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“Muslim Citizens of the West: The Struggle to Claim Our Humanity”

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There has been a fairly common idea that Muslims in the West face a certain dilemma of identity, that is, remaining partial to the concerns and interests of the global *ummah* while simultaneously enjoying the fruits in their newly adopted lands in the West. This paper will argue that the debate around this issue has neglected to address more fundamental issues of the nature of modern citizenship, the limitations of the western liberal framework in which the concept of citizenship has arisen, and the heavy burden of responsibility that now rests on the shoulders of those who have benefited from a world system so polarized and divided. The transition from the concept of “subject” to that of “citizen” was most thoroughly articulated by the French Revolution and its aftermath. However, despite the noble theoretical formulation behind the idea of citizenship and the claim of conferring ultimate sovereignty to the people, large segments of the population in the core areas of the world system were still denied the privileges of citizenship. In addition, the formulation of the whole notion of citizenship also rested on the view that only certain peoples of the world, namely Western Europeans, had achieved the level of civilization necessary for being “proper” citizens. Thereupon fell unto them the “white man’s burden.” Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the core capitalist countries of the West were able to provide their citizens with higher standards of living and political and civil liberties due to the enormous material surplus they gained from their relationships with the peripheral zones of the world economy. This concessionary process, to a large extent, has been contingent on the “othering,” and relegation of the peoples of the South to an inferior position in the world system, denying them these social, political, and economic advances. The struggle of the Muslim citizen of the West today is to understand the complex history of the mechanisms by which rights were attained in the West, as well as how the “others” were simultaneously denied these rights. The relationship between development and underdevelopment, the attainment, or lack thereof, of certain socioeconomic and political and civil rights of those who are still not considered as “full citizens,” and the struggle to expand the notions of freedom and social justice in the US are the issues that will form the central themes of this presentation.