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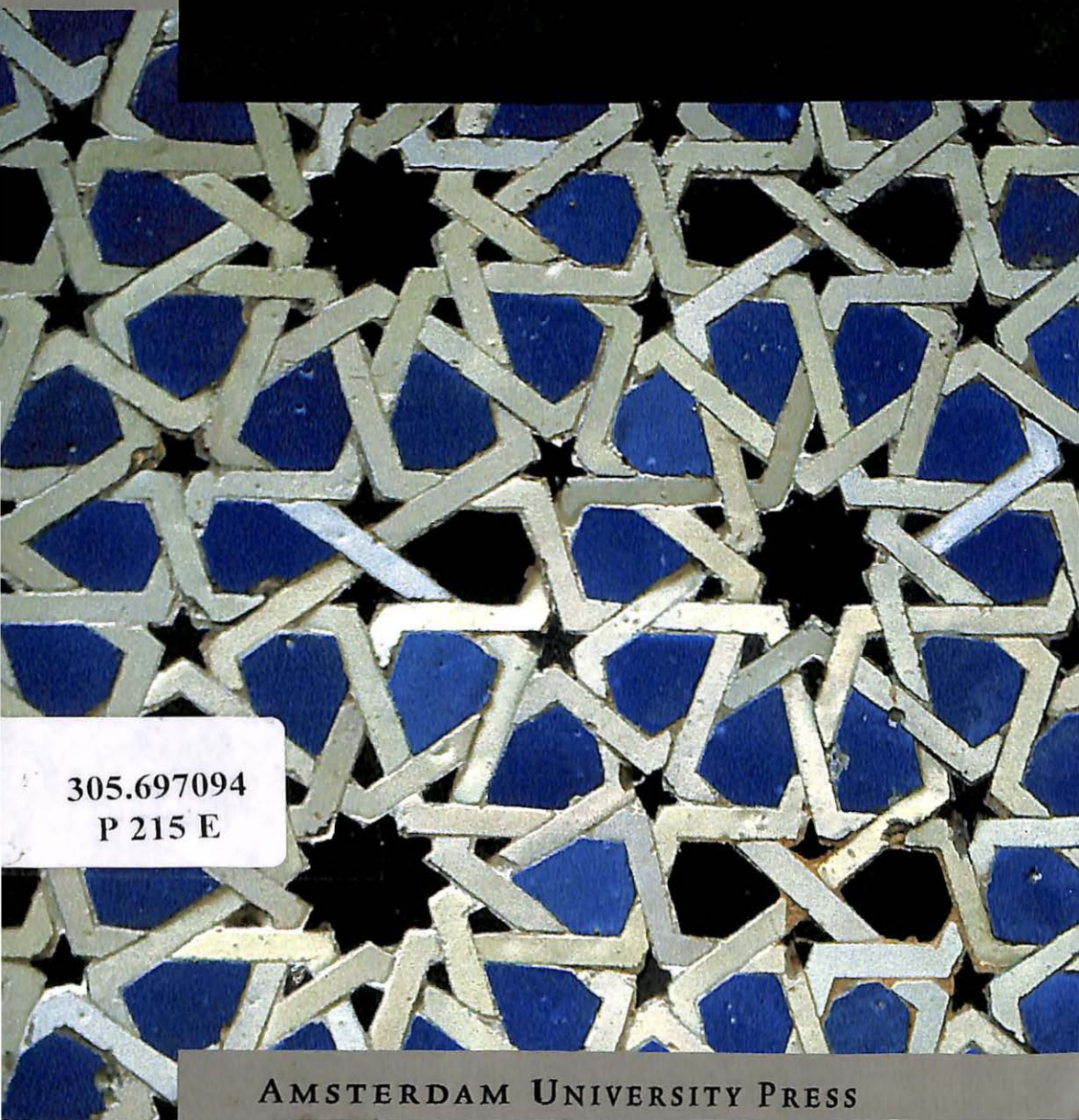
EUROPEAN LIBERALISM AND 'THE MUSLIM QUESTION'

Bhikhu Parekh

ISIM PAPERS 9



Amsterdam University Press

European Liberalism and 'the Muslim Question'

The ISIM Papers represent individual lectures delivered at the invitation of the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM). The aim of this series is to allow the papers, initially presented before limited audiences, to be shared by the entire academic community and beyond.

This ISIM Annual Lecture was delivered on 10 May 2007 at the Groothandelsgebouw, Rotterdam. This event was organized in cooperation with Kosmopolis Rotterdam, Huis voor de Culturele Dialoog, and co-hosted by the Rotterdam Alderman for Participation and Culture, Orhan Kaya.

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ISIM / LEIDEN

Cover design and lay-out: De Kreeft, Amsterdam

ISBN 978 90 5356 087 7
ISSN 1568-8313
NUR 717 / 741

European Liberalism and 'the Muslim Question'

Unlike in the United States with its sizeable Muslim population, it is widely held in many influential circles in the European Union that its over 15 million Muslims pose a serious cultural and political threat, and that this shows, among other things, that multicultural societies do not work.[1] Sometimes this view is explicitly stated; more often it takes the form of an attack on multiculturalism for which Muslims are largely held responsible and which is a coded word for them. It cuts across political and ideological divides and is shared alike, albeit to different degrees and for different reasons, by rightwing nationalists, conservatives, liberals and socialists. In this lecture I shall critically examine the basis of this view, paying particular attention to how the Muslim identity has evolved over the years, and why liberals, the champions of minority rights, cultural diversity and civic as opposed to ethnic nationalism, feel threatened by it.

Emergence of Muslim Identity

Although Muslim immigrants had begun to arrive in Europe to feed its labour-hungry industries from the 1950s onwards, they were culturally invisible until

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the 1970s and politically invisible until the late 1980s.[2] Most of them came alone, intending to stay for a few years and return home with enough savings to give them a better start in life. They had little command of the language of their country of settlement, were unused to the urban environment, and harboured a deep sense of inferiority, especially those coming from ex-colonies. They knew who they were, generally lived among their own people, did not see themselves as immigrants, and had little anxiety about maintaining their homeland-based identities. Since they faced racial discrimination, they united with other similarly placed groups to fight it, and acquired an additional, externally imposed, and in a few cases freely accepted, racial identity of 'blacks'.

As Muslims abandoned their plans and even their hopes to return home, they were joined by their wives and began to raise families. They worried about how to bring up their children, ensure intergenerational continuity, transmit their culture, religion and language, and counter the assimilationist pressure of the wider society. This increased their interest in the culture, institutions and practices of the society to which they had hitherto remained indifferent, and they began to form a view of their place in it. By and large, they defined their identity in religio-national terms. They were Pakistani, Indian, Algerian or Moroccan Muslims, not Muslims *simpliciter* but rooted in the cultures of their homelands. The society in which they lived could not be so easily defined for, although Christian, religion did not play an important role in it. They saw it as basically secular, and the question for them was how to maintain their religio-national identity in a secular environment.

Muslim immigrants set up welfare and cultural associations along religio-national lines. They built mosques whose number increased dramatically in

2 It is striking that Islam in Europe became an important area of research from the 1980s onwards. The European Science Foundation sponsored a collaborative Europe-wide project in the mid-1980s. Sweden convened a conference appropriately called 'The New Islamic Presence in Europe' in 1986. It is against this background that the Rushdie affair in Britain and the headscarf affair in France burst on the scene. Both involved young people, sometimes acting in opposition to their parents. Europe had now discovered and begun to fear its Muslims.

In the United States a distinctly Americanised version of Islam is beginning to emerge based on a clear separation between religious and secular matters, the individual's right to interpret the *Qur'an*, giving the lay governing boards of mosques final authority over the imam, etc. Some commentators even call it Presbyterian or Baptist Islam.

the 1970s, and began to demand that state schools make appropriate provisions for their children, including *halal* meat, facilities for prayer, exemption for girls from sports, swimming and other activities that required them to wear shorts, and teaching children their history and culture. They could not expect their children to acquire and value their identity unless they set them appropriate examples and provided a suitable domestic environment. Accordingly, Muslim immigrants reorganised their personal lives and began to press for appropriate provisions in workplaces, hospitals, etc. for themselves and especially for their women.

Since European states have traditionally seen themselves as nation-states based on a homogeneous national culture, and since their earlier immigrants had made no such demands, the schools, workplaces and other public institutions often resisted Muslim demands. This led to tensions, court cases, public debates and protests. As a result, Muslims now became an unmistakable *cultural* presence and a source of public anxiety. Much agonised discussion took place throughout Europe on how to integrate them culturally. Different European countries worked out different models, France opting for assimilation, Britain for integration, the Netherlands for multiculturalism, and others for one or more of all three.[3]

3 In Britain multiculturalism has been welcomed by liberals and even conservatives since the 1970s. During the Thatcherite period, it was viewed with disfavour by conservatives, but liberals remained its strong champions, and even the conservative government did little to arrest its progress. Although the Rushdie affair dampened the liberal enthusiasm for it, they continued to support it. In recent years, especially after the events of 9/11, more and more of them are turning against it, arguing that it ghettoises communities, gives them a licence to continue dubious practices, and militates against common values and national cohesion. Most of the examples they give refer to Muslims. A similar trend is evident in Holland where multiculturalism was much valued for years and is now blamed for Muslim 'separatism'. France, Germany, Belgium and Spain were never very keen on multiculturalism, and think that they were right in this reluctance.

Much confusion in the discussion of multiculturalism arises because the term is used in two opposite senses. For some it means treating each cultural community as a world unto itself and involves cultural relativism. For others including myself, it means that no culture is perfect and that it benefits from a critical dialogue with others, and involves rejection of cultural relativism. Once the definitional differences are cleared up, there is often no serious disagreement between those who reject and favour multiculturalism. Many who accept a multicultural society reject multiculturalism because they think it turns a regrettable but inescapable fact into a value.

From the late 1970s and especially the early 1980s onwards, the situation took a political turn. Although their pursuit of cultural demands and the resistance they encountered had already begun to politicise the first generation of Muslim immigrants and throw up political organisations, the second generation (which was now reaching adulthood) began to play a crucial role. Having grown up in European societies, young Muslims did not share their parents' inhibitions and diffidence, and knew how to find their way around well in the political system. More importantly, they increasingly began to define themselves in exclusively religious terms, not as Pakistani or Algerian Muslims as their parents had done, but simply as Muslims. They did so for several reasons. Since they had limited contacts with their parental homeland, it meant little to them and was at best a minor element in their self-definition. In order to be politically effective, they needed to transcend ethnic and cultural divisions and build up nationwide organisations, which could only be based on their shared religion. Many of them, especially the girls, also chafed against parental constraints and found it strategically useful to counter them by studying and suitably reinterpreting the *Qur'an*. The fact that many young Muslims were embarrassed by some aspects of their parental culture reinforced the desire to return to the 'true principles' of Islam. Since the wider society, too, had begun to refer to them as Muslims and associated negative ideas with the term, Muslim youth in the spirit of 'black is beautiful' asserted their Islamic identity with pride.

International events played an important part in reinforcing the consciousness of Islamic identity. The basically non-violent Iranian revolution, in which almost all the violence came from the Shah and whose impact on Muslim consciousness was broadly comparable to that of the Russian Revolution of 1917 on the European left, gave Muslims the confidence that they could topple Western-supported regimes and offer an alternative to Western modernity. The Afghan resistance to Soviet occupation brought together Muslims of different nationalities, forged a common identity among them, and convinced Muslims the world over that they could defeat a determined superpower. The dependence of the West on oil exposed its vulnerability and awakened Muslims to their enormous potential economic power. The continuing Arab-Israeli conflict, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the Muslim struggle against injustices and oppression in different parts of the world gave them common global causes and sharpened the awareness of the *umma* or the global Muslim community, a concept that had earlier played only a marginal role in Muslim history. The historical memory of the centuries-long Ottoman empire and

the way it was dismantled by European powers was increasingly revived, and used to intensify the Muslim sense of humiliation and the desire to restore its glory. By the mid-1980s, pride, power, the sense of victimhood, the tantalising dream of what over a billion of them, forming a majority in 55 countries and a significant presence in just as many more including the West, could achieve if they put their mind to it, and the deep anxiety that all this could be easily lost through internal divisions and western manipulations combined to form an increasingly global Islamic identity. European Muslims shared and asserted that identity and felt part of a worldwide community. The fact that they were courted and their religious institutions and activities generously funded by the oil-rich Muslim countries, especially Saudi Arabia, reinforced this trend.

The growing importance of religion in Muslim self-definition and others' perception of them made European Muslims intensely sensitive to how their religion was represented in the West. Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, published in 1989, was read against this background and was widely seen as an anti-Islamic work written by a lapsed, westernised Indian Muslim to impress and curry favour with a predominantly Western audience. The protests it generated both reflected and intensified Islamic identity. In France there had been a growing feeling that its Muslim population had remained only 'paper French', French in their passports and nothing else, and needed to be integrated. The Commission on Nationality appointed in 1987 produced its two-volume report titled *Being French Today and Tomorrow* a year later. The report insisted that Muslims should be 'absorbed' into the cultural mainstream, and their religious and cultural differences confined to the private realm. It was in this climate that *l'affaire du foulard* flared up. It acquired particular significance from the fact that 1989, the bicentenary of the French Revolution, witnessed aggressive statements of the country's republican and secular identity. Muslim youth in Britain, almost all male, and Muslim girls in France led the battle for Islam, quite often against the wishes of their parents, and demanded that the state should recognize, respect and make public space for it. By the late 1980s Islam became a powerful *political* presence in Europe, its power deriving from its number, militancy, firm sense of identity, and global connections.

Bosnia was another important milestone in the development of Muslim self-consciousness. It had two unique features. It was in Europe's backyard and should have been of particular interest to it, and its Muslims were 'racially' no different from the rest of Europeans. In spite of the geographical proximity,

'racial' similarity and the considerations of enlightened self-interest, European governments not only did nothing to protect them but even prevented them from obtaining arms elsewhere. For many Muslims this showed Europe's apathy, even antipathy, to Muslims and how little it cared for their lives. Some even conjured up the lurid nightmare that if they lowered their guard, Europeans could perpetrate another Holocaust against them. The twelve Danish cartoons, published in *Jyllandsposten* in April 2005 and in which even the Prophet Mohammed was not spared, and the commentaries that accompanied them, led the Muslims to conclude that not only they as a community but their very religion was regarded as backward and unfit to be part of civilised Europe.

European Anxiety

As the politically visible Muslims began to define their identity in religious terms from the late 1970s onwards, Europeans began to wonder how to integrate them and turn them into loyal citizens. A sizeable and influential section took the pessimistic view that this was virtually impossible or at least exceedingly difficult. Such distinguished liberal leaders as Helmut Schmidt in Germany and Roy Jenkins in Britain even thought it a mistake to have admitted them in large numbers. Islam, they argued, was inherently undemocratic, which was why no Muslim country had so far thrown up a stable democracy, and almost all of them strenuously resisted internal and external pressures to introduce one. European Muslims could not be counted upon to respect democratic institutions, and at best offered a prudential and instrumental loyalty to them. Since Muslims privileged the *umma* over the nation-state, they were far more interested in global Muslim causes than in their fellow citizens, and could not be trusted to be good citizens. Islam in their view was also profoundly illiberal and collectivist. It opposed freedom of expression, secularism, critical thought, personal autonomy and individual choice, and mocked such hard-won minority freedoms as recognition of homosexuality, cohabitation, and gay and lesbian partnerships. Some liberals worried about an anti-secular alliance between Muslims and Christians, and the likely dominance of religion in public life. Others thought that the fear of Islam would lead to the resurgence of conservative values. Cardinal Simonis of Utrecht confirmed these fears when he remarked : 'Political leaders ask whether the Muslims will accept our values. I ask what values are these? Gay marriage? Euthanasia? We are disarmed in the face of the Islamic danger: we must recover our identity'.

Even those Europeans who were sympathetic to Muslims thought them too demanding. When the request for *halal* meat was met, they asked for a time-off for prayer at workplaces. When the latter was met, they asked to ban blasphemous books. And when that was met or seen off, they wanted recognition of polygyny. And after that, they pressed for interest-free loans, Islamic banks and insurance companies, and so on and so on. In the ultimate analysis they wanted to live in Europe on their own terms. Their apparently innocent demand that the state should respect and accommodate their identity was part of the wider goal of replacing the 'heathen' and 'decadent' European with an Islamic civilisation. For these and other reasons, it was argued, they were an enemy within, an inassimilable cultural and political presence, which had to be contained and neutralized. This involved judicious use of force, aggressive assimilation, promoting liberal interpretations of Islam, and denying them the right to bring culture-reinforcing spouses from their homelands. Many leading politicians, including liberals, also thought that admitting Turkey into the European Community, as it then was, would gravely compound the problem and should be resisted at all cost.

The terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid, London and elsewhere had a traumatic effect on Europeans. Hitherto they had seen Muslims as a culturally threatening but manageable presence; they now developed a morbid fear of them. Furthermore, this fear was transformed into the fear of Islam as a religion in whose name the attacks were believed to have been perpetrated. All Muslims *qua* Muslims are suspect, and those in Europe are assimilated to and seen as an undifferentiated part of the worldwide *umma*. They are expected and even asked to condemn terrorist attacks in any part of the world in the strongest terms, and those remaining silent or lukewarm are assumed to be in sympathy with them.

Thanks to the widespread distrust of Muslims and the belief that they do not wish to and cannot integrate, there is today an extensive moral panic.[4] This has

4 In the Netherlands, Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk announced that immigrants from now on would be compelled to pass an examination in Dutch language and culture and attend 350 hours of classes before becoming permanent residents. See *Time*, 28 February, 2005, p. 37. In Belgium, Filip Dewinter, the leader of the Far Right Vlaams Belang Party, which won nearly a quarter of the national vote in the regional elections in June, 2004, wants to prevent Muslim immigrants from marrying in their home countries and bringing their spouses into Belgium. See *Time*, op. cit. p. 38. In Britain the Labour Government and many of its liberal supporters endorse this idea.

led to a growing spirit of intolerance and nationalist backlash in almost every European country. The veil that had been around for sometime dominated public debate in Britain in 2006, and government ministers have refused to fund and have official dealings with the Muslim Council of Britain because of its allegedly inadequate condemnation of terrorism and weak control over Muslim youth. France has passed a law banning the *hijab* and even the Sikh turban. In the liberal and culturally relaxed Netherlands, a Muslim leader who refused to shake hands with a woman minister for cultural reasons and volunteered to greet her in other ways was widely attacked in the media. In Greece, Spain and Germany there is a strong opposition to building 'too many' mosques, especially in prominent places, because they lead to 'Islamicisation' of the country and alter its 'visage'. There is a demand in many European countries that dual nationality should be disallowed, and that all immigrants should unequivocally opt for the citizenship of their country of settlement. As a way of, among other things, integrating and fostering patriotism among its Maghrebian population, the French National Assembly passed a law on 23 February 2005 requiring all 'high school history courses and textbooks' to emphasise the 'positive dimension of the French colonial era'. Although this extraordinary law was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, it is striking that the National Assembly passed it and that a large number of its conservative and even liberal members saw nothing wrong with it.[5]

5 For a variety of reasons, Muslims in the USA do not arouse this kind of cultural anxiety. Many of them are economically better off and are not residentially concentrated. Historical memories of Islam are also different. The geographical distance from Muslim countries is greater. The percentage of Muslims is smaller. Since the census does not gather information on religion, their number is estimated to be between three and six million, that is, less than two percent of the population. At most only ten percent of the new immigrants are Muslim. Since they are drawn from many different countries, they do not form organised communities. About a third of American Muslims are African-American converts, and hence Islam is not seen as a wholly foreign religion. The USA sees itself as a country of immigrants held together by the Constitution rather than as a nation-state based on a shared culture, and is less nervous about cultural and other differences. Its political structure both permits a greater range of ethnic diversity and prescribes clear limits to it, and channels immigrant demands in certain directions. The American society and culture are not tightly structured as they are in Europe, and leave greater space for and are less judgemental about diversity. Since it is much more religious than Europe and allows public expression of religion, Muslims feel more comfortable with it.

In some European societies there are deliberate attempts to demonise and generate powerful feelings against Muslims. Take the following excerpt from an article by Daniel Pipes and Lars Hedegaard titled 'Something Rotten in Denmark?' that appeared in *National Post*, a Danish magazine, in the aftermath of the Danish cartoon affair. Although the article was widely criticised for its factual errors and alarmist tone, it had many supporters. The fact that it was published itself speaks volumes.[6]

"For years, Danes lauded multiculturalism and insisted they had no problem with the Muslim customs – until one day they found that they did. Some major issues: Living on the dole: Third-world immigrants – most of them Muslims – constitute 5 percent of the population but consume upwards of 40 percent of the welfare spending. Engaging in crime: Muslims are only 4 percent of Denmark's 5.4 million people but make up a majority of the country's convicted rapists...Self-imposed isolation: Over time, as Muslim immigrants increase in numbers, they wish less to mix with the indigenous population. Importing unacceptable customs: Forced marriages ... are one problem. Another is threats to kill Muslims who convert out of Islam ... Fomenting anti-Semitism: Muslim violence threatens Denmark's approximately 6,000 Jews, who increasingly depend on police protection ... Seeking Islamic law: Muslim leaders openly declare their goal of introducing Islamic law once Denmark's

It is striking that Muslim immigrants arouse anxiety in a way that other religious and ethnic minorities do not. This has to do with their number, the kinds of demands they make, their forms and degrees of self-assertion, and of course the contemporary international situation. Historically speaking, the anxiety provoked by Muslims bears a resemblance to that associated in earlier times in some countries with Jews and Catholics.

Contrary to popular misconception, Islam has undergone more drastic changes than almost any other religion. Turkey under Ataturk underwent extensive secularisation including changes in dress, script, etc. that has no European parallel. Libya under Gaddafi broke the hold of the *ulema*, insisted on an officially sponsored radical interpretation of Islam, and even encouraged Muslims to date their calendar from the Prophet's death rather than the *hijra*. Nasser proclaimed a socialist interpretation of Islam and nationalised Al – Azhar University in 1961. Almost all of these and other changes occurred during periods of crisis, were largely initiated by determined governments, and did not organically grow out of a sustained process of cultural criticism and change. This may partly explain why they remained precarious.

6 Cited in Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Ethnicities and Global Culture: Pants for an Octopus*, Landham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007, p. 192

Muslim population grows large enough – a not-that-remote prospect. If present trends persist, one sociologist estimates, every third inhabitant of Denmark in 40 years will be Muslim."

The fear of Muslims has prompted deeply perplexed European leaders to ask what else to do to counter the 'Islamic threat'. In addition to pursuing even more vigorously the strategy they had evolved in the 1990s, many European countries are devising new tools, such as greater surveillance of Muslims, a better network of informers, stronger anti-terrorist laws, detaining people on suspicion, making 'glorification' of terrorism a criminal offence, monitoring mosques, banning imams from abroad, requiring them to show competence in local languages, greater supervision of their training and sermons, requiring Muslim leaders to accept greater responsibility for the behaviour of their fellow-religionists, denying dual nationality and imposing stringent conditions of citizenship. Although many Europeans realize that such measures severely restrict the civil liberties of not only Muslims but all others and violate some of their deeply cherished values, they see no other way to deal with the 'Muslim problem'.

A Critique

A careful examination of European societies shows that although the anxiety informing the reaction outlined above has some basis, it is exaggerated. The terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, which between them took nearly four hundred lives, were all mounted by Muslims. They involved about two dozen young people, a third of whom were neither Spanish nor British citizens and not even immigrants. It is widely reported that several terrorist attacks have been foiled in France, Germany and Britain during the past three years. If true, and there is no reason to doubt it, they would most certainly have led to a considerable loss of life. In Britain there are estimated to be 200 terrorist networks involving just under 2000 identified individual terrorists under surveillance and hatching plots at different stages of development. The two recent failed terrorist attacks in London and Glasgow were mounted by about a dozen Muslims, though none of them was a British citizen. Between 500 and 3000 British Muslims are estimated to have passed through al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. Several al-

Qaeda cells were recently uncovered in Germany, France, Britain and Italy, and there is no saying how many more still exist, what their targets are, and how much damage they can inflict. The military group al-Muhajirun in Britain pumps out the most rabid *jihadi* propaganda against the Jews, Hindus and the West in general, and says on its website that its aim is to act as a 'fifth column' preparing the way for a 'worldwide Islamic revolution'. Although most of this is recent, the incitement to violence goes back much earlier. It was threatened against Rushdie in 1989. And on the eve of the first Gulf War, al-Muhajirun's Omar Bakri, then leader of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (the Party of Liberation), had called on Muslims to assassinate Prime Minister John Major, saying that he and many others 'will celebrate his death'.

While a small group of disaffected young Muslims, acting alone or in league with militant groups abroad, have shown active disloyalty to their country of settlement and should be condemned, the overwhelming majority of European Muslims have a good record as a law-abiding community. During the past 40-odd years, there have been four Muslim riots in Britain compared with eight race-related riots by the Afro-Caribbeans. One of them concerned Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, others police insensitivity and racist marches through Muslim areas. All were relatively minor and lasted barely a couple of days. France witnessed three riots during this period, almost all triggered by local grievances or police high handedness. And even the week-long riots in 2006 were caused by persistent discrimination, high unemployment and police insensitivity. They were limited to the youth, did not challenge the authority of the state, and involved neither religious demands nor religious leaders. Britain has 300 Muslims in its armed forces, and the chief of staff Sir Nicholas Walker, who recently praised their loyalty and commitment, asked for more Muslim recruits.

Even when subjected to blatant discrimination, such as not being allowed for years to build mosques in parts of Italy and Greece or denied state funding for their schools on the same lines as Christian and Jewish schools in Britain, Muslims have either suffered quietly or protested peacefully but rarely taken the law into their own hands. They have also taken considerable pride in their country of settlement. Both young and old Muslims appreciate the rights and freedoms they enjoy in Europe, many of which are not available in most Muslim countries, and value the support of their fellow-citizens in their struggle for equality and justice. In a British survey

in 2004, 67% of the Muslims said that they felt very or fairly patriotic, 11% that they were mildly patriotic, and only 15%, mostly under 40 years of age, claimed not to feel patriotic at all. In a BBC poll conducted just after the terrorist attacks in London, 78% of Muslims and 73% of the rest of the country said that immigrants should pledge their primary loyalty to Britain, and 91% of Muslims and 93% of the rest of the country said that immigrants should respect the authority of British institutions. The situation in the rest of Europe is broadly similar.[7]

As for the extraterritorial loyalty to the *umma*, it is neither unique to Muslims nor often amounts too much in practice. The Jews press the cause of Israel, and their counterparts in other countries may support their countries of origin, as do Indians, Chinese, Pakistanis and others. What matters is whether the bulk of European Muslims are prepared to be disloyal to their country in order to promote the interests of the *umma*, and the answer to that is largely in the negative. Just over a couple of dozen British Muslims fought with the Taliban, and they were roundly condemned by most of their community. Although we do not have the exact figures for France, Italy, the Netherlands and elsewhere, the proportion of Muslims joining the Taliban was even smaller there. When terrorist attacks took place in Spain and Britain, the bulk of the Muslim community roundly condemned them, showed their solidarity with the victims, and undertook to put their communal house in order. After the recent unsuccessful terrorist attacks in London and Glasgow, they organised peaceful marches and placed pagelong statements in national newspapers condemning them and declaring them incompatible with the principles of Islam. When two French journalists were taken hostage by the Islamic army in Iraq to pressurise the French

7 See ICM Survey for the BBC, Radio 4, 24 December 2002. Rather surprisingly the proportion of those claiming to be patriotic was higher among men than women (71 percent as opposed to 59 percent). Predictably it was higher among those at the top of the occupational hierarchy than those at the lower end (73 percent as opposed to 60 percent) and in the older generation than the younger (90 percent as opposed to 60 percent).

Such polls can be highly misleading and should be read with care. Words like 'patriotic' and even 'primary' loyalty mean different things to different people, including the pollster and his subjects. Many of us love our country but would not call ourselves patriotic because of the exclusivity, uncritical loyalty and intensity of passion associated with it. Our vocabulary in this respect is too poor and limited to allow the range of emotions one feels towards one's country and its people, and these two are not the same.

government to lift its recently imposed ban on the headscarf, the French Muslims mobilized as never before, and insisted that the Islamic army had no right to speak in their name and that their primary loyalty was to their compatriots.

Like millions of their fellow citizens, a large number of European Muslims, though by no means all of them, were bitterly opposed to the second war on Iraq, but remained content to join peaceful protests against it. Had they been so minded, they could have been far more noisy, tried to sabotage the war effort in countries belonging to the 'coalition of the willing', refused to pay their taxes, courted imprisonment, formed a human shield in Iraq, and used other familiar tactics. The fact that they did not do any of these things is significant. In Britain when the Imam of Finsbury Park mosque, who preached hatred of the West and urged support for the terrorists, was arrested and his mosque raided, there was some outrage but also quiet satisfaction that some action had at last been taken against him and his associates.[8]

Muslims have also shown respect for democratic institutions. They have participated in local and national elections, stood as candidates in fairly large numbers, joined mainstream political parties, and accepted the decisions of the majority. When a Muslim parliament was set up in Britain in the 1990s by a pro-Iranian group to discuss issues of common interest and provide Muslims with a distinct political voice, it received little general support and became defunct, largely because of widespread Muslim hostility and factionalism. Calls for separate Muslim parties throughout Europe have gone unheeded, and Muslim candidates standing on Muslim platforms in local and national elections have almost always been defeated.

It is sometimes argued that the Muslim support for democratic institutions and loyalty to the state are largely a matter of political expediency and remain precarious. The argument makes a valid point, as reasons for sup-

8 Most of his audience consisted of young Muslim men whose parents took a different view of him. The Islam of the first generation immigrants is heavily folkish, oral, tied up with local culture and traditional. That of their children and grandchildren is textual, learned in mosques and schools, lacks historical continuity, is shaped by intellectuals rather than *mullahs*, and is often strident.

porting democratic institutions do matter, but it does not apply to a large majority of European Muslims. As the extensive debate among them shows, they are exploring the moral dimension of their relationship to their country of settlement and beginning to articulate a theologico-moral theory of political obligation.

While a small minority dismisses democracy as a form of polytheism (*shirk billah*) that deifies people and sets up their sovereignty in rivalry to that of Allah, most Muslims take a different view. Democracy, they argue, does not deify people but subjects their will to clearly stated constitutional constraints including basic human rights. It shows respect for human dignity, protects fundamental human interests, ensures responsible use of power, guarantees freedom of religion and institutionalises *shura*, all of which are not only consistent with but often enjoined by the *Qur'an*. Although an enlightened monarchy might be able to achieve these objectives, it is heavily dependent on the character of the monarch and inherently risky. The Prophet was one such individual, but it is naive to imagine that all societies can throw up men like him on a regular basis. For most European Muslims democracy is therefore a better form of government than any other, and they have a moral obligation to support it. This does not mean that they approve of its current liberal form. Many of them would like it to be more respectful of religion and less secular in its orientation, but most of them agree that its basic institutional structure is worthy of their support.

Political participation is being given a similar theologico-moral basis. While a small minority such as the Hizb al-Tahrir dismisses it as *haram* (or sinful) because it involves working with secular political parties and accepting the authority of secular political institutions, most Muslims take a very different view. The *fatwa* by Taha Jabir al-Alwani, chairman of the North American Fiqh council, asks Muslims to participate in political life because it enables them to promote worthwhile causes, protects basic human rights, ensures responsible rule, and improves the quality of information about Islam and Muslim interests. For al-Alwani, political participation is not just a 'right' that can be surrendered, nor a 'permission' that may be ignored, but a 'duty' that must be discharged.

Loyalty to the state too is defended on *Qur'anic* grounds. The *Qur'an* places high value on the sanctity of contracts, and enjoins Muslims to show loy-

alty to the state in return for its physical protection and respect for basic freedoms. This argument was commonly made by British Muslims when a small number of them wanted to fight with the Taliban against British troops. It was further clarified in the *Fatwa on British Muslims* issued by Shaykh Abdullah al-Judai, a member of the European Council for Fatwa and Research. The *fatwa* insisted that one of the Muslim's 'highest obligations' was to respect agreements and contracts, that they were contractually bound to their country of settlement, and that they 'cannot take up arms' against it even in order to defend Muslims elsewhere. This last point is disputed by some Muslims, largely members of an Islamist group lacking popular support.[9]

As far as the basic European values and practices are concerned, Muslims do not have much difficulty with many of them. Human dignity, equal human worth, equality of the races, civility, peaceful resolution of differences and reciprocity are all either enjoined by Islam or can be read into it. Although polygyny and female circumcision are practised by some groups of Muslims, they are disapproved of by others and are in decline. It is hardly surprising that the laws banning them provoked little Muslim protest in any European country. Two areas that have proved particularly contentious relate to the values of gender equality and freedom of expression.

Gender equality, though resisted by some, is being increasingly accepted by a majority of European Muslims. Women vote in elections and stand for public offices without facing much male opposition. Muslim girls go on to complete their school education and do better than boys. A fairly large number of them pursues higher education, though the proportion is smaller than for boys, often because of parental discouragement. However, that is changing for the better. Muslim girls are discouraged from pursuing certain occupations, but that too is changing. They enjoy less social freedom and are sometimes forced into arranged marriages, but they are rebelling against this with some success. The struggle for gender equality

9 The Muslim Manifesto published by Kalim Siddiqui's London-based Muslim Institute in 1990 took a different view. While agreeing that Muslims have a duty of loyalty to the state in which they have settled, it argued that the loyalty was overridden if in conflict with the *umma*. The Institute is openly committed to Ayatollah Khomeini, and reflects a minority view.

is being fought in many families. And although the rebellious young girls and women are subjected to intimidation and violence, leading to nearly a dozen, sometimes horrifying cases of honour killing and many more of abduction every year in Britain alone, they are beginning to take collective action with the judicious help of the state. Young girls also invoke the authority of the *Qur'an* in their struggle, arguing that sexist practices are conventional in origin and lack a religious basis. This requires them to study the *Qur'an* well enough to interpret it. While *prima facie* such a diligent study of religion appears conservative, its intentions and outcome are often radical, as is evident in the growing popularity of 'Islamic feminism'.

Issues relating to free speech have provoked the greatest Muslim anger, and an equally fierce reaction against them. Muslims do not question the value of free speech but rather its scope and limits. After all, they use it to criticise the West, highlight their grievances, press their demands, challenge some of their own ugly practices, and are its beneficiaries. Many of them value it not only on instrumental but also on moral grounds, and find a theological support for it. The *Qur'an* could not have been passed on and its message widely disseminated without free speech. The sticking point comes when free speech is in conflict with Muslim religious sensibilities.

Accommodating Religion

One of the major causes of European anxiety about Muslim immigrants has to do with religion. Liberals in general and European liberals in particular have long been troubled by religion. For some it rejects many of the central principles of liberalism, such as humanism, individualism, critical rationality, commitment to scientific inquiry, freedom of thought and belief in progress, and represents a reactionary and obscurantist form of thought. Others take a more discriminating view of it. They welcome it as a necessary corrective to human hubris and a valuable moral resource, provided that it is suitably rationalised and reformed and does not seek to dominate political life. Whether their secularism is comprehensive or narrowly political, almost all liberals are convinced that political life should be organised along secular lines. The state, they argue, is equipped to deal with material and moral interests, not with the destiny of the human soul. Since it deals with matters that all citizens share in common,

its affairs should be conducted in a secular language which they all understand and share, and can critically assess in terms of public reasons. It is inherently coercive and must stay clear of the religious and other areas in which coercion has no place. It should treat all its citizens equally and respect their freedom of conscience, which it cannot do if it is tied to a particular religion.

In the liberal view, Muslims challenge this historical consensus and threaten to reopen long-settled controversies. They reject not only the comprehensive secularisation of society but also its more limited political form, and introduce religion into political life at several levels. They make demands based on religion, such as a particular form of animal slaughter, time-off for prayer during working hours, and exemption from certain laws and practices. They want the state to protect their religious beliefs and practices by restricting the freedom of expression and imposing unfair burdens on others. They reason about political matters in religious terms, debating whether the *Qur'an* allows loyalty to the state, support for democratic institutions, political participation, equal rights for women, or participation in a particular war. In these and other ways Muslims introduce a theological form of political reasoning in which others cannot participate but by whose outcome they are deeply affected. This rules out any form of shared public discourse, the *sine qua non* of common citizenship. Liberals cannot see how a secular political system can cope with this sudden intrusion of religion, especially one that rejects any form of private-public distinction on which all modern states are based. Their anxiety is further compounded by the fear that the Muslim example might encourage other religious groups and lead over time to the disintegration of the liberal political order.

Although liberals are right to worry about the danger posed by militant Islam, their anxiety in the European context is exaggerated and largely arises from a misunderstanding of how European societies are actually constituted and conduct their affairs. No European society or political system is secular in the sense in which liberals use the term. Subject to the qualifications discussed in a later chapter, its Christian heritage has shaped and continues to shape its vocabulary, self-understanding, institutions, ideals and practices. The ideas of human dignity, equal human worth and unity of humankind derive their moral energy from it, and reappear in liberalism in their secularised form. The views of human nature and history that inform much of the European political thought and practice, many of its current laws and practices, and even such trivial things as treating Sundays, Christ-

mas and the New Year as public holidays are all further examples of the continuing influence of Christianity. The fact that their historical roots are often forgotten and religion survives as culture does not mean that their religious basis or overtones go unnoticed by non-Christians. Muslims and for that matter devout Christians do not introduce an alien element in an otherwise secular society. Rather they speak loudly in the same language which the rest of society speaks in a quiet whisper.

The theological style of reasoning about political matters that worries liberals is not unique to Muslims. Anti-abortionists, pacifists, some groups of environmentalists, champions of global justice, and opponents of Sunday trading reason from within the Christian, Judaic or some other religious tradition. And even some liberals only reproduce the basic Christian beliefs in a secular language, as becomes clear when they are pressed to articulate and defend them. Contrary to what liberals imagine, our public life does not and cannot rest on a homogeneous view of public reason, for the latter is not a neutral and sanitised species of reason but is, like all other forms of reason, embedded in no doubt revisable particular traditions or philosophical frameworks. Our public life is inherently plural and includes several different forms of reasoning, such as the secular, the religious, a mixture of the two, and the countless varieties of each of them. Liberals wonder how citizens can communicate across different moral and political languages. In fact, they manage reasonably well.

Since many of these languages are precipitates of European history and form part of its common heritage, Europeans grow up acquiring considerable familiarity and even a measure of sympathy with some of them, and do not even notice their society's mixed discourse. Unbeknown to them, they themselves sometimes speak in several moral languages. And when they do not speak a language, they often understand it well enough to respond to its speakers. From time to time there are no doubt passages of incomprehension and breakdowns in communication, and then they seek to improve their knowledge of other languages, find a common language, turn to translators and interpreters, leave the matter unresolved, reach a tentative compromise, or do one of several other familiar things. What is troublesome about the Muslim political reasoning is not its religious character but its unfamiliarity. And the answer to that lies in greater interaction, sympathetic dialogue, multicultural education, and Muslim spokesmen acquiring reasonable competence in other languages, especially the secular.

Secularism is a complex concept. Since religion matters to the large majority of Europeans and an attack on it can easily provoke public disorder, no European political system excludes it from political life. At the same time no European state allows it to colonise political life and threaten its citizens' liberties. The history of every modern European state is a story of how best to balance these requirements. All European states are secular in the sense that they do not impose a religion on their citizens or make citizenship rights dependent on subscription to that religion, are not generally guided by religious considerations in making laws and policies, and do not derive their legitimacy from religious sources. They do however allow religion its proper place in political life, including religiously based political parties and a religiously grounded political rhetoric. They also have institutional mechanisms for maintaining regular contacts with major religious organisations, and many of them are provided with public funds to undertake secular activities.

Britain funds Anglican, Catholic and Jewish schools, and its government informally but regularly consults religious bodies in matters relating to them. In France religious schools, most of them Catholic, receive public subsidy, and in three out of its nineteen *départements* clerics are civil servants and appointed by the state. In Germany, the Jewish community, the Catholic dioceses, and the regional Protestant churches enjoy the status of publicly recognised corporations, a uniquely German legal category. The state collects taxes from members of churches on their behalf and hands over the money to the churches after deducting the agreed administrative charge. Nearly 80 percent of publicly funded nursery schools are run by them on behalf of the state, and so are a number of hospitals and other welfare institutions. And while secular France refuses to take any notice of group differences, it recognises those based on religion and regularly consults the representatives of the officially recognised national organisations of Catholics, Protestants and Jews. Whether European states are right to do any of these things is an important question that does not concern us here. The fact is that they do so, and we should begin by accepting this as a fact of political life.

Within this framework Muslims pose no major problem. All that most of them ask for and what European states should do is to find ways of accommodating them without radically altering the existing structure. This is broadly what is happening in practice, in some cases proactively, in others after considerable resistance. France has set up a Council of Muslim Faith, a national

representative body, with the right to speak on behalf of French Muslims and enjoying a consultative status. In Holland Muslims are part of 'pillarisation' and have state-funded religious schools and television channels. In Belgium Islam has been a full member of the Council of Religions since 1974. Spain, which had been subject to Islam for centuries, tried for years to define its identity in opposition to it. In November 1992, it reached an accord with the Islamic Commission of Spain similar to that reached with other religious communities. The accord dealt with Muslim demands, such as the provision of *halal* meat, burial places, right to religious holidays, recognition of religious rights in hospitals, prisons and armed forces, tax relief, authority to perform civil marriages, and religious education in public schools. Although parts of the accord remain unimplemented for lack of political will and funds, it represents a public acceptance of Muslims as an equal religious community with the rest.

European societies have in these and other ways accommodated Muslims without compromising their secular character. Muslims are given regular access to power, their religious interests are taken into account, their demands discussed and either conceded, shelved or rejected. At the same time the secular historical settlement remains firmly in place, and Muslims have not generally asked for nor will or should be allowed any changes in it. Indeed, since the existing arrangements treat them with respect and give them full and equal religious freedom, often far greater than what they enjoy in sectarian Muslim societies, these arrangements rightly claim and generally receive their moral support. They also make it easier for them to challenge the militant minority's mindless fulminations against the 'godless' land of 'infidels'. Liberal society has far greater intellectual and institutional resources and is far more flexible than its theorists imagine.

Defending Liberal Society

Another factor that generates liberal anxiety about Muslims has to do with the defence of liberal values and practices. Liberals ask Muslims to give these their wholehearted moral allegiance. They do not want to say that 'this is how we do things here', because while that argument is valid in relation to local customs and traffic rules, it does not apply to moral values where it smacks of

moral coercion.[10] Liberals want to convince them that these values are right, and think that this requires them to give transculturally compelling reasons. While such reasons are available in the case of some liberal values such as respect for human life, human dignity and equal human worth, they are not in the case of others such as individualism, personal autonomy, choice of spouses and minimum restraints on freedom of expression. There are good reasons for the latter, but they are internal to the liberal tradition and not transcultural. While liberals find them convincing, even self-evident, they do not convince many Muslims who sometimes find no supporting reasons for them within their own tradition. Other immigrant groups face similar difficulties, but many generally give in because they find supporting reasons within their tradition or out of self-doubt, timidity and prudential considerations. Many Muslims do not because they are as certain of their values and as determined to live by them as the liberals, and worry deeply about their erosion under the liberal impact.

The stage is now set for mutual hostility and suspicion. Each fears the other not just politically but morally and culturally, and sincerely believes that it cannot survive without defeating the other. The fear is particularly acute among liberals and leads to a veritable panic. Unlike the religious Muslims who feel sure that God is on their side, liberals have no such certainty and must protect their values and way of life themselves. Having long thought that history was on their side, they now find that it is acting capriciously and signalling the return of the 'dark ages' that they had successfully seen off several centuries ago. Like most such panics, the liberal panic is partly fuelled by a lingering self-doubt. Despite much agonised reflection in recent years, the more self-critical liberals realise that they cannot make a transculturally compelling case for some of their cherished values. Compelling others to live by the latter therefore gives them an uneasy conscience. Since Muslims precipitate it, they become a moral irritant, an object of fear and resentment.

Liberals get into this difficulty because they claim more for their way of life than is warranted. The liberal way of life is historically contingent and embedded in a particular culture or form of social self-understanding. It is not underwritten

10 Although Brian Barry, the leading British liberal political philosopher, talks a great deal about culture, he does not offer a systematic analysis of it. He often equates it with customs and thinks that it rests on the authority of tradition. He does not realize that culture could involve reasons that are internal to it.

by history, mandated by human nature, or grounded in universal reason. Good internal reasons can be given in support of it, however, such as those based on the society's history, experiences, moral traditions, cultural and religious heritage, circumstances and level of development. These reasons do not convince all human beings and command their allegiance, and there is no reason why they should. It is enough if they are good reasons, publicly debated, and carry conviction with all or most members of the liberal society. The liberal society represents one good way to organise human life, and that is a strong enough moral basis to stand up for it and to use such compulsion as is unavoidable and prudent. It is not the best, the most rational, or the only universally valid form of good society. If liberals make such a claim, as many Europeans liberals do, they not only cannot redeem it but end up accusing Muslims of being irrational, morally obtuse, backward: not a way to win them over. Liberals should aim not to convince Muslims that this way of life is the best but rather to get them to see that it is one good way to live, not to assert that this is the only acceptable way to be human but rather that they and others understand their humanity in this way and have good reasons to commit themselves to it, and that Muslims should respect it. The aim should be *limited* in the sense of defending a particular society rather than prescribing a universal model, and *modest* in the sense of making a good case for it without claiming that no rational man can fail to be convinced by it. If some Muslims remain unpersuaded, they would at least see why others are persuaded and why they should go along with them for moral or prudential reasons.

Once culture is explicitly recognised and brought into the political discourse as a source of claims, an additional form of reasoning is available to both liberals and Muslims. The latter could legitimately argue that when they offer good reasons for their cultural beliefs and practices, these should be respected and suitably accommodated. For their part, liberals could argue that Muslims should respect the prevailing cultural beliefs and practices when good reasons are given for them. Such an appeal to mutual cultural respect has several advantages. It reassures Muslims that their culture is valued by the wider society and that they need not panic and turn inwards or become intransigent. It reassures the wider society that it remains in charge of its cultural life, that Muslims will not seek to undermine it by irresponsible demands, and that the differences between the two are to be resolved through a rational dialogue conducted in a spirit of mutual commitment to a common life.

An appeal to mutual cultural respect also often avoids and sometimes even resolves otherwise intractable disagreements and controversies. Since the cultural argument works both ways, it is perfectly valid for the two parties to say that one of them cannot be expected to respect the deeply held cultural beliefs and practices of the other unless the latter does the same. It is often forgotten in the heat generated by the *l'affaire du foulard* that over 95 percent of Muslim girls in French schools avoided the *hijab* largely out of respect for the French culture and its reasons for placing a high value on *laicité*, not because it went against French customs or some universal value.[11]

Difficult situations arise when both parties feel equally strongly about their cultural norms. A few French Muslim girls did insist on wearing the *hijab*, as did Fereshta Luden, a Muslim teacher in Germany, to considerable public out-

11 The French case is complicated by the fact that since Christian pupils are allowed to wear the crucifix, Muslims girls complained of discrimination. France could ban the crucifix or at least the cross as well, but dares not do so for fear of provoking public disorder and falling foul of human rights. It therefore argued that, unlike the crucifix, the *hijab* was ostentatious and had a proselytising dimension, and thus subverted the principle of *laicité* in a way that the crucifix did not. Although this argument is not as specious as its critics suggest, it cannot bear the weight the French government puts on it.

Wearing a *hijab* can symbolise many different things. It can be an act of subjection to parental or communal pressure and a sign of inequality. It can also signify the process of personal spiritual development or turning inwards, and be a statement of a self-chosen identity. As some French girls put it, it made them more restrained and inward-looking and less extrovert, and that is what they wanted. It can also be a way of conveying to boys without actually having to say it that they are not interested in certain kinds of activities or relationships. Since the *hijab* is open to conflicting interpretations, the school authorities and the government face a difficult decision. The French government took it to signify subordination, denial of gender equality and pressure on other girls to do the same. This enabled it to show that the ban did not contravene Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects the 'freedom to manifest one's religion and beliefs'. Switzerland and Turkey have taken a similar legal route.

In this connection a story, probably apocryphal, is relevant. There was a discussion at a tribal meeting in Kabul about ending the practice of women walking several steps behind their men. Young radicals insisted the women should not only walk alongside but ahead of men. This will show the world that the country has begun to change and bring more American dollars. To their surprise the greatest support came from the conservative elders. Their reasons were two. Since all roads were mined, men would not only be spared an early death but be free to marry again! The same view, but different meanings and contradictory reasons!

rage.[12] Such clashes could be between two important cultural norms, between a human right and a cultural norm, and sometimes even between two human rights. There are good arguments on both sides. The French *laicité* and the German principle of religious neutrality should be modified to allow the *hijab* and other defensible Muslim beliefs and practices. But equally, these traditions are valuable historical achievements, embody important values, exceptions to them alienate the majority, which is not in the Muslims' interest, and set a precedent whose unexpected long-term consequences can be unfortunate. In such situations of what Rawls calls reasonable disagreement, it is wrong to claim that only one course of action is truly rational. Good reasons on both sides require and create a space for mutual accommodation and compromise. What form these should take depends on the context.

12 In Germany the teacher is a Beamte, a public servant representing the neutral and impartial state and expected to be above political, religious and other markers of identification. This is why he or she is required not to go on strike, to wear a neutral dress, and so on. When Fereshta Ludin decided to wear a headscarf in the school, she was told not to. She took the matter to the Federal Constitutional Court on the ground that she had a human right to practise her religion. Although the Court shared the general unease about her action, it had no alternative in law but to rule in her favour. There have been other such cases where exemptions from established practices were granted to accommodate the right to religion.

Several of them complained that human rights were being used to change their culture and that Germans were losing control over it. While some of them did not wish to change any established custom, others wanted to draw a line at practices they regarded as central to their way of life. This involves striking a delicate balance between respecting human rights and upholding valuable cultural traditions. It is not obvious that human rights should automatically trump traditions. Courts may feel legally constrained to take that view, and then their decisions alienate a large majority and become contentious, as happened in Germany. Such matters are therefore best settled politically. Johanne Kandel, a keen advocate of Christian – Muslim dialogue, expressed this view well when he asked Muslim organisations if they were right to use human rights to 'push through their interpretation of Islam by means of the German Courts' and maintain practices that might be deeply offensive to the majority of Germans. See his article in *Islam und Gesellschaft*, no. 2, Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, no date. Every liberal society contains a structural tension. It is committed both to human rights and to particular cultural traditions. When interpreted in a certain manner or pressed beyond a certain point, human rights might undermine the latter. Conversely, if the cultural traditions were to set the limits of human rights, they would emasculate them. Much good sense is required on the part of both the majority and the minority to maintain the balance.

Islam and Multicultural Society

Like their counterparts elsewhere, European Muslims have some difficulty in coming to terms with multicultural societies, and that aggravates the European anxiety. There is almost no religion whose followers do not think it the best one of all. This sense of superiority is particularly strong among Muslims. The *Qur'an* is believed to be unique in being the literal, unmediated, exhaustive and final revelation of the divine will. According to it, the Word of God was also revealed to Jews and Christians, whom are therefore respected and whose prophets are revered. Since their revelations, however, are believed to have suffered corruption because of human mediation and the failure to live by them, Islam is supposed to 'confirm', 'continue' and 'complete' them. Although Islam is pluralist in relation to them while they are not in relation to it, its pluralism is articulated within an absolutist framework.[13] As the *Qur'anic* verses say, 'O mankind! The messenger has come to you in truth from Allah: believe in him, it is best for you'. And again, 'Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him'. Although Jews and Christians, 'the people whom God has guided', are to be respected and left free to practise their religions, they remain legitimate targets for conversion to the 'most perfect' religion. As for other religions such as Hinduism, they are dismissed as polytheistic and idolatrous and unworthy of respect. The remarkable military successes of the early and medieval Islam generated among its followers a triumphalist spirit, and seemed to them to confirm their belief in its absolute superiority. During the centuries of European colonization, this belief was, and in their current sorry state remains, almost the sole basis of their collective pride, and has a powerful appeal for the overwhelming majority of them.

The belief in the absolute superiority of Islam is reflected in the constant invocation of its past glory by moderate and militant Muslims alike. It is also evident in many of its beliefs and practices. While Muslims have a duty to convert the followers of other religions, they are not themselves free to convert to another, this being apostasy, an act of treason, meriting punishment in this world and the next. Most Muslims are anxious that others should learn about their religion, but few of them take much interest in others'. They may marry non-Muslim girls but do not allow others to marry theirs, and expect those marrying within Islam to convert to it. This cannot be attributed to the current

13 Other verses such as 2:136, 5:48, 6:83-96, and 29:46 display a pluralist spirit.

Muslim feeling of siege or fear of loss of identity. Even in the self-confident Ottoman Empire where Jews and Christians enjoyed considerable tolerance, they were treated as second-class citizens lacking the right to participate fully in its political life. While they were free to convert to Islam, they were strictly forbidden to convert Muslims or marry their women.

Thanks to all this, many European Muslims' attitude to the multicultural society is one-sided. They understand it in the light of the millet model of the Ottoman Empire in which different communities followed their own customs and led more or less self-contained lives. They welcome multicultural society because it gives them the freedom to live by and propagate their religious beliefs and practices. But many of them also feel uncomfortable with it because it puts them on a par with, and exposes them and their children to the influence of, other religions and secular cultures. As Shabbir Akhtar, an influential British Muslim thinker during the Rushdie affair, put it, 'Our inherited (Islamic) understanding of religious freedom and the nature and role of religion in society is in the last analysis being fundamentally challenged by the new religious pluralism in Britain'.[14] In his view and that of many others, religious and cultural pluralism presents Islam as a religion of Muslims in a way that Judaism is of Jews and Hinduism of Hindus, and implicitly rejects its claim to universality and absolute superiority.

Such an approach to the multicultural society leads many Muslims to take an instrumental view of it, to welcome it because and only to the extent that it gives them the space to maintain their identity. It also encourages a narrow and static view of multiculturalism, not a transformative and open-minded dialogue between people belonging to cultures and religions but a compartmentalised social and cultural universe in which different groups live out their ghettoized existence. As a result, large groups of Muslims tend to withdraw or keep a comfortable distance from the wider society, and deny themselves the opportunity to interact with others, understand their views and concerns, and take a critical view of themselves. This partly explains their current tendency to be unduly defensive about their religion and history, see slights when none might be intended, take minor criticisms out of perspective, fall prey or

14 S. Akhtar, *Be Careful with Muhammed! The Rushdie Affair*, London: Bellow Publishing, 1989, p. 32. See also his 'Is Freedom Holy to Liberals?' in Parekh 1990.

react disproportionately to misguided rightwing provocations, and in general appear to want to live in Europe on their own terms.

European Muslims are no doubt changing, but they have a long way to go before they are able to participate enthusiastically in the creative tensions and controversies of the multicultural society, and make the contribution to which their great history and civilisation entitle them. For the first time in their history, they are living in large numbers in societies where they are neither rulers nor subjects – their historical situation so far – but fellow citizens enjoying equal rights with the rest in plural liberal democracies.[15] This requires them to rethink the traditional views on their rights and obligations, their relation to other religions and cultures, and their response to modernity. Some of their thinkers like Mohammed Arkoun and Tariq Ramadan have begun to do just that, and their ideas are receiving sympathetic attention among Muslims not only in the West also in Muslim countries. If this trend continues and Muslim intellectuals in Europe successfully develop a creative Euro-Islam, they could play a vital role in setting off long overdue debates and offering valuable guidance to the global *umma*.

Muslim Youth

I have argued that although the Muslim presence in Europe does not constitute a political and cultural threat and can enrich European life, if handled with wisdom on both sides, a small but deeply alienated group

15 Europe is not *dar al-Islam* (an abode of Islam), but nor is it *dar al-harb* (the land of unbelief or war) because its large Muslim population is born here, enjoys all the rights and has begun to shape the ethos of the wider society. It requires Islamic scholars to develop a new category with its own appropriate claims and obligations. Zaki Badawi, a distinguished Egyptian-British theologian, invented the third category of *dar al-sulh* (the land of contract). It is helpful, but goes wrong in seeing Muslim citizenship as nothing more than contractual in nature.

Some Muslims mistakenly see their presence in Europe as comparable to the prophet's *hijra* to Madina, and draw misleading conclusions from it. The prophet founded a new community with its own rules and structure of authority; Muslim immigrants are not like that. The prophet migrated to avoid persecution; Muslims are voluntary migrants. For a creative interpretation of Islam which takes account of this, see Tariq Ramadan, *European Muslims and the Future of Islam*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

of young Muslims is a legitimate source of concern. In almost all European societies, young Muslims underachieve educationally and are among the poorest members. Take Britain. Over half its Muslims live in areas with the most deprived housing conditions compared with 20 percent of the total population, and their unemployment rate is twice the national average. Nearly 70 percent of Muslim children live in poverty and receive state support, and some 36 percent of them leave school without qualifications. These socio-economic disadvantages are compounded by cultural factors. Young Muslims are alienated from their parental culture, which they either do not understand or find conservative, backward, restrictive and not a source of pride. There is often limited emotional intimacy between parents and children, and very little meaningful conversation. Problems relating to drugs, mental health, personal relationships and sexuality are considered taboo and are rarely discussed in families. Not surprisingly, many parents and elderly family members admit ignorance of what their younger members think, feel and do, as was confirmed in the case of some of those involved in the London terrorist attacks in July 2005.

Although they have grown up in Britain, many young Muslims lack roots there and feel alienated from the country as well. This is due to several interrelated factors. Residential concentration in some parts of the country means that they lead parallel lives, go to predominantly Muslim schools, and have limited contacts with their white counterparts. Unemployment denies them the opportunity to participate in one of the most important areas of life, and to get to know and become an integral part of British society. Those who succeed in breaking through the barrier sometimes find that the wider society fears and takes a demeaning view of them, and that the national identity is too narrow and exclusive to find a respectable place for them.

Detached from their parental and British cultures, alienated young Muslims tend to form their own groups based on a shared subculture of defiance and victimhood. Some turn to drug trafficking, prostitution, gang warfare and petty crimes. It is striking that young Muslims form nine percent of the prison population, which is three times their proportion in the country. There is an increasing trend towards drug addiction among young Muslims, and a disturbingly large number of single moth-

ers in London are Muslims. Many of those who avoid crime turn to Islam to give them a sense of dignity and identity, a particularly noticeable trend among college and university students.

Although religious consciousness is quite strong among most Muslims, it takes a different form among the alienated youth. Their parents' Islam is largely traditional, tied up with the culture of their homeland, and bound up with their ethnic and other identities. They revere the *Qur'an*, but their Islam is not narrowly centred on it and textual in character. They do not know Arabic and rely on the traditionalist *ulema* drawn from their native homelands to interpret it for them. The Islam of young Muslims could not be more different. Many of them read Arabic, have direct access to the text, and interpret it themselves or rely on others like themselves. Their Islam is 'purged' of local culture and is textual in its orientation. It is not woven into their lives as an aspect that is taken for granted as it is for their parents, but a self-consciously adopted badge of identity needing to be constantly asserted, an ideology providing them with a clear programme of action. Since it is a matter of conscious commitment, it is shadowed by a deep fear that the commitment might weaken or get diluted. They therefore become loud, rigid and uncompromising in their religiosity, both to guard themselves against the fear that they might slacken and to ask others to pull them up if they should do so. It is hardly surprising that compared with their parents, a much larger majority of those between 16 and 24 years of age favour Islamic state schools over the secular, want women to wear head scarves, prefer the *sharia* to British laws, and believe that a Muslim converting to another religion deserves to die.[16]

Freed from the ethnic, national and other ties and turning to religion as the sole basis of their identity, young Muslims are available for mobilisation by militant groups with a global agenda. These groups idealise and flatter them by describing them as the 'true elite' charged with the responsibility to stand up for the honour of the *umma*. The pursuit of global causes gives them a sense of power, a purpose, a thrill, a sense of belonging, and a ready network of friends. The biased Western foreign

16 Populous poll, cited in *Policy Exchange Report*, titled 'Living Apart Together', 30 January, 2007. www.policyexchange.org.uk.

policies, the invasion of Iraq, and the scandals of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay give their anger a moral edge and intensify their sense of victimhood.

There is also another important factor at work. Joining the ranks of Muslim fighters in different parts of the world and engaging in terrorist acts at home and abroad involve risking one's life, to which young Muslims (like others) are naturally averse. This is overcome by an increasingly popular interpretation of Islam among the young that thinks nothing of human life. Death in the cause of Allah is a mark of the elect, a calling, an expression of one's love for Allah. It also opens the door to paradise, where one is reunited with the loved ones who have died, and eventually with those one has left behind. While the latter are on earth, they will be well looked after by Allah as a reward for one's noble deed or by other members of one's group. Death is seen as nothing but a wink, marking the end of a brief and painful sojourn on earth and the beginning of a happy eternal life. Giving up one's life is thus made virtually cost-free and represents a perfectly rational choice, though of course the true believer sees it in much more grandiose terms.

An intriguing and highly complex combination of these and other factors throws some light on why some young Muslims are drawn to terrorist activities. Unemployment and poverty do not by themselves lead to terrorism, but they generate widespread resentment, lack of purpose and apathy to the wider society, and create a climate in which there is pervasive indifference to or a weak and passive acquiescence in terrorist activities. Even when some family members of some of the British terrorists had a vague idea of what the latter were thinking of doing and did not like it, they either half-convinced themselves that they did not mean it, turned a blind eye or thought the matter too complex to worry about. The identity vacuum created by the alienation from both the parental and wider social cultures and filled by the obsessive religious identity is an important activating factor, and explains why the youth and not others are drawn to terrorist activities. It links up the individuals involved with globalised Islam and brings them within the sphere of militant groups. The reading of Islam propagated by these groups makes death not only virtually cost-free but a special obligation on the intellectual elite, and has a particular appeal for the well-educated.

The British situation is reproduced in different forms and degrees throughout the rest of Europe.[17] Relative unemployment rates for young Muslims are broadly similar in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain, yet anti-discrimination legislation is relatively weaker. Few Muslims occupy high public offices or represent their country abroad and symbolise their integration. As for educational underachievement, average income, child poverty, residential concentration, percentage of prison population and inter-ethnic friendships, some European societies are marginally better on some indices and worse on others. All have a small but significant, rootless, deeply alienated and sulking Muslim underclass defining its identity in exclusively religious terms. This group sees itself as Muslims *in* Europe, Muslims who happen to live in Europe without any commitment to it, not as Muslims *of* Europe, that is, those who see it as their home, let alone as *Europeanised* Muslims or those who share its culture and values. Islam is the sole basis of their personal and public identity and is freed from the moderating influence of other identities. Since this is precisely what the Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafis and others advocate, they gravitate towards them.[18]

Reclaiming the Muslim youth requires addressing some of the factors discussed earlier, and is the joint responsibility of both the Muslim communities and the wider society. Senior politicians and public figures throughout Europe say that this involves 'winning their hearts and minds', but no one has a clear idea of how their hearts and minds (which are not the same) function and what winning them means and involves. It cannot mean that

17 In France riots began in the high-rise, decaying and overcrowded housing estates of Sous-Bois and Montfermail, where up to half the youth are unemployed and have nothing to do except watch television and peddle drugs. They are subject to frequent harassment and humiliation by the police. Almost a whole generation is being lost in this way. It is worth noting that American ghettoes present quite a different picture to their European counterparts. They have more poverty and violence, but they display a greater community spirit. Religion is generally joyful and uplifting, unlike many European ghettoes where it is aggressive and sour. Women play a greater role in holding families together in the American ghettoes.

18 See Olivier Roy, 'Britain, home-grown terror', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 5, August 2005, p.1, where he talks of 'born again' Muslims and the 'revolt of a generation adrift between its culture of origin and westernisation'. See also T. Modood, *Multicultural Politics*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

the alienated youth should come to love their country of settlement as 'winning hearts' implies, nor that they should uncritically endorse all of its policies or take a liberal or 'moderate' view of their religion as 'winning minds' implies. These things are not under the outsider's control, and not even necessary. Rather we should aim at the more modest and realistic goal of ensuring that they become responsible citizens, discharging the basic obligations of citizenship including respect for the law and over time developing a sense of common belonging with the rest.

Although such widely canvassed proposals as asking the parents to report on the activities of their offspring, an extensive network of informers, requiring universities to report on Muslim students, spying on what the imams say in their Friday sermons, and restricting the foreign visits of young Muslims cannot be ruled out under all circumstances, they are fraught with grave danger and often counterproductive. They not only alienate Muslim communities but destroy the very trust and cohesion they need to carry any kind of moral authority with their youth. Teaching citizenship in *madrasas* is of marginal value, because that is not where much of the *jihadi* ideology is picked up. And even if it sometimes is, formal classes on moral values can have only a limited impact. Requiring the imams to be trained in European societies has only a limited value because the *jihadi* ideology is picked up not only from them but from a variety of other sources, and there is no reason why the locally trained imams should be 'moderate'. In the days of globalisation, ideas and passions flow through countless channels, and the solution cannot be entirely local.

Individuals develop a commitment to their society and form a view of their place in it on the basis of their experiences of how it views and treats them, and that should be our focus. European societies need to give young Muslims a stake in society, hope for a better future, and the opportunity to develop and enjoy multiple and mutually moderating identities. They should develop well-planned educational, economic and other strategies to tackle the roots of their disadvantages and alienation, and do so in consultation with them. They should also treat them with respect, and so define their identity that all Muslims (including the young) feel an integral and valued part of it. While guarding against murderous attacks by all necessary and legitimate means, they should stay within the law, respect human rights and avoid appearing to target Muslims. No government measures can work

without the cooperation and support of the Muslim communities, and it must do nothing to forfeit that. Foreign policy necessarily has domestic implications and cannot be framed in isolation. This is particularly so in our interdependent world where groups of citizens are part of a global network. While European societies cannot be held hostage to sectional pressures, though they sometimes are, both justice and the need for a national consensus require that their policies in relation to the Middle East and elsewhere should be far more even-handed than they have been so far.

Muslim communities have an equally important role. They need to take a long and overdue critical look at themselves, and find ways of overcoming the pervasive sense of victimhood and the tendency to father all their ills on the wider society. They need to repair their disintegrating social fabric, build strong families and support networks, take greater interest in and responsibility for their youth, and reform those social and religious practices that stifle and alienate them. When the Afro-Caribbean youth in Britain became notorious for their subculture of drugs, violence and contempt for educational achievement, their community leaders used all available forums including the black churches and communal gatherings to campaign against it. Although their problems still persist, they are less acute, and Muslim communities could usefully follow their example. Their intellectuals and religious leaders also need to take the battle to their youth, and challenge their perverted reading of Islam by offering a better alternative.

The closer co-operation between the government and the Muslim communities raises difficult questions about the nature, role and legitimate sphere of action of the government, and challenges some of the current liberal ideas on the subject. We generally assume that the government should not interfere with what goes on in religious gatherings and what the preachers preach there, that it has no business taking an active interest in how parents bring up their children and relate to them, that it is none of its concern where people go for their holidays, that it should stay clear of how people interpret their religious texts and the kind of debate they throw up, and so on. These and many other related restraints are being breached, and we need to ask if we are right to do so and why. Our legal and political thinkers have their task cut out for them, and it will be interesting to see how they meet the challenge.

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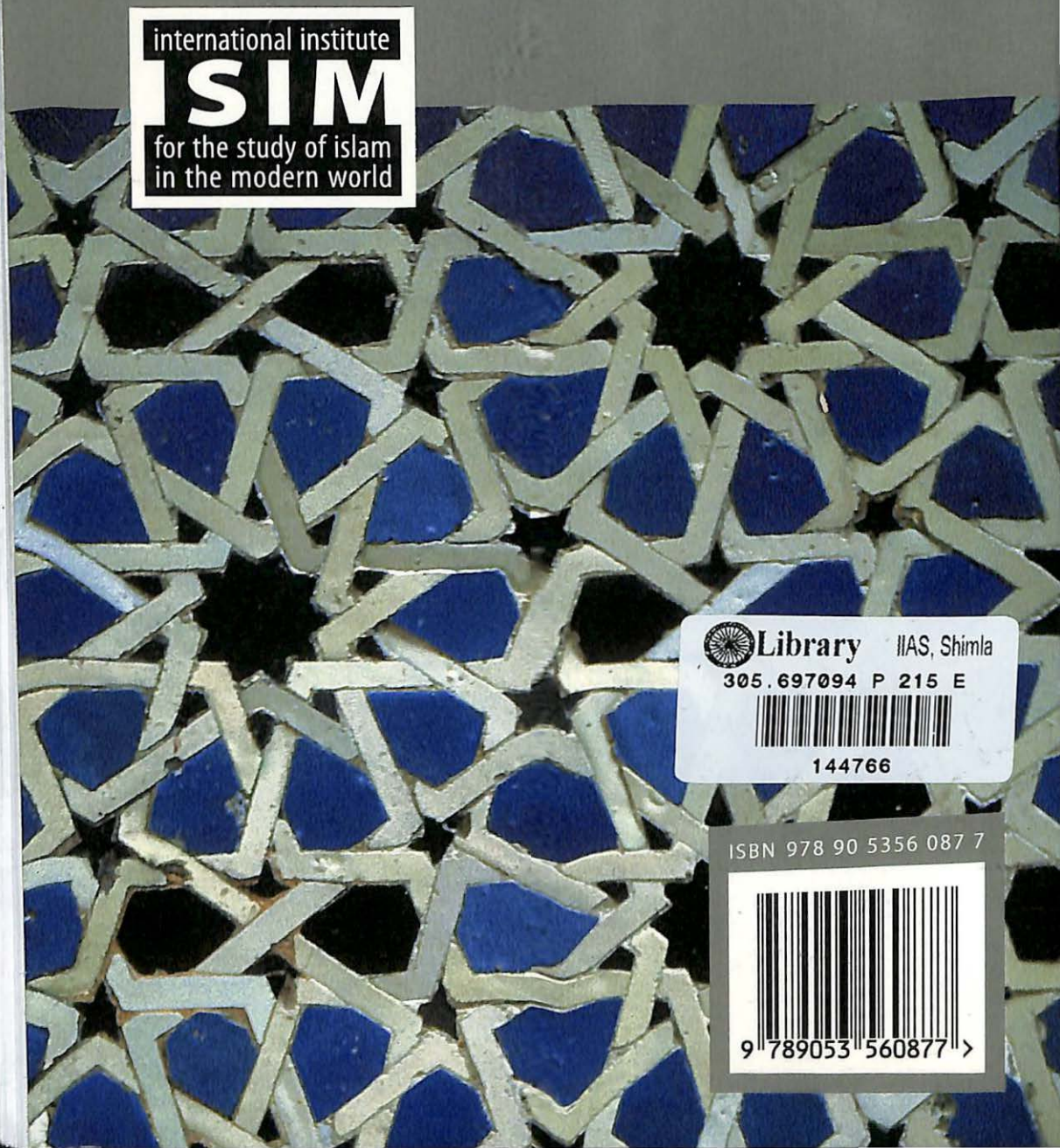

ISBN 978 90 5356 087 7