

INTRODUCTION: MUSLIMS IN NEW ZEALAND

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Muslims in New Zealand may be viewed from at least two angles. Viewed from New Zealand, they represent a part of the recent immigration that is beginning to change the face of this society from its Maori and Anglo-Celtic past. They are a relatively small part of this movement, but are distinctive and high-profile for various reasons. Viewed from the world outside, they are one of the smallest and most far-flung tentacles of the modern Muslim diaspora, which has brought several million Muslims to live as minorities in Western countries, thus inaugurating a different relationship between Muslims and the West from that which had existed before. These Western countries can no longer quite be *dar al harb* (the Abode of War), as the old Islamic tradition had it, since Muslims have come to them voluntarily in search of a better life, but they are certainly not *dar al Islam* (the Abode of Islam), since Muslims are minorities in them and Western life-styles are at variance with Muslim life-styles in many ways. The New Zealand Muslim community is even smaller than most other Muslim diaspora communities, both in absolute numbers—about 40,000—and as a percentage of the population—about one percent.

New Zealand has in fact hosted Muslim immigrants for more than a hundred years, although little is known of the very first ones. Mainly from East and South Asia, as far as is known, they were very few in numbers, individuals rather than family groups, miners and possibly sailors arriving on these shores, deciding to stay for a time or permanently. At first hardly noticed, there are only sparse references to their presence in historic records.

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We do not know whether they were devout or Muslim only in name, or indeed in many cases whether they were Muslim at all or rather Hindu, or Sikh. In most cases they or their descendants were assimilated into the larger community.

This situation has changed markedly. Though only one percent of the total population, Muslims form a noticeable ingredient in the population mix of the urban landscape. Places of Islamic worship, easily identified by their distinctive architecture, spring up in all major cities and traditional Islamic dress is proudly displayed by both genders, especially for *jummah*, the Friday prayers at the mosque. Muslims make their contribution in the schools, in the workplace, on the sports field, in various community activities and in politics, even in Parliament.

Although often thought of by outsiders as a single, coherent community, New Zealand's Muslims represent a wide diversity of religious orientations, of ethnicities and of class and educational backgrounds. In some ways these differences are as intense as they are in the so-called Muslim world. It is certainly not true, as many New Zealanders think (and some Muslims wish it were the case), that all Muslims are the same. These differences, which hamper or even prevent unity here, mostly reflect divisions and tensions in other parts of the Muslim world. At the religious level there is the division between Sunnis and Shi'is, and the division between those who affirm popular celebrations and 'folk' customs and those who stress Islam as presented in the authoritative texts and consider many of the folk customs as unwarranted innovations. The latter is illustrated in New Zealand in the disagreement between those who stress the celebration of the Prophet's birthday and those who reject it. Also, there is a division between those who insist on a more liberal interpretation of Islamic rules and prescriptions and those, often labelled 'fundamentalists', 'Salafi' or even 'Wahhabi', who insist on a strict interpretation. This is quite prominently reflected in attitudes toward rules and practices relating to gender, but not only in these.

Ethnic differences are still more divisive, as New Zealand Muslims now reflect most of the huge geographic expanse from Morocco in the West to Indonesia and the Philippines in the East, and from central Asia and the Balkans in the North to sub-Saharan Africa in the South that is the Muslim world. The variation in both secular and religious customs over this expanse is considerable. Differences in secular customs spill over into religious activities and there is some tendency for each ethnic group to see its own religious customs as true Islam and other groups' customs as un-Islamic innovations. Ethnic interactions may be intense in a small community, but they have less chance to institutionalise themselves, e.g. in ethnically-specific mosques. The small size of the community *vis-à-vis* the larger society means that radical and rejectionist ideologies should have little long term appeal. It

is not large enough to provide the kind of enclaves in which such attitudes of separation might flourish.

There are, on the other hand, strong forces for unity. Practically, in the face of discrimination and other pressures from the host society, any group of immigrants will tend to pull together to support each other and defend what they value and share. Ideally, Islam is in principle one set of doctrines and Muslims are one *umma* (community, nation), a point repeatedly stressed by reformers and radicals for the last century and accepted in principle at some level by virtually all Muslims. This ideal has always been a reality to the extent that the most basic practices, such as *salat* (formal prayer), are uniform throughout the Muslim world. Bringing such diverse groups together under diasporic conditions may lead people to emphasise what they have in common. This, combined with the distinctive New Zealand environment, could in time produce a New Zealand-specific form of Islam.

There is the important issue of Muslim adaptation to 'Kiwi' society, something that will vary from one group of Muslims to another, but which is also subject to certain common factors. Issues arise from the side of the host society and from the side of the Muslim community. Although New Zealand society is generally tolerant and *laissez-faire*, especially in matters of religion, and increasingly pluralist and practically multicultural, Muslims here do suffer some degree of prejudice arising from the fact that they are different. From the Muslim side, ethnic customs are often hard enough to give up or modify, but when the practices, which are at variance with those of the host society, are seen to be religiously of fundamental significance, compromise is all the more difficult. Issues such as women's garb, food habits or getting time off from work or school illustrate this. The fact that many see Islam not just as a belief system, but as a total way of life, increases the likelihood of these problems. Muslims do not have the long tradition of diasporic accommodation that Judaism has, though they may in time acquire it.

Thus, the division between the so-called West and the Islamic world, the Occident and the Orient of old, becomes increasingly blurred. In previous centuries these concepts referred to a geographic as well as a cultural distinction in a world that was still clearly delineated. This straightforward categorisation no longer holds true in an increasingly complex and intertwined present-day reality. Not only has Western culture made strong cultural inroads into the Orient, but a substantial part of this new complexity has been contributed by the fact that millions of Muslims over recent decades have moved to the West, and, taking their religion, their way of life and their world view with them, have established there a noticeable cultural presence of the 'Islamic world'.

Underlying this is a more pervasive, deeper and more difficult issue. The West is not just a cipher for a geographical region, it is a symbol for a

way of life, a *Weltanschauung* of a set of cultures that have developed democratic states, and become highly secularised and anthropocentric in outlook, some enclaves of religionism, traditionalism and theocentrism notwithstanding. The Muslim world, by contrast, still draws its basic values and much of its day-to-day practice from its religion. This is true to a considerable degree even of its more secularised elements. These two, fundamentally different world views sit uneasily together. The secularist irreverence towards religious values gives frequent offence, when it tolerates or even encourages 'immoral' behaviour, or directly attacks the sacred as in cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad or the 'Virgin in a condom'. Conversely, Muslim beliefs and sensitivities remain alien and 'bizarre' to Westerners, and are often seen as uncivilised and a threat to freedom and 'human rights'. This applies on the world scale, where Muslims and Westerners still largely view each other across state borders, but in some ways more intensely in the diaspora where Muslims feel they are surrounded by 'immorality' and Westerners have these 'strange' people as neighbours. In both cases, the West has at least material dominance and Muslims often feel under siege.

Thus, as globalisation has in most recent decades brought a wave of Muslim immigrants to the West, their search for a better material existence and to escape conflict and oppression at home, has not always delivered peace and satisfaction, or a sense of strong identification with the host society. Muslims' old loyalties often remain strong, grating against the relentless politics of domination exercised by the West *vis-à-vis* the Islamic world. Secularised *laissez-faire* tolerance, now underpinned by human rights guarantees, well-intentioned as it may be, may create its own problems.

In the Muslim world at large in recent decades, this situation has stimulated radical Islamic political ideologies, such as those of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran, Maulana Mawdudi in Pakistan and Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt. The ideologies they generated are anti-Western and call for a thorough Islamisation and de-secularisation of society, including government. Such ideologies could not be implemented in their full form in the diaspora, where Muslims have insufficient numbers and power. But the writings of those mentioned are widely read in the diaspora and the ideologies do appeal to some, especially those who are or feel marginalised by the host society.

Muslims are undoubtedly conspicuous as an immigrant group in New Zealand. However, it is not that which in recent years has drawn public attention to their presence. It is rather international events, events happening overseas far from these shores, which have brought New Zealand Muslims into the focus of, often unfavourable, attention, in an otherwise pluralist, multicultural, multi-religious and *laissez-faire* tolerant society. The most obvious impact on New Zealand Muslims comes from the dramatic and

violent events, inspired by radical ideologies, such as 9/11 in New York and 7/7 in London, events far from these shores but making their impact on New Zealand (see Allen 2004). These events more than anything else have put Muslims into the focus of attention, world-wide and locally, raising questions about the characteristic nature of Islam and about the peacefulness or otherwise of Muslims. The events of 9/11 and subsequent extremist attacks have raised questions about the quintessential nature of Islam and about whether Muslims can be trusted as citizens of the West. In the subsequent wave of demonising Islam and stereotyping Muslims as dangerous fanatics, the term *jihadist*—a person striving to be a good Muslim—has become virtually synonymous with terrorist.

Although few, if any of New Zealand's Muslims themselves have done anything to warrant this kind of unfavourable image, it is a global reality they have to live with. Probably most of the occasional acts of violence against Muslim persons or property can be linked to this. Even when there is no violence or even bad intention, the prevalence of this image in the media tends to create a difficult atmosphere, a certain wariness of Muslims as such, short of Islamophobia, but sufficient to impede any multiculturalist, Islam-friendly discourse. Sufficient, also, to lead those responsible for national security to target Muslims more than they otherwise would.

While most media attention goes to these divisive events, there are forces no less important working for reconciliation. In Europe and America there are many groups involved in dialogue and cooperation in both religious and ethnic terms. Prominent Muslim intellectuals such as Mohammed Arkoun, Tariq Ramadan and Bassam Tibi have become strong advocates for mutual rapport and peaceful coexistence and propagate a form of Euro-Islam which teases out doctrinal principles and modifies their applicability in order to make them fit European or Western conditions. Here in New Zealand organised efforts at dialogue and cooperation are relatively new, but are making headway and appear to be well received on the Muslim side. At least some New Zealand Muslims are consciously interested in developing a 'Kiwi'-specific Islam, one capable of engaging in a dialogue with the host community and being recognised by multicultural policies. The small size and diversity of the community could favour this development. The tolerant and open nature of New Zealand society will also give space for a 'Kiwi'-specific Islam—perhaps more readily so than elsewhere—and lead New Zealand society increasingly to embrace multiculturalism. Much will of course depend on the leadership of the Muslim community, something it is still too early to judge.

The questions loom large: What will shape the Muslim identity in New Zealand in the foreseeable future? Will it be oppositional feelings borne from rejection by the wider society or a sense of belongingness borne from acceptance? Will a Muslim identity remain distinct from being a New

Zealander? Or will Islam in New Zealand undergo a progressive process of adaptation? Certainly at the moment the dire predictions of Sam Huntington's (1996) clash of civilisations seem very far from New Zealand's relatively irenic conditions. We hope they will remain so and that these articles will contribute in a small way to this outcome.

This volume brings together some of the scholars currently engaged in research and academic writing on Muslims and Muslim affairs in New Zealand universities. Most of them are focussed primarily on other issues, taking in the New Zealand religio-ethnic situation only as an aside. As Islam and Muslims are holding world attention at the moment, it is perhaps surprising that there aren't any more university-based scholars in this country whose work focuses on local Muslim issues. With one exception (Ian Clarke's essay) the papers contained in this issue stem from a symposium at Canterbury University on 18 to 19 February 2006. (Dr. Ghazala Anwar and Amelia Davis organised this symposium at Canterbury University under the aegis of the University Community Education programme.) This occasion brought together ten scholars working on Muslim issues to speak about their research, though in a very abridged or preliminary form, to an interested audience. Among the audience were some Muslims and representatives of FIANZ (Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand), keen to hear what might be said about them. Interesting debates ensued showing a wide diversity of viewpoints and perspectives among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Unfortunately, only six of the papers presented at this occasion are included in this special issue, as some of the paper presenters were unable to prepare their lectures for publication.

William Shepard's paper, drawing on many years of research among New Zealand's Muslims, gives a useful overview of the Muslim population, its ethnic, linguistic and sectarian diversity and the various organisations that represent Muslim interests. Erich Kolig and Ian Clarke address the topical issue of multiculturalism. Especially, Clarke's argument critically analyses the underlying agenda of multiculturalism and its hidden pitfalls that lie in the difficulty of doing justice to cultural and religious diversity; while Kolig's points out the problems that arise from combining two very different world views and value systems under a regime of cultural liberalism. The spread of the mystical brand of Islam, Sufism, and its popularity not only among Muslims, is subject of the essay by Art Buehler. Sufism, in some respects, falls outside the conventional perception of Islam; and indeed it is, although overlapping with Islam, not necessarily identical with it. Najib Lafraie investigates the effects of 9/11 on New Zealand's refugee policy. The vast majority of refugees come from Muslim countries. The very recent case of the Algerian refugee Ahmad Zaoui sticks out as an example par excellence of the change in policy climate. Aisha Boulanouar discusses Islamic notions of propriety in dress, especially in the female sartorial code.

The characteristics of Islamic dress, as prescribed by the sacred scriptures, are foremost in making Muslims, especially women, conspicuous in New Zealand's street scene. In illuminating the doctrinal background, Boulanouar writes very much from the perspective of a devout Muslim, as the style and argument of her essay clearly reveal.

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