

# Islam in Europe: Culture War or Religious Toleration?

EUROPE has become a battlefield,' according to Gilles Kepel. Samuel P. Huntington says it is facing a 'clash of civilizations' and 'cultural war', a new *Kulturkampf*. Helmut Schmidt, the former Chancellor of Germany, argues that a peaceful accommodation between Islam and Christianity is possible only in authoritarian states. These apocalyptic pronouncements are not only counter-productive. They are dangerously misleading. The question of Islam in Europe is not a matter of global war and peace. Rather, it raises a more familiar set of domestic policy issues about the relations between state and church, and on occasion even prosaic questions about government regulation and equitable policy enforcement. Muslims are a new interest groups and a new constituency, and the European political systems will change as the processes of representation, challenge, and co-optation take place. There is a clash of values, but perhaps the most important is that between two old European parties, secularists and conservatives, as each struggles to come to terms with religious pluralism. The conflict does raise large questions, but these have to do with long-standing European pre-occupations with state neutrality in religious matters and the place of Christianity in the construction of European public identity.

Europe's Muslim political leaders are not aiming to overthrow liberal democracy and to replace secular law with Islamic religious law, the *sharia*. Most are rather looking for ways to build institutions that will allow Muslims to practice their religion in a way that is compatible with social integration. To be sure, there is not one Muslim position on how Islam should develop in Europe but many views. However, there is general agreement that immigrants must be integrated into the wider society. There is also a widespread feeling that Europe's Muslims should not rely on foreign Islamic funding of local institutions but be able to practice their faith in mosques built with local funding

and with the assistance of imams certified and educated at European universities and seminaries.

Huntington predicted a historic and decisive global confrontation between 'Islam' and 'the West', and he represented problems with Islamic minorities in Western countries as local skirmishes in this international struggle, a struggle that was at bottom one of values, symbols, and identity.

Huntington's thesis rests on two postulates. The first is that religion is the predominant source of identity and value orientation for Muslims. 'Liberal' and 'Muslim' values are irreconcilable. The religious Muslim cannot separate public law and private religion. Only individuals who renounce key parts of Islam can be trusted as interlocutors in democratic societies. The second postulate is that Islam and Christianity are competing for global control. Islam is represented as monolithic and intent on world domination. From this perspective, a Muslim schoolgirl's headscarf is imbued with symbolic significance beyond the individual girl's reasons for wearing the scarf.

However, domestic conflict over the integration of Islam in European countries has little to do with foreign policy. Muslims in Great Britain and the United States, the two allies in the war in Iraq, find fewer obstacles to the development of faith institutions than do Muslims in France and Germany, the two leading European anti-war countries. Rather, domestic conflicts have local causes, rooted in the particular histories of modern European states. One of the key factors, usually neglected in these debates, is the legacy of the 'stability pacts' that were made between the majority churches and European states in the course of twentieth-century adjustments to universal suffrage and constitutional reforms. The accommodation of Islam necessitates a rethinking of those pacts and obliges national churches to reconsider their own position on matters of

proselytizing, inter-religious relations, and even on questions of theology and liturgy.

Until very recently, European governments have been reluctant to formulate policies for the integration of Muslim minorities. Muslims interpret this neglect as yet another form of discrimination, an extension of the discrimination experienced in daily life, in employment, education, and the provision of social services. Yet governments are now beginning to grapple with the issues. Some of their initial measures provoked fresh conflicts, notably bans on wearing the *hijab*, the Islamic headscarf, by female Muslim students and teachers; policies curtailing ritual slaughter; and immigration controls on imams. These policies are often perceived to be discriminatory, but they are sometimes supported also by Muslim leaders. There is little disagreement that radical clerics should be kept out, although the general view is that Muslims have democratic rights to say stupid things too. Most Muslims think the headscarf should be tolerated, but many think it is a bad idea to wear it. However, few governments have institutionalized democratic consultative mechanisms with Muslims, or come to terms with the fact that they are dealing with a diverse religious constituency that cannot be represented by a single head of a national 'church' as is the European custom. For decades, Europeans paid little attention to the modest prayer halls and mosques that sprang up in their cities. Benign neglect was the preferred official response to the growing presence of Muslim immigrants. A Dutch anthropologist, Jan Rath, and his collaborators found the first reference to Muslims in Dutch government sources was a Memorandum on Foreign Workers from 1970, which referred obliquely to the need to provide 'pastoral care' for foreign workers.

The lack of public policy involvement has both historical and political roots. When Muslims first began to come to Europe in the

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1950s and 1960s, they were not expected to stay. They were mostly labour migrants, and often single, men who themselves expected to return with savings to the families they had left at home. Ironically, it was the collective recognition by Europe's Muslims that they are 'here to stay' that triggered conflict. Once Muslims demanded integration it became evident how much Europeans and their governments would have to change in order to accommodate them.

There are probably about 15 million Muslims living in Western Europe, but the exact number is in doubt. The count is subject to inflation, in part because Muslim leaders and populist politicians like to exaggerate the number to press their causes, but also because few reliable statistics exist. Most European countries do not include questions on religious affiliation in their census. However, this method may also exaggerate the size of the Muslim population, since allowance is not made for assimilation through inter-marriage or the acculturation of descendants, and it obviously confounds religious affiliation with country of origin. (Nor, though, does it allow for conversions to Islam.) On the other hand, official estimates do not include illegal immigrants, who in recent years have arrived primarily from predominantly Muslim countries, such as Albania, Algeria, Morocco, or Nigeria.

Public reactions in Western Europe to the growing presence of adherents of an unfamiliar religion have been remarkably similar. From Protestant Scandinavia to pluralist Holland and Catholic France, controversies have broken out over religious holiday schedules, accommodations for prayers, the wearing of Muslim dress in the workplace, the provision of building permits for mosques, the public ownership of all available cemeteries, concerns about animal rights that disallow ritual slaughter, issues of pastoral care for Muslims in prisons and social services, the teaching of religion in public schools, and divorce law and other family law issues.

It is not possible to discuss the 'clash of practices' set off by Muslims' claims for recognition without also discussing the reaction of the Christian churches. There is a popular fallacy that public life in Europe is

secular. On the contrary, European states have given privileges to the Christian churches for centuries, from public funding for religious schools to tax support, to the maintenance of church real estate and clerical salaries. Most Europeans are accustomed to relying on the state for the public provision of pastoral needs, from cemeteries to churches and the training of clergy. The bias of current policies has become perceptible only with the increased visibility of the different customs of the immigrant religions.

However, Muslim leaders are generally reluctant to press too hard for equal treatment on all fronts. The German Greens were the first to suggest that an Islamic holiday – Eid al Fitr, the end of Ramadan – should be added to the long list of official German holidays, but the other parties responded with derision. Few Muslim leaders who I spoke to think that holiday equity is a cause worth fighting for. Granting Muslims employment protection to take the day off as a personal holiday is sufficient. It is not productive for Christian-Muslim relations in the current situation to suggest that Christians should take off Islamic holidays. As a Dutch Muslim parliamentarian said to me, when I suggested that the Netherlands needed to beef up anti-discrimination law in the face of unequivocal evidence of widespread employment discrimination against well-educated immigrants, 'any suggestion that Muslims are victims of discrimination is not helpful right now, when Christians think that Muslims already take far too much.'

At the same time, there has been a growing suspicion about Muslims' loyalty to western values. The issue was first dramatized in 1989. Ayatollah Khomeini pronounced a death sentence in absentia against Salman Rushdie for the blasphemous descriptions of the prophet Muhammad in his novel, *The Satanic Verses*. Book-burning demonstrations in the English towns of Bradford and Oldham and violent demonstrations across the Islamic world invited comparison to fascist bonfires of banned books in the 1930s.

A decade later, there were fears that terrorist networks were embedding themselves in little known mosques throughout Europe.

Mohammed Atta, one of the 9/11 terrorists, attended the al-Quds mosque in Hamburg. When the German police found a tape featuring the imam of the mosque, a man of Moroccan origin known only by his last name, al-Fazizi, raging that 'Christians and Jews should have their throats slit,' seven men from the mosque were arrested on terrorism charges. It was discovered that a 37-year old Swedish Muslim, who was convicted of possessing weapons and suspected of planning terrorism, had links to the Finsbury Park Mosque in London and its fiery preacher, Abu Hamza. The shoe-bomber, Richard Reid, and the suspected twentieth 9/11 hijacker, Zacarias Moussaoui, were also linked with the Finsbury Park mosque. Abu Hamza became an emblematic figure for those who feared that a new jihad was being prepared in Europe, as was the 'Kalif aus Köln,' Metin Kaplan, who was extradited to face murder charges in Turkey in October 2004. The murder of the Dutch film-maker, Theo van Gogh, by a young Dutch-Moroccan who was linked to Hizbollah, an Islamic terrorist group, and the July bombings in the London tube system elicited strong reactions against Muslims. Sixty-five attacks on mosques and imams were reported over a six-month period in Holland and hate crimes against Muslims on the streets of major British cities multiplied. However, the overwhelming majority of European Muslims are as repelled by the ranting of these clerics as are Christians.

The Muslim mainstream is better represented by civic and political figures who have been elected to public office by voters and parties that draw support from all voters and by leaders of Muslim national and community organizations. That is why their views and policy choices must be heard. European Muslims are necessary partners in the negotiation of accommodation with Islam, and the Muslim political and civic leaders will play a critical role in that process. Democracies are tested by their capacity to respond to the claims and needs of new social groups and by their capacity to integrate new elites representing those claims. The prospects for the accommodation of Islam rest in part on the ability of governments to come up with solutions, and in part on the Muslim elite's involvement in the resolution of conflict.

There is an urgent need for a wide-ranging public debate about the implications of state neutrality and how equitable treatment of different religions is possible. The main concerns of Muslim leaders are, however, rather with what is seen as the persistent mischaracterization of Islam by the media and politicians, the absence of public policy initiatives to support Islamic religious organizations, and the lack of public recognition that Muslims are Europeans too.

The above text is the introduction to Professor Klausen's book *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (2005) and is excerpted with the permission of Oxford University Press ([www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com)).

## Europe and Islam: A Question of Culture?

The British Academy hosted a discussion meeting: 'Europe and Islam: A Question of Culture'. The event took the form of a panel discussion between Professor Adam Kuper FBA (Brunel University), Professor Fred Halliday FBA (London School of Economics), and Professor Jytte Klausen (British Academy Visiting Professor at Nuffield College, Oxford, and Brandeis University). The event was held first in London in 2004, and then repeated at Queen's University, Belfast in 2005. Later in the year, the discussion meeting was hosted by Bilkent University, Ankara, bringing British, Danish and Turkish scholars together in lively debate.

An audio recording of the debate that took place in Belfast is available on the Academy's web site via <http://britac.studyserve.com/home/default.asp>

# Culture and Identity Politics

Professor Adam Kuper FBA, Brunel University, discusses the history of ideas about culture, and their significance in debates about identity in Europe today.

## I

CULTURE SEEMS to explain everything at the moment. Intellectuals once thought that race was the key to history. More recently, everything was said to boil down to social class. The day before yesterday, gender was the secret. Today, culture explains everything from crime rates to economic development and even, in the hands of Samuel Huntington, the deep structure of international relations.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, Samuel Huntington put forward a series of large propositions about the new age that would succeed the era of the Cold War. History was not about to come to an end. New divisions would emerge, greater even than the ideological divisions of the previous generation, but they would be of a different order.

The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural ... The major differences in political and economic development among civilizations are clearly rooted in their different cultures ... cultural and cultural identities ... are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world. ... In this new world, local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations. The rivalry of the superpowers is replaced by the clash of civilizations.<sup>1</sup>

Despite Huntington's claim that a new era has begun, with a new dynamic, he is peddling very old ideas, including even the equation of culture and religion. Half a century earlier, immediately after World War II, T.S. Eliot made the same point, more memorably: 'Ultimately, antagonistic religions mean antagonistic cultures; and ultimately, religions cannot be reconciled.'<sup>2</sup>

Arguments of this sort depend, of course, on what is meant by culture or civilisation. Both terms were born in the late eighteenth century, *civilisation* in France and, in

reaction, *kultur* in Germany. Civilisation was represented in the French tradition as a universal human good that marks us off from animals. Civilisation is progressive. It has advanced furthest, no doubt, in France. Yet even the proudest French intellectual insisted that civilisation was universal, enjoyed – though in different degrees – by savages, barbarians, and other Europeans. The greatest and most conclusive victories of civilisation had been booked in the fields of science and technology. Progress could be measured by the advance of reason in its cosmic battle against raw nature, instinct, superstition and traditional authority. But civilisation not only produces more reliable knowledge about the world. It also delivers a higher morality, and a more advanced and just political order.

As soon as the notion of civilisation crystallised in France, it provoked a reaction in Central Europe that gave birth to the idea of *Kultur*. *Kultur* was the very antithesis of an imperial, materialistic, soulless (and French-speaking) civilisation. It was associated with a specific people rather than a nebulous humanity, and it was inspired by spiritual rather than material values. The highest expression of a culture was a language. Its