

CHAPTER 11

Radical Islam in Europe

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last three decades, a particularly radicalised form of self-awareness has manifested itself amongst Muslim societies in many parts of the world. In the long journey of Muslim radical thought, the contemporary period seems to represent a distinct phase. In studying its development amongst European Muslims, we must take note of the fact that the Muslim Diaspora in the cities of Europe have experienced an unique set of influences, which have transformed the Muslim thinking on their identity, and pushed some of them to take a radical stance.

A large body of work already exists in this area. However, the bulk of this work inevitably approaches the issue from the European perspective and, as such, reflects European security dilemmas born of an essentially diasporic Muslim community, numbering below or around 10 percent of the population.

Post 9/11, a great deal of attention has been focussed upon the security threats emanating from Radical Islam. Perhaps, too much attention. The side effects of this security focus among Western students have been:

- (a) To ignore, or underplay the important role of socio-economic conditions in giving rise to radicalisation;

- (b) To underplay the distinction between Muslim communities and the radical fringe; and
- (c) To underplay the distinctions between the many different Muslim communities themselves – thus creating a very ominous illusion of a single monolithic Muslim community at odds with the larger European society.

Analyses based on such misconceptions leads to the tendencies to externalise the problem, and to focus upon a ‘containment’ strategy, rather than to understand and address its ‘root cause’.

Neither Islam itself, nor radicalism are unitary. So, any talk of European Islam, or Radical Islam, in the singular, is flawed and self-defeating. It could very well be that it is just such false notions that are helping to create a reality very similar to the notions themselves.

Then again, the idea that any one stream of thought within the Muslim communities is totally at fault may be technically correct at some particular point in time, but it would be misleading to believe it is true all the time. There are phases of activism as well as of quietism inherent in the history of ALL communities. These may arise from capabilities, the given circumstances of the times, or from the availability of opportunities.

At another level, it is also true that the experience of Islam in Europe has been qualitatively different from that in the home countries in the Middle East, or South Asia. This combined with the unique experiences of Muslim youth in Europe – who experience inter-generational pressure, plus racism, plus their Muslimness (to the extent that this sets them apart from the majority population), serves to create a situation where some members of the Muslim community become susceptible to radicalisation.

Thus, Islam in Europe can be seen to be a plural, diverse phenomenon. Also, radical tendencies within Muslim communities are the outer manifestation of, primarily, their European experiences.

The recourse to traditional identities has remained strong and, in the absence of acceptable means of expression, they have veered to confrontational modes. European society’s error has been that it has kept the door open to such means of expressing identity (preferably within a larger European rubric).

In this article, we seek to understand the predicament in which Muslim communities have found themselves in Europe, and the reasons why the community appears threatening to outside observers. Then, we will attempt to examine how some elements of the Muslim circumstance might work towards pushing the attitudes and opinions within the Muslim communities towards an adversarial stance vis-à-vis the larger community in which they are located. Is it, for example, the case that the unique contextual specifics of Muslim youth in European cities tend to direct their group dynamics towards radicalisation?

Most critically, we need to understand and differentiate between two aspects of a fact: first, there is the perception of a threat and second, there is the actual threat itself. It would be self-defeating to talk simply about ‘Muslim’ threat *per se*. We must learn to recognise that cultural ‘otherness’ is altogether a different reality from Radicalism, which is a fringe phenomenon. Above all, we need to remind ourselves that all these problems can be overcome if policymakers and communities put their minds to it.

There are two broad issues – the first is Muslims (or Islam) in Europe, and the second is Radical Islam in Europe. These two issues are obviously closely related, BUT we must distinguish between them, and isolate the radical component from within the larger Muslim stream. Thus, we will need to differentiate between Muslim protest, or Muslim angst on the one hand, and Radical Islamist action on the other. This becomes more difficult because, first, there is a relatively greater propensity among Muslim immigrants (vis-à-vis native European populations) to think as groups, rather than as individuals. Amongst immigrants from more traditional cultures, this preference for the ‘group’ rather than the ‘individual’ is often encountered. For Westerners, this takes some getting used to. The second reason is that, sometimes, ‘Muslim’ angst tilts towards Radical Islamism.

WHY STUDY RADICAL ISLAM?

Most experts have studied Radical Islam to arrive at an understanding of the magnitude, nature and causation of the threat and the security mechanisms needed to contain it. However, as we will see in this article, many of current dilemmas are substantially the result of structural

deficits, and defaults, rather than a matter of inner choice, or outside provocation alone. Given the demographics of Muslim communities, and the possible geo-strategic scenarios in the decades to come, it is critical that security measures be supplemented by policies designed to address these deficits. Failure to do this will radicalise opinion in wide swathes of Europe's Muslim populations.

SO, WHAT IS RADICAL ISLAM?

Radical Islam strictly refers to a political agenda and to that set of interpretations of Islamic doctrine which further that agenda – that of re-creating the ideal Islamic state. Towards this end, it tends to reject secularism and the rights of non-Muslims, and it is prepared to use violence as a means.

However, Radicalism is a much wider phenomenon, and could range from actual activism, to supporting, or even just sympathising with the Radical narrative. Much of this spectrum is rooted in the immediate societal alienation of Muslim communities.

Thus, given that Radical Islam is more than just a theological exercise, we need to look at the socio-economic aspects that facilitate its emergence. We need to think of the Muslim communities in Europe in terms of their 'other than Muslim' aspects, e.g. 'Asian', 'Traditional – Tribal', 'Diaspora', 'Non-Western', 'Less educated', etc.

MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE

Traditionally/historically, European states tended to interact with their constituents' minority communities as groups. These communities, within themselves, displayed a fair degree of homogeneity, and tended towards physical proximity (partly due to state decree, and partly due to security and mutual support needs). Due to this structure, and due to the existence of more traditional economic structures, interaction between different communities was fairly limited. Understandably, a fair amount of self-governance devolved onto these communities, since the preference was for dealing with community matters within the 'community' itself. State institutions (especially at the lower level) also preferred this informal arrangement.

In the present times, however, many of the foundations of this pattern of relationships have altered due to a range of factors, like greater heterogeneity within the communities, increasingly more diffused (individual focussed) economic interactions, the operation of the welfare state, and the development of modern communications.

Paradoxically, however, when dealing with minority communities in society, contemporary analysts appear to have favoured the 'group' approach, and to broadly follow this rubric. The overriding tendency has been to conflate all Muslims into one single category, and then to closely identify that category with the religion. This perspective is not grounded in facts, and it obscures the appreciation of the rich diversity within Islam, in terms of peoples and cultures.

Most importantly however, this community based approach in a profoundly individualistic context, is a fundamental source of tension.

An interesting side effect is observed wherever communal aggregation, or articulation through groups, is used as a means of expression/mediation, there will follow a struggle amongst the participants (tending towards the violent), to become the recognised articulator. And, more often than not, the most strident (and often the most violent), will tend to win even against sizeable majorities.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

To begin with, it would be appropriate to take a look at the physical characteristics of Muslim communities in Europe.

Muslim populations are dispersed fairly widely across Western Europe, and can be encountered in most large cities. Estimates of the total size of the Muslim community in Europe differ widely, but the rough figure seems to be around 15 million. That said, we must keep in mind that the Muslim communities in Europe differ widely amongst themselves in terms of the country of origin, language, sectarian allegiance and, sometimes, their socio-economic status.

A good starting point might be to take a very broad, impressionistic look at the Muslim populations of the major West European states, and then try to see if a coherent picture begins to emerge.

In terms of numbers, it is difficult to arrive at a precise figure, because most of the West European states have tended to avoid asking about the religious affiliation of individuals in their census. Moreover, in almost all the countries, there are a large number of illegal migrant workers from Muslim countries.

Country	Approximate Muslim Population
France	3.5 to 5 million
Germany	2.8 to 3.3 million
UK	1.5 to 2 million
Italy	1.5 million
Benelux	0.7 to 1.0 million
Scandinavia	0.5 to 0.7 million

Over the years, Muslim populations of each of the major states have become very diverse in terms of country of origin – nevertheless, due to the differing histories of migration, the ethnic conglomerations/pockets are clearly visible.

For example, France has seen a large majority of its Muslim population come in from its former colonies, Algeria and Morocco. The United Kingdom too drew in a huge Muslim influx from its former colonies, and the Muslim component came predominantly from the Punjab and Mirpur regions in Pakistan and later from Sylhet in East Pakistan. In Germany, an overwhelming percentage of the Muslim population (almost 70 percent) is of Turkish origin. In the Netherlands too, the initial migration of Muslims came from Surinam. Later, there was a wave of Muslim immigrant workers from Turkey and Morocco, and today this group seems to have become the largest.

In each of these (and other) states, there have been several subsequent waves of Muslim migration – of workers, or of refugees, and asylum seekers, from different regions of the world. Thus, in each state, a certain ethnic ‘flavour’ seems palpable: the Muslim population is very diverse in composition. Consequently, there is no one singular Muslim community in any of the Western European states – it would be more correct to speak of Europe’s Muslim populations.

Another very visible feature of the Muslim populations is its physical concentration in particular areas. In general, the distribution is heavily

skewed towards a few of the larger cities, and their suburbs. For example, in France, almost a quarter of the population of Marseilles is Muslim, and some of the housing projects have an almost 85 percent Muslim population. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, almost half of the country's Muslim population is concentrated in some of London's neighbourhoods – a heavy predominance of Turks and Bangladeshis can be found in East London. Apart from London, Birmingham and Bradford also have large concentrations of migrants – many of whom are South Asian Muslims.

In the Netherlands, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague have the largest concentration of Muslims. Almost predictably, the pattern is repeated in Sweden, where almost half of the country's Muslim population lives in Stockholm and its suburbs, Gothenburg and Malmö.

This somewhat peculiar pattern has emerged due to several obvious factors. Since the majority of Muslim migrants came to work as labourers in industries, they end up finding living accommodations near the place of work. Also, across Europe, Muslim habitations seem to come up close to ports or airports, as they offer better employment opportunities.

Community Neighbourhoods

Within these locations too, Muslims seem to have chosen the least expensive neighbourhoods. This is because most of these labourers intend to earn, send home money and sooner, or later, go back. So they looked for very cheap accommodation. Moreover, the tendency was to try and live near earlier migrants from their own countries, or with whom they had cultural kinship. Apart from this pull factor, there was a powerful though unstated push factor in operation – this was the unwillingness of landlords in general to rent their properties to these migrants. As a consequence, Muslim migrants had to gravitate towards the most run down quarters of cities.

Naturally, over time, these neighbourhoods acquired a heavily migrant/Muslim character, and became virtual ghettos with their own mosques and ethnic markets. The troublesome aspect is that once these community specific neighbourhoods come into existence, the fall out is a sharp drop in interaction between communities. *'Many Muslim*

*Britons, Germans, and Frenchmen do not just pray only with their coreligionists, but also study, play sports, and socialise only with their coreligionists.*¹

Of course, as social scientists have demonstrated, segregation is not peculiar to a particular community – wherever two or more disparate communities exist, aggregation on community basis will lead to spatial segregation, and perhaps avoidance of one and other.

In contrast to this pattern of ethnic concentrations, Italy displays a somewhat unique character. Possibly, due to the greater than average diversity of countries of origin, and a lack of linguistic affinity to Italy, there is a much higher physical dispersal of immigrants in geographic terms. As such, there is almost no single ethnic entity that dominates a locality. In terms of distribution too, there seem to be no concentrated pockets that could degenerate into ghettos.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC – SETTLING IN/SETTLING OUT

As we have seen, most of the Muslim communities have remained mired in very run-down and sub-standard localities. More importantly, their economic and educational indicators (as a group) are relatively low.

Almost universally, Muslims in Europe have a below average status in both earnings and educational performance. By and large, unemployment amongst Europe's Muslims is far above the national averages. And, even those employed or partially employed, are unskilled and, therefore, low paid labourers.

The per capita earnings of Muslims are lower too – at times only two thirds the pay packet of men from other communities.

The net result is that, as in the United Kingdom, more than eighty percent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi households have an income less than half the national average. With very few exceptions and only some variations, this pattern is repeated across the Muslim communities scattered across Western Europe.

The already insecure position of the Muslims as ill-paid labourers was worsened by the changes that have swept the economies of Western Europe over the years. Traditional industries where these people were

mostly employed, have either shut down, or been upgraded by automation – in either case, resulting in widespread job losses. Of course new jobs were created, but these were either for the highly skilled or the differently skilled, such as in the service industry. Once again, Muslim workers were left out in the cold, for they neither had the new skills, nor the ability to easily acquire them, due to their very low educational levels.

Whatever the economic status of the initial generations, one would have hoped that subsequent generations might have somehow waded out of the economic quicksand. However, here too, two factors have held them back – first, their overall educational backwardness combined with the employers reluctance to hire them, even if they were qualified.

In the domain of education, the overall picture for Muslims is bleak. The already low level of education is aggravated by the fact that the school drop-out rates are far higher amongst Muslims than others, including other immigrants.

There are, of course, some ethnic pockets where the performance is better, but these are the exceptions. The only positive factor is that Muslim women may be performing better than men, for example in the United Kingdom.

This educational handicap can partly be explained by the overall socio-economic constraints on the Muslim students, as well as the perception that, given the established social attitudes, even educational qualifications would not be of any help to them.

Additionally, Muslim communities have reservations about the schooling systems in Europe due to:

- The perception that the schools represented an alien and undesirable cultural framework. This was the case initially in Germany, where the majority of the kindergartens were Church run;
- State schools provided no religious instruction specifically for Muslim children;
- Mixed gender events, sports and swimming lessons for girls were not welcomed by Muslim parents;
- Some parents had problems with the prescribed dress codes.

One of the hot issues for debates has been about Islamic schools that have come up with state recognition in some countries of Europe. While some sections of the Muslim communities have driven this agenda forward on the premise that it would enable their children to acquire modern education in a safe, Islamic context, but many experts have tended towards the view that such schools will only hamper the integration of these children into the larger society, and will thus tend to drive the communities even further apart.

In the larger social domain, several trends and developments within Muslim communities are noteworthy.

They had initially come in search of employment and had, by and large, intended to return to their home countries. However, as they ended up settling down in Europe, their families began to migrate to join them.

This process of family reunification had several important effects.

- In economic terms, the number of economically inactive and dependent immigrants soared.
- Socially too, male workers had earlier been content to live in shared accommodation – now, with their families coming in, they began setting up independent homes within the safe proximity of the community.
- Most importantly, with the advent of families, migrants became much more concerned with social issues and with adherence to religion and culture. Thus, a process of social and cultural conservatism was consolidated.
- The process of forming self-contained communities was given further impetus by the dietary regimes of Muslims – many European countries did not allow *halal* (a religiously mandated ritual for butchering).
- While male workers had been able to adapt their style of dress to loosely conform to Western modes, with the coming of female family members, traditional styles of dress appeared – most notably, the veil. This made ‘the difference’ more visible in the streets and public places, adding to the ‘us and them’ syndrome.

Thus, family reunification accelerated the process of forming inward looking, self-contained communities. The result, as some experts have observed, was the creation of an extensive and versatile vernacular culture.

The advent of modern communications and television opened up the possibility of the migrants ending up having far greater contact with, and knowledge of their home countries, than of their host environment. *'It is an electronic pipeline to the world, people left behind, and it may induce tunnel vision.'*²

The general assumption is that as migrant populations move from the first generation to later generations, they begin to adapt better with the socio-cultural ways of the host countries.

This does not seem to be the case when we look at the history of the violent clashes involving Muslims. We find that, although those clashes were triggered by racial attacks, Muslims responded by coming together not on racial or ethnic premise, but on the basis of a shared Muslim identity. This tendency has been passed on from generation to generation. The suggestion here is that the experiences of the Muslim community and its composition have been such, that it has virtually perpetuated the traits of the 'first' generation.

This trend is accentuated by a continual inflow of fresh migrants through family reunions, marriages, or the recruitment of foreign *Imams*. In effect, a perpetual cycle of 'de-integration' is set into motion.

Net Effect

Europe's Muslim communities can thus be seen to have diverse origins and cultural practices but, once in Europe, they appear to lead a marginalised and isolated existence with some sharing of cultural resources amongst ethnically varied groupings of the Muslim Diaspora. Given this shared experience, it is natural that a degree of homogenisation develops amongst peoples of diverse origins. Moreover, this homogenisation is predicated upon the only significant commonality – religion.

It thus became possible for large sections of the Muslim communities to exist in Europe with almost no interaction with the native population. Effectively, they opted out of European society. It is these relatively

innocuous developments that led to the highly divisive ‘US and THEM’ syndrome – just the right chemistry for radicalisation and conflict.

Given the patterns discussed earlier, we can surmise that Muslim populations in Europe will:

- (a) Be overly visible, giving the impression of being much more in numbers than just 10 percent of the population.
- (b) Remain a strong ‘foreign’ element, because they do not have full citizenship in many countries, as also because immigration is an increasing and on-going process. The effect would be that there will be a perpetuation of the ‘First Generation’ thinking and practices, because of Muslims who find it difficult to adapt to Western norms.
- (c) Will continue to constitute a culturally separate and marginal underclass in most Western European states.

ADJUSTING TO ALIENESS

Whatever model we individually subscribe to – assimilation or integration – it is increasingly apparent that sizeable segments of the immigrant communities (particularly Muslims) have not learned to adapt and amicably co-exist with the larger communities in their countries of adoption. Ultimately, this lack of cohesiveness creates the space for radicalisation of certain sections of the marginal populations.

As we try to understand the reasons for this lack of cohesiveness, we see that all societies, whatever their nature, have well-defined codes of behaviour that facilitate smooth interaction of individuals within them.

However, many of the migrants originated from particularly tradition bound communities into a very different social context in Europe. Their migration led to a breakdown of their traditional social norms (particularly within the family). They were, instead, confronted with a completely different way of life which they were unprepared to adopt. This aroused in them a deep sense of loss and anxiety.

As individuals struggled with these anxieties, and with their inability to adopt new norms, they naturally resisted ‘Western’ influences and codes of behaviour; looking for succour and solution, they looked

back towards societies that they had left behind. In some cases, individuals tried to re-create their past in the new environ. All it did was to aggravate the already difficult process of integration.

IMMIGRANT SELF-ORGANISATION

The mosque has always held a place of centrality in Muslim social life. In a new and alien environment, the mosque assumed even greater significance as a place of worship, a cultural refuge, and as a social centre. Quite naturally, local mosques have tended to become the focus of social life for Europe's Muslim communities, and the *Imam* assumed a very important leadership role in the community, particularly in relation to influencing the younger members of the congregation.

The problem however, was that almost universally the *Imams* of Europe's mosques were recruited from Muslim countries. Obviously, while they were well-versed in Islamic theology, they knew next to nothing about the European way of life. Often, they did not even know the local language. In some of the more extreme cases, the *imams* were trained in particularly rigid interpretations of Islam, and they had the effect of minimising the more tolerant local traditions amongst the Muslim communities. Some states have begun paying attention to the problem of foreign born and trained *imams*. The Netherlands, for example, has begun introducing a compulsory training programme for prospective *imams*, teaching them the Dutch language and familiarising them with European society and polity.

In the home countries, the communities were invariably monochromatic – limited to small uniform groups. In the countries where Europe's Muslim populations originated, the people, by and large, shared a number of cultural attributes – ethnicity, kinship, language, food and sectarian identity. However, in Europe, Muslims from diverse backgrounds shared very few of these attributes, and were often forced to congregate only because they were fellow Muslims. This had two natural effects: first, identifying with the common shared core and, dissemination of ideas from one group to the entire community. Thus, on the one hand, the community lost many of the moderating local influences and, on the other, their minds were opened to radical thinking and, as a consequence, a readiness for conflicts.

There was another process set in motion. Individual mosques gradually began to be drawn into a larger network of mosques which shared theological traditions and financial support. The effect of this trend has been to somewhat homogenise the teachings and practice of Islam, at the cost of the natural plurality of traditions. In some cases, this trend provided radicals with the pulpit for disseminating their teachings.

OUTSIDE COUNTRIES

One of the more controversial aspects of Islam in Europe is what is seen as its 'extra-territorial' tendencies.

At one level, as we have seen, we have to deal with the strong links that Muslim communities have maintained with their countries of origin, often at the cost of harming their interactions in European countries they have now made their home – temporarily or otherwise.

At another level, we see Muslim states seeking to exert their influence on these communities. This is done broadly in two ways.

First, there is the process of institutional support. In some cases, outside countries seek to support (and influence) Muslims in Europe by providing an affiliatory framework for their institutions. For example, the Directorate for Religious Affairs of the Turkish Government influences the affairs of a huge number of Turkish mosques in Europe.

Second, Muslim states seek to garner influence with Europe's Muslims through a variety of support activities like, financial assistance for building mosques and Islamic centres, or by providing scholarships for religious studies.

Muslim communities welcome such support, because finding an *imam* who speaks their language is not easy and, in the historically short period they have been in Europe, they neither had the purpose, nor the financial means to build places of worship.

Yet again, perhaps most visibly, sections of Europe's Muslim communities have often found it easier to take their problems in Europe to their Muslim states that, in many cases, have responded by interjecting in the debates.

Given these linkages with, and dependence upon other states, the loyalty of the Muslim community to the host countries is put in doubt.

ISLAM AS IDENTITY

All immigrants are confronted with multiple identity issues. For Muslims, the salient ones are Muslim versus Modern, Islam versus Democracy, as also the dilemma of growing up a Muslim in a Western context.

None of these three issues represents a fundamental contradiction and yet, they are dichotomies that keep surfacing. One possible explanation could lie in the fact that, generally, Muslims tend to equate 'Tradition' with 'Religion'.

As we have seen earlier, given the circumstance they found themselves in, Muslims in Europe found shared ground only in Islam. Alternate identities like Nationalism or Ethnicity were structurally or circumstantially too weak to be relevant. Faced by sustained social disadvantage and prejudice, it was easier for radical elements in the community to identify the 'opponents' by the latter's faith, that is, Christian. Once the 'Them' had been defined in religious terms, it follows that 'Us' would be identified as Muslims first, and anything else, later.

Moreover, some influential segments of native Europeans too framed their viewpoint in a religio-cultural framework, rather than a secular, universal context.

Muslims' social demands were actually religio-cultural in origin. So, it seemed logical to use the Muslim card even in secular negotiations.

Thus, Muslim communities found it convenient to use their Muslim identity as a basis for negotiating demands in the work place, or even to navigate rent disputes. The structures that emerged for these purposes were naturally religion based (often overlapping the centrality of the mosque), and served to reinforce the hold of religion on the community.

In addition, the mosque was far more than a place of worship – it was the focal point of social life. A number of ancillary 'social centre' functions came to be taken on by the mosques like Quran courses or language classes, community activities, including sports and

hobbies. Large segments of the Muslim communities – especially the working class – are quite content to live their lives within this framework.

A natural consequence has been the tremendous growth in the influence of the *imam*. In fact, one scholar, who has studied the Pakistani community in the UK, has observed that even in Pakistan, the *mullah*'s influence was tempered by other rivals like political leaders, but in Europe, no such constraint was visible.

'The Islamic Threat' – Contributions to Image

Besides shaping of identities, a parallel set of perceptions about Muslims (mostly negative and threatening), have taken root amongst the majority native populations of Europe.

Of course, we could point to the long history of conflict between the Christian and Muslim worlds to account for these perceptions, but such historical arguments are meaningless in the current context.

The current Occidental awareness of Muslims as a political entity, and as a potential challenge to the West itself (in terms of Western interests, Western values and security), appears to have begun taking shape around the 1970s.

At the global level, the most significant events in this context were the Palestinian conflict with Israel, Iran's Islamic Revolution, the anti-West incidents in Lebanon and, most importantly, the controversy over Salman Rushdie's novel, '*Satanic Verses*'.

At the European level, the differential in the demographics of Muslim and Native European populations, together with the unstoppable inflow of illegal immigrants, mainly from the Muslim dominated south, have given rise to widespread fears of a demographic time-bomb that could wipe out native European peoples and cultures.

Here we can see that, in the popular imagination, the religious divide is projected onto a relatively secular problem of migration.

The particularly worrying aspect is the unchanging 'immigrant mentality' exemplified in their preference for acquiring marriage partners from the home countries, rather than from the community in Europe.

The fact that culturally, Muslims are so very different from Europeans has given a definition to this 'fear of the outsider'. The

Muslim tendency to overlay religion upon culture has also contributed to the image of a very alien Islam.

At a more concrete level, this somewhat amorphous fear of Muslim communities arise from the fact that native Europeans find certain Muslim dogmas and taboos, strange and troubling. Some of them are:

- Prohibition on conversion from Islam to other religions while the reverse is allowed.
- Their 'hostile' attitude towards non-Muslims.
- The very different societal values and attitudes displayed by some Muslims with regard to women, gay people and other minority groups.

These attitudes go against the fundamental European concept of individual rights.

We have already discussed how, for a variety of reasons, Muslims choose to live amassed in one rundown, marginalised locality that is more of an ethnic ghetto than a colony. It is an universal truth, that such ghettos mired in socio-economic deprivation, spawn criminals and criminal activities. For the native European populations, these areas began to look very threatening and many have effectively become 'no – go' areas for the whites. '*. . . the French internal intelligence agency noted that there were dozens of neighbourhoods where the French police dared not set foot.*'³

The often close links that Muslim communities maintain with their home countries (and quite often these links seem to be far stronger than those with the host country) tend, once again to strengthen the perception that Muslims (and therefore Islam), will continue to be outsiders. The fact that many Islamic states have tended to overtly support the consolidation of a Muslim identity that is conflictual to, and at odds with Europe, further aggravates the threat of Islam, which comes to be perceived as being associated with fundamentalism and political extremism.

THE SOCIETAL CONTEXT – ANTI-IMMIGRANT SENTIMENT

Anti-immigrant sentiments, particularly against Muslims are prevalent in most European societies. It may sometimes be expressed openly,

but mostly it remains a covert attitude of resentment, or prejudice. Either way, the immigrant is made acutely aware of this hostile feeling.

In concrete terms, this unstated prejudice has clear socio-economic consequences. One of the perceptions, especially among young Muslims applying for jobs, is that they do not get them because of their religion. Once this 'Us and Them' notion takes root, they become even more religious. Their assertion to Islam and overtly Muslim symbols becomes a form of counter-culture. Their feeling of solidarity with the community strengthens, and becomes a form of self-defence against what is perceived to be a hostile and threatening environment.

An example of this overtly symbolic gesture is the issue of head-scarves worn by some Muslim school-girls, could be an instance. To begin with, when faced with family pressures to wear *hijab*, or at least head-scarves, many young school-girls had, in their own way, devised a way around that enabled them to negotiate both with the family, and the secular outside world. They put on head-scarves when they set out from home, and once inside the school gates, would simply dispense with it. But this was obviously an informal arrangement, and the odd case where a student wanted to continue wearing head-scarves even inside the school, could have been left to be sorted out in its own course. In any case, the issue should have been handled with cultural sensitivity at the local level. Once it was made into an issue, then obviously attitudes firmed up on both sides of the debate.

In the economic domain, the Muslim immigrant was thought of (by European states and politicians), only as an economic expedient – he would come in to fill a labour shortage, work till they were needed, and then quietly go back. In the whole process, it was conveniently forgotten that the immigrant may be a labourer in his economic role, but he is also a social person. No consideration was given, nor were arrangements made for that social aspect. Thus, the Muslim migrants found themselves both economically and socially marginalised. Of necessity, the immigrants soon created a virtually parallel economy and society.

At this stage, it can be said that the two sections of Europe's populations are standing in opposition to each other.

WHO GETS RADICALISED AND WHY?

As we try to construct an archetype of who actually gets radicalised, we find that it is often the young, mostly educated, and often second generation Muslims. The apparent causes differ from individual to individual.

“Each person who is radicalised isn’t radicalised the same way. They may prey on the minds of those who don’t have alternatives, who are alienated, who don’t have opportunities. They may appeal to someone’s sense of world justice. They may prey on a young person who doesn’t know about his religion, and is fed a bastardised interpretation of it.”⁴

INTER GENERATIONAL ASPECTS

The core of the problem could be the generation gap – the clash between the value systems of youth, and of their parents. However, interviews of participants in the Bradford rioting in the UK in 1996 suggest that it was not so much a clash of values, as a sense of deep disappointment that the parents’ generation had failed to resist discrimination against Muslims.

Feeling let down, the younger generations searched for an alternate, ‘truer’ system which would empower them, and help them negotiate their proper place in society. For some, this search appears to have veered towards radical interpretations of Islam.

“The extremists offer a simple, empowering narrative that helps youth explain their situation and the world around them: ‘The West is at war with Islam, and it is the obligation of all not only to defend Islam, but to fight all elements of that assault’.”⁵

Moreover, this radicalism is often born of youthful impatience with the larger, moderate stream of opinion (however weakly articulated) within the Muslim community. It is important to note at this point, that amongst the youth who appear to have been radicalised into *Jihadi* activities, a significantly large percentage seem to have come from amongst the educated, and are well integrated into European society. If this be the case, then obviously the explanation is neither in religion, nor in economic underachievement alone.

It is important to note at this point, that the real problem lies NOT just in poverty, the lack of education and employment that afflicts European Muslims, BUT, in the fact, that far from being integrated into mainstream Europe, Muslim populations have, to a significant extent, coalesced into ‘parallel worlds’, where many live out whole lives with little or no interaction with people of other communities. Although the bulk of Europe’s Muslims are not radicalised, sizable sections of them lead an alienated and anxious existence in these parallel worlds, that happen to be located within Europe.

In such a context, radical interpretations of Islam appear to offer a kind of a solution:

“. . . For the alienated, the radicals offer a sense of belonging; for the bored, meaning and excitement; for the unemployed, a new means of sustenance; for those with a limited knowledge of Islam, salvation . . . the promise that you will belong to something greater than yourself, that you will never be alone again, that no one will victimise you again, is a powerful elixir.”⁶

Thus, well before radicalisation started, a far more ominous development had concretised – entire communities were living in ‘parallel worlds’ within Europe with no positive interaction, or communication between the two worlds.

We can see, therefore, that there is sufficient opportunity for radicalisation (i.e. opposing the West) to occur amongst Europe’s Muslims. We now need to look at its actual manifestations.

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF RADICALISM

Along with a host of Muslims going about their everyday life, there are those that see themselves (and their communities) being ranged in adversarial positions with ‘Christian’ Europe. Proceeding from this point, they see Europe as *Dar ul Harb* or ‘the abode of war’ and this group have, accordingly, developed a set of theological postulations which present the image of an uncompromising Islam.

Let us first look at some of the major landmarks that are evidence of radicalisation amongst sections of Europe’s Muslim populations. These may not be the most notable incidents of terrorism. The most

relevant are, the Bradford riots, the ‘*Satanic Verses*’, the Danish Cartoons and the Pym Fortuyn murder. Each of these had a set of ostensible reasons or causes, but as we prise open the contexts for each incident, we encounter the same core alienation that we have detailed earlier.

WHO OR WHAT DRIVES RADICALISATION?

Sustained policy defaults by European governments have helped spawn pockets of radicalisation.

First, the conflating of economic migration with human rights policies has resulted in the influx of a large number of Radical Islamists who then proceeded to infiltrate and sometimes take over the existing Islamic institutions within Europe, giving rise to the phenomenon of ‘*Jihadis on Welfare*’. For example, the British government estimated in December 2005, that nearly a quarter of all terror suspects arrested in Britain in the previous four years, were asylum-seekers.⁷

Second, once the initial pockets of radicalisation had come into existence, whether in particular mosques or in prisons, European governments hesitated to act against them, either because of apathy, or a misplaced sense of political correctness.

RADICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF ISLAM

Radical interpretations of this religion originated from essentially non-European contexts – whether it was ibn Taimiyah urging *Jihad* against the Mongol incursion, or Maulana Maududi in South Asia, or Syed Qutb in Egypt. These initial thoughts are now mediated in relatively distant conflicts – in the Middle East, South Asia or South Eastern Europe. Radical Islam then attempts to distil these very disparate experiences, and to put forward an interpretation of Islam that envisions itself at odds with European values. It is thus, Radical Islamists, more than anyone else, who seek to realise the *Clash of Civilisations*.⁸ Such a dichotomy or alienation between European and Islamic values, need not and does not in fact exist. ‘*Let’s recognise right away that alienation is by no means the natural state of all European Muslims. Disaffection is not the default position.*’⁹

In the current context, the radical ‘tip’ of Radical Islam is essentially extra-European in origin, and takes the form of radical preachers, *Jihadi* cadres, or the support in cash, or kind, from foreign sources.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF RADICAL ISLAM AND WHAT DOES IT REPRESENT?

One way of looking at this radicalism is that it is an evil ideology to begin with. Another way could be that it is ONE of the solutions emanating from the efforts of a large number of disparate and dispersed individuals. ‘. . . *Indeed, Radical Islam in Europe, as in the Islamic world, appears increasingly to have become an ideology of desperation, driven by frustration, helplessness and a sense of impotence. . . .*’¹⁰

If this latter be the case, then it is important for us to define the contours of the problem, and thereafter see if alternate, gentler answers are also possible.

The second mistaken belief we have is that the clash of ideas is between an extreme Islam and the Christian West, when actually it is a clash of ideas within the Muslim communities – it is the tension between moderate and extreme persuasions within Islam.

At some level, it is important to remember that the radicals within the Muslim community were seeking explanations for the reality surrounding them, and solutions to their problems. Given the failure to deploy Western mechanisms, the only recourse left was a limited repertoire of idioms and tools.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSION

As we look for the potential for conflict between Europe’s Native and Muslim populations, it would be relevant for us to look at the populations involved in terms of their composition, relative, and absolute sizes, and age profile.

Experts (of all types) have often noted the differentials in the demographic profile of native European populations, and of Muslim communities in Europe. The fact that the latter have a much higher rate of growth has been a cause of concern amongst Europeans.

Another cause of worry is the youthful demographic profile of the Muslim populations compared to the native European populations. The suggestion has been that larger the population, the angrier they are, and more prone to violence.

INCUMBENCY

As important as the question, WHO seeks or comes to power (formal or informal), is the question WHO or WHAT was in power before. Thus, an individual or a group seeks power, or legitimacy – but, will tend to do this by negating the incumbent power.

Now, at some risk of over-simplification, we can say that, Western European states saw a transition from Nobility-Church dominated structures to more broad-based ones. This will account for the tendency of these states to subscribe to ‘secularism’, and view religion with suspicion, the most obvious case being that of France.

In the case of many, if not most Muslim lands, however, the incumbent power was one, or the other of West European states. In the popular imagination therefore, it was the Christian West that was the ‘Other’ and it was ‘Muslim’ identity (more than nationalism), which came to define the self. This is most clearly visible when we consider how Turkey (where the incumbent power was the Muslim Caliphate), took a different, more secular, course from most of the other Muslim areas.

This positional statement became woven into the popular narrative and gradually assumed the form of the ‘Secular West’ versus ‘Islam’. And, as is often the case, it was not only the image of the ‘other’, but also the image of the ‘self’ that was being constructed.

As the migrants travelled from Muslim lands into Europe, they brought over some of this narratives.

That this migration of idioms was not resolved satisfactorily is demonstrated by the fact that many within Europe’s Muslim communities routinely use their countries of origin, or the Middle East as reference points.

“ . . . the Danish cartoon crisis . . . encapsulated the fact that, despite all these years of being in Europe, those Islamists seeking

to make use of the crisis still had to take the issue to the Middle East for any meaningful action to occur. . . . It . . . symbolised the dilemma [of] . . . having to play to their own constituencies who in many cases still feel that they remain outside of mainstream European society.”¹¹

A REACTION TO MODERNITY?

Given that there is a natural divergence between traditional societies from where many of Europe’s Muslims originate and Europe, it is easy to begin thinking of Radical Islam as a reaction to modernity itself. However, this involves several problems, because such an analysis conflates European with ‘modern’ and Islamic with ‘traditional’. Such a dichotomy is patently untenable. Muslim communities themselves are now contesting such ideas, and are beginning to detail the modern, secular and plural potential of Quranic teachings.¹²

THE RANGE OF RESPONSES

As societies progress through history, they are, at some point or the other, presented with the challenge of accommodating to the advent, or emergence of new groups. This could happen through transformation of a section of the population, or through inward migration of a new group. Faced with such challenges, societies tend to throw up a range of responses – these could be at the popular level, the administrative level or, the policy level – and could range from accommodation, to conflict.

In the context of Islam in Europe, a number of responses are visible. The most obvious of these has been the ‘multi-cultural’ enterprise. Second, some pockets of racism or xenophobia continue to make their presence felt. Both of these emphasise the differences between native populations and Muslims. A third possible response is seen in France’s much vaunted assimilationist model. This model falls below its potential due to latent prejudice amongst the native French population.

Effectively then, Europe has not yet succeeded in evolving an inclusive model that could bring together people of diverse origins into one framework, in spite of their diversities.

CONCLUSIONS

In our perspective, the following observations must be kept in mind.

- Muslim communities in Europe are there to stay.
- Muslim communities in Europe were, and still are, small diasporic microcosms of several very different and diverse cultural traditions.
- Given the trajectories till date, a large part of Europe's Muslim communities, though perhaps not radicalised, are separate and alienated from the European mainstream.
- Here, we must also draw lines of distinction (although it is often very difficult to do so) amongst Islam the religion and faith, the core Islamic traditions and culture and finally, the many local traditions and cultural traits that Muslims have picked up over the centuries in disparate locations, such as languages, dress, food or even social mores.

Europe's own history shows the way. The continent navigated itself out of societal stress by traversing from feudalism to capitalism by means of the welfare state. It was this that provided a vital safety net to the individual, and facilitated the transition from a large familial norm to a more individualistic norm. A similar transition is needed today to facilitate the assimilation and integration of immigrants into the social and work ethics of the West, while retaining the core values of their religion.

And Muslim communities, at some point, have to confront and solve the dilemma of their European identity, as also deal with Radical Islamism in their own community.

Unfortunately, while Europe was able to rework its conception of the 'Individual in Society' for much of its native populations, when it came to dealing with immigrant minorities, it reverted to thinking of and dealing with them as 'groups'. Perhaps, this was a conceptual shortcoming which resulted from '*. . . a false understanding that liberal*

*pluralism meant respecting the rights of communities rather than individuals. . . .*¹³

In either case, it resulted in a fundamental default, i.e. the inability to create requisite institutional structures to communicate and inculcate the core European values and norms, to members of minority communities.

Today, what is required is, first and foremost, a restatement of what these 'European values' and norms are and, in what manner they are instrumental in helping modern-day, composite European societies to define and attain their goals. Given the now pluralistic nature of Europe's populations, this cannot be taken for granted, and must be rediscovered and renegotiated.

Thus, the problem is not in the Western values themselves, but in the failure to enunciate them clearly and demonstrate their relevance to all groups within society. The need therefore, is a clear statement of secular universalism rooted in the rights of the individual.

Moreover, this must not be confused with the term 'democracy' which is understood very differently by different cultures. Democracy must be understood and communicated as being more than just a system of electing and replacing governments; it must be shown to be rooted in the rights of the individual, and no exceptions can be allowed to it. Equally, the obligations of the individual to the larger society, as well as to the other members of that society need to be re-stated.

All European communities must realise that recourse to human rights/defamation laws, etc., cannot go hand in hand with recourse to violence, or to violent protests, which are outside of the democratic/liberal norm. Nor can they be one sided – if members of any one community seek (and receive) the benefits of these protections, then they must be willing to extend them to all other communities also.

However, it is not only European states that are worried – many, perhaps a majority, within the Muslim communities are also beginning to react in many small ways. Experts have noted a newfound interest in Sufism amongst some Muslims. There have been efforts to outline how Muslim practice can comfortably co-exist with being European.¹⁴ If this is indeed the case, it may reveal a movement towards a more individual oriented, and more accommodative approach towards religious and secular life.

Thus, Europe's Muslim communities have to move beyond the currently passive role, and begin articulating their beliefs on their own terms – as Europeans. They need to reach down into the rich repertoire of their traditional beliefs and practices of Islam, and sieve out the core elements and teachings of Islam from the larger body of context specific tradition. Effectively, they need to define Islam in a European context.

Muslim identity is only ONE of many possible identities – what is needed is an articulation of the alternative identities available to European Muslims, and the means to live out those other identities in harmony with being Muslim.

ENDNOTES

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6. Farah Pandith, Speech to the Henry Jackson Society, 4th December, 2007.
7. Melanie Phillips, Londonistan.
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12. Contextualising Islam in Britain – Yasir Suleiman and Western Muslims and the Future of Islam – Tariq Ramadan.
13. Francis Fukuyama: Europe vs Radical Islam.
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