

ON first reading the book cannot fail to dazzle the reader as he discovers the encyclopaedic knowledge of a modern-day Ibn Batutta at work. Muslims from the remotest corners of the globe have been studied, their numbers and organisations assessed and their history and problems outlined. It is clear from the book that the author has spent a great deal of his spare time visiting and collecting data about Muslim populations in different parts of the world. Indeed, whatever theoretical constructs emerge are a consequence of the growing databank, rather than the other way round.

The data itself is extensive and gleaned from a variety of diverse sources. The author rightly dismisses official statistics, since in most countries these have become subjects of acrimonious debate and have major political overtones. He has therefore, tried to corroborate official figures by other sources, personal visits, local informants and a host of other methods. In the end it would appear that whilst the global figures arrived at may be very near the mark, some individual country figures look suspect. Thus the figure of 40% Muslims for Uganda is too high; a figure of 84.7 million Muslims in India is conservative; and Tanzania is reckoned to have over 65% Muslim population as opposed to the author's estimate of 55%.

Another problem is with the presentation of the data. Here, the author's obsession with categories recognised by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) leads to some glaring anomalies. Thus Uganda with the author's estimate of 40% Muslim population, and Gabon with a 10% Muslim population are presented as Islamic states because they happen to be members of the OIC. Nigeria with a Muslim population of over 60% Muslim and Tanzania with over 55% Muslims are categorised under Muslim minorities.

True, the author states that numerical superiority is not the only criteria for imparting 'majority' or 'minority' status. In the introduction he states, "...one could conclude that a Muslim community might be numerically inferior but superior politically, or socially. Such a group is not a minority. ...On the other hand, a Muslim community might be numerically superior to the non-Muslims but might be relegated to a position of insignificance and ineffectiveness by the more powerful non-Muslims even though the latter might be numerically in-

The Muslim Diaspora

The nature, composition and problems of Muslim minorities in the world are the subject of a new study. **M Iqbal Asaria** takes a critical look at one of the first attempts to analyse and theorise this vexed question.

Muslim Minorities in the World Today, by M Ali Kettani, Mansell Publishing Ltd., London, 1986, 267pp. £26.50.

ferior. In this case, the Muslims should be considered a minority."

However, when coming to apply

Muslims in minority communities, 1982

	thousands
Asia	228,000
Africa	116,000
Europe	34,000
America	4,000
Oceania	300
Total	382,300

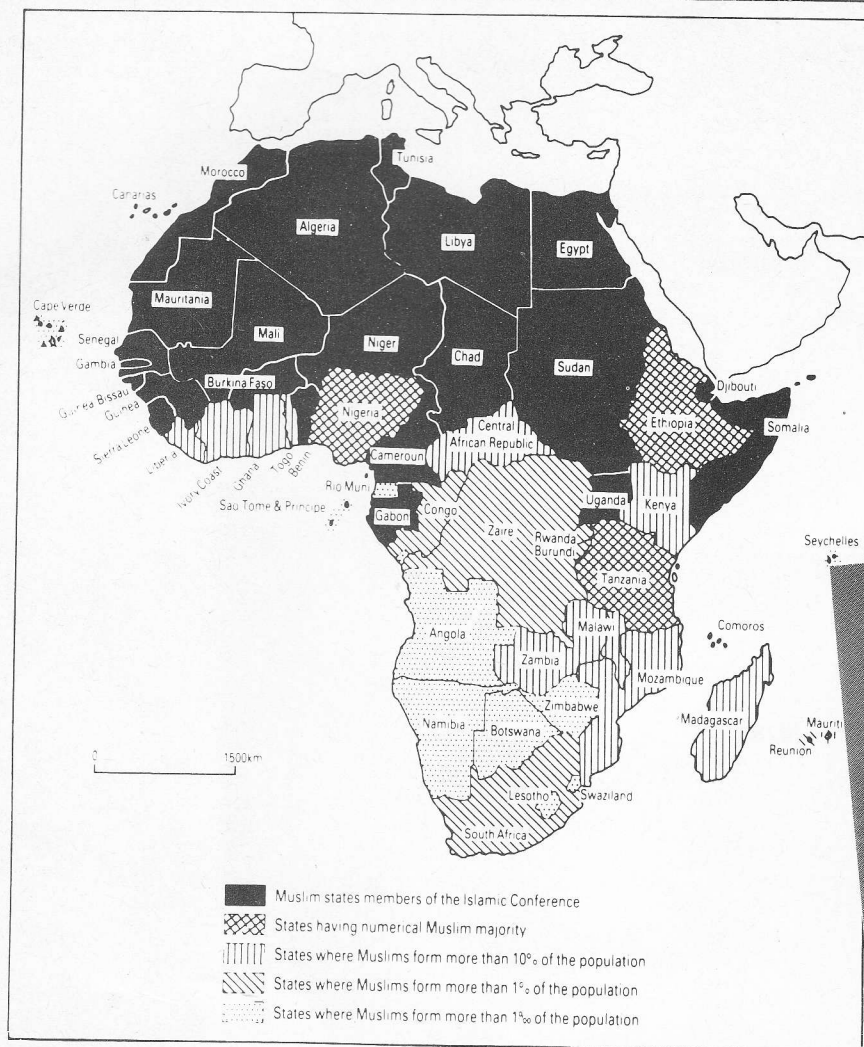
these constructs to the figures, the author adopts an inexplicable definition of a Muslim majority. "Muslim majority is defined as those Muslims who live in those countries which define themselves as Muslim by being members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, whose permanent secretariat is in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia!"

Fortunately, a simple rejigging of the figures shows that the overall proportions given by the author remain valid when a straight forward definition of majority-minority on numerical basis is applied. Overall, Muslim minorities comprise about 382 million people or some 40% of the total global population of Muslims. That some 40% of the *Ummah* is living outside the *Dar al-Islam* (domain of Islam) is perhaps the most startling statistic to emerge from the study. The history, composition, status and problems of this nearly half of the *Ummah* thus assumes an urgency,

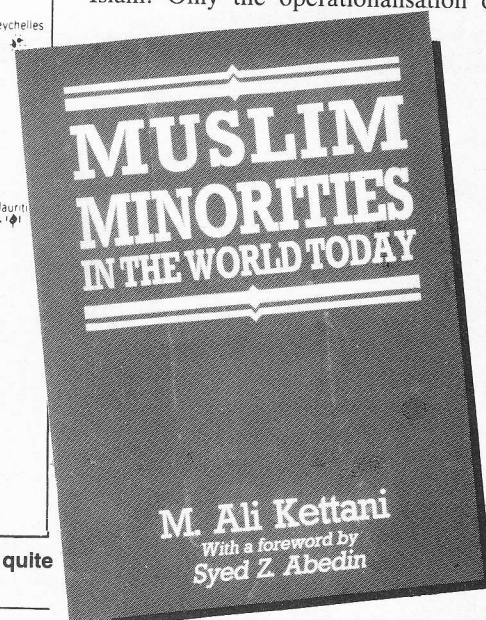
hitherto lacking.

According to the author, Muslim minorities have historically emerged in three different ways. Firstly, there are groups of Muslims who have left their lands because of persecution and migrated to more 'friendly' environs in order to organise and make a comeback to their original places of abode. These are the true *muhajirs* in the tradition of the beloved Prophet's migration to Medina. Secondly, there are communities of Muslims who have ventured out to seek new avenues of trade and commerce and have settled and intermingled with the local populations in far away lands. In many cases like that of Malaysia and Indonesia, these minorities have slowly become majorities as the pace of conversion in the host community has accelerated. Finally, there are small groups of indigenous Muslims who have accepted Islam of their own accord. In many cases a particular minority is composed of a fusion of all three categories of Muslims.

As Syed Zain al Abedin, the director of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, points out in his foreword, the key theoretical novelty of the work is that, "Kettani... offers two alternate models for Muslim minorities to choose from... The first is the classical model of 'Makkah'. In this model the Muslim minority subject to cruel and unrelenting pressure is constrained to opt for *Hijrah* or belligerence and warfare. For a long time this option was in traditional Muslim majoritarian thinking invested with the status of inevitability and exclusive viability. But the unique distinction of *Muslim Minorities in the World Today* lies in its cognition of an alternate model – the 'Abyssinian Model'. Here at last for the believers is the assurance of a future *with* others. ...This is the



A map of Africa from the book: The obsession with OIC categories is quite apparent



closest that any 'committed' majoritarian Muslim scholar, to my knowledge, come in the awoval of a pluralistic reality."

This would appear to be a wishful reading of Kettani's position. The author while advocating adoption of minor characteristics like 'language, dress and minor social habits' of the host community is adamant on retaining the Muslim's Islamic identity and control over education of their children. As recent events in Europe over the education of Muslim children and the Sha'ria debates in countries like India and Nigeria have shown, the possibility of 'tolerance, peaceful coexistence and exchange of ideas' is fraught with practical difficulties. Indeed, the 'Abyssinian Model' was also a kind of *Hijrah*. It is not a prescription for a permanent exit from the *Dar al-Islam*.

The author rightly points out that a thriving and confident *Dar al-Islam* is the best guarantee of Muslim minor-

ities throughout the globe. Indeed, he argues that "minorityness" in its sociological sense is the product of overall Muslim decadence and subjection. As this is reversed, so will the state of "minorityness" be alleviated. Indeed, the revival of Islam over the last two decades has led to a new mood of self-assertion on the part of the Muslim minorities of the world. As opposed to Syed Zain al-Abedin's summation of the author's position in his foreword, Kettani's position is best summed up by saying that "minorityness" is a transitory phase, a redressable accident of history. A Muslim is not supposed wilfully to acquiesce in it.

In addition to *Hijrah* as the author states, 'A Muslim may also emigrate either in search of knowledge or of material benefits, etc., as long as his faith is not endangered'. What Kettani does not examine is the qualitative change in the nature of such emigration and the consequences of this on

the resulting Muslim minorities. It is one thing for a self-confident Muslim merchant emigrating from a thriving *Dar al-Islam* and quite another for an emerging colonial subject showing gratitude for being offered the chance of doing the most menial task in a modern European metropolis. Through the former Islam has spread to the far corners of the world. The latter are finding it difficult to retain their own Islam, let alone spread it. Once this dimension is taken into account, the argument for Syed Zain al-Abedin's version of the 'Abyssinian Model' would appear to be even less valid today than in the heyday of Islam. Only the operationalisation of

the idea of the oneness of the *Ummah* can provide succour to the Muslim minorities.

Here, the author is sadly silent on one of the saddest case of a Muslim majority being dissipated by force. Reference is made to Palestine. Zionist immigration financed by the USA and aggression again financed by the USA has reduced the Muslim population of Palestine to about 40%. Yet many Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, remain the staunchest allies of the USA! Herein lies the challenge that needs to be tackled if practical shape is to be given to alleviating the lot of the Muslim minorities.

Kettani's contribution to the study of Muslim minorities is a commendable one, and his encyclopaedic knowledge of the situation of Muslim in all corners of the world is impressive. However, his theoretical formulations and proposed solutions need to be refined and developed further by new researchers in the field. ■