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Muslim Migrants in Europe: Between Euro-Islam and Ghettoization

Bassam Tibi



Instead of rooting my discourse in the notion of an inevitable and much-publicized "clash" between Islam and Europe, I choose to underline the potential for intercivilizational dialogue. Such needed dialogue over values presupposes an awareness of difference and of its limits, that is, the limits of pluralism.¹ This, in turn, requires a willingness by those involved to open themselves to one another in pursuit of a cross-cultural consensus over values valid in the political culture. While I respect "difference," and submit that coping with it is an essential element of tolerance and pluralism, I also maintain that it is unacceptable to stop at simply acknowledging difference, as cultural relativists do, without providing prescriptions for how to deal with it.²

In his criticism of cultural relativism, Ernest Gellner has argued that religious fundamentalism is a variety of absolutism. Following this view, it might be expected that cultural relativists and fundamentalists would find themselves in conspicuous conflict with one another. But Gellner has noted that "in practice, this confrontation is not very much in evidence."³ The reason for this is that cultural relativists generally apply their views only to those who espouse Western values, and they stop short of proceeding in a similar manner with non-Western cultures. Moreover, cultural relativists mostly confuse the critiques of premodern cultures with an often misconceived "cultural racism."⁴

Unfortunately, the popularity of the cultural relativist position has become so widespread that it has now been adopted even by people belonging to these non-Western cultures—for example, Islamic reformers and secularists. As a Muslim scholar who descends from a centuries-old, Muslim-Damascene notable family, but who lives today as a migrant in Europe, I maintain that the types of positions cultural relativism leads to—victimology, accusation, self-accusation, and self-denial—are inappropriate for dealing with "difference" and the issue of Islamic migration to Europe.

There is a need to overcome Western Islamophobia, but the demonization of Europe, as pursued by some, is not the proper way. If one is committed to intercultural dialogue, one should not simply replace one phobia with another.

Migration to Europe today is a new process, one that involves several actors. In common debate on the issue one often hears the demand that Europe needs to change, which is utterly correct. Indeed, Europe needs to adjust to globalization—to the very process it set in motion through the European expansion.⁵ And in the present age, migration is surely one component of this globalization. However, it is not only Europe that needs to change; the migrants need to change as well. Thus, the call for a de-ethnization of European identity must apply equally to the identity of migrants. Otherwise, it would involve only “one-way change” and “one-way tolerance.”

In embracing the typology of Manuel Castells concerning identity-building, I want to single out his ideal type of “project identity.” By this, Castells means that social actors need to “build a new identity that redefines their position in society. . . . No identity can be an essence.”⁶ Thus, as much as Europeans are called upon to de-ethnize their identity to allow the newcomers to become Europeans, it makes sense that Muslim migrants should be requested to redefine their identity in the diaspora by adding a European component. My position relies on the assumption that no prudent person would choose to be alien forever, and that the will to live in Europe is ultimately irreconcilable with a wholesale rejection of Europe, as those who demonize European civilization commonly do. In my book on Europe in the age of migration, I thus proposed that Europeans overcome their Euro-arrogance, while Muslim migrants engage themselves in the unfolding of a Euro-Islamic identity.⁷ Muslims living in Europe need to find a commonality between themselves and European civilization. At the same time, the de-ethnization of Europe is a prerequisite for the feasibility of Euro-Islam.

In short, both actors are today challenged to change and redefine their identities. It is as wrong to essentialize Europe as “racist, genocidal, and so on,” as it is to essentialize Islam in an Islamophobic manner. Europe and the Islamic world are separate civilizations, with centuries-old records that encompass enmity and cordiality equally.⁸ In this regard, dichotomies built on this legacy—such as East versus West and First World versus Third World—are based on “artificial categories,” as Nezar AlSayyad has rightly argued. AlSayyad has added that “societies are constructed in relation to one another and are . . . perceived through the ideologies and narratives of situated discourse.”⁹ When it comes to the construction of identities—as based on the production of meaning—academics need to free themselves from their “preoccupation with globalization” in acknowledging that “each individual belongs to many cultures, and people have multiple cultural identities. . . . Identity is always under construction and in constant evolution.”¹⁰ My vision of an Euro-Islamic identity for Muslim migrants has been developed along such lines that question constructed dichotomies—however, without overlooking real value conflicts.

THE UNDERLYING ISSUES

The term *New Islamic Presence* has been coined to describe the increasing contemporary migration from Muslim countries to Western Europe.¹² By the end of World War II there were fewer than one million Muslim people living in Western Europe, mostly in France and the United Kingdom. This figure has now risen to about fifteen million, as Muslim migrants now live in almost all European societies, from Scandinavia to Italy.

It is, of course, wrong to relate the presence of Islam in Europe exclusively to migration. There are about eight million native European Muslims, who mainly live in southeast Europe.¹³ However, since the focus of this chapter is on Western Europe, I shall set aside this native Muslim community and concentrate on Muslim migrants to Europe's west. From an American perspective, it is first important to ask why Muslims born in France, the United Kingdom, or Germany are even considered migrants at all, and not natives. The answer is that in Europe the second and even the third generation of Muslim migrants have still not been accepted as part of the polity. In many cases, being considered a migrant would actually represent an improvement in status—in particular, over the view that Muslims are merely *Gastarbeiter*, or "temporary residents." In considering their present legal and social status, I continue to address Muslims in Western Europe as migrants struggling for citizenship and acceptance.

It may be misleading to talk in general about Muslims in Europe at all. Such a broad grouping overlooks the fact the migrant community is ethnically multifaceted and strongly divided along sectarian lines. For example, Muslims living in France have been, and still are, predominantly migrants from the Maghreb.¹⁴ Meanwhile, those living in the United Kingdom have been, and still are, mostly from South Asia (Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh). Until the early 1960s, the Muslim presence in these countries was almost exclusively related to French colonial rule in North Africa, and to British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. In addition, sectarian divisions in Europe are severe. Thus, for example, the Muslim Sunni community in the German state of Hessen has refused in its appeals for recognition to include Shi'is, Alevis, or Ahmadis as Muslims.

Since the 1960s the situation has been changing, as labor migration linked to the booming economies of Europe has boosted Islamic migration's statistical significance. Western European countries today need labor but lack the internal demographic growth to provide it. In this context, Western European countries other than France and the United Kingdom have started to encourage people from the Mediterranean to come there to earn money.

Until the end of the Cold War brought a loosening of Europe's internal boundaries, there was generally no talk about migration in Western Europe.¹⁵ In Germany, for instance, the majority of workers (i.e., not simply Turks, but also

south and southeast Europeans working in German factories) were perceived both by themselves and by Germans as guest workers—people whose presence in the country would end when their labor was no longer needed.¹⁵ Critically minded Germans have stated with equal prudence and repentance: “We have imported labor and have overlooked the fact that we were importing human beings.” Despite the official German slogan “We are not a country for migration,” the office of Commissioner for Issues Concerning Aliens of the former Christian Democratic-Liberal government has introduced the very term *migration* in its documentary entitled “Foreigners Residing in Germany.”¹⁶ Among these legal aliens, there exists a considerable Muslim community of more than three million (more than two million being Turks and Kurds).¹⁷ Yet, although the new Social Democratic/Green German government is more open-minded toward the migrants, it has continued an intrinsic level of duplicity by confusing real integration with simply granting a German passport. In a country with no tradition of citizenship, receiving a passport in line with the new German citizenship law is no more significant than acquiring a piece of paper. A passport does not provide a citizen identity if the cultural underpinning is lacking. Most important, it does not convey membership in “The Club.”

The majority of those who now comprise the new Muslim labor force in Western Europe—in particular, Turks who have migrated to Germany—came, and still come, from rural areas and have quite low levels of education and training. It follows that such migrants not only lack in technical skills, but are also considered by some as lacking a fundamental understanding of their own religion and culture. Most important, because there is a lack of spokespersons among this community—who might have been expected to come from an educated elite—such spokespersons are now coming from outside the migrant community, without being knowledgeable of its needs. Today such people are mostly imams who do not speak German, English, or French, and who have no clue as to the problems and concerns of young Muslims born in Western Europe. These imams have either been imposed on the migrants by Islamist groups, or they have been appointed by the Muslim governments of countries such as Turkey or Morocco. In Germany, even Saudi Arabia has acquired considerable influence by using its petrodollars to fund such appointments—despite the fact that there are no Saudi migrants there.

HISTORY

As stated earlier, in 1945 there were less than one million Muslims living in Western Europe. In the 1960s workers were requested to come, and those Muslims who came were welcomed because they were needed. But by the early 1990s the situation had changed considerably, as a rapid increase in the inflow of

Muslims to Western Europe coincided with an end to the boom years for the European economies. Among other things, this meant that as unemployment rose, there was no longer as great a need for unskilled migrant labor.

The present wave of Muslim migration has had more to do with the worsening economic conditions in Muslim countries than with the need for labor in Europe. In particular, the populations of the southern and eastern Mediterranean have suffered from poverty and unemployment, and migration to Europe has been seen as a principal source of hope. In this context, the total number of Muslim migrants in Europe climbed at the end of the 1990s to an estimated fifteen million and is still increasing tremendously. At a time when most European economies have levels of unemployment that average almost 10 percent, illegal migration is thriving. In fact, illegal migration and the abuse of the right to political asylum are now the primary instruments for gaining access to Europe.¹⁸ The common view among migrants is that it is more dignified to live on the benefits of welfare as an asylum-seeker in Western Europe than it is to live in a suburban *gecekondu*, or shack, in Ankara or Istanbul, or in the slums of Casablanca or Algiers, with no income at all.

In Germany, for instance, the average monthly income of welfare benefit recipients (regardless of whether they are Germans or foreigners) is DM 1000 per adult, which does not include additional generous allowances for children, payments for free accommodation, full-scale medical insurance, and a variety of other government allowances (e.g., for clothing, furniture, fees, and even pets). According to the most recent official figures (published in August 1998), almost three million residents out of a population of eighty-two million (including legal aliens) are receiving welfare payments in Germany (7 percent more than in 1997). This amounts to a total annual expenditure of DM 52 billion. Despite the fact that only 8 percent of those eighty-two million residents are aliens (i.e., do not enjoy German citizenship), 23 percent of the recipients of welfare are aliens.¹⁹ Furthermore, this figure includes only legal aliens who receive ordinary welfare; according to new legislation of June 1998 "tolerated illegals" are to receive special reduced payments not covered by this figure.

Such statistics, regularly published in the local press, have only furthered xenophobia in Germany, including anti-Islamic sentiments. The irony is that not only does Germany receive more unwanted migrants and asylum-seekers than almost any other European state due to extremely lax laws, but it also provides them with the most generous payments.

In regard to the above, it is important to note that a key feature of globalization is the spread of information in all directions. The most generous aspects of the German welfare system are therefore well known in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. The increasing inflow of illegal migrants and unprosecuted asylum-seekers attracted by such financial largesse has, however, exposed Muslims living legally in Germany to increased levels of xenophobia and anti-Islamism.

Thus, the existing socially and economically integrated populations of Muslims in Germany and other parts of Europe do not favor illegal migration, because it creates increasing hardships for them.

THE INQUIRY: A CHALLENGE AND THE RESPONSES TO IT

Unlike the classical Muslim residents of France and the United Kingdom, most other Muslim workers on the continent—for example, the Turks in Germany—initially came not as migrants, but as a temporary labor force. They were looked at as staying in Europe only long enough to earn enough money to return to their countries of origin with the means to start a new existence there. The implication was that these workers would leave Europe when they were no longer needed.

In other words, apart from exceptions and some militant Muslims who relate migration to the religious obligation of *hijra*, as discussed later, most first-generation Muslims, like native Europeans, originally did not view the “presence of Muslims in Europe” as a lasting phenomenon. However, the continuing nature of their stays, and the fact that a second (and, by now, a third) generation are not only living in Europe, but have been born there, have contributed to radical changes in perception. In Germany, as in other European states, this has made migration an increasingly complicated issue for both parties. Until the legislation of the new citizenship law by the 1998 elected Social Democratic government, German law did not allow double citizenship. Even though most Turks want to acquire German citizenship, they do not want to give up their Turkish one. Therefore, they mostly do not apply for German citizenship. Adding to the problem is that Turks born in Germany are despised in Turkey as *allemanci* (something negative like “Germanized”). But neither are they considered to be Germans, even if they were born there.

Such issues concerning the interrelation of identity and migration have been dealt with extensively elsewhere. The focus here is on future strategies for addressing the risks and opportunities of Muslim migration to Western Europe. The most important issue in this regard is clearly that a large majority of the fifteen million Muslims now in Europe are there to stay and thus can no longer be considered temporary residents.²⁰ As indicated, this population is comprised of basically three big, comparable subgroups: Muslim Turks and Kurds (three and a half million—more than two million of them in Germany); Maghrebis (more than five million—about four million of them in France); and South Asians, basically in the United Kingdom, but also in all other European countries.

In addition to these large basic groups, there are migrants from all over the Islamic world in Europe.²¹ For example, 30 percent of the residents of the city of Frankfurt are foreigners, carrying the passports of 165 different nations. Among this number are representatives of almost all the Muslim countries. The ethnic

and sectarian divides among Muslim migrants in Europe are reflected in the structures of their mosques and their related religious associations.²² These may be Sunni or Shi'i, Turkish, Bosnian, Arab, or Pakistani, again divided into Ahmadi and Sunni sects. Seldom are there comprehensive Islamic organizations. Such a fragmented structure naturally leads to concerns that the politicization of internal divides within the community of European Muslims could lead to inter-Islamic rift and violence.

Bearing these realities in mind, a central question must be whether these Muslim migrants will be able to integrate politically into Europe as citizens of Muslim faith, or whether they will continue to live in Muslim ghettos, divided along ethnic and sectarian lines.

PROSPECTS FOR A EURO-ISLAM

The Muslim presence in Western Europe is often incorrectly viewed as monolithic, in much the same distorted manner that Western-dominated international media normally presents images of Islam outside Europe. The richness of Islam has long been related to its cultural diversity; it is a misperception to see it as an expression of a monolithic worldwide phenomenon.

Despite a unity of belief, Muslim migrants living in Europe have different ethnic, national, and cultural backgrounds. Across these lines they also subscribe to diverse political and social strategies for articulating their views and options concerning their status in society. In this regard, it is not a contradiction to speak in each case of a culturally distinct Arab, African, Indian, or South-Asian Islam. The identity of Muslims is thus the identity of culturally different people who nevertheless share the same faith. If it is therefore possible to talk about Afro-Islam for African Muslims or Indo-Islam for Indian Muslims, why should it not be possible to talk about Euro-Islam in the context of Muslims who have migrated to Western Europe?

In a project at the Institute du Monde Arabe in Paris in 1992 I outlined my concept of Euro-Islam.²³ The concept of Euro-Islam is intended to provide a liberal variety of Islam acceptable both to Muslim migrants and to European societies, one that might accommodate European ideas of secularity and individual citizenship along the lines of modern secular democracy.

In other words, Euro-Islam is the very same religion of Islam, although culturally adjusted to the civic culture of modernity.²⁴ In European civil societies, an "open Islam" could be as at home as, for instance, Afro-Islam, having been adjusted to domestic African cultures. As I have described them, the major features of Euro-Islam would be *laïcité*, cultural modernity, and an understanding of tolerance that goes beyond the Islamic tolerance restricted to Abrahamic believers (*ahl al-kitab*). In addition, by acknowledging cultural and religious pluralism, Euro-

Islam would give up the claim of Islamic dominance. Thus defined, Euro-Islam would be compatible with liberal democracy, individual human rights, and the requirements of a civil society. It would also contrast sharply with the communitarian politics that result in ghettoization. To be sure, the politics of Euro-Islam would not allow complete assimilation of Muslims.²⁵ Yet it could enable the adoption of forms of civil society leading to an enlightened, open-minded Islamic identity compatible with European civic culture.

The presence of Islam in Western Europe has already proposed a challenge. Related realities trigger a variety of responses by the Muslim migrants and the Europeans. As a response to this situation, Euro-Islam would be directed against both ghettoization and assimilation. It is, furthermore, a democratic response directed by a commitment to individual human rights.

There have, of course, been other responses directed at the challenge. The German Orientalist Tilman Nagel has, for example, proposed that the German government view Muslim migrants arrogantly as "protected minorities." This is originally an Islamic concept describing enemy aliens who have been given temporary safe-conduct.²⁶ In other words, they are people who would continue to be aliens. For Nagel and other German Orientalists, tolerance lies in "keeping the aliens away from Europe in underlining our otherness to them."²⁷

Unlike this xenophobic position, multiculturalists are usually much more benevolent, arguing from a cultural-relativist angle that presents "differences" from a favorable point of view. Nevertheless, the result is the same: Islamic ghettos—in this case, however, in the name of communitarian multiculturalism. Despite different positions, the outcomes are comparable.

Although by no means multiculturalists, the Islamists among the migrants to Europe are nevertheless usually more sympathetic to multicultural positions than they are to democratic integration. The reason is that they understand perfectly well how to instrumentalize multicultural views—how to make use of them for fundamentalist ends. Thus, Islamists often willingly confuse assimilation with political integration in order to rebuff the latter.

This chapter takes the view that Euro-Islamic political integration is the best response to the pending challenge. Muslims need to become members of the European body politic they live in—without, however, giving up their Islamic identity. Citizenship issues ought to be seen within this framework. And toward this end an enlightened Islamic education might serve to maintain Islamic identity without promoting segregationist ends.

SHEDDING LIGHT ON MUSLIM MIGRATION TO EUROPE: THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Many varieties of migration have been studied by historians, and there is no doubt that migration patterns today differ from earlier patterns in many respects. The present moment has been described as a "global age."²⁸ And in the context of a "global village," ever-unfolding structural and institutional networks in economy, politics, transportation, and communication have brought an unprecedented degree of interaction among culturally diverse people. A novel pattern of mass migration all over the world has been one of the many by-products of this globalization.²⁹

Such a level of migration implies great potential for conflict, and it necessitates the development of peaceful solutions that address identity-related issues. Generally, the emerging "global village" has been equated with the "McWorld" of consumption. But present fascination with these ideas has obscured the fact that culture refers in more basic terms to norms, values, and worldviews that result from a social production of meaning.³⁰ Eating hamburgers, watching videos, handling computers, wearing fashionable dress, and the like are only the outcomes of more fundamental social processes. Likewise, the development of a global culture has far more profound bases than the simple spread of an American popular culture of consumption. The rampant use of the global village notion as a sweeping critique of McWorld-culture has also led to wrong and misleading assumptions about impending cultural standardization. Despite the structural reality of the global village, there in fact exists no global culture based on outlooks shared by the entire humanity. Hedley Bull has been among the few scholars who have advanced the insight that the shrinking of the globe "does not in itself create a unity of outlook, and has not in fact done so."³¹ Bull's insight has been phrased in the following manner by Zbigniew Brzezinski: "Humanity is becoming simultaneously more unified and more fragmented."³²

On cross-regional and cross-cultural grounds, I believe it is today possible to observe both globalization and local cultural self-assertion. In my writings, I have coined the formula "the simultaneity of structural globalization and cultural fragmentation."³³ As a Muslim living in the West, I am at pains to be a mediator, seeking to establish bridges between the Islamic world and the West. In this regard, my work has addressed both entities as civilizations, and my first concern has been with their encounter, as now framed in terms of the global village. In this pursuit, I distinguish between economic interaction as bargaining; political interaction among states as negotiation; and cultural interaction on the civilizational level as cultural dialogue. In terms of the latter, it often becomes important to question the notion of "cultural racism," especially when it is implied indiscriminately. The focus of the ensuing analysis will be on the nonstate-related level of cultural interaction.

Muslim migration to Europe has revived the significance of the Euro-Mediterranean region as a classical intercivilizational basin linking the West to

the core of the Islamic world. It would be dishonest to avoid the central question of whether Europe and the Mediterranean are one international society. In the understanding of Hedley Bull, an international society exists when states share "common values . . . [and] conceive of themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another. . . . An international society in this sense presupposes an international system, but an international system may exist that is not an international society."³⁴ In applying these insights to today's Mediterranean region, one may see a combination of system and society. North of the Mediterranean, the European Union forms a society of states interacting with another one. Another society, of predominantly Islamic states, exists south and east of the Mediterranean. Interaction between the two societies takes place on the grounds of an international system in which both state groupings are sub-systemic parts. However, Islamic migration to Europe has blurred the boundaries between system and society and complicated the issue.³⁵

European moralists have suggested that the Mediterranean embodies the basin of a single civilization that combines a northern (European) and a southern (Islamic) component. This view was, for example, presented by several Dutch politicians at an intercultural dialogue held by the European Union at The Hague in March 1997.³⁶ However, an honest cultural dialogue between Islam and the West would dissociate itself from such disruptive moralistic views and meaningless mutual assurances. It would recognize instead that while both groups of states share formally in certain established international norms and values, they simultaneously belong to different civilizations, with different outlooks and worldviews.

In viewing the Mediterranean as a bridge and not a boundary (let alone a warrior frontier),³⁷ the need arises to determine common and shared values. My view is that such Euro-Mediterranean relations and the related migration issues are not basically interstate affairs. A prominent American student of Islam, John Kelsay, has emphasized the fact that "the rapidity of Muslim immigration . . . suggests that we may soon be forced to speak not simply of Islam *and*, but of Islam *in* the West."³⁸

The outcome of this situation will ultimately be related to how Muslims and Europeans deal with cultural divergences in the course of the present civilizational interaction, of which migration is a basic part. Politicians on both sides of this issue have attempted to deny and obscure how it involves fundamental differences in worldview. Those involved must go beyond the censorship of political correctness to address impending and real issues. This must involve both an inclination to reconcile, not antagonize, divergent views, and a clear commitment to avoid concealment. Only in this manner will it be possible to realize how foolish it is to deny existing cultural differences.

Unfortunately, the debate on migration has largely been related to the concept of a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West. In an important

Islamic-Western dialogue undertaken in Karachi, Muslims and Westerners succeeded in going beyond the fallacy of a false sense of harmony. Instead, they assigned to themselves the task of searching for new modes of peaceful coexistence based on a proper answer to the challenge: "how to deal with differences."³⁹ In an interview on the occasion of that event, I argued, "The clash of civilizations was not invented, but it was used, abused for other reasons."⁴⁰ With this concern in mind, one might reconsider John Kelsay's reference to the shift in Islam's importance for the West from Islam *and* the West (an issue of neighborly relations between states) to Islam *in* the West (an issue of neighborhoods within one's own state). In this new situation there is a need to deal with persistent commonalities between both civilizations in a new manner. According to Kelsay:

Perhaps such commonalities serve, in the main, to indicate the nature of disagreement between the West and Islam. . . . But there should be no doubt that in certain contexts, the common discourse about ethics . . . has the potential for creative and cooperative endeavor. Given the increased presence of Muslims in Europe and North America—a presence that makes for a more than intense interaction between the two traditions than ever before—it is important to see this.⁴¹

Among the premises of this chapter is a belief that a common discourse about ethics needs to be linked to the migration debate.⁴² The outcome could be a civic culture shared by all.

ISLAM IN THE WEST: WHAT CHOICES?

As a Muslim living in the West, I have chosen to become a European citizen—however, with a clear commitment to the French notion of *citoyen*, not to the German ethnic concept of *Staatsbürgerschaft*. I claim to maintain my Islamic cultural identity, while combining it with the political identity of *citoyenneté*. In so doing, I find myself in conflict both with an inherent European racism based on exclusive ethnicity, and with an opposed trend of multicultural communitarianism that has been combined with the claims of some Islamist leaders in Europe for a separate Islamic entity within the West. In general, those Islamic migrants who want to become citizens of the West are caught between these views: between rejection, and the pressure to join a cultural ghetto. Such polarization is particularly harmful to Muslim juveniles who have been born in Europe and are seeking to unfold identities and personalities there.

Among Germans, two attitudes exist currently, which represent two extremes toward Muslim migrants: the anti-Islamic, and the philo-Islamic. German philosopher Helmuth Plessner, who found refuge in the Netherlands during the

Nazi period, has criticized the propensity of Germans to shift from one extreme to another, with no option in between. In this case, such a polarization has led on the one hand to those who demonize Islam while glorifying themselves, and on the other to those who have moved from European universalism to cultural relativism, with the result of self-denial. (In fact, the latter two views do not necessarily contradict each other, as I demonstrate below.) Siegfried Kohlhammer has depicted these attitudes as separating the "Enemies and Friends of Islam."⁴³ Of course, there exists a third group which combines cultural open-mindedness with a commitment to the enlightened values of European civilization. But it is unfortunate to see that the extreme views (Euro-arrogant exclusiveness, and self-denial presented as self-opening) are now being represented as dominant.⁴⁴

Muslims like me who subscribe to the Ibn Khaldunian notion of *asabiyya*—a kind of *esprit de corps*, or civilization awareness—believe that such pseudo-opening to others in the shape of self-denial actually represents a decline in the West, concealed as open-mindedness. It is very important that Europeans grasp how a low degree of *asabiyya* is not the alternative to Euro-arrogance and racism. Just as philo-Semitism cannot overcome anti-Semitism, so is cultural-relativist self-denial only the other side of Eurocentric exclusivity.

Likewise, the choice that migrants make regarding the variety of "Islam in the West" will be decisive for the future of Europe. The outcome of the cooperation of the parties involved, as well as their ability to dialogue with one another, may lead to common responses to the pending challenges. In arguing that there is no such thing as an essentialist Islam, just as there is no such thing as an essentialist Europe, one must realize there exists no constant pattern of Islamic or European identity. Islam will always be an ever-changing cultural system designed by Muslims themselves. Similarly, Europe can be an open society in which there is a place for Muslims as equal citizens.

Both inclinations among Europeans—the exclusivist and the self-denying—are great obstacles to intercultural dialogue based on reason. But this dialogue is essential to determining what variety of Islam will prevail in Europe in the future. Migrants could have a multiple identity, a position I support in relation to my own multiple identity as both a Middle Eastern Sunni Muslim and a European citizen.⁴⁵

As much as I am concerned with European exclusiveness, I am equally concerned about the maintenance of orthodox Islamic views among parts of the Muslim community in Europe, and in particular their view that migration is related to the *da'wah*, that is, the call to Islam.⁴⁶ According to this view, like missionaries, Muslims in Europe consider themselves an outpost for the spread of Islam. This belief—and, of course, the publicizing of its rhetoric—can only encourage anti-Islamic attitudes among Europeans and bolster existing prejudices. Thus, for example, among the exiled groups of Muslim extremists in London is one led by Sheikh Omar Bakri, called "Movement of the Muhajirun."⁴⁷ Bakri has clearly linked the

status of migrants to the doctrine of *hijra* in the pursuit of the *da'wah*. And like his late predecessor, the fundamentalist Kalim Siddiqi, who established the Islamic Counter-Parliament in London, Bakri has become prominent through the British media. After the terrorist attacks at U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998 and the U.S. retaliation in Sudan and Afghanistan, Bakri stated in a BBC television interview that Muslims in Europe "are all Osama bin Laden." Slogans like this have proven to be a great disservice not only to Islam, but to all Muslims living in Europe.

A dialogue is imperative to establishing the grounds for a search for commonalities. Though I oppose Euro-arrogant exclusiveness and assimilation, I do not favor cultural-relativist multiculturalism, nor that related cultural communitarianism which has clearly been abused by Islamists. My objection to multiculturalism is related to its inherent support for cultural ghettos, and to its negation of civic identity patterns and the assertion of one law for all.

I favor honest intercultural dialogue, in which both sides, with adequate standing, may seek out positive commonalities among themselves in search of foundations for a civic culture.

Honest dialogue of this sort will not overlook areas of disagreement, but address them consciously, while developing an ability to deal properly with disagreement. The goal of this combination of realism and humanism is a commitment to live together in peace, mutual respect, and self-respect, without feelings of superiority. For enlightened Muslims, it is therefore imperative to reject all kinds of Western missionarism, as well as reverse missionarism. By this statement, I address the need for Muslims to be committed to reason-based dialogue and not to confuse this with the *da'wah*, as some Muslim fundamentalists in the diaspora do. The Qur'an clearly states: "*Lakum dinakum wa liya din* [You have your religion, I have mine]." One cannot turn down Western missionarism and dialogue in favor of one's own, and at the same time be honest and committed to true dialogue and mutual tolerance.

Muslims in Europe need to decouple themselves from the Islamic tradition of associating migration with the spread of Islam, and also from the abuse of this tradition by Islamist groups. Such reason-based dialogue facilitated common understanding in a meeting among open-minded Muslims, Christians, and Jews held in Cordoba in the first week of February 1998 and again in 2000. There the *imam* of Jericho, Sheikh Rajai Abdou, said: "I am in conflict with myself. You want to dialogue and you mean by this intellectual exchange; to me *hiwar* [dialogue] is a means of *da'wah* [call to Islam]."

WESTERN-MUSLIM ENCOUNTERS: LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Earlier, I referred to a distinction between dialogue and negotiation. While the latter is pursued between states, dialogue is not bound to political constraints

that can create gaps between rhetoric and action, word and deed. But true intercivilizational dialogue needs to be both honest and rational—that is, reason-based. This understanding is in line with both the tradition of medieval Islamic rationalism and with the European Enlightenment. It is also in line with the current political culture of democracy and human rights.

In making the choice in favor of dialogue, it is important to learn from history. For example, Prince Hassan Ibn Talal of Jordan has stated, with crucial insight, that “Muslims and Europeans have been at their worst when they sought to dominate each other, and at their best when they looked to learn from each other.”⁴⁸ Research on Muslim-Western relations supports this view. For example, in my view, the opening of the Islamic mind to Hellenism, and the ensuing Hellenization of Islam in the medieval period, were the factors that led to the height of Islamic civilization.⁴⁹ In time, European adoptions from Islamic rationalism at the eve of the Renaissance also led to beneficial new processes within European civilization. As the Berkeley scholar Leslie Lipson has written:

Aristotle crept back into Europe by the side door. His return was due to the Arabs, who had become acquainted with Greek thinkers. . . . Both Avicenna and Averroës were influenced by him. . . . Aristotle was introduced from Cordoba. Aristotle was significant not only for what he taught but more for his method and spirit.⁵⁰

During medieval times Muslim thinkers were able to combine Aristotle's method and spirit with their Islamic mind and identities. They thus accorded Aristotle the status of *mu'allim al-awwal* (the first teacher). Such was the height of Islamic tolerance at the time that the great Islamic philosopher al-Farabi was considered second to Aristotle.⁵¹

As Muslims in Europe search for options, they may refer to this historical record. References to positive historical exchanges between the two civilizations continue to be both topical and relevant for the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. Thus, just as Arab Muslims and Europeans have encountered each other positively in the past on the grounds of *aql* (reason), so might they revive such a spirit as a framework for new dialogue, instead of engaging in new varieties of *jihād* and crusade.

My friend and intellectual mentor at Harvard, the Iraqi Muslim philosopher Muhsin Mahdi, believes that al-Farabi was the greatest thinker in Islamic political philosophy. In fact, al-Farabi was by origin a Turk; but his cultural language was Arabic, and his commitment was to Islamic civilization, not to any particular ethnicity. The Farabian Islamic *aql*-based philosophy is a lasting indication of a Euro-Islamic encounter in its best terms, and could provide the common ground for a new Western-Muslim relationship in the age of migration.

CULTURAL PLURALISM IS NOT MULTICULTURALISM

As a Muslim migrant to Europe, I am opposed to all varieties of monoculture, favoring instead a plurality of cultures. My commitment to civic culture is in clear opposition to that tenet of cultural relativism which denies the importance of common values. Multiculturalism is based on cultural relativism; thus, European multiculturalists look with a sense of romantic-eccentric mystification at other cultures, viewing aliens in the Eurocentric tradition as *bons sauvages*. There are multiculturalists who consider Cordoba an example for multiculturalism, when in fact they lack clear knowledge of the subject. Such mystification is extremely important in understanding the distinction between cultural pluralism and multiculturalism.

To understand the implications of the distinction, one needs to return to the question of choices. Do Muslims living in Europe want to belong to a peripheral minority, with respective minority rights? Or would they rather become members of the European polity itself, with all its respective rights and duties? I see no contradiction between being a European and a Muslim. But there are Islamist groups in Europe which have no interest in Muslim migrants serving as a bridge between civilizations. They are instead interested in using the Muslim diaspora to create political confrontation. In arguing from the point of view of an open-minded Islam, one might again refer to the words of Prince Hassan:

Muslims respect the rule of their host states and the applicable laws. For the principles of Islam require a Muslim minority to obey a state in which it is resident, just as a Muslim state expects non-Muslims to respect and to abide by its laws. The Muslims of Europe are therefore not asking for special privileges, and do not demand what is denied to others. They are merely asking for their religion to be recognized within the European context.³²

Muslims who are committed to this understanding of their position in Europe "view themselves as both Muslims and Europeans, seeing no essential contradiction between those identities," according to Prince Hassan. I believe it is up to Europeans whether or not such views will help Islamic migrants become Europeans. Can such an enlightened Euro-Islam become a reality at the turn of the century? Or will the opposite scenario of a ghetto Islam gain ground among migrants?

It must by now be clear that such an enlightened Muslim position does not accord with those forms of multicultural communitarianism which demand different laws and different treatment for people of different cultural communities. It should be noted that the issue is *intercultural*, not one of "multicultural discourse." The difference is determined by whether one accepts or rejects the paramount importance of a single shared civic culture. I view multiculturalism as a romantic ideology, one that is clearly distinguished from a more realistic cultural

pluralism. In refuting the multicultural reference to Spain, I want to state that Islamic Spain was a society characterized by cultural pluralism; it was not a multicultural society in the cultural-relativist sense that is now spreading through Europe. In other words, Islam was the culture of Arab Spain, and Arabic was its language. No such thing as cultural relativism existed there.

MINORITY RIGHTS AND MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITARIANISM ARE NOT AN ALTERNATIVE TO EURO-ISLAM: WHY?

In the present age of global networking, it is important to learn from the experience of others. In this regard, India, with a considerable Islamic minority, may be seen to provide a good comparative study.⁵³ In research completed for the project of the University of Leiden on the Islamic presence in Western Europe, I dealt with the status of Muslims in India.⁵⁴ Despite the fact that the constitution of India prescribes one secular personal law for all religious communities, the early Congress government, for reasons of political expediency and to lure Muslim votes, allowed the practice of a "Muslim Personal Law." One result has been the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, for which the elections of 1996 and again of 1998 were an alarming signal. This rise has been related to resentment toward the privileges given to minorities. While pointing at these privileges, Hindu fundamentalists have called for the desecularization of India, something that may potentially infringe even on the physical existence of Indian Muslims.

Based on my study of this case, I believe Muslim migrants to Europe should beware of minority-rights issues in light of a growing hatred toward foreigners and the danger of right-wing radicalism.⁵⁵ As in India, I fear that granting special privileges and rights to minority cultural and religious groups in Europe will be counterproductive. Such measures will not only impede the political integration of these groups, but they will encourage the growth of right-wing radicalism. Muslims could end up being treated as the new Jews of a revived European anti-Semitism.⁵⁶

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this analysis, I have tried to establish a clear distinction between multiculturalism and cultural pluralism, and between political integration and assimilation. I have recommended the political integration of Muslim migrants into Europe. Granting citizenship rights and duties to migrant Muslims will have the effect both of smoothing the way for their membership in "The Club of Europe" and demanding from them loyalty to the democratic polity in which they live. In

particular, the acceptance of secular European laws—and, above all, secular constitutions separating religion from politics—will require Islamic migrants to reconsider the concept of the legitimacy of the imam.⁵⁷ Cultural reforms must enable a Muslim migrant to live under the governance of a non-Muslim imam/ruler. But cultural reforms are needed on the European side, as well. In particular, the process of cultural reform must make it feasible for European states to accept Muslims as citizens. Remaking the club by altering the conditions for membership is thus not only an issue that requires Europeans to change. Muslim migrants need to change, too.

Unlike political integration, however, demands that migrants be assimilated involve the effort to deny cultural identity. They thus contradict the notion of cultural pluralism. An Arab Muslim migrant may have a triple identity: religio-culturally, I am a Euro-Muslim; ethnically, I am a Damascene Arab; and politically, I am a German citizen. I believe that the combination of these identities is feasible within the framework of cultural pluralism and political integration.

The argument I have made in support of cultural pluralism clearly runs counter to those notions of multicultural communitarianism pursued equally by Muslim segregationists and European cultural relativists. My criticism of these multiculturalist views is based not only on my commitment to a shared civic culture, but on my opposition to rampant universalisms. As a Muslim with a European education, I oppose all varieties of hegemonic Western universalism, and believe that multiculturalism is just another variety of them. I share the view of David Gress, who made the following observation in his overall study of Western civilization:

Although multiculturalism might seem to contradict universalism, the two were compatible; indeed, multiculturalism was simply universalism applied to cultural politics. . . . Universalism . . . never solved its fundamental dilemma of being both a Western idea . . . and an anti-Western idea.⁵⁸

In my rigorous criticism of advancing cultural relativism to a rampant universalism, I also share the view of the late Ernest Gellner.

Three principle options are available in our intellectual climate: religious fundamentalism, relativism, and Enlightenment rationalism. . . . Logically, the religious fundamentalists are of course also in conflict with the relativists.⁵⁹

Enlightenment rationalism has already succeeded in building bridges between Islam and Europe during two previous encounters. The rationalism of Islamic philosophy was the seed of an Islamic Enlightenment that was prevented from unfolding by the Islamic *fiqh* orthodoxy.⁶⁰ It emerged out of the Hellenization of

Islam, which I have said was the first positive Euro-Islamic encounter. The second positive encounter was the impact of Islamic rationalism on the European Renaissance. In contrast, the Islamic fundamentalism of our age may succeed only in materializing the wrongful prophecy of a clash of civilizations, not in building bridges between them.⁶¹ The spread of such an Islamism in the European diaspora will cause Muslim migrants great pains, because it will only lead to the rise of anti-Islamism and result in the isolation of Muslim migrants in dreadful ghettos.

Ethnic identities are exclusive identities. If cultivated in the diaspora, they will lead to a kind of neo-absolutism and related social conflicts. The alternative is an all-inclusive civil identity, based on cultural pluralism. Thus, while fundamentalism is a modern variety of neo-absolutism, pluralism would encourage people to represent different views while at the same time being strongly committed to shared cross-cultural rules—and, above all, mutual tolerance and respect. Tolerance can never mean that only one party has the right to maintain its views at the expense of the other. For this reason, the exclusivist bias of multicultural communitarianism stands in clear contrast to cultural pluralism and tolerance. One-way tolerance is the tolerance of the loser. Muslim migrants cannot deny others what they require for themselves.

The granting of multicultural minority privileges to Muslim migrants in Europe may prove to be a double-edged sword with far-reaching consequences. On the one hand, it may facilitate unwanted interference by mostly undemocratic Islamic-Mediterranean governments in the affairs of Muslim migrants in Europe. But its political effects could also run in the opposite direction. Thus, on the other hand, ghettoized minorities in Europe could provide the base from which exiled representatives of political Islam act to topple existing governments in the Islamic world. And these Islamists would by no means be democrats.⁶²

In subscribing to the Euro-Islamic view that Muslim migrants should act as a bridge between Islam and Europe, I find myself in opposition to those who would make Europe a refuge for Islamic fundamentalists. Such fundamentalists have no interest in the integration of Muslim migrants. And in siding with the concept of civic culture for all on grounds of cultural pluralism, I also find myself in opposition to multiculturalists and their cultural relativism. I argue that the bottom line for a pluri-cultural (not a multicultural) platform is the unequivocal acceptance of secular democracy, individual human rights for men and women, secular tolerance, and civil society. In my understanding, this is exactly what is involved in Euro-Islam. It is not ghetto Islam or fundamentalist Islam. Thus it is that at the turn of the century Muslim migrants in Europe must choose the destiny they want for themselves and for their children: to continue to be alien; or to join the changed club—without, however, being forced to assimilate.

Due to the great burden of history in Europe and the view of most Europeans that their continent is not designed for migration, the study of Muslim

migrants in Europe should not be confused with the same issue in the United States. In Europe these matters are more complicated, have a different scope, and need the type of sensitive insight that only people familiar with both worlds, Islam and Europe, can provide. Europe has its own strong identity, and this needs to be taken into consideration in addressing these issues.

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