

European Islam: Myth or Reality?

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Abstract

This article critically examines “European Islam” as both an ideological discourse and a social reality in contemporary Europe. The roughly 25–30 million Muslims across EU member states have prompted debate over whether Islam can develop distinctively European traits without compromising its religious essence. The study explores the historical formation of Muslim communities, theological debates on reform and integration, socio-political challenges, and empirical cases of hybrid identities. Drawing on sociological evidence, theological discourse, and examples from France, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands, it argues that European Islam is neither a myth nor a fully realized reality, but an ongoing negotiation between religious tradition and European civic values. It highlights how second- and third-generation Muslims navigate multiple allegiances, how European legal frameworks shape Islamic practice, and whether theological innovation is occurring. Despite emerging new forms of Islamic belief and practice, barriers such as institutional discrimination, securitization of Muslim communities, and opposition from both conservative Muslim authorities and nationalist European movements continue to impede a fully integrated European Islam.

Keywords

European Islam; Muslim integration; Religious pluralism; Islamic reform; Secularization

L'islam européen : mythe ou réalité ?

Résumé

Cet article examine de manière critique l'« Islam européen » à la fois comme discours idéologique et réalité sociale dans l'Europe contemporaine. Les quelque 25 à 30 millions de musulmans vivant dans les États membres de l'UE ont suscité un débat sur la possibilité pour l'islam de développer des traits spécifiquement européens sans compromettre son essence religieuse. L'étude explore la formation historique des communautés musulmanes, les débats théologiques sur la réforme et l'intégration, les défis sociopolitiques, ainsi que des cas empiriques d'identités hybrides. S'appuyant sur des données sociologiques, le discours théologique et des exemples de France, d'Allemagne, du Royaume-Uni et des Pays-Bas, elle soutient que l'Islam européen n'est ni un mythe, ni une réalité pleinement réalisée, mais une négociation constante entre tradition religieuse et valeurs civiques européennes. Elle met en lumière la manière dont les deuxième et troisième générations de musulmans gèrent des allégeances multiples, comment les cadres juridiques européens façonnent la pratique islamique et si une innovation théologique émerge. Malgré l'apparition de nouvelles formes de croyance et de pratique, des obstacles tels que la discrimination institutionnelle, la sécurisation des communautés musulmanes et l'opposition des autorités musulmanes conservatrices comme des mouvements nationalistes européens entravent une intégration pleine de l'islam en Europe.

Mot-clés

Islam européen ; Intégration musulmane ; Pluralisme religieux ; Réforme islamique, Sécularisation

الإسلام الأوروبي: أسطورة أم حقيقة؟

المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة مفهوم "الإسلام الأوروبي" من منظور نقدي، بوصفه في آن واحد خطاباً أيديولوجياً وواقعاً اجتماعياً في أوروبا المعاصرة. وقد أثار وجود ما يقارب 25 إلى 30 مليون مسلم في دول الاتحاد الأوروبي نقاشاً واسعاً حول مدى إمكانية تكيف الإسلام مع الخصائص الأوروبية دون المساس بجوهره العقدي. تستعرض الدراسة التشكل التاريخي للجاليات المسلمة في أوروبا، وتناقش الجدال الفقهي المرتبط بالإصلاح الديني والاندماج، كما تحلل التحديات الاجتماعية والسياسية التي تواجه هذه الجاليات. وتعتمد في ذلك على دراسات حالة من فرنسا وألمانيا والمملكة المتحدة وهولندا، مع التركيز على بروز هويات هجينة تعكس تداخل الانتماءات الدينية والثقافية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن "الإسلام الأوروبي" ليس مجرد وهم نظري ولا واقعاً مكتمل التحقق، بل هو سيرة ديناميكية من التفاوض المستمر بين المرجعية الدينية الإسلامية والقيم المدنية الأوروبية. كما تبرز كيفية تعاطي الجيلين الثاني والثالث من المسلمين مع تعددية الولاءات، ودور الأطر القانونية الأوروبية في تشكيل الممارسة الدينية، فضلاً عن إمكان ظهور اجتهادات فقهية جديدة. ورغم بروز أنماط متجددة من التدين والممارسة الإسلامية، فإن الدراسة تؤكد أن هناك عوائق بنيوية لا تزال تحول دون تحقيق اندماج

كامل، من بينها التمييز المؤسسي، والمقاربات الأمنية، ومعارضة بعض التيارات الدينية المحافظة، إلى جانب تصاعد الحركات القومية في أوروبا.

الكلمات مفتاحية

الإسلام الأوروبي، التكامل الإسلامي، التعددية الدينية، الإصلاح الإسلامي، العلمنة

1. Introduction

The issue of the “myth” or reality of “European Islam” is one of the most topical in contemporary European thought and politics. With the 25-30 million Muslims in the European Union making up some five percent of its citizenry— (Pew Research Center, 2017), integrating Islam into the social and national fabric of European societies holds large significance as various issues related to this tend to cross-cut countries, institutions, religions, and cultures in Europe and also weaken absolutized patterns or sub-cultures with respect toward variety. However, the very notion of “European Islam” is disputed according to different conceptualization: as a theological project, social reality or political ideal used to domesticate Muslim difference (Césari, 2004; Roy, 2004; Ramadan, 2004).

Advocates of European Islam assert that Muslims living and working in non-Muslim majority countries in Europe are articulating new forms of Muslim faith, practice, and community life by reconciling religious orthodoxy with democratic citizenship, European identity, and multicultural nationality (Ramadan 2004; Ramadan 2009). It makes similar references to agency, creativity and historical precedent of Islamic adaptation to various cultural contexts. Its critics, on the other hand, consider European Islam to be either a dangerous pipe dream that fails to recognize the irreconcilability of Islamic jurisprudence with European liberalism or familiar cultural imperialism, forcing Muslims to abandon true tradition in favor of secular required socialisation (Roy, 2004, 84; Kepel, 2012).

There is a complex empirical reality between these extreme positions. Studies of second and third-generation European Muslims demonstrate that religious observance, political participation and identity construction follow complex patterns that do not lend themselves easily to classification (Césari, 2004; Voas & Fleischmann, 2012; Carol & Koopmans, 2013). Some Muslims adopt reformist understandings of Islam that reinterpret Islamic teaching for European conditions; others strictly practice conservative versions of that faith but are simultaneously full participants in European civil society (Modood, 2003; Klausen, 2005); and yet others experience religious identity as one feature among many within hybrid or cosmopolitan identities (Klausen, 2005).

This article analyzes European Islam in a number of domains: historical construction, theological discourse, social configurations, political processes and legal mechanisms. The analysis is divided into six sections. First, the historical background of Muslim presence in Europe testifies to long-established and changing Islamic communities on the continent. Second, paradigms of European Islam are analyzed, such as secularization theory, multiculturalism and post-secular frames. Third, theological discussions in Islamic thought about adaptation, reform and contextual jurisprudence are the third point of analysis. Fourth, I discuss empirical studies on Muslim integration, identity and religious practice in Europe. Fifth, in

this work there is an inquiry into institutional and political obstacles for the establishment of a European Islam. Finally, the essay offers a critical assessment of whether European Islam represents genuine transformation or rhetorical illusion.

The key thesis of this work is that European Islam exists only in embryo as a new social fact, and patterns of religious interpretation and practice among native-born Muslims. These challenging issues include recurring social exclusion, institutional discrimination, securitization in the aftermath of terrorist incidents, and opposition from transnational Islamic actors as well as right-wing populist forces that have refused to recognize Muslim belonging in Europe. Whether there will be a strong, theologically based European Islam or whether it will remain a delicate aspiration depends decisively on political decisions, institutional restructuring and theological leadership in the decades ahead.

2. Historical Context: Muslims in Europe

Recent migrations aside, Muslims have been present in Europe for centuries. Islamic Iberia (711-1492) had a high level of cultural interaction but once the reconquest was completed, Muslims and Jews were expelled. The Ottoman conquest of southeastern Europe created Muslim communities in the Balkans that survive to date (Norris, 1993). But the modern problem of European Islam is really all about Muslim migration to western Europe post-World War II (Nielsen, 2004).

Labor shortages in the post-war period saw Western European countries recruit workers from former colonies and Mediterranean nations. France selected from North Africa, chiefly Algeria; the UK drew from South Asia, mainly Pakistan and Bangladesh; Germany from Turkey in guest worker programs (*Gastarbeiter*); and Holland from Indonesia, Morocco and Turkey (Fetzer & Soper, 2005). Originating as temporary labor migration, family reunification, was, nevertheless, adopted in the 1970s through which permanent settlement was incorporated (Joppke, 1999). Later waves included conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Somalia, Iraq and Syria with asylum seekers coming from a variety of Muslim majority countries (Castles & Miller, 2009).

Contemporary Muslim populations in Europe vary significantly by country. Muslims in France are the largest in Europe, estimated at 5.7 million (8.8% of the population); and they also reside in Germany with about 5 million Muslims (6.1%); United Kingdom with between 3 to 4 million Muslims (4.8%) and Italy, which is home to approximately 2.6 million followers of Islam (4.3%) (Pew Research Center, 2017). These communities are relatively internally diverse, with respect to national origin, sectarian affiliation (Sunni/Shia/Ahmadi/Ismaili), linguistic background, or social class and religiosity (Nielsen, 2004).

Generational transformations have completely changed the face of European Muslim communities. The first-generation migrants, however, often felt they retained a strong relationship with the country of birth as they regarded it as a temporary residence and continued to adhere to religious practices from back 'home'

(Césari, 2004). Their children, on the other hand, were exposed to European schools and languages as their native language, and developed a mixed identity which married religious heritage with nationality in Europe (Modood, 2003). This second generation grew up in the 1980s and 1990s, they were critical of their parents' cultural Islam, and turned to more "authentic" sources when encountering Islamic knowledge through such channels as Islamic movements, satellite television and the Internet (Roy, 2004).

For third-generation Muslims, those who have arrived in the current century and were born here, Europe is all they know. The research shows a range of pathways: embrace of secular lifestyles with marginal religious connections, return to religionism through rote imitation and learning, alienation that leads in very rare but headline-catching circumstances to radicalization (Savage, 2004; Khosrokhavar, 2005; Chtatou, 2017, September 19). It is important to know this generational profile if we are to judge the likely trajectory of European Islam as a unique religious configuration grounded in European experience rather than imported from elsewhere.

European peoples and their awareness of themselves as nations or communities have been greatly influenced by the events of history prevailing in Islamic areas. The Rushdie Affair, - (1989), in which British Muslims protested against a novel by Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, dramatically opened the eyes of pious measures of Europeans to the extent of religious sensibility among Muslim communities (Modood, 1990). The headscarf affairs in France (which paved the way for a 2004 ban on conspicuous religious symbols in public schools) encapsulated debates over secularism, freedom of religion and national identity (Bowen, 2007). Since 9/11 and the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) attacks, as well as further incidents in Paris, Brussels, Nice among others, such violent events have led to a securitization of European Islam with its Muslim communities being subject to continuous surveillance practices or suspect counterterrorism policies (Césari, 2009; Kundnani, 2014).

These historical paths have made the conditions that European Islam can possibly grow, but also produced considerable challenges. The question is whether Muslim history can be followed by a real European Muslim thought and practice.

3. Theories on European Islam

To come to terms with European Islam, we have to get back into engagement with several theoretical traditions which provide different 'spectacles' for understanding the interplay of religion, migration and European modernity. This paper discusses four central theoretical frameworks: secularization theory; multiculturalism and integration models; post-secularism; and theories of religious transnationalism.

3.1. Secularization Theory and Its Discontents

The conventional secularization perspective of scholars like Weber, Durkheim and subsequently Berger prophesized secularization as a necessary outcome of modernity, that is the withering away of religious convictions and activities (Bruce, 2002). European societies were taken as ideal-typical examples of this kind of situation, in which Enlightenment rationality, the authority of science, and the differentiation of institutions had all served to confine religion to the private sphere (Casanova, 1994). From this standpoint, Islam in Europe is also anomalous – a relic of pre-modern religiosity that will fall off in due course as modern socialization prevails through education and strength becomes wealth and generational replacement (Bruce 2011).

But higher degrees of religious devotion among European Muslims persist, challenging the validity of theories on secularization. Casanova (1994) identified three facets of secularization: institutional differentiation, religious decline and privatization. Although Europe has experienced institutional differentiation, religious withering and privatization are not deterministic outcomes. Muslims in Europe are, in fact, frequently more religiously observant than their Christian compatriots on measures of linear secularization (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012).

Norris and Inglehart's (2004) revised secularization theory focused on existential security. Material security, predictable governance and a generous welfare state either diminish the longing for religion or fulfil it. On the other hand, in insecure, discriminatory and marginalized communities' religious commitment continues to be a means and mark of identity. This pattern can be used to understand why European Muslims, who may suffer socioeconomic disadvantage and discrimination, are more religious than the majority population (Heath, Rethon, & Kilpi, 2008).

Opponents of secularization theory like Stark and Finke (2000) advanced models rooted in religious economy focused on competition, pluralism, and rational choice. From this point of view the health of religion requires competitive religious markets in which diverse suppliers seek adherents. European state churches led to complacency, decay, as did the Mahommedan religious monopoly in domicile after domicile crowded to ruin until vigorous enthusiasm threatened them with change. Islam adds a real competitor to European landscapes of religious participation and may indeed stimulate greater religiosity in religion overall (Foner & Alba, 2008).

3.2. Multiculturalism and Integration Models

There is a loss in scholarly literature about the understanding of European Islam through the prism of integration theory, i.e., as how immigrant-origin populations integrate in host societies. Brubaker (1992) rejected the convergence thesis by demonstrating that there were major dissimilarities between French republican

assimilationism (which stressed equality of citizenship and cultural homogeneity), German ethnic nationalism (determined by descent) and British multiculturalism (acknowledging group differences within common citizenship). Such national models have divergent effects on how Muslim integration is imagined (Koopmans, 2013).

France's republican model based on *laïcité* (state secularism) calls for a religious privatization and the homogenizing of citizenship that is not differentiated by ethnic or religious categories (Bowen, 2007). This framework interprets visible Islamic practices — headscarves, halal constraints, prayer spaces — as threats to republican universalism. When religious observance demands public space, there is tension since such demands confront a French Muslim whose primary allegiance should be to their citizenship rather than their religion (Laurence & Vaisse, 2006).

British multiculturalism in contrast sees religious and [ethnic] communities as valid corporate actors in the public sphere (Modood, 2007). Muslims are asked to speak through tabled organizations; religious schools receive state financing; dietary principles must be observed in public institutions of education. This approach recognizes Islam as being a settled part of British society but has been accused of essentializing Muslim identity, empowering conservative religious gatekeepers and foreclosing on internal diversity (Malik, 2004; Phillips, 2006).

For generations, Turkish-origin Muslims had been denied full membership in Germany even though they had resided there long enough by birth to German parents for *jus sanguinis*— with German citizenship laws enforced by blood rather than landlines for well over a century - to take effect (Green, 2012). Reform in 2000 liberalized the birthright citizenship for conditions, but integration debates continue to be dominated by concern with cultural assimilation, requiring Muslims to demonstrate a commitment to German *Leitkultur* (leading culture) (Joppke, 2007).

Initially Dutch multiculturalism assumed an accommodationist shape, where "pillarization" (*verzuiling*) was taken as a model for institutional recognition of Muslim communities beside Protestant, Catholic and secular pillars (Rath, J., Penninx, Groenendijk & Meyer, 1999). But the murders (Pim Fortuyn in 2002, Theo van Gogh in 2004) and integration fears led to a dramatic U-turn towards an assimilationist policy that has been focusing on Dutch values as well as limiting religious freedom (Vink, 2007).

Comparative studies demonstrate that the results of integration are not a straightforward extrapolation from ideological models, but are rather contingent on felicitous combinations of national policies, local contexts, structures in the labor market and education systems, and enforcement measures against discrimination (Heath et al., 2008; Crul & Schneider, 2010). Integration is not one way assimilation, but mutual adaptation in which immigrants' impact gets absorbed by host societies (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

The notion of 'integration' has itself been criticised for suggesting a one-way process of acculturation by minorities to mainstream norms; the term is accused of masking power relationships and structural barriers to incorporation (Favell, 2001).

Other frameworks focus on "inclusion," "participation" or "belonging" to indicate mutual processes and institutional barriers (Anthias, 2013).

3.3. Post-Secular Perspectives

Habermas (2006, 2008) coined the term "post-secular" to describe European societies where religion has vanished as secularization theory anticipates but rather has come back into plain view. The post-secular context demands that secular citizens recognize religious voices as legitimate participants in public reasoning, and that religious citizens articulate faith claims in terms that are accessible to everyone (Habermas, 2006). Such a perspective justifies Muslim belonging in European public arenas whilst demanding reciprocal adjustment.

Dissenters claim that post secularism endorses an acceptable Christian heritage and insist that Muslims must do the extra translation work to make religious reasoning okay (Mavelli, 2012). In addition, the framework presupposes a distinction between public and private that Islamic traditions may not follow, underscoring secular assumptions being read into religious conceptions (Asad, 2003; Mahmood, 2005).

Casanova's (2009) theory of multiple modernities questions the notion that there is such a thing called European secularism which can be taken to be universal, so everyone should 'catch up'. Rather, various combination of religion and state can live together inside modernity as a bloc maintaining Islamic — but not secular European who are also Muslim — form of modernity. This pluralist reading leaves conceptual space for European Islam as a legitimate, not contradictory, option.

3.4. Religious Transnationalism

The transnational perspective posits that migrants establish relations of simultaneity between home and destination societies, giving rise to transnational social fields expanding beyond the borders of nation-states (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). For Muslims, transnational dynamics flow through various channels: to their homelands in the form of financial remittances, satellite TV viewing and internet access that connects diasporas with religious authorities outside their countries; the *hajj* as physical support for pan-Islamic solidarity or networks built on marriage stretching across continents; and where both competition and substitutes to government sources of expertise are created by Islamic cross-national organizations (Mandavil, 2001; Césari, 2004).

Transnational Islamic movements such as Salafism, Tablighi Jamaat, Muslim Brotherhood networks and Sufism among others structure European Muslim religiosity regardless of its national context (Roy, 2004). They provide a kind of identity you can take with you—unchained to a single place, which for many youths no longer pins them down the way it did 30 years ago. Yet, transnationalism does not necessarily conflict with European Islam; rather, cross-border ties can give local

invention a source by providing theological repertoires for creativity among European Muslims (Mandaville, 2001).

Vertovec (2009) made the differentiation between transnationalism as social morphology (patterns of connection), transnationalism as type of consciousness (dual orientation), and as mode of cultural reproduction (hybrid identities). We will approach these three expressions by means of: (i) relating to ancestral homelands, (ii) having double consciousness as European and Muslim, and (iii) hybridization of cultural forms.

Religious transnationalism has intensified with the internet; European Muslims now can gain access to worldwide Islamic knowledge, engage in a virtual *umma* and create their religious identity by means of mixing up elements derived from different sources around the world (Bunt, 2009). This digital transnationalism both facilitates Europe's Islamic innovation, by providing alternative authorities, but also problematizes it by bringing local innovation to a place of criticism and scrutiny at the hands of these transnationally connected others.

These theoretical perspectives cast various lights on European Islam. Secularization theory asks if in enlightened modern Europe strong religiosity can survive. Integration models focus on the specific context from which derives integration. Post-secularism affirms religious public appearance, but demands translation. Transnationalism emphasizes global links that subverted national consolidation. Collectively, these perspectives help us to see the tricky ground upon which European Islam may form.

4. Reform, Renewal and the Jurisprudence of Context

Theological considerations are central to assessing the viability of a "European Islam." At stake is a fundamental question: can Islamic tradition be authentically rearticulated within the European socio-cultural and political context without diluting its normative religious core? This problem necessarily extends to the issue of religious authority, raising critical questions about who possesses the legitimacy to interpret and adapt Islamic sources in changing environments. Moreover, it foregrounds the challenge of reconciling Islamic law with the structural realities of Muslim minority existence in secular democratic societies. In this regard, debates surrounding reformist thought, the elaboration of minority jurisprudence (*fiqh al-aqalliyāt*), and the reconfiguration of intellectual and religious leadership have become pivotal. Together, these discussions illuminate the evolving dynamics of contemporary Islamic thought in Europe and underscore the complex interplay between continuity and transformation within the Islamic tradition.

Normative Islamic thought was essentially formed in situations where Muslims were in a majority and under Muslim rule. Between *dār al-Islām* (the house of Islam) and *dār al-harb* (the house of warfare), which is a classic division of the world, there must be a territorial locus for Islamic sovereignty (Abou El Fadl, 1994).

Living as Muslims in non-Muslim polities introduced religious-theological questions: How to be living and practicing as Muslims where Islamic legal system does not operate. What duties do Muslims owe to non-Muslim polities? Is it possible to be both a devout Muslim and a patriotic citizen of a liberal democracy?

Modern Islamic scholars have dealt with these issues in diverse ways. Responding to this, another claim is made on *dâr al-‘ahd* or *dâr al-sulh* (land of treaty/reconciliation) where Muslims have legitimate places of residence in citadels under the protection pact of European powers when freedom to worship and practice their religion is provided by "others" (Ramadan, 2004). This model is built on an agreement between Muslims and host states, the *quid pro quo* given to Muslims being protection and religious liberty, while they agree to follow laws whilst participating in that society.

The question of theological reform and intellectual authority is further illuminated through the contrasting perspectives of key contemporary thinkers. Abdolkarim Soroush, for instance, has critically engaged with the epistemological foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly its tendency to institutionalize certain ideas as quasi-sacred principles within the educational system, regardless of whether they derive from rigid or potentially counterproductive interpretations of divine law. In contrast, Tariq Ramadan articulates a reform-oriented vision of Islam in Europe grounded in the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqâṣid al-sharī‘a*), rather than in a narrow or literalist application of classical jurisprudence.

Ramadan argues that Islamic law is fundamentally oriented toward universal ethical purposes—namely the preservation of life, religion, intellect, lineage, and property—which can be realized across diverse legal and cultural contexts. From this perspective, Muslim communities in Europe are called not to replicate juridical rulings formulated in historically different environments, but to extract and operationalize the underlying moral spirit of the tradition. Where necessary, this ethical framework should be articulated and defended within the constitutional structures of European societies, thereby enabling a dynamic and context-sensitive expression of Islamic normativity (Ramadan, 2004, 2009).

Here, Muslims can accept European citizenship as Muslims, rather than in contradiction to Islam. On the issue of European Islam vs Islam in Europe Ramadan calls for “*a European Islam*” as opposed to an “*Islam IN Europe*,” meaning that it is possible for Islam to be authentically Islamic, yet become European by a creative fidelity to its goals and not to its forms (Ramadan, 1999). For his part, Ramadan's critics accuse him of blurring what is distinctively Islamic in the name of liberal universalism and doubt the practical utility of his invocation of *maqâṣid* (March, 2015).

5. Minority Jurisprudence (*Fiqh al-Aqalliyât*)

The spirit of the *fiqh al-aqalliyât* (Jurisprudence for Muslim minorities), initiated towards the end of the last century, is a well-structured intentional effort to

deal with the legal and religious issues that confront Muslims as minorities in non-Muslim societies. It emerged from this basic understanding developed by scholars like Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Taha Jabir al-Alwani, this approach aims at creating specific rulings that are appropriate for minority contexts but also compatible with Islamic legal principles (Caeiro, 2010).

Al-Qaradawi has issued various fatwas for European Muslims of the European Council for Fatwa and Research -ECFR- (established in 1997) to rule on the situations regarding participations in democratic processes, transactions related to the economy based on interest, socialization with non-Muslims, and family law issues (Caeiro, 2010). Muslim interests (*maslaha*), facilitation (*taysir*), and cognizance must be taken into account in issuing vouchers even when they are formulated contrary to the rest of the world i.e., if new fatwa is issued that differs from others by putting conditions not accustomed to in Islamic countries, it only applies within a non-Muslim society immanent (Al-Qaradawi, 2001).

For instance, the ECFR has sanctioned that Muslims can obtain conventional mortgages even if their faith condemns interest-based (*riba*) finance when this is indispensable for family housing via the rule of necessity (*darûra*) and in a European environment characterized by scarce availability of Islamic finance products (Caeiro, 2010). Likewise, it has allowed Muslims to be active members in the frame of democratic politics, although some schools of thought see democracy as being diametrically opposed to Islamic leadership (al-Qaradawi, 2001), through which they justify political participation with reference to protecting Muslim interests on the European continent.

But *fiqh al-aqalliyât* has been a very contentious issue. Detractors criticise it for perpetuating the notion of Muslim exceptionalism by continuing to uphold a separateness in platform for minorities instead of recognizing one single Islamic jurisprudence that could be applied uniformly throughout (March, 2009). Others argue that *fiqh al-aqalliyât* is too conservative, modifying only slightly and maintaining the patriarchal and repressive interpretations of Islamic law that need to be elaborated from scratch (Rohe, 2004). Conversely, conservative scholars know it as an undesired accommodation of Islamic values for utilitarian purposes (Caeiro, 2010).

Furthermore, the institutional place from which such *fiqh al-aqalliyât* authorities have been located raised issues. However, the ECFR is to a large extent composed of scholars who were trained in individual traditional Islamic institutions outside Europe, especially al-Azhar (Egypt) and Zaytuna (Tunisia) respectively (Caeiro, 2010). Although making rulings in situations from Europe, their theological formation and perspective are set outside Europe. Whether this is real European Islamic thought or borrowed authority tailored for Europe's market remains a matter of controversy (Peter, 2006).

6. The Islamic Reform Movements and the European-Affiliated Contexts

Apart from minority jurisprudence, wider modernist Islamic trends shape European Muslim thinking. Islamic modernism, that of 19th- and early 20th-century reformers including Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida saw Islam as compatible with modernity, encouraged rational reading of scripture, and called for educational reform (Hourani, 1962). European Muslims of today rely on this tradition to be able to make the progressive interpretations that defend gender equality, pluralism and democracy (Ramadan, 2009).

Muslim feminists such as Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and others have advanced gender-egalitarian interpretations of the Islamic texts that contest patriarchal readings of Islam and call for full participation by women in religious and social affairs (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002). Although they are not of European origin, these feminist perspectives appeal to European Muslim women facing the demand to combine religiosity with gender equality challenge that is placed upon them by the standards existing in European societies (Jouili, 2015).

Articulations of “progressive Islam” stress social justice, pluralism, human rights, and engagement with Islamic tradition as a critical eye (Amin, 2013). This movement is neither conservative and dogmatic on the one hand, nor a form of secularization for everything else, on the other; rather, it seeks transformative fidelity to Islamic justice values, compassion and human dignity. European Muslims of Muslim reformist leanings call for integration rather than assimilation, and keeping the Islamic identity compatible with pluralistic citizenship (Safi, 2003).

It stands in contrast to Salafism, which advocates a return to the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and the first three generations of Muslims (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), while rejecting religious innovation (*bidʿa*) and subsequent cultural accretions (Roy, 2004). Salafi movements in Europe, however, are far from monolithic. As Quintan Wiktorowicz (2006) demonstrates, they can be broadly categorized into three tendencies: quietist Salafis, who avoid political engagement and emphasize personal piety; activist Salafis, who seek to promote the political implementation of their interpretation of Islamic norms; and jihadist Salafis, who view violence as a legitimate means of achieving societal change.

Paradoxically, quietist Salafism’s apolitical stance and its strong emphasis on scriptural rigor may, in certain contexts, facilitate forms of integration by encouraging law-abiding behavior, discouraging involvement in homeland conflicts, and fostering a degree of social withdrawal from contentious political arenas. However, these characteristics—simultaneously rigid and disengaged—are not inherently conducive to integration within European societies, as their strict doctrinal framework may limit adaptability to pluralistic and culturally diverse environments.

Another religious form are Sufi orders (*tariqas*) that privilege spiritual advancement, devotional practices, and hierarchically structured obedience around a living guide (*shaykh*) (Sedgwick, 2005). Western Sufi Orders such as the

Naqshbandi and Qadiri provide fellowships centered around Islamic forms of worship with eventual High Culture adaptation. Some Sufi movements are openly engaged in integration and dialogue with European societies, while others remain isolated (Malik & Hinnells, 2006).

The variety of Islamic theological positions in Europe – ranging from progressive reformism to conservative Salafism to mystical Sufism – shows that “European Islam” cannot stand for a theological homogeneity. Instead, the issue is whether European Islamic thought can form across that spectrum, in its interpretation of European contexts from differing perspectives of interpretation and still be recognisably Islamic.

7. Authority and Knowledge Production

One of the most challenging questions for European Islam concerns religious authority: who has the legitimacy to interpret Islam in a European context? Traditionally, the authority of the *‘ulamā’* has been established through the system of *ijāza* (certification), granted by recognized institutions such as Al-Azhar University, University of Ez-Zitouna, and University of al-Qarawiyyin (Zaman, 2002). However, this model of authority, historically rooted in Muslim-majority societies, is often “imported” into Europe and may not fully correspond to the lived realities of Muslims there.

As noted by Peter Mandaville (2007), many European Muslims lack access to traditional forms of scholarly training, while those who do possess such credentials may not always be equipped with a deep understanding of the social, cultural, and legal contexts of Europe. This creates a gap between inherited forms of religious authority and the emerging need for context-sensitive interpretations. Consequently, the question of who speaks for Islam in Europe remains open, contested, and central to the broader project of articulating a coherent and relevant European Islam.

This vacuum of authority has been filled by an array of actors: ‘cyberliterate’ preachers, charismatic preachers, transnational movement activists and the new breed of Europe-educated scholars (Bunt, 2009). The titular democratization of religious authority that comes with digital media has the potential for unprecedented access to Islamic knowledge, but can also create confusion and contestation, and make individuals susceptible to extremist ideas rejected by any scholarship (Mandaville, 2007).

There are various projects trying to reinvent an indigenous European Islamic scholarship. The Cambridge Muslim College in UK is another example which combines traditional Islamic studies and academic religious studies aiming at training scholars who have knowledge of the language of Islam and that of the European discourse (Birt, 2006). The Center for Islamic Theology at the University of Tübingen in Germany is an expression to state projects seeking to establish university Islam studies for training imams and religious educators that apply scripture-based

equilibrium with German factors. France's Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), and Institut Français de Civilization Musulmane, strive to train French imams in Islamic learning and French cultural familiarity (Peter 2006).

Yet, these are embryonic institutions, hardly completing enough graduates each year to serve the millions of Muslims living in Europe (Laurence, 2012). Most of the imams in Europe come to serve their communities from abroad (Turkey, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan), whence they also bring precious Islamic learning but a shallower sense of European languages, societies and the challenges facing Muslim citizens in Europe (Césari, 2004). This reliance on imported religious personnel restricts the development of an Islam that spoke to local realities.

Religious instruction in ex-Soviet Central Asia had become a state affair that also raised questions related to freedom of religion and the government's role in interpreting it (Laurence, 2012). There is a disjuncture between the way religious functionaries with public role are trained and the demand for more autonomy in the hand of Muslim communities because clerics trained only to play their narrow profession could find it problematic when this profession does not meet necessarily social needs, at least directly (Jeldtoft, 2010). Restrictions on Islam can lead to it being instrumentalized as an object that serves a political or other purpose. Moderate Islam reflects state control rather than genuine diversity.

Public intellectuals of European Muslims like Tariq Ramadan, Abdullahi An-Na'im, Bassam Tibi and Abdolkarim Soroush made their way into public debates but their reception with common European Muslims differs greatly (Mandaville, 2007). Scholarly degrees and media presence do not necessarily lead to religious authority in the face of practicing Muslim communities that consider such intellectuals as too distant from practice, too conceding to Western norms or lacking traditional scholarly heritage (March, 2015).

The issue of authority is thus not resolved. A successful emergence of European Islam depends on religious leaders who are rooted in Islamic learning and understand European contexts. They are definitely accepted by Muslim public opinion but can also cooperate with civil society institutions, and convey teachings responsive to distinctly European questions. Whether such leadership is being provided in enough desirable shapes and sizes, however, is an open question.

8. Muslim Integration, Identity and Religious Practice in Europe

From matters of faith to sociability, this section looks at the research into how European Muslims actually experience and practice their religious beliefs. What do surveys and ethnography tell us about discrete patterns of European Islam? How and why does religious identity, practice and belief differ across generations, nations, and social locations?

8.1. Religious Identity and Belonging

General population surveys have long identified that religiosity remains strong among most European Muslims, even while other identity attributes (national, ethnic and professional) also play a role in how they identify themselves (Pew Research Center, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2017). For example, in a Pew Research Center's 2017 survey of Muslims across Western Europe, majorities felt strong identification as Muslims and as nationals of their countries: 89% of French Muslims, 79% German Muslim and 82% British Muslim reported very high national identity along with very high religious identity (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Yet substantial minorities have a conflict of identity between their religious and national allegiances. Discrimination, Islamophobia and social exclusion, therefore, may enhance Islamist identity as a positive self-image against the background of rejection by majority society (Heath et al., 2008). On the contrary, Muslims who are experiencing upward social mobility and integration are more likely to adapt a hyphenated identity that combines Muslim religion with national belonging in Europe (Foner & Alba, 2008).

Generational patterns reveal complex dynamics. In contrast to straightforward secularization expectations, second generation Muslims often feel more religious than their parents (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012). This tendency, frequently referred to as "reactive religiosity," happens because second-generation Muslims want genuine Islamic knowledge rather than simply defaulting to their parents' culturally indoctrinated conduct. They differentiate between "culture" and "religion," and accuse their parents of blending, say, ethnic rituals with Islamic ones (Roy, 2004). The process of religious revival on a generational level, however, is expressed in a variety of ways – some embracing conservative Salafi-informed interpretations, others adhering to progressive reformism and many inventing their own eclectic religious identity (Césari, 2004).

8.2. Religious Practice and Observance

European Muslims display significant variation in their levels of religious observance, shaped by national context, generational differences, and socio-cultural backgrounds. According to Pew Research Center (2017), the proportion of Muslims who report praying daily differs notably across Europe: 47% in France, 39% in Germany, 31% in the United Kingdom, 27% in Spain, and 23% in the Netherlands. Similarly, weekly mosque attendance varies, with approximately 33% in France compared to 18% in the Netherlands. While these levels of religious practice are generally higher than those observed among Christian populations in the same countries, they remain below a universal or homogeneous standard of observance, underscoring the considerable internal diversity among Muslim communities in Europe (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Voas and Fleischmann (2012) based on data that cover multiple Muslim ethnic groups in a range of European countries, found that the Muslims continue to be more religious, but there is generational decline in religiosity for at least third and subsequent generations. But this decline is less sharp than among Christians, and when practice wanes, religious identity does not. The authors argue that European Muslims are not becoming fully secularized, nor are they replicating the religiosity of the immigrant generation, but instead creating their own religious configuration in European societies (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012).

Through ethnographic fieldwork, it emerges that religious practice is changed under European conditions in different ways. Islamists form tactics for performing religious duties—angel prayer, fasting, dietary observance/respect—in European institutional frames (Jouili, 2015). It is in these metropolitan settings – at workplaces, in schools and public institutions – that Muslims have to navigate between religious expression and institutional imperatives, which may make room for some practices or restrict them (Joppke, 2009). These negotiations produce hybrid practices: shortened prayer breaks during work hours, portable prayer mats for office use, halal options in university cafeterias, and Islamic financial products adapted to European legal frameworks (Peter, 2006).

Studies also show that Muslim women in Europe are more likely than men to express their religious commitment through prayer, fasting and mosque attendance where possible (Pew Research Center, 2017). But at the same time, women's religious participation is also more negotiable and suppressible, especially around access to mosques and leadership. Muslim women's movements in Europe have also called for more access to mosque leadership, female-led prayer and the education of women in religion, contesting patriarchal readings while retaining Islamic orthodoxy (Jouili, 2015; Rinaldo, 2013).

Veil wearing reveals a dense entanglement of religious belief, identity politics and gender-based regulation. Some women wear headscarves as a symbol of personal piety, others make political statements about their Muslim identity; and still others are due to family pressure (Brems, 2014). For instance, it has been observed by studies that second-generation Muslim females in Europe are wearing headscarves at a higher rate than their mothers due to both religious revival and identity assertion within a context where veiling has proved politically charged (Göle, 2006). In the other extreme corner, some Muslim women refused to wear the veil symbol of male-oppression and were happy to have a religious sanction for such refusal (Bilge, 2010).

9. Integration Outcome: Education, Work and Socio-economic Status

Muslims' integration into different European societies presents mixed levels of performance on socioeconomic indicators. Educational levels across generations have improved significantly, with second-generation Muslims overtaking their

parents in terms of attainment (Heath et al., 2008). There are still significant disparities compared to the general population. These figures apply to Turkey and these are also the corresponding figures in Germany, although only 14% of Turkish origin adults in Germany have higher education degrees compared to 27% among Germans overall (Crul & Schneider, 2010). Among the offspring of North African immigrants in France (Chtatou, 2025, September 12) completion at the secondary level is close to that of their ethnic French peers (Beauchemin, Hamel & Simon 2015), while it lags substantially at the post-secondary level (Chtatou, 2025, September 12).

Muslims in Europe experience higher levels of unemployment and are often concentrated in lower-status occupations, even when controlling for education and qualifications (Heath et al., 2008). This discriminatory pattern has been empirically tested through field experiments using identical job applications with different names to assess the impact of religious identity on hiring outcomes. The results show that applicants with Muslim-sounding names receive significantly fewer positive responses compared to equally qualified candidates with Christian-sounding names (Adida, Laitin, & Valfort, 2010). This form of discrimination affects both men and women; however, Muslim women who wear the headscarf face disproportionately greater barriers to employment (Brems, 2014).

Muslims are also isolated in socioeconomically deprived neighborhoods characterized by poor schools, a lack of employment and poor public services (Musterd, 2005). Some clustering is due to immigrant networks and co-ethnic neighbor preference, but much is the result of housing discrimination and economic limitations (Phillips, 2006). These spatial orders generate predominantly Muslim settings, in which members of the majority population have little contact with Muslims, which may both slow down integration and facilitate communal bonding (Schönwälder, 2010).

Yet, the results of integration are quite different between European countries and specific Muslim origin groups. The Turkish-origin Muslims in Germany do encounter more problems than the Turkish-origin populations in Sweden, and differences may be related to citizenship policies, schooling systems and labor market structures (Crul & Schneider, 2010). There is somewhat greater success of South Asian Muslims in Britain when compared to their North African counterparts in France (Chtatou, 2025, September 12); while British Muslims have - overall - fared significantly (Heath et al., 2008). These differences show that the integration results are heavily dependent on institutional settings, rather than a necessary consequence of being Muslim.

10. Civic and Political Participation

European Muslims are engaged to varying degrees in civic and political life. Turnout lags, as compared with native populations, yet rises with education, earnings and generational tenure (Maxwell, 2010). And the level of Muslim political

representation is on the rise, with Muslims now elected to the national parliament in France, Germany, Britain and the Netherlands albeit at a ripple below proportional representation (Laurence, 2012).

Muslim civil society organizations range widely from religious associations organizing mosques and Islamic education, cultural organizations preserving heritage, campaigning groups challenging discrimination and welfare agencies providing social services to political groups mobilizing around issues (Modood, 2007). These groups build infrastructure for Muslim involvement in European public life but are criticized for not being representative and their impact is mixed (Statham, Koopmans, Giugni, & Passy, 2005).

Comparative work by Koopmans et al. (2005), studying Muslims in a sample of European countries, concluded that the political opportunity structure is central to explaining Muslim mobilization. Muslims in multiracial Britain organize according to their religious identity and advance demands for recognition on the basis of religion. In republican France, Muslims emphasize citizen equality and anti-discrimination in their public advocacy of civil liberties while playing down religious identity. Ethnic identity was, however, the glue that bound together Turkish-origin Muslims in Germany: there, citizenship had a long tradition of excluding rather than including. This evidence leaves one to infer that there are strong effects from national institutional structures on Muslim's political engagement, which might strengthen or diminish the role of a Muslim collective in shaping politics (Koopmans et al., 2005).

Political Islam in European environments has been quite diverse. Certain kinds of Muslim political activism focus on universal issues—such as social justice, antiracism, and peace—rather than Islamic ones per se (Klausen, 2005). Bodies such as the Muslim Council of Britain or CFCM in France want to be recognized as legitimate representatives of Muslim citizens - knocking on governments' doors to address aspects related to Muslims without pushing a theocratic platform (Laurence, 2012). Yet these groups are challenged by Muslims for not representing their interests, for having a male monopoly on power and decision-making processes and also for being too obedient to the state (Césari, 2004).

As discussed in this article, the transnational dimension remains a significant factor in the political mobilization of European Muslims. Issues such as the conflicts in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, and more recently Iraq and Syria (Mandaville, 2001) continue to resonate across borders, fostering a sense of shared political consciousness. Such mobilizations complicate simplistic narratives of integration by demonstrating that European Muslims maintain an awareness of, and engagement with, global Muslim concerns. However, transnational involvement should not be viewed as inherently contradictory to processes of Europeanisation. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argue, diaspora politics can coexist with, and even reinforce, domestic political participation, reflecting a multilayered form of belonging that spans both national and transnational spheres.

11. Values and Attitudes

Survey research on Muslim values and attitudes demonstrates similarities as well as differences from European majority populations. On multiple topics such as education, jobs, health, Muslim views converge with those from the rest of Europe (Pew Research Center, 2017). But the fault lines are much deeper when it comes to religion, morals and social conservatism.

On the whole, Muslims in Europe have more traditional attitudes than non-Muslims toward gender relations, homosexuality and sexual morality (Pew Research Center, 2017). According to a 2017 poll conducted by Pew, among European Muslims, 69% think that wives should obey their husbands (compared to 25% of non-Muslims), and only 26% believe homosexuality should be accepted (vs. 84% for non-Muslims) (Pew Research Center, 2017). This attitude gap provides a source of worry about the integration of Muslims into liberal European societies.

But there are significant generational and educational effects. The more educated and the younger Muslims are, the ones with more liberal attitudes with regard to gender and sexuality issues (Tillie et al., 2013). Second-generation Muslims are more tolerant than first-generation but still more conservative than non-Muslim Europeans. This indicates that there is slow convergence over time, but with values shifts lagging behind processes of socioeconomic integration (Heath et al., 2008).

Studies on democratic values are in agreement that Muslims generally approve of democracy, political engagement and civil rights (Koopmans, 2015). Large majorities of Muslims in Europe also eschew violence, endorse democracy and appreciate freedom (Pew Research Center, 2017). Fears of Muslim rejection of democracy are out of line with views held by minorities within the tradition, rather than majority opinion, even if some acts of terrorism where perpetrators give an Islamic justification for their behavior receive all too much focus (Klausen, 2005).

Carol & Koopmans (2013) investigated the extent to which European Muslims believe in religious diversity and secular governance. European Muslims tend to support most aspects of religious freedom but also wish for religious input into politics and some legal exceptions concerning Muslim practice. This is not an expression of being against democracy but rather a discussion about what the appropriate separation of religion and state should be – a debate that is taking place with Western societies in general, not just Muslims (Carol & Koopmans, 2013).

The empirical data surveyed in this article show that Muslims in Europe display varying identities, practices and modes of integration. No single model of Muslim assimilation or segregation applies. Rather, the negotiation of theological identity within a European belonging does have complex hybrid results that might be considered grounds for “European Islam” but also demonstrate continued tensions: discrimination, socioeconomic marginalization and value disagreement on controversial topics.

12. The Institutional and Political Challenges of European Islam

Even if theological frames are capable of encompassing European Islam and secular patterns point to developing specific Muslim identities, there are significant institutional and political hurdles that constrain full integration. These are: securitization and counter-terrorism, institutional discrimination, controversies over religious accommodation, right-wing populism and its rise from below, and transnational pushback against European convergence.

After the September 11 attacks and the subsequent events in European cities, a new landscape prompted a more critical engagement with European Islam. Counterterrorism became the predominant lens through which European states approached Muslim communities, with issues of security frequently taking precedence over integration and dialogue (Césari, 2009; Kundnani, 2014).

There are different aspects to securitization such as intensified policing of Muslim communities, including the surveillance of mosques and Islamic organizations and online activity; pre-criminal or preventive policing that targets people who may be at risk of radicalization before they have actually committed a criminal act (Chtatou, 2017, September 19); counter extremism programs that seeks cooperation from Muslim communities in identifying those likely to engage in terrorism (Kundnani, 2014). These steps regard Muslim communities as suspects that need to be managed, rather than citizens with rights that need to be protected.

The UK's Prevent strategy, itself a mainstay of the UK's counterterrorism strategy (e.g. Heath-Kelly, 2013) is an exemplar of this approach. Teachers, health workers and social services are required to refer those deemed to be showing "signs of radicalization" (Chtatou, 2017, September 19), thus, establishing networks of mass surveillance that disproportionately target Muslims (Kundnani, 2014). Opponents of Prevent claim that it destroys trust between Muslims and the State, has a chilling effect over freedom of expression and turns Muslim religiosity itself into something suspect (Qureshi, 2015).

13. Institutional Challenges Continued

France's strategy against terrorism has included the shutting down of mosques, bans on radical Islamic organizations, and security-based limitations with respect to Islamic attire (Bowen, 2007). The state of emergency implemented in the aftermath of Paris attacks (2015) is extended and naturalized through such enactments, allowing police disproportionate search, house arrest and surveillance powers aimed against Muslim communities (Hennette-Vauchez, 2018).

Islamic organizations in Germany, as well as mosques, are also infiltrated by German domestic intelligence services that keep comprehensive information on potential radical Muslims (Rytter & Pedersen, 2014). The Dutch state has instituted

complex risk assessment that categorizes “vulnerable” Muslims youth to be intervened upon, where political dissent is medicalized into psychological pathology (de Koning, 2020).

These practices of securitization produce deep contradictions for Islam in Europe. When the practice of religion is subject to suspicion— which has included sporting beards, dressing in Islamic attire and attending certain mosques—that both religious worship and Muslimness per se become criminal (Kundnani, 2014). Muslims face an impossible choice: giving up visible signs of Islam, or being authentic selves and facing scrutiny and rejection. This contributes to thwarting the development of European Islam, as it problematizes Islamic commitment per se and does not encourage a contextually grounded expression of Islam.

Additionally, counter-terrorism measures have emboldened other conservative Muslim groups that are more than willing to cooperate with police surveillance and sidelined progressive voices of dissent over state scrutiny (Maira, 2009). Governments would rather have reliable, hierarchical Muslim representatives they can blame even if they hold conservative religious views than localized, diverse Muslim populations that include secular and liberal reformers.

Scholarship on radicalization also suggests that securitization may, paradoxically (Chtatou, 2017, September 19), intensify alienation and extremism by fostering perceptions of shared victimhood, limiting avenues for the legitimate expression of grievances, and generating self-fulfilling dynamics in which Muslims internalize and perform the roles ascribed to them as potential threats (Kundnani, 2014; Schmid, 2013). Accordingly, the counterterrorism agenda—intended to safeguard European societies from Islamic radicalism—may instead hinder the development of a balanced and integrated Islam in Europe, which could arguably serve as a more effective deterrent than strategies rooted primarily in surveillance and repression.

14. Institutional Discrimination and Islamophobia

Systemic Islamophobia runs through European societies, stifling opportunity and sowing distrust. Institutional discrimination exists in the form of either explicit organization policies disadvantaging Muslims and/or organizational practices characterized by subtle biases (Zick, Küpper, & Hövermann, 2011).

Discrimination in hiring, as found through both audit (Adida et al., 2010) and legal research, is faced by Muslim job applicants irrespective of skill level. Veiled Muslim women are anyway experiencing a deeper type of resistance, as employers refer to customer preferences, workplace harmony or institutional neutrality to justify their exclusion (Brems et al., 2014). The 2013 EU ruling that permitted employers to ban religious symbols gave judicial cover for discrimination, where the courts have subsequently found that headscarves are not a direct form of discrimination if religion is being treated equally, although in practice Muslims bear the brunt of it (Howard 2012,11).

Schools impose rules against Islamic practices: bans on headscarves, prayers at school and participation in activities due to modesty expectations as well as negative representations of Islam in the curriculum (Joppke, 2009). These limitations send Muslim students the message that their religious identity is not a welcome one, which otherwise could result in feelings of alienation or defensive religiosity.

The bias of landlords, the inequitable lending practices and discriminatory zoning practices have held Muslims in marginal neighborhoods (Musterd, 2005). When spatially concentrated in high poverty areas, immigrants paradoxically are both stigmatized as a source of disadvantage across generations and become highly visible targets for far-right mobilization against the “Islamization” of neighborhoods (Schönwälder, 2010).

Islamophobia - anti-Muslim sentiment, based on stereotype of Islam as violent, oppressive and incompatible with Western civilization - dominates Europe's discourse (Runnymede Trust, 1997; Allen, 2010). Media representations unfairly stigmatize Muslims, by associating them with terrorism, extremism and social problems and simultaneously neglecting the everyday lives of quite ordinary Muslims (Bail 2015). Muslim impending danger is sometimes used by politics, even from moderate political parties to mobilize electoral support (Hafez, 2014).

The European Islamophobia Report clustered the anti-Muslim hate crimes, discrimination and prejudices reproducing across Europe (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2019). It sends a message that not only Muslims' religious spaces but their bodies are under assault, and hatred in digital forms can manifest in forms of physical violence - not just on the net, but also everyday life. This backdrop is directly hostile to the development of a European Islam, and indeed doubts whether Muslims can belong in Europe at all.

Stella (2009:16) points out that *‘Islamophobia operates as acceptable racism in a context...in which overt racism is legally prohibited and socially condemned but cultural and religious critiques of Muslims remain permissible’*. Concealed behind the defense of secularism, gender equality and other western values, Islamophobia is nothing less than exclusionary nationalism that would be perceived as racist if it were pointed towards ethnic minorities (Modood, 2005).

15. Religious Accommodation Conflicts

These fights over religious accommodation, you could say, show the one-size-fits-all tension between Islamic practice and European institutional norms. Freedom of religion is anchored in the constitutions across Europe, but in its practical form for Islam it is continually controversial (Joppke, 2013).

Islamic clothing, notably women's headscarves and face veils, has become the most visible and contentious accommodation issue. France has prohibited overt religious symbols in public schools (2004), face veils in all public domains (2010) and religious symbols for state employees, these issues seized under the rubric of counter-secularism and gender parity (Bowen, 2007; Brems et al., 2014). Belgium,

Austria, Denmark and some regions of Germany and Switzerland have also introduced similar bans (Howard, 2012).

These prohibitions have a disproportionate impact on Muslim women, presupposing that the veil is as a product of force and not choice thereby denying them their voice (Bilge, 2010). Studies have shown that for many veiled women wearing the veil connotes piety, modesty and identity, instead of subordination to the patriarchal authority (Brems et al., 2014). They themselves are dictating (liberal) secular notions of freedom in oppressive ways against women's right to choose (Mahmood, 2005).

Construction of mosques provokes extremely bitter disputes, that are of an intractable nature. Zoning, noise regulation of calls to prayer and architectural directives that don't allow minarets (banned outright in Switzerland after a 2009 referendum) are some tactics through which communities resist such mosque construction and mobilization arguments underpin the threat of mosques to neighborhood integrity (Césari, 2005). These turbulences signify deeper fears towards Muslim presence and a striking reluctance to give Islam the same institutional status as Christianity given full formal religious freedom (Maussen, 2007).

The demands of Halal diets have raised sensitive issues in places such as schools, prisons, hospitals and other institutions. Most European states do provide for religious dietary requirements, but the way provisions are applied can differ dramatically, and there have been schools which have refused any kind of accommodation (Joppke, 2009). The slaughter of animals under halal demand is limited, and has been a subject for legislation in guiding consumers for compliance.

In France, the government-established the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) which seeks to offer official interlocutors for Moslem communities; however, its legitimacy is debated (Laurence & Vaisse, 2006). To many French Muslims, the CFCM is unrepresentative, male-dominated and too close to government rather than reflecting community interests (Peter Who). Additionally, member organizations of the CFCM have links with Moroccan, Algerian and Turkish states which also brings up issues around foreign control over French Islam (Laurence, 2012).

The descendants of North African immigrants (Chtatou, 2025, September 12), specifically French Muslims, experience extreme socioeconomic marginality that is concentrated in banlieues (suburbs) surrounding large cities (Wacquant, 2008). Unemployment, school failure, police oppression and lack of services provide the sustained condition of marginalization that periodic riots dramatize (2005, 2017). Such conditions encourage estrangement from French society enough to make religious identity compensation a factor (Khosrokhavar, 2005).

Nevertheless, French Islamic thought has developed in its own right. Intellectuals like the Swiss-based and now controversial intellectual Tariq Ramadan and organizations such as Union of Islamic Organizations of France are presented to have projects reconciling Islamic commitment with republican citizenship (Césari, 2004). For many Muslims in France, to be Muslim and French are not mutually

exclusive categories, their religious identity does not have to come at the expense of national identity (Foner & Alba, 2008).

But the denial of Muslim difference by republican assimilationism stunts any institutional growth of European Islam in France. For such a process to unfold effectively, the existence of an aboveboard public sphere for Islamic expression is essential; failing this, Islam in France risks remaining either confined to the private domain or subject to radicalization (Chtatou, 2017, September 19), thereby hindering its integration into civil society. The terrorist attacks of 2015-2016 and the states of emergency that ensued epitomize this deep securitization of French Islam: Muslims have become “inseparable” from security actions, rather than legitimate citizens (Hennette-Vauchez, 2018).

16. Case Study: France and Republican Integration

France hosts Europe's largest Muslim population, with approximately 5.7 million Muslims comprising 8.8% of the population (Pew Research Center, 2017). French republicanism, grounded in *laïcité* (state secularism) and assimilationist citizenship, provides a particularly challenging context for European Islam (Bowen, 2007).

Laïcité emerged from 19th century conflicts between the Catholic Church and the Third Republic, establishing strict separation of religion from state and public institutions (Baubérot, 2000). Religious expression is relegated to private life, with public space conceived as neutral territory free from religious markers. This framework treats all citizens as abstract equals, refusing official recognition of ethnic, religious, or cultural differences (Laborde, 2008).

French Muslims must navigate this republican framework by maintaining religious commitment while demonstrating civic loyalty uncomplicated by religious identity. The headscarf controversies exemplify tensions: when Muslim girls wore headscarves in public schools during the 1990s, the practice was interpreted as challenging republican universalism by introducing religious particularity into secular space (Bowen, 2007). The resulting 2004 law banning conspicuous religious symbols aimed to preserve secular neutrality but disproportionately affected Muslim students (Joppke, 2009).

Organizational representation of Muslims in France has proven contentious. The government-created French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) attempts to provide official interlocutors for Muslim communities, but its legitimacy is contested (Laurence & Vaisse, 2006). Many French Muslims view the CFCM as unrepresentative, male-dominated, and too closely aligned with state interests rather than authentically representing community concerns (Peter, 2006). Moreover, CFCM member organizations maintain ties to Moroccan, Algerian, and Turkish governments, raising questions about foreign influence over French Islam (Laurence, 2012).

French Muslims, particularly descendants of North African immigrants (Chtatou, 2025, September 12), face severe socioeconomic disadvantage concentrated in suburbs (*banlieues*) surrounding major cities (Wacquant, 2008). Unemployment, educational underachievement, police harassment, and inadequate services create conditions of marginalization that periodic riots (2005, 2017) have dramatically highlighted. These conditions foster alienation from French society and strengthen religious identity as compensatory resource (Khosrokhavar, 2005).

Despite these challenges, distinctive French Islamic thought has emerged. Intellectuals such as Tariq Ramadan (though Swiss-based and now controversial) and organizations like the Union of Islamic Organizations of France articulate visions reconciling Islamic commitment with republican citizenship (Césari, 2004). Many French Muslims embrace dual identity as both Muslim and French, rejecting the false choice between religious authenticity and national belonging (Foner & Alba, 2008).

However, republican assimilationism's refusal to recognize Muslim difference institutionally limits development of European Islam in France. Without legitimate public space for Islamic expression, French Islam risks remaining privatized or radicalized, rather than developing as accepted component of French civil society (Chtatou, 2017, September 19). The 2015-2016 terrorist attacks and subsequent states of emergency have further securitized French Islam, treating Muslim communities as security threats rather than citizens (Hennette-Vauchez, 2018).

17. Case Study: Germany and Its Guest Worker Unwanted Hordes

Germany's around 5 million Muslims, predominantly of Turkish origin, descended from the guest worker (*Gastarbeiter*) programs that the country established to import foreign workers as of the 1960s (Yurdakul & Yükleyn, 2009). Until 2000, German citizenship law was based on descent (*jus sanguinis*), so that immigrants of Turkish origin were not granted citizenship even after decades of residence and having been born in Germany (Green 2012).

This exclusionary framework was an expression that Muslims in Germany were not understood as minorities but as foreigners, temporary guests and not permanent residents. Parallel organizations such as mosques, cultural associations and the media were established in Turkish communities which largely remained attached to Turkey rather than integrated into German society (Mandel, 2008). Through *Diyanet*, the Turkish state was able to maintain a significant measure of control over religious life and how the faith was practiced by appointing imams and providing religious instruction and guidance (Yükleyn & Yurdakul, 2011), thus sustaining Turkish national identity among the diaspora.

Citizenship legislation (Reform in 2000) included a "conditional birthright citizenship" clause (*jus soli*), which required at least one of the parents to have permanent residency in order for their children, born on German soil, to be granted

German nationality (Green, 2012). The very presence of permanent Muslims was recognized in this reform, while these Muslims were given access to final institutional membership. Yet, the integration discussion is ongoing and continues to privilege processes of cultural assimilation, demanding from Muslims an adherence to German *Leitkultur* (leading culture) and democratic values through mandatory integration courses and tests (Joppke, 2007).

Germany has formalized initiatives aimed at cultivating an indigenous Islamic theology, notably through the establishment of university-based Islamic studies programs. The University of Tübingen and the University of Münster, and others, have established an institute of Islamic theology that integrates traditional Islamic sciences with (secular) academic studies to educate Imams and religious educators for a German context (Schmid & Akca, 2019). These efforts are a form of state investment into European Islamic scholarship and yet raise issues of state meddling in religious exegesis, or its privileging prescribed tenets (Spielhaus, 2011).

The integration trajectories of Muslims of Turkish origin in Germany remain uneven, marked by both notable successes and persistent challenges. Second and third generations indicate education and economic improvement, while rates of attending university and employed in a professional occupation go up (Crul & Schneider, 2010). However, long-term discrimination – especially in the job and housing market – obstructs full integration (Diehl & Liebau, 2016). The rise of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), coupled with the normalization of anti-Muslim discourse within mainstream political arenas, has fostered hostile socio-political climates that undermine Muslims' sense of belonging (Hafez & Heinisch, 2018).

These are not the only religious pathways that are followed by German Muslims. These include culturally-based Turkish Islam learned from their parents; adopters of reformist movements aimed at pure Islamic practice; and individuals who craft individualized spirituality, integrating their Islamic identity with German citizenship (Tezcan 2012). Muslim women's associations argue for increased participation in mosques and contest patriarchal interpretations, thereby contributing to altered German Islamic discourse (Nökel, 2002).

The extent to which an Islam that is distinctly German will emerge involves a combination of whether structural obstacles recede and whether Turkish state hegemony over mosques wanes, thus opening space for independent institutions such as *'Ibâd al-rahmân* (German Muslims). This process is, however, in turn made more difficult by recent Turkish political trends under President Erdoğan which enhance rather than moderate transnational Turkish influence and raise pressure against European adjustment (Yanasmayan, 2016).

18. Case Study: UK and Multiculturalism Acceptance

With an estimated 3.1 million Muslims in Britain, the majority of whom are from a South Asian background (Pakistani and Bangladeshi). They occupy a social

setting that embraces multiculturalism as both a historical and contemporary official recognition of religious and ethnic diversity (Modood, 2007). Although increasingly contested in recent years, multiculturalism in the United Kingdom has traditionally enabled the institutional acknowledgment of Muslim communities as legitimate corporate agents within the public sphere (Meer & Modood, 2009).

In the United Kingdom, Muslims participate in a framework of institutional accommodation that includes access to state-funded faith schools, provision for religious dietary requirements in public institutions, and recourse to non-binding sharia councils for family dispute resolution (Bano, 2012). In addition, umbrella organizations such as the Muslim Council of Britain and similar representative bodies negotiate with the state on matters concerning Muslim communities, thereby consolidating institutional avenues for a collective Muslim voice (Klausen, 2005).

Although often regarded as one of the least prescriptive national cultural models, British multiculturalism has remained deeply controversial. Following the September 11 attacks, critics argued that it contributed to the formation of parallel communities, the consolidation of conservative religious authority, and the potential for radicalization (Phillips, 2006; Chtatou, 2017, September 19). This critique was reinforced by the 2001 disturbances in northern English cities and the 7 July 2005 London bombings, which heightened anxieties about social fragmentation. Consequently, policy debates increasingly shifted toward promoting “British values” and enhancing social cohesion (Cantle, 2001; Phillips, 2006).

The Prevent counter-terrorism program perfectly encapsulates these tensions in British Islam. Although presented officially as a measure to counter extremism from any ideology, Prevent is disproportionately focused on Muslims with the school system, NHS and social services under surveillance (Kundnani 2014). This securitisation is in opposition to multicultural recognition by positing the Muslim religious identity as tainted (Qureshi, 2015).

British Muslims exhibit significant socioeconomic variation. There are differences based on the country of origin, with Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims faring worse than Indian Muslims, who have high poverty rates, educational underachievement and experience employment discrimination (Heath et al., 2008). The production of socio-economic disadvantage has been closely tied to residential concentration in northern industrial cities; however, Muslim communities in London remain comparatively more socially and economically mixed (Finney & Simpson, 2009).

The vitality of Islamic thought in the United Kingdom is a testament to these dynamics. A range of scholars and intellectuals actively contribute to theological debates, while Muslim civil society organizations address community concerns and Islamic institutions—including schools, charities, and media outlets—develop the infrastructure necessary for Muslim participation in British society (Lewis, 2007). At the same time, liberal voices, feminist Muslim activists, and LGBTQ Muslims

challenge conservative interpretations of Islam while remaining engaged with the faith, thereby contributing to its internal pluralism (Yip & Page, 2013).

Sharia council polemics lay bare tensions between multicultural concessions and liberal rights considerations. Sharia councils offer alternative dispute resolution for family matters, with critics claiming they discriminate against women and run parallel legal structures while proponents highlight participation on an opt-in basis as well as cultural sensitivity (Bano, 2012). This process serves to reflect the complexities of religious accommodation in a secular system.

Brexit and creeping xenophobia have made the public environment in Britain increasingly hostile for British Muslims. Post-Brexit referendum, anti-Muslim hate crimes have surged and political discourses are increasingly calling into question the belonging of Muslims (Elahi & Khan, 2017). It is not clear yet whether British multiculturalism will continue to support the institutional growth of Muslims in this new climate.

19. Comparative Analysis: Convergence and Divergence

A comparison of France, Germany and Britain shows both shared patterns and also some striking differences in how European Islam unfolds at the national level.

These challenges include:

- Continued socio-economic disadvantage affecting Muslims across communities.
- Discrimination in employment, housing, and education, regardless of national framework.
- Securitization following terrorist attacks, leading to greater scrutiny of Muslim populations (Nordin, 2015).
- Issues in creating indigenous Islamic scholarship distinct from foreign influences.
- Generational divides, as Europe-born Muslims establish hybrid identities where religious commitment fuses with European values (Heath et al., 2008).

Such differences mirror differing national institutional settings for Muslim incorporation. French republican law prohibits public expressions of religion, requires Islam to be privatized and causes friction over outward signs of Islamic piety. Muslims could not be formally members under the German *jus sanguinis* citizenship regime, although recent reforms have increased access. On the other, British multiculturalism offers institutional recognition of Muslim distinctiveness but has been steadily challenged (Koopmans, 2013).

Koopmans et al. (2005) argue that national citizenship regimes—the way rights, inclusion, and belonging are institutionally organized in a given country—shape how Muslims perceive their rights and how they mobilize politically around

those rights. In other words, whether the state recognizes group-based claims, frames equality in universalist or difference-friendly terms, and controls access to citizenship formally all affect Muslim political claims and collective action.

In Britain, the relatively multicultural citizenship regime has historically allowed and even legitimized claims by Muslims framed in terms of religious accommodation (e.g., faith schools, chaplaincies, anti-discrimination protections). This “pragmatic multiculturalism” creates a space where Muslim groups can make specific demands for religious rights and symbolic recognition, often justified through anti-discrimination and minority-rights frames rather than total assimilation.

In France, the republican model tends to universalize and depoliticize Muslim grievances: it assimilates complaints about discrimination or religious exclusion into a broader discourse of universal anti-discrimination and social justice, downplaying or rejecting explicit religious or ethnic group claims. Because the republican idiom emphasizes a single, secular citizenship, many Muslim claims are reframed as violations of “equal rights for all” or breaches of anti-discrimination principles, rather than as legitimate group-specific religious demands.

In Germany, the historically more ethno-national mode of citizenship—where access to formal citizenship and political inclusion for guest-worker descendants (especially Turkish-origin Muslims) was long restricted—has produced a different pattern. Exclusion, both legal and symbolic, encouraged many Turkish-origin Muslims to maintain a stronger orientation toward the homeland and to invest less in domestic political integration, which in turn limited the scope and character of their Muslim-specific political mobilization in Germany.

In short, Koopmans and colleagues show that Britain’s multiculturalism enables Muslim religious claims, France’s republicanism reroutes them into universalist justice frames, and Germany’s exclusionary citizenship regime dampens domestic Muslim political integration, pushing attention outward toward the country of origin.

Recent empirical studies and theoretical analyses confirm striking convergences between European countries in responses to Muslim immigration, particularly after Islamist terror attacks like Charlie Hebdo in 2015, which heightened resistance to Muslim immigrants across regions with high intergroup competition. These parallels encompass widespread stereotyping of Muslim and MENA ethnicities as inherent security threats—often termed “post-racial racism” or “Islamophobia”—fuelled by media portrayals linking Islam to terrorism and extremism post-9/11 and subsequent attacks. Additionally, political opposition to Muslim immigration transcends national traditions, as seen in shifts from multiculturalism to assimilationist policies emphasizing cultural integration and *Leitkultur* (leading culture).

A persistent challenge is reconciling religious liberty for Muslims with secular values like gender equality and state neutrality, where courts navigate symbolic Christian privileges against Islam’s public claims, often resulting in exclusive culturalization of religion. Joppke (2013) highlights this in debates over a “Christian

identity" for liberal states, signalling exclusion to Europe's 20 million Muslims while institutions uphold liberal norms amid public opposition.

These homologies underscore that national specificities, while significant, operate within pan-European dynamics: securitization of Muslim communities via integration policies, citizenship barriers, and counterterrorism measures that foster exclusion and radicalization fears (Chtatou, 2017, September 19). This framework not only shapes Muslim experiences but also erodes broader democratic rights through racial profiling and xenophobic rhetoric.

20. Assessing European Islam: Is There a Generation Gap?

Considering all this, how to revise European Islam? The answer, it seems from the evidence, is complicated: both pure myth and total reality - but also a possibility with a long way to go, impeded by some significant obstacles.

a. Arguments Supporting Reality

Demographic Immutability: Muslims are 5–6% (2010), and being second- and third-generation growing up in Europe, they simply have not known any other home than the one they live in (Pew Research Center, 2017). It is this permanence that allows for the emergence of identifiable European Islamic forms.

Hybrid Identities: Research repeatedly shows that many European Muslims adopt a hybrid identity, defining themselves both as Muslim and European, and rejecting the false choice between religious authenticity and national citizenship (Foner & Alba, 2008).

Theological Innovation: Theology invented by scholars such as Tariq Ramadan who construct visions of contextual and Islamically sound European-Islam (Ramadan 2004, 2009).

Institution building: Infrastructure for European Muslim life is created by Muslim organizations, mosques, educational institutions, and civil society groups (Laurence, 2012).

Process of Accommodation: Muslims make pragmatic accommodations between their Islamic tradition and European institutional framework including accommodations in the workplace with prayer, Islamic financial products to education compromise (Peter, 2006).

Religious Revival of the Second Generation: The resurgence of religion among the second-generation involves European Muslim youth seeking sound Islamic knowledge adjusted to their situation rather than simply reproducing parents' cultural customs as a matter of course (Roy, 2004).

b. Arguments Supporting Myth

Structural Subordination: Pervasive marginalization leads to continued exclusion from full integration and generates a sense of alienation (Heath et al., 2008).

Securitization: Counter-terrorist policies securitize the Muslim identity itself and lead to hindering European Muslims at peace with themselves (Kundnani, 2014).

Theological Resistance: Conservative religious authorities, both within Europe and transnationally, resist contextual adaptation as dangerous innovation departing from authentic Islam (Roy, 2004).

Political hostility: Right-wing populism raises questions about whether Islam can truly become part of Europe, and under such pressures, the integration of Muslims becomes brutal (Hafez, 2014).

Institutional Restriction: Limited recognition of Islamic institutions, restrictions to religious practice and a lack of accommodation serve as barriers to full Muslim participation (Joppke, 2009).

Foreign Influence: Reliance on foreign-trained imams, Gulf financing, and transnational Islamic groups stifle the formation of independent European-Islamic institutions (Laurence 2012).

21. Conclusion: European Islam on Trial as a Thing to Become

"European Islam: Myth or Reality?" cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. European Islam exists in embryonic, contested form — a becoming rather than an established fact, a project rather than an accomplished one. It is a specific form of Islam practiced, for instance, by a young man born and raised in Belgium who simultaneously maintains close links with transnational religious networks. The complexity of internally differentiated Islamic belief and practice among European Muslims points to hybrid identities, contextual adaptations, and constructive engagement with European civic structures among Muslim populations born and raised on the continent. Yet significant barriers remain. Institutional bias, securitization, theological inertia, political hostility, and socioeconomic marginalization all impede the emergence of a vibrant European Islam as a distinct tradition — one with a robust theology comparable to the historic Islamic traditions that have taken root in other regional contexts. European Islam, in short, is neither myth nor accomplished reality, but an ongoing and deeply contested process of formation.

The expanded mythos of which the perpetrators are part allows us to see such adaptations. The "Islam" practiced in Indonesia is not the same as Arab Islam, which is not the same as West African Islam, but are still recognizably Islamic, and mixed with local influences (Mandaville, 2001). The question is whether European context allows similar adaptation, or if what are identified as peculiar aspects of European modernity — secularism, individualism, strong state-church separation, liberal rights structures — just can't be squared with Islamic tradition.

There are theological resources for European Islam. Ideas like the *maqasid al-sharia* (objectives of Islamic law) offer paradigms that encourage historical interpretation in search of underlying values rather than mindless application of classic rulings (Ramadan 2004). Although it has limitations, *fiqh al-aqalliyât* deals with

some related issues in Europe (Caeiro, 2010). These Islamic reformist movements for progressive change offer alternative interpretations that enter a dialogue with the patriarchal and authoritarian readings, without abandoning religiosity (Safi, 2003).

But theological innovation also needs institutional footing, academic authority, and communal respect. European Islamic scholarship is still in its early stages of development with a large proportion of the imported religious leadership having only very limited knowledge about European issues and society (Laurence, 2012). Academia-based Islamic theology programs seek to close this gap, but they are still limited in scale and open to accusations of state interference in religion (Schmid & Akca, 2019). Whether the European Indigenising Islamic scholarship is able to become sufficiently deep and broad so as to steer Muslims communities authoritatively in the future is uncertain.

Empirical study shows that Muslim experiences are heterogenous. Some Muslims live secular lives without much religious identification, other adhere to conservative practices while engaging with a more European-style civil society and yet even some develop “ecumenical” (Outhwaite, 2007) readings that harmonize Islamic norms with those of liberal democracy and human rights (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012). This variety is a reflection of European pluralism per se, however, whether it transpires into an integrated European Islamic tradition or remains atomised individuality is unknown.

Institutional contexts play a decisive role in shaping outcomes. In settings where European states provide recognition, accommodation, and genuine inclusion, the conditions are conducive to the emergence of a “European Islam.” Conversely, where Muslims encounter discrimination, securitization, and exclusion, these dynamics tend to foster alienation and forms of defensive religiosity. Cross-national comparisons further highlight the importance of contextual variation: British multiculturalism, for instance, has enabled trajectories distinct from those associated with French republicanism or Germany’s historical guest-worker framework (Koopmans et al., 2005). However, recent shifts toward heightened securitization and increasing restrictions on religious practice risk undermining the integrative potential of these national models.

European Islam is ever more hemmed in by political dynamics. Muslim presence is vilified as an existential danger by right-wing populism delegitimising Muslim belonging and encouraging hostility (Hafez, 2014). Dependent on counter-terrorism frameworks, Muslim religiosity is the very axis of suspicion and monitoring (Kundnani, 2014). These political circumstances undermine the possibility of a comfortable European Muslim identity based on accepting that Muslims belong in Europe.

Transnational influences further complicate European Islamic growth in equivocal terms. Gulf-sponsored Salafi literalism is a conservative version of the religion that resists contextual adaptation (Meijer, 2009). The Turkish and Moroccan state domination of diaspora mosques hinders the development of autonomous

European Muslim organizations (Yükleyen & Yurdakul, 2011). But international networks also manifest theological resources, a plurality of perspectives, and links with global *umma* that Muslims in Europe creatively adapt to the local situation (Mandaville, 2001).

The securitization triggered by terrorist acts is, in many ways, the most serious challenge. When mosque surveillance, imam monitoring, and prevention programs treat Islamic commitment itself as a risk factor, authentic Muslim practice becomes nearly impossible (Qureshi, 2015). Muslims are thus placed in an unwinnable position: they must either prove their integration by minimizing their religion or hold fast to their faith at the risk of suspicion. This duality frames Islam and Europe as inherently opposed rather than potentially complementary, precluding the emergence of a distinctly European Islam by definition.

Gender becomes a particularly controversial site of struggle. Patriarchal domination as articulated in some conservative Islamic interpretations clashes with European gender equality standards, thereby generating tensions over issues such as family law, mosque governing systems, and women's religious leadership (Jouili, 2015). Yet Muslim women are actively present in these debates: many have produced feminist Islamic interpretations that challenge patriarchy without abandoning religious belief (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002). The extent to which European Islam will develop egalitarian gender frameworks or reproduce these patriarchal structures will strongly determine how credible and appealing it is to the younger generation.

Socioeconomic integration as a basis for religious adaptation. Muslims with educational and employment success, residence integration tend to develop hybrid identity blending Islamic and European ethnic identities (Heath et al., 2008). On the other hand, marginalized Muslims, who are confronted with discrimination and disadvantage more often adopt a defensive religiosity or deny that they belong to Europe. Policies that affect Muslim socioeconomic incorporation influence the potential for European Islam more directly than religious-specific policies themselves.

As we look ahead, several promising possibilities emerge. In the best-case scenario, European Muslims thrive socioeconomically, discrimination diminishes, and an indigenous Islamic scholarship takes root in Europe. Europeans increasingly accommodate religious diversity in their midst, allowing European Islam to crystallize as a distinct tradition. This tradition expresses Muslim values within the European framework of civil rights, democracy, and tolerance for differences. Muslims become visible as successful professionals, entrepreneurs, politicians, writers, and intellectuals in their own right—shaping the Europe of the mind. In this way, positive images normalize their belonging.

In this ugly future, discrimination continues, securitization grows ever more severe and the power of right-wing populism surges as exclusionary policies take root. Muslims are still on the fringe, building their own communities and remaining separate from the established society. Some Muslims end up dropping their

religious identity altogether in an effort to eliminate stigma, and others may actually become even more conservative, or extreme, as a result of feeling rejected. European Islam doesn't evolve because Europeans won't accept Muslim membership.

The best approach probably is somewhere between these two extremes: ongoing contested negotiation where European Islam remains present in incomplete, fragmented form and never fully institutionalized. Various Muslim communities produce divergent adaptations — some absorb themselves into secularism, some retain conservative traditionalism, still others evolve forward-leaning hybrids. A geographic divide persists, with certain cities or areas managing to successfully absorb Muslims while others remain locked in tense standoffs. This is why European Islam still embodies eternal becoming.

Whether European Islam eventually prospers is crucially a matter of political decisions over the next generation or two. Will European societies sincerely accept pluralism, and see Muslims as legitimate stakeholders in European projects? Will there be enforcement of anti-discrimination policies ensuring equal opportunity for all, regardless of religious identity? Are the days of robocops truly over, at least in Washington? Will the Muslims be able to gain political representation in accordance with demographics? Can educational and financial opportunities flourish for Muslim communities?

The answers to these questions stem not from theological necessity or cultural determinism, but from deliberate policy choices, institutional reforms, and evolving social values. European Islam is neither inevitably unattainable nor automatically assured. It represents an opportunity hinging on the solidarity of Muslim communities and European societies alike: Muslims must constructively engage the European experience, forging a theological vision attuned to this context while safeguarding religious authenticity. In turn, European societies must transcend Islamophobia, embrace genuine inclusion, and recognize Muslims as fully authentic citizens whose distinct religious identity enriches rather than endangers European civilization.

The idea of a European Islam grates on both conservative Muslims who disdain accommodation and secular Europeans uneasy about public religion. It calls upon Muslims to accept creativity, *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), and context-based interpretation instead of a mechanical adherence to rulings meant for the different times and places in which they were developed. It encourages Europeans to broaden definitions of what it means to be European to encompass Islam, rather than seeing being Muslim and European as mutually exclusive.

Ultimately, "European Islam: Myth or Reality?" can only be concluded with respect to it, while the phenomenon is still being built. There can be few who have been entirely ignorant of these factors, and yet at their heart a pessimistic conclusion looms: despite signs of European Islam—hybrid identities, contextual practices, emerging institutions, theological innovation—it is hamstrung by too many barriers to form a fully-fledged tradition. The prospect of an 'ever closer' European

Islam becoming a reality — or to use the phrase more appropriately, a European Islam that is just realized, since in most respects it is already an interwoven fact — ultimately depends on the choices taken in coming years by political leaders and religious authorities as well as Muslim communities and all kinds of native-born citizens. Thus, it is not a mere dream or prospect already realized but rather an open question, something undecided and contested—a civilizational undertaking whose success or failure will determine the future face of Europe and contribute profoundly to Islam's ongoing global development.

The stakes are larger than Muslim communities themselves. What native Muslims experience in European policies of integration and what kind of Islam is cultivated in Europe will decide if European pluralism has a potential to accommodate substantial religious diversity or whether European secularism can only work with cultural homogeneity free from radical religious otherness. It's going to test whether liberal democracy can truly accommodate communities with values at odds with secular liberal consensus. And it will help shape how Muslims around the world think about the relationship between Islamic tradition and modern pluralistic democracy. European Islam is hence not only a Muslim problem, but rather all-European and ultimately global task with implications reaching far beyond the immediate one of how Muslims are being integrated within European societies.

In summary, European Islam is an emerging phenomenon confronting profound challenges—neither a mere myth nor a settled reality. Its trajectory depends on a complex interplay of theological innovation, institutional dynamics, political forces, social sensibilities, and policy choices. What is required is neither unbridled skepticism about its feasibility nor premature triumphalism, but a sober recognition of the ongoing negotiations that will ultimately determine its shape and substance—raising the question of whether marginal dynamics might come to exert a disproportionate influence over broader societal outcomes.

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