State-Societal System, Values and Culture in New Zealand

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Abstract

New Zealand has observed an uneven history in context to the Muslim population and their relationship with the government. Is Muslim society integrate-able to any state-societal system, values, and culture? This would be a possible main question for any scholars who are studying Islam and Muslim societies as a minority. In this context, the contribution of this work is to investigate the influence of religion on cultural value. This research concluded that religion plays an important role in culture formation of a country. Moreover, ethnic and religion entities tend to maintain individual culture values derive by respective cultural values and religious believes thus enriching the culture and society of a country.

1. Introduction

The topic concerning Islam and Muslim[s] in New Zealand is not a new study. There has been a number of studies conducted by the scholar on this topic since the 1980s. Khan’s two-page “Muslims in New Zealand” (1981) published in The Muslims could be the first writing on Islam and Muslims in New Zealand. He briefly introduced one of the earliest accounts on this topic including the history of the first arrival of Muslims in New Zealand. Laura Ashworth (2010) examines the “implications of New Zealand’s unique Muslim community, as well as the Government’s approach to multiculturalism”. Laura focuses on the implications of the size and composition of New Zealand’s Muslim community. The author further
argues that: “New Zealand’s cultural make-up has changed markedly in recent decades, with a diverse range of ethnicities immigrating to New Zealand from all over the world. This pattern of immigration has impacted significantly on both the size and the composition of New Zealand’s Muslim population” Heitmeyer (1996) once coined and introduced the term “parallelgesellschaft”, literally translated as a parallel society. Although he only mentions immigrant groups, he actually insinuates Islam and Muslim society as an ethnic-religion-driven society in terms of their minimal approach to integrating with particular (Western) society. In this context, this work investigates the relationship between ethnic values and religious believes in the cultural formation of a country. The rest of this work has been organized as follows. In section 2 literature review is presented. Analyses and discussion are covered in section 3 whilst the conclusion and future work are presented in section 4.

2. Literature Review

Some scholars then continue the academic study of this community in New Zealand. Kolig of Otago University and Sheppard of the University of Canterbury are worth to mention in regards to pioneering scholarly studies on Islam and Muslims in New Zealand. They contended that: “Muslims in New Zealand may be viewed from at least two angles. Viewed from New Zealand, they represent a part of the recent immigration that is beginning to change the face of this society from its Maori and Anglo-Celtic past. They are a relatively small part of this movement but are distinctive and high-profile for various reasons. Viewed from the world outside, they are one of the smallest and most far-flung tentacles of the modern Muslim Diaspora”.

In a related study William Shepard (2006) states that “The Muslim community in New Zealand is small, remote and relatively new, but not so
small, remote or new as it once was. Over the last three decades it has become effectively organised and has grown vigorously, but not without growing pains”. William further elucidates that: “The present Muslim community began with a few Indian immigrants early in the twentieth century and now includes some forty nationalities, including people from various Arab countries, Malaysians, Indonesians, Iranians, Somalis, people from the Balkans, Afghans and some Pakeha. Though still small in number, the community has, in fact, increased almost thirty-fold since 1976 and roughly doubled in each five-year Census period since 1986. According to the Census of 2001, there were 23,631 Muslims in New Zealand, representing 0.7 percent of the population.5 Current estimates run between 30,000 and 50,000, with 40,000 being a reasonable guess. This would represent about 1 percent of the total New Zealand population. The majority of Muslims live in the Auckland area, while most of the rest live in Wellington, the nation’s capital, or four other major cities”.

3. Discussion and Analysis
Is Muslim society in New Zealand a parallelgesellschaft as Heitmeyer pointed out? This research will examine Heitmeyer’s idea of the parallel society in order to have a look at Muslim societies in New Zealand. Yet, given a share in common as a Western society, New Zealand and Europe have different contexts and strategies in applying the concept of multiculturalism. This research project then extends the discussion into the treatment of New Zealand authorities to Muslim societies and Islamic organizations. The permanent or temporary movement of people across territorial boundaries is referred to as migration. It could be Internal or International migration. Our concern here is the Muslim immigration to
New Zealand. In fact, New Zealand has hosted Muslim immigrants for more than a hundred years, although little is known of the very first ones. Mainly from East and South Asia, as far as is known, they were very few in numbers, individuals rather than family groups, miners and possibly sailors arriving on these shores, deciding to stay for a time or permanently. At first, hardly noticed, there are only sparse references to their presence in historic records. (Kolig & Shepard 2006).

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Although often thought of by outsiders as a single, coherent community, New Zealand's Muslims represent a wide diversity of religious orientations, ethnicities and of class and educational backgrounds. In some ways, these differences are as intense as they are in the so-called Muslim world. It is certainly not true, as many New Zealanders think (and some Muslims wish it were the case), that all Muslims are the same. These
differences, which hamper or even prevent unity here, mostly reflect divisions and tensions in other parts of the Muslim world. At the religious level, there is the division between Sunnis and Shi’is, and the division between those who affirm popular celebrations and ‘folk’ customs and those who stress Islam as presented in the authoritative texts and consider many of the folk customs as unwarranted innovations. (Kolig & Shepard 2006).

There are, on the other hand, strong forces for unity. Practically, in the face of discrimination and other pressures from the host society, any group of immigrants will tend to pull together to support each other and defend what they value and share. The intention at the outset of the Building Bridges program was to establish an environment for interfaith bridge-building in the sense of “creating new routes for information, appreciation, and respect to travel freely and safely in both directions between Christians and Muslims, Muslims and Christians.” (Michael, 2002)

Religion is derived from the Latin word ‘Religare’ which means to “to bind back” or “to rebind”. In a related but dissimilar view religion is the Latin word ‘relegere” denoting “to re-read” (Griffiths, 2000). Religion also has been defined in various ways depending on the researcher’s outlook. Some refer it to its social or psychological functions (Berger, 1974). At the same time, religion as an important determinant of identity is more likely to be more binding. It established that identity is an integral part of every human being; nonetheless, to identify a person’s identity is a complex process and depends on various factors (The Lutheran World Federation, 2015). Ethnic and cultural identities are particularly salient aspects of social identity. According to Phinney (1990) and Cameron (2004), the key components of these identities include: (1) self-identification (self-
definition or self-labeling); (2) sense of belonging; (3) attitudes toward the in-group (an emotional evaluation, including ethnic pride); (4) centrality (subjective importance and the frequency with which group membership comes to mind); and (5) involvement (ethnic, cultural, and religious behaviours and practices, including language, friendships, and dress). Social identity is understood to be that part of the self-concept that derives from knowledge about membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1981).

4. Conclusion and Future Work
The conclusion of this work shows that religion is a strong instrument in any community, New Zealand inclusive. But the uniqueness of NZ is that religion is regarded as a culture. It is placed under the Office of Ethnic Communities and supervised by a Minister, which is somehow different from other countries' systems of operations. On the other hand, Islam as a religion has a significant role to play in Muslims life, globally and in particular NZ. The future will investigate the role of cultural organizations in New Zealand. We are committed to sharing future findings with the ongoing research in this area.

References


5. Laura Ashworth (2010), Islam Arbitration of Family Law Disputes in New Zealand, A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Bachelor of Laws with Honours at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

