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978-0-521-86011-6 - Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence

Edited by Aziz al-Azmeh and Effie Fokas

Excerpt

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## 1 Introduction

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*Effie Fokas*

It is a daunting task to introduce a text on this subject today, given the rapid pace of change surrounding Islam in Europe. The vast dimensions of this change defy simple summary and necessitate new, continuous and multifaceted research. By contrast, it is all too easy to list developments that have saturated print and electronic media coverage of Islam and of Muslims – even if only superficially related to the latter. The list ranges from examples of extremism such as the killing of Theo van Gogh and the Madrid and London bombings, to controversies pivoting on Islam, such as the eruptions following the printing of the cartoons of Mohammed in the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* and the reprinting elsewhere (aftershocks continue to be felt in the form of intense debates on free speech versus blasphemy, or versus religion, or versus Islam, depending on the interlocutor's perspective), and following Pope Benedict XVI's denigrating words on Islam in his Regensburg University speech. Meanwhile, also contentious have been plans for the subjection of immigrants to 'citizenship tests' aimed at assessing whether their values are compatible with those of the majority community. The Dutch example is the most poignant, suggesting little tolerance for immigrants who do not embrace Dutch values of tolerance, and raising further debate on whether 'some values are better than others'.<sup>1</sup> International press reports also bring to light national-level debates, such as controversy over the 'identity soup' served in soup kitchens in France to the exclusion of Muslims (and Jews), renewed disputes regarding the wearing of headscarves in public schools, and tensions concerning the building of mosques (most acute in France, Italy and of course Greece).<sup>2</sup> This current mediatic attention honing

<sup>1</sup> And in this, echoing the words of the leader of another liberal European country – Denmark's Anders Fogh Rasmussen – that 'Danes for too many years have been foolishly kind. They have not dared to say that some values are better than others. But this must happen now.' See European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) European Roundtables Meetings report of 2003, accessible via the EUMC website: [www.eumc.europa.eu/eumc/index.php](http://www.eumc.europa.eu/eumc/index.php)

<sup>2</sup> See special issue of *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 31, no. 6, 2005, devoted to the issue of conflicts over the building of mosques in European cities. Much like the

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especially on Islamist extremism or, at best, on points of tension between Muslims and non-Muslims, serves either to produce or reinforce popular perceptions of Islam as a (violent) monolith and as the shared and main definition of Muslims living within Europe.

Against this background, the present volume derives from the contention that, beyond new research, what is critically needed is methodological rigour in the study of Islam in Europe, aimed to counter two trends in particular. The first is cultural differentialism, and the second is monist conceptions of identity. Hackneyed dichotomous representations of 'liberal' versus 'traditional', moderate versus radical, and 'authentic' versus 'reactionary' Islam are clearly insufficient. A more nuanced approach is necessary, taking into account a number of key factors (as well as *combinations* of them, where applicable), including whether Muslim groupings are autochthonous or immigrant; the origins of immigrant communities (e.g. Arab, African or Asian Muslims, Bengali or Pakistani) and particularities of the host communities; differences according to generation and gender; objective versus subjective conceptions of identity; and cultural, ethnic, political and/or theological references and motivations. Such an approach goes a long way towards reflecting the intricate realities of Islam in Europe which tend to be so far from public purview: it also reveals the tremendous diversity of Muslim collectivities across Europe, including such contexts as Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Greece, with proportionately large numbers of Muslims; the differences between the experiences of Muslims living in Thrace and of those in other parts of Greece; and the clashes in perspective amongst Muslim intellectuals of the autochthonous Muslim communities in Bosnia – all of which relate to a number of factors well beyond culture and religion. This nuanced approach thus serves to counter tendencies towards cultural differentialism. Even deeper examination is needed to comprehend the diversity of individual identities, including the many shades of relation to Islam, and to different interpretations of the faith. Such examination renders evident the fact that, as Aziz al-Azmeh has articulated, 'there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it',<sup>3</sup> and that these situations are national, local, familial *and* interpersonal.

This careful attention to diversity and identity is important not least for the fundamental objectives of accuracy and academic integrity of the researchers, but also as a sound basis upon which to think in policy terms. Here a dialectical approach is instructive in highlighting

headscarf issue, the mosque conflicts play an important role in bringing Islam from the private to the public sphere.

<sup>3</sup> See Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and modernities*, London: Verso, 1993. Citation from p. 1.

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the inter-influence between Islam and Europe. Islam in Europe is in a state of flux, but so is religion in general in Europe, and it is useful to recognise how these two dimensions affect one another: understanding, in other words, how European policies impact upon Muslim communities and individuals, but also how activities and discourse of Muslim individuals and groups influence changing conceptions and policy considerations on the place of religion in the European public sphere. Discussions of religion's proper place in the European public sphere have not found much of a formal discursive space within the EU thus far, but one may wonder how long these conversations will be delayed, given their increasing salience in so many EU member states. A case in point is the present state of somewhat muddled questioning of the assimilationist model of integration in France following the Paris riots of 2005, and of the multiculturalist model in Denmark and Britain following especially the murder of Theo van Gogh and the London 2005 bombings, respectively and – in most cases – separately. In general, the EU finds itself at what seems to be a critical juncture in its relationship to religion; currently we experience an unhealthy situation in which definitions of this relationship are being drawn on a *reactive* basis, in a climate of frequent, attention-grabbing 'events'.

### Why Europe?

Much of the above is applicable, of course, well beyond the case of Europe. The rationale for the European focus here is threefold. First, the historical interchange between Islam and Europe specifically is marked by clichéd notions of tensions which permeate both European (in general terms) and national narratives and which are often used by Muslims and non-Muslims seeking to perpetuate such tension. The process of weakening of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century and increasing exposure to secular European influence, together with the waves of secularising reforms in the nineteenth century, comprise a triad providing the cornerstones of an account of friction between Islam and 'the rest' worldwide. Meanwhile, the history of European colonialism lends increased fervour to such accounts, whether by dint of collective memory or as the result of selective politicisation of the past by certain Muslim leaders – or, at least, as a highly charged point of reference for comparisons between this period and certain current US, and European, policies related to Islam. For their part, non-Muslims in the business of perpetuating tension refer to such aspects of history as the 1453 fall of Constantinople, and the 1683 siege of Vienna. However distant and essentialised they may be, these are specifically European

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images which operate quite powerfully in the imaginations of many Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe (and beyond).

A second particularly significant dynamic of the European context is the sheer size of the Muslim presence. This, together with the rise in numbers through immigration and relatively high birth rates, and the increasingly visible religiosity amongst Muslims, has led to both real and perceived transformations in the social fabric of European societies. When we add to this list of developments the facts of the continent's declining and aging population and its declining (visibility of) traditional Christian religiosity, we find the underpinnings of a great deal of right-wing anti-immigration rhetoric, reflected in the striking wave of right-wing electoral victories across the continent in the early part of this decade.

Third, and related to the above, Europe offers a kaleidoscope of policies and approaches to religious pluralism in general, and to Muslim communities in particular. The diverse approaches to the 'headscarf issue', and the even more diverse motivations for these approaches, are paradigmatic of this situation. Whilst our purpose here is not to explore and appraise the broad range of policies related to Islam, this volume does touch on the question of cause and effect, and on the extent to which the host community and its policies influence the trajectory taken by Muslim groups living therein.

To propose to offer a solution for the tensions surrounding Islam in Europe today would certainly be unwise. There is a marked lack in consensus amongst scholars and practitioners concerning the roots of particular problem points – including references to prejudice, 'clash of civilisations', 'clash of interpretations', varying degrees of assimilation, socio-economic underdevelopment and/or exclusion, etc. Discussions comparing the assimilationist policies of the secular French republic against the multiculturalist policies of the United Kingdom, for example, lead to cyclical debates regarding 'the root of the problem' – socio-economic underdevelopment in the former being pegged as a clear cause of the riots which swept across France in October–November 2005, whilst educated and financially secure British Muslims perpetrated the London bombings of July 2005. Clearly, generalised prescriptions are futile.

Nor, of course, is there consensus on these matters amongst Muslims in Europe. How are we to reach sound conclusions when division and controversy mark different 'strands' of radical, fundamentalist, reformist, and moderate Islam? And this when, meanwhile, the lines of communication and influence between immigrant communities and their countries of origin are so variable? Policies and attitudes towards women entail one of

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the areas of most acute divergence within various groups, revealing such discrepancies as women marching in Morocco to free Islam of the secularising influence of the West and to maintain family codes which significantly limit their freedoms and equality, and Moroccan women in Paris working hard to free Islam of ‘imported’ elements, i.e. the national and ethnic, usually traditional and conservative. Likewise, there is a significant rift amongst Muslim thinkers (as amongst many non-Muslims) regarding multiculturalism and cultural relativism, with calls for multiculturalist policies being countered by condemnations of these as cultural relativism which betrays reformist trends in Islam and which protects ‘culture’ at the cost of continued segregation in society.

### Contextualising our study

Many scholars have sought to understand the potency behind particular aspects of Islam which serve as mobilising forces. Though they may disagree on the cause, they have no illusions as to the powerful *effect* of uses of the conceptual ‘substratum’ of Islam.<sup>4</sup> As Fred Halliday notes with reference to invocations of the *umma* in a variety of time periods and contexts,

the terms and images used were . . . an eclectic mixture, with no theological or conceptual coherence to them; the cupboard of Islamic and Arab themes was ransacked for whatever was there, from the Prophet to heroes on horses, dreams and *munafiqin* and much else besides.<sup>5</sup>

Our subject of study is not the substratum, per se, but we are interested in the preconditions for such forms of mobilisations to take place. More specifically, we are concerned with the preconditions insofar as they point to misconceptions of ourselves and of others – hence our specific focus on *identity*. The authors who have contributed to this volume make a concerted effort to shed light on the multifaceted nature of individual and collective identities, including elements of continuity and of contingency, and objective and subjective dimensions. On the whole, they point to a multiplicity of factors which shape different stances, within Muslim communities, on areas of potential tension between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. The message which

<sup>4</sup> Of course, the best of these are equally attuned to exceptions and failed attempts to manipulate religion for non-religious purposes. See, for example, Fred Halliday, ‘The politics of the *umma*’, in B.A. Roberson (ed.), *Shaping the current Islamic reformation*, London: Frank Cass, 2003, pp. 20–41.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

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emanates from this text is that neither culture nor Islam can alone be used to explain tension where it does arise.

A degree of intellectual honesty suffices to remind us that the political uses of religion are old, and they are widespread across cultures and faiths. One illustration of this is the fact that news reports in the immediate aftermath of the 7 July 2005 bombings in London included reports of the Srebrenica massacre tenth anniversary (11 July 1995), as well as the ninth anniversary of the Manchester IRA bombing (15 July 1996), with little to no attention to any similarities between these events: 'Islamic terrorism' is treated as entirely in a class of violence of its own (and with this, Islam is presented as in a religious class of its own, and Muslims as unified in it). But such mobilisations to violence are of course limited neither to Islam nor to religion; rather, political movements use whatever aspects of the 'substratum' are available and functional in a given context.<sup>6</sup> As Maxime Rodinson writes, in graceful understatement: 'For their faith and/or their homeland, people are commonly induced to perform splendid deeds as well as hideous crimes', even if 'they do not always have a good understanding of either that faith or of the plans of the leaders of that homeland'.<sup>7</sup> In this context, misunderstandings of ourselves and others are conspicuous in such developments as the fact of sexual assaults by 'coalition of the willing' troops in the Iraqi Abu Ghraib prison; the tension between the US Senate and White House over a possible ban on 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment' of anyone in US custody, which, the latter feared, might 'unduly constrict Americans who are leading the difficult fight against terrorism'; and the statement of one US senator, during discussions of the anti-torture bill, that 'every one of us . . . knew and took great strength from the belief that we were different from our enemies'.<sup>8</sup> Seen in the light of such developments, when an example of Islamist terrorism is described as 'a return to a primitiveness that we in the West had assumed a progressive history had left behind';<sup>9</sup> the irony is all the more acute, as should be our awareness of a pattern of misconceptions.

The bit of conventional wisdom on religion which is so often overlooked in relation to Islam is worthwhile mentioning here: religion does

<sup>6</sup> See Halliday, 'The politics of the *umma*', p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Maxime Rodinson, in *Europe and the mystique of Islam*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987, p. xv.

<sup>8</sup> See Brian Knowlton, 'Bush repeats threat to veto torture curb', in *International Herald Tribune*, 7 October 2005, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Quotation taken from Charles Krauthammer, 'Europe's native-born enemy', *The Washington Post*, 15 July 2005, p. A23.

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not operate in a vacuum, and its influence is mediated by that of a series of other factors.<sup>10</sup> In fact, if we seek to locate the role of Islam, or of culture, in 'Islamic militancy', perhaps we should contemplate what proportion of the foreign relations of Muslim states – e.g. Iran's movements on nuclear weapons, the conflict in Somalia, Syrian claims on Lebanon – is to do with religion or culture. Clearly, very little. This is not to say that all Islamic militancy is devoid of religious meaning, but here it is absolutely critical to distinguish between fundamentalist movements and activities, and those of Muslims in general. This we do with relative ease when we think of Christianity in its relation to examples of Christian fundamentalist activities, such as the bombing of abortion clinics.<sup>11</sup>

As noted above, a red thread which runs throughout this book is a statement against culturalist differentialism. In this vein, the present study should be located within the broader framework of uncertainties and unease about religion in Europe *in general*. The debates emanating from many European countries on references to religion in the Preamble to the Constitutional Treaty of the EU and on Turkey's potential membership within the EU signal an ambiguity concerning the role of religion in contemporary Europe which goes beyond the EU as such and, indeed, beyond the question of Islam. These issues have challenged Europeans to clarify their notions of European identity: how can a Christian element be found there where Christianity's presence is ever-disappearing – except, that is, where it has to do with culture? The prejudiced manner with which this term is sometimes used is evident in the German case of debate and court cases on the crucifix and the headscarf in schools – in the case of the crucifix, decisions allowing it because of its supposed historic and cultural meaning, and in the case of the headscarf disallowing it on the same basis.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, Christianity maintains a distinctly strong presence in Europe through culture and tradition (e.g. church weddings, baptisms and

<sup>10</sup> Bhikhu Parekh makes this point well in an article entitled 'Is Islam a threat to Europe's multicultural democracies?', in Krzysztof Michalski (ed.), *Religion in the new Europe*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006, pp. 111–21 (esp. p. 117).

<sup>11</sup> On this subject, see Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: the search for meaning*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. See also Olivier Roy, 'Islam in Europe: clash of religions or convergence of religiosities?', in K. Michalski (ed.), pp. 131–44.

<sup>12</sup> Astrid Reuter has presented an astute analysis of this situation in her unpublished paper, 'Headscarf and crucifix: on the politics of interpreting religious symbols', presented at the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR) Conference in Zagreb, July 2005. For a further comparison between German and French handlings of religious symbols in general, see Leonora Auslander, 'Bavarian crucifixes and French headscarves', *Cultural Dynamics*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 283–309.

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funerals) and through architecture and town planning.<sup>13</sup> The latter fact is particularly clear in Greece and Spain, where plans for the building of mosques have led to public backlash and demonstrations, respectively. Christianity also maintains a presence for many through a ‘chain of memory’, linking individuals to a community through memory of a shared past, with religion deeply rooted in tradition which persists in the (increasingly secular) present and, it must be noted, through a range of church–state relations privileging majority Christian churches across Europe, under ‘a chimera of neutrality’.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, studies have shown the large extent to which Europeans ‘believe without belonging’ (to traditional Christian churches), or ‘belong without believing’, as well as various expressions of public religion within Christian contexts.<sup>15</sup> The latter illustrates clearly that ambiguity regarding the role of religion in politics and public life goes well beyond the case of Islam.

There is a budding discussion, with many and diverse intellectual centres of gravity, regarding the place of religion in the European public sphere. From vastly different perspectives, the concept of the EU’s ‘secular neutrality’ has been questioned most recently by José Casanova, Jürgen Habermas and Francis Fukuyama.<sup>16</sup> Brief attention to their perspectives gives a sense of the depth and breadth of the discussion which is hitting at the core of deep-rooted conceptions regarding religion’s proper place in European society. According to Casanova, secularist assumptions ‘turn religion into a problem’, thus precluding the resolution of religion-related challenges in a pragmatic manner. He argues that ‘to guarantee equal access to the European public sphere and undistorted communication, the European Union would need to become not only post-Christian but also post-secular’.<sup>17</sup> Habermas also

<sup>13</sup> See chapters 4 and 5 of David Martin’s *On secularization: towards a revised general theory*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> See Hervieu-Léger, *La religion pour mémoire*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993, and J. Madeley and Z. Enyedi (eds.), *Church and state in contemporary Europe: the chimera of neutrality*, London: Frank Cass, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> See Grace Davie *Religion in Britain since 1945. Believing without belonging*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994; and José Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> For Casanova, see ‘Religion, European secular identities, and European integration’, in Timothy Byrnes and Peter Katzenstein (eds.), *Religion in an expanding Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 65–92; for Habermas, see ‘Religion in the European public sphere’, in *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2006, as well as a lecture delivered upon receipt of the Holberg Prize, on ‘Religion in the public sphere’, 28 November 2005 (available online at: [www.holberg.uib.no/downloads/Habermas\\_religion\\_in\\_the\\_public\\_sphere.pdf](http://www.holberg.uib.no/downloads/Habermas_religion_in_the_public_sphere.pdf)); in terms of Fukuyama’s work, of special interest here is his ‘Identity, immigration and liberal democracy’, in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 17, no. 2, April 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Casanova 2006, p. 82.



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speaks of the necessity for secular citizens to learn to live in a post-secular society, rather than the current ‘asymmetric distribution of cognitive burdens’ which prevails: ‘Religious citizens, in order to come to terms with the ethical expectations of democratic citizenship, have to learn to adopt new epistemic attitudes toward their secular environment, whereas secular citizens are not exposed to similar cognitive dissonances in the first place’.<sup>18</sup> This he sees as an imbalance which needs to be rectified. For his part, Fukuyama concerns himself with the ‘valuelessness of postmodernity’, and the rise of relativism which bars ‘postmodern peoples’ from asserting their positive values and shared beliefs. He locates this problem specifically within the domain of Muslim immigration in Europe, and he finds that Europeans have not suitably addressed the problem of Muslim integration due to a pervasive political correctness stemming from the limitations set by the rise of relativism. He suggests that Europe may have much to learn from the US in terms of how to integrate its Muslim minorities.

As a whole, these proposals may come across as fairly radical, normative, and/or highly un-European. They certainly seem radical against the backdrop of the debates on reference to religion in the Constitutional Treaty, which suggested that Europeans are generally not ready to agree, at least, on any formal changes to the stable notion of European secularity. This secularity is conceived as a fundamental aspect of European *collective* political identity and is, for many Europeans, a prized point of difference between Europe and the United States.

Yet, in spite of the above, it is the Muslim presence in Europe which is perceived, more than any other factor, as a challenge to conceptions of a secular Europe. In general, increasing religious diversity within and across Europe related to Islam has led to examination and re-examination of models of church–state relations, as new methods for protecting religious pluralism have had to develop – both at the national level and within the context of the European Union. Meanwhile, Islamist terrorism, and backlashes against Muslims in the wake of terrorist attacks, have served to bring the state, including the police, deeper into religion-related matters at a time when, across Europe, states have operated comfortably in a practical separation from religion. Thus, to a certain extent, contemporary developments in Islam in Europe can be viewed from within the wider lens of the struggle between the secular and the religious. This is but one of many new forms of Islam’s influence on Europe.

<sup>18</sup> Habermas, 2005.

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Our exploration of Islam in Europe begins with an historical overview of the relations between Muslims and Christians in Europe, highlighting the role of collective memory in relations between Muslim communities in Europe and their host communities. Along these lines, Tarek Mitri addresses the historical interchange between Islam and Europe and offers important insight into the malleability of collective memory, variously leading to amity and to enmities but of course, most visibly to enmities. Mitri explores reactivations of enmity-prone collective memory for the sake of political mobilisation and shows how the success of such mobilisation depends on the mediation of contemporary education and communication. In keeping with the text's general theme, this chapter focuses on the inter-influence between Christians and Muslims, illustrating how constructed conceptions of collective *differences*, and not religiosities, have underlain enmities between Christians and Muslims in Europe. This chapter places our focus on Europe in its proper historical context, exploring the particular relationship between Islam and Europe.

In Chapter 3, Jorgen Nielsen parallels Mitri's survey in contemporary context by considering the developing notion of a particular Islam in Europe: 'Euro-Islam'. Nielsen examines divergent uses of the term 'Euro-Islam' and how these are indicative of two trends emanating from within Muslim communities in Europe. In some contexts, the term is being used to imply the development across Europe of forms of expression and thinking which allow Muslims' constructive participation in their various countries and localities. In other contexts, use of the term 'Euro-Islam' shows signs of acquiring an ideological content infiltrated from outside the communities (or, at best, from the margins), a process which in the view of some is aimed at controlling and setting limits to European Muslim expression. Nielsen's chapter explores these two trends and evaluates their impact on the place of Muslims in European society.

Together, Nielsen's text and that of Jocelyne Cesari (Chapter 4) serve to make the point that Muslim identity in Europe should be understood in terms of a process, rather than a static structure: Muslim *identification*, instead of identity, is their subject matter. In Chapter 4, Cesari discusses the fact that the forms of identifying oneself as Muslim are profoundly influenced by a narrative (active from the local to the international level) that puts into circulation a whole series of images and stereotypes which make Islam seem religiously, culturally and politically foreign and backward. This does not necessarily mean, however, that Muslim responses to this narrative are predetermined. Cesari's aim is to