

PART 2**UNDERSTANDING AND MINISTERING TO MUSLIMS IN THE WEST****RADICALIZATION OR ASSIMILATION?
DIASPORA MUSLIMS IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA.**

by Dale Martin

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Introduction

A number of recent reports have noted the rising discontent and marginalization of second and third generation Muslims in parts of Europe. The Muslims in North America, however, appear to be assimilating more completely into society, and as a result, are less vulnerable to being recruited by Islamic fundamentalists than their European counterparts. There are several reasons for this: the degree of diversity of ethnic origin, immigration policies of the host country, and access to the educational system and professional work force appear to be at the root of these differences. These difference have definite implications, which I will spell out in the course of this article, for those working with the Muslim Diaspora on their continents.

North American Muslims

The diaspora of Muslims in North America is made up of diverse populations. About 68 percent of Muslims were born outside the US in over 80 different countries.¹ They have formed a number of national origin communities, often building their own mosques and community centers. They make up small minorities in most of North America. There are so many linguistic, ethnic, and religious differences between them that it would be incorrect to imagine the Muslim community as a single and homogenous unit within North American society. It is more like a mosaic, or as one author has described it, 'it is at once a mosaic, and a tattered quilt.'² It is truly a microcosm of the entire Muslim world which includes all religious schools of thought, intellectual trends, political ideologies and Islamic movements.

The North American Muslim community, therefore, has a number of identities. As the second and third generations increasingly find their identity as Americans, Canadians, and Mexicans their ties to their parents' country of origin weaken; they tend to reject the efforts of their parents and grandparents to define

Islam in culture specific or national origin terms. This seems to be in sharp contrast to what is happening in Europe where second and third generation immigrants have become more attached to Islam than their parents. Collectively, the North American Muslim communities are in a state of transformation as they reproduce themselves into the North American context. As professor Jane Smith has stated, 'The result may well be that a truly American Islam, woven from the fabric of many national, racial, and ethnic identities, is in the process of emerging.'³ The ethnic make-up of immigrant Muslims in Canada is very similar to those of the United States with 37 percent of South-Asian descent, 21 percent of Arab descent, 14 percent of West Indian descent and the other 27 percent is made up of African, Chinese and other ethnicities.⁴ As in the US, cultural diversity of Muslims in Canada may hamper intra-Muslim communication. Attempts to organize Canada's Muslims by Islamic groups is at an early stage and many of them have competing agendas. Muslims are represented by the Canadian Islamic Congress, the Muslim Association of Canada (MAC), the Council of American Islamic Relations Canada (CAIR-CAN) and the Muslim Canadian Congress. Thus, no one group in Canada or the United States can speak for all its Muslim citizens. Canada has often been described as more of a cultural mosaic rather than a melting pot as is commonly referred to in the US. While the integration of Muslims proceeds fairly smoothly in both countries it may be that the process of assimilation will occur differently in Canada.

Islamic Institutions

In 1960 there were only 104 Muslim places of worship in the United States. In 1993 this number had increased to 1100 and today there are over 2100.⁵ The Muslim Student Association (MSA) has 150 chapters in the United States and is thought to be funded by extremist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶ In general, mosques established by Arabs prior to 1960 are liberal and women are allowed to participate on administrative boards. Mosques established by Arabs in the last thirty years tend to be more conservative and the participation of women is restricted to certain roles.⁷ One moderate Muslim leader, Muhammed Hisham Kabbani, has warned that Islamic extremists have taken over about 80 percent of the mosques in the United States.⁸ The main institutions of American Islam do not accurately represent the interests and views of moderate Muslims who make up the majority. Khalid Durán believes that the American Muslim Council (AMC), the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) and the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) are all run by extremists connected with various Islamists groups.⁹ Pipes has described the Islamic Society of North America as a Wahhabi front group and pointed out that CAIR is funded by Saudi financing.¹⁰ Similar extremist elements appear to be present in both North America and Europe. However, response to it is

generally apathetic in North America as a result of several factors including the diversity of ethnic backgrounds and the degree of assimilation into the North American educational systems, work forces and culture. One important distinction between the situation in Europe and North America is that a majority of those entering North America today are well-educated professionals. Many Muslims initially come for undergraduate or postgraduate studies and are able to stay on when they find employment in various professional fields. Those with a university education can have an easier assimilation into the work force than laborers who often work two or three part-time jobs at minimum wages.

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Another factor in the rejection of extremist elements is the limited degree to which second and third generation immigrants are included in the leadership of mosques and other Islamic institutions. Arabic-speakers tend to have greater proficiency in fiqh and shari'a so they often dominate many immigrant Muslim mosques in functions like teaching Arabic, leading prayers and teaching the Qur'an. As such, they are over-represented in Islamic organizations. It would appear that the African American Muslim community and second and third generation immigrants are very much under-represented in official organizations and publications. This may be one reason why they are less attracted to the mosque than the first generations and radicals appear to be. The Shi'a minority in the US and Canada has established their own separate mosques and organizations. The Shi'a separation from the Sunni majority has grown rather than diminished in the United States.¹¹ Pakistani immigrants from the Ahmadiyya sect have typically established their own mosques and organizations as well.

Assimilation or Radicalization of Muslims?

Larry Poston divides immigrant Muslims into two broad categories: 'defensive-pacifist' Muslims and 'offensive-activist' Muslims.¹² The first are those who have come to North America with the intention of finding a better life and who have a minimal desire to convert North Americans to Islam. They are content to raise their families, pursue their occupations and take part in American life. These 'defensive-pacifist' Muslims have been instrumental in establishing mosques and Islamic institutions to help Muslims preserve their Islamicity in the midst of a 'Christian' North America. 'Offensive-activist' Muslims seek to propagate their faith and persuade Americans to abandon their current religious beliefs or secular lifestyle and convert to Islam. They believe that Islam is the only path and that non-Muslims will be condemned on Judgment Day. These Muslims generally refuse to assimilate into North American society. They also condemn 'defensive-

pacifist' Muslims for succumbing to materialism and secularism. Most 'defensive-pacifist' Muslims reject the radical agenda in North America.

A poll taken of British Muslims before 9/11 found that 70 percent considered themselves Moderates, 15 percent considered themselves Liberals, and 15 percent were considered Radicals (They support jihad with Scripture and are passionate about Islam).¹³ After 9/11 in the summer of 2002 the percent of Radicals grew to 25 percent and after October 2003 it increased to 45 percent. Most of these new Radicals came from the Moderates group. A British government study picked up by The Times of London in 2004 estimated that there were 10,000 Al Qaeda sympathizers in the U.K. The significant insight here is that it appears to be second and third generation immigrant Muslims who are becoming radicalized rather than their first generation parents.¹⁴ Long-time observer of Islam in the West, Fouad Ajami, describes how Islamists from the Middle East have found a willing audience for recruiting in second generation children in Europe. Europeans had been expecting Muslim immigrants to assimilate into European life and culture, ultimately producing a more tolerant version of Islam. Instead, Ajami notes, a neurotic zealotry has emerged within the gates.¹⁵ In England and France government leaders have at times described the situation as a cultural and religious battleground. Several factors seem to be responsible for this radicalization of Muslim youth in Europe. One is that moderate Muslims have failed to establish themselves at the center of their communities.¹⁶ Another element often cited is the collapse of the Christian values that once defined the nation's identity, creating a cultural vacuum which Islam is busy filling.¹⁷ Melanie Phillips points to the danger of the doctrine of multiculturalism, which believes that upholding majority values is somehow illegitimate. This effect is exacerbated when combined with the official policy of appeasing Islamic extremism.¹⁸ While living and working in France for two years during the 1980s it was apparent that the predominant Muslim majority from the countries of North Africa were in many places socially alienated from other French nationals. The fact that second and third generation North Africans continue to be viewed by French society as outsiders points to a potential barrier for assimilation and appears to make them more vulnerable to radical Islam. These are the same dynamics which were responsible for so many African-Americans in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s turning to the Nation of Islam in the USA.¹⁹ In contrast to nominal white Protestant churches and the withdrawn black Protestant churches, the Nation of Islam offered the African-American person a sense of community, of belonging, a God-given purpose and a respectable identity and dignity.

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Many are wondering if the same political, cultural, and social factors in North America could create a similar radicalization of North American Muslims. There are, however, significant differences between the Muslims of North America and those of Europe. There is a much greater ethnic diversity of Muslim immigrants in North America. This diversity has resulted in a fragmentation of Muslims along national-origin lines preventing widespread movements. North American Muslims tend to have a higher education level and be better off financially than their counterparts in Europe.²⁰ For instance, proportionally, Canadian Muslims withdraw much less from the social security system and contribute to it more than the Canadian population as a whole.²¹ One study found that children of immigrants in Germany were scoring significantly below German students in a variety of areas while a study of 400 immigrant families in the USA revealed that 40 percent of the immigrant students received, on average, grades of A or B over a five year period.²² This leads to a greater integration into the University system and professional work force.

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Differences in immigration policy between Europe and the North America are consequential. It is far easier for immigrants to obtain full citizenship in the US and Canada than in most European countries. The North American experience is one of rapid linguistic acculturation and native language loss.²³ The US and Canada are traditionally immigrant or host countries while France, Germany, and other European nations are traditionally emigration societies with no long tradition as host societies. The US and Canada also have a much lower proportion of Muslims to their general population than do European nations. Taken together, these factors appear to give hope that the kind of radicalization of second and third generation European Muslims will not happen in the same way or to the same extent as in North America.

North American Muslims are integrating into society far more rapidly and eventual assimilation appears likely for most. However, strong attachment to the mosque may be a barrier to assimilation. The Somali refugee population is proving to be an exception and a number of churches in our area report a high degree of suspicion and lack of assimilation into the local community. There are reports that American Muslims have become alienated since 9/11 as evidenced by becoming more religious.²⁴ One recent study pointed out the role that religious institutions have in the lives of immigrants by providing a place of bonding and/or providing a bridge to the wider society.²⁵ Allen found that Muslim refugees used the mosque primarily for bonding purposes while Catholic refugees used their church for both bonding and bridging to the wider society.²⁶

Conclusions

Islam has developed from a relatively insignificant number of Muslims before 1960 to a rapidly growing population today in all three countries of North America. The influence of Islam in the USA is increasing and becoming more significant, though the American and Canadian Muslim communities are relatively new and very much in the process of finding their identities compared with those in Europe. Muslims have come from 80 different nations, escaping injustice, poverty, wars and persecution to build a new life among us. Many have come from many hard to reach 'restricted access' countries where it would be very difficult to send missionaries and sustain a viable witness. In Europe many of the Muslims have formed concentrations from the same ethnic or national-origin background. This makes it easier for them to identify as a community, agree upon an agenda and be united in pursuing it in contrast to the fragmented and heterogeneous communities in North America. Muslims in Europe have stronger identities as a result of being less culturally diverse. North American Muslim communities are in a process of finding and forming their identities as they assimilate into the North American context. They do not seem to be holding onto their ethnic identity as tightly as in Europe. Extremist Islamist groups are well-funded from outside both continents and are attempting to influence the kind of Islam which will emerge. They have found more of a hearing with second and third generation Muslims in Europe who have not assimilated as fully into the educational system and professional work forces as their counterparts in North America. Many observers are pointing to cultural, social, and religious factors as the explanation for the radicalization of Muslims in Europe. An important study by Phillip Connor concluded that less welcoming immigrant contexts result in higher levels of religious commitment than the person had in their home country before immigration.²⁷ Many of us working with immigrant Muslims would confirm this having observed that immigrants who feel unwelcome and misunderstood tend to fall back more tightly on Islam as part of exercising their identity.

It appears that the lack of diversity of ethnic origin, immigration policies, and access to the educational system and professional work forces are significant factors for the rising discontent and marginalization of second and third generation Muslims in Europe. When immigrants have job security, a level of satisfaction and comfort, and an identity of dignity in the community they appear less likely to turn to the solutions which radical Islam is actively propagating on both continents. There are several major implications for those of us working in Diaspora ministry to Muslims which could be the subject of an

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entire study. The friendship network into which we are inviting Muslims must be a welcoming community that provides a bridge for the Muslim immigrant into the host culture, educational system, and professional work force. Our network should be attempting to introduce the Muslim immigrant not only to Jesus but should enable them to assimilate in practical ways so that our network appears to be a viable alternative to the Muslim immigrant community. The church into which we are inviting the Muslim immigrant needs to be an authentically multicultural community which is welcoming and not culturally distant. Otherwise we need to create culturally friendly contexts for them to discover the Christian faith. The Muslim immigrant needs to be able to see a real potential identity for himself or herself as a member of this welcoming community. If the Muslim sees the community of Christians as a viable entryway into the host culture not only will Muslims be less likely to remain marginalized and vulnerable to Islamists, but the gospel will get a better hearing.

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 - 5 Joshua Lingel, who teaches Christian Apologetics to Islam at Biola University, states, 'There are well over 2100 mosques, 165 Islamic Schools, 426 associations, and 90 Islamic publications,' personal communication.
 - 6 The Muslim Brotherhood has unofficial links with other organizations as well as having sponsored its own organization, the Muslim American Society (MAS).
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