philosophy that can apply to government or religion or other areas. As I will explain in this chapter, I use the term “liberalism” to mean creative thinking and rational argumentation.

¹³⁰ The Word Book Encyclopedia, L 12, 227.

¹³¹ Ibid., 228.

¹³² My understanding of liberalism as creative thinking and rational argumentation may have the same implication of a political theory of liberalism that suggests that “individuals are capable of running their own lives in opposition to paternalism, involving guardians –whether of church or state – who claim to define how to live good life.” Austin Harrington, Barbara I. Marshall and Hans-Peter Muller ed., *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (London and New York: Routledge 2006), 320.

¹³³ For instance, in the Islamic religion Muslims are reminded that “When God and His Messenger have decided on a matter that concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing man and woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter.” [Quran 33:36].

¹³⁴ For example, the Quran teaches Muslims to respond to its teachings by “We hear and obey.” [Quran 2:285].

¹³⁵ My referral to the Quran is not about addressing Islamic thoughts or reformist approaches to the Quran on the subject of liberalism. It is a personal understanding of the meaning of liberalism based on my reading to certain verses of the Quran.

good life outside the principles of the Quran. Liberalism, and not religion, seems to encourage the thinking without dependence on external authority.

Furthermore, the main theme constructed around the message of the Quran is the issue of truth: the Quran has a message and wants humans to respond to it. In doing so, the Quran divides humans into those who accept its message and those who deny it. The former are invited to manifest the religious truth in a practical and a normative way, whereas the latter are challenged to produce argument for their claimed truth; “Produce your evidence if you are telling the truth,” [Quran 2:111]. In contrast, liberalism does not divide the world into those who accept the divine message and those who do not, one can simply entertain truth claims.

Despite this apparent conflict between Islam and liberalism, I suggest that the Quran aims at the liberation of reason through rational argumentation. By “reason,” I mean the freedom to think rationally beyond one’s conviction and without depending on the external. I call this kind of thinking that transcends one’s conviction and the rational argumentative process in assessing any truth claim the notion of *daf*’ (Repel). First, I propose that the understanding of the Quran as a miracle inaugurates the liberation of reason from the custody of the supernatural. This claim is further supported by the idea that Muhammad is the Seal in the chain of the prophets. Second, I explain the forceful and peaceful means of the notion of Repel to demonstrate that the Quran wants the liberation of reason to occur by means of argumentation. In light of this argumentation, the truth can be definite or can be envisioned by the contenders. Lastly, I will present and analyze some debates as sketched in the Quran to highlight the elements of the model argumentations sought by the Quran. I am hoping that the notion of Repel be insightful to the critical mind and a modest contribution to the scholarly accounts of religion and liberalism.

Part 1: The Quran and the Liberation of Reason

The Understanding of the Quran as a Miracle

‘Read’ is the first word of the Quran revealed to Prophet Muhammad during his seclusion in a cave near Mecca in 610 AD. Like most of his contemporaries, Prophet Muhammad did not know how to read or write; unlike many of them, he also did not know how to make poetry. The event of this first revelation is documented in the history with exceptional circumstances: when Prophet Muhammad was asked to ‘Read,’ he replied that he could not read. The angel squeezed him firmly two times, in each time he asked him to read, and then recited to him the first five verses of the revelation in which the concept of reading, teaching, learning and pen occurs six times:

Read! in the name of your Lord who created: He created man from a clinging form.
Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One who taught by the pen, who taught man what he did not know. [Quran 96:1-5]

These are the first verses of the Quran that were revealed to Prophet Muhammad in that extraordinary event. The point to make from this event is to note that from the very beginning, the Quran is “talking about reading, teaching, knowing and writing.”¹³⁶ Hence, the “Quranic revelation allies recognition of the Creator to knowledge and science.”¹³⁷

The call to ‘Read’ inaugurates a new chapter in the history of humanity. It portrays humans as ‘reading’ beings capable of comprehending the scripture, competent to confirm its accounts, free to challenge its claims and mature enough to be responsible for their own actions.

¹³⁶ Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur’an Themes and Styles* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999), 1.

¹³⁷ Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet*, 31.

The Read task grants the right of each individual to decide her/his own fate and to write down her/his own history. A review of the verses of the Quran reveals that men and women are honorable beings: “We have honoured the children of Adam” [Quran: 17: 70]. This honor involves the individual’s right to believe or not believe; “Say, ‘Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so,’” [Quran: 18:29]. Each individual, however, is reminded that honor and the consequent right to believe or not believe carry with them responsibilities; “Man will only have what he has worked towards.” [Quran: 53:39]. During the twenty three years’ period of Quran revelation, Prophet Muhammad continued to receive similar messages. The last verse revealed to him reaffirms the responsibility of humans for their actions; “Beware of a Day when you will be returned to God: every soul will be paid in full for it has earned, and no one will be wronged,” [Quran: 2: 281].

The Quran, starting by emphasizing the idea of reading and learning and ending with an accent on accountability, is the main miracle of the Prophet Muhammad. The Quran thus wants the liberation of reason from the custody of the supernatural.¹³⁸ The revelation of the Quran calls upon humans to elevate to their potential and use their reason in order to examine the claimed truths inherited from earlier generations or put forth previously by any given claimant including Prophet Muhammad himself. In the light of the Quran, human beings should not wait for supernatural miracles to accept or reject important truths. Instead, they need to look for the truths themselves: “On earth there are signs for those with sure faith-and in yourselves too, do you not see?” [Quran: 51:20-21].

¹³⁸ I use the word supernatural to refer to anything that cannot be rationally or scientifically explained.

A brief comparison between the miracle of Prophet Muhammad and the miracles of the previous prophets demonstrates the trend in the way humans should discern important truths. After the revelation of the Quran, humans should no longer rely on supernatural events to believe. Instead, they need to resort to reason, use their faculties and make their decisions accordingly. There are many messengers who received revelations from God, the like Prophet Muhammad. The Quran recounts their stories and their attempts to reason with their people. Nonetheless, the main supporting element of the truth claims of these messengers is miracles. For example, in the story of Ibrahim we read: “But We said, ‘Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham.’ [Quran: 21:69]. In the case of Moses, we find: ”He said, ‘Produce this sign you have brought, if you are telling the truth.’ So Moses threw his staff and-lo and behold!-it was a snake, clear to all, and then he pulled out his hand and-lo and behold!-it was white for all to see” [Quran: 7:106-8]. As to Jesus, his miraculous birth and the healing of the blind and the leper, among many other miracles, did not prevent his own disciples from requesting more signs to confirm his truth; “When the disciples said, ‘Jesus, son of Mary, can your Lord send down a feast to us from heaven?’ he said, ‘Beware of God if you are true believers.’ They said, We wish to eat from it; to have our hearts reassured; to know that you have told us the truth; and to be witnesses of it. Jesus, son of Mary, said, ‘Lord, send down to us a feast from heaven so that we can have a festival-the first and the last of us- and a sign for from You. Provide for us: You are the best provider”” [Quran: 5:112-114].

In the examples listed above, God supports His messengers with supernatural events that rise above the circumstances of peoples’ lives in a way that cannot be rationally explained. Accordingly, faith and reason drifted apart. Religion is wedded with miracles and the human mind, including that of the believers, is accustomed to the supernatural. In contrast, the main

miracle of prophet Muhammad is the Quran, a text anyone can read. There is no cool-safe fire, no snake made from stick, and no feast coming down from heaven. The human being is no longer that hopelessly inept person who needs miracles to discern or to examine important truth, and reason can no longer be left in the margin. In short, with the conception of the Quran as a miracle an opportunity occurred to assuage reason.

The revelation of the Quran has closed the chapter of miracles.¹³⁹ The assessment of claims and the confirmation of the truth is now based on reason and not supernatural proof. When the pagans of Arabia, like their predecessors, asked prophet Muhammad for miracles and signs to confirm his proof (Quran: 6:7; 17:91-93; 25:27-28), their request was denied; “They say, ‘Why have no miracles been sent to him by his Lord?’ Say, Miracles lie in God’s hands; I am simply here to warn you plainly.’ Do they not think it is enough that We have sent down to you the Scripture that is recited to them? There is a mercy in this and a lesson for believing people.” [Quran: 29:50-51]. The pagans are reminded that the role of the prophet is to transmit a message and not to produce miracles. Further, the sending down of the scripture is considered a mercy because it consists of reading material with content that is not beyond the understanding of human reason. As such, the revelation of the Quran signals the end of the era where the supernatural evidence used to serve as the main guide to the concept of belief and starts the beginning of a new age in which reason and rational thinking is the new alternative method for discerning important truth.

¹³⁹ This means the human mind should no longer rely on miracles to confirm or deny religious truth claims. Instead, the human mind is called to rationally assess such claims before accepting or rejecting them.

Muhammad: The Seal of the Prophets and the Responsibility of Reason

The belief, by Muslims, that Muhammad is the last messenger of God is, in my view, another piece of evidence supporting the claim that the supernatural yields its position to reason and to rational thinking. Prior to the sending of prophet Muhammad, the Quran sums up the history of the communities with the following verse: “We sent Our messengers in succession: whenever a messenger came to a community they invariably called him a liar, so We destroyed them one after the other and made them into cautionary tales. Away with the disbelievers!” [Quran: 23:44]. According to this account, the history of a nation follows a cycle: a community goes astray, a messenger is sent to them, the community is punished for the disbelief, the destroyed community is then replaced by a new generation, who in turn receives a messenger and so on. With the idea of the prophet Muhammad as the last messenger of God, the trio cycle of messenger-punishment-new generation with a new messenger is replaced by a linear narrative: a message which one accepts or denies.

The Quran speaks about prophet Muhammad as “the seal of the prophets,” [Quran 33:40], sent to all people, “Say [Muhammad], ‘People, I am the Messenger of God to you all,’” [Quran 7:158]. As a result, the Quran conveys two messages, one is the affirmation that God will no longer send any further messenger, and second humanity will be treated as one community. In my view, this idea of “the last messenger” suggests that humanity has the maturity to be independent. Therefore, there is no longer any need for further messengers and miracles after receiving the final message.

Contesting the Rational Authority of the Quran

In the concept of the Quran as a miracle and in the idea of Prophet Muhammad as the last messenger, I intended to demonstrate that aspects of Islamic religion place heavy emphasis on reason. This involves an openness to change and a desire to seek new way of thinking as opposed to accepting traditional norms. Such objectives cannot be achieved without the liberation of the human mind.

The Quran, for Muslims, is the supreme authority. This means the individual Muslim and the Muslim community have confidence in it. They welcome its rules, abide by its commands and favor them without resistance. The Quran, for Muslims, is at the same time a referential heritage to which they are accountable, and a guide they cannot give up without renouncing themselves or losing their Islamic identity. For so long, Muslims have not questioned the supremacy of the Quran. They take it as a guide in all aspects of their lives, in theory and, to different degrees, in reality. From their perspective, any relevant truth is contained in the Quran or must be supported by the Quran. This explains why every single Islamic sect quotes some of the Quran to support its claim. Nowadays, when Muslim thinkers are dealing with major issues such as globalization, the environment, gender equalities, combatting terrorism, and issues of medical ethics, they seek verses from the Quran to support their arguments. This is because, in the past as in the present, Muslims strongly believe in the Quran as a fundamental and paramount source for creed and ritual as well as for law and ethics. In short, Muslims believe in the Quran as a book that differentiates between right and wrong, a book that “does show the straightest way” [Quran 17: 9].

The Quran aims at the emancipation of the human mind. However, it may result from the conception of the Quran as a supreme authority, may appear to obstruct the liberation of reason. I

would like to briefly highlight three main arguments that may support this charge. I will then explain that the Quran is free of such charge on the basis of the theory of ‘*daf*’ (Repel).

The first argument is the claim that the Quran guides the Muslim mind by setting the scope of its thinking. Hence, poses limits to the freedom of thinking and ties it to what conform the message of the Quran. Take as an example the hostile attitude towards homosexuals, which almost did not change over the time.¹⁴⁰ For certain Muslims “the matter is this simple: We do not make our religion, but we receive it and obey it. We cannot impose our beliefs on anyone, but we believe in the veracity of the teachings of the Quran and of Prophet Muhammad that clearly and explicitly condemn homosexual practices.”¹⁴¹ The Islamic studies on the subject of homosexuality “have little to say about the evolution of attitude throughout the centuries, on a scholarly, theological, or sociological level.”¹⁴² Muslims around the world recite *Bismilla ar-Rahman a-raheem* (in the name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful) millions of times a day. For many of them, the act of compassion and mercy is not about toleration or acceptance of homosexuals but about eliminating them and thereby purifying the society from their offense. The Muslim mind seems to adhere to a uniform thinking on this subject because the hostile attitude towards homosexual is inherent in the Quran (7: 80-84; 11: 77-83; 26:160-183).

The second arguments rests on the Islamic belief that the Quran is the word of Allah sent down to the prophet Muhammad through Angel Gabriel and intended for all times. This

¹⁴⁰ Arkoun notes the following “Another determining, and totally unthought factor is sexuality... All religion have simply covered with a so-called sacred law, the archaic codes and structures prevailing in all societies. In the case of Islam, we know how the Qur’anic categorisations of the licit and illicit (*halal/haram*) are still enforced as divine and intangible, rejecting any kind of secularized definitions.” Mohammad Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert* (London: Saqi Books, 2006), 34.

For further reading on Islam and Homosexuality see also George E. Haggerty, ed. *Gay History and Cultures* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 2000), 478-480.

¹⁴¹ Hassan Hahout, *Reading the Muslim Mind* (United States of America: American Trust Publication, 2008), 118.

¹⁴² George E. Haggerty, *Gay History and Cultures*, 479.

definition suggests that the human mind is expected to conform to the teachings of the Quran and not to oppose them. The Quran then, becomes the author of the Muslim actions and the guide of their thinking. Consequently, the supposedly sacred book that aims at the liberation of reason becomes a form of shackles to reason itself. The First-Cause Argument used by theologians to demonstrate that the existence of God can be proved by unaided reason exemplifies the apparent shackles posed by Quran. The Muslim mind, a monotheistic mind, maintains that everything in this world has a cause, and as you go back in the chain of causes further and further, you must come to a First Cause, and to that First Cause you give the name Allah. Allah then, is the Cause of all causes and there is no cause for Him; “He is the First and the Last,” [Quran 56:3] without a beginning and without an end. From an atheist point of view, the First-Cause argument does not carry much weight because it exposes a fallacy in reasoning. An Atheist minds holds that “If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God, so there cannot be any validity in that argument.” A Muslim theologian may not necessary be convinced with an atheist way of thinking. This is because the Muslim mind starts reasoning with an end in mind. That end is ‘God does exist,’ therefore, any argument pertaining to the existence of God is validated only, and only, if it proves the case, otherwise it will be rejected. Thus, the Quran, for the Muslim mind, appears to be at the same time the starting point of thinking and the end of reasoning. It is simultaneously the one that sets the ground for the debate and the one who arbitrates. The Muslim mind submits to this reality without resistance since it believes in the Quran as a book that differentiates between right and wrong.

The third argument is grounded on the claim that the Quran can be a source of tension because it is open to different interpretations including rigid and literal reading of the Quranic

text. Muslims, or some of them, attempt to overcome the challenges of modern world through a return to their old sacred principles, which is fourteen hundred year old scriptures. Such principles tend to emphasize a particular morality and place the trust in one authority, an ancient scripture. Hence, the Quran, through its possible rigid interpretation, may serve as a manipulative device to influence and to dominate the thinking of the fellow Muslims and to deepen the difference between humans by dividing them into right thinkers and block thinkers. The former are the ‘guardians’ of the camp of good, whereas the latter present the ‘advocate’ of the camp of the evil. In time of difficulties, such division amounts to concrete violence, which, according to Habermas, is already inherent in religion (my emphasis)¹⁴³:

(b) The fastest growing religious movements, such as the Pentecostals and the *radical Muslims*, can be most readily described as ‘fundamentalist.’ They *combat the modern world or they withdraw from it*. Their forms of worship combine spiritualism and Adventism with rigid moral conception and literal adherence to holy scripture... (c) The mullah regime in Iran and the worldwide Islamic terrorism are only the most spectacular examples of a political unleashing of the potential for *violence inherent in religion*.

The above three points might be used to lay serious charges against religion in general, and the Quran-the supreme Islamic authority, in particular; far from liberating reason, one may argue that the Quran carries ingredients for suppression that serve to imprison the human mind in an old sacred scripture. In what follows, I will introduce the pacific notion of ‘*daf*’ (Repel) to reconfirm that the liberation of reason is deeply rooted in the Quran.

Part 2: The Notion of *Daf* (Repel): Meaning, Objective and Means

¹⁴³ Jurgen Habermas, *Europe: The Faltering Project*, translated by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), 61-62.

The Meaning of the Notion of Repel

The word (*dafa* ') is derived from the root *da-f-* ' (دفع) meaning to repel and to push back. The word can be used with the preposition 'to' to mean 'to hand over,' and with the preposition 'on' or 'about' to mean 'to protect' and 'to defend'. In the Arabic dictionary, the entry for the word *dafa* ' gives a list of meanings such as (1) to push away, shove away, repel, remove, to get the better of, to rebut, refute, disapprove, contend with, differ, (2) to protect, defend.

The word *dafa* ' is used in the Quran several times to mean 'to defend and to pay back.' But there are two particular verses that speaks about the root *dafa* ' as an idea or a notion and not as a mere verb or as a noun. These two verses are:

If God did not drive some by means of others the earth would be completely corrupt, but God is bountiful to all. [Quran 2: 251].

If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. [Quran 22:40]

In these two verses, the Quran uses the word 'people' and not believers, and speaks about the driving of/the repel of 'some by means of others' as act of bounty. The apparent reading of the two verses suggest that the standing of some people against other people for the welfare of people is legitimate and is recognized as an act of bounty. I call this apparent reading of the Quran, the Notion of Repel.

In my opinion, the Quran provides two different venues by which the notion of Repel occurs; one is forceful and the other is peaceful. The former refers to an armed struggle and a justified war. The latter however, consists of a rational argumentation. It is this pacific notion of Repel that I intend to explain and to defend in this chapter.

To better understand the two means of the notion of Repel, I would like to refer back to the Quran to highlight the characteristic of each of these two meanings. I will provide a very brief account on the first venue, the forceful path, then, elaborate more on the pacific route of Repel to further demonstrate that the liberation of reason is deeply rooted in the Quran. The purpose of this liberation is to give humanity an opportunity to engage in a debate to glean and to contest important truths.

The revelation of the Quran is divided in two phases, each corresponding to a number of *surahs* (chapters) of the Quran. The first phase, from the beginning of the revelation 610 AD until 622 AD, is called the Meccan period. The Quran revealed during this period is called the Meccan Quran. The second phase from 622 to 632 AD, is called the *Medinian* period and the Quran revealed during this period is called the *Medinian* Quran.

The Meccan Quran reflects the image of a solitary man, marginalized from the society because of the revelation. This Quran deals mainly with spirituality and Individual Islam. The role of the Prophet is limited to transmitting God's Word (the Quran). The Medinian Quran, however, involves a wider message, it introduces the organized Islam. In Medina, the first Muslim community is born and the individual religious identity becomes the collective identity of the ummah (community). The Medinian Quran gives primacy of the community over individual. It defines the social fabric of the Muslim ummah, its political and economic spectrum as well as its ethical and juridical principles; "Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion islam [total devotion to God]. [Quran 5:3]. During the Medinian period, prophet Muhammad embodied a second role, in addition to his role a messenger of God; he is the head of the State and he presents the image of the charismatic authority who manifests the rule of the Quran and its ethic.

The Forceful Repel

With regards to the forceful route of the notion of Repel, the use of force was not a legitimate option for Muslims before the *hijra* (migration) of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD. The *Meccan Quran* did not allow Muslims to retaliate the pagans' aggression. Instead, it repeatedly and explicitly commanded them to remain patient. The use of force becomes permissible after the *hijra* of the prophet. The Medinian Quran was revealed to permit the use of force. There are three verses that sum up the governing rules of war. These are:

- Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged-God has the power to help them-those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, 'Our Lord is God.' If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. [Quran 22:39-40].
- Fight in God's cause against those who fight you, but do not step the limits: God does not love those who overstep the limits. [Quran 2:190]
- But if they incline towards peace, you [Prophet] must also incline towards it, and put your trust in God: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing. [Quran 8:61]

The first verse is the first Quran revealed in Medina pertaining to the theme of war. It gives the Muslim community the permission to retaliate to the hostilities of the enemies. This war is an *option* and is justified for defending religious freedom. The second verse identifies the individuals to be fought and it warns Muslims from exceeding the limits. The Arabic command used to refer to 'do not overstep the limits' is '*la ta'tadu*.' This is a general inclusive word, the

commentators “have agreed that it includes prohibition of starting hostilities, fighting non-combatants, disproportionate response to aggression, etc.” The excess of limits is further explained by the Prophet in his instruction to his army such as his call to forward in the name of Allah, with Allah and upon the religion of the Messenger of Allah. His instructions not kill an old person, a child or a woman. His prohibition to transgress the limits or to still and his preference to consider reconciliation.¹⁴⁴ The last verse governing the rules of war urges the cessation of hostilities in case the enemy inclines towards peace.

The verses stated earlier¹⁴⁵ suggest that the forceful Repel (the armed struggle) may become necessary under certain conditions¹⁴⁶ such as self-defense. This is meant to reflect that the relationship between individuals and nations is one of peace and not of war: “People, We created you from a single man and a single woman, and made you into tribes so that you should get to know one another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful to Him: God is all knowing, all aware. [Quran: 49:13]. The peaceful attitude of the Quran is further manifested by the Prophet’s amnesty to the pagans after he re-entered Mecca in triumph, as well as in his treaties with the Jews upon his arrival to Medina.

The Peaceful Repel

At the other end of the spectrum is *jihad*. It presents the pacific attitude of the notion of Repel which consists of the exerted effort to argue for the claimed truth. The use of the word *jihad* to denote the peaceful path of Repel may sound unusual, especially if the meaning of *jihad* is contrasted with the definitions provided by the main English dictionaries and encyclopedias. In

¹⁴⁴ See Muhammad Abedl Haleem, *Understanding the Quran Themes and Styles*, 63-64.

¹⁴⁵ On page 87, Quran 22-39-40; 2:190; 8:61.

¹⁴⁶ To read more about the justifications and conditions for war in Islam see Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Quran Themes and Styles*, 59-70.

these references, jihad is coined with the idea of a holy war waged against unbelievers to propagate Islam. It is important to note that “The term “Holy war” is of Western origin; it is not used in Islam.”¹⁴⁷ This misrepresentation of jihad seems to appear for the first time in the 19th century¹⁴⁸ and is still circulating as such in certain contemporary dictionaries¹⁴⁹ and encyclopedias.¹⁵⁰

I use the word jihad to describe the peaceful route of Repel for two main reasons. First, because the Quran used this word for the same purpose: “strive hard against them with this Qur’an.” [Quran 25:52]. The Arabic word for ‘strive hard’ is ‘*jaahidhum*,’ which means to carry on the action of jihad with the Quran. This Meccan verse commands the Prophet to take the Quran, and not the sword, as his tool for jihad. I will explain later that jihad with Quran is about argumentation characterized by the call upon humans to rule themselves by rational thinking and not by caprice. My second reason is the obvious distinction between the usage of the word jihad and the word fight in the Quran. The Meccan Quran does not use the word jihad to refer or to

¹⁴⁷ Cyril Glasse, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 269. Cyril’s note that “Holy war” is not used in Islam further supported by Abdelhaleem who affirms that: “Another term which is misunderstood and misrepresented is jihad. This does not mean ‘Holy War’. ‘Holy War’ does not exist as a term in Arabic, and its translation into Arabic sounds quite alien. The term which is specifically used in the Qur’an for fighting is *qital*. Jihad can be argumentation (25:52), financial help or actual fighting.” Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Quran Themes and Styles*, 62.

¹⁴⁸ See for example the entry for the term Jihad in *The Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, the use of the word Jihad as a “Holy War” is traced back to 1865 onwards. J. A. Simpson and E.S.C Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1989), VIII 238. Stuart Berg Flexner, ed. *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1993), 1029.

¹⁴⁹ For example, in the Canadian Oxford Dictionary Jihad means “a holy war undertaken by Muslims for the propagation or defence of Islam.” Katherine Barber, *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 757.

¹⁵⁰ For example, in Cyril’s Concise Encyclopedia jihad is a “‘Holy war”, a Divine institution of warfare to extend Islam into the *dar al-harb* (the non-Islamic territories which are described as the “abode of struggle”, of disbelief) or to defend Islam from danger.” Cyril Glass, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Singapore: Stacy International, 2010), 240.

Moreover, in Cyril’s New Encyclopedia of Islam, the term “Holy war” is replaced by “obligatory military service” yet it is still define as a “divine institution of warfare”: “The term “Holy war” is of Western origin; it is not used in Islam, and has become an inflammatory term, which could well be replaced by “obligatory military service.” Jihad is a divine institution of warfare.” Cyril Glass, *The new encyclopedia of Islam*, 269.

mean war. Instead the term is used to refer to a non-violent inner or outer struggle manifested in a code of conduct aimed at pleasing Allah. The word ‘fight’ and ‘fight in the way of Allah’ is custom to the Medinian Quran and it refers to particular wars that happened back then. Jihad in the Medinian Quran is used in few instances to signify a broader meaning of struggle which may or may not include an armed struggle. Though I do not deny that in Islamic religion and jurisprudence, jihad in its broader meaning involves an armed struggle regulated by strict rules as I noted earlier. However, I want to use the term jihad in its original peaceful meaning as used by the Quran.

Part 3: Repel According to the Quran: The Conception of the Truth

The Concept of Truth

A meticulous reading¹⁵¹ of the Quran and the Sunnah suggests that the idea of truth has two different conceptions. The first speaks about an explicitly and definite truth. I call this first kind of truth the Pronounced Truth. The second is about a possible envisioning of truth, to which I give the name of the Silent Truth.

The Pronounced Truth appears regularly in the Quran, yet it is very limited in numbers. It involves the main issues pertaining to the fundamental Islamic tenets such as the existence and the oneness of God, the existence of the Day of Judgment, the truth of the Prophet Muhammad and similar fundamental beliefs. When the Quran speaks about these issues, the meaning of the verses is obvious and does not allow different plausible meanings or interpretations. Take for

¹⁵¹ This is my personal reading to the Quran.

example the verse that reads: “God: there is no god but Him,” [Quran: 3:3]. The obvious meaning, at least in the Arabic language, is the denial of the existence of any divine other than God. This same obvious meaning is frequently repeated in other verses, which may be different in form but it has similar sense like “Say, ‘He is God the One’” [Quran: 112: 1]. Further, Muslim scholars and theologians do not dispute the apparent meaning of The Pronounced Truth. For example, Muslims theologians held strong disagreement on particular subjects pertaining to the concept of divine such as God’s attributes but such disagreement doesn’t amount to engage in a dispute on whether the divine does exist or not or if it is one or more.

In contrast, the Silent Truth appears sporadically in the Quran. And though the verses from which Silent Truths can be deduced is limited in number, Muslims scholars however, rarely achieve a consensus on the meaning of those verses. Often these verses are highly disputed. The Silent Truth involves issues pertaining to the Islamic jurisprudence and to a lesser degree the Islamic theology. As an example, Quran: 4:6, commands the believing Muslims to “Test orphans until they reach marriageable age; then if you find they have sound judgment, give their property to them.” In this verse, it is clear that orphans are entitled to their property if they reach marriageable age and if they have sound judgment. What is not clear however, and is highly disputed is the determination of the ‘what’ and the ‘who:’ What is the marriageable age? What does it mean to be at this marriageable age and to have a sound judgment? Who should test the orphans and who decides if they meet the conditions? Is it the entrusted person, the judge or another party? Does it has to be an authority or not? The same is true to the Prophetic Sunnah. The Sunnah of the prophet is open for different interpretations and the prophet himself allowed different reading to his command as in the example of “none should offer the ‘*Asr*’ prayer but at

Bani Quraiza.”¹⁵² Some of the Companions understood the command literally, therefore gave primacy to the location even if they miss the proper time of the prayer. The other group looked at the spirit of the command and understood it as an order to hasten to the location; therefore they gave priority to the timing of the prayer and not its location. The prophet “did not blame anyone of them.”¹⁵³ In other words, the Prophet refrained from giving preference to one interpretation over the other.

Muslim scholars responded to the openness of the text by developing different methodologies by which they approach the Quran and the Sunnah. The four famous Sunni juridical schools, the Hanafite, the Malikite, the Shafi’te and the Hanbali, are just an example of the different ways the Quranic and Prophetic texts can be codified. The difference of approaches to the Quran and Sunnah in pursuit of Silent Truths features the intellectual richness of the traditional Muslim mind.

To sum up, the Pronounced Truth is mainly found in the Meccan Quran. The number of the Truth Pronounced is very limited but its supporting arguments are diverse and numerous. The Silent Truth, however, lies mostly in the Medinian Quran. It consists of a limited number of texts, opened for interpretation. The Pronounced Truth is also present in the Medianin Quran, but to a lesser degree. The Pronounced Truth stated in the Medinian Quran is either a Truth already proclaimed in the Meccan Quran, or a new Truth declared as a result of the new condition posed by the *hijra* of the prophet. For example, the belief in the oneness of Allah and the belief in the Day of Judgement are stressed in the Meccan Quran because the Quran deals mainly with the Arab pagans. But the state of Jesus is addressed in the Medinian Quran due to the encounter with

¹⁵² Fuwad Abdul Baqi, *Al-Lu’lu’ wal-Marjan*, Hadith no. 1158.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, Hadith no. 1158.

the Christians. Lastly, it is important to note that there is more Meccan Quran (87 chapters), than Medinian Quran (27 chapters). It is important in part because the Meccan Quran emphasizes argumentations.

I draw this comparison between the Meccan and the Medinian Quran to conclude that:

(a) The Meccan Quran wants to engage human beings in a self-examination in an attempt to liberate reason, and consequently assess important truth in a rational way. The Meccan Quran is doing so by listing a very limited number of Pronounced Truths but focusing more on argumentations.

(b) The Medinian Quran gives the supposedly rational mind the opportunity to treat the sacred text as an open body, and consequently allows the Muslim community to run their own affairs with the least interference from the Quran itself. The Medinian Quran is doing so by limiting the number of the judicial texts and emphasising their openness for different reading.

(c) The Truth could be pronounced and could be silent. The Pronounced Truth consists of a definite claim. The Silent Truth involves an attempt to envision a plausible claim. Both, the Pronounced and the Silent Truth, plead for argumentation as a way of contesting claimed truths.

This conclusion is further confirmed by the inclusive approach of the prophet in governing the city of Medina, “Consult them about matters,” [Quran: 3:158]. This approach led to an ongoing debate among the Companions of the Prophet in their concerned matters. Moreover, the extensive literatures penned by Muslim scholars and thinkers during the first centuries of Islam documents the creative critical attitude of the Muslim mind. Muslims are

united by their belief, but never adhere to a uniform thinking. They developed sciences and codified methodologies for the purpose of understanding their sacred text; “The Qur’an was the starting point for all the Islamic sciences: Arabic grammar was developed to serve the Qur’an, the study of Arabic phonetics was pursued in order to determine the exact pronunciation of Qur’anic words, the science of Arabic rhetoric was developed in order to describe the features of the inimitable style of the Qur’an, the Qur’an is the basis of Islamic law and theology.”¹⁵⁴ In the time of the famous caliph Harun al-Rashid, Baghdad became the most glamorous city in the world, famed for its library, *baytu al Hikma* (the House of Wisdom). In short, Islam, whose etymology means submission and also peace wants the human mind to surrender to a rational thinking, a task that cannot be achieved without *Repel* or *jihad* in examining arguments and contesting claims.

The Quran Debates

The Quran promotes conditioned argumentation and documents the kind of debates occurred at the time of revelation. These debates highlight three features of the practical meaning of *Jihad* with Quran, the *Repel* by means of argumentation. First, the debate should be in a restrained language, “[Believers], argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, [Quran: 29:46]. Second, an *encouragement to think without dependence on the Sacred Quran, an external authority*. And thirdly, the debate should be in a language that understood and accepted by the contenders. I would like to refer to the Meccan Quran 36:78-83, to briefly clarify these second and third features. The verses say:

¹⁵⁴ M. A. SA. Abdel Halem, *The Qur’an English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), xi.

Can man not see that We created him from a drop of fluid? Yet-lo and behold!-he disputes openly, producing arguments against Us, forgetting his own creation. He says, ‘Who can give life back to bones after they have decayed?’ Say, ‘He who created them in the first place will give them life again: He has full knowledge of every act of creation. It is He who produces fire for you out of green tree-lo and behold-!and from this you kindle fire. Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the likes of these people? Of course He is! He is all Knowing Creator: when He wills something to be, His way is to say, “Be”-and it is! So glory be to Him in whose Hand lies control over all things. It is to Him that you will all be brought back.

The following table sums up the different elements of the debate:

Topic of the debate	Resurrection	
	The Quran	The Arab Pagans
Contenders		
Position of each party	Resurrection is possible	Resurrection is not possible
Premises	Both parties agreed that: Human is <i>created</i> form a drop fluid, [Quran: 56:62]. Allah is their creator, [Quran: 43:87]. Allah is the <i>creator</i> of the heaven and earth, [Quran: 43:9]	
Arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the creation from a drop fluid is possible, than the <i>re-creation</i> of the decayed bone should be possible too. • The one who can create the first time can create another time. • It is possible to produce something (fire) from its opposite (<i>green tree</i>). • The one who has the capability of creating the heaven and earth, should have the capability to re- 	It is not possible to produce something (life) from its opposite (decayed bones).

	create humans after their death.	
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The point made from this summary of the debate is not to discuss the validity of the arguments put forth by the Quran, but to stress the nature of the Quranic debate. This debate is carried on with premises accepted to the contenders, in a language they know well, with a variety of evidences they can understand, and more important without dependence on external authority.

The Quran did not make a mere declaration of the Truth of the Resurrection and asked people to believe in it just because it is stated in the revelation. Instead, the Quran pronounced its claimed truth and produced arguments to justify it. The Quran wants its contender to re-think their position and examine the arguments in a rational way.

The same pattern of the Meccan Quranic debate occurs with the Medinian Quran where Muslims encountered the People of the Book. In the city of Medina, the contenders are the Jews and the Christian. The two main topics of the debates are the Truth the Prophet and the divinity of Jesus. The Medinian Quran argues differently but the elements of the debate are the same. For example, in Meecca, the pagans denied the Truth of the prophet but believed in the prophethood of other messengers such as Ibrahim and Moses. The argument of the Quran was very simple, it consists of a reminder: “Say, ‘I am nothing new among God’s messengers,” [Quran: 46:9]. In other words the Quran says that to believe that God had messengers and God sent down revelation then denying the *possibility* of having another messenger and sending down another revelation does not resonate with rational thinking. In Medina, the argument employed against the People of the Book, particularly the Jews, consist of a referential to their own scriptures: “When God sent them a messenger confirming the Scriptures they already had, some of those

who had received the Scripture before threw the Book of God over their shoulders as if they had no knowledge,” [Quran 2:101].

The debate with the Christians involves analogy and a call to re-think the possible attributes of God. The first argument is exemplified in Quran: 3:58: “In God’s eyes Jesus is just like Adam: He created him from dust, said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was.” The analogy used here is to demonstrate the fallacy of the argument that the miraculous birth of Jesus is an evidence for his divinity. The Quran’s argues that if the miraculous creation of someone justifies his divinity, then Adam should be a divine too. If the miraculous creation of someone does not justify his divinity, then Jesus is not a divine. In Quran: 5:75, the Quran analogy is employed differently and is associated with the need to re-consider the nature of God’s attributes. The verse reads: “The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; other messengers had come and gone before him; his mother was a virtuous woman; both ate food [like other mortals]. See how clear We make these signs for them; see how deluded they are.” The analogy of the state of Jesus with other messengers is the first argument employed to conclude that Jesus should not have special state other than being a God’s messenger who produced miracles like previous messengers. The referral to ‘food’ in the second argument, “both ate food,” is meant to remind the contenders, who do acknowledge that Jesus feels hungry and wants food, that God cannot be in need or feel hungry.

The example of the debates stated above suggest that the Repel by means of argumentation is deeply rooted in the Meccan and the Medinian Quran. The model of these debates is insightful to the Muslim mind and a guide to the kind of the Islamic discourse to be produced. The Notion of Repel is, in my opinion, one effective way to construct a discourse that meets the challenges posed by the constant development in the world of ideas that characterize

our age. The Muslim mind should appeal to this notion and produce an Islamic discourse accordingly. The Islamic intellectual contribution should not be: “We do not make our religion, but we receive it and we obey it.” Yes, Muslims received their religion, but they are the ones who are interpreting it and actually divided it: “As for those who have divided their religion and broken up into factions, have nothing to do with them,” [Quran: 6:159].

Furthermore, the modest evolution of the Islamic disciplines is very disturbing. A brief review to the evolution of the discipline of Qur’anic studies affirms Mohammed Arkoon’s note that “the topics discussed, the areas of concern and the fundamental assumptions of the scholarly discipline have not changed significantly from the outline of them provided by Jalal al-Dine al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505) in the fifteenth century, itself based on a long heritage of Muslim scholarship on the Qur’an.”¹⁵⁵ The early centuries of Islam pictures an innovative Muslim mind, successfully developing many areas of discipline including philology, Jurisprudence, ethics, mysticism, theology, philosophy, literature and rhetoric, to name but few. The Muslim mind needs to engage in debates with restrained tone in order to suggest new ideas, revise notions, or challenge claims. Omar ibn Abdel Aziz (d. 720) appealed to the politics of Repel to settle the political dispute that sparked a furious civil war. In his letter to the head of the seceders, Omar invited his opponents to a debate to address the conflict saying: “It was brought to my knowledge that you revolted out of anger for Allah and his Messenger, and you are not more concerned than me [in following in such anger]. Come and debate me. If the truth lies in our hand, join what people have joined, and if it is in yours, we re-examine our affairs.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Andrew Rippin, “Western Scholarship and the Qur’an,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 242.

¹⁵⁶ Hassan Ibrahim Hassan, *The political, Religious, Cultural and Social Islamic History* (Beirut: Daar AlJell, 2001), Volume 1, 314.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the meaning of liberalism in light of the Quran. I proposed that the Quran aims at the liberation of reason and its emancipation from the custody of the supernatural. The notion of *Repel* by means of argumentation is the venue by which reason can be liberated. It encourages concerned actors to contest truth claims in a restrained tone and a understandable language. The Notion of *Repel* stresses an open debate which can be effective in society that wants to pursue its own conception of good life with least interference from the control of government or religious institutions.

Moreover, the Western studies of Islam progressed from the perception of the Quran as a “plot against Christianity”¹⁵⁷ to a scholarly approach to a book that gained “its rightful place as an element in the study of world literature.”¹⁵⁸ Despite this trend, the Quran is still treated as “a text which is attempting to convey a message, it divides the world into those who respond to its message and those who do not.”¹⁵⁹ Hence, “From the perspective of the Qur’an the issue is thus one of religious truth.”¹⁶⁰ In my view, the message of the Quran should not be limited to a religious truth which may be accepted or rejected. Whether one approaches the Quran with or without confessional (‘secular’) attitude, the Quran should be perceived as a spring of knowledge constantly awaiting new readers to unfold novel ideas. For instance, the flexibility of the Islamic law vastly improved the conditions of women in the medieval Arabia, restricting polygamy, abolishing female infanticide, allowing women free will in marriage and the ability to initiate

¹⁵⁷ Andrew Rippin notes that “For medieval writers, effective polemic was to be grounded in secure knowledge even if they concluded that the Qur’an is a mixture of falsehood and truth and part of a conspiratorial plot against Christianity.” Andrew Rippin, “Western Scholarship and the Qur’an,” 238.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 236.

divorce. The Notion of Repel by means of argumentation has the potential to pave the way for a lengthy journey that engage concerned actors in a debate to better overcome the challenges of our age.

Chapter 5

The Next Step: Deliberative Democracy, A Practical Mechanism for the Theory of Daf'

In the previous chapter, I wanted to demonstrate that the notion of *Repel* is a process of argumentation deeply rooted in the Quran. According to this notion, the truth is attained through convincing rational contestation. However, there is no specific way on how the notion *Repel* could be translated into a normative mechanism that regulates the welfare of the society.

In this last part of my thesis, I would like to center my commentary on a normative model of democracy that privileges deliberation among citizens, namely the deliberative model of democracy as argued by Seyla Benhabib. In my opinion, this model of democracy provides a practical framework for the theory of *Repel*.

Benhabib investigates how a “universalistic public morality may be reconciled with an orientation sensitive to the particularities of cultural differences.”¹⁶¹ She engages in an insightful conversation with multiculturalist theorists to unveil the limitation of multiculturalism as a normative ideal for a pluralistic society and proposes a different form of dialogical understanding in the public sphere of civil society.

My aim in this chapter is to briefly outline Benhabib’s deliberative model of democracy “that incorporates features of practical rationality.”¹⁶² I will first, illustrate Benhabib’s critique of

¹⁶¹ Maria Herrera Lima, “Who judges Democracy and the dilemmas of multiculturalism, Commentary to the Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era, by Seyla Benhabib,” in *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 31 no. 7 (Sage Publication), pp. 727-737.

¹⁶² According to Benhabib, “A deliberative model of democracy suggests a necessary but not sufficient condition of practical rationality.” Seyla Benhabib, “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,” in *Democracy*

multiculturalism by citing a concrete example of how culture compromises the institutional sphere of legal proceeding and therefore neglects the very basic right of an individual. Next, I will provide Benhabib's understanding to democracy which insists on legitimacy and rationality. I will explain that central to this understanding is the possibility of a free public deliberation about matter of shared concern to all. This deliberation is based on a discourse ethic that recognizes each participant as free and equal. Finally, I will highlight the main critiques pertaining to the practicality of Benhabib's deliberative model and provide her convincing response to these critiques and the ability for this model to aspire to change through actual case.

Benhabib's Critique of Multiculturalism

Benhabib elucidates the conflict between right claims to cultural difference and universalist human-rights norms by citing series of referenced¹⁶³ legal cases involving immigrant defendants in which "the defense presented, and the prosecutor or court accepted, cultural evidence as an excuse for the otherwise criminal conduct of immigrant defendants." One of these cases speaks of a Japanese-American mother who drowns her two young children and then attempts to kill herself. Rescuers save her before she drowns. The children's recovered bodies bear deep bruises where they struggled as their mother held them under the water. The mother later explains that in Japan, where she is from, her actions would be understood as the time-

and Difference: Contesting Boundaries of the Political, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 87.

¹⁶³ Benhabib referred to the article of Doriane Lambelet Coleman, from the Harvard University School of Law, entitled "*Individualizing Justice through Multiculturalism: The Liberals Dilemma*," published in 1966 by Columbia Law Review. The article is available online at: http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=faculty_scholarship

honored custom of parent-child suicide, prompted in this case by the unfaithfulness of her husband. She spends only the year that she is on trial in jail. In other words, she was acquitted.

In this case, the official decision appears to confirm the assumption that the “moral culpability of an immigrant defendant should be judged according to his or her own cultural standards”¹⁶⁴, rather than those of the relevant jurisdiction. Although no individual state recognizes legally the use of cultural evidence as exoneration, some commentators and judges have called this the strategy of “cultural defence.”

This “cultural defense” strategy exemplifies the extent to which the claims of culture are used to excuse some perpetrators from criminal prosecution. Moreover, the acceptance by the courts of different cultural norms undermines the normative aspects of multiculturalism itself. In fact, the purpose of considering the cultural defense into criminal cases is to ensure a fair trial to the defendant through contextualizing his or her actions in light of his or her own background. Nonetheless, in doing justice to the defendant, injustice is done to the victim who belongs to the very same culture. Hence, Benhabib concludes, that the cultural defense strategy “imprisons the individual in a cage of univocal cultural interpretations and psychological motivations; individuals’ intentions are reduced to cultural stereotypes; moral agency is reduced to cultural puppetry.”¹⁶⁵

Benhabib’s critique of multiculturalism is not limited to highlighting the obvious limitation of the cultural defence strategy or the discriminatory aspects of certain cultures, particularly towards women and children. She takes issue with the multiculturalists’ claim that the preservation of culture is an individual and a group right that needs to be recognized.

¹⁶⁴ Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Cultures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 87.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

Benhabib's critic contends that multiculturalism argument for the preservation of culture acknowledges the existence of a pure version of culture and the need for its protection. In doing so, multiculturalists are crippling culture its ability to hybridity. Benhabib argues that culture is not a whole, distinct or self-contained body. Culture, in her view, is overlapping and interactive. Therefore it has the ability to adapt to changes in circumstances. The lure of the preservation argument obscures the dynamic feature of culture and consequently its ability to embrace changes.

Instead of multiculturalism, Benhabib pleads for a deliberative model of democracy which acknowledges a genuinely global moral cosmopolitanism, transcends group attachment, and engages affected parties in a fair deliberation for the purpose of achieving an agreement.

A Deliberative Model of Democracy

Benhabib's deliberative model of democracy deals with the moral foundation of democracy and the communicative ethical procedure of democratic institutions in a complex democratic societies. She provides an account on when and why democracy is desirable, and what she takes to be fair legitimate process of political outcomes. This passage helps to clarify her view on democracy:

Democracy, in my view, is best understood as a model for organizing collective and public exercise of power in the major institutions of a society on the basis of the principle that decisions affecting the well-being of a collectivity can be viewed as the outcome of a

procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals.¹⁶⁶

According to this understanding of democracy, a free well-functioning democratic society requires that the moral and the norms governing our polity be justifiable and acceptable to all those members over whom the political rules intend to have authority. The procedure for achieving political decisions on matters of mutual concerns is deemed to be legitimate if it is thought to be the result of an unconstrained public deliberation of all concerned members.

The outlook for this view on democracy is both desirable and justifiable. It is desirable because it demonstrates a practical conception of members as free and equal. The members are free in a sense that none of them is subjected to any other person's moral or political authority. And they are politically equal on the basis that all of them are equally situated with respect to the right to exercise power in the democratic institutions. This perception of democracy is also rationally justifiable by appeal to the argument that the political outcomes are the result of a public deliberation regulated by rules stipulated by the members themselves.

Under such circumstances, the norms governing the polity are morally grounded on the principles of freedom and equality. The communicative ethic of the procedure, characterized by an inclusive, collective discussion free from any internal or external coercion, is legitimate. Consequently, the political rules affecting the well-being of a collectivity can be rightly imposed on the members.

¹⁶⁶ Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," 68.

Benhabib's understanding of democracy privileges a deliberative model of democracy over other kind of normative consideration. The main future of this model of democracy is deliberation. However, it is important to clarify that deliberation here is not limited to a matter of argumentation, but more important about an *open process of working through contested choices*.

Benhabib wants all those who are affected by political decisions to have a voice in deliberations. Legitimacy and rationality are two necessary conditions of such deliberations. The extent to which a democratic deliberative process is fair and sound is measured by the inclusiveness of affected members in any given deliberation; "The more collective decision-making processes approximate this model the more increases the presumption of their legitimacy and rationality."¹⁶⁷

In order to effectively involve members of shared concern in an open deliberative process, Benhabib highlights three main futures for her model of deliberation. This passage outlines what she considers to be a legitimate and rational component of a collective decision making process:

Only those norms (i.e., general rules of action and institutional arrangements) can be said to be valid (i.e., morally binding), which would be agreed to by all those affected by their consequences, if such agreement were reached as a consequence of a process of deliberation that had the following features: 1) participation in such deliberation is governed by norms of equality and symmetry; all have the same chances to initiate speech acts, to question, to interrogate, and to open debate; 2) all have the right to question the assigned topics of conversation; and 3) all have the right to initiate reflexive arguments about the very rules of the discourse procedure and the way in which they are applied or carried out. (Benhabib 1996, 70)

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 69.

According to this passage, the democratic deliberative process assumes that argumentation is conducted fairly and rationally among free and equal individuals. The outcomes of the deliberation could lead to decision that would be accepted to all parties with common interest. Benhabib is confident that the open deliberative process itself has the potential to fairly engage all concerned parties, particularly those marginalized members whom their voices are left out. Why?

The deliberative model of democracy is based on a discourse ethic which requires that all those who are affected by the consequences of a norm have equal say in its validation. This is a necessary condition to attain legitimacy in deliberation while ensuring equality of opportunity. The argumentation among participants is set by an open-ended agenda, meaning that as long as the members are compliant by the norms they collectively gave to themselves, no rules can be introduced to limit the agenda of conversation or the identities of participants. By stressing upon the openness of the agenda for public debate in democratic institutions, no one can be said to be left behind, at least in theory. Any individual or group has equal opportunity to be part of the decision making. The deliberation among participants shall continue until a consensus is attained. Hence, the deliberative model permits plurality to concretize normative ideas in an open process that would be at the outreach of any individual or group.

The Enlarged Mentality and the Self-Examination in Deliberative Democracy

According to the ideal guidelines of deliberative democracy, the common interest of all who are affected should be the result of an inclusive public discussion free from any internal or external coercion. The affected participants, be individuals, institutions or agencies, have equal

right to challenge or to raise a point relevant to the topic at hand. There are no regulative rules imposing limits on who should participate or how participants should reason about public matters. The inclusive public discussion continues until a consensus is attained.

In the deliberative model of democracy, this inclusive public discussion is a process of reasoning among participants and not “a regulative principle imposing limits upon how individuals, institutions, and agencies ought to reason about public matters.” It is open to plurality of modes of associations and networks which arrange from political parties, to social movements, to voluntary associations, to citizen initiatives and the like. The main focus of this process is to force participants to articulate their views in public context and from the standpoint of all involved. Hence, the procedural generates public reasoning that transcends individual or group’s interest to include that of the collectivity involved in the discussion?

To further explain the process of public reasoning, one or more participant starts by bringing their views or wishes. They understand however those such views are subject to the concept of confirm or challenge. Any view must be confirmed on the basis that what appears to be good and doable for particular participants can also be considered so from the standpoint of all participants involved. In the course of deliberation, argumentation and exchange of views with other participants, one starts to see the issue from the wider angle of the collectivity, thus becomes more aware of the conflict and finds compelling to undertake a coherent ordering. The open debate process gives the individual an opportunity to self-examine their views and opinions and plunge them into further critical reflection on those views and opinions.

Critique and Reply

Critique to the deliberative model of democracy suggests that such model may be an ideal that works in theory but not in practice. First, this model insists on an inclusive public deliberation which is not plausible because “no modern society can organize its affairs along the fiction of a mass assembly carrying out its deliberations in public and collectivity.”¹⁶⁸ Second, since the deliberative model gives high degree to unanimity on public issues through open debate, one can suspect that such unanimity could be attained “at the cost of silencing dissent and curtailing minority viewpoints.”¹⁶⁹ A third critique to the deliberative model is related to the protection it can provide to minority “against the tyranny of democratic majorities”¹⁷⁰ from imposing their choices on them.

Benhabib recognizes these critiques as fair and relevant to other kinds of democratic theories that merits deliberation; “I believe that these objections are fair when raised against most versions of radical participatory democratic theories that also prioritize political deliberation.”¹⁷¹ Her convincing response rests on the identification of the arenas assigned to deliberation and the discourse theory of ethic on which the model stands on.

Benhabib explains that deliberative model of democracy doesn’t need to operate with the fiction of a general assembly. As stated earlier, this model works with a plurality of modes of associations which gives all those who are affected different venues in which they can articulate their views. The arena of operation includes, but not limited to, political parties, social movement, voluntary organizations and the like. These are the democratic institutions which organizes the open debates of concerned parties.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 77.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 77.

With respect to the second critique, the importance of the idea of a consensus cannot be overemphasized if a democratic theory is ought to seek a higher level of legitimacy in matters of mutual interest of a collectivity. The idea of deliberation is meant to widen the scope of discussion on issue of public interest among citizens in order to attain the welfare of the collectivity. The legitimacy of a democratic theory might be at stake if its political decisions are based on the result of a majority versus minority. This is because such decisions gives primacy to numbers and not necessary convictions of all affected. Consensus however, reflects confidence in the democratic institutions as a forum for an inclusive yet genuine debate. The need to attain the desirable outcomes gives assurance that the entire political process presents the interest of all affected and not limited to some of those involved.

As to the third critique pertaining to the protection against the tyranny of a majority who may impose its views on a minority, Benhabib's counter argument asserts that "*only the freely given assent of all concerned can count as a condition of having reached agreement in the discourse situation.*"¹⁷² The deliberative model presupposes a discourse ethic which proceeds from a view of individuals as equal and free. This discourse ethic entitles each participant to a reciprocal moral right. The recognition of this right engages all participants in a coercion-free political dialogue. Hence, the respect of one another's right to moral personality prevents the majority from dictating its view on a minority, while minorities find no need to speak with a victimized mind. In the deliberative model, the recognition of reciprocal moral right of each person keeps the focus of the participants on achieving an outcome accepted to all of them in an inviting moral political dialogue.

¹⁷² Ibid, 79.

One may further argue that the deliberative model naively presupposes the engagement between different groups in a complex pluralistic society can successfully generate civil mutually agreeable outcomes. In fact, in a highly polarized societies in which different cultures, ethnic and linguistic groups coexist; it may be better to minimize the encounter among these group and not to engage them into a most likely discursive discussion. Benhabib recognizes this reality and proposes a ‘cool off period’ that separates the various groups; “there are certainly instances when the actual separation of the various communities through political secession may be advisable.”¹⁷³

There are many factors that pose challenges to the practical functionality of the deliberative model. But, Benhabib is confident that when democratic will of the participants exists, then it will be possible to overcome these challenges and attain desirable outcomes. The discourse ethic wedded to her deliberative model may not necessarily present a blueprint for change, but it can help to measure the fairness and the legitimacy of certain practices and the motive to reform them. The Shah Bano case illustrates the way in which deliberative model of democracy can aspire to change. In this case, Shah Bano, an Indian woman, wants to reform the marriage and Divorce Act which she considers discriminatory to women. Under the Act, (1) the unilateral practices of polygamy and divorce gives obvious privilege to the male; (2) economically, the divorced woman is expected to become dependent upon her male relatives for her livelihood; and (3) the conviction that nothing can be done to change the circumstances so she can achieve independence. Shah Bano faces more difficulty from her spouse-an attorney who can manipulate the Indian courts on his behalf, but she was intelligent enough to resort to an Indian federal court in order to demand an increase in her level of alimony support. At first

¹⁷³ Benhabib, *The Claims of Cultures*, 122.

glance, it may seem that the discourse ethic of the deliberative model would be irrelevant in this matter because “the norms of moral autonomy and the principles of universal respect and egalitarian reciprocity are clearly contradicted by the hierarchical and inegalitarian practices of many of India’s subcommunities-Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and others.”¹⁷⁴ However, the affairs of Shah Bano has shed light on the tradition and the Muslim community found it necessary to reform the Marriage and Divorce Act in a way that is desirable to the affected party particularly women.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 115

Conclusion

My thesis addresses the challenges posed to the normative ideal of multiculturalism. I examine the efforts of Ramadan, Taylor and Benhabib to grapple with the difficulties of adopting normative ideals and searching for forms of civic identification that meet the democratic principles of political self-determination and equality, while at the same time fostering an inclusive environment in which minorities can sustain their distinctiveness irrespective of their affiliations and affinities.

In dealing with the complex relationship between religion, democracy and differences. I highlight the limitations of multiculturalism and propose a theory of liberation of reason, which I call the theory of *Daf'* (Repel), in order to address the myriad challenges spawned by this complex intermingling of political and cultural identities within liberal democratic societies. The theory of *Daf'* in the context of Benhabib's deliberative model of democracy complements the normative ideal of multiculturalism.

In conclusion,¹⁷⁵ I further advance the research on the topic of democracy and differences by suggesting that Western secular societies will continue to undergo a period of political and

¹⁷⁵ I draw my conclusion based on Hayward's chapter on the tension between democratic principles and civic ideals. I am interested in her suggestion that the definition of the civic "we" requires public contestation. Such suggestion provides me further insight into Ramadan's view on the "New We" addressed in the second chapter and Benhabib's call for public conversation. Hayward wants to render the tension between democratic and civic ideals "explicit, with the view to promoting democratic contestation over the definition of the civic "we." Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro and Danilo Petranovic, ed. *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances* (United States of America: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7.

See also Clarissa Rile Hayward, "Binding Problems, Boundary Problems: The Trouble with "Democratic Citizenship"" in *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*, Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro and Danilo, ed., 181-205.

religious ferment while developing the foundation of a hybrid cosmopolitan community. I want to sketch some insights this suggestion yields for those concerned with the kind of binding that relates people of such a community¹⁷⁶, and also whether the Quran, the Islam-binding belt, in particular reconciles with the idea of binding under the purview of a liberal model grounded on individualism.

Ethnicity, religiosity, shared values, citizenship and constitutional principles are examples of anchors that bind people together and allow them to form a unity or a distinct identity. In a homogenous society, the bond that unites citizens has the potential to encourage trust, solidarity and patriotism. At the same time, however, such civic ideals impel citizens to create a “social closure” and an exclusive political “we.” Oddly, this closure of the social and political “we,” inherent in the very notion of civic ideals, poses a critical problem for any democratic theory since democracy invokes the principles of equality and inclusiveness.

The tension between the democratic principles and the civic ideal is more obvious in a mosaic society whose members may be united by their citizenship but could be divided by their social allegiances and cultural or religious affinities. Furthermore, this tension becomes acute if democratic principles are intended to create a hybrid cosmopolitan community, as I suggest in this conclusion.

Cosmopolitanism expands the boundaries of moral concern. As such, it advances the democratic principles of inclusiveness and political self-determination, but unlike the notion of the civic ideal, it is plagued with the complex clusters of binding problems. The issue at stake is

¹⁷⁶ My primary concern is to identify the kind of binding that relates people from an Islamic perspective.

the identification of a possible political form of attachment that surmounts the perplexing binding problems while at the same time inspiring/fostering hybridity. To further highlight/exemplify the opacity of this issue, I refer to Islam and its grapple with modern secularism.

There are many reasons to think that unless Islam is secularized,¹⁷⁷ it will continue to create conditions that preclude the developing of a cosmopolitan community outside Islamic norms.¹⁷⁸ First, in Islam, there is no separation between religion and politics; second, there is no separation between public and private spheres since both are within the juristic purview of Islamic injunctions. Third, the Islamic community (*ummah*) has no geo-political representation. And, fourth, the Quran, though is a text that wields great influence over Muslims, but also is a source of tension¹⁷⁹ and cannot effectively respond to the hybridization of Muslims themselves. For instance, the Quran provides meaning to all kinds of readers.¹⁸⁰ From liberal modernist to traditionalist cleric, from moderate scholar to radical fundamentalist, the Quran is the supreme source of reference. Because of these reasons, one may claim that in theory, the idea of a hybrid cosmopolitan community is illusive, and the construction of such community is, in practice absurd.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ This is based on the claim that secularism is “a necessary stage that all cultural formations have to pass through if they are to progress towards modernity.” S. Sayyid, “contemporary Politics of Secularism” in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizen*, Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 190.

¹⁷⁸ To read more about secularism and Islam see S. Sayyid, “Contemporary Politics of Secularism,” 186-199.

¹⁷⁹ For instance Ferid Esack suggests that due to the influence of the Quran “it is reasonable to expect that it would become a rather weapon in the hands of those who have access to it and that various interest groups would compete for the right to own, access, and interpret it.” Ferid Esack, *The Qur’an: A User Guide* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 21-22.

¹⁸⁰ Esack notes that the Quran provides meaning to kinds of readers: “From the scholars to the Sufi, from the housewife desiring to stretch a meal to feed an extra mouth to the terrified child confronting an approaching dog, from the liberal modernist to the radical revolutionary; from the laid back traditionalist cleric to the klashinkov toting Afghan tribalist – the Qur’an provides meaning.” *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸¹ Due to the “battle,” as Esack’s says between “tradionalism and modernism.” *Ibid.*, 22.

To respond to this claim, I suggest that one should not treat Islam as a closed body. Islam is also a matter of intellectual research and philosophical inquiries. This is confirmed by the wide range of methods, approaches and ideologies applied when studying Islam. The scholarly discourse includes, but is not limited to, geographically focused, socio-historical, global political and ideological accounts, the sociology of religion, modernization studies and so forth. Each scholarly study brings its own lens to Islam.

Historically, Islam demonstrated its responsive contribution to hybridization. The harmony and tolerance that people of different religions enjoyed in Andalusia is one example. Nowadays, Muslims are an integral part of Western secular countries. This suggests that the notion of “Islam” and the “West” is an outdated topic and may amount to a distorted discourse. In fact, the focus should not be on “Islam” and the “West” but about Islam *in* the West. It is illuminating to note that there is a significant population of Muslims who know nothing of being separated from the West.

In my view, the Quran is an active speech of God addressing itself to every age. From this perspective, the Quran provides a social, economic and political binding. The challenging task, however, is to interpret the Quranic message creatively. To this end, I suggest that the Quran is not concerned with the issue of binding but looks for the communicative foundations. I ground this claim on the Quran which reads: “People, We created you from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should *recognize one another*,” [Quran 49:13]. I argue that the idea of “recognize one another” can be established in the form of a civic association.

I take this claim further and propose that the emergence of a cosmopolitan community does not require a binding of any kind. It needs political contestation, which is sufficient to connect people, while at the same time it allows them to maintain their distinctiveness and separateness. The cosmopolitan community to come does not in need to form a unity or a distinct identity but is content with bringing together citizens for political association.

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