Islam and the New Europe: The Remaking of a Civilization

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Europe is a civilisation in cultural turmoil. It has suddenly awoken to a basic cultural transformation taking place within itself—the transplantation of Islam into Europe—and is having a tough time accepting and adjusting to this irreversible new reality.

It is not as if Europeans were unaware of the presence of Muslims in their midst. European states have been taking measures independently to integrate Muslims into their existing cultural and legal frameworks. Commentators have already studied and managed to distinguish between the separate approaches adopted by the French, the British and the Germans towards Muslims. Europeans have gradually been becoming conscious of the Muslim presence and its political and cultural ramifications for their societies for years now. None of this is new or the reason for the current storm that is tormenting the very soul of Europe.

New Awareness of an Old Threat

The source of the turmoil is Europe’s collective perception of itself as a unitary civilisation, not as individual countries or governments, and the sense that its cultural and civilisational identity is in danger. Europe feels threatened not by the Muslims in its midst, but by an assertive Islam from within, which is determined to challenge the constitutive norms that make up Europe. To put it simply, the intransigent assertiveness of Islam inside Europe and its ability to have a transformative impact are threatening to unmake and remake Europe. Europeans are suddenly behaving towards Islam like a minority under siege that fears for its identity in the presence of a dominant majority culture. The awareness of the widespread presence of Muslims and the strong fervour for and adherence to Islamic values of so many of them have caused numerous Europeans to feel culturally threatened and behave like an insecure minority.

In her official biography, published in 2006, Queen Margrethe II of Denmark made provocative remarks that revealed her fear of Islam and her desire to “counterbalance” it:

We are being challenged by Islam these years... There is something endearing about people who give themselves up completely to their faith. But there is likewise something frightening about such a totality, which also is a feature of Islam. A counterbalance has to be found, and one has to, at times, run the risk of having unflattering labels placed on you. For there are some things for which one should display no tolerance. And when we are tolerant, we must know whether it is because of convenience or conviction.1

Only 3 per cent of Denmark’s population is Muslim, yet the Queen seems to find them so threatening that she is calling for an end to tolerance in order to combat them. Margrethe’s thoughts are indicative of the dark mood that Europe is struggling with in its effort to figure out how to respond to the challenge of a growing and self-confident Islamic presence. It should be troubling to all concerned Europeans that Margrethe’s first suggestion is a reduction in tolerance. Europe has boasted for decades that what distinguishes it from other civilisations is its culture of tolerance and religious freedom. It is ironic that to defend this very culture, the Queen of Denmark suggests a departure from it.

The Danish Queen’s remarks are neither rare nor isolated. It is impossible to review the European media today without finding statements by politicians and political commentators explicitly expressing fear of and intolerance towards Islam. I have no desire to give these sentiments further mileage by reproducing them here, but for those who are unaware, I recommend a few minutes of browsing on “Islamophobia Watch” [http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/], a website dedicated to documenting Islamophobic statements and episodes. A single theme dominates the Islamophobic discourse: Islam is a threat, and if we do not face up to it, we will lose our identity, culture and values.

Farish Noor, a Malaysian intellectual living in Europe who frequently engages in civilisational dialogues between Muslims and European leaders and intellectuals, has commented on the intensity of the fear and hatred of Islam expressed by so-called rational and liberal individuals. He reports that in one intercultural exchange, he was told that:

Islam is a fascist, woman-hating, Christian-killing, gay-bashing macho male ideology of hatred that was built on fourteen centuries of conquest and bloodshed, murder and rape. That is why there cannot be integration of Muslims into Europe, because the Muslims that we have here are the savages of the Arab world who are barbaric, violent and brutal. They do not believe in reason and the Enlightenment and Islamic civilisation has not produced anything scientific, rational or humane.²

However, we must keep things in perspective and remember that if Europe has a Queen Margrethe, then it also has a Prince Charles, who thinks that:

Islam can teach us today a way of understanding and living in the world which Christianity itself is poorer for having lost. At the heart of Islam is its preservation of an integral view of the Universe . . . there are things for us to learn in this system of belief which I suggest we ignore at our peril.³

**Europe’s Internal ‘Other’**

The total Muslim population in Europe (excluding Russia) is about 25 million, roughly 3.5 per cent of the entire population. In only three countries, France, Germany and Britain, do Muslims cross the 1 million mark (6, 3 and 1.8 million respectively). In all other west European countries they number fewer than half a million and often constitute about 3 per cent or less of the population. In the Netherlands, there are about nine hundred thousand Muslims, constituting over 5 per cent

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of the population. There are more Christians in some Arab nations than there are Muslims in any European country. Thus, Christians form 45 per cent of the population in Lebanon, 15 per cent in Syria, 7 per cent in Jordan, and 10 per cent in Egypt. Yet the Arab nations do not display existential anxiety or fear of a cultural Christian “threat” from within, despite the long history of Christian colonisation and invasion of Arab lands, starting with the Crusades and continuing in Iraq today.

Although the absolute Muslim population figures are not overwhelming, demographic trends and the oft-touted slogan that Islam is “the fastest-growing religion in the West” have made Islam the cultural “other” in contemporary Europe. For centuries, Islam has been the challenger to Christianity, and since Max Weber it has been the designated exemplar of tradition and the antithesis of modernity represented by Europe. Once again, as new and huge mosques are built in Europe, as the continent witnesses tall minarets arise, and hijabs and turbans, jilbab and beards proliferate, Islam and Muslims are firmly monopolising the cultural marker in reference and opposition to which European identity is seeking to redefine itself.

Edward Said, in his seminal works Orientalism (1978) and Covering Islam (1981), has shown how Islam was manufactured as a despised and hated other in opposition to which the modern Western conceptions of the self have evolved. This imaginary Islam, which existed only in the discourses of the Orientalists, became a repository for all the values and conditions—religiosity, fascism, traditionalism, underdevelopment—that modern European societies were struggling to transcend. The image of Islam as inferior and backward has served as a contrast to underscore the development and moral superiority of Europe even as it committed egregious crimes against the Muslim world, through conquest, colonisation and imperialism. The cultural and physical distance and foreignness of Islam insulated the European conscience during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

But conditions are markedly different today. European nationalists continue to use an imagined inferior Islam as a chisel with which to craft and sharpen European identities. But the Islam and Muslims they demonise are neither distant nor foreign, they are at home. The Muslims they ridicule are not foreigners but fellow citizens, some of whom may also have indigenous European roots. The practice of glorifying Europe while demonising certain Europeans is, in my opinion, a fundamental cause of the European agony. Such demonisation does not sit well with Europe’s humanist goals and self-perception as a home of liberal values and human rights. For many Europeans, the future of Western civilisation is now connected with how Europe deals with Islam. America’s “war on terror” is seen as a betrayal of Western values, and it therefore becomes more important that Europe in its conduct show greater concern than the United States to safeguard democratic principles.4

Nevertheless, as European countries increasingly project Islam as the threat to the cultural integrity of their societies, internal Islam and Muslims become the new barrier that Europe must transcend to become a truly integrated entity. Europe continues its march towards becoming a single community. Even though the European Union failed to agree a constitution, European leaders are determined to put it to the

4. In several private conversations with me, German parliamentarians, British foreign office staffers, and French and Belgian officials have uncannily expressed this sentiment of the need for Europe to distance itself from American methods.
vote again. For Europe to become a single, integrated community, it has to resolve its internal cultural and political differences. The “threat” of internal Islam to Europe’s integrity is a useful foil. Islam as a common threat to Europe from within and without can play a powerful role in uniting Europe and realising the dream of a truly integrated European community. Thus, the “Islamic threat” is useful both for nationalists who fear for the future of local cultures and identities and for Europeanists who wish for a new future and regional identity.

Visible, Assertive, Radical

Islam’s biggest crime against Europe is its visibility. Europeans have no problems with the presence in their midst of large numbers of Third World immigrants of varied cultures, beliefs and habits. Nor do they greatly resent that such immigrants are a mild burden on their welfare states. It makes them feel good about themselves and gives credibility to claims that Europe is an enlightened, compassionate civilisation that is prosperous, benign and concerned for its fellow beings. It also vindicates the claim that Europe has made remarkable strides in the defence of human rights and social equality. For some liberals, the charity shown towards the miserable former subjects from the colonies is a balm that assuages feelings of guilt and shame.

I recently saw an interesting protest poster in London which bore a slogan that I was told is frequently displayed by angry youths whose parents migrated to Britain from Third World countries. It read, “We are here, because you were there”. Clearly, a provocative reminder that the Third World within Europe is a direct consequence of European colonialism and imperialism. What Europeans do not like is slogans such as, “Hijab is freedom”, “Islam will dominate”, and “Behead those who insult Islam”. While “We are here, because you were there” reminds Europeans of their imperial heritage, the other slogans arouse mixed emotions of fear and anger. That about the hijab triggers an unsettling awareness of double standards on the subject of religious freedom. Some Europeans do realise that the ban in certain countries on wearing the hijab infringes the right of Muslims to practise their faith freely.

Islam’s visibility is not confined to protests and catchy slogans. There is a more enduring and institutionalised visibility that has become a constant reminder not only of the Islamic presence but also of its threat and that even acts as a barometer of its growing health: newer, bigger and more imposing mosques. Opposition to a projected “mega mosque” in east London—which if built would be the largest in Europe—is just one indication of this new visibility. The architecturally spectacular Centre for Islamic Studies in Oxford is a reminder both of Islam’s presence and its determination to endure for ages. Similarly new and spectacular Islamic centres in Rome, Berlin, and across Europe are changing the cultural content of Europe’s public landscape. They promise a permanence that is disturbing.

Add to this the intellectual and political intermingling of Islam with the European ethos. People like the Muslim thinker Tariq Ramadan have found a way to cement theoretically a place for Islam in Europe by envisioning a European Muslim identity. It is becoming apparent that a highly visible Islam, enjoying the allegiance of millions of young Europeans, will, through manner of dress, beliefs and political expression, remain a permanent feature of Europe.

5. See Tariq Ramadan, To Be a European Muslim (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), and Western Muslims and the Future of Islam (London: Oxford University Press, 2004).
Europe is becoming an Islamo-European civilisation. Once Turkey joins the European Union, this will be a fait accompli. Hence, the enduring opposition to Turkey's accession to the European Union and the rising decibel levels of expressions of fear of Islam.

After visibility, Islam's second crime is assertiveness. I understand that visibility and assertiveness are related, but there is an aggressiveness in Islam's assertiveness that is missing from other cultures new to the West such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Islam's assertiveness has many dimensions and presents problems for European societies at a truly fundamental level. Muslims in the West are affirming their identity and demanding the rights promised to them by Western constitutions with a firmness and frequency that are disquieting to European populations. Europeans by and large like to believe that they are religiously tolerant, opposed to discrimination based on ethnicity and race, and proud of their secular heritage. Muslims who seek recognition of Islam as a religion in Germany, who seek there and elsewhere in Europe to establish Islamic schools, mosques, and dawah (missionary) organisations, and most importantly, who call for the upholding of shari’a (Islamic law) values, are exposing the gap between Europe's moral reality and its moral self-perception.

When Muslims demand religious equality with Christianity and Judaism, they expose the long-existing and durable accommodations between religion and the state in Europe, thereby revealing the limits of European secularism and also the reality of how strongly Europeans feel Europe is Christian and should remain so. These deeply held sentiments of keeping Europe a Christian fortress often surface in the debate about Turkey's accession to the European Union. France's new president, Nicolas Sarkozy, is not alone in his opposition to Turkey's EU membership. According to polls (March–May 2006) by the European Union's statistical survey organisation, Eurobarometer, a plurality of Europeans, as many as 48 per cent, are against Turkey's EU entry, while a significant minority, about 39 per cent, are in favour.

Europeans, it seems, would like to have their cake and eat it too. They wish to build a strong political community on the foundation of Christian identity but also enjoy a reputation for religious tolerance and a secular ethos. Unfortunately, Islam's institutional demands for recognition and equal status and other issues such as Turkey's proposed EU membership force Europeans to choose one of two values: Christian solidarity or secularism. Islam's assertiveness, therefore, becomes very irksome: it exposes the gap between Europe's proclaimed and real values.

Islam's third offence against Europe is the alignment of some European Muslims with Islamic movements and militias in the Muslim world. Such movements are challenging the cultural and political hegemony of Europe and the West across the Muslim world. They have raised the cost of dominating their region and its resources to painful levels. Today, the West is forced to fight expensive and prolonged wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Levant—wars which are causing it moral as well as material damage. A key consequence of these new crusades is the widespread alienation of Muslim youth in Europe, especially in Britain, which of all European countries aligned itself most closely with Washington, joining it in an illegal war against Iraq that resulted in mayhem and chaos, several hundred thousand deaths and the destruction of a modern nation.

Radicalised Muslim youths in Europe seem increasingly open to the anti-Western message and agenda of Islamist and jihadi groups. In the past few years there have been a number of major terrorist attacks in Europe, notably those
in Madrid and London, which underscore the threat of Europe's internal Islam aligning with external Islam to subvert Europe's security and political integrity from within.

Besides terrorism, there are other instances of European Muslims aligning with outside forces to pressure European governments. A striking example of this is the triggering of an international crisis by a group of Danish Muslims angered by insulting cartoons about the Prophet Mohammad that were published by a Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, in September 2005.

The growing threat of terrorism, demonstrated by frequent attempted attacks and arrests of alleged plotters, along with the proven ability of European Muslims to spark international crises which can embarrass European states and damage their interests, are indicative of the growing inside-outside linkage of Islam and Muslim activism that presents new forms of challenges to European governments from both radical and so-called mainstream Muslims.

The Cartoons Affair

The Danish cartoons affair is a fascinating indicator of Europe's struggle to cope with Islam. On 30 September 2005, Jyllands-Posten published twelve editorial cartoons mocking and ridiculing the Prophet of Islam. Danish Muslims and their organisations protested and demanded an apology. The newspaper defended its publication of the cartoons on free-speech grounds. It also claimed an additional public-interest motive: it wanted to highlight the growing culture of self-censorship on Islamic subjects in Denmark. When Danish Muslims found that their protests fell on deaf ears and that more and more newspapers were beginning to reproduce the offensive cartoons, they went international. A group of Danish imams travelled to the Middle East and "raised awareness" about the cartoons. The ensuing storm of protests across the Muslim world resulted in arson attacks on the Danish embassies in Syria and Lebanon, vandalism against European buildings, a boycott of Danish products, and the death of dozens of protesters.

The cartoons affair highlights three salient dimensions of the ongoing dynamics of the relationship between Islam and Europe. First, it points to the persistence of xenophobia and the rise of Islamophobia in certain sections of European society. While there is governmental acknowledgement of the existence of both xenophobia and Islamophobia (and also of anti-Semitism), there is no concerted effort by governments and civil society to combat them. A seminal report in 1997 by the Runnymede Trust, Islamophobia: A Challenge for All of Us, first drew widespread attention to Islamophobia in Britain. In 2006, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia published a report entitled Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia. This highlighted the under-reporting of hate crimes against Muslims and acknowledged that they suffer both systematic and institutional discrimination, as seen in their underprivileged and marginal status.

Civil rights groups and Muslim organisations wherever they may exist have made feeble attempts to address Islamophobia but have failed, as evidenced in the persistence of Islam-baiting in the European media. Incidents such as the Danish cartoons affair underscore how free and emboldened Islamophobes feel in the current European atmosphere, which is fostering a culture of increased intolerance towards Islam and Muslims. Danish historian of ideas, Rune E. Larsen, describes the cartoons affair as a crisis
triggered by Danish Islamophobia, which he believes to be the worst in Europe.6

The cartoons affair, following a series of such episodes reaching back to the Salman Rushdie affair of 1989, inclines Muslims to believe—rightly or wrongly—that Europeans know only one way to prove the existence of free speech: by mocking, insulting and ridiculing the sacred symbols of Islam. Some Muslims propose that Europe prove its devotion to free speech by making it legal to deny and/or question the Holocaust. Merely to suggest the idea shows that Europe, like Islam, has its own sacred cows, in respect of which the right to freedom of speech must be suspended. Just as shutting down free discussion of the Holocaust keeps a lid on anti-Semitic, far-right, neo-Nazi propaganda (anti-Semitism is also on the rise in Europe), so treating insults against Islam’s sacred symbols as hate speech may keep a lid on expressions of anti-Muslim hatred. Perhaps Europe is waiting for a disaster before it clamps down on hate speech against Islam. For those who think such an eventuality is remote in contemporary enlightened Europe, it should be sobering to recall that not too long ago nearly two hundred thousand European Muslims suffered a mini-genocide accompanied by mass systematic rape in Bosnia and then in Kosovo, where four hundred thousand Muslims were displaced.

The second development that the cartoons affair highlights is the reaction of some Muslims to real or perceived insults against Islam, with perceived insults seeming to have a galvanising effect on Muslim activism. It underscores the vital reality that religious identity has become a powerful motivator for self-assertion by European Muslims. Indeed, defending Islam from Europe, whether by demanding apologies for insults, by resorting to violence as in the abhorrent murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, by acts of terrorism as in London and Glasgow, or by volunteering for jihadi campaigns on far-away battlefields in Iraq, has become a way of expressing dissent for militant Muslim youths in Europe. It raises the question whether politics and civil society have so failed European Muslims that some believe they have no means other than violence to make their point. European leaders are mistaken in thinking that the radicalisation of Muslim youths is solely a function of radical ideology and indoctrination by extremist groups. The lack of empowerment that Muslim youths feel in Europe often drives them into the arms of radicals. If it was easier for young Muslims to express their discontent, challenge Islamophobia, and effect change in European foreign policy through political activism then perhaps fewer would choose the more dangerous, deplorable and often counter-productive path of violence. Many Muslims in America share the views of European Muslims about Western double standards in the Middle East, yet they do not follow the same path, primarily because they feel more empowered than their European co-religionists.

The third element of the changing reality in Europe highlighted by the cartoons affair is the new-found ability of even small, weak and marginalised Muslim minorities to generate an international storm and pressure European governments. While Muslims in Europe may not have domestic power, they have international leverage way beyond their numbers and resources that can be harnessed by plugging into the umma, the global community of Muslim faithful. The reaction to the Danish cartoons across the Muslim world resulted in protests and a boycott of


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Danish products that actually hurt, leading to job losses in Denmark. The country’s international image was damaged and its relations with many states in the Middle East and beyond were undermined. The ability of European Muslims to internationalise their causes lends strength and substance to their self-assertion.

Clearly, there is a reaction to this greater Muslim assertiveness. It contributes to the further alienation of European Muslims, increases animosity in host societies and also intensifies fear of Islam itself. For instance, a growing number of people in Britain believe the country now has a “Muslim problem”. More than 50 per cent of respondents to a 2006 survey in Britain felt that Islam as a religion, not just its tiny minority of extremist adherents, “poses a threat to the West”. Seven years ago, after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, an overwhelming majority felt otherwise.\(^7\)

**Cultural Purity**

Both Islam and Europe seem to be gripped by a desire for cultural purity. As Muslims become more assertive they are seeking to distinguish themselves both culturally and morally in order to underscore, perhaps to themselves, that they have not assimilated in a way that has made them forget their religious values and religious identity. They do not wish to become like the non-Muslim majority—whom they imagine to be a materialist community devoid of spiritual and moral direction seeking only to maximise wealth, power and pleasure.

Even as Islam asserts itself, Europe fears that its culture and value system will be diluted by Muslims who refuse to speak local languages and to adopt local customs, and moreover who insist on importing foreign values, norms and practices and demand that Europeans respect them in the name of religious freedom and multiculturalism. Muslims do seek to assimilate, but in the political and economic arenas, where they face significant discrimination and entry barriers. In the cultural and normative spheres, Muslims demand autonomy and insist on their right to live according to Islam. Europeans, for their part, insist that Muslims first demonstrate that they have fully assimilated culturally, and authorities are reluctant and slow to take steps to address anti-Muslim economic discrimination. Thus, the battle for Muslim assimilation in Europe has become a struggle for cultural purity on both sides—a travesty, indeed, since culture is always evolving, always fluid and often capable of taking eclectic forms. Cultures are enriched and not weakened through exposure to new traditions and norms.

The most prominent indicators of the politics of cultural purity are the calls by Muslims for the implementation of shari’a law and the proclamations by European politicians and commentators that multiculturalism has failed and that tougher immigration procedures are needed. Jeremy Bransten writes that:

> If you don’t speak Dutch, and the thought of nude beaches or homosexual marriage makes you uncomfortable, then the Netherlands is not for you. That’s the message from Dutch immigration authorities . . . \(^8\)


Bransten describes how the Netherlands is leading Europe in making immigration rules more difficult for financially poor Muslims and for those who have reservations about European cultural mores. He also discusses the growing feeling in Europe that multiculturalism has failed.

Lee Jasper, the mayor of London’s director of policing and equalities, wrote quite openly in the *Guardian* in October 2005 that racists were blaming Islam for the death of multiculturalism in order to push for assimilation. His exact words were:

None the less, the cloak of integration is being used to push aggressively what is really an assimilationist agenda. Fascists and racists swim in the pool of racism. How this manifests itself—concretely—is [as] an onslaught on British Muslims, using the religion of Islam as a battering ram. Islam is promoted as uniquely evil, or uniquely backward. The most explicit example is the British National party, which issued thousands of anti-Muslim leaflets after the London bombings with a graphic illustration of the devastated No 30 bus. According to the BNP, multiculturalism was to blame. The BNP is feeding on the mainstream onslaught against the Muslim communities and multiculturalism.9

For their part, many Muslims seem to think that the cultural balance of power has shifted in their favour. They now have a sufficient critical mass of people to hunker down and sustain cultural autonomy. Additionally, the proliferation of Muslim ghettos across Europe allows for geographic separation and the exercise of cultural sovereignty by community leaders. The ghettos thus undermine efforts by states to assimilate Muslim minorities.

Younger Muslims frequently express allegiance to shari’ a law. A survey conducted for the *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper in February 2006 was widely reported to have shown that 40 per cent of British Muslims wished to live under the shari’a. For many analysts, this suggested that Muslims were not taking to modern Western values, underscoring the incompatibility of Islam and Europe. I think the survey essentially expresses the desire of Muslims to identify themselves as such, and perhaps is also an acknowledgement that it is possible to be both Muslim and British. It is important that both Europe’s mainstream and minority communities view such responses within the context of the large areas of compatibility between Islam and modernity, rather than in the light of the few issues where the two part company.

In fairness to Muslims, it must be noted that the question was a kind of trap: it was phrased to elicit maximum support for the shari’a. Question 10 read as follows:

Would you support or oppose there being areas of Britain which are pre-dominantly Muslim and in which Sharia law is introduced?

Interestingly, while 40 per cent said they would support such areas, 41 per cent said they would oppose them. This finding is being projected as the expression of a demand for the shari’a by Muslim youths in Britain. I doubt that the possibility of territorial and constitutional segregation had even occurred to the Muslim respondents (even to those who expressed support for it) until the—wildly hypothetical—question was put to them. The

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question itself is loaded with Islamophobic malice, seeking to entrap a poorly educated minority in order to portray it as a threat to the integrity of Britain. Nevertheless, the alienation and the radicalism of Muslim youths in Britain are palpable. The discourse and rhetoric from radical Muslims are quite disconcerting and must be addressed lest they flare into something much more dangerous, with regional and perhaps global consequences.

**Inadequate Leadership**

European governments and intellectuals are not alone in failing European Muslims. Muslim leaders, too, have not served their communities well. One of the major causes of the growing chasm between Muslim youths and European realities is the failure of Muslim leadership. The character and vision that shape the politics and determine the priorities of European Muslim leaders are fundamentally out of sync with what is needed in order to bridge the gap between their communities and Europe’s mainstream societies.

There are five types of Muslim elite which seek to mould the identity, the theological orientation, the political priorities and the cultural vision of European Muslims. The five are traditional Islamic leaders, political

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<td><strong>Key goals</strong></td>
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<td>To preserve Islamic identity (understood in terms of rituals) and the culture of Muslims’ countries of origin. Resistance to cultural assimilation is their primary concern</td>
<td>To develop a pan-Islamic identity with a focus on the political assertion of Islamic values. Loyalty to <em>shari’a</em> law is their primary goal</td>
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<td>Examples</td>
<td>The <em>Tablighi Jamaat</em> and most imams of mosques</td>
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NOTE: This typology is based on several dozen interviews that I conducted with Muslim leaders from Belgium, Germany, France, and Britain. Some I met at the annual Brookings US–Islamic World Forum in Doha and others during my many visits to Europe.
Islamists, radical Islamists, the secular elite, and moderate modernist reformists. Table 1 provides a quick overview of the various leadership types. I shall restrict the application of the model to Britain but it can be adapted to reflect the situation of Muslim communities across Europe.

The leadership potential of the secular elite is really marginal; voices like Salman Rushdie appeal more to Western secularists and liberals than to the Muslim community. Because there are very few secular Muslim institutions in Europe, secular Muslims have limited contact with the community and have little opportunity to guide it. Some secular voices such as Rushdie in Britain and Ayaan Hirsi Ali in the Netherlands are seen by many Muslims in Europe and elsewhere as enemies of Islam who are determined to acquire fame and fortune by ridiculing the faith and its followers. For this and other reasons, the secular elite have failed to create an effective alternative to the traditional and political Islamic leaderships.

The traditional leadership is composed primarily of imams, and lay members of the Tablighi Jamaat (a missionary Muslim movement) and Sufi tariqas (mystical orders) who lead various mosques and prayer assemblies. They have essentially focused on preserving the Islamic identity of Muslims, keeping them within the spiritual periphery of the mosque, and have also tried to retain the cultural aspects of Islam prevalent in European Muslims' countries of origin. Thus, in Britain, most Friday sermons are given in Urdu and the context of the interpretation of Islam remains Pakistani rather than British. The traditional leaders and imams may or may not have had a traditional Islamic education, but they are generally without a deep understanding of European history, of Europe's values and culture. Many lack fluency in local European languages and what they do not know they fear and reject. Thus, the Islam they preach has an isolationist subtext.

Traditionalists are the dominant force in European Muslim communities. Their Islam is not a threat or danger to anybody. Indeed, it is impotent and incapable of either enlightening or empowering Europe's Muslim communities. It disables its followers from engaging the mainstream, encourages isolation and breeds alienation. This alienation is compounded by discrimination in the job market and generally poor economic conditions. Traditional Islam and the ghetto have come to rely on each other for their existence. Traditionalists, furthermore, are unable to offer a satisfactory understanding of global geopolitics and the contemporary existential condition of Muslims in Europe, thereby leaving their communities with a strong feeling of being lost and adrift.

Some of these Muslims, many of whom are powerfully affected by the disturbing situation in Iraq and Palestine, are forced to turn to other sources, such as the Internet, or Arabic television or even local radical voices, to get an explanation of Muslim geopolitics. It is in this political vacuum created by the limited scope of traditional Islam that political and radical Islam thrive.

Islamists, Muslim leaders influenced by political Islamic ideologies such as those expounded by the Jamaat-e-Islami of South Asia and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world, dominate non-mosque Islamic organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain. Their orientation is primarily ideological and pan-Islamic, and focuses largely on Western foreign policies vis-à-vis Muslim crises such as Palestine, Kashmir, and Chechnya. While Islamists do adopt local causes which enable them to expand their leadership role, they choose issues which project them as defenders of Islam, the religion. They rarely take up causes
that will improve practically the material, economic or social wellbeing of Muslims. They primarily see themselves as agents of Islam rather than as representatives of Muslims. Thus, in a curious way, ordinary European Muslims become tools that counter-hegemonic political and radical Muslim elites manipulate to advance ideological visions of Islam.

Both the traditional and political Islamic leaderships are responsible for the strong Islamic fervour among European Muslim youths, and it is the political Islamists who chiefly fuel the assertiveness of European Islam. Unfortunately, these leaders have failed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Muslim world's political realities, and also to identify pathways for political action that lie within the framework of Western democracies. As a result of these failures, Muslim youths strongly influenced by their religious identity become easy prey for the ideas and tactics of radical Muslim clerics and lay leaders of small informal groups who provide a dogmatic worldview that blames the West for all the problems in the Muslim world.

Moderate voices like those of Tariq Ramadan do exist, but they are few, lack institutional support and certainly do not have the incredible influence that a mosque has on a Muslim community. Before the ideas of moderate Muslims can become popular and acceptable with the majority of Muslims, Muslim communities will have to reach a threshold level of education, enlightenment and awareness of global history (free from radical ideological spin). Unfortunately, most Muslims in Europe are not ready for the complex intellectual arguments that deconstruct both modernity and traditional Islamic thinking in order to develop a narrative that emphasises the compatibility of Islam and modernity, Islam and democracy, and Islam and liberalism. The angry reaction to and furore over Ramadan's recent call for a moratorium on the application of hudud laws (shari'a-based ordinances that mandate capital punishment for certain offences) are indicative of the lack of readiness of even prominent and so-called moderate Muslim leaders for a dialogue/transition towards a more compassionate and enlightened interpretation of Islam.

Until European Muslim leaders get their act together and consciously and systematically work towards the goal of harmonious co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe based on the principles of mutual accommodation and mutual tolerance, European governments will fail in their efforts to assimilate Muslims. European Muslim leaders also need to work towards the intellectual and economic empowerment of their communities and not just foster an uncritical solidarity with all things Islamic. They must help European Muslims develop a thoughtful approach both to Islam and to the political and material realities of the societies in which they live. Most importantly, they must help Muslims in Europe develop an affinity for their new homelands and nurture a sense of belonging to and responsibility towards the good of Europe. So far, Europe's Muslim leaders have generated an Islamic identity that needs a degree of value separation from Europe in order to sustain itself. They have failed to develop an Islamic identity that is in harmony with Europe.

The New Europe

The cultural battle in Europe is a consequence of the Muslim refusal to assimilate into European societies and the mainstream European refusal to embrace Europe's new cultural dimension—Islam. The die is cast; Europe has changed significantly in its demographic and cultural character. Most Europeans recognise
this but are not assimilating into the new Europe, whose second religion and second culture is Islam. Brussels, a city 20 per cent of whose population is Muslim and which boasts over one hundred mosques, is an apt metaphor for the new Europe. Nothing about Brussels is Islamic at first sight. It is like a mini-Paris, resplendent with architectural beauty typical of historical European cities, with elegant streets and many splendid and majestic churches. But a second glance will show the omnipresence of Islam and Muslims. The frequent sighting of hijabs, the kebab stores on every corner, the occasional glimpse of a minaret, all remind you that there is a new presence in old Europe. It is apparent that both Brussels and Muslims have embraced each other.

The story is not the same elsewhere in Europe. The visibility and assertiveness of Islam and the growing ability of Muslims to have an impact on European politics and policies through civic activism and international networking are inciting Islamophobia. Hostility between Western nations and Muslim countries like Iran and the consequences of the US “war on terror” are further driving wedges between Europeans and European Muslims. More and more European intellectuals are rejecting the idea of the new Europe—inextricably intertwined with Muslims and Islam—and are aggressively demanding the assimilation of Muslims. The demand for Muslim assimilation is in reality a demand for the elimination of the presence, visibility and influence of Islam in Europe. Unfortunately for those making this demand, Muslims are not co-operating. They live in the new Europe, they like the new Europe, they wish to make it more new. The issue really is no longer about whether Muslims will integrate and assimilate into Europe. They already have, and therefore there is now a new Europe. The question is really whether Europeans in general can and will integrate and assimilate into the new Europe.

Suspicion and fear about Islam and Muslims were artificially intensified by al-Qaeda’s 11 September attacks on the United States and by the latter’s war on terror. These events raised the levels of anxiety, anger, and in some instances even hatred, and the resultant discourse on Islam in Europe is edgy and unwise. But unless Washington starts another major war in the Muslim world (perhaps against Iran) in partnership with a European power (perhaps France), or unless there is a major terrorist attack against a Western target by extremist Muslims, I expect that the rhetoric of Islamophobia will be replaced by a more sober discussion about the material conditions of Muslims in Europe, and that policies to alleviate these will be articulated. In other words, Europe may get its act together, but what about European Muslims?

European Islam faces and will continue to face enduring challenges which cannot be addressed by government policies. Yes, Muslims can be helped out of their ghettos, and sensible economic initiatives will remedy their material alienation, but changed economic conditions will not automatically resolve cultural, moral and identity issues. Four developments are necessary for such a resolution.

First, European Muslims must define for themselves what European Islam is and what it means to be a European Muslim. Islam has always embraced local cultures and norms, and it is in the interest of European Muslims to cherish and indeed defend and nurture the values of religious freedom, secularism, tolerance, and multiculturalism.

Second, as long as there are insecurity, underdevelopment, political strife and political violence in the old Muslim world, the reverberations will be felt and even echoed in
the new Muslim world (diasporas in the West). The problems of the Muslim world are not going to disappear in a hurry, but perhaps European civil society can help channel the energy and angst of Muslim youths in more constructive directions to provide aid and assistance where needed rather than letting these forces act as a wedge between Muslims and other Europeans.

Third, Muslim leaders in Europe have to revisit systematically their vision of Islam and Islamic identity. They must start moderating their aspirations for an Islamic revival with genuine concern for the economic and educational development of their communities and for the social of harmony of Europe.

Finally, European powers must profoundly re-examine the moral basis of their foreign policies towards the Muslim world. It is in the interest of the new Europe to have a new relationship with the Muslim world, one based on mutual respect and co-operation, not domination. The new Europe’s domestic structure no longer supports an imperial foreign policy.