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Editor's Introduction

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# MUSLIM CITIZENSHIP IN THE WEST

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Jan A. Ali\*

Modern democracies have been identified by scholars as dealing with two rather incongruous principles. As they are organised around issues of scarce resources, where the resources are differently distributed among various segments of the society, the result often is exclusionary structures such as social classes, age clusters and status groups. Despite this, they must also produce and protect social solidarity by emphasising the interdependence between individuals in a society and allowing them to engage in mutual enhancement of lives. In increasingly plural societies in the age of globalisation this is not easily achievable. States are constantly struggling to deal with pressures created by increasingly plural and complex societies. In modern social sciences, especially sociology, these incongruous principles are usually referred to as the allocative efficiency and integrative necessities. In modern liberal secular plural societies, particularly in those cases where social inequality has increased under the weight of neoliberal governmentality, citizenship plays a key role in the establishment of social solidarity where a citizen denotes an individual with rights, responsibilities and membership to a political community.

Citizenship is understood as one of the chief mechanisms for countering the diverging forces generated by pluralism. It is seen by some as the antidote for providing political unity in contemporary liberal democracies, which are becoming increasingly internally diversified in the light of challenging demands on citizens' loyalty and fast-evolving sources of identity such as class, gender, race, religion and ethnicity. The notion of citizenship occupies a significant place in the history of Western political thought. It is at the very centre of the idea of justice in a civil society; that is, the relationship between the individual and the community, and the sharing of the benefits and responsibilities of membership. The way we think about the normative dimension of citizenship has transformed in complex manners over the years. The idea of citizenship originating in the Enlightenment thinking as a democratic citizenship within the nation states of Western Europe and gradually evolving and transforming in the face of subsequent economic and political struggles citizenship is a contested concept today. The relationship between individuals and the political community has been conceptualised in a variety of diverse complex ways.

In classical conceptions of citizenship, three key elements or dimensions are stressed. The first is the liberal conception, which concentrates on the individual as the central focus.

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Citizenship is a legal status with the individual having social, civil and political rights. The citizen is the legal person who is free to do as he or she pleases within the parameters of the law and who has the right to legal protection. In this conceptualisation of citizenship, emphasis is placed on the equality of rights and how they facilitate the individual in achieving their aims and objectives. The second is communitarianism, which places the community before the individual and acknowledges the social nature of individuals. Here, citizenship is membership in a political community that provides a distinct source of identity and citizens have responsibilities and duties first and foremost to the community for wider civic goals. The third is the republican tradition, where citizens are considered to be political agents, whose active participation in government and political institutions is pivotal for the advancement of the civic good.

Different modalities, approaches and interpretations point to the need to conceptualise citizenship as a sociological process. The new interest in and revival of citizenship debates in the contemporary period is a response to the pressures exerted by globalisation on the sovereign nation-states, the formation of newly independent states in the former Soviet Union and other parts of the world, the growth of nationalist and sub-national groups, demands for political participations by minority groups, and the rapid rise in people movement particularly through the process of immigration.

Thus, several distinct forms of citizenship and numerous notions of citizenship exist in the modern world. Citizenship can be understood in relation to various broad conceptualisations based on factors such as legal status, a system of rights, a form of political activity and a form of identity and unity. Citizenship purportedly confers citizens membership to a democratic political community, offers them collective benefits and rights, and allows them to participate in the social, economic and political processes of the society. Groups of individuals stress the importance of citizenship differently; therefore, types of citizenship abound ranging from dual and transnational citizenship to corporate citizenship to international citizenship. The sheer variety of “citizenship” definitions, models and uses makes the idea of belongingness to a society and political membership to the broader structure of the state hugely challenging and even practically problematic.

Muslims in the West often find themselves hugely challenged by the idea of belongingness to a society and political membership to the state. Their feelings of attachment and identification with the nation or national belongingness are proven when Muslims obtain their citizenship and make significant socio-cultural, economic and political contributions to their respective societies. Despite this, they often find themselves with a second-class citizenship status in the West. This raises the question about the limits of citizenship and national identity claims. Like many immigrants from other faiths, Muslims have been challenged to define and determine their place in Western liberal democratic regimes. They face many challenges ranging from issues of identity, gender relations, intermarriage, education and worship to civil rights and responsibilities. While many Western liberal democracies have accommodated Muslims as they have accommodated other minorities, in the last several decades it is curious then, given the long focus on citizenship rights for all, that the fate of

citizenship and national belonging in the West should suddenly be interconnected with the political identities of Muslims. This is especially the situation when Muslims are in the contemporary period seen to be people with opposite views and practices to that of modern liberal democracies in which individual rights and secularism are celebrated and enjoyed. Such assumptions about Muslims are formulated against the backdrop of the way in which Muslims practice their faith, such as women veiling, mosque building, establishing Muslim schools that are been reduced to and conflated with alleged Muslim practices such as wife-bashing, forced marriages, child marriages, polygyny and the rejection of civil/common law, and the espousal of Sharia. This suggests a process of “othering” of Muslims and an illiberality of liberal democracy. The basis for this is the prevailing local conditions, which embody Muslims as well as global events and the acts of terrorism involving Muslims conflating a criminal minority with the general Muslim population.

The *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 5, Special Issue 2, explores the scope of Muslim citizenship and belonging in the West through examination of Muslim belongingness, Islamists citizenship, identity, the questions of Muslim inclusion and exclusion, and the special challenges of Muslim citizenship in modern multicultural Western societies. It critiques the treatment and citizenship status of Muslims in the West, pointing to a more robust and balanced discussion about Muslim citizenship, particularly around the theme of globalisation, human rights and terrorism. Political theorists and sociologists are increasingly open to the idea that citizenship is much more than simply about the legal status granted by states to individuals to feel part of a national political community. The contributors to this special issue examine the ways in which Muslims make meaning of their citizenship and manner in which they forge and imagine their membership in the political communities of the West. The problem of Muslim citizenship as an issue is not only about practical political questions regarding access to public health, education and employment, but also related to the conditions of social integration and social solidarity.