

ISLAM AND THE QUESTION OF ITS COEXISTENCE WITH MODERN DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

Islam and Islamic culture are frequently discussed and debated around the world. These discussions have often been linked to immigration in general and assimilation and integration policies, and thus to the coexistence of different religious and ethnic groups, and to the practice of racism and racial segregation in particular. These issues have now become visible in cultural, religious and migration studies, as well as in studies of race relations and socio-economic inequalities. For example, people inside and outside academia question Islamic politics, the place of democracy and human rights in Islam, and most importantly, whether Islam can coexist with other (i.e. Western) cultures. Against this background, it is important to understand the Islamic cultural system, Islamic society and politics, including democracy, in Islam, Muslim views on migration and some other phenomena related to Islam. The article will discuss the norms and values of Islam in relation to current issues and the search for the place of political Islam, democracy in Islam and whether Islam can coexist with other cultures.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is one of the most crucial aspects of modern society. It is a system of government in which the people have a central role in political decision-making. Through elections, active participation, and the protection of individual rights, democracy has become the foundation for a just and civilized society. In the era of globalization and advances in information technology, this idea is increasingly echoed around the world.

Nevertheless, Islam and modern democracy is a complex and multifaceted topic that has been the subject of much debate and discussion in recent years. At its core, the topic revolves around the compatibility of Islamic principles and values with the principles and values of modern democratic systems.

As a system of government that bases its power on popular participation, democracy has become the dominant norm in many countries around the world. However, Islam, a religion with a long history and a wide following, has a unique view on the structure of government and the

moral values that shape society. While globalization and advances in information technology have created a more favorable climate for democracy to take root and flourish (Naseem & Tyagi, 2014), there are also concerns about the impact of globalization on income inequality and the ability of democratically elected governments to pursue their political agenda (Bardhan et al, 2006). In Latin America, for example, the market has greater capacity to influence political outcomes and also has a preference for candidates based on their position on the party-political spectrum, which may constrain the political agenda of democratically elected governments (Campello, 2015).

Islamic political thought is based on the principles of sharia, or Islamic law, which is derived from the Quran and the Hadith. The Quran is considered the literal word of God, and the Hadith are the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. Islamic political thought emphasizes the importance of justice, equality, and consultation, and it rejects tyranny and oppression. The structure of government in Islam is based on the concept of the caliphate, which is a system of government in which the leader is elected by the people and is responsible for upholding the principles of shariah.

While democracy has become the dominant norm in many countries around the world, Islam has a unique view on the structure of government and the moral values that shape society. The impact of globalization and advances in information technology on the spread of democratic values and Islamic political thought is complex and multifaceted, and it is important to consider the unique historical, cultural, and religious contexts of different societies.

Some scholars argue that Islam and democracy are compatible, and that Islamic teachings contain principles that are compatible with democratic values (Odah, 2021; Parray, 2012; Rahman, 2020). Others examine the views of Muslim intellectuals on the compatibility of Islam and democracy, and suggest that more reflection, research, and interpretation is required to reconcile the tenets of Islam with the modern notions of democracy, liberty, justice, equality, and human rights (Rahman 2020). Some scholars examine the views of specific Muslim thinkers, such as Rachid Ghannouchi, who propose principles and characteristics of Islamic democracy and argue that Islam does not contradict democracy (Alisakun, 2020). Others examine the compatibility of state religion and constitutional secularism coexistence in Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh (Rahman, 2020).

Therefore, in order to fully understand this relationship, it is important to examine the underlying assumptions and values of both Islam and modern democracy, as well as the experiences of Muslim-majority countries with democratic systems.

According to Parray (2012), development from an Islamic perspective is an integrated process that includes the processes to build up a balanced nature of economic, social, environmental, and spiritual life. It is purposeful human endeavors intended to bring about real material benefits, visible social advantages, and spiritual satisfactions based on the principle of unicity of God (Tawhid). Development is thereby a process of triangle-relations; the relations between human and God, human and human, and human and nature (environment). This perspective differs from the Western perspective on development, which is seen as failing to understand the very nature of humans as material and non-material beings.

The compatibility of Islam and modern democracy has been a subject of much debate. Some argue that Islam and democracy are inherently incompatible, while others believe that they can coexist and even complement each other. According to Kuru (2009), the compatibility of Islam and democracy depends on the interpretation of Islamic principles and values. He argues that Islamic principles and values can be interpreted in a way that is compatible with democracy, but that this requires a reinterpretation of traditional Islamic political thought.

The experiences of Muslim-majority countries with democratic systems provide insight into the compatibility of Islam and modern democracy. According to Esposito and Voll (1996), the

success of democratic systems in Muslim-majority countries depends on a variety of factors, including the level of economic development, the strength of civil society, and the degree of political openness. They argue that Muslim-majority countries with democratic systems have been able to reconcile Islamic principles and values with democratic principles and values.

The purpose of this article, however, is to explore the relationship between Islam and modern democracy. The article will examine the underlying assumptions and values of both Islam and modern democracy, as well as the compatibility of Islam and modern democracy. By examining this relationship, the article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Muslim-majority countries in the 21st century.

METHOD

The research methodology used in this article is a qualitative approach that involves a critical analysis of existing literature on Islam and modern democracy. The approach involves a systematic review of academic articles, books, and other relevant sources of information. The research methodology used in this article is based on the principles of grounded theory, which involves the development of a theoretical framework based on the analysis of empirical data. The approach is particularly useful for exploring complex and multifaceted topics such as Islam and modern democracy.

The sources of data and information used in this article include academic articles, books, and other relevant sources of information. The data and information were collected through a systematic review of existing literature on Islam and modern democracy. The sources of data and information were selected based on their relevance to the research questions and the quality of the research. The data and information were analyzed using a grounded theory approach, which involved the development of a theoretical framework based on the analysis of empirical data.

One of the limitations of this study is the reliance on existing literature on Islam and modern democracy. The study did not involve primary data collection, which may limit the depth and breadth of the analysis. Another limitation of the study is the potential for bias in the selection of sources of data and information. The study attempted to mitigate this limitation by using a systematic review approach and by selecting sources of data and information based on their relevance and quality. Finally, the study is limited by the scope of the research questions and the available data and information. The study focused on the relationship between Islam and modern democracy, and did not explore other aspects of Islamic governance and ethics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Islam has always been a topic of discussion around the world. From the Western point of view, Islam is identical with fanatic behavior, fundamentalism, militant movements that lead to terrorism (Schuurman & Taylor, 2018). Consequently, the West now uses the term fundamentalism to be applied to Islam or Islamic activists. In fact, the term is actually used to refer to conservative Christianity (Roy, 2018).

The term "Islamophobia" is now used to refer to the attitudes and behaviors of Muslim militancy, terrorism, etc. Therefore, people within and outside academia have always questioned the politics of Islam (Blom et al., 2007; Kelsay, 2007) and argued that religion is a cohesive force that independently shapes politics. This is a result of attempts made to identify Islam's unique political role (Pipes, 2017). Others argue that Islam can actually adapt and accommodate democracy if political Islam and Islamic divinity are deeply understood (Ayooob & Lussier, 2020).

It is undeniable that such debates have become public consumption outside the realm of academia and social research and have even turned public attention away from politics, media and

certain religious issues. In fact, for the time being, Islam has received good attention in the fields of cultural studies, religion and in relation to socio-economic and racial approaches. On the other hand, today Islam is even a significant political instrument in Eastern and Western countries. For example, how politicians in Muslim-majority countries build arguments against the West while Western politicians massively promote fear of foreigners. On the other hand, Islam is also utilised as a tool to pursue political power, even clearly utilised to maintain power that is not in accordance with Islamic teachings (Said et al., 2001).

Recognizing the current debate in the world about Muslim identity, Stauth (Haddock & Peter, 2003) states that Islam is slowly but surely re-emerging in world history and regaining its strong and vital position in global politics immediately after the collapse of socialism. In the subsequent dynamics, the relationship between the West and Islam has never been calm, always in a state of tension and mutual suspicion if not mutually hostile. Like two polar opposites, Islam as religion and tradition, the West as secular, modern and rational (Herbert, 2017). However, according to Mackey (1999), this is an excess of misunderstanding about Islam where sociologically, it must be recognized that the concept of Islam has not been studied and understood in a balanced and fair manner.

As already discussed, some scholars debate whether Islam is compatible with democracy and human rights, a perception that is raised from Islamic politics, Islamic jurisprudence, the position of women in Islam and so on. The discussion always starts from these points, about Islam as a political system and Islam as a religious teaching, then its position in human rights guarantees related to the position of women and minorities.

Against, it is argued that Muslims are currently engaged in a serious debate about political ethics (Kelsay, 2007) and that the politicization of religious thought is often considered an inherent characteristic of Islam (Cesari, 2004). Others argue that this politicization only emerged in the last quarter of the 20th century as a deliberate policy of the former colonial powers (El Fadl, 2001). Others argue that Islam cannot be reconciled with democracy and human rights and that the position of women and non-Muslims is fundamentally unequal in Islam (Dalacoura, 2007). Many also voice that the idea of a democratic religious government is absurd and consider Islamic societies as societies that combine inequality, theocracy and the absolute authority of jurists (muftis), the use of the death penalty and so on (Soroush, 2000).

On the other hand, others argue that some of the rights embodied in modern democracies (such as civil or political rights) do not guarantee socio-economic and cultural well-being, that the freedom of the market economy may pose a threat to human rights (Matthews, 2019), and that Islamic revivalism, for example, is the main focus of Islamic politics today (Mohammadi, 2002). As Lahoud (2005) argues, in the context of political discourse, the nature of political thought in Islam is a dangerous and controversial issue. He supports Muhammad Amara's view that "in the Islamic tradition, political power is not limited to a clear set of standards, nor do rulers adhere to a specific and uniform Islamic moral code" (Lahoud, 2005). Islamic ideology, in contrast, suggests that Islam does have a political manifesto. Certain scriptures are used to indicate divine commands. Another view says that "the meaning of a text often depends on the morality of its readers. If the reader is intolerant, hateful, or oppressive, so is the interpretation of the text, but the text does not command such intolerance" (El Fadl, 2002).

In addition, peaceful worship is a key requirement of a religious society and such religiosity can build and ensure the religious and democratic character of government (Soroush, 2000). Inter-religious and non-religious environments must be harmonized, as well as freedom and voluntary participation in democracy, which can create flexibility and tolerance. Soroush reiterates that when it comes to the issue of democracy in Islam, there is a stronger connection in some relationships, then he points out that the horizon of such judgment is covered by three dark and dangerous errors. For example, democracy is equated with extreme liberalism, while Sharia is considered

synonymous with Islam (Soroush, 2000). From its theoretical foundation, democracy limits the power of rulers to rationalize their deliberations and policies.

However, those who are uneducated, unaware or unable to acquire their rights will be disenfranchised and consequently will not achieve democracy. Democracy is a process of choice that can be achieved through periods of moderation, discussion, offering various freedoms, choices, etc. From a religious point of view, it involves many difficult decisions, discussions and trials. In both cases (i.e. Western democracies and Islamic governments), the success of the endeavor depends on the leaders of the country. As a result, we see some countries experiencing bad practices, despite citizens voting and electing their representatives. Similarly, we see autocrats and rulers seeking power in the name of Islamic governance.

Islamic scholars refer to "democratic conceptions and ethical constructs in the Islamic tradition, including *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), *shura* (consultation), *ijma'* (consensus of scholars) and *bai'at* (oath of allegiance while holding leaders to certain standards of accountability)" (Mohammadi, 2002). In other words, religion requires constant scrutiny through a "troublesome cycle of narrowing, broadening, modifying and balancing" (Soroush, 2000), which suggests that modern democracy already exists in Islam.

At its most conservative level, Islam is opposed to modern globalization, and some of its adherents vehemently deny the universal validity of a global moral vision and global culture. However, Islamic discourse sees opportunities for Islamization and argues that Islamic civilization can always be reconstructed, reinvented, and renewed, and it can provide an alternative to Western secular models that exclude Islam (Göle, 2015) at a time when societal trust in secular ideas of modern progress is in total disrepair (Kersten, 2015). Furthermore, the Islamic concept of community (*umma*) "recognizes and respects diversity but emphasizes unity" and "the idea of *ummah* is aspired to and constantly renewed" (Cesari, 2004). Although some argue that since *sharia* is "a historically based human interpretation of the basic sources of Islam, alternative and modern interpretations are possible", and recognize that renegotiation of Islam and international human rights standards is also possible (Mohammadi, 2002).

Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muḥammad and the fourth Caliph in the history of Islam stated that "this is the Qur'ān written in a straight line between two fronds (bound), it does not speak a language, it needs a translator, and the translator is a human being" (Esack, 1997). Therefore, it is recognized that interpretation and discussion are important issues in Islam. This implies that people cannot escape the circumstances they find themselves in, so their interpretation depends on the people involved, and this is also a reality in any political system.

In this context, based on the Islamists' view of Islam and the West, their arguments in favor of "Islam's place in Western society" and against the call to embrace "European ideas" show that European multiculturalists do not understand the Muslim argument. Islamic groups are not entirely opposed to so-called modernism and "we hear many Islamic groups calling for democracy" (Tibi, 2008). In this context, it is also worth noting Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk's statement addressed to Nathan Gardels, editor of *New Perspective Quarterly*, discussing the political environment of the Islamic world in relation to the political situation in Turkey "The idea of Islam's incompatibility with modernity is an argument that adopts a fundamentalist logic. Western liberals, democrats or thinkers should stop making generalized, vulgar and essentialist observations about Islam every time they find new problems, most of which are of their own making" (Tibi, 2008).

Regarding the issue of the religious rights of others, the principle of religious freedom and liberty has been guaranteed to non-Muslims living in Islamic countries (Mohammadi, 2002), as Allah says in the Quran: "Verily, those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, the Shabiin, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, they do what is good." (QS. Al-Baqarah: 256)

Another verse quote: Say (Muhammad): "We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to

us, and what has been revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Ya'qub, and their children, and what has been given to Moses, Isa, and Jesus, and what has been given to other prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him alone do we submit." (QS. Al-Baqarah: 136)

Regardless of race, color, gender and social status, Islam guarantees equal rights. The zakat system (zakat tax) guarantees the rights of the poor in society as the rich are obliged to pay zakat which will be distributed to the poor. Therefore, "Islam encourages private property but strictly limits it by forbidding usury" and provides social and economic rights through the obligation of zakat (Dalacoura, 2007).

While there is much debate over the proper and correct interpretation of Sharia - the application of Sharia in modern society - the primary concern of Sharia is to maintain good and harmonious relations within and across all levels, with a special emphasis on humanity. Moreover, according to Islamic law, the ruler is the brother of his people (Said et al., 2001). Therefore, the meaning of ummat can be viewed as a community within a shared normative framework, which is actually a product of understanding and communication.

Today, women's rights regarding marriage, divorce and alimony (in Indonesia, for example) and women's political participation (in Kuwait, for example) were initially very conservative but are slowly increasing as a result of the modernization of Islamic law (Mohammadi, 2002). Previously, the status of women in Arabia (and what we see in Europe) during the jahiliyyah, before Islam, was very limited. Against bad and ignorant customs and injustices, the Quran defends women, their place and obligations, their rights and duties. "In the Quran, women are fully independent and fully responsible human beings. The Quran speaks to women directly and does not address them through third parties, or through intermediaries, or through the intermediaries of Muslim men" (Cesari, 2004). The noble status and rights of women are clearly defined and recognized in the Qur'an, and men and women are created to give each other love and a sense of community. The Prophet Muhammad repeated many times: "Woman is the legitimate partner of man" (Soroush, 2000), and a woman, when she reaches maturity, assumes full responsibility, ability and accountability (Nasir, 2002). Sometimes women get concessions that men do not get. For example, during menstruation and forty days after childbirth, a woman is exempted from daily prayers and fasting, and these periods can be longer (never shorter) depending on her condition. On the other hand, "the Quran makes it difficult for Muslim rulers or authorities to deny women their noble status and rights, political or otherwise. [...] Denial of these rights is a sign of social, political, and moral injustice and a form of defiance of Islamic teachings" (Cesari, 2004).

Islamic scholars have stated that Islam offers and guarantees freedom of learning, expression and research in all fields of study (Mohammadi, 2002), hence Islam's position of not making its adherents prisoners of ignorance. Furthermore, the Qur'an (30:30) recognizes that every human being is created "in a state of fitrah, pure, just and free, inclined to truth and virtue, and endowed with a proper understanding of their fitrah" (Said et al., 2001).

Some argue that Islamic practices regarding women and human rights are being reformed and secularized (Cesari, 2004). However, when the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was approved in the 1950s, Muslim representation was ignored and Islamic traditions were not taken into account (Mohammadi, 2002).

In fact, this covenant emerged from a monolithic (i.e. Western) perspective and other perspectives were ignored. Since the 1980s, Muslim scholars have studied the relationship between Islam and international human rights (Mayer, 2007). Then, the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in August 1990, represented by Muslim leaders and scholars, created a new bridge between secular concepts of human rights and religious ideas, and the declaration generally indicated broader cooperation in the field of human rights (Mohammadi, 2002). Meanwhile, some Islamic

countries (e.g. Indonesia) have recognized the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and incorporated it into their constitutions (Azra & Wayne, 2008), and Muslim countries have contributed to the formulation of "public international law through their active participation in the UN" (Mayer, 2007). In the process, some argue that "Islam is compatible with democracy and civil society if Muslims want it to be", while those who believe that Islam and civil society are incompatible and therefore doubt Islam are wrong. This is dangerous for Islam, Muslims and our society as a whole (Tibi, 2008).

In this regard, we must realize that democracy is not just majority rule and not just voting procedures: it is a political culture of pluralism (Tibi, 2008). Moreover, Islamic societies need a culture of democracy, and democracy cannot be imposed from outside. Perhaps the world already has proof that democracy cannot be established by destroying a regime or exerting extreme or external pressure on it. From another point of view, it can be said that the Western approach to political communication (e.g. political participation) cannot be applied anywhere because there is a need to understand the patterns and values of the society. Otherwise, "to ask only about formal processes, about elections and public opinion, is to ignore the range of informal politics [...]" (Tibi, 2008). Democracy, participation, communication and interaction all encompass the practices and ethos of an entire society (Stout, 2004) and are defended because they are seen as invaluable and as a commentary on the state of political communication at home and abroad.

Islamic societies also need better education (and not education explicitly imposed by the West), an education that is not only embedded in their culture, but will also open their eyes to the West. They need to educate themselves to understand their rights first, to be able to conceptualize and understand the importance of democracy and the place of religion in their society. Islam can be compatible with democracy, but it depends on the responsibility and morality of its leaders, as in modern democracies, and "Islam can replace nationalism as a basis for legitimacy and loyalty if individuals, groups, and states allow it, but Islam does not show the same signs of a replacement state" (Stout, 2004). However, past and present societies have misinterpreted and misapplied Islamic law, or Sharia, to suppress "undemocratic patriarchal regimes" (Cesari, 2004), which also makes Islam controversial from a democratic point of view. Moreover, "theology", "Talibanism" and the late Osama bin Laden's popular jihad organization are dangerous not only for democracy but also for human civilization today. Selfish spirit, intolerance and a sense of supremacy, or "puritanism", hinder our civilization. Islam should therefore be considered compatible with democracy, but this depends on how Muslims interpret religious principles and on the morality and integrity of their own rulers.

CONCLUSION

The issues of human rights and democracy are controversial among scholars in the Muslim world and beyond. But both issues can be resolved if Muslims so choose. Islam can adapt to democracy and protect human rights, depending on the interpretation of Islamic principles, Quranic verses and others. Moreover, it is important for leaders to apply these principles honestly. That way, all citizens will get their rights. In addition, Islam and Western countries need to get closer to understand each other's concerns and communicate better than in recent years. As a religion of peace and tolerance, Muslims should abandon the ideology of (popular) political jihadism to create a dynamic and peaceful coexistence in any society. They should envision that Islam can be compatible with democracy if they want to. In addition, Muslims need better education and a culture of political communication that enables them to understand their rights in society and in relation to others. They must conceptualize the essence of Islam and abandon the idea of a political "jihadist" Islam.

Thus, this discussion concludes with the basic premise that in the emerging world discourse

on the West and Muslims, what is fundamentally needed is recognition and understanding that Muslims and the West agree and share common concerns, and that mutual understanding will enable mutually enriching integration.

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