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Assimilation, Integration or Convivencia: The Dilemma of Diaspora Muslims from “Eurabia” to “Londonistan”, from “Lakembanon” to Sri Lanka¹

AMEER ALI

Abstract

Muslim diaspora has a religious as well as a secular dimension. The religious dimension is closely connected to the Islamic concept of hijra. This concept and the Muslim jurists' binary division of the world, with an intermediate stage in between, has created an existential dilemma for the Muslim diaspora between their physical existence as a religious minority and psychological existence as members of a borderless ummah. The Spanish convivencia experiment in medieval times appears to provide a compromise solution. This however, can only be a temporary response to an inter-generational problem. A more permanent solution has to come from a fundamental change in the Muslim mindset, away from a rigidified religious orthodoxy.

Introduction

Historically, the term diaspora has become synonymous with the dispersion of Jews in pre-Biblical times, to the extent that the Oxford English Dictionary spells the word with a capital “D”. However, over the years the term has developed a more general connotation referring to
the migration and dispersion of all ethnic and religious communities from their native soil to foreign lands due to a perceived or real hostile environment at home. Political oppression, economic discrimination, and cultural and religious marginalisation of ethnic- and faith-based groups have forced several communities in many parts of the world to seek greener pastures abroad. In this sense, even the original American settlements, until they became independent in 1776, could be considered as the European diaspora. In recent times, and in the wake of the rapid economic transformation of India and China, the role of the Indian and Chinese diaspora received considerable attention from research scholarship. These communities constitute the new diaspora in modern history. In light of these developments the term Diaspora needs to be de-capitalised to include dispersions of all migrant communities.  

**Muslim Diaspora: The Religious Perspective**

It is popularly claimed by Muslims that the religion of Islam is an all-encompassing way of life. In that sense, even migration has a religious dimension or connotation. The Arabic word *hijra* (meaning migration/withdrawal/breaking of the ties of kinship/flight), is inextricably entwined with the birth and history of Islam. It was the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his 70 or so immediate disciples in the year 622 CE, from a politically oppressive environment in Mecca to the more hospitable surroundings of Medina that actually rescued the nascent religion from immediate persecution and ultimate extinction. In fact, the Muslim calendar begins from the date of that migration, and accordingly, the Gregorian year 2010 for example, is the *hijri* year 1431. The Qur'an, the holiest of Islam's foundational sources, refers to this unique event in some verses explicitly and in some others implicitly, but in the following verse it generalises the religious sanctity of migration to all Muslims if they were to migrate “in the cause of Allah”. “To those who leave their homes in
the cause of Allah, after suffering oppression”, says the Qur'an⁴ (16:41), “We will assuredly give a goodly home in this world: But truly the reward of the Hereafter will be greater”. The Qur'an calls those who migrated from Mecca as muhajirs,⁵ the migrants, and their hosts in Medina ansars, the helpers. Even though after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet is reported to have declared that there was no need for further migration, yet, to the Kharijites, a group of Qur'anic fundamentalists who revolted against the rule of the fourth caliph Ali in the seventh century, hijra was not simply an historical event but “a model for proper Muslim behaviour”.⁶ It is in keeping with this fundamentalist tradition of the Kharijites that Bin Laden in 2003 made hijra a condition for the creation of an Islamic state.⁷

In the binary vision of medieval Muslim theology the world was divided into Darul Islam, the Abode of Peace, which meant in general all territories in which Islam prevailed and Muslim government ruled, and Darul Harb, the Abode of War, or regions inhabited by non-Muslims and which had not yet accepted Islam and submitted to Muslim rule. It is important to note that this division is not found either in the Qur'an or in the sunnah, the traditions of the Prophet and the second foundational source of Islam. Instead, the Qur'an implies a division of the world into Darul Iman (the Abode of Belief) and Darul Kufr (the Abode of Disbelief).⁸ Between the two abodes however, latter day theologians added a variety of a third alternative, Darul Sulh or Darul Ahd, the Abode of Truce, and Darul Aman, the Abode of Safety, all of which are an intermediate stage before moving into Darul Islam permanently.⁹ In this tripartite theoretical division, the diaspora Muslims who currently live as minorities in several parts of the Western World, whose total number is estimated to be around 20 to 25 million, would fall under the intermediate category.
The theologians' theoretical vision of the world, which is still the dream of present day Islamists, runs counter to the development of modern political systems based on secular concepts of nation, nation-state and national sovereignty. These territorially determined entities are anathema to the universalism of textual Islam. “This is no less than a message to (all) the worlds”, proclaims the Qur'an (38:87), and accordingly, Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian founder of the Ikhwan or the Muslim Brotherhood, and Abul Ala Maududi, the Pakistani founder of the Jamaate Islami, described nationalism as the product of pre-Islamic ignorance (jahiliyya) and satanic fanaticism respectively. The national poet of Pakistan, Muhammad Iqbal, for example, epitomized the universal Islamic citizenship in his Urdu poem, Taranaah-e-milli (anthem of the nation) where he wrote:

Cheen –o-Arab hamaara, Hindustan hamaara,

Muslim hain hum, “watan” hai saara jahan hamaara. 11

In the Islamic religious perspective therefore, a Muslim need not have any special attachment or allegiance to any particular country or territory. A Muslim's primary allegiance is to God alone and his or her primary identity is not national, ethnic or tribal but religious. This is reinforced by the Qur'an in another verse, “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you” (49:13). The idea of Muslimness thus cuts across all tribal, ethnic, cultural or territorial divisions.
In short, within the theological tripartite division of the world and universalism of Islamic shariah, migration becomes a divinely blessed conditionality for the creation of Pax Islamica. To live as diaspora communities under non-Muslim rule therefore, is only a halting place in the journey towards Darul Islam. The dilemma of diaspora Muslims arises when this theoretical postulate is set against the reality of their situation.

**Muslim Hijra Today**

The present world of Islam has embraced the secular concepts of nationalism and nation-states. A total of 56 Muslim nation-states, with the Palestinian Authority as the fifty-seventh, currently form the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), “the only one in the world based on religion”,12 which is a permanent delegation in the United Nations. Instead of a Darul Islam ruled by a single caliph, what the world finds is a web of nation-states ruled by kings, sultans, emirs, presidents, and prime ministers. These Muslim states have their own rules of citizenship, emigration and immigration and there is no free entry into or exit from these countries for anyone, be they Muslims or otherwise. Nevertheless, a majority of these Muslim nation-states are in such political, economic, religious and social turmoil that hundreds of thousands of their own citizens queue up daily at the gates of foreign embassies with the hope of obtaining entry visas to Darul Harb or Darul Kufr in order to live there permanently. Likewise, even those Muslims who live as minorities in non-Muslim countries such as India and Sri Lanka are yearning to migrate permanently not to Darul Islam but to Darul Harb. In this, it is not the divinely blessed hijra of the theologians that motivates them but the earthly attraction of peace and material comfort. Religious considerations, if any, are only marginal in driving the hijra of modern Muslims. However, the followers of militant Islamism like the Al-Qaida are an exception to this generality.
Ironically, the citizens of Western countries have now become the *ansars* receiving a large influx of Muslim *muhajirs*. In this sense, the location of *Darul Islam* and *Darul Harb* needs transpositioning.

Apart from the push factors of political oppression, economic discrimination and cultural and religious ostracism at home, modern-day *hijra* is also the product of pull factors from abroad, such as the lure of better living conditions and demand for cheap and skilled labour in the industrialised countries of the West. In addition, an intellectual and political shift towards embracing multiculturalism as a positive contributor to economic affluence and cultural richness has induced many Western countries to relax their restrictive laws on immigration. Thus, the increase in the intake of migrants came to be justified not only on economic grounds but also on the basis of humanitarian concerns. The colonial nexus of the past determined, in some cases, the particular direction of the migrant flow. Most Algerian Muslims therefore flocked to France, the land of their former colonial masters; a vast majority of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi Muslims migrated to Britain; and many Turks went over to Germany. The United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand attracted a mixture from various parts of the world. It is a strange irony in European history that what the Muslims failed to achieve militarily at the Battle of Poitiers in 733, in order to penetrate Europe, they succeeded in achieving it peacefully after nearly 1200 years. Edward Gibbon, in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* contemplated in panic what would have happened had the Muslims won that battle. “Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford”, he wrote, “and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet”. The influx of millions of Muslims to the West after the Second World War with its concomitant increase in the number of mosques,*madaris* and Muslim colleges, and a rising
demand for recognition of Muslim religious and cultural identity, all go to show that Gibbon's assessment was not far off the mark. However, to the Muslims who have migrated to the West it is a new challenge, because “few guidelines exist in Muslim history for living permanently in a society with a large non-Muslim majority and in which non-Muslim law, government and institutions predominate”.15

Assimilation and Integration

The dictionary meaning of assimilation is to get absorbed into the system, and that of integration is to complete (imperfect things) by addition of parts into a whole. There is a huge difference between the two. Analogically that difference is like the one between a mega fruit juice, in which different fruits are squeezed into one container where each fruit loses its individual taste; and a fruit salad, in which each individual fruit-piece remains intact but covered by a cementing cream or liquid. In social terms, assimilation, whether born out of coercion or spontaneity, assumes a melting-pot where all subcultures are submerged or eliminated to make way for the imperium of the dominant culture; whereas integration leads to cultural pluralism or multiculturalism where the subcultures maintain their individual identity but interleave with the dominant culture on the basis of “implicit egalitarianism”.16 Although elements of the far-right political groups wish for a total assimilation of Muslims into the Western society, that itself is no guarantee that Muslims will not suffer open discrimination and even physical violence, as demonstrated by the horrible experience of the most assimilated Jewish community in Europe before the Second World War. Even non-Muslim ethnic migrants in the West do not support a program for complete assimilation.
Integration is a more favoured option; but it is here the Muslims face a nagging dilemma. How does a community that believes that its own religion is the best, that it was “chosen by Allah”, and that its mission is to establish a global *pax Islamica*, integrate with other religious and non-religious groups in a secular society like Australia or anywhere else in the West? Is Islam a religion *par excellence* or *primus inter pares*? In fact this question can be posed generally to all religious groups and the orthodox among all of them will always choose the first of the options. Otherwise, why would they remain in that religion?

Abdullah Saeed, an Islamic scholar attached to the University of Melbourne, in his book *Islam in Australia* categorises the Muslims into four: traditionalist, neo-revivalists, neo-modernists, and liberals. Among the traditionalists, according to him, are two sub-categories, one “committed to a pre-modern conception of Islamic law (sharia’h) … and feel that they are unable to function as Muslims in Australia”; and the other, whose “main interest is to function as practising Muslims in their personal life … and have no particular difficulties in adjusting to the Australian environment, and therefore to fundamental Australian values”. Among the neo-revivalists also there are two sub-categories: one, with “a high degree of hostility to the West and ‘Western values’ (and) … are … ideologically linked to the thought of anti-Western neo-Revivalist thinkers of the twentieth century”; and the other, also “critical of the West … (but) focus … on ‘reforming’ Muslim societies from within … (are) more pragmatic and have no difficulty in living in the West”. The followers of *Hizbul Tahrir* for example, would fall into the first sub-category and those behind *Tabligh Jamaat* would come under the second. Saeed's last two categories, the neo-modernists and the liberals, include both practising and non-practising Muslims of whom the practising ones are not prepared to compromise on the core values and practices of Islam but are prepared to reinterpret the *shariah* to suit the environment in which they live, while the non-practising
ones are lackadaisical about religion and consider it as a personal matter between oneself and God. While the first two of Saeed's categories would consider Islam as religion *par excellence*, the last two may consider it at best as religion *primus inter pares*.

This categorization of Saeed can be applied to the entire Muslim diaspora in the Western world. The question is what is the relative numerical strength of these categories? In Australia for example, Saeed does not know and there is no way of knowing how many Muslims are there in each of these categories. According to him, “Many Australian Muslims”\(^2^4\) are neo-modernists, and “A very large number of Muslims in Australia”\(^2^5\) are liberals. One faces the same vagueness in other countries also. The most practical way of reckoning the strength of these categories is to listen to the *imams* who deliver the weekly sermons on Fridays and during other public occasions. These *imams* command significant respect within the community and their ideas influence the thinking and behaviour of the followers.

Tarek Fatah, the host of the Canadian weekly TV show, *The Muslim Chronicle*, in a critique of the Muslim yearning for an Islamic state cites a newspaper report in which a student *imam* at the New York University mosque had inveighed during his Friday sermon against the Christians and Jews and had asked his listeners not to make friendship with them.\(^3^6\) A few years ago, the current writer was present at a similar sermon in Perth, Australia, where also an *imam* by profession expressed the same negative sentiments. This anti-Christian and anti-Jewish idea emanates from a literal interpretation of a set of verses in the Qur'an, all but one of which warn Muslims of making friendship with unbelievers in general. The one exception is the verse: “O ye who believe! Take not for friends and
protectors those who take your religion for a mockery or sport—whether among those who received the scripture before you, or among those who reject faith”.27 Those “who received the scripture before you” obviously refers to the ahlal kitab, the People of the Book, referring mainly to Christians and Jews. This and the other set of verses have a certain context for their revelation and de-contextualising the text can lead to all sorts of misinterpretations like the one uttered by the imams quoted above. Another imam, attached to the Islamic Council of Western Australia, recently applauded apartheid and wanted to allocate a block of apartments, designed to be built by the council, exclusively to Muslims. A few years ago, a visiting Muslim ecclesiastic to Australia urged the Muslims to purchase a large tract of land away from the cities, develop it as a residential area and populate it exclusively with Muslim families. His idea was also a call for total isolation of Muslims from the rest of the population.

There has been, in recent years, a growing demand from sections of diaspora Muslims in the West, especially in Australia, Britain, and Canada, for their governments to recognize and implement aspects of the Islamic shariah, particularly those pertaining to Muslim marriage and divorce.28 In Australia again, Muslims have shown great reluctance to allow their kids in Muslim schools, which are largely funded by the Australian tax payer, to sing the national anthem; in fact, it was reported in 2008 that a teacher from a Muslim school in Brisbane was sacked for wanting the national anthem to be introduced in his school.29 A year before that in 2007, when it was suggested that the national flag should be hoisted in the mosque compounds at least on days of national importance, there was a cacophony of protest voice from the community.30 In France, “Muslims have demanded to set their own rules as to which doctors or teachers they will permit to treat or teach them in French hospitals or schools, or which lessons they will or will not attend and which texts they will or will not read”.

These instances do not augur well for a community that desires to integrate. On the contrary, they demonstrate a community's willingness to isolate itself and live in seclusion as a “parallel society”. The Muslims are caught between their physical existence in Darul Kufr and their psychological existence in Darul Islam. Can these two coexist? Is there a historical precedent to this duality of existence?

**Convivencia**

*Convivencia* is a Spanish word for coexistence. It means “not social equality … (but) tolerance secured by restrictions”, a model that evolved in Muslim Spain in the eighth century. *Convivencia* is neither a fruit juice nor a fruit salad but it is like the individual baskets of different fruits in a fruiterer's shop. As Richard Fletcher explains, “Whether in Outremer, Sicily, or Spain, Muslims and Christians lived side by side, but did not blend. These were multicultural societies only in the severely limited sense that peoples of different culture shared the same territories. Multicultural in the sense of integrated, as the term is usually understood today, they were emphatically not”. “Where you lived, how you dressed, … your language and gestures, what food you ate and how you prepared it, the pets you kept, how you brought up your children, … all of these gave off signals indicative of cultural allegiance, indicative therefore of frontiers which might or might not be negotiable”, in this medieval social experience.

In the Islamic Spain, Muslims, although a minority in number, were the ruling class and the Christians and Jews were the subject communities. This was also the case in Moghal India, where also an Indian version of the Spanish *convivencia* was developed especially under the
rule of Emperor Akbar. Although in these regimes non-Muslims like the Jewish rationalist Musa ibn Maymun or Maimonides in Cordoba and the Brahmin master of finance Raja Todar Mal in Delhi, held prestigious positions in their respective administrative hierarchies, non-Muslim communities under Muslim rule were generally gated communities. In the entire history of Islam before the modern era there was no model for present day Muslims to follow which could demonstrate to them how to live as an integrated minority in a non-Muslim country. The only historical experience where this happened was when the Prophet Muhammad sent his followers, about one hundred in number including about twenty women, to Abyssinia in 615 to seek temporary asylum under its Negus. Not much is known about this experience except for the fact that almost all of them stayed in Abyssinia for about 15 years before joining the Prophet in his Khyber expedition in 630 to settle in Medina.35 (Interestingly, one of those Muslims who migrated, Ubaydallah, is reported to have converted to Christianity, and after his death, his widow Umm Habiba married the Prophet.36)

This absence of an historical experience of living as a minority under non-Muslim rule has also left the entire corpus of the shariah vacuous on the subject. The shariah was derived from the foundational sources of Islam, compiled and completed by Muslim jurists at a time when the Muslims were a ruling power. In it there is guidance for the treatment of non-Muslims living in Darul Islam; but there is none to guide the Muslims as to how they should live as minorities in Darul Kufr. The best the Muslims could think of is to imitate in reverse the convivencia model. It is this dilemma that explains the isolationist tendencies reflected in the behaviour of Muslims living in the West. This tendency is not a minority phenomenon, as Saeed makes us believe. Is there however, room for change in the future?
Prospects for the Future

Social isolation has no place in democratic plural societies and multiculturalism should not take the form of separate development for different communities. As far as the Muslim diaspora is concerned, the current isolationist tendency is more a generational problem than a permanent feature of the community. The large influx of Muslims to the West is a recent development. A combination of factors such as the economic globalization and the West's demand for foreign skill and labour, the political unrest in the Muslim world, and the revolution in communication technology and transport—all of them occurring simultaneously or in quick succession after the 1970s—led to this flood of migrants. The first couple of generations of these migrants are still alive and form the majority of Muslim population in the West. This majority is staunchly committed to its own native Islamic tradition and culture. As Tibi describes they are mostly citizens by passport and not by heart. It will be a losing battle for anyone to try to change the beliefs and attitudes of this majority. The hope therefore lies in influencing the thinking and attitude of the third, fourth and future generations of Muslims.

This transformation has to take place through education, a field in which urgent reforms are needed to create an integrated society in the future. The national educational curriculum in schools and higher education at the university level require fundamental changes in content rather than just in form. Education should be aimed not only at teaching rights and responsibilities but most importantly at developing the faculty of critical thinking which is intentionally suppressed by Muslim religious orthodoxy. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into that subject. In short, the new generation of students must be educated not only on the values of citizenship, democracy and cultural pluralism but also to think critically and
analyse objectively all received wisdom. The preponderance of private Muslim schools in countries like Australia, with their own independently designed curriculum in religious studies, and the demand for *shariah* compliant Islamic studies in the universities may slowdown this process of transformation. Although the Muslim schools in Australia attract only about one-fifth of the Muslim children, these schools with their strong emphasis on religious orthodoxy and culture taught by teachers, many of whom are not professionally qualified and are themselves the product of traditional *madaris* or religious colleges, require teachers who could inculcate in the young minds the ability to think critically. In Britain, the problem appears to have become even more acute in the sense that state public schools themselves have turned out to be centres for indoctrinating Islamic religious and cultural orthodoxy and have become the recruiting ground for Islamist radicals. The need for social integration in Western societies demands a revolution in Muslim religious education. The time has come for the Western governments to revisit their hands-off approach to religion in the name of embracing secularism and take a serious look at religious education in faith-based schools.

So far, the discussion on Muslim diaspora in this article has focussed on communities that have migrated to the West to live permanently. There is also another type of Muslim diaspora resulting from recent migration to capital-rich Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Employment opportunities in this part of the world have attracted hundreds of thousands of Muslims for temporary stay. The problems created by this diaspora are of a different sort. What follows is a case study of one such diaspora from Sri Lanka.
Sri Lankan Muslim Diaspora

The Sri Lankan Muslim diaspora is a very recent phenomenon. Unlike the Sri Lankan Burgher emigration that started almost immediately after the island's independence, and unlike the Tamil diaspora that began modestly with the government’s Sinhala Only language policy in the mid-1950s but gradually gained momentum thereafter and accelerated with greater speed following the 1983 pogrom, Muslim emigration is the result of certain domestic and international changes that took place in the late 1970s and after.

To the religious minded Muslims of Sri Lanka, whose vast majority are known as Moors, an appellation bestowed upon this community by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the country falls into the category of Darul Aman, which actually means a territory that is at peace with Muslims. Except for the Sinhalese–Muslim racial riots of 1915, which were caused primarily by economic rather than religious factors, the history of Muslims and Islam in Sri Lanka has been relatively peaceful and cordial. Today, the Muslims constitute about 8% of the total population of the island, and they had been a well integrated community living ubiquitously in every administrative district of the country, participating practically in every sector of the island's national life but without any separatist political aspirations like some sections of the Tamil community. Therefore, until the end of the 1970s, there was no compelling political, economic, cultural or religious reason for Muslims in this country to migrate en masse to any foreign country.

Since the end of the 1970s however, there had been two different trends of Muslim migration, one temporary but motivated solely by the desire to gain employment and income mainly in
the oil rich Middle East, and the other, long term and inspired by an impulse to settle permanently in the Western nations, notably in Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America. The reasons for this outward migration are several. While all of them occurred almost simultaneously none was directly connected to the Sri Lankan Muslim community in particular. The Sri Lankan Muslims were the unintended beneficiaries of a fortunate set of beneficial circumstances.

Firstly, the last quarter of the 1970s witnessed a paradigm shift in the economic policy of Sri Lanka from *dirigisme* to free-markets, which coincided with the economic rise of the labour-scarce but capital-abundant members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC). This paradigm shift in the domestic economic scene had a positive impact on the Muslim community which has been historically renowned for its business and commercial entrepreneurship. Historically, it was trade and commerce that originally brought the Muslims to the shores of Sri Lanka, and it was mainly through trade and commerce that the community prospered from pre-colonial days to the period immediately following independence in 1948. Their economic expertise in trade and commerce was also the main reason why they came to be known as a “business community” during colonial times, even though not all Muslims were engaged in trading activities. But between the 1960s and late 1970s private enterprise and the market economy received a major setback under an ideologically driven and inward-looking economic strategy of the Bandaranaike regimes. After 1977 however, with the open economy policies of the Jayawardena Presidency, government control over the economy was eased and trade, travel, investment and foreign exchange restrictions were relaxed, which not only restored the free market economy of the earlier era but also provided a new impetus to the business acumen of entrepreneurially
talented commercial communities of the country. The Muslim businessmen undoubtedly stood to benefit from this sea change.

Secondly, and parallel to this paradigm shift at home, was the surge in development activities abroad, particularly in the rich petrodollar Arab countries. The demand for skilled and unskilled labour that these development projects generated had an enormous windfall effect on the employment opportunities of Muslim communities all over the Third World. Thus, millions of Sri Lankans of both sexes flocked to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States in search of jobs, among whom the vast majority were Muslims. The historical religious bond between the Arab countries and these communities now translated itself into an economic asset. In 2007, according to official data, approximately 1.5 million Sri Lankans were estimated to be working in the Muslim Middle East, and of this 60–65% were said to be Muslims.40

A third important factor that made long-term migration a necessity and possible for the more skilled and professional Muslims was the events that led to and followed the 1983 pogrom of the Tamils. This tragic event which marked the culmination of three decades of anti-Tamil propaganda and discrimination by sections of the Sinhalese majority sent a strong message to other minorities also that Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhalese and Sinhalese only and that minorities can live in the country only at the behest of the majority—a message echoed even very recently by some Sinhalese military men, Buddhist monks, and politicians. The official proclamation of the Sinhala Urumaya, a far right political party launched in 2000, called its mission a “liberation struggle of the Sinhalese” and wanted to “build a Sinhala Nation”.41 The deepening racial politics of Sri Lanka and the ongoing Civil War since 1983 convinced the
educated and professional Muslims that their future will be safer and brighter abroad than at home.

The growth of a sizeable educated and professional class among the Sri Lankan Muslims is a recent development that resulted partly from the community's self-realisation of the importance of secular education, and partly and perhaps more significantly from a government policy of intervention in university student admissions. One of the immediate causes that transformed the Sri Lankan Tamil struggle for equality and justice from a peaceful protest through parliamentary legislative processes in the 1960s and 1970s into a militant resistance movement through armed struggle in the 1980s and after was the then government's penalisation of Tamil tertiary education through a university admission scheme introduced in 1971 called the Standardisation and District Quota System (SDQS). In the name of providing more opportunities for university education to rural students the marks obtained by candidates at the University Entrance Examination were statistically manipulated in such a manner that it removed the virtual monopoly that students from better resourced colleges in the urban areas like Colombo and Jaffna had enjoyed for a long time. It was from these colleges that a majority of Tamil students entered the more prestigious faculties of the university, such as medicine, engineering and physical sciences; and consequently, these professions remained for a long time a virtual monopoly of the Tamil community. The SDQS hit the Tamil students hard and the Tamil youth were naturally angered, became frustrated, and felt betrayed and victimised.

Among those who stood to benefit by this new admission scheme however, were the Muslims. The Muslims of Sri Lanka were latecomers to higher education. Islamic religious
orthodoxy frowned upon secular education, disenfranchising the community from professional employment for a long time. The Muslim student ratio in the universities never exceeded 2.5% until the 1980s, but in the 1990s it hovered around 7% in certain years.\textsuperscript{43} The fact that a Muslim was the Minister of Education at that time was a strong variable in this equation which might have worked in favour of Muslim students. As a consequence, a new generation of university educated and professional Muslims were entering the labour market in the 1980s, especially at a time when Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic chauvinism and Buddhist fundamentalism were beginning to show their ugly faces. After the 1983 Tamil massacre and with the rise of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as an armed fighting force, Sri Lanka was set to enter an era of civil war in which the Muslims became the meat in a sandwich. The civil war produced tens of thousands of refugees and enormous humanitarian problems. International bodies such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and several human rights groups like Amnesty International pressured developed countries including the US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the EU to open their doors to Sri Lankan War victims. One should also remember that the 1980s and 1990s were also the decades that witnessed the acceleration of economic globalization marked by the dominance of free market capitalism and international economic integration. Multinational corporations and high-tech industries were competing in the international market for cheap skilled labour and management personal. These push and pull factors acted in favour of many qualified Sri Lankans, be they Sinhalese, Tamils or Muslims. It was in this national and international political and economic background that the new generation of educated and professional Muslims of Sri Lanka found an opportunity to migrate permanently to the West. Even those temporary migrants who flocked to the Middle East used their working experience and acquired income to apply successfully to gain permanent residence visas in the Western countries. As a result, we find today hundreds of Sri Lankan Muslim families constituting the
youngest diaspora community, mostly in Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. In Australia and in the United Kingdom for example, their number is so significant that they have formed their own community organizations in several cities of Australia and England.

**Diaspora Impact at Home: A Socio-economic and Religious Dimension**

In trying to assess the socio-economic and religious impact of the Sri Lankan Muslim diaspora one has to make a distinction between the impact caused by the temporary migrants and that by their permanent counterparts. It is safe to conclude that the latter category is fast losing any commitment to their motherland except to maintain some contact with their immediate kith and kin. Other than helping their close family members at home through financial assistance, these migrants carry out their long-term investments and asset accumulation in the adopted country. Unlike the Tamil diaspora, which regularly collects funds to assist its community at home, and actively commits itself to campaigning in support of the political struggle of their brethren in Sri Lanka, the Muslim diaspora is only marginally interested in Sri Lanka's local politics. It does collect funds occasionally either to assist community welfare projects like building mosques, religious schools and orphanage homes or in times of natural disasters like the tsunami of 2006, but there is no evidence of any organised effort to assist the community at large at home regularly. This is in stark contrast to the role of temporary migrants who are concentrated in the Middle East.

The Muslim diaspora in the Middle East is certainly making an economic impact in Sri Lanka. According to the Central Bank statistics, their total remittances amounted to 160,502
million rupees in the year 2007, which constituted almost 60% of the total foreign remittances equivalent to US$ 2.5 billion. The total remittances were estimated to have financed 70% of the country's trade deficit in that year. Between 1991 and 2007, remittances from the Middle East had been fluctuating between 50 and 60% of the total remittances received annually. It is difficult to get an ethnic or religious categorization of the expatriate workers in the Middle East, but according to the author's unofficial contacts, about 60 to 65% of those workers are deemed to be Muslims. This means that in the year 2007 alone the Sri Lankan Muslim diaspora in the Middle East has remitted around one billion rupees to Sri Lanka, a significant contribution to an economy which is financially drained because of an expensive civil war and burdened with a huge external debt, which as a percentage of GDP increased from 43.3% in 2006 to 44.1% in 2007.\textsuperscript{44} These temporary residents in the Middle East, since they have no prospect at all of living there permanently, in spite of the Islamic bond, have to return home one day and therefore they invest their earnings in Sri Lanka in the form of establishing businesses, building houses and apartments and acquiring other properties and economic assets. If not for the Middle East a number of leading Muslim businesses in Colombo and other towns would not have had their initial capital to invest in their enterprises.

However, the economic contribution that this diaspora Muslims make to the growth of the Sri Lankan free market economy is viewed negatively by certain political and religious sectors of the country. The increasing concentration of Muslim residences and businesses in Colombo and its suburbs has raised the ire of the far right Sinhalese political parties like the Jatika Hela Urumaya which carries the support of sections of the Buddhist Sangha. These political elements by resorting to an ultra-nationalist propaganda are busy recreating a politico-economic scenario that produced the first Sinhalese–Muslim racial riots almost a century
In a country that is already buried neck-deep in the Sinhalese–Tamil ethnic quagmire the rising anti-Muslim sentiment, if allowed to proceed unchecked, is bound to drown it even further.

If the blame for this anti-Muslim economic sentiment could be laid partly at the doors of Buddhist ultra-nationalism, the rest of the blame at a national socio-cultural level has to be borne by the growing Arabized religiosity promoted by the activities of the tabligh jamaat (TJ) or the “group for propagating Islam”, and Wahhabism, a brand of puritanical Islam which is the state religion of Saudi Arabia. Of the two movements, the first is internationally the most popular, so much so that its unregistered membership runs into several millions; but the second, backed by the government of Saudi Arabia, has influenced heavily the religious attitude of the migrant workers in that country and in other parts of the Middle East. Many returnees from this diaspora are the unofficial agents of Wahhabism, even though there are a good number of Muslim clerics who receive funds from the Saudi Government to propagate the Wahhabi version of Islam. This is causing not only division within the local Muslim community, as demonstrated by the sectarian violence unleashed in 2006 in Kattankudy in the Eastern Province, but also, together with the foot soldiers of TJ, they are endangering the social harmony that prevailed among the various religious communities in Sri Lanka for centuries. Although the two movements are feeding on each other, their joint impact on the social and cultural landscape of Sri Lanka is anti-integrative. A detailed exposition of the principles and practices of TJ and Wahhabism is not within the scope of this paper, but a couple of comments will be in order for us to understand the type of problems that they are creating.
First of all, Wahhabism is a form of puritanical Islam that claims to purify the religion from all corruptive beliefs and practices that had crept into Islam since the demise of the era of the “Rightly Guided Caliphs” in the year 661 CE. It condemns a number of religious practices as bid’a or un-Islamic innovations, such as saint worship, sufi meditation, and mawlid celebrations. Secondly, its interpretation of the Qur'an is too literal and narrow, and its teachings discriminate against women, and followers of other religions. And thirdly, according to Abdul Wahhab, the ideological father of Wahhabism, Muslims who did not accept his version of Islam should be considered mushrikun or polytheists, and they should be forced to become true Muslims. This explains the violence in Kattankudy mentioned earlier. Obviously in a plural society like Sri Lanka this approach to Islam is bound to create existential problems.

More than the strict and narrow version of the religion indoctrinated by Wahhabism, which is a problem affecting only the Muslim community, it is the outward manifestation of the Islamic image, like the Arabized attire of Muslim men and women and the multiplicity and concentration of mosques built in an alien architecture and in overcrowded cosmopolitan cities, that is confronting the other communities, particularly the majority Buddhists. In this both Wahhabism and TJ are at congruence. The gravity of the problem can be understood by looking at one particular issue that has bedevilled Muslim–Buddhist relations in Sri Lanka in recent years.

The adhan or call to prayer, at least five times a day, from the minaret of the mosques is part of the Islamic structure of worship. This was a tradition started by Prophet Muhammad to remind the faithful of the times of prayer and in a manner unique to Islam. Many Muslims
still believe that they should live close to a mosque so that they could hear the sound of \textit{adhan}. This is why wherever the Muslims settle the first public building they erect is a mosque. However, this is not something exclusive to Muslims. Even in the Tamil Hindu tradition there is a saying “\textit{koyil illatha ooril kudiyirukkathe}” meaning, do not live in a place where there is no temple. In a multi-religious free society like Sri Lanka, as villages grew into towns and towns into cities, and, as those settlements became increasingly cosmopolitan and urban in character, the vocal sound of a \textit{muezzin}, the person making the \textit{adhan}, naturally became inaudible to many Muslim worshippers. Hence, amplifiers and loudspeakers were installed to make the call louder without realising that there are also non-Muslims living in the area who do not want to be disturbed by the Muslim prayer call. Among the five prayer times, the call for the pre-dawn prayer is a particular source of disturbance to non-Muslims. The use of loudspeakers and amplifiers in mosques may be an advantage in a Muslim majority country like Saudi Arabia, Malaysia or Pakistan, but in countries where the Muslims are a minority it will always provoke confrontation. The issue became so serious in Sri Lanka that in at least one suburb of Colombo, Dehiwela, the court has banned the use of loudspeakers in several of the mosques. The protest is spreading to other towns also. There are also other issues like traffic congestion during mid-day prayers on Fridays and the extended nightly prayers during the fasting month of Ramadhan that have become problematic to non-Muslims.

Secondly, in the name of Islamization and religiosity TJ and the followers of Wahhabism are promoting a kind of Arabization of the Sri Lankan Muslim culture. The Arab \textit{hijab} and \textit{jalabiyya} for women and men respectively are fast replacing the traditional attire of \textit{mukkadu} (one end of the \textit{sari} thrown over the head) for women and \textit{sarong} for men. Long beards and turbans are also increasingly becoming the symbols of Muslim male
identity. These are more a manifestation of Arab culture than a religious requirement, although some argue that it was how the Prophet dressed and appeared and that his Sri Lankan devotees are only imitating the Prophet's model. A cynic may well question them as to why they are not riding a camel as the Prophet did when he was alive, instead of driving expensive motor cars. To add further to this Arabizing trend is the Arabic-inflected speech that is transforming the Tamil dialect spoken by these Muslims.

Thus, while economically the temporary Muslim diaspora is adding to the growth of the country by providing desperately needed hard currency and by reducing the pressure on domestic employment, socio-religiously their impact has become a de-stabilizer.

**Impact Abroad**

When communities migrate to foreign locations they often carry with them their own political attitudes and cultural prejudices acquired at home. This can become problematic to the mainstream host communities when the size of the guest communities grows in a particular location and their attitudes and prejudices become publicly manifested. As long as the migrants remain temporary, in order to satisfy a particular demand arising from a particular scarcity in the host country, the host communities may tolerate and perhaps even enjoy the idiosyncrasies of the strangers. However, when migrant communities settle permanently questions of assimilation and integration obviously dominate national political debates. The recent ethnic violence between the Algerian Muslim migrants and local communities in France, and the running tension between immigrant communities from the Indian
subcontinent and indigenous British in parts of the United Kingdom are cases that clearly depict this problem.

In the case of the Sri Lankan Muslim diaspora the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East have adopted strict rules of conduct to monitor the activities of immigrant workers, and the host communities themselves do not favour the foreign Muslims assimilating or integrating with them. Historically also, the Arab Muslims, especially under the Ummayad rule (661–750), never treated the *ajami* or non-Arabs equally. The foreign Muslims, like the *mawalis* or the newly converted to Islam, were even subjected to a special tax in the past. Today, even though there is no special tax on foreign Muslims working in the Middle East, the relationship between the Sri Lankan Muslim diaspora and their host communities is entirely pecuniary in character. Religious equality is no substitute to ethnic gradation in the Middle East. This is in contrast to the situation in the Western countries where the host communities and their governments want the guest communities to assimilate with them at best or to integrate with them at worst. In this context what was discussed in the first part of this article applies to the Sri Lankan Muslim diaspora also.

The Sri Lankan Muslim diaspora constitutes only a very small percentage of the total Australian Muslim diaspora of nearly 400,000. Even though in Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth, Sri Lankan Muslims have formed their own exclusive registered associations, none of them have joined even the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, which claims to be the umbrella body for all Muslims. Thus while they are excluding themselves from the mainstream Australians, they are also doing so from other Muslims. Some Sri Lankan Muslims are even interested in building their own mosques. This is not a healthy trend.
The future belongs to the young and it is in the inculcation of the right values and attitudes through early education that a harmonious life in the host country can be assured to these children. Teaching the children to disrespect the national flag, discouraging them from singing the national anthem, and isolating them from non-Muslim kids, as is happening now in a few Muslim schools, are measures that are not going to promote integration.

**Conclusion**

What appears to be a fundamental problem that is shaping the mindset of the Muslim diaspora, whether as temporary migrants to the Middle East or as permanent settlers in the West, is the narrow world view imposed by centuries of indoctrination by Islamic orthodoxy. A detailed exposition of this world view, which is now being critiqued by a number of scholars (some of whom are Muslim) is an interesting area for future research. These scholars are revisiting the foundational sources of Islam and re-reading them to find new meanings and answers to some age old questions. One of those questions is how Muslims should live as minorities in non-Muslim majority environments. Currently, nearly one third of the world Muslim population is living in diaspora as minorities ruled by non-Muslims. The problems they face demand new answers and those answers have to come from the intellectual Islam that is originating now from the West.
Notes

1. After September 11, 2001, a few Islamo-neologisms have crept into English vocabulary loaded with negative connotations on Islam and its followers. “Eurabia” was a name coined by Bat Ye'or for the title of her book, *Eurabia: Euro-Arab Axis*, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005; and Melanie Phillips introduced the name “Londonistan” in her book, *Londonistan How Britain is Creating a Terror State from Within*, London: Gibson Square, 2006. These two books, authored by two Jewish writers are a polemic attack on Islamism and Islam from an Israeli viewpoint and a bitter criticism of Europe for its so-called obsequiousness of Islamism and Palestinians. “Lakembanon” is a popular name among the Lebanese living in Lakemba in South Western Sydney, Australia, to signify the concentration of Lebanese Muslims in that suburb.


5. The word hijra is not found in the Qur'an, but its derivative noun muhajirun occurs seven times.


8. “The believers are but a single Brotherhood”, Qur'an, 49:10; and “the unbelievers are protectors of one another”, Qur'an, 8:73.


11. Translation from the Urdu: “China and Arabia is ours as is Hindustan; we are Muslims, the whole universe is our homeland”. *Kulyaat-e-Iqbal*, Lahore: Shk. Gulam Ali S Sons, 7th edition, 1986, p. 159.


17. Qur’an, chapter 5, verse 3.
19. Ibid., p. 203.
20. Ibid., pp. 203–204.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
27. Qur’an, chapter 5, verse 57.
30. This suggestion was made by the present writer when he was the president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (2002–2006), the peak body of Australian Muslims. The Australian, 17 February 2007.
37. Bassam Tibi, op. cit., pp. 198 and 204.
40. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka annually publishes data on migrant workers and their remittances but does not categorise the workers into ethnic or religious groups.
However, the author's unofficial contact with the Bank sources provided a rough estimate of 60–65% for the Muslims.


43. S. Chandrasekaran, “Muslimkalin Palkalaikkalahak Kalvi Anmaikkalach Chelnerikal” (University Educational Disciplines of Muslims in Recent Times), file//\3se5mu 1 nvzjfetj\0 bawas bups\0 Store l\News After Elections\Musli Education...


45. During the last decades of the nineteenth Century Anagarika Dharmapala, the leading Buddhist revivalist at that time was so anti-Muslim in his attitude that he openly advocated that Muslims should go back to Arabia. See, Ameer Ali, “The 1915 Racial Riots in Ceylon (Sri Lanka): A Reappraisal of its Causes”, South Asia, Vol. IV, No. 2, December 1981, pp. 1–20.


48. The period of the first four caliphs of Islam who succeeded Prophet Muhammad and ruled the Islamic community from Medina (632–661) is known as the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs or khulafa al rashidun.

49. Mawlid are panegyrical poems composed in classical time on the life of the Prophet Muhammad and sung during the third month of the Islamic calendar, Rabi ul awwal, to celebrate the prophet's birthday. In many places in Sri Lanka this celebration used to go on for 12 nights in the mosques until the Wahhabis put a stop to them, because they considered it an innovation by the Sufis.

50. The Australian census figures for 2006 count only about 320,000 Muslims in the country. This is obviously an under estimation because many Muslims do not declare their religion when completing the census forms. On the other hand, some Muslim leaders have exaggerated the number to about a million. Yet, judging from the mosque attendance, school enrolment and other related estimates 400,000 is the upper limit.