

Islam in Europe: Current Trends and Future Challenges

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Europe is changing. While this in itself is not a remarkable fact, the role of Muslim immigrants in hastening that change warrants clear-eyed analysis. Coming to grips with Europe's changing identity must involve taking seriously the anxieties of all stakeholders and addressing the implicit legitimate values driving the conversation. The experience of Muslims in Europe holds lessons for Muslims elsewhere in the world.

Media portrayals of Muslims in Europe are overwhelmingly negative. Islam is often presented as a new religion that threatens European secular values. In the American context, stereotyping of Islam in the mass media has rendered the religion a convenient replacement for the Red Menace, which replaced the Yellow Peril. Both in America and in Europe, the fear is that Islam is an alien religion bent on fragmenting long-established identities. It is one of history's best-kept secrets, not just that Moors ruled parts of Portugal and Spain for centuries, but the extent to which Islamic culture took root and flourished in Christian Europe. Latter-day attempts to ignore the positive contributions of Islam to European identity and to conceal this peaceful coexistence cannot be innocent. A balanced reading of history would acknowledge the mutual appropriations and cross-fertilization of East and West. It is important to unearth the anxieties that necessitate such denials.

The development of Muslim culture in the Iberian peninsula and the willingness of Iberian residents to convert to Islam were necessary steps in making Europeans think of themselves as a people.¹ The Umayyad caliphate that collapsed in the eleventh century succeeded in making Spain a place of intellectual openness, scientific and philosophical learning. A full accounting of European identity must include the contributions of rationalist Muslim thinkers like Al-Kindi (812–873), Al-Farabi (870–950), Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980–1037), Al-Ghazali (1058–1111), Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126–1198), and Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406). It is crucial in light of this history to put in context what is written in the newspapers or said on TV about the perceived everlasting incompatibility between Islam and democracy, Islam and gender equality, Islam and modernity, and relationships between Mus-

lims and non-Muslims. Rather than relying on what is written in the newspaper or said on TV, a more balanced approach would be to undertake a careful study of the evolution of the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, emphasizing daily life and local experiences of actual Muslims. It is important to listen to Muslims as they articulate their own experience instead of taking at face value the representations of others or hastily concluding that the loudest voices must be representative of the whole. Placing the focus on a cross-section of relevant arenas in civil society such as schools, cultural institutions, mosques, and places of work allows insight into the types of concrete conflicts that emerge from religious issues and cultural issues. Such an examination better equips us to judge whether the public controversies attributed to religion are really about religion.

The impetus for this article was my participation in a faculty seminar in Summer 2007 titled "Muslim Communities in Contemporary Europe." Organized by the Consortium for International Education Exchange (CIEE), the seminar brought together fourteen multidisciplinary faculty members who traveled to France and the Netherlands. Those two countries were chosen because they have taken different approaches in integrating their Muslim communities. The French portion of the seminar was hosted by the Institute for the Study of Islam and Societies of the Muslim World (IISMM). Linked to the prestigious *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, the IISMM is an interdisciplinary center established in 1999 to support creative scholarship about Muslims and Islam. It promotes research and diffusion of knowledge and is characterized by its interdisciplinary perspective.

The Dutch portion of the seminar was hosted by the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM). The ISIM conducts and promotes interdisciplinary research on social, political, cultural, and intellectual trends and movements in contemporary Muslim societies and communities. It was established in 1998 by the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, Radboud University Nijmegen, and Utrecht University and is based in Leiden, the Netherlands.

Seminar discussions and site visits were designed around an exploration of the following types of questions: To what extent can secularized European societies cope with religious plurality? Are the public controversies such as the headscarf debates in France and Germany really about religion? How does the public stigmatization of Muslims and Islam affect daily practices of citizens? How do we make sense of the appeal of religious extremism for some young Muslims in Europe? The completely different French and Dutch models of multiculturalism and integration of Muslim immigrants make for an interesting contrast of how best to integrate Islam and Europe. The Dutch and French experience may hold some lessons for other countries with Muslim minorities, or even, with the necessary modifications, Muslim-majority countries.

Guest speakers for the seminar included representatives of the host institutions, academics (Olivier Roy in Paris² and Ruud Peters in Amsterdam), government officials, and imams in both countries.

Site visits included a guided tour of the Great Mosque of Paris and visits to Bobigny (*Hôtel de Ville* and *CANAL 93*, a community center that funds immigrant youth engaged in artistic expression), 18th arrondissement (immigrant neighborhood

of Goutte d'Or), Olympia Concert Hall, the Islamic University of Rotterdam, and an Islamic school El Amien in Bos en Lommer, a Muslim neighborhood in Amsterdam.

A common theme emerged from the presentations by the guest speakers and the site visits. They invited reflection on how being a Muslim impacted individual citizenship in a broad range of democratic and pluralistic frameworks. The similarities of the conditions under which European immigrant Muslims and American Muslims live are intriguing. The United States, France, the Netherlands, and Germany share commitments to democracy and pluralism even as they differ in the specific ways these ideals get cashed out for their Muslim citizens. In all these situations, Muslims are a minority living in environments they find largely hostile. There is a collective sense that the Western world looks rather scary to Muslims since it is a world dominated by majority populations that are aggressive, irreverent, and comfortable in their ignorance. The common thread is that being in the minority negatively affects the identity formation of individuals, the more so if the majority in question is perceived as hostile. At the same time, the struggles of the minority shape the wider community and their specific nations. The majority and the minority share a fate that must be worked out together. Often the tensions that are triggered are attributed to Islam, when the truth is that their real causes are far more complex and uncomfortable to untangle.

The writing of this article was completed while I was a visiting scholar at the Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, Universiti Malaya. Extended residence in Malaysia allowed reflection, in a Muslim-majority context, on the challenges facing Muslims.

Diversity within Islam

Nobel Prize laureate Naguib Mahfouz in his 1988 acceptance speech characterized Islam thusly:

In one victorious battle against Byzantium it has given back its prisoners of war in return for a number of books of the ancient Greek heritage in philosophy, medicine and mathematics. This is a testimony of value for the human spirit in its demand for knowledge, even though the demander was a believer in God and the demanded a fruit of a pagan civilization.³

There is an unfortunate tendency in media discussions about Islam to conflate Muslims with Arabs. A 2009 Pew Research Center report noted that of the 1.57 billion Muslims worldwide, more than 60 percent lived in Asia. Indonesia had the most Muslims (with 202,867,000 in total, or 88 percent of the country's population). Only an estimated 20 percent of Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa.⁴ The words of a Nobel laureate and the Pew Research Center figures should serve as reminders that despite the stress on unity (the one-ness of God, of the *ummah*, and of the Quran), Islam is not monolithic.

In 2011, the schism between Sunni and Shia Muslims entered its 1,331st year. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) died without naming a successor. A dispute soon

arose between the majority who backed the Prophet's friend and companion Abu Bakr and those who would eventually be called Shi'at Ali, or the partisans of Ali, who believed that the role of Caliph should be passed down through Muhammad's bloodline, starting with his cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib. Today about 90 percent of Muslims worldwide are Sunni, meaning followers of the Sunnah, or Way, of the Prophet. The rest are Shia, and they became majorities in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan. The conflict over succession took on doctrinal overtones over the years and thus became progressively more complex to undo and, sadly, more amenable to manipulation by anti-Islamic ideologues to further divided the *ummah*.

Compounding the diversity of the Muslim world is the range of countries usually called Islamic. It is more accurate to speak of local manifestations of Islam (for example, Islam in France, American Islam, and Malaysian Islam), as each of these countries leaves its unique historical stamp on the faith. There should be no doubt that Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia exhibit the flexibility of Islam. While the European countries and the United States are not predominantly Muslim, their Muslim minorities practice their faith in interesting variations from their co-religionists in the Middle East and in South East Asia. Setting aside for now the primary examples of France and the Netherlands, the examples of Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia will illustrate this point about diversity.

One of the most compelling examples for a democracy in a state with an overwhelming Muslim majority of 99 percent is Turkey. The origins of the Turkish democracy lie in the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938). In order to abolish the authoritarian rule under the Ottomans in Turkey, Atatürk and his followers attempted to introduce a secular republic in which the role of Islam was considerably diminished in the public sphere. Atatürk had a genuine, and yet realistic, faith in liberal democracy, and to reach this aim he was convinced of the necessity of curtailing religious power in the new republic. Nevertheless, Atatürk could also establish one-party rule in Turkey with authoritarian characteristics without any sense of irony. Maybe the one-party rule was the reason that the political system remained relatively stable during the Second World War and could prevent Islamist forces from gaining power again. But after the war it was possible to establish a multi-party system in Turkey without leading to a breakdown of the secularist state. Despite three military coups, the power was given back to civilian leaders again. However, it has to be admitted that “the military, perceiving itself as the guardian of the republic, especially its unitary and its secular nature, continued to be a significant and, more importantly, an independent actor in Turkish politics.”⁵ In a practical attempt at secularism, Turkey maintains a Religious Affairs Directorate that has a billion-dollar budget from which mosques, churches, and synagogues are funded. Understandably, decisions have to be made about who qualifies as a legitimate recipient of state funding. To illustrate the point made before about diversity in Islam, the Turkish government has thus far considered the Alevi mystics an illegitimate sect.⁶ As Turkey applies to join the European Union, the turmoil over the country's identity continues to pit political Islam against staunch secular pluralism in the courts and in the streets.

Another example of an Islamic country is offered by the Islamic Republic of

Iran. The overthrow of the shah in the Islamic revolution of 1979 initiated the creation of a very distinctive system with a blend of authoritarian and democratic features. The head of state is the Supreme Leader (currently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei), who is elected by the Assembly of Experts. He is the main figure in Iranian politics and serves as Commander-in-Chief as well as leader of the Guardian Council, the body which serves to ensure compatibility of constitutional laws with Islam. The second important figure is the president of Iran, who is elected for a maximum of two four-year terms. He is leader of the actual cabinet and executive but does not, due to the overwhelming position of the Supreme Leader, enjoy the highest authority in Iran. The system may accurately be described as a sort of theo-democracy in which secularism in its strict sense does not exist. Olivier Roy has noted that “Chapter 5 of the Iranian constitution stipulates that, in the absence of the Hidden Imam, the leadership of the *ummah* should be entrusted to a ‘just and pious jurist (*faqih*) aware of the circumstances of his time’.”⁷ This conjunction of the legitimacy of both religion and politics ensures that interaction between the popular vote and powerful clerics will produce tensions such as became obvious in 2009, when presidential elections caused demonstrations in Tehran and all over the world. The demonstrators were disputing the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in support of opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi. The democratic process was widely believed to have been thwarted by the clerical establishment, and the government response to the demonstrations in Tehran further made clear the in-built tensions within the system.

Saudi Arabia provides a third example. It is a monarchy historically allied with the United States. This is a particularly sore point for radical extremists opposed to any entanglements between the West and the holiest places of Islam. The ultimate leadership is in the hands of the Saud family, but interestingly the house of Saud is challenged by strange bedfellows—ranging from those with a variety of Islamist orientations, most notably Osama Bin Laden, to those with liberal leanings agitating for more democratic reform. Government takes place through the royal family rather than in institutions within civil society. Despite the formal structures the actual power remains in the hands of the king’s family. Royal decrees are the decisive regulations which have to be implemented in the country. The Sharia is the basis of the judicial system and thus represents the source of law which is interpreted in its harshest sense, including the ordering of the cutting of limbs and stoning for relevant crimes. Though established as a modern state in 1932, the constitution in Saudi Arabia is the Quran and the state is governed by Islamic law as interpreted by its guardians in the sharia court system.⁸

These examples should serve (1) to highlight the internal complexity of Islam and (2) as a warning against simplistic answers to the question about who speaks for Muslims. This warning remains largely unheeded in public discussions of Islam.

Negative Views of Islam

In spite of the richness of Islam, Muslims in the West struggle under the burden of persistent negative associations that are regularly reproduced in the public discourse. Regarding women, Islam is seen as problematic in the areas of family

law related to marriage (particularly perceived as permitting polygamy and forbidding divorce), work, education, and modesty requirements, as exemplified in the debates about the hijab all over Europe.

The intellectual underpinning for the representation of Islam as a religion of violence has been reliably provided in recent times by scholars such as Samuel Huntington.⁹ Huntington's "clash of civilizations" is an often-heard "explanation" that the features of democratic life—like the separation of powers, the rule of law, social pluralism, representative government, civil liberties, and championing of human rights—are uniquely Western phenomena. In contrast, Islamic values are seen as incompatible with democratic values and practices. Bernard Lewis, in the same culturalist vein as Huntington, acknowledges that Islamic civilization developed in wealth and knowledge long before the West but has since the eighteenth century consigned itself to "a downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression."¹⁰

Pope Benedict XVI's speech in 2006 at Regensburg University in Germany shows that the strand can be traced much further back in history. In articulating the main point that reason is the very essence of Christianity, the Pope quoted a fourteenth century Byzantine Emperor, Manuel II Palaeologus, and the cited passage left the impression that Islam had a tendency to "exclude the question of God" from reason. The Pope quoted the Byzantine Emperor as saying "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."¹¹ Following worldwide expressions by Muslims that the remarks were offensive and demands for an apology, the Pope insisted he respected Islam—and proceeded with a previously scheduled trip to Turkey. Yet the damage was done.

The stereotypes of Islam expressed by the Pope's speech make it difficult to think of Islam as a "peaceful" religion capable of adopting rational discourse and embracing the democratic values as they are practised in western countries. The question whether Islam and democracy would be compatible is often inspired by the public image of states in the Muslim world which are dominated by monarchies, authoritarian regimes, terrorism, and the suppression of women. In Saudi Arabia, there are restrictions on travel by women unaccompanied by their male relatives. There are no such restrictions in Malaysia. This means that the use of Saudi Arabia as an example of incompatibility involves a sleight of hand. The example depends for its "explanatory" value on a very superficial portrayal of states with Muslim majorities, since it is often biased and tends not to reflect inter-societal dynamics, socio-cultural backgrounds, as well as evolving historical developments.

To be fair, the misrepresentations and misunderstandings are on both sides. For their part, Muslims appreciate many western values. Uncritical Muslims, however, tend to view western societies as devoid of spirituality and as denying them some fundamental rights which they require to live out their faith fully. Such are the reasons given by Mohammed Bouyeri, who murdered filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004, the perpetrators of the Madrid bombings of 2004, as well as the terrorists of the London bus and subway bombings of 2005. Western societies too are complex. While freedom of expression protects the rights of citizens who are stridently

opposed to religion in all its forms, a blind obsession with blasphemy and apostasy makes it impossible to appreciate the deep respect for freedom of religion as well. The actual practice may differ substantially from any imagined pure form, but an honest accounting must acknowledge the internal complexity of the West.

World Events of Concern

Muslims have long been concerned about what they perceive as a pervasive anti-Islam Western bias. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is read as an example of the West siding with Israel to slow down progress on establishing a Palestinian homeland. Extremists such as Osama Bin Laden also constructed the first gulf war in 1990–91 and also the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as modern-day continuations of the Crusades. It did not help that some Western leaders talked in the same way. “The so-called Global War on Terror or GWOT, as the Bush administration initially labeled America’s offensive against vaguely defined dark forces, certainly has achieved some successes . . .”¹² The successes Max Rodenbeck refers to here are losses to American prestige and credibility in the Middle East and the shrinking of the percentage of Saudis expressing confidence in America. This suspicion of America and the West by Muslims is mirrored in the west. Discussions of the changing meanings of European and Muslim identity have been heightened in the wake of robust immigration. Some events in Europe have also been constructed through the kind of Islam-is-violent and anti-Western narrative telegraphed by Huntington and thus have been used to put Muslims on the defensive. It is more instructive to view these events as opportunities to discover the values that the competing sides defend so passionately.

Some examples of these events:

1. **Fatwas.** On February 23, 1998, a fatwa by Osama Bin Laden was published in *The London Daily Telegraph* stating that “to kill Americans is a personal duty for all Muslims.” Also in the 1990s Salman Rushdie lived under a death sentence fatwa against him by Ayatollah Khomeini after publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses*. There had been demonstrations against Rushdie in England for blasphemy and apostasy as early as 1988.
2. **Movies.** Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali-born activist and former Muslim turned Dutch politician and campaigner against Islamic extremism, collaborated with Theo Van Gogh on his eleven-minute film “Submission.” She wrote the script for the movie in which selections from the Quran are projected on the body of a naked, bruised, beaten, and transparently veiled young woman. In 2008, anti-Islam right-wing Dutch politician Geert Wilders released a fifteen-minute internet film “Fitna” (civil strife) in which graphic violent images of terrorists are matched with verses from the Quran which he has called fascist and likened to *Mein Kampf*. In 2009, a Dutch court indicted Wilders for inciting violence and discrimination. Despite all this, or maybe because of his anti-

Islam stance, Wilders' popularity has increased and his political party is enjoying a resurgence in Dutch politics.

3. **High-profile killings.** Dutch sociologist Pim Fortuyn, who rose to political prominence by denouncing Islam's intolerance and Dutch folly in throwing money at poorly integrated immigrants, was killed by an animal-rights activist in 2002. The animal-rights connection is fascinating, since it brings to the discussion the tension between European notions of animal protection and the Muslim requirement that animals only be slaughtered the halal way (which is seen as cruel by animal rights activists). Filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered in 2004 in Amsterdam by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch citizen born into an immigrant family from Morocco. Like Fortuyn and Wilders, van Gogh spoke loudly against misguided European policies seeking to accommodate what he considered a bigoted religious minority and in the process left Europe with societies in which more and more things could not be said openly.
4. **Bombings.** September 11, Madrid, and London have become the lens through which to understand the phenomenon of homegrown terrorism (sometimes inaccurately referred to in the media as jihadi terrorism) and the connections between radical extremist networks. On September 11, 2001, hijacked planes were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, into the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and onto a field in Pennsylvania. This was the first large-scale terrorist attack on U.S. soil. On March 11, 2004, blasts from thirteen sports bags stuffed with explosives and nails killed 191 people in the Madrid train bombings in three commuter trains. On July 7, 2005, the London bus and subway bombings resulted in fifty-six deaths.
5. **Free expression incidents.** In this category, three examples stand out. The "scarf law" debates in France in 2004 and in Germany, cartoon depictions of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005 and 2006 by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (September 30, 2005) and then all around Europe (February 1, 2006), and Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 speech at Regensburg University in Germany in which he quoted a passage by a fourteenth century Byzantine emperor that seemed to cast Islam as violent and unreasonable, and hence inherently un-European.
6. **Riots.** Following the publication of the Danish cartoons that caricatured the Prophet Muhammad, there were riots all around the world. On a smaller scale, in October and November 2005 there were riots in the *banlieues* (French suburbs) against structural discrimination and racism in French society. Starting on October 27, the riots continued for three weeks, saw 9,000 cars burned, six police officers injured, and 3,000 arrested. John Bowen observed that "French social analysts, politicians, and public intellectuals know that the social and political problems found in France's poor neighborhoods are due in large part to French failures to welcome Muslim immigrants and their descendants. The world became aware during the riots in late 2005 of how deeply

ran the resentments and anger created in the poor suburbs by these policy failures.”¹³ A community organizer who spoke at our seminar interpreted the riots as an inter-generational contest and the *banlieues* as badly managed internal colonies. The older generation came to France as low-skilled immigrant workers and were not equipped to make too many demands of their hosts. In contrast, the younger generation is more educated and hungry for the rights of full citizenship.

Each of these items represents a tension between opposing values, some stated explicitly and others held implicitly. Though media reports identified Islam as their major cause, in truth the events embody a variety of values simultaneously. They are about a scary sense of losing your identity, about the dissonance between comforting myths and changing reality, about freedom of expression, about deeply cherished religious beliefs, about the proper limits of behavior in civil society, indeed about engaged citizenship. Each of the events listed can be further discussed with an eye to unearthing their real causes, but that is beyond the scope of this article. I want to observe that it is simplistic and misleading to see the debates arising from these events as really being about Islam. The pyrotechnic-minded may see them as just many more logs in the fire of self-definition. It should be possible to tend the fire without being consumed by it. These events are more profitably seen as European attempts to redefine European identity and values in the face of non-traditional immigration.

The two radically different approaches taken by France and the Netherlands highlight contrasting strategies in dealing with new immigrants and their perceived threat to European identity. In the following section I discuss what became known as the headscarf debate in France and Germany as a way to explore the underlying values in dispute.

The Headscarf Debates

An estimated 15 million Muslims live in Europe, 5 million in France.¹⁴ Laurence and Vaisse go on to note that though the French do not officially keep statistics about religious affiliation (for reasons to be discussed below), it has been “estimated that there are between 3.65 million and 6 million residents of Muslim descent living in France, equivalent to roughly 6 to 10 percent of the general population (of 61 million).”¹⁵ France, it should be noted, has Europe’s highest Muslim population both in terms of absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total population. In the Netherlands, the country’s 1 million Muslims make up about 6 percent of the population.¹⁶

The headscarf debate in France makes sense only against the background of the founding of the republic. The “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” that was approved by the National Assembly August 26, 1789, allowed social distinctions to be founded only upon the general good. The document is remarkable for the inclusive nature of its rhetoric. When King Louis XVI, who signed it, reneged on the promises of its unifying myths, revolution in France was

inevitable.¹⁷ A few articles of the declaration are worth reprising here because the contemporary debate in Europe is precisely about the values enshrined in them:

Article 1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good.

Article 4. Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else . . .

Article 10. No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.

Article 11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.¹⁸

The values of equality, liberty, and fraternity have been fought over ever since. “Man” and “Citizen” as used in the document seem to include all citizens, but as recent events make clear, the issue of who the truly active citizens are has never really been settled. From the early days of the French republic, the struggles for full participation by a changing cast of claimants have hinted at the limitations, distinctions, and constraints of the founding principles. Women, black slaves and subjects in the French colonies, Jews, and the poor have challenged their exclusion from the full rights of citizenship. Muslim immigrants and their descendants are just the latest to test the flexibility of the principles. The principles prove themselves flexible to the extent that they expand freedom to all with legitimate claims.

Religion, especially membership in the Catholic Church, was historically a recognized and valued part of French citizenship. Under Napoleon, the state recognized membership in the Church, paid the salaries of clerics, and subsidized religious business ventures.¹⁹ It was not until 1905 that a law was passed ending this regime. Under the new law, the state could no longer link religion to citizenship, pay the salaries of clerics, subsidize religion in any way, or allow public employees to display their religious affiliation. Religion was still a valued part of civil society, but it became a private matter.²⁰ The 1905 law codified *laïcité*—separation of church and state. It is helpful to distinguish between political *laïcité* and social *laïcité*. Though the political and legal idea of *laïcité* forbids the state from supporting any religion, socially it does not mean neutrality. *Laïcité* acknowledges that religion remains an important part of civil society but confines the practice of religion to the private sphere. In matters of religion the state defers to and consults with “privileged interlocutors” representing the different religions. Laurence and Vaisse note that the heavy state involvement with Islam mirrors “arrangements for religious accommodation and representation of Muslims [that] have been modeled on existing arrangements for Jews and Christians.”²¹ Ideologically, *laïcité* is a system of values whose precise contours are being worked out in contemporary France.

Since the French do not keep records of the religious affiliations of their citizens, the 2004 law banning the wearing of visible religious symbols in public was defended as not being an attack on Islam but as clarifying the 1905 law. “The law of 1905, celebrated as having proclaimed the separation of church and state, was but the outcome of a long prior struggle, with its Revolutionary thesis and Restoration antithesis. The law against religious signs in schools then can be seen as carrying still further that same struggle, along the same direction, toward a fully realized *laïcité*.”²² It was positioned as an extension of this long-running policy of *laïcité*. The politicians who made the 1905 law, it is safe to assume, were worried about large Catholic crosses and never imagined the threat to French secularism as coming from veiled Muslim women. So the justification about clarification sounded specious when it was offered. In any case, headscarves were seen as bringing religion illegitimately into public spaces.

Article 141-5-1, the 2004 law that barred conspicuous religious apparel in public schools, came to be known by many people, somewhat inaccurately, as the veil law. Those who refer to it this way may mean a chador, burka, hijab, jalabib, abaya, nikab, or even a bandana. Actually the law also covered Jewish skullcaps, Sikh turbans, indeed any item that looks ostensibly religious. A justification for the law was that it was an issue of the republic seeking to maintain a balance between shared citizenship and cultural pluralism. It was precipitated by a growing feeling in 2003 that French identity was being threatened by new Muslim immigrants who were proving difficult to assimilate. Immigration to France was of course not a new phenomenon. French colonialism, especially in Algeria, resulted in an influx into France of former colonial subjects. This was particularly true after the Algerian war of independence (1954–1962), a fact that was to later loom large in the discussion of Islam in France.

The hijab emerged as a convenient visual symbol of non-assimilation. Partly to assess Muslim public opinion, and partly to answer critics such as Jean Marie Le Pen and Jacques Chirac, then interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy proposed the creation of the French Council of the Muslim Faith, or CFCM (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman). Sarkozy, as Minister of the Interior, oversaw the ministry’s appointment of CFCM’s governing board (representing one-third of its sixty seats).²³ This government involvement was quite in line with the legal and political framework of *laïcité*, since the aim was to elect for Muslims a recognized “privileged interlocutor” such as the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish institutions had enjoyed since the time of Napoleon. A system of elections was put in place in 1,000 of the 1,500 mosques in France. The “democratic” elections gave rise to Moroccan, Turk, and Muslim Brotherhood leaders. Inconveniently for those running the elections, the majority of French Muslims are Algerians. So the government stepped in once more and chose the top leadership in order to make it more representative.²⁴ None of this inspired confidence. CFCM came to be widely seen by French Muslims as a fake organization, especially on account of the skewed results its elections had produced. The problem highlighted by this whole saga still remains one of representation. Who is a Muslim, and who speaks for Muslims in France, are twin questions that remain to be worked out.

Headscarf Debate in Germany

A recent estimate is that Muslims in Germany comprise between 4.6 and 5.2 percent of the total population (that translates to between 3.8 and 4.2 million Muslims). About two-thirds of them are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from Turkey.²⁵ This means that Islam ranks in the top three in numbers of adherents, besides Catholicism and Protestantism. Most of the Turkish immigrants came to Germany as *Gastarbeiter* families (guest workers) in the 1960s. The debate in Germany unfolded for much the same reasons of multiculturalism and multiethnicity as in France, though with a local flavor. While the debate in France revolved around the prohibition of conspicuous religious apparel primarily by schoolchildren, the debate in Germany focused on whether wearing a headscarf is a public or a private matter and whether it should be permissible to wear headscarves while working in a public office or as a civil servant, for example as a teacher in public schools. Other categories of public workers remained mainly unaffected by the discussion. Germany is a federal system. There are sixteen federal states, a system of separation of powers, and of checks and balances. In general there were six stakeholders in the debate: the different state courts, individual politicians, political parties, the media, the Muslims who live in Germany, and German society broadly.

The outcome of the German headscarf debate was that Germany's Federal Constitutional Court let the *Länder* (federal states) decide if female Muslim teachers should be allowed to wear headscarves in classrooms in their jurisdictions. As it turned out, most of the *Länder* were in favor of the ban of the headscarf because they regarded "Oriental religious attire as not compatible with the cultural homogeneity of majority society"²⁶

The headscarf issue raises further, broader questions about religious tolerance, collective norms and values, responsibilities, and the constitutional rights of citizens within Germany. The discussion moves between two seemingly contradictory values. On the one hand the Basic Law of Germany constitutes religious freedom for everybody, including Muslims. On the other hand, there is the value of a religiously neutral educational system. It is easy to see that children should not be unduly influenced in any religious matter by authority figures like teachers. The youngest children have not yet developed critical skills and could be manipulated into adopting the opinions or religious perceptions of persons in authority without critical scrutiny. This fear relates to the possible psychological effects on pupils by headscarves and other religious symbols worn by authority figures.²⁷ Looked at from another perspective, contact with people of diverse religious backgrounds could help to diminish prejudices and bring about the integration of Muslims. Many Germans argued that teachers wearing headscarves at school provide just the opportunity to teach sheltered European children tolerance.

Meanings of the Headscarf

One of the dangerous consequences of the stereotyping of Islam in the West is that in America and Europe, the hijab has come to mean only one thing: The aver-

age person who sees a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf automatically associates it with oppression and backwardness. It is automatically assumed that the hijab is something Muslim women desire to be liberated from, the better by crusading Western human rights activists. It is patronizing to see Muslim women simply as either duped or downtrodden. Muslim women are constructed, in this popular view, as helpless and in need of emancipation from patriarchal domination. The idea that the veil might be freely chosen, and that the wearer is appropriating its multiple meanings and symbolism, never arises. The debates in France and Germany shed light on the multiplicity of readings the hijab makes possible. It is at once a cultural, religious, and political symbol.

The person who views the hijab as oppressive is indirectly raising the most important question of all—Is wearing a headscarf really voluntary? On January 17, 2004, about 20,000 French Muslims—most of them women wearing various forms of the hijab—protested in different parts of France against the newly proposed law forbidding religious signs in public. There were chants of “Chirac, Sarkozy, we chose the headscarf” and “Not our fathers nor our husbands, we chose the headscarf.” It was clear from the debate that in some cases the wearing of the hijab was voluntary, whereas in others it was the result of societal pressures. In some situations fundamentalist Islamic families forced their daughters to wear headscarves, whereas in others women considered wearing the headscarf to be a crucial visual indication of their break with an immigrant culture they found to be insufficiently Islamic.²⁸

The reasons for choosing to wear a headscarf, as John Bowen shows, can be varied. Wearing a headscarf may symbolize obedience to the religion and therefore signifies piety, an expression of one’s respect for tradition and cultural heritage, a sign of sexual unavailability, a shield from sexual assaults, a liberation from the pressure of outward appearance and consequently an approval of inner values, a fashion statement, a testing of limits, and a freely chosen way of being in the world. For proponents it is most definitely an expression of emancipation of women.²⁹

Opponents, however, argue that the headscarf is a sign of submission to men, a sign of oppression, and a rebellion against European identity. There are times when the opponents may indeed be right, but it is reductionist and absurd to assume that wearing a hijab or a scarf must only mean oppression of women.

The Dutch Approach

Dutch policy diverges from the path of French *laïcité*. Historically a deliberate strategy has been to encourage religious affiliation as crucial for civic participation. This policy was deemed the most likely to address migration patterns and the country’s colonial history.

Muslims make up about 5.5 percent of the Dutch population, and they came in three waves. The first wave was labor migration in the 1960s from Turkey and Morocco. This was followed by postcolonial migration in the 1970s from Surinam and Indonesia. The third wave of immigrants arrived as recent asylum seekers from politically troubled countries such as Iran, Somalia, and Iraq. Forty percent of the

Dutch Muslims have Turkish heritage; thirty-four percent, Moroccan; six percent, Surinamese and Pakistani; and the remaining twenty percent is an assorted mix.

The first generation of Turks and Moroccans came as unskilled laborers and thus had limited knowledge of Dutch, which made integration into society difficult for them. Compounding the problem, Muslims tended to be divided along the lines of countries of origin. As a consequence, mosques are similarly divided and social welfare organizations maintain strong links with the country of origin.³⁰

Social structures in the Netherlands have also tended to favor what might be called a “pillarized society” model and, therefore, not surprisingly, new immigrants mold themselves to the contours of the society at large. In practice, the state funds Islamic schools, had provided some support for mosques in the 1970s and 1980s, and had even funded religious broadcasting. Integration policies accept group identity rather than demanding the assimilation of individuals. Denominational schools get public funding provided they also teach the traditional Dutch curriculum. Article 23 of the Dutch constitution guarantees freedom of education. This has meant funding “denominational” schools at par with “public” schools. Professor Ahmed Akgunduz, President and Rector of the Islamic University of Rotterdam (IUR), has articulated the uniqueness of the Dutch system. “By virtue of this constitutional right,” he states, “people living in the Netherlands can possibly found schools on the basis of religious, ideological, and/or educational beliefs and have them funded by the government.”³¹

The murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh served to make the Dutch public more hesitant about continuing with the same integration policies. The resurgence of Geert Wilders’ anti-Islam party in the 2010 elections hints at the fact that public opinion has shifted against making accommodations.

Lessons

Several lessons emerge from these events in Europe:

1. There are many ways to be a Muslim. The problem of where the legitimate authority lies to speak for Muslims is one that invites constant dialogue and negotiation. Wearing a tudung in Malaysia and wearing a hijab in France do not carry the same meaning. As the examples of the different Islamic countries and doctrinal positions have shown, the failure of Huntington’s analysis is that he imagined Islam as one neat civilizational block and Christianity as another. Curiously, this is the same failing of those who justify violence in the name of Islam or enforce narrow conformities of other sorts. They, too, imagine Islam as a neat block. To push the point further, this is the same problem with an imagined European sameness that will be destroyed by those who are different. None of these identities were ever that simple. In other words, we would all be well-served by being more comfortable with complexity.
2. Public controversies in Europe, such as the headscarf debates in France and Germany and the recent Swiss ban on minarets, are at their core

not really about religion. Behind the headscarf debates there were serious issues about who should define how a Muslim woman dresses, violence against women, and the coercion by fundamentalists enforcing strict conformity. Behind the Swiss ban there were real anxieties about loss of identity. The debates are not about religion but, rather, about the angst of Europeans who fear the disintegration of mythical narratives now being vigorously challenged. Immigrants hold up a mirror to the static notions of European identity and signal the end of sameness. They raise anew the question of what it means to be French, German, Dutch—indeed, to be European. Islam, by being different, is then cast as illegitimate and deviant.

3. Public stigma affects the identity formation of Muslims in a hostile environment. Patterns of exclusion and layers of stereotypes impede the ability of Muslims to be full citizens. The riots in immigrant communities around the continent are expressions of this frustration. In the case of France, the seeds of the uneasy relationship can be traced to guilt about French atrocities during the Algerian war of 1954–62. Anti-Semitism has an even longer history, and the oft-used example is the Dreyfuss Affair of 1898–99, when a Jewish officer named Alfred Dreyfuss was accused of treason, wrongly convicted, and humiliated publicly by being stripped of his military commission. Islamophobia is just the latest face of racism and active discrimination, and it makes turning to extremism tempting. Full citizenship would mean representation in all aspects of public life. It is telling that there still is not a single French Muslim elected to the National Assembly or the Senate.
4. Islam is compatible with modernization, capitalism, democracy, and globalization. Despite the evidence that Muslims have lived with a diversity of cultures quite peacefully, the stereotype of Islamic tendencies toward violence and traditionalism persists. Combating stereotypes must become the work of all people of goodwill.
5. Public controversies are embarrassing invitations to the dominant society to engage in critical self-reflection to get a true measure of the gap between the dominant narrative and counter-narratives. Preferably, developing the soft skills necessary for ongoing reflection and responding respectfully to emerging challenges would head off controversies before they explode into the public sphere. The aims are to reconcile the principle of equality with the fact of difference in ongoing negotiations and to confront hard truths honestly.

Future Challenges

Insight into possible future challenges may be gathered by looking back to riots in June 2010 by immigrant youth in Rinkeby, Sweden (Rinkeby has been nicknamed “little Mogadishu” because it is home to a large number of immigrants from Somalia), to the resurgence of the Dutch anti-Islam Freedom Party, and to

the Swiss ban on minarets earlier in the year. All of these examples underline the need for engaged dialogue that takes into account the complexity of all these issues involved. The Rinkeby riots are a particularly apt metaphor for the problem of full participation. The immigrant youth there rioted because they were refused entry to a school dance.³² The global challenge for the future entails figuring out how to make the dance for freedom and full citizenship more inclusive.

To be sure, these negotiations of identity are not being conducted under completely fair circumstances. Though their strength and numbers are growing, Muslims in Europe are still in a weaker position compared with the dominant society. After decades of being uprooted from their homes and confronted with the deprivations of forging an identity in hostile environments, they face an extra burden of educating the receiving community about what it means to be a Muslim. An alternative path to creating understanding and probably also the best answer to discrimination may lie in attaining undeniable success.

The underlying issue for dialogue in all the situations discussed in this article is appreciating the complexity of what on the surface seem like simple issues. This is a call for more dialogue, not less. That dialogue must be sustained, and it must be carried out in as wide a range of venues as possible. Only then will issues that once struck us as controversial seem innocuous. We will have learned the lessons of Europe when we are willing to debate matters openly.

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