

## **Feeling at Home: Some Reflections on Muslims in Europe<sup>1</sup>**

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It is widely believed in many influential circles in Western Europe that its nearly 15 million Muslims pose a serious political and cultural threat.<sup>2</sup> Some say this openly, and others attack multiculturalism, which is often a coded word for Muslims. This view is shared by ordinary men and women as well as by distinguished commentators and political theorists and cuts across the usual ideological divides. Gilles Kepel, a distinguished French commentator on the subject, thinks that “Europe has become a battle field” between the values of the Enlightenment and Islam.<sup>3</sup> Olivier Roy, another distinguished writer on European Muslims, thinks that they represent a “new age of religiosity” and could easily lead to “recommunitarianisation” (or social fragmentation) and the disintegration of secular society.<sup>4</sup> For the Italian Minister of Interior, it is “natural that the idea of the silent Islamic invasion” creates great anxiety among conservatives and “also among many liberal souls and worries public opinion.”<sup>5</sup> Sartori, an Italian political philosopher and widely read columnist in his country’s major national newspaper, argues that Muslims are “too different to be integrated . . . ; they can at best be tolerated.”<sup>6</sup> Helmut Schmidt, the former German chancellor, rules out the possibility of a “peaceful accommodation between Islam and Christianity,” particularly in a democracy.<sup>7</sup> Roger Scruton, a well-known British philosopher, observes that European Muslims cannot respect the demands of the secular state and citizenship and despairs of coming to terms with their “rival and inimical loyalties.”<sup>8</sup>

In this article, I examine this view critically, paying attention to how Muslim identity in Europe has evolved during the past four decades and why some consider it to be a threat to Europe’s democratic, secular, liberal, and multicultural society.

## The Emergence of Muslim Identity

Although Muslim immigrants began to arrive in Europe to feed its labor-hungry industries in the 1950s, they were culturally invisible until the 1970s and politically until the late 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Most came alone, intending to stay for a few years and then return home with enough savings to give them a better start in life. They had little command of the language of their country of settlement, were unused to the urban environment, and harbored a deep sense of inferiority (especially those coming from former colonies). They knew who they were, generally lived among their own people, did not think of themselves as immigrants, and had no worries about maintaining their homeland-based identities. Since they faced racial discrimination and formed alliances with other similarly placed groups to fight it, they acquired an additional externally imposed (and in a few cases, freely accepted) racial identity as blacks. As Muslims abandoned their plans and even hopes to return home, they were joined by their wives and began to raise families. They worried about how to bring up their children; ensure intergenerational continuity; transmit their culture, religion, and language; and counter assimilationist pressures from society. This increased their interest in the culture, institutions, and practices of the society to which they had hitherto remained indifferent and began to form a view of their place in it. By and large, they defined their identity in religionational terms. They were Pakistani, Indian, Algerian, or Moroccan Muslims—not simply Muslims but Muslims who were rooted in the cultures of their homelands. The society in which they lived could not be easily defined because, although it was Christian, religion did not play an important role in it. They saw it as basically secular, and the question for them was how to maintain their religionational identity in a secular environment.

Muslim immigrants set up welfare and cultural associations along religionational lines. They built mosques (whose number increased dramatically in the 1970s) and began to demand that state schools make religious provisions for their children—including providing *halal* meat; offering facilities for prayer; exempting girls from sports, swimming, and other activities that required them to wear shorts; and giving lessons for children in their homeland history and culture. They felt that their children would not acquire and value their historical identity without appropriate examples and a suitable domestic environment. Accordingly, Muslim immigrants reorganized their personal lives and began to

press for religious provisions in workplaces, hospitals, and so on for themselves, particularly for women.

European states have traditionally seen themselves as nation-states that are based on a homogeneous national culture, and since their earlier immigrants had not made religious demands, schools, workplaces, and other public institutions often resisted Muslim pressures. This led to tensions, court cases, public debates, and protests. As a result, Muslims became an unmistakable *cultural* presence and a source of public anxieties. Throughout Europe in the 1970s, many discussions took place on how to integrate them culturally. Countries worked out different models: France opted for assimilation, Britain for integration, the Netherlands for the “pillarized” form of multiculturalism, and others for one or more of all three. In the late 1970s and particularly the early 1980s onward, the situation took a political turn. Although the first generation of Muslim immigrants had pursued cultural demands, encountered resistance, and begun to be politicized, the second generation was now reaching adulthood and began to play a crucial role. Having grown up in European society, young Muslims did not share their parents’ inhibitions and diffidence and knew how to find their way around political systems. They increasingly began to define themselves in exclusively religious terms—not as Pakistani or Algerian Muslims (as their parents had done) but simply as Muslims. They did so for several reasons. Since they had limited contacts with their parental homelands, those countries meant little to them and were at best a minor element in their self-definition. To be politically effective, they needed to transcend ethnic and cultural divisions and build nationwide organizations that were based on their shared religion. Many (especially the girls) chafed against parental constraints and found it strategically useful to counter them by studying and reinterpreting the Qur’an. Because many young Muslims were embarrassed by some aspects of their parents’ culture, their discomfort reinforced a desire to return to the “true principles” of Islam. As the wider society began to refer to them as Muslims and to associate negative ideas with the term, Muslim youth (in the spirit of “black is beautiful”) asserted their Islamic identity with pride.

International events played an important part in reinforcing the consciousness of Islamic identity. The basically nonviolent Iranian revolution—in which almost all of the violence came from the side of the Shah’s supporters and whose impact on Muslim consciousness was broadly comparable to that of the Russian Revolution of 1917 on the

European left—gave Muslims the confidence that they could topple Western-supported regimes and offer an alternative to Western modernity. The Afghan resistance to Soviet occupation brought together Muslims of different nationalities, forged among them a common identity, and convinced Muslims the world over that they could defeat a determined superpower. Western dependence on oil exposed its vulnerability and awakened Muslims to their enormous potential economic power. The continuing Arab-Israeli conflict, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the Muslim struggle against injustices and oppression in different parts of the world gave them common global causes and sharpened the awareness of the *umma* (the global Muslim community), a concept that earlier had played only a marginal role in Muslim history. The history of a centuries-long Ottoman empire and its dismantling by European powers was increasingly revived and used to intensify Muslims' sense of humiliation and a desire to revive Ottoman political power. By the mid-1980s, pride, power, a sense of victimhood, the tantalizing dream of what over a billion Muslims (who formed a majority in fifty-five countries and a significant presence in an equal number, even in the West) could achieve if they put their minds to it combined to form an increasingly assertive global Islamic identity. European Muslims shared that identity and felt part of a worldwide community. The fact that they were courted and their religious institutions and activities generously funded by oil-rich Muslim countries, especially Saudi Arabia, reinforced this trend.

The growing importance of religion to both Muslim self-definition and others' perception of them made European Muslims critical of ways that their religion was represented in the West. Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (published in 1989) was viewed against this background and widely seen as an anti-Islamic work written by a lapsed, Westernized, and Indian Muslim to impress and curry favor with a predominantly Western audience. The protests and hostile reactions that the book provoked intensified Islamic identity.<sup>10</sup> In France, feelings had been growing since the late 1970s that its Muslim population had remained only "paper French" (French on their passports and not in terms of culture and loyalty) and needed to be integrated. The Commission on Nationality was appointed in 1987 to define what it meant to be French, and a year later it produced a two-volume report entitled *Being French Today and Tomorrow*. The report insisted that Muslims should be absorbed into the cultural mainstream and that their religious and cultural differences should be confined to the private realm. This was the context

in which *l'affaire des foulards* (affair of the headscarves) flared up. Civil society's stand against the wearing of religious head coverings in schools acquired particular significance in 1989, when the country was celebrating the bicentenary of the French Revolution and its republican and secular identity. Muslim boys in Britain and Muslim girls in France felt the need to battle for Islam, often against the wishes of their parents, and demanded that the state make public space for it. By the late 1980s, Muslims' increased numbers, militancy, firm sense of identity, and global connections had led Islam to become a powerful political presence in Europe.

Bosnia was another milestone in the development of Muslim self-consciousness. The country now known as Bosnia and Herzegovina was in Europe's backyard and should have been of particular interest to it. Its Bosnian (Muslim), Serb (Orthodox Christian), and Croat (Catholic) people were racially Europeans. In spite of this, European governments prevented Bosnian Muslims from obtaining weapons and then were slow in invading the country to protect Muslims from mass atrocities and murders at the hands of its Serbian military. For many Muslims, European apathy about their safety and well-being translated to antipathy. Some felt that if they lowered their guard, Europeans might perpetrate another Holocaust against them. The twelve Danish cartoons that lampooned the Prophet Muhammad (which were published in *Jyllands-Posten* in April 2005) and the commentaries that accompanied them led Muslims to conclude that their community and religion were regarded as backward and unfit to be part of civilized Europe.

## European Anxieties

As politically visible Muslims began to define their identity in religious terms in the late 1970s, Europeans began to wonder if and how Muslims could be integrated and turned into loyal citizens. A sizeable and influential group took the pessimistic view that integration was virtually impossible or at least exceedingly difficult and that admitting Muslims into European countries in large numbers had been a mistake. Islam, they argued, was inherently undemocratic, which was why Muslim countries had never established a stable democracy and strenuously resisted internal and external pressures to do so. European Muslims could not be counted on to respect democratic institutions and at best offered a prudential and instrumental loyalty to them. Since Muslims privileged

the *umma* over the nation-state, they were far more interested in global Muslim causes than in their fellow citizens and could not be trusted to be good citizens. Islam was also illiberal and collectivist. It opposed freedom of expression, secularism, critical thought, personal autonomy, equality for women, and individual choice and mocked such hard-won minority freedoms as the recognition of cohabitation, homosexuality, and gay and lesbian partnerships. Some worried about an antisecular alliance between Muslims and Christians that would lead to the dominance of religion in public life. Others thought that the fear of Islam would lead to a resurgence of conservative social values.

But even Europeans who were sympathetic thought that Muslims were being too demanding. When Muslims demanded that *halal* meat be served in public schools, the demand was met. Then they asked for time off for prayer at workplaces. After that, they demanded that books that Muslims considered blasphemous be banned. Then they wanted civil courts to recognize Islamic polygyny. And after that, they pressed for interest-free loans, Islamic banks, and insurance companies, and so on and on. Ultimately, they wanted to live in Europe on their own terms. Their demand that the state accommodate their identity was part of a wider goal of replacing a “heathen” and “decadent” European civilization with an Islamic civilization. For these and other reasons, it was argued, they were an enemy within—an unassimilable cultural and political presence that had to be contained and neutralized by judiciously using force, aggressively assimilating them, promoting liberal interpretations of Islam, and denying permission for their culture-reinforcing spouses to emigrate from their homelands. Many leading politicians, including liberals, also thought that admitting Turkey into the European Community (as it then was called) would gravely compound the problem and should be resisted at all cost.

Terrorist attacks by Muslims in New York, Madrid, London, and elsewhere has had a traumatic effect on Europeans. Before those attacks, most Europeans had seen Muslims as a culturally threatening but manageable presence. Afterward, they saw Muslims as an internal enemy and developed a deep fear of them. Furthermore, this fear became transformed into the fear of Islam as the religion in whose name the attacks were perpetrated. All Muslims are now suspect, and those in Europe are seen as an undifferentiated part of the worldwide *umma*. They are asked to condemn terrorist attacks in any part of the world in the strongest terms, and those who remain silent or appear lukewarm in their condemnations are assumed to be in sympathy with them.

This widespread distrust of Muslims and the belief that they do not wish to and cannot integrate have resulted in an extensive moral panic. Many Europeans think that they are in danger of being culturally swamped by Muslims. They dread being subjected to Islamicization and reject the Islamic values that gain momentum when Europeans meet Muslims' apparently innocent or trivial but in the long run culturally subversive demands. They talk of "Eurabia" and "Londonistan," demand an end to appeasement (a term once used for Europe's initially conciliatory attitude toward Hitler), and condemn liberal relativists for failing to defend the heritage of the European Enlightenment.

This has led to a growing intolerance and nationalist backlash in almost every European country. The veil dominated public debate in Britain in 2006, and government ministers have refused to fund and have official dealings with the Muslim Council of Britain because of its allegedly inadequate condemnation of terrorism and weak control over Muslim youth. France saw the wearing of the *hijab* by Muslim girls in public schools as a violation of its constitutionally mandated separation of state and religious activities. Indeed, some saw it to be an aggressive challenge to the country's republican and secular national identity. In response, it has passed a law that bans all ostentatious symbols of religions (including the Sikh turban) in the public schools. In the liberal and culturally relaxed Netherlands, a Muslim leader who refused to shake hands with a woman minister and volunteered to greet her in other ways was widely attacked in the media, and a Muslim woman's registration for a teacher training program was cancelled because she refused to shake hands with her male teacher, a decision that was reversed on appeal by the Dutch Commission for Equal Treatment. In Greece, Spain, and Germany, there is a strong opposition to building "too many" mosques, especially in prominent places, because they lead to "Islamicization" of the country and alter its "visage."<sup>11</sup>

In many European countries, there is a demand that dual nationality should be disallowed and that immigrants should be required to opt for the citizenship of their country of settlement. In the Netherlands, immigrants cannot become citizens unless they acquire fluency in Dutch and a considerable knowledge of the country's history and social and political system. Germany requires that they should "internalize" the values of its constitution and believe in them "sincerely." As a way of integrating and fostering patriotism among France's Maghrebian population, the French National Assembly passed a law on 23 February 2005 requiring all "high school history courses and textbooks" to emphasize



the “positive dimension of the French colonial era.” Although this extraordinary law was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, it is indicative of the country’s mood that the National Assembly passed it initially and that a large number of even its liberal members saw nothing wrong with it.<sup>12</sup>

In some European societies, attempts have been made to demonize Muslims and generate powerful feelings against them. Consider the following excerpt from an article by Daniel Pipes and Lars Hedegaard entitled “Something Rotten in Denmark?” that appeared in *National Post*, a Danish magazine, in the aftermath of the Danish cartoon affair. Although the article was widely criticized for its factual errors and alarmist tone, it had many supporters.<sup>13</sup>

For years, Danes lauded multiculturalism and insisted they had no problem with the Muslim customs—until one day they found that they did. Some major issues:

Living on the dole: Third-world immigrants—most of them Muslims—constitute 5 percent of the population but consume upwards of 40 percent of the welfare spending.

Engaging in crime: Muslims are only 4 percent of Denmark’s 5.4 million people but make up a majority of the country’s convicted rapists. . . .

Self-imposed isolation: Over time, as Muslim immigrants increase in numbers, they wish less to mix with the indigenous population.

Importing unacceptable customs: Forced marriages . . . are one problem. Another is threats to kill Muslims who convert out of Islam. . . .

Fomenting anti-Semitism: Muslim violence threatens Denmark’s approximately 6,000 Jews, who increasingly depend on police protection. . . .

Seeking Islamic law: Muslim leaders openly declare their goal of introducing Islamic law once Denmark’s Muslim population grows large enough—a not-that-remote prospect. If present trends persist, one sociologist estimates, every third inhabitant of Denmark in 40 years will be Muslim.

The fear of Muslims has prompted perplexed European leaders to ask what they should do to counter the “Islamic threat.” In addition to



pursuing even more vigorously the strategy that they evolved in the 1990s, many European countries are devising new tools—such as increasing surveillance of Muslims, building a better network of informers, passing stronger antiterrorist laws, detaining people on suspicion, making glorification of terrorism a criminal offense, monitoring mosques, banning foreign-based *imams* from visiting, supervising the training and sermons of *imams*, banning spouses from immigrant homelands, and requiring Muslim leaders to accept greater responsibility for the behavior of their fellow religionists. Although many Europeans realize that such measures severely restrict the civil liberties of Muslims and all others and violate some of their deeply cherished values, they see no other way to deal with the “Muslim problem.”

The main European anxieties about European Muslims are basically four: Muslims (1) have no commitment to democratic institutions, (2) threaten secularism, (3) are hostile to liberal values, and (4) are ill at ease in a multicultural society. I take each in turn.

### **Democracy**

A careful examination of West European societies shows that while their anxieties about Muslims have some basis, they are exaggerated. Some Muslim groups have ignored the normal rules of civility and pressed their demands without regard for the feelings and anxieties of their fellow citizens. Some Muslim teachers have taken time off for Friday prayers without considering the inconvenience that their absence causes for their pupils and colleagues. In several European societies, Muslim students have strongly objected to slight criticisms of their religion and history and in some cases threatened or refused to cooperate with the teachers involved. Some Muslim leaders have used offensive language to attack the values and norms of their fellow citizens. Militant groups such as al-Muhajirun pump out propaganda against Jews, Hindus, and the West in general. They claim that they are preparing the way for a worldwide Islamic revolution and that they do so by using innocent-looking educational, welfare, and other organizations as fronts.

The terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), which between them took nearly 400 lives, were all mounted by Muslims, as were the recently thwarted attacks in Glasgow, Frankfurt, and London. In Britain, 200 hundred terrorist networks are estimated to involve just under 2,000 identified individual terrorists under surveillance and hatching plots at different stages of development. Between 500 and 3,000 British Muslims are estimated to have passed through al-Qaeda

training camps in Afghanistan. Several al-Qaeda cells were recently uncovered in Germany, France, Britain, and Italy, and the actual numbers, their targets, and their potential for inflicting damage are unknown. Although most of these activities are recent, the incitement to violence goes back decades. Death threats were made against Rushdie in 1989, and on the eve of the first Gulf war, Omar Bakri, leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) called on Muslims to assassinate Prime Minister John Major, saying that he and many others “will celebrate his death.”

A small group of disaffected young Muslims, acting alone or in collaboration with militant groups abroad, have shown active disloyalty to their country of settlement and should be condemned, but the overwhelming majority of European Muslims have a good record as a law-abiding community. Since the 1960s, there have been four Muslim riots in Britain compared to eight race-related riots by Afro-Caribbeans. One riot was against Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*, and others were against police insensitivity and racist marches through Muslim areas. All were relatively minor and lasted only a couple of days. France witnessed three riots during this period, almost all triggered by local grievances or police mistreatment. The week-long riots in 2006 were related to persistent discrimination, high unemployment, and police insensitivity. The rioters were limited to boys and young men, did not challenge the authority of the state, and involved neither religious demands nor religious leaders. Britain has 300 Muslims in its armed forces, and the chief of staff Sir Nicholas Walker, who recently praised their loyalty and commitment, asked for more Muslim recruits.

Even when subjected to blatant discrimination—such as for years being denied permits to build mosques in parts of Italy and Greece or being denied state funding for their schools on the same lines as Christian and Jewish schools in Britain—Muslims have either suffered quietly or protested peacefully but rarely taken the law in their own hands. They have also taken considerable pride in their country of settlement. Both young and old Muslims appreciate the rights and freedoms that they enjoy in Europe (many of which are not available in most Muslim countries) and value the support of their fellow citizens in their struggle for equality and justice. In a British survey in 2004, 67 percent of Muslims said that they felt very or fairly patriotic, 11 percent that they were mildly patriotic, and only 15 percent (those who were mainly under forty years of age) claimed not to feel patriotic at all. In a BBC poll that was conducted just after the terrorist attacks in London, 78 percent of

Muslims and 73 percent of the rest of the country said that immigrants should pledge their primary loyalty to Britain, and 91 percent of Muslims and 93 percent of the rest of the country said that immigrants should respect the authority of British institutions. The situation in the rest of Europe is broadly similar.<sup>14</sup>

Extraterritorial loyalty to the *umma* is not unique to Muslims, and it rarely amounts to much in practice. Jews press the cause of Israel and their counterparts in other countries, as do Indians, Chinese, Pakistanis, and others. What matters is whether the bulk of European Muslims are prepared to be disloyal to their country to promote the interests of the *umma*, and the answer to that is no. Just over a couple of dozen British Muslims fought with the Taliban, and they were roundly condemned by most of their community. Although we do not have the exact figures for France, Italy, the Netherlands, and elsewhere, the proportion of Muslims joining the Taliban there was even smaller. When terrorist attacks took place in Spain, most of the Muslim community roundly condemned them, showed their solidarity with the victims, and undertook to put their communal house in order. After the recent unsuccessful terrorist attacks in London and Glasgow, they organized peaceful marches and placed page-long statements in national newspapers condemning them and declaring them incompatible with the principles of Islam. When the Islamic Army in Iraq took two French journalists hostage to put pressure on the French government to lift its recently imposed headscarf ban in public schools, French Muslims mobilized as never before and insisted that the Islamic Army had no right to speak in their name and that their primary loyalty was to their compatriots.

Like millions of their fellow citizens, many European Muslims (although not all of them) opposed the second war on Iraq but remained content to join peaceful protests against it. Had they been so minded, they could have been far noisier, tried to sabotage the war effort in countries belonging to the “coalition of the willing,” refused to pay their taxes, provoked imprisonment, formed a human shield in Iraq, and used other familiar tactics. The fact that they did not do any of these things is significant. In Britain, when the *imam* of the Finsbury Park mosque, who preached hatred of the West and urged support for the terrorists, was arrested and his mosque raided, there was some outrage but also quiet satisfaction that some action had at last been taken against him and his associates.<sup>15</sup>

Muslims have also shown respect for democratic institutions. When a Muslim parliament was set up in Britain in the 1990s by a pro-Iranian

group to provide Muslims with a forum for discussion and a distinct political voice, it received little general support and became defunct, largely because of widespread Muslim hostility and factionalism. Calls for separate Muslim parties throughout Europe have gone unheeded, and Muslim candidates who stand on Muslim platforms in local and national elections have almost always been defeated. Muslims have participated in local and national elections, joined mainstream political parties, and stood as candidates. Several hundred Muslims have been elected as town councilors in major European cities, and every election has seen an increase in their number. In Berlin, Bradford, and Rotterdam, their number is significant enough to shape the city councils' decisions. There are four Muslims in the British House of Commons, and seven in the House of Lords, one of them openly gay. The German Bundestag has two Muslim members, both women. The Riksdagen in Sweden has five members, the Folketing in Denmark three, the Tweede Kamar in the Netherlands seven, and the French National Assembly and Senate have two and four members, respectively. These are disproportionately small numbers, and the reasons for them have to do with the resistance of the major political parties, the biased political system, and limited Muslim participation.

It is sometimes argued that the Muslim support for democratic institutions and loyalty to the state are largely a matter of political expediency and hence precarious. Although the argument makes a valid point because reasons for supporting democratic institutions do matter, it does not apply to a large majority of European Muslims. As the extensive debate among them shows, they are exploring the moral dimensions of their relationship to their country of settlement and beginning to articulate a theologico-moral theory of political obligation.

Although a small minority dismisses democracy as a form of polytheism (*shirk billah*) that deifies people and sets up their sovereignty in rivalry to that of Allah, most Muslims take a different view. Democracy, they argue, does not deify people but subjects their will to clearly stated constitutional constraints—including basic human rights. It shows respect for human dignity, protects fundamental human interests, ensures responsible use of power, guarantees freedom of religion, and institutionalizes *shura* (consultation)—all of which are consistent with and often enjoined by the Qur'an. Although an enlightened monarchy might be able to achieve these objectives, success depends heavily on the character of the monarch and is inherently risky. The Prophet was one such individual, but it is naive to imagine that all societies can produce some-

one like him on a regular basis. For most European Muslims, democracy is therefore a better form of government than any other, and they have a moral obligation to support it. This does not mean that they approve of its current liberal form. Many of them would like it to be more accommodating to religion and less secular in its orientation, but most of them agree that its basic institutional structure deserves their support.

Political participation is being given a similar theologico-moral basis. A small minority (such as the Hizb al-Tahrir) dismisses it as *haram* (sinful) because it involves working with secular political parties and accepting the authority of secular political institutions, but most Muslims take a very different view. The *fatwa* by Taha Jabir al-Alwani, chairman of the North American Fiqh council, urges Muslims to participate in political life on the ground that it enables them to promote worthwhile causes, protects basic human rights, ensures responsible rule, and improves the quality of information about Islam and Muslim interests. For al-Alwani, political participation is not just a right that can be surrendered or a permission that may be ignored but a duty that must be discharged.

Loyalty to the state is also defended on Qur'anic grounds. The Qur'an places a high value on the sanctity of contracts and enjoins Muslims to show loyalty to the state in return for its physical protection and respect for basic freedoms. This argument was commonly made by British Muslims when a small number of them wanted to fight with the Taliban and against British troops. It was further clarified in the *fatwa* on British Muslims issued by Shaykh Abdullah al-Judai, a member of the European Council for Fatwa and Research. The *fatwa* insisted that one of the Muslim's highest obligations was to respect agreements and contracts, that they were contractually bound to their country of settlement, and that they cannot take up arms against it even to defend Muslims elsewhere. This last point is disputed by some Muslims, largely members of a militant Shi'ite group that lacks popular support.<sup>16</sup>

As far as basic European values and practices are concerned, Muslims do not have much difficulty with many of these. Human dignity, equal human worth, equality of the races, civility, peaceful resolution of differences, and reciprocity are all either enjoined by Islam or can be read into it. Strong Muslim disapproval of homosexuality and same-sex marriages has rightly worried Europeans, but it is weakening and is not limited to Muslims. Although polygyny and female circumcision are practiced by some groups of Muslims, they are disapproved of by others and are in decline. It is hardly surprising that the laws banning them in

the 1980s provoked little Muslim protest in any European country. Two areas that have proved particularly contentious relate to the great values of gender equality and freedom of expression.

Gender equality has been resisted by some, but it is increasingly accepted by a majority of European Muslims. Women vote in elections and stand for public offices, although they still face some Muslim male opposition. Muslim girls continue to advance at school and sometimes do better than boys. Fairly large numbers of girls pursue higher education, although fewer girls than boys attend universities because of parental discouragement, and Muslim women have been discouraged from pursuing certain occupations. They enjoy less social freedom and are sometimes forced into arranged marriages, and they are rebelling against these practices with some success. Some girls and women who resist their families' religious prohibitions are subjected to intimidation and violence, which every year in Britain includes nearly a dozen horrifying "honor" killings and many more abductions. Even so, some women are beginning to take collective judicial action against these oppressive practices. Girls also invoke the authority of the Qur'an in their struggles for equality. This requires them to study the Qur'an well enough to interpret it and to argue that sexist practices are conventional and lack a religious basis. Although religious study can appear on its face to be conservative, its intentions and outcomes are often radical, as is evident in the growing popularity of Islamic feminism (also known as "gender *jihad*").

Issues relating to free speech have provoked the greatest Muslim anger and an equally fierce reaction against Muslim responses. Muslims do not question the value of free speech but rather its scope and limits. They use it to criticize the West, highlight their grievances, press forward their demands, and challenge some of their own ugly practices, and they are its beneficiaries. Many of them value it not only on instrumental but also on moral grounds and find a theological support for it. The message of the Qur'an could not have been widely disseminated without free speech. The sticking point comes when free speech criticizes Islam or otherwise offends Muslim religious sensibilities.

Salman Rushdie's publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 triggered the first Europe-wide public expression of Muslim anger and was a turning point in the European perception of Muslims. Death threats were made against this writer for mocking and lampooning Islam and its founder and for doing so in a language most Muslims thought filthy and scurrilous. As mentioned earlier, when the Danish

newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published cartoons about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad in 2005 (many of them were not particularly offensive), Muslims in Europe and the rest of the world mounted vigorous and in several cases violent protests, leading to nearly a hundred deaths, though none in Europe. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a naturalized Somali Muslim filmmaker who was then living in the Netherlands, was threatened with death and had to go into hiding because her documentary *Submission* showed words of the Qur'an written on the back, stomach, and legs of a partly dressed woman to highlight women's oppression in the name of Islam. Although Ayaan Hirsi Ali remains unharmed and has now joined a conservative American think tank, Theo Van Gogh, who directed the film and declined protection, was shot and decapitated with a butcher's knife by a Muslim. When challenged by a petrified bystander, Muhammad, his assassin, is reported to have said that his victim had "asked for it" and that "now you all know what you can expect."<sup>17</sup> The Moroccan-Dutch painter Rachid Ben Ali received death threats because of the homosexual themes in his work and his satirical treatment of fundamentalist *imams*. Fearing reprisals, several critical scholars of the Qur'an write under pseudonyms. Christoph Luxenberg, a pseudonymous author, argues that some key words in the Qur'an are derived from Aramaic, the language group of most Middle Eastern Jews and Christians, and have meanings that are quite different from their conventional readings. He fears that even this might be too much for some Muslims.<sup>18</sup> Many Muslims have a problem with critical and historical examinations of the Qur'an, and it is likely to take decades before they become used to this type of analysis.

While small groups of Muslim militants have reacted violently against the works of Christoph Luxenberg, Rachid Ben Ali, and others like them, many either ignore or dismiss them with varying degrees of disapproval. *The Satanic Verses* and to a lesser extent *Submission* are in a separate category because of the kinds of issues that they raise. Even here there is no unanimity among Muslims. A sizeable group considers violence to be justified in such cases, but many disapprove of it—although they feel that these works stretch freedom of expression beyond acceptable limits. There is thus a deep difference of opinion between liberals and Muslims on this point, and it is likely to trigger acute conflicts from time to time. These disagreements are not over the value of freedom of expression, however, but rather over the compromises that are necessary between free speech and religious sensibilities. These disagreements are not only between Muslims and liberals, for the Mus-



lim view is shared by many other religious groups and some liberals, and the liberal view enjoys some support with a small number of Muslims. The editor of the *Jyllands-Posten*, which published the controversial cartoons in 2005, had three years earlier rejected those about Jesus on the ground that they would offend Christians. In October 2005, a French court ordered a marketing company to remove posters featuring a tasteless depiction of the Last Supper. As long as Muslim protests are peaceful and nonintimidating and stay within the limits of the law, they need not arouse undue anxiety. Indeed, liberals should welcome them out of respect for the principle of freedom of expression as a useful corrective to the excesses of its absolutist champions and to show Muslims in public discussion why some of their views are unacceptable.

### **Threat to Secular Europe**

One of the major causes of European anxieties about Muslims is related to religion. Liberals in general and European liberals in particular have long been troubled by religion. For some, religion rejects many of the central principles of liberalism (such as humanism, individualism, critical rationality, scientific inquiry, freedom of thought, and belief in progress) and represents a reactionary and obscurantist form of thought. Others welcome religion as a necessary corrective to human hubris and a valuable moral resource, provided it is suitably rationalized and reformed and does not seek to dominate political life. Whether their secularism is comprehensive or narrowly political, almost all liberals are convinced that political life should be organized along secular lines. The state, they argue, is equipped to deal with material and moral interests, not with the destiny of the human soul. Since the state deals with matters that all citizens have in common, its affairs should be conducted in a secular language that they all understand and share and in terms of public reasons that they can critically assess. It is inherently coercive and must stay clear of religious and other areas in which coercion has no place. It should treat all its citizens equally and respect their freedom of conscience, which it cannot do if it is tied to a particular religion.

In the liberal view, Muslims challenge this historical consensus and threaten to reopen long-settled controversies. They reject the comprehensive secularization of society and even its more limited political form and introduce religion into political life at several levels. They make demands on the public schools that are based on religion—including demanding that a particular form of animal slaughter be used for food served in public schools, taking time off for prayer during working

hours, wearing the *hijab*, and being exempted from certain requirements. They want the state to protect their religious beliefs and practices by restricting the freedom of expression of others and imposing unfair burdens on others. They reason about political matters in religious terms, debating whether the Qur'an allows loyalty to the state, support for democratic institutions, political participation, equal rights for women, or participation in a particular war. In these and other ways, Muslims introduce a theological form of political reasoning that others cannot participate in but are deeply affected by. This rules out any form of shared public discourse, which is an essential element of citizenship. Liberals cannot see how a secular political system can cope with this sudden intrusion of religion, especially one that rejects any form of the private-public distinction on which all modern states are based. Their anxiety is further compounded by fears that the Muslim example might encourage other religious groups to demand special treatment and might lead over time to the disintegration of the liberal political order.

Although Europeans are right to worry about the dangers posed by militant Islam, their anxieties arise largely from a misunderstanding of how their societies are actually constituted and conduct their affairs. No European society has built an American-style wall of separation between state and church, and even in the United States, the separation is not rigid and is applied to the church as an organized institution rather than to religion as a form of moral and political discourse. Although secular on one level, European states are open to religion on other levels. Indeed, because they are confident of their strong secular public culture, they do not normally feel threatened by the public role that is played by religion.

No European society or political system is secular in the narrow sense of the term. Europe's Christian heritage has shaped and continues to shape its vocabulary, self-understanding, institutions, ideals, and practices. The ideas of human dignity, equal human worth, and the unity of humankind derive their moral energy from it and reappear in modern Europe in their secularized form. The views of human nature and history that inform much of European political thought and practice, many of its current laws and practices, and even such trivial things as treating Sundays, Christmas Day, and the New Year's Day as public holidays are all examples of the continuing influence of Christianity. The fact that historical roots are often forgotten and religion survives as culture does not mean that the religious basis or overtones of these practices go unnoticed by non-Christians. Muslims and devout Christians do not intro-

duce an alien element in an otherwise secular society. Rather, they state loudly in the same language what the rest of society says in a whisper.

The theological style of reasoning about political matters that worries liberals is not unique to Muslims. Antiabortion activists, antiwar pacifists, some environmentalists, champions of global justice, and opponents of Sunday trading reason from within the Christian, Judaic, or some other religious tradition. And some liberals reproduce basic Christian beliefs in a secular language, as becomes clear when they are pressed to articulate and defend them. Contrary to what liberals imagine, European public life does not and cannot rest on a homogeneous view of public reason, for the latter is not a neutral and sanitized species of reason but is, like all other forms of reasons, embedded in traditions or philosophical frameworks. European public life is plural and includes different forms of reasoning, such as secular, religious, a mixture of the two, and the countless varieties of each of them. Liberals wonder how citizens can communicate across different moral and political languages. In fact, they manage reasonably well.

Since many of these languages are precipitates of European history and form part of its common heritage, Europeans grow up acquiring considerable familiarity and even a measure of sympathy with some of them and do not notice their society's mixed discourse. They themselves sometimes unknowingly speak in several moral languages. And when they do not speak a language, they often understand it well enough to respond to its speakers. From time to time, there are passages of incomprehension and breakdowns in communication, and then they seek to improve their knowledge of other languages, find a common language, turn to translators and interpreters, leave the matter unresolved, reach a tentative compromise, or do one of several other familiar things. One thing that is troublesome about Muslim political reasoning is its unfamiliarity. And the way to respond to that unfamiliarity is to find more occasions for greater interaction, sympathetic dialogue, and multicultural education and for Muslim spokesmen to acquire competence in other languages, especially the secular.

Secularism is a complex concept. Since religion matters to the majority of Europeans and attacks on religion can easily provoke public disorder, no European political system excludes it from political life. At the same time, no European state allows religion to colonize political life and threaten its citizens' liberties. The history of every modern European state is a story of how best to balance these religious and political requirements. All European states are secular in the sense that they

do not impose a religion on their citizens, do not make citizenship rights dependent on subscription to that religion, are not generally guided by religious considerations in making laws and policies, and do not derive their legitimacy from religious sources. They allow religion a place in political life, including religion-based political parties and a religion-grounded political rhetoric. They also have institutional mechanisms for maintaining regular contacts with major religious organizations, and many states provide public funds to enable religious groups to undertake secular activities.

Great Britain funds Anglican, Catholic, and Jewish schools, and its government informally but regularly consults religious bodies on matters relating to them. In France, the state finances chaplains' offices in state schools, hospitals, prisons, and the military; funds morning religious broadcasts through France 2 television; and pays the salaries of teachers in confessional schools if they agree to follow the state curriculum and make doctrinal teaching optional. In Germany, the Jewish community, the Catholic dioceses, and the regional Protestant churches enjoy the status of publicly recognized corporations, a uniquely German legal category. The state collects taxes (*Kirchensteuer*) from members of churches and gives the money to the churches after deducting a previously agreed-on administrative charge. Nearly 80 percent of publicly funded nursery schools are run by churches on behalf of the state, and so are a number of hospitals and other welfare institutions. The Netherlands has its "pillars," which include its major religious communities. And although the most secular country in Europe, France, refuses to take any notice of group differences, it recognizes those based on religion and regularly consults the representatives of the officially recognized national organizations of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. Whether European states are right to do any of these things is an important question that does not concern us here. They do so because of their history and political constraints, and we should begin by accepting it as a fact of political life.

Within this framework, Muslims pose no major problem. All that most of them ask for (and what European states should do) is to find ways to accommodate them without radically altering the existing structure. This is broadly what is happening in practice—in some cases proactively and in others, after considerable resistance. France has set up a Council of Muslim Faith, a national representative body that has the right to speak on behalf of French Muslims and enjoys a consultative status. In the Netherlands, Muslims are part of "pillarization" and

are provided with state-funded religious schools and television channels. In Belgium, Islam has been a full member of the Council of Religions since 1974. Spain, which had a strong Islamic presence for centuries, tried for years to define its identity in opposition to it. In November 1992, it reached an accord with the Islamic Commission of Spain that was similar to one that was reached with other religious communities. The accord dealt with Muslim demands, such as the provision of *halal* meat in public schools, specific burial places, the right to take religious holidays, the recognition of religious rights in public institutions (hospitals, prisons, and the armed forces), tax relief, the authority to perform civil marriages, and religious education in public schools. Although parts of the accord remain unimplemented because of a lack of political will and funds, it represents a public acceptance of Muslims as an equal religious community with the others.

European societies have in these and other ways accommodated Muslims without compromising their secular character. Muslims are given regular access to power, their religious interests are taken into account, and their requests discussed and conceded, shelved or rejected. At the same time, the secular historical settlement remains firmly in place, and Muslims have not generally asked for, will not be allowed, and should not be allowed to make major changes to it. Indeed, since the existing arrangements give them full and equal civil and religious freedoms (often far greater than those that they enjoy in sectarian Muslim societies), these arrangements rightly claim and generally receive their moral support. They also make it easier for Muslims to challenge the militant minority's mindless fulminations against the godless land of infidels. Liberal society has great intellectual and institutional resources and flexibility.

### **Defending Liberal Society**

Many Europeans argue that Muslims are deeply uncomfortable with the basic ethos and constitutive principles of liberal society and are unable or unwilling to give it their moral allegiance. Muslims, they contend, dismiss liberal society as materialistic, soulless, permissive, individualistic, self-indulgent, given to the satisfaction of every passing desire, sexually obsessed, centered on rights rather than duties, committed to the cult of self-expression and self-fulfillment, devoid of a spiritual basis, and hence incompatible with a truly human life. Since Muslims are supposed to be self-proclaimed enemies of liberal society and to want to

overturn it by “civilizing” the Europeans, they are considered a mortal threat to it.

While European anxieties are not wholly misconceived, they homogenize Muslims and treat them as an undifferentiated mass. Some Muslims oppose liberal society, some others are fully committed to it, and most fall between the two positions. Furthermore, radical criticisms of Western society are also advanced from different angles by Christian and Jewish leaders, conservatives, socialists, and even liberals. If such critiques were to be considered subversive and unacceptable, all these groups and not just Muslims would have to be declared enemies of liberal society. Liberal society values criticism and diversity of views and relies on them to revitalize itself. It should therefore welcome Muslim critics, engage in a dialogue with them, and accept what it finds valuable in them. The only politically relevant questions are whether Muslims are willing to adapt themselves to liberal society and live as good citizens and (more important) how liberal society can legitimize itself in their eyes and secure their allegiance.

We saw earlier that first-generation Muslims had no problem adjusting to liberal society and accepting its obligations. They did not organize their personal lives the way that most of their fellow citizens did, but they were able to discharge their duties and responsibilities as citizens. Second- and third-generation Muslims grow up imbibing the ethos and values of liberal society and are at ease with it. Some disapprove of some aspects of it (such as its permissiveness, sexually obsessed culture, consumption of alcohol, and materialism), but they have no quarrel with its other values and practices (such as privacy and autonomy in making decisions about their lives). Some reject parentally arranged marriages, choose their own careers, and freely choose to wear the *hijab* and follow other religious practices. These expressions of autonomy and a self-chosen Islamic identity distinguish their religiosity from that of their parents. In some areas (such as family structure, banking and business practices, and communal activities), young Muslims organize their social lives differently than the rest of society does. Unless these practices violate civil and criminal laws, they remain matters of individual choice and should arouse no anxiety. They represent what John Stuart Mill called “experiments in living,” add to the richness and vitality of society, and can easily be accommodated by liberal society.

The question of how to defend liberal society and secure Muslim allegiance is more complex. Liberals do not want to say that “this is how we do things here” because they feel that this argument is valid in rela-

tion to local customs and traffic rules but does not apply to moral values. They want to avoid moral coercion but still want to convince Muslims that liberal values are the best way to live. Difficulties arise when Westerners try to give transculturally compelling reasons in defense of the liberal values of Western, secular society. Although some values (such as respect for human life, human dignity, and equal human worth) are acceptable to Muslims, other values (such as individualism, personal autonomy, individual choice, and minimum restraints on freedom of expression) are internal to the liberal tradition and are not transcultural. Liberals find them convincing and even self-evident, but they do not convince many Muslims. Other immigrant groups face similar difficulties with Western values, but some accept them because they find supporting reasons within their tradition or because they have self-doubts or fear negative reactions from society. Many Muslims are as certain of their values and as determined to live by them as are secular Westerners, and they fear that Muslims values will be eroded by the society at large.

The stage is now set for mutual hostility and suspicion between Muslims and secular liberals. Some people in each group fear the other group politically, morally, and culturally and believe that their group cannot survive without defeating the other group. Unlike Muslims, who believe that Allah has established their way of life and is on their side, liberals must defend Western secular values without recourse to religion. For some, the liberal panic is partly fueled by self-doubt because they cannot make a transculturally compelling case for tolerating some of their cherished values. Compelling others to live by the latter therefore gives them an uneasy conscience, and since Muslims have precipitated it, they have become a moral irritant, an object of fear and resentment.

Liberals get into this difficulty because they claim more for liberal society than is warranted. The liberal way of life is historically contingent and embedded in a particular culture or form of social self-understanding. It is not mandated by human nature or grounded in universal reason. Good internal reasons can be given in support of it (such as those based on a society's history, experiences, moral traditions, cultural and religious heritage, and level of development), but these reasons do not (and there is no reason why they should) convince all human beings and command their allegiance. It is enough if they are good reasons, publicly debated, and carry conviction with all or most members of society. The liberal secular society represents one good way to orga-



nize human life, and that moral basis is strong enough to allow it to use such compulsion as is unavoidable and prudent to defend itself. It is not the best, the most rational, or the only universally valid form of good society. When liberals make such a claim, as many European liberals do, they not only cannot redeem it but end up accusing Muslims of being irrational, morally obtuse, backward—which is not a way to win them over. Liberals should try to persuade Muslims that the liberal way of life is one good way to live, that they understand their humanity in this way, and that Muslims should respect it. Their aim should be limited (defending a particular society rather than prescribing a universal model) and modest (making a good case for their model rather than claiming that no rational man can fail to be convinced by it).

Liberals (perhaps Muslim liberals) should also show that support for many of the central liberal values can be found within the Islamic tradition itself and that Muslims should uphold these values for their own internal reasons. This is already beginning to happen. In France, some Muslim leaders are trying to develop a liberally oriented *Islam de France* rather than the traditional *Islam en France*. In Italy, they are seeking to develop an Italian Islam that is free from traditional conservative ideologies and at ease with modernity and liberal values. “One does not have to think and behave as an Arab” to be an “authentic Muslim,” as some of them put it. Similar trends are noticeable in Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. Converts to Islam play a crucial but ambiguous role. Although some seek to prove their sincerity by taking a purist and rigid view of their new religion, others act as a bridge and give it a distinctly European orientation.

Once culture is explicitly recognized and brought into the political discourse as a source of claims, an additional form of reasoning is available to both groups. Muslims could argue that when they offer good reasons for their cultural beliefs and practices, these should be respected and suitably accommodated. Liberals could argue that when they offer good reasons for society’s prevailing cultural beliefs and practices, these should be respected and suitably accommodated. Such an appeal to mutual cultural respect has several advantages. It reassures Muslims that their culture is valued by the wider society and that they need not panic, turn inward, or become intransigent. It also reassures the wider society that it remains in charge of its civic and cultural institutions, that Muslims will not seek to undermine it by irresponsible demands, and that the differences between the two can be resolved through a rational dialogue.

An appeal to mutual cultural respect also often avoids and sometimes even resolves otherwise intractable disagreements and controversies. Since the cultural argument works both ways, it is perfectly valid for the two parties to say that one of them cannot be expected to respect the deeply held cultural beliefs and practices of the other unless the latter also does the same. It is often forgotten in the heat generated by the *l'affair du foulard* that over 95 percent of Muslim girls in French public schools did not wear the *hijab* because they respected French culture and its reasons for placing a high value on secularism (*laïcité*), not because wearing a headscarf was contrary to French custom or some universal value.<sup>19</sup>

Difficult situations arise when both parties feel strongly about their cultural norms. Some French Muslim girls insisted on wearing their *hijabs* in public schools, and so did Fereshta Luden, a Muslim teacher in a public school in Germany, to considerable public outrage.<sup>20</sup> Clashes can be between important cultural norms, between a human right and a cultural norm, and sometimes even between two human rights. Arguments can be made on both sides of any controversial issue. The French *laïcité* and the German principle of religious neutrality could be modified to allow the *hijab* and other Muslim beliefs and practices. But the traditions of *laïcité* and religious neutrality are valuable historical achievements, and exceptions to them alienate the majority (which is not in Muslims' best interests) and set a precedent whose unexpected long-term consequences could be disastrous. In situations that John Rawls calls reasonable disagreement, good reasons on both sides require that a space be created for mutual accommodation and compromise.

### **Islam and Multicultural Society**

Like their counterparts elsewhere, European Muslims have some difficulty in coming to terms with multicultural societies, and this aggravates European anxieties. Many religious people feel that their religion is the best one of all, and this sense of superiority is particularly strong among Muslims. They believe that the Qur'an is unique in being the literal, unmediated, exhaustive, and final revelation of the divine will. According to it, the word of God was also revealed to Jews and Christians, who are therefore respected and whose prophets it reveres. Because Jewish and Christian revelations are believed to have suffered corruption through human mediation and failures, Islam is supposed to confirm, continue, and complete them. Because of this history, Islam has a record of tolerance and being at ease with these two faiths. As the

Qur'anic *suras* say, "We have created you nations and tribes that you may know one another" and "We have created colors and tongues," thereby stressing the centrality of plurality.<sup>21</sup>

Islamic pluralism, however, is shadowed by absolutist assumptions. As the Qur'anic *suras* say, "O mankind! The messenger has come to you in truth from Allah: believe in him, it is best for you". And again, "Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him". Although Jews and Christians ("the people whom God has guided") are to be respected and left free to practice their religions, they remain legitimate targets for conversion. Other religions (such as Hinduism) are dismissed as polytheistic, idolatrous, and unworthy of respect. The remarkable military successes of early and medieval Islam generated among its followers a triumphalist spirit and seemed to them to confirm their belief in its absolute superiority. During the centuries of European colonization, this belief was and remains almost the sole basis of their collective pride and has a powerful appeal for the overwhelming majority of them.

The belief in the absolute superiority of Islam is reflected in the constant invocation of its past glories by the moderate and militant Muslims alike. It is also evident in many of its beliefs and practices. While Muslims have a duty to convert the followers of other religions, they are not themselves free to convert to another religion. Conversion is considered apostasy, which is an act of treason that merits punishment in this world and the next. Most Muslims are anxious that others should learn about their religion, but few take much interest in other religions. Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women (who are expected to convert), but Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslims. This cannot be attributed to the current Muslim feeling of siege or fear of loss of identity. Even in the self-confident Ottoman empire, Jews and Christians were tolerated but were treated as second-class citizens and lacked the right to participate fully in its political life. They were free to convert to Islam, but they were forbidden to convert Muslims to other faiths or to marry Muslim women.

Because of all this, many European Muslims' attitude to the multicultural society is one-sided. They understand it in the light of the millet model of the Ottoman empire in which different communities followed their own customs and led more or less self-contained lives. They welcome a multicultural society because it gives them the freedom to live by and propagate their own religious beliefs and practices. But many of them also feel uncomfortable with it because it puts them on a par with (and exposes them and their children to the influence of) other religions

and secular cultures. Religious and cultural pluralism presents Islam as a religion of Muslims in a way that Judaism is of Jews and Hinduism of Hindus and rejects its claim to universality and absolute superiority.

Such an approach to a multicultural society leads many Muslims to take an instrumental view of it—to welcome it only to the extent that it gives them the space to maintain their identity. It also encourages a narrow and static view of multiculturalism—not as a transformative and open-minded dialogue between people belonging to cultures and religions but as a compartmentalized social and cultural universe in which different groups live out their ghettoized existence. As a result, large groups of Muslims tend to withdraw or to keep a comfortable distance from the wider society and deny themselves the opportunity to interact with others, understand their views and concerns, and take a critical view of themselves. This partly explains their current tendency to be unduly defensive about their religion and history, see slights where none might be intended, lack perspective on minor criticisms, fall prey or react disproportionately to misguided right-wing provocations, and in general to appear to want to live in Europe on their own terms.

European Muslims are changing, but many are still not able to participate enthusiastically in the creative tensions and controversies of a multicultural society and make the contributions that their long history proves that they are capable of making. For the first time in their history, they are living in large numbers in societies where they are neither rulers nor subjects but citizens who enjoy equal rights with other citizens in liberal democracies.<sup>18</sup> This requires them to rethink traditional views on their rights and obligations, their relationships with other religions and cultures, and their responses to modernity. Some of their thinkers (such as Mohammed Arkoun and Tariq Ramadan) have begun to develop an Islamic theology of pluralism that is suited to multicultural society, and their ideas, along with those of their American counterparts, are receiving sympathetic attention among Muslims in the West and also in Muslim countries.<sup>22</sup> If this trend continues and Muslim intellectuals in Europe develop a creative Euro-Islam (an Islam that is informed by European values and experience), they might inspire long overdue debates and offer valuable guidance to the global *umma*.<sup>23</sup>

## Muslim Youth

I have argued that the Muslim presence in Europe does not constitute a political and cultural threat and can, if handled with wisdom on both

sides, enrich European thought and life. A small but deeply alienated group of young Muslims, however, is a legitimate source of concern. In almost all European societies, young Muslims underachieve educationally and are among the poorest. In Great Britain, for example, over half of Muslims live in areas with the most deprived housing conditions (compared to 20 percent of the total population), and their unemployment rate is twice the national average. Nearly 70 percent of Muslim children live in poverty and receive state support, and some 36 percent leave school without qualifications or degrees. These socioeconomic disadvantages are compounded by discrimination, marginalization, and negative stereotyping. Young Muslims also are alienated from their parents' culture, which they either do not understand or find conservative, backward, restrictive, and not a source of pride. There is often limited emotional intimacy between parents and children and little meaningful conversation. Problems relating to drugs, mental health, personal relationships, and sexuality are considered taboo and rarely discussed in families. Not surprisingly, many parents and elders admit ignorance of what younger family members think, feel, and do (as was confirmed in the case of some of those involved in the London terrorist attacks in July 2005).

Although they have grown up in Britain, many young Muslims lack roots in the country and feel alienated from it as well, for several interrelated reasons. Residential concentration in some parts of the country means that they lead parallel lives, go to predominantly Muslim schools, and have limited contact with their non-Muslim counterparts. Unemployment denies them the opportunity to participate in one of the most important areas of life and to get to know and become an integral part of British society. Those who succeed in breaking through the barrier sometimes find that the wider society fears and takes a demeaning view of them and that its view of its national identity is too narrow and exclusive to find a respectable place for them.

Detached from their parental and British cultures, alienated young Muslims tend to form their own groups based on a shared subculture of defiance and victimhood. Some turn to drug trafficking, prostitution, gang warfare, and petty crimes. There is an increasing trend toward drug addiction among young Muslims, and a large number of single mothers in London are Muslims. Many who avoid crime turn to Islam to give them a sense of dignity and identity, a particularly noticeable trend among college and university students.

Although religious consciousness is strong among most Muslims, it takes a different form among the alienated youth. Their parents' Islam is

largely traditional, tied up with the culture of their homeland, and bound up with their ethnic and other identities. The parents revere the Qur'an, but their Islam is not narrowly centered on it and is not textual in character. They have no Arabic and rely on the traditionalist *ulama* who come from their native homelands to interpret it for them. The Islam of young Muslims is very different. Many of them read Arabic, have direct access to the text, and interpret it themselves or rely on others like them. Their Islam is "purged" of local culture and is textual in its orientation. It is not a woven-into and a taken-for-granted aspect of their lives as it is for their parents but a self-consciously adopted badge of identity that needs to be constantly asserted. Since it is a matter of conscious commitment, it is shadowed by a deep fear that the commitment might weaken or become diluted. They therefore become loud, rigid, and uncompromising in their religiosity both to guard themselves against going soft and to ask others to pull them up if they should do so. Compared to their parents, a much larger majority of those between sixteen and twenty-four years of age favor Islamic schools over secular public schools, want women to wear headscarves, prefer the *Shari'a* to British laws, and believe that a Muslim converting to another religion deserves death.<sup>24</sup>

Freed from ethnic, national, and other ties and turning to religion as the sole basis of their identity, young Muslims are available for mobilization by militant groups with a global agenda. These groups idealize and flatter them by describing them as the "true elite" who are charged with defending the honor of the *umma*. The pursuit of global causes gives them a sense of power, a purpose, a thrill, a sense of belonging, and a ready network of friends. Western foreign policies, the invasion of Iraq, and the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay prison abuses give their anger a moral edge and intensify their sense of victimhood.

There is also another important factor at work. Joining the ranks of Muslim fighters in different parts of the world and engaging in terrorist acts at home and abroad involve risking one's life, to which young Muslims (like others) are naturally averse. This is overcome by an increasingly popular interpretation of Islam among the young that thinks nothing of human life. Death in the cause of Allah is a mark of the elect. It is a calling and an expression of one's love for Allah. It also opens the door to paradise, where one is reunited with the loved ones who have died and eventually with those one has left behind. While the latter are on earth, they will be well looked after by Allah (as a reward for one's noble deed) or by other member of one's group. Death is seen as noth-

ing but a wink marking the end of a brief and painful sojourn on earth and the beginning of a happy eternal life. Giving up one's life is thus made to seem virtually cost-free and to represent a rational choice, though the true believer sees it in much more grandiose terms.

The British situation is reproduced in different forms and degrees in the rest of Europe.<sup>25</sup> Relative unemployment rates for young Muslims are twice the national average in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain and four times as high in Sweden, yet antidiscrimination legislation is relatively weaker. Few Muslims occupy high public offices, represent their country abroad, or in other public ways symbolize their integration. As for educational underachievement, average income, child poverty, residential concentration, and interethnic friendships, some European societies are marginally better on some indices and worse on others. Partly because of poverty, marginalization, alienation, and drug trafficking and partly because of the discriminatory systems of criminal justice, the rate of imprisonment of immigrants (many of them Muslims) is considerably higher (in some cases, three times higher) than that of the native population.<sup>26</sup> All West European countries have a small but significant rootless, deeply alienated, and sulking Muslim underclass that defines its identity in exclusively religious terms. This group sees itself as Muslims *in* Europe (that is, Muslims who happen to live in Europe without any commitment to it), not as Muslims *of* Europe (that is, those who see it as their home) or as *Europeanized* Muslims or those who share its culture and values. Islam is the sole basis of their personal and public identity and is freed from the moderating influence of other identities. Since this is precisely what the Hizb ut-Tahir, the Wahhabis, the Salafis, and others advocate, they gravitate toward them.<sup>27</sup>

Reclaiming Muslim youth requires addressing some of the factors discussed earlier, and it is the joint responsibility of both Muslim communities and the wider society. Senior politicians and public figures throughout Europe say that this involves "winning their hearts and minds," but no one has a clear idea of how hearts and minds (which are not the same thing) function and what winning them means and involves. It cannot mean that the alienated youth should come to love their country of settlement (which "winning their hearts" implies) or that they should uncritically endorse all its policies or take a liberal or moderate view of their religion (which "winning their minds" implies). These things are not in the outsider's control and are not even necessary. Instead, European societies should aim at the more modest and realistic



goal of ensuring that young Muslims become responsible citizens, discharge the basic obligations of citizenship (including respect for the law), and over time develop a sense of common belonging with the rest.

Although some widely canvassed proposals—such as asking parents to report on the activities of their children, developing an extensive network of informers, requiring universities to report on Muslim students, spying on what the *imams* say in their Friday sermons, and restricting the overseas visits of young Muslims—cannot be ruled out under all circumstances, they are fraught with grave dangers and often counterproductive. They alienate Muslim communities and also destroy the trust and cohesion that those communities need to carry moral authority with their youth. Teaching citizenship in *madrassas* is of marginal value because that is not where much of the *jihadi* ideology is picked up. And even if it sometimes is, formal classes on moral values can have only a limited impact. Requiring the *imams* to be trained in European societies also has only a limited value because the *jihadi* ideology is picked up not only from them but also from a variety of other sources and there is no reason why locally trained *imams* should be moderate. In the days of globalization, ideas and passions flow through countless channels, and the solution cannot be entirely local.

Individuals develop a commitment to their society and form a view of their place in it on the basis of their experiences of how it views and treats them, and that should be our focus. European societies need to give young Muslims a stake in society, hope for a better future, and opportunities to develop and enjoy multiple and mutually moderating identities. They should, in consultation with them, develop well-thought-out educational, economic, and other strategies to tackle the roots of their disadvantage and alienation, facilitate their upward mobility, and give them access to a wider range of identities. They should treat them with respect and define their societies in a way that all Muslims (including the young) feel an integral and valued part of it. Thanks to the dominant ideology of the nation-state, Western European societies equate the national identity with cultural identity, and the latter with the Judeo-Christian heritage. It is therefore widely held that one cannot be both a Muslim and a full citizen of the country, at least not in equal measure. This is why European converts to Islam are often believed to have abandoned not only their religion but also their culture and national identity. Just as Europeans are beginning to deracialize national identity and to accept that a European can be white, brown, or black, they need to dereligionize it.

While guarding against murderous attacks by all necessary and legitimate means, European societies should stay within the law, respect human rights, and avoid singling out Muslims, challenging their existential legitimacy, and questioning their loyalty. The current state of panic and the measures and attitudes it has spawned suggest that hardly any European society has learned this crucial lesson. No government measures can work without the goodwill and support of Muslim communities, and governments must do nothing to forfeit this. Foreign policy necessarily has domestic implications and cannot be framed in isolation from them. This is particularly so in our interdependent world, where groups of citizens are part of a transnational network and European societies cannot be held hostages to sectional pressures (although they sometimes are), but both justice and the need for a national consensus require that their policies in relation to the Middle East and elsewhere should be much more even-handed than they have been so far.

Muslim communities have an equally important role to play. They need to take a long and overdue critical look at themselves and find ways of overcoming a pervasive sense of victimhood and a tendency to blame all their ills on the wider society. Much of the discussion in Muslim communities rightly highlights the wider society's racism and Islamophobia but wrongly ignores things that the communities themselves can do to regain their individual and collective agency and regenerate themselves. Muslim communities need to repair their disintegrating social fabric, build strong families and supporting networks, take greater interest in and responsibility for their youth, and reform those social and religious practices that stifle and alienate it. Their intellectual and religious leaders need to offer a way of reading Islam that connects with European modernity and counters the perverted interpretations that are popularized by the al-Qaeda and its associates.

Global causes are important and worth pursuing, but they can also become a convenient escape from the vital task of revitalizing the community of which one is a part and where one can make a difference. It is not enough to keep blaming the West (and especially the United States) for the sorry state of the Muslim world. Many Muslim societies are willing accomplices to Western domination. Their complicity, oppressive regimes, and iniquitous treatment of Muslim and non-Muslim minorities need to be exposed and challenged in an even-handed manner. In the age of globalization, Muslim struggles for dignity and equality in Western Europe are inseparable from those in the global *umma*.

## Notes

I am grateful to the reviewers of this journal for their helpful comments.

1. This article is a revised version of "European Liberalism and the 'Muslim Question,'" which appeared in my *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles for an Interdependent World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

2. Most European countries do not include questions on religious affiliation in their censuses. They instead estimate their Muslim populations on the basis of, among other things, immigration statistics. France has between four and six million Muslims; Germany around three million; Italy between 500,000 and 800,000; the Netherlands between 700,000 and 900,000; Belgium around 400,000; and Sweden around 300,000. In Great Britain, the 2001 census asked a question on religion and reported a Muslim population of 1.6 million. These figures do not include illegal immigrants, many of whom have arrived in recent years from Muslim countries. Their number in Western Europe is estimated at between three and seven million. In Spain alone, the number of illegal migrants from North Africa during the last ten years is estimated to be around four million. See Konrad Pédziwiatr, "Muslims in Europe: Demography and Organizations," in *Islam in the European Union: Transnationalism, Youth and the War on Terror*, eds. Yunas Samad and Kasturi Sen. 26–59 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jytte Klausen, *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6. Klausen's book is a perceptive and balanced analysis of the process of Muslim integration in Western Europe.

3. Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 241.

4. Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Umma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 7.

5. Magdi Allam, "Patto Con L' Islam Moderato," *La Repubblica*, January 21, 2003, 1.

6. See Ruba Salih, "The Backward and the New: National, Transnational and Post-national Islam in Europe," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 5 (2004): 999.

7. Quoted in Holger Dohmen, "Wieviel Anatolien verträgt Europa?" *Hamburger Abendblatt*, November 24, 2004, 3.

8. Roger Scruton, "The Muslim Next Door," *National Review*, June 17, 2002, 38. June 17, 2002

9. Islam in Europe became an important area of research from the 1980s onward. The European Science Foundation sponsored a collaborative Europe-wide project in the mid-1980s. Sweden convened a conference appropriately called The New Islamic Presence in Europe in 1986.

10. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 295–303.

11. For a variety of reasons, Muslims in the United States do not arouse this kind of cultural anxiety. Many of them are economically better off and generally come from urban areas. Historical memories of Islam are also different. The geographical distance from Muslim countries is greater. The percentage of Muslims is smaller. Since the census does not gather information on religion, their number is estimated to be between three and six million—that is, less than two percent of the population. At most, only ten percent of the new immigrants are Muslim. Since they are drawn from many different countries, they do not form organized communities. About a third of American Muslims are African American converts; Islam is therefore not seen as a wholly foreign religion. The United States sees itself as a country of immigrants held together by the Constitution rather than as a nation-state based on a shared culture and is less nervous about cultural

and other differences. American society and culture are not so tightly structured as they are in Europe; they also leave greater space for and are less judgmental about diversity. Because the United States is more religious than Europe and allows public expression of religion, Muslims feel more comfortable with it. For a perceptive discussion, see Jocelyn Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and the United States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Muslim immigrants in Western Europe arouse anxiety in a way that other religious and ethnic minorities do not. This has to do with their number, the kinds of demands that they make, their forms and degrees of self-assertion, and the contemporary international situation. Historically speaking, the anxiety provoked by Muslims resembles that associated in earlier times in some countries with Jews and Catholics.

12. In the Netherlands, Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk “announced that immigrants from now on would be compelled to pass an examination in Dutch language and culture and attend 350 hours of classes before becoming permanent residents.” See Vivienne Walt, “Life on the Front Lines,” *Time*, February 28, 2005, 37. In Belgium, Filip Dewinter, the leader of the far-right Vlaams Belang Party, which won nearly a quarter of the national vote in the regional elections in June 2004, “wants to prevent Muslim immigrants from marrying in their home countries and bringing their spouses back to Belgium” (*Ibid.*, 38). In Great Britain, the Labour Government and many of its liberal supporters endorse this idea.

13. Cited in Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Ethnicities and Global Culture: Pants for an Octopus* (Landham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 192.

14. See ICM Survey for the BBC, Radio 4, December 24, 2002. Surprisingly, the proportion of those claiming to be patriotic was higher among men than women (71 percent as opposed to 59 percent). It was higher among those at the top of the occupational hierarchy than those at the lower end (73 percent as opposed to 60 percent) and in the older generation than the younger (90 percent as opposed to 60 percent).

Such polls can be misleading and should be read with care. Words like *patriotic* and even *primary loyalty* mean different things to different people, including the pollster and his or her subjects. Many who love their country would not call themselves patriotic because of the exclusivity, uncritical loyalty, and intensity of passion associated with the term. Our vocabulary in this respect is too poor and limited to express the full range of emotions that people feel toward their country and its population; and these two are not necessarily the same.

15. Most of his audience consisted of young Muslim men whose parents took a rather dim view of him.

16. The “Muslim Manifesto” published by Kalim Siddiqui’s London-based Muslim Institute in 1990 takes a different view. It argues that Muslims have a duty of loyalty to the state in which they have settled but that the loyalty is overridden where it conflicts with the *umma*. The Institute is openly committed to Ayatollah Khomeini and reflects a minority view.

17. A few years earlier, the assassin of Theo Van Gogh had his photograph on the cover of a Dutch magazine and was featured as an example of successful Muslim integration into Dutch society. He later joined an international gang of Muslim terrorists.

18. Paul Cliteur. “Cast Your Discomfort Aside,” *Times Education Supplement*, January 28, 2005, 18.

19. The French case is complicated by the right that Christian pupils have to wear crosses or crucifixes, which Muslims girls complained was discrimination. France could ban the cross or crucifix but did not do so for fear of provoking public outrage and falling foul of human rights. It therefore argued that, unlike the crucifix (which usually is worn as a small pendant that hangs from a chain that is often hidden by clothing), the *hijab* is ostentatious and therefore has a proselytizing dimension that subverts the principle of

*laïcité* in a way that the crucifix does not. Although this argument is not as specious as its critics suggest, I don't feel that it can bear the weight that the French government puts on it.

Wearing a *hijab* can symbolize many different things—subjection to parental or communal pressures, inequality, personal spiritual development, a turning inward, or identity. As some French girls put it, wearing a headscarf made them act more restrained, more inward looking, and less extroverted (which is what they wanted). It can also convey to boys (without actually having to say it), that they are not interested in certain kinds of activities or relationships. Since the *hijab* is open to conflicting interpretations, school authorities and the government face a difficult decision. The French government took it to signify subordination, denial of gender equality, and pressure on other girls to do the same. This enabled it to show that its ban did not contravene Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects the “freedom to manifest one's religion and beliefs.” Switzerland and Turkey have taken a similar legal route. For an excellent discussion of the French case, see John Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like the Headscarf: Islam, the State and Public Sphere* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

20. In Germany, the teacher is a public servant who represents the neutral and impartial state and is expected to be above political, religious, and other markers of identification. This is why he or she is required to wear neutral clothing, not to go on strike, and so on. When Fereshta Ludin decided to wear a headscarf in school, she was told not to. She took the matter to the Federal Constitutional Court on the ground that she had a human right to practice her religion. Although the Court shared the general unease about her action, it ruled in her favor. There have been other such cases where exemptions from established practices were granted to accommodate the right to freedom of religion.

Several leading Germans complained that human rights were being used to change their culture and that Germans were losing control over it. Although some of them did not wish to change any established custom, others wanted to draw a line at practices that they regarded as central to their way of life. This involves striking a delicate balance between respecting human rights and upholding valuable cultural traditions. It is not obvious that human rights should automatically trump traditions. Courts may feel legally constrained to take that view, and then their decisions alienate a large majority and become contentious, as happened in Germany. Such matters are therefore best settled politically. Johannes Kandel, a keen advocate of Christian-Muslim dialogue, expressed this view well when he asked Muslim organizations if they were right to use human rights to “push through their interpretation of Islam by means of the German Courts” and maintain practices that might be deeply offensive to the majority of Germans. See his article in *Islam und Gesellschaft* no. 2 (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, 2003).

Every liberal society contains a structural tension. It is committed both to human rights and to particular cultural traditions. When interpreted in a certain manner or pressed beyond a certain point, human rights might undermine the latter. Conversely, if the cultural traditions were to set the limits of human rights, they would emasculate them. Much good sense is required on the part of both the majority and the minority to maintain their balance.

21. Other verses (such as 2: 136, 5: 48, 6: 83–96, and 29: 46) display a pluralist spirit. For a good discussion, see Ali S. Asani, “‘So That You May Know One Another’: A Muslim American Reflects on Pluralism and Islam,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 588 (2003): 40–51.

22. Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); and Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

23. In the United States, a distinctly American brand of Islam is beginning to emerge which is based on a clear separation between religious and secular matters, the individual's right to interpret the Qur'an, and the final authority of the laity-governing boards of mosques over the *imam*. Some commentators even call this Presbyterian or Baptist Islam. See Yvonne Y. Haddad and J. I. Smith, eds., *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible* (Walnut Creek: Alternative Press, 2002), 128; and J. Esposito and F. Burgat, eds., *Modernising Islam* (London: Hurst, 2003).

24. Populous Poll, cited in Policy Exchange Report, "Living Apart Together," January 30, 2007. Available at <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/>.

25. In France, riots began in the high-rise, decaying, and overcrowded housing estates of Sous-Bois and Montfermeil, where up to half the youth are unemployed and many spend their time watching television and pedaling drugs. They are frequently harassed by the police. Almost a whole generation has experienced these conditions. It is worth noting that American ghettos are quite different from their European counterparts. They have more poverty and violence, but they display a greater community spirit. Religion is generally joyful and uplifting, unlike many European ghettos, where it is aggressive and sour. Women play a greater role in holding families together in the American ghettos.

26. E. Reyneri, *Migrant Insertion in the Informal Economy: Deviant Behaviour and the Impact on Receiving Societies* (Brussels: European Commission, 1999).

27. See Olivier Roy. "Britain, Home-Grown Terror." *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 5, 2005, 1, where he talks of "born again" Muslims and the "revolt of a generation adrift between its culture of origin and westernisation." For an illuminating discussion of Muslims and Multiculturalism, see Tariq Modood, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).