

A painting of a woman in traditional attire, possibly a scholar or a noblewoman, holding a book. She is surrounded by cherry blossoms. The background is dark, and the foreground shows a red box and a yellow box on the ground.

Martha LEE

# THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISLAMISM AND PROGRESSIVISM IN THE WEST

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## SUMMARY

In the uncertain and tumultuous context following 9/11, Muslim Americans drew closer to the Democratic Party in an attempt to protect themselves from the anti-Muslim policies of the Republican Party that affected the community in the 2000s. Since then, it has been taken for granted that Muslim organizations and well-known figures of the Muslim community would call to vote for Democrats or invite Democratic elected officials to speak in mosques. But the golden age of this alliance appears to be over: Islamists and conservative Muslims, worried about seeing the younger generation confuse Islam and progressivism, have shattered this consensus, as can be seen in the evolution of the Muslim vote during the 2024 presidential elections.

For the conservative and Islamist movements, the current situation represents nothing less than a battle to save the faith of young Muslim Americans who, blinded by their political activism, are allegedly distancing themselves from the pillars of their religion without even noticing it. If the conflict between more conservative interpretations of Islam and progressive ideals is not exclusive to the United States, the First Amendment allows these debates to take place in public forums, particularly on social media.



*Poet in a garden*, Oil painting by Ali of Golconda, 1610-1615.

# THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISLAMISM AND PROGRESSIVISM IN THE WEST

**Martha LEE**

Specialist in Western Islamist movements. She lives in the United States.

Imam Yasir Qadhi – “*But how far do you think it's realistic to go before it backfires and results in existential suicide for our community? Are we going to start campaigning and lobbying to legally ban zinā and khamr [alcohol] here?*”<sup>1</sup>

Abdullah bin Hamid Ali – “*Shaykh, I think the current posture is what will result in existential suicide. What future will there be for Islam if our children have no moral clarity and are confused about sex and gender? Why can't we lobby against zina and khamr?*”<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION: MUSLIM AMERICAN ARE INCREASINGLY DIVIDED

As the exchange between Yasir Qadhi and Abdullah bin Hamid Ali suggests, Muslim Americans are divided between those who believe that the most urgent priority is to preserve the imperiled religion— as the younger generation is increasingly influenced by the Western societies where it resides— and those who are reluctant to adopt such an aggressive approach, fearing that they will alienate some of their followers and perhaps draw unwelcome attention upon the Muslim community.

1. Yasir Qadhi, X, June 23, 2022 [online].

2. Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, X, June 23, 2022 [online].

Certain Western imams and many Muslim activists, who cannot be described as Islamists, are increasingly aligned with leftist ideas regarding a number of matters, particularly LGBT rights. As a consequence, certain observers have judged this incongruous alliance to be as fruitful for Islamists as it is dangerous for liberal Western societies. Indeed, this alliance has been described as allowing Islamists to infiltrate politics under the banner of the left and gain power, while still having the firm intention of promoting the classical objective and ideals of Islamists. But this analysis does not take into account the denunciations and condemnations coming from other Islamists, who are convinced that this alliance, if it can still be referred to as such, not only weakens Islamists ideas and their transmissions, but also leads young Muslims straight towards apostasy, without them even realizing it.

During the last few years, the diversity of Islam's interpretations, movements, and sects has been the subject of increased attention. In parallel, Islamism continues to be presented as a unified movement that is allegedly divided only by minor strategic disagreements rather than by radically different convictions. But this doesn't reflect the reality of Islamism in the West, where Islamists are evidently very divided. In recent years, the most noticeable divisions have opposed Islamists convinced that Muslim political representation has proved dangerous and that alliances with the left inevitably dilute Islam in order to make it more acceptable to progressive sensibilities, to those who avoid expressing what their adversaries would consider to be authentically Islamic interpretations on controversial subjects such as homosexuality and abortion. The former accuse the latter of having unwisely led a generation of Muslim to think that what should be, according to them, blatantly "haram" (religiously prohibited) is actually compatible with Islam.

American-born Islamists, with their impeccable command of English and in-depth knowledge of the Western societies that they denounce, seem well positioned to influence Muslim on contemporary issues, and there is no doubt that many Muslim Americans expect them to do just that. Western Islam was long considered as influenced by and dependent on the more "authentic" Islam of Muslim countries, but the relation between the two has arguably inverted. It is perhaps from Western countries that contemporary Islamists are best positioned to develop their ideology, although their influence is more dependent on the relevance of their ideas rather than on the size of their Western following.

## I. ISLAMISM AND (THE LIMITS OF) ITS DEFINITIONS

There is no universally recognized definition of Islamism. The term generally refers to individuals or organizations inspired by the ideas of Hassan Al-Banna, Abul Ala Mawdudi, or Sayyid Qutb. It is associated with the desire to establish a caliphate under the authority of which all Muslims would live under Islamic law, as interpreted by the legal scholars participating in this project. The word remains useful, undeniably, as it allows for Islam as a religion to be distinguished from Islamism, a political ideology. But the more “Islamism” is used without being defined, the more likely it is to give the deceptive impression that the Muslims grouped under this label form a united movement. In reality, Islamism includes many antagonistic movements. Making the situation more obscure still, it is common for leftist activists who happen to be Muslim, and whose ideas are in no way different from those promoted by their non-Muslim comrades, to be described as Islamists. Years have gone by since the efforts of the three Islamist ideologues mentioned above: Islamism today is not identical to the Islamism of yesterday. The ideologies of contemporary Islamists in the West, influenced by different traditions and thinkers, are often more subtle than those of their predecessors. It is possible that the word “Islamism” will become less and less relevant as the ideas and circumstances that created it become more distant.

Islamism will be defined here as a rigid interpretation of Islam that tends to delegitimize any interpretation other than its own and considers Islam almost exclusively through the prism of Islamic law which, according to its partisans, should be imposed whenever possible. This definition may seem too broad, but it remains preferable to the alternative of systematically linking, without evidence, Islamism to Salafism or the Muslim Brotherhood. It is true that many Islamists reject that label, but their reasons for this are usually practical. They indeed affirm that the term is now purely pejorative and used only to discredit them by implying that they are extremists. It is therefore necessary to specify that “Islamism,” as used in this essay, should not be confused with Salafi-jihadism – the latter ideology is not relevant here.

Regarding the Muslim Brotherhood, while many influential Islamist organizations in the West were founded by people closely linked to the movement, the ideological influence has since been diluted. These organizations now focus on more political questions, such as civil rights, or the defense of Muslim against discrimination, rather than on purely Islamist objectives. Their employees and representatives often hold opinions, particularly concerning women’s rights, that bring them in

conflict with Islamists. These organizations will therefore be described as historically linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. The people working in those organizations have their own views and are often completely unaware of the ideological history of their employer. According to former Muslim Brotherhood member Kamel Helbawy, most of the employees of Islamic Relief, a charity founded by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood members, have no idea of the ties between the two organizations and are completely sincere when they deny them. One need only observe the profiles of the young people hired by the different organizations historically linked to the Muslim Brotherhood in order to confirm the truth of Helbawy's remark.

As for Salafism, no description could clearly delineate a group including so many individuals who are firmly at odds with one another. As a definition should be attempted, one could say that Salafis adopt viewpoints that are uncompromising (more so than the Muslim Brotherhood) on contemporary issues, privilege a literalist reading of religious texts, and claim to be perpetuating the legacy of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions. While Salafis are often confused with Madkhalis (a movement associated with the Saudi scholar Rabi Al Madkhali and criticized by Islamists for being excessively loyal to Saudi rulers), one cannot consider the two terms to be synonymous, just as one cannot reasonably claim that Salafis who are not strictly opposed to voting (a classical position in the 1990s, but that now seems old-fashioned) or to political participation more generally are simply influenced by Brotherhood ideas and should be subsumed under that movement. Readers are urged to keep in mind that a number of figures mentioned in this study, who oppose any compromise with leftist movements, are not Madkhalis, and their arguments should not be dismissed as the typical rejection of political participation that is so often associated with Salafis.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study relies almost exclusively on virtual resources — messages on social media, blogs, articles, sermons, online debates— that represent years of Islamist ideological development in the West. If these sources have the advantage of showing the spontaneous reactions of Muslims, they also present certain problems: it is common for these publications to disappear; they could be deleted by their author, or the author's account may be restricted, as often happened on X (formerly Twitter).

As one event is rapidly replaced by the next, this essay cannot claim to offer an exhaustive chronology of developments. The objective here is rather to show the important ideological developments that have affected the Muslim American community over the last few years.

One could object that certain imams are not active online and that the lack of data collected in the field weakens the credibility of this research. It is true, of course, that not all religious actors are active online, but given the omnipresence of virtual media, relying on online trends to draw deductions should be considered reasonable and sufficient. In addition, as will be discussed later, Muslims all over the world follow the online activity of American imams; no other media could offer such a level of influence at such a speed.

In 1990s Egypt, the distribution of cassettes allowed for Islamist interpretations to spread. It would have been logical then to examine ideological tendencies through the lens of that media. Today, Islamic interpretations and counter-interpretations can be found on X, Facebook, YouTube, etc. Thanks to this format, it is possible to observe various reactions and discussions that are ignited by Islamist social media posts. This format is, thus, arguably preferable to “fieldwork” to the extent that understanding trends necessitates evaluating their popularity and repercussions—something that would be more difficult to do with smaller samples found, for instance, in a mosque.

Another more recent and relevant example would be the developments of the Arab Spring. A report<sup>3</sup> published by Pew Research Center concludes that “social media indeed played a part in the Arab uprisings” and mentions that “networks formed online were crucial in organizing a core group of activists, specifically in Egypt.” Pew also notes that “passing along information is an important part of the news process.” Given that intra-Islamist divisions are made possible by the rapid “passing along” of information and opinions related to these divisions, the importance of communication via social media in this context cannot be overstated.

While divisions between religious actors are in no way limited to the American context, this study focuses on the United States, as the Muslim community of this country, sometimes described as the “Ummah’s<sup>4</sup> Hollywood,” has a singular influence upon Muslims all over the world. The Muslim American community exists in a unique context, made possible by the First Amendment that guarantees, amongst other things, freedom of speech and religion to an extent unthinkable elsewhere. It is under this umbrella that these different individuals are able to freely

3. Pew Research Center, “The Role of Social Media in the Arab Uprisings”, November 28, 2012 [online].

4. Ummah refers to the global Muslim community.

engage in their debates, without worrying about legal consequences that, in other countries, could end these debates altogether or chill them by relegating them to the private sphere.

### III. CONTEXT

Understanding these divisions requires minimal knowledge of the context from which they arose. The current situation involves the denunciation of well-known imams by their detractors who are convinced that these imams have diluted Islam to please contemporary sensibilities, particularly on LGBT rights and feminism. On the opposite side are Muslim politicians that these detractors consider to be fully aligned with the left and implicitly rejecting Islam through their actions. These elected officials are regularly invited by influential Muslim organizations to speak in mosques and at popular conferences, which only accentuates the conflicts between the two sides. The resulting disputes are shared on social media, whether through posts or videos, and then make their way through different communities.

#### 1. Who are the main actors at the center of these conflicts?

The most remarkable aspect of intra-Islamist divisions as they developed in the U.S. over the last few years is that they tend to center around social and political questions rather than more strictly Islamist themes. While there have been some arguments and debates on subjects such as the necessity, or not, of a caliphate, these tend to be less frequent than Islamists' condemnation of LGBT rights, abortion access, secular pro-Palestine activism, and other causes typically associated with the left. Ismail Royer, a former jihadi who now focuses on preserving Muslim's religious freedom in the U.S., justifies this focus by noting that "LGBT and abortion are the tip of the spear in destroying 'iman' [faith] in US culture."<sup>5</sup> This is also a particularly sensitive issue because it involves Muslim children. The Deobandi<sup>6</sup> imam Yasir Nadeem Al-Wajidi insists<sup>7</sup> that this new tolerance for LGBT rights "affects the imam (faith) of our children, affects the life of our children."

5. Islam & Religious Freedom Action Team (@IslamRFI), X, July 5, 2022 [online].

6. Islamist movement in South Asia that has given birth to the Taliban.

7. Suleyman Ahmed Khan (@SulKhan760), X, April 27, 2023 [online].



Observers who are exterior to the evolution of Islamism often attribute intra-Islamist divisions to strategical disagreements, such as the long-term objectives and pragmatic approach of the Muslim Brotherhood compared to the more uncompromising stance of Salafis. The same observers are more reluctant to attribute these divisions to genuine differences in interpretation and ideology. Although the questions of strategy and realism shouldn't be entirely discounted, they do not provide a sufficient explanation for these divisions. The influential Salafi preacher Daniel Haqiqatjou claimed<sup>8</sup> that a "generation of 'religious' Muslims in America has been secularized by the mafia of dawah."<sup>9</sup> The "dawah mafia," as he defines it, is made of powerful muslim organizations with a national reach, famous religious figures, elected officials, and activists, whose refusal to condemn LGBT rights has resulted in spreading misguidance and deviance to unsuspecting Muslims."<sup>10</sup>

In the U.S., Daniel Haqiqatjou arguably has played the most important role in leading the movements against the perceived betrayal of famous imams and Islamist organizations. The son of secular Iranian Shias, Daniel Haqiqatjou converted to Sunnis as a teenager, before attending Harvard University, where he obtained a B.A. in philosophy. He then earned a Masters in philosophy from Tufts University. Daniel Haqiqatjou is often not taken seriously by certain observers of Islamism and a number of Muslim activists who see him as a "red pill" figure. This Matrix-inspired term is associated with individuals and movements on the right of the political spectrum, who take pride in allegedly seeing the world as it truly is, in contrast to those who are said to take the blue pill and keep their blinders on. According to his detractors, Daniel Haqiqatjou's popularity can be explained by his misogynistic opinions that appeal to his followers, rather than on a credible call to religion. It is true that Daniel Haqiqatjou seems to enjoy writing provocative posts denouncing the secular perspective on women's rights and that he often uses a vocabulary that is more reminiscent of a mens' rights activists than an imam; but it would be a mistake to underestimate his religious reputation in certain circles. He describes himself as Salafi and has spoken at Salafi conferences. Muslim student organizations, mosques, and a prominent Deobandi institution have all invited him to speak. Several well-known imams take his arguments seriously. Imam Yasir Nadeem Al-Wajidi, who is extremely influential in Deobandi circles, regularly defends Daniel Haqiqatjou. This friendship is remarkable given the historically antagonistic relationship between Salafis and Deobandis, and illustrates that the American context

8. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Telegram, June 27, 2022 [online].

9. Da'wa ["the call" or "the invitation" in Arabic] refers to the invitation of non-Muslims to convert to Islam, as well as the encouragement of Muslims to respect religious practices.

10. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Telegram, June 16, 2022 [online].

allows for alliances that would be unthinkable elsewhere. In addition, while some denounce Daniel Haqiqatjou's views on women (such as their duty of obedience to their husband) and see them as inspired by the far-right, many popular imams have long expressed the same opinions.

Yasir Qadhi and Omar Suleiman, two of the most prominent clerics in the country, are regular targets of Daniel Haqiqatjou's anger for allegedly being part of the aforementioned "Dawah mafia" and refusing to openly condemn pro-LGBT figures. Both are highly educated. Yasir Qadhi holds a bachelors in chemical engineering, as well as bachelors and masters degrees from the Islamic University Madina University and a PhD from Yale University. Omar Suleiman has two bachelors, one in Islamic law and one in accounting, as well as two masters, one in Islamic finance and one in political history, and a PhD from the International Islamic University of Malaysia. Omar Suleiman delivered the opening prayer in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2019.

Ideological divisions like the ones discussed in this essay are rarely about ideology alone but often also involve personal ties, and these are no exception to the rule. Daniel Haqiqatjou was once close to the famous clerics against whom he promotes ire. He studied with Yasir Qadhi, whom he now denounces, and judging by Yasir Qadhi's own comments, was respected by him. Daniel Haqiqatjou also worked for Omar Suleiman whom he later publicly humiliated. These divisions do not represent a rift between respectable figures and an envious outsider, as sometimes portrayed, but reflect an internal split. Daniel Haqiqatjou mocks imams like Yasir Qadhi and Omar Suleiman by describing them as "Compassionate Imams." This pejorative term refers to imams who hesitate to express opinionated views on Islamic law far, because they fear alienating their support base. These imams are accused of focusing on the general objectives (maqasid) of Islamic law rather than on the letter of the law, and of tolerating what is legally impermissible, or at least undesirable, in the name of a more important good or advantage—"maslaha" in Arabic. In Islamic law, maslaha allows for the evaluation of a certain thing while taking general welfare into account. This is not a new concept but modern Muslim legal scholars have used the term, and the word is now invoked on one side or the other of these disputes.

If the term maslaha is more complex and nuanced than can be expressed here, it often has a negative connotation when used by those who denounce "Compassionate Imams." These Imams are said to lean on maslaha to justify their political positions and to invoke the larger interests of the Muslim community. As Daniel Haqiqatjou explains, he "was a fan of many (like, several) of the people I have been criticizing among the Compassionate Imams."<sup>11</sup>

11. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Telegram, June 26, 2022 [online].

According to him, he “saw them take increasingly liberal positions at the expense of Islam and [he] saw them work with and endorse increasingly deviant politicians and activists. The compromises got worse and worse.” He then attempted to advise them privately in the hope of making them see their mistakes, but was told that “[they] understand exactly the situation and this is what [they] believe and [they] are going to continue exactly on this path.”<sup>12</sup> Whether Daniel Haqiqatjou is being truthful or not, these imams’ reticence to be honest on opinions that would bring them into conflict with progressivist ideals has allowed them to attain a level of influence that they might not have reached otherwise. A number of Daniel Haqiqatjou’s targets have rejected his methods as too aggressive and have requested that his criticism be expressed exclusively through private channels. Given Daniel Haqiqatjou’s popularity, however, it is difficult not to wonder if this preference for “naseha” (advice) given behind closed doors is really a matter of courtesy rather than an attempt to shut down debate.

The aforementioned politicians and activists include the pro-Palestinian activists Linda Sarsour, described by the *New York Times* as a “Brooklyn homegirl in a hijab”<sup>13</sup> ; the Palestinian-American member of Congress Rashida Tlaib, denounced by Islamists for having said “my Allah is She”<sup>14</sup> and for having supported LGBT rights; the Somali-American Ilhan Omar, also a member of Congress, who introduced “legislation to hold Brunei accountable for brutal penal code,” and danced at Gay Pride parades. That these three figures were regularly, and wrongly described as Islamists by right-wing media can be explained by their presence at events organized by historically Islamist organizations and some of their anti-Israel stances. Although the rejection of Israel and Islamism often overlap, these two systems of opinion are not identical. Linda Sarsour, Rashida Tlaib, and Ilhan Omar do phrase their opposition to Israel in religious language; they also do not invoke an Islamic superiority, as do Islamists, but rather the human rights of Palestinians as a people “indigenous” to the region.

## 2. Muslims and the Democratic Party

To understand these divisions in the American context, one has to examine the more explicitly political activities of the Muslim American community. National Muslim organizations as well as Muslim activists in the U.S. have closely and publicly aligned with the Democratic Party, presented as the only solution to fight against the Islamophobia of the Republican Party

12. *Ibid.*

13. Alan Feuer, “Linda Sarsour Is a Brooklyn Homegirl in a Hijab”, *The New York Times*, August 7, 2015 [online].

14. Elizabeth Dias, “For Rashida Tlaib, Palestinian Heritage Infuses a Detroit Sense of Community”, *The New York Times*, August 14, 2018 [online]

(such as the “Muslim ban” under the Trump presidency). This alignment has taken the form of supporting Democratic candidates and claiming to bring them the votes of the Muslim community, or by running for office themselves under the label of the party. A number of critics attribute this alignment to the post-September 11th context and its accompanying concerns about misguided policies affecting ordinary Muslims, with Democrats appearing as protective allies. According to Yasir Qadhi himself, “Muslims were widely portrayed as the enemy”<sup>15</sup> after 9/11, and “as a matter of pragmatic political (and in some cases, literal) survival, Muslims flocked to the liberal political parties of Canada and the United States.” This led to “Many Muslims [...] approaching politics not as a tool but as an ideology.”<sup>16</sup> Yasir Qadhi’s detractors might be surprised to see that their own opinions converge with Yasir Qadhi’s analysis of these Muslims who “felt motivated to resolve the cognitive dissonance between their political commitments and their religious beliefs, even if it meant radically reinterpreting the faith to allow for such accommodation.”<sup>17</sup>

However, as many Muslims have highlighted, if the situation has considerably improved since then, Muslims continue to be pressured to support the Democratic Party.

#### IV. MASLAHA: AN INCONGRUOUS ALLIANCE BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND PROGRESSIVES

##### 1. Muslims’ support for LGBT rights

The most controversial alliance between leftist figures and certain Islamists in the U.S. involves LGBT rights. During the 2010s, certain Islamists considered that in order to best preserve their religious liberties, it was wise to support LGBT rights in the hope of finding themselves allies who would return the favor. This occurred in a context where Muslims were already generally in agreement with the American left. According to its detractors, this incongruous alliance was presented as a *maslaha*, something that would be in the best interest of Muslims.

Yaqeen Institute, an important think tank founded by Omar Suleiman, published an essay in which Jonathan Brown, professor at Georgetown, argued that Muslims should support gay marriage “because Muslims

15. Yasir Qadhi, “Muslims opposed to LGBTQ curricula for their kids aren’t bigots”, *Al Jazeera*, June 19, 2023 [online].

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

and LGBTQ groups have the same goal, namely a notion of marriage in which laws are not influenced by Western-European/Christian cultural mores.”<sup>18</sup> Yaqeen described this as a “path of political accommodation to secure reciprocal rights for Muslims as a religious minority.”<sup>19</sup> Since then, many Islamists have become convinced that the collaboration with leftist organizations and the general mentality illustrated by Brown’s essay in Yaqeen was a terrible mistake that will haunt the Muslim community for years to come. Following a deluge of criticism, Yaqeen took down the article and replaced it with a declaration indicating that Brown “agrees that his earlier treatment of the subject has been rendered obsolete by Supreme Court rulings that entrench and enforce understandings of sexual and gender identity in law.”<sup>20</sup>

These developments took place very rapidly. As several Muslims noted, one of the preoccupations in 2016 was the appeal of perennialism<sup>21</sup>; who could have imagined that several years later, there would be “Muslim politicians dancing at gay pride parades.”<sup>22</sup> Imam Shadiq Elmasry wondered<sup>23</sup> “In 1998, could you have ever imagined that books, websites and faux fiqh<sup>24</sup> arguments would exist to advocate homosexuality in Islam?”

Siraj Muhammed, director of the well-known *Muslim Matters* publication, is of the opinion that “we (wrongly) tried to support gay marriage for a quid pro quo, and now we have woke intersectional nonsense pervading our children’s schools.”<sup>25</sup> This view is shared by Khalil Muhsin of the Lamppost Education Initiative, an American non-profit offering Islamic education for English-speaking Muslims, who denounced<sup>26</sup> the “pure utilitarian politics that misguided Muslims follow seeking a kind of quid pro quo deal.” As Muhsin explains it, the “crass, calculated political position is that if Muslims can give ‘support’ to LGBTQ, the powerful political force of the LGBTQ will be in support of Muslims on issues like the Palestinian rights and other foreign policy issues.”<sup>27</sup> Khalil Muhsin concluded that this was a failure and “all the Muslim Liberal Left ends up with is the compromising of Deen [religion] and political embarrassment.”<sup>28</sup>

18. Jonathan Brown and Shadiq Elmasry, “LGBTQ and Islam Revisited: The Days of the Donald”, Yaqeen Institute, December 14, 2017 [online].

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. A school of thought that states that humans everywhere and at all times have recognized the reality of a singular principle and have been guided by it.

22. The Mad Mamluks, “Should Muslim Imams CONDEMN Liberal Muslim Politicians? Dr. Shadiq Elmasry”, YouTube, June 30, 2022 [online].

23. Shadiq Elmasry, Facebook, August 5, 2018 [online].

24. The fiqh is the Islamic law: it encompasses Muslim lawyers’ different interpretations of sharia.

25. Siraj Muhammad, Facebook, October 15, 2021 [online].

26. Hassan Shibly, Facebook, October 11, 2021 [online].

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

## 2. Pro-Palestinian activism and the October 7th Hamas attacks

Palestine is a particularly thorny issue. Several high-profile supporters of Palestine (including the aforementioned Ilhan Omar, Linda Sarsour and Rashida Tlaib) embrace such causes as abortion access or LGBT rights, and are consequently detested by many Islamists. Abdullah bin Hamid Ali has remarked<sup>29</sup> that it “often seems that the only non-negotiable issue on the national agenda is Palestine” and even “if a pro-Palestinian Muslim utters things that are clearly blasphemous about God or His messenger, they still get a pass and the community’s support.” Mobeen Vaid praised Abdullah bin Hamid Ali for making this point about “Palestinian activism as a single-issue that can seemingly absolve any moral transgression, no matter how indefensible.”<sup>30</sup> The fact that many Muslim progressive activists boast Palestinian flags in their social media bios while they ardently defend queer Muslims has not gone unnoticed.

British Islamist preacher Mohammed Hijab has expressed<sup>31</sup> his surprise and bewilderment “that takfeer [excommunication] has not been passed by any Islamic senior” on Ilhan Omar and Linda Sarsour. Mohammed Hijab further declared<sup>32</sup> that they should both be “ostracized from the Muslim community entirely.” Islamists complain that not only do the main clerics refuse to ostracize these women, but they are still presented as role models and inspirations to young, impressionable Muslims, who gather to watch them speak at annual Islamic conferences. The themes of these events have undeniably secularized over the years. Daniel Haqiqatjou has complained<sup>33</sup> that the Islamic Society of North America went from being a “beneficial annual Muslim conference” that offered religious teachings to an event focused, in 2020, on “The Struggle for Social and Racial Justice” with Linda Sarsour giving the main session keynote.

In the U.K., Islamist cleric Moinul Abu Hamza referred to Linda Sarsour when advertising his new class on “race and gender” that aimed to prepare students to defend Islam in the face of leftist activism such as the one she promotes<sup>34</sup>. In spite of their views, Linda Sarsour and Ilhan Omar continue to be invited to Islamic organizations’ events, to the anger and outrage of an increasing number of Muslims. According to Daniel Haqiqatjou<sup>35</sup>, “the prominence and notoriety that Ilhan Omar and Linda Sarsour enjoy in the masjid-going [mosque-going], conservative Muslim community is solely”

29. Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, Facebook, June 6, 2019 [online].

30. Mobeen Vaid, Facebook, June 7, 2019 [online].

31. Mohammed Hijab, X, June 4, 2022 [online].

32. Mohammed Hijab, X, June 4, 2022 [online].

33. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Facebook, [online].

34. Moinul Abu Manza, Facebook, May 9, 2022 [online].

35. The Muslim Skeptic, “Omar Suleiman, Yasir Qadhi, and LGBT: The Dark Legacy,” YouTube, June 15, 2022 [online].

because of clerics like Yasir Qadhi and Omar Suleiman who “campaign for these figures [and] open doors for them.” Mohammed Hijab claims<sup>36</sup> that it is because Muslim women see that “the religious clergy are quiet” when it comes to Omar and Tlaib that “you have now sisters in America wearing rainbow colored hijabs.”

Hamas’ attacks against Israel on October 7th and the reactions of English-speaking Muslims have illustrated the implicit obligation of holding Palestine as a preeminent cause, superior to any other. Few Islamists dared to openly condemn the murders committed by Hamas instead of joining in the collective euphoria, and the ones who did were soon cowed into silence. Following October 7th, there were few usual dissensions on the usual subjects: one concerned the famous Islamic seminary Zaytuna’s decision to publish an essay on Hindu theology, thereby affording a tacit tolerance towards that religion, according to critics. But the divisions around feminism and LGBT rights nearly stopped entirely. This provided an illustration of the Palestinian cause’s ability to unify.

This power later appeared in an unforeseen manner, for once favoring Daniel Haqiqatjou. He had been invited to speak during an event titled “Analyzing the Israel-Palestine Conflict: A Multifaceted Examination,”<sup>37</sup> and organized by the Muslim Students Association of Queen College, in New York. His presence was the object of so much media attention that the Anti-Defamation League described<sup>38</sup> Daniel Haqiqatjou as “antisemitic,” and accused him of spreading “anti-LGBTQ+ and misogynistic rhetoric.” While it seems likely that Daniel Haqiqatjou would not mind that description, he may have been surprised by the wave of support he received<sup>39</sup>. His usual critics called for differences to be put aside and to unite around him, claiming that “an attack against one is an attack against all.”

### **3. Elected Muslims: the consequences of political representation in the West**

These dissensions have not and will not remain in North America. Aside from the fact that many of those involved live abroad, news of the latest conflict is quickly shared around the world. Mobeen Vaid, describing the Muslim American community as the “Ummah’s Hollywood,”<sup>40</sup> noted that “American Muslims today frequently find themselves at the center of

36. 5 Pillars, “Takfir, American Duat & Ikhwani Pragmatism”, YouTube, April 7, 2023 [online].

37. Zach Kessel, “Queens College Muslim Student Association to Host Event with Speaker Who Accused Israel of Creating ISIS and Involvement in 9/11, Jews of Pedophilia”, National Review, February 21, 2024 [online].

38. Anti-Defamation League, “Daniel Haqiqatjou: What You Need to Know,” [online].

39. Hamza A. Tzortzis (HATzortzis), X, March 29, 2024 [online].

40. Mobeen Vaid, “The Ummah’s Hollywood: On American Islam and Political Islam,” Occasional Reflection, February 20, 2023 [online].

global Muslim discourse” as their “public squabbles and disputes become matters of immense interest to scores of Muslims around the world” and their “religious leaders are admired and followed in corners far and wide.” As Mobeen Vaid remarks, students from abroad so “closely track the ongoings of American Muslims on social media” that they are able to recount minor “social media scandals” from years ago in detail<sup>41</sup>.

Concerns about Muslim political representations are perhaps best exemplified by the 2023 election of the first Muslim head of state in Scotland, Humza Yousaf. He had barely been elected when British preacher Mohammed Hijab, supported in this by many Islamists from both the U.K. and the U.S, declared<sup>42</sup> that Humza Yousaf, due to his acceptance of LGBT marriage, was no longer a Muslim. The aforementioned U.S.-based Deobandi imam Yasir Al Wajidi issued a ‘takfir’<sup>43</sup> of his own, saying that Yousaf shouldn’t be called the first Muslim PM. Roshan Salih, from the influential British-Islamist publication 5 Pillars, stated<sup>44</sup> that the “victory of Humza Yousaf is ultimately a win for the UK's attempts to distort Islam” and that for “those whose priority is the preservation of our perfect religion, this is a very sad day.” Salih was particularly infuriated<sup>45</sup> by Yousaf “[telling] the world that you can mix secular liberalism with Islam.”

Dilly Hussain, also of 5 Pillars, documented<sup>46</sup> Humza Yousaf’s “kufr [unbelieving] statements” in support of abortion access, transgender rights, LGBT marriage, rights and education. Yousaf’s election highlighted the frustration of many Islamists regarding Muslims’ being elected. Dilly Hussain’s anger towards Humza Yousaf extended to Muslim members of Parliament (MPs) who had voted in favor of a bill on LGBT rights, saying that when “your children tell you [they] learned today that it’s ok to be gay and Muslim, [it’s] because those [members of Parliament] supported that bill.”<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, Mohammed Hijab denounced<sup>48</sup> the “the liberal segments from the Muslim Brotherhood movement” for “not taking into account what Muslim people actually want.” He concluded that Western Muslim Brotherhood movements are “out of touch with what Muslim people believe.”

41. *Ibid.*

42. Mohammed Hijab, X, March 29, 2023 [online].

43. Declaring someone to be out of the fold of Islam.

44. RmSalih, X, March 28, 2023 [online].

45. RmSalih, X, February 24, 2023 [online].

46. Dilly Hussain, X, March 31, 2023 [online].

47. 5Pillars, "Mohammed Hijab | Takfir, American Duat & Ikhwan Pragmatism | BB #94," YouTube, April 7, 2023 [online].

48. *Ibid.*



It is, of course, hard to say what Muslim people believe. However, there is no doubt that some are able to mobilize outrage on social media. The UK branch of Islamic Relief, arguably the most prominent charity founded by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood members, learned that the hard way when it was condemned for its tweet<sup>49</sup> proudly displaying its (female and non-hijab wearing) officials posing with Humza Yousaf; the tweet was later deleted after comments calling their promotion of Yousaf an “utter shame.”<sup>50</sup> Roshan Salih had mocked<sup>51</sup> the publication, saying that “if you call yourself ‘Islamic’ Relief and solicit donations from Muslims then surely parading Humza Yousaf on your publicity isn't a great idea.” It is worth noting that this isn't the first time that Islamic Relief has backed down following Islamist backlash. Last year, Islamic Relief Worldwide published a post calling for an end to child marriages. The post was deleted following Daniel Haqiqatjou accusing<sup>52</sup> the charity of promoting “liberal feminist hegemony onto the Muslim world” by opposing marriage for girls under the age of eighteen.

The Muslim Council of Britain, arguably the most well-known British association historically linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, having claimed<sup>53</sup> that Muslims welcomed Humza Yousaf's victory with “excitement, delight and awe,” was also the target of aggressive denunciations emanating from furious Islamists. Yasir Qadhi's attempt to assuage tensions by telling Muslims that they shouldn't have the same standards for politicians as for scholars, was predictably condemned<sup>54</sup> as well. While some Islamists expressed reluctance at openly “takfiring” Humza Yousaf, many agreed that his positions on the aforementioned issues couldn't be reconciled with Islam.

There were also concerns about London mayor Sadiq Khan. While some were excited by his switching on London's Ramadan Lights, a holiday decoration, 5 Pillars editor Roshan Salih expressed his desire to debate<sup>55</sup> whether Khan was still a Muslim given his support for LGBTQ rights. In June 2022, Sadiq Khan called<sup>56</sup> on Londoners to join him “[in marching] through the capital in celebration and in protest as we remind ourselves that LGBTQI+ Londoners will never walk alone.” One Twitter user declared<sup>57</sup> that British Muslims couldn't get mad at American Muslims for

49. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Telegram, April 12, 2023 [online].

50. Musa Hakeem, X, April 10, 2023 [online].

51. RmSalih, X, April 10, 2023 [online].

52. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Telegram, December 10, 2021 [online].

53. Muslim Council, X, March 30, 2023 [online].

54. Yasir Qadhi, Facebook, March 30, 2023 [online].

55. RmSalih, X, June 27, 2023 [online].

56. Mayor of London, X, June 27, 2023 [online].

57. Younes Ibn Islam, X, October 9, 2022 [online].

“getting [disbeliever] Ilhan Omar into office” when they had “Sadiq Khan as London mayor, who commits the exact same forms of [disbelief] as her.”

In the United States, Representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib are arguably the most high-profile Muslims elected to office. Daniel Haqiqatjou has blamed<sup>58</sup> Ilhan Omar for “introducing legislation to Congress calling to sanction Muslim countries that implement Sharia,” as well as “publicly dancing in music videos and LGBT Pride parades with transgenders.” He also denounces Rashida Tlaib for “being a frequent attendee at LGBT marches and fighting hard for LGBT legislation.” His dislike of these public figures is increasingly popular among some Muslims. Historically-Islamist organizations have presented Ilhan Omar as an inspiration for the Muslim community, and Ilhan Omar is regularly invited to speak at their events. For Daniel Haqiqatjou and others, this is nothing less than a blatant attempt to lead the community astray.

Given this context, it is unsurprising that for many Islamists, Muslim representation is not only meaningless but also a threat to the community. Daniel Haqiqatjou explains<sup>59</sup> Muslims in the West were told that “having Muslims in media, politics, and academia would benefit the Muslim community.” However, he argues that this representation has only resulted in “liberalized cultural Muslims, Muslims, [most of whom] are technically not even Muslim” and “only know how to take the community's resources for their own career advancement.”<sup>60</sup> This idea is repeated elsewhere: Ismail Royer describes<sup>61</sup> it as “telling” that the platform of Muslim politicians who won their races is “indistinguishable from the political programs of atheist organizations.” During a discussion organized by The Mad Mamluks podcast with imam Shadee Elmasry as a guest, the participants agreed that “we have seen Muslims engage, [...] successfully get elected” and the result is “nothing.”<sup>62</sup>

58. Daniel Haqiqatjou, “Omar Suleiman Continues Promoting Pro-LGBT Activists and Politicians,” *Muslim Skeptics*, December, 2021 [online].

59. Haqiqatjou, Telegram, [online].

60. *Ibid.*

61. Islam RFI, X, November 10, 2022 [online].

62. The Mad Mamluks “EP 274: Should Muslim Imams CONDEMN Liberal Muslim Politicians? | Dr. Shadee Elmasry”, Youtube, June 30, 2022 [online].

## V. THE RESPONSE OF CONSERVATIVE ISLAMISTS

### 1. The failure of the maslaha strategy

Conservative Islamists delayed expressing their opposition to the alliance between progressivism and a segment of Islamism. Many claim that this reticence on the part of certain imams and Muslim religious actors to openly condemn Ilhan Omar, Linda Sarsour and Rashida Tlaib, can be explained by their fear of no longer being able to speak at important conferences, losing their invitations to certain events or even being deprived of their speaker fee; many Muslims have reported that it isn't rare for famous speakers to receive fees of thousands of dollars.<sup>63</sup> Some of these religious actors have allegedly defended themselves by implying that if they were to express more conservative religious opinions, more specifically on Islamic law, they would be taking the risk of pushing young Muslims even farther from Islam. It is also true that even if these figures were to condemn Ilhan Omar, Linda Sarsour, and Rashida Tlaib and turned away from influential Muslim organizations, they would struggle to rebuild a similar base of support among the Muslims who believe that they went astray. Meanwhile, while their detractors may well be motivated by sincere convictions, they are also becoming more influential, and probably wealthier, thanks to their antagonistic positions.

Today, however, many believe that this maslaha logic has been a resounding failure. Some have concluded that the strategy consisting of trying to be compassionate to attract leftist movements has resulted in Muslims being pulled in this direction rather than the other way around. As Mohammed Hijab and Dilly Hussain agreed during an April 2023 conversation, the theory of “gradualism” fell apart because leftist politics progressively change Muslims, but Muslims don't change politics.<sup>64</sup>

The influence of Islamists who oppose these alliances is growing. Indeed, even if Siraj Muhammad lamented that “advancing with all levels of the Left has meant community leaders have had to remain silent for fear of cancellation, ostracization, and law enforcement action,” he also expressed cautious optimism and said it was “deeply encouraging to see leaders give video talks, khutbahs [sermons], programs, and khatirahs [talks] pushing back”<sup>65</sup> on issues such as abortion, LGTBQ identities, or the criticism of white converts.

63. Bloke Faruq, X, July 19, 2023 [online].

64. 5Pillars, “Mohammed Hijab. Takfir, American Duat & Ikhwani Pragmatism”, YouTube, April 7, 2023 [online].

65. Siraaj Muhammad, Facebook, June 29, 2022 [online].

It is undeniable that this “pushback” against alliances with the left has had results. In September 2020, Haqiqatjou published a video in which he introduced video evidence that imam Omar Suleiman had allegedly engaged in a pagan ritual. Suleiman had participated in a protest at the border with Mexico to express opposition to the mistreatment of migrants. The protests’ leaders poured water on the ground as a ritual to commemorate the spirits of the deceased migrants. Suleiman was also shown posing in the middle of a “LGBT priestess sandwich,” in the memorable words of Haqiqatjou. Haqiqatjou’s video led to such backlash that Suleiman was forced to “publicly repent”<sup>66</sup> for his actions, as reported by the British Islamist news site 5 Pillars. At the time Sirraaj Muhammad expressed a widespread concern that “if an educated Muslim leader like Shaykh Omar can be blindsided when working with such groups, then the rest of us who are not trained scholars, du'at [preachers], and imams have a far greater chance at making larger mistakes.”<sup>67</sup>

Haqiqatjou’s influence was on display once again, in June 2022, as he managed to force one of the main Muslim organizations in the U.S. to publicly justify its actions. Following Haqiqatjou’s video<sup>68</sup> denouncing the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), an organization linked to the South Asian Islamist movement Jamaat-e-Islami, for inviting Ilhan Omar to speak at its conference<sup>69</sup> (one of the main events in the country), ICNA issued a statement noting that “inviting a speaker to ICNA cannot be an endorsement of every view that person holds or professes.”<sup>70</sup> ICNA leader Mohsin Ansari’s opening speech at the conference insisted on the importance of moral values in the context of condemning homosexual acts.

However, ICNA followers weren’t convinced. One asked: “What moral values are in accordance to the Qur'an and Sunnah? Inviting Ilhan to speak at your “Islamic” conference, the same person that dances at LGBTQ parades and drag events? Another threatened: “You will be held accountable for misguiding Muslims that come to these conferences to gain knowledge and guidance from the speakers and ‘scholars.” Yet another commenter accused Ilhan Omar of having “declared war on Islam.”<sup>71</sup>

While Haqiqatjou’s impact on American Muslims is perhaps most visible on the internet, it appears to be rippling around physical mosques in the country. Hussam Ayloush, director of one CAIR’s California chapters,

66. 5Pillars, “Imam Omar Suleiman Publicly Repents for Unknowingly Participating in Un-Islamic Ritual”, [5pillarsuk.com](https://5pillarsuk.com), September 21, 2020 [online].

67. Sirraaj Muhammad, Facebook, September 19, 2020 [online].

68. The Muslim Skeptic, “Omar Suleiman, Yasir Qadhi, and LGBT: The Dark Legacy”, YouTube, June 15, 2022 [online].

69. 47<sup>th</sup> annual convention ICNA-MAS, “Building A Just Society. The Mission Continues”, Baltimore, May 28-30, 2022.

70. ICNA, Facebook, July 3, 2022 [online].

71. *Ibid.*

recounted<sup>72</sup> meeting a young man in a mosque who told him that he “had lately stopped listening to scholars because he learned that they were ‘liberal’ scholars and that he no longer can trust them.” Ayloush was then “shocked and disturbed” to hear the young man considered “some of the most respected and mainstream scholars in America” to be among these untrustworthy imams. The CAIR leader concluded that he was very concerned “by the concerted and unfair campaign to discredit and defame respected and honorable scholars by a few shady individuals and their fans, driven by ignorance or malice.” It bears noting that Ayloush’s worries may not be entirely related to the fact Haqiqatjou documented Ayloush’s involvement in the aforementioned protest near the Mexican border, describing Ayloush as having “participated in a Christian ritual and had an LGBT priestess woman put a crucifix on his forehead.”

Muslims are not the only ones to be disappointed by the results of this alliance. In September 2023, *The Washington Post* published an article<sup>73</sup> on the increasing tension in Hamtramck, Michigan, between the LGBT community and local officials. Hamtramck is the only American town where the local council is entirely made up of Muslim members. This council blocked the display of Pride flags on public property, awakening anger and a sense of betrayal among members of the LGBT community and their supporters. A former council member, who identifies as gay, told<sup>74</sup> the council: We did everything we could to make your transition here easier, and this is how you repay us, by stabbing us in the back?”

## 2. Muslim Americans: towards a rejection of the Democratic Party?

Islamists are increasingly worried that aligning with progressive politics represents the gravest danger to the Muslim community and that influential Muslim figures are selling out the religion in order to be invited to White House iftars<sup>75</sup> and advance their careers. A Muslim researcher claimed that the Democratic party sees the American Muslim community as nothing more than a voting bloc: “they never intended to protect traditional, orthodox Islam from anything; they intended to mold American Muslim identity into simply another submissive ethnicity, another permanent [Democrat] voting bloc.”<sup>76</sup>

72. Hussam Ayloush, Facebook, July 18, 2023 [online].

73. Allan Lengel, “Hamtramck, Michigan, Bans Pride Flag, Citing ‘Unity and Harmony,’” *Washington Post* September 16, 2023 [online].

74. Washington Post, “Hamtramck, Michigan, Bans Pride Flag, Citing ‘Unity and Harmony,’” September 16, 2023 [online].

75. Iftars diner of the White House are an annual reception held by the President of the United States which celebrates the month of Ramadan.

76. Justin Parrott, “The False Promise of Identitarianism”, *Muslim Matters*, July 29, 2022 [online].

Siraj Muhammad, executive director of the popular publication *Muslim Matters*, has lamented that “advancing centrist Muslim reps in Washington did nothing for us.”<sup>77</sup> According<sup>78</sup> to Ahmed Ghanim, a writer and political activist with 126K followers on Facebook, the American Muslim community “requires leaders who do not shy away from Islamic teachings and values, and instead uphold them without twisting them to please the establishment,” leaders who “understand that Muslims do not belong to one political party, and certainly not the far left.”

The pro-Democratic Islamic organizations and activists, particularly those that claim to defend civil rights, were reinvigorated by Donald Trump’s election and presidency. It allowed them to portray themselves as the sole defenders of an imperiled Muslim community and to deflect all criticism, whether coming from Muslims or Islamists. An anti-Islamist Muslim blogger argued<sup>79</sup> that Trump’s presidency “emboldened the problematic organizations claiming to speak in our names to deflect criticism of their poor performance” by wielding Trump’s “Islamophobia” as a shield. Meanwhile, Islamist activist Abdullah bin Hamid Ali claimed<sup>80</sup> that a leftist national agenda was being imposed on Muslims due to “national organizations’ [view] that the biggest threat to the Muslim community are Trump and Islamophobia.”

Islamists regularly criticize these national organizations for terrifying Muslims into voting for Democratic candidates by brandishing threats about what could happen under a Republican presidency. Daniel Haqiqatjou, referring to an imam that had messaged him about the “scary time” following Trump’s election, laughed at “these fools [that] really believed Trump was going to throw Muslims in concentration camps.” Daniel Haqiqatjou further denounced<sup>81</sup> influential members of the community for “telling Muslims to vote for the more liberal politicians ‘otherwise they’ll throw Muslims in concentration camps,’ threatening Muslims that they will die if they do not “shut down all mosques and hajj<sup>82</sup>” and get the Covid vaccine, [and] ordering Muslims to “support gay rights otherwise Muslims can’t get married.”

More recently, following the State Department funding allotted “to organizations committed to the practice and spread of atheism and humanism” in mostly Muslim-majority countries, Mobeen Vaid sarcastically wrote<sup>83</sup> that he was “waiting for someone to say: “if we don’t back this bill

77. Siraj Muhammad, Facebook, June 28, 2022.

78. Freedom in Action, Facebook [online].

79. Mukashafat, “Trump Uthoo Abh Kooch Karo,” mukashafat.com, January 1, 2021 [online].

80. Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, Facebook, June 6, 2019 [online].

81. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Telegram, June 26, 2022 [online].

82. Hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam, is the pilgrimage to Makkah.

83. Mobeen Vaid, Facebook, July 6, 2022 [online].

or at least stay silent on it they'll shut down our masjids [mosques] and round us up in camps!"”

It is worth keeping in mind that the divisions being discussed here do not encompass all Islamist strands of political decision-making. For instance, an influential Kashmiri Islamist, Ghazala Habib Khan, encouraged her followers to vote for Trump, not because of concerns about LGBTQ alliances but simply because he was a “better choice than an Indian [referring to vice president Kamala Harris].”<sup>84</sup>

President Biden’s election in 2020 resulted in renewed criticism against the Muslim national organizations that portrayed his election as a victory for Muslims. Both Daniel Haqiqatjou and Abdullah bin Hamid Ali argued that the situation for Muslims under Democratic administrations is not at all preferable. Daniel Haqiqatjou wrote to his followers: “all the worst, most bigoted anti-Muslim policies that were implemented under Obama are now back in full force with Biden.”<sup>85</sup> He added that “these useless civil rights orgs, like CAIR, are silent because they have fully sold out to become left wing shells” and only “pretended to be so tough and pro-accountability for Trump.”<sup>86</sup>

The Islamist worries about aligning with the Democratic party go beyond the obvious issues of embracing specific policies and extend to Muslims leaving Islam altogether as a result, perhaps without even noticing it. Siraaj Muhammad, executive director of the well-known publication Muslim Matters, warns that “the end result of progressive Islam is functional disbelief.”<sup>87</sup> According to him, following their “forcing a progressive left framing upon the Quran,” “many [Muslims] have left their belief in the divine origins of the Quran without publicly voicing it because they know how we will respond.”<sup>88</sup>

Muslim commentator Ismail Royer has explained that “Muslims in America don’t care about abortion, gambling & pornography because they’ve been taught by their activist leaders that the issues they care about & the positions they should take on them are identical with those of the left to ultra left wings of the Democratic Party.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, Islamists guests during an August 2022 discussion, on the podcast “Mad Mamluks” agreed<sup>90</sup> that young Muslims wrongly believed that “American Islam is Democrat.”

84. Ghazala Habib Khan, Facebook, October 28, 2020 [online].

85. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Telegram, December 21, 2022 [online].

86. *Ibid.*

87. Siraaj Muhammad, Facebook, July 17, 2021 [online].

88. *Ibid.*

89. Ismail Royer, X, September 20, 2020 [online].

90. The Mad Mamluks “EP 274: Should Muslim Imams CONDEMN Liberal Muslim Politicians? | Dr. Shadee Elmasry”, Youtube, June 30, 2022 [online].

In fall 2022, in Michigan, Christians and Muslims combined forces to oppose the teachings of certain books, that were allegedly sexually explicit, in local schools—a very Republican concern. While Islamists praised the initiative, Representative Rashida Tlaib issued a statement condemning the protests and expressing her refusal to “stay silent while our neighbors in the LGBTQ community are vilified.”<sup>91</sup> In response Zain Siddiqui, a volunteer for Helping Hand charity, posted <sup>92</sup>: “Don’t ever tell me that this person is a representative for Muslims when she is quite literally selling out and turning on her local Muslim community, the same people that got her elected in the first place.”

In the aftermath of the protest, a very desperate Siraaj Muhammad lamented<sup>93</sup> that “we were told this is just coalition building, we don’t have to attend gay pride parades, and more. Now? Our politicians attend parades, they party, and our activists are all in on trans rights everywhere. And best of all, Rashida Tlaib, who represents the district fighting against this porn, is on record throwing her constituents under the bus as right wing extremists.”

These issues have also gained an audience beyond that of Muslim communities. Michelle Goldberg, a columnist at the *New York Times*, published an op-ed in June 2023 where she examined a “nascent alliance between conservative Christians and Muslims [marking] the resurrection of a right-wing project that was derailed, for a time, by the Sept. 11 attacks.”<sup>94</sup> As Goldberg explained, Muslim and Christian parents had found common ground in their concerns regarding gender ideology.

A few days later, Wajahat Ali, a well-known Muslim writer, reviled by both progressive Muslims and Islamists for his insufficient opposition to Israel and his liberal views, respectively, joined in with a *New York Times* op-ed of his own, asking why Muslims were “joining the LGBTQ pile-on.”<sup>95</sup>

Given all this, some may wonder whether allying with Republicans would be feasible or preferable. This wouldn’t be an entirely new development as in pre-9/11 America, many Muslims supported the Republican party. Some Muslims are open to the possibility of renewing that alliance as they believe that the Republican party’s positions on abortion and LGBT rights is a better fit. Others, however, see the choice as limited to ‘supporting Zionism’ (Republicans) or ‘supporting LGBT’ rights (Democrats).

91. Chewhaqqa, X, October 19, 2022 [online].

92. *Ibid.*

93. Siraaj Muhammad, Facebook, October 23, 2022 [online].

94. Michelle Goldberg, “Creeping Shariah Has Nothing on the Woke Mob”, *The New York Times*, June 16, 2023 [online].

95. Wajahat Ali, “We Muslims Used to Be the Culture War Scapegoats. Why Are Some of Us Joining the L.G.B.T.Q. Pile-On?”, *New York Times*, June 23, 2023 [online].



There is also a concern that Republicans are too biased against Muslims, particularly Muslim women, to be reliable allies. A consensus on this question is unlikely to be reached.

President Biden's support for Israel after the October 7th attacks officialized the split between his party and the more leftist Muslim organizations. These were already very critical towards him and preferred to maintain their image, developed during the Trump presidency, of an uncompromising opposition rather than to be perceived as indefectible allies of the Democratic Party that they considered too centrist. In 2020, the call to vote for Biden was nearly unanimous, but four years later, he was denounced by those who accused him of being complicit in a genocide in Gaza and refuse to vote for him. Any Muslim who dared to show themselves in company of government officials was immediately accused<sup>96</sup> of being a "Zionist agent" betraying their community. In a certain way, this is a victory not for conservative Islamists, whether Salafis or Deobandis, who already kept their distances from partisan activism, but for individuals and organizations whose ideology are more inspired by decolonial ideas than Islamism. They call for a rejection of the Democratic Party as it is too insensitive towards Palestinians.

### 3. Wokism and Islamophobia: Islamism threatened from the inside by identity politics

Islamists consider that Muslims are linked first and foremost by the religious obligations that are, according to them, inseparable from a correct interpretation of the religion. They are therefore wary of competing allegiances, such as nationalism or cultural attachment, that could turn Muslims away from their religion.

As organizations, some historically associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), highlight the struggle against "Islamophobia," academics and researchers seek to explain the mechanisms and manifestations of anti-Muslim discrimination, and activists work to increase Muslim representation, Islamism and identity politics are increasingly in conflict. By elevating self-identification and cultural background as the primary definition of being a Muslim, the religious obligations that Islamists associate to the faith appear to have been set aside. Indeed, hardline Islamists express concern that CAIR and leftist Muslims seek to make Muslims into a political, ethnic and cultural community rather than a religious one. The ways in which most civil rights organizations and activists seek to defend Muslims' interests place it at odds with traditionally Islamist objectives.

96. Sana Saeed, X, March 31, 2023 [online].

Justin Parrot, a Muslim convert and researcher at the Yaqeen think tank, argues<sup>97</sup> that “it should be clear by now that American Muslims politically allying with the Identitarians or Identitarianism was an enormous mistake.” For Parrot, the end result<sup>98</sup> of American Muslims “so fervently [supporting] these apparent political allies is that a new generation of young Muslims is so thoroughly propagandized into the movement that traditional, orthodox Islam appears to them as just another racist, patriarchal system of oppression.”

Contemporary interpretations of certain Islamic doctrines or texts do appear to be influenced by political preoccupations. A Muslim blogger denounced the widespread practice of describing Iblis, the “jinni”<sup>99</sup> that refused to bow to Adam, as “the first racist.”<sup>100</sup> Elsewhere, young Muslims argue that the destruction of the city of Sodom, as narrated in the Qur’an, was meant to condemn rape, not homosexual acts.<sup>101</sup> In 2020, the Muslim American Society published a video superimposing George Floyd’s last words with a verse from the Qur’an. In the verse, the word ‘hawa’ [caprice, inclination] was translated as ‘privilege.’<sup>102</sup> Rather than reminding humans not to let themselves be guided by ephemeral desires, the verse now sounded as though it were meant to remind them to keep their (racial?) privilege in mind.

As imam Shadee Elmasry wrote,<sup>103</sup> “I fear that the term ‘Muslim activist’ is one of a secular, social identity just as one would say ‘Turkish activist’ or ‘Pakistani activist.’” He added that “it doesn’t connote a type of activism molded by an active understanding of the [religion].” For Ismail Royer, many Muslims today see Islam less as a “religion with truth claims about the nature of God and mankind’s relationship to him than an aggrieved identity group among other identity groups.”<sup>104</sup>

On social media, some Muslims have increasingly taken to targeting ‘white converts,’ who are sometimes seen as outsiders to a community built on cultural common ground. White converts who adhere to conservative views are the subject of much anger. This is most likely tied to certain Muslims embracing the idea that converts can’t possibly have a true understanding of Islam and that there must therefore have been some sort

97. Justin Parrott, “The False Promise of Identitarianism”, *Muslim Matters*, July 29, 2022 [online].

98. *Ibid.*

99. Arabic word that refers to invisible spirits created from a smokeless fire to whom God has granted free will, like humans and unlike angels.

100. Avdullah Yousef, “The Reformed Word”, *Substack*, March 29, 2023 [online].

101. Ghada Sasa, X, June 3, 2023 [online].

102. Muslim American Society – National, Facebook, June 2, 2020 [online].

103. Shadee Elmsary, Facebook, October 2, 2016 [online].

104. Ismail Royer, “A Tale of Two Muslim Generations”, *First Things*, January 23, 2023 [online].

of sinister motive for their conversion (misogyny, for example). Islamists are, of course, horrified to see this, particularly given the fact that some of these Muslims are willing to say, only half-jokingly, that they would swiftly exit paradise if it turned out to be filled with white converts.

Mobeen Vaid, whose astute observations have earned him the respect of warring sides, warned that “the explicit appeal to “identities,” and the refashioning of Islam as an ‘identity’ to which we find fraternal belonging must be critically examined for a community that continues to search for a footing in today’s polarized political landscape.”<sup>105</sup> He remarked that progressive politicians have “assimilated the Muslim cause into their ever-expanding oppression platform” within which “Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, patriarchy, and racism are all viewed as intrinsically bound up in the same matrix of hate.”<sup>106</sup> Sana Saeed, a prominent Pakistani-American journalist, who works for the Qatari digital media AJ+, unintentionally illustrated this very platform when she denounced the “blueprint” that results in “anti-Sharia bills to anti-BDS<sup>107</sup> bills [...] to anti-trans bills”<sup>108</sup> and described it as “fascism in action.”

Islamists themselves have condemned the use of the word “Islamophobia” and distanced themselves from it. Mobeen Vaid further noted that the original discourse around Islamophobia that highlighted “the hegemonies of the military industrial complex, the aggressive securitization of Muslim spaces, and invidious criminalization of Muslim thought,” has “found itself increasingly infiltrated by a sort of chic identity politics.”<sup>109</sup>

As one Islamist asked: “Am I the only one tired of the word ‘Islamophobia’ and “the literal industry that has crept up around it ?”<sup>110</sup> Judging by the increasing Islamist opposition to the term and what it has come to encompass, he is far from being the only one.

Indeed, Daniel Haqiqatjou complained that “we used to celebrate Islamic conquests and feats of power [...] and now we celebrate being girls who cry “islamophobia!” whenever a kafir [unbeliever] says something mean.”<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Abdullah bin Hamid Ali dismissed the significance of a “physical threat” to Muslims as these can be dealt with through “physical defense”

105. Mobeen Vaid, “On American Muslim Progress and Identity Politics”, Medium, December 6, 2018 [online].

106. *Ibid.*

107. “Anti-BDS” laws, referring to Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, are laws that, within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, penalize individuals and organizations engaged in boycotts against entities affiliated with Israel.

108. Sana Saeed, X, March 7, 2023 [online]. “Anti-Sharia bills to anti-BDS bills to anti-CRT bills to anti-trans bills. The blueprint is the same everytime: create hysteria, exploit ignorance, stoke hatred, a media that ‘considers both sides’, & campaigners very quickly revealing the fascism driving their actions.”

109. Mobeen Vaid, Facebook, December 11, 2020 [online].

110. Hamzah Wald Maqbul, Facebook, March 12, 2021 [online].

111. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Telegram, July 31, 2021 [online].

or “martyrdom.” Abdullah Bin Hamid Ali argued that the “greater enemy is the one that actually threatens your faith.”<sup>112</sup>

An increasingly common view among Islamists is that “many who are ‘fighting Islamophobia’ are themselves ad-hoc agenda-driven committed ‘Islamophobes’ who resolve this paradox by hideously redefining Islam.”<sup>113</sup> This criticism is aimed at the leftist activists, Muslims or of Muslim background, whose tolerance and sometimes support for LGBTQ rights, feminism or abortion leads them to, from an Islamist perspective, mutilate Islam by reinterpreting it according to their desires. Daniel Haqiqatjou indeed argues<sup>114</sup> that “fighting Islamophobia” has become the true religion of these activists and that this is illustrated by their willingness “to violate the commands of God on the excuse that that is the ‘only way to fight islamophobia.’”

Some Muslims have indeed been so frustrated by the pro-LGBTQ sympathies of Muslim civil rights organizations that they have decided to found their own organization. Certain Salafis plan to “secure sharia accommodations” but without surrendering to a liberal agenda or promoting democracy as do, according to them, the other Muslim legal organizations.

Divisions between Islamists and young leftists Muslims regarding Islamophobia were also illustrated in an incident that occurred last year. In December 2022, the university of Hamline in Minnesota terminated one of its professors' contract because she had shown her Islamic arts class a 14<sup>th</sup> century painting of the prophet Muhammad and upset a student in the process. It would be natural to assume that this student, a leader of the university's Muslim Students Association (MSA) chapter, had invoked religious arguments to justify her opposition to the painting. Instead, the student appeared to be rather drawing from the ‘intersectional identity politics’ reviled by Islamists when she told the school newspaper that “as a Muslim, and a Black person, I don’t feel like I belong, and I don’t think I’ll ever belong in a community where they don’t value me as a member, and they don’t show the same respect that I show them.”<sup>115</sup>

Some assumed the student would receive broad Islamist support. However, this turned out not to be the case. While the student's complaint may, at first glance, seem motivated by Islamist reasoning, her desire to categorize Muslims as an easily “hurt” minority among other minorities cannot be

112. Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, Facebook, June 6, 2019 [online].

113. Hamzah Wald Maqbul, *op. cit.*

114. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Facebook, May 23, 2019 [online].

115. Edward E. Curtis IV and Kayla Renée Wheeler, “The role of Blackness in the Hamline Islamic art controversy”, *Richmond Free Press*, January 19, 2023 [online].

easily reconciled with the Islamist understanding of the inherent superiority of Islam as they interpret it. Aside from local agreement from East African imams espousing a very culturally-influenced form of Islam, few Muslim American scholars defended the student. Imam Shadee Elmasry was so irritated that he expressed his desire to send “these bratty kids” to “Paris for half a day” where “they couldn’t care less about your religion.” According to him, what had happened at Hamline had absolutely nothing to do with Islam. Rather, it was “wokeism [...] using Islamophobia as a token.” Referring to the student’s statement, Shadee Elmasry said that he “[could not] stand this language” and “the negativity”, bemoaning that “this generation has been taught to be so negative about everything.” Elmasry was not any more gentle with the university administration, accusing them of being “spineless” and having “zero character.”<sup>116</sup>

Ismail Royer, in an article titled “A Tale of Two Muslim Generations”<sup>117</sup>, connected the Hamline case to the fact that “over two decades ago, many traditional Muslims made a strategic decision to deploy the rhetoric and tactic of grievance to further Muslim values and interests,” and opined that the decision “had disastrous results for the very community they wished to safeguard.” In his view, one of these disastrous results is that “for many Muslims today—as seems to be the case for the student in question—Islam is less a religion with truth claims about the nature of God and mankind’s relationship to him than an aggrieved identity group among other identity groups.”

Pro-Palestinian protests in American streets and campuses after October 7th reflected these dissensions. On one side, young activists who support Hamas as a decolonizing force (rather than an Islamist one) and who seem more intent on intimidating public opinion rather than convincing it, whether by preventing New Yorkers from going home after work<sup>118</sup> or by disturbing a dinner at the home of Berkeley Law school’s Dean<sup>119</sup>. On the other side, Muslims and Islamists who are often older and more cautious, worry that this strategy is counter-productive and will turn the American population away from the Palestinian cause.

After October 7th, some Muslims expressed their hope that the decolonial support for Palestine coming from the left would give way to the religious aspect of the cause. In spite of these calls, the last months have shown that progressives maintain their monopoly on the Palestinian cause and are able to influence the traditionalist wing more than the reverse.

116. Shadee Elmasry, X, January 11, 2023.

117. Ismail Royer, *op. cit.*

118. Nerdeen Kiswani, X, January 3, 2024 [online].

119. Pete Suratos, “Confrontation at UC Berkeley dean’s house sparks debate over free speech”, *NBC Bay Area*, April 11, 2024 [online].

Yaqeen Institute unintentionally demonstrated this in a piece published in May 2024, well after the beginning of the campus protests. According to Yaqeen, protesting is not only Islamically permissible but mandatory; Muslims avoiding this obligation would therefore be sinning. It is a conclusion that is remarkable both by its extremism and the weakness of its textual basis—a Libyan fatwa from 2009. That Yaqeen published this piece months after the beginning of the protests suggests that it perhaps wanted to verify that these protests were sufficiently popular before taking a position.

Perhaps in order to compensate for this delay, Yaqeen denounced “leftist spokespeople,”<sup>120</sup> and accused them of “exploiting the work and achievements of more Islamically oriented resistance factions to advance their agenda, thereby insulting the very martyrs and resistance they supposedly champion.” The Palestinian-Canadian activist Ghada Sasa angrily responded that Omar Suleiman, Yaqeen’s founder and director, was a “fascist & a sellout.”<sup>121</sup>

Liberal, leftist and so-called ‘woke’ Muslims arguably represent the most dangerous threat from an Islamist perspective. Ex-Muslims may be problematic from a legal and moral point of view but they do not represent a real challenge as, if anything, they confirm the idea that one cannot engage in certain activities or hold certain opinions and still remain pious. Shadee Elmasry stated that there is no need to worry about the person who has said explicitly that he is not a Muslim as such a person has done the “takfir fatwa [legal ruling] for you by himself.”<sup>122</sup>

Muslim reformists, in so far as they regularly criticize the religion, and tend to express their ideas in terms that are more political than religious, are regularly dismissed by Islamists as well as some Muslims who see them as outsiders. That they often lack an equivalent interest in anti-Muslim discrimination only reinforces many Muslims’ impression that these figures’ interest does not coincide with theirs. The fact that these reformists usually denounce Islamism and embrace anti-Islamist measures also place them at odds with many Muslims who are wary of law enforcement and attribute this focus on Muslims to “Islamophobia” rather than genuine concern.

Islamists appear to be the most worried about Muslims who see nothing incongruous about being both God-fearing and doing certain things that other Muslims believe are forbidden by law; this can range from

120. Yaqeen Institute, X, July 9, 2024 [online].

121. Ghada Sasa, X, July 10, 2024 [online].

122. The Mad Mamluks “EP 274: Should Muslim Imams CONDEMN Liberal Muslim Politicians? | Dr. Shadee Elmasry”, Youtube, June 30, 2022 [online].

seemingly innocuous things such as nail polish, to more serious issues like homosexuality. The threat here is not only that both those aspects are combined, but that they rest on a worldview that acts of faith, such as wearing the hijab, for instance, are a choice that must be made freely and respected either way, rather than simply a recognition of its purported obligatory characteristic. From an Islamist perspective, if certain features of the religion that are, in their view, obligatory, are done by choice, then everything becomes a question of choice. An understanding of Islam that has little to do with unavoidable obligations, where choice and freedom of interpretation prevail on the supposed orthodoxy and should receive equal respect, cannot result in an Islamist society.

From an Islamist perspective, this danger is already apparent in the ways that the younger generations conduct themselves and their lack of understanding of or respect for interpretations that seemed obvious not too long ago. An imam was recently asked<sup>123</sup> by young Muslims how mosques could be made “LGBTQ-friendly.” During religious classes for teenagers offered by a well-known historically Islamist organization and taught by equally well-known clerics, students expressed discomfort at the idea of judging their friends for “[belonging] to the LGBTQ+ community.” The instructors were also taken aback when female students wondered why women shouldn’t also be allowed to have several husbands.

Similarly, the death of Queen Elizabeth II provided a telling illustration of the lack of basic religious knowledge as conceived by Islamists. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was denounced by other Islamists for its statement “[Paying] Tribute to Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II.”<sup>124</sup> Muslims openly mourned the Queen and asked God to have mercy upon her. Even worse than that, from an Islamist perspective, an imam inside a mosque sang “God Save the King” with Muslim students and, despite Islamist pressure, was not consequently fired. One horrified observer expressed worry that “at this point [you] can't even say ‘look [at] those Sufis,’” and pointed out that even Deobandi (a hardline South Asian Islamist movement) and Salafi mosques were guilty of mourning the Queen.

Similarly, the death of Christian Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh had resulted in Muslims announcing that they had no interest in going to paradise if Abu Akleh wouldn’t be there. Several American clerics and preachers were shocked to see Muslims so openly rejecting the doctrine that only Muslims can access paradise.

123. Yousef Soussi, Facebook, January 11, 2020 [online].

124. Muslim Council of Britain, “Muslim Council of Britain Pays Tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II”, [mcb.org.uk](http://mcb.org.uk), September 8, 2022 [online].

Religious actors are increasingly pressured to choose a side. A significant development occurred in the form of the May 2023 statement titled “Navigating Differences: Clarifying Gender Ethics in Islam,” in which prominent imams expressed their concerns about the “increasing push to promote LGBTQ-centric values among children through legislation and regulations” and expressed their “[rejection of] any attempt to attribute positions to Islam concerning sexual and gender ethics that contravene well-established Islamic teaching.”<sup>125</sup> Regardless of one’s opinion on the statement, this document represents a marked shift on the part of these imams, several of whom had studiously avoided taking a strong position on the issue.

The “Navigating Differences” statement did not benefit from a unanimous reception. In fact, the conflicting reactions to it are a perfect illustration of the complicated environment that Muslim religious figures must themselves navigate. While some welcomed it as offering a much-needed clarification, Daniel Haqiqatjou, Yasir Wajidi, and others predictably condemned the document. According to Daniel Haqiqatjou, it was the latest iteration of the “Dawah Mafia” pretending to condemn LGBT while still “collaborating with pro LGBT activists, promoting pro LGBT politicians, featuring them at their Islamic conferences,”<sup>126</sup> etc. Yasir Wajidi stated<sup>127</sup> that signing the document meant “acknowledging the sinners as a minority” and opened “a door for Muslims to have a political alliance with the sinners.”

Meanwhile, many leftist Muslims were furious about the statement for radically different reasons. Zareena Grewal, a professor at Yale, condemned the signatories for pretending that “these are the only possible interpretations of Islam or that they always have been.”<sup>128</sup> Su’ad Abdul Khabeer, an associate professor at the University of Michigan, went further by observing<sup>129</sup> a link between the statement and “anti-LGBTQ rhetoric [...] directly linked to vigilante violence against queer people,” declaring this to be “against the foundations of Islamic law in which the preservation of life is paramount.” Several Muslim commentators<sup>130</sup> noted that the furor of the reactions of liberals and progressives constituted further evidence that the signatories had not been clear about the Islamic position on LGBT rights.

125. “Navigating Differences: Clarifying Sexual and Gender Ethics in Islam”, [navigatingdifferences.com](https://navigatingdifferences.com), May 23, 2023 [online].

126. Daniel Haqiqatjou, Telegram, May 24, 2023 [online].

127. Yasir Nadeem Al Wajidi, X, May 24, 2023 [online].

128. Zareena Grewal, X, May 24, 2023 [online].

129. Su-ad Abdul Khabeer, X, June 1, 2023 [online].

130. Mohammed Azam Ali, X, May 26, 2023 [online].



Indeed, while the anger on the part of these critics was unsurprising, it was regularly accompanied by sincere disappointment,<sup>131</sup> suggesting that they had not expected these imams to take such a stance. Rather than seeing the statement as an expression of the signatories' interpretation of Islam, however conservative, many detractors viewed it instead as a departure from the religion. Observing these reactions, Siraaj Muhammad opined<sup>132</sup> that the statement had revealed that “many academics, political activists, and influencer personalities for what they truly are - people who identify as Muslim, but largely reject the Quran, the Sunnah, the scholars, and in some cases, even the Prophets.”

## VI. PROSPECTS

In a way, October 7th marked the end of divisions between Islamists and progressives. These did not end entirely: on social media, Muslims continue to denounce compassionate imams or, on the contrary, to defend alliances with leftist movements, particularly in the context of the war in Gaza. However, these dissensions no longer exist in the form they had taken over the last few years. Those responsible for their rise have turned away: Daniel Haqiqatjou started spending a lot of time analyzing the Talmud in order to shed light on Israeli motivations, and his companions are also focused on the war in Palestine. On the other side, Ilhan Omar, Linda Sarsour, and the famous imams, who were recently denounced for their silence on the LGBT question, and other well-known figures of alliances with the left, are entirely dedicated to defending Palestine and are no longer obligated to justify their political positioning.

It is important to keep in mind that while ideological questions are relevant and deserve to be analyzed, the different actors involved also have more practical ambitions. In May 2024, Daniel Haqiqatjou and his comrades invited<sup>133</sup> their partisans to spend several hundreds of dollars per person to join them in Turkey in order to participate in various workshops, including “Developing intellectual, physical & moral courage,” and activities like MMA sessions and ziplining. Another, more luxurious conference took place in Istanbul the same summer; participants paid \$3,000 to improve in strategy and activism by listening to Yasir Qadhi and Omar Suleiman. Whether on one side or the other, it's business as usual.

131. Karachiite, X, June 15, 2023 [online].

132. Siraaj Muhammad, Facebook, May 31, 2023 [online].

133. Daniel Haqiqatjou, X, May 5, 2024 [online].

It is undeniable that there is no unified Muslim community in the West. Western Muslim populations consist of a plethora of individuals whose opinions diverge with one another and who are regularly in disagreement. Decisions taken by the self-picked representatives of Muslim communities are as susceptible to reflect calculations on the different advantages these represent as they are sincere convictions. The disagreements analyzed in this piece have occurred very rapidly, and it will certainly take more time in order to fully grasp their importance. But it is already possible to observe that they allowed for an unprecedented debate. Instead of the previous *naseeha* (advice) that was expressed in private, influential figures were held accountable. Rather than being held at a distance from disputes that previously were hidden from them, 'ordinary' Muslims had a front-row seat to these divergences, which allowed them to reach their own opinions and express them in real time. This can be understood as resulting from the development of an Islam that is exclusive to the U.S. and made possible by the First Amendment to the Constitution and the free speech culture that it protects, which contrasts with the silence and secret compromises that dominated among Islamist movements over the last decades.



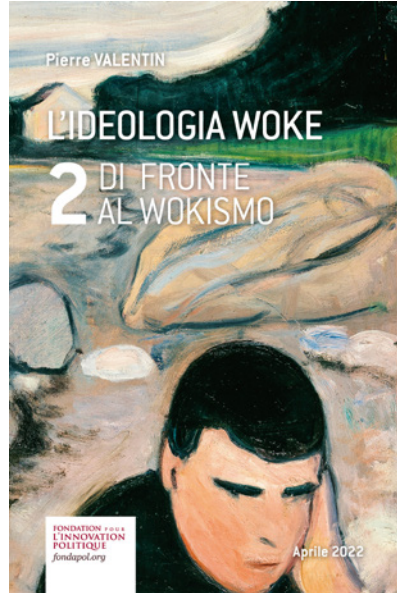
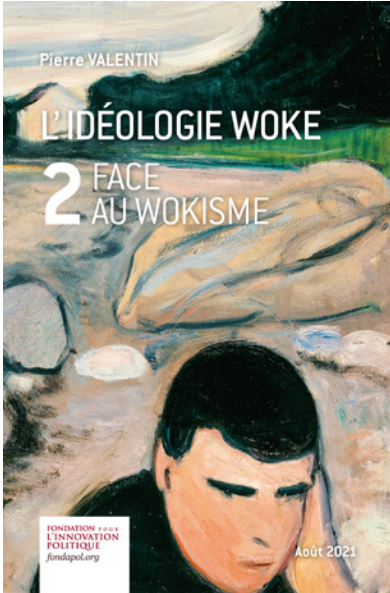
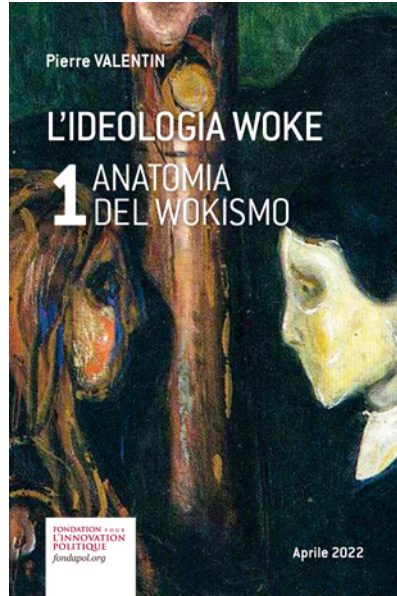
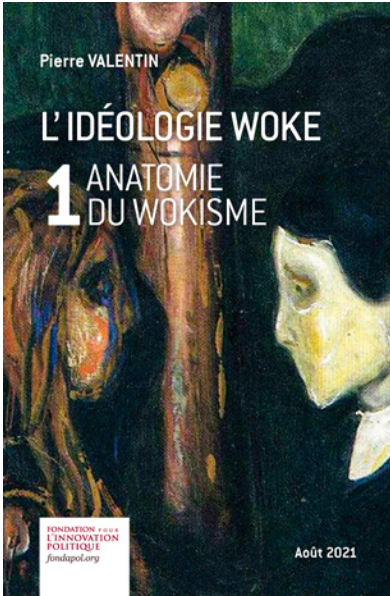
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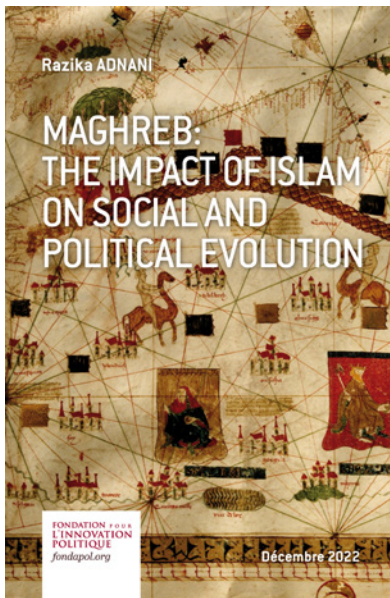
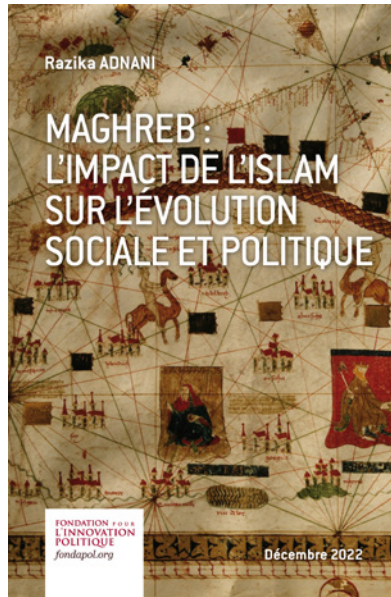
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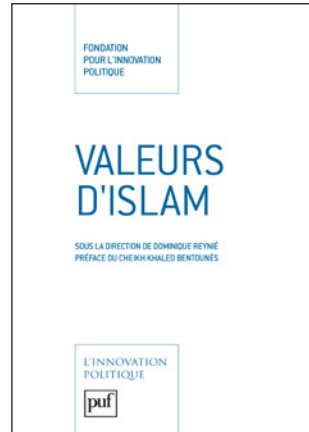
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# THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISLAMISM AND PROGRESSIVISM IN THE WEST

By *Martha LEE*

In the uncertain and tumultuous context following 9/11, Muslim Americans drew closer to the Democratic Party in an attempt to protect themselves from the anti-Muslim policies of the Republican Party that affected the community in the 2000s. Since then, it has been taken for granted that Muslim organizations and well-known figures of the Muslim community would call to vote for Democrats or invite Democratic elected officials to speak in mosques. But the golden age of this alliance appears to be over: Islamists and conservative Muslims, worried about seeing the younger generation confuse Islam and progressivism, have shattered this consensus, as can be seen in the evolution of the Muslim vote during the 2024 presidential elections.

For the conservative and Islamist movements, the current situation represents nothing less than a battle to save the faith of young Muslim Americans who, blinded by their political activism, are allegedly distancing themselves from the pillars of their religion without even noticing it. If the conflict between more conservative interpretations of Islam and progressive ideals is not exclusive to the United States, the First Amendment allows these debates to take place in public forums, particularly on social media.

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