



## ISLAM IN EUROPE: QUEST FOR A PARADIGM

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My guide at the *Alhambra*, the fabulous Moorish palace in Granada, Spain, drew my attention to its lush gardens livened by a gentle breeze. Did I know why the gardens were square-shaped? asked Mohamed Yusef Garcia, a native Spaniard who had converted to Islam. I said I did not. Historically, he said, four has been Islam's "lucky number." Islam says God has sent down four holy books. There are four principal angels and four "rightly guided" caliphs. The Prophet Muhammad's fourth military campaign won him the *Kaaba*, the holiest Islamic shrine in Mecca . . . . My friend went on and on.

Another example, I thought to myself, of how people mythologize religion. Yet I remembered Yusef Garcia a month later during a luncheon in Bonn, Germany, with Hasan Ozdogan, president of the Islamic Council for Germany, an umbrella organization for 38 Muslim groups. A native of Turkey, Ozdogan reminded me that four centuries ago, in 1683, the forebears of today's Germans and Austrians had thrown

back an Ottoman Muslim advance toward Western Europe. "We just had to take the plane to get in," he added with a grin.<sup>1</sup>

Western Europe today has a Muslim population of 10 to 12 million. Most of these Muslims or their parents or spouses were brought in from Africa and Asia as workers in the 1950s and 1960s to meet the labor shortages of the booming postwar West European economies. Today France has 4 million Muslims, Germany 3 million and Britain 1.5 million; Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands have about a half-million each. In other West European countries the figures hover in the six-digit range.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of burgeoning Muslim communities in Western Europe marks not only the fourth century of the Ottomans' westward thrust to which Ozdogan alluded. It also represents the fourth Muslim tide into Europe. In this article I will examine the outlook for this new Muslim presence in the European heartland. Is this fourth wave going to be, to use Yusef Garcia's term, a lucky one for Islam?

In a democratic Europe, an anti-Muslim pogrom seems quite unlikely even



though prolonged economic crisis could change the situation.<sup>3</sup> Unless that happens, the question that will decide the fate of Islam in Western Europe is whether Muslims will preserve a separate religious or cultural niche or assimilate into native communities. To explore this question, it will be useful to look into the nature of the challenges Islam has been facing in Europe.

The first Islamic phase in Europe consisted in seven centuries of Moorish civilization in Spain, which was blotted out by Catholic Spaniards after they captured Granada in 1492. In the thirteenth century, Tatar Muslims set up a principality in Russia and part of Eastern Europe, known by the pejorative label, Khanate of the Golden Horde. The Russians gobbled up the Tatar domain in the fifteenth century, but the Tatars retain their Muslim identity. The Ottoman Turks of Anatolia brought the third Muslim tide into Europe in the fourteenth century. Istanbul is the only European territory that Turkey, the successor state to the Ottoman Empire, still holds.

On all three previous occasions, the Christian faith was Muslims' main credal adversary. Nationalism had yet to be born as an inspirational force behind political and military contests. The defense and dissemination of Christianity was Europeans' rallying cry against Muslims. In fact, the final and decisive phase of Spanish wars against the Moors, the *reconquista*, began after Pope Clement V had issued a decree saying the presence of Muslims on Christian soil was "an insult to the Creator."<sup>4</sup>

By the time the Ottomans and Tatars emerged on the European scene, Turks and Mongol Tatars were portrayed as new threats to Christianity. John Calvin, for example, warned Christian Europe that

Muhammad, "apostate as he was, has alienated the Turks from Christ" and was making them "worship the devil in the name of God."<sup>5</sup> Prayers were offered in churches to spare Christian Europe from Muslim "hordes."

A clue to the outlook for the West European Islamic niche could be found at the continent's other end, inhabited by 8.2 million Muslims.<sup>6</sup> They are the descendants of converts from Ottoman times or belong to Turkish stock and are spread over northern Cyprus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria. From the vantage point of their co-religionists to the west (and in the Muslim world), the problem facing them is not their identity or culture. Balkan and East European Muslims proudly profess their Muslim identity. And few Muslim groups elsewhere have paid such a heavy price for their Muslim culture in blood and tears as have the Turkish Cypriots, Bosnians, Kosovar Albanians and now Macedonian Albanians.

Yet the content of their faith has markedly declined over the centuries. Balkan and East European Muslims are among the most secular in the world. Some Europeans have an esoteric term for it: "Bosnianization." It is used for Muslims who would die for their Islamic identity but won't bother to practice the faith. Some West European Muslims worry whether their posterity may become "Bosnianized."

Secularization means "a decline of religion both in society and in the minds of individuals."<sup>7</sup> Until recently, most leading sociologists generally agreed with Max Weber and Talcott Parsons that secularization was triggered in the West by economic and social modernization, which, in turn, has been a gift of the Protestant work



ethic. Protestant “workaholism,” according to this argument, was generated by the Reformation concept of man’s individual responsibility to God.

Some of the later social anthropologists, including Peter Berger, Robert Bellah and David Martin,<sup>8</sup> have modified and embellished the Weberian theory. The most interesting of their theses traces the secularization process to the inception of the monotheistic tradition. It says during the times when man lived under a primitive religious order, his life from dawn to dusk was part of the cosmic order; he had no conception of his individual self, no sense of alienation.

Bellah says:

Primitive religions are on the whole oriented to a single cosmos; they know nothing of a wholly different world relative to which the actual world is utterly devoid of value. They are concerned with the maintenance of personal, social, and cosmic harmony and with attaining specific goods – rain, harvest, children, health – as men have always been. But the overriding goal of salvation that dominates world-rejecting religions is almost absent in primitive religion, and life after death tends to be a shadowy semixistence in some vaguely designated place in the single world.<sup>9</sup>

Man’s separation from the sacred space, according to this theory, began with Abraham. The patriarch of monotheism differentiated the sacred world above from a mundane one below. Moses accelerated the process when he made the covenant with God, placing the “chosen” Israelites above the rest of the human race.

Weber argues that man’s “individualization” culminated with Martin Luther.

Luther tore man away even from the society with which Moses and the Catholics had left him, making him directly accountable to God. From Luther, Enlightenment thinker René Descartes was only a short step away, waiting to snap man’s ties to God, leaving him in the solitary pursuit of happiness through the acquisition of goods here on earth.

Bellah and others acknowledge that Muhammad, nearly a millennium before Luther, had preached the individual’s direct responsibility to God, but they suggest that the Islamic message of individualism got trapped in the tribal Arab social structure. Tradition kept the Muslim tied as ever to his tribal community. The Islamic concept of individual freedom, Bellah argues, “was too modern to succeed. The necessary social infrastructure did not yet exist to sustain it.”<sup>10</sup> In others words, Islam was meant to be the Christian reformation. The bedouins just did not get it.

The thought crossed my mind during my 1998 and 1999 research trips to south-East Europe. On Cyprus I saw that Turkish Cypriots were significantly more secular than Greek Cypriots (who chose their archbishop as their first president). In Athens a so-called “Greek Turk,” a graduate student in chemistry, said Muslims everywhere are suffering because of their “backward, religious outlook.” In Istanbul members of the Turkish intelligentsia offer you drinks at 11 a.m. and mock their “Islamic brothers” in the Arab world to flaunt their secularity. Bosnians and Albanians are known as models of secular Muslims. The post-communist rediscovery of their Islamic identity has not, notes a French specialist on the Balkans, triggered “a true religious revival.”<sup>11</sup>

It appears that in Western Europe, too,



Bosnianization of Muslims is well underway. To be sure, many mosques in Western Europe are teeming with worshipers. But about 90 percent of those congregations are immigrant Muslims who grew up in the Middle Eastern, North African or South Asian Islamic religious and cultural environments.<sup>12</sup> The European-born second- and third-generation Muslims, who make up 50 percent of the West European Muslim population,<sup>13</sup> are a sparse sight in mosques, often forming the tail ends of the last rows of the congregations.

In Germany, according to a survey by Aziz Gardezi, only 4 percent of the European-born Muslims pray

“regularly” or “fairly regularly.”<sup>14</sup> In Marseilles, France, Algerian intellectual Toumi Azzedine said, “Not more than 6 to 8 percent” of the *beurs*, French-born children of North African Muslim immigrants, pray “regularly” or “fairly regularly.”<sup>15</sup> In Amsterdam, a Pakistani studying Dutch immigration policy said, “About 30 percent of Muslim children go to the mosque on weekends with their fathers, but once they are 15 or 16 most of them stop [going to the mosque].”<sup>16</sup>

I picked prayer to measure secularity because “secularization,” as a social scientist notes, “is indicated by a decline in church attendance.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, prayer is the most representative symbol of Muslim piety. Secondly, it is a common yardstick to compare the levels of secularity between Muslims and Christians, as both faith groups consider praying an essential

religious requirement. And from a comparison of prayer statistics between West European Christians and European-born Muslims, one can conclude their levels of secularity are about the same. The percentage of West European Christians considered “core members” of a church is 23 percent in Northern Ireland, 13 percent in Britain, 12 percent in Germany, 9 percent each in Belgium and Portugal and 5 percent each in France and Norway.<sup>18</sup>

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“Algerians in France,” observes a researcher, “are no more Muslim than the French are Catholic.”<sup>19</sup> He could say the same thing about second and third generation Muslims all over Western Europe.

Many West European intellectuals – Muslim and non-Muslim – say the increasing secularization of Muslims proves the Weberian theory of secularization through modernization. They included Muslim intellectuals Mohammed Arkoun, Tahar Be Jelloun and Gardezi, and native European scholars on Islam Remi Leveau, Oliver Roy and Lucette Valensi. Eventually, said Valensi, director of the Paris think-tank *Institut d’Etudes de l’Islam et des Sociétés du Monde Musulman* (IISMM), Muslims will assimilate like the other immigrants who have poured into France since the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Gardezi, a journalist at Deutschwelle radio in Cologne, argued that the assimilation will take place in two stages. Muslims will “first secularize, and then assimilate.”<sup>21</sup>

Their prognosis and prediction do not, however, explain the current wave of



religious revival in some of the modernizing and modern societies including the United States, Israel, India and parts of the Muslim world. Neither do they shed light on the secularity of the Hellenistic and Sinic civilizations, or of Europe before Charlemagne. Modernity did not touch any of those societies. And none of them knew of Martin Luther or dabbled in monotheism.

Secularization apparently has many mothers, and one of them is exposure to other cultures and cross-cultural interaction. It has promoted secularity in premodern (Hellenistic) as well as modern (German) societies. A groundbreaking survey conducted in Detroit by Gerhard Lenski showed that people who migrate from rural ethno-religious settings into urban centers mostly lose their religious sensitivity. This transformation, explained Lenski, occurs through the segmentation of their lives between the secular sphere of factory and civic institutions and the "religious" sphere of the church and family.

At his workplace and in the mall the immigrant is thrown into the midst of people from different cultural backgrounds and constrained first to tolerate, and then respect, the religious customs of others. Eventually the religious sphere of his life is "compartmentalized," and he becomes used to "a common code of moral norms . . . shared by all the various faiths represented in the community," which is what secularization means.<sup>22</sup>

Berger and other sociologists have come to similar conclusions. When people from different cultural backgrounds come in contact with one another, says Berger, their "different lifestyles, values and beliefs begin to mingle," and they realize that "maybe these other people have a point or

two."<sup>23</sup> The exposure has a rapid and dramatic effect when it occurs in a modern environment. Normandy is perhaps the most conservative Catholic region in all France. Gabriel LeBras, the pioneer French sociologist of religion, studied the secularization of rural migrants from Normandy to Paris. The seduction of secularity begins, he says, on the platform of the Gare du Nord, the Paris train station where the arriving migrants have the first glimpse of the "eternal city."<sup>24</sup>

Muslim immigrants and their offspring are not escaping the seduction of cultural pluralism in modern Western Europe. Mohammed Ahnif, a Moroccan immigrant in Amsterdam, said, sadly, that he and his wife worked hard to teach their four children prayers, Islamic etiquette, reading the Quran and the life of the Prophet. But then "they go to school and the street and mix with other [non-Muslim] children, and come home and watch TV." Two of Ahnif's three sons, who are in the upper teens, "pray only when I'm home." Only his 15-year-old daughter is punctual about prayers and other Islamic rites. He is not sure if his sons will pray at all when they leave home. He blames their "indifference" to religion on their living "in the midst of Christians, atheists, homosexuals and the TV."<sup>25</sup>

A hard core of Muslim youth throughout Western Europe is devoted to Islam. They practice the faith punctually; propagate it among secular Muslims and, occasionally, non-Muslims; conduct Islamic seminars and workshops; and campaign for Islamic causes. Some of them were born in Europe of parents who are lackadaisical about Islamic practices. But their number is small.

In Berlin I attended a meeting of the local branch of the Islamic Youth of



Germany, which is engaged in the dissemination of Islam in that country. I asked all 14 participants in the meeting whether they thought the outlook for Islam's resisting the secularizing influence of Europe was "excellent," "good" or "dim." Eleven of them answered "dim."<sup>26</sup>

The secularizing trend notwithstanding, it appears Muslims are strongly resisting the second step in the Gardezi recipe for their assimilation: the assimilation itself. Most of the secularizing or secular West European Muslims I met showed little inclination toward melting into native cultures. They mostly socialize among Muslims. Only about 3 percent of Muslim youth marry non-Muslims in Britain. The percentage appears somewhat higher in France and Germany, but not by much.<sup>27</sup>

Young West European Muslims talk about integration, by which they mean abiding by the laws of the native countries and having good relations with everybody but preserving and fostering their Muslim cultural life. Many native Europeans spurn such argumentation. For them integration means becoming part of native cultures except perhaps keeping Muslim names, praying and having *doner kebab* or *humus* for meals. But the Turks in Berlin, Algerians in Paris, or Pakistanis in Bradford, England, are no more willing to assimilate with their secular Christian neighbors than are Bosnian, Kosovar or Macedonian Muslims with theirs.

"Muslims," said Muhammad Anwar, professor of ethnic and racial studies at the University of Warwick in England, "will remain a distinct layer in the social makeup of Europe." He discounted the argument that education and prosperity would promote Muslim assimilation into West European societies. "Education and

economic well-being," he argued, "give you greater confidence in yourself and your cultural identity."<sup>28</sup>

The main reason Muslims have so far resisted assimilation is a unique feature of Muslim life: the bond of the *umma*, the Islamic community. It came into a spectacular, though somewhat misleading, display during protests over *The Satanic Verses*, which denigrates Muhammad's family; the ban on headscarves in French schools; and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Kosovo. Muslims – mostly young and secular – from different ethnic, national and age groups participated in those protests in England and France.

No other religious group except the Jews has demonstrated such multiethnic, multiracial and multinational ties. The Jews are a small community in today's Western Europe, and hence Muslims remain the only faith group tied across ethnic and linguistic boundaries by a communal bond. The Jewish bond stems partly from their tribal origin, partly from their history of persecution and partly from their mission to support Israel.

The *umma* solidarity has a different source, and it has been nurtured by a different set of circumstances. Issues such as the publication of *The Satanic Verses* and a ban on Muslim headscarves made a dramatic show of Muslim communal spirit (as do Israel's troubles among Jews in the West), but they are misleading because they fail to spotlight the real nature and source of *umma* solidarity. The places to look for that solidarity are the coffee shops near the Omar Mosque in Paris, the weekly Quranic exegesis and refreshment gathering of the Muslim Youth of Germany, the fundraising campaign for an Islamic school in Granada and the lively



interaction on the myriad Islamic sites on the Internet.

It also reveals itself in the everyday incidents in the life of West European Muslims. On the afternoon of September 30, 2000, outside the Amersfoort train station in the Netherlands, I met four young men, three born in the Netherlands and one in Morocco. Of the three Netherlands, one was born of Surinamese parents, one of Turkish parents and the third of a Turkish father and Dutch mother. They had been just acquaintances for a year until two weeks previously, when "a bad incident" made them good friends. The Moroccan had been denied access to a discotheque on the alleged ground it had been "full." When he saw some native Dutch were allowed in later, he telephoned the other three, and the next day all four went to the disco, demanded an explanation of the previous night's incident, got an apology from the management and were allowed to enjoy an evening there free of charge.

None of them prayed except on Eids and some Fridays. They spoke Dutch among themselves, and spoke different languages and ate different kinds of foods at home. What prompted the Moroccan to ask the others' support on the disco incident, and the others to give it? "We are Muslims," replied the son of the Turkish-Dutch parents. After an uncomfortable pause, the Moroccan added, apologetically, that they should not, after all, be going to the disco "too often," but will settle down and become "better Muslims" later in life.

Everywhere in Western Europe Muslims belonging to different racial or ethnic stocks, speaking different native languages, dressing differently and eating different foods are joining hands to build

mosques and Islamic schools; praying together; celebrating Eids together; attending one another's weddings, picnics and fast-breaking (*iftar*) parties during the holy month of Ramadan; gathering for Quranic readings; and organizing Chechnya relief campaigns.

The Mevlana Mosque in Berlin's Kreuzberg district has a coffee shop astride the gate. After the late-afternoon (*asr*) prayer, one can see Turkish, Bosnian, Pakistani and native German Muslims sitting around the table, sipping Turkish coffee and sharing jokes, despite difficulty in communicating in German. An Islamic library on one side of the mosque, too, would contain an ethnic rainbow of Muslims browsing through books. Then at the other end of the mosque, a Turkish teacher would be seen frantically trying to accomplish the seemingly impossible: Teaching the articles of faith, prayers, etc., to small children speaking three different mother tongues.

There are almost as many Hindus or Catholics in the world as Muslims. But one does not see Hindus from India, Nepal, South Africa and the Caribbean socializing and struggling for common causes in Paris or Frankfurt. And Catholics from Poland, Italy, Spain and Mexico may be living in the same apartment complex in East London for a year and not know one another's names.

The Muslim umma spirit originates in numerous Quranic references. The Creator expects the Muslim to be an integral part of his community and society. His responsibilities as an individual involve his duties to his family, kin, orphan, the needy, the wayfarer<sup>29</sup>. He is enjoined by God over and over to strive for justice in society and told that he has been created



as a member of a nation or tribe,<sup>30</sup> so he appreciates human fellowship. And he is designated by God as His “vice-regent on Earth.”<sup>31</sup>

Although Muslims over the centuries have jettisoned many Quranic caveats, the umma tradition endures. It does so because, apart from the stipulations in the scripture, history has played a seminal role in fostering communal solidarity. In Muhammad’s time the young Muslim community, drawn from different tribes and regions, was in constant danger of annihilation by its enemies. The key to its survival lay in sticking together. “Faith,” as Bernard Lewis aptly observes, “replaced blood as the social bond.”<sup>32</sup>

Over the centuries, Muslim caliphs, sultans and emperors created multiracial armies to build multinational empires, which were adminis-

tered by multiethnic bureaucracies. Later, as European colonialism engulfed Muslim

domains, peoples in far-flung lands united in spirit, if not physically, to fight common enemies under the Islamic banner. Above all, throughout the past millennium and a half, the core Islamic tenets, values and rituals remain unchanged, binding the believers from Morocco to Indonesia and from Canada to Yemen with a common spiritual thread. Often a simple Islamic greeting – *Assalaamu alaikum* (peace be upon you) – builds trust and starts camaraderie among strangers that none of the modern communication techniques can.

During a research trip to Iraq in December 1991, I found myself in the company of one of Saddam Hussein’s

monitors every time I went out to interview people. Often I would be attached to a monitor along with one or two Western reporters. Some of those reporters had spent years in the Arab world and spoke fluent Arabic, which I didn’t. The problem was that few Iraqis would open up to them.

But if I approached the Iraqis scrambling up my English with Arabic, they would break into broad smiles, greet me with *ahalan wa sahlam* (welcome to you) and *kaifa haluk* (how are you?), offer me coffee and then answer my questions. Sometimes they would ask me to go back for a meal, signaling that they would want to talk with me when I was not being stalked by a monitor. Alexandra Avakion, then with *Newsweek* magazine, asked me one day to tell her the “secret code” I was

using to get the Iraqis to talk. I said it was *assalaamu alaikum*.

The Muslims who

have migrated to Western Europe brought along the umma tradition with them and are passing it on to their children. It is now a salient part of European Muslim culture. *Assalam alaikum* sets up instant bonding among immigrants from diverse countries and cultures and native converts to Islam. Yet the Muslim umma tradition, too, marks a deep cultural divide in Western Europe. It stamps Turks, Punjabis, Moroccans and Berbers with the Islamic diacritical mark, making them victims of violence and job discrimination in Western Europe, especially in France and Germany.

In France, neighborhood residents as well as public officials oppose mosque

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### Germany allows Christian and Jewish religious instruction in schools, but not Islamic courses.

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building although the law allows it. The last time Muslims could obtain local government permission for a full-fledged mosque was in the early 1990s, when the mosque of Lyons was built after the Saudi government directly lobbied the French government for it. In many schools, Muslim girls are barred from wearing headscarves while Christian children are allowed to wear the cross and Jewish boys the skullcap.

Germany allows Christian and Jewish religious instruction in schools, but not Islamic courses. In parts of Western Europe complaints are rife of Muslim women being denied jobs because of their headscarves, Muslims being served last in stores, denied the membership of a local club, jeered at in the street, asked to “go back to Turkey.” The news media have a proclivity to link Muslims’ troubles with the law to “Islamic fundamentalism.”

Because Muslims themselves tend to view the world through the lenses of their faith, they often attribute these incidents to “Islamophobia,” paranoia about Islam. “The Crusader mentality is the main problem” facing West European Muslims, said Mehmet Sabri Erbakan, president of the Cologne-based National View (*Milli Gorus*) organization.<sup>33</sup> He said the fear of Islam once evoked in Europe by Ottoman and Moorish conquests has been reborn with the growth of Muslim communities in many parts of Europe. Rashid Benaissa, of UNESCO publications in Paris, agreed and added that French liberalism is a “hoax,” that the French government subsidizes Catholic and Jewish schools while denying the same privilege to Muslim schools.<sup>34</sup> (The problem, said a French government official, is that Catholic and Jewish schools receiving government

subsidy agree to accept students from other faith groups, but Muslims resist this legal requirement.)

In reality the Islamic faith is not a main concern of Muslims’ detractors in Western Europe. Secularity has stretched deep roots in West European societies, which so far have proved impervious to the winds of religious revival that are sweeping parts of Asia, Africa and the Americas. It appears that the old Weberian secularization theory still holds on the continent of its birth.

Muslims, as other non-European minorities, are victims of a unique element of European culture: racism. Racist xenophobia has revived there with a vengeance since the end of the Cold War. A Europe-wide study conducted in 1998 found that 48 percent of the French described themselves as “racist” or “fairly racist.” Fifty-five percent did so in Belgium, and more than 30 percent in Germany, Britain, the Netherlands and Italy.<sup>35</sup>

Resurgent racism seems to have been Western Europe’s answer to the failure of its older moral and social paradigms. After the failure of Christianity, Nazism, Fascism, socialism and communism and the decline of nationalism (under the pressure of European Union integration), race is the only cultural root many of them feel they have left. Many non-European societies that have suffered the setbacks of nationalist experiments or economic models have turned to religion. But Enlightenment liberalism has wiped religion out of Western Europe more thoroughly than almost anywhere else.

As the largest of Western Europe’s immigrant cultural groups, Muslims bear the brunt of racist campaigns, which target them as an amalgam of non-European races molded by Islam into a cultural



category. The racist-cultural, rather than religious, nature of those campaigns is reflected by the fact that they do not spare other non-white minorities.

In Brandenburg, Germany, a black Christian worker was the first victim of violence following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Throughout eastern Germany, Vietnamese, Jews and Mozambicans – but not the Muslim Turks – are the main targets of the neo-Nazi and skinhead extremists.

The situation became so bad in the early 1990s, recalled Czarina Wilpert, a sociologist at the Technical University in Berlin, that a group of Japanese industrialists who had come to explore investment opportunities in eastern Germany were chased away by skinheads who thought they were Vietnamese!<sup>36</sup>

Yet, in many parts of Europe, Muslims are prime targets of the xenophobes because of their long history of antagonism with Europe and especially European racism. The Muslims were, so to speak, “present at the creation” of European racism and are among its oldest and most irreconcilable adversaries.

As an ideology implying the superiority of one race over another, racism was born of European colonialism and slavery introduced into the New World by European settlers. These colonialists and slaveholding plantation owners in the Americas came to believe that their mastery over other races proved their intellectual superiority over them. Intellectual excellence, it was argued, enabled them to advance in the sciences and technologies, build armies, conquer colonies, and organize industries and eventually dominate other races. Intellectuals and polemicists summoned Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selec-

tion to claim the white race’s genetic superiority over the rest of mankind. Social sciences have since debunked the theory of white racial superiority, but many white Europeans, including intellectuals, continue to believe in it.

Muslims have contested European colonialism and claims of superiority in more places and more vigorously than any other religious and racial categories. It began in the mid-seventh century when Arab Muslims conquered Syria, Egypt and North Africa from Christian Byzantium. But the contest reached its widest dimension during colonial times, when the entire Muslim world except Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran and Arabia came under European colonial rule.

Since the unraveling of communism, an enemy of both Islam and Europe, these two old adversaries are once again faced with one another. Muslim immigrants and their offspring rake up the old fears in European minds that Islam, in Samuel Huntington’s words, “has put the survival of the West in doubt, and it has done that at least twice,” under the Ottomans and Moors.<sup>37</sup>

The perception of the threat is mutual, as one is reminded daily by the parallel lifestyles reflecting the contradictory worldviews of Muslims and native Europeans. In cities and towns with sizable Muslim populations, Muslims live in separate neighborhoods with *halal* meat shops, mosques, Quran schools, Islamic bookstores and so forth. Their social outlook and priorities of life are starkly different from those of native Europeans.

The typical European is a devoted member of his community, the nation. But his relationships are essentially deliberate, flowing from a rational paradigm. The



Muslim's relationships with his religious and cultural groups, flowing from the paradigm of the umma, are essentially organic. The European lives with his nuclear family and visits with, or has visits from, his relatives once or twice a year. The Muslim lives in the same neighborhood or town with his extended family and goes away on vacation once or twice a year.

Both the Frenchman and the Muslim supported the NATO war against the Serbs in Kosovo, the Frenchman because the Serbs were killing other Europeans, the Muslim because they were killing other Muslims. Both support the creation of a Palestinian state,

the Frenchman because he believes the Palestinians have the right of national self-determination, the Muslim because

he believes Palestinian Muslims need to be freed from Jewish repression. Both resent American hegemony, the Frenchman because of the perceived American dominance over Europe, the Muslim because of the perceived American dominance over the Muslim world.

The awareness of this cultural cleavage has been intensified by the realization on both sides that there is no easy escape from it. In the colonial era, the French in Algeria lived their separate lives away from the natives, as did the British in India. But in the backs of their minds they knew that if things got rough they could always go home, and they did. Europe today is home to both Europeans and Muslims. Offers of financial incentives by France and Germany have failed to induce immi-

grants to return to their native countries. Foreign-born Muslims are a passing generation, anyway. The 50 percent of European Muslims born in Western Europe assert their European identity.

Increasingly, the native intelligentsia and public-policy planners are betraying the awareness that ignoring Muslims and their cultural demands would further complicate rather than alleviate social problems. In Britain, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, pluralist (or multicultural) political institutions have been put in place, allowing Muslims and native populations to live their parallel cultural lives. In the rest of

Western Europe, too, native intelligentsia and the public appear slowly to be opening up to Muslim and other non-European minorities.

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**National governments are feeling increasing pressures from the EU to concede the cultural rights of Muslims and other minorities.**

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Globalization and integration are gradually relaxing French-German resistance to the concept of autonomy for minority cultures. Attributes of national sovereignty, a hallmark of the liberal state, have been transferred to the EU. The supranational union now has jurisdiction over currency, monetary policy, security measures, border control, human rights, immigration and asylum policies, and so forth, which were once vested solely in the sovereign West European states. As a result, cultural groups are dealing directly with transnational agencies over the heads of their national governments. The legitimacy of cultural interests is more and more recognized by these agencies, forcing national governments to do so. And national governments are feeling increasing



pressures from the EU to concede the cultural rights of Muslims and other minorities.

In the fall of 2000, the French Interior Ministry buttonholed eight Muslim community leaders to help devise a plan to enable Muslims to ritually sacrifice animals during their annual festival of sacrifice (*Eid al-Adha*). Farouk Laazouzi, imam of an elegant Saudi-built mosque in the French town of Evry, was “surprised” when he received the invitation to work on the plan. The government had persistently denied permission for the sacrifice, citing health concerns even though it is a religious obligation for Muslims. The Tunisian-born imam had since learned that the European Commission had put pressure on the French government to accommodate the practice. The Muslim group was asked to develop procedures that would satisfy the government’s health regulations and Muslim religious ritual.<sup>38</sup>

About the same time, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder appointed a commission to recommend an “integrative immigration policy” by summer 2001. Germany is officially known as a “non-immigration country”: children born in Germany of non-German immigrants and educated in German public schools do not have the right to citizenship, but ethnic Germans from anywhere have the automatic right of return to German citizenship even though some of them do not speak a word of German. Turks, Balkan Muslims and other immigrants have been pressing the German government and Bundestag to ease restrictions on their acquiring German citizenship. Some of the restrictions have already been eased. In January the Bundestag passed a law granting citizenship to children of German-born “foreign-

ers,” who have lived in Germany for eight years or more.

Brend Knopf, the spokesman for the German Labor Ministry, said the Schroeder government was trying to expose “the myth that we’re not an immigration country,” but it would take some time to do so. Germany has always received foreigners, he said, and the German population is ethnically mixed. “In Berlin alone we have 160 religions,” he said, showing me around the thick-walled, steel-and-stone building that Hitler had built to house his Ministry of Propaganda. “If you visit Bremen or Hamburg, they will say, ‘Here’s our mosque; come take a look. There’s our synagogue.’ Things are changing.”<sup>39</sup> Knopf’s pitch about racial coexistence made from what is still jokingly called “Goebbels’ office” marked a change indeed!

The same day, however, a German court sentenced a neo-Nazi to 18 months in jail for participating in an attack on a group of Vietnamese in the town of Lassin. Four of his 14 accomplices already had received sentences for that crime.<sup>40</sup> Despite persistent efforts to erase it, racism remains ingrained in German society. However, Germany’s continuing labor shortage, as well as its integration with the EU, is slowly sensitizing Germans, especially the educated youth, to the need for coexistence with others.

An interesting aspect of the continual violence committed against Muslims and other foreigners in Germany is the almost total absence of college-educated youth in it. None of the nearly 50 German university students I interviewed indicated his or her sympathy for the perpetrators of violence. Several of those students said, in almost identical terms, that Germany would



not be able to do without foreigners and was heading toward a “pluralist society.” Rainer Meunz, an authority on immigration trends at Berlin’s Humboldt University, said “pluralism is inevitable” in Germany and Europe. “With 1.2 children [per woman], we can’t do without foreigners,” he added. “We’ll look more and more brown. We’ll look eventually like California.”<sup>41</sup>

Some of the conservative West European intellectuals and statesmen find pluralism an attractive option for a different reason. Among them is Britain’s Lord Hylton, who wrote to me in 1998 to say he opposed Turkey’s membership in the EU, because, among other reasons, Muslim Turks would have difficulty integrating into West European societies “based on Christian values.”<sup>42</sup> Last November he said he is “very much in favor” of cultural pluralism, which is “working well” in Britain.<sup>43</sup> One of his colleagues in the British House of Lords, who did not want to be identified, said Hylton and conservative Christians like him ardently support pluralism because “they would never accept Muslims and other colored people in their white English society.”

Muslims in Western Europe generally are excited by the thought of pluralism. Most embrace the concept for the same reason some conservative Christians support it: It would allow Muslims to build Islamic institutions and preserve the Islamic lifestyle, which would be denied under an assimilationist social model. Like Christian conservatives, they hope pluralism will prevent the contamination of their culture.

The problem is that pluralism promotes, instead of preventing, cultural contamination. When people from different faiths or cultural groups come together under a

common project – be it working on a welfare program, participating in a housing committee or campaigning for a parliamentary candidate – they focus not only on the project but on one another’s work, manners, attitude and so forth. They begin to look at their own customs, values and beliefs through those others’ eyes and realize everything they believe may not sound plausible.

As this process continues, an individual’s beliefs and values become relativized. Pluralism exacts a price from its practitioner, which rises with the increase in the level of his cultural tolerance. That price is his belief system and, in a deeper sense, his worth.

“[T]he totally tolerant individual,” to return to Berger, “is *ipso facto* an individual who holds nothing to be true, and in the final analysis perhaps an individual who is nothing.”<sup>44</sup> People do not feel comfortable about relativizing their beliefs and values. “[T]he human mind,” says Berger, “abhors uncertainty, especially when it comes to the really important concerns of life. When relativism has reached a certain intensity, absolutism becomes very attractive again.”<sup>45</sup>

Before long they grope for their old cultural paradigm or a new version of it, or embrace a new one. Hence pluralist eras, which have occurred during the decline of civilizations, have been short-lived and followed by robust new ones offering certainty of beliefs and standards, and little tolerance for dissent.

The Roman civilization overwhelmed pluralist Hellenism; Christianity and Islam supplanted the flagging, pluralist Roman empire; liberal Europe vanquished the Ottoman Islamic caliphate, which had glided into its *milliyet* pluralist system



during its decades of decline.

Pluralism did not flourish in the Europe of what Ernest Gellner calls “enlightenment secular fundamentalism”<sup>46</sup> any better than in Christian Europe. Does the current phase of pluralism in Britain, the Netherlands and Scandinavia and the emerging one in the rest of the continent signal the exhaustion of liberalism’s moral and cultural paradigm? If it does, what new or old paradigm of moral certainty and cultural security awaits Western Europe?

Carol Quigley, a historian of civilization, appears to know the schedule. The entire liberal Western civilization, she says, “will surely pass out of existence ... perhaps before A.D. 2500.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, West Europeans only have a half-millennium left to enjoy the stock market, Beethoven and tennis games. But she does not tell us about the nature of the “truth” they should be waiting for.

Michel Gurfinkiel, editor in chief of *Valeurs Actuelles*, France’s leading conservative weekly newsmagazine, seems to have an idea of the shape it could take on his turf. He cites the dismal attendance (less than 5 percent) in Catholic churches, the decline in the nation-state, an upsurge of violence, theft and racism, a drop in native birthrate (1.3 percent per white woman) and other indices showing the French are fast losing their cultural values and norms.

The Muslim population of France, he points out, is growing more than three times that of the Christian (between 4.4 and 5.8 children per Muslim woman). 50,000 non-Muslims already have con-

verted to Islam in France, and the conversions continue. And he recalls that Christianity began in Europe as a small, alien sect. “Why should the average Frenchman of Catholic origin,” he asks, “not forsake a dying religion for an expanding, living religion that is anyway described as Christianity’s younger sister?”<sup>48</sup>

Modern Europe was born of the Greek intellectual tradition, which was overwhelmed by the Christian era, which in turn has nearly been wiped out by Enlightenment liberalism. As liberalism shows signs of exhaustion, will Europeans try Islam as their fourth and “lucky” creed? Other European intellectuals dismiss these thoughts as unwarranted spasms of defeatism, among them, David Landes. In his breathtaking survey of global economic currents, he says liberalism remains man’s ultimate destiny, with rationality – not religion – his guide. The reason European Muslims are worked up by their religious culture is the same one that has sparked religious revivals elsewhere in the world: the search for moral security due to economic frustration. The answer, he says, is not to panic or retreat into religious contemplation, but to speed the production and marketing of goods in order to maintain a “positive” view of life. Western “technological precedence” and optimism will enable Europe and North America to overcome the current challenge of “Europhobia.”<sup>49</sup> If so, Muslims, on their fourth incarnation in Europe, would finally get God’s message for reformation that Robert Bellah says they missed the first time around.

<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Jorgen S. Nielsen, *Fluid Identities: Muslims and Western Europe’s Nation States*, “amended version” of paper presented at the International Center of Ethnicity, Migration and Citizenship, New School University, New



York, January 2000, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Berger, *A Far Glory*, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> John McManners, ed., *Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 186.

<sup>5</sup> Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad, eds., *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1995), pp. 131-35.

<sup>6</sup> Xavier Bougarel, "The Balkan Islam," *ISIM Newsletter*, Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands, No. 6, 2000, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Berger, "Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdsman Publishing, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: reprinted Routledge, 1992); Roland Robertson, et al., *Talcott Parsons: Theories of Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1991); Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> Bellah, *Beyond Belief*, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Selcuk Eren, Athens, Greece, September 23, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Ahmed Reza Khan, Ph.D. student in "Islam in Europe," University of Paris, Paris, September 19, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Nielsen, *Fluid Identities*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Aziz Gardezi, Cologne, Germany, September 29, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Toumi Azzedine, Marseilles, France, September 8, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Inayet Kazim, researcher in immigration trends, Amsterdam, September 30, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Ester and Loek Halman, eds., *The Individualizing Society: Value Change in Europe and North America* (Tiburg, Netherlands: Tiburg University Press, 1993), p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Sheena Ashford and Noel Timms, *What Europe Thinks: A Study of Western European Values* (Aldershot, England: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1992), p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Rachid Tlemcani, "The French Have Themselves to Blame," *Middle East Quarterly*, March 1997, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Lucette Valensi, IISMM, Paris, October 31, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Gardezi.

<sup>22</sup> Gerald Lenski, *The Religious Factor* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1963), pp. 9-11.

<sup>23</sup> Berger, *A Far Glory*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Mohammed Ahnif, Amsterdam, September 30, 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Interviews with members of the Muslim Youth of Germany, Berlin, October 16, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Muhammad Anwar, Center for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, Warwick, England, November 15, 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Quran, II: p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, XLIX: p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, II: p. 31.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Lewis, *Arabs in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Mehmet Sabri Erbakan, Islamic Milli Gorus office, Cologne, October 6, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Rashid Benaissa, UNESCO, Paris, September 18, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Frank Viviano, "Europe Suddenly Doesn't Even Recognize Itself," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 5, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Czarina Wilpert, Technical University, Berlin, October 18, 2000.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 210.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Farouk Laazouzi, Islamic Cultural Center, Evry, France, September 17, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Brend Knopf, Ministry of Labor, Berlin, October 20, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 21, 2000.



<sup>41</sup> Interview with Rainer Meunz, Department of Sociology, Humboldt University, Berlin, October 17, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Lord Hylton, April 25, 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Telephone conversation with Lord Hylton, London, November 8, 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Berger, *A Far Glory*, p. 71.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Carol Quigley, *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979), pp. 127, 164-66.

<sup>48</sup> Michel Gurfinkiel, "Islam in France: 'Is the French Way of Life in Danger?'" *Middle East Quarterly*, March 1997, pp. 19-27.

<sup>49</sup> David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), pp. 514-24.