Lifting the Integration Veil

Outcasts From Islam in Western Europe

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Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

Credits

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About the author

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Executive summary

The topic of Islam has become a frequent guest in policy and media debates in Europe, often in connection with radicalisation or with migration from Muslim countries. Amid polarised discussions on how to counter violent extremism, address the threat of foreign fighters, and open or close the ports to migration, scarce attention is devoted to the long-term integration of different cultures within a system based on the rule of law and individual liberties. In fact, the threat to our societies does not stem from migration but from ideologies that foster contempt for and hatred against liberal democracies, paving the way for non-violent and violent radicalisation.

Integration, therefore, is to be viewed as a process substantially hinged on a socio-cultural, values-based, component. This is not to advocate a levelling, monocultural model, but a pluricultural one focused on individuals and their chosen identity, not on pre-constituted groups—as multiculturalists claim. All cultures or traditions are to be accepted and embraced, as long as they respect the rule of law and individual liberties. Every integration process needs to make these limits clear, especially in relation to the most controversial issues.

With specific reference to the prevalent culture among Muslims of immigrant descent in Western Europe, quantitative surveys, accounts and reports from those on the ground show the persistence of a divergence from mainstream views on sensitive topics such as gender equality, religious freedom and sexual orientation. The primary victims of this phenomenon are to be found within the Muslim communities themselves: the 'outcasts' who, in spite of their Muslim background, do not adhere to the prevalent cultural code and are therefore perceived as extraneous and become potential targets of hostility.

While cultural and socio-economic conditions may play a role in this phenomenon, the religious–cultural factor is as crucial as it is overlooked. The same dynamics that lead to radicalisation also affect the attitude towards out-groups, which shows that intolerance is strongly linked with religious conservatism. The lack of adequate integration policies for newcomers and the absence of socio-cultural interconnections between many Muslims and the native European populations deepen the divide, thereby reinforcing Muslims' Islamic identity at the expense of the national one, and fostering prejudice on both sides. Outcasts of Muslim heritage are the first victims of this vicious circle.

Hence, it is necessary to adopt policy measures aimed at promoting liberal democratic rules and values both among newcomers and within the wider society, in the framework of school curricula, reception centres, integration courses, and so on. In the same vein, integration policies should always be focused on and tailored to individuals, rather than the ethno-religious groups to which they belong. It is also paramount to bring together, as much as possible, people of different backgrounds and ethnicities, in order to foster intercultural exchanges under the common denominator of the rule of law and individual liberties. Finally, it is crucial to empower and give voice to progressive actors and outcasts of Muslim background, in order to improve the extent to which people enjoy human rights, to prevent radicalisation and to counter all those narratives—promulgated by the right, the left and Islamist groups—that depict Muslim communities as monolithic entities frozen in an outdated, liberticidal religious orthodoxy.

The political function of rights is precisely to protect minorities from oppression by majorities (and the smallest minority on earth is the individual).

Ayn Rand

Introduction

The topic of Islam has become a frequent guest in policy and media debates across Europe. Unfortunately most discussions are triggered by negative occurrences, such as terrorist attacks, episodes of violence and intolerance, migratory crises and human rights violations. As a result, Islamic extremism has become a burning issue. Policymakers and analysts display deep divisions in their assessments of the phenomenon. The two extremes of the spectrum are represented by, on the one side, those adopting a rigidly relativistic and multiculturalist approach, often combined with portraying Muslims as victims; and, on the other, hard-line supporters of the 'clash of civilisations' theory, at times with racist or conspiratorial connotations. Both groups tend to consider Muslims a monolithic entity: the one to condone 'their' religion, culture and related behaviours; the other, to condemn them.

The recent phenomenon of ISIS, with its concomitant terrorist attacks and foreign fighters, and the simultaneous migration crisis in Europe have further fuelled this polarisation, unleashing a flurry of different reactions and sharpening tensions both domestically and at the international level. Amidst heated discussions in politics and the media on whether to open or close the ports and how to redistribute newcomers, scarce attention is devoted to what happens once boats have docked and bureaucratic procedures are concluded—in a word, to long-term integration.[1] Similarly, radicalisation is often considered within the context of its purely violent connotations—whence the abused acronym 'CVE' (countering violent extremism) at the policy level.

It would be misleading, though, to analyse problems stemming from Islamic extremism through the prism of either border management—since many radicals are European citizens, sometimes of the second or third generation—or securitisation—for terrorism and foreign fighters constitute the tip of the iceberg of more profound dynamics. These dynamics, ultimately, have to do with respect (not to say acceptance or even appreciation) for a system based on the rule of law and individual liberties as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and the national constitutions—whose observance must supersede religious beliefs and cultural traditions.

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[1] 'Whilst European totalitarianism may have partly inspired jihadism as an ideology, it is likely that mistakes in the integration of foreigners have something to do with the radicalisation of young Muslims in recent years. The topic requires further research and debate. It is obvious that today's European societies are not generating sufficient allegiance of their members and that our approaches to integration need to change' (V. Novotný, *Politics of Identity IN FOCUS: What Next after Multiculturalism* (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2015).

Hence, this study aims to address the vexed question of the values-based integration of Muslims of immigrant descent in Western Europe. So as not to remain on a purely theoretical level or to focus on the violent fringes, I will approach this by investigating the prevalent outlook towards out-groups and the condition of members of vulnerable categories (such as women, LGBTs and apostates) among Muslim communities. Indeed, integration deficits linked to radical interpretations of Islam need to be addressed bearing in mind that Muslim communities, like any other, are comprised of individuals, many of whom are actually the first victims of intolerant ideologies and behaviours.

My analysis is carried out using a mixed methodology based on qualitative and quantitative literature, and on interviews with experts, first-line practitioners and community members. In selecting the quantitative data, I have relied on EU-funded projects, peer-reviewed academic articles and reputed survey institutes from different Western European countries. When available, priority has been given to comparative studies that report aggregate data from multiple sources. Concerning expert input, I focused on the following groups: (1) progressive Muslims working on human rights, radicalisation prevention and integration programmes; (2) state officials and civil servants dealing with integration and/or radicalisation in different capacities; and (3) activists and refugees of Muslim heritage expressing nonconformist views and identities. As regards the criteria for the selection of individuals, I first targeted actors whose activities I had already been exposed to (either in person or indirectly), adding more as I encountered them in the course of my investigations and on the suggestion of trusted sources. Specifically, I interviewed the following people (in alphabetical order):

• Noura Amer, representative of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association Belgium (AWSA-BE);

• Ahmed Azzouz, inspector-advisor for the Executif des Musulmans de Belgique;

• Three staff members of the Belgian Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (FEDASIL): Johan Bourlard, a radicalisation expert; and Abdel-Ilah El Abbassi and Nicolas Van Puymbroeck from the Studies and Policy Department;

• Cherif El Farri, Islam expert and director of the Centre of Expertise and Advice for Prevention and Intervention of Radicalism and Extremism (CEAPIRE);

• Annalisa Gadaleta, Belgian Centre for Equal Opportunities and Fight against Racism (UNIA), formerly a Molenbeek alderwoman with the Flemish Green Party;

- Karin Heremans, Principal of the Royal Atheneum school in Antwerp and Co-Chair of the Education Working Group at the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN);

- Hosine/Yasmine, a transgender Muslim woman of Algerian origins;[2]

- Mohammed Khattab, a Muslim civil servant in an Austrian state agency that deals with integration;

- Marzia Masjidi, an Afghan-born representative of the Humanitarian Welfare Association—an organisation devoted to providing training on gender equality to newcomers of Muslim origin;

- Oumayma, a bisexual, feminist young woman of Muslim descent working for Brussels' RainbowHouse, an umbrella organisation for LGBT support groups;

- Sam Touzani, who was born into a Muslim family and raised in Molenbeek, and is now an openly atheist playwright, comedian and free speech activist;

- Ludovic Mohamed Zahed, an openly homosexual imam, founder of the first European inclusive mosque (Paris) and director of the CALEM Institute (Marseille).

- Two Muslim refugees (one Macedonian, the other Lebanese) who obtained this status in Belgium because of their sexual orientation, and one Muslim Lebanese currently seeking asylum for the same reason.

- The founder of the Movement of Former Muslims of Belgium and three of its members (two Belgians of Moroccan origin and an Afghan refugee);

- A high-ranking police officer of Muslim background who deals with radicalisation.

Additional information was gathered through interviews and meetings held in the framework of a previous project in which I had taken part. Published by the European Foundation for Democracy, it was devoted to the comparative study of the integration of refugees in seven European countries. We interviewed 245 individuals across Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, 131 of whom were refugees, the others being representatives of state agencies or civil society

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[2] The original, male name is given together with the female one upon her explicit request, for she views this as a form of activism.

organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers.[3] At the request of the participants or for security reasons, the current paper only discloses a few of the interviewees' names.

In terms of structure, this study is divided into three main parts. In the first I discuss the meaning of 'integration', a term that in many policy debates is as abused as it is undefined. My main claim is that integration cannot be conceived without a central value component, one that hinges on respect for the rule of law, the liberal democratic order and individual freedoms. These requirements do not entail cultural homogenisation but represent the lowest common denominator for social coexistence in a liberal state. As such, they ought to be actively promoted by state authorities and civil society organisations working with newcomers—with no exceptions based on multiculturalist considerations. Having defined 'integration' according to these normative lines, in the second part I analyse the specific integration challenges faced by Muslims of immigrant descent who live in Western Europe. My aim here is to assess what the main sensitive issues are and the factors that may be driving socio-cultural disconnections. In this framework, the attitude of Muslim communities towards perceived outcasts and out-groups represents an indicative benchmark of the tension between liberal democratic values and conservative traditions. In the third and final part, I offer policy recommendations on overcoming this tension, in order to promote respect for individual rights and societal cohesion.

Methodological disclaimers

At risk of raising suspicions of *excusatio non petita, accusatio manifesta*, I wish to address from the beginning a criticism that all too often surrounds topics of this kind: my aim is *not* to stigmatise Muslims or to claim that problematic attitudes towards out-groups do not exist among other segments of society, because they clearly do. Yet, one issue does not exclude the other, and the simple truth is that a problem of cultural integration of *many (not all)* Muslims in our society does exist. Too many surveys tell us about the cleavage between the majority of Muslims of immigrant descent and the majority of native European people

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[3] European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe: Review of Integration Practices and Policies* (2018).

on certain matters related to individual freedom and equal rights. Too many cases of home-grown Islamic radicalisation, even among middle-class second generations, have afflicted Europe in recent years, giving rise to viciously anti-democratic groups, terrorist acts, foreign fighters, forced marriages, honour killings and less serious, but nonetheless unacceptable, occurrences of daily intolerance linked to culture and religion.[4] The Brussels neighbourhood of Molenbeek—epicentre of several terrorist networks involved in recent attacks, and in part characterised by a separate, closed community and by the presence of shady mosques and radical preachers—has sadly acquired the status of being the prototype of a ghetto neighbourhood where integration has failed. Definitely gone are the (not distant) times when analysts could argue that its late mayor Philippe Moureaux (among others) 'successfully managed—or so it seemed' the issues related to the local Muslim community.[5] The Parisian *banlieues*, certain London neighbourhoods, the Swedish city of Malmö and many other European areas offer similarly disturbing pictures.

Just as we need to effectively address other forms of religious extremism, far-right and far-left groups, racism and xenophobia among Europeans, we cannot turn a blind eye to radicalisation or extreme conservatism among Muslims. The yardstick must be the same in all cases: racism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia and all other forms of intolerance against the 'others' are simply unacceptable and inexcusable because they are *wrong in themselves*, regardless of the colour of those involved and the ideology inspiring them. To quote Hosine/Yasmine (the transgender woman of Muslim origins I interviewed during this study), 'it is not a matter of stigmatising a community, it is about criticising an ideology: are we perhaps stigmatising Germans when we talk about Nazism?' No ideology is beyond scrutiny, whatever the earthly or celestial gods inspiring it.

Concerning the subject of this study, when we speak of Western European Muslims, we are, for the most

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[4] Emblematic, from this point of view, is the hell on earth experienced daily by a young gay Muslim in his community in a Paris *banlieue*, with no state intervention. Unfortunately, this is something which seems to occur more frequently than it should. See *YouTube*, 'Reportage : Lyes Alouane Cet Algérien Gay Qui Milite Pour Les Droits LGBT', posted 11 February 2019.

[5] T. Koutroubas, W. Vloeberghs and Z. Yanasmayan, 'Political, Religious and Ethnic Radicalisation among Muslims in Belgium', in M. Emerson (ed.), *Ethno-Religious Conflict in Europe: Typologies of Radicalisation in Europe's Muslim Communities* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2009), 52. In particular, Moureaux has been accused of having built a clientelist system, giving radical Islam free rein in exchange for electoral support, and this to the point that, when Hind Fraihi's famous inquiry *En immersion à Molenbeek* came out, he called on local imams to unite with him against the book. See A. Gadaleta, 'KVAB 2017 – Multiculturalism', *YouTube posted on* 30 June 2017 and J. Sinnige, 'Terrorisme. L'ancien bourgmestre de Molenbeek critiqué pour son laxisme', *Courrier international*, 17 November 2015. In a similar vein, Touzani reported during my interview with him that Moureaux personally prevented him from performing in Molenbeek's cultural centres, due to the actor's opposition to Islamism.

part, talking about a 'new immigrant-based religious minority',[6] insofar as '[t]he vast majority of Muslims residing in the West are of recent immigrant background',[7] with religion being one of the main cultural heritages passed on to the second generation.[8] From this viewpoint, the relational challenges host communities and recent newcomers face within Western European societies are not entirely dissimilar to those involving second and third generations of immigrant descent. In both cases, we have a clash of identities, which has become all the more acute after the first generation. A strong sense of identity that is deeply rooted in both the dominant culture and the legislation of the countries of origins finds itself in the minority in a context ruled by different values and laws.[9] This identity is often rooted in religion, as I will elaborate below.[10] For this reason, I have chosen to focus on the common factor of religious identity and not on ethno-national ones, an approach that accords with a specific stream of literature on these topics.[11] This is not to deny specificities and differences between nationalities, ethnicities and branches of Islam (which will be highlighted when relevant), but to isolate the impact of the religious factor on integration.

A disclaimer is necessary here. Margaret Thatcher once famously said, 'there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women.'[12] Since I profoundly share the authentic, foundational pluralism this statement underscores, I am always wary of talking about, *inter alia*, 'groups', 'communities' and 'collective identities'. This is not to deny the existence of multiple layers of bonding and commonalities between individuals, some social and others biological (ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, sex, sexual orientation, political affiliation, etc.), but to reaffirm the unicity of each person in spite of these layers. For the purposes of this paper, this methodological and philosophical premise undergirds my resolute rejection of any essentialisation of Muslim men and women under the umbrella of religion or ethnicity. This means that whenever I speak about the 'the Muslim community', 'identity' or similar concepts, I do this merely as a simplification to indicate a category of individuals most of whom share a certain heritage or certain values,

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[6] A. Duderija, 'Emergence of Western Muslim Identity: Factors, Agents and Discourses', in R. Tottoli (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West* (London: Routledge, 2015), 199.

[7] Ibid. See also H. El Karoui, *A French Islam Is Possible* (Institut Montaigne, 2016).

[8] Duderija, 'Emergence of Western Muslim Identity', 201.

[9] See ibid., 200; and M. Maliepaard, 'Religious Trends and Social Integration: Muslim Minorities in the Netherlands' Ph.D. dissertation, Utrecht University, 2012, 18.

[10] Duderija, 'Emergence of Western Muslim Identity', 201.

[11] For a description of the theoretical background, see, among others, Maliepaard, 'Religious Trends and Social Integration'.

[12] *The Guardian*, 'Margaret Thatcher: A Life in Quotes', 8 April 2013.

and not to suck every Muslim into a frozen archetype.[13] Actually, the policy goal of this study is the very opposite, namely to guarantee a safe space of individuality for everyone beyond fixed identity paradigms— bearing in mind that some of the strongest advocates of secularism in the West are, in fact, of Muslim origins.[14] Furthermore, I do not claim to provide a statistical picture of Muslims and their views; this study remains a qualitative one, although it draws significantly on previous quantitative analyses and surveys.

The final disclaimer concerns my approach to Islam as a religion and culture. In opposition to a certain line of thought on the matter, I follow the sociologist Ruud Koopmans in avoiding any theological debate on the 'authentic Islam', my goals being purely empirical: first, I aim to assess how the majority of Muslims in Europe approach certain issues; second, I want to offer policy recommendations on how to bring illiberal behaviour in line with European constitutional orders.[15] I am neither a Muslim nor a theologian, but this is not the main point; rather, it is not necessary to take a stand on the 'true' interpretation of a certain creed to critically evaluate the ways in which people behave under its banner, in their legal and social implications. In fact, taking such a stance might even be counterproductive, especially if done naively or maliciously by people with a vested interest in either excusing or attacking Islam as a whole, according to the specific reading they select. Furthermore, the 'authentic' commandments of a religion, whatever they may be, should be completely irrelevant for a secular state, which derives its legitimacy from the constitution, as well as for the protection of the individual rights that constitution guarantees. Consequently, my analysis and policy recommendations will draw purely on the compatibility of a certain interpretation of Islam with the liberal democratic framework, not on theological discussions.

[13] 'It is worth stressing that "Muslims designates not a homogeneous and solidary group but a heterogeneous *category*" (Brubaker 2013, 6, emphasis in original). Indeed, Muslim immigrants in Western Europe differ in terms of ethnic background, economic integration, juridical status, and religiosity' (E. Banfi, M. Gianni and M. Giugni, 'Religious Minorities and Secularism: An Alternative View of the Impact of Religion on the Political Values of Muslims in Europe', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42/2 (26 January 2016), 3).

[14] This paper extensively quotes some of them, both activists and academics. See also V. Colombo, *Basta! Musulmani contro l'estz*, 2010). Several others may be identified through the network Humanists International. Some are public figures, but many more are common people of Muslim faith or descent who praise the secular, liberal democratic systems protecting their rights as citizens and believers or non-believers.

[15] 'Rather than entering into, ultimately theological, debates about whether Islam is inherently pluralistic or fundamentalist, I approach the issue empirically by investigating the attitudes of European Muslims and Christians towards their respective religions. This, rather than any theological approach, will allow us to determine whether most or only few European Muslims adhere to fundamentalist interpretations of their creed, whether such fundamentalist attitudes are more than just a correlate of strong Islamic religiosity, and whether fundamentalism is less, more, or just as widespread among European Christians' (R. Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups: A Comparison of Muslims and Christians in Western Europe', J*ournal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41/1 (2015), 37).

On integration

In spite of omnipresent debates on the issue, one would look in vain for a universally accepted definition of 'integration'—or, in many cases, for any definition at all, even in the policy documents outlining what integration requires. The puzzle of integration has many pieces, which are social, economic or cultural in nature. How these elements are articulated and placed in balance is determined by the specific policy choices and the philosophy driving them. Different theories tend to privilege one or the other component, although, in practice, integration policies are often designed in the absence of an overarching theoretical background. In this section, I will briefly address the two main theories of integration, one focused on socio-economic inclusion and the other on the values and culture of the host society. Then I shall attempt to outline what I view as a workable definition.

Integration as socio-economic and bureaucratic inclusion

In many cases, integration has primarily a socio-economic dimension. Courses and programmes for newcomers generally emphasise language and work, or in certain cases even work alone, with little attention being paid to the cultural and value components.[16] At the theoretical level, as well, integration has traditionally been measured predominantly through socio-economic indicators, in particular access to education and to the labour market.[17]

A purely normative approach, not even based on socio-economic benchmarks but mostly on bureaucratic facilitations, is used in the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX).[18] This project, co-financed by the EU Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, is meant to measure integration in EU member states, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland,

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[16] This is, generally speaking, the finding of European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*. It has been corroborated by many practitioners and refugees.
[17] Maliepaard, 'Religious Trends and Social Integration', 12.
[18] Migrant Integration Policy Index.

Turkey and the US. It does this through the prism of 167 policy indicators, divided into 7 macro-areas: labour market mobility, family reunion, education, political participation, permanent residence, access to nationality and anti-discrimination policies. From the analysis of the macro-areas and the related indicators in MIPEX, we may infer two main points. First, MIPEX defines integration in purely formal terms, paying no attention to the values and culture of the host society. Second, integration emerges largely as a function of governmental action. It has therefore nothing to do with either the achievements or efforts of newcomers, but only with the adoption of certain legal, logistical and economic facilitations provided by the state, which are assumed—but nowhere proven—to promote favourable integration outcomes. In doing this, MIPEX tips the balance heavily towards the *rights* of migrants, while ignoring their *responsibilities*, especially when it comes to cultural integration. Besides the theoretical questionability (why should assistance be given to foreigners who do not commit to integrating?), these parameters are highly debatable even on the practical level. In fact, being granted the formal status of resident or citizen, being reunited with family members and enjoying the benefits of a welfare state are certainly desirable conditions for newcomers. What is dubious is whether these advantages actually facilitate their inclusion in the host society and their desire to become full-fledged members of it, since, in themselves, these benefits are fully compatible with a radical disconnection from the external environment and with poor performance in the labour market.

In Europe, Sweden is considered one of the main examples of this approach, insofar as 'economic assistance and residence permits remain independent from integration performance. There is still a fairly broad political consensus that the acquisition of citizenship fosters integration, while the introduction of citizenship requirements stifles it.'[19] Nevertheless, in spite of having the highest naturalisation rates, Sweden, Belgium, and the Netherlands perform much worse than Germany, Austria and Switzerland in labour market participation and social integration.[20] Regarding Belgium specifically, from the 1960s onwards, the authorities largely promoted the intake of foreign labourers, so that until the late-1980s–early-1990s immigrants enjoyed easy access to jobs and family reunification,[21] and until 2012 acquiring

[19] A. Skodo, 'Sweden: By Turns Welcoming and Restrictive in Its Immigration Policy', Migration Policy Institute (5 December 2018).
[20] R. Koopmans, 'Trade-Offs between Equality and Difference: Immigrant Integration, Multiculturalism and the Welfare State in Cross-National Perspective', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36/1 (January 2010), 1–26.
[21] K. Phalet and M. Swyngedouw, 'Measuring Immigrant Integration: The Case of Belgium', *Centro Studi Emigrazione* 40 (2003).

citizenship remained an extremely easy and quick procedure.[22] However, this has not prevented the emergence of social gaps, ghettoisation and even radicalisation, regardless of whether one ascribes the phenomenon to hostility and discrimination by the host society, or to migrants' self-exclusion and identitarian closure, or to some combination of these two positions. What is certain is that no integration policy (separate from rights attribution) existed until the early 1990s.[23]

Socio-cultural/values-based integration

Another theory conceives cultural and value aspects as a core part of the integration process. This, clearly, may be articulated in very different ways when it comes to policies, practices and expected outcomes.

At the one end of the spectrum, integration is sometimes conflated with assimilation, which detractors and identitarian groups alike regard as homogenisation that erases identity differences.[24] Actually, even the term 'assimilate' is polysemous. Etymologically, it refers to the idea of 'similarity', not 'sameness' or 'homogeneity'. Furthermore, it bears both a transitive meaning ('making similar'), in which the target population is an object, and an intransitive one ('becoming similar'), in which the target population is an active subject. Third, it can be understood either as a final state or as a process.[25] In other words, what is called 'assimilation' may take on very different concrete meanings, ranging from forced conformity in all aspects of life (typical of dictatorships[26]) to the normal process of voluntary inclusion in the fabric

[22] S. Cosemans, 'Frank Caestecker, Bernadette Renauld, Nicolas Perrin En Thierry Eggerinckx, *Belg Worden. De Geschiedenis van de Belgische Nationaliteitsverwerving Sinds 1830*. Mechelen: Wolters Kluwer, 2016. 283p.', Contemporanea.

[23] Phalet and Swyngedouw, 'Measuring Immigrant Integration: The Case of Belgium'.

[24] H. Redgrave et al., *The Glue That Binds: Integration in a Time of Populism*, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (London, 2019), 17.

[25] R. Brubaker, 'The Return of Assimilation? Changing Perspectives on Immigration and Its Sequels in France, Germany, and the United States', in C. Joppke and E. Morawska (eds.), *Toward Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 42.

[26] One of the most dramatic cases of this kind nowadays is the physical and cultural persecution of Muslim Uyghurs in China. See *Meduza*, 'An Internment Camp for 10 Million Uyghurs: Meduza Visits China's Dystopian Police State', 1 October 2018.

of a society.[27] Having clarified that, I will avoid this negatively charged term here and favour the more versatile 'socio-cultural/values-based integration', even though it, too, contains similar ambiguities: what is 'integration', what is 'culture' and what are 'values'?

I shall try in a moment to enucleate these concepts and to provide workable definitions, but not before addressing a preliminary question: how can a liberal democratic state, pluralist by definition, select some values and cultures among many and promote them, without betraying its very nature? Indeed, those who are wary of assimilation tend to regard socio-cultural integration as a purely voluntary process, for which no specific result is set or even desirable.[28] This minimalistic theory can be the outcome of a collective/communitarian approach, which sees society as an agglomeration of juxtaposed communities all maintaining their own customs, or can arise from a radically individualistic mindset. The latter, which is actually more nihilist than liberal in outlook, despises the idea of a 'common culture' as an illiberal instrument of oppression: 'From a liberal point of view, which became *the* point of view in Western states in the second half of the twentieth century, it is a violation of the dignity and autonomy of the individual, citizen or immigrant, to force a substantive culture on her, except the thin and procedural culture of liberalism itself'.[29]

Once again, it is a matter of definitions. While one could definitely agree with the conscious rejection by Western countries of an all-encompassing, oppressive idea of 'culture' on the model of Communist and Nazi–Fascist dictatorships, one could also argue that the 'procedural culture of liberalism' is anything but thin. The idea of everyone being free to express his or her individuality in all domains, as long as this does not infringe upon others' liberties, is actually a very strong normative concept. It is precisely this that characterises the main *raison d'être*, and virtue, of Western liberalism and shapes its collective identity. Different cultures, religions, traditions, ethnicities, and so on can only coexist if they observe that framework. They should be welcomed in Europe, respected and included, as long as they do so.

Let us move from theories to a practical example. According to a comprehensive evaluation of all surveys conducted in the UK among Muslims, '83% of Black and Asian Muslims agree, including 37%

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27 To quote Touzani in *Cerise sur le ghetto*, 'un peu d'assimilation n'a jamais toué personne'.
28 C. Joppke and E. Morawska, 'Integrating Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States: Policies and Practices', in C. Joppke and E. Morawska (eds.), *Toward Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 5.
29 Ibid.

who strongly agree, that it is important that people of their ethnic group should maintain their own values, beliefs and traditions'.[30] The question, posed as such, has little meaning. What do 'values, beliefs and traditions' denote? It is one thing to refer to a certain faith, clothing style, habits such as celebrating religious holidays, and so on. But it is quite a different matter to refer to 'values' such as family and social control of women, religious intolerance and homophobia; and to 'traditions' such as genital mutilation, child marriage, honour killing and the like. One could argue that those surveyed might have interpreted the question in different ways, so that no definitive conclusion can be drawn from the statistic cited. Nevertheless, a state has both the right and the duty to define the values it rests on, and to draw a clear line between those that, in a liberal democratic society, may be considered matters of individual conscience and those which conversely are inviolable since they guarantee the rights of others and social coexistence.

1. The idea of 'monoculturalism', however it is called, must be rejected in a democratic society, which by definition should embrace different cultures and identities.

2. Cultural pluralism is admissible only as long as it does not imperil the liberal democratic system and the rights of others.

In fact, it is on the very basis of these arguments that the 'multiculturalism of pillars' must be rejected, along with its nationalist and populist counterpart, as I will explain in the next paragraph.

The debate on multiculturalism

Having clarified that cultural integration does not coincide with the promotion of a monocultural model, it remains to be seen whether a multiculturalist approach is compatible with my second claim, that is, that the liberal democratic framework and the rights of others need to be respected.

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[30] Ipsos MORI, *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain* (2018), 31.

Like the concepts examined above, 'multiculturalism' enjoys several definitions, at both the scholarly and policy levels.[31] The first interpretation corresponds to the 'lived experience of diversity', grounded in the kaleidoscope of individuals from different identities but all equal in rights and dignity. This is also called 'descriptive multiculturalism'.[32] The second is based on a normative ideology 'that attaches positive value to cultural diversity, calls for the equal recognition of different cultural groups, and calls upon the state to support such groups in various ways'.[33] This 'multiculturalism as a political process' focuses on groups and manages diversity by automatically assigning individuals to those groups, which are seen as ethnic and cultural boxes, each ruled by different norms pertaining to personal rights and public policies.[34] The first theory is grounded in a universalistic conception of human rights: in the words of the Belgian–Moroccan Hind Fraihi, 'let's get rid of exotism. A person is a person'.[35] The second—in its more radical, post-colonialist forms—rejects universal human rights as a form of Western imperialism. Afflicted by a post-colonialist sense of guilt, the champions of this type of multiculturalism react to it by advocating the protection of the 'authenticity' of other cultures from contaminating Western influences, no matter the consequences. Muslim scholar Elham Manea calls this standpoint a new form of the 'white man's burden'.[36]

These two opposed approaches strongly affect integration policies. The universalist model, while embracing diversity, tends to include a cultural and value dimension, in the interest of the host society *as much as of the newcomers, and especially of the vulnerable individuals among them* (this point can never be stressed enough). Conversely, the normative multiculturalist model tends to focus on economic and daily life issues, and to reject cultural integration—even in its human rights component—

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[31] A. Triandafyllidou, 'The Multicultural Idea and Western Muslims', in R. Tottoli (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Islam in the West* (London: Routledge, 2015), 219; and R. Koopmans, 'Multiculturalism and Immigration: A Contested Field in Cross-National Comparison', *Annual Review of Sociology* 39/1 (30 July 2013), 147–69.

[32] Koopmans, 'Multiculturalism and Immigration', 149.

[33] Ibid., 148.

[34] E. Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law: The Impact of Legal Pluralism in the UK* (London: I. B. Tauris Academic, 2016), 11.

[35] H. Fraihi, *En immersion à Molenbeek* (Paris: La Différence, 2016), 10.

[36] Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law,* 27.

as a form of 'assimilation' and 'cultural imperialism'.[37] Through these lenses, multiculturalism[38] has often become synonymous with a justified refusal to integrate.[39]

Normative multiculturalism has shaped the dominant policies in different parts of Europe, even if it is not as influential now as it was in the past. I will give a few examples. In the UK, the process, which had already begun in the late 1960s, intensified in the 1970s and 1980s with the establishment of cultural, housing and even health-care services based on ethnicity, and the creation of ethnic umbrella organisations as political interlocutors of municipalities and recipients of funding on behalf of 'their' communities.[40] With the focus of communitarianism progressively shifting from race and ethnicity to religion,[41] the creation in 1997 of the Muslim Council of Britain represented the 'institutionalisation of Muslim political demands', which was also encouraged by the government's appetite for a unified Islamic interlocutor.[42] In Belgium, migrant self-organisations were empowered at the local level to act as the official representatives of certain minorities and to negotiate specific policies with the municipalities, on the assumption that 'these umbrella organizations would be best suited to voice and defend the interests of all people in their respective communities'.[43] In Sweden the same happened between 1975 and 1986:

> Sweden in 1975 became one of the first countries to officially adopt a policy of multicultural-ism, embracing ethnic and religious diversity and state support to safeguard minorities' iden-tity and culture. The state thus provided financial support for a range of activities, including state-funded minority cultural associations and mother-tongue instruction in primary schools.

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[37] For instance, according to an author analysing integration courses in Belgium, instructing women about their rights in the West is not a form of empowerment but a 'securitarian narrative' meant to impose 'funding [*sic*] concept [*sic*] of western cultures and values, such as equality, democracy and human rights' (C. Y. Ghanem, 'Integrating Muslim Migrants with a Gender Perspective? An Analysis of Integration Policies in the City of Brussels', *Peace Human Rights Governance* 3/1 (2019), 24).

[38] From now on I will use the term in its normative meaning, in accordance with what is now the usual practice.

[39] Redgrave et al., *The Glue That Binds*, 3.

[40] Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law*, 40–6.

[41] C. Peach, 'Muslims in the 2001 Census of England and Wales: Gender and Economic Disadvantage', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29/4 (July 2006), 631; and M. Mirza, A. Senthilkumaran and Z. Ja'far, *Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism* (London: Policy Exchange, 2007), 22.

[42] T. Peace, *European Social Movements and Muslim Activism: Another World but With Whom?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 42.

[43] A. Saeys et al., 'From Multicultural to Diversity Policies: Tracing the Demise of Group Representation and Recognition in a Local Urban Context', *European Urban and Regional Studies* 26/3 (2019), 246.

This policy lasted until measures were introduced in 1986 that moved Swedish integration policy away from targeting groups and towards individuals.[44]

In the Netherlands, under the 1979 Ethnic Minorities' Policy, migrants were considered within a group framework, rather than as individuals: 'membership of an ethnic minority was perceived as a master status, a dominant social characteristic that takes precedence over all other characteristics'.[45] Even after modifying its multicultural policies, the Dutch state has continued to subsidise 'a wide spectrum of immigrant organisations on an ethnic and religious basis and has co-opted their leaders in representative councils for each main ethnic group, which have significant consultation prerogatives'.[46]

The theoretical flaw behind this type of multiculturalism is twofold. At the group level, it freezes collective identities according to a specific contingent reading of cultures, or even to a clichéd interpretation thereof.[47] This may even descend into borderline racism, implicitly following a reasoning whereby 'Muslims are backward, but since they are a discriminated minority we should respect and preserve their culture.' At the individual level, it fails to consider that each individual has multiple layers of identities, and it is not clear why one should have pre-eminence over the others for policy purposes. To quote the Council of Europe:

> Freedom to choose one's own culture is fundamental; it is a central aspect of human rights. Simultaneously or at various stages in their lives, everyone may adopt different cultural af-filiations. Whilst every individual, to a certain extent, is a product of his or her heritage and social background, in contemporary modern democracies everyone can enrich his or her own identity by integrating different cultural affiliations. No one should be confined against their will within a particular group, community, thought-system or world view, but should be free to

[44] Skodo, 'Sweden: By Turns Welcoming and Restrictive in Its Immigration Policy'.

[45] H. Entzinger, 'The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism: The Case of the Netherlands', in C. Joppke and E. Morawska (eds.), *Toward Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 62.

[46] Koopmans, 'Trade-Offs between Equality and Difference', 7.

[47] 'In this sense, populists on both the left and the right obsess over and essentialise rigid conceptions of identity, rooted in race, ethnicity and religion, rather than focus on addressing the multifaceted nature of identity in an increasingly globalised world' (Redgrave et al., *The Glue That Binds*, 20). See also Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law*, 9.

renounce past choices and make new ones—as long as they are consistent with the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.[48]

In other words, to mention the concrete example of a person interviewed for this paper: which group should represent a Belgian–Moroccan woman of Muslim origins who happens to be atheist and bisexual?

But the practical implications of multiculturalism are even more decisive than the theoretical ones. In fact, one of the core aspects of multiculturalism is the recognition of group rights alongside, or even *before*, individual rights, on the premise that groups are entities as real as individuals.[49] The consequence of this is that the individuals artificially placed in a certain box may suffer twofold discrimination: from their supposed community, which refuses them certain rights it deems culturally unacceptable; and from the state, which has decided to empower the group and its 'cultural authenticity' in opposition to the individual.[50] Indeed, it is misleading to frame multiculturalist integration, as opposed to the 'individualist' and 'cosmopolitan' models, as a dialogical way of 'accommodating' groups' demands in the spirit of 'multi-directional respect and recognition' that avoids granting any specific culture a place of 'privilege'.[51] While disguised under what Amartya Sen describes as 'the apparent Western modesty that takes the form of a humble reluctance to promote "Western ideas of democracy"',[52] this thesis seems to imply that some groups' traditions of having women and girls socially segregated, sexually mutilated or married off represent 'cultural demands' worth engaging with, discussing and possibly accommodating. Even when cultural rights are protected in the form of individual ones,[53] one must be wary of the negative implications for members of the most vulnerable categories: how free are they, really, to make their own choices? For instance, is it part of individual rights, as some claim, for a primary school Muslim girl to obtain an exemption from sports activities? Or is this, to the contrary, a downright infringement of her

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48 Council of Europe, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue 'Living Together as Equals in Dignity'* (7 May 2008).

49 Triandafyllidou, 'The Multicultural Idea and Western Muslims', 220.

50 See Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law*.

51 T. Modood, 'KVAB 2017 – Multiculturalism', *YouTube*, posted on 30 June 2017.

52 A. Sen, 'Democracy and Its Global Roots' *The New Republic*, 28 October 2003.

53 'The individual rights and liberties protected by the constitutions of liberal states have allowed immigrants *qua* individuals to find recognition and protection for their distinct cultural practices' (Joppke and Morawska, 'Integrating Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States: Policies and Practices', 8).

right/duty to receive the same education as her peers?[54] And how free is a young girl to decide against her family's wishes?

Finally, in these times dominated by the political resurgence of nationalism and identity claims on the right, we cannot but follow the director of the think tank British Future in noting that 'a group-based multiculturalism is hoist with its own petard if the majority community feels that the natural response is to assert its own group-based ethnic interests'.[55] In other words, if we move from an individualistic and universalistic logic based on citizenship to a collective, multiculturalist one based on ethnicity, it is difficult to counteract the ethnocentric argument that opposes the 'native' population and its interests to the immigrants, who are seen as a threat to them.[56] Identity politics is a double-edged sword, fostering polarisation on either side.

For all these reasons, and because of the integration gaps evident in Western societies, the debate in the most recent years has shifted from 'multiculturalism' to 'interculturalism'. This concept was officially laid down by the Council of Europe in 2008. It is based on mutually respectful dialogue between individuals and groups from different traditions, against the backdrop of an inviolable framework of human rights defined as 'universal'. It differs from assimilation (as it is understood by those who give it a pejorative definition) in that it compels authorities not to accept a majority ethos only; and from multiculturalism, in rejecting pillarisation and moral relativism. The ultimate goal is the promotion of 'full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law', leaving 'no one marginalised or defined as outsiders'.[57] The document, importantly, also stresses the need for minorities to learn the language of the majority (without relinquishing their own), in order to fully participate in society.

While this idea of interculturalism is theoretically sound, the document lacks concreteness.[58] In particular, it does not explain how, in cases involving insolvable conflicts, 'dialogue' is to be reconciled with the 'universalism of human rights'. In fact, while a dialogical approach may lead to sensible solutions

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Redgrave et al., *The Glue That Binds*, 17.
[56] 'Ten years ago identity politics was reserved for minorities. Today the white majority population uses it too' (I. Krastev, 'Can Europe Go Wrong? Of Course', interview by J. Vogt, *Erste Stiftung*, 18 September 2018).
[57] Council of Europe, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue 'Living Together as Equals in Dignity'*.
[58] See Novotný, *Politics of Identity*.

on public policy issues, such as the use of minority languages in public settings or the definition of how to accommodate religious identities in the public sphere (issues involving food, clothing, celebrations, etc.), most controversies actually centre on respecting individual freedoms and equality. While the document itself recognises that, among other things, gender equality, freedom of expression (including religious criticism) and non-discrimination are non-negotiable principles, it fails to address the effectiveness and expected goals of intercultural dialogue when conflicts of this kind come up. For instance, we cannot possibly compromise on culturally driven genital mutilation (including male circumcision outside personal consent or medical necessity), accepting solutions like the 'soft infibulation' that a Somali–Italian gynaecologist once proposed.[59] In a similar vein, conceding that women are 'complementary' to men, or 'equal in dignity' (and not in rights)—a position Islamists tried to put forward in post–Arab Spring constitutions[60]—does not quite strike me as a viable middle ground between full 'equality' and 'subalternity'. In such cases, dialogue can only have the instrumental function of *persuading* people who have different values about the merits of the liberal ones—and ultimately of conveying the message that they *must* abide by them whether they see the merits or not. But it can never serve to *redefine* a different, 'intercultural' ethos.

A workable definition of integration

The preceding analysis leads to the following elements for a definition of integration:

1. Integration has cultural and value dimensions. It cannot be reduced to economic opportunities and practicalities of daily life. There can be no societal coexistence, let alone cohesion, in the absence of a common denominator.

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[59] M. Bocci, 'L' Infibulazione è Sempre Barbarie', *La Repubblica*, 22 January 2004.

[60] L. Abu-Odeh, 'Egypt's New Constitution: The Islamist Difference', in M. Rosenfeld and S. Mancini (ed.), *Constitutional Secularism in an Age of Religious Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 160–74; and M. M. Charrad and A. Zarrugh, 'Equal or Complementary? Women in the New Tunisian Constitution after the Arab Spring', *The Journal of North African Studies* 19/2 (15 March 2014), 230–43.

2. Socio-cultural integration does not mean imposing an all-encompassing system of life. It is compatible with multiple identities, which deserve protection against discrimination.

3. Cultural pluralism finds its limits in respect for the rule of law and individual freedoms (i.e. no argument based on culture is acceptable as an excuse to violate the law or infringe others' rights).

4. Multiculturalism based on groups' rights and societal pillarisation does not respect conditions (1) and (3). Hence, it should not be considered a viable model of integration.

Theoretically, the definition of integration proposed by the European Commission seems to include all the necessary elements:

> . . . [I]ntegration should be understood as a two-way process based on mutual rights and corresponding obligations of legally resident third country nationals and the host society which provides for full participation of the immigrant. This implies on the one hand that it is the responsibility of the host society to ensure that the formal rights of immigrants are in place in such a way that the individual has the possibility of participating in economic, social, cultural and civil life and on the other, that immigrants respect the fundamental norms and values of the host society and participate actively in the integration process, without having to relinquish their own identity.[61]

This definition, however, is too generic to provide concrete guidance to policymakers and social operators if not complemented with the above-mentioned specifications. In particular, 'respect' must be understood not only vis-à-vis external groups (which is the multiculturalist assumption), but also internally, towards the members of one's own group itself. This might require that certain aspects of one's identity be indeed relinquished, when they clash with the law and others' rights.

It is important to stress that this goal cannot be attained overnight. It would be delusional to assume that cultural integration can be ensured by requiring newcomers to sign formal declarations of intent, or by offering them a few lectures, speeches or party manifestoes. These are better than nothing, but we should

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[61] European Commission, *On Immigration, Integration and Employment*, Communication, COM (2003) 336 final (3 June 2003), 17.

be aware that integration is a process, as opposed to an end-state. It hinges on a mixture of measures aimed to 'improve the competence of minority groups in the host country's language, and to increase awareness of its values, history and traditions', in addition to 'policies to facilitate social and labour market inclusion'.[62] At the same time, the obligation to obey the law of the land, including respect for constitutional rights, should not be considered an end-state, but a prerequisite. The vast majority of the people I consulted on this subject, and *especially* refugees and vulnerable individuals, assertively called for compulsory teaching and enforcing of the law and the secular framework, with no tolerance for transgressions. To ensure this, formal declarations of intent compelling newcomers to abide by the values and laws of a liberal democracy are not a useless rhetorical expedient, if social benefits and residence permits are conditioned upon their observance.

I wish to summarise these points with the words of refugee-supporting practitioners who attended a workshop on values-based integration convened by the European Foundation for Democracy.[63] According to them, values-based integration can be defined as a binary process whereby newcomers, in interaction with locals, learn to respect the law of the land and others' individual liberties (at the minimal, non-negotiable level), and progressively become more involved in active participation in the life of the local society, hopefully reaching the point of internalising liberal democratic values. It should go without saying that the reverse is also true: newcomers need to have their rights protected against all forms of racism and discrimination.[64]

Unfortunately, European countries are far from reaching this level of societal cohesion. In the following section, I will address the issue of the integration of Muslims of immigrant descent in Western Europe, in order to assess what the main problems are in terms of integration as hitherto defined.

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[62] M. Emerson, 'Summary and Conclusions', in *Interculturalism: Europe and Its Muslims in Search of Sound Societal Models* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2011), 3.

[63] I was one of the organisers of the workshop, which was held in Brussels on 18–19 October 2019.

[64] In this vein, see also Redgrave et al., *The Glue That Binds*, 34.

Integration challenges facing Muslims in Western Europe

Setting the scene

Freedom of religion or belief constitutes an inviolable guarantee of European legal and moral orders, as well as one of the multifaceted aspects of a pluralistic society. The fundamental recognition of this right cannot be separated from two additional considerations: (1) like any other right, freedom of religion is not absolute, but needs to be balanced with the rights of others; (2) religion not only has an individual, inner component, but also has behavioural and societal aspects that impact the outside world. Therefore, when dealing with integration or lack thereof, religious tenets and behaviour not only *may*, but *should*, be subjected to scrutiny.

When dealing specifically with Islam, analysts, researchers and policymakers need to navigate by minding the cliffs of two opposing, and equally dangerous, trends. One is the populist wave, which views the whole of Islam as an existential threat to our civilisation, and migration as its Trojan horse—sometimes with conspiratorial overtones, such as the theory of a coordinated, worldwide plan to 'substitute' European people with migrants. On the opposite side we have the 'Islamophobia' narrative, whereby any analysis, let alone criticism, of religious-driven intolerance, sharia-based tenets or Islamist political movements is taken to represent a form of Western imperialism and racial discrimination. This narrative has two core flaws. First, it conflates 'Islamism', which is an ideology and a basis for law and politics,[65] with Islam, which is a spiritual creed. Second, it knowingly disregards the fundamental difference between hatred against individuals targeted because of their faith or descent, and the assessment of Islam as an ideology driving certain kinds of behaviour—which is why the EU, correctly, utilises the terminology 'anti-Muslim hatred' instead of 'Islamophobia'.

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[65] 'Islamism' may be defined as a socio-political ideology built upon the rules and dogmas of Islam. See T. Volk, 'The Islamist Challenge: How Europe Can Defend Its Values', in V. Novotný (ed.), Unity in Adversity: Immigration, Minorities and Religion in Europe (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2017), 38.

Socio-cultural integration of Muslims in Europe: attitudes towards out-groups

Different studies show that Muslim immigrants are less likely to integrate than non-Muslim ones—the time spent in the country being equal, and irrespective of origin or social condition.[66] This applies to various aspects of integration, such as identification with the local nationality,[67] knowledge and use of the local language,[68] ethnocultural segregation,[69] employment[70] and attachment to the values of liberal democracies.[71] Furthermore, compared to other ethno-religious minorities, Muslims are by far those who make the most requests for religious rights to be accommodated in Western societies.[72] As a consequence, except for certain Muslim minorities (see below), surveys conducted in Western Europe offer the picture of a significant cleavage between a mostly secularised non-Muslim population and a religiously conservative Muslim one.[73]

This is especially true in relation to out-groups, that is, people perceived as extraneous who are often the objects of hostility.[74] The attitude towards certain categories of the population, such as different ethno-religious groups, LGBTs, women, and non-believers, is a particularly relevant benchmark for testing the acceptance of the liberal democratic framework. As specified above in the discussion on assimilation, this is not to claim that the whole of society should have the same views and hold the same values, but to stress

[66] A. Bisin et al., 'Are Muslim Immigrants Different in Terms of Cultural Integration?', *Journal of the European Economic Association* 6/2–3 (2008), 447; and Peach, 'Muslims in the 2001 Census of England and Wales', 645.

[67] J. Tillie et al., *EURISLAM: Finding a Place for Islam in Europe: Cultural Interactions Between Muslim Immigrants and Receiving Societies* (2013), 93.

[68] Bisin et al., 'Are Muslim Immigrants Different in Terms of Cultural Integration?', 447.

[69] Peach, 'Muslims in the 2001 Census of England and Wales', 651; and Phalet and Swyngedouw, 'Measuring Immigrant Integration: The Case of Belgium'.

[70] Phalet and Swyngedouw, 'Measuring Immigrant Integration: The Case of Belgium'; R. Koopmans, 'Does Assimilation Work? Sociocultural Determinants of Labour Market Participation of European Muslims', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42/2 (2016); Ipsos MORI, *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, 13; and Peach, 'Muslims in the 2001 Census of England and Wales', 643.

[71] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups', 39 and 43. And see below.

[72] Koopmans, 'Multiculturalism and Immigration', 151.

[73] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups', 52.

[74] See the definition given in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.

that there is a sphere of individual rights that nobody is authorised to infringe, whatever his or her own views and values.

Compared to the overall population, including believing Christians, most Western European Muslims tend to show significantly higher hostility towards out-groups.[75] Let us examine some examples. According to Koopmans' cross-border survey of Sunni Muslims in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Sweden, '57% do not accept homosexual friends, 45% do not trust Jews and 54% see the West as an enemy out to destroy Islam. Hostility towards all three out-groups is present among 26% of the Muslim respondents'.[76] Regarding homosexuality, in the UK only a tiny 8% of Muslims agree that it should be legal (and 10% 'tend to agree'). This is opposed to 73% among the whole population and 67% of Christians.[77] A more positive sign comes from France, where 67% of Muslims state that homosexuals should be free to live their life as they wish, as opposed to 26% against.[78] It must be remarked, nevertheless, that among the wider French population 88% of those who were asked the same question—in the same year by the same survey centre—replied in the affirmative.[79] A problematic outlook towards women and their personal freedom is definitely an issue to be addressed. According to different sources on the ground,[80] neighbourhoods with high concentrations of Muslims witness widespread social control of Muslim women, and this at all levels, from the family to the community. Indeed, homogenous neighbourhoods play a considerable role in reinforcing traditional ideas, thus 'making a shift to mainstream less likely',[81] as will be explained in more detail below. According to polls in the UK, 45% of Muslims think that 'wives should always obey their husbands', with 38% even favouring polygamy.[82] In the Netherlands, 28% of Muslims (compared to 3% of the native Dutch population) believe that husbands can forbid their wives to work.[83] Concerning anti-Semitism, the German agency for domestic security—the first of the European intelligence agencies to do so—has recently

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[75] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups', 47.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ipsos MORI, *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, 66.

[78] Ifop pour Le Point et la Fondation Jean-Jaurès, *Étude auprès de la population musulmane en France, 30 ans après l'affaire des foulards de Creil* (2019), 39.

[79] Ifop pour Jasmin Roy, *Observatoire des LGBTphobies: Le regard des Français sur l'homosexualité et la place des LGBT dans la société* (2019), 16.

[80] As interviewed by the author. See also European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*; and Gadaleta, 'KVAB 2017- Multiculturalism'.

[81] M. Maliepaard and R. Alba, 'Cultural Integration in the Muslim Second Generation in the Netherlands: The Case of Gender Ideology', *International Migration Review* 50/1 (March 2016), 77.

[82] Ipsos MORI, *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, 66.

[83] Maliepaard and Alba, 'Cultural Integration', 73.

published a report on 'Anti-Semitism in Islamism', which addresses the rising threat of hatred against Jews among Germany's Muslim communities. Defining Islamism as a form of political extremism that aims to eliminate democracy, the report stresses that its ideology is inherently anti-Semitic and influences even Muslims who have no direct connections with organised Islamism.[84] One of the most problematic findings is that the increase in anti-Semitism may be linked to the arrival of more than one million Muslim migrants between 2014 and 2017.[85] This explanation was confirmed by the high-ranking Muslim police officer I interviewed for this study. It shows, once again, the importance of linking humanitarian duties with cultural integration.

It must be noted that the tension between liberal democratic orders and Islam is not necessarily an overt one, especially in those societies where communities tend to be organised in separate pillars. For instance, in the UK, 83% of Muslims and 66% of the general population believe that 'it is possible to fully belong to Britain and maintain a separate cultural or religious identity'.[86] Different polls give contradictory indications of how this translates into identification, or lack thereof, with the local nationality.[87] In any case, the problem lies elsewhere. Irrespective of national identification, problems arise when core values of liberal democracies clash with those of the 'community'. If 78% of Muslims in Britain assert that 'it is deeply offensive to me personally when images of the Prophet Mohammad are published,'[88] with 11%–18%[89] even deeming violence a justified reaction;[90] slightly less than half consider women not equal to men; and only 18% agree or tend to agree that homosexuality should be legal—then a tension clearly exists, especially in comparison with the wider population's view on the same matters.[91] Other worrisome signals have been coming from Sweden. The police commissioner interviewed explicitly cites Sweden as one of the most worrying cradles of Islamism, confirming anecdotal accounts from refugees and civil society

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[84] M. Gerstenfeld, 'German Intelligence Issues Taboo-Breaking Report on Muslim Antisemitism', Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (30 April 2019).

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ipsos MORI, *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, 58.

[87] The same research shows that the vast majority of British Muslims identify with their British nationality, and appreciate the British democratic system. The EURISLAM project argues the very opposite.

[88] Ipsos MORI, *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, 70.

[89] This depends on which polls are taken into account.

[90] Ipsos MORI, *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, 69.

[91] Ibid., 66.

operators.[92] Furthermore, this alarming picture is reinforced by two studies on Islamism commissioned by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (the administrative body under the Ministry of Defence that is in charge of social protection). The first study, focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood, describes in detail this Islamist network in Sweden and the polarising discourse its organisations promote—often while enjoying state funding and official recognition.[93] The second report concentrates on Salafism and discloses the widespread reality of intolerance and extremism in Muslim neighbourhoods, which afflicts women, non-Muslims and 'impious' Muslims with harassment and violence.[94]

A significant and troubling trend in many European countries is that this kind of conservatism can be found on an equal or even larger scale among younger generations. Koopmans' cross-border survey,[95] for instance, indicates that there are no significant differences between first and second generations when it comes to placing Islam above secular laws. In the Netherlands, a small majority of second-generation Muslims adopt a more liberal outlook than their parents on gender matters; however, a worrying 20% are actually more conservative than the previous generation.[96] Another example comes from France: Muslims who reject secularism and advocate stricter religious practices and sharia law represent around 20% of the Muslim population under 40, but almost 50% of younger individuals. In parallel, secularised Muslims are the least represented among the younger generations.[97] In addition, a very recent survey shows that the last three decades have witnessed a marked reinforcement of religious orthopraxis in all domains of daily life among French Muslims.[98] In the UK, a study found that British Muslims aged 16 to 24 tend to be both more puritanical and radical than their parents; larger numbers of the younger generation feel that Muslims and non-Muslims have nothing in common, tend to avoid non-Muslims, are more prone to support a sharia-based system (including the death penalty for apostates) and express comparatively

[92] European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*, 78.

[93] A. Carlbom, *Islamic Activism in a Multicultural Context: Ideological Continuity or Change?* Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency and Malmö University (2018).

[94] M. Ranstorp et al., 'Mellan Salafism Och Salafistisk Jihadism – Påverkan Mot Och Utmaningar För Det Svenska Samhället' (mentioned in J. Bergman, 'The Relentless Radicalization of Sweden', *Gatestone Institute*, 13 July 2018).

[95] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-Groups'.

[96] Maliepaard and Alba, 'Cultural Integration', 89.

[97] El Karoui, *A French Islam Is Possible*, 19.

[98] 'Ce que ces résultats traduisent, c'est que, dans cette population, la norme sociale est beaucoup plus religieuse aujourd'hui qu'il y a trente ans' (J. Fourquet, 'Le "tchador" n'a pas encore dit son dernier mot', interview by T. Mahler, *Le Point*, 18 September 2019).

more sympathy for terror groups such as Al Qaeda.[99] Furthermore, in all these countries, the overall identification with the nation of residence seems to have increased only marginally from generation to generation.[100] Marzia Masjidi, the Afghan representative of the Humanitarian Welfare Association, has stated on the basis of her own experience that her compatriots who arrived in Belgium 25 years ago were more open-minded than those coming at present. Other Muslim first-line practitioners have confirmed that new generations show an obsession for the prescriptive aspects of Islam, reading all things through the lenses of a rigid halal–haram dichotomy.[101] It must be stressed, however, that this is not the universal view on the matter. Ahmed Azzouz, inspector and advisor of the Executif des Musulmans de Belgique, speaks of improvements in critical thinking among the younger generations of Muslims. The same view is shared by Ludovic Mohamed Zahed, an openly homosexual Algerian–French imam.

This aggregation of data and opinions is certainly unsystematic in many ways, as we do not have pan-European studies conducted at the same time, on the same topics, and with the same methodology (although we do have cross-border ones, as has already been mentioned). Therefore, the figures given cannot be universalised so as to place all Western European Muslims in one basket. However, the comparative analysis makes it safe to state that certain features of contemporary Western society—and ultimately, certain individual rights—are particularly distressing for a significant number of Muslims. Critics of this kind of survey argue that they foster prejudice against Muslims, and deepen the 'us vs. them' divide.[102] The obvious counter-argument is that they merely unveil an *already existing*, profound rift between *a relevant number* of (not *all*) Muslims and the rest of society, a divide that is not simply going to fade away if left unspoken and unchallenged. Furthermore, as extremisms typically feed on each other, overlooking these problems[103] may actually have the opposite effect of further polarising European populations, to the advantage of populist and xenophobic forces.

Most importantly, we should not forget that, while we indulge in theoretical debates on these dynamics, people on the ground are concretely suffering the consequences thereof in their daily lives, with vulnerable

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[99] Mirza, Senthilkumaran, and Ja'far, *Living Apart Together*, 5.

[100] Tillie et al., *EURISLAM*, 93.

[101] 'Permitted/forbidden' in Islam.

[102] R. Shabi, 'Beware of "What British Muslims Really Think?"', *Al Jazeera*, 14 April 2016.

[103] In the words of Khattab, a Muslim civil servant in an Austrian state agency dealing with integration, the 'fear to be racist'.

individuals being the most exposed. For instance, Marzia Masjidi and FEDASIL's radicalisation expert Johan Bourlard, in their different capacities, report on serious issues concerning respect for women—both asylum seekers and personnel in reception centres—especially among Muslims. This happens in spite of laws and regulations that are, in theory, quite strict.[104] According to Khattab—a Muslim civil servant in an Austrian state agency dealing with integration—some homosexual newcomers prefer not to attend integration courses, even at the cost of losing social benefits, due to the constant harassment they endure from their peers. The situation is even worse in collective reception centres, where gays 'are put together with the same people they are escaping from'.[105] Indeed, several asylum seekers and refugees have reported episodes of intolerance and harassment against women and LGBT people in reception centres.[106] The three gay Muslim refugees I interviewed describe a very tense situation, almost unbearable. One of them, who is currently living in a collective refugee centre waiting for his status to be assessed, told me that he would never admit to being homosexual out of fear for his own safety—and yet he still suffers verbal harassment due to suspicions and innuendoes. Another gay refugee left the centre after a few days due to serious bullying. The atheist Afghan refugee reported a similar experience (he was once told: 'we should wage a jihad against you'). They describe the psychological impact of pressure, fear and isolation as devastating—all of them have had to resort to seeing a psychologist. Nor is the situation any better for European citizens of Muslim heritage when they face ostracism, discrimination and attacks. Even the police sometimes refuse to take action: 'You would better move to another neighbourhood' is what both Hosine/Yasmine and Lyes Alouane, a French homosexual of Algerian origin[107] were told by the police upon filing the umpteenth complaint about aggression from members of 'their' community. Commenting on this, the police officer I interviewed did not excuse the authorities' laxity, but he also stressed that 'for the police it is almost impossible, from a practical standpoint, to protect minorities, when facing the opposition of an entire neighbourhood counting thousands of people'. In this kind of situation, occurrences of social unrest are a concrete possibility, as shown by locals rioting against the police during the arrest of terrorist suspect Salah Abdeslam in Molenbeek.[108]

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[104] Abdellah El Abbassi, from FEDASIL, spoke to me about various actions that can be taken against transgressors. These range from verbal reprimands, to suspension of pocket money and even exclusion from the centre.
[105] Khattab, interview by the author, September 2019.
[106] European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*, 32.
[107] See *YouTube*, 'Reportage: Lyes Alouane'.
[108] S. Sykes, 'Missiles Thrown at Police in Molenbeek by Salah Abdeslam "supporters" – Their Sick "HERO"', *Express*, 19 March 2016.

Hence, we have no other choice but to address an issue that for too long has been swept under the carpet. To do this, we need to dig to the very foundation, inquiring into the root causes of the disaffection with the core values of our liberal democracies that is in evidence among a significant share of European Muslims.

Socio-economic factors and 'reactive religiosity'

According to the theory of 'reactive religiosity', conservatism/fundamentalism grows in reaction to a hostile environment. In other words, the more people feel discriminated against and excluded by the outside world due to their identity and values, the stricter they become in emphasising and defending them.

While certain studies confirm this theory, identifying a nexus between perceived discrimination and a stronger religious attachment,[109] others cast doubt on it.[110] The main common problem for surveys of this kind is their failure to provide a precise definition of discrimination, and therefore to distinguish between downright acts of prejudice, racism and intolerance, and cultural misunderstandings. The case of the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*[111] is emblematic: it was perceived as discriminating against Muslims for satirising the Prophet Muhammad, even though it had mocked a long list of other beliefs, sentiments and communities. Equally representative are the cases where people do not take advantage of economic opportunities because of cultural–religious demands: the refusal to meet these demands is sometimes perceived as discriminatory even when based on objective rules and necessities related to work (see below).

Moving from the individual to the institutional level, the theory of reactive religiosity predicts an increasingly strong attachment to an Islamic identity the more this identity is challenged by laws and society. However,

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[109] Maliepaard, 'Religious Trends and Social Integration', 114.
[110] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-Groups', 37.
[111] The well-known magazine's editorial board was exterminated in a terrorist attack in January 2015 for having published satirical cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.

studies do not find an evident correlation between, on the one hand, public recognition of Islam and its demands, and, on the other, the extent to which individuals identify with Islam. For instance, according to the EU-funded EURISLAM project, Belgium shows the highest level of religiosity in spite of being one of the most permissive countries when it comes to Muslims' requests; in Switzerland, the most restrictive country, the level of religiosity is the lowest.[112] Similarly, there is no clear connection between a negative environment for religion and the level of religiosity: in Germany one finds the most negative climate, but not the highest religiosity.[113] The UK, as well, exemplifies the case in point: in spite of being one of the most permissive countries when it comes to the recognition of minorities' demands—the very prototype of multiculturalist models—the level of integration there scores the worst in all benchmarks examined by EURISLAM. British Muslims emerge, comparatively, as the least progressive,[114] the most detached from the culture of the non-Muslim majority,[115] the least integrated in terms of social bridging,[116] and those identifying the least with the country of settlement and the most with the country of origin.[117]

If we turn our gaze from conservatism to out-and-out fundamentalism, we find that, here too, the causes have no apparent relationship to the exclusion of Islam from the public sphere, immigration-related experiences of exclusion or perceived discrimination.[118] Similarly, hostility against out-groups does not seem to spring from marginalisation or emerge in reaction to the environment, if one considers that similar attitudes against the same categories of vulnerable people are also registered in the countries of origin of European Muslims, where their culture is certainly dominant.[119]

The role of education and socio-economic variables in reactive religiosity is controversial, as is the direction of the causal link. For example, higher qualifications seem to have a positive effect in making

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[112] C. Torrekens and D. Jacobs, 'Muslims' Religiosity and Views on Religion in Six Western European Countries: Does National Context Matter?', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42/2 (26 January 2016), 331. For instance, although the highly debated 2009 referendum banned the construction of minarets in Switzerland, the percentage of Swiss Muslims who are in favour of building minarets is smaller than elsewhere in Europe (Tillie et al., *EURISLAM*, 49).

[113] Torrekens and Jacobs, 'Muslims' Religiosity and Views on Religion in Six Western European Countries', 332.

[114] Tillie et al., *EURISLAM*, 97.

[115] Ibid., 61.

[116] Ibid., 98.

[117] See, for example, the data given in ibid., 29.

[118] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-Groups', 51.

[119] Ibid., 53.

French Muslims more sympathetic towards secularism,[120] although it is striking that 20% of educated Muslims favour the superiority of sharia law over state law.[121] Drawing from his own experience, Zahed also points to conditions of intellectual and material poverty as a breeding ground for extremism and intolerance. In the same vein, higher educated Muslims in the Netherlands are more egalitarian in their gender ideologies[122] and less attached to their religious identity (although, surprisingly, there is no impact on religious practice).[123] There are therefore arguments supporting the idea that socio-economic disadvantage negatively affects socio-cultural integration, which in turn fosters isolation and a stronger attachment to the homogenous group.

Conversely, other findings show the very opposite: a high level of education, higher qualifications[124] and a higher employment rate[125] in some cases actually bring about a stronger disaffection with secularism and the local identity,[126] or result in more engagement in religious practice.[127] This could be the outcome of educated Muslims' higher sensitivity towards perceived or real discrimination, followed by reactive religiosity and rejection of the mainstream environment: 'Radicalized Muslims do not tend to be underprivileged, uneducated individuals on the fringe of society, but rather feel a strong sense of commitment and responsibility toward their religious community: "eradication of poverty and universal secondary education are unlikely to change these feelings. Indeed, those who are well-off and well-educated may even perceive such feelings more acutely"'.[128]

Koopmans' cross-country survey offers a more elaborate picture. On the one hand, fundamentalism is shown as being inversely proportional to one's level of education and the status of one's job, although

[120] El Karoui, *A French Islam Is Possible*, 19.
[121] Fourquet, 'Le "tchador" n'a pas encore dit son dernier mot'.
[122] Maliepaard and Alba, 'Cultural Integration', 88.
[123] Maliepaard, 'Religious Trends and Social Integration', 33–6.
[124] Bisin et al., 'Are Muslim Immigrants Different in Terms of Cultural Integration?', 450; and M. Verkuyten, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Radicalization Among Muslim Minority Youth in Europe', *European Psychologist* 23/1 (January 2018), 25.
[125] Bisin et al., 'Are Muslim Immigrants Different in Terms of Cultural Integration?', 450.
[126] 'Muslims do not seem to assimilate with the time spent in the UK, or, at least, they seem to do so at a much slower rate than non-Muslims. Also, education does not seem to have any relationship with the attenuation of identity for Muslims. Finally, job qualification as well as living in neighborhoods with low unemployment rates seem to be associated with a higher rather than lower sense of identity' (ibid., 446).
[127] See n. 123.
[128] Verkuyten, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Radicalization Among Muslim Minority Youth in Europe', 25. See also F. Fleischmann, K. Phalet and O. Klein, 'Religious Identification and Politicization in the Face of Discrimination: Support for Political Islam and Political Action among the Turkish and Moroccan Second Generation in Europe', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 50/4 (2011), 638.

the correlation is very weak.[129] On the other hand, socio-economic variables fail to explain why (1) socio-economic conditions being equal, Muslims are considerably more fundamentalist than Christians and (2) Alevites, a Shiite branch of Turkish Islam, are much less supportive of fundamentalism than Sunni Muslims. In sum, 'the relation between education and religion is not that straightforward'.[130]

Finally, there is another causal conundrum that needs to be addressed. So far, I have examined reactive religiosity, that is, whether feelings of discrimination and socio-economic conditions increase religiosity. What about causality in the opposite direction? Does extreme religiosity lower the feeling of inclusion and diminish socio-economic opportunities?[131] It may do so, according to various sources. A survey conducted by the European Institute of Peace among Muslims in Molenbeek found that '[a]t times, when the demands of employers and the personal religious conviction are at loggerheads, the latter prevails'.[132] This is also what El Farri, Muslim director of the Antwerp-based Centre of Expertise and Advice for Prevention and Intervention of Radicalism and Extremism (CEAPIRE), reported, on the basis of accounts from the Flemish employment agency Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeidsbemiddeling en Beroepsopleiding: there are cases of Muslims refusing jobs because the latter require activities seen as religiously inappropriate (selling or distributing alcohol or pork, women having to remove the hijab, etc.). In the same vein, a census comparing different minorities in the UK has found that, among the South Asian community, Muslims' employment rate is significantly lower than those of Sikhs and Hindus, the main reason being the minimal participation of Muslim women in the work force. The cause has been traced to a 'distinctive religious, rather than South Asian, culture'.[133] Two facts from the UK job market demonstrate the point: the employment rate of South Asian Muslims in the UK (1) differs from the rates of other South Asians of non-Muslim descent and (2) is similar to the employment rate of the wider Muslim population.[134] 'Fear of contamination by the lax morals of British society, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity and lack of respect for elders is strongly felt'.[135] A more comprehensive study on the matter has assessed the impact of socio-cultural assimilation on economic opportunities among Muslims of different origins. Using data extracted by EURISLAM, the study measured the extent of this impact by

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[129] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-Groups', 45.
[130] Maliepaard, 'Religious Trends and Social Integration', 40.
[131] Maliepaard acknowledges this kind of limitation in studies of reactive religiosity (ibid., 122).
[132] European Institute of Peace, *Molenbeek and Violent Radicalisation: 'A Social Mapping'* (2017), 38.
[133] Peach, 'Muslims in the 2001 Census of England and Wales', 642.
[134] Ibid., 645.
[135] Ibid.

means of the following indicators: language proficiency, media use patterns, social ties to the majority group and liberal gender values. According to this report, the employment gap is linked not so much to the 'ethnic penalty' as to gaps in these integration factors, which reduce working skills and female employment.[136] This does not mean that anti-Muslim discrimination plays no role in decreasing economic opportunities for European Muslims—it does.[137] However, it is also important to weigh potential ethnic penalties against the skill gaps and cultural barriers to performing certain tasks.

To conclude and summarise this issue, there is no conclusive evidence that socio-economic factors have a meaningful impact on Muslims' lack of integration. Nor is there any proof that fundamentalism is causally related to marginalisation and feelings of exclusion. In some cases, the opposite relation seems to apply: weaker socio-economic performance caused by a refusal to come to terms with key cultural features of the host society (language, gender equality, work habits, etc.). Most importantly, these kinds of socio-economic theories fail to address the elephant in the room: why do similar conditions bring about very different results among traditional Muslims, on the one hand, and Muslims from minority sects and non-Muslims, on the other?

The religious factor

The elephant in the room is the impact of a conservative, or even radical, religious ideology on Muslims' integration in Europe. First of all, we need to acknowledge that Islam constitutes a distinctive feature strongly shaping the identity of many Muslims in the West (the vast majority in certain communities).[138] A stronger religious identity, in turn, translates into a perception of a greater distance from out-groups (both Muslim and non-Muslim).[139] Although religious identity does not necessarily equate to religious piety, multiple studies confirm that Muslims show a considerably higher level of

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[136] Koopmans, 'Does Assimilation Work?'

[137] Tillie et al., *EURISLAM*, 86; and L. Bradshaw, 'Study Confirms Discrimination in Brussels Jobs Market', *The Bulletin*, 5 July 2019.

[138] Duderija, 'Emergence of Western Muslim Identity', 202; Tillie et al., *EURISLAM*, 31; and Maliepaard, 'Religious Trends and Social Integration', 90.

[139] Tillie et al., *EURISLAM*, 96.

devotion than non-Muslims.[140] Often this religiosity includes fundamentalist features, defined on the basis of three elements: assertion of the need to return to eternal and unchangeable rules laid down in the past, acceptance of one sole interpretation of religion binding for all believers and belief in the primacy of religious rules over secular laws.[141] Koopmans' cross-border survey of Western European Sunni Muslims found that '75% think there is only one possible interpretation of the Quran, which is binding for every Muslim, and 65% say that religious rules are more important to them than the laws of the country in which they live', with no significant differences between first and second generations.[142]

Research conducted in other countries confirms this data. In the UK, different surveys have found that a significant percentage of Muslims would like to have sharia law introduced in the British system (43% in family matters and one in six in criminal law as well),[143] and 7% would even support an Islamic Caliphate on ISIS's model,[144] while 24% sympathise with violence organised by groups to 'protect their own religion'.[145] In Germany 47% of Muslims believe that 'following the prescriptions of my religion is more important for me than democracy', and 43% of Dutch Muslims state that 'the rules of God are for me more important than the Dutch laws'.[146] In France, more than one in four Muslims believe that 'sharia law should prevail over the laws of the Republic'. This percentage rises to 41% among Muslim residents who do not have the French nationality.[147]

Overall, among Western European Sunni Muslims, there is a meaningful link between religious identification and fundamentalism, in the sense that the former is a predictor of the latter.[148] This may seem obvious, as if fundamentalism were a normal symptom of bold religious piety. However, among other faiths a strong religious identity does not necessarily entail fundamentalist beliefs. Indeed, while 50% of strongly religious Sunnis agree with all the three items of fundamentalism, this number

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[140] Bisin et al., 'Are Muslim Immigrants Different in Terms of Cultural Integration?', 447; Ipsos MORI, A *Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, 17; and Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-Groups'.

[141] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups', 39.

[142] Ibid., 43.

[143] Ipsos MORI, *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, 60.

[144] Ibid., 69.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility Against Out-Groups', 39.

[147] Ifop pour Le Point et la Fondation Jean-Jaurès, *Étude auprès de la population musulmane*, 55.

[148] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-Groups', 45.

decreases to 8% and 21% respectively among strongly religious Christians and Alevi Muslims.[149] The last finding, already highlighted above, is interesting and would deserve a deeper analysis: are certain currents within Islam more liberal than others? While this is certainly true, especially for some niche schools of thought,[150] a sociological explanation is also possible here: certain minorities within Islam are often discriminated against and stigmatised in Muslim countries, and therefore tend to be more supportive of secularism and spiritual (as opposed to socio-political) religiosity.[151]

In general terms, religion is a personal matter that should suffer no interference in a liberal democratic state, not even in its most conservative forms. However, it takes on great relevance when connected to disaffection with, or downright non-compliance with, the rule of law and individual rights. In other words, believing that there is only one interpretation of the Quran is not, in itself, the problem. What is problematic is the belief that the Quran, so interpreted, supersedes national law and is binding on all Muslims—and in some cases even non-Muslims.

An additional consequence of this worldview is a statistically proven connection between fundamentalism and hostility towards out-groups.[152] This is the outcome of fundamentalists' belief that their interpretation of religion is absolute and should dictate everyone's behaviours, with those not espousing their views automatically ascribed to the ranks of the out-groups: 'Religious fundamentalism implies a clear in-group versus out-group distinction, whereby the own superiority can go together with hostility toward the threatening out-group, and toward members of one's own religious group who are not viewed as true believers or dissenters'.[153] The more rigid the doctrine, the larger the out-group, due to the stricter conditions for belonging to those who are approved. In contemporary Islam this rigid dichotomy is often linked to *takfirism*: the accusation of heresy or apostasy and consequent excommunication. This worrisome phenomenon is significantly impeding both societal and religious evolution, in the first instance in Muslim countries, but also in Europe. This tendency is by no means limited to a tiny circle of hard-core Salafists but is to be seen in the framework of a widespread religious

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[149] Ibid.
[150] For a wide-ranging examination of this topic, see Colombo, *Basta*.
[151] Banfi, Gianni, and Giugni, 'Religious Minorities and Secularism'.
[152] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-Groups', 48.
[153] Verkuyten, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Radicalization Among Muslim Minority Youth in Europe', 26.

formalism that considers orthodoxy and orthopraxy preconditions of faith.[154] It should be borne in mind that, in Islam, excommunication is a de facto licence to kill the apostate, the death penalty being the most credited punishment for this 'crime' under sharia.

> There are profound cleavages within the Muslim communities such as the division between moderates and seculars versus fundamentalists and Islamists. The latter groups of people consider their way of being Muslim the only correct one and they spend much time in criticizing what they consider 'contaminated' or 'compromised' interpretations of Islam. They do not hesitate to denounce and reproach the non-pious lifestyle of 'moderate' Muslims branding them as unbelievers and sometimes threatening them with violence. This makes it difficult for 'moderate' Muslims to speak up as a Muslim, and many Muslim youngsters find themselves caught in the middle between, on the one hand, religious fundamentalism that they fear, and, on the other hand, a host society that rejects and humiliates Islam.[155]

In this way, the voices of radicals are amplified, and alternatives become more difficult to find.

The influence of Islamism, as a form of societal and political ideology, is fuel to the fire of extremism and divisions. In fact, a strategic goal of Islamist groups is to further stiffen identitarian and sharia-based narratives, so as to alienate Muslims in Europe from the mainstream society.[156] They do this by leveraging Muslims' religious identification: the greater the level of people's attachment to this identity, the more likely they are to support the 'public assertion of Islam in European societies and politics'.[157] In 2006 the journalist Hind Fraihi carried out an inquiry into social life and radicalisation in Molenbeek and found that the form of Islam practiced there was much stricter and more puritanical than the forms

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[154] This point was made by several of those I interviewed, including El Farri.

[155] Verkuyten, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Radicalization Among Muslim Minority Youth in Europe', 26.

[156] 'Our opinion is that a Muslim must never live amongst non-Muslims whilst compromising or even discarding his or her Islamic identity, unless that individual is one who is entirely overpowered and has no other option to choose' (European Council for Fatwa and Research, *First Collection of Fatwas*). See also Chambre des Représentants de Belgique, 'Enquête parlementaire chargée d'examiner les circonstances qui ont conduit aux attentats terroristes du 22 Mars 2016 dans l'aéroport de Bruxelles-National et dans la station de métro Maelbeek à Bruxelles, y compris l'évolution et la gestion de la lutte contre le radicalisme et la menace terroriste – quatrième rapport intermédiaire sur le volet "radicalisme"', Doc 54 1752/009 (23 October 2017); and T. Virgili, 'Yusuf Al-Qaradawi: False Moderate and True Radical? The Star of Al-Jazeera Perhaps Is Not so Bright', *Al-Mesbar Studies & Research Center* (blog), 27 March 2018.

[157] Fleischmann, Phalet and Klein, 'Religious Identification and Politicization in the Face of Discrimination', 636.

found in North Africa.[158] In the same vein, some Muslim newcomers have complained about the more conservative environment they have found in Europe compared to their countries of origin and have lamented incidents of harassment.[159] According to Karin Heremans (Principal of the Royal Atheneum school in Antwerp and Co-Chair of the Radicalisation Awareness Network's Education Working Group), Islamist groups such as Sharia4Belgium have played a substantial role in gaining ground among second- and third-generation Muslims, spreading radical narratives and trying to impose their demands.[160] In her school she faced a great deal of pressure to allow prayer rooms, separate girls from boys and allow girls to wear the hijab. Some pupils were even recruited to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

In a similar vein, all those interviewed for this project have invariably attributed the current exacerbation of fundamentalism to Salafism/Wahhabism, the Muslim Brotherhood and sometimes Iranian propaganda. Many studies on the matter confirm these observations.[161] This preaching has increasingly put Muslims under pressure to conform to conservative standards. It has been transmitted by satellite channels, imported literature, mosques, religious schools and even preachers knocking door-to-door at Muslims' houses.[162] The dynamic described to me by ex-Muslims who witnessed this process of radicalisation among relatives and friends is typical of sects: gradual, initially gentle, brainwashing, followed by increasing peer pressure, leading finally to the complete identification with the group and its ideas based on puritanism and sectarianism.

Islamism brings about societal pressure—what Elham Manea calls 'societal Islamism'.[163] The wearing of the *hijab* is an emblematic example: for Islamists, this is the dividing line par excellence between

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[158] Fraihi, *En immersion à Molenbeek*.

[159] European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*. See also J. Nasr, 'In Germany, Syrians Find Mosques Too Conservative', *Reuters*, 28 October 2016.

[160] From an interview by the author.

[161] See among others, Chambre des Représentants de Belgique, 'Enquête Parlementaire'; Ranstorp et al., 'Mellan Salafism Och Salafistisk Jihadism' (mentioned in J. Bergman, 'The Relentless Radicalization of Sweden', *Gatestone Institute*, 13 July 2018); Carlbom, *Islamic Activism in a Multicultural Context*; and J. Jenkins and C. Farr, *Muslim Brotherhood Review: Main Findings* (2015).

[162] On this in particular, several interviewees mentioned the Tabliqh movement.

[163] E. Manea, 'Tackling Militant Islamism Means Also Confronting Its Non-Violent Forms', *Friends of Europe*, 5 May 2015.

good and bad women—even defining their belonging to Islam.[164] Therefore, while some women feel discriminated against for wearing it, others experience the very opposite situation, namely '"social" or "familial" pressure within the community to wear it'.[165] Other cases concern Muslims and even non-Muslims not feeling comfortable with eating or smoking in Muslim neighbourhoods during Ramadan, and apostates facing hostility and ostracism.[166] Sometimes incidents of violence are connected to these issues.[167] Theatre artist Touzani has experienced this hostility as an outspoken atheist. Raised in a conservative Muslim family and neighbourhood, he has faced physical aggression from his own community, who consider him a traitor, and he has witnessed similar acts against friends and acquaintances.[168] The title of his latest theatre piece, *Cerise sur le ghetto*, refers to a real-life case where eating a cherry in a Molenbeek street during Ramadan provoked an outburst of violence.

The accusation of treason is a recurring one. Dzenk, a Muslim homosexual refugee from Macedonia, explains that 'many Muslims are raised with the idea that gays deserve death as enemies of religion and traitors of their community'. Noura Amer refers to a similar reaction to secular women, who are accused of 'selling themselves to the West'. All interviewees agree that apostasy is problematic for similar reasons: 'being atheist means being demonised. It is considered treason—the choice of the West against your community. Instead, it is simply freedom of conscience'. 'Apostates deserve death. My parents always said so, therefore I have never confessed to them that I am no more a believer. It is a very widespread thought among Muslims, even in Belgium'. 'My mother threatened me with a knife when I told her I didn't consider myself a Muslim any longer. Since then, all of my relatives and friends have cut all ties with me'.[169] In their view, this situation is not exceptional but common. This is confirmed by the surveys on these matters, and by the phenomenon of *hisba* (moral policing) in the Muslim

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[164] See A. A. Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Kazi Publications, 1992), 80; R. M. Khomeini, 'An Interview With Khomeini', interview by O. Fallaci, *The New York Times*, 7 October 1979; *YouTube*, 'Le Hijab Une Obligation Indiscutable Par Cheikh Al Qaradawi', posted on 29 January 2014; European Council for Fatwa and Research, *First Collection of Fatwas; Egyptian Streets*, 'Video of Egyptian President Nasser Mocking Mandatory Hijab Goes Viral', 24 June 2017; *MEMRI*, 'Qatari Educational Software to Girls: Not Wearing Hijab Defies Allah, Brings You Closer to Satan', 22 February 2016; and *BBC News*, 'Islamic Headscarf: Iran's Promotional Video Divides Opinion', 11 July 2019.

[165] European Institute of Peace, *Molenbeek and Violent Radicalisation,* 38. This was confirmed by a number of the people interviewed for this project.

[166] Ibid., 39.

[167] As described in Touzani's theatre piece *Cerise sur le ghetto*. See also n. 174.

[168] Sam Touzani, interview by the author, October 2019.

[169] These accounts were given by various interviewees.

neighbourhoods of several European cities, at times accompanied by violent attacks.[170]

Hence, religion is a societal element that may negatively affect out-groups. Indeed, Muslims with a stronger religious identity are less progressive on issues such as abortion, homosexuality and premarital sex.[171] According to a Dutch study, 'the frequency of mosque attendance is consistently associated with deviations in a less [gender] egalitarian direction'.[172] The same impression is confirmed by Masjidi, who finds that many mosques in Belgium reinforce illiberal ideas. In fact, according to her, many Muslims have more problems with gender equality than non-Muslims do (regarding issues such as clothing, family matters, freedom of movement and the right to work) because of their literalist interpretations of the Quran and the Sunna. The legal element enshrined in Islam is a further complication. Manea's inquiry into British sharia courts shows that religious arguments are used to significantly curtail women's rights, with the state relinquishing its role as the guarantor of equality—not only between women and men, but also between women of different ethno-religious groups.[173]

The impact of fundamentalist religious beliefs on out-groups has been measured by comparing the sentiments of fundamentalist Muslims with those of both adherents of non-fundamentalist forms of Islam and non-believers of Muslim origin. To go back to data mentioned earlier, 70% of fundamentalists state they do not want homosexual friends, that Jews cannot be trusted, and that the West is out to destroy Islam. For the sake of comparison, the percentage of those with anti-Semitic views stands at 30% for very religious but non-fundamentalist Muslims, and slightly above 20% for those who are not very religious, while hostility towards gays and Westerners is below 50% for the first group and slightly above 30% for the second.[174] The data reveals two different, but not mutually exclusive, trends. On the one hand, there is a clear link between the level of perceived observance of Islam and out-group hostility. In other words, the more strongly people are attached to their Muslim identity, the less tolerant they are towards out-groups—the peak being reached among fundamentalists. In this sense, religion does play a role in integration (and lack thereof). On the other hand, the still significant animosity

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[170] L. Vidino, *Hisba in Europe? Addressing a Murky Phenomenon* (Brussels: European Foundation for Democracy, 2013); Novotný, 'Politics of Identity'; Fraihi, *En immersion à Molenbeek*; Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law*; S. Jones, 'Muslim Vigilantes Jailed for "Sharia Law" Attacks in London', *The Guardian*, 6 December 2013; and AFP, 'German Court Orders Fines for "Sharia Police" Group', *Al Arabiya*, 27 May 2019.

[171] Tillie et al., *EURISLAM*, 96.

[172] Maliepaard and Alba, 'Cultural Integration', 86.

[173] Manea, *Women and Shari'a Law*.

[174] Koopmans, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-Groups', 50.

among tepid believers and unbelievers reveals the existence of a specifically cultural trigger. This brings us to a discussion of the interplay between religious faith and cultural dynamics.

Religion or culture?

Hostility towards out-groups does not have to be rooted in sound theological arguments or profound religious sentiments. Often it is difficult to discern what derives from sincere piety and what is more the outcome of an overarching cultural milieu. In El Farri's experience with dealing with Muslim youth, religion and culture are interrelated. The predominance of cultural themes is eminently demonstrated by the attitude of Belgian Muslims towards Jews: although religious fundamentalism remains strong, the level of anti-Semitism is, according to El Farri, currently lower than it was a few years ago because less attention is being focused on the Israeli–Palestinian issue. Indeed, this seems to be confirmed by polls conducted in the West among non-fundamentalist Muslims,[175] as well as in Arab countries.[176] Meanwhile, the fact that anti-Semitism is still rampant among fundamentalist Muslims may be read as a mark of the religious importance attributed to this issue—a reading that also applies to the above-mentioned German intelligence report on anti-Semitism. When it comes to misogyny, similar ambiguities emerge. According to El Farri, this depends on a mixture of religious convictions, upbringing and even exogenous phenomena such as the hip-hop culture. Similarly, Hosine/Yasmine attributes non-egalitarian and discriminatory views to a combination of Islamic tenets and a patriarchal, typically Mediterranean, ethos. Women's rights activist Amer stresses the element of collectivism versus individualism: maintaining social control over women in order for them to be 'respectable' is viewed as legitimate because the group is allowed to, and must, ensure the collective social code deriving from patriarchy. According to Gadaleta, a former Molenbeek alderwoman to whom aggression against LGBTs and women was reported during her term of office, these phenomena are linked to an aggressive occupation of the public space. She told me that social workers denounce forms of social

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[175] See above. It is only among fundamentalists that the level of anti-Semitism matches that of homophobia and hostility towards the West.

[176] For Arab youth the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has descended to seventh place among their top concerns, after Daesh, terrorism, unemployment, civil unrest, the rising cost of living and lack of strong political leadership. See Asda'A Burson-Marsteller, *Inside the Hearts and Minds of Arab Youth*, Arab Youth Survey (2016), 11.

control of people's behaviour (girls' in particular), which is conducted at the level of the family, friends and the neighbourhood. Her assertions have been corroborated by Oumayma and Amer. In effect, a mixture of religion and culture was most probably behind the very similar attitudes towards women and gays that could be found among average native Europeans not so long ago (and to a lesser extent even now).[177] The overall societal environment, the local community, media portrayals, the level of secularisation and the legal framework all affect the common view on social matters, without this excluding the specific role of religion.

In sum, culture and religion can be considered mutually interrelated, with one influencing the other: a powerful religion will impact the mainstream culture, shaping it in its own image, while the influence of a feeble one will be minor.[178] Similarly, a conservative society will be protective of its religion, reacting against both deviations and reforms. Conversely, a largely secularised society will not only marginalise illiberal religious values but may even drive changes within the religion itself.[179] This brings us back to the primary importance of the Islamic identity for many European Muslims: it shows that Islam has not only a religious dimension, but an overall cultural one, to the extent that some deem it impossible to separate the one from the other. This identity is often embraced in opposition to the 'Western' one: Muslims, apostates and front-line practitioners I have interviewed say that a strongly adversarial discourse is promoted in certain Muslim families, schools and circles, where 'the best community' of Islam is constantly contrasted with the 'debauched' Westerners. Therefore, the above-mentioned accusation of 'treason' is repeatedly made against out-groups, and refers to both Islam and its community. Combined with the rhetoric of 'honour', it is used to harass (at times violently) homosexuals, women who behave 'too freely', and apostates or non-practicing Muslims. As if this picture were not gloomy enough, Oumayma and Amer have added the intersectional element. Muslim LGBTs, apostates and women suffer both within their group, for not conforming to the dominant ethos, and outside it, for being immigrants. Furthermore, Oumayma, Amer, Touzani and others emphasise the hardship secular Muslims face, standing as they do between the devil of the extreme right, who exploit them with xenophobic intent, and the deep blue sea of leftist activists, who adopt a relativistic outlook and avoid any criticism of Islam in order not to 'stigmatise' or 'patronise' a community. Islamists and fundamentalists gain from both dynamics, to the detriment of Muslim outcasts.

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[177] See, for instance, *La Chiave di Sophia*, '"Comizi d'amore" di Pasolini: il conformismo è ancora tra noi?', 6 August 2017.

[178] The scarce attention paid to Rastafaris' demands by lawmakers, legal operators and the media is an emblematic example.

[179] One thinks of, among other things, the reforms the Catholic Church launched by means of the Second Vatican Council and the LGBT- and women-friendly policies adopted by the Episcopal and Swedish Churches.

A pernicious consequence of this adversarial and binary view of society among Muslims is self-ghettoisation ('parents often do not let Muslim kids play with non-Muslim ones'; 'I met the first Belgians at university at 20 years old'[180]), amplified by external mistrust, hostility or racism in a vicious circle. From this perspective the phenomenon of 'ghetto neighbourhoods' can be considered one of the main sources of trouble, a point confirmed by the vast majority of refugees, policymakers and first-line practitioners I have interviewed. While finding a community that shares the same origin, culture and language can be an element of mental comfort and material support for newcomers,[181] it may also turn into a form of peer oppression,[182] as well as an instrument for exclusion from the wider society, thereby reinforcing divisions and hindering integration.[183] In Gadaleta's experience, harmful group dynamics perpetuate, amplify and impose a certain system of values (or disvalues) at the community level, to the detriment of the out-groups not sharing them. Previous research confirms that such group dynamics reinforce the idea that Islam should play a major role in public life,[184] and translate into forms of pressure and retribution against out-groups.[185] Conversely, Muslims with more bridging social capital (in the form of neighbours, friends, family members and colleagues) tend to be more progressive.[186] For these reasons, I have found almost unanimous agreement with the idea that fighting segregation should be one of the top priorities for policymakers wishing to foster integration. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. In a liberal democratic society, segregation can be fought via a top-down approach only to a certain extent—an even distribution of newcomers being one such measure.[187] As banally cliché as it may sound, the only solution in the long run may be to build cultural bridges and provide opportunities for interaction between people from different communities, while at the same time taking a clear stance against those who do not play by the rules and spread ideologies of hatred and segregation.

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[180] From interviews conducted by the author.

[181] S. Islam, A. Rohde, and G. Huerta, 'Europe's Migration Challenge: From Integration to Inclusion', *Friends of Europe* (blog), 18 June 2019.

[182] European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*, 32.

[183] Redgrave et al., *The Glue That Binds*, 11.

[184] A study conducted in the Netherlands measured this by means of the following statements: 'Religion should have a strong influence on Dutch politics'; 'I think all Muslims should live strictly according to the rules of Islam'; 'I think that Turkish/Moroccan children in the Netherlands should go to Islamic schools' and 'Muslims should convert people in the Netherlands to Islam'. See Maliepaard, 'Religious Trends and Social Integration', 93.

[185] Ibid., 17, 88.

[186] Tillie et al., *EURISLAM*, 97; and Maliepaard and Alba, 'Cultural Integration'.

[187] European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*, 36.

Discussion and policy recommendations

In this study I have examined the issue of the integration of Muslims of immigrant descent in Western Europe through the prism of the prevalent attitude towards out-groups, that is, people perceived as extraneous and who are potential targets of hostility.

I have defined integration as a process with a substantial socio-cultural and values-based component. This is not to be understood in accordance with a levelling, monocultural model, but in line with a pluricultural one focused on individuals and their chosen identity, not on pre-constituted groups. Cultures or traditions can and should be accepted and embraced, but only as long as they respect the legal framework and the rule of law, and accept that individual liberties have priority over community norms. Any integration process needs to make these limits clear, especially in relation to the most controversial issues, and all actors financed or in any way involved by the state in activities of public relevance should be vetted in order to ensure their commitment to these goals.

Quantitative surveys, accounts and reports by those on the ground show the persistence of a cultural cleavage between Muslims and non-Muslims in Western Europe, especially when it comes to topics such as gender equality, religious freedom and sexual orientation. While cultural and socio-economic conditions may play a role in this phenomenon, the religious/cultural factor seems as crucial as it is overlooked. The same dynamics that lead to radicalisation also affect the attitude towards out-groups, which shows that intolerance is strongly linked to religious conservatism.

The lack of adequate integration policies for newcomers deepens the divide, as does the absence of socio-cultural interconnections between many Muslims and the native European populations. This reinforces Muslims' Islamic identity at the expense of the national one, fostering prejudice on both sides. Outcasts of Muslim heritage are the first victims of this vicious circle.

Respect for the framework of the rule of law, individual freedom and equality is the precondition for social coexistence. Defending and giving voice to members of out-groups who are of Muslim descent—that is, to those who are the first victims of intolerance—will contribute to normalising their presence as *a real component of* Muslim communities, thereby disrupting a dangerous homogenisation.

On the basis of the foregoing findings, I devote this final section to policy recommendations aimed at promoting individual rights and social coexistence. These recommendations are divided into three main

clusters, proceeding from general to particular, namely from what pertains to society as a whole, to what concerns the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, and finally to what relates specifically to the Muslim community. As to the first cluster, it is up to the entire society—in the first instance, the authorities—to create an environment of mutual respect and harmonious coexistence, paying special attention to the individuals most vulnerable to stigmatisation and persecution. Second, it is necessary to counter the risk of an intolerant ethos becoming dominant in a closed community, by promoting intercultural exchanges in the framework of secularism and liberal democratic values. Finally, it is crucial to deconstruct an intolerant and backward interpretation of religion, fighting fundamentalism by protecting and empowering progressive voices within the Muslim community.

A collective effort towards establishing a safe, tolerant and harmonious society

A harmonious, intercultural coexistence where individual rights are fully respected is not merely the result of newcomers' efforts, or of targeted policies concerning the niche domains of migration and Islam. There are clear, general conditions—incumbent upon society as a whole and applicable to everyone—that are necessary to create the fertile ground out of which such a society can grow. These conditions have legal, ethical and practical components.

In the first place, compliance with the law and respect for the individual rights this guarantees are paramount. This was stressed by everyone I spoke to: the limits provided by the law are not open to discussion and exceptions. The principle of equality dictates that everyone is called upon to adhere to them. At times a misplaced sense of 'cultural sensitivity' restrains authorities and civil society organisations from imposing certain principles and rules. I have already mentioned the authorities' laxity in dealing with the complaints lodged by Lyes Alouane and Hosine/Yasmine. This kind of behaviour does not seem to be isolated: among the most striking cases is the scandal of the authorities who covered up the sexual abuse perpetrated by British-Pakistanis against 1,400 children in Rotherham (UK), for fear of being accused of

racism.[188] Under no circumstances may such gross negligence be tolerated or excused, the raison d'être of public institutions being to enforce the rule of law, not the rule of the strongest. Minorities within Muslim communities deserve the same protection as every other member of our societies, a fortiori when the external environment threatens them. As Yasmine remarked: 'If the police today suggest that I change neighbourhood, in 50 years will they tell me to change country?' While the police should never relinquish their duties of protection and investigation, legislative and governmental authorities must enable them to perform their job. This implies not only providing them with material resources but also making them confident about dealing with crimes without fearing accusations of racism. The authorities also need to avoid the creation of no-go zones where the police themselves cannot operate without risking social unrest and even their own lives.

At the theoretical level, these efforts must be based upon the premise that collective rights come into existence as recognitions of claims from a sum of individuals, and can only apply to the specific individuals in question. The construction of an autonomous category of 'collective rights' puts individuals, trapped in a cluster regardless of their will, under the tyranny of the majority within their supposed community, and in a position of inferiority compared to the 'privileged natives', who enjoy all the constitutional guarantees a liberal democracy provides. It can never be stressed enough that the rules protecting individual rights do not represent a form of cultural hegemony of the majority, but instead a guarantee for minorities. In other words, them being respected is in everybody's interest.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Respect for the law is the precondition of any integration process and, more generally, social coexistence. Ensuring its observance, and particularly the protection of members of vulnerable categories, is a duty which a state must never relinquish.

- All actors concerned—from government authorities to judges, intellectuals, NGOs, and so on—should always interpret human rights as individual, not collective. Cultural exceptions

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[188] A. Jay, *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (1997–2013)*, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, 2014.

must never be condoned when they involve extremism, intolerance and human rights violations.

- The authorities should include ethics classes in school curricula, comprising discussions on common values, citizenship, diversity and human rights.

- Funding and other forms of public support for professionals and organisations dealing with integration should be conditional upon a proven commitment to liberal democratic values.

Countering the intolerant ethos through intercultural exchanges

Our societies are witnessing a (increasing?) cultural gulf between Muslims and non-Muslims. In some cases it is fostered by intolerant ideologies, in others by misconceptions that are the fruit of insufficient contact between different segments of the population.

On the one hand, there must be zero tolerance towards hatred against Muslims. There are two reasons for firmly reasserting this concept: one is pragmatic, while the other—the more important—is moral. The pragmatic reason is that—however things stand with the data on reactive religiosity and the deep root causes of extremism—every occurrence of hatred and intolerance brings about further divisions and a stronger attachment to a belligerent identity. The moral reason is that there is no worse hypocrisy than boasting about 'European values' (and rules) if Europeans are the first to violate them.[189] All human beings are born equal and deserve equal respect; therefore, racism must never be condoned.

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[189] 'Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected', reads Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. And Article 21 states, 'Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited'.

There are never good reasons to tolerate intolerance. The practical way to achieve this purpose is, first, to enforce existing EU and national legislation against discrimination. To avoid abuses, these laws should always aim to protect *individuals*, not ideologies, symbols and associated sentiments. (In other words, *feeling* offended or discriminated against is not sufficient grounds for claiming that something unjust has really occurred, as the case of *Charlie Hebdo* should have taught). Second, soft measures should be adopted, such as supporting NGOs that bring together people of different ethnicities, inviting refugees to present their experiences in schools, encouraging social diversity instead of ghettoes and presenting successful role models of Muslim origin from a variety of fields. It is also important that the media offer a panoply of views regarding Muslims, not as a means of whitewashing real problems, but to show that the reality of Islam cannot be reduced to them. For instance, while the media should not refrain (as they often do) from raising the alert on anti-Semitism and homophobia in Islam, they should also provide appropriate coverage when Muslims make attempts to combat prejudice. Two examples come readily to mind: the Muslims who formed human rings to protect six synagogues in Toronto after an anti-Semitic attack[190] and the pro-LGBT festival organised by Muslim groups in the UK.[191] More generally, the media have a responsibility to present Muslims as normal citizens in all domains, not necessarily in connection with their Islamic identity. This would serve the twofold purpose of decreasing anti-Muslim discrimination and of fighting Islamists, whose core interest it is to prevent their targets from fully becoming European citizens.

On the other hand, building bridges is also key to bringing Muslims of immigrant descent closer to the liberal democratic ethos, fostering cultural integration in a practical way. First of all, discussions on liberal democratic rules and values should be compulsory in integration courses and begin at the earliest stage, namely among asylum seekers in reception centres. As much as possible, these classes should be run by vetted trainers who come from, or profoundly understand, the newcomers' cultures of origin and are committed to liberal democratic values. According to various sources, this twofold characterisation represents the most effective bridge to cultural integration. In the framework of these activities, a clear system of sanctions related to violations of the law and the rights of others should be outlined and enforced from the beginning. These sanctions should include the general consequences provided by the law, and specific ones related to the violator's legal status—in full compliance with asylum provisions—such as the loss of social benefits

[190] C. Maxouiris and B. Griggs, 'Busloads of Muslims Formed Human "Rings of Peace" to Protect Synagogues in Canada', *CNN*, 6 November 2018.
[191] C. Wilson and M. Baggs, 'LGBT Muslim Festival: "We Don't Just Have One Identity"', *BBC News*, 23 September 2019.

or of one's work visa. The importance of these measures can be stressed with the words of a homosexual refugee: 'If I accept your religion, you have to accept my sexuality. Sometimes forcing people is a good thing'.

Having said that, long-term results cannot be obtained solely with theoretical rules enforced through the threat of retribution. This must be complemented with a strategy of persuasion aimed at showing the universal merits of human rights. 'Tell, and it will go to the mind. Share, and it will go to the heart', a refugee told me.[192] Various studies based on direct accounts show that the main avenue to integration is based on social networks and interaction between the majority and minority communities.[193] Newcomers, first-line practitioners and Muslim outsiders stress the necessity of giving visibility to role models who belong to minorities within the Muslim community, as living examples of the compatibility between different identities in a liberal democratic framework. Furthermore, many organisations[194] bring together people of different ethnicities, religions, genders, nationalities and sexual orientations in order to create an environment of diversity, cultural connections and respect for all people and their multiple layers of identities. These examples deserve encouragement and support, as a way of countering prejudice between and within groups.

Societal interchanges should not be over once formal integration requirements are fulfilled. As explained above, ghetto neighbourhoods, in which one culture predominates, can be incubators of intolerance, bullying and even radicalisation. According to all the people consulted, dismantling them should be high on the agenda. As far as newcomers are concerned, they should be systematically distributed in order to ensure better integration and avoid peer pressure.[195] When it comes to long-term residents, things become more difficult: a liberal democracy cannot force its population to reside in specific places. However, there are ways to encourage better social diversity. El Farri underlines the merits of the virtuous gentrification experimented with in certain Scandinavian cities, where municipalities managed to make problematic neighbourhoods more attractive without pushing locals away. Gadaleta, as well, mentions the importance of a well-maintained urban environment to show the presence of the state in degraded areas. Azouz stresses that only a limited number of apartments in any given

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[192] European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*, 50.
[193] 'Overall, respondents described their sense of belonging to be related mainly to their social networks and the lifestyle choices they had been socialized into' (Tillie et al., *EURISLAM*, 36). See also European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*.
[194] For multiple examples, see European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*.
[195] See ibid., 31.

neighbourhood should be devoted to social housing, leaving the rest of them open to people with higher incomes. Emphasising this same point, Gadaleta mentions the example of Rotterdam, where some large, alienating social edifices have been demolished and income diversity is now required to access the new ones. Khattab confirms that Vienna represents a good model for the same reason, that is, a wise management of social accommodations which are scattered throughout the city.

Clearly, all of this is useless in the absence of law enforcement (see above) and policy measures against extremism (see below). No sensible person with the means to leave can be expected to continue residing in a place where one should be afraid to eat a cherry during Ramadan. It is certainly a vicious circle: less mixing brings about more societal pressure which in turn generates even less mixing. But none of this is an excuse for authorities to turn a blind eye to abuse.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Muslims must be protected from religious and ethnic hatred through legislation, security enforcement and education that promotes diversity.

- The media should provide different kinds of information about Muslims. This does not have to be connected to their Islamic identity, but when it is, it should reflect both positive and negative news related to Islam.

- Integration courses need to include a compulsory values-based component. Newcomers must commit to respecting the law and the rights of others, with clear sanctions for all violations.

- States, regions and municipalities should adopt measures to prevent the creation of ghettos and ethno-cultural segregation.

- Tolerance should be promoted through credible role models and bridge-builders, and by bringing together people with different origins.

Deconstructing an intolerant interpretation of Islam and a monolithic view of the Muslim community

As happens with other religious or non-religious ideologies, Islamic dogmas are susceptible to inter-pretations that clash with individual liberties. It is undeniable that a literalist reading of certain tenets of Islam, whether theologically sound or not, paves the way for radicalisation, illiberal (and illegal) behav-iours and intolerance towards out-groups. A serious discussion, and critique, of this should never be avoided. The media and politicians should refrain from censoring criticism and even satire of Islam, as long as this does not involve an incitation to hatred or personal defamation. This is how societies and ideologies evolve: by being questioned and challenged, not by being protected and pampered like rare beasts in a zoo.

This effort is all the more effective when it comes from within. It is crucial, therefore, that a liberal ver-sion of Islam go beyond the small niches of experts and reformers, so that it can make its presence felt strongly in mainstream Muslim discourse. To quote Azzouz, it is important to educate Muslims—in the first place, imams—about diversity *within* Islam. This is only possible with a two-sided strategy aimed at, on the one hand, hindering Islamist efforts towards the opposite goal (i.e. establishing a literalist Islam as a political and social force) and, on the other hand, protecting and promoting the voices of liberal Muslims.

Concerning the first point, it is unfortunate that Western policymakers and civil society actors have often selected Islamists as their preferred interlocutors, because of political convenience, ideology or mere lack of knowledge. Whatever the reasons, this support has to come to an end. As stated in the introduction to this work, we should adopt a single set of benchmarks to define intolerance: racism, misogyny, homophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim or anti-Christian hatred, anti-democratic discourses and the like should be universally condemned. General statements against violence are not enough

for one to be considered a moderate.[196] There are no *if*s, *and*s or *but*s when it comes to respecting individual freedoms.

To claim that they have democratic credentials, Islamists often resort to double-talk, all the while carefully avoiding disowning religious precepts clearly in conflict with individual rights.[197] These actors cannot be considered bridge-builders, quite to the contrary; hence, they should be excluded from participating in, let alone managing, integration programmes and other delicate social activities. For instance, in several cases religious schools, especially Salafi ones, have proved to be incubators of extreme conservatism and radicalisation,[198] the latter being in large part facilitated by the influx of radical literature, imams and funding from abroad. Radical teachers are sometimes detected even in state schools.[199] Similar dynamics occur when Islamists are involved in integration and asylum-support activities.[200]

Such forms of extremism should not be fought solely by coercive measures, as they do not always amount to criminal violations, nor should a liberal state expand this area so as to censor all disliked thoughts. What is crucial is that authorities become more effective and careful not just in wielding the stick, but also in distributing the carrots, ensuring that funding, public sector assignments, taxation privileges, social benefits and so on are only granted to individuals and organisations that take an active stance in favour of universal human rights and constitutional provisions. In Azzouz's words, it is paramount to guarantee that religious teaching and pastoral care respect the primacy of the constitution and human rights. The task of ensuring that this is done is sometimes performed by religious bodies: inspectors appointed by religious institutions conduct training for religious operators and can report to the appropriate state structure those they deem unfit for the role, or even dangerous.[201] Without

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[196] One emblematic case was the mayor of London inviting Yusuf al Qaradawi, described as a 'man of tolerance and respect'. T. Kirby, 'Livingstone Embraces Visiting Muslim Cleric as "Man of Tolerance"', *The Independent*, 13 July 2004. In fact, considering that the controversial cleric has called for the death of LGBTs and apostates, has praised female genital mutilation and even spoken of the merits of the Holocaust, his 'tolerance and respect' are questionable, to say the least. See Virgili, 'Yusuf Al-Qaradawi'.

[197] Some of the authors who use this concept are quoted in Carlbom, *Islamic Activism in a Multicultural Context*, 33; Virgili, 'Yusuf Al-Qaradawi'; and T. Virgili, 'Libertà e democrazia nell'Islam: un nodo di Gordio?', *Federalismi* 2 (2016).

[198] A recent example comes from Salafi schools in the Netherlands. See *La Libre*, 'Aux Pays-Bas, des écoles salafistes où les élèves apprennent que les non-musulmans méritent la peine de mort', 11 September 2019.

[199] Cherif El Farri, interview by the author.

[200] European Foundation for Democracy, *Refugees in Europe*, 32.

[201] This is, for instance, the Belgian model.

wanting to take away from the control exercised by religious institutions themselves, the fact remains that the state should not relinquish its role of guarantor of the constitution. Some countries adopt a rigid separation between church and state, while others have forms of agreement between the state and religious denominations. In either case, the autonomy of the religious sphere should not be interpreted as a blank cheque to propagate precepts incompatible with the constitution and human rights. As different sources stress, this control should not be maintained as a means to interfere in religious affairs but to ensure that the law is complied with and that religious institutions do not become an instrument of influence for the foreign powers sponsoring them.[202] There is no point in introducing civic education classes, counter-narrative programmes and dialogue sessions in the morning, only to have them, like Penelope's shroud, unravelled in the evening.

The identification of non-Islamist, truly democratic Muslim actors should be based on concrete parameters:

1. Condemnation, without exception, of the killing of civilians, including Israelis and those who are perceived as denigrating Islam.

2. Acceptance of the secular framework and of the superiority of the constitution and individual rights over sharia law.

3. Belief in the legal and social equality of men and women in all areas, including a woman's right to marry a man of any religion and to receive the same share of an inheritance.

4. Recognition (regardless of moral agreement or disagreement) of the constitutional right to self-determination in sexual matters, including premarital intercourse and homosexuality.

5. Belief in the freedom of conscience, including the right to discuss and criticise the foundations and dogmas of Islam, refuse its orthopraxy or abandon it in order to switch to another religion or to atheism.[203]

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[202] 'Islam diplomatique et consulaire', as Zahed defines it.
[203] See Colombo, Basta, xxxi.

Many Muslims are the first to vigorously and courageously reassert these principles. They represent our best hope for internal reform, and we must do whatever is in our power to support them. There are different kinds of progressive Muslim actors. Some attempt to contextualise and reinterpret the sources of Islam without denying their validity, while others go further in radically changing the approach to these sources. To mention people interviewed for this paper, Azzouz stresses the need to take a gradual approach, which may involve hermeneutics but should aim more at the desired result (respect of human rights) than at a front-line battle against Islam as traditionally conceived by the majority, for this would not be practically effective. El Farri's and Masjidi's teams proceed by deconstructing fundamentalist beliefs with a Socratic methodology, that is, by gradually questioning the theological foundations of these tenets with the use of contextual and historical interpretations, in order to show that Islam is compatible with more progressive readings. Zahed goes a step beyond, arguing for the deconstruction and reconstruction of Islamic scriptures by applying interpretation, historical contextualisation, philosophy and even apocryphal sources. He responds to criticism by arguing that this Islamic reformation responds to a need on the ground (as shown by the multiplication of liberal mosques) and that it represents the only way to overcome the aporia of claiming that Islam is peace while refusing to confront, or even legitimising, homophobia, misogyny and political authoritarianism in its name. It is not up to me to state if any of these methodologies rests on strong theological grounds. What really matters, though, is the practical effect of advancing a more tolerant interpretation of religion and giving voice to those believers who would otherwise remain silent. After all, Christianity and Judaism have also passed through reforms that were considered, and some still consider, heretical.

A caveat is necessary here: not every outsider Muslim agrees with the hermeneutical approach as a means of reform. According to strong secularists, especially the apostate ones, there are two problems with liberal Muslims: from a theoretical point of view, the latter whitewash Islam by denying the undeniable, namely the presence of clearly intolerant Islamic rules and precepts; and from a practical point of view, they form such a small niche group that any impact on the wider Muslim community would be minimal.[204] As understandable as this criticism is, we should avoid following, albeit involuntarily, the path of Islamism and the far right, both of which consider Islam an inevitably conservative and frozen reality. First, this is not wise from a strategic perspective, for it reinforces the legitimacy of extremism as the 'true' voice of Islam. Second, it is unfair to all those looking for answers that would not force them to choose between one identity

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[204] These points emerged in some of my interviews.

and the other. Empowering and protecting liberal mosques; bringing liberal Muslims into schools, social centres and prisons; and having these Muslims visible in the media are the best responses to those who equate Islam with intolerance and extremism, whether out of blind faith, fear or hatred.

There are different things that policymakers can do to support these groups and individuals. These include providing financial support, involving them in integration courses and civic education, and countering the diffusion of radical literature by promoting secular–progressive materials in schools and public libraries. The media, for their part, should ensure that these same groups receive much wider coverage, whereby their actions and ideas are presented, and that they are given the space that at present is more generously allotted to Islamists.

Having clarified this, it is also crucial to stress that support for liberal Islam does not exclude, but actually *must* accompany, an equal effort to support ex-Muslims, who need both protection and visibility. All too often these individuals and groups are persecuted within the Muslim community and ostracised by mainstream policymakers and media, out of fear, political convenience or for ideological reasons. It is worth mentioning that 'empowering' also means, more concretely, providing financial support. For instance, the Movement of Belgian Ex-Muslims is currently looking for funding to set up a safe house for apostates threatened by their family and community. Some LGBT groups have similar concerns for gay Muslims.[205] It is well known and has been documented that Western states and the European Commission allocate considerable amounts of money to Islamist groups.[206] If this funding were diverted to minority groups among Muslim communities, it would be beneficial both for the latter and for society as a whole.

Furthermore, at this particular moment in Europe's history, specific attention (including by the media) should be devoted to the asylum seekers fleeing many Islamic countries because of nonconformist ideas or behaviour. This would serve several purposes. First, it would raise awareness about the human rights situations in these countries, at a time when human rights seem to have lost their appeal in international relations. Second, it would give a voice to people silenced, concealed and persecuted by their societies, thereby contributing to the multifaceted portrayals I mentioned above. Finally, it would offer the best alternative to the narrative of the 'invasion' by showing Europeans that, in many cases, what they fear

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[205] This point was made in interviews conducted by the author.
[206] For a comprehensive overview, see *Islamism Map*, 'Islamism Map' (n. d.)

from refugees is what refugees themselves are escaping, as they crave the same freedoms we gladly enjoy, but often forget to cherish.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- While Muslims as individuals need to be respected, discussions of Islam as a system of dogmas should never be avoided. No ideology or religion is beyond scrutiny and critique.

- Governments should take active measures to tackle extremist preachers who condone or promote social control and human rights violations. Such measures must consist of judicial proceedings when criminal actions are involved, but also need to be accompanied by administrative control over, among other things, the distribution of funding, social benefits, tax privileges and involvement in public activities (including those related to integration). The authorities should make these benefits conditional upon organisations' and individuals' taking an active and unambiguous stance in favour of constitutional liberties. Leniency towards intolerant ideologies and their mouthpieces must stop.

- Governments and security apparatuses should monitor religious schools, cultural centres and religious teaching in public schools, also vetting foreign funding received and the didactic materials employed.

- The promotion of a humanist and enlightened form of Islam is key. The authorities and civil society organisations should increasingly involve non-Islamist, progressive trainers in integration and radicalisation prevention programmes, and should empower the liberal mosques and imams that are now flourishing across Europe. The media should give them more visibility.

- Governments, the media and civil society should empower the out-groups within Muslim communities as a means of furthering integration and countering radicalisation.

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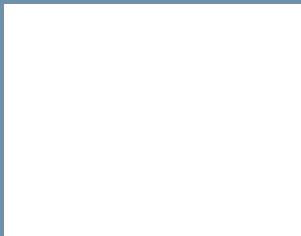
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In the current debates about Islam, scarce attention is devoted to the long-term integration of different cultures within a system based on the rule of law and individual liberties. With specific reference to the prevalent culture among Muslims of immigrant descent in Western Europe, quantitative surveys and reports show the persistence of a divergence from mainstream views on topics such as gender equality, religious freedom and sexual orientation. The primary victims of this phenomenon are to be found within the Muslim communities themselves: the 'outcasts' who, in spite of their Muslim background, do not adhere to the prevalent cultural code and may become targets of hostility. The lack of adequate integration policies for newcomers and the absence of socio-cultural interconnections between many Muslims and the native European populations deepen the divide, thereby reinforcing the Islamic identity at the expenses of the national one, and fostering prejudice on both sides.

To promote liberal democratic rules and values both among newcomers and within the wider society, integration policies should be adopted in the framework of school curricula, reception centres and integration courses. These measures should always be tailored to individuals, rather than the ethno-religious groups to which they belong. It is also paramount to bring together, as much as possible, people of different backgrounds and ethnicities, in order to foster intercultural exchanges. All this would not lead to a levelling, monocultural model, but a pluricultural one focused on individuals and their chosen identity. All cultures or traditions are to be accepted and embraced, as long as they respect the rule of law and individual liberties.

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