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Мусульманский взгляд на управление комплексностью постпривычного времени для построения лучшего будущего (Интервью с д-ром Шамимом Миа)[3]

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Аннотация. Существует множество определений современности. Одно из них называет настоящее время «постпривычным» или «промежуточным периодом, когда старые ортодоксии умирают, новые еще не родились, и очень немногое имеет смысл». Данное определение в 2010 году было дано Зияуддином Сардаром, британским мусульманским мыслителем-энциклопедистом, в ключевой статье «Добро пожаловать в постпривычное время». Эта концепция стала главным структурообразующим элементом интервью с доктором Шамимом Миа (Лондон, Великобритания). В интервью были рассмотрены вопросы современной общественной жизни с точки зрения мусульманского мировоззрения в контексте постпривычного времени. В нем

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[3] Интервью было проведено в рамках исследовательского проекта BR21882428 «Влияние и перспективы ислама как духовного, культурного, политического и социального феномена в постпривычное время: опыт стран Ближнего Востока и Центральной Азии».

предлагается разбор ключевых компонентов теории постпривычного времени, таких как комплексность, хаос и противоречия, и их проявлений в современных мусульманских сообществах по всему миру. Также собеседники затронули тему разделения в современной академической науке исламоведения и мусульманских исследований, что может помочь осознанию и правильным выводам в отношении ряда острых вопросов, связанных с современным исламом и теми, кто его исповедует. В интервью была затронута и тема политического ислама, его места и роли в современном развитом обществе, а также говорилось о необходимости развития критического мышления у исповедующих ислам.

Information about the article

Shamim Miah[4]
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A Muslim Perspective on Navigating the Postnormal Times Complexity to Build a Better Future (Interview with Dr. Shamim Miah)[6]

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Abstract. There are multiple definitions of contemporary time. One calls the present "postnormal times" or "an in-between period when old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have yet to be born, and very few things seem to make sense". This definition appeared in 2010 in *Welcome to Postnormal Times*, a seminal paper by Ziauddin Sardar, a British Muslim polymath. The concept structured the interview with Dr. Shamim Mia (London, UK). During the conversation, he examined issues of modern life from the Muslim perspective in the context of postnormal times (PNT). The interview offers an analysis of the critical components of the PNT theory, such as complexity, chaos, and con-

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traditions. Their examples in contemporary Muslim communities are given as well. The discussion also addresses the separation of Islamic Studies from Muslim Studies in modern academic science. Such separation can help raise awareness and proper conclusions regarding specific pressing issues related to modern Islam and those who profess it. The interview also briefly touches upon political Islam, its place and role in a modern developed society, as well as the need to nurture critical thinking among those who profess Islam.

Keywords: postnormal times, Islam, complexity, Muslim societies, changes.

– Thank you, Prof. Shamim, that you agreed to give an interview. To start our conversation, let's talk about our time, which is characterized by uncertainty and rapid changes. How does this affect Muslim societies worldwide? What are the primary areas of change?

– It is a fascinating and timely question as well. I will answer this question in two ways. There are things that affect Muslim communities in Muslim-majority countries. Moreover, there are also Muslims living in a diaspora, which is increasing in numbers. The Muslims living in a diaspora are perhaps the most critical and crucial group because of contemporary factors and socio-political issues. Let us look at the Muslims living in a diaspora, for example, in the context of the United Kingdom. We have Sadiq Khan, the London mayor, who is of Muslim heritage, or you have got Humza Haroon Yousaf, a Scottish politician who has served as First Minister of Scotland and Leader of the Scottish National Party since March 2023. He is a Muslim of Pakistani heritage. Then there is Anas Sarwar, an oppositional leader in Scotland who is also of Pakistani heritage. They all came from one particular geographical area of Pakistan, namely Panjab. Moreover, their activity is not necessarily about integration but about contribution. Here, in the UK, we have moved away from the debates and the discussion of "Should Muslims integrate into Western society?" as well as other questions of integration or assimilation, including political ones. We live in an exciting moment when we can move away from these debates. Now we look into the contribution issue, not necessarily for Muslims but for society in a broader sense, when you can use a more inclusive definition of contribution. For example, when we talk of Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London, he does not represent Muslims only but all the people of London who happen to be Muslims in significant numbers, as well as a significant number of non-Muslims. And suppose my understanding of sociology, politics, and economics serves me well. In that case, we will have an increasing number of Muslim contributions happening in the fields of politics, economics, and science. We will witness different political changes that will impact the understanding of theology and other areas.

Many exciting developments are happening worldwide in Muslim diasporas, e.g., Canada, the USA, the UK, France, Germany, etc. Those developments have an interesting bearing on our understanding of what constitutes Muslim politics. So, leaving that aside, there will be other interesting developments taking place in the Muslim world, which we can divide into three segments.

We have the Muslim world, which embraces capitalism and shows how it can surpass Western capitalism. Among them are countries like Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and Qatar that say, "Look, if the measure of progress is capitalism, we can outdo that capitalism." Moreover, everything these countries do is gaining speed. For example, in October 2023 Saudi Arabia hosted a professional boxing match took place in Riyadh between two legendary heavyweight

boxers Francis Ngannou and Tyson Fury [1]. I recently watched a documentary on the event that discloses that when the fighting contracts between the opponents were signed, the stadium where the fight was supposed to occur did not exist. However, it was constructed in a ridiculous amount of time: in 180 days, Saudi Arabia completed the Kingdom Area in Riyadh, accommodating 30,000 people. That stadium was to entertain people from around the globe. That stadium was to entertain people from around the globe. That example shows that when it comes to such issues as speed, this group of Muslim countries can outperform the capitalists, and they do it exceptionally well if the speed of capitalism determines your marks of progress.

Then we have other parts of the Muslim world who are coming from the yokes of the Arab Spring. This group includes such countries as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and other countries in the different parts of the world that experienced the Arab Spring back in 2010-2011. Very interesting research done by the sociologist, Asif Bhat [2; 3]. He presented a fascinating theory that says that Muslim countries of that period went not necessarily through a *revolution* but *'Refvolution.'* In other words, he says those Muslim countries undergo neither 'revolution' nor 'reform' but a paradoxical in-between space.

Moreover, these *'Refvolutions'* are happening not necessarily in these individual countries but in peripheral countries. So, the events taking place in the Saudi version of 2030 now should be understood in the context of the Arab Spring because the Saudis do not want to repeat the same scenarios that have happened in Tunisia and Egypt. So, interesting sociological research projects are happening in those parts of the world. Conversely, there are typical Muslim countries that seem to repeat the history of decline. I am thinking of countries like Bangladesh or Pakistan, plagued by the cyclical decline of politics, personality, etc.

But one thing is sure: environmental impacts arising from the climate crisis will disproportionately affect the Muslim world. This situation will significantly impact climate refugees stemming from the sudden or gradual movement of people resulting from climate-exacerbated disasters, such as heavy rainfall and droughts. There is also a new phenomenon that human geographers such as Laurie Parson and others describe as *Carbon Colonialism* [4] or the process through which the West outsources its environmental impacts. In my opinion, the big issues that collectively unite the Muslim world will come from the impacts of climate change. Moreover, the Muslim world has a significantly younger population, so the influences of AI on employment, education, and culture will disproportionally affect it. The Centre for Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies has started important work in this field through its *Atlas of Muslim Futures* [5].

Returning to your question and answering it more coherently, we can discuss the Muslim world in its plurality. I do not think that there is a *Muslim world*, but instead, *Muslim worlds* in the history, developments, speed of change, and level of chaos unique to these geographical parts of the world. And I also think that we cannot talk about the Muslim world without talking about the Muslim diaspora. Because my understanding of history – and I am more of a sociologist – seems to demonstrate that when macro changes happen in the Muslim world, they do not necessarily come from the center and determine the change but rather from the periphery. Most of those big Muslim thinkers like Ibn Sinah or Al-Farabi came not from the center but from the Muslim periphery, and the countries of Central Asia – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – made a profound impact on shaping the character, history, and direction of the Muslim world.

Once again, when it comes to the issue of change and development, we need to look not only into the center but also at what is happening in the margins of the Muslim world. It is important not to think in terms of prioritizing but look more in a mosaic way, recognizing that the picture is not determined by one model or point. The developments are taking place throughout the terrain, the whole Muslim world, and we have to take a holistic picture. More-over, it would help if you took a broader picture to make sense of the Muslim world. Often, when we talk about the Muslim world, we tend to zoom in on specific areas, like Palestine. It is a tragedy, no doubt. However, we must learn to zoom in on a broader picture to see the complexity of the chaos and speed at which the Muslim world is changing. Therefore, it is essential to have a complex understanding of change and not of isolated cases.

– Complexity is one of the characteristics of postnormal times (PNT), which is actively propagated by the Centre for Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies, where you are a senior fellow. How does the PNT theory contribute to Islamic Studies? How can we apply it to this field?

– It is an essential question. For Islamic Studies, we can identify two broad approaches, which correspond to two axles—the horizontal and the vertical ones. The vertical axis is about relationships between God and individuals. Questions like how many times you should pray, how you should pray or fast, etc., are basically about the relationship between God and His subjects, and they transcend time.

However, there is a horizontal axis or relationships between individuals and fellow individuals, or *muʿāmalāt* issues[7], which deal with interactions with fellow human beings, issues dealing with economics, politics, culture, technology, and other fields. Islamic Studies scholars should have a grounded understanding of this particular change in order to make sense of the contemporary Muslim world or Islam in general.

I want to add that if you accept that Islam is for all people, for all times, and all spaces, then those issues of the horizontal sphere dealing with interactions among fellow Muslims as well as interactions with those who happen to be non-Muslims become much more critical if you like. For example, let us take the environmental problem. Muslim theologians have to understand issues related to chaos, speed, and complexity. However, at the same time, we have to recognize that the environmental impacts affect not only Muslims but also everyone because we all inhabit the world. That is why we have to redefine the concept of *ummah*. It means not only Muslims or Muslims who share the same *madhhab*. In this case, the ummah will have a broader definition and an encompassing aspect. Therefore, the scholars of Islamic Studies have to understand the *muʿāmalāt* issues, which require understanding the issues of history, politics, futures studies, and postnormal times. Otherwise, we won't be able to navigate environmental, economic, or political terrain.

Contradictions are the central aspect of postnormal times, and I find it interesting that recently, about the issue of genocide in Gaza, Palestine. It was South Africa, which is not a Muslim majority country which submitted an *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)* through

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[7] *Muʿāmalāt* (Arabic: معاملات, literally "transactions" or "dealings") is a part of Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh.* It includes civil acts and, in general, all aspects of fiqh that are not *ibadat* (acts of ritual worship such as prayer or fasting).

the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 29 December 2023. Another example of genocide took place in Myanmar, where a series of ongoing persecutions and killings of the Muslim Rohingya people by the military took place. More than one million people were displaced, and another African country – I think, the Gambia – took Myanmar to the ICJ. So, where is the concept of ummah in those cases? If the concept of ummah is to mean anything, it has to understand the complexity associated with the world, world politics, ethics, and justice. You do not have to be a scholar of Nelson Mandela to comprehend why it was South Africa to initiate the case against Israel. The history of apartheid is still hurting. We have to understand the broader complexities to understand the broader chaos of the world and the Muslim world to navigate throughout society. I do not think we do ourselves full justice as Muslims and live to the highest ethics that the Qur'an teaches us if we do not understand the society we live in today.

There are examples throughout the history of Islam of that. If I am not mistaken, it was Imam Al-Shafi'i[8], one of the famous jurists. He gave a few *fatāwā* or legal rulings while being in Iraq. However, when he went to Egypt, he gave different directives. Many scholars have reflected on this and concluded that the social-cultural context determines the process of legal rulings. One has to understand the issues that deal with society's nature in order to give specific rulings. My point is that the best way of understanding the nature of socio-cultural change is through the social sciences.

Nevertheless, there are issues related to interactions between fellow human beings. They go through changes from one historical period to another, from one geographical space to another. People who represent Islamic Studies have to be grounded in futures studies, post-normal theory, economics, sociology, and ethics. We cannot have the 'ulamāʾ giving judgments on complex scientific issues if they have training only in theology. What they need to demonstrate and cultivate is the idea of polylogue between the people who are experts in Islamic Studies, experts in politics, and experts in ethics and science. They have to develop a consensus through dialogues and debates because we have to recognize not only our individual disciplines. Nowadays, a researcher cannot only be a sociologist but should also use transdisciplinary approaches to understand societies and changes and develop solutions and recommendations for those solutions.

– In this context of complexity, comparing Islamic Studies of the 20th and 21st centuries and referring to your image of horizontal and vertical axles, can we say that we can now differentiate between *Islamic* and *Muslim* Studies?

– Absolutely! For example, the issue of terrorism goes on throughout the world. If you open the Qur'an and try to make sense of suicide bombing, it will not take you anywhere. The textual hermeneutics can lead to the only possible conclusion that suicide bombing is wrong. However, the Text says one thing, and the Muslims' behavior says the other, even though those behaviors are justified on the grounds of religion.

You have to ask yourself, "What should we do in order to understand the Muslim world fully and comprehend what is happening?" The answer is that we have to understand the Muslims' behavior. We have to understand not what the Text says but rather what Muslims do. One cannot understand what Muslims do through the Text, through the

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[8] Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (767–820) was a Sunni Muslim scholar, jurist, traditionist, theologian, ascetic, and eponym of the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence.

Qur'an, *ahadith*, hermeneutics, or Arabic language. Understanding Muslim behavior through social sciences, economics, sociology, cultural studies, and political sciences is essential. This is my argument for the importance of developing Muslim Studies. Only by developing these studies will we be able to make sense of complexities and contradictions and understand the changes that are happening.

Textual studies are very important, but contextual studies are important as well. They help to understand the nature of a Muslim society. There is a fascinating political scientist from France, Olivier Roy. He spent much time researching the Afghan world back in the 1980 s. Five years ago, he published a book on the nature of ISIS [6]. The idea of the book is to understand why Muslims flew from France, Germany, other EU countries, and different parts of the world and joined ISIS. What motivated those individuals to go there? So, he looked through the biographical profiles of those people. Some would have thought that those "volunteers" might have had a background in Islamic Studies or madrasah. However, the author found that people who went there had a history of cannabis consumption, a criminal record, or mental health issues. It was not the Text that motivated them; it was something else. So, Roy developed the theory of Islamization of the radicals. In other words, it was not Islam radicalizing individuals but the radicalization of Islam by people. People who were already radicals had a tendency to go to prison; they radicalized Islam. This work proves that it is crucial to see what people do, not necessarily what the Text says. Olivier Roy is one of the many political scientists who says that in order to understand the Muslim world, the reference point should not be only the Text. Behavior, sociology, politics, and economics should be behind the individual.

– So, we have started talking about epistemology, which is one of your academic interests. How is it changing in light of the changes we have discussed above? Can we now identify Islamic epistemology and Muslim epistemology?

– I am quite pessimistic about answering this question. I do not think that Muslims are developing their own epistemology. Instead, because of colonization, we automatically accept the epistemology of the West. We follow the same Western logic as we set up the university departments and have separate social, humanity, and other sciences. We do not see a direct connection between ethics and economics or medicine and ethics. We do not recognize that philosophy should inform our medical practice or govern how we think about economics. I am quite pessimistic that we have developed new ways of thinking or looking at the world. We are practically reverting to the old Western thinking about knowledge classification. It is on the one hand.

On the other hand, some Muslim countries still continue to discuss knowledge Islamization, not necessarily looking into the epistemological flows of how disciplines are formed. Ziauddin Sardar, in one of his books [7], looking at the integration of knowledge and the implications of that process, says that we have to integrate the knowledge system in order for us to navigate the complexities of the world. It pushes to the vertical direction discussed above. I have also discussed this at length in one of my articles on Zombie disciplines published in an edited collection by Ziauddin Sardar entitled *Emerging Epistemologies: Changing Fabric of Knowledge on Postnormal Times* [8]. In fact, Sardar has an excellent article in that volume named *The Smog of Ignorance: Knowledge and Wisdom in Postnormal Times* for those interested in this area of discussion [9].

Talking about Islamic epistemologies, we can take lessons from the past. For example, reading the works of Ibn Khaldun, who wrote in the 14th century, we see that when he tried to make sense of the rise and fall of civilizations, he did not find a single discipline that would help him to understand the phenomenon he was observing. He basically developed his own discipline, and it was sociology. He did not talk about Islamizing a discipline but created a new one. We should invest a lot of time and energy in inventing new ways of looking at the world and not necessarily reverting to old models that do not necessarily serve any purpose. That will be my response; it takes a lot of time and investment.

Our challenge is not looking to the old models of knowledge formation but instead searching for new ways of looking at the world. We have many examples of that throughout history. If we look at the classification of the hadith literature, we see that Muslim *‘ulamāʾ* had to come with that classification system as new knowledge. Alternatively, if we look at *fiqh*, the knowledge system of jurisprudence, someone had to develop it. Jonathan Brown has an interesting book [10] on the canonization process of *Sahih al-Bukhari*[9]. Often, Muslims tend to take the hadith literature as a given one, but it was socially constructed, and society played a critical role in it. We should stop persistently looking into the past and start looking forward.

However, we should not abandon ALL the intellectual traditions, like Chinese or Indians, because there is an intellectual substance on which we can draw. The beauty of Islam is in Muslims' ability to collect knowledge from all around the world. There is a hadith that says, "Knowledge is a lost property of a believer." Knowledge is not a product of the Greeks but divine and inspired. And if the Devine inspires it, we can benefit from the Greeks, the Chinese, the West, and others. That will be my response.

– Considering a new type of epistemology, what can promote and what can prevent its development?

– Basically, we have to take ownership of knowledge production to prioritize the idea of agency. We have to become masters of our own destiny. We have to invest in our own system of knowledge production in. universities and other educational institutions. Nevertheless, it does not mean we cannot and should not learn from others. It is also essential to learn from other disciplines and intellectual heritage. I am not talking about just the West. Let us take the series of books about the history of science and technology in China by Joseph Needham[10] [11]. The author talks about the idea of science and technology developed by the Chinese. Another book called Beyond Timbuktu by Ousmane Kane [12] focuses on the Islamic form of

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[9] *Sahih al-Bukhari* is a hadith collection and a book of sunnah compiled by the Persian scholar Muhammad al-Bukhari around 846. The author was born in Bukhara, which is today's Uzbekistan. "Sahih" in Arabic means "authentic". Alongside "*Sahih Muslim*," it is one of the most valued books in Sunni Islam after the Quran.

[10] *Science and Civilisation in China* is a monumental piece of scholarship that breaks new ground in presenting to readers a detailed and coherent account of the development of science, technology, and medicine in China from the earliest times until the advent of the Jesuits and the beginnings of modern science in the late seventeenth century. It is a vast work, necessarily more suited to the scholar and research worker than the general reader, and published by Cambridge University Press. For more details, see Winchester, S. (2008). The man who unveiled China. *Nature* 454, 409–411. https://doi.org/10.1038/454409a

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knowledge from Western Africa. Therefore, we should look at knowledge globally; it will serve us much better.

For example, if we talk about Islamic history, scholars usually start with the death of the Prophet, then the Umayyads, Abbasids, and so on. However, what if we start the history of Islam from the point of Central Asia, Western Africa, India, or China? I visited China, and several *aṣ-ṣaḥābah*[11] are buried in China. The history of Islam in China goes back to the ninth or tenth century. There are mosques from that time there which you can still visit. There are possibilities for developing the history of Islam not from an Arab-centric point of view but from a much broader and inclusive perspective.

– There is an issue with such an inclusive perspective in Islam, particularly in our part of the globe. Integration and study of, let's say, other madhhabs are almost blasphemy here. Being a Muslim here means to be an adherent of only one, that is, the Hanafi madhhab of the Maturidi school. However, strict belonging to only this or that madhhab is not typical for the rest of the Muslim world. So, what can help people overcome that separatism and segregation?

– That is a critical point. If someone lives, for example, in a remote village in Pakistan, then adhering to the Hanafi madhhab makes sense because everyone else is also of the Hanafi madhhab. But it does not make sense if someone works in the prison ministry delivering spiritual care because they interact with people from different intellectual and madhhab backgrounds. It means you have to have a more pluralistic understanding of your own Islamic tradition.

Islam, by definition, is quite diverse. The cultural imperative is the center of Islamic civilization. If we look at the architecture, for example, Muslims have built mosques differently in Uzbekistan, India, and Africa. That was the beauty of Islam, that we can draw upon something important in our Muslim heritage to understand and be more inclusive. The world is becoming so interconnected that we cannot live in seclusion anymore. That is one of the things that the postnormal times theory is teaching us. The world's speed is so profound that we must confront those challenges, otherwise we will be left out. Coming back to my point, if we recognize that Islam is for all people, all times, and all spaces, we have to embrace those challenges. The good thing is that the Islamic intellectual heritage is not a closed tradition; it is very open and dynamic.

– Let us turn to another issue widely discussed in our region: political Islam. In the context of the war in Gaza, it is gaining prominence in the discourse around the world. How is political Islam changing?

– I want to give another book by the author I have mentioned already as an example. It is The *Failure of Political Islam* by Oliver Roy [13]. The book's central argument is that every time Islamic political parties stand for local or national political elections, they lose. The political solutions, that those parties offer, are not adequate to the needs of the Muslim communities because they do not recognize the complexity, the actual chaos around the world, or the speed of change – those core aspects of the postnormal times theory, which we take as the historical reality. After the pandemic, we thought postnormal times was a theory, but the society confirmed it.

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[11] *Aṣ-ṣaḥābah* (Arabic: الصحابة, "The Companions") were the Muslim companions of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad who had seen or met him.

As for political Islam, the idea of reinstating the Caliphate as the answer to all the questions for the Muslim world is just populism and has nothing to do with a concrete plan of change. Let us take the central premise, for instance. If the Caliphate had the solution to all the problems, how did the Caliphate come to an end in the first place? It is a logical question! To bring solutions to ingrained problems, one needs to do much hard work in economics and sociology and look at them from an interdisciplinary point of view. The same is true about solid grounding in the textual sciences, which cannot guarantee a robust solution. Also, if you have a detailed reading of Islamic history, say through the 3-volume *Venture of Islam* by Marshall Hodgson [14], you must really ask the question: When did we have a unified caliphate? This is especially true given the internal conflicts between rival political dynasties and empires.

Another point is that the older political Islam sees the solutions to the Muslim community rooted in the past. In reality, the solutions for the Muslim communities lie in the present and the future. Until we accept that premise, there will be one sound after another sound, one after another sound.

– We can only solve our current problems by looking back into the past. However, we must be critical about what we take from the past into the present and the future.

– Yes, a hundred percent agree!

– So, what might influence our critical lenses, and what should influence them for Muslims in this time of complexity?

– You make a very interesting point here. Ibn Khaldun's history is not a study of the past because history informs the present and, in the same way, informs the future. So, history becomes a study of philosophy. From the critical perspective, history is not solely about the past because the past informs our present. Therefore, we have to look at history from the point of view of philosophy, and critical thinking is central to that. Ibn Khaldun argues that in studying history, we see that wisdom is not necessarily received from one generation to another. Instead, the individual must step back and critically evaluate the information passed from generation to generation.

Without developing a sense of critical thinking, Muslims cannot navigate the contemporary world of, for example, fake news, AI, and many other big questions we are facing. We have to embrace critical thinking, otherwise we will not survive. How do you know whether the image your friend is sending you is real? This year, 2024, is a year of politics because the world will face many more political elections than any other time in history. We know that AI and deep fakes will be central components of that. As we scroll down TikTok, we have to be armored with critical lenses. Otherwise, we won't be able to navigate the terrain. Two useful sources that might be useful to your reader are the *Postnormal Times Reader*, volume 1[12] [15], which is already available and can be downloaded on the CPPFS website, and the *Postnormal Times Reader*, volume 2, which is coming soon. Both volumes have several profound articles covering a wide range of topics on the complex, chaotic and contradictory nature of our times.

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[12] For downloading go to https://postnormaltim.es/sites/default/files/uploads/PostNormalTimesReader (booktext)-USintlepub(25APR2019).pdf

НАУЧНАЯ ЖИЗНЬ

– Critical thinking is closely connected with asking questions and questioning *the status quo*. Yet, Muslims are often accused of questioning the faith itself when they start asking questions. They are looked down upon as traitors and edified that they should take what they are told for granted. But it doesn't work like that in the contemporary world. Still, the question is how to balance faith and critical thinking in PNT?

– That is a big challenge, isn't it? The Qur'an teaches people to accept that God is one. It is a belief, and we have to accept it. To accept it, we should have the critical faculty and choice. We have to be grounded in a sense of the Real. That will be my answer. It is a big challenge for individuals as well as for our institutions, the madrasah system, the schooling system, and the education system. Otherwise, faith becomes irrelevant. I have already alluded that we cannot break away from the past because traditional forms of knowledge are also necessary. Yesterday, I read an article about building schools in Africa and how indigenous forms of knowledge use different materials. The problem is not in embracing or not modernity but in having a more inclusive picture. We do not reject the traditional knowledge system but critically interrogate it.

– Modernizing does not necessarily mean rejecting what has been in the culture for centuries, but seeing how we can adjust that without losing our roots, first of all, cultural roots, yet not being trapped in them. And this dilemma is important for the issue of identity. The UK is an EU country with the biggest share of the Muslim population. What does it mean to be a Muslim in the UK?

– The unique feature would be the recognition that identity is not fixed but fluid. It is a constant process of becoming. My Muslim identity today is not as it was ten years ago or is going to be ten years from now. Because identity is constantly in the process of becoming, it is not a destination you arrive at but a journey. We can say that our identity is constantly made. It is a unique feature for a Muslim living in a diaspora. You are intensively being changed.

– But isn't that fluidity a unique feature for Muslims living everywhere?

– I would say that it is; this is the essence of identity. However, for Muslims in a diaspora, it is a critical feature. Because for a person living in a Muslim-majority country, the dynamics will be different. There Islam is the cultural fabric of society. You go out and hear the *adhan* [a call for prayer] daily, you may have a Friday off. If you want to pray, you do not need to seek a room for that. People living in Muslim-majority countries take these things for granted, and it is a norm. However, Muslims living in the West are constantly on the periphery. Islamophobia always challenges them from society and different institutions. Therefore, Muslims in non-Muslim countries have to learn to navigate.

– However, the Mayer of London is of Muslim background, and the Muslim population in the UK is growing. Do you think the British Parliament may welcome an Islamic political party one day?

– No. We moved away from that. Throughout history, we can identify several periods, like the politics of separation, the politics of integration, and the politics of assimilation. Now, we are in the politics of contribution. It is about how Muslims can contribute to the broader fabric of society. This is our big question. It is not about separatism and creating a separate system, but how to contribute to the society we are a part of–not only to a local Muslim community.

– Do you think that creating any political entity for Muslims would be considered as a separatist intention, and there are many other ways to present their ideas and demands?

– Yes, there are lots of opportunities in developed countries, though many people are moving to places like Dubai or Qatar. But that's the point of the problem: dealing with the challenge where you meet it, facing institutional Islamophobia, violence, etc. It becomes increasingly challenging and not an easy way of living here in the West, but that shows your level of commitment to society.

– And it also shows the level of maturity of your relations with God. So, thank you for your time and the answers you shared.

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