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THE INFLUENCE OF POSTMODERNISM ON CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

The theory and ideology of postmodernism has changed the world, and very few areas of existence have been spared. Postmodernism (and the pluralism, skepticism, and relativism it produces) has altered how individuals create and perceive art, read and report the news, ponder and produce philosophical arguments, and perhaps most importantly, interpret and venerate spiritual texts, religion, and God. This paper focuses on the latter, and seeks to provide a broad overview of how postmodernism has changed Muslim thought in both positive and negative ways. In order to achieve this goal, we draw upon the writings of a diverse set of contemporary scholars, so as to provide a well-rounded understanding. The essay begins with a discussion on what exactly is meant by the term postmodernism. Following that, we explain how postmodernism has led to individuals viewing Muslims and Islamic practices differently. Next, we present some of the ways in which postmodernism has affected Islamic theology, including the rejection of a universal answer and the creation of new modes of interpretation. Subsequently, we discuss some of the fears some individuals have written about postmodernism (such as the theory creating indifference, apathy, and nihilism). After that, we explain how postmodernism has been associated with a rise in Islamic wave or Islamism. And lastly, we conclude the essay by presenting a model and standpoint of Islam that visually depicts the influence of postmodernism on followers of Islam.

INTRODUCTION

To begin, before one can properly investigate how postmodernism has influenced followers of Islam, one must have a thorough understanding of exactly what postmodernism is. While an admittedly difficult concept to adequately characterize and define, by examining the writings of several authors on the topic, one can come away with a better understanding. In this section, we shall discuss what Akbar S. Ahmed, Chase L. Clow, Fred Dallmayr, and Anas Coburn have written about postmodernism.

Akbar S. Ahmed (1992), a prominent Islamic thinker, writes, in regard to gaining an understanding of the meaning of "postmodernism:"

‘’To approach an understanding of the postmodern age is to presuppose a questioning of, a loss of faith in, the project of modernity; a spirit of pluralism; a heightened skepticism of traditional orthodoxies; and finally a rejection of a view of the world as a universal totality, of the expectation of final solutions and complete answers’’ (1).

As can be seen in the quotation, Ahmed (1992) believes that postmodernism essentially rejects the notion of a universal truth or understanding. In other words, individuals with postmodern viewpoints typically reject the "truths" that the modern age has provided. For example, the "truths" provided by science (e.g., evolution, medicine, physical laws, etc.) and religion (e.g., scriptures, monolithic beliefs about how to find God, saying of religious leaders, etc.) are questioned and ultimately rejected by postmodern individuals. Due to the fact that modernity has created many different ways to view the world (through science, religion, metaphysics, spirituality, etc.), and there is no way to objectively determine the ultimate validity of any of these ideas (as one is not God, and therefore cannot, with certainty, ever know which view point is "right" or

"wrong"), a postmodern individual typically rejects anything that claims to possess the ultimate truth or that provides monolithic answers. Thus, the central component of postmodernism is the rejection of monolithic views of the truth.

Next, Chase L.Clow (1999) writes that after postmodern individuals become suspicious of classical notions of reason, truth, and knowledge, they start to place their interest on local narratives and local knowledge (i.e., knowledge that is produced from within a community). Since the world holds many different views on what knowledge and truth means, postmodern individuals attempt to gain a better picture of existence by examining the beliefs of persons from various backgrounds and cultures. Postmodern individuals attempt to learn and understand others, without judging or criticizing them. (2)

Further, because of their belief that no one culture is "right" or "wrong," postmodern individuals are very concerned with the representations of others Clow,(1999). While some may view other cultures' spiritual beliefs, practices, and understandings as "primitive," "heretical," or "wrong," postmodern individuals simply treat other cultures as different, but equal. While other cultures may have different ways of going about their daily lives, they are not "wrong" or "incorrect" in the eyes of postmodern persons. In fact, the different views, or local knowledge, that different cultures provide, is essential in gaining a better understanding of the world as a whole. Thus, postmodernism is very interested in the narratives, beliefs, and understandings that local knowledge can provide.

In addition, Dallmayr (1997) writes that postmodernism creates a "profound destabilization of cognitive boundaries and frameworks" in individuals (3). Essentially, Dallmayr (1997) believes that because of a rejection of an ultimate truth, and the acquisition of many local truths, the thought processes of individuals actually change. The mental barriers and schemas that individuals had pre-postmodern thought are eliminated, and they are allowed to think in new and exciting ways. In other words, since they are no longer trapped by the belief in a monolithic truth, they are free to explore many different ways of knowing.

Because there are so many options, and so many truths, it is difficult for an individual to know the self. If nothing is ultimately true, then how is one supposed to view one's self? How is one to understand who they are? If one does not know who they are, how are they supposed to move forward? How are they supposed to decide how they want to live their lives? By combining Dallmayr (1997) and Coburn's (1998) ideas, one comes away with an ambivalent picture of the effects of postmodernism on individuals' states of mind. While postmodern thought can eliminate boundaries to new knowledge, it can also negatively affect identity formation. One will have to decide for one's self if the positives outweigh the negatives.

In sum, by examining the ideas of various scholars, one comes away with a clearer understanding of what is meant by the term "postmodern." Postmodernism involves the rejection of universal notions of truth, the reliance on local knowledge to gain a better understanding of the world, and this affects thought processes and identity formation. As will be seen below, all of these different components of postmodernism influence Islam in a variety of interesting ways.

Others: The first way in which postmodernism has influenced Muslim thought is by altering the ways in which Muslims and non-Muslims view each other. In the following section we shall discuss how postmodernism's influence on the media, feminism, and the law has changed how Muslims and non-Muslims perceive each other.

First, postmodernism has influenced the media, and as a result, has affected how Muslims and non-Muslims view each other. As Ahmed (1992) notes, "Postmodernism coexists and coincides with the age of the media; in many profound ways the media are the central dynamic, the Zeitgeist, the defining feature of postmodernism" (4). Ahmed (1992) also notes that as a result of postmodern thought, the media is essentially neutral; it holds no alliances, and treats all voices as equals.

The neutral media greatly influences how Muslims and non-Muslims see each other, as the media gives both groups a great deal of exposure. For example, non-Muslim westerners living in America can turn on CNN and hear the voices of prominent Islamic figures, as well as the voices of less prominent Muslims throughout the world. Likewise, Muslims living in the Middle East, can turn on Al-Jazeera, and hear the voices of prominent Western figures such as Barack Obama, George Bush, Hilary Clinton, and Gordon Brown, as well as the voices of less prominent Westerners.

This exposure both helps and hurts how each group perceives the other. It helps because each group can learn a lot the other group. For example, non-Muslims can learn about the beliefs of Iranians and Islamists, and Muslims can learn about the beliefs of Americans. Through this exposure, it is possible the both groups will gain a better understanding, and therefore a respect, for each other.

However, the media also hurts how each group sees the other, as the media oftentimes presents the extremes of both groups. For instance, the Western media appears to focus more on extremist Muslims than moderate Muslims, and the Middle Eastern media seems to focus more on the Western extremists and their warmongering, than the more moderate Westerns. By continuing showing these extreme views, viewers may start to believe that all Muslims or all non-Muslims are extremists and that they are the enemy. However, this is obviously not the case. Thus, it appears that postmodern influence of the media has both helped and hurt how Muslims and non-Muslims view each other.

Second, postmodernism has influenced feminism, and as a result has influenced how feminists view Muslims and their practices. Several authors have discussed the postmodern influence on feminism. For example, Hamid (2006) explains that postmodernism has been very positive for feminism, as it has helped feminists to stop imposing their own views of what is "right" onto others. For example, many western feminists believe that sexual and personal freedom from all imposing structures (such as religion, the government, and male-domination) is the ultimate goal of feminism. These feminists believe that they should fight any structure that limits women, even if the women under those structures do not believe they are being oppressed. This has led many western feminists to oppose Islam, as they perceive it to be oppressive toward women. These feminists believe that Islam forces women to wear veils and promotes the male domination of women. (5)

However, postmodernism has changed this belief in some feminists. Since there is no ultimate "right" or "wrong" in postmodern thought, some feminists have come to the understanding that their former beliefs about Islam may not have been correct. It is quite possible that women want to follow the guidelines of Islam and do not perceive Islam to be oppressive or limiting at all. These postmodern feminists came to recognize that they needed to understand the local knowledge of Muslim women; they needed to understand how Muslim women actually perceived Islam. Thus, postmodernism taught them to view Islam differently.

Third, postmodernism has changed how some countries view their laws. For example, Yilmaz (2002) discusses the postmodern legal system present in England. In England, there is both British law and Muslim law. Since England recognizes and respects the views of its Muslim population (a form of postmodernism), it allows Muslims to carry out law according to their Shari'a. Muslims are allowed to arrange marriages, handle disputes, and oversee divorces, as they see fit according to their religious beliefs. This postmodern legal system shows just how much of an influence postmodernism has had on how non-Muslims view Muslims. Postmodernism's rejection of universal truths, and acceptance of pluralism, has allowed some to view Muslims in a whole new light. As can be seen by the presence of Muslim law in England, postmodernism has had some significant material benefits for Muslims.(6)

In sum, postmodernism has greatly influenced how Muslims and non-Muslims alike view each other. The postmodern media's neutral viewpoint has allowed people all over the world to come into contact with a diverse set of opinions and beliefs. Muslims can watch and read about the views of Westerners, and non-Muslim Westerners can watch and read about the views of Muslims. Additionally, postmodernism has influenced feminism, and as a result, postmodern feminists have come to view and understand Muslims and Islamic practices in a more nuanced and complete manner. Lastly, postmodernism's influence on how non-Muslims see Muslims, has had a positive material benefits for Muslims in England, as it has allowed Muslims in that country to practice Shari'a law.

Standpoint of Islam:

Religion is a phenomenon that has been the part of the experience from time immemorial. In the modern age, it has been taken as a given that this phenomenon has weathered the storms of time because of the immaturity and primitiveness of the pre-modern mind. The argument is that the continued evolution of science and technology would eventually reduce religion to the collective history of humanity, and that religion would eventually cease to be a part of human experience. Many loud and persistent voices even proposed (and continue to

propose) that the demise of religion should be actively promoted because it was/is a major hurdle to the progress of society. The predictions from the latter half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century regarding the demise of religion have proven to be only partially correct. Whereas religion has indeed receded from much of the public realm of modern society, a closer look at the private feelings and the popular culture in the most advanced technological societies shows that religious themes and religious ideas continue to appeal to all segments of society. A recent survey done in the United States showed that more than 42% of the scientists affirmed their belief in God and the percentage goes above 80% when the question of belief in God is put to average citizens. Why have religious themes and ideas not lost their appeal even for the most educated elements in the most advanced societies? The answer is simple. The human being instinctively knows that the visible realm of reality is only a very small part of the ultimate reality; in other words, a human being instinctively knows that there is an unseen realm of reality that lies beyond the grasp of human senses and beyond the grasp of science and technology. Religion is an attempt to describe this unseen realm of reality. Furthermore, religious teachings contain the wisdom that defines the relationship between the visible realm of reality and the invisible realm of reality.

All the religions in the world, in spite of their apparent differences, are unanimous on three fundamental points:

• The existence of One Supreme Lord to Whom the entire cosmos and everything in it is subservient;

• The periodic communication of this One Lord with selected human beings (known as prophets, sages, holy men etc.), chosen to deliver the Message of the One Lord to humanity at large;

• The inevitability of a life hereafter, to follow this worldly life, in which a human being will be judged to see how closely he/she followed the teachings that were communicated to humanity by the chosen prophets, sages, messengers, etc., of the One Lord.

In short, the why of religion is: a) description of the unseen realm of reality and defining the relationship of the visible realm of reality to the invisible realm; b) providing the moral and ethical teachings that will establish a balanced and just society in this world; and c) providing the spiritual and transcendental teachings that will help the individual gain salvation in the Hereafter. In relation to the why of religion, what is the current status of religion in postmodern society? Throughout human history, see that the masses have always taken religious teachings seriously. At the same time, however, a small minority of people have always held the view that there is no substance to the religious claim that the One Lord communicates to select individuals to reveal the Divine Will for the benefit of humanity. This elite has rejected the religious claims of life-after-death even more vehemently than its rejection of Prophethood. (In the sacred texts, there are many examples of people accepting the notion of the One Lord and chosen Prophets but categorically denying resurrection after death.) These individuals argued that it is only uneducated and backward people who believed in religion and religious teachings. For this tiny elite no sensible, sophisticated, and intelligent individual could possibly believe in the teachings of religion. For them, religion was the product of pre-modern primitive societies/minds and therefor it was not worthy of any serious attention. Prophets such as Nuh, Saleh, Shu‘aib, and Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be upon them) came to their respective people with the Divine message. Those who rejected them claimed that the Prophets were propagating nothing but *Asateer Al-Awwaleen*--- “ stories of the ancient people.’’ This tiny elite has always been very proud of its ‘‘intelligence’’ and its ability to ‘‘recognize’’that all religion and religious teachings are really ‘‘myths of primitive people.’’In addition to this external factor, there is an internal factor in the phenomenon of religion itself that has contributed to the decline of religion in modern society. Even though religion is of Divine origin, once it comes into the world and becomes a part of the human experience it becomes subject to the laws of nature and history that govern the visible cosmos. One of the most preeminent of these laws is the cycle of life that passes through the stages of birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death. There is nothing in this universe, including the universe that is exempt from this law, religion included. Consequently, history has seen the various religions emerge and pass through this cycle. The ‘‘death’’ stage of a great universal religion has been defined as the degeneration of a great universal religion that shaped the culture and civilization of a given society during its birth, growth, and maturity stage. During its decline and death stage, religion deteriorates into a mere folk tradition which is pushed to the fringes of society, thereby exercising no influence whatsoever on the culture and civilization of that society.Where does

Islam stand in relation to the why of religion and the modern predicament of religion in contemporary society? Strictly speaking, Islam is not a ‘‘religion’’ (a collection of ritual practices and dogmatic beliefs); rather it is a *Deen*(a complete way of life). Nonetheless, the *Deen* of Islam is built upon essentially religious propositions; consequently, much of what has been said about the contemporary condition of the religious phenomenon applies to Islam as well. As with other religions, Islam has also been becoming progressively marginalized in Muslim societies during the course of the 20th century and afterward. The attitude of the elite in Muslim societies towards Islam is hardly distinguishable from the attitude of Hindu, Christian, and Jewish elite towards their respective religions in their own societies. Similarly the attitude of the Muslim masses has progressively come to mimic that of the European Christian and Jewish masses. The most vociferous criticism of Islam was voiced by western orientalist circles in the beginning of the 20th century; today, a far more derisive and abusive criticism is being heaped upon Islam by the Muslims themselves. The scholars and proponents of Islam cannot even take proper stock of the vitriolic campaign against it, to say nothing about articulating an effective response. Consequently it is no surprise that, as with other religions in modern industrial countries, Islam is also appears to be dying a slow and seemingly certain death in the rapidly industrializing and modernizing Muslim world. But there are a number of crucial differences between Islam and other religions that make it inevitable that Islam will not face the same fate as the other religious traditions in the coming century. Whereas other religions have entered their folk tradition stage, Prof. Ellwood notes that Islam is entering its reformation stage.(7) This is the stage in which the religion attempts to brush off the dust of history, to recapture the pristine Prophetic vision, and to shape the contemporary reality in light of this re-discovered vision. Islam is engaged in this exact struggle at this very point in its history. Each of the other great religions have already passed through this stage; the Christian Reformation of the16th century and the Hindu renaissance during the Gupta dynasty are two such examples. Being the youngest of the historical religions, the reformation of Islam was bound to be later than the others. And it is very significant that the Islamic reformation, which started in the beginning of the 20th century according to Prof. Ellwood, is coinciding with the decline and disintegration of the modern-secular western paradigm. As a result, Islam is much better positioned to deal with the challenge of non-religious postmodernism than were European Christianity and Judaism which were forced to confront this challenge during the modernity’s vibrant youth. But far more significant than this historical factor is the fact that Islam is far better equipped to brush off the dust of history and reclaim the Prophetic vision during its reformation period than any previous religious reformation. The reason for this is simple: the primary sources of Islam that will make this reclamation possible are still intact. The previous religious reformations failed because, by the time the religion reached this historical stage, the primary sources had been so corrupted that the reclamation of the Prophetic vision was impossible, in spite of the ardent wishes of the believers. But the primary sources of Islam, the Qur’an and *Sunnah*, are still intact, thus making the reclamation of the Prophetic vision possible. The postmodernist circles in the beginning of the 21th century and certain Muslim elites today have done their very best to deconstruct these two primary sources. But any objective analysis of their criticism reveals that the criticism has no historical, logical, or sensible validity. In essence, the criticism is merely an expression of the critics’ wishful thinking. Whereas the scientific study of other religious texts and sources has detected their historical manipulation and alteration by human beings, all genuinely scientific studies of the primary sources of Islam have only confirmed their authenticity. Besides the authenticity of these primary sources of Islam, there is a living tradition of Islamic scholarship that continues to exist even today. While it is no secret that many so-called Muslim ‘‘scholars’’ are nothing more than self-serving charlatans, it is also an undeniable fact that there are a handful of genuine scholars whose personal histories, intellectual endeavors, and continued sacrifices in this godless age are the most convincing testimony to the authenticity of the Qur’an and *Sunnah*. Indeed, such scholars are indispensable assets in the struggle to reclaim the Prophetic vision. The great turmoil in the Muslim world is undoubtedly a sign of disintegration, of something dying, and at the same time those with knowledge also see that it is a sign of something new being born. That Islam which became far removed from the Prophetic vision because of historical

circumstances is dying, and a new Islam faithful to the original Prophetic vision is being born. Islam claims to be the Final Message revealed to humanity, and history has shown that it is indeed the youngest of the historical universal religions. At the same time, it also lays claim to being the primordial, religion,the*Deen Al-Fitrah*, of which all other religions are varying manifestations. As of now, history has not yet shown this claim to be true because the history of the past cannot validate this claim. It is only the history of the future that can possibly validate this claim. If and when the current reformation process in the Muslim world succeeds, only then will this claim be validated. That point will mark the culmination of the intellectual and spiritual journey of humanity which began when the primordial Ur-religion, the *DeenAl-Firah*, was shattered into sects by humanity's own bungling.

The reclamation of this *Deen Al-Fitrah* through the unceasing struggle and sacrifice of noble human beings over the course of uncounted millennia will be the final proof against all those ''intelligent,'' ''modern, postmodern'' and ''sophisticated'' elite who have claimed and continue to claim that religion is nothing but ''myths of primitive people.''

In sum, Islam is not pre-modern nor postmodern but a trance- modern religion of all times.

Fears:

Next, much has been written about the potential problems and fears that are associated with postmodernism. Many fear that postmodern thought will lead to indifference, nihilism, and apathy. In the following section, we shall discuss how postmodernism may hinder liberation and feminism. First, and perhaps most damning, Esack (1998) writes, in relation to postmodernism, "Such pluralism makes a genial confusion in which one tires to enjoy the pleasures of difference without ever committing oneself to any particular vision of resistance, liberation and hope" (8). Similar fears are echoed by Afzal-Kahn (2001), who explains that "we have to find creative solutions to the burdens of a post-modernity that threatens, in its global ambitions, to collude with pre-modern orthodoxies to maintain, even tighten, the noose of oppression around the necks of the world's inhabitants" (9). As can be seen in the quotations, these two authors fear that postmodernism will harm any liberation efforts that may occur in the future. But why is this; why do they feel this way?

Their fears stem from postmodernism's rejection of universal truths. Esack and Afzal-Khan feel that because postmodern individuals do not believe in monolithic interpretations of "rights" or "wrongs," they will see nothing wrong with oppression. Since oppression is simply one possible existence out of the infinite number of possibilities, and any possibility is no better or worse than any other, it is feared that oppression will be seen as natural and normal by postmodern individuals. Further, if local knowledge is all that matters in postmodernism, then what is stopping postmodern persons from simply viewing oppression as local knowledge? Oppression may simply be something that they do not understand, but at the same time, something that is not inherently wrong.

This is certainly a possibility, and one that is difficult to argue from a postmodern perspective. However, it should be noted that these assertions have not be proven, at least not yet. There is little evidence to suggest that postmodern individuals willingly promote and support oppression. However, it is important to acknowledge the possibility.

In summation, many fear that postmodernism will lead to nihilism, indifference, and apathy. Since postmodernism espouses a belief in local knowledge, and a rejection of universal "truths," many fear that postmodernism will oppose liberation and support oppression. It is feared that postmodern feminists will become indifferent to the struggles of women in non-Western countries, and that postmodern individuals all around the world will willingly support oppressive regimes and terrible situations.

Fundamentalism:

Finally, many Islamic thinkers have written about the influence of postmodernism on Islamic fundamentalism, or Islamism. While some authors, such as Gualp (1997) and Tibi (1995) have suggested that Islamism is a form of postmodernism (because Islamism rejects modernism, just like postmodernism),(10) we disagree, due to the fact that Islamism opposes pluralism and promotes the notion of a universal truth (two ideas that run very contrary to postmodern ideology). Rather, we, like Ahmed (1992) and Clow (1999), feel that postmodernism may actually cause a rise in fundamentalism. In the following section, we shall present what Ahmed (1992) and Clow (1999) have hypothesized about the subject, and then we shall present evidence to help support some of their claims.

First, Ahmed (1992) writes that "the connection between postmodernism and ethno-religious revivalism—or fundamentalism—needs to be explored by social and political scientists" (11), and that "fundamentalism is the attempt to resolve how to live in a world of radical doubt [that postmodernism provides].It is a dialogue with the times; a response to it"(12). Essentially, Ahmed (1992) views fundamentalism as a counter to the uncertainty and doubt that postmodernism instills in its adherents. Because postmodernism asks people to question everything, reject monolithic notions of the truth, and suspect authority, many postmodern individuals may start to become lost. They may start to feel that their lives have lost meaning, and that nothing matters in the world. They may become apathetic, nihilists, or even atheists. In order to counter these difficult feelings, many may turn to fundamentalism, as fundamentalism provides clear-cut answers and clear-cut solutions to many of the problems found in the world. In other words, fundamentalism fills the hole that postmodernism as created in an individual's soul. Thus, fundamentalism has become an attractive alternative to postmodernism, and as a result, its popularity has risen.

Second, Clow (1999) too thinks that postmodernism helps to give rise to Islamic fundamentalism, but for different reasons. She writes, "the uncritical fascination with western postmodernism can prove a costly intellectual experiment for Middle Eastern intellectuals, who inadvertently lend support to the most effectively cloaked repressive movement in the region: Islamic fundamentalism" (13). Similar to the points made in the previous section of this paper, Clow (1999) believes that postmodernism breeds apathy and indifference. Due to the fact that postmodern individuals do not believe in universal truths and treat every belief as equal, they find little wrong with fundamentalism. Further, because they believe that fundamentalism is just one answer, which is not "right" or "wrong" (but just "is"), they find no reason to oppose it. Thus, by not opposing Islamism, they indirectly support it. Postmodern individuals, through their inaction, lend support to Islamic fundamentalism. And if nobody is opposing fundamentalism, then it will only thrive.

But, are Ahmed (1992) and Clow's (1999) hypotheses correct? Does postmodernism actually lead to Islamic fundamentalism? Clow's (1999) claim is difficult to prove, as her theory predicts a state of indifference (or lack of action), and it is extremely hard to prove that a lack of action does or does not result in fundamentalism. One would have to control for a myriad of factors (history, context, politics, etc.) before one could make any causal claims about indifference. Because that is next to impossible to do, I will ignore her claim in this paper. However, there does seem to be support for Ahmed's (1992) beliefs about postmodernism and fundamentalism. While one cannot determine the validity of his argument with certainty, there is some evidence to support his theory.(14)

Further, by examining Asef Bayat's book entitled *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, it seems clear that Islamism in Egypt has come about, in part, because of postmodernism. For example, in his book, Bayat (2007) writes that Islamism came about in Egypt as a result of the uncertainty many Egyptians felt in the last century.(15) Through Western influence, increased incomes, etc., many Egyptians began to feel empty and lost. The freedoms and pluralism that the postmodern world provided made many Egyptians feel uneasy. Islamism provided the answers that they desired, as it grounded them and gave them hope. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that postmodernism can lead to Islamism, at least in Egypt.

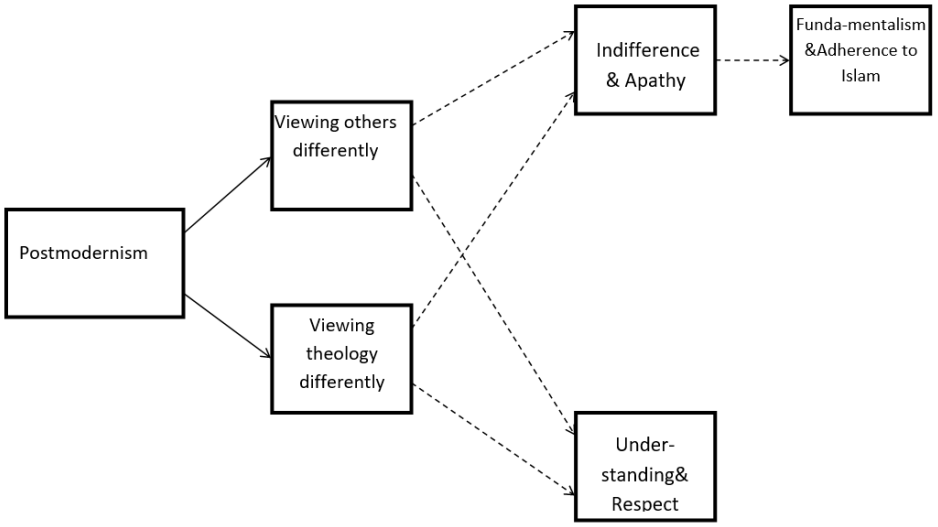
In sum, several authors have suggested that postmodernism can lead to fundamentalism. Through postmodern indifference, and the apathy and uncertainty the theory provides, many postmodern individuals either turn to fundamentalism for answers, or indirectly support fundamentalism through their inaction. Further, evidence seems to suggest that, in some cases, postmodernism may indeed lead to fundamentalism.

Conclusion:

By examining the influence of postmodernism on Muslim thought, it seems clear that postmodernism has affected Muslims in many different and sometimes contradictory ways. As can be seen in the below diagram, the effects of postmodernism are difficult to predict.

Diagram 1: The influence of postmodernism on Muslim Thought

*Note: Solid lines = Certain connections; Dotted lines = Possible connections



Postmodernism certainly leads to Muslims and non-Muslims viewing each other differently. First, thanks to the postmodern media, Muslims have been given a voice in the Western world. Because they have been given more exposure than any time period before the current one, Westerners are forced to consider Muslim viewpoints. Second, due to the fact that postmodern individuals believe in pluralism, local knowledge, and reject universal notions of "truth," many postmodern persons have ceased imposing their own views onto others, and engage in dialogues with an open mind.

Additionally, it is certain that postmodern individuals lead to search and ponder the monolithic beliefs found in the Qur'an. They are forced to question religious leaders' views, and are forced to question their own views on religious theology.

While viewing others and theology differently are directly related to postmodernism, the remaining affects are not as certain. For example, viewing others and theology differently may lead to a greater understanding and tolerance of religious and cultural others, but that is not necessarily the case. It is also quite possible that after postmodern individuals come to view theology and others differently, they start to become indifferent and apathetic. They may start to believe that nothing matters, and that it makes no sense to try and change anything. This can lead to postmodern individuals viewing oppression and injustice as "normal," and something that cannot, and should not, be stopped. Further, it is possible, but not certain, that the indifference and apathy that some postmodern individuals feel may lead to a rise in fundamentalism and Islamism. Either because spiritually lost postmodern individuals are looking for answers, or because of the inaction of other postmodern persons, fundamentalism may start to prosper.

Thus, it is important that future researchers further examine the influence of postmodernism on followers of religion. Future researchers may be able to determine some concrete reasons why postmodernism sometimes leads to negatives (i.e., indifference, apathy, fundamentalism), and sometimes leads to positives (understanding and respect for others). Once this is determined, future researchers may also be able to present strategies to help minimize the negative effects of postmodernism.

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