



Hossein Askari and Hossein Mohammadkhan, *Islamicity Indices: The Seed for Change*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 103 Pages

Reviewer: Harun Sencal

Modern academia demands us to quantify, measure and compare things so that we can make objective evaluations. This method for evaluating reality has reached the point that even incommensurable things such as religiosity are unable to escape and have become an object of research as a result of quantification through various indicators. Islamicity Indices prepared by Askari and Mohammadkhan are one such effort at the national level to quantify, measure and compare the states based on the indicators of Islamicity proposed by the authors. This is not the first attempt for Islamicity indices, but the authors notably differ from the other indices by aiming to constitute the indicators directly from the primary sources (e.g., Qur'an and Sunnah) instead of *Maqasid Shari'ah*-based indices.

The book consists of six chapters, including introduction and concluding comments. The authors state three explicit goals for the book (p. 4-5). The first goal is to measure to what degree Muslim countries are Islamic. The second goal is to explain the (bad) performance of Muslim countries vis-à-vis non-Muslim countries. The third and final goal is to establish an Islamicity index as a benchmark for Muslim countries to measure to what degree the country comply with the demands of Islam and compare their position with other countries. Muslim countries are identified as "countries that belong to the OIC and where a major percentage of citizens identify themselves as Muslims" (p. 25). Although the authors do not explicitly mention as a goal of the book, an implicit goal is to point out how Muslim rulers have used the religion "as an instrument to gain legitimacy and control" (p. 70) and "refrain [citizens] from questioning 'official' or 'sanctioned' interpretation

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they are given” (p. 71). The authors, hence, offer the Islamicity index as a measure to reveal how Muslim countries are away from the fundamental Islamic teachings due to their rulers’ misgovernance.

After the introduction, the authors discuss the principal teachings and the rules of behavior in Islam. Four fundamental concepts are proposed: (i) *walayahh* as ever-present love of Allah for His creation, (ii) *karamah* (human dignity), (iii) *meethaq* (the primordial covenant of all humans with the Creator), and (iv) *khilafah* (agency-trusteeship). As for the concept of development, the authors suggest three dimensions: *rushd* as the individual self-development, (ii) *isti’mar* as the physical development of the earth, and (iii) as a combination of both, the development of human collectivity. Furthermore, as a foundation for the proposed indicators, the authors list the rules for property rights, market behavior, exchange and trade, and contracts and trade as the institutional economic structure of a Muslim society. The core principles of these rules are revealed in the Qur’an and practiced by the Prophet, which lead to the rules of behavior. The justice constitutes the foundation of these rules and institutions, which the authors define as placing the things where the Creator intends them. The authors argue that if societies follow the rules of behavior revealed in the Quran and practiced by the Prophet and articulated in Chapter 2, distributive justice would be a natural outcome. Moreover, the beneficence of individuals through sacrificing one’s own interest for the sake of others would elevate the level even further.

The third chapter presents the Islamicity index proposed by the authors. First, the authors discuss eight potential objections related to the index and respond to each objection. Their particular emphasize on the dynamic nature of such indices for further improvements and warnings against the possible abuse of the indices by the malevolous leaders are essential points to note. The Islamicity indices are composed of five indices, four of which are individual, and the fifth one is a combination of the four: (i) Economic Islamicity Index, (ii) Legal and Governance Islamicity Index, (iii) Human and Political Rights Islamicity Index, (iv) International Relations Islamicity Index, and (v) Overall Islamicity Index.

The fourth chapter displays the scores of sampled countries based on the Islamicity indices. While the top-ranking Muslim country, Qatar, is the 39th country out of 153 sampled countries, the top-five ranking positions are as follows: Netherlands (1), Sweden (2), Switzerland (3), New Zealand (4), and Denmark (5). The authors argue that the failure of Muslim countries in Islamicity indices is due to the failure of the Muslims to follow the Quran and critically approach its core teachings without blindly following the rulers. Such teachings are articulated as

“political and economic freedom, respect for human rights and more effective institutions” (p. 66) and practiced by the Western countries, which, in turn, located them in high-ranking positions.

In the fifth chapter, the authors suggest ways to improve Muslim countries' conditions according to the Islamicity indices. Three main elements for change are (i) informed Muslim communities, (ii) Islamicity indices as proposed in this book, and (iii) supportive media that would make justice to the news related to the Muslim societies. In the concluding comments, however, the authors expand required three elements to transform Muslim countries to ten: (i) Muslims are required to take control of interpretation of Islam, (ii) Muslims must work to develop individually without relying on the state, (iii) the indices such as the one proposed in this book should be critically discussed and evaluated continuously, (iv) alternative indices to quantify and measure Islamicity should be developed, (v) Western powers should end their duplicity against Muslim countries, (vi) and also reduce their rhetoric against Islam, (vii) Western countries should be more successful in assimilating the Muslim population in their countries, (viii) non-Muslim individuals and institutions should strive for understanding of Muslims and Islam, (ix) the international media should objectively report the conditions of Muslim societies and collaborations between Muslim rulers and Western powers, whether the collaborations are positive or negative, and (x) organization of annual conferences to exchange ideas and also advance the developed Islamicity indices.

An essential contribution of the book is to propose a concrete index to measure the Islamicity of countries; in other words, to what degree the countries comply with the teachings and rules of Islamic sources. Furthermore, in the fifth chapter and concluding comments, the authors offer concrete steps for changing Muslim countries. The language used in this book to present the indices and describe the preparation steps are explained clearly. However, as the ten elements for change mentioned earlier demonstrate, the initiative for the elements between v-ix, half of the elements, is expected from “the other” such as Western powers, international or local media, and non-Muslim individuals. The other elements expect individual Muslims to take the initiative to advance the conditions in Muslim societies through developing benchmarks, organizing events, and working hard for development. It seems that the authors are hopeless from the Muslim rulers as they occasionally state that the religion is exploited by some rulers to serve their interests and do not offer any element initiated by them.

The authors state eight potential objections against the book's proposed Islamicity index and respond to each of them; however, further objections could be

put forward. First, the authors state that “[s]elf-development is necessary to transcend selfishness” (p. 72), yet describe the five pillars of Islam except for *zakat* payment as “mechanical requirements of the religion” and argue that they do not affect “the outward and observable characteristics of the societies” (p. 27). However, as Hallaq (2012), among others, argues, such pillars play an essential role in the self-development of Muslims and practicing the morality of Islam in everyday life. Furthermore, they have consequences at the societal level. Particularly, prayers in the mosque and *Hajj* (pilgrimage) directly affect establishing a bond among Muslims. The quantification of such articulations of the pillars might be difficult -even impossible- through indices. However, the failure to quantify or measure does not mean that they do not have any effect. On the other hand, the authors argue that these pillars do not have any outward implication, which is debatable.

The second objection is the nature of distribution and redistribution. As the authors also suggest, beneficence is an essential quality of the self that helps to overcome selfishness and establish solidarity among community members. Index item 11.1, income distribution, measures the income distribution in a country. Social welfare states such as Netherlands and Sweden, which are top-ranking countries in the proposed indices, redistributing income centrally through the state mechanism to those who the state sees eligible for benefits. The income for redistribution is collected through involuntary taxes from the citizens and corporates. However, as the authors present in Chapter 2, the redistribution mechanism in Muslim societies is either voluntary in the form of *sadaqah*, animal sacrifice and other forms, or involuntary in the form of *zakat*, *fitr* and other forms. While the beneficiaries of some involuntary payments such as *zakat* is specified in the Quran, others are left to the ruling authority. Voluntary payments, on the other hand, are left to the Muslims to dispose of. In welfare states, however, to a great extent, income distribution is realized involuntarily and centrally by the state. Although the outcome might seem similar (*i.e.*, redistribution of income from the wealthy to the needy), how and to whom differs qualitatively and fail to produce the self-development to overcome the selfishness but rather lead to the transfer of responsibilities from individuals to the state in exchange of the tax payments. Thus, there are particular political economy distinctions including the nature of social contract offered by an Islamic society and modern welfare state.

The third objection is related to the articulation of the teachings of Islam as stated in the primary sources of Islam in the modern world. The authors argue that the poor performance of the Muslim countries is due to the lack of internalization of Quranic teachings and practices of the Prophet. However, there is a transfor-

mation in paradigm both in terms of the ruling of societies (*i.e.*, the emergence of the nation-state in the modern period) and prevalent principles shaping the relationships and institutions in the societies (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). As an outcome of this missing aspect, the authors do not approach education critically (Items 2.1., 2.2., 2.3., and 2.4.) to discuss how the educational institutions such as schools are utilized as state apparatus to raise the children as good citizens of the state (Althusser, 2014) and obedient workers for the capitalist market system (Reich, 1989), instead of promoting the internalization of Quranic teachings. Furthermore, lack of considering the secular nature of the nation-state and the impossibility of its integration with the morality of Islam (Hallaq, 2012) lead to the suggestion of using Islamicity indices to change the Muslim-majority countries in a way to follow Quranic rules and establishing the institutions necessary to uphold these rules, which is very difficult, if not impossible, to implement rules and establish institutions based on Quranic values at the society level in a secular nation-state. In other words, the distinction between Islamic logic and the logic of the nation state must be taken into account.

The fourth objection is due to the incompatibility of the results with the claim of the authors, which states that “[i]n Islam, the state’s role is one of administrator, supervisor, and protector of society. It is the members of society who must develop themselves and ensure that justice prevails” (p. 73). Although the authors defend a liberal state approach, the top-ranking countries are best known for their welfare-state mechanisms. Hence, the state directly interferes with the market and relationships among the members of the society to organize educational institutions, income redistributions, who gets what and when through increasing accessibilities which otherwise will not be possible under the market system. This suggests that the varying degrees and types of market system prevails in the western societies. However, it seems that societies where social and individual well-being is prioritised are not the high market economies but rather countries where social market economy logic prevails. As an extension of the second objection, therefore, the indices lack an indicator to measure to what degree the members of the society actively involve with the redistribution mechanism and ensuring justice in the society instead of transferring such responsibilities to the state through tax payments or delegating to the capitalist market system.

The available indices to measure the Islamicity of countries, whether based on *Maqasid Shari’ah* or otherwise, utilize the available indicators developed and produced by the Westerns countries to sustain the developed/underdeveloped dichotomy between the Western countries and the rest of the world in the postcolonial era as an “objective” justification to interfere with the “underdeveloped” countries

(Supiot, 2007). Since the authors developed indices in a way to reflect the dominant Western paradigm with an additional layer of morality (e.g., in the form of income redistribution, etc.) in compliance with the liberal market (p. 74), the welfare states compatible with the liberal values score higher than Muslim societies which are following neither liberal nor Islamic principles in practice, in general. To overcome such dichotomies established by the West, Muslim researchers, first and foremost, are required to develop their own indicators and collect data accordingly whereby avoiding the ongoing Islamisation of concept, theories and also indices. More importantly, they need to go beyond a positivist understanding of quantifying, measuring, and comparing everything but explore the realities qualitatively as well (for a detailed discussion of utilization of statistical methods to quantify Shari'ah objectives, see Asutay & Yilmaz (2018, p. 398)). For sure, such initiatives require a good number of researchers; however, it is important to develop alternative indices or other indicators that are not limited to quantitative methods to understand the reality we are in. Despite these shortcomings of the proposed indices, the authors' contribution to initiate a debate to establish benchmarks to advance Muslim societies in the contemporary period is invaluable. The responsibility is now on the shoulders of the academic community to critically approach the available indices and propose ways to improve them. As the abovementioned objections suggest, such discussions about the benchmarks should be interdisciplinary to have a more holistic understanding of the reality.

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