

# Islam at the Gates

*Are Muslim immigrants to blame for their isolation from European society? Or is Europe?*

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**REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION IN EUROPE: IMMIGRATION, ISLAM, AND THE WEST** BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL • DOUBLEDAY • 2009  
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**E**arly on the morning of September 29, 2005, hundreds of would-be refugees seeking new lives in the prosperous nations of Western Europe made a desperate—and fatal—dash for a high-security reception center in the Spanish-held North African enclave of Ceuta. A European possession since the fifteenth century, Ceuta, along with its sister city, Melilla, 200 miles away, had taken on a new identity in recent years: the gateway to economic opportunity for the destitute masses of Central and West Africa. Tightly guarded reception centers for political asylum seekers, surrounded by coiled razor wire, have become the goal in a dangerous game of cat and mouse between the would-be migrants and the authorities.

Matters came to a head on that September morning following two weeks of orchestrated assaults, and bloody dispersals, of refugees attempting to storm the refugee centers using ladders, stones, and clubs. That day, with three companies

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*JOSHUA HAMMER is a freelance foreign correspondent based in Berlin. He is currently writing a book about the German colonial experience in southwest Africa.*

of Spanish soldiers and Moroccan border guards on high alert, four migrants were shot dead as they tried to rush the fence surrounding the Ceuta center. One week later, Moroccan soldiers shot dead six more people taking part in a 400-man assault on the refugee processing compound at Melilla.

As journalist Christopher Caldwell asserts in *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, the violence at Ceuta and Melilla augured a new and more aggressive phase in the long-running attempt by the have-nots to get into the lands of the haves. But it also reflected the inevitable consequences, he writes, of a flawed European immigration policy that took root in the 1970s, when countries such as Denmark, France, England, and Germany opened their floodgates to migrant workers from Eastern Europe and, later, their even poorer brethren in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

The search for low-cost workers to rescue moribund industries and take jobs that no Western Europeans wanted, as well as the desire for new population groups to contribute to the tax base and strengthen the underpinnings of the European welfare state, gave rise to such phenomena as Germany's *Gastarbeiter* program. A misconceived attempt to fill a temporary labor shortage, it brought tens of thousands of Turks to Germany on short-term contracts but contained loopholes that allowed them to settle permanently in the country. Eventually, Caldwell notes, European policymakers, faced with increasing evidence that the economic benefits brought to host countries by these immigrant laborers were chimerical, began to search for new rationales to justify the now-unstoppable flow across their borders. (Caldwell points out, among a wealth of startling statistics, that the number of foreign residents in Germany rose from 3 million to 7.5 million between 1971 and 2000, but the number of employed foreigners stayed the same at 2 million.) "The main [excuse] was the duty to offer asylum to those threatened by violence, poverty or political persecution," he writes.

But this new approach, as exemplified by the Ceuta and Melilla incidents, created its own recipe for confusion. "Europeans in general could not figure out whether these immigrants were desperate wards, diligent workmen, or ruthless invaders, and lacked the imagination to admit that they could be all of those things or none," Caldwell writes:

What Europe needed under the circumstances was a moral code that would give answers about what it owed these people. It does not have one. A vague idea that Europe needs labor coexists with a lack of curiosity about whether migrants are indeed coming to work; a vague idea that migrants need to be cared for as refugees makes it seem impolite to count the cost of assuming responsibility for the world's poor. To roll out the welcome mat for all these people would be nuts; to turn them away would be racist. Unable to muster the will for either a heartfelt welcome or for earnest self-defense, they hope the world will mistake their paralysis for hospitality.

To wit: a vast, rejectionist Islamic population, isolated from and hostile to the countries that extended it the welcome mat. The result of this muddled thinking, argues Caldwell, has been a phenomenon that has undermined, and now threatens to destroy, European society.

An American columnist for *The Financial Times* and a contributing editor to *The New York Times Magazine*, Caldwell is the latest in a long line of academics and journalists, from Samuel Huntington to Oriana Fallaci, to sound the alarm about this supposed fifth column of radical Islamicists preparing to rip apart European culture from within. It is a provocative thesis, and Caldwell, a beautiful writer and a brilliant polemicist, knows how to couch his arguments in measured language and deliberative tones. He argues that Europe's lack of confidence in its own culture, its knee-jerk political correctness, its collective shame over the Holocaust and centuries of colonial exploitation, and fascination for the virility of the Third World "other" have caused its leaders to stand by passively while a Trojan Horse wheels itself into the continent.

Caldwell largely avoids the incendiary tone of, for instance, Fallaci's *The Rage and the Pride*, her 2001 best-selling screed about Islam, in which she offered the view that "there is something about Arab men that is disgusting to women of good taste." But while Caldwell has plenty of insightful things to say about European immigration policy, and about the ongoing debate within European societies about how best integrate Muslim foreigners, his beguilingly argued polemic is also deeply flawed. It seduces its readers into a sense of outrage, even as it offers a distorted and highly inflammatory view of Islamic culture.

**T**he rise of a Muslim immigrant culture in Europe has transformed debate on the continent and given rise to a host of highly visible political movements: These include the late Jörg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria, which did so well in the 1999 elections that it was invited to become part of the coalition government, to the movement founded by the late Dutch activist Pim Fortuyn, who called Islam a "life threatening culture." These movements gained momentum in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but, as Caldwell sees it, their roots date as far back as 1968, when the British Tory parliamentarian Enoch Powell delivered a speech at the Midland Hotel in Birmingham warning of the steady influx of "coloured" former colonial subjects, mostly from the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean:

We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation, to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependents, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre.

Caldwell harnesses an array of numbers to show how mass immigration to Europe over the past three decades has outpaced Powell's predictions: A total of 40 million out of 375 million people in Western Europe are living outside the countries of their birth, of which 20 million are Islamic immigrants. Net migration into Europe from outside the continent has risen to 1.7 million per year. Three million of 16 million Dutch—including two-thirds of the students in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and the Hague—are immigrants or their children. By the middle of the twenty-first century, according to the Oxford demographer David Coleman, cited here by Caldwell, Great Britain will have seven million "non whites" if immigration comes to a dead stop, and 16 million if immigration continues at its current pace of 108,000 a year. "By midcentury," Caldwell writes, "in most of the major European countries, foreign-origin populations will be between 20 and 32 percent."

Caldwell astutely points out that these trends have already forced legislative and cultural adjustments that would have been unthinkable a few decades ago: Public swimming pools have initiated women-only hours, offices and factories have installed prayer rooms, companies have eliminated the traditional drinking-after-work routine. He reports numerous instances in which, he feels, Europeans have bent over backwards to accommodate their new Muslim neighbors, often to the detriment of larger society. He cites examples of "political correctness" run amok, such as the notorious decision by the Dudley, England town council in 2005 to "[ban] certain toys and images from its municipal offices after a Muslim employee complained about a colleague's keeping a picture of Piglet...on her desk."

Like so much of what Caldwell conjures up in his polemic, however, it is hard to extrapolate beyond a few well-chosen anecdotes to solid evidence of a shift in the texture of European life. (The Dudley case is murky anyway: The pig incident took place at the height of Ramadan, involved pig-shaped stress removers, not a picture, and ended only with an informal request to keep such objects out of sight.) He also blames the onslaught of Islamic immigrants for reshaping the politics of the Europe, pointing, among other examples, to a wave of Palestinian solidarity—and anti-Semitic violence—that broke out in France and other European countries following the Second Intifada in September 2000. "The European obsession with Third World 'causes' was a function of Europe's new, guilt-based moral order," he writes. As Europeans struggle to make their new Islamic neighbors feel at home, Caldwell argues, "many Europeans were tempted to embrace vicariously the nationalisms of others—particularly Palestinian nationalism, which, in its most radical versions, allowed Europeans to reconnect with a discredited strand of European nationalism, anti-Semitism." But anti-Semitic attacks rose only in some EU countries, not all.

Caldwell is on more solid ground in his argument that Europe, unlike the United States, has done a poor job of finding a place in larger society for its Islamic immigrants. He depicts, with impressive detail, governments seesawing between approaches—from the multiculturalism of the Netherlands to the enforced stripping away of religious symbols, such as the hijab, in French schools and other institutions.

But Caldwell goes farther, arguing that many of Europe’s Islamic immigrants choose to be isolated because their religion tells them to do so. Indeed, Caldwell believes that Islam is driven by a secret agenda: the creation of a radical Islamic state on European shores. The second half of *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* devolves into a classic clash-of-civilizations rant against the inherent dangers of Islam, and against what Caldwell describes as a stealth onslaught by jihadis, publicly professing an ideology of moderation while secretly advocating the opposite. “It can fairly be said that, until its steep military decline in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Islam was the arch enemy,” Caldwell ominously intones at the beginning of this section. “For virtually all of Europe’s history since the Dark Ages it has been a mortal threat.”

**Moderate Islam remains a viable alternative in places where the majority of Muslims have embraced secularism.**

Caldwell seeds his narrative with notorious examples of terror and violence in Europe during the past few years, as if these handful of sensational cases demonstrate a society falling apart at the seams under attack from a mortal enemy. These include the bombings on the London underground on July 7, 2005; the murder of the leftist filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam by a radical Islamicist who had shown proclivities to violence yet had been coddled by the Dutch courts; and “the Muslim-led gang of two dozen self-described ‘barbarians’ who used acid, knives, and lighter fluid to torture to death the Jewish cell phone salesman Ilan Halimi over three weeks in 2006.” He cites sympathy expressed among European Muslims for co-religionists who rioted across the Islamic world—after the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published cartoons seen as mocking the Prophet Mohammed—as proof of an intrinsic hatred of nearly all Muslims for Western values.

And Caldwell argues that a new generation of Islamic youth, radicalized in European mosques and brought up to reject Western society and embrace violence, constitutes perhaps the gravest threat to European civilization since the Ottoman siege of Vienna. He draws a contrast to the American “melting pot,” with its dynamic and all-encompassing culture that tends to obliterate ethnic, religious, linguistic, and racial differences within a generation. Europe, Caldwell

argues, has seen the opposite phenomenon: the progeny of Islamic immigrants becoming less assimilated, more isolated into self-imposed ghettos—brooding and dangerous, with proclivities toward nihilistic terror.

**E**xhibit A for Caldwell's thesis is the Paris *banlieues* riots of October 2005, "the worst and most widespread civilian violence Western Europe had seen in decades." "Unlike the American race riots of the 1960s, and unlike France's student riots of 1968, for that matter," he writes, "this steady but occasionally surging violence produced no leaders, no social movement, no body of thinking that outside observers could either accept or deplore, and no demands that could be productively answered." It was, Caldwell maintained, nothing more than a nihilistic expression of rage against society, with a religious cast. To Caldwell, the days of violence that began with the accidental electrocutions of two teenagers who believed, mistakenly, that they were being pursued by the police, was rooted in the doctrine of radical Islam. Citing an International Crisis Group report on the incident, Caldwell writes that "the youths sympathized with jihad...They were furious partisans of the Arab cause in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. They embraced an autocratic version of fundamentalism that the report's authors called 'shaykhist salafism.'"

Caldwell gives short shrift to the complex tangle of other possible motivations—history of police violence in the *banlieues*, the anomie of life in the city's sterile and dangerous housing projects, an utter lack of economic opportunity for the city's marginalized immigrant youth—cited in other reports, in journalist inquiries, and by Crisis Group itself. Instead, he fits the *banlieues* riots neatly, and shakily, into his basic arguments about Islam's inherent violence and the doomed politics of accommodation. Nor does he stop at the Paris *banlieues*. In his world view, every Islamic leader in Europe is suspect, every European politician who seeks to build bridges to the Islamic community is a dupe. "For now, the moderation of Islam is a hope, not a fact," he writes. "Yet European leaders have wagered so much on it that they see evidence of it everywhere." That Germany's millions of Turkish immigrants and their children co-exist, for the most part, in relative harmony with their native German population, or that growing numbers are opting for German citizenship and taking part in the political process, are facts largely ignored by Caldwell, who chooses to dwell only a few isolated examples of discord and disaffection.

Indeed, moderate Islam remains a viable, healthy alternative in such places as Bosnia-Herzegovina, where—despite efforts by Saudi Arabia to build Wahabi mosques throughout the country—the vast majority of the Muslim population has embraced secularism and tolerance. Moderate imams have denounced ter-

ror and become forces for assimilation, from the United Kingdom to Belgium to France. Moreover, the failure across Europe of xenophobic political movements, such as Haider's Freedom Party, to gain momentum suggests that either most Europeans are blind to the Islamic "plot," or Caldwell has wildly exaggerated it. (I covered the backlash against Haider in the spring of 2000, when tens of thousands of young Austrians poured into the streets of Vienna to denounce both his anti-Semitic background and his anti-immigrant platform.)

To be sure, Europe has compiled a largely dismal record in integrating its Islamic populations, and that sense of second-class status can, as the Paris *banlieues* riots attest, make radical Islam seem, to many, an appealing choice. But to equate this with the violent tendencies of an entire religion or an entire population is reductivist and inflammatory, and undermines the many insights of Caldwell's provocative book. ■