

Assimilation in American Life: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

The influx of Muslim immigrants into America has become steady in the last decade, a development which raises the need for a theoretical outlook delineating a model of an Islamic-controlled process of assimilation.

Using Gordon's model of assimilation, the paper suggests an Islamic position regarding each of his seven types and stages of assimilation.

In respect to *cultural assimilation*, the paper advocates an interactive process of assimilation on the level of extrinsic cultural traits. Such a process utilizes six filtration procedures regarding different kinds of American cultural artifacts. But on the level of intrinsic cultural traits, the paper suggests a counterassimilation position, and considers it a cornerstone in keeping the originality of Islam.

As to identificational assimilation, the paper defines Islamic boundaries relevant to each of its three components: ethnic, national, and racial.

The paper discusses behavior-receptional and attitude-receptional types of assimilation in light of patterns of behavior that affect such reciprocity. The paper argues that civic assimilation is a crucial area where much of the Muslim community's efforts could be invested.

Finally, the paper briefly discusses marital assimilation and structural assimilation.

Introduction

Assimilation is an important subject that deserves careful consideration from minorities, marginal groups, and immigrants. The position of a group on assimilation has far-reaching effects on its present and future, as well

as on its very survival. A group's stance on the different stages of assimilation has many ramifications, including community decision towards education, political strategies, style of organization, and community planning in general.

Assimilation theories in America have developed from the "Anglo-Saxon Conformity" viewpoint, to the "Melting Pot" theory, and have finally crystallized in the concept of "Cultural Pluralism." Milton Gordon's Nobel Prize winning book, *Human Nature, Class, and Ethnicity*, contributed generously to the concept of cultural pluralism. Later on, his book *Assimilation in American Life* spelled out the most elaborate model of assimilation. In this paper, I will try to give an Islamic perspective on the different components of this model.

Basic Pre-Assumptions

It is important to mention four pre-assumptions that underlie the logic of discussion in this paper. They are:

- 1) Assimilation is neither a totally voluntary process nor an uncontrolled one. Community leaders can influence this process and direct it.
- 2) Reaching an Islamic solution to assimilation in America is a gradual process. The model that I will try to build will not completely solve the dilemma of assimilation.
- 3) What I will create of a model is an optimum solution, not an absolute one. To find a non-flawed solution in a non-Islamic system is not possible.
- 4) The different components of the model are interdependent. Thus, weakness or lack of effectiveness in one part will hinder the whole process.

Gordon's Model – Subprocesses of Assimilation

Gordon breaks down the process of assimilation into seven subprocesses or conditions. Each subprocess represents a type or a stage of assimilation; they are: behavioral assimilation, identificational assimilation, behavior-receptional assimilation, attitude-receptional assimilation, civic assimilation, marital assimilation, and structural assimilation (Gordon 1978, 166). For the purpose of brevity and clarity, I will present the definition of these types along with a discussion of their Islamic counterparts.

Before proceeding to details, two generalizations can be made regarding the subprocesses of assimilation. First, cultural assimilation is the most likely type of initial assimilation, and might take place even if no other type of assimilation has occurred. Two obstacles can hamper this *acculturation* process or its rapidity: segregation of the ethnic minority, and institutionalized discrimination. Second, if structural assimilation occurs, all other types automatically follow (*ibid.*, 178).

The limitations of Gordon's paradigm can be identified in four points. First, it does not pay attention to the immigrants' viewpoint(s) on assimilation. Second, it over-emphasizes assimilation in presuming that interactions between the host society and migrants would bring change. However, such a result is not automatic, and it could be very minimal. Third, it does not consider the position of immigrant minorities towards their homeland, which affects their assimilation in the host society. Fourth, it does not take into consideration economic and power issues (Hastings, Clelland, and Danielson 1982, 190-191). In the Islamized model that I will present, I will try to bridge the gaps of the first three limitations.

I. Behavioral Assimilation

The first type of assimilation is cultural or behavioral assimilation, which is also known as acculturation (Gordon 1978, 167). The host society's dominant culture is called the core culture, which is the white Protestant middle-class culture in America. In this stage, the immigrant minority starts to change its behavior and patterns of life to match those of the host society.

Cultural assimilation embodies two levels of cultural traits—extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic cultural patterns include such elements as dress, manners, patterns of emotional expression, language, diet, recreational patterns, art forms, and economic techniques. Intrinsic cultural traits include religious beliefs and practices, ethical values, a sense of a common past, and folklore (*ibid.*, 168).

A. Extrinsic Cultural Traits

It is indicative of the universality of Islam that it has been able to accommodate different kinds of extrinsic cultural patterns. The Muslim world can be grouped into five categories of cultural patterns: the Arab, the Indian, the Far Eastern, the Central Asian, and the African. Of course, these groups of cultures have quite wide variations and subgroups. For example, the Arab culture could be divided into five subgroups: the Fertile Crescent, the Egyptian, the Arab-West (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Libya), the African (Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Mauritania), and the Arabian Peninsula cultures. Further

division based on micro cultural traits and norms is also possible.

The relevant observation here is that all of these cultures and subcultures are found within Muslim societies. The existence of Islamic elements within these cultures needs no proof, as the same Islamic value or principle could be found manifested in more than one cultural practice. Taking, for example, the value of generosity, we find it manifested in various ways in different Muslim countries.

Behavioral assimilation on the extrinsic level is important, though this might not be readily apparent at first. The significance of the daily practices involved in this type of assimilation lies in the fact that they affect five areas:

1. They affect the individual's interaction with the greater society, which in turn reflects on his/her growth.
2. They affect the acceptance of the minority by the host society. Group alienation would then arise as a result of the lack of acceptance.
3. The effectiveness of the individual could be lessened when those daily practices come to be perceived of as obstacles and/or irritants.
4. Rejecting the extrinsic patterns of the core culture necessarily results in substituting them with extrinsic patterns of another culture, thus making ethnocentrism and isolation more likely.
5. The ability to propagate Islam could be severely hampered by foreign ways of conduct that are not based on the Shari'ah. Further, such an orientation could set Muslim communities apart and cause the emergence of ethnic polarities and separateness.

Islamization of behavioral assimilation on the level of extrinsic cultural traits can be defined in an interactive-accepting approach. This interactive process applies six filtration processes: accepting, rejecting, seeking, restricting, appending, and supplementing.

In accepting, the Muslim individual opens himself/herself and accepts, or comes to accept in the case of immigrants, the "American way." He/She would speak the language of America and accept it as the medium of communication. He/She would accept American tastes, eat American food, and dress in what Americans consider appropriate colors and styles. The individual would accept American manners, such as American ideas of personal space when talking to others, making eye contact, and interrupting a talk according to the American etiquette of interruption.

In rejecting, the Muslim individual rejects specific items which he/she accepted during an earlier process because of its direct conflict with Islamic

values and beliefs. Thus, he/she would exclude from his/her diet foods and beverages prohibited by Islamic law, and would not dress in styles that violate the rules of Islamic dress and modesty.

In seeking, the Muslim individual's pursuit of American cultural skills and features that are Islamically valid and encouraged is the major trend. Risk-taking, the American work ethic, team spirit, punctuality, and spontaneity are some examples.

Restricting is a preventive procedure used to adjust extremism—a basic property of American culture. That is, some of the American culture's artifacts and practices are not bad in and of themselves, but the extent to which they are used and the manner in which they are applied make them Islamically undesirable.

Taking video-games as an example, excessive use should be filtered out through restricting, not through rejecting. Celebrating 'īd is another example. In accepting the cultural patterns of American society, Muslims' celebration of 'īd in America would be somewhat American-like. However, the restricting must also be used to prevent the commercialization of our Muslim holidays and to keep their true meaning uppermost in our minds.

The distinction between restricting, and rejecting is very important. Rejecting is based on Islamic rulings, and a statement of *ḥarām* would be issued to prohibit certain activities. In restricting, the general rules of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al sharī'ah*) are considered, and the social sciences' findings would be consulted.

In appending, the Muslim accepts the American cultural milieu, but adjusts it by adding an extra dimension. For example, engaging in recreational activities of a sporting or an adventurous nature is one American cultural trait. The Islamic adjustment in this example would come in the addition of a dimension of contemplation.

In supplementing, Muslims try to remedy a trait that is missing or neglected in American culture. For example, the virtue of controlling anger is almost absent in American culture, including psychology, for releasing one's anger is encouraged. Thus, patience-promoting activities would have to be supplemented by various Islamic activities, as the Qur'an constantly mentions the virtue and desirability of patience. One example of such an activity would be the teaching of the Qur'an and Qur'anic Arabic, both of which American culture has no reason to consider important.

Finally, it should be mentioned that such filtration processes cannot be achieved on an individual level. The Muslim community in America needs to develop a subculture capable of producing norms conducive to the Islamic goals behind the above-mentioned filtration processes. Naturally, Islamic education and special Islamic activities are basic means towards achieving such an ideal. However, it is only when the results of the Islamization process

become accepted as the norm (*urf*) in the form of the development of a specifically Islamic subculture among American Muslims that they will become effective.

B. Intrinsic Cultural Traits

As mentioned before, behavioral assimilation on the level of intrinsic cultural traits means accepting those of the host society, which include religious beliefs and practices as well as ethical values (Gordon 1978, 168). It is this type of assimilation with which American Muslims need to be the most careful, for if they go too far, they are in danger of losing their Islamic identity altogether. The Islamic intrinsic cultural traits are the necessary ingredients for any viable Islamic formula, whether it is on the individual or the group level. The centrality of this type of assimilation becomes clearer when focusing on two possibilities of assimilation.

First, if there is an un-Islamic assimilation in other types of assimilations, it is only the intrinsic traits of original Islamic ideals and values which can work as corrective agents.

Second, if there is an un-Islamic assimilation on the intrinsic level, three possible types of Muslims in America might result:

- 1) People who, as a result of the total assimilation of their intrinsic traits, have lost most of their Islamic identity, which they might have retained for a while as their ethnic heritage. Typically, such people have no relationship with Islam but they might sympathize with Muslims on a humanitarian level, especially when Muslims are facing a crisis.
- 2) A person who assimilates on the intrinsic cultural level, but also reacts by intensifying his/her ethnic extrinsic cultural traits in a conservative or traditional fashion. Such a person lives a kind of struggle between ethnic ways of life and American lifestyles. Ethnicity to him/her is dear, but not meaningful enough. The contradictory and inconsistent practices of such people can be understood in this light. I believe that most Muslims fall into this category.
- 3) A person who has maintained a high level of identification with Islam, but at the same time has assimilated on the level of intrinsic cultural traits and accepted the premises of American culture. Then, to resolve the conflict between being intrinsically assimilated and being a Muslim, he/she tries to find in Islam supports for American cultural characteristics. Such Muslims miss the fundamental differences in conception

between two worldviews, each of which gives its cultural products a certain orientation. A typical example of this is a reconcilist Muslim who was born as a Muslim, or a convert who has not had the opportunity to study Islam in depth. Such people tend to see themselves as enlightened and believe that they represent the hope and future of Islam because of their sense of Islamic modernity.

The position towards “democracy” illustrates the three above cases. The first group accepts American democracy as is, with all its social, economic, and political ramifications. The second group accepts democracy as a principle, but defends authoritarian practices. The third group considers democracy as the real Islamic political system, failing to make the distinction between democracy as a philosophy (intrinsic cultural trait), democracy as an organizational tool (extrinsic), and democracy as a behavioral attitude (mixed).

In sum, intrinsic cultural traits are the safety valve and the cornerstone of the Islamicity of a people. They are the key factors that dictate and construct the scheme of a healthy assimilation.

II. Identificational Assimilation

Under this type of assimilation, the immigrant minority develops a sense of peoplehood based exclusively on the host society (ibid., 170). There are four components of “peoplehood” through which people recognize and experience their identity. These are national origin [ethnicity], nationality, race, and religion (ibid., 110).

Islam, being a comprehensive religion, can and should be the ideological cement that binds together the other three components. It is inaccurate to say that Islam does not consider ethnic, national, and race-related feelings. Rather, Islam prioritizes these components in relation to itself, and defines for them boundaries within which they will be allowed to operate. This facet of the issue will be discussed below.

A. Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity hinges on collective cultural units and sentiments that have a historical background. Smith defines ethnicity as the distinctive shared culture that binds its members together and differentiates them from the “outsiders” (Smith 1986, 90). He also identifies different dimensions of ethnicity, three of which pertain to our discussion. Following each dimension, I will include the Islamic position in relation to life in America.

1) Ethnicity provides its people with a common sense of descent. It

provides the character of the community which explains its origins, growth, and destiny; in addition, it answers questions of similarity and belonging (ibid., 91). The goal of Islamic assimilation in this regard is to acquire an American ethnic identity, a feeling that the Muslim group has made it, that it successfully kept its Islamicity and maintained its values in a country of value disarray, and that it achieved growth through *ḥalāl* ways.

The assimilated Muslim who identifies with American culture would feel his/her American identity to be similar to that of other fellow non-Muslims, because he/she shares with them extrinsic cultural patterns. Such people also experience their American ethnic identity through a feeling of belonging to a country in which much of their life experiences have taken place. But what makes such an identity an Islamic one is its being contained through the basic identity of being a Muslim, and this would embody the pledge to bring the country in which he/she lives closer to Islam.

2) Ethnicity gives a minority group a sense of shared history in the form of shared memories which unite successive generations and result in accumulated experience (ibid., 91). In that respect, the American-Islamic ethnic identity focuses on the shared memories of the survival of Islam—the struggle to keep Islam and propagate it in a totally foreign and rather unfriendly environment.

Further, when a person is Islamically assimilated, his/her American ethnic identity would promote a sense of responsibility for acquiring those skills which are available to him/her while living in America. In other words, he/she would feel the responsibility to utilize these skills for the service of the Muslim ummah as a *farḍ kifāyah* on its behalf.

Having a non-American ethnic background in that respect can be converted into a positive element by adding the special skills acquired as a result of this ethnic background to the American skills, and thereby enhancing the opportunity for success. Acquiring the ethnic language is only one example. Indeed, a cross-cultural study shows that ethnic groups who maintained their cultures are as likely to succeed in education as those who acquired “status culture” (Grove 1985, 239).

Traditionally, status culture is considered the major indicator of success. But Grove points out that one should not neglect to take into account specific cultural socialization practices, such as the prevailing work ethic, respect for learning, motivation, and so on, since “too much emphasis on a class-based notion of style skips over the cultural nuance of different paths to advancement” (ibid., 239). For example, Muslim cultures are expected to emphasize intrinsic motivation more than competitiveness due to the nature of Islam and its teaching on individual responsibility. Also, studies show that intrinsic motivation enhances performance in the mastery of subjects (Vallerand, Gauvin, and Halliwell 1986). Thus, if Muslim children in America

grew up in a less competitive atmosphere than average Americans due to the earlier-mentioned filtration process of un-Islamic or non-Islamic extrinsic cultural traits, those children would be expected to possess other motivational factors which could compensate for this presumed lack of American-style competitiveness. Magen's study on Arab-Muslim youths in Israel confirms this assumption. This study found that Muslim youths have higher MPRES (Most Positive Remembered Experience) in the category of "with self," and it is suggested that individuals of "with self" personality tend to perform effectively (Magen 1985, 1631).

What has been demonstrated so far is that the specific traits that Islam fosters, in addition to the non-American ethnic-related skills that Muslims might have, constitute an "ethnic capital" which can be utilized in a positive manner. Keeping in mind that Muslims belong to different cultural backgrounds, those Muslims who successfully assimilate into American culture would add on to their American reservoir of skills and have a better chance to excel.

3) The third dimension of ethnicity that Smith mentions is that ethnicity gives a sense of solidarity (Smith 1986, 91). Assimilation on the Islamic identificational level would give the American Muslim a sense of solidarity in defending Islam in one of its most prospective and strategic positions. In that respect, the notion of America as a strategic position for Islam does not have to be accurate; what counts here is the people's perception of their role. For non-American Muslims, this means that those groups are proud of their ancestors who once defended Islam, produced outstanding scholars, or contributed significantly to its glories.

B. National Identity

The second component of peoplehood, as mentioned before, is the national identity. A national identity develops through the daily experiences of a person and through civic participation. By investing a great deal of psychic energy in the American system, it is expected that the Muslim will acquire some kind of national identity. It does not matter whether this participation is opposing or supporting; both types intensify national feelings and belonging. In other words, it is almost impossible for an American-born Muslim who has had most of his/her life experiences in America not to have an American national identity. And, it is possible for a politically active immigrant Muslim to acquire an American national identity as well.

The Islamization of this identity comes through locating this identity within the Islamic universal outlook, guarding it from developing into an identity of superiority and exclusiveness. Islam channels the national identity to a sense of priority in efforts directed towards those who are closer in relation to the Muslims (Qur'an 26:214).

One factor which Muslims need to be aware of in regard to their American national identity is that exclusiveness and assertive self-interest are historical traits of the Americans (Nash and Jeffrey 1986, 166). Smidt's study found that an alarming 85 percent of elementary school children believe that "America has been placed on this earth for a special purpose, and that America is God's chosen nation, and that America's success is a reward for her goodness" (cited in Light and Keller 1985, 413).

At this point, the importance of accepting the extrinsic cultural patterns of the host society becomes clearer. That is, the ethnic and national identities cannot be Islamized in the way suggested above unless the focus on the background ethnicity is lifted.

C. Racial Identity

The third level of identity in Gordon's model is that of race. I do not see Islam giving this factor any consideration, other than to emphasize the concept of "The best of you in the sight of Allah is the most pious" (Qur'an 49:13). Practically, racial identity arises only when its survival is threatened, while others are always in action. When a threat to one's race becomes real, Islam channels the feelings towards lifting injustice off the "oppressed" at large (Qur'an 4:75, 97-99).

Finally, three Islamic concepts define the boundaries of Muslim national identity: 1) the concept of ummah, not only referring to today's Muslims, but to all Muslims throughout history; 2) the concept of allegiance to Allah and His messenger (Qur'an 8:72); and 3) the concept of the precedence of truth (*haqq*) over national or local interests (Qur'an 5:8).

III. Behavior-Receptional Assimilation

The third type of assimilation is behavior-receptional assimilation. In this type, the host society comes to accept the behavior of the minority which, in turn, results in the absence of discrimination (Gordon 1978, 171). The success of dismantling those types of discrimination based on an individual's ethnicity depends on how the minority behaves, and how the host society perceives its behavior.

A. Reflecting Behavior

There are three aspects related to how the minority reflects its behavior: the Islamicity of such behavior, the fiqh regulating such behavior, and the use of cultural symbols.

First, when the host society perceives the minority group's behavior as

not “group-bounded,” it comes to respect the behavior. Muslims need to reflect true Islamic ethics, where the universal dimension of “. . . mercy to the worlds” (Qur’an 21:107) directs their actions. The non-American individual then acts on the basis that his/her actions are good for the whole society, for humanity, and not that they are good just for “our” people. That does not mean that a Muslim minority community in America should not provide special services for Muslims; on the contrary, the Muslim community should be its priority. But, a Muslim should provide services from the perspective that Islam approves of them, and that they are “good” for all people (Qur’an 11:88). Some Muslims oppose such a universal outlook; instead, they suggest applying the traditional concept of *dār al ḥarb*. Such an application, in my opinion, is more or less a justification for the behavior of opportunists, all of which must be clearly discredited within the Muslim community in order to achieve a healthy and successful assimilation.

The second aspect which has a major influence upon Muslims’ behavior is *fiqh*. In other words, Islamic rulings regulate Muslim behavior in a certain fashion and affect the acceptability of various behaviors by the host society. An updating of the field of *fiqh* is needed for the whole Muslim ummah. However, for the Muslim minority in America, the existence of *fiqh* which can give guidance to those Muslims living in the American social context is more crucial.

Third, the use of non-American cultural symbols is likely to discourage the acceptance of the minority’s behavior. This factor is related to the concept of extrinsic cultural patterns which has been discussed above.

B. Perceiving Behavior

The second area affecting the acceptance of the minority group’s behavior is how the host society perceives its behavior. A non-Muslim’s perception of a Muslim’s behavior would depend on the background of the receiver and how distant it is from the actor’s background. A Muslim’s behavior is based on a worldview very different from the American worldview, which means that the former’s behavior has a high potential of being misunderstood by the latter. Such a development becomes more likely when the media enhances misconceptions about Islam and Muslims.

Taking the above factors into consideration, two courses of action could be used by the minority to enhance acceptance of its behavior. First, it could make use of the “Exposure Effect,” by which the host society is exposed to a rather passive mode of the minority’s behavior just for the sake of familiarity. Slade’s study of Americans’ attitudes toward Arabs suggests that the media’s documentary programs on Arabs could contribute to better attitudes towards them, even if they are not totally positive, because such programs

introduce Americans to the complexity of the Arab world and its culture (Slade 1983, 451).

The second course of action is more active, for it involves the minority's skillful presentation of the rationale for its behavior, and provides a clarification of its values. The availability of feedback channels is indispensable for the minority in order to reevaluate its practices (De Anda 1984, 105). The minority might very well misjudge a situation because of its status as being an outsider to the host society's subjectivity.

So far, the overall suggested group behavior for Muslims in America could be summarized by the term "magnanimity." Altruistic behavior encouraged by Islam has historically been the biggest underlying factor behind Islam's expansion. It is my conviction that this will always be true, since it is part of the very nature of Islam itself.

Finally, it is interesting to note that although discrimination against Muslims in America has not been institutionalized yet, it has the potential to become so in the future. The American subconscious is fully prepared for guilt-free rationalized discrimination. The absence of a unified ethnic group, class, or color among the Muslim population is probably one factor still preventing the appearance of institutionalized discrimination against them.

IV. Attitude-Receptional Assimilation

This type of assimilation involves the attitudes of the host society towards the minority becoming positive enough to bring about the absence of prejudice (Gordon 1978, 172). Prejudice is defined as "prejudged negative attitudes directed at a negatively valued group" (Robertson 1981, 632), and as a state of mind that paves the road for actual discrimination (Light and Keller 1985, 298).

Taking into consideration the historical depth of misconception surrounding Muslims, a tradition which is systematically maintained and which is expected to continue, and the huge gap between the aims of the Muslim minority and the American majority, the Muslim minority must carefully choose its "problems" with the host society. In other words, it is not possible for Muslims to address every un-Islamic practice that exists in America; rather, specific practices that have the most adverse impacts on Muslims' life need to be identified and addressed.

One pattern of behavior, that of paranoia, can harm the minority. This negative result occurs when the minority reacts in a manner and to a degree that is perceived by the host society as being an exaggeration and an over-reaction. If such is the case, the host society may intensify its prejudice because it feels threatened.

Another area that can produce adversarial feelings against Muslims is the ideological debate about Islam itself. This debate is tempting to Muslims because of their trust in the validity of Islam. However, such debates, if not confined to academic circles and separated from normal social contact, would likely enhance the perception of the Muslim minority as a hostile entity.

V. Civic Assimilation

This stage of assimilation occurs when no conflict of power and values exists between the minority and the host society, and when all work towards common goals and value premises (Gordon 1978, 175).

This type of assimilation is delicate and crucial. Given the comprehensiveness of Islam as being a system in itself, total reconciliation with the American civic system is not possible. However, such conflict could be optimized as much as possible in a positive manner.

The Muslim minority could redirect its conflict with the American civic system from being one over rights and privileges to that of a contributive conflict. For example, Muslims have the potential to contribute to the American judicial system, thereby enriching the American civic system (Moore 1990, 65). Muslim political participation, I suggest, could be more effective on the local level, and could have a considerable long-term effect on the federal judiciary level.

VII. Marital Assimilation

This is the sixth type of assimilation, and is also termed amalgamation. This level occurs when large-scale intermarriage takes place with the host society across ethnic lines (Gordon 1978, 176).

Here, the Muslim minority faces two scenarios: marriage from the host society to a Muslim, and marriage from the minority society to a non-Muslim woman. The first case should contribute positively to a healthy assimilation. The second case, although it might be legitimate in terms of Islamic law, is problematic. The problem concerned here does not lie in the realm of personal relationships, but in the fact of living in a non-Islamic social system. The family of such an intermarriage, facing the socializing factors of the wider society, will likely experience difficulties in implementing the Islamic family role.

Intermarriage across ethnic lines within the Muslim community could, indirectly, be a positive development vis-à-vis assimilation in two ways. First, such a family has a better chance of not falling into ethnocentrism due to the duality of its ethnic background. Second, since such marriages would reduce the distinct racial properties of the resulting offsprings (color and

complexion), it would reduce the chance of discrimination on those bases.

VIII. Structural Assimilation

The seventh and final type of assimilation is known as "structural assimilation." This type occurs when a large-scale relationship at the primary level takes place between the host society and the minority ethnic group. Under this type of assimilation, the ethnic group enters the clubs, cliques, and institutions of the host society on a large scale (ibid, 177). Gordon observes that when structural assimilation occurs, all other types automatically follow. This is so because after the large-scale entrance of the minority into the host society's institutions, interethnic marriages are expected to take place. Once this happens in large numbers, marital assimilation occurs. The product of marital assimilation is a genetically mixed subsequent generation. In addition, interethnic relationships would necessarily take place as a result of the interethnic marriages. That in turn would eliminate prejudice and discrimination, since no distinct groups would still exist (ibid, 178-179).

Two considerations face Muslims in this type of assimilation: the norms and the goals of such institutions. The norms and practices of American clubs and cliques might very well be problematic from an Islamic point of view. Yet, equally important are the unwritten goals of such institutions, which might be Islamically problematic. For example, some institutions may be vehicles for maintaining social stratification, a problem which Muslims in America would supposedly address and try to alleviate.

One way for Muslims to get around the above problems is to start new institutions that address public needs and interests and meet the Islamic criteria at one and the same time.

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