Tariq Ramadan’s View on Western Muslims Identity: Between Nation and God’s Revelation

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Abstract

The Western civilization is often considered to be more advanced than any other civilizations. Many people who think that western civilization is always in contradiction with Islamic values. Such this thing, it is written by Samuel P. Huntington that the West would have clash against Islam. The tragedy of 11 September 2001 was a historic event that made the world condemned this action. Some Muslim terrorists launched an attack on the West. Since then, the Western Countries are always alert to everything related to Islam. They think Islam is a threat to the survival of democracy and secularism. Tariq Ramadan Suggested that western Muslims must understand their identity as Western Muslims in order to be accepted in the West and tackle all negative views of Western people which are against them. They can have multiple identities depending on the situation they faced. There are four principles in their identity they are Faith, the understanding of the text and context, education (teaching) and participation. By participating without losing the first of those four principles, means Muslims able and should participate in realizing the integration of Western culture, with carrying on Islamic Values in order to be a significant contribution which equals Islamization.

Keywords: Identity, Nation, Tariq Ramadan, Western Muslims
Abstrak


Kata Kunci: Identitas, Bangsa, Tariq Ramadan, Muslim Barat.

Introduction

According to Robert Spencer, the first tragedy that Muslim terrorist involved, it happened at Munich Olympics 1972, when Muslim terrorists killed an Israeli athlete, at that time people claimed that it did not relate to Islam, it was caused by war between Israel and Palestine. In 1979, Muslims attacked the U.S. embassy in Iran and took fifty-two hostages. And again, it was not Islam but it was an expression of Iranians because American government gave their support to Shah, the rejected one by Iranian people. In 1983, when a Muslim suicide bomber bombed a U.S. Marine Barracks, in Beirut, there were 241 Americans killed, America considered this was a political matter, and no more.(Spencer, 2002)

The violence related to Muslims continued. Muslim terrorists threw the elderly, wheelchair bound Leon Klinghoffer to his death off the hijacked cruise ship Achille Lauro in 1985, when militant Muslims first blew up the World Trade Center in 1993; when they murdered nineteen American soldiers in the bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996; when they bombed the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998; when they bombed the USS Cole in 2000 Each time that Muslim terrorists did their action, Americans quickly make themselves and the world sure and calm,
that what happened is not a real Islam; This statement swelled after September 11. (Spencer, 2002)

In the morning of September 11, 2001, some unforgettable tragedies happened in United States of America. “The September 11 attacks” were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks launched by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda upon the United States in New York City and the Washington, D.C. It caused about 3,117 people were thought that they had died. (Gehman, 2002) George W. Bush, Tony Blair and virtually every other Western leader insisted that their shadowy foe in this strange new war was not Islam, but terrorism, and that the relationship between the two was only coincidental. But a few of western people did not accept this, they began to claim that Islam is a threat for Western people. Later, the Involvement of USA in these tragedies, made a long unpredictable implication. It caused, first the reaction of European governments in implementation of new laws of surveillance and control that target immigrants from Islamic countries. Second, the situation in Islamic countries themselves. (Karstedt, 2003)

Since those tragedies, Islam became a threat to the West. Paranoid Phenomenon against Islam and Muslims appeared in many decisions of the Western countries. Islamophobia spread among the Western people. Many discussions and studies assumed “militant Muslims are the main enemy of the West”. This statement allowed and legitimated the Western countries to attack the Islamic countries which were suspected those terrorists were staying there. And finally, the Western countries did not look for the terrorists only, but also the political interests, business, and economy by the name of democracy, liberalization, and human rights. (Husaini, 2005)

The Western Muslims always feel that they are the victims of the superiority of the West. The “victim” mentality of the Western Muslims, that assumed the West is controlled by their deep hatred, is dangerous as same as the West regarded western Muslim’s actions and their rejection based on their hatred against the West. (Esposito, 2010)

Many years ago, Samuel P. Huntington, an influential political scientist from the United States of America, had predicted what the West would face. He called it “the Clash of Civilizations”. He stated that a conflict between Islam and Christianity, both Orthodox and Western was a real
conflict.(Huntington, 1997) In 2001 he told that “the Clash” had come. The violence of extremist Muslims became a conflict between Islam and the West.(Husaini, 2005)

Huntington wrote some factors which would increase the conflict between Islam and the West; first, the increasing number of Muslims Populations would make numbers of unemployed young Muslim people and their dissatisfaction. Second, the Islamic Resurgence (Revival). Third, the intervention of the West on Muslims countries would make them begin to fight and counter them. Fourth, the collapse of communism removed the common enemy between Islam and the West, each thought threat to other. Fifth, the increasing of interactions between Muslims and Western people made a new sense how it differed from another.(Huntington, 1997)

Tariq Ramadan, a Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Oxford University, the grandson of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hassan al-Banna,(Fourest, 2008) stated that Western Muslims should have been treated as Muslims by religion and Western by culture.(Esposito, 2010) He reminded Western people the forgotten component in the Western’s civilization is Islamic civilization. Western Muslims have to be allowed to build their identity and their own Western culture, just as the other faiths and ethnics have done.(Ramadan, 2007b)

From the points above, the writer sees that there are problems for being a Western Muslims, and Tariq Ramadan, who is currently a lecturer in Oxford University, has a view which explained what should be done by Western Muslim in according to be a good Muslim and loyal citizen and also argued there was no “clash” between both.

Discussion
Tariq Ramadan’s Biography
Tariq Ramadan was born on 26th of August 1962 in Geneva. He is the son of al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn’s fonder, Hassan al-Banna which was very famous of all Islamic activities and politics he held in Egypt. His father is Said Ramadan, was one of al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn’s leader, he had a great responsible of spreading the idea of al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn throughout Europe. His mother is the daughter of Hassan al-Banna, she is the most beloved daughter of Hassan al-Banna. Her name is Wafa al-Banna. Tariq Ramadan’s parents were exiled to Switzerland because of their Islamic activities during the period of Gamal Abdul Nasser. His parents later were the first who gave him some knowledge about political Islam.(Fourest, 2008)

Tariq Ramadan held his MA in France. His Dissertation in master was The Notion of Suffering in Nietzsche’s Philosophy. It discussed into reading deeply of western philosophers, from Socrates, Plato and Aristotle to Schopenhauer, through Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, Hegel and Marx in order
to make confrontation the substance of their views with Nietzsche’s. (Ramadan, 2010b)

In 1989, the Affair of Creil, it happened when a headmaster of Collège de Creil, a school in Creil, a city of France, refused to allow three muslimah girls to come to school because of wearing headscarves. The reason of the headmaster was it would contravene the republican principal of secularism. (Freedman, 2004) This affair motivated him to take a stand as a Muslim. He was aware, he needed a title to speech and preach. (Fourest, 2008)

In 1991, he decided to go to his Parents land, Egypt, to study Islamic sciences in an accelerated program. He did not take the long and complex apprenticeship which al-Azhar university offered it to him. His purpose to be in Egypt was to study how to make a relevant and coherent argument based on limited number of Islamic reference and not to cultivate his mind. (Fourest, 2008) He studied many lessons from many Islamic books, articles in general and Islamic laws and jurisprudence in particular. He completed his study five years program in twenty months. (Ramadan, 2010b) He got his Ph.D. in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Geneva. He succeeded to apply for professorship in Islamic Studies at the University of Leiden.

Western Muslims

“Western” is adjective form of “west”. “West” is a name of four cardinal points. “The West”, in accordance to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary is Europe and North America and Canada, contrasted with eastern countries. (Hornby, 1995) It refers to “Occident”, the countries of the West, Europe and America. (Hornby, 1995)

Ulrich Steinvorth, stated that The West, originally, comes from Greece, Rome, and Christianity, but it is led by ideas and continued by the Enlightenment. These ideas changed or developed traditional religion with belief in the value of the personal and rational powers and inalienable rights, and with trust in science and technology, production, and trade. Openness to these ideas constitutes modernity, with which the West can be understood. It constitutes a specific rationality, a way of justifying and
explaining actions, which is oriented to utility, happiness, and personality. The West can be known neither geographically nor historically, but only by its ideas and its superior rationality. This at least is the self-understanding of the West. (Steinvorth, 2009) Rationality that claims superiority to alternatives is produced by The West. In order to deeply understand about the Western Muslims, John L. Esposito divided Muslims in the West into two kinds: Muslims in America and Muslims in Europe. (Esposito, 2002)

John L. Esposito stated that Western Muslims have been challenged to explain their position in American and European society. They struggle and some have failed with the relationship of their faiths to their national identities (assimilation, integration, and multiculturalism), intermarriage, gender relations, worship, and education. Many struggle with the English language, as well as their willing to hold on to their original or homeland cultures, and many Muslims face religious and ethnic discrimination in the workplace and society. Incidentally, numerous of the minorities who “made it in America” don’t recognize with what Muslims are presently confronting. They are in disappointment to see the similarities between their past and Muslims’ current issues. Muslims fell down from the circle of American pluralism. (Esposito, 2002)

Diana L. Eck explains that Islam is the religion which many western people have the most negative stereotypes extremist terrorism, saber-rattling jihad, and the oppression of women. In America, the Muslim society feel misunderstood, maligned by the media, and subject to continuous low-level harassment. The emerge of Islamic Revival and the rise of militant Islam throughout the world have made the public description of an Islam dominated by its most radical voices. It is no wonder that American Muslims put public education and information high on their list of priorities and those Muslim societies leaders often spend countless hours interpreting Islam to non-Muslim neighbors. Islam is the most misunderstood of America’s religious traditions. Ironically, Islam is also theologically and historically closer to Christianity and Judaism than the traditions of the East; actually it should make it easier to understand. (Eck, 2001)

According to M.A. Muqtedar Khan, the west’s idea on Western Muslims that Islam, the religion they converted, is irrational and nonsense, no democracy in its faith and always in contradiction with the equality, freedom, and peace. They always confront the values and principles of Islam. This idea which is made by the west that Islam is in contradiction with the west makes western Muslims difficult to perform the religion and to show their commitment to their faiths. It becomes the mainstream of the West people, even the Media makes it worse, when there is a conflict in the Middle East, and Media attacks Islam and its values. The prejudice, hatred,
and intolerance, make practicing Islam in the public arena a dangerous prospect. There are many prejudices against Islam. (Khan, 2005)

The illustration of discrimination that Western Muslim women continuously confront is almost wearing the hijab. It gets to be an enormous issue when a Muslim woman wears the hijab. In the interview for job’s application, when they start to wear it after they obtained a position within the workplaces, they can be sacked without any reason. Principal or teacher will send their Muslim student in case they wear the hijab. Most of them will be punished when they denied to wear uncovering dress in exercise center classes or swimming. The alienation is continuously happened to them in numerous interactions to the social orders between individuals of different genders, this is what they continuously confront within the west. (Khan, 2005)

What happened to Western Muslim women, also happened to western Muslim men. Their appearance for wearing beards or caps is always discriminated. The discrimination continued and also happened when they need a longer break in order to pray Jumat prayer. When western Muslims, both men and women, asked for being off for Islamic festival, they will be resisted. There is discrimination when many Muslims scholar or intellectual looks for the jobs in need of higher education, when they write the essay about politics, Middle East issue, from their perspectives as their beings are Muslims. (Khan, 2005)

I. Tariq Ramadan’s Viewpoint on the Western Muslims Identities

On Ramadan’s opinion, western Muslims look so different when they are around the Western people in their daily life. Western Muslims need a revolution; they need to redefine their selves in to find out their identities. The experience of being collapsed of economic and political exile brings them to the search for an identity at the core of their natural environment. This reaction is understandable; it is above all the reaction and responses to the presence or feeling foreign environment this is what should have an attention. This is the reason why man defines another’s identity by reaction, by differentiation, in opposition to what he is not or even against the other.
This process is definitely natural, although his natural process actually is harmful, unhealthy, and dangerous to another. (Ramadan, 2010b)

Western Muslims are required to answer a question whether they Muslims or American, French, Italian, Swiss etc. this questions force them to define and explain their identities, and relate to their loyalty because loyalty doesn’t recognize duality, this is what western people thought on western Muslims identities. That is a meaningless question. Because western people have an obsession with an idea of defining oneself in contrary to what one is not. That’s question is asking whether one is primarily, Muslim or French, American, Italian, English etc, in contrary the two identities and relationship that do not belong to the same realm. (Ramadan, 2010b)

The different side between being Muslim first or being “American, English or French” first is in the way of thinking, this is a false case, and the two relationships are of a different nature and a different order, being a Muslim means to embody a certain conception of life, a sense of the meaning of life and death, meanwhile being an American, English or French is to play one’s role as a citizen from a nation. (Fourest, 2008)

The Western Muslims are always asked whether they can be a loyal citizen and a good Muslim. (Esposito, 2010) Tariq Ramadan told that a Muslim, as a citizen he has a social contract to the nation he is living, it is his duty to obey his nation rules. Everything in the country in social, cultural, economic and legal terms, which is not contrary to Islamic principles, it becomes Islamic. He added that whatever the rules and cultures which are not contradictory with Islam, we as Western Muslims have to accept them as our loyalty for being a citizen. (Fourest, 2008)

John R. Bowen stated that some people are worried about the Western Muslim’s integration into Republic, the problems are: Muslims cultural communalism (communalist) which makes them commit to their association, including the presence of mosques, schools and kinship. The next problem is the failure of the Muslim community to accept secularism. (Bowen, 2010)

To answer this question we need to warn Western Muslims as Ramadan warns Western Muslims to stop their feeling, perceiving their selves as minorities; they have to move from integration to contribution, to be more pro-active and offer something to the society. (Ramadan, 2007a)

According to Ramadan, there is no any verse of al-Qur’an or Prophetic tradition or Western constitutional prohibits Muslim to practice his Islamic teaching and become the loyal citizen. There is no related conflict. Islamic civilization is an integral part of Western civilization, through the philosophy, medicine, the sciences, art, and architecture. Ramadan told that integration doesn’t mean assimilation at all. Western Muslims have to be allowed to build their own civilization, as what the other faith have done.
before. Including in the culture is Muslim’s acceptance to the constitution, laws, and the frameworks at the Western countries where he lives. (Esposito, 2010)

Western Muslims agree with the integration, and about the content, it is in their hands. The basic substance that Western Muslims need is not in contradiction to Islam. Western Muslims acknowledge the laws as long as they don’t constrain them to do something which is forbidden to Muslims. In this case, if to be a faithful and good citizen the Western Muslims have to be take off his religion, or to be terrible Muslims, surely, Western Muslims will instantly reject it. (Fourest, 2008)

There are no any problems with Western Muslims in their integration with the nations they live. The problem is when Western Muslims are forced to choose to be assimilated (to lose one’s own identity) or to remain alien (to live apart from society in order to protect oneself). It is like a western Muslim has to choose, to be a western Muslim without Islam or to live in Western out of Western. (Ramadan, 1999)

The Middle Path

The middle path is introduced by Tariq Ramadan to maintain the Islamic identity and to deal with the challenges of nationality which are always asked toward western Muslims. This is the path that a Muslim should not lose his loyalty to the nation, when he or she keeps his or her faith in all his activities, on the contrary, a nationalist will never lose his or her faith when he or she participates and contributes to show his or her loyalty to the country. This path distinguishes Islam from all cultures including Arab or Asia and their traditions and customs, because this path is the main principle of Islamic identities.

a. Faith, Practice, and Spirituality.

This is the first path and the core of Islam. It is a belief to the Oneness of God; this is the main concept of Tawheed. It is the most important element for every Muslim. It is confirmed and testified by Shahadah. Shahadah binds Muslims all time. Shahadah is the sign of the muslim’s loyalty to Islam. It shows that the Muslim identity beyond space and time. This loyalty sign is concretely proved by Practicing of worship like Sholat, Zakat etc.
And finally, that spirituality is the way to make Muslims keeps alive, intensifies and strengthens his faith. All of practices in Islam are in order to make Muslims remember the God. To know Muslims Identities it means to acknowledge the basic fundamental of faith and to allow them to perform all practices in their spiritual life. (Ramadan, 1999)

No human being in this world can live without faith, belief, and reason. People always believe in something and try to understand everything, unless some of them are mad. (Ramadan, 2010a) In Islam, those Faith, Practicing and spirituality are inseparable. Those are the basics of Islam, in an integrated perspective, they are the principles of Islamic civilization. It is clear enough that the West, as the time goes, it cannot easily understand Islam as a religion and a civilization. All of that because of the Western perspective always sees and analyzes everything dichotomously and partially. (Ramadan, 2001)

Faith is to believe in God, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and in the Last Day, and in fate, both in its good and bad aspects. Those are the six pillars of faith in Islam. Faith comprises of belief in all that belongs to the order of the visible and invisible frequently the mysterious, which believers have to accept in their hearts within the rope of encountering it profoundly. (Ramadan, 2017)

The Islamic guide in practice is often related to five pillars of Islam. Those are the main rituals in Islam. Shahadah, Shalah, Zakah, Shoum, and Hajj are the contains of five pillars of Islam. (Ramadan, 2017)

Tariq Ramadan formulated iman, islam, and ihsan into faith, practice, and spirituality. Spirituality is projected on life and on the world, imparts meaning to being just as it makes meaningful and orients the actions of human beings. (Ramadan, 2009) Spirituality means generosity, sincerity or excellence in faith. Whatever a Muslim does through sincerity towards God, in adoration and love, he has to attains the state of the heart that feels and “sees” His presence intensely, above and beyond time spent in ritual practice. (Ramadan, 2017) Spirituality is constructed by Ruhani (which animates the breath, the spirit, or that which lies within), Rabbani (which is ripe with God’s presence), and Tazkiyah (purification of the self and the ego in order to draw closer to God). (Ramadan, 2017)

b. An Understanding of Text and Context

The second way is to understand both the text (al-Qur’an and al-Sunnah) and the context. A Muslim will never achieve the true faith without understanding. This understanding brings Muslims to find the way to remain faithful to the Islamic teachings and values, anytime and anywhere. Muslims identity is permanently based on active, dynamic, and dialectic tradition to make the harmony between text and context. (Ramadan, 1999)
To be a Muslim means to strive in order to enrich and increase one’s capacity and capability, to search more knowledge, to be intelligent in the light of Islamic sources. (Ramadan, 1999) Intelligence means act of reason including observing, comprehending, attempting to understand and analyze the being, the self, the universe, and the life in order to find out the way to combine faith and understanding. (Ramadan, 2009) A Muslim has to act based on Islamic teachings, it means a Muslim has to build his capacity and capability to choose what is right and what is wrong. A Muslim needs knowledge to distinguish between right and wrong, and through understanding the text and context, it will increase one’s knowledge. Understanding has to be based on knowledge, and choice has to be based on freedom. (Ramadan, 1999)

Finally, A Muslim should perform two hard and difficult works, both are deconstruction and reconstruction. Deep comprehension and full understanding of Islamic values and teachings make a Muslim able to distinguish between religion and culture. Religion is not culture. This is what we call deconstruction. Second, a Muslim should reconstruct their activities based on the teachings of Islam, not the culture. This will never be happened at all, unless a Muslim has a deep understanding of text and context. (Ramadan, 2010b)

c. To Educate or Transmit

The secular environments and the educational systems that no longer care about religion definitely cause some concerns and fears among Muslims community. How can Muslims talk and teach freely about the light of faith, the beauty of spiritual life, and faithfulness to the Islamic teachings and values, if the current situation, such those environments and educations are based on secular system. (Ramadan, 2004) This is the main challenge of Western Muslims.

Meanwhile, according to Ramadan, Iman (faith) is Amanah (trust). A muslim has a duty to have a faith in his heart and to deliver this amanah to everyone. Being a muslim means being an educator and transmitter. To be a Muslim is to uphold and to convey the conception of Islam based on faith, spirituality, and fundamental understanding of Islam. (Ramadan, 1999)
Muslims have responsibility to spread the message of God. This responsibility does not mean converting people to Islam. This responsibility is about sending and inviting people to recognize the God’s presence and the genuine comprehension of His teachings. Sending the message is not only by speech, moreover, it will be more effective if a Muslim delivers God’s message through his behavior. (Ramadan, 1999)

d. To Act and to Participate

The completion of Muslims identities is to express what they believe through relevant behavior. Faith, understanding, education and transmission represent the substance of the Islamic ethic together as they have to direct and manage the Believer’s actions. To be a Muslim is to act in accordance Islamic teachings whatever the environment. Islam does not command Muslims to avoid the society and keep away from them in order to be nearer to God, it means that Muslim has an obligation to participate and contribute to the country he lives to show his existence of citizenship. (Ramadan, 1999)

On the middle path between being Muslim without Islam or a Muslim in Europe out of Europe, Muslims can find the reality of a Muslim aware of his four dimensions of identity. There is no contradiction as long as Muslims act according the law and not being asked to keep away himself from a part of his identity. It means the nation where the Muslims live, has to respect their faiths, their concept of life, and their spirituality, their need to learn and understand, to speak and educate, to give them the chances to participate and contribute in order to make a positive effect with their citizenship. (Ramadan, 1999)

The Muslim’s acceptance to the secularism and other laws which are not forbidden by Islam is a chance to do more, to prove the Muslims existence, all of this to spread among the western people the values of Islam. In another words, as Caroline Fourest wrote contributions and participations of Muslims mean Islamizations. (Fourest, 2008)

A. Conclusion

As the final point, the writer should like to conclude Tariq Ramadan’s view on the Western Muslims. The first point that western Muslims have to know is about their identities. This is a crucial and main point to distinguish between us and another also to understand the common background of Western Muslims.

There are four principles points for Muslim’s identity such as first; Faith, practice and spirituality, second; Understanding of texts and contexts, third; to educate and transmit, fourth; to act and participate.
Those are four principles of Muslims as the Muslim’s identity, by knowing this identity, western Muslims are capable to distinguish which the essential component of religion is.

According to Ramadan, western Muslims should be integrated into the countries they live. They have to be loyal citizens and good Muslims. But it does not mean assimilation. Assimilation means to lose the identity; in fact, someone may have more than one identity.

He criticizes the immigrant Western Muslims who can’t leave their previous culture in the West. Moreover, they consider that their previous culture is Islamic culture, like Islam’s converter becomes more Pakistani or Arabic because of lacking knowledge of Islamic culture. Western Muslims need to distinguish the essence of Islam from their previous culture. Most of western Muslims isolate and prohibit their selves to have any interaction to the western people. Though Ramadan denies the isolation because it means to do nothing as citizen, but he also orders the West to respect them because Western Muslims have decided to avoid the clash than to make a contradiction.

The west is superior. Western Muslims some of them feel that they are the victims of the west by being discriminated and another. They have to erase this feeling, and change it into a significant contribution to the country. As western Muslims, Ramadan’s thought that they have to accept the secularism, as long as it is not in contradiction of their principles of Islam. Moreover, that is the right moment to prove that western Muslims can contribute to the country. The more they contribute, the more they spread the values of Islam, and that means Islamization.

There are many challenges that Muslims, especially in the West, to study more about Islam and its application to the West context. The minority feeling is also becoming the challenge they have to face. Actually they have known, in secular country, everyone is equal in the law, and nothing to worry about it. Tariq Ramadan’s goal is to create a society independent Western Islam, which is not based on tradition of Islamic countries, but the reality of Western culture. He started by offering a new way of reading of Islamic sources, interpreting for the Western context, and shows how a new understanding of Islamic principles will make a great result for integration
to the western countries. Tariq believes that western Muslims must remain faithful to the teachings of Islam, as well as to participate fully in Western society as citizens of a secular state. With the basic intellectual, Western Muslims and the future of Islam offer a vision of Muslims identity which refused to the statement “Islam must always be opposed to the West”.

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