

# Islam in Europe, Religious Freedom, and the Fear of Globalization

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The growth of immigrant Muslim communities in Europe during the second half of the twentieth century has deepened cultural pluralism and demands common political symbols upon which to reinscribe religious freedoms. A stark public-private distinction is a recent Protestant and Catholic compromise in urban centers following centuries of inter-religious and intra-religious conflict. An enriched historical understanding of the contributions of Jews and Muslims to the Renaissance and Enlightenment is required. Civil interfaith dialogue and social action projects among leaders and laypeople, combined with improved history education, can shape the unifying symbols necessary for a flourishing civilization.

Self-identifying secularists in the European Union have strong feelings about religion.

On Sunday, November 29, 2009, 57.5% of the voters in the secular nation of Switzerland voted to add a ban on the construction of minarets to their Constitution. Four Swiss mosques currently have minarets. On October 13, 2009 Thilo Sarrazin was demoted at the Deutsche Bundesbank after stating in *Lettre International* that economic problems in Berlin were more severe than elsewhere in Germany because, “*Eine großes Zahl an Arabern und Türken in dieser Stadt, deren Anzahl durch falsche Politik zugenommen hat, hat keine produktive Funktion, außer für den Obst- und Gemüsehandel, und es wird sich vermutlich auch keine Perspektive entwickeln.*”

In Britain on June 8, 2009, Nick Griffin of the British National Party was elected to the European Parliament. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders called for a ban on Muslim immigrants and on the Qur'an on August 8, 2007 in *de Volkskrant*, where he called it “*de islamitische Mein Kampf.*” Then, on October 13, 2009 following the successful appeal of his UK travel ban, Wilders hailed the decision as “a victory for free speech.” What first appeared as a conservative political tactic

to scapegoat powerless immigrants during economic downturns has gained wider public support. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Cardiff as Fulbright Scholar to the UK, in Los Angeles for the Ford Foundation, and in Bradford and Manchester for the UC Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, I have seen two kinds of fear of Muslim immigrants. First, there are legitimate concerns about religion-inspired violence. Secondly, and this will be the focus here, is a broader fear of modern globalization that is made visible by growing immigrant populations, who also generate alternative responses to modernization.

José Casanova and Shmuel Eisenstadt have helped to clarify what these “multiple modernities” might look like. Following Max Weber’s analysis of Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*, where John Calvin and Adam Smith each emphasized values of autonomy and punctuality, Eisenstadt agrees that modernization involves western assumptions about agency and time. In response, when this modern individualism became industrial and combined with social evolutionary misreadings of Darwin's theory of natural selection during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, alternative modernities of communism and fascist/nationalism emerged.<sup>1</sup> In the U.S., Casanova describes a third model where the establishment and free exercise clauses of the first amendment were defined as an alternative public-private distinction to those of England (Established Church) and France (*Laïcité*).<sup>2</sup>

As Eisenstadt explains, our expectation would be that the increased competition of globalization would be opposed by increased localization:

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<sup>1</sup> Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus*, Winter 2000, pp. 1-29, esp. 3 and 11.

<sup>2</sup> José Casanova, “What is a Public Religion?” *Religion Returns to the Public Square*, Hugh Hecló and Wilfred M. McClay, eds., (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003), pp. 111-139, esp. p. 114.

“Significantly, fear of the erosion of local cultures from the impact of globalization has led these movements to be suspicious of the emerging centers of a globalizing world, giving rise yet again to a continuous oscillation between cosmopolitanism and various ‘particularistic’ tendencies.”<sup>3</sup>

Kwame Appiah has described this well in Ghana where a precipitous drop in global cocoa prices can transform a local Asante farming community outside Kumasi significantly.<sup>4</sup> This transformation is an ambivalent one for “cosmopolitans,” who enjoy the benefits of new medicines, drinking water, and schools, yet deplore the additional “diseases, prostitution, organized crime, and youth violence....and international groups of separatists or terrorists.”<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the greatest difficulties are the unanticipated changes and feelings of loss of control, which require a theodicy and eschatology; both an understanding of traumas in history, and hope for the future.

The response to increased globalization is not to localize, as we might expect, but to invent an alternative transnational universalism that is powerful enough to compete with previously unimaginable human and capital migrations.<sup>6</sup> Local ethnic and/or religious identities are insufficiently powerful. This is why most immigrant Muslims in Europe are not organizing to create a new British Islam, French Islam, or Dutch Islam. A transnational framework of ideals provides stronger resistance to perceived threats of hedonism and materialism, and real threats of racism. In the U.S., the foundational history of African-American Muslims brought during slavery can be reframed as indigenous to justify a new Judeo-Christian-Islamic identity.

José Casanova recognized how sacred symbols, historical narratives, and ritual performances address fears of globalization when he wrote:

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<sup>3</sup> Eisenstadt, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Case for Contamination,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 1, 2006, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Eisenstadt, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

“The great world religions in particular, as the stored collective normative and moral memories of humanity, are bound to become a valuable resource in dealing with these new transcendent issues. Thus, the interconnectedness of religion and public policy is only likely to increase in the future as we enter new uncharted moral territory.”<sup>7</sup>

A three part solution that incorporates his insights might include, firstly, a better understanding of the meanings of religious symbols (such as headscarves, holidays, and halal food) through improved education. Second, the trauma of centuries of Protestant-Catholic-Jew violence in Europe should not prevent an honest discussion of the positive contributions of Abrahamic revelations to Europe’s Roman roots. Third, inter-religious dialogue promotes democracy and civil society effectively. Both the promise and difficulty of inter-religious dialogue is visible in Casanova’s quotation of Francis Cardinal George of Chicago speaking at the Library of Congress in 2000:

“Inter-religious dialogue is more basic to the future of faith, therefore, than is Church-state dialogue, important though that remains. And among the dialogues, that between Christians and Muslims promises to be the most significant for the future of the human race. Islam did not undergo the Renaissance and Enlightenment and therefore enters the post-modern world as a fully universal faith without having gone through the experience of modernity which shaped European cultures and the Christian faith.”

Because of battles at Poitiers, Vienna, during the Crusades, and more recently with the Ottoman Empire, an Abrahamic *rapprochement* does face profound obstacles. The colonial heritage since World War I presents a further challenge. Despite these significant historical tensions, globalization in Europe, including the migration of Muslims, is a “brute fact.” For social cohesion to be possible, common symbols involving a reinterpretation of history are required, and religion cannot be bracketed as taboo.

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<sup>7</sup> Casanova, p. 130.

## **How to Secure Access and Claim Rights**

The above quote by Cardinal George is telling because of its awareness of the problem and also as an example of the problem. Inter-religious dialogue did become more important during the papacy of John Paul II and the Church encouraged dialogue officially during Vatican II.<sup>8</sup> Almost every major religious institution has encouraged inter-religious dialogue, and in the U.S. and Britain grassroots organizations have grown at ten times the rate of institutional efforts.<sup>9</sup>

Where Cardinal George demonstrates the need for greater awareness about Islam is in his statement about the Renaissance and Enlightenment. These two common misunderstandings about Islam are barriers to democracy and religious freedom. First, European contact with Muslim civilization in Medieval Spain and during the Crusades inspired the Renaissance. Secondly, important and necessary conversations about the secular Enlightenment only become possible after examining the religious Enlightenment in greater detail, including the influence of the Protestant Reformation, and also Judaism, on secular European values. Pretending that religions, cultures, or “worldviews,” do not play an important role in intellectual history is a handicap of academic specialization and centuries of violent church-state conflict, that harms secularism and dialogue. Religious values contribute to well-being in profound ways.

Fulbright research in Wales in 2009 revealed how effective inter-religious dialogue can prevent violent conflict. In contrast to the riot towns I visited in and around Bradford and

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<sup>8</sup> “Respectful dialogue with others enables us to be enriched by their insights, challenged by their questions and impelled to deepen our knowledge.” Pope John Paul II from Maurice Borrmans, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims* (New York: Paulist, 1990, orig. 1981 Paris).

<sup>9</sup> In their 2007 Annual Review, the Inter Faith Network for the UK reported 183 new inter faith groups since 2000.

Manchester, the Welsh Assembly has a clear plan for integrating immigrant Muslims. First, diverse religious leaders meet regularly. This has prevented the inter-religious violence of other European capitals from recurring in Cardiff. For instance, during the Danish cartoon controversy, staff at the University student newspaper and Church in Wales newsletter wanted to reprint the offending images. Because of the open lines of communication between leaders, midnight phone calls between leading officials stopped the presses. Instead of inciting anger with abstract media taken out of context, the University and Church in Wales set up interfaith dialogues to educate Muslims about free speech concerns and non-Muslims about hospitality. Though only a symbolic gesture, this negotiation of a religious accommodation prevented violence through open dialogue; a value common to the religious and secular Enlightenments. As two additional examples, the Welsh Assembly finances Muslim entrepreneurs willing to redevelop blighted neighborhoods and they sponsor a “Getting on Together” inter-religious citizenship curriculum in local area secondary schools.

### **Hijab, Holidays, and Halal Food:**

#### Individual and Group Rights, Negative and Positive Liberty

Religious accommodations are negotiated at the local level, where immigrant Muslims and the non-Muslim majority attain workable compromises about headscarves, holiday commemorations, and *halal* food options. As Hannah Arendt argued in *The Human Condition*, an accessible public space for face to face communication makes non-violent social cohesion possible. Excessive veiling practices that restrict movement, the self-flagellations that sometimes accompany Ashura celebrations in Karbala and strict dietary restrictions have all been moderated in London. In contrast, strip clubs next to mosques, mandatory work meetings during

Friday prayer, and bacon for breakfast at an Islamic Studies conference I attended, or church hosted Christian-Muslim dialogues at the pub, show a lack of effort at accommodating Islam publicly.

The efforts by Swiss voters, Thilo Sarrazin, Nick Griffin, and Geert Wilders to ban Islam do not help their own cause or harm their opponents. To assert a desire to return to a mythical past should be a protected right. Meanwhile the real world negotiations between positive and negative liberty and individual and group freedom will continue. As the problem is stated in the background paper (p. 3) for the 12<sup>th</sup> Roundtable:

“Participants of the workshop could focus on the diverging interpretations of religious freedom and rights in terms of individual or group rights.... these questions raise concerns as to how the rights and freedoms of religious minorities may be applied without infringing the rights and freedoms of others.”

These are the issues I would like to study more in depth with the support of the Irmgard Coninx Foundation, the Social Science Research Center Berlin, and the Humboldt-University Berlin. With the support of 39 colleagues and Professor José Casanova I can enhance my ability to prevent inter-religious violence and to promote civil discourse. As the junior scholar who leads interfaith efforts in Central California (population 7 million), editor of three volumes on Religion and Daily Life for Praeger (35 contributors in 8 countries), as Fulbright Distinguished Scholar to the UK, and Humanities Assistant Professor of the year at my home institution, I would be honored to be able to attend the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Roundtable on Transnationality and Cultural Pluralism. The “I Have a Dream” speech of Martin Luther King, Jr., on August 28, 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., has an unexpected relevance to transnationalism after a half century of rapid urbanization and technological advances.

“Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.”

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