

The integration of Islam in the European Union; Prospects and Challenges

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The tragic events of September 11th, 2001 with the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York by *Al-Qaeda* terrorists catapulted Islam and the Islamist movement onto television screens and the front pages of newspapers worldwide. The events of that momentous day have left an indelible imprint on the mindset of contemporary society and subsequent military campaigns and terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq have maintained the Islamist movement at the forefront of global attention. However, this concern with the growth of “political” Islam is not new and over the last forty years, the rise of Islam or more correctly, the Islamist movement as a political force across the Muslim world is a phenomenon which has been greeted with fear and trepidation by both European governments and academics¹. In fact, the term Islamist movement is itself a misnomer as it tends to suggest that the Islamist movement, according to its interpretation in Europe, is a united entity with an expansionist character which knows no borders and a highly-developed programme of societal transformation which threatens the values, mores and indeed, the sheer existence of European civilization². On the contrary, the Islamist movement is itself a deeply fragmented body, composed of a kaleidoscopic myriad of deeply divergent and often radically opposed groups, currents and trends whose methods, aims and objectives differ not only from country to country across the Islamic world but indeed within the respective states themselves.

¹ A good general introduction to this issue is contained in the recent Sardar, Ziauddin, 2004. *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim*, London: Granta.

² See for example Halliday, Fred, 1996. *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation; Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris. See also Roy, Olivier, 1994. *Political Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris and Roberson, B.A., 1994. “Islam and Europe: an Enigma or a Myth?”, *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 288-308.

In Europe, this preoccupation with Islam and the perceived threat posed by Islamist resurgence has increased significantly over the last two decades and since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War, this preoccupation has become intensified and far more visible as Islam has graduated to fill the threat vacuum left behind by the disappearance of the old Soviet enemy³. For a generation in Europe which had grown up in the shadow of a perceived Soviet desire for world dominance enshrouded by the threat of nuclear oblivion, the sudden and unexpected disintegration and disappearance of the Soviet empire left Europe in a state of confusion and uncertainty but the emergence of the perceived Islamic threat has in many ways, changed the shade of Europe's common enemy from Soviet red to the green hue of Islam and the existence of this enemy is an often ignored but undoubtedly important one in the fostering of social and political cohesion in the new Europe.

Over the last decade, the impact of the emergence of the Islamic threat has been undoubtedly accentuated by the need for a common enemy to cushion the effects and aid the accommodation of the great changes which the Maastricht, Nice and Amsterdam Treaties have set in motion across the European societal landscape. In an era of unprecedented flux and change with commentators forecasting the end of history and the birth of a brave new world of integrated political and economic blocs⁴, Europe has found itself at a decidedly uncertain crossroads and the question of European identity and its future have been catapulted to the forefront of social and political agendas across the continent.

³ See Fuller, Graham E. and Ian O. Lesser, eds. , 1995. *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West*, Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press. See also for examples of newspaper coverage Adams, James, 1994. "CIA fears Islamic takeover of Egypt", *The Sunday Times*, April 24th, p. 24., Hirst, David, 1995. "As night falls the terror begins", *The Guardian*, Nov. 15th, pp. 1-2 and Higuera, Georgina, 1994. "Marruecos niega cualquier vínculo entre el asalto a un hotel de Marrakech y el terrorismo islámico", *El País* (Spain), Aug. 26th, p. 3.

⁴ See Fukuyama, Francis, 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Hamish Hamilton and his preceding article Fukuyama, Francis, 1989. "The End of History ?", *The National Interest*, Summer, No. 16, pp. 3-18. See also Huntington, Samuel P., 1993. "The Clash of Civilizations ?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, pp. 22-49.

The wheels of European integration have remained firmly in motion but for growing numbers of Europeans, the pace and extent of the changes have been excessive and ever-increasing harmonization and similarities at the level of monetary policy, transport and communications have been met in many cases, by conversely increasing cultural fragmentation and social dislocation. This emerging multi-tiered societal panorama in the new Europe is an urgent and pressing problem for its architects and attempts at the creation or inculcation of a common European cultural identity have been hitherto characterized by their lack of success or penetration.

One could therefore argue that one of the main impetuses driving and one of the main bases underpinning the concept of European unity is in fact the existence of an external threat. Legatees of a heritage of over twelve centuries of distrust and miscomprehension between the two parties, Muslims have become the most obvious and most easily identifiable candidates to fill this threat vacuum. The presence of increasing numbers of Muslims in European societies is a further development which has augmented considerably this idea of an Islamic threat in the new Europe. In particular, the visible increase in socio-political activity and demands for representation amongst second-generation European Muslims have provoked anxiety and disquiet throughout Europe whilst placing a spotlight on the question of the role that Muslims will play in the new Europe. However, in raising this issue, Muslims in Europe have also re-activated a complementary and one could argue, more fundamental debate as their situation highlights the still vague and ill-defined nature of the new emerging Europe from a socio-cultural point of view and the need for this question to be properly and comprehensively addressed.

The relationship between Islam and Europe currently is and traditionally has been a relationship which has been principally based on a dual foundation of

conflict and distrust⁵. The Judaeo-Christian foundations of modern European society and the historical evolution of Europe's borders are based principally on Europe's opposition to Islam and its geographical and cultural exclusion of the Islamic "other" from the myriad bases of European identity and civilization. Indeed, the marriage of myth and historical experience which underpins the foundations of much of modern Europe is based on the struggle against the Islamic threat and events such as the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1453 and the Spanish *Reconquista* have played a profound if often underestimated role in the formation of diverse national psyches and perception of identity across the European societal landscape⁶. The establishment and growth of the European Union and the march towards European integration has done little to suppress these national myths or dilute the idea of the importance of the identification and exclusion of the Islamic "other". On the contrary, national myths and prejudices have been transplanted to a supra-national level and as increasing European integration has eroded former sources of national socio-cultural identity, national myths and prejudices with regard to Islam have become aggravated, a development which has been fuelled by a variety of other sources including the increasing political activity and social mobilization of Muslims in European society and the perceived incompatibility of their desires and demands with the socio-cultural programme of secular values which the new Europe embodies and the paradoxical Judaeo-Christian heritage which underpins them.

In the modern era, the study of the position of Muslims in European society has been an academic subject which has been chiefly characterized by its neglect and the corresponding dearth of relevant data⁷. However, alongside

⁵ See Wharton, Barrie, 1996. "The contemporary Islamist movement in Egypt and its effect on the relationship between Egypt and the European Union" in Cox, Michael, ed., National Committee for the Study of International Affairs-Proceedings of the Graduate Seminar in International Relations, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, p. 54.

⁶ The anecdotal tale of the emergence of the croissant or crescent after the Siege of Vienna as a symbol of victory against the Muslim invaders may seem a humorous one but the influence of the "crusader" mentality in the social imaginary of many Western Europeans should not be under-estimated. In Spain, El Cid Campeador remains a revered and much-loved national hero and the existence of Spanish towns such as Matamoros (Killers of the Moors), etc bears living witness to a history of conflict.

⁷ This dearth of data or material on the internal positions of Muslims in Western Europe is paradoxically marked by an abundance of literature emanating from the West on the position of Muslims in the Islamic world reinforcing

the emergence of the aforementioned perceived Islamist “threat”, there are also several other factors at work which have brought the question of the role of the Muslim community in the new Europe to the top of the socio-political agenda. Uncertainty surrounding the precise nature of European citizenship has clearly been one as it has focused increased attention on minorities such as Muslims and more than often, on the perceived incompatibility of these minorities with the ideals of the partisans of European integration. In the Muslim case, this new interest in their position has also come about at a time when Muslim communities within Europe are expanding due to increased immigration and simultaneously, becoming more active politically as second and third-generation Muslim communities who have now consolidated their socio-economic and legal positions in European society are showing an increased desire for a political voice. The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia is another contributory factor which has heightened contemporary interest in the role of Islam in the new Europe as the sectarian nature of the conflict in the Balkans has candidly revealed the present-day importance and relevance of an indigenous Muslim presence in Europe which had almost been forgotten.

Given the complementary and related nature of these varying factors, it is therefore no surprise from the beginning of this decade onwards to see a revival of interest amongst Western European academics in the position of Muslims in the new Europe and during this period, some excellent studies have been produced such as Nielsen’s *Muslims in Western Europe*⁸ alongside the work of Anwar and Niblock⁹. However, the rapidly changing face of the new Europe and the evolving nature of the Muslim community within it render the issue an extremely difficult one to address and it is undoubtedly a question which requires a multi-layered analysis as its study within neat

the idea of otherness and externality which dominates the perception of Muslims in the West. The seminal work of this school is Said, Edward W., 1978. *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon.

⁸ See Nielsen, J., 1992. *Muslims in Western Europe*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

⁹ See Nonneman, Gerd, Niblock, Tim and Bogdan Szajkowski, 1996. *Muslim Communities in the New Europe*, London: Ithaca Press and Anwar, M., 1992. “Muslims in Western Europe” in Nielsen, J., *Religion and Citizenship in Europe and the Arab World*, London: Grey Seal Books, pp. 71-94.

geographical or chronological parameters will only be able to offer misleading results which may not be merely erroneous but also more importantly, of significant danger. The study of the position of Muslims in Europe and their future role in European society therefore requires a framework which not only investigates socio-political factors but moreover, one which also examines the cultural present and future of Muslims in European society for it will be the ability of the European cultural sponge to absorb Muslim communities which will determine their real future on the European societal landscape¹⁰. The saturation level of this sponge remains unknown and in the case of Muslims in Europe, it depends on a variety of factors ranging from rising unemployment in Europe coupled with increased Muslim immigration to Muslim communities' resistance to absorption and cultural integration and the implications that this presents for the future of European unity.

A serious deficiency in many contemporary studies on the role of Muslim communities in the new Europe is the tendency to generalize and use an overly simplified approach in the definitions applied both to the Muslim community in Europe and to Europe itself. Firstly, this usage of the term "Muslim community" creates the erroneous concept of a homogeneous European Muslim community when the reality is in fact, a deeply fragmented and heterogeneous entity which contains a kaleidoscopic myriad of diverse and often conflicting groups, trends and currents of thought which differ not only from country to country across European society but indeed within individual countries themselves. It is therefore far more correct to speak of Muslim communities in Europe and to stress rather than play down their plurality and diverse nature. Likewise, the treatment of European society as a single entity is another definition which poses serious problems with regard to the situation of Muslim communities within this entity. The uncertain and malleable nature of European identity is a feature which must be recognized and acknowledged alongside the highly particular and individual traits of the

¹⁰ For a good theoretical discussion of this issue, see Tibi, Bassam, 1990. *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change*, Boulder: Westview Press. See also Abu-Lughod, Ibrahim, 1963. *Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A*

respective constituent societies within the European framework and how this has affected the role of Muslim communities within them¹¹. More importantly, in any discourse on the role of Muslim communities in Europe, one must also acknowledge the fundamental cleavage between the role of Muslim communities in Eastern Europe and their respective position in Western Europe. Both of these developments have enjoyed vastly different historical and political trajectories and whereas this essay will concentrate on the role of Muslim communities in Western Europe, it would be wrong to deny or not to mention the indigenous Muslim presence in parts of Eastern Europe which has been a social, political and cultural reality for centuries and is undoubtedly of vital importance in any contemporary debate regarding the present or future role of Muslims in the context of an expanding European society and political infrastructure¹².

In the immediate post-war period, the position of Muslim communities in European society was not a pressing concern for the fathers of the European integration movement. The lack of focus or concentration on this position seemed at the time to be a logical one as Europe faced many more immediate challenges and the actual Muslim presence in Western European society was a weak and politically unimportant one. Therefore, until the 1970's, the relationship between Europe and the Islamic world continued to focus on the position of Muslim communities in the former European colonies and on political upheaval in the Middle East with problems of cultural integration and comprehension between the two bodies being seen as a distinctly external concern by both parties.

Study in Cultural Encounters, Princeton : Princeton University Press.

¹¹ See for example Dehousse, Renaud, 1996. *Intégration ou désintégration ? Cinq thèses sur l'incidence de l'intégration européenne sur les structures étatiques*, San Domenico: European University Institute (Robert Schuman Centre) Working Papers No. 96/4. See also Tarrow, Sidney, 1994. *Social Movements in Europe: Movement Society or Europeanization of Conflict*, San Domenico: European University Institute (Robert Schuman Centre) Working Papers No. 94/8 and Jordan, Bill, 1996. *A New Social Contract ? European Social Citizenship: Why a New Social Contract Will Probably Not Happen*, San Domenico: European University Institute (Robert Schuman Centre) Working Papers No. 96/47.

¹² See for example Szajkowski, Bogdan, Niblock, Tim and Gerd Nonneman, 1996. "Islam and Ethnicity in Eastern Europe" in Nonneman, Gerd, Niblock, Tim and Bogdan Szajkowski, 1996. *op. cit.* , pp. 27-51.

However, throughout the 1950's and 1960's, large numbers of Muslim immigrants had entered European society with the expansion of labour migration fuelled by Europe's economic recovery. These new Muslim communities were chiefly characterized by their relative silence in the socio-political and cultural arenas and their role in society was seen both by themselves and their respective host societies as a fundamentally economic one which was temporary in nature.

The mid-70's were thus to be a watershed in the relationship between Western European society and its new Muslim communities as in response to the economic recession which had begun in 1972, Western European governments introduced radical changes in their hitherto relaxed immigration laws. These changes transformed the position of Muslim communities in Western Europe as they ended further labour immigration, a change which removed the purely economic character which had previously characterized the position of Muslim communities. However, the new laws allowed family unification, a policy which would have much greater repercussions for European society as a whole as it brought the hitherto economic communities in from the edge of European society as they were now brought into contact with the socio-cultural mechanisms of their respective host societies.

Muslim communities were now no longer composed of migrant workers with an economically-defined, temporary status in Western European society. On the contrary, Muslim communities were now made up of families and as wives and children arrived throughout the 1970's, these new communities began to adapt a much more permanent character which was marked by increasing involvement in the fields of education, housing and health¹³. Socio-cultural concerns in these fields led to a growing demand for political expression on the part of Muslim communities and the simultaneous emergence of the "second-generation" Muslims who had been born and educated in Western

¹³ See Vertovec, Stephen, 1996. "Muslims, the State, and the Public Sphere in Britain" in Nonneman, Gerd, Niblock, Tim and Bogdan Szajkowski, 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 167-186.

Europe exacerbated this demand as this group articulated the desires of a new Muslim community which saw itself as a permanent feature in a new Western European society and which was no longer willing to accept the temporary and economically-determined status which had been the lot of their predecessors.

From the early 1980's onwards, a marked rise in political activity could be noted on the part of Muslim communities in Western Europe. This rise was particularly evident in France and Great Britain where Muslim communities were already well established and where rights of citizenship were easiest to obtain. External factors were also of vital importance in the politicization of Muslim communities in Europe. The oil crisis of the mid -70's had been perceived by some Western Europeans as an example of the Muslim world's belligerent attitude towards the West as the rise in oil prices had literally held Western Europe to ransom and had sent shock-waves throughout Western European economies. However, it was the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran which really polarized European public opinion with regard to Islam¹⁴. The media coverage of and governmental reaction to the Islamic Revolution in Iran fuelled the idea that Islam was a radical and militant force which was incompatible with the aims and aspirations of Western Europe and whose presence in Western European society constituted a potential threat and a serious obstacle to further European integration.

Muslim communities reacted to this erroneous stereotyping of Islam in a reactionary and markedly negative manner by adopting an increasingly isolationist position with regard to political expression and societal engagement. Growing unemployment in Europe coupled with the realization that Muslim communities were now a permanent fixture on the Western European societal landscape aggravated the polarization between the two parties and as both sides adapted increasingly entrenched positions, there

was a marked radicalization of their respective postures. This radicalization was characterized on the Western European side by the rise in support for right-wing parties and an increase in racist sentiment which led at times to almost anti-Islamic hysteria. Meanwhile, Muslim communities responded to these attacks by acting in a defensive manner which perceived the secular values underpinning Western European society as a threat to their identity and existence.

This theme of social and cultural dislocation is a fundamental one in the trajectory of the relationship between Muslim communities in Western Europe and Western European society over the last two decades. In the shifting cultural quicksand, this first generation of permanent immigrants found itself under attack and culturally at sea in what was perceived as the unwelcoming and alien harbour of Western Europe. It is therefore no surprise that they turned to Islam, their natural source of identity and belonging, as a safe haven and their increased emphasis on and assertion of this religio-cultural identity can be clearly seen in events such as the *Foulard* affair in late-1980's France and the Salman Rushdie crisis¹⁵.

This growing politicization of Muslim communities in Europe has come at a time of great and unparalleled political change across the continent and this has accentuated the importance of the demands of the Muslim communities as it has focused attention on the extent of plurality and tolerance which really exist within the new Europe.

Muslim communities exclusion from the commonality of a Western European experience is undoubtedly an important question which must be examined before any project of religious or cultural integration or assimilation can be

¹⁴ For a good general account, see Bakhsh, Shaul, 1985. *The Reign of the Ayatollahs; Iran and the Islamic Revolution*, London: I.B. Tauris. See also Abrahamian, Ervand, 1982. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁵ See Ruthven, M., 1990. *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Wrath of Islam*, London: Hogarth Press. See also Asad, T., 1990. "Multiculturalism and British identity in the wake of the Rushdie Affair", *Politics and Society*, Vol. 18, pp. 455-480. For more background on the Foulard affair, see Siblot, P., 1992. "Ah! Qu'en termes voilés ces-choses-là sont mises" in *Mots*, No. 30, March, pp. 5-17.

discussed. The entire concept of the commonality of a Western European experience and the role that religion plays in it is a highly divisive one. However, despite the myriad historical differences, it is valid to speak of a number of fundamental pillars which support a certain Western European sense of identity and which are by their very nature, exclusive rather than inclusive.

The secular principles underpinning Western European society are easily identifiable and have its historical roots in the Enlightenment and the French export of the 1789 Revolution. Concepts of socio-political organization and obligations, common myths, linguistic ties and racial bonds are all factors which feed in varying degrees into the Western European psyche and although its existence is often veiled or hidden, the role of a Judaeo-Christian unifying identity is still an important factor today as it has been implicitly absorbed into the national identities of the respective Western European states and has played an active if highly paradoxical role in the "secularization" of contemporary Europe which is perceived by many Muslims as simply a thinly-veiled disguise for an anti-Islamic crusade.

The question of the incompatibility between the religio-cultural beliefs and the socio-political organization of Muslim communities with the secular values and Judaeo-Christian heritage of Western European society is therefore a crucial one. The notion of Islam as a seamless garment where the respective realms of politics and religion are inseparable is a fundamental tenet of the Islamic faith and it is true that you cannot divide a seamless garment without tearing it apart and destroying it¹⁶. However, in practice, Islam has historically been a pragmatic and accommodating religion and socio-cultural system which enjoyed its original success and expansion through cultural synthesis and assimilation of existing socio-political conventions and practices. This presentation of Islam is radically different to its current perception in much of

Western European society but as Khaldi points out, one of the most interesting features of the Islamic Revolution in Iran was its complete historical novelty and indeed, in the almost two decades which have passed since the Revolution, its export abroad has enjoyed very little success¹⁷.

Therefore, there exists very little historical evidence for the theory that Islam and henceforth, Muslim communities could not be accommodated within or integrated into a Western European societal landscape. On the contrary, there are many similarities between the ideas of citizenship and socio-political organization held by both parties and the roots of the concept of the Islamic "other" are more likely to be found in cultural differences which may indeed have very little to do with Islam or religion at all.

This cultural polarization of Western Europe and the Muslim communities is a very interesting phenomenon and indeed, close examination reveals that religion is often merely a secondary factor in the conflict although it is often highly visible as a legitimizing banner or an identifiable enemy for the respective parties involved. Analysis of the political agitation and social expression of Muslim communities show a group which perceives itself as under siege and their reaction is the case of a cultural minority under attack searching for a rallying beacon rather than a unified body defending Islamic practices or principles. The same is true of much of Western European opposition to the increased Islamic presence in Western European society as its leaders represent the concerns of a growing number of Europeans who are suffering from similar problems of identity as globalization and the rapid drive towards European integration have eroded traditional reference points and symbolic identity pillars in many Western European societies while their replacements have often been agents of socio-cultural exclusion rather than inclusion.

¹⁶ For further discussion of this matter, see al-Sayyid, Mustapha K., 1981. "A Civil Society in Egypt ?", Middle East Journal, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 228-247. From a more Islamist perspective, see al-Ghannoushi, Rachid, 1993. *Al-Hurriyat al-'Amah fi al-Islam (The Freedom of the Islamic Nation)*, Beirut: Centre for the Study of Arab Unity.

¹⁷ See Khaldi, T., 1992. "Religion and Citizenship in Islam" in Nielsen J., ed., 1992. *op. cit.*, pp. 25-30.

The fundamental concept concerning the present and future of Muslim communities in Western Europe is therefore a question of cultural absorbancy and the capacity of both parties to accommodate socio-cultural change. The current crisis in cultural identity which can be identified in both camps only aids miscomprehension and widens the gulf between both sides. This has given rise to a climate of ignorance and fear in Western European society with regard to Islam and a climate of ignorance and fear within the Muslim communities with regard to the values and mechanisms of Western European society.

A clear example of this climate within Muslim communities was the book-burning which accompanied the Salman Rushdie affair in Great Britain which showed the complete incomprehension of many members of the Muslim community of the significance of book-burning in European history and its association with some of the continent's darkest periods such as the Spanish Inquisition and the rise of Nazi Germany. Meanwhile, Western Europeans' ignorance and fear of Islam is well documented in the European media and in the activities of many of its elected representatives. The E.U.'s backing of the undemocratic 1992 coup d'état in Algeria and its continued support of the increasingly de-legitimized regime is a further manifestation of this fear and distrust of Islam and its message has been interpreted by Muslim communities in a distinctly negative manner which has only served to accelerate the polarization process.

Such arguments obviously cast serious doubt over the ability of Europe to function as a multi-cultural pluralist society and raise fundamental questions about the future of European integration. The situation of Muslim communities would tend to suggest that its existence as the alien "other" is vital to the marrying of national identities in Europe in the face of a common

enemy¹⁸. Most of these national identities are in fact based on quite uncertain and vague premises many of which are historically inaccurate. However, the successful inculcation in the national repository of memory and the continuing influence of the founding myths of these national cultures or projects have converted them into contemporary realities which are much more important and relevant today than their historical accuracy. The majority of these myths are founded and depend on an alien or foreign element for their existence and as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Muslim communities have been the prime historical candidates to fill this threat vacuum and legitimize the myth.

One could therefore argue that as Europe attempts to stretch itself beyond the limited commonality bonds of nation-states, it is relying not only on external threats for internal cohesion but indeed, on perceived internal threats. This raises the disturbing scenario of an emergent Europe which needs conflict and distrust in order to achieve a degree of cultural cohesion and sense of social togetherness. The increase in cultural resistance amongst Western European nations to the integration in society of Muslim communities is a clear indicator of the rise in support for the latter scenario and although harmonious interaction between Muslim communities and their host nations and the quest for a consensus based on social and cultural cohesion are noble ideals and appear the logical road to follow, the reality is that contemporary European society is in fact taking a radically divergent path.

A good example of the interaction between Muslim communities and Western European societies is the French case. The French case is a particularly interesting one to analyze due to a number of factors. Firstly, Muslim communities in France are among the oldest and most-established in Western Europe. Secondly, much of the secular ideology and thought which dominates

¹⁸ See footnote 5. A multitude of similar myths regarding the Muslim “community” as an “enemy” still exist across the European societal landscape and during fieldwork carried out by the author in Spain and Italy, their influence was found to be still considerable and significantly under-estimated by national governments and supra-national institutions.

much of Western Europe's discourse with Islam emanated from France and French national culture. Finally, the numerical strength of Muslim communities in France and France's long association with Islam through its colonies have rendered both Muslim communities in France and the French as fundamental reference points for the development of the relationship between host nations and Muslim communities in other Western European states.

The relationship between France and Islam has always been an enigmatic one. Napoleon's embrace of Islam upon his arrival in Egypt co-exists uneasily alongside France's reputation as the cradle of secularism. This paradoxical relationship between the two parties has continued throughout the contemporary era. In 1979, it was an Air France plane which brought Ayatollah Khomeini from exile in Paris to a triumphant return in Tehran whereas it was also in a French court in 1998 that an 84-year-old Muslim philosopher was threatened with imprisonment for the expression of his religious beliefs¹⁹. Recent French opposition to the war in Iraq despite American pressure was also interpreted by many Muslim commentators as a pro-Islamic stance yet this was followed by a further attempt by the French government to ban the use of Islamic headscarves in French schools along with Catholic and Jewish symbols which has provoked a severe backlash from Islamic groups worldwide.²⁰

The first primary factor of importance in the analysis of Muslim communities in France is the heterogeneity of these groups, a factor which is common to Muslim communities throughout Western Europe. This heterogeneous nature of Muslim communities in France and indeed, throughout Western Europe is a factor which is often neglected. This neglect is understandable given Western Europe's aforementioned need of a homogeneous Muslim threat but the

¹⁹ Roger Garaudy is a French philosopher who was formerly a Communist but has now converted to Islam. He was tried several years ago in the French courts as his book, *Les Mythes Fondateurs de la Politique Israelienne* had questioned certain aspects of the Jewish Holocaust of World War Two. See Fisk, Robert, 1998. "Rewriting history appeals to Arabs in denial", *Independent on Sunday*, Feb. 1st, p. 14.

²⁰ Two French journalists from "*Le Figaro*" were recently taken hostage in Iraq and are threatened by execution unless the law is rescinded.

reality of the “Muslim community” is in fact, a fragmented, heterogeneous entity which is composed of a kaleidoscopic myriad of varying currents, trends and groups whose respective platforms and objectives are often radically different or even opposed²¹.

This heterogeneity has been a serious factor in the dilution and weakening of the political voice of Muslims in French society and it is no surprise therefore to find the representation of French Muslims in public life to be significantly less in proportion than what would be expected given their actual numerical strength. On the contrary, French society which is traditionally characterized by its diversity of opinion has been relatively homogeneous in its insistence that Muslim communities must be assimilated within the established norms and rules of secular French society and there is strong resistance across French society to the recognition of Muslim communities as a different or unique entity as public opinion and government policy strongly oppose such recognition under the premise that it would lead to the “Lebanization” of France.

The French posture towards its Muslim communities is not however merely a case of French society protecting its secular heritage. Power relations also play a fundamental role and the fact that Muslim immigration in France is largely colonial-based has been vital and coupled with the socio-economic weakness of the immigrants, power relations have been evident throughout the trajectory of the relationship between France and its Muslim immigrants in the contemporary era.

This colonizer/subject dichotomy has not only been important in the formulation of French policies and public opinion with regard to Muslim immigrants. Moreover, it has played a decisive role in the shaping of Muslim self-awareness in France and in the immigrants’ perception of the role in the

²¹ See Kepel, G., 1987. *Les Banlieues de l’Islam: Naissance d’une religion en France*, Paris: Seuil. See also Etienne, B., ed., 1990. *L’Islam en France*, Paris: Éditions du CNRS.

societal space which has been assigned for them in France. This has led to the development of a Muslim identity in France which is socio-political rather than religious and in many ways, this identity is an externally-imposed one rather than the result of any strong religious convictions.

Therefore, it is possible to speak of the Muslim community in France as a stigmatized one created by the exclusionary mechanisms of French society. This idea of stigmatization is vitally important for the fragmented "Muslim community" as it brings into the "community" non-practising Muslims and acts as a fundamental element of cohesion in the socio-political platform of the "community". The principal forces behind this isolation and stigmatization of Muslim communities in France are the discourse of traditionally inward-looking French nationalism coupled with the political activities of the Nouvelle Droite and Front National movements. In fact, it would not be impertinent to suggest that French nationalists, in the course of their perceived defence of their culture and society, have actually been the main impetus behind the re-islamization of Muslim communities in France, a theme which strikes a common resonance with the actions of diverse right-wing groups throughout Western Europe²². This re-islamization in the political imaginary of Muslim communities in France in the socio-political sense has had very real consequences for French society and the polarized situation it has created has been aggravated by external political developments in North Africa and an entrenchment of postures on both sides.

The chronological politicization of Muslim communities in France closely follows the aforementioned Western European model. Until 1974, the question of Muslims in France was mainly a temporal one which depended on the prevalent economic conditions and trends in labour migration. Muslims were "guests" and France was a "host" nation but the 1974 decision to halt all

²² See Silverman, M., 1992. *Deconstructing the Nation: Immigration, Racism and Citizenship in Modern France*, London: Routledge. For a more general treatment, see Ford, G., 1992. *Fascist Europe: The Rise of Racism and Xenophobia*, London: Pluto Press and Harris, G., 1994. *The Dark Side of Europe: The Extreme Right Today*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

new immigration was a watershed as Muslim families united and the decision to remain in France now became a permanent one with the associated socio-political ramifications and demands that families now presented.

The first signs of a nascent politicization of Muslim communities came in the late 1970's with demands for the provision of prayer rooms and the recognition of Ramadan obligations in factories such as Renault²³. These demands achieved considerable success and France seemed to be enjoying a multi-cultural honeymoon based on consensus and social harmony but in the wake of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, anti-Islamic hysteria would result in a backlash against Muslim communities which was reflected politically in the rise in support for parties of the far right. The Muslim communities reacted by adapting an increasingly entrenched and militant stance which was clearly visible in the strikes in the car industry which ravaged France from 1980 to 1983 and which became tainted with a distinct hue of Islamist militancy.

In this socio-political context of hostility and distrust, both parties began to adapt increasingly polarized positions. An absence of dialogue throughout the 1980's allowed radical elements on both sides to prosper and by the end of the 1980's, one can speak of a clear and defined division between Muslim communities in France and mainstream French society in their respective views of socio-political and cultural identity. On both sides, a climate of condemnation rather than comprehension was evident and the *Foulard* or Headscarf affair of 1989 was to be a visible manifestation of this deep fissure in French society which had been allowed to grow by both parties and it would become a defining episode in the relationship between Muslim communities and their host societies not only in France but indeed, throughout Western Europe as a whole.

²³ See House, Jim, 1996. "Muslim Communities in France" in Nonneman, Gerd, Niblock, Tim and Bogdan Szajkowski, 1996. op. cit. , p. 226.

The *Foulard* affair had its origins in the exclusion of three Muslim girls from French state schools for the wearing of Islamic headscarves or *hijab*. However, the affair soon became a catalyst for the examination of the position of Muslim communities in Western Europe and their relationship with the societies in which they lived. The Foulard affair dealt a severe blow to the mythical ideal of a multi-cultural Europe as it candidly revealed that French secularism was in fact still based on the ethos and practices of the Roman Catholic Church and that French society which was apparently based on principles of tolerance and equality was willing to compromise these principles where Muslim communities were concerned.

The affair revealed the non-extension in France of tolerance in the public imaginary to Islam and the hegemony of a franco-centric concept of the ordering of society which might allow assimilation but rejected integration. The ramifications of the *Foulard* affair resounded throughout Western Europe and it helped to define more clearly the escalating conflict and burgeoning divisions between Muslim communities and Western European society into a set of identifiable polarizations; tradition versus modernity, minority versus majority, oppressed versus oppressor, them versus us.

The *Foulard* affair, recently re-ignited, was undoubtedly a watershed in the relationship between France and its Muslim communities and since then, there has been little progress made in repairing the divisions that it revealed. The outbreak of the Algerian conflict in 1992 has been a further source of division and the French government's unflinching support of the secular regime in Algiers and its clampdown on FIS (*Front Islamique du Salut*) supporters in France²⁴ has further fuelled the idea amongst Muslims in France that they are perceived by mainstream society as at best outsiders or at worst enemies of the nation. Furthermore, a strong link, nurtured by the media, has been cultivated in the French social imaginary between Islam and terrorism

and this has increasingly led to a negative stereotyping of Muslim communities²⁵ and their further exclusion from mainstream French society. On the Muslim side, this exclusion has only served to galvanize and radicalize the socio-political Muslim community and on both sides, hard-liners rather than moderates have been the dominant voices in the discourse as was clearly exemplified in the recent hysteria which surrounded the trial of Roger Garaudy²⁶.

The relationship between Muslim communities in France and the French state and society has been a high profile one over the last two decades and events in France have tended to influence relationships between Muslim communities and their host societies elsewhere in Western Europe. However, the relationship between Muslim communities and other Western European societies has also depended on national particularities alongside the diverse origins of the respective Muslim communities involved and generalizations about the position of Muslim communities in Europe and the attitude of Western European society towards them must acknowledge the inherent heterogeneity of both parties.

The position of Muslim communities in Great Britain with regard to their relationship with British society is another important one in the Western European equation and it presents some interesting variations on the French model. Firstly, Muslim communities in Britain are composed in the majority of Muslims of Asian origin²⁷ and secondly, Muslims in Great Britain have been far more successful than their French counterparts in having their demands recognized and met in the public sphere.

²⁴ See Diwan, Roger and Mohamedi, Fareed, 1995. "Paris, Washington, Algiers", Middle East Report, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 27.

²⁵ A classic example of this is the report in the popular French weekly *Le Point* of August 28th, 1993 (No. 1093). The front cover of the magazine led with the headline, "Islam: 4 million Muslims in France" above the photograph of a Muslim in a *gallibiya* in front of a mosque. Only in the fine print of the actual article is it discussed how many of these Muslims are actually practising or whether this figure is exaggerated but it is the emotive headline which undoubtedly exerts most influence.

²⁶ See Fisk, Robert, 1998. *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²⁷ See Peach, C., 1990. "The Muslim Population of Great Britain", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 13, pp. 414-419.

Muslim communities in Great Britain first came to prominence as in the rest of Western Europe in the late 1970's after family unification in the mid-70's transformed them into a permanent fixture on the British societal landscape. The main difference between British Muslims and their French counterparts was the socio-economic status of British Muslims which was markedly higher and which enabled them to organize themselves much more effectively in a socio-political manner. British Muslims were also stigmatized but they managed to harness this stigmatization for their own benefit and remain active in the public sphere.

The first real campaign of British Muslims was on the *halal* or food permitted by Islamic law issue which began in the early 1980's with Muslim calls for the provision of *halal* food in schools, prisons, hospitals and other public institutions²⁸. Despite opposition from a variety of groups including right-wing nationalists and animal rights activists, Muslim communities fought an effective and successful campaign and *halal* food soon became a standard procedure in all British public institutions.

Spurred on by this victory, the socio-political voice of Muslim communities in Great Britain moved its campaign to the field of education and the Honeyford Affair of 1984/85 would represent a further victory for British Muslims with an implicit recognition and acceptance of their demands by the British state²⁹. The Salman Rushdie affair would consolidate this importance of the Muslim voice in Great Britain and in contrast to the re-Islamization of the beleaguered Muslim communities in France, right-wing commentators began to call for a de-Islamization of British society in the early 1990's³⁰.

²⁸ See Vertovec, Stephen, 1996. op. cit. , pp. 170-171.

²⁹ For a good analysis of this controversy , see Halstead, M., 1988. Education, Justice and Cultural Diversity: An Examination of the Honeyford Affair 1984-1985, London: Falmer Press.

³⁰ See Ruthven, M., 1990. op. cit. . See also Bowen, D. G. , ed., 1992. The Satanic Verses: Bradford Responds, Bradford: Bradford and Ilkley College and Modood, T, 1990. "British Asian Muslims and the Rushdie Affair", The Political Quarterly, No. 61, pp. 143-160 for a discussion on the aftermath of the Rushdie affair.

The success of Muslim communities in Britain is due to a number of important factors which distinguish the attitudes of British Muslims from their French counterparts. Firstly, British Muslims tend to see themselves as a distinct group and have made very little attempt to integrate into mainstream British society. This cynicism has been a pre-emptive strike against attempts at assimilation and it is British Muslims who have been the fiercest opponents of multi-culturalism³¹. This cultural resistance of British Muslims has been held responsible for the ghettoization of British society and Kalim Siddiqui's Muslim Parliament is often cited as an example of this³². Secondly, British Muslims have been able to maintain this isolationist stance through their socio-economic power which allows them to circumvent the imposed demands of British mainstream society. Thirdly, British Muslims have managed to exploit the increasingly fragmented fabric of modern British society and as a relatively powerful socio-economic minority, they have managed to reap the benefits of a divided Britain³³.

The posture of Muslim communities in Britain has not been a popular one in British mainstream society and especially since the outbreak of the conflict over Salman Rushdie in late 1988, they have become increasingly perceived in a negative fashion. However, the posture of Muslim communities in Great Britain is understandable as a defence mechanism within a society which is perceived by them as a bastion of token multi-culturalism where control still rests with a secular elite underpinned by Christian traditions. External events such as the Gulf War and the involvement of the British Armed Forces have not helped this negative image of Islam in Britain and during the last decade,

³¹ A good example of British Muslims' rejection of multi-culturalism is the marked scarcity of their presence in comparison with other minorities in respective spheres of British popular culture such as the national sport, soccer and popular music (The No.1 single by the Pakistani band, Cornershop was the first ever by a British Muslim group and the very name of the group reinforces the minority stereotype which exists in British society regarding its Muslim communities). On the contrary, the French national soccer team is largely made up of immigrants and French Muslims are well represented. Indeed, its star player until his recent international retirement, Zinedine Zidane, is of Algerian descent whilst French Muslims have also been vibrant actors in the world of popular music.

³² Well-known examples have been his championing of the Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie and his speech supporting civil disobedience where British law was found to be un-islamic which he gave at the opening of the Muslim Parliament in January, 1992. He died in 1996.

³³ For further discussion, see Asad, T., 1990. op. cit. , pp. 455-480.

there has been a noticeable retreat on the part of Muslim communities into an increasingly isolationist stance akin to their French counterparts, a development which does not augur well for the future of a British society based on mutual understanding and consensus.

The role of Muslim communities in Germany has evolved similarly along British lines. The origins of Muslim communities in Germany were also purely economic and their status as *gastarbeiter* of guest workers in the public imaginary and indeed in political discourse bears witness to this³⁴. However, Muslim communities in Germany which are mainly Turkish in origin have become increasingly important numerically due to family unification policies in the 1970's and continued labour migration to Germany over the last two decades in order to serve the needs of German industrial expansion.

While they have not been as successful economically as their British counterparts, Muslim communities in Germany have been very active in the socio-political arena and Islam has played a key role in defining the cultural self-perception and identity of the immigrants in a German society which is often perceived as an overly homogeneous one which is intent on assimilation rather than integration or multi-culturalism.

The economic demands placed on Germany by the reunification process have had a profound effect on the lives of Muslim communities in Germany and the host society's perception towards them. As unemployment becomes a growing problem with the need to absorb the East German labour force, social unrest has increased with xenophobic attacks against Muslims with the increasing realization on the part of both Muslims and German society that they are no longer guest workers but on the contrary, permanent fixtures on the German societal landscape whose fortunes are now inextricably intertwined with those of the new Germany.

This realization has provoked a growing polarization of divisions and dismay on both sides with Muslim communities turning increasingly to Islam as a psychological crutch in an unwelcoming society and second-generation Muslims have sought to use Islam as an indigenous source of socio-political expression in what they perceive as a societal system which is alien and unresponsive to their needs. On the German side, there has been a marked growth in support for and the activities of the far right and only the national historical context and German constitutional provisions have prevented this growth unlike France, from becoming registered in the form of parliamentary representation and access to political power.

Elsewhere across Western Europe, Muslim communities have been growing steadily but due to their still relatively small size, the debate over their future role has remained up until now relatively muted. However, Muslim communities in the liberal heartlands of the Netherlands³⁵ and Belgium³⁶ are becoming socially and politically, a much more important group whereas increasing Muslim immigration to Sweden³⁷ and Denmark³⁸ since the beginning of the 1980's has led to growing social unease over their role in the respective host societies and has provoked a profound self-examination on behalf of these societies of their hitherto accepted standards of tolerance and religious freedom.

In Southern Europe, the increase in Muslim immigration has been seen to re-ignite old historical prejudices as has been the case in Spain³⁹ and Greece⁴⁰

³⁴ See Karakasoğlu, Yasemin and Nonneman, Gerd, 1996. "Muslims in Germany; with special reference to the Turkish-Islamic Community" in Nonneman, Gerd, Niblock, Tim and Bogdan Szajkowski, 1996. *Op. cit.*, pp. 241-267.

³⁵ See Landman, N., 1992. *Van Mat tot Minaret. De institutionalisering van de Islam in Nederland*, Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij. See also Shahid, W. and Van Koningsveld, P., eds., 1992. *Islam in Dutch Society: current developments and future prospects*, Kampen: Kok Pharos.

³⁶ See Dassetto, F. and A. Bastenier, eds., *L'Islam transplanté. Vie et organisation des minorités musulmanes de Belgique*, Bruxelles: EVO.

³⁷ See Sander, A., 1996. "The Status of Muslim Communities in Sweden" in Nonneman, Gerd, Niblock, Tim and Bogdan Szajkowski, 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 269-289.

³⁸ See Hjärnö, Jan, 1993. "Causes of the increase in xenophobia in Denmark", *Migration-A European Journal of International Migration and Ethnic Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 41-63. See also Hjärnö, Jan, 1996. "Muslims in Denmark" in Nonneman, Gerd, Niblock, Tim and Bogdan Szajkowski, 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 291-302.

³⁹ See López-García, B., ed., 1993. *Inmigración Magrebí en España: el retorno de los moriscos*, Madrid: Mapfre. See also Abumalham, M., ed., 1993. *Actas del Simposio Internacional: Comunidades Islámicas en España y en la*

and the rapid growth of Muslim communities in Italy has seen Islam become Italy's second religion and the visible extension of Muslim influence in the very heart of Roman Catholicism is a fascinating development with the reaction of Italian society still a tentative and unsure one⁴¹. One of the most interesting areas for future study will surely be virgin territories such as Ireland and Portugal whose reaction to Muslim immigration and demands on their societies will reveal much about the existence or viability of a new "European" approach.

Meanwhile, Muslim communities in Eastern Europe are increasingly becoming key players in the Western European dynamic through immigration to the west as political or economic refugees. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, Muslim communities in the Balkans and to a lesser extent, Central Europe have enjoyed or indeed, in many ways, endured an entirely different historical and political trajectory than their Western European counterparts and treatment of their role in contemporary European society merits a separate study and methodological framework. However, the importance of the existence of these indigenous communities on the borders of Western Europe and the influence this has had on Western European policies and attitudes towards Islam cannot be under-estimated and this influence can only grow in the future as immigration from these countries to Western Europe remains a contemporary phenomenon⁴².

Comunidad Europea, Madrid: Ed. Trotta (Universidad Complutense de Madrid). In fieldwork carried out by the author amongst Muslim immigrants of Moroccan and Algerian origin in Spain, many spoke of the latent hostility towards Islam which is fuelled by the power of the historical prejudices which exist in Spanish society and how assimilation or integration could only be at best superficial under these circumstances. The tragic events of March 11th, 2004 with the Madrid train bombings has obviously exacerbated this situation.

⁴⁰ See Christidis, Yorgos, 1996. "The Muslim Minority in Greece" in Nonneman, Gerd, Niblock, Tim and Bogdan Szajkowski, 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 153-166. The problems associated with Muslim communities in Greece are accentuated by the often strained relationship between Turkey and Greece and the presence of an indigenous Muslim minority in Western Thrace which is regarded by Athens as being pro-Turk. A continuing influx of Muslim refugees from Albania has been a further problematic factor in the contemporary debate over the role of Muslim communities in Greece.

⁴¹ See Allievi, Stefano, 1993. *Il Ritorno dell'Islam. I Musulmani in Italia*, Rome: Edizioni Lavoro. In fieldwork carried out by the author of this chapter in Southern Italy, growing Albanian immigration was found to be having a significant effect on the perception of Islam in Southern Italy and in the context of the rise of the Lega Nord, Islam was seen by immigrants as a fundamental element of socio-political and cultural rather than religious identity.

⁴² This is particularly true in the Italian case and it was a recurring theme throughout the author's research there. For further discussion, see Szajkowski, Bogdan, Niblock, Tim and Gerd Nonneman, 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 27-51.

While continuing to stress the heterogeneous nature of Muslim communities in Europe and indeed, the national particularities of their respective societies, it is possible to draw several general conclusions on the role of Muslim communities in contemporary Western European society and offer some suggestions as to how this role is likely to evolve in the future.

Firstly, one can state that there is a growing awareness throughout Western Europe of the importance of Muslim communities and the challenges posed by their problematic cultural absorbancy or integration capacity as the architecture of a new socio-political and cultural Europe continues to unravel. This growing awareness and concern is a theme for debate amongst both Muslims and their respective host societies and is due to a number of complementary factors. Principally, second-generation Muslims have been increasingly more vocal and active in their use of Islam as a means of socio-political expression and as an affirmation of their separate identity. This has led to a marked rise in the societal “visibility” of the Muslim community through media coverage of events such as the Foulard affair or the Salman Rushdie controversy and this in turn has led Western European society as a whole to focus increased attention on Muslim communities and their demands and dynamics as an internal European concern rather than an external phenomenon.

One can also state that prevailing economic conditions command a powerful influence over the respective fortunes of Muslim communities in Western Europe and thus closely affect both the reaction of the host society towards Muslim communities and the corresponding response of the Muslim communities. This factor has been seen to be at work during times of economic recession and unemployment in Western Europe when the non-indigenous nature of respective Muslim communities and their perceived “intrusionary” status was found to have been emphasized and exaggerated in a negative fashion.

Socio-economic status is another key element in the relationship between Muslim communities in Europe and their host societies. Therefore, in countries such as Great Britain where Muslim communities have found themselves located higher up the socio-economic strata than their continental counterparts, the position of the communities has been markedly stronger and far more effective in the socio-political arena. Socio-economic status also plays a fundamental role in determining the posture of sectors of Western European society towards Muslim communities and it is in the areas of lower socio-economic status where the highest degree of intolerance towards Muslim communities is to be found and much of the xenophobic and anti-Islamic sentiment stems from these sectors of Western European society which form the traditional bulwark of national cultures and identity bases which are perceived as clashing with the stereotyped Muslim enemy⁴³.

One interesting finding is that there is very little differentiation across Western Europe with regard to the attitude towards the role of Muslim communities on the part of both the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church. This strengthens the idea that the apparent conflict between Muslim communities and Western European society may be taking place in the socio-cultural rather than religious domain and one could suggest that the sectarian aspect of the conflict is in fact over-exaggerated.

It is also important to note that access to an avenue of political expression and success in this arena has remained the domain of Muslim communities in societies such as Great Britain and France where citizenship was relatively easy to obtain for immigrants. Thus, exclusion from citizenship rights and access to the reins of political power has seriously weakened the voice of Muslim communities in countries such as Germany where these rights were more difficult to obtain.

⁴³ For further discussion of this question, see Harris, G., 1994. *op. cit.* .

A final salient point is that the relationship between Muslim communities in Europe and their host societies depends to a great degree on the respective confidence in its identity which is enjoyed by both parties. Resistance to cultural integration or absorption has been found to run almost parallel to the level in which the respective entity can be said to be undergoing a crisis of identity. This factor was seen to be of particular relevance in the immediate post September 11th period and continues to dominate the relationship between the two communities.

Therefore, one could argue that this question of identity is probably the most important as Europe and its Muslim communities face up to the challenges of a new millennium and the future relationship between both parties will undoubtedly hinge on it. As Europe faces up to a serious identity crisis with the erosion of the nation-state and its replacement by a new European identity which is finding an unwelcome and decidedly frosty reception in many sectors of European society, Muslim communities may well feel the backlash of this growing tide of cultural dislocation and sentiment of social exclusion. Meanwhile, second and third-generation Muslims will have to face similar challenges and their perceived status as unwelcome guests of foreign nations can only serve to radicalize their socio-political posture as they serve to establish some type of firm foothold in this emerging socio-political wilderness of cultural chaos and detachment.

These aforementioned questions of identity and cultural inclusion are fundamental issues which the new Europe needs to address and the under-estimation of their potential impact is a perilously dangerous exercise. The refusal to recognize these symptoms of a spreading societal cancer has already led to the growth of the contemporary Islamist movement and its consequent radicalization across the Muslim world and it would not be foolish to suggest that a continued polarization of respective positions could lead to a similar scenario in Western Europe and the strength of the fragile European societal fabric should not be over-estimated.

However, in the immediate future, it is unlikely that the role of Muslim communities in Western Europe will provide a catalyst for societal disintegration but it is time for both sides to engage in meaningful dialogue which will help to lessen the distance between the two parties. Such a dialogue is necessary for both sides but it must be a compromise where the cultural coherence and security of Western Europe is respected but Muslim communities are allowed to integrate on mutually acceptable terms which allow their proper evolution and development as social and cultural partners. Whether such a dialogue will be initiated and if it will succeed along the terms indicated are questions which still remain unanswered but the challenge and opportunity of dialogue is currently there for both parties and it may well be pertinent to address it before the whole question of dialogue with escalating polarization becomes classified in the terms of a problem.