Muslims in America: Identity Dilemma and the Islamic Fundamentals of Coexistence

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Abstract

Muslims in the contemporary United States try to assimilate themselves with the American society to benefit from potential opportunities of this country; however, they are concerned about preserving their Islamic identities well. This article attempts to examine the Islamic fundamentals of coexistence which could help Muslims to keep their Islamic identity and meanwhile be assimilated with the multi-cultural and multi-religious American society. Unlike many scholars who believe that Islamic teachings would not allow Muslims to be assimilated in non-Muslim societies, this article concludes that assuming American identity by Muslims does not necessarily lead to avoiding Islamic principles and thus, Muslims can practice noble principles and fundamentals of Islam during the procedure of coexistence while preserving their Islamic identity on one hand and becoming American on the other.

Keywords: Muslims, Islam, coexistence, identity, America

1. Introduction

The United States of America hosts one of the largest groups of Muslim immigrants in the globe. The Muslim community in the United States is widely varied. These Muslims on one hand tend to maintain their religious identity and on the other hand try to be part of the American society and to play a role in political and social institutions. That's why they may face an identity dilemma and cannot decide which one to choose. Preserving Islamic identity in the American society and at the same time assuming American identity may face them with dual identity and therefore force them to opt for only one. This article surveys Islamic principles of coexistence which could help Muslims to preserve their Islamic identity and simultaneously to be able to play a role in the American society. In fact, Muslims enter the United States of America to enjoy the benefits of the "American Creed" including liberty, equality, civil rights and the rule of law; however, circumstances dictate them to identify themselves with an "American" identity. Americanization of Muslims requires the integration of cultures and coexistence of beliefs. In recent years, socioeconomic realities of the Unites States have necessitated the American Muslim community to further integrate their original culture with that of the West and therefore facilitated the possibility of their ideological coexistence.

The main question of the article regarding the Islamic fundamentals and principles of coexistence is that which part of the Islamic teachings, by what means, could be helpful to Muslims in the process of Americanization and simultaneously in preserving Islamic identity. To answer this question, the article firstly explains the status of the Islamic identity in the American society and then demonstrates that by relying on intellectual and theoretical foundations of Islam about coexistence, Muslims can both preserve their religious identity and be assimilated with the American society.

Coexistence in Islam has fundamentals, principles, theories, approaches and solutions; out of which, this article examines some of its fundamentals. By fundamentals, we are referring to Muslims' convictions, attitudes and beliefs that are rooted in original teachings of Islam and are crucial in shaping the interactions of Muslims with non-Muslims.

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Moreover, the first step for changing one's behavior is to amend their convictions, attitudes and beliefs and then to construct appropriate ideological and cognitive fundamentals in their minds. By Islam, we are referring to Quran and the *Sunnah[1]* that are both universally accepted among Muslims.

Islamic Fundamentals of coexistence that are examined in this article include views to human beings, views to religions and views to society. In this sense and according to the findings of this article, if Muslims in the American society could harmonize their views (on other human beings, religions and society) with Quran and *Sunnah*, then they would be able to adhere to their Islamic identity and meanwhile play a role, as Americans, in socio-political arenas.

2. Muslims' presence in the United States and their Current Status

For ages, the dominant discourse in Europe and later in America regarded Muslims as "outsiders" and regarded Islam as "other." Whereas long before the word "multi-culturalism" was coined, the Islamic civilization in Andalusia was actually multi-cultural for almost seven hundred years. In this region, Muslims, Christians and Jews were having peaceful coexistence.

Not much is known of the first Muslims in America, yet most scholars believe that Zammouri, also known as Estebanico, was the first Muslim in America who was bought as a slave by the Spanish and was taken to Florida; and then huge wave of slaves form African countries were brought to the region. Still, there is controversy among historians surrounding the exact number of Muslims who were brought as slave; however, estimates show a population of up to one million people. Doubtlessly, for hundreds of years, Muslims were part of the history of America (Curtis, 2009, p. 4).

The population growth of Muslims in America can be divided into five periods: 1. early 18th century: during which, a considerable amount of slaves who came to America were Muslims (Haley, 1976) and had to leave their language, culture and religion behind. 2. and had to leave their language, culture and religion behind. 2. Late 19th century: when Muslims from East Europe (Russia, Albania, Yugoslavia and Poland) and Near East (Turkey, Palestine and Syria) entered the USA. It was considered as the first voluntary immigration of Muslims to America. Most of these people, who came to America as labor force, had lost their religious identity as a result of interfaith marriage with other religions (Christianity and Judaism) or due to the limits or impossibilities of travelling to their homeland. On the other hand, some of these immigrants could assimilate themselves in the American society and could preserve their Islamic culture (Khan, 1980, p.34-39). 3. WWII to 1965: in this phase of immigration, there has not been a sharp rise in the population of Muslims, yet there occurred significant changes. The awareness of Muslims increased with the independence of third world nations and the coming of Muslim diplomats and traders. The newly empowered class, tried to participate in the US politics, economics, and society. These attempts coincided with the arrival of a significant number of Muslim students to the American universities, resulting into the establishment of Muslim Students' Association (MSA) in Canada and the United States in 1952. It was in this period that for the first time, Muslims started building mosques and Islamic centers in large cities. An early example of which, is the Islamic Center of Washington D.C. Establishing such centers is regarded as turning points in the evolution of Muslim community in the US. 4. 1965 to 2000: with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, patterns of immigration to the United States were changed. Accordingly, numerous Muslim immigrants from around the world applied for living in the United States and many of them could even win permanent residency. 5. Post-2000: this period has greater complexity than those four previous ones. In this phase, a large number of Muslim students and traders from almost all countries of the Middle East, Africa, South Asia and South East Asia have entered America. Since then, Muslims are trying to quickly assimilate themselves into the American society. In fact, the sooner immigrants melt themselves in the American pot, the easier they would be accepted by the White Anglo-Saxons Protestants.

In recent decades, the ethnic and religious formation of the American population has significantly changed. The reasons for that include the rapid growth of the Muslim population and the increase in conversion to Islam in this country (Eck, 2001). Today, Muslims constitute a growing part of the American society. Due to the discontinuation of asking about religious affiliation since 1936 census, there are no precise official statistics concerning Muslim population in the US (Jones, 2002).

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[1]*Sunnah* is the verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings, silent permissions (or disapprovals) of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad

According to estimates (Haddad, Smith, & Esposito, 2003, p. 1-19), after Christianity and Judaism, Islam, is the third largest religion in the United States. As Leonard mentions, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the United States and is on the verge of overtaking Judaism (Leonard, 2003). According to a Pew Research Center estimate, in 2015, there were 3.3 million Muslims in the United States. This center also estimates that by the year 2050, Muslim population would constitute 2.1% of the US population (nearly 8.1 million) and would surpass the population of the Jews (Muhammad, 2016).However; many scholars (Bagby, Perl, & Froehle, 2001) estimate the Muslim population between 6 to 7 million people which makes it the second largest religion in the United States.

This populous community is unique in terms of diversity and includes a wide range of ethnic, racial, and cultural groups. Muslims of America are mostly immigrants who entered the United States from 77 different countries. 63% of American Muslims were born outside of the United States. Almost 9% of the US population has origins in Pakistan. In terms of regional backgrounds, the largest group belongs to Arab Middle Eastern countries and Northern Africa constituting 41% of Muslims born outside of the US and 26% of American Muslims. The second group is from Southern Asian countries like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan constituting 16% of whole Muslim population. Other immigrant Muslims have origins in sub-Saharan Africa and Europe (Pew, 2011). In order to actively participate in the host country, these entire immigrant Muslims, of any social background, need to be accepted and be assimilated.

3. Assimilation of Muslims in the American Society

1.3. Assimilation Procedure

Assimilation primarily means accepting new conditions (Peek, 2005, p. 215-242). It refers to the ways in which members of the immigrant community are absorbed into the host community through various mechanisms like language, socio-economic mobility and interracial marriage. Overall, assimilation as a one-way procedure means integrating immigrants within the host society. In this procedure, immigrants are challenged while adapting themselves with the new society. According to Burgess (1925, p. 47-65), assimilation is a procedure by which immigrants gradually turn to the lifestyle of the host society (case in point the United States). In classical models of assimilation, like in the writings of Warner and Srole(1945), in order to be assimilated with the host society, the immigrant groups were expected to move from being adapted to adopting mainstream cultural traditions and practices of the host society.

In the "straight line" model of assimilation, acculturation of immigrants and their children is very crucial in terms of their economic and social development in the host country. This model depicts a straight process, during which, immigrants from different generations gradually accept new cultures to be fully assimilated with the host society. Moreover, newer studies argue that assimilation process is a multi-faceted, complex and highly intertwining, which entails cultural, social and economic consequences (Gans, 1979, p. 1-20).According to the above definition, and then we need to define how the assimilation of immigrants is, in the United States and where Muslims are in this process.

Aronovici(1920, p. 135) believes that an outsider is a person who is away from his/her native milieu a place where local traditions, language, dreams and aspirations, ethnic and national loyalties, economic and legal reforms were dominant and is placed in a new milieu with many difficulties to integrate in its way ahead. One may opt for an American lifestyle and leave a positive view of himself/herself in the society, or be seen as a dishonest and dangerous alien, seeking acceptance without adherence to basic principles of the host society. American Muslims belong to the first group. Unlike Britain and some Western European countries that receive a disproportionate percentage of poor and unskilled working class Muslim immigrants, America is a destination for educated Muslims.

This social reality has placed the American Muslims in a unique position to promote convergence between Western culture and migrant culture and to preserve their Islamic identity. This unique position does not make Muslims to abandon their cultural heritage and religious obligations (Haddad, 1991).However, in the process of being adapted to new surroundings; it is possible that some of the Muslims may give up some of their identity features, like voluntarily adopting American names (Goffe, 1999, p. 22-22);in order to be more assimilated with the American society.In the past, many factors facilitated the assimilation of immigrants in America: most of the immigrants were from European countries with similar or compatible cultures with that of America; generally immigrants were trying to become American and those who refused American lifestyle, values and culture returned their countries;

Immigrants from different countries came to America and none of them had the supremacy of language and nationality over the other; immigrants in ethnic neighborhoods, which in no case constitute a majority population of a large city or an area, were scattered across the United States; immigration was sporadic, associated with pause and declines; and even Immigrants fought alongside the Americans and many of them were died. However, nowadays most of these factors have confronted with different complexities. Samuel Huntington (2004, p.185) argues that today assimilation process is slower and different from 20th century and Muslims are no exception.

The current reality in the United States shows that Islam and Muslims can no longer be referred to as "outsider or stranger." Due to the significant presence of Muslims in the United States and despite the unstoppable stimuli of globalization, there is a need for a new paradigm that could change former discourse of "Islam against the West" and could replace it by a new model based on "Islam in the West". This article tries to introduce those Islamic teachings that could eliminate confrontation and strengthen the Islamic discourse in the West.

For AfafNasher, the executive director of Council on American-Islamic Relation in New York (CAIR-NY)(as mentioned in an email to me from Nasher, August 11, 2016), "American culture is a culture of different cultures. What means is that living in one homogeneous way does not represent America. We are a country of immigrants, tied together by central values of freedom that allow us to live respectfully and equally under the law". Feisal Abdul Rauf (2012), a prominent Muslim leader in the US, believes that Muslim immigrants and their children have been assimilated in the American culture. All Muslims are socialized to become American; this socialization is explicitly evident through clothing and behavior and implicitly in customs and moral values. Muslims are trying to become American citizens; they are socialized to accept beliefs and values.

Statistics and figures also show the assimilation of Muslims in the American society. Accordingly, more than six-in-ten Muslims "do not see a conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society," and a great number (56%) believe that most of "Muslims coming to the U.S. today want to adopt an American way of life rather than remain distinctive from the larger society." Only (20%) say that Muslims try to keep a distinction from the American society (Haddad and Esposito, 2001). Attempts to assimilate Muslims in the American society have provided living conditions for this group of people. While in 2007, only 54% were satisfied with their life in the United States, in 2011, roughly eight-in-ten Muslims (82%) were satisfied with their life in the United States. This number is higher than that of the Americans population in general (75%)(Ibid, Muhammad, 2016).

1.1.3. Americanization of Muslims

When in 1963, Glazer and Moynihan asked that "to what does one assimilates in modern America?" the answer in 1990 was Americanization. Yet, after 2000, answers were complex, contradictory and vague. Many American elites no longer believe in the practicality of mainstream American culture and instead defend the doctrine of diversity and equal credit for all cultures in America. "Immigrants do not enter a society that assumes an undifferentiated monolithic American Culture," Mary Waters observed in 1994, "but rather a consciously pluralistic society in which a variety of subcultures and racial and ethnic identities coexist"(Tatalovich, 1995, p. 136-48, 150-60).

As much as the United States is becoming multicultural, therefore immigrants either opt for subcultures, or preserving their own cultures or a mixture of American culture and identity and their own culture and identity. They may even assimilate themselves with the American society without being absorbed in core American cultural. Hence, "assimilation" and "Americanization" can no longer be considered as equal.

Americanization involves a wide range of features that can be found only in the United States. Turks immigrate to Germany and Algerians to France, yet they do not try to introduce themselves as "German" or "French." On the other hand, immigrants who go to America try to assimilate their clothing, eating behavior, English accent, behavior and even their mindset, and introduce themselves as "Americans". Americanization implies acceptance of production patterns, consumer behavior and common ways of American life by someone from another country. This complicated process involves scientific, technological, economic, social, political and cultural aspects. Twentieth century was known as the "American Century."In fact, Americanization is in compliance with a process of values originated from Europe. Values that have been developed and evolved by the United States through compliance with rational principles, new methods of management, art, politics, religion, sports and business (Barjot, 2003, p.2-3).At the core of these developments, a set of values and beliefs or "American Creed"reflecting a unique image of the United States appears. With assimilation in American society, Muslims can also enjoy "the American Creed." As mentioned earlier, Americanization of Muslims needs the assimilation of cultures and the coexistence of beliefs.

They are fundamentally different from their predecessors; they were born in the United States, have grown up there, have continued their education in this country and as an American have fought and died in the army(Wright, 2016). They are "Americanized" and as Kaya(2004, p. 295-308) puts it, they are like a bridge between their "old or aged" parental immigrant culture and a "new" one. "While we huddle together as Pakistanis or Egyptians or Iranians or whatever else, our children are, whether we believe it or like it or hate it or not, American kids. The question should be whether they will be Muslim-American kids or just American kids. Anyone who believes that he will raise an Egyptian boy in America is wrong; the maximum we can do is to have a distorted Egyptian kid. The grandchildren will be without doubt American", said Muhammad Ahmadullah Siddiqi (Hathout, p.62), a Muslim leader in America.

The idea of the compatibility of values and principles of Islam with those of America is intertwined with the concept of "American Muslim" and reconciliation between Muslims and Americans we are not just Muslims or just Americans, we are both of them, said Louay Safi, a speaker of Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). There is no discrepancy or inconsistency between being a Muslim and being an American. Our values reflect others' values; they do not challenge each other. We do not have to choose; we can easily be both of them. In fact, "American Muslims" emphasize on the flexibility of Islam. Schmidt(2004, p.189) believes that Islam is an "American religion." This conceptualization does not change the concepts of sacred texts or original doctrinal principles, yet it is only influential on the perception of Muslim communities of reading, understanding, and their practices in their own life. He adds that "religion is nothing but practice and that practice is always influenced by time and place. The Islam which is practiced in America is involved with American culture and would continue as American as well."

Overall, the integration of American culture and identity with the Islamic culture and identity reflects "American Muslim." In the past years, countless efforts by American Muslims have been made to preserve their religious identity while assimilating with the American society; actions and efforts which reflect the criticality of Islamic original thinking and principles for Muslims in one hand, and on the other shows that there is no conflict between Islamic principles of coexistence and the assimilation of Islamic followers in the United States.

4. Measures Taken to Preserve Islamic Identity and Americanization

During the past five decades, the US religious landscape has changed quickly with the approval of the Immigration Act in 1965. A massive flood of new immigrants has arrived to American territory that is more diverse than their previous counterparts in terms of race, language, ethnicity and particularly religion. In this respect, in the growing diverse religious landscape of the United States, Islam has associated a special status to itself. Islam is a major component of individual and collective identity of Muslims in the world. Muslims' identity is derived from an "objective" and "eternal" system of beliefs (Ysseldyk, Matheson, &Anisman, 2010, p. 60-71) capable of having the potential to coexist with other identities and cultures. Likewise, American Muslims can preserve their Islamic identity and simultaneously assimilate themselves with the American society and play a role. To do so, firstly the concept of "identity" should be examined.

1.4. Defining the Concept of Identity

Identity is a term that has both academic and everyday usage. This concept covers a wide range meanings and definitions. Sometimes different meanings and sometimes interrelated meanings are associated with identity; including I, me, we, self, self-concept, self-image, self-representation, self-identity, ego, superego, character and etc. (Doran & Mohseni, 2007). In fact, identity implies two main meanings. Firstly, it expresses the concept of absolute similarity; Secondly, it refers to the concept of differentiation which assumes consistency and continuity over time. Therefore, identity simultaneously establishes among people or objects two likely relations; on one hand, similarities and on the other differences (Jenkins, 2014, p.16). Identity has always been important during centuries and many social, psychological, philosophical and mystical definitions are associated to it. Conventionally, identity is the borderline between us and others and is a relative concept that holds similarities and differences jointly in it. Our identity is our particular dedications which are not others', and in this respect we are different with them, resulting in mutual recognition between us and them. Two elements are involved in shaping one's identity; how one defines itself and how it defines others. Identity, in whatever level, arises in contrast to "other."

2.4. Preserving Religious Identity in Assimilation Process

The United States of America is a product of a settler society. Settlers and immigrants are fundamentally different from each other. Settlers of a community are provided with an existing society; they are usually in groups and are saturated with a sense of collective purpose. On the contrary, immigrants do not form societies, because they only move from one society to another. Migration to the United States has turned this country into one of the most successful multi-ethnic nations of the world that any foreigner would like to take the most advantage of the potential opportunities of this country.

Muslims also fall within this framework, a framework which has some certain complication for them. Since, they are struggling to assimilate themselves in the American society in one hand, and to preserve their religious identity on the other. There are many scholarly researches (Haddad & Lumis, 1987) on the role of religion in preserving immigrants' collective identity, many of which emphasize the relationship between religion and ethnic identity regardless of the fundamentals of the intended religion. According to Williams (1988, p. 12-13), although religion is an important aspect of ethnic culture, however, distinguishing properly whether having religious affiliation for a community living in another country is vital or unnecessary is difficult; hence having a brief review to some religious roles on immigrants' identity is necessary.

Religions considered as a major factor in organizing the hierarchy of identity. Reasons for emphasizing on religious identity are the functions that religion has in a society. In addition to the role of religion in meeting one's mental needs; membership in a religious organization has psychological and social benefits like holding meetings with ethnic groups and creating economic and educational opportunities. Therefore, the more a religious person gets benefits from that, the more they would be affiliated to religious beliefs. Moreover, to overcome the feeling of being alienated and socially isolated from the host society, immigrants usually refer to their religions (Kwon, 2000, p. 109-123). So, they would pursue building religious institutions and resume their activities in the host society.

In fact, in this procedure, the significance of religion in defining "the self" becomes even more important for the immigrants. This applies in circumstances where immigrants move from the communities in which they were part of the religious majority, and then migrate to a country where they would be considered as a religious minority, like Pakistani Muslims, Israeli Jews and Indian Hindus who migrated to the United States. Besides, religion can be used as a tool to underlines personal and social distinctions within the context of the US multicultural society (Rayaprol, 1997).

While in the pluralistic and secular society of the United States, religion has been reduced to a "simple discourse," respectively, followers of different religions are becoming more aware of its potentials and more committed to their religious beliefs and values (Warner and Wittner, 1998, p.17).In this regard, observing religious duties, wearing religious clothing (Hijab) and affiliation to religious organizations act as important indicators of identity which help boosting individual self-consciousness and maintaining group cohesion.

Muslims identity, being derived from the Islamic teachings and fundamentals, is distinct from the American identity; yet with the continuing presence of Muslims in the liberal society of the US, in long-term this distinction turns into compatibility and interaction. A compatibility and interaction which are "difficult" if not "impossible for the Muslims to find in other countries like Russia and China."For instance, Muslim communities in Russia Chechen, Dagestani and Tatar do not describe themselves with Russian identity and resist Russian efforts of cleaning up Islamic identity.

In China, officials pursued de-ethnicization of Uyghur Muslims. In schools, Uyghur language was replaced by Mandarin language; and Islamic traditions and symbols, including wearing veil or growing beard, prayer and fasting have been banned or severely restricted for employees of state organizations. There were broader repressions in the Soviet Union. In accordance to Russification policies, officials recognized Russian language as the official language in all universities and schools. Appealing to similar policies, the Bulgarian government in 1980s obliged all minority groups; particularly Muslims to change their Islamic family names into Bulgarian. These efforts led to Muslims' dissatisfaction and consequently a massive immigration of more than 350 thousand Bulgarian Muslims to Turkey in 1989. Things are different in the United States, as society is open to Muslims and there is no obligation for abandoning their Islamic identity. Like Protestants, Muslims also seek to adopt American identity and simultaneously preserve their beliefs. According to Pew Research Center, roughly seven-in-ten American Muslims (69%) believe that religion has a significant role in their life.

Among American Muslims, 96% believe in God, and 65% (nearly two-third) perform their daily prayers (Mogahed& Pervez, 2016, p.9).Also, the number of Muslims who are participating in meetings held by different NGOs or mosques has increased annually. In 2000, 12% of the mosques were attended by over 500 people, while in 2011 the figure was 18%. Muslims had a growing participation in Eid prayer as well[1]. According to statistics, Muslims participants in Eid Prayer had reached an estimated 2.6 million in 2011, compared to two million in 2000. (Bagby, 2012, p. 4) Participating in religious ceremonies reflect the fact that Muslims seek to preserve their religious traditions.

3.4. The Role of Islamic NGOs

Preserving Islamic identity and assimilating in the American secular society requires Muslims' measures and provisions which are mainly done through Islamic NGOs organizations that seek to minimize the challenges of Muslims. Religious organizations provide Muslims with a secure environment for the exchange of views and strengthen their religious identity. (Ammerman, 2003, p. 207-224) Religious and interfaith organizations, civil society, political and legal organizations are placed in this category. Each of these organizations have specified functions in the United States; for instance, some are focusing on education and spiritual awareness, while others have adopted strategies to promote interfaith dialogue and look for ways of reconciliation between Islam and American democracy with the aim of combating violence and promoting peace. In fact, Islamic centers and NGOs have become a leading intermediary between American mainstream, government and Muslim society. Moreover, there are some centers and NGOs which are trying to eliminate Muslims' challenges of assimilation in the American culture while maintaining religious principles.

Obviously, such institutions cannot be exclusively considered as the first providers of assistance to Muslims in the history of Islam. Although it is hard to found an exact equivalent for today's Islamic NGOs in the past, yet the tradition of charity (*SADAQA*) has been there since the beginning of Islam. *Zakat* and *Waqf*, which are applicable in the redistribution of wealth among Muslim communities, can be part of this tradition. Nowadays, most of Muslim NGOs in the American society perform in the form of advocacy organizations. Holding educational courses and classes and contributing in building mosques are among the measures taken by NGOs to preserve Islamic identity in the American society.

Holding numerous programs to facilitate Muslims' livings in the American society has turned *the American Society for Muslim Advancement* into one of the most successful NGOs in unifying Muslims. American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA) believes that the more knowledgeable Muslims become of Islamic texts, the more likely they would preserve their identity and be flexible in interactions with followers of other religions in the American society. One of the key factors of this interaction is expanding the scope of training to the American Muslim community. Cordoba Initiative has the responsibility of this training. Cordoba Initiative is an organization affiliated to ASMA which seeks, through massive training programs, the improvement of the relations between the Muslim world and the United States, as well as the acceptance of other religions by the Muslims as an objective reality.

In this respect, Cordoba Initiative cooperates with Christian and Jewish leaders in investigating origins of cultural intolerance and violence. This organization, being cited for more than five thousand time in the US media (Cordoba House), in an effort based on the principle of "thinking of others as yourself", tries to prepare the American liberal society for further assimilation and acceptance of Muslims through media, lectures, and publications (books and articles). Also, Cordoba Initiative believes that faithful persons collectively hope for the expansion of peace. In order to create a lasting peace, people should strive to promote more realistic understanding of religion (Proquest, 2011).

In the United Sates, young Muslims have defined an especial status in the training programs of Islamic NGOs. Comparing to other NGOs, CAIR organizes a wider range of activities, among which "Muslim Youth Leadership Program" can be pointed out. MalekHabak, Communications Coordinator at CAIR-LA describes this program as:

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[1] According to the publisher, thousands of Muslims participate in such ceremonies being held in Islamic centres. In some cases, due to massive participation of Muslims, these ceremonies were held in open environments such as parks.

"a series of workshops that brings together high school youth across California to receive training in public speaking, media relations, public service, and civil rights according to Islamic principles. By providing an in depth understanding of the legislative process and hands on training in civic engagement and media advocacy, 50 youth were able to advocate for the anti-bullying legislation in their meeting with California legislative officials in the State Capito" (as mentioned in an email to me from MalekHabak, November 23, 2016).

On the other hand, NGOs also pave the way for the construction of mosques and Islamic centers. Mosques play an essential role in the lives of Muslims. The number of mosques in America is growing. In 2011, the US Mosque Survey estimated that there are 2106 mosques in the United States. Comparing to the number of mosques in 2000 (1209 mosques), it had increased by 74%. In the United States, mosques are important religious and social institutions with different functions and roles for Muslims. Unlike, in Muslim societies where mosques are mainly a place for worshiping, in the United States Muslims refer to these centers to preserve their Islamic identity. Whereas mosques in the United States have other functions like a place for social and educational services, social gatherings and political participation (Bassiri, 2010) .More than 20% of mosques offer full-time courses over the weekends. A considerable number of these courses (73%) are about basic principles of Islam at primary levels. Generally, nearly two-thirds of all mosques in the United States operate courses over the weekend (Ibid, Bagby, Perl, & Froehle 2011). In addition to holding religious classes at weekends, many mosques provides classes in Islamic Studies with a focus on memorizing Quran, analyzing fundamentals and principles of Islam, youth activities and classes for those newly converted to Islam. Also Nasher explains that:

"CAIR's role in helping Muslim Americans to keep our Islamic identity is centered in protecting our constitutional rights to be able to practice our faith without unjustified interference. This means we fight against illegal opposition to masjid construction, Islamic centers and schools. It means we help to ensure Muslim children attending government public schools do not have to take off their hijab or skip salah. It means that employees at work do not have to compromise principles of their faith out of fear of getting fired or harassed at work. It means that we can fully engage in society on every level as productive citizens and still live in a way that is, insha'Allah, pleasing to Allah (swt) and the Rasul (saw)" (as mentioned in an email to me from AfafNasher, September 12, 2016).

There are many Islamic principles for having a peaceful coexistence that, if practiced by Muslims and Islamic NGOs, can help preserving the identity of Muslims and facilitate their assimilation in the American society and bring about desired results for the millions of Muslims in the United States of America.

5. Islamic Principles of Coexistence

In this section, some Islamic principles of peaceful coexistence, which can be helpful to American Muslims in having a better interaction with other people and religions in the American society and simultaneously preserve their own identity, are discussed. These principles are discussed in three categories of views to human beings, views to religion and views to society.

1.5- Views to Human Beings

The fact that how American Muslims view human beings and other people in the United States has a major impact on how they behave or decide. In the following, there are some Quranic verses and parts of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad, which help Muslims to have a deep and efficient understanding towards human beings in today's world.

1.1.5. Belief in Human Dignity

Many Quranic verses and Islamic teachings explain inherent human dignity from an Islamic perspective. According to Quran, when God created man, God breathed from his own soul into him[1], and honored him above all other creations[2].

Allamah Tabataba'i (1988, p. 228) believes that the attribution of spirit to God is due to regarding respect, dignity and honor for the human beings. This divine spirit or honor is exclusively bestowed to all human beings of all times regardless of their race, religion or political affiliation.

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[1]Quran, 15:29 / 38:75
[2]Quran, 17:70

Prophet Muhammad, in his Farewell Pilgrimage sermon had emphasized that "your Lord is One, and your father is one: all of you are from Adam, and Adam was from the ground," and no one is superior to the other (Al-Harrani, 1983, p. 368). When God created Humans, He ordered all angels to bow to Adam[1]. The first reason of Angels' prostration was because of humankind himself and his nature not his attitude, religion or ethnicity; and secondly (as *Imam* Ali the Islamic ruler from 656 to 661 explains it) because of honoring and dignifying human beings. Firstly, the merit of pious and devout people is only before God, and it is only God who can distinguish piety from hypocrisy or recognize the level and value of human virtues; and only God knows how what to do with these people in this world or in hereafter. Then, because of their piety and inner faith, a great deal of advantages and a high ranking position would be given to them in the afterworld[2]. Both cases are related to God and hence human interactions with each other or the allocations of rights and socio-political positions cannot be criteria. Yet, there is an argument among some scholars that whether criminals, convicts and sinful are also having human dignity and divine spirit, or their human dignity is lost (Ja'fari, 1991, p. 279-304). There are many theories in this regard that are not our concern in this paper.

2.1.5. Believing that All Human Beings are from the same Origin:

In the Islamic teachings, there are many arguments and reasons that prove all human beings are from the same root or origin. From the Islamic perspective, this can be explained in three areas:

(1) A single origin before creation (spiritually and naturally): God says in Quran that He took the covenant from the Children of Adam and all their descendants and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): "Am I not your Lord?" all of them answered "yes" and testified, so that on the Day of Judgment they could not say they were not mindful[3]. According to this verse, God takes covenant from each individual human being and makes them testify His Lordship. This divine covenant has been placed in the nature of humans and hence is continuously taken from all human generations (Qutb, 1982).According to Tabataba'i(Ibid, 1988, 408-411), all human beings has come out of the loins of same man and the covenant with the Lord was taken from the elements of human seed before the According to this verse, the origin all human creation is one.

(2) A single origin at the time of creation (physically): Quran explicitly explains that God firstly created a single body, then created his mate from his like nature and finally it is from those two whom many men and women were born. In the onset and closure of the verse, God warns people about their behaviour and asks them to have respect for God as well as for each other and their relatives[4], and this is an important recommendation for having coexistence and respect for each other. However, this diversity in the creation of mankind and making them into groups of different races is also in accordance to God's will, as another Quranic verse says that if God wanted, He could have created humans as one *Umma*, and could create them alike with one attitude or belief, yet He did not[5].

(3) A single origin after creation (socially): Quran stipulates that all humans were from one single nation[6]. This means that at first human beings were an interrelated group with many commonalities but later were divided into tribes and groups. This division was due to disputes, social needs, demands and realities of human societies, or – as Tabataba'i(Ibid, 1988, p. 168) describes - jealousy, rage or human greed and does not have originality.

Therefore, from this perspective mankind can still be considered as potentially one nation if jealousy, rage, cruelty and greed are left aside. Obviously, becoming one nation does not mean having one ideology or one religion; as other verses of Quran also recognize diversity of religions[7] and diversity of cultures and groups[8] regardless of being rightful or wrongful as a reality,

Which means an agreement on general principles of ration and human, and adherence to peaceful coexistence? In other words, becoming one nation in one sense can mean rejecting injustice, aggression, greed, war and violence, and a general agreement on basic principles of a peaceful living.

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[1]Quran, 20:116 / 2:34 / 7:11 / 17:61 / 18:50.
[2]Quran, 49:13
[3]Quran, 7:172
[4]Quran, 4:1 / 6:98 / 7:189 / 39:6
[5]Quran, 11:118 / 5:48
[6]Quran, 2:213 / 10:19 / 21:92 / 23:52
[7]Quran, 2:62 / 5:69
[8]Quran, 49:13

3.1.5. Distinction between Essential and Accidental Aspects of mankind

Distinguish between essential and accidental aspects of human being have a rational basis which is also rooted in the teachings of Islam. Human being is consisted of two aspects: essential and accidental. Essential aspect refers to things that the essence of human beings depends on, and is not relative, like honor[1], divine spirit breathed into humans[2], and reason, which bring differentiation and advantage for humans over other creation in the world. Accidental aspects refer to relative and changing factors like race, color, attitude, belief, geography or where people live. While essential aspects have originality and humanity of a person depends on that, accidental aspects are marginal and subsidiary and thus do not affect humanity. The basis of viewing at human being and its rights and dignity is its essence and while the essence of human does not vanish at any circumstances, so does the human dignity and rights and they never lose their originality, so accidental aspects should not lead into conflicts, tensions and consequently forgetting peaceful coexistence.

The concept and phenomenon of "being minority" or belonging to a group, tribe or particular culture is a "changing" and "relative" factor." It is changing because one can become majority group by changing his/her religion, belief or homeland; and it is relative because some individuals or groups may be minority in one society while some other with exactly the same characteristics and beliefs would be majority in another society. Accidental aspects being changing and relative which cause the creation of ethnic, cultural, and ideological diversities or minority groups should be subordinate to essential aspects which are "constant" and "original" and human dignity and rights including those of minorities and diverse groups of societies derives from them.

2.5. Views to Religion

In the American society, there are many different people with different religions who should work together towards common goals. The question is how Islam and Muslims view other religions or those who do not have a particular one. The answer to this question would help Muslims in a way that while preserving their Islamic identity, they can have a positive view towards followers of other religions or beliefs and cooperate with them.

1.2.5.No Mandatory Religion or Belief:

According to the Islamic teachings, there are several reasons why accepting any particular religion or belief is not mandatory, otherwise it would have essentially no legitimacy or value. It has been stipulated in Quran that the acceptance of religion is not mandatory[3]; also Quran explicitly mentions that if God wanted so, He could make all of them believers or Muslims[4]. However, God chose to leave people to their own in opting the way they want, the result of which they would see in the afterlife[5], and Quran articulates for the Muhammad that his responsibility is not to overawe people to accept Islam, but to solely advise and preach[6].On this basis and according to another Quranic verse, everyone is responsible for his/her own behavior and action, whoever opts for the right way and right religion, this is for their benefits, and whoever closes his/her eyes on the correct and righteous way, then they have acted to the detriment of themselves. Inner faith is the result of each individual's free will in accepting religion and their autonomy in consciously choosing that. God says to Muhammad that if people deny you, say my doings are for me and yours for you, and I am not responsible for your actions and you are not for mine[7].

The same applies to the case of another verse which confirms that attitudes, behaviors and doings of each person is for them[8], however, this does not mean that all behaviors and attitudes are correct (righteous), but attitudes and behavior of every person is assessed in its own logic and context, and of course, everyone will be held accountable and will see the result of his doings.

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[1]Quran, 17:70
[2]Quran, 15:29 / 38:72
[3]Quran, 2:256
[4]Quran, 10:99
[5]Quran, 76:3
[6]Quran, 50:45 / 88:21,22 / 10:99 / 3:20 / 5:92 / 5:99 / 13:40 / 16:35 / 16:82 / 24:54 / 29:18 / 42:48 / 64:12
[7]Quran, 10:41

[8]Quran, 2:139

That is why, from the Islamic perspective, there is no right for anybody to compel others to have a particular religion or belief be it righteous or correct[1].

2.2.5. Having Respect for Each Individual's Doings according to their Religion:

In Islamic teachings, there are some proofs and reasons that show doing righteously and humanitarianly and being virtuous are most valued and most important. While Quran recognizes Islam as the religion which is acceptable to God[2], it also stipulates that if followers of other religions truly believe in God and act righteously, salvation would be theirs as well and their reward is with God[3]. Tabataba'I (Ibid, 1988, p.239) believes that salvation and prosperity is not solely for Muslims, but for all who truly believe in God and act righteous. Although Tabataba'i (Ibid, 1988, p.278-281) believes religions of pre-Islamic era as distorted, yet he does not consider them as obsolete, nevertheless, he regards some Quranic verses as the abrogation of some statements in other religions. Quranalso recognizes light and guidance in other divine scriptures and asks their followers to comply with and practice them[4]. It is stipulated in Quran that Torah is also the command of God[5]. Islam approves other religions and holy prophets as associated. Quranic verses tell Muhammad that:

"We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: we sent inspiration to Abraham, Isma´il, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms. Of some messengers We have already told thee the story; of others We have not;- and to Moses Allah spoke direct;-Messengers who gave good news as well as warning, that mankind, after (the coming) of the messengers, should have no plea against Allah: For Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise."[6]

Accordingly, Islam approves all previous prophets and of course recognizes the Prophet of Islam as the last of them who has brought the most complete religion. Muhammad has also said that "all prophets are brothers and our religion is one"(Kathir, 1998, p. 320).It shows the one and only essence of all divine religions, while Abraham is the spiritual ancestor of all divine religions and has been introduced in Quran as the first Muslim and monotheist[7]. Another verse in Quran indicates that:

"To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute"[8]

While acknowledging all divine scriptures and religions, this verse states that God did not want to make all people of one religion and one community, and more importantly, this verse identifies a practice as the essence of all divine religions and beyond any nationality, religion or belief, and it is "the practice of goodness and righteousness." That is why it is mostly recommended that the followers of all religions and all men get ahead of each other in doing good and being good. Therefore, Quran considers good deeds as the main criteria of judging people. Yet there remains another question where some Quranic verses stipulate that the accepted religion before God is Islam[9] and it would not be acceptable by God from a person who takes a religion other than Islam[10]. These verses can be interpreted in correlation with other verses regarding divine religions, in a way that while Islam is introduced as the most complete, most comprehensive and most righteous religion before God, then expectedly it would be the one accepted by Him. Nevertheless, each divine religion has righteousness in itself, and includes God's commandments. So, cases in which it would not be accepted from a person who follows another religion other than Islam are firstly when the person knows Islam and recognizes its completeness and comprehensiveness but refuses to follow it[11].

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[1]Quran, 3: 20 / 5:99 / 5:92 / 42:48
[2]Quran 3:19
[3]Quran 2:62 / 5:9
[4]Quran, 5:44 /5:47 /5:68
[5]Quran, 5:43
[6]Quran 4:163-165
[7]Quran, 3:65-67
[8]Quran, 5:48
[9]Quran, 3:19
[10]Quran, 3:85
[11] There are some Quranic verses saying that non-Muslim people are judged based on their rules and beliefs.

Secondly, Islam is a complete religion and following its rules has respectably its own earthly and heavenly rewards, hence, it is not logical for a person who does not accept the perfect religion to expect his religion being equally accepted like a perfect one and see its equal results. However, some believe that "Islam" in these verses, does not refer to the name of the religion of Islam but to its literal meaning which is succumbing to the will of God and obedience to God.

3.2.5. Realism in Dealing with other Religions

Each phenomenon can be examined from two perspectives of being right or wrong, (correct or incorrect), and existing objectively as an external reality or not. In our case, the external realities of peaceful coexistence are the presence of different religions, faiths and attitudes. Many Quranic verses view this factual phenomenon realistically. There are many verses which recognize other religions as a fact and ask their followers to behave according to their own beliefs and principles[1]. Even God makes those who reject the call of Muhammad by their own[2], and by making everyone responsible of their doings, He does not make them to compulsorily accept the religion of Islam. This does not contradict with the fact that Islam is the only accepted religion before God[3]. This is actually Islam and Quran which see Islam as the most complete and the best religion while followers of other religions see their owns as the best and the most complete one otherwise their religions would be essentially put under question by themselves. However, what Quran stipulates about the completeness and accuracy of Islam does not contradict with having respect for other attitudes, beliefs or even other human beings. Also, it has been argued that a person who believes his/her religion, beliefs and attitudes are the best and the most complete ones, still respects and dignifies other religions as well, though not acceptable in his mind.

The next phase of Islamic realism includes those who believe in no religion and worship no God. Then, if Muslims are confronted with such people, once more a peaceful coexistence becomes meaningful and crucial, since they are faced with a reality which should be come up with, so that everyone could practice based on what they believe. According to *Imam* Ali, "the faithful persons perform (good) acts in his rule while the unfaithful enjoys (worldly) benefits in it". While confronting with the unfaithful, Quran commands Muhammad to "Say: O ye that reject Faith! I worship not that which ye worship, nor will ye worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship, nor will ye worship that which I worship. To you be your religion, and to me mine."[4]

Here, it is not the issue of being right and wrong; since people are situated in a circumstance in which different groups do not accept each other's beliefs and each insists on his/her own. In the above verses, Quran commands that the religion of each person belongs to his/her own and no one should be annoying or disruptive to the other. Tabataba'i(Ibid, 1988, p. 645-648)has interpreted the objective of these verses as not having an agreement with or persuading each other, yet as a sense that nobody would accept the belief and faith of the other. As a result, each pursues his/her own way. This view from Quran is an important strategy for coexistence and closes the way of "violently asking others to think like us and to be like us."

3.5. Views to Society

The main question is that how Islam views society and how Muslims should behave in a multi-religious and multicultural society. In this part of the article, those Quranic verses and tradition which are helpful to American Muslims in having better interactions with the multi-religious and multicultural society of the United States of America are discussed.

1.3.5. Believing in "Thinking of Others as Yourself" or "other-self"

"Thinking of others as yourself" as one of the most important Islamic fundamentals is a social strategy rooted in Islamic teachings and refers to the views of human beings towards each other. Based on an important Islamic principle, thinking of others as you means that everybody should consider others as him/herself.

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[1]Quran, 5:44 / 5:47 / 5:68
[2]Quran 6:104 / 10:41 / 2:256
[3]Quran 3:19 / 3:85
[4]Quran, 109:1-6

According to this principle "you should wish for the others what you would wish for yourself, and reject for others what you would reject for yourselves" (Al-Saduq, p. 395).This central principle of Islam is absolute in a sense that, it is applicable to any people from any society in any time and any place. However, there is an issue in our case that while Muslims in an Islamic society are considered as majority, by immigration to a non-Islamic society they may become minority; or even they may actually be a minority group in their own homeland. By the principle of "other-self", and the necessity of reason and social ruled, the religion of Islam should introduce certain principles and practices in dealing with non-Muslim minorities of Muslim countries, so that the same principles and practices could also be expected from non-Muslims towards Muslim minorities. Muslims should treat with non-Muslim minorities in a way that they wish Muslim minorities be treated in other societies. This fact, which has been considered in Islamic teachings, is a full-realistic view in social and political interactions between individuals of one society. In a multicultural, multi-religious and multi-racial society, any group, race or religion should treat others in a way that he/she expect to be treated by others, and regard what is bad for him/her as bad for others as well.

2.3.5. Multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Attitude:

Muhammad's conduct was that followers of different religions or thoughts should live peacefully together, be free to perform their rituals, and no one should prevent or disturb them (Alikhani, 2007, p. 270-484). This conduct comes from a humanitarian attitude towards all other people regardless of their race or religion. Muhammad said that "people are equal like comb teeth". Obviously, identity, ethnic, cultural and religious diversities have no impact on being equal, yet it is the matter of being human per se.

In the letter of Alito Malik Al-Ashtar one of the most loyal companions of Ali there are many sentences that addresses all human beings regardless of their nationality, race, class or religion. In this letter, the word "people" has been mentioned for nine times; "subjects, or citizens" for thirteen times; "public, or common people" for three times; "any person" for twice, "worshipers of *Allah*" for once, and more importantly "one like you in creation" for once. By the last expression, Ali identifies two groups of citizens in an Islamic society: Muslims who are regarded as religious brothers of rulers, as well as non-Muslims who are from the same creation with rulers and other people (Ibn Abi Talib, letter 53:326).

Being merely human has been recognizes by Ali as the factor of establishing a peaceful coexistence. By this, rulers should care for all people, even those who are not in the same religion, belief, race, or language with them, and loving others should be based on being merely human beings, although you are not going to accept their attitudes or beliefs. Accordingly, Ali believes that merely a human regardless of nationality, religion, or race is enough to fill your heart with kindness towards them and view them with dignity and reverence (Ibid, Ibn Abi Talib, letter 53:326). In all these comments by Ali, human beings are regarded as equal regardless of their race, nationality or religion (Ja'fari, 1949, p. 319).

6. Conclusion

The population of Muslim community in the United States is on the rise. Islam is no more a "foreign" religion in this county, but a part of social, cultural and political life. On one hand, this growing population is in need of assimilation with the American society and on the other hand tends or even insists to preserve its Islamic identity. Assimilation into the host society is not a unilateral process, meaning that: while primary principles of the Americans are not harmed, as a result Americans themselves would welcome the assimilation of Muslims. American Muslims also like the other minorities try to stay faithful to their own culture and traditions. Nowadays, with the help of advanced communication equipment, Muslims can easily communicate with the "Old World", while in the past it was not possible for the ethnic minorities who migrated from Europe to the United States. In fact, American Muslims are simultaneously living in two worlds, and their children are adopting American values.

This research paper found that there is a meaningful correlation between preserving Islamic identity and Americanization. In fact, by resorting to the Islamic principles of coexistence, Muslims can maintain their Islamic identity on the one hand, and characterize themselves with the American identity on the other hand. This conclusion is in parallel with the findings of Haddad, Read (2014, p. 76) and Peek in which the role of religion in shaping the identity of Muslim is highlighted, but is in sharp contrast with Karim (2009) who believes that "Islam would not allow its followers to be assimilated in non-Muslim communities." However, principles of coexistence outlined in this study reveal an opposite fact. With the help of existing potentials in Islamic coexistence, Muslims would be able to show the peaceful face of Islam and challenge anti-Islamic doctrines in the United States.

Not employing the Islamic principles of coexistence by Muslims would make them more than ever confused in terms of identity in the United States and would make the identity dilemma even more complicated. Moreover, a disproportionate approach towards coexistence would bring hesitation in their assimilation process, and as a result would jeopardize "Americanization" process as well. Employing Islamic principles and fundamentals of coexistence, draws a brighter future for Muslims in the assimilation process, and makes them more flexible and safer in the face of challenges in the hosting society.

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