Emergence of Western Muslim identity
Factors, agents, and discourses

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In which sense can we talk about the emergence of a Western Muslim identity (or, more precisely, types of Western Muslim identity) over the last two to three decades? Is this Western Muslim identity to be thought of in terms of mere geography? Is it an issue of politico-legal allegiance (i.e., legal status, citizenship) or intellectual and cultural affinity? Is it perhaps a question of an identity based on distinct understanding of a religious tradition? Can it be best understood in terms of subscription to certain values, principles, and the philosophical and worldview assumptions underpinning these? Alternatively, is it a question of emotional attachment and belonging? Or is this emerging Western Muslim identity a combination of some or all of the above? Put differently, would the emergence of such an identity be signaled or manifested by the sociologically observable processes of (various degrees and modes) of de-ethnicization (in case of those whose sense of “Muslimness” is strongly linked with their ethnicity), de- and or transculturalization (in particular the loss of language, customs, etc., or the adoption of Western equivalents), creolization, acceptance of civic and civil rights and responsibilities, the development of a strong sense of emotional attachment and belonging to the West, the engendering of Western-Muslim-specific literature, performing and fine arts, music, norms, or the development of Western-Muslim-specific Islamic theology, legal and ethical thought. To answer the question posed above it would, of course, be inevitable for us to deal with the issue of the very definition of what makes the West Western, and to a certain extent what makes a Muslim a Muslim. Assuming that there is something clearly identifiable as the “West” and as a “Muslim,” this article will examine the emergence of Western Muslim identity from the last decade of the twentieth century to the present by focusing on factors, agents, and discourses which could be identified as facilitating the emergence of a Western Muslim identity primarily defined in terms of its cultural, religio-philosophical, and socio-political dimensions. In the second half of the chapter (pp. 000–000) I describe two different types of Western Muslim identity at work here, termed Progressive Muslims and Neo-traditional Salafis. Finally, in the third section of the chapter (pp. 000–000) I ask the question of which factors can be seen as contributing towards the emergence of different types of Western Muslim identity, and in this context I highlight the important role of scriptural hermeneutics.