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Muslims in Britain are torn between western consumerism and traditional Islamic culture

There has been a Muslim presence in Britain since the early nineteenth century, but the Muslim community only began to increase significantly in the 1950s and 1960s, with the arrival of large numbers of workers from the Indian sub-continent. About half of the current 2 million Muslim population were born here, so there is an increasing tendency to communicate in English, thus indigenising Islam. Today, Muslims are the second largest religious group in much of Europe and North America. For many Muslims it is a soul-searching journey when adapting to life in the West and having to face the prospect of where their identities truly lie. This question of identity affects converts and second generation immigrant Muslims alike who have questions to ask themselves about the culture surrounding them.

Muslims in Britain are torn between two different types of loyalties. On the one hand they are expected to maintain loyalty to the Western secular state and on the other hand they believe in Islam, which is a comprehensive guidance that encompasses all aspects of life. Often there is a conflict between these two views leading to an identity crisis i.e. "am I British or am I a Muslim?" In other words, Muslims in the West live in a constant state of anxiety and are unable to solve the feelings that arise from these divided loyalties. For instance, Parents, who insist that their daughters wear the Islamic dress when attending Mosques to learn the Quran, see nothing wrong in their daughters wearing non-Islamic dress to go to school in order to further their education. The Muslim grocer, who prays five times a day, attends the mosque regularly, but is not ashamed to sell alcohol.

There are numerous examples which are commonly found in the Muslim community and make the same point i.e. The identity of Muslims is confused and they are unable to determine which basis Islamic or British/Western should be the sole reference point for their identity, values and vision.

The financial sectors in Britain manipulate the minds of the masses in their own interests, creating a secular society, a society that through marketing consumerism maintains the highest possible increase of wealth for the elite. With this in mind it does not bind well with Muslim people who look towards the Quran for spiritual guidance in every part of their lives. There are many examples where people have been blessed by Allah

and not been grateful. One such example is mentioned in Surah Al-Kahf (18:32-43). Two men were blessed with Allah's generosity and given a garden of grapes and date palms. One of the men said, 'I am more than you in wealth and stronger in respect of men.' The man's companion reminded him that everything in life is from Allah and reminded him of the Day of Judgement where we will be accounted for our actions. The first man placed so much importance on his wealth and acquisition of possessions, that he forgot it was Allah who had generously given them to him. As a result, Allah punished him by encircling his fruits with ruins, leaving him to suffer poverty. Greed was a characteristic of the misguided man in Surah Al-Kahf. It led to his demise. Greed is not a suitable characteristic for Muslims. Islam is about moderation, so the western consumerist society where people see one's identity through one's possessions comes into great conflict with Islam.

Muslims believe that the purpose for our entire existence is to worship Allah, TV ads tell them otherwise. According to advertisements, people's needs, wants and instincts are everything; we should obey them. The Western way of life relies on a continual cycle of want. The people must always desire to own something new, regardless of whether they need it. The people keep the cycle of consumption in constant motion. They work extra hard, in order to buy things they do not really need in order to impress people that they do not really care for. The objective is to have the newest and the best; and therefore, in their eyes, to be the best. They are not just selling products, they are selling an ideology. They are promoting a value system that continuously bombards the public with messages of self-indulgence and instant gratification. There is much bitterness about this, for example in the Quran it explains "Should they gain the upper hand over you, they would behave to you as enemies, and stretch forth their hands and their tongues against you with evil, and they desire that you should disbelieve. [Al-Mumtahinah 60:2]

Secular society has been formed on a hierarchical democracy, in which there is a competition to rise in the hierarchy without any change in everyday beliefs. These beliefs are quite simply that freedom and happiness are the most desirable things to be pursued in life, and they are attainable only by increasing the amount of leisure time at one's disposal and one's buying power. The failure to experience either freedom or happiness is explained on the premise that one has not yet achieved enough of either leisure or buying power. Justice is seen as a by-product, which arises when there is a sufficiently high level of freedom and happiness. The Islamic approach seems to be very much the opposite. Justice is the most desirable thing to be pursued in life, and it is attainable

to the degree that shari'ah or divine law is carried out in society. The failure to experience justice is explained on the premise that there has been at some point a failure in carrying out shari'ah. Freedom and happiness are seen to be by-products, which appear when there is a sufficiently high level of justice. The Shari'ah is Divine Law, in the sense that for a Muslim it is the concrete embodiment of the Divine Will according to which man should live in both his private and social life. In Islam the embodiment of the Divine Will is not a set of only general teachings but of concrete ones. Not only is man told to be charitable, humble or just, but how to be so in particular instances in life. The Shari'ah by considering every aspect of human action thus sanctifies the whole of life and gives a religious significance to what may appear as the most mundane of activities. Therefore for a Muslim to follow man made laws would be insulting to his religion, this becomes quite a predicament for western culture as one cannot have one set of rules for some and another for others, on the sole fact that western society is built upon the shoulders of equality.

From the Islamic point of view the question of the equality of men and women is meaningless. It is like discussing the equality of an ivy plant and a red rose. Each has its own perfume, colour and shape. Man and woman are not the same; each has particular features and characteristics. Women are not equal to men. But then neither are men equal to women. Islam sees their roles in society not as competing but as complementary. Each has certain duties and functions in accordance with his or her nature and constitution. In Islam the husband is responsible, by virtue of being a man, for maintaining his wife; the Quran makes clear his absolute, unequivocal responsibility to provide for his children. In modern Britain it is extremely common now to find dual working families simply from the fact that the cost of living over the last few decades has sky rocketed. A Muslim family would find it extremely hard to stay true to the shari'a's teachings as it would be fairly likely that they would have to live under the poverty line as a consequence of only have a single bread winner who statistically speaking is very unlikely to be earning a good wage anyway.

Another problem Muslim citizens face is that of the language barriers they face, to neglect their mother tongue or their parents mother tongues would mean that they would feel alienated from their roots when they visit their homelands; but on the other hand without a firm grip on English a Muslim will almost definitely fall victim of prejudice and will struggle to lead a successful life in British society either.

However there are also many examples of second generation Muslims turning their back on their religion, Muslims blame this on the British media, consumerism, drink, drugs and relationships with non-Muslim women. Many do not wish to follow Islam out of choice or simply because their parents have not placed great emphasis of Islam in their lives. Parents have played a great part in maintaining their children's Muslim identity in a non-Islamic civilization. The younger generations potential to succeeding as a Muslim is largely based according to their background encompassed within their education; upbringing; psychological; emotional make-up and intellectual capabilities.

Despite the richness of culture of British Muslim youth, many find themselves in a cultural vacuum where they may not find themselves having anything in common with someone from their country of origin but more with a convert to Islam. Hence, a fusion of Islam without attachment to any one particular culture has created a whole new identity and a new generation of Muslims.

In conclusion to the essay title 'Muslims in Britain are torn between western consumerism and traditional culture' one could say that second generation Muslims are torn between western consumerism and traditional culture but not in a violent relationship but in a way in which they can live harmoniously with both sides of the dichotomy, how to be a good Muslim in a capitalist society is an extremely hard question to answer, as it is impossible in a non-Muslim country to make Islam your 'way of life' as Shar'ia or divine law will not exist. So western societies consumerism will probably also secularise Islam like it once did with Christianity. The reason why many second generation Muslims have intensified or clung onto their cultural and religious heritage could be partly be caused by racism in society, Muslim youths form a sub-culture to get away from the stresses of western society.

### Bibliography

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