3 The question of Euro-Islam: restriction or opportunity?

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In 2002 a group of senior journalists on the Danish daily newspaper *Politiken* published a collection of essays under the title 'Islam in Denmark: reflections on a third way'.[1] In their foreword they described the two positions between which they were positing a third way.

> In one trench are the *xenophobes* who say 'no thank you to everything' regarding Muslims. They oppose the multicultural society, even though it is already reality. They are against further immigration, even though that is a condition for the continuing financing of the welfare state. They are sceptical about the immigrants' religion, customs, dress, etc., even though these are things which belong to the private sphere. The xenophobes prevail in large sections of the political parties and were especially visible in the general election campaign last autumn.
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> In the other trench are the so-called *progressives* who say 'yes please' to everything as regards Islamic culture. They see Muslims as inherently an enrichment of Danish culture. Any attempt to take a critical stand towards fundamentalist and reactionary tendencies in Muslim culture is automatically labelled racism and xenophobia.
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> Both stances are deeply problematical.[2]

The following year another collections of essays appeared, this time edited by a group of young Danish Muslims of immigrant heritage, interestingly including an introduction by yet another *Politiken*

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[1] Adam Holm, Michael Jarlner and Per M. Jespersen (eds.), *Islam i Danmark: tanker on en tredje vej*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2002.

[2] Ibid. pp. 7–8 (my translation; emphases in the original). The election campaign referred to in this quotation is the Danish general election in November 2001, which was characterised by a major debate about asylum seekers in response to the 11 September attacks in the US and led to a new, sharply right-wing coalition government.

journalist, Anders Jerichow.[3] In what might be considered a response to the above, the editors in their conclusion state:

> To dare to state that Islam is also a Danish religion, and thus distance oneself from the Middle East's monopoly on holiness, requires . . . that Muslims understand themselves as full citizens of the society in which they live . . . It particularly requires that Muslims in Denmark (and the rest of the West) become active participants in developing a feeling of 'being at home' in their societies and challenge the bi-polar perception of a world where Christianity and secularism are a western preserve and Islam an eastern, regardless of the fact that Islam and secularism by nature are universal and transnational.[4]

To many, such statements might seem uncontroversial. They certainly would not cause much in the way of raised eyebrows in Britain outside small extremist circles, whether among Muslims or on the political right. However, they do represent middle-ground views which are far from being shared across Europe, whether among Muslims or among the non-Muslim majority.

A term which has come into increasing use in recent years in this context is that of 'Euro-Islam'. Apart from its questionable aesthetic character, it is a term which, like so many short-hand terms, is in danger of disguising as much as it reveals. Professor Bassam Tibi claims to have been among the first to use it, but he uses it in a very particular sense. In his contribution to a series of round-table discussions held in Paris in 1992–3 under the title *Islams d'Europe: intégration ou insertion communautaire?*, Tibi called for 'an Islam integrated into European societies'.[5] He asserts that this integration is not a one-way process: 'the two parties must share in this and, as the third religious community of Europe, ''Euro-Islam'' must accommodate and assimilate the socio-cultural evolution which Europe has accomplished.' He then emphasises three aspects of this:

1. Tolerance 'but not in the Muslim sense', rather in the broader European sense.
2. Pluralism, by which he means that Muslims must abandon the Qur'anic sense of superiority (viz. Qur'an 3:110).
3. Secularism, namely the separation between religion and state.

[3] Mona Sheikh, Fatih Alev, Babar Baig and Norman Malik (eds.), *Islam i bevægelse*, Copenhagen: Akademisk, 2003.
[4] Ibid. p. 256 (my translation).
[5] Bassam Tibi, 'Les conditions d'un ''euro-islam'' ', in Robert Bistolfi and François Zabbal (eds.), *Islams d'Europe: intégration ou insertion communautaire?*, Paris: L'Aube, 1995, pp. 230–4 (my translation).

According to Tibi, it is the duty of the European political structures (national governments and the European Union) actively to encourage the 'development of a liberal Islam and to defend its own [the European] identity'. More recently Tibi took up this discussion again, clarifying that by secularism he means *laïcité* and reiterating his points regarding tolerance and the abandonment of a sense of superiority. He takes the argument further, attacking the views of some that Muslims should be granted some form of protected status akin to that of the *dhimmi*, as well as the 'multiculturalists', arguing that the result of both policy directions would be ghettoisation.[6] His particular target here is the German orientalist Tilman Nagel who ventured this idea in a 1998 lecture,[7] but Tibi confuses Nagel's reference to 'protected minorities' (*dhimmis*) with the status of 'enemy alien' (*musta'min*). Nagel has not been alone in suggesting a *dhimma*-type solution; it has also been used by some Muslims to denote the kind of status they could see for themselves.[8]

There are several problems with this approach, but I will briefly point to two particular ones. Despite the assertion that both sides need to move, there is precious little discussion of how Europe is supposed to move, other than by encouraging change in the right direction by Muslims. More problematical are the assumptions being made about Europe implied in the direction which Muslims are expected to follow. On the one hand, demands are being made of Muslims to meet European standards which Europeans themselves have often not met. The expectation of religious tolerance is one which is blind to the continuing national and ethnic intolerance which remains endemic in European culture and continues to find expression in national legislation and policies. The implication that the European religious scene is one which acknowledges the equality of esteem of all religions in the public space is also open to question, especially in countries where some churches hold privileged positions in relation to the state and the taxpayer. This last point then takes one directly into Tibi's call for an Islamic *laïcism*. The term is commonly used to denote not only the very strict separation of church and state established in the French law of 1905 but also the more ideological French view that the citizen's

[6] Bassam Tibi, 'Muslim migrants in Europe: between Euro-Islam and ghettoization', in Nezar AlSayyad and Manuel Castells (eds.), *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: politics, culture and civilization in the age of globalization*, Lanham: Lexington, 2002, pp. 31–52.

[7] Reported in the *Frankfurt Allgemeiner Zeitung*, 10 June 1998, referred to by Tibi, p. 38 and note 27.

[8] I heard such views being expressed at the Islamic Foundation in Leicester in the 1980s, although it is a view no one there would espouse today.

relationship to the state is based exclusively on the individual's *citoyenneté* – the state does not relate to citizens as communities, especially not as religious communities. But if we take the term to mean simply the separation of religion and state, not only are Muslims being asked to be more European than the Europeans, but other Europeans are being asked to become like the French![9]

Here is the crux of the issue at hand. There is more than one way of being a European when it comes to cultural and religious practice and identity. There are therefore necessarily more ways than one for Muslims to become European. In raising the banner of 'Euro-Islam', its proponents stand accused of painting with a very broad brush indeed – in both the 'Euro' and the 'Islam' parts of the expression. It is this form of the concept which becomes restrictive. Too quickly and easily it shifts subtly from being a description of the complicated process of integration which Muslims of immigrant origin are passing through, to becoming a prescription which implies a dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, a dichotomy which is particularly dangerous at a time when Islam in the public space is too facilely viewed from the perspective of public security.[10] Ironically, while this approach appeals to a need for differentiation within Islam, in this case cultural and ethnic differentiation as between, for example, Arab and African Islam – so why not a Euro-Islam? – it merely concludes in establishing smaller but equally monolithic blocks, such as 'Europe'.

The point has already been made that Europe is not one, especially not when it comes to matters of religion, whether in the public or the private sphere. There are certainly those who, in the overall context of the so-called European project, have sought to apply the Treaty of Rome's 'ever closer union' also to these spheres, but here surely is a sphere where the principle of subsidiarity applies. Let me illustrate with some examples, first of all in Denmark where we started. This is a small country of only five million inhabitants, which until the Second World War had been a country of emigration. Denmark is also in many ways the archetypal nation-state as that creature was developed in the national–romantic movement of the nineteenth century. It had one language, one religion (Lutheranism), one sense of ethnic–national belonging, a core territory which had existed as one political entity for a thousand years (at least in the myths of collective memory and national historical narrative

[9] This is a view which Tibi expounds at greater length in chapter 12 of his *Im Schatten Allahs: der Islam und die Menschenrechte*, Munich: Piper, 1994, pp. 298–315.

[10] This is the concern, for example, behind a collection of articles on *Islamismus* published in 2003 by the German Ministry of the Interior in its series 'Texte zur inneren Sicherheit'.

of the school textbooks), and an unbroken line of monarchs throughout that period. It has had its glory days, but they are long since gone leaving only residual echoes in popular tourist sites. It had not been untouched by the outside world, so there were small Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Jewish and other congregations. But to be Danish meant, essentially, to be Lutheran, something which was regularly reiterated in the public celebration of rites of passage, especially as confirmation classes were integrated into the annual cycle of the public-school year. The Lutheran church is literally a department of state, with its own cabinet minister, its civil service regulations, and priests as government employees. The church was the official registrar of births, marriages and deaths. Where other countries have birth certificates, Danes have baptism certificates.

But things have changed. Starting in the late 1960s the country experienced the immigration from outside Europe which had already become common in the previous two decades in many other parts of the region. While there were some smaller religious groups among these immigrants, the majority were of Muslim background. Unlike some of the other countries the immigration into Denmark was very mixed in its ethnic origins. Turks, North Africans and Pakistanis were later followed by Iraqis, Iranians, Palestinians, Lebanese, Somalis and Bosnians, giving a current total of over 150,000 or about 3% of the total population.[11] Gradually, the question marks which had traditionally been placed against the Danishness of Catholics or Baptists were transferred to the newcomers. As elsewhere, different parts of Danish society responded in different ways and at different speeds. Within the limitations set by official structures and regulations, schools were surprisingly fast to adapt. This was aided by a traditional ease of access to public funding for parent-led 'free schools' instituted in the nineteenth century to cater for the various revival movements which were appearing within the Lutheran fold. The facility had been used later by a number of free-thinking and humanist movements, movements attracted to alternative approaches to education, including Marxist groups. After the Muslim immigration started, Denmark was among the pioneers in the opening of Muslim schools.[12] On the other hand, the state church and the ministry of the interior were slow to adjust to the changing situation. It took some years before it was made possible for birth or naming certificates to be issued by a civil authority, rather than the Lutheran parish

[11] Brigitte Maréchal, Stefano Allievi et al., *Muslim in the enlarged Europe: religion and society*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. xxiv.

[12] The government's Humanities Research Council funded a project on Muslim schools in the mid-1980s: Asta Olesen (ed.), *Islam og undervisning I Danmark*, Århus: Århus Universitetsforlag, 1987.

priest whose function this had traditionally been. There was a struggle before the state would allow the registration of names not to be found on an official list of approved Danish first names. And by the 1980s the status of 'recognised religious community', laid down in the Constitution, was regarded as being redundant in the face of Muslim claims for such a status.[13]

Such resistance could not last, for a number of reasons. The sheer pressure of numbers was one dimension, especially in the three main cities where Muslims were concentrated: Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense. More important probably was a combination of the growth of a new Danish-born and educated generation of Muslims – they have been called 'new-Danes' – more than capable of holding their own in the public debate and in the workplace, and the strengthening of a consciousness of traditions of democracy and equality of rights in the context of a very lively, and sometimes quite rough, public debate about Danishness and its ability to change and be more inclusive. This debate came to a head around the turn of the millennium with some politicians and public figures peddling scare stories about floods of asylum seekers, often termed 'illegal', and the electoral success in November 2001 of a coalition of right-wing parties entering government with the parliamentary support of the extreme right Danish People's Party. At the same time, the clergy and lay leaders of the state church had realised that they had to review the role of the church, after the similar state churches of Norway and Sweden had been disestablished. So just when the political lead has fallen into the hands of nationalist politicians, significant sectors of society – certain local governments, such as the second city of Aarhus, leading bishops and literary personalities – have engaged more actively in working with younger Muslim leaders and intellectuals towards a multicultural and cooperative approach to integration, a process in which both sides adapt.

I have paid possibly too much attention to a country of little significance to most. But it is an interesting case for our purposes precisely because it started almost as the model European nation-state. It was inevitable that there should be some kind of *Kulturkampf* in response to the settlement of significant new communities, a process in which a defence of the national identity potentially put the nation at odds with its equally strong democratic and cooperative identity.

[13] For further information about Denmark, see Jørgen Bæk Simonsen, 'Globalization in reverse and the challenge of integration: Muslims in Denmark', in Y. Y. Haddad (ed.), *Muslims in the West: from sojourners to citizens*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 121–130, and the index references to Denmark in B. Maréchal, S. Allievi et al. (eds.), *Muslims in the enlarged Europe*.

Let me then pay a little more attention to some better-known countries. It was in the United Kingdom in 1967 that an attempt was made by the political leadership to set a framework for the response to immigration and settlement. The then Labour Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, sought to define the process of integration not as a process of levelling leading to uniformity but one which aimed at 'cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.'[14] While much remains to be done to achieve this goal – and each of the concepts used by Roy Jenkins can be and has been problematised by academics – it still stands out as one of the most positive statements by any British politician in this field. In many ways, some of them often not admitted, this kind of view remains the benchmark of UK policy across the various sectors. (It is, of course, also an expression of the kind of 'communitarianism' which is often contrasted as a British model against the 'French model' of the *citoyenneté* of the individual under the law.) Despite the endless ideological debates of the 1970s and 80s around overarching concepts of race and racism understood within class analyses of society, public policy, as Kepel correctly records,[15] has always tended to find its way back to something like the Jenkins model.

What has changed is the terms of reference of cultural identities. As the idealised solidarity of 'black Britain' came under increasing strain, especially in the wake of urban street clashes in 1981 and 1985, so religious identities began to play a more active role. Various factors contributed to this. One is likely to have been the gradual withdrawal of public funding from voluntary organisations instigated by the Thatcher government. I have argued elsewhere that this opened the field for those organisations which had quietly grown up within the communities themselves, often hardly noticed by those groups whose existence was predicated on public funding. Such 'hidden' organisations were often the mosque and other religious associations.[16] There were a number of high-profile local political incidents, in which the city of Bradford featured prominently, including the Rushdie affair.[17] The Rushdie affair itself, quite apart from whatever else it may have been, was a symptom of the impact which the generation of the children of the immigrants was

[14] Quoted by Kenan Malik, 'The trouble with multiculturalism' in *Spiked-politics*, 18 December 2001, on http://www.spiked-online.com/Articles/00000002D35E.htm, accessed 27 May 2005.

[15] See Gilles Kepel, *A l'ouest d'Allah*, Paris: Seuil, 1994, pp. 322–5.

[16] Jorgen S. Nielsen, 'Islam, musulmani e governo britannico locale e centrale: fluidità strutturale', in J. Waardenburg et al., *I musulmani nella società europea*, Turin: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1994, pp. 143–56.

[17] See Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: religion, politics and identity among British Muslims*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1994.

beginning to have. In the 1981 Census, the group of children aged 6–15 in households headed by someone of Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnic origin was markedly more numerous than any of the older ten-year age categories.[18] Through the protests against Rushdie they, for the first time, brought into the public sphere their own perspectives of how they see themselves and their communities. This new process of self-identification is more complex and variable than had been assumed to be the case previously, whether among the governing authorities or among the holders of power in the immigrant generation.[19]

But there is also another dimension of the British environment which must play a role. In many ways Britain did not share the mainland European experience of the construction of the nation-state. 'Englishness', however it plays out, preserves a conscious memory of at least some of the component parts which went into its construction. This is most obvious in the marriage of Anglo-Saxon and Norman which is a theme in the popular tales of Robin Hood and which Sir Walter Scott romanticised in some of his novels in, among others, the figure of King Richard I. 'Britishness', in its turn, is a conscious conglomerate of the various so-called nations of the British Isles, even though its relationship to the component nations, above all the English, remains complex and mobile. While religion did play a role in the formation of some of the nations of Britain, especially in the centuries-long strife over the place of Roman Catholicism in the body politic, there was never the foundational identification of one state with one religion which was constituted elsewhere in the settlement of Westphalia in 1648.[20] In fact, only the following year the execution of King Charles I in the Cromwellian revolution signified the categorical rejection of such a settlement. Britain, and above all England, became multireligious. Indeed, Cromwell welcomed Jews back to the country some five centuries after they had been expelled by Edward I. Although Roy Jenkins did not primarily have the religious dimension of culture in mind when he made his 1967 statement,[21] it is certainly an argument worth considering that his

[18] Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, Census 1981: Country of Birth, Great Britain London: HMSO, 1983.

[19] This is discussed significantly in Gerd Baumann's *Contesting cultures: discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

[20] Adrian Hastings argues that the religious dimension of, in particular, English nationalism should be traced rather further back, well into the medieval period, and its origins are almost quintessentially Christian; see his *The construction of nationhood: ethnicity, religion and nationalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[21] In fact, he expressed some doubts about his own principle when reflecting on the Rushdie affair over two decades later.

concept of 'multicultural integration' flows much more easily out of this historical background than it does from the background of the post-Westphalian princely state.

Can one undertake similar exercises with reference to other European countries? Undoubtedly, although I will not attempt to do so in such detail here. But it may be worth just drawing attention to the examples of Austria and Spain, both countries where Islamic community structures have been afforded legal recognition within an existing system of recognised religion status.[22] Austria still has an extant memory of being at the centre of a multiethnic and multireligious empire: recognition of Islam in 1979 was legally a re-enactment of an earlier recognition which had taken place in 1912 within the terms of the 1867 Constitution of the Habsburg dual monarchy. The recognition of Islam in Spain in 1992 was not only a consequence of post-Franco moves to making the newly democratic state neutral. It was also part of a conscious attempt to reorientate Spanish national identity towards a more inclusive view of its past and thence towards a more integrated place in the Mediterranean region; the year of the recognition was not a coincidence, being the 500th anniversary of the fall of Granada and the end of Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula.

However, there is another side to this discussion, namely the Muslim one. While I take the view that the histories, policies and legal structures of the various European countries impose varying constraints on the way Muslim communities and individuals orient themselves, this in no way means that Muslims have their choices dictated by these structures. In fact, without going into details, it is fascinating to observe the many different ways in which Muslims are constructing their sense of self and community, their relations to the wider society both locally and nationally, and imagining the directions they want to mark out for the future. They range from positions close to full assimilation, with religion and personal piety becoming limited to the private space (a position apparently close to what Bassam Tibi sees as desirable), through various forms of collective visibility and public participation, to various forms of the assertive and even aggressive public separation characteristic of certain radical extremist movements, at the edge shading over into a

[22] The question of relations between the state and Islam is covered in Silvio Ferrari, 'The legal dimension', in Brigitte Maréchal, Stefano Allievi et al., *Muslims in the enlarged Europe: religion and society*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, pp. 219–54. For Spain, see further J. Mantecón Sancho, 'L'Islam en Espagne', in R. Potz and W. Wieshaider (eds.), *Islam and the European Union*, Leuven: Peeters, 2004, pp. 105–42. For Austria, see M. Schmied and W. Wieshaider, 'Islam and the European Union: the Austrian way', in ibid., pp. 199–217.

willingness to use violence. Some years ago, I suggested a typology to capture this varied spectrum:

1. One result of social marginalisation is a growth in youth activity on the margins of the law. In the last few years, Asian youth gangs, some mobilising Islamic symbols, have appeared in certain districts of the main cities. One might call this the *random retaliation* option.
2. A large proportion of young people, especially in city districts with major concentrations of Muslims, are finding security in a process of quiet retrenchment within the family and clan networks of the community. The price of this support is loyalty to the collective norms of the community in question. This option is one of *collective isolation.*
3. A not insignificant number of young people have been successful at school and have gone into further and higher education. They are taking an active part in the wider economy but are keeping this strictly separate from their home and community lives, an option which might be called *limited participation.*
4. Many young people have, since the Rushdie affair, become increasingly involved in organising Muslim activities. A majority of such organisations are campaigning at local and national level for social and political space. Internally little attention is being paid to the adaptation of ways of life to the surroundings. This could be termed the *high profile separation* option.
5. A smaller but growing tendency is for groups of young Muslims to seek simultaneously to develop new cultural ways of being Muslim while at the same time attempting to find ways of constructive participation in the wider society: a *high profile integration* option?
6. Finally there is a small minority who have adopted a programme, at least in propaganda if very seldom in implementation, of radical Islamist political action. This is the option of *aggressive action.*[23]

While most public attention is directed to how these various trends relate to the public sphere and how they express themselves in the context of the various political events of recent years, less is being paid to the internal debates taking place. Here there is a range of philosophical and theological discussions, which in many ways remind one of the debates which ranged among Islamic theologians in the formative periods of the eighth–eleventh centuries. In the process of trying to explore what it means to be an authentically practising Muslim believer in a

[23] J. S. Nielsen, 'Muslims in Europe: history revisited or a way forward?', *Islam and Christian-Muslim relations*, 8, 1997, 135–43.

contemporary European environment, young Muslims are again having to work out principles of faith, approaches to textual hermeneutics, the nature and function of Sharìa, the role of religious authority for the believer and the community, and their place in the universal community of believers, the *ummah*. This debate is but a small part of a global Islamic debate, one in which European – and North American – Muslim experiences potentially have something significant to contribute.[24] The debate is wide and thorough and comprises not just the conservative or 'fundamentalist' voices which grab the headlines but significant 'liberal' and 'moderate' ones (most of whom would reject such labelling).[25]

But that internal debate regularly comes under enormous pressure from outside. The two-dimensional worldviews encouraged particularly from Washington in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001 ('if you are not with us, you are against us') have made differentiated discussions within the Muslim world extremely difficult. The growing number of voices seeking to develop Islamic ideas of democracy and human rights – precisely the 'liberals' and the 'moderates' just referred to – have been forced onto the defensive. I have personally heard some of them bemoan that it is now much more difficult to discuss democracy in open forum without being accused of surrendering to a US agenda. A similar tone started emerging from the UK government within a few weeks of the London bombs of 7 July 2005. It was quite clear, and was confirmed by leading politicians to be so, that the alleged bombers, who attacked the London transport system that day and those who carried out the failed bombings two weeks later, neither represented nor had the support of the vast majority of the Muslim community – in fact the identities of some of them were provided to the police by family and community members. Despite this, pressure was very soon put on the Muslim community as a whole to re-emphasise their commitment to being British in ways which implied that their opposition to some aspects of government policy, in particular UK involvement in the war in Iraq, was potentially tantamount to treason. The effect in both instances has been to reinforce traditional Western views of a monolithic, threatening

[24] This potential contribution of Western Muslim experience is the theme of Tariq Ramadan's *Western Muslims and the future of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

[25] See, for example, on Egyptian thinkers, Raymond W. Baker, *Islam without fear: Egypt and the new Islamists*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003; on government, Gudrun Krämer *Gottes Staat als Republik*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1999; and on religious minority rights, J. S. Nielsen, 'Contemporary discussions on religious minorities in Islam', in *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 325–35.

Islam, and perversely to weaken the traditional internal pluralism of Islamic thinking.

This takes us back to where I started. If the concept of 'Euro-Islam' can be prevented from falling into the kind of restricted narrow and prescriptive role, which threatens in some quarters, and an open and plural conception of European Islam can gain the upper hand, then there are more opportunities than restrictions. This opens opportunities for both Islam and for Europe. Tariq Ramadan advocates

> a new and constructive posture which relies on a fine comprehension of Islam's priorities, a clear vision of what is absolute, definitively fixed and what is subject to change and adaptation and, finally, an appropriate understanding of the Western environment. The objective being to shape a European-Islamic identity out of the crisis. Before disputing the secondary aspects of Islamic legislation, it is thus imperative to protect the five elements constituting *maqasid* [objectives of] *ash-Sharià*: namely, Religion, life, intellect, lineage and property.[26]

I am aware that Tariq Ramadan is, in some circles, a controversial figure – for reasons which I personally think have mostly to do with wilful misunderstanding of what he is trying to achieve and ignorance of the tradition out of which he comes.[27] But he is just the most well-known of a growing number of Muslim intellectuals in Europe who are seizing the opportunity of an open society to engage in the kind of profound rethinking of Islam which the encounter with modernity provokes.[28] For Europe, the situation we are currently living through provides an opportunity to escape from the sterile and too often destructive dimensions of the nationalist heritage. The response from the extreme right in, for example, Austria's local and regional elections and in the French regional and presidential elections, seems to indicate that they feel themselves under threat from such a development.

But the opportunity stretches further. Kevin Robins has used the term 'interrupted identities' to encapsulate the processes which take place when a culture is challenged to reinvigorate itself through the encounter with another culture. 'History is created out of cultures in relation and interaction: interrupting identities', says Robins.[29] Nezar

[26] Tariq Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim*, Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 1999, p. 101.

[27] For more detail see my discussion in 'New centres and peripheries in European Islam?', in B. A. Roberson (ed.), *Shaping the current Islamic reformation*, London: Cass, 2003, pp. 64–81.

[28] In a discussion with young Islamist intellectuals in Jordan in 1995, I was asked by one what they might be able to learn from that much broader encounter with modernity which young Muslims in Europe were experiencing.

[29] Kevin Robins, 'Interrupting identities', in Stuart Hall and P. du Gay (eds.), *Questions of cultural identity*, London: Sage, 1996, p. 82.

AlSayyad and colleagues take this further in the context of discussing urban spaces, arguing that these 'borderlands' or 'third places' where cultures and traditions meet are no longer the ignored zones of tension and mingling between, for example, coloniser and colonised.[30] Relating this explicitly to the position of Muslims in Europe, he proposes

> that borderlands are no longer fragments anchored between two fixed and well-defined places, and that sites of the in-between, such as the Third place, no longer simply occupy the margins of the periphery. I now believe that the most hybrid of places have moved firmly to the centre of the core . . . Muslim Europe may be the new but quintessential borderland.[31]

Given the rather Danish atmosphere to the beginning of this paper, I will conclude with a statement from the Danish writer Vilhelm Grønbech (1873–1948), who died long before the developments discussed here took place. It is quoted at the beginning of their conclusion by the four young Danish Muslims cited earlier:

> It is probably something which is repeated everywhere, that the most fertile cultures come into existence where peoples meet. It is not the pure, unmixed populations which dominate history, but precisely those populations, where different peoples, different cultures and ideas have fused.[32]

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[30] Nezar AlSayyad (ed.), *Hybrid urbanism: on the identity discourse and the built environment*, Westport: Praeger, 2001, esp. pp. 1–18.

[31] Nezar AlSayyad, 'Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: on the discourses of identity and culture', in AlSayyad and Castells, p. 28.

[32] Quoted in Mona Sheikh et al., p. 253.

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