

Title—Muslim Minorities and Citizenship: Authority, Community, and Islamic Law

Author—Sean Oliver-Dee

Year—2012

Categories: Religion, Islam, Politics, Migration

Place: Europe

Time: 20th-21st Century

Argument Synopsis:

Oliver-Dee's book is concerned with the issue of citizenship and belonging among Muslims living in non-Muslim states, in order to provide historical context to the current issue over citizenship facing Muslim minorities in Europe. He highlights the importance of understanding this issue for the modern period, noting problems with incorporating sharia into European law as an example of the ongoing issue. The issue of citizenship, especially in Islamic doctrine, lies at an understanding of belonging, identity, and loyalty. Oliver-Dee explores the colonial experience of Muslims, specifically in India under the British Empire and in Algeria under the French Empire, to provide a better understanding of the relationship between Muslims and issues of citizenship. Oliver-Dee attempts to overview a diverse selection of ideas from Muslim thinkers and statesmen, mainly from British India and French North Africa. He traces the British policy of allowing Indian Muslims to follow Islamic law and contrasts this with the assimilationist policies of the French Empire.

Oliver-Dee's central question is how have Muslims understood citizenship when they were a minority within the state. He examines the impact of Western imperialism on Muslim societies in India and in Algeria in order to better interpret the religious experiences of Muslims living today in Britain and France. The book is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the historical and theological roots of citizenship from an Islamic perspective, providing the theoretical framework for the rest of the book. The second section covers internal Muslim debates regarding citizenship by Muslim reformists. These debates revolve around two topics, namely the extent of the loyalty due to a sovereign (Muslim or not) and the scope of the concept of the Muslim umma. In this section, Oliver-Dee seeks to identify the most effective 'mirror moment' for understanding the present Muslim experience in Western Europe. The third section shifts the perspective from that of the ruled to that of the rulers, i.e. the British in India and the French in Algeria. This section's focus is a detailed reading of two acts of legislation, the Shariat Act of 1937 and the Code Morand, to accommodate the Muslim population in order to maintain peace.

As opposed to other studies of citizenship and loyalty to utilize a political perspective, Oliver-Dee utilizes a theological point of view which distinguishes his study from others on the topic. He concludes by posing questions that Muslim communities must answer to determine how to move forward. These are: should Muslims build on what they already have or should they tear it down and build afresh? Citizenship, loyalty, and belonging are all connected with an understanding of an umma—what should the scope of this umma be: political, religious, pan-Arab, global, or regional? Should Muslims be involved in constructive identity building or regressive identity construction?

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Citizenship and loyalty should be analyzed using both a political framework and a theological one
- Colonialism experience of Muslims in British and French empire can help inform the experience of Muslims living today as minorities in Britain and France
- Debates in India and Algeria can be seen as part of the process of transition from imperial Islam to jihad Islam