

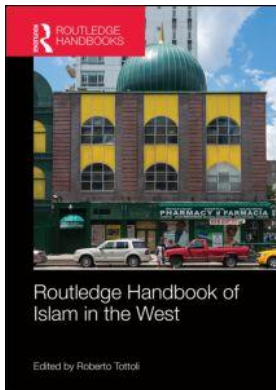
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Emergence of Western Muslim identity

Factors, agents, and discourses

Adis Duderija

In which sense can we talk about the emergence of a Western Muslim identity (or, more precisely, types of Western Muslim identity)¹ over the last two to three decades? Is this Western Muslim identity to be thought of in terms of mere geography? Is it an issue of politico-legal allegiance (i.e. legal status, citizenship) or intellectual and cultural affinity? Is it perhaps a question of an identity based on distinct understanding of a religious tradition? Can it be best understood in terms of subscription to certain values, principles, and the philosophical and worldview assumptions underpinning these? Alternatively, is it a question of emotional attachment and belonging? Or is this emerging Western Muslim identity a combination of some or all of the above? Put differently, would the emergence of such an identity be signaled or manifested by the sociologically observable processes of (various degrees and modes) of de-ethnicization (in case of those whose sense of “Muslimness” is strongly linked with their ethnicity), de- and or transculturalization (in particular the loss of language, customs, etc. or the adoption of Western equivalents), creolization, acceptance of civic and civil rights and responsibilities, the development of a strong sense of emotional attachment and belonging to the West, the engendering of Western-Muslim-specific literature, performing and fine arts, music, norms, or the development of Western-Muslim-specific Islamic theology, legal and ethical thought. To answer the question posed above it would, of course, be inevitable for us to deal with the issue of the very definition of what makes the West Western, and to a certain extent what makes a Muslim a Muslim. Assuming that there is something clearly identifiable as the “West”² and as a “Muslim,” this article will examine the emergence of Western Muslim identity from the last decade of the twentieth century to the present by focusing on factors, agents, and discourses which could be identified as facilitating the emergence of a Western Muslim identity primarily defined in terms of its cultural, religio-philosophical, and socio-political dimensions. In the second half of the chapter (pp. 207–10) I describe two different types of Western Muslim identity at work here, termed Progressive Muslims and Neo-traditional Salafis. Finally, in the third section of the chapter (pp. 210–11) I ask the question of which factors can be seen as contributing towards the emergence of different types of Western Muslim identity, and in this context I highlight the important role of scriptural hermeneutics.

Some significant factors and processes facilitating the emergence of a distinct Western Muslim identity

In order to understand the processes involved in the emergence of a distinct Western Muslim identity over the last two to three decades it is necessary to start our discussion by identifying which factors, agents, and discourses play an important part in its construction because for most Muslims residing in the West, especially those who were born there, as shall be argued on p. 201, their Muslim identity is a product of a conscious process of identity (re-)construction.

Studies which examine identity construction among Western Muslims have identified a number of factors which influence this dynamic. Among the most important ones are secularization and cultural globalization, contemporary geopolitics and the nature of international affairs, the broader socio-economic, political and legal contexts of “host societies,” the diversity within the Muslim communities themselves (such as ethnicity, family, and socio-economic background, the length of immigration experience), and the context of belonging to a new immigrant minority religion (Duderija 2007). The following dimensions of Western Muslim minorities have been identified by Cesari (2007: 52) as being particularly important in the construction of their identities: the meta-discourse on Islam; the influence of dominant cultural and political frameworks; the complex interaction between religion and ethnicity; the influence of global Islam; state collusion between religion, ethnicity, and social marginality and intra-Muslim theological diversity. What concerns me here is to discuss some of the factors and processes which I consider significant in facilitating the emergence of distinct Western Muslim identity(ies).

Before I move on to discussing what I consider to be significant factors and processes which facilitate the emergence of a distinct Western Muslim identity, one important clarification is necessary; namely, when talking about the emergence of a Western Muslim identity throughout this chapter I do not assume that there only exists one such identity but use it as an umbrella term for different types of specific Western Muslim identity, all of which share certain elements which make them distinctly so. This will be made more clear in the part of the article which discusses different ways of being a Western Muslim (pp. 203–7).

Migration and identity changes in new immigrant religious minority communities in the West

One of the significant processes which play an important role in the emergence of Western Muslim identity is their status of belonging to a new immigrant-based religious minority. The vast majority of Muslims residing in the West are of recent immigrant background (Duderija 2007). So to have a better understanding of the identity dynamics at work among Western Muslim communities, the dialectic between (im)migration and identity changes in new (im)migrant religious minority communities requires some elaboration.

The impact of (im)migration on identity dynamics among new religious minority immigrant communities has not been studied until very recently, although, for a number of economic, social, and political reasons, the size and the number of new immigrant communities belonging to a religious minority from very diverse religious backgrounds have significantly increased in the West over the last forty years, and the last twenty-five years in particular (Duderija 2007).

In this context it is important to point out that one significant factor in understanding the construction of new immigrants’ religious and ethnic identities is their transplantation from forming a religious majority to having a religious minority status. This applies to the majority of

the Muslim immigrants since most of them have come to the West from Muslim majority countries. This is of significance because the change in context in which new immigrant communities undergo a transition from the more homogeneous majority socio-cultural setting of their country of birth to a secular, pluralist, and minority one in the West has important identity changing implications. This point is illustrated by Ammerman's (2003: 208) assertion that the context and the requirements of a culture into which immigrants enter will inevitably influence the beliefs and practices that the immigrants were accustomed to and that were taken for granted. Why this is so can be explained by the fact that in the majority context religious community and society stand in a complementary relationship, whilst in the minority context they often stand in opposition to each other. This seems to be particularly the case for new immigrant Muslims who have come from still largely traditional cultures and societies strongly influenced by traditional Islamic beliefs, practices, norms, and values.

It is in the changing nature of the relationship between their ethnic and religious identity that the identity modifications experienced by new immigrants belonging to minority religions are most readily evident. The actual dynamic between the two loci of identity varies greatly depending upon the immigrant group in question and also with respect to the extent to which immigrants emphasize their religious or ethnic identity. One useful model which can shed light on this dynamic is a threefold typology developed by Hammond and Warner (1998: 55–66) which describes the changes in the relationship between the ethnic and religious aspects of identity among immigrants from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. One such process that takes place in some groups (e.g. Amish and Jewish communities in the USA) is described as ethnic fusion, a process through which religion becomes a foundation of ethnicity.

The Greek and Russian Orthodox and Dutch Reformed Church communities are examples of the second type of relationship, named "ethnic religion" by Hammond and Warner; this applies to those religious communities in which religion comprises one of several foundations of ethnicity. Finally, Hammond and Warner's typology includes the term "religious ethnicity," in which religious tradition is shared by other ethnicities, such as in the case of Mexican, Irish, and Italian Catholics.

There are a large number of sociological studies on religion and new immigrants which emphasize the crucial role religion plays in ethnic identity and the difficulty of delineating between the two (Duderija 2007). This is demonstrated well by the fact that at the center of classical sociological studies of immigration and religion is the notion of the centrality of religion for immigrants, especially if they belong to a minority religious group (Duderija 2007). For example, Mirdal's (2000: 39–40) assertion that "religious and ethnic identity especially play an important role for persons belonging to minority groups, often to the point that they predominate above all other aspects of identity," is indicative of this. Williams forms a similar view, maintaining that

Immigrants are religious – by all counts more religious than they were before they left home – because religion is one of the important identity markers that help preserve individual self-awareness and cohesion in the group.

(Williams 1998: 29)

Several other studies further reinforce this idea. Yang and Rose (2001: 269–88) argue, for example, that the "internal" and "external religious pluralism" in Western liberal democracies encourages institutional and theological transformations that energize and revitalize religions of immigrants. Alba (2005: 20–49) notices the same trend in Western European societies, where religion for immigrants becomes a key institutional site for the demarcation of native immigrant

boundaries. Gilliat (1994: 26), writing in the context of examining identity changes in British Muslims, notes that the process of (im)migration can lead to “an invigoration of old traditions, and thus a strengthening of identity.” Waardenburg (2003: 485) makes a similar observation by asserting that “in migrant or minority situations religion may play an important role in reaffirming and integrating identity on a communal level.” Smith’s (2000: 1174) study of religion and ethnicity in America indicates that in the immigrant context ethnicity is determined frequently by identification with a particular religious tradition more than any other factor, such as language or feelings of nationalism. He further maintains that traditional religious beliefs “have been decisive determinants of ethnic affiliation in America” and that the religious factor in ethnic identity is strengthened by the migration experience (Smith 2000: 1174). Gilliat (1994: 279–85) notices the same trend among British Muslims, stating that for them the crucial dimension of their ethnic identity is religious identity. Based on these findings we can rather safely conclude that for many immigrant religious minority groups the religious component of their identity, in particular, becomes highly salient.³ What implications do the processes described above have for the second and subsequent generations of immigrants who were born/raised in the West?

The first point that needs mentioning in this context is that parent immigrants, when passing their cultural heritage on to their children, consider religion to be the key to cultural reproduction of identities (Warner and Wittner 1998: 16). Eid (2002: 25) and Waardenburg (2000: 49–69) form the view that immigrant children focus on identity strategies which move away from both the host society’s and their parents’ prefabricated boundaries, resulting in the Western-born generations of immigrants belonging to new immigrant religious minorities arriving at their own relationships between ethnic and religious traditions. Although most first-generation immigrants continue to cling to their distinctive ethnic identities and practices, Ebaugh and Chafez (2000: 406) maintain that the “second and subsequent generation-dominated religious institutions will likely be more pan-religious and/or more pan-ethnic in their practices, identities, and memberships.” The evidence that this process is already at work in Muslim immigrant communities in the West will be argued on pp. 000–00.

The context of belonging to a new immigrant minority religious community and the emergence of Western Muslim identity

A significant number of Western Muslims have immigrated to the West over the last two to three decades. As such, Western Muslims as a whole enjoy a status of belonging to what we refer to as a new immigrant minority religious community in the context of a liberal democracy which is committed, in theory at least, to what could broadly be termed the policies of multiculturalism. As we briefly alluded to on p. 199, this particular context of Western Muslims has important implications for how they construct their identity, especially in the relation to new, Western context-specific Muslim identity potentialities. Relevant scholarship has, for example, demonstrated that the context of having a minority religion status becomes a decisive element in the transformation of Western Muslim practices and their relationship to Islam. The status of being a new immigrant minority religious community also can (significantly) alter Islamic thought, practice, and community in the West. Let us describe these processes in more detail.

As identified by Roy (2004), for new Western Muslim immigrants tensions between four levels of identity exist, namely: identity based on geography and/or kinship; the larger ethnic or national identity based on common language and culture; Muslim identity exclusively based on religious patterns with no specific reference to language (apart from basic Qur’anic Arabic, which the majority of non-Arab Muslims do not understand) or culture; and identity based on

acculturation along Western patterns. The status of belonging to a new immigrant minority religion community conforms with the last two of the four levels of identity identified above. One important reason for this is that for new immigrant Muslim communities living in the West the common defining factor is the mere reference to Islam as a religion, not Islam as a dominant socio-cultural force. This, in turn, is based on the fact that the new immigrant Muslim communities share, in their totality, no common cultural or linguistic heritage. This is particularly so for the Western-born or raised generations of Muslims (as well as Western converts to Islam – see pp. 204–5), who did not inherit a set of well-defined Islamic social and cultural values and symbols from their parents' or grandparents' generations. These Western-born/raised Muslims of immigrant background are, thus, unable to reproduce the ethno-religious identity of their predecessors but have to construct their own, thereby re-evaluating Islam in the new socio-cultural context. This new context, therefore, engenders a potential for the emergence of specific types of Western Muslim identity.

The fact that the context of belonging to a new minority-religion-based immigrant community facilitates what I term a religion-based identity as a distinct feature of Western Muslim identities is another important aspect that needs to be taken into consideration. By religion-based identity I mean that religion becomes a primary source of identity construction for these new immigrant Muslim community members. In other words, religion assumes a master locus of identity construction at the expense of other options, such as ethnicity or race. Although religious faith has lost its institutional representative power among many Western Muslims, relevant literature suggests to us strongly, as outlined on p. 201, that it is becoming a very important source for the definition of personal and collective identity. I would like to highlight again that this “I-am-a-Muslim-first” type of identity does not, however, necessarily translate into increased religious practice and religious piety, although it often can. As we saw on pp. 200–1, the literature on new immigrant communities in general indicates that the religious component of immigrant members' identity in immigrant minority communities, especially those belonging to a religious minority as well, generally takes on added significance. Several studies specific to Muslim immigrant communities are in line with these findings (Duderija 2007). One concrete way, apart from those mentioned above, that facilitates this religion-based identity construction among Western-born Muslims in particular is their desire to affirm their identity in a different, more open and assertive manner to that of their parents. The immigration-related processes of what Roy (2004: 26–29) terms de-territorialization of identity – i.e. the decoupling of its ethnic, geographical, and religious components that apply to Western immigrant Muslims – and the context of secular, plural Western societies, alongside the experience of racism, socio-economic exclusion, and the current international political climate, also foster the development of this religion-based Western Muslim identity. The idea of a global *umma*, or Muslim global brotherhood, is another important factor in the construction of this religion-based identity among Western Muslims as it can often resonate particularly in ethnically and racially diverse Muslim congregations in the West. Indeed, based on my personal experience, the idea of a Muslim global *umma* often features in, for example, the weekly Friday sermons or other similar religious gatherings in many Western Muslim mosques and other places of worship.

The context of belonging to a new immigrant minority religion also has a bearing on what we here term the forms of Western Muslim religiosity. These different forms of Western Muslim religiosity also facilitate the emergence of a distinct Western Muslim identity because they are peculiar to the specific socio-cultural context in which Western Muslims find themselves. In order to understand this point more clearly it is helpful to explain the difference between the concepts of construction or emergence of Western Muslim identity in general and

religiosity in particular as employed here. By Western Muslim identity I mean a broader dynamic which includes all the elements mentioned in the first two paragraphs of this chapter (pp. 203–4), such as culture, ethics, politics, philosophy/worldview, emotions/sense of belonging, etc. By religiosity I mean something more narrow, namely the realm of faith or one's relationship with or experience of God and how that manifests itself in a person's daily life. As shall be argued on pp. 207–10, secularization of Muslim identity and the construction of Muslim identities embedded in the premodern Islamic worldview form part of these new modes of religiosity in the West. Secularization-based religiosity manifests itself in its symbolic or non-symbolic modes (on pp. 208–9 we describe the latter as Progressive Muslim), whilst the premodern-based religiosity is apparent in its apolitical revivalist fundamentalist (here termed Neo-traditional Salafi) or more politically oriented revivalist types.

One important and perhaps the most widespread distinguishing feature of Western Muslim religiosity is the process described in the relevant literature as privatization or individualization of Islamic faith and practice (Cesari 2005: 5). It should be pointed out that due to the West's peculiar historical experience of secularization and the role of religion in the public sphere as well as in the collective memory of Westerners of established stock, especially in Western Europe, the process of individualization of faith among Western Muslims is qualitatively different from that of possible secularization-like influences experienced by those living in Muslim majority nations because of the broader socio-cultural forces that operate in the Muslim majority context which resist secularization and which are largely absent in the West.

Importantly, the process of individualization of faith among Western Muslims contributes significantly to the emergence of a Western Muslim identity in at least two ways. First, it often provides emancipation from cultural, ethnic, and often patriarchal constraints, and is therefore used to disassociate individuals from established ethno-national communities. This is especially so for young Muslim women, who, as described on p. 205, are considered the main bearers and safeguards of religio-cultural authenticity. Second, and related to the first point, individualization also contests established ethno-national communities' understanding of the religious tradition itself, thereby affecting the manner in which Islamic normativity and authority are reproduced and Islamic knowledge is transmitted (Jacobsen 2006).

In summary, the context of belonging to a new immigrant religious minority is one important factor which contributes to the emergence of a distinctly Western Muslim identity.

Western Muslim intellectuals and the emergence of a Western Muslim identity

The discourses and thought engendered by Western Muslim intellectuals, and in some cases religious leaders, is another important factor which facilitates the emergence of a Western Muslim identity. The context of residing in Western liberal democracies where ideas can be freely developed and exchanged has been crucial in the emergence of a new class of Muslim intellectuals who, by virtue of either birth or immigration (or in some cases exile), have made the West their home. These new Western Muslim intellectuals, over the last two to three decades in particular, have made serious efforts to engender new discourses aimed at developing "authentic" interpretations of the Islamic tradition which would religiously justify and promote the social, cultural, and political integration of Western Muslims without the loss of their religious identity and, thereby, attempt to create a distinctly Western Muslim identity which is culturally Western. While there is a range of often contrasting views with respect to the method, the substance, and the ultimately desired outcomes of this religiously grounded theoretical framework, all of them share one common characteristic, namely the viability of the very

concept of a Western Muslim identity. For example, the proponents of the *fiqh al-aqaliyyat* project (Islamic jurisprudence for Muslim minorities in the West),⁴ both in their approach to the interpretation of the normative sources of the Islamic tradition and in their views on what it means to be a Muslim residing in the West, differ from Neo-traditional Salafi and Progressive Muslims' approaches. The most "forceful" of these proposes a creation of a Western Muslim identity as a distinctly specific religio-cultural and philosophical construct based on its own and substantially different interpretation of the Islamic tradition as manifested in the development of culturally specific Islamic ethics and jurisprudence. So, just as through history Islam was shaped by African, Asian, and South Asian cultures, the advocates of this type of Muslim identity call for a European, North American, or Australian Islam. While the success of these efforts is not assured (Al-Affendi 2009), the mere presence of these discourses is a significant factor which facilitates the emergence of a Western Muslim identity. Here the works of Tariq Ramadan, with his insistence on the possibility of a specific Euro Islam and European Muslim identity, since the 1990s have significantly contributed to the engendering of the discourse on this very topic. Ramadan has been consistently arguing, and more forcefully over time, that the context of citizenship in Western liberal democracy permits Western Muslims to be genuinely Muslim, to develop their own distinct European culture as well as Islamic ethico-religious thought (March 2011), and to be law abiding citizens. In other words, Ramadan has been a proponent of the idea that Western Muslims can remain in complete fidelity with their religious identity and practices and at the same time cultivate a distinctly Western Muslim culture, thought, and identity by developing new interpretations of their inherited religious tradition.

Increasing institutionalization of Islam in the West

Institutionalization of Islam in the West should also be seen as a significant force which contributes to the emergence of a Western Muslim identity. Over the last two to three decades Western Muslims, ever more aware of their permanent rather than temporary status in the West, have increasingly made recourse to the policies of politics of recognition. The process of institutionalization of Islam or Muslims in the West is defined here as primarily a public method of this politics of recognition. The continued, although often controversial, building of Muslim places of worship, the mushrooming of numerous Muslim schools or weekend madrasas, the growing network of *halal* food outlets, the flourishing Western-based Islamic mass media, the increasing political representation of Muslims at various levels of government either in mainstream political parties or in so-called "Islamic" parties, their solid participation in social and cultural affairs of the broader Western society are all clear signs of the progressive institutionalization of Muslim communities in the West, and the integration of these communities and their representative institutions into the broader social and political structures of Western liberal democracies. Consequently, this process of progressive institutionalization of Islam in the West is also an important element of Western Muslim identity and is also strongly indicative of its emergence.

Western Muslim converts

Another important agent for an emergence of a distinctly Western Muslim identity is the role, activism, and the ideas of Western Muslim converts. This is so for several reasons. First, in some ways reminiscent of the Western-born generations of Muslims of immigrant background, the Islam of Western Muslim converts does not have established ethno-cultural roots. Having

been brought up in a culturally Western mentality, these Muslim converts' Muslim identity and understanding of Islam is inevitably shaped by this context and is therefore distinctly Western. Indeed, their intellectual and culture-producing contributions both within and outside their newly adopted religious community are an important locus for the emergence of a distinctly Western Muslim identity. Second, by assuming the role of cultural mediators between Western Muslims with immigrant background and non-Muslim Westerners these Western Muslim converts often facilitate the acceptance of the very idea of a Western Muslim identity in the minds of both non-Muslim Westerners as well as Western Muslims of immigrant background. Significantly, based on their physical features and Western-style dress, they also problematize the idea of an "authentic stereotypical Muslim" who does not look "Western" (i.e. non-white, non-Caucasian, wearing traditional clothes from Muslim majority cultures such as *jalabiyya* or *shalwar khamis*). Third, by their very presence they demonstrate the possibility of Muslim citizenship in the West as they themselves are, of course, its citizens. Fourth, with their frequent critiques of traditional cultural or ethnic Islam (often acting in chorus with Western-born generations of Muslims with immigrant background in this respect) they contribute to the engendering of a Western Islam and thus the emergence of a Western Muslim identity. Western converts to Islam, due to their unique positions, also significantly contribute to the above-mentioned process of institutionalization of Islam with their social know-how and through the pooling of a network of relationships (including political, institutional, and religious ones). Lastly, some of these Western Muslim converts belong to the category of Western Muslim intellectuals described above (such as Anne Sofie Roald or Hamza Yusuf), who have significantly contributed to the intellectual formulation of a Western Islam and thus to the emergence of a distinct Western Muslim identity.

The hijab

The wearing of the *hijab* by Muslim women in the West is imbued with multiple meanings and symbolisms. They range from those of opposition to inherited ethnic culture and racialized discourses of exclusion, to those of political protest/defiance (usually in the form of political Islam); from a sign of moral purity to that of strong commitment to religious identity or a tool of security in unfamiliar, potentially threatening environments. Importantly, research on the role and the function of *hijab* among Western Muslim communities has increasingly demonstrated that for those Western-born young Muslim women who choose to wear it the *hijab* seems to play a decisive role in the construction of new Western Muslim identities. The *hijab*, it seems, has become an overdetermined signifier for the identity of young Western Muslim women. There is also mounting evidence from many minority communities indicating that young Western-born Muslim women are increasingly adopting a more explicitly traditional religious dress, including the *hijab*, as part of asserting their specific Western Muslim identity (Duderija 2008). The wearing of an American flag-patterned *hijab* after 9/11 by many young American Muslim women is one powerful symbol of this Western Muslim identity. It is important to highlight in this context that even the styles and forms of wearing of the *hijab* of Western Muslims are often specific to their Western context, as can be seen in Muslim women's magazines in the West, such as *Aziza*⁵ or *Sisters*.⁶ Indeed, these types of *hijab* often invite rebukes by conservative religious scholars, who do not consider them to be in accordance with the traditionally prescribed *hijab* rules, for example in terms of color or how adequately they cover parts of the women's body that are required to be concealed in public. As such, the presence of specific forms of *hijab*-wearing among Western Muslims can often be indicative of the emergence of a specific Western Muslim identity.

Religious music

The last three decades have witnessed a flourishing of Western Muslim religious songs sung in European languages, including French, German, Spanish, Italian, and particularly English (sprinkled with Qur'anic and other religious phrases in Arabic). This religious music is at times expressed in the form of hip hop, clearly mirroring Western equivalents, and is not restricted to American Muslims of African descent. This interesting development, much like in the case of *hijab*, plays a very important role for many a young Western Muslim in the construction of a distinct Western Muslim identity. It does so in a number of ways. First, by being truly trans-ethnic in character, it facilitates a religious rather than ethnic-based Western Muslim identity. Second, it provides an important avenue for young Western Muslims to develop a sense of Muslim self which has the potential to make Islam more meaningful and attractive to their lives (in contrast to traditional ways of Islamic *da'wa* which, apart from some Sufi groups, largely eschew music and consider that listening to it, even if it is religious in nature, is a sin), and to at least partially bridge the often wide gap between mainstream Western values and practices and those of traditional Islam. Third, especially in the context of Western Europe, it acts as one channel through which Western Muslims are able to voice their grievances of belonging to a socio-politically and religiously marginalized and often stigmatized community. This can lead to a more politically engaged and participatory Western Muslim citizenship consciousness, which, in turn, potentially facilitates their sense of belonging in the West. Fourth, this religious music is often educational in character and is aimed at bringing up law abiding and young pious Western Muslims. The works of Muslim convert Yusuf Islam, formerly known as Cat Stevens, are particularly important in this regard. Fifth, this pious Muslim music contributes to the development of a distinctly Western Muslim cultural identity, of which it is a very important element.

Western languages

Unlike the first Muslim immigrants to the West, subsequent generations of Muslims have no problem in communicating in the official languages of the countries in which they reside. This language proficiency is an important element in facilitating Western Muslim identity in at least two crucial ways. First, it potentially enables Western Muslims to be more intimately familiar with the dominant cultural, social, political, intellectual, and legal context of their countries of citizenship/residence, thereby enhancing their ability to meaningfully integrate into the broader public sphere and be active and participatory members of it. This, in turn, enhances the levels of acceptance of Western Muslims by the broader non-Muslim community as being genuine and contributing members of the broader society in which they live. Second, it runs counter to the stereotype of (a Muslim) immigrant who does not and/or is unwilling to learn the official language of their country of residence and as such is destined to live on the cultural, social, political, and intellectual margins of the broader community.

In the context of the discussion of the importance of language in the emergence of a Western Muslim identity the issue of discursive hegemony on Islam and Muslims written in Western-based languages is of importance as well. Today the number of both academic and non-academic forms of discourse (journals, magazines, books, newspapers, internet websites and blogs, television and radio) on Islam and Muslims in English and other major Western European languages, notably French and German, far outweighs the number in any other language, including Arabic. This is true in relation to both Muslim and non-Muslim authors of these various writings. This phenomenon is of course a reflection of the global cultural and economic dominance of Western countries worldwide, especially the United States. One clear

example of this dominance of European languages on discourses on Islam and Muslims is the amount of Muslim religious terminology that is being integrated into Western languages and the speed with which this is happening. To take the example of the English language, words such as *jihad*, *hijab*, and *in sha' Allah* are no longer in need of translation and have been adopted into the language. It is my contention that this process also contributes to the emergence of a distinctly Western Muslim identity because it not only provides Western Muslims a window into acquiring knowledge of their tradition, as many are unable to read in the language of their parents (especially in the case of Arabic-, Urdu-, Bengali-, and Farsi-speaking Western Muslims, whose alphabet is not based on Latin characters), but the literature on Islam and Muslims in European languages is aimed at advocating views which are in favor of the development of a Western Muslim identity. The work of Tariq Ramadan is, again, an excellent case in point. However, it must be kept in mind that some literature in European languages, often a translation written by ultra-conservative Saudi or Saudi-supported religious scholars and those who share their views, does not advocate such principles.

Two types of distinct contemporary Western Muslim identity

In this part of the article I discuss two very different types of distinct ways of being a Western Muslim, one which is very comfortable with the idea of such an identity and another which by and large rejects it. For reasons that are outside the scope of this chapter, we refer to the former as Progressive and the latter as Neo-traditional Salafi (for details, see Duderija 2011). Before I present a discussion of the two distinct types of Western Muslim identity I would like to outline a more elaborate typology of Muslim identities operating both in Western and in Muslim majority contexts. This is necessary for two reasons. First, it helps us appreciate the diversity and complexity of Muslim identities in general and, second, it allows us to situate more specifically and therefore define more clearly the two identities under discussion. The first point that needs to be made is that the construction of distinct Western Muslim identity, as indicated on pp. 199–204, is not homogeneous and does not presuppose sameness, either in terms of how Western Muslims relate to the inherited Muslim tradition or with respect to their understanding of what it means to belong to or be part of a Western society. As such, a distinct Western Muslim identity, the way it is defined and understood here, can mean an existence of such an identity that is based not just on its acceptance but also on a conscious rejection of its very possibility by those who possess this identity, again based on their understanding of what it actually means to be Muslim and a Westerner. Nonetheless, even those among Western Muslims who object to the very notion of a distinct Western Muslim identity, indeed, for reasons outlined on pp. 199–204, in actual fact cannot construct their identity in a contextual and spatio-temporal vacuum and their identity is, in fact, by their very physical presence in the West and by the virtue of their spatio-temporal contemporariness, already unique to it.

The typology is based on and adopted from the work of Ameli (2002) and it is particularly useful for the purposes of this chapter because it approaches the issue of identity from the perspective of the dialectic between the understanding of and the adherence to the inherited Muslim tradition and understanding and orientation towards Western culture, and was developed in the context of typologizing British Muslim identities. It is also useful because it is broadly representative of all Western Muslim identities. The eight-tiered typology consists of the following types of Western Muslim identities:

- 1 Traditionalist, which is characterized by social conservatism, ritual centeredness, and political indifference.

- 2 Islamist, characterized by their emphasis on Islamic politics and movements and the comprehensiveness of the Islamic way of life.
- 3 Modernist, characterized by a “combination of modernization and Islamic ideology,” their desire to achieve social reformation through modernization and reformation of religious thinking in accordance with modern modes of thought.
- 4 Secularist, characterized by rejection of the politicization of Islam, and its traditional aspects, but, unlike the traditionalist form, with active participation in secular politics and social activity, and lack of religious observance and involvement within social institutions.
- 5 Nationalist, characterized by those who identify themselves primarily with the culture of the parents’ homelands as an expression of patriotism.
- 6 Western secular, with no serious inclination towards the original culture, an inability to re-assimilate into it, and absorption of attitudes, values, and norms governing Western secular culture to the point that it is indistinguishable from “native” counterparts; and with involvement in multiplex secular social relationships with non-Muslims, and comparatively less religious orientation.
- 7 Hybrid, characterized by no firm orientation towards the original culture as well as not giving primacy to the new Western culture.
- 8 Undetermined, characterized by rejection of diverse cultures one is confronted with, confusion about religious belief, and a sense of hopelessness and rootlessness.

As will become evident, the Neo-traditional Salafi and Progressive Muslim identities share to various degrees common characteristics with the list just outlined, the former being closest to what Ameli terms “traditionalist” and the latter to “modernist” identity.

Progressive Muslim identity

On the one hand, the processes associated with belonging to a new immigrant minority religion described on pp. 199–201 have resulted in the creation of a unique, hybrid group of second-generation Muslims. They are characterized by a “mixture of (basic) Islamic Weltanschauung, an appreciation of Western democratic institutions” and a Muslim identity that is “comfortable with fluid and plural identities” (Roy 2004: 117–49). For this type, a Muslim identity which genuinely engages with mainstream Western society and yet remains genuinely Muslim is not seen as contradictory. Mandaville notes this type of Western Muslim identity in the context of European Muslims when stating that:

there are observant Muslims who view Western norms, popular culture, and lifestyles as mostly compatible with Islam. They do not see inherent conflict in their dual identities as Muslims and Europeans.

(Mandaville 2002: 220)

Gilliat refers to this type of Muslim thus:

There is an important minority of young Muslims in Britain who are not only devoted Muslims, but also fully participating in the wider society when it comes to general social life ... [T]hey appear to be confident in their religious identity, and they do not rely on outward signs of this identity to bolster their inner sense of being Muslim. As a consequence they can mix freely with non-Muslims in the wider society, without feeling

threatened, or compromising their Islam. They are perhaps the ones who most aspire to being recognised as “British Muslims.”

(Gilliat 1994: 236)

Niebuhr (as quoted in Gilliat 1994: 249) describes them as “those who have a firm religious identity that is not threatened by active participation in the wider society. It is an identity that does not have to be ‘proved’ to others by outward appearances.” This type of Muslim is variously described as reformist, modernist, rationalist liberal, and as enlightened rationalist (Duderija 2007). Cesari (2003: 174) points to the existence of similar reformist trends in Islam as a result of “Western freedom of expression and cultural globalisation.” In this article this type of identity construction is described as a progressive religious identity. Progressive Muslims consider their religious identity to be traditionally authentic and derived from a particular interpretation of the normative sources of Islam, namely the Qur’an and *Sunna* (Duderija 2011). It should not be confused with what is usually termed symbolic religious identity, which denotes a poor and fragmented knowledge of religious norms and a low level of ritual observance but a strong identification with their religion and their religious community. The existence of this symbolic Western Muslim religious and ethnic identity is also evident in the literature (Eid 2002: 37).

Neo-traditional Salafi identity

It is interesting to note that the same processes that have facilitated what we here termed religion-based identity, including the Progressive Muslim identity, have also been largely responsible for the emergence of puritanical religious identities among Western Muslims and the creation of what Hermansen (2003: 309; cf. Roy 2004: 232–57) terms the “culture free identity Islam.” For example, Gardner’s (1993: 213–35) study of the Bangladeshi community in the East End of London indicates that transnational migration processes and practices can lead to puritanism, increased religious zeal, and what she terms “orthodoxy” based on scripturalism. This particular type of religious-based identity “attempts to purify Islam of cultural influences and redefine it along purely religious lines.” Eid (2002: 51) refers to this type of religious identity existent among American Muslim university students as a “nonsymbolic” or “ultra-orthodox” identity which “develops parallel alternatives to mainstream institutions and cultural systems shielded from Western influences.”

According to Hermansen, many aspects of this version of Islamic identity are based on:

A mindless and rigid rejection of “The Other” and the creation of decultured, rule-based space where one asserts Muslim “difference” based on gender segregation, romantic recreations of madrasa experiences and the most blatantly apologetic articulations of Islam ... replacing spirituality with arrogance and a smug pride in one’s superior manifestation of visible symbols of identity.

(Hermansen 2003: 310)

This type of affirmation of “pure culture-free religious identity” by alienated, marginalized, and disempowered Muslim youth is most frequently associated with global, militant Islam (Roy 2004: 232–87). The widespread “neo-fundamentalist” component of the contemporary Islamic resurgence among Western-born generations of Muslims (Roy 2004), is exhibited by engaging in what Noor (2003: 322) terms the “rhetoric of oppositional dialectics,” in which the question of Islamic identity is primarily approached on the basis of “the trope of the negative Other

which manifests itself in a number of forms: secularism, the West, international Jewry/Zionism, capitalism etc.” Labeling it orthodox, Cesari (2003: 53–6, 95–109) identifies this type of religious identity as operating within a binary view of the world in which “Islam is the positive and the West is the negative.”

Factors responsible for the emergence of different types of Western Muslim identity

Given that there exist such different distinct types of Western Muslim identity, the immediate question that emerges is what gives rise to them? I will here briefly explore one such factor that I consider to be important in this dynamic, which relates to the question of the interpretation of the normative sources of the Islamic tradition themselves and its role in identity construction.

The role of scriptural hermeneutics

An important element in the construction of different types of Western Muslim identity is the role of religious tradition itself, and more precisely the different ways of conceptualizing and interpreting this religious tradition. According to Ammerman (2003: 216), religious tradition forms a type of a powerful “meta-narrative,” a religious narrative. A religious narrative is a narrative in which “religious actors, ideas, institutions, and experiences play a role in construction of identities.” Religious narratives in fact act as the “building blocks of individual and collective religious identities” (Ammerman 2003: 216).

The construction of a religious identity is also based upon a particular understanding (or interpretation) of the religious tradition itself (i.e. its primary, normative sources). Waardenburg (2000: 49–69) and Wadud (2000: 3–21), for example, argue that in the context of Muslim immigrant descendants the normative sources and the search for true, normative Islam are particularly important. This is especially true for the Western Muslim identities described on pp. 207–9, both of which engage seriously with the normative teachings in the construction of their identity.

Furthermore, the (radical) change in the context from a homogeneous majority religion/culture to that of a heterogeneous minority religion/culture brings to the foreground and facilitates the changes in interpretation of sources of faith. To borrow Vroom’s (2007: 230) term, the change in context changes the “interpretative schema” of Western Muslims, which become central to their identity dynamics. Speaking in the context of Muslims in Europe, Waardenburg (2000: 55–6) asserts that what he refers to as the normative character of Islam for Muslims is a social fact and that normative Islam based on literature on Islamic law and its theory (*usul al-fiqh*) has “obtained a new relevance for Muslims living in Western societies,” that it is of “utmost importance,” and that it has “practical relevance.” This view is confirmed by several other empirical studies conducted, for example, by Noeckel (2002) and Boos-Nünning and Karakasoglu (2005). This is so because normative Islam, that is one based upon a particular interpretation of primary sources of the Islamic worldview, is assumed to offer Muslims a comprehensive guide, with many guarantees and benefits in terms of what they should do and believe in, in order to lead the life of a good Muslim, which becomes their primary concern.

Thus any attempt to understand the variant religious identity constructions among Western Muslims needs to take this important element into account. I term this the scriptural-hermeneutical factor in religious identity construction. This phrase refers to a particular approach to the interpretation of primary sources of the Islamic worldview, namely the Qur’an

and the *Sunna*. However, as I have shown elsewhere (Duderija 2011), religious tradition and its sources are subject to various interpretations based upon certain methodological and epistemological assumptions. These hermeneutical differences, argues Wadud (2000: 3), in the case of Islamic tradition are crucial in the construction of variant religious identities.

The primary, normative sources of the Islamic religious tradition are the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. The centrality of the Qur'an and the *Sunna* in Muslim thought permeates through the entire Islamic intellectual legacy. They are uniformly recognized by Muslims as the ultimate points of reference, but whose interpretation has always been a point of contention among various Muslim religious communities. Reflecting this, Waardenburg (2003: 243–5) argues that the quest for normative Islam in the Western context is constantly reconstructed by successive generations of Muslims who appeal to a “true, normative” Islam along variant lines, so that one is faced with the dilemma of the multiplicity of normative Islams. Therefore, differences in interpretative models of the Qur'an and the *Sunna* are central when examining which type of religious identity is being constructed (Wadud 2000; also Duderija 2011) because they are open to various interpretations, at times diametrically opposed ones.

As a summary of this section let me quote Raines, who highlights the political nature of the act of interpretation of religious tradition by asserting the following:

It [interpretation] is a contentious terrain precisely because it continues to deeply affect people in their daily lives. It is contentious because interpreting the sacred shapes how power is used in society. To interpret religious tradition is to enter a conflict and to make a choice. Our appropriation of our heritage is never neutral; it displays our intention and purpose for its use. It is taking up sides even if, or perhaps especially if it claims to do so.

(Raines 2001: 2)

Conclusion

This chapter identified and described various processes, agents, and factors which facilitate the emergence of Western Muslim identity. It also described two different types of contemporary Western Muslim identity and discussed one mechanism which contributes to the emergence and construction of different Western Muslim identities, namely the role of scriptural hermeneutics. We can conclude that since the last decade of the twentieth century we have witnessed strong indications of the emergence of a distinctly Western Muslim identity driven by multiple processes, discourses, and agents. What is less certain, however, is what type of Western Muslim identities will in the long term predominantly take root in the West. At the very general level, it can be asserted that this will depend upon many factors, some of which are internal to Western Muslim communities themselves, while others are external to them.

Notes

- 1 See the discussion in the main text on pp. 207–10.
- 2 The term “the West” in this article is employed in the meaning of “Western liberal democracies,” namely those in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand.
- 3 This does not automatically translate into the claim that Western Muslims as a result of their immigration experience become highly religiously observant but that their sense of “Muslimness” is highlighted either by the processes internal to their “Self” or by their environment, “the Other” which influences the Self. On the Self–Other identity construction dialectic, see Duderija (2008).
- 4 As embodied by the scholars associated with the European Council for Fatwas and Research (www.ecfr.org/en) based in Dublin.

5 www.azizahmagazine.com/.

6 www.sisters-magazine.com/index.php.

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