Muslims in Public and Media Discourse in Western Europe: The Reproduction of Aporia and Exclusion

Tsagarousianou, R.

Muslims in Public and Media Discourse in Western Europe:

The Reproduction of Aporia and Exclusion

Roza Tsagarousianou

This chapter provides a critical overview of the ways in which European Muslims have been constructed as communities and individuals within Western European societies. It does so by focusing on key aspects of the discourse(s) of key political and cultural actors and media representations in Western Europe over the past three decades (from the early 1990s, through the post-9/11 period to today). It traces the progressive transformation and escalation of perceptions of Muslims in Europe over this period from an 'exotic presence' to bearers of values, cultural traits and political predispositions deemed radical, threatening and incompatible to European values and way of life as well as the progressive convergence of discourses and policies related to the above issues within and across country borders.

The murders of the Charlie Hebdo editorial team on January 7, 2015 by a couple of fanatical Muslims were one of the last in a long series of instances where the problematic character of the representation of Islam and Muslims in Europe was revealed. In the subsequent reporting of the attacks and their aftermath, Islam assumed the form of a culture and religion alien to the European way of life and values. Charlie Hebdo became a symbol of the freedom of expression, a value threatened by an intransigent and increasingly aggressive Islam and the European Muslims who practice it. On the night of the murderous attack at the Charlie Hebdo offices, the UK Channel 4 news reported from La Place de la République where thousands of people stayed up late to protest against the brutal massacre. One of their interviewees, Matthieu Ecoiffier, journalist with the French newspaper Libération, talking to

Channel 4, was shocked, surprised that Charlie Hebdo could have caused offence. He mentioned the 'innocent' cover of the magazine issue with the title Charia Hebdo and a cartoon depicting 'Muhammad with a red nose saying that humor and Islam are after all compatible'.

In moments like this, collective amnesia can paralyze our critical reflexes and lure us into the vortex of a false sense of superiority and self-righteousness. Ecoiffier, like many others who addressed television audiences on the day and the days that followed, has been instrumental in the cultivation of a collective amnesia by leaving out some ugly details and focusing on the innocence of the humor that Charlie Hebdo professed to be serving. Thus, he did not mention the numerous instances in which the prophet Muhammad was depicted naked, in positions that may have caused offence to Muslim publics in France, not necessarily because of their faith but because of the cultural and political connotations such depictions of Muhammad may have. In this sense, I would argue, Ecoiffier's treatment of the incident was an instance in a long chain of representations of Europe's Muslims; yet another abstraction of the issues of representation of Muhammad from the broader issue of the symbolic minoritization of France's and, more broadly, European Muslim populations.[1]

Indeed, over the past two decades or so, Islam has assumed an unenviable position in European public debate as it has been represented and understood as equivalent, or conducive to cultural and religious fundamentalism, political extremism and terrorism. This has affected significantly European Muslims and their communities as, by being systematically posited as the antipodes of Western culture and the values of liberal democracy, in domestic debates, it has been seen as a religion and culture that stubbornly hinders the cultural and social integration of Muslims in European societies. In addition, the ongoing debates on the desirability and usefulness of immigration have often converged with those focusing on Islam, giving rise to discourses defining Muslim immigration as a problem, and contributing to the

formulation of distinctions between 'manageable' and 'unmanageable' population movements, the latter often comprising immigration from Muslim countries.[2] Seen as a threat to social cohesion (in the United Kingdom), or to the secular character of European societies (in France but also elsewhere), adherence to Islam or declaration of some sort of Muslim identity by Muslims in Europe has come to be viewed as a deficiency, as something that had to be rectified through adaptation to European cultures or to be contained through various forms of exclusion. Featuring prominently in the processes of construction of societal insecurity in most European societies, Islam, and more specifically, Europe's Muslims, have unavoidably borne the brunt of public scrutiny and condemnation.

Although in the 1980s and early 1990s, the encounter of European populations with Islam was rather localized, soon, Islam and European Muslims acquired broader visibility in European societies and presence in public debates. In areas of settlement of Muslim migrants their initially 'exotic' presence gave gradually way to closer interaction, cooperation and, not uncommonly, competition between Muslims and non-Muslims in various public spaces dedicated to work, education, welfare and consumption. Different approaches to an array of issues such as gender relations, aspects of schooling and the creation or use of buildings and public spaces informed, or perceived to be informed, by Islamic principles, especially in domains characterized by scarcity of resources, often were construed in terms of a clash of cultures and led to disputes and confrontations. Instances of such perceptions of cultural clash and incompatibility are discernible in the various disputes around the construction of mosques or community centres in European cities, the visibility of Muslims in public spaces through the construction of minarets or the wearing of headscarves or the face veil, the provision of *halal* school dinners for Muslim students or the negotiation of acceptable school attires taking into consideration Muslim sensitivities.

As migrants of Muslim backgrounds became more settled in Europe and as the predominant pattern of settlement shifted from that of single guestworkers to families, these, initially localized, disputes progressively gave their place to more general debates and, not surprisingly, confrontations between Muslims and non-Muslims. The settlement or formation of Muslim families confirmed in many ways in Muslim and non-Muslim minds alike that their presence in Europe was no longer temporary and brought to the foreground a number of issues, concerns and aspirations linked to their social and cultural reproduction. Interaction between European Muslims and the broader societies which they formed part of, eventually revolved around symbolic, issues such as blasphemy and the limits of free speech, the visibility of Islam as an element of European societies and cultures, as well as more practical matters such as the right to religious schooling or to sharia governing personal status law. Whereas conflict between 'the mainstream' of European societies and European Muslim communities has traditionally been latent or of low intensity, only occasionally disrupted by more manifest and widespread disputes, during the past couple of decades or so it became much more visible and pervasive. During this period, together with a host of other themes such as unemployment or immigration, the compatibility of Islamic and European cultures and the alleged 'islamization' of European societies became a staple ingredient in the articulation of societal insecurity throughout the continent.

Genealogies of Representation

One of the first instances of the confrontation of European media and public opinion with Islam was the 1989 *Satanic Verses* controversy in the United Kingdom. The controversy saw British Muslims engage in highly visible and vocal protests calling for Salman Rushdie's novel to be banned for blasphemy, and even some threatening the author and his publishers, constituted an important moment of 'awakening' for many Muslims in the United Kingdom as

well as far beyond its borders.[3] More importantly, in the UK, the controversy prompted a process of rethinking the position of Islam in British society and started a debate on whether their relationship entailed merely the progressive adaptation of British Muslims to the mainstream, dominant culture, or a much more mutual process that involved cultural exchange and dialogue (Parekh, 1998). One of the most visible instances of the transformation of the mood among the Muslim community was the campaign for the rethinking of the blasphemy law to encompass Islam in addition to the Anglican Church (Cesari, 2009).

Across the Channel, the *affaire du foulard* which erupted in France in the late eighties over the alleged threat headscarves posed to the principle of secularity (*laïcité)* in French schools and public institutions focused on a visible item of clothing and transformed it into a symbol of cultural alterity and of a cultural clash (Sofos & Tsagarousianou, 2013, pp. 12-13).

The Affaire du foulard consisted of a series of disputes around the right of Muslim women to wear headscarves in public places, especially schools in France. Premised on the view that the headscarf was not a mere clothing item but a religious or quasi-religious symbol, the Collège Gabriel Havez in Creil suspended three female students when the latter refused to remove their headscarves in October 1989 as their attire was deemed incompatible with the principle of laïcité that is supposed to inspire public education. A month later the Conseil d'État found that wearing a scarf was not incompatible to the laïcité of public education, In December, the then minister of education Lionel Jospin intervened and issued a statement that reignited the controversy, declaring that schools had the discretion and responsibility of determining whether wearing the scarf in schools was to be allowed. Following this rather ambiguous statement, the principal of Noyon's Collège Pasteur suspended a number of female students, while parents of one of the previously affected students initiated legal procedures against the school. Soon, the headscarf issue mobilized Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Teachers in various schools held strikes against students wearing headscarves in school

premises. Muslim parents became more vociferous while the government issued yet another statement effectively ignoring the earlier verdict of the Conseil d'État and stressing the importance of upholding the principle of laïcité in public schools. In September 1994, the 'François Bayrou memo' attempted to distinguish between 'acceptable' 'discreet' religious symbols, and 'ostentatious' ones (including the headscarf), which were to be banned in public establishments. This new government intervention sparked protests among students against the effective ban on the headscarf. Since 1994 the headscarf remained an important rallying point for advocates of secularism, human rights but also Muslim religious activism and provided an arena for debate and confrontation. To date over one hundred female students have been sanctioned for covering their hair, although several such measures have been annulled by the courts.

The controversy lasted several years and subsequently informed public debate throughout Europe, cast European Muslims in an unflattering light representing their faith and cultures as backward and misogynistic while giving rise, at the same time, to a more critical approach towards the assumed neutrality of secularism within Muslim communities.

In Germany, the debate on the right of Muslim women to wear a headscarf has a fairly long history too. One of the first confrontations followed the decision of a Baden-Württemberg school not to employ a female applicant because she wore a veil. In July 1998, the regional government upheld the decision claiming that the hijab is a political symbol of female submission and not a religious requirement. In 2003 the issue of the hijab reached the Federal Constitutional Court which recognized the right of German länder to introduce bans (Statham, 2004; Cesari, 2009). Soon after, the Brandenburg government introduced a ban of all religious symbols for civil servants, and Baden-Württemberg introduced a hijab ban for teachers, which was, however, rejected by the Court in July 2006 on the grounds that such a prohibition was discriminatory against Muslims, since veiled Catholic nuns were not

forbidden to teach in the state's schools (Cesari, 2009). As this last case indicates, the debate in Germany has focused on abstract concerns regarding the submission of women to patriarchal structures without sadly paying attention to the affected women's personal choices. And, in other instances, Muslim women clearly constitute the main targets of secular drives to expunge religious symbols from public spaces.

The dress codes observed by some Muslim women in Europe have continued to provide fertile ground for the mobilization of a motley constellation of xenophobic, right wing forces only too happy to jump into the bandwagon of the secular, liberal and feminist opposition to Muslim women's practice of covering. Over the past decade public attention was directed to the practice of a relatively small minority of Muslim women of using variations of the *burqa* or *niqab* (full body and face cover), again a visible and quite alien item of clothing for the majority of the Western European population. In Spain, campaigns were initiated by local authorities. By 2010 several municipalities introduced bans that effectively prohibit women who wear the niqab to enter public buildings. The bans were prompted according to municipal government spokespersons by allegedly security reasons. However, many politicians suggested that one of the main goals of such measures was the protection of 'the dignity and freedom of [Muslim] women' (Tsagarousianou & Sofos, 2010) as they considered the niqab demeaning and a sign of oppression. In the UK too, the niqab, has been posited in public discourse as the visible symbol of the perceived lack of integration of the Muslim community into British society and has therefore been associated with the whole debate over the perceived failures of multiculturalism as Jack Straw's (who was at the time leader of the House of Commons) 6 October 2006 column in the *Lancashire Telegraph* indicated when he described the veil as 'such a visible statement of separation and of difference'. In all these debates proponents of such bans have used arguments that identify in the veil patriarchal oppressive practices that are detrimental to the dignity of Muslim

women, or safety and security problems or, finally, barriers to intercultural communication and social cohesion. As I argue later on, these discourses are often articulated within the context of xenophobic and indeed islamophobic [4] definitions of the situation, under the cover of concerns over security, community cohesion and women's rights.

In the summer of 2001, a more explicit campaign against the 'belated' and 'barbaric' culture of Islam was unleashed in the Netherlands in the wake of homophobic statements made by the Moroccan imam El-Moumni and became a typical precursor of Dutch (and, more broadly, European) responses towards the 'backwardness' of Islam that were to be rehearsed on several occasions over the past decade. The tension between an otherwise libertarian and tolerant Dutch society and its uncompromisingly negative attitude towards Muslim communities in the country was renewed after the assassination of Theo van Gogh by Dutch-born Mohammed Bouyeri, in November 2004.[5] Close by, the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy that arose in Denmark in September 2005 rapidly mobilized Muslims all over Europe and beyond. The Jyllands-Posten or Muhammad cartoons controversy was sparked by the publication in the Danish conservative daily on 30 September 2005 of twelve caricatures on the theme of the prophet Muhammad. Although the newspaper culture editor, Flemming Rose, justified the publication of the caricatures on the grounds of the need to have a debate on the nature of Islam as a religion and system of cultural values as well as of the importance of addressing the predominant western culture of encouraging or imposing self-censorship among intellectuals when they touch upon difficult issues (2005), the publication of the cartoons opened a window of opportunity for some marginal yet vocal minorities within European Muslim communities to express their total rejection of an 'uncompromising' and 'Islamophobic' West as exemplified by the offensive affront of *Jyllands-Posten* against Islam or, rather, Muslims.

But the controversy also prompted more moderate Muslims to question the value of unfettered freedom of speech and to draw attention to the need on the part of the media to exercise this right responsibly and, in the process became the catalyst for the formation of a disparate coalition of political and social forces around the issue of freedom of expression.

On the other hand, Muslim protests have been routinely dismissed as irrational and regressive, primarily due to the visibility enjoyed by the most radical and intransigent views and mobilizations in the media. Indeed, whereas questions about freedom and its potential limits have been posed time and again in debates around the concept of western democracy by theorists, politicians, jurists and ordinary citizens alike, their articulation within the confrontational and polarized context of the Muslim protests dissimulated the potential legitimacy of such interventions and stifled moderate Muslim voices that did not manage to compete with their radical counterparts who enjoy public visibility and audibility, thus reinforcing the perception of an irreconcilable cultural rift in European societies. Ordinary Muslim voices remain thus in a subaltern position, unable to gain a voice in a confrontation between islamophobic mainstream and radical Muslim voices which is staged and reproduced in the media.

In addition to such controversies which were instrumental in representing the diverse cultures of European Muslims as 'backward' and 'unsophisticated', events such as those of the 1995 Paris Metro bombings, the September 2001 attacks in the United States, the 11 March 2004 bombings of the commuter train network in Madrid, and the 7 July 2005 London bombings, or the outcry that followed the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh introduced another crucial element in the public discourse about Islam and have given European Muslims further unprecedented and rather unwelcome visibility.

As Burgat (2008) aptly points out, another facet of the progressive transformation of the term *Islamism*, from one merely referring to Islam to one tainted by a 'quasi-criminal connotation', is the misrecognition of otherwise legitimate forms of social action and protest:

> Therein perhaps lies the source of the real difficulty experienced by the West in hearing what they [those who assert the right to 'speak Muslim'] have to say. Preceded by an 'Islamic' formula, a protest against some military occupation here, against the absolutism of a leader there, against the American superpower everywhere are so easy to dismiss! (p. 8)

These incidents of terrorism and political violence have virtually indiscriminately coupled Islam and Muslims (in and out of Europe) with uncompromising and irrational terrorist violence and given rise to concerns of public safety. They have decisively contributed to the 'securitization' of anything related to Islam as the religion, its followers and the communities and cultures informed by it, are no longer merely viewed as an 'irritating anomaly' in the European social landscape but hitherto seen and 'administered' through the lens of a significant societal threat. Thus *Islamic militancy*, *fundamentalism*, *jihad* and *terrorism* have become part of the staple vocabulary used by policy-makers, politicians, commentators and ordinary people in everyday contexts when discussing Islam and Muslim communities.[6]

But, it should be stressed that this misrecognition is not accidental or 'innocent'. It is premised on a long tradition of misunderstandings, of selective appropriation of the past, of particular ways of viewing the present, on the construction of particular *regimes of truth* (Said, 1978), ultimately on the exercise of the power to construct and regulate the Muslim world.

This misrecognition posed questions about the place of Islam in Europe (or, more broadly, the West), or the possibility of accommodation of Islam in secular societies. It gave

rise to intense debates on multiculturalism and its consequences, on the feasibility of integrating European Muslims into contemporary European societies as well as the social and material cost of such an endeavor.

There is a vast and diverse debate on this issue. On 28 June 2006 the then United Kingdom Communities Secretary, Ruth Kelly, summarized the often rehearsed key argument against multiculturalism pointing out that in her opinion 'we have moved from a period of uniform consensus on the value of multiculturalism, to one where we can encourage that debate by questioning whether it is encouraging separateness'. Interestingly, the 'moment of truth' for exponents of this argument, the point at which such a verdict became possible was predominantly linked with the perceived resistance of Europe's Muslims to integration or assimilation, depending on one's point of view.

The Muslim Threat

And, as the spectre of terrorism cast its shadow over Europe, politicians and commentators pinpointed what they perceived to be inextricable links between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism, anti-westernism or even terrorism. Muslims were systematically represented as virtually prone to irrational, violent behavior. Naturally, the particular social-historical conjecture in which such questions were posed and revisited and the urgency attached to them further contributed to the predominantly negative framing of the debate on Islam. In this context, disputes about Islam and Muslims have, more often than not, acquired racist overtones, whereby secularly minded commentators have been readily stigmatizing Islam as a profoundly anti-modern religion and way of life and European Muslims as bearers of the associated burden that this 'unsavory' cultural baggage entails. It would be fair to say that the dominant perspectives on Islam and Muslims in Europe, reinforced by the visibility and near monopoly of the 'Muslim voice' by radical Muslim activists and groups have severely

undermined the possibility of creating spaces for a constructive encounter and exchange between non-Muslims and Muslims in the current moment. Characteristically Rabasa and colleagues (2007, p. 1) point out on the issue of the visibility of Muslim radicals:

> By and large, radicals have been successful in intimidating, marginalizing or silencing moderate Muslims – those who share the key dimensions of democratic culture – to varying degrees.

More importantly though, the process of securitization of Islam is not just a matter of a changing rhetoric but possesses, or generates, its own reality, its own 'materiality' and has the ability to tangibly impact on the relationship between mainstream European societies and their Muslim minorities and define and shape them both. [7]

For one, as Cesari (2009) points out, the discourse of securitization permeates the policy-making process and has tangible effects in a variety of fields ranging from immigration law to minority protection framework, schooling and health provision, security policies and broader processes of inclusion. In other words, contemporary discourse on Islam, and on European Muslims, is thus not merely a way of talking about them or representing them but a means of 'constructing' them, making sense of them and developing relevant reactions to their presence and action. Through today's securitized discourse therefore, Muslims in Europe are constructed, not only as culturally different, but as a significant security threat that needs to be monitored and 'administered', whose presence in Europe and membership to European societies is increasingly questioned and subject to terms and conditions, constraints and regulation.

On the other hand, securitization also provides a lens through which European Muslims themselves see (and shape) their relationship with the broader societies which they are part of. It impacts on their repertoire of collective representations and actions and in their attempts to gain control over the ways they become visible and they are heard. In a way,

policy and societal definitions of European Muslims, attempts to curtail their rights in response to the securitization of the way they are seen and understood by authorities and public opinion set in motion reactions on the part of Europe's Muslim communities, which often take the form of increased assertiveness, giving rise, in the process, to what amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy in the eyes of those recognizing in this assertiveness a threat. And, crucially, as I will show later on, these perceptions and actions of European Muslims are constitutive of their very own identities and consciousness as 'European Muslims'.

The Clash of Traditions?

Several commentators identify in the philosophy that underlies Muslim assertiveness and mobilization in European societies and, by extension, in the values and practice of Islam that is supposed to inspire them, an authoritarian ideology that is seen as deeply inimical to the clear and unambiguous separation between religion and politics that is thought to underlie European traditions of secularism. Quite often, populist politicians and commentators see in demands that European Muslims put forward for recognition and voice, a challenge to western liberal (or even Christian, depending on one's standpoint) values and a threat to social cohesion. The succession of controversies and disputes such as the ones I attempted to outline earlier on and the emergence of anti-western terrorism in the name of Islam have contributed to the construction of a framework of understanding Islam, and European Muslims for that matter, that has given rise to definitions of the situation in Europe along the lines of what Samuel Huntington has called *Clash of Civilizations* (1996). Indeed, many of the commentators expressing concern over the presence and rootedness of Muslim minorities in Europe claim that Muslim societies (and, by extension, Muslim communities in Europe) are markedly different in terms of history, language, culture, tradition, and, most important, religion from European societies. At best, they argue, Muslims need to adapt to the Western

way of life, while many suggest that Muslims are unwilling or unable to change and therefore have no place in Europe.

Mamdani, (2004) argues that the implications of this trend which he calls *Culture Talk*, not only posit two opposing cultures but also sustain a hierarchical and unequal relationship between them by representing one of the two as reified, frozen in time, incapable of evolving and adapting to new challenges. As he characteristically points out:

> According to some, our [Muslim] culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates, so that *all* Muslims are just plain bad. According to others, there is a history, a politics, even debates, and there *are* good Muslims and bad Muslims. In both versions, history seems to have petrified into a lifeless custom of an antique people who inhabit antique lands. Or could it be that culture here stands for habit, for some kind of instinctive activity with rules that are inscribed in early founding texts, usually religious, and mummified in early artefacts? (p. 18)

Many recognize in the perceived tensions between Islam and Europe, or more broadly, the West, an antagonistic and mutually exclusive relationship, or a fundamental incompatibility. This alarmist discourse that sees in Islam and the West two largely monolithic and timeless, mutually irreconcilable and contradictory forces has, not unexpectedly, made inroads in the way the presence of Islam and Muslims in Europe has been seen. What is more, it has often led to arguments subjecting Europe's Muslims to relentless public scrutiny. The crux of such arguments is that if Islam and the West are mutually incompatible, then the presence of Muslims in Europe cannot but be a grave problem and their inclusion through economic and political forms of citizenship may be, at the end of the day, incomplete or even impossible. This effective and indiscriminate marginalization of European Muslims is exemplified in the passionate and uncompromising discourse of the French political philosopher and influential commentator Yves Charles Zarka who

characteristically criticizes those who adopt a sceptical stance against such assertions and represents the relationship between Europe and its Muslim communities in a highly polarized way:

> In France, a central phase of the more general and mutually conflicting encounter between the west and Islam is taking place, which only someone completely blind or of radical bad faith, or possibly of disconcerting naiveté, could fail to recognize. (Zarka, 2004, p. 5)

When it comes to speculating as to what the outcome of this apparently conflicting encounter is going to look like, the answers are rather bleak. Bassam Tibi, an academic of Syrian origin who lives in Germany, echoing Bernard Lewis (2002, 2007) claims that we are faced with an unequivocal dilemma: 'Either Islam gets Europeanized, or Europe gets Islamized' (2006, p. 217). Tibi and other proponents of this argument accept an ahistorical model of civilizations akin to that of Huntington's. Civilizations, according to such formulations are monolithic and for all intents and purposes immutable. The possibility of 'civilizational' interaction and exchange, of cultural translation, domestication and hybridization is either non-existent or undesirable. This simple, clear, binary *either or* schema leaves no other option but confrontation. In this context the European or Western civilization is in a collision course with Islamic civilization due to their *a priori* mutual incompatibility. The simplicity of this representation of the relationship between Islam and European Muslims on the one hand, and European societies on the other, has contributed considerably to their 'homogenization' and essentialization in public discourse and has made such formulations appealing to European media as it provides an easy to understand and 'newsworthy' interpretive framework. As Shawn Powers (2008) suggests in his analysis of the media reporting of the Danish cartoons affair:

Western mainstream media outlets drew heavily on Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' narrative, increasing public fear of Islamic culture, obscuring public understandings of the geopolitical and cultural realities underlying the affair, and further entrenching assumptions that have become barriers to productive cross-cultural dialogue (p. 339) … by drawing from the deeply entrenched clash of civilizations narrative in describing the events of the affair, many media organizations intentionally deployed culturally inscribed solidaristic appeals – particularly those that invoked fear – in order to appeal for public support and construct collective public cohesion behind their cause. (p. 356)

Interestingly, some intellectual circles even go as far as to attribute agency and purpose to the increase of the visibility and presence of Islam in Europe, suggesting that the particular, confrontational way in which Muslim communities encounter and interact with European societies constitutes part of a strategy designed to achieve the 'takeover' of Europe. This perspective can be clearly exemplified in the work of Zarka, Taussig and Fleury (2004), [8] who discern in the politics of organization and self-representation of Muslims in France a strategy for the takeover of the country. This process entails, in their opinion, the creation and promotion of an Islamic religious orthodoxy that would in turn sanction and promote relevant modes of behavior and action. In this way, they argue, the scholars and clerics that represent this orthodoxy work towards the effective purification and homogenization of the French Muslim community by suppressing moderate and secular voices and eliminating alternative viewpoints and identifications. They suggest that through a combination of the ideas they propagate and physical force and coercion, representatives of this orthodoxy aim to create Islamic public spaces inhabited by Muslims. As part of this 'Islamization of public space', they consider aspects of contemporary identity politics such as the various mobilizations and lobbying in support of the construction of mosques, or for the recognition of Islamic holidays,

and devolution of political functions to religious authorities. More importantly, Zarka et al,

give an additional geopolitical substance to this 'cultural threat' as they argue that the

'conquered territories of the [French] Republic' will become a base for fundamentalists whose

aim is the Islamization of France and, eventually, all of Europe. Resorting to the idiom of

conquest and evoking images of territorial threat is a common and highly effective rhetorical

strategy that invests talk on European Muslims communities with a sense of urgency as well

as threat and strengthens the overall narrative thread of an impending hostile 'takeover' of

Europe by Islamic fundamentalists.[9]

Without underestimating the validity of some of their remarks, such as the current

competition of élites and counter-élites within Europe's Muslim communities for the

attainment of hegemony and leadership, the representation in this competition of various

aspiring orthodoxies, the existence of discourses that are antagonistic to the West, the

increasing importance of identity politics and of various forms of collective action among

Europe's Muslims for the attainment of the right to recognition, it is hard not to object to their

particular framing within a discourse that revolves around the themes of conspiracy and

conquest, especially when Zarka et al. fail to provide any substantiation of such claims. It is

important to stress at this point that what Zarka et al. consider rather unproblematically to

constitute part of a planned 'takeover of Europe' is at best a constellation of processes which

are the product of cultural and social strategies and conjunctures, often unrelated to each

other, even accidental.

The invocation of this 'threat' to Europe and its culture is, of course, instrumental in

the construction of this very Europe. As Said (1993) suggested, conflating Islam with

fundamentalism, is implicitly positioning 'Europe' in such a way as to uphold the

'moderation, rationality, executive centrality of a vaguely designated 'Western' ethos'. Again,

the construction of a Europe that is largely defined through an antagonistic relationship to its

Muslim 'other' entails their reification, imagining both as highly homogenous and monolithic. It is no accident therefore that islamophobic attacks are often taking place in conjunction with attempts to delegitimize and silence voices that are critical of the alleged universality of the values that underpin European societies. Drawing on the rhetoric that was used to describe the bipolar world of the Cold War era conservative, liberal and Left-wing commentators and politicians have been launching attacks to those advocating the respect of human rights accusing them of betrayal.

> Islamist fellow-travelers' and useful idiots … weaving a climate of opinion today that advances the purposes of radical Islam and is deeply damaging to the prospects of reconciliation. Just as every Soviet aggression was once defined as an act of self-defense against the warmongering west, today terrorists of al Qaeda, or the Chechen terrorists who killed children in the town of Beslan, are described in the media as militants, activists, separatists, armed groups, guerrillas—in short, as anything but terrorists. Dozens of apologists pretend that there is no connection between the religion of Islam and those who practice terror in its name, or suggest that western leaders are no better or are indeed worse than Islamist murderers (Pryce-Jones, 2004).

A similar idiom is adopted by the British commentator Polly Toynbee (2005) who accused the Trotskyist–leaning British *Socialist Workers Party* of being 'fellow travelers with primitive Islamic extremism' while a few days later, Nick Cohen (2005), another left-leaning British political commentator and founding member of the *Euston Manifesto* [10] accused the Left of having 'become the fellow travelers of the psychopathic far-right'. Although highlighting not unimportant concerns over the tendency of parts of the European left to uncritically forge solidarities with dubious Islamist partners motivated by a shared 'anti-americanism', the discourse of such critics rarely focused on the diversity of Islam and Muslim lives in Europe, or the tangible issues that made imperative the construction of

solidarities that addressed the threats posed by racism, islamophobia and the marginalization of Europe's Muslims. In Germany, in a book entitled *Hurra, wir kapitulieren* (Broder, 2006), Henryk Broder, a critic of what he sees as concessions to Islam by the state and the political class accuses them of pursuing 'appeasement' politics towards totalitarian Islam. Broder's choice of language is deliberate and specific to his country's political culture and collective memory as he refers to a different past, that of the appeasement of National Socialism prior to the Second World War. In this way, he both attempts to undermine the credibility of the German and European political class that, in his opinion, refuses to stand up to Islam, and to draw parallels between National Socialism and Islam which he considers a totalitarian religion.[11]

Despite the different historical periods with which the choice of language is associated, the *idiom* utilized in both cases is telling. Being a *fellow-traveler* or *practicing appeasement* conjure an imagery of severe political misjudgment and even more so an aura of treason. They also reify Islam and European Muslims as they effectively and, I would claim, intentionally conflate a few radical anti-western movements with an entire, highly diverse community. The absence from this language of stark dilemmas of any reference to the existence of Muslim communities that share very little, if anything, with the radical Islam such commentators flag as the face of Islam in Europe is telling of the biases and prejudice inherent in their discourses.

Misrecognizing European Muslims

It should therefore come as no surprise to find that discourse on Islam and European Muslims has considerably been coupled with the highly emotional and xenophobic politics of terrorism and migration and has cast Muslims as external to all things European. As Poole (2002, p. 259) points out representation of Muslims and media discourse on Islam 'legitimize current

social relations of dominance, power structures and therefore continuing patterns of discrimination'. They exclude Muslims from European culture and identity and discount their claims to citizenship and equality. Or as Deltombe eloquently puts it, the imaginary Islam constructed in (French) media discourse is an evanescent one,

> disappearing from the television screens as suddenly as it had appeared, just as the events that seem to have put it in the spotlight. It is also a partial Islam, seen through the lens of the 'problems' and the crises that are not linked inextricably to it … . Those who consider themselves to be Muslims can feel dispossessed and rejected by this amputated and deformed gaze. (2005, p. 9)

Public 'debates-cum-panics' almost invariably exoticize European Muslims, focusing on what appears to be mysterious, alien yet seductive about their cultures and practices. As a result, the veil or, more generally the attire of women appears to be one of the central elements in discourses on European Islam echoing the earlier Orientalist obsession of westerners encountering Near Eastern cultures with peering through the (veil-like) curtains of the harem. The very same public gaze carries within it assumptions that these exotic cultures are inferior to western culture. European Muslims and their ways of life are represented as partial and belated, incomplete, and desperately left behind in time by western modernity. And, not surprisingly, European Muslims are seen as threatening, both as they are perceived and represented as being 'so different' and as they are associated with religious and political intolerance and as they are represented as having allegiance to external religious and political centres (Poole, 2002; Deltombe, 2005).

Such representation strategies drew and keep on drawing upon 'extreme' behavior among Muslims (personalities such as the notorious Abu Hamza or – now outlawed – organizations such as *Al-Gurabaa*). By doing so, they have conflated Muslims and Islam with an extreme and possibly extremist minority within it and, impatiently and unsympathetically

have refused to engage in processes of translation between 'us' and 'them', in attempts to comprehend the other's individual and collective standpoint before passing judgment on them. Such constructions of the other tend to dress in the straightjacket of homogeneity diverse and polyphonic 'communities' and to anchor public definitions of Islam around extremes.

In the midst of this intense debate and public as well as academic interest lies a paradox: while so many have and are still dedicating considerable time and energy in discussing the position and impact of the growth of populations of Muslim background as well as of the practice of Islam in Europe, the debate is politically and emotionally charged and largely informed by widespread societal insecurity. This unprecedented degree of public visibility of Islam and Muslims in Europe is matched by the invisibility of the actual people, of the majority of ordinary European Muslims whose real life concerns, whose everyday life, whose encounters with practices of exclusion are obscured by this intense, yet ideologically loaded, debate.

References

Broder, H. (2006). *Hurra, wir kapitulieren! Von der Lust am Einknicken*. Berlin: wjs-Verlag.

Burgat, F. (2008). *Islamism in the shadow of al-Qaeda*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Cesari, J . (2009). *The Securitisation of Islam in Europe*. Challenge Research Paper No. 14. Paris: CEPS

Cohen, N. (2005). I still fight oppression. *Observer*, 7 August.

Conway, G. (1997). *Islamophobia: A challenge for us all*. London: The Runnymede Trust.

Cousins, M., & Hussain, A. (1984). *Michel Foucault*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Deltombe, T. (2005). *L'Islam imaginaire : La construction médiatique de l'Islamophobie en France, 1975-2005*. Paris : La Découverte.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge*. London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. (edited by C. Gordon). London: Harvester.

Halliday, F. (1996). *Islam and the myth of confrontation*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Lewis, B. (2002). *What went wrong? Western impact and Middle Eastern response*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, B. (2007). *Europe and Islam*. Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute Press.

Malik, K. (2010). *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and its aftermath*. New York: Melville House.

Mamdani, M. (2004). *Good Muslim, bad Muslim*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Miera, F., & Sala Pala, V. (2009). The construction of Islam as a public issue in western European countries through the prism of the Muhammad cartoons controversy: A comparison between France and Germany. *Ethnicities*, *9*(3), 383-408.

Ozkirimli, U. (2012). 'And people's concerns were genuine. Why didn't we listen more?' Nationalism, multiculturalism and recognition in Europe. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 20*(3), 307-321.

Parekh, B. (1998) 'Integrating Minorities in a Multicultural Society in U. Press and F. Requejo (eds.) European Citizenship, Multiculturalism and the State. Baden-Baden: Nomos. 67-85.

Poole, E. (2002). *Reporting Islam: Media representations of British Muslims*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Powers, S. (2008). Examining the Danish cartoon affair: mediatized cross-cultural tensions? *Media, War & Conflict*, *1*(3), 339-359.

Pryce-Jones, D. (2004). The Islamization of Europe?. *Commentary*, December 31, 2004. Retrieved at 2 October 2011 from http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/the-islamization-of-europe/.

Rabasa, A, Benard, C., Schwartz, L H., & Sickle, P. (2007). *Building moderate Muslim networks*. Santa Monica, Ca: Rand Corporation.

Rivière, J. (2010). *Le multiculturalisme des imbéciles.* Retrieved on 2 October 2012 from http://blog.jeromeriviere.fr/spip. php?article33.

Rose, F. (2005). Face of Muhammed. *Jyllands-Posten*. 30.09.2005. Retrieved on 5 February 2006 from http://www.jp.dk/kultur/artikel:aid=3293102/.

Rushdie, S. (1989). *The Satanic Verses.* London: Viking Penguin .

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism* New York: Pantheon Books.

Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Sofos, S., & Tsagarousianou, R. (2013). *Islam in Europe: Public spaces and civic networks*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Statham, P. (2004). Resilient Islam: Muslim controversies in Europe. *Harvard International Review*, *26*(3), 54-61.

Tibi, B. (2006). Europeanizing Islam or the Islamization of Europe. In T.A. Byrnes & P. Katzenstein (Eds.), *Religion in an expanding Europe* (pp. 204-224). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Toynbee, P. (2005). In the name of God. *Guardian*, 22 July.

Tsagarousianou, R., & Sofos, S. (2010). *The voice behind the veil*. Retrieved on 2 October 2012 from http://europeanmuslims.blogspot.se/2010/07/voice-behind-veil-by-roza.html.

Zarka, Y.C., Taussig, S., Fleury, C., & Tribalat, M. (Eds). (2004). *L'Islam en France: Difficile tolérance*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.

---

[1] In his attempt to counter the bipolar logic underlying arguments positing Islam and the West in an antagonistic relationship, Halliday (1996) points out that the 'myth of confrontation' between the West and Islam cannot be adequately made sense of if one does not focus on the particular political needs it serves. As he very aptly points out, the kernel of what he calls anti-Muslimism is not theological objections or religious differences but a 'hostility to Muslims, to communities of people whose sole or main religion is Islam, and whose Islamic character, real or invented, forms one of the objects of prejudice' (p. 160).

[2] This distinction was explicitly articulated back in 1991 by the then candidate for the French presidency Jacques Chirac in what became known as *le bruit et l'odeur* (the noise and smell) speech as it referred to the noise and smell emanating from families of Muslim and black African immigrants. In it, Chirac contrasted the latter with immigrants of the post-war era, most of which left the European South and Poland, suggesting that they were far more easily

assimilable. The discourse of the unmanageable character of Muslim immigration has resurfaced on many occasions in many different European societies at the official and everyday level.

[3] Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was published by Viking Penguin in July 1988. The book, a work of fiction, recounted a number of episodes from the life of Prophet Muhammad some of which painted him in a way that challenged orthodox representations of his person, representing him as a confused individual surrounded by followers of dubious qualities. Its irreverent stance towards the person of the Prophet but also its deconstructive approach towards the formative era of Islam were soon identified by Muslim activists and leaders and sparked mobilizations against the book that often culminated in violent acts such as bombings and arson against companies and persons associated with the book. Although established accounts of the controversy focus on the passionate and violent reaction of 'pious' or fanatical Muslims to the offensive way in which the Prophet Muhammad was represented and quite often on the issuing of a fatwā by Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, inviting Muslims to kill Rushdie, what is more important, as I will argue later on, is the sense of injustice that many Muslims – pious and non-pious alike - in Europe and beyond experienced at the time. In this sense, theThe *Satanic Verses* were seen by many Muslims in Europe not so much as an assault against the Prophet but as an assault against them and against their position in European societies. What is more, the official and dominant reactions to the anger and, often violence, of some were perceived as largely dismissive of Muslims as a whole and of their cultures which were represented as lesser, belated and partial. As Malik (2010) suggests, the main effect of the controversy was the polarization of public debate dividing 'Muslims from Westerners along the fault line of culture'. As I will argue later, the controversy over Salman Rushdie's book *Satanic Verses*, just as a chain of subsequent high profile controversies, represented a constitutive moment in the process of formation of a

European Muslim identity or, at least, of a widespread consciousness among Muslims in Europe sharing aspirations, concerns and challenges.

[4] Islamophobia is a relatively new term, at least in the sense of being used in the social sciences to and refers to a set of attitudes and predispositions - the 'dread or hatred of Islam and therefore, to the fear and dislike of all Muslims' but also to a set of practices - discriminating against Muslims by excluding them from economic, social, and public life (Conway, 1997). Fred Halliday's (1996) preferred term - anti-Muslimism - which I consider more accurate - refers to Muslims and not to Islam and therefore pinpoints the target of islamophobia – real people. I will nevertheless adopt the convention and I will be using the term Islamophobia throughout this chapter when referring to such repertoires of attitudes and action.

[5] Van Gogh was an outspoken critic of the multicultural policies of the Netherlands, particularly with reference to the efforts to accommodate Muslim immigrants. He frequently referred to Muslims as 'goatfuckers' in his radio show and cooperated with Ayaan Hirsi Ali – a Dutch MP and vocal critic of the 'backwardness of Islam' - turning her script into the ten-minute long film *Submission* exploring the violence against women in Islam. Mohammed Bouyeri murdered Van Gogh as he was cycling to work on 2 November 2004 by shooting him eight times and afterwards stabbing him in the chest. Bouyeri left a five-page note accusing the West, Van Gogh's collaborator in the film *Submission* Ayaan Hirsi Ali of contempt towards Islam and Muslims. Van Gogh's murder caused a public outcry and renewed calls towards the government to review its multicultural policies.

[6] It is interesting to note here that 'according to Europol statistics, only 3 attacks (failed, foiled or completed) have been carried out by people who were described as 'Islamist' in 2010, compared to 160 undertaken by 'separatists' and 45 by 'left-wing groups' (TE-SAT 2011, 'European Terrorism Situation and Trend Report', 2011, p. 36 cited in Özkırımlı, 2012) .

[7] Here I see discourse in the way understood by Michel Foucault (1972, 1980), as transcending the common sense distinction between language, thought and action. According to this definition, discourse comprises constellations of statements working together which 'refer to the same object, share the same style and support a strategy … a common institutional … or political drift or pattern' (Cousins & Hussain, 1984, pp. 84-5). Discourse is the means of creating the *social*, a vehicle for the construction of thought and action, self and other. Discourse constructs its subject and delimits the ways in which it can be constructed.

[8] Ibid., pp. 159–162. In their editorial introductions to each section of this 733-page volume, Zarka, Taussig, and Fleury present a comprehensive and coherent view of Islam as a problem. See especially pp. 1–14, 159–162, 221–223, 241–243, 319–322, 397–400, 467–470, 515–517, 559–602, and 665–667.

[9] Among the permutations of this discourse of territorial threat is that of the *inverse colonization* of Europe. For example, shortly after the riots of November 2005, a Gaullist deputy, Jérôme Rivière, said in obvious anguish that France was undergoing a process of 'colonization in reverse.' There is, he suggested, 'a threshold of immigration beyond which a country looks in the mirror and no longer recognizes itself". 'France has been, for over a millennium, a country of Judeo-Christian heritage. Speaking for myself, I do not want it to become a land of Islam.' (Rivière, 2010).

[10] The *Euston Manifesto* is a group of left wing academics, journalists, and activists based in the United Kingdom, named after its 2006 declaration of principles by a group. The manifesto calls for 'the reconfiguration of progressive opinion' by 'drawing a line between forces on the Left that remain true to its authentic values, and currents that have lately shown themselves rather too flexible about these values'. The group criticized quarters within the left which are critical of particular actions of Western governments such as the military presence in Iraq, or

which 'conceal prejudice against the Jewish people behind the formula of 'anti-Zionism' and called for the left to define itself 'against those for whom the entire progressive democratic agenda has been subordinated to a blanket and simplistic 'anti-imperialism' and/or hostility to the current US administration'. (see 'The Euston Manifesto', March 29, 2006 http://eustonmanifesto.org/the-euston-manifesto/)

[11] See also Miera and Sala Pala, (2009), p. 396.