# Choosing Sharia? Multiculturalism, Islamic Fundamentalism and British Sharia Councils

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## Choosing Sharia?
## Multiculturalism, Islamic Fundamentalism and British Sharia Councils

## Summary

The multiculturalist moral and political perspective on human life is one that emphasizes the value of diversity, tolerance, and authenticity, regardless of certain unacceptable practices. This ideology stands apart from sociological diversity, which is a fact. It is a moral movement that wants to have the dignity, rights and worth of minority groups recognized. The multiculturalist ideology holds that members of minorities should not be harmed by non-recognition, that the focus should be on either respect or toleration, and that minority cultures must not be criticized by the majority, which has the obligation to preserve minority cultures.

Multiculturalist sensitivities have detracted many from studying the underlying foundations of Islamist ideology. There is a wide range of Islamist ideologies and movements, but there are significant commonalities among fundamentalists. They believe in the imposition of Islamic laws, also called Sharia. The core of this Islamic fundamentalism is a theologically justified political goal of saving and purifying society by means of establishing a Sharia state in which the Umma – all Muslims worldwide – is unified. This Sharia state can be achieved by means of terror, by a political takeover, or by a bottom-up approach. In the West, the aim is to form disciplined diasporic communities ruled by these laws.

It needs to be acknowledged that Islamic fundamentalism exists, that it is increasingly present, and that it is something that deserves to be rejected. Especially as Islamic fundamentalism is increasingly gaining ground among European Muslims.

Since the 1980s, in the United Kingdom, Islamic family law has been informally institutionalized in the form of Sharia councils. These councils falsely operate under the flag of mediation and arbitration.

Contemporary multiculturalists advocate the position that accommodation of these councils is possible within the (legal) norms of the host society – either by stating that unacceptable parts of Sharia "have nothing to do with Islam", which is not true, or that parts of Sharia *should* not clash with human rights, which is not possible – particularly with regard to family law.

Multiculturalism incorporates the assumed need for (some degree of) legal autonomy for communities, rather than one body of laws for all individuals, regardless of diversity. Since it is religious codes that provide such laws, multiculturalists, just like fundamentalists, place religion at the heart of one's identity.

Multiculturalists aim to do so out of a presumably well-meant gesture towards minorities, whereas fundamentalists do so driven by what is taken to be divine command. Both political ideologies challenge the state's sovereignty when it comes to ordaining and enforcing laws. Sharia councils are part of a minority Muslim legal order that stands apart from the host society's. It undermines and reorders Britain's secular and democratic character.

Multiculturalism as an ideology is not merely theoretically questionable, but also practically. For: if Islamic fundamentalists in Europe seek to enhance the goal of *more* fundamentalist Sharia for *more* Muslims through practicing their ideology, the multiculturalist ideology of preserving minorities is nurturing just that.

It is correct that fundamentalist Muslims in Europe *choose* to live under Sharia. Yet, multiculturalists tend to overlook the fact that they may increasingly choose for that, if not challenged adequately. Letting go of the practice and ideal of one law for all is a vital example of not challenging Islamic fundamentalism adequately.

Arguably, political agnosticism – as coined in this dissertation – is a better model to serve a pluralist society than the multiculturalist and theocratic models.