

Islam and Tolerance

in Wider Europe



Islam and Tolerance in Wider Europe

Edited by Pamela Kilpadi

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p a r t o n e

Europe's Transforming Identity

The Role of Islam in Europe: Multiple Crises?

Amel Boubekeur and Samir Amghar

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The Role of Islam in Europe: Multiple Crises?

Amel Boubekur and Samir Amghar

A car is blazing after it was set alight by rioters in the La Reynerie housing complex in the Mirail district of Toulouse, southwestern France. ■ Remy Gabalda, AP

Over time, virtually all social problems involving European Muslim communities have been reconceptualized within the framework of Islam as a crisis phenomenon. Questions of Muslim political and social integration have become inextricably tied to the ‘Islam crisis.’ Traditional ideas of a ‘clash of civilizations’ and the consequent need for intercultural policies to prevent crises involving Islam have dominated recent public debates surrounding the headscarf, French rioting, and cartoon controversies. European policymakers engaging in these debates are finding it difficult to agree on whether Europe’s Muslim citizens should be defined as minorities, immigrants, or new Europeans.

The contemporary history of Muslims in Europe extends over 50 years. Until the early 1980s when a new generation of young Muslims born in Europe began rising to prominence, their presence was not particularly visible and European public policies tended to categorize them as temporary immigrants. Policies intended to curb discrimination and unemployment and respond to social discontent and rioting were elaborated along ethnic lines (in particular French migration and social policies affecting the ‘beur’ children of immigrant parents from North Africa), sparking social discontent and rioting. Beginning in the 1990s, public discourse increasingly identified Islam as a major part of the problem. Developments including the terrorist attacks in Europe (Paris,

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Madrid, London), Rushdie controversy in the United Kingdom, process of the ‘re-Islamization’ of young people born in Europe, questions about the separation of religion and politics (laïcité), struggles against anti-Semitism, and even concerns about delinquency in poor districts predominantly inhabited by Muslims reinforced the view that a new phenomenon—a ‘crisis of Islam’—called for drastic policy prescriptions.

These ‘multiple Islam crises’ and controversies are reflections of the existing gap between Europe’s policy elite and Muslims citizens living on the social periphery. The apparent failure of 30 years of European social policies to integrate Muslims is directly related to the lack of Muslim political participation in European affairs at both national and local levels on issues other than security and terrorism. Although the radicalization of Islam is an important and urgent issue, the policy relevant concerns of most Muslims in Europe instead involve day-to-day problems of Islamophobia; worship management; and social, cultural and political exclusion—problems that tend to be ignored or poorly articulated at the policy level.

To better understand the real role of Islam in European social crises, it is necessary to examine both its European roots and external influences of Muslim countries. Any balanced analysis should also question whether the ghettoization of Muslim communities, or their *communautarisme*, often seen as a basis for radical Islam, actually leads to political radicalization and violence.

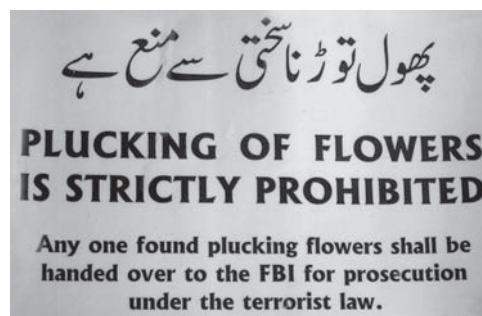
The external influence

Islam is now considered a European religion. Crises involving Muslim populations in Europe are often blamed on influences from ‘foreign’ Islam, with blame most often assigned to two types of external phenomena.

First is what has been called ‘consular’ Islam. During the 1970s and 1980s, the first Muslim immigrants to Europe (mainly from Algeria, Morocco and Turkey) effectively organized worship, mosques finances, imam activities, and Koranic teaching through their countries’ consulates. The consulates were intent on diffusing Muslim protests or crises in Europe carried out in the name of Islam.

More recently a second phenomenon—transnational or ‘foreign’ Islamic movements—have begun to compete for control over Muslims in Europe. These include the Tabligh from Pakistan, the Salafi movement from Saudi Arabia, and the Muslim

The apparent failure of 30 years of European social policies to integrate Muslims is directly related to the lack of Muslim political participation. Muslims in Europe are most concerned with day-to-day problems of exclusion that tend to be ignored at the policy level.



Sign greeting visitors at a hill station guest house in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province near Kashmir. The Urdu translation: “It is strictly forbidden to pick the flowers” ■ Pamela Kilpadi, IPF

Brotherhood organized by an Islamist elite in exile from Middle Eastern and North African countries.

‘Consular Islam’ and these ‘imported’ groups employ various means in their attempts to influence the ideological and normative landscape of Islam in Europe. During the 2003 elections to establish the French council of Muslim worship organized by conservative French politician Nicolas Sarkozy, for example, Moroccan and Algerian consulates in France tried to influence the voting process. The goal was to secure a kind of national political majority among Muslim leaders from these countries via the elections. The Turkish diaspora has played an important role in advocating for Turkey’s accession to Europe. After fatwas were issued related to the Iraqi and Israeli-Palestinian conflict from Youssouf Qaradawi (an Egyptian-Qatari theologian with the Muslim Brotherhood movement), many European Muslims chose to oppose to the war by boycotting Israeli and American products. Foreign violent videos advocating for religious war (jihad), foreign fighter narratives, and websites from the Middle East also target young European Muslims.

Nevertheless the European roots of these crises are also crucial, since a small minority of Muslims in Europe resort to violence in response to what they perceive to be injustice directed against them via European policies. Such frustration is of course

more often acted upon peacefully, as demonstrated by the decisions of more and more young Salafis to leave the Europe of their birth in search of a better life—and most importantly a ‘bourgeois’ standard of living which Europe failed to provide—in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries.

Movements promoting violence can serve as an outlet for disenfranchised and frustrated European Muslim youth seeking upward social mobility. While most vent their frustrations via peaceful means, a small number choose jihad.

European responses to ‘foreign’ Islam

The incursion of ‘foreign’ Islamic discourse has led European policymakers to search for external solutions to European crises involving Islam. For example, in an attempt to fight radicalization, France, the United

Kingdom, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands have launched expulsion campaigns against foreign imams to their countries of origin (Morocco, Algeria, Turkey). During the headscarf controversy, Nicolas Sarkozy traveled to the Al Azhar University in Egypt to obtain a fatwa from the Egyptian mufti Al Tantawi requiring girls to remove their veils at school. During the recent riots, French media described the “young Muslim” rioters as foreigners leading an “intifada des banlieues” with France becoming “Baghdad,” while some US commentators asserted that France was paying the price for its pro-Arab policies. Such clichés only serve to further convince political actors in the Muslim world of the need to develop opportunities for influencing policymaking affecting Muslims in Europe. Following Sarkozy’s Egyptian trip, Islamist movements led demonstrations against the veil law.

Experience has shown that Muslim religious leaders are not able to diffuse social crises or even adequately represent Muslims in Europe. Public debate surrounding the controversy over Islamophobic cartoons, for example, revealed that the views of Muslim

religious leaders describing the cartoons as evidence of the West's hatred of Islam were not shared by European Muslims, who largely perceived the issue in terms of the need for equal respect for Muslims as European citizens. In fact, most European Muslims rally around European values in such cases. During the veil and cartoon controversies, European Muslims turned to their local judiciaries and the European Court of Human Rights in support of values of freedom of belief, multiculturalism, and even secularism. In the same spirit the French rioters, who were not mainly practicing Muslims but rather various groups sensitive to French Islamophobic attitudes, did not have clearly defined proposals because they were not contesting the French model of integration, but rather seeking its effective implementation.

Islamic religiosity, politics and violence

The religious factor is also relevant to the process of Muslim radicalization in times of crises. Three distinct groups of activist Muslims can be distinguished according to their views on the relationship between religion and politics: Muslims who develop a 'religious citizenship,' those who reject all non-Muslim political systems, and an ultra-radical minority that places jihadist Islam at the core of their political commitment.

For the first group, Islam is their starting point for a sense of citizenship and commitment to European society. Demonstrations against the veil law, for example, were for them a political negotiation emphasizing the need for citizens' participation to build a common society where Muslims act as a positive minority. They vote, engage in traditional secular political parties, and participate in European political events such as the referendum on the European Constitution, organized events related to globalization, etc. European Muslim leaders such as Tariq Ramadan contributed to the development of the concept of religious citizenship.

We find the second group among Salafi and Tablighi disciples. Their conception of politics does not lead to violence, but rather a withdrawal from all political processes and institutions based on non-Muslim concepts. For them, commitment to a secular state is not relevant; they do not conceptualize themselves within the framework of a non-Muslim political system. Withdrawal is considered preferable to participation in light of their stigmatization as Muslims and their social exclusion as ethnic minorities and poor people. This group was not concerned by the demonstrations against the veil law or the publication of cartoon caricatures of the Prophet.

The last group is the jihadist one. Although they do not share any particular social status, they do share the experience of social decline and displacement. Their reasons for resorting to violence have more to do with painful personal experiences of social and political injustice as Muslims in Europe than belief in radical Islam. They trust that Islam will defend Muslims from European/Western threats against them. They place jihad at

During the veil and cartoon controversies European Muslims turned to the courts in support of European values of freedom of belief, multiculturalism and even secularism. French rioters were not contesting the French model of integration, but rather seeking its effective implementation.

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the core of their religious beliefs and rely on violence as the only way to provide Muslims a voice in European policymaking. They believe that terrorist acts such as the London and Madrid attacks are the only way to successfully achieve certain political objectives such as the withdrawal of UK and Spanish troops from Iraq.

Integration rather than confrontation

The role of Islam in Europe's 'multiple crises' is as complex as the various Muslim communities living in Europe. To better address such crises we need to understand the common interests shared by European institutions and EU Member States. Currently these interests rarely converge, leaving European Muslims feeling trapped in a tug-of-war while Europe struggles to discern its changing identity. Muslim groups can be categorized according to their mode of political protest during European crises involving Islam, but they are extremely diverse. The single feature they have in common is their disappointment over European policies affecting their everyday lives in Europe.

More than ever, Europe has a role to play in rethinking what can be proposed to its Muslim citizens in terms of real political representation and participation rather than occasional solicitation. To minimize the likelihood of social crises, Europe needs to create and make visible an alternative and common public space that provides its Muslims with a voice just as it does its Christian and Jewish communities, especially concerning questions related to Islamophobia, inclusion, religious radicalization...

The strength of the foundations of a new Europe will depend upon the extent to which Muslims are allowed to participate in the construction of a new European identity.

پھول توڑنا سختی سے منع ہے

Islam and Tolerance in Wider Europe offers a refreshing new look at the complex interplay between religion, nationalism and expansionism in an increasingly globalized world, as revealed by a new generation of open society leaders working to build a more tolerant Europe. The authors are fellows and colleagues of the International Policy Fellowships program—an initiative of the Open Society Institute that has attempted to combat ‘brain drain’ while developing policy research capacities, initially in emerging democracies of the former Soviet sphere where concepts such as ‘policy’ and ‘fellowship’ were virtually untranslatable. Since its establishment in the late 1990s, some 250 of its fellows have grown into a network of open society leaders spanning more than 40 countries on nearly every continent.

Each chapter—focusing on Western Europe, the Caucasus, Russia, Turkey, Central Europe, and the Balkans—includes several essays by different authors, all of whom are actively involved in the dynamic policymaking processes transforming their respective countries. Their policy perspectives benefit from a uniquely ‘inside out’ rather than the usual ‘outside in’ orientation found in most English-language information about their communities. Taken as a whole, the compilation offers insightful insider stories and comparisons across countries and regions. The results are illuminating.