

# The Securitisation of Islam in Europe

Jocelyne Cesari

## Abstract

This paper summarises the main hypotheses and results of the research on the securitisation of Islam. It posits that the securitisation of Islam is not only a speech act but also a policy-making process that affects the making of immigration laws, multicultural policies, anti-discrimination measures and security policies. The paper deconstructs and analyses the premises of such policies as well as their consequences on the civic and political participation of Muslims. The behaviour of Muslims was studied through 50 focus groups conducted in Paris, London, Berlin and Amsterdam over the year 2007-08. The results show a great discrepancy between the assumptions of policy-makers and the political and social reality of Muslims across Europe. The paper presents recommendations to facilitate the greater inclusion of Muslims within European public spheres.

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# THE SECURITISATION OF ISLAM IN EUROPE

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## Introduction

European discourse on Islam is a microcosm of the debate on Islam's compatibility with the West. Because Western countries generally associate Islam with the al-Qaeda movement, the Palestinian issue and Iran, their discussion of the religion involves an essentialised approach to a multifaceted faith. In his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, Mahmood Mamdani refers to this slant as 'culture talk', or viewing the religion as a single unified ideology spreading from Europe to Iraq and Afghanistan. According to this perspective, Islam is steeped in history and absolutely incapable of innovation, and Muslims are defined by an almost compulsive conformity to their past and an inability to address the current challenges of political development and religious liberal thinking. Therefore, culture talk justifies the artificial divide between modern and pre-modern religions and between secularism and Islam.<sup>1</sup> Culture talk has become prevalent in modern international relations discourse, in part because it refers to stereotypes that are familiar to the historical consciousness of Western politicians and intellectuals.

The use of these trite depictions of Islam in professional debates has established a paradoxical policy of European governments both fearing and fostering radicalisation in a process I call the 'securitisation' of Islam. The conditions that lead to this development have already occurred: The European state views Muslim groups as a threat to its survival and takes measures to reassure citizens that it will not allow the incubation of terrorism. However, the politicisation of religion essentially impoverishes and threatens its survival,<sup>2</sup> leading devout Muslims to feel resentful of the interference of non-religious actors. Thus, the measures intended to prevent radicalisation actually engender discontent and prompt a transformation of religious conservatism to fundamentalism. This is the process of securitisation. It involves actors who propose that Islam is an existential threat to European political and secular norms and thereby justifies extraordinary measures against it. Ole Weaver best explains repercussions of such actions: "When mobilised as politics, religion represses the transcendence of the divine. Fear and trembling is replaced by absolute certainty."<sup>3</sup> As an existential concept, faith is easily securitized, and it can incite a proclivity for violence in place of pious concepts.

In this paper, we acknowledge that the politicisation of Islam started in Muslim-majority countries and was intensified and radicalised by Muslim actors before spreading to Europe. In this condition, the situation of Islam in the West cannot be disconnected from the political and

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<sup>1</sup> See Talal Asad, "Secularism, Nation-State, Religion", in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam Modernity*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Carsten Bagge Laustsen and Ole Waever, "In Defense of Religion, Sacred Reverent Objects for Securitisation", in Pavlos Hatzopoulos (ed.), *Religion in International Relations, the Return from Exile*, London: Palgrave, 2003.

religious contexts of Muslims in the Muslim world.<sup>4</sup> This research analyses the conditions and outcomes of the securitisation of Islam in the European context.

European nations face a paradox: Although they seek to facilitate the socioeconomic integration of Muslims, anti-terrorism and security concerns fuel a desire to compromise liberties and restrict Islam from the public space. As domestic and national concerns converge, these factors result in cultural talk that tends to overemphasise the role of religion in the process of integration. Unfortunately, the characterisation of Islam in the current debate has begun a process of institutionalising the notion of Islam as a security threat. In both political rhetoric and policy areas, politicians and academics are conflating factors such as immigrant background, ethnicity, socio-economic deprivation and the war on terror with Islam as a religion. This research shows that the confusion has exacerbated the securitisation process.

In order to analyse this phenomenon, we proceeded in two ways. First, we looked at both the political discourses and rhetoric of policy-makers that contribute to the securitisation of Islam in a top-down manner. Next, we collected data on the attitudes of Muslim populations on issues such as religious identity, political participation and discrimination. This field research was conducted among Muslims of diverse ethnicity, national culture, generation, education level and gender. It took place in cities across Europe, including Paris, London, Amsterdam and Berlin, in order to provide a representative picture of this multifaceted issue. We organised 12 focus groups, in which more than 500 Muslims participated, across these cities. We also organised at least two control groups per city to discuss the same topics with non-Muslim immigrants.

## 1. Most Muslims are immigrants or have an immigrant background

According to the best estimates, Muslims currently constitute approximately 5% of the European Union's 425 million inhabitants. There are about 4.5 million Muslims in France, followed by 3 million in Germany, 1.6 million in the United Kingdom and more than half a million each in Italy and the Netherlands. Although other nations have populations composed of fewer than 500,000 Muslims, these can be substantial minorities in small countries like Austria, Sweden or Belgium. In general, these populations are younger and more fertile than the domestic populations, prompting many journalists and even academics to hypothesise that these numbers will become even more significant in the future.

The majority of Muslims in Europe come from three regions of the world. The largest ethnic group is Arab, comprising some 45% of European Muslims, followed by Turkish and South Asian. The groups are unevenly distributed based on European nations' immigrant history. In France and the United Kingdom, for example, Muslim populations began arriving from former colonies in the middle of the twentieth century, leading to a predominately North African ethnic group in France and South Asian migrants in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, the Muslim community in Germany began with an influx of 'guest-workers', mainly from Turkey, during the post-war economic boom. Although immigrants arrive in Europe from all over the world, the countries with existing Muslim populations tend to attract those from the same ethnic background. Among current European Union member states, only Greece has a significant indigenous population of Muslims, residing primarily in Thrace.

Therefore, categories of 'immigrant' and 'Muslim' overlap in Western Europe, unlike in the United States where immigration debates centre on economic and social concerns such as

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<sup>4</sup> See Jocelyne Cesari, *Muslims in Europe: Local and global conditions of integration in religion and democracy in Europe*, Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem, 2008.

wages, assimilation and language.<sup>5</sup> In America, terrorism remains at the margins of such issues: In 2006, the US Congress rarely referred to terrorism when considering new immigration measures. In Europe, by contrast, the association of Islam and immigration has led to a tightening of immigration laws specifically targeting migrants from Muslim countries.

Over the last few years, European governments have greatly restricted immigration. Part of this is certainly due to the difficulties of unemployment and poor economic conditions. For the more economically-developed countries, such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom, the prospect of admitting significant numbers of low-skill workers has become economically untenable. Instead, these countries have moved in the direction of policies oriented toward the acquisition of more highly skilled immigrants, who are seen as more economically productive. In France, Nicolas Sarkozy's call for a more selective immigration policy was supported by the legislature in May 2006. The prime minister alluded to the implications of the legal changes for France's Muslim population by stating that new migrants must accept the publication of potentially offensive or satirical cartoons in newspapers and that women must take identity photographs without head covers as well as accept treatment by male doctors. The harsher measures have been supported by both sides of the political spectrum. In October 2007, the French Parliament went further by passing an immigration bill that sanctioned DNA testing, allowed for government collection of ethnic statistics and required applicants to pass exams on the English language and French values. Although the French Constitutional Court overturned the provision allowing for the collection of ethnic statistics, it upheld the other facets of the law.

Some of the proposals for immigration and naturalisation changes openly target Muslim migrants. The Netherlands and Germany, for example, insist that immigrants must espouse Western liberal values before entering the countries: The Dutch Ministry of Aliens Affairs and Integration produced a film intended to help screen 'inappropriate' immigrants by showing them the extremes of Dutch gender relations and sexuality: The depiction of naked beachgoers, public displays of homosexual affection and assertive female characters aim to shock and surprise the socially conservative Muslims. In the German state Baden-Wurttemberg, new citizenship tests include questions concerning the willingness of parents to allow children to participate in swimming lessons, in an obvious reference to past tension stemming from Muslim conservatism. Furthermore, such tests were selectively demanded for individuals from Muslim countries.<sup>6</sup> These new measures circumvent the logic of immigration preceding integration by requiring that migrants show signs of integration *before* even entering the EU. All these changes in immigration policy demonstrate changing expectations of migrants, who are now required to show more compatibility than ever with the lifestyles of host countries.

The issue of asylum-seekers in the United Kingdom has resulted in vigorous public and political debate, although Muslims have not been specific targets. Since 2003, Spain and Italy have tightened immigration policies, and it is too early to determine how these policies will be implemented with respect to Muslims. Spain has a history of benevolence toward asylum-seekers, and in the past it has provided applicants with the right to interpreters, legal counsel and

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<sup>5</sup> In the US, the prototypical immigrant is a low-skilled Mexican or Central American worker rather than a conservative Muslim. Of the 15.5 million legal immigrants who entered the United States from between 1989 and 2004, only 1.2 million were from predominantly Muslim countries. There was a sharp drop from more than 100,000 per year prior to 2002 down to approximately 60,000 in 2003, but this recovered somewhat to 90,000 in 2004. Immigration in the United States is thus a topic in which the issues of Islam and terrorism are at best marginal issues.

<sup>6</sup> "Putting Citizenship to the Test", *International Herald Tribune*, 12 September 2006.

other assistance. The latest measures of restricting immigration, however, have caused human rights groups to criticise the reduced rights of asylum-seekers.<sup>7</sup>

The focus groups that we conducted among Muslims revealed that the migrants view their religion as a major source of discrimination and exclusion codified in new immigration policies. Most of the Muslims interviewed said that the perception of Muslim migrants as ‘foreign’ greatly affected their capacity to act as legitimate social or religious actors. This externalisation of their condition creates frustration among the new generations born or educated in Europe.

## 2. Hardening of the national discourse on immigration

In Europe, the pressure caused by increasing immigrant populations and the erosion of national boundaries through the transnational force of the European Union have led to a rising incidence of nationalist rhetoric and an essentialising approach to identity.

Anti-immigrant sentiment is common in many countries facing the difficulties of integrating culturally diverse populations. However, in European countries, this can degenerate into what can be termed more accurately ‘Islamophobia.’. Because immigration introduces such a large proportion of Muslims into Europe, the anti-immigrant rhetoric of extreme right-wing parties has become markedly anti-Muslim. The French National Front has adopted an electoral strategy that associates Islam with terrorism. Jean-Marie Le Pen described the potential radicalisation of Muslim immigrants in terms that implicated him for inciting hatred,<sup>8</sup> but his party still came in second in the 2002 French election. Germany’s Deputy Interior Minister August Hanning only worsened this fear by telling citizens that the government believes there are roughly 700 German citizens involved in Islamic extremist movements.<sup>9</sup> Since then, the term *leitkultur*, which refers to a European cultural sphere and had been taboo for many years, returned to the vernacular and can now be employed approvingly by members of the centre-right. Even in Italy, the Lega Nord has adopted anti-Muslim rhetoric, deploying slightly modified versions of traditional anti-Semitic devices as weapons against Islam. In the UK, Tony Blair’s government criminalised condoning terrorism in speeches both at home and abroad.<sup>10</sup> Both Muslims and non-Muslims alike fear that the label ‘terrorist’ is being used to criminalise what they consider resistance or liberation movements. The definition of terrorism is, after all, highly controversial, and results from political decisions more than from objective facts concerning movements or groups. In many European countries, it has become acceptable to associate Muslim immigration and the potential for terrorism.

The changing political stance toward terrorism is far-reaching, but perhaps the most dramatic change has been in the political culture of the Netherlands, where violence and death threats have become increasingly common in an acrimonious debate. Ideas surfacing in the public debate now have called for the deportation of second generation Moroccans, a ban on gender segregated mosques and even the prohibition of Islam itself. Anti-Islamic discourse has become a staple of political discourse in the Netherlands: Pym Fortuyn had openly criticised Islam in inflammatory terms prior to his assassination in 2002, and his party continued to run on a

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<sup>7</sup> “Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Europe, Central Asia and North America, Report 2006”, International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, 8 June 2006.

<sup>8</sup> “Country Profile: France”, Euro-Islam.info, an active network of researchers and scholars who conduct comparative research on Islam and Muslims in the West and sponsored by GSRL Paris/CNRS France and Harvard University (available at <http://www.euro-islam.info>).

<sup>9</sup> “Hundreds of potential terrorists live in Germany, official says”, Euro-Islam.info (available at <http://www.euro-islam.info/2008/11/01/hundreds-of-potential-terrorists-live-in-germany-official-says/>).

<sup>10</sup> “Fears over ‘condoning attacks’ law”, *The Independent*, 9 July 2005.

platform of tougher measures against non-assimilating integrants after his death. The Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh also openly opposed Muslim immigration to the Netherlands, and his assassination in 2004 sparked riots that continued for the entire month of November. These political changes in the Netherlands reflect a general trend across Europe in which making anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant statements in politics is now commonplace.

Two other trends in the political discourse are worth mentioning. First, a distinction between radical, 'bad' Islam and law-abiding, 'good' Islam has become a common political framing. The fact that Muslims must be named as good or law-abiding means that there is an underlying assumption that Islam is a potential menace to society. The second trend has been the usage of Muslim spokespeople to criticise Islam and Muslims. As members of the minority, these spokespeople can voice criticisms that would seem unduly harsh from the majority population. Probably the most celebrated of these is Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Dutch legislator born in Somalia, who is often described as an expert on Islam and thus a plausible critic. Hirsi Ali switched her political allegiance from left to right as her prominence in this debate increased. She has declared even moderate forms of Islam fundamentally incompatible with liberal democracy and called the prophet Muhammad a 'pedophile' and a 'perverse tyrant'. Her Muslim origin lends her opinions a form of legitimacy that is denied to non-Muslim critics of Islam.

The difficulties of integrating Muslims into national societies have led many to question the merits of multiculturalism. The prevailing sentiment in European societies favours the rejection of cultural differences. Although an increase in religious diversity is a key issue, the status of cultural diversity is also at stake: As Muslim immigration to Europe increased, a specific integration process was also designed, distinct from the older systems such as regionalism in the UK or pillars in the Netherlands. Initially, the concept of multiculturalism "connoted compromise, interdependence, [and] a relativising universalism" expected to lead to an "intercultural community". Over time, however, it began to seem more that multiculturalism meant an institutionalisation of difference, with "autonomous cultural discourses and separated interactional communities".<sup>11</sup>

In the United Kingdom, the shock of the 7 July subway attacks by 'homegrown bombers' led to increased questioning of the entire possibility of cultural difference. The consensus was that Muslims must become more like some abstractly-defined, ideal British citizen. However, this debate began earlier: The Rushdie Affair of 1988 in particular created the conditions for a critique of public culture. Before this incident, integration had been seen as the adjustment of minorities to the dominant society; after the Rushdie affair, it was understood to be a mutual process that would also transform the majority population.<sup>12</sup> Muslim leaders campaigned for the extension of the blasphemy law, previously oriented towards the Anglican Church, to Islam as well, creating an ongoing debate in British society that continues to this day. As a counterpoint to its new laws on terrorism and political radicalism, the Blair government pushed for the criminalisation of incitement to religious hatred, but the House of Lords restricted the application of the law, limiting it to threatening language rather than the broader rules on insults and abuse desired by the government. Despite the continuing efforts of the Blair government, Parliament maintained the weaker provisions, specifically prohibiting only intentionally threatening words.

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<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Theorizing the 'Modes of Incorporation': Assimilation, Hyphenation, and Multiculturalism as Varieties of Civil Participation", *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, "Integrating Minorities", in Tessa Blackstone, Bhikhu Parekh and Peter Sanders (eds), *Race Relations in Britain, A Developing Agenda*, London: Routledge, 1998.

In the Netherlands, multiculturalism was the explicit policy of the government since its inception in the mid-1980s.<sup>13</sup> However, since the 1990s, immigrant and minority incorporation policies have placed much greater emphasis on cultural assimilation. ‘Good citizenship’ and ‘civic integration’ became important new policy goals. Minorities were expected to assimilate into the dominant public culture and to maintain any divergent practices in the private sphere. The 1998 Law on the Civic Integration of Newcomers made integration courses compulsory. As part of the continuing debate, there was a parliamentary commission on Dutch Integration policies in 2004.<sup>14</sup> Although the report had some optimistic conclusions, multiculturalism is viewed as a failure in the eyes of the general public. The late Pim Fortuyn made this argument best when he claimed that Muslims were undermining the traditional liberalism of Dutch culture.

A fundamental tenet of French political society is the republican ideal that downplays ethnic and cultural differences. However, faced with the difficulties of integrating its sizable minority population, France has moved towards a pluralist conception that advocates positive discrimination. In 2001, the Constitutional Council recognised that sometimes difference must be recognised in the pursuit of true equality. One solution has been to make nominal distinctions on a territorial rather than ethnic basis, so the ideal of individual equality can be maintained; priority zones for education are a manifestation of this policy. The creation of the state organisation the Muslim Council in 2003 can also be seen as an attempt to integrate immigrant populations, as can the creation of a Ministry for Equal Opportunities in 2006.

The trend of identifying cultural practices defined or perceived as Islamic has emerged throughout Europe recently. For example, a German judge was ready to deny a case of domestic violence to a Muslim wife since, the judge believed, Islamic marriages condone such actions. Similarly, in France, a judge conceded to grant divorce on the husband’s claim that his wife was not a virgin at the time of their wedding. Such cases have raised protests from Muslim organisations, as well as feminist and human rights groups, because they lead to a discrimination of Muslims based on recognition of diversity. Muslims decry these actions for a variety of reasons – some argue that a French judge is not sufficiently educated in Islamic law to rule on issues of personal status, while others condemn the French court for interpreting Islam law. The latter opinion stems from the belief that France is a secular state and that French Muslims ought to have the same constitutional and legal protections granted to French non-Muslims. These changes demonstrate that in the last ten years, the discourse on cultural accommodation has been increasingly linked with religious issues.

### 3. The challenge of accommodating Islam

Although there is a tradition of religious freedom across Western Europe, Muslims have encountered difficulties in practicing their faith. Country reports indicate that most of the nations in this study have tried adjusting to the practices of Islam. However, they have done so largely within legal and social frameworks intended to accommodate Christianity, rather than Islam. In particular, Germany and France have faced difficulty accommodating women’s head and face covering, or the *hijab*, which is interpreted as a political rather than religious practice. Attempts to build mosques often face resistance from local communities. There have also been particular problems with extending the practice of religious instruction in public schools to

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan van Selm, “The Netherlands: Tolerance under Pressure”, Migration Policy Institute, Washington, D.C., 2003.

<sup>14</sup> See Parliamentary Inquiry Committee (Tijdelijke Commissie Onderzoek Integratiebeleid), 5 volumes, 2004.



Muslims. The other significant problem has been the fear of international terrorism, which is associated with conservative and radical imams in domestic contexts.

Policies on the *hijab* are often implied in broader laws, such as the French ban on religious symbols in public schools, but they are still widely understood by Muslims as restrictions targeting Islam. The case is different in Germany, where the *hijab* is allowed for public school students but may be banned for public school teachers. In July 1998, the Minister of Baden-Württemberg upheld the decision made by a Stuttgart school not to recruit a Muslim woman as a teacher because she wore a veil. The Minister declared that in Islam the *hijab* is a political symbol of female submission rather than an actual religious requirement.<sup>15</sup> Since then, discussion on the legitimacy of the *hijab* has grown even more polemical: A Federal Constitutional Court decision of 2003 acknowledged the right of German states to enact bans on *hijab*, prompting seven German states to declare their support for legislation barring teachers from wearing the headscarf.<sup>16</sup> In late March 2004, the regional government in Berlin agreed to ban all religious symbols for civil servants, and a month later, the southern state of Baden-Württemberg became the first German state to ban teachers from wearing the *hijab*, setting a precedent for another five states to enact similar bans. However, the July 2006 ruling of a Baden-Württemberg Court has impeded the trend by rejecting the state's ban as discriminatory against Muslims, since veiled Catholic nuns were not forbidden to teach in the state's schools.<sup>17</sup>

The construction of mosques is often opposed with pragmatic complaints about traffic and noise, but as the church bells ring across European cities, it seems inevitable that Muslims will see these kinds of complaints as Islamophobic in nature. In Spain, the threat of terrorism has been deployed in campaigns against mosques in a way that it had not been prior to the Islamist international terrorism of recent years. After the attacks of March 2004 in Spain, a new mosque in Sevilla faced significant problems as its site was vandalised and local community members organised a slaughter of pigs on the grounds. Reports of these problems have also been noted in the Netherlands, France and Germany.

In the countries that provide religious education in public schools, there have been ongoing problems. Part of the debate is due to the lack of an official hierarchical clergy that can speak for Muslims as a whole: Accustomed to the organisation of European Christian churches, negotiations stall when Muslims cannot find representatives acceptable both to the community and to the state. This has been a particular problem in Germany in light of controversies over the unwillingness of some Muslim girls to participate in physical education in the public schools. In Spain, the problem was assumed solved in the 1990s when the state came to an agreement for the provision of classes by Muslim teachers in the schools. However, in practice, the programme has not been implemented in many places. In the wild rhetorical climate of contemporary Dutch politics, extreme ideas, such as banning Muslim schools, have been proposed.

Across Europe, concerns regarding radical preaching in mosques have led to restrictive measures on the practice of Islam. For example, after the attacks of March 2004, the Spanish Minister of the Interior proposed a law to control the sermons of *imam*. The proposal was greeted with mixed reviews; it was denounced by the president of the Islamic Commission of Spain, Mansur Escudero, but welcomed by the Maghrebi union. Both France and the

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<sup>15</sup> Germany Country Report on Human Rights Practices 1998, US Department of State, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> "Seven German States Back Hijab Ban, Eight Refuse", IslamOnline.Net and News Agencies (<http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2003-10/11/article08.shtml>).

<sup>17</sup> Although the Federal Administrative Court had ruled in 2004 that such legislation did in fact apply to nuns.

Netherlands have since deported *imam* for radical speeches. If the *imam* were inciting terrorism, it might have been simple law enforcement, but the punishment has been extended to cases where the primary complaint is about attitudes towards women. In this way, the legal accommodation of Islam is only one aspect of the current tension between Islam and European secularism.

Western European states tend to consider faith misplaced and illegitimate within the civic context. The idea that religion cannot play a role in the general well-being of societies – a mark of the secularised mind – is, in fact, common throughout all of Europe, despite differences among the national contracts between states and organised religions. It is important to note here the existence of non-Muslim religious groups that question tenets of mainstream secularism. In Germany, for example, Christian values in the public sphere have been debated, while the display of a crucifix in an Italian classroom has sparked controversy in Southern Europe. However, the main strands of public culture in the political, media and intellectual spheres are highly secularised, and they tend to ignore religious dimensions and references that are still meaningful to some segments of society. The implication of secularism is that the various manifestations of Islam in Europe have become troublesome, or even unacceptable. The *hijab* controversy, the cartoon crisis and the Rushdie affair shed light on the tension between Islamic claims and European conceptions of secularism. In this ideological struggle, media and intellectuals play a major role, best illustrated by the cartoon crisis.

Paradoxically, the focus groups conducted in Paris, London, Amsterdam and Berlin in 2008-09 concluded that the 500 Muslims of diverse ethnic backgrounds are willing to make accommodations in their practices to fit into Western society. Nearly all of the focus groups showed great adaptability and complexity in defining what it meant to ‘be Muslim’. When answering direct questions about what makes a person a Muslim, or which aspects of Islam are most important for Muslims, respondents tended to immediately answer by referring to the ‘five pillars’. However, when pressed to elaborate, the category ‘Muslim’ was increasingly identified with more general qualities such as ‘being a good person’ or ‘being tolerant’. Islam was often identified as a way of life. In fact, most, if not all, of the respondents refused to draw a line between being a ‘practicing Muslim’ and just ‘being Muslim’. In other words, someone who does not pray or perform all of the practices and rituals of Islam was still considered Muslim. Here it became evident that there is a strong and widespread notion of Muslim culture that seems to override the more circumscribed definition of ‘being Muslim’.

Supplementing this conclusion, the following exchange was typical: [Translation]

[ - Yes, it’s more of a mindset, it’s more believing in God, uh... it’s related to the relationships one can have with other, values too,...

- Yes, such as?

-Tolerance, solidarity and that kind of thing, it’s more in relationship to other people.

- So, for you, religion is more in relationships with others and less in [religious] traditions?

- That’s it]

Respondents tended to answer an open-ended question about “what it means to be Muslim”, “defining Muslim” or “what qualities do you consider to be Muslim” in one of two ways. The first was to list certain practices or key beliefs, such as belief in the prophet Muhammad or the performances of daily prayers. However, more often, the response would be to appeal to abstract qualities such as tolerance, respect for others, fairness and open mindedness. While this recourse to universals is perhaps less surprising in the French context than it would be elsewhere, it is nevertheless worth noting that such responses almost always overrode all

discussion of practice or ritual. In other words, once a discussion of practice (pillars, dietary habits and mosque attendance) got under way, it almost always resolved itself with a general consensus that none of these practices made a Muslim and that a true Muslim was well intentioned and sincere in his embrace of the more universal positives we mentioned. In other words, even when asked to discuss Islam in terms of specific ritual practice, many respondents tended to abstract. The French subjects were, by and large, very uneasy with the supposition that strict adherence was the final word on who could and would not be considered a 'good Muslim' or even 'a Muslim' for that matter. (The references to Muslim culture or traditions were so ubiquitous that we had to create a code for it).

Another typical statement depicts the struggle between a broad definition of the 'Religion of Islam' and being Muslim through some sort of culture:

[to be Muslims, it is the religion of Islam, practicing or not practicing, on the cultural and the civilisational plane, me personally I'm not practicing but I am Muslim...I'm having a little trouble explaining myself.]

This flexibility extended to almost all rituals or practices. Most respondents were noncommittal about the necessity of prayer and prayer times. Many identified non-practicing Muslims as Muslims nonetheless. While almost everyone agreed to the importance of practices such as prayer, this practice was usually voiced in the language of motivations, for example "I will try" or "in the future I will". Women, when talking of the *hijab*, frequently stated that they did "not yet" wear the *hijab*, but hoped to do so one day. For example, echoing sentiment from other groups, one participant said, "If a person says 'I believe in that but I am not ready to follow it just yet', then that is to a certain extent fine, as long as they are working on it."<sup>18</sup> Again, what is important to note for future survey creation is the fact that these same people, when asked specifically, would list the five pillars as the essential elements of Islam for new Muslims.

#### 4. Muslims are part of the underclass of Europe

Because European Muslims tend to be socio-economically marginalised, much of the discrimination against them may be due to their class situation rather than their religion. Religion and discrimination may also interact in the formation of 'class', especially in the formation of underprivileged classes of British Asian Muslims or French North African Muslims.<sup>19</sup> According to a 2003 report by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) on employment,<sup>20</sup> Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK had unemployment rates higher than 20%, compared to only 6% in the broader population. Immigrants in general had a 13% unemployment rate. In Germany, the unemployment rate in the Turkish community stood at 21%, in contrast to the national rate of only 8%. Nationality statistics were unavailable for France, but immigrants had a 22% unemployment rate, compared to 13% for the country as a whole. Immigrant unemployment rates tend to be at least twice that of native-born workers. In the Netherlands, non-Western immigrants had an unemployment rate of 9%, Western immigrants 4% and native-born Dutch 3%. In Spain, the numbers were closer, while in Italy migrants had only a 7% unemployment rate compared to 11% the broader population.

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<sup>18</sup> London, Bangladesh co-ed.

<sup>19</sup> Tariq Modood, "The Place of Muslims in British Secular Multiculturalism", in Nezar Alsayyad and Manuel Castells (eds), *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: Politics, Culture and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002 and Jocelyne Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> "Comparative Report: Migrants, Minorities, and Employment", EUMC, October 2003.

In France, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands, OECD data shows that individuals with ancestry from majority Muslim countries have substantially lower educational success, while they are more equivalent in Italy and the United Kingdom. In Germany, about 70% of those with ancestry in majority Muslim countries have secondary education or less, while this is true for only about 25% of the rest of the population. Only 5% have advanced degrees, compared to 19% of the broader population. In France, 56% of those with ancestry in majority Muslim countries have secondary education or less, compared to 46% in the broader population. Higher degrees are more equally distributed in France. In Spain, 76% of those with ancestry in majority Muslim countries have less than a secondary education, compared to 63% for others, while only 11% have advanced degrees, relative to 20% nation-wide. The Netherlands' numbers are divergent as well, with 50% of those of Muslim ancestry having less than secondary education, with the balance going the other way in advanced degrees – 31-20%. In Italy, the numbers are roughly equal among the wider population. In the United Kingdom, the statistics are also relatively equal, although this conceals the difficulties facing those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage.

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) released a report in 2006 on housing<sup>21</sup> showing that, although there have been some improvements, immigrants routinely have poorer housing facilities and are sometimes subject to exclusionary violence.<sup>22</sup> In Germany, the report states that minorities clearly live in spatially segregated areas with poorer quality housing. The problem has been recognised by the government in Spain, which is taking action to increase public support for housing. France is in a similar situation, although there is a more particular difficulty with declining conditions in the stock of public housing. In Italy, responsibility for housing laws is distributed at various levels, with the resulting patchwork being difficult to analyse, although there is consensus that housing availability is generally more difficult for immigrants. In the Netherlands, although there have been reports of exclusionary violence, the best evidence available suggests that state policy on housing has benefited Muslims fairly well. The United Kingdom, in particular, has offered effective support for public housing and more effective anti-discrimination initiatives. Even so, those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi extraction, comprising the majority of British Muslim, live in much poorer conditions than the average Briton, with over two-thirds living in low-income households.<sup>23</sup> Nearly a quarter live in overcrowded houses, compared to just 2% of white Britons.<sup>24</sup>

## 5. Securitisation of Islam

In response to the recent threat of 'Islamic' terrorism, European states have restructured and strengthened their security and anti-terrorism laws while placing further restrictions on immigration. Terrorism can no longer be characterised as foreign or domestic; rather, it is transnational. If international terrorists based in foreign countries are recruiting among the disaffected populations of Europe, then European states face a simultaneous internal and external security threat. Europe's connect with terrorism should not be understated: The

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<sup>21</sup> "National Analytical Study on Housing (Country Reports)", EUMC, January 2006.

<sup>22</sup> The situation in Europe sharply contrasts to that in the United States, where Muslims tend to have higher education and income levels than the non-Muslim population. Although exact information on American Muslims is difficult to obtain, Zogby International Polling surveys from 2001 and 2004 show that more than half of American Muslims earn at least \$50,000 per year relative to a nationwide average of \$43,000. Education levels are also higher among American Muslims than the population as a whole.

<sup>23</sup> Household below Average Income Series, UK Department of Work and Pensions, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Harrison and Deborah Phillips, "Housing and Black and Minority Ethnic Communities: Review of the evidence base", Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London, 2003.

September 11<sup>th</sup> plots were partially planned in Hamburg, and there were at least 20 Europeans among the individuals imprisoned by the United States in Guantanamo Bay.<sup>25</sup> Since 9/11, EU states have arrested more than 20 times the number of terrorist suspects as the United States.<sup>26</sup> Because of this connection, European Muslims are often viewed as ‘foreign enemies’, a classification that implies a much lower level of legal and social rights and privileges.

In all European countries, laws expanded the powers of the state to deal more harshly with potential threats associated with Muslim immigration. In France, the 2001 Law on Everyday Security expanded police powers by permitting officials to stop vehicles, search unoccupied premises and monitor or record electronic transactions without notice as part of anti-terrorism investigations. A new French immigration law in 2003 made it substantially easier to deport individuals who “committed acts justifying a criminal trial” or whose behaviour “threatens public order”, along with increased penalties for illegal immigration, more temporary detention centres and new limits on family reunification. Germany developed wholly new policies in the year after 9/11: in addition to many of France’s expanded police powers, the laws permit the banning of religious groups that threaten democratic order; unrestricted police access to financial records, electronic and postal communications and most forms of transportation records; and the use of a previously controversial data-mining search method called the ‘grid-search’. In the United Kingdom, Parliament passed a new Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill that stipulated the indefinite detention of foreign nationals considered unsafe to deport to their country of origin and even permits detention in the anticipation of violence rather than response. It also called for the freezing and confiscation of funds associated with terrorism or proscribed groups, as well as requiring that individuals not associate with suspected terrorists or organisations but report any suspicions to the police. A study by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR)<sup>27</sup> suggests that the anti-terrorism statutes have been invoked overwhelmingly against Muslim defendants. All of these policies seem to have a disproportionate effect on Muslims.

Other countries’ responses were more subtle yet still responded to the perceived threat of terrorism caused by immigration. Spain was one of the few European nations that did not significantly change its security and anti-terrorism laws, but preventive detention of alleged conspirators increased dramatically. Spanish immigration laws have strengthened restrictions on the entrance of ‘undesirable’ foreigners, and the ability of foreign nationals to exercise basic rights such as that of assembly was restricted. Similarly, Italian immigration law, which had been somewhat disorganised prior to the Bossi-Fini law of 2002, now tightly controls the entry and residency of immigrants, mandates harsher penalties for illegal immigration, called for the creation of more detention centres and limits family reunification. The Netherlands has plans to legally weaken the protection provided against the search of mosques and to introduce searches outside of databases to profile suspects. After much debate, the Dutch have developed immigration policies emphasising the assimilation of immigrants into a common set of values. This departs from the Netherlands’ previous focus on multiculturalism. In 2001, the Netherlands passed an Aliens Act aimed at reducing the number of accepted asylum-seekers. This policy has been successful, and asylum requests have now dropped to one-quarter of their previous number.

Policy changes have made the general public suspicious of Muslims, but terrorism does not stem solely from Islamic radicalism. For instance, both Spain and France have arrested far more

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<sup>25</sup> Timothy M. Savage, “Europe and Islam: Crescent Waxing, Cultures Clashing”, *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Cesari (2004), *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Arun Kundnani, “Stop and Search: Police Step up Targeting of Blacks and Asians”, Institute of Race Relations (IRR), London, 26 March 2003.

Basque nationalists than Islamists. Of the 358 inmates accused of terrorism in France, only 94 are radical Muslims, while the largest contingent of 159 is composed of Basques. Indeed, we can conclude that legal responses to terrorism and immigration have caused three major effects on Muslims in Europe: increased surveillance and police activity, banning of groups and the deportation of radicals.

These policies effectively restrain the civil liberties of Muslim migrants. As a result of the British law criminalising indirect incitement or glorification of terrorism, a number of formerly legal groups have been banned. The EUMC reports that the new surveillance and search laws have disproportionately been used against those of South Asian ancestry and that the special legal authority for terrorism-related cases has been used for other crimes such as credit card fraud. In Germany, a number of organisations were also banned, mosques faced searches with little justification and a new data-mining technique was instituted for formerly private personal records to identify the 'quiet' radicals. Although Spain has not gone nearly as far in its suspension of liberties, the government has detained a number of Muslims for periods of time using a policy many believe is oriented towards improving relations with the United States in the aftermath of the Spanish military evacuation of Iraq. The disproportionate effect of these laws on Muslims may engender resentment and misunderstandings among the Muslim immigrants.

## **6. Conclusion: Coming to terms with Islam without Islamophobia**

Despite the aforementioned political, social and academic discourse, efforts to combat discrimination against Muslims are underway in European countries. These plans concern not only the economic arena, but also cultural and religious matters. There has been an increase in state initiatives to protect Muslim rights in various domains; these include the new French Ministry of Equal Opportunity and recent legislation against hate speech in the United Kingdom. Muslims have been strengthening their own organisations in an effort to keep records of hate-based incidents and to push for helpful policies, as with the establishment of the Islamic Anti-Defamation League of Italy in 2005. There have also been numerous efforts at interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Much of the debate over these issues has been about the extension of rights and protection already offered to other groups, especially Jews, but not yet applied to the situation of Muslims.

In Germany, state-led initiatives have been minimal, but Muslim organisations and interfaith dialogue have become particularly active. The Christlich-Islamische Gesellschaft, a new national organisation that sponsors interfaith dialogues, has opened local chapters in cities across Germany. The Muslim organisation Deutsches Islamforum attempts to document and battle anti-Muslim tendencies in society. One of its main focuses has been to mediate between Muslim leaders and authority figures to peaceably defuse conflicts. In addition, the Central Council of German Muslims has declared 3 October, the day of German reunification, an annual Open Mosque Day, in which other members of the community are invited to visit mosques in an effort to encourage dialogue.

Spain and the Netherlands have ongoing state-level attempts to battle racism and xenophobia in their respective societies. In 2006, the Spanish state established an advisory council to work on questions of immigrant integration. Later that year, a Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia was established in order to present reports and enable communication with like-minded national and international entities working to promote equality. The Netherlands established a Commission on Equal Treatment to help implement the Equal Treatment Law of 1994. There is also a National Bureau against Racial Discrimination established to provide expertise towards the prevention of racial discrimination. In response to the murder of Theo van Gogh in November 2004 and the burning of a mosque in Helden, the Dutch Minister of Aliens

Affairs and Integration Rita Verdonk established intervention teams to prevent further violence in Dutch cities.

The Rushdie affair of 1988 brought the issue of Islamophobia to the attention of the British public, and it has remained a constant in the UK ever since. In 1997, the Runnymede Trust, under government sponsorship, produced a report outlining the state of affairs and possible policy direction of the British government in response to widening public awareness and usage of the term Islamophobia. This led to many local initiatives against Islamophobia, including the cooperation between Southwark police and Muslim community members to track and handle the problem of backlash incidents against community members. There have also been joint efforts by community activist organisations, such as the campaign called “Islamophobia – Don’t Suffer in Silence”, which spearheaded a crime-reporting framework established by the ACPO, National Community Tension Team and the Muslim Safety Forum and the Islamic Human Rights Commission.<sup>28</sup> In the public sphere, FAIR, or the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism, has established itself as a prominent public voice urging integrated action. Another notable effort by a Muslim organisation is the Islam Awareness Week, which involves discussions, presentations and social and fundraising events nationwide. It was established in 1994, but has become more important following the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Paradoxically, all these efforts do not seem to facilitate an ‘indigenisation’ of Islam in all European societies. Islam is still seen as an alien and dangerous religion. Coming to terms with Islam would mean for Europeans to acknowledge their own restrictive conception of religion vis-à-vis civil society and citizenship. This would require a paradigm shift that Europe does not yet seem ready to accept.

#### **Recommendations to National Governments and the EU:**

In order to facilitate inclusion of Islam within public spheres of European countries, the few following measures could be taken:

- 1) *Change the portrayal of Islam in the discourse of politicians:* In this regard, the EU can have a crucial role in producing helpful materials and overall guidance. It also entails the development of new policies, especially in the educational and cultural domains.
- 2) *End the ghetto-isation of Islam:* Develop initiatives where Muslims are engaged in mainstream social issues and not only solicited about Islamic issues. Encouraging cross-cultural civil society organisations will aid this process.
- 3) *Include Muslim groups in all public events where other religious and ethnic groups are invited.*
- 4) *Disentangle the discourse on Islam from international politics.*
- 5) *Increase opportunities for Islamic education:* Create and develop national and European resources for teaching Islam in culture and history curriculum.
- 6) *Increase opportunities for Arabic and Turkish language instruction within the mainstream curriculum of public schools.*

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<sup>28</sup> For more information, see Islamic Human Rights Commission (<http://www.ihrc.org>).

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## About CHALLENGE

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The familiar world of secure communities living within well-defined territories and enjoying all the celebrated liberties of civil societies is now seriously in conflict with a profound restructuring of political identities and transnational practices of securitisation. **CHALLENGE** (Changing Landscape of European Liberty and Security) is a European Commission-funded project that seeks to facilitate a more responsive and responsible assessment of the rules and practices of security. It examines the implications of these practices for civil liberties, human rights and social cohesion in an enlarged EU. The project analyses the illiberal practices of liberal regimes and challenges their justification on the grounds of emergency and necessity.

The objectives of the **CHALLENGE** project are to:

- understand the convergence of internal and external security and evaluate the changing character of the relationship between liberty and security in Europe;
- analyse the role of different institutions in charge of security and their current transformations;
- facilitate and enhance a new interdisciplinary network of scholars who have been influential in the re-conceptualising and analysis of many of the theoretical, political, sociological, legal and policy implications of new forms of violence and political identity; and
- bring together a new interdisciplinary network of scholars in an integrated project, focusing on the state of exception as enacted through illiberal practices and forms of resistance to it.

The **CHALLENGE** network is composed of 21 universities and research institutes selected from across the EU. Their collective efforts are organised under four work headings:

- *Conceptual* – investigating the ways in which the contemporary re-articulation and disaggregation of borders imply a dispersal of practices of exceptionalism; analysing the changing relationship between new forms of war and defence, new procedures for policing and governance, and new threats to civil liberties and social cohesion.
- *Empirical* – mapping the convergence of internal and external security and transnational relations in these areas with regard to national life; assessing new vulnerabilities (e.g. the ‘others’ targeted and critical infrastructures) and lack of social cohesion (e.g. the perception of other religious groups).
- *Governance/polity/legality* – examining the dangers to liberty in conditions of violence, when the state no longer has the last word on the monopoly of the legitimate use of force.
- *Policy* – studying the implications of the dispersal of exceptionalism for the changing relationship among government departments concerned with security, justice and home affairs, along with the securing of state borders and the policing of foreign interventions.

### The CHALLENGE Observatory

The purpose of the **CHALLENGE** Observatory is to track changes in the concept of security and monitor the tension between danger and freedom. Its authoritative website maps the different missions and activities of the main institutions charged with the role of protection. By following developments in the relations between these institutions, it explores the convergence of internal and external security as well as policing and military functions. The resulting database is fully accessible to all actors involved in the area of freedom, security and justice. For further information or an update on the network’s activities, please visit the **CHALLENGE** website ([www.libertysecurity.org](http://www.libertysecurity.org)).

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