4 Muslim identities in Europe: the snare of exceptionalism

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Muslims are currently the largest religious minority in western Europe. This presence of Islam in Europe is a direct consequence of the pathways of immigration from former western European colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean that opened up in the early 1960s. Since the official end of work-based immigration in 1974, the integration of such immigrant populations has become irreversible.[1] Concerns regarding integration are connected with an increasing number of policies on family reunification that contribute to a noticeable increase in family size 'within the Muslim communities in' Europe. In such a context, asserting one's Islamic faith becomes a major factor in population sedentarisation. In each country, this increasing visibility of Islam is at the origin of many questions, doubts, and often violent oppositions.

We no longer seek to grasp, as certain culturalist-based approaches have sought to do, the traditional attributes that define an individual or group essence. Our aim here is to understand the practices of differentiation used by individual Muslims in certain social circumstances. Identity is to be conceived not as a structure, but as a dynamic process. Accordingly, it is more relevant to talk about *identification* than identity, and it is important to emphasise the fact that the ways an individual defines him-/herself are both multidimensional and likely to evolve over time.

When studying religious practices and the formation of identities of European Muslims, one must take into account relationships of domination which tend to impose a reference framework that permanently places Islam and the West in opposition. More than any other religion today, the forms of identifying oneself as a Muslim are profoundly influenced by a narrative (active from the local to the international level)

[1] In 1974, the OPEC oil embargo created an economic crisis that justified the end of labour immigration and signalled a turning point in the European economy.

that circulates a whole series of images and stereotypes portraying Islam as religiously, culturally, and politically foreign.

This *does not mean*, however, that all acts or choices to be adopted by Muslims within this context are predictable. The goal of our approach is to examine what seems to be a gap between the racialisation of national discourses and the meta-discourse on Islam as an enemy, on the one hand, and the diversity and fluid nature of Muslims' attitudes, on the other. In other words, while studying the way that Muslims respond to a reference framework that is both imposed on them and based on a relationship of domination, we should neither assume that Muslims are prisoners of this framework, nor that they model themselves according to the identity that has been assigned to them. Although often considered an 'exceptional case' (i.e. operating according to rules of exceptionalism), Muslims are not always such an exception.

Research on Islam in Europe has not always managed to avoid the snare of exceptionalism. For example, when I first began researching in France in the mid-1980s, almost all Muslims in Europe were immigrants and existing knowledge about Muslims came primarily from the sociology of immigration. Such early research focused on the ways Muslims integrated into French society. In contemporary France, as in the rest of Europe, this key question remains. Is the integration process for Muslims similar to other immigrant experiences, or does the Islamic origin of the immigrants introduce something new and specific?[2] Still, sociologists specialising in immigration matters in France (and in Europe in general) have been inclined to downplay that aspect of an individual's identity related to his or her being a Muslim as less worthy of detailed analysis. Other factors (one's position in the economic market place, as well as social and political factors) continue to be seen as more important than religion for any explanation of the Muslim condition.

Conversely, scholars of Islam and political scientists of the Muslim world, as well as certain sociologists and anthropologists, emphasise the role of Islam itself as a system of norms and values. This second approach, often criticised for being too culturalist, runs the risk of becoming essentialist and ahistorical, a fact that has been underscored by researchers working in the tradition of Edward Said's *Orientalism*.[3] However, given that the question of an individual's Islamic identity has progressively moved to occupy a prominent position on the public stage,

[2] Frank Buijs and Jan Rath, *Muslims in Europe: the state of research*, Report for the Russel Sage Foundation, New York, 2003.
[3] E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Book, 1978.

and because of the increased visibility of Muslim action and activity, the specifically religious component of integration has come to be, over the years, a legitimate subject for research in France and Europe. And, of course, the relevance of such research has increased in the post September 11 context.

We should note that political interest in Islam in the European context was strengthened in the 1980s in response to the increased domestic influence of political movements linked to Islam (the Algerian FIS, *Milli Görüş*, etc.) and to the greater proximity between European States and certain Muslim States such as Algeria, Morocco, Turkey and Pakistan. This political interest soon began to shape Islamic identities and research on Islam. Let us recall that the term 'Islamophobia' appeared four years before the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the context of British public debate on discrimination towards Muslims.[4]

European researchers have been attempting to establish a general interpretative framework to understand the religious condition of Muslims in such a context.[5] For example, many researchers in Europe consider that being a minority within a democratic and secularised environment entails a decisive element in the transformation of Muslims' practices and relationships with Islam. However, this approach often amounts only to a mere description of the modalities according to which Muslims adapt to their new context.[6] Another (and more innovative) approach aims to explore the modes of interaction between Muslim groups and different segments of Western societies. Such a process-based approach to identities means refusing to essentialise both the minority and the dominant culture and leads to an

[4] Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all*, London: Runnymede Trust, 1997. See also J. Cesari (ed.), *Muslims in Western Europe after 9/11. Why the term islamophobia is more a predicament than an explanation*. Report of the European Commission, 2006.

[5] Felice Dassetto, *La construction de l'islam européen: Approche socio-anthropologique*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996; Jan Rath, R. Penninx, K. Groenendijk and A. Meyer, *Western Europe and its Islam: the social reaction to the institutionalization of 'new religion' in the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom*, Leiden: Brill, 2001.

[6] T. Gerholm and Y. G. Lithman (eds.), *The new islamic presence in Western Europe*, London: Mansell, 1988; B. Lewis and D. Schnapper (eds.), *Muslims in Europe*, London: Pinter, 1994; G. Nonneman, T. Niblock, and B. Szajkowski (eds.), *Muslim communities in the New Europe*, Ithaca, NY: Ithaca Press, 1996; W. A. R. Shadid and P. S. van Koningsveld (eds.), *The integration of Islam and Hinduism in Western Europe*, The Netherlands: Kampen, 1991; W. A. R. Shadid and P. S. Koningsveld, *Religious freedom and the position of Islam in Western Europe*, The Netherlands: Kampen, 1995; W. A. R. Shadid and P. S. Koningsveld, *Muslims in the margin: political responses to the presence of Islam in Western Europe*, The Netherlands: Kampen, 1996; S. Vertovec and C. Peach (eds.), *Islam in Europe: the politics of religion and community*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997; S. Vertovec and A. Rogers (eds.), *Muslim European youth: reproducing ethnicity, religion, culture*, London: Ashgate, 1998.

understanding of the social construction of Muslim communities within the dialectic formed between surroundings and group resources.[7]

The multiplicity of identities follows from the fact that these identities are distributed according to age, gender and socio-economic level. In the case of Muslim minorities, it is also useful to underline the following particular dimensions of identity construction: the meta-discourse on Islam; the influence of dominant cultural and political frameworks; the complex interaction between religion and ethnicity; the influence of global Islam; the state of collusion between religion, ethnicity and social marginality; and the challenge of a theological revival.

Meta-narratives about Islam

In order to study the ways Muslims define and experience their identity, it is necessary to take into account the frameworks and structures that are imposed by dominant meta-narratives about Islam. Certainly, the importance of the way an individual is viewed by others and the significance of *interaction* in identity formation in general are well known. Muslims in Europe, perhaps more than the members of any other religious group, are no longer in control of this interaction, and a discourse about Islam is imposed upon them – a discourse that spreads across all levels of society from the micro–local to the international.

In the post-September 11 context, both European and American Muslims have faced relentless correlations between *Islam*, seen as an international political threat, and *Muslims* in general (even those living in democratic nations, as has been shown by the hostile reactions that followed the attacks of 11 September 2001). This suggests the permanence of an essentialist approach to Islam and Muslims which is rooted in several centuries of confrontation between the Muslim world and Europe. What we profess to know about Islam is to a large extent the product of a vision constructed upon centuries of discord, as much political as religious. The mobile and paradoxical reality of Muslims, both

[7] Jocelyne Cesari, 'Muslim minorities in Europe: the silent revolution' in John Esposito and François Burgat (ed.), *Modernizing Islam: religion in the public sphere in the Middle East and in Europe*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 2003, pp. 11–15; see also www.euro-islam.info; our work also borrows much from a strain of research that accords prime importance to the dialectic process in the analysis of interactions between groups and cultures, notably when the recognition of one group by another group is at stake. See N. Sakai, 'Modernity and its critique: the problem of universalism and particularism' in H. Harootunian and M. Myoshi (eds.), *Postmodernism and Japan*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989, pp. 93–122; R. Sakamoto, 'Japan, hybridity, and the creation of colonialist discourse,' *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 13 no. 3, (1996), pp. 113–128. See also J. Cesari, *When Islam and democracy meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States*, Palgrave, New York (2nd ed.), 2006.

inside and out – from their most private behaviour to their most public – tends to disappear under the weight of perceptions that have been progressively deposited over the centuries. These perceptions are constructed out of specific historical moments and encounters that permanently crystallise different, even contradictory, sets of images such as violence, heresy and debauchery, or sensuality, brutality and cruelty.[8] This discourse tends to play on the confrontation between Islam and the West and positions Islam as a problem or obstacle on the path towards modernisation. Muslims are thereby pressed to make adjustments, particularly since 11 September 2001. Of course, no ethnic or religious group escapes stereotyping when it encounters other groups. What seems specific in the case of Islam is: (a) the historical moment at which the same network of representations is invested with meaning, from the micro–local to the international level; and (b) the strengthening of the stereotype by certain forms of the scholarly tradition that have been built up around Islam.

The essentialist approach, as described and criticised by Edward Said in his *Orientalism*,[9] remains pervasive. It is remarkable to note that, since the 1980s, the tendency to consider Islam as a risk factor in international relations has been legitimised by perceptions deposited over centuries, perceptions which would seem very familiar to any eighteenth-century gentleman or *honnête homme*. The same recurring attributes are activated and reformulated by changes in international and domestic circumstances. It seems that the attacks of 11 September 2001 have reinforced this interpretation that considers Islam an inherent risk to security.

Islamic identities are constructed at the heart of these contexts. There is an interstitial space between the act of representation and the actual presence of the community. It is within this gap that Muslims can act. In such a situation, where the relationship between the dominating and dominated has so many consequences, three scenarios are possible: acceptance, avoidance, or resistance.[10] These three possible attitudes

[8] Many such perceptions descend from the tradition of orientalism. While the more conspicuous forms of orientalism have been profoundly modified by sociology, anthropology and political science, its more latent forms (the result of amassed representations) still continue to operate. Edward Said is thus correct in asserting that the orient and Islam only exist as topoi, the collection of references and sum of characteristics linked to the imagination. Within such an interpretation, supported by actual quotes from religious texts, Islam is always presented as a closed system, thus denying Muslims and Islamic society any capacity for change. Such interpretations are clearly motivated in part by the same ideology that has sought to justify all attempts at dominating these parts of the world since the nineteenth century.

[9] Said, *Orientalism*.

[10] Gerard A. Postiglione, *Ethnicity and American social theory*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983, pp. 181–2.

subtend the multiplicity of discourses and actions in the name of Islam, whether they are oriented towards Muslims or non-Muslims. Acceptance means that a dominant discourse is accepted and is accompanied by cultural amnesia and a definite will to assimilate. This trend is marginal amongst immigrant Muslims. Avoidance refers to behaviours or discourses that attempt to separate Muslims as much as possible from the non-Muslim environment by developing, for example, a sectarian usage of Islamic religious beliefs. Resistance means refusing the status given to Islam within dominant discourses and politics. Resistance need not be violent: it can involve, for example, taking a view opposite to that of dominant narratives, and producing a voluminous apologetic literature. As for practices, certain forms of resistance involve what Erving Goffman calls 'contact terrorism'. This means using certain Islamic symbols linked to clothing or behaviour in order to play on the other's fear and repulsion. Resistance can also take on more radical forms, such as an inclination towards certain violent Islamic movements. This tendency is demonstrated by the cases of Khaled Kelkal, a French citizen (born in France to Algerian parents), who was involved in the GIA battle, and others such as John Reid the 'shoe bomber', who joined the *Al Qa'ida* movement. However, there also exist positive forms of resistance through which Muslims reappropriate for themselves elements of Islamic practice, based on personal commitment and faith while still 'keeping up with the times'. In other words, in order to understand the space between the act of representation and the actual presence of the Muslim communities in Europe we must ask in relation to Islam, who? says what? and where? One element affecting an array of responses is the diversity of dominant political and cultural frameworks.

The diversity of dominant political and cultural frameworks

The ethnic diversity of European Muslims is often (and very rightly) underlined, but it is also important to take into account the diversity of national contexts: the status of religion within different societies, the modes of acquiring nationality, the presence or lack of acknowledgment of multiculturalism, and the specific characteristics of each European country, all have a direct influence on the dynamics of the formation of Muslim minorities and on the construction of identities. Thus, the secularisation of social relationships makes less valid any form of social or cultural action based on religious values. In other words, the actions of European Muslims should be contextualised within the range of

opportunities made possible by the dominant elements of each society. There are many examples of such identity formation that are closely related to the characteristics of the dominant culture and political framework. In this way, Britain's multicultural policies have impeded the specifically religious dynamics of the Muslim minority, at least before the time of the Rushdie affair. Similarly, the introduction of religious instruction within state schools in Germany and Austria has motivated Muslims to create textbooks with the goal of transmitting the Islamic tradition in a way that is adapted to their status as a minority.[11]

The importance of the link between the local and the national level within the dynamics of Muslims' identification must be highlighted. For example, the visibility of a new generation of Muslim leaders is being reinforced based on the validity of action that has appeared at the local level. In a similar vein, disputes at the local level feed national debate about Islam and vice-versa, according to subtle dialectics between the two levels of visibility and Islamic activity. Moreover, such disputes are often inserted in the global debate regarding the political role of Islam. For example, the lack of permission to build a mosque at Lodi in 2002 became a topic of national public debate in Italy and was used to justify resistance towards the construction of other mosques all over the country. Public discourse of this nature has only been fuelled by the international situation following 11 September 2001.[12]

Ethnicity versus religion

Individuals' identification with Islam appears in most cases to be an element of emerging ethnic communities. From Turkish immigrants in Germany to British Indians and Pakistanis, or even (to a certain extent) Moroccans living in France, Islam is a vital element in the orchestration of ethnic identity within European societies – especially for the first generations of immigrants. Simultaneously over the last decade, more 'transethnic' forms of Islamic religion have begun to develop.[13] For example, in Great Britain, a new generation of Muslim leaders has

[11] Sean Macloughin, 'Recognising Muslims: religion, ethnicity and identity politics' in J. Cesari (ed.), *Musulmans d'Europe*, Cemoti 33, 2002, pp. 43–57; Irka-Christin Mohr, 'Islamic instruction in Germany and Austria: a comparison of principles founded in religious thought' in J. Cesari (ed.), *Musulmans d'Europe*, Cemoti 33, 2002, pp. 149–67.

[12] Chantal Saint-Blancat and Ottavia Schmidt di Frieberg in J. Cesari (ed.), *Musulmans d'Europe*, Cemoti 33, 2002, p. 91–106.

[13] Transethnic refers to the use of Islamic references insisting upon a universal meaning of religious bonds and dismissing the importance of cultures and ethnicity in the relationships between Muslims.

started to emerge who articulate positions distant from the ethnicised and often isolationist Islam dominated by the early Indian and Pakistani immigrants (following the precepts of *Barelvis* and *Déobandis*).[14] Since the Rushdie affair in particular, these new leaders have opened a dialogue with the national government.

The emergence of a new generation of leaders within Islamic associations and religious movements is a phenomenon that is spreading all over Europe. In fact, this development is indicative of a specific social phenomenon, namely the acculturation of Islamic references to a secularised context. The existence in certain European countries of a third or even a fourth generation of Muslims means that versions of Islam detached from the ethnic and national identifications of the first generations (cultural references, language, behaviour, interactions with non-Muslims, etc.) are already well established. In other words, there now exists a French Islam, an English Islam, a Belgian Islam, etc. This acculturation is realised through a contradictory double movement: the privatisation of Islamic references and the increase in the collective practices of Islam.[15] While we must be careful to keep in mind the gap between the reality of Islamic practice and theological or intellectual discourse, daily concrete practices reveal an acculturation to the secularised context. This kind of 'homemade' and personalised version of Islam takes relativism into account (something which is not always reflected in even secular intellectual debate, especially in Europe).

Global Islam

Globalisation is a cultural process that favours the development of non-territorialised cultures and communities based on race, gender, religion, or even lifestyle. In this respect, Islam is a powerful element in identity formation, weaving together solidarity between various groups that are separated by the constraints of diverse nations, countries and cultures.

Over the past two decades, two different globalised forms of Islam have attracted an increasing number of followers in different parts of the Muslim world and beyond. One form includes theological and political movements that emphasise a universal link to the Community of

[14] The *Déobandis* are followers of a fundamentalist movement that appeared in India in 1866. They emphasise extensive knowledge of the *Hadith* (deeds and sayings of the prophet Muhammad) and reject the innovations of Sufi practices and saints. The *Barelvi*, founded by Ahmed Reza (1856–1921), also emphasise the figure of the Prophet, but they believe that the immortal souls of the Prophet and saints act as mediators between believers and God.

[15] See the section below: 'The challenge of theological revival'.

Believers (*Ummah*). This form includes movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the *Jamaat Al-Tabligh*, or the Wahabi doctrine. Today, the conditions for communication and the free movement of people/ideas make the *Ummah* even more effective. Unlike Protestantism, where a diversification in interpretations of religious belief led to the founding of separate communities and the proliferation of sects, the unity of the *Ummah* as an imagined and constantly renewed community based on an understanding of a shared fate is maintained.

It is important to make a distinction at this point between radicalism and fundamentalism. While radicalism is manifested in groups that advocate the use of violence and reject any kind of compromise with non-Muslims and especially Westerners, fundamentalism may come in the form of the desire to believe in an Islam based on a direct relationship to the divinely revealed text. This desire is often the cause of people's decisions to join Salafi and Wahabi movements.[16] Members of these movements are thus fundamentalists, in the sense that they refer back to the sources of the religion, the Qur'an and the *Hadiths*. The return to the source texts can be conservative or puritan, as is shown by the growing success of the *Jamaat Al-Tabligh* and the fact that portions of the new generations find inspiration in schools of thought such as the one built around Sheik Al-Albani, a specialist in *Hadiths*.[17] This return to the divinely revealed sources can also give rise to more open-minded interpretations that are in touch with the social and political facts and issues of various European contexts.[18]

The other form of global Islam refers to diasporic communities that are based on solidarity beyond the boundaries of nations and culture and that are often labelled 'transnational networks'. These networks consist of non-governmental participants such as religious leaders, immigrants, entrepreneurs and intellectuals who develop bonds and identities that

[16] Historically the Muslim Brothers (founded 1928) and the Wahabi movement (created by Ibn Abdel Wahab (1730–1792) and became the official doctrine of the Saudian monarchy in 1924) are part of the *salafist* current. The institutional and political evolutions of these two trends have made the term '*salafist*' a synonym for conservatism connoting a 'reactionary stance,' most notably within the European context. Wahabism is hostile to all forms of intellectualism, religious establishment and even mysticism. However, this is not true of all trends based on a return to the word of the religious texts. Not all Muslim Brothers, for example, are originally anti-modern or anti-intellectual.

[17] Al-Albani was a sheik at the University of Medina who died in 1999.

[18] For example, Muslim actors in Europe inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood are at the forefront of negotiations for the recognition of Islam in the public space of various European countries. They are also concerned by the development of a specific jurisprudence taking into account the minority condition of Muslims in European democratic and secular societies. See J. Cesari, *When Islam and democracy meet: Muslims in Europe and in the US*, New York: Palgrave, 2004.

transcend the borders of nation-states. To achieve transnational status, a group must possess three main traits: (1) awareness of an ethnic or cultural identity, (2) establishment of group organisations across different nations, (3) development of relations – whether monetary, political or even imaginary – linking people in different countries.[19]

The various forms of virtual Islam are part of this globalised Islam. 'Electronic religiosity' is contributing to the global expansion of Islam through the circulation of audio and videotapes, the broadcasting of independent television satellite shows, and (most significant of all) the creation of websites. In particular, bulletin boards, chat rooms and discussion forums on the internet are promoting alternative and even contradictory understandings of Islam where only nationally based understandings previously existed. In so doing, these websites have a significant impact on Islamic discourse and help break up the monopoly of control over sacred issues possessed by traditional religious authorities.[20]

Mobile dynamics thus lead to the autonomy of social groups in the field of international relations. Often, these social groups do not strive to assert themselves as collective participants in the transnational arena; instead, private interests push them into this unintended role. Family reunions, marriage arrangements and business activities, for example, are usually motivated by individual or family interests; yet, these activities often entail international mobility. Private decisions affect not only visiting rights, family groupings and monetary flows, but also religious, linguistic and cultural models, indirectly producing a collective result on the international scene.

A glimpse into the complex interaction of local, national and international groupings characterising Islam in Europe reveals some of the shortfalls of current scholarship on this subject. Because of the importance of transnational networks for Western Muslim communities, any

[19] Diaspora is one form of deterritorialised identity that links dispersed people with their country of origin. In the case of Muslims, even if their bond with their country of origin is strong, it is challenged by a broader solidarity with the Muslim world at large. See Sheffer Gabi, 'Whither the study of ethnic diasporas? Some theoretical, definitional, analytical and comparative considerations', in George Prevelakis (ed.), *The networks of diasporas*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996, pp. 37–46; Robin Cohen, *Global diasporas: an introduction*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.

[20] It would be misleading, however, to consider on-line Islam as an exclusive indicator of a new democratic public space without paying attention to specific social changes within specific Muslim contexts. In other words, to assess accurately what Muslim websites are accomplishing in terms of knowledge, perspective and affiliation, one must investigate how electronic religiosity is resonating with significant social changes in general. See Peter Mandaville, 'Information technology and the changing boundaries of European Islam', in Felice Dassetto (ed.), *Paroles d'Islam: individus, sociétés et discours dans l'Islam européen contemporain*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2000, p. 281–97.

analysis that stresses Muslims' obligations to the host society – excluding international influences – fails to provide a balanced view. The adaptation of Islam to the democratic context is a two-dimensional activity, involving both the identification with global or transnational forms of Islam and with the national cultures of different host countries. As explained below, one major factor influencing adjustment to the national cultures is the socio-economic position in which Muslims find themselves in the European societies.

Islam, ethnicity and poverty: a set of 'dangerous liaisons'

The socio-economic condition of European Muslims is one of great fragility. The unemployment rate for immigrant Muslims is, as a general rule, higher than the national average: e.g. 31% and 24% for Moroccans and Turks respectively in the Netherlands. In 1995, INED (the French National Demographics Institute) showed that with equal levels of education, unemployment was twice as high for youth from Muslim immigrant backgrounds as for youth from non-Muslim immigrant backgrounds and the situation has not improved since then.[21] In this respect, the situation of Muslims in Great Britain is particularly critical. Those persons originating from Bangladesh and Pakistan have a level of unemployment three times higher than that of the minority communities considered to be the most disadvantaged. In British inner cities, almost half of all Bangladeshi men and women are unemployed. This marginality is passed on to the generation born and educated in Great Britain: in 2004, the unemployment rate (13%) was the highest for male Muslims and the highest for females as well (18%). This disadvantage is not limited to jobs requiring only basic qualifications, but also concerns high-profile domains such as medicine and education.

This socio-economic marginality is most often accompanied by residential segregation. Data from the British census shows that Pakistani immigrants tend to live in the most dilapidated or unhealthy housing conditions; ethnic concentration per residential area or per residence is also a factor that must be taken into consideration in the inner cities of the United Kingdom and Germany, as well as in France's poorer suburbs.

[21] Felice Dassetto, B. Maréchal and J. Nielsen (eds.), *Convergences musulmanes, aspects contemporains de la présence musulmane dans l'Europe élargie*, Louvain La Neuve: Academia Bruylant, 2001. A report of 2002 from the Consil Economique et Social describes discrimination practices on the job market.

Such a situation of relegation has important consequences for Islam in Europe. The temptation within the realm of politics is to associate Islam with poverty and to consider (although without any open acknowledgment of this) that the former is the cause of the latter. On the Muslims' side, there is a tendency to use Islam in a defensive or reactive way. Ethnicity thus becomes a trap when a collusion occurs between ethnicity, religion and poverty. This trap can in some situations lead to riots or a state of social unrest as has recurrently been the case in England where a team of researchers on community cohesion, established under the auspices of the Home Office, led an inquiry in the towns of Oldham, Burnley, Southall, Birmingham and Leicester where riots broke out in the spring of 2001. The results, published on 11 December 2001, are alarming.[22] They show whole groups withdrawn from society, experiencing an immense feeling of frustration, and faced with poverty and a lack of equal opportunities. 'You are the only white person I shall meet today,' said one Pakistani in Bradford who was interviewed for the report. Whether in the domain of housing, employment, education, or social services, the report describes an England segregated according to closely related factors of race and religion. The predominant anti-Muslim racism in British society is responded to by withdrawal and a reactive use of Islam. There is a marked lack of communication between ethnic groups and local political milieus, particularly concerning delicate questions of culture, race and religion. The British situation is reminiscent of that of black American Muslims as Islam has become an element that accentuates separatism.

Although similar levels of segregation are not reached, the ethnic perception of social differences is also pervasive within the urban space of France, Germany and Holland. In the case of France, this takes the form of concentrating the poorest populations (a majority of Muslims) in the suburbs. Ethnicity generally corresponds to a way of defining oneself or being defined by others, as Arab, Moroccan, or Muslim, based on factors that allow differentiation (facial features, religion) without being systematically realised by culturally specific behaviour.

The correlation between social problems and Islam can be cited as one reason for the political success of movements on the extreme right, not only in France (with the Front National's marked advance during the first round of the presidential elections on 28 April 2002), but also in

[22] Community cohesion, A Report of the Independent Review Team, Home Office, December 2001.

Belgium, Austria, and even Holland.[23] Indeed, the collusion between Islam and poverty accentuates the validity of hypotheses concerning the incompatibility of cultures and the threat constituted by the settling of Islam in the West.

One of the consequences of 11 September 2001 has been the intensification of stigma via the knotting together of Islam, the poor suburbs and terrorism. This and subsequent terrorist attacks have indeed hardened the discourse on immigration (in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy and Portugal) and security. The antiterrorist law ratified by George Bush on 26 October 2001 has been followed by comparable initiatives in Europe. In Great Britain, a law on antiterrorism, crime and security issues was passed on 14 December 2001 – giving rise to an intense debate on the restriction of public freedom: the law increases the power of the police in matters of collecting information on and monitoring of citizens. In Germany, two similar laws were introduced (one on 8 December, the second on 20 December, 2001). They increase both the funds available to police forces and their powers of investigation. Moreover, these new laws planned to place armed security agents in German planes and to review the privileged public corporation status of religious organisations.

The security debate has been subverted by the events of September 11 and by efforts to develop counter-terrorist measures. This much is evident in the French law promulgated on 15 November 2001. This law addressed security issues in daily life, but it also included a whole series of clauses that amalgamated interior (i.e. national) security, crime and terrorism; such actions combining approaches to terrorism and local crime increasingly ostracise Muslim youth living in the poor suburbs.[24] It is still too early to measure the consequences of these laws on the religious behaviour of Muslims in Europe, but it is very likely that they will result in an increase in the reactive and defensive use of Islam.[25]

[23] In March 2002, an openly xenophobic and anti-Islamic party led by Pim Fortuyn emerged in the parliamentary elections, and to general surprise, won a majority of votes in Rotterdam. The party leader was murdered under mysterious circumstances on 6 May 2002. Despite this loss, the party arrived in second place behind the Christian-Democrat party during the parliamentary elections of 15 May 2002, taking 26 out of 150 seats in the Houses of Parliament.

[24] Two measures in particular show no relationship with important crime issues or terrorism. The first concerns the maintenance of quiet in the entry halls of large apartment buildings, and the second villainises people who 'regularly' do not purchase a valid ticket when using public transport.

[25] The integration of Muslims in Europe in the Aftermath of 9/11, NOCRIME Conference, Paris: February 3, 2003 (see www.euro-islam.info).

The challenge of theological revival

Regarding the religious practices of Islam and the 'Europeanisation' of Islam, we might speak in terms of two phenomena that follow parallel paths. We have noted that ethnicity often plays a more important role than religion in the definition of Islamic identities. However, there also exists a scenario in which the relationship to Islam takes precedence over ethnic identities.

The dominant mode found within European Muslim populations is an attempt to reconcile a maximum amount of individual freedom with belief in a more or less well-defined form of transcendence that can be lived according to the constraints of one's own era (at least via observance of key rites of passage: circumcision, marriage and burial). People who follow such a mode will define themselves as 'non-practising believers'. Many such believers who do not really practise also do not reject the ethnic Islam which they inherited from their parents and which forms them within a festive and traditional relationship to Islam. They generally have little knowledge of the Islamic tradition or the rituals it prescribes. Most in this category will not have received any instruction in the Qur'an, either within or beyond the family (religious schools, etc.). In such a context, Islam means faithfulness to one's group of origin and implies no real feelings of belief or piety. This kind of loose identification with Islam is present in both the middle and upper social classes.

For those who defend Islam as a form of identity, the term 'Islam' is associated with ritual-like moments in family life, most notably the celebration of special feast days (for example *Aïd-El-Kebir*); such celebrations imply a break in the surrounding space and time. Furthermore, the word is associated with the respect due to parental beliefs and practices – although it does not imply the same conformism amongst those who show this respect. For these Muslims, Islam is conceived of as a cultural heritage inscribed within family traditions and behaviours linking them to their family's country or area of origin. In this way, Muslim identification operates as a 'marker' revealing cultural affiliation – thereby making Islam more a matter of culture than of religion.

On the other hand, a small minority of Muslims form a second group that is defined by a strict demand for respect of Islamic prescriptions. Religion in this case is invested in as an orthopraxis, i.e. as a concern for respecting religious prescriptions to the letter, and this group attempts to embody them in daily life. Identification with Islam offers the individual direct access to daily reality and provides a framework that s/he can use

to structure life: the world can be sectioned off into the 'pure' and the 'impure', and all acts can be categorised according to the degree to which they are lawful or unlawful. All available evidence describes this behavioural conformity as a function of Islamic prescriptions (whether on the topic of food, clothing, or ritual acts).

Muslims in this second group are often involved in an individual search that takes the form of learning classical Arabic (a language which most Muslim children in the West do not understand); they begin active investigation of the divinely revealed texts, and they read general works on the founding and tradition of Islam (for the most part in translations into the language of the host country). The main European-language books that are available in almost all bookstores offer explanations of the pillars of Islam and prescriptions in different domains of life (social, economic, cultural, educational, etc.); they include biographies of the Prophet and tell of the exemplary lives of certain famous Companions; and they address such subjects as the status of women and the relationship between Islam and science.

The Europeanisation of Islam is thus built upon a paradox. The democratic context promotes a diversification of religious practices marked by the seal of individualisation and secularisation. However, given the lack of religious authorities and sufficient places for people to learn about Islam, the Islam that is learned about is still, in the majority of cases, dominated by the conservative trends of the Muslim world. Europe has become a chosen land for fundamentalist movements dominated by Saudi Wahabism and other trends grouped together as *salafist*. The growth of such groups can be explained by the fact that they are capable of quickly supplying a basic education in Islam to those who are not only lacking real knowledge on the subject, but who also lack the means to gain access to broader information. Where formal education is dispersed, it tends to be conservative and to promote a withdrawal from and rejection of the non-Muslim environment – especially amongst the most fragile layers of Muslim youth. When collusion occurs between Islam and marginality, the trend is to identify oneself with Islam in reaction to hostility or the underrating of one's surroundings. Of course, destructive use of the Islamic message does exist and is evident in the involvement of young European Muslims with *Al Qa'ida* and the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States as well as the Madrid bombing in 2004, the murder of Dutch film-maker Theo Van Gogh in 2004, and the London bombings of 2005. We must investigate the meaning of such commitments to a theology of hatred that is not always limited to the poorest members of society and is more specifically a European

phenomenon. Explanations that rely upon nihilism or humiliation are insufficient.[26]

Alongside this radical and destructive trend, there is another unprecedented and opposing conception of Islam being formed: this Islam offers a source of morality and education while extolling the logic of individual choice (i.e. free will) and breaking away from the ethnicisation of religion. These European Muslims advocate an individual logic for decision-making that fits well with the increasing subjectivisation of religious affiliation. Within this logic, it is not enough to believe and to practise one's religion because one was born into a given tradition or belief system. It is necessary, rather, to express one's individuality and give personal meaning to the divinely revealed message by making a choice to be a practising believer. This results in the individual making his/her distance from his/her family – a move justified by the perception that the parents do not seem to understand what 'real' Islam is and that they have no 'true knowledge' but act only under the influence of customs and superstitions linked to their culture. This well-informed and logical search for a universal Islam highlights the unprecedented experience of reconstructing a religious tradition within the European context. It is important to emphasise at the same time the extreme difficulty of this process, as it often requires difficult ruptures with the family milieu, as well as the adaptation of elements of the Muslim tradition to the context of the Muslim community's minority status.[27]

Because of the increasing deterritorialisation of religious references, a gulf has been growing between fundamentalists and modernists regarding the interpretation of the Islamic tradition.[28] One fundamental

[26] Olivier Roy, *L'Islam mondialisé*, Paris: Seuil, 2002.

[27] These modes of identification with the Islamic tradition are also very visible (in different ways) in American society. However, we can observe that given the greater importance of the elite within American society, intellectual output is also more substantial there than in Europe. There is, in particular, one current that is critical of the emerging Islamic tradition. Taking a hermeneutic approach, it attempts to produce interpretations that question the traditional outlook on certain points: the relationship with non-Muslims, the relationship with secularism, and in particular the status of women. The question of the status of women is a key element in the divergence between modernist and conservative approaches. With one or two exceptions, the most vocal supporters of modernism have been in the United States (Khaled Abou El Fadl, Farid Esack Fazlur Rahman, Amina Wadud, etc). See Khaled Abou El-Fadl, *And God knows his soldiers: the authoritative and authoritarian in Islamic discourses*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001; Farid Esack, *Qur'an, liberation and theology: essays on liberative elements in Islam*, New Dehli, India: Sterling Publishers Ltd, 1990; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and modernity: transformation of an intellectual tradition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982; Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and women*, Kuala Lampur, Malaysia: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn Bhd, 1992.

[28] Fundamentalists as represented by Wahabism or the *Tabligh* movement recommend a return to the divinely revealed text in order to apply the principles of the Qur'an and the

distinction among Muslims and the way they relate to the European context will concern the status of the Islamic tradition. Muslims clearly follow two different ways of dealing with the revealed text and its interpretation: for one group it is an absolute that must be wholly accepted and never questioned, while for the other, still a minority, it is questionable and available for historical and hermeneutical critique. Such a polarised attitude goes hand in hand with an acceptance of the relativism and pluralism that are linked with a democratic and secular context. The current climate of Islamophobia in Europe does not facilitate the acceptation of such a relativism, and it is probable that tensions over religious and cultural issues in Europe will increase, thereby reinforcing the unity of Muslims around the perceived cause of their discrimination – their religious affiliation.

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Sunnah in daily life. They refuse any form of adapting Islamic principles to the modern world and to its culture. Several extremely varied currents exist, which range from the refusal of politics (e.g. *Tabligh*) to radicalisation (e.g. the Taliban or *Al-Qa'ida*). Alternately, there is a current of thought that recommends a return to the divinely revealed texts but that does not reject contemporary surroundings or modernity. This latter current is often referred to as reformist. I, however, prefer the term modernist, given its explicit objective of returning to the religious texts in order to find solutions to political and social problems of the time, as well as its explicit reflection on the philosophical principles of modernity. (This form of modernism should not be confused with the first vintage of modernists who recommended that the colonially dominated Muslim world should abandon Islamic principles in favour of a form of modernisation without God, following the Western model.) There are obviously significant differences between the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan El Banna and Mohamed Iqbal, and Ali Shariati or Rached Ghannouchi.

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