

ANSWERING THE MUSLIM QUESTION: THE POLITICS OF MUSLIMS IN EUROPE

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Abstract: Since at least the 1990s, there has been a huge growth in interest about the Muslim presence in Western plutocracies. Part of this interest has been due to series of moral panics which have centred on the figure of the Muslim. The mobilisation of Muslims as Muslims has raised questions about national identity and belonging. Increasing interest is also due to the way in which the security threat - as posited by the 'war on terror' - has been focused on the Muslim question as a means of reconfiguring the liberal-democratic contours of Western plutocracies. The responses to the attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, Madrid on 11 March 2004 and London on 7 July 2005 have been the most obvious examples of the way in which issues of national security have become conflated with issues of national cultural integrity. The very continuity of Western liberal-democratic traditions is being contested around the Muslim presence. This paper explores the problematisation of a Muslim presence outside Muslimistan, by interrogating the concept of a European Islam.

Key words: Muslims, European Islam, multiculturalism, integration, ethnic minorities

When we are afraid of others we believe that they hate us, and when we think they hate us we doubt our own legitimacy.

Paul Veyne

INTRODUCTION

"In heart I am a Moslem (sic); in heart I am an American; in heart I am Moslem, in heart I'm an American artist...", so said Patti Smith. This was way back before the

Islamic Revolution, before the Rushdie affair, before Affair Foulard, before the murder of Theo van Gogh, before the Danish cartoon affair, and of course, before the war on terror. It is increasingly difficult to imagine, from today's perspective, how it would be possible to establish equivalence between American, Muslim and Art. Does not America and Muslim signify opposition between Western and non-Western and does not antagonism between Art and Muslim represent a deep antagonism between rigid orthodoxy and enlightened self-expression? Since at least the 1990s, there has been a huge growth in interest about the Muslim presence in Western plutocracies. Part of this interest has been due to series of moral panics, as noted above. What unifies these moral panics - despite their local contexts and specific histories – is the way in which mobilization of Muslim identity has raised questions about national identity and belonging. Increasing interest is also due to the way in which the security threat - as posited by the 'war on terror' - has been focused on the Muslim question as a means of reconfiguring the liberal-democratic contours of Western plutocracies. The responses to the attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001, Madrid on 11 March 2004 and London on 7 July 2005 have been the most obvious examples of the way in which issues of national security have become conflated with issues of national cultural integrity. The very continuity of Western liberal-democratic traditions is being contested around the figure of the Muslim. The metaphorical excess of "Muslim" and "Western" points to the politicization of these labels, since they operate as surfaces of inscription for a wide range of demands and mobilizations that are not reducible to the facticity of being Western or being Muslim. Islam and the West become the names of antagonistic global projects which increasingly polarize the world and its history. It is in this context that the presence of ethnically marked populations in the European Union, which increasingly define themselves and are defined by others as being Muslim, assume a critical importance.

The regulation and disciplining of Muslim-ness has become a mechanism by which the state authorities have been able to introduce measures which seemingly threaten to roll back many of the cherished democratic institutions and practices of civil society. As William Connolly (2005: 6) writes:

The cold war generated McCarthyism as an extreme response to the threats that the Soviet Union posed to Christian faith and capitalism together. The terrorism of Al-Qaeda, in turn, generates new fears, hostilities, and priorities. The McCarthyism of our day, if it arrives, will connect internal state security to an exclusionary version of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Thus the Muslim question is not only of importance for ethnographers, urban planners, and local government officials; it is currently at the heart of the debates about the nature of European-ness itself.

On the one hand, it is assumed that the presence of so many Muslims in the urban heart of the European Union subverts the binary opposition between Islam and the West. On the other hand, it is argued that the persistence of Muslims in Europe constitutes one of the gravest threats to European societies and cultures – in that it provides the sea in which the jihadist infiltration of Europe can proceed. Thus, the presence of Muslims *qua* Muslims has a general resonance that goes beyond the actuality of Muslims living in the European Union. One way proposed to resolve this dilemma has been to articulate a European Islam. This approach emerges from diverse points of the political spectrum and from some who are hostile to Islam and Muslims as well as from those who are not. So what would a European Islam look like?

One approach that we can immediately dismiss, is one that uses a geographical notion of Europe to locate European Islam – in Andalusia, or Islamicate Sicily, or Bosnia, or in the ‘indigenous’ Muslim populations like Pomaks in Bulgaria, or Tartars in Finland. Historically, the idea of what became Europe was based on the exclusion of what had been under Islamicate control, hence instances of European Islam, if they are to be substantive, cannot be reduced to a retrospective projection of cartographic exercises.

Another approach that we can also reject quickly is that which understands European Islam as simply an ethnographic description. In other words, that Muslims living in Europe are going to inflect their Islam with European accents. It is really not that interesting (or that novel) to say that Islam in Europe is different from Islam in Muslimstan. No doubt Muslims in Germany, in Paris or in Bradford have particularities that they may not share with Muslims living in Thailand, in Amsterdam or Utrecht. These local inflections however do not constitute distinct multiple “little Islams”. The attempt to argue for a world of multiple Islam is a rather hurried response to the threat of essentializing Islam. Multiple Islams would only make sense if they could be said to exist in splendid isolation from each other, hermetically sealed and unaffected and fully self contained in whatever locale (it is not clear what would be the proper zone of demarcation of these multiple Islams. Would there be a British Islam or Islam for London or Manchester?) One does not need to posit an essence to Islam to argue that Islam is not reducible to its ontic manifestations. All the particular expressions of Islam do so in the name of a singular Islam: at the most, we have rival

projects to interpret a singular Islam.³³ Indeed, it is precisely the existence of a singular Islam as signifier that allows the constitution of an Islamicate politics, in which Muslims (and also non-Muslims) wage wars of interpretation to attach the signifier of Islam to the signified of their various specific projects. The knowledge that Islam may be used as the means of articulating a multiplicity of positions is not grounds to assume that we are dealing with distinct multiple Islams. Dialectal variation is not sufficient to constitute a distinct language, nor should it cause us to jump to the conclusion that these local attunements and particularities of Muslims posit distinct Islams.

If we reject the cartographic and ethnographic descriptions of European Islam as being either banal or flawed, then what, if anything, can be meant by the idea of a European Islam? To answer this question requires abandoning the primacy of the matrix of ontic studies. That is, studies that posit an essence that underpins (and predetermines) any subsequent investigation (Thomson, 2006). For the most part, depictions of Muslims in Europe (including official, journalistic, academic and popular) are represented in terms of an 'immigrant imaginary' (Sayyid, 2004; Hesse and Sayyid, 2006). This immigrant imaginary provides a reservoir of highly mobile tropes which have been used over time to mark out various groups of ex-colonial and ethnically marked settlers.

THE IMMIGRANT IMAGINARY

The immigrant imaginary is a series of identifications by which the emergence of non-Europeaness within the spaces of naturalized Europeaness is made comprehensible, coherent and concrete. The immigrant imaginary is a product of various historical constructs around notions of Europeaness; its representations are penetrated by various discursive practices culled from coloniality, racism, and Orientalism. These elements are marshalled and represented as way of understanding postcolonial settlement of Europe by resignifying the relationship between peoples and places in the context of displacement of Europeaness from the centre of the world. It is possible, at the analytical level, to distinguish four key features of this imaginary.

First, the immigrant imaginary sees distinction between the host society and the immigrants as being ontological. Immigrants and host societies refer to different order of being. This difference is marked in a variety of ways. The immigrants' food smells, their music is loud, their family structures are either anarchic or oppressive,

³³ See Sayyid, 2003, for a critique of the notion of local little Islams, pp. 34-36.

their everyday conduct is different from that of “normal people.” Whereas the host society has networks, immigrants have kinship; whereas the host society has modernity, the immigrants are tradition-bound. Or, for example, consider the way in which “settler” communities have too often been considered to be outside the pale of proper politics. It is thought that their activities can be explained in terms of “factionalism” or machinations of egotistical community leaders.

Secondly, the immigrant experiences are seen as either an exotic or banal. The tendency to exoticize treats the immigrant as representing something exceptional: a manifestation of difference, expressed in signifiers of ritual, dress, and life in general. This is countered by the seemingly opposite tendency to make the immigrant the same. The bland sameness produced by banalization empties the Other of any particularity, by reducing the Other to a superstructural moment of a more general and deeper infrastructure. This may be defined in terms of either their genetic make-up, or their evolutionary development into the essence of what is human. In other words, under their (often darker) skins immigrants are not different from the ethnically unmarked. There is nothing seriously distinctive about them. In other words, the exoticization of the immigrant works by treating every aspect of the immigrant experience as being distinct. The banalization of the immigrant works by considering the immigrant to be indistinct. Both these modes of appropriating the immigrant, despite their superficial opposition, are based on the assumption that the ethnically unmarked provide the norm by which the immigrant is to be judged. In other words, the ethnically unmarked represents the quintessential human.

Thirdly, the immigrant imaginary assumes that, with the passage of time, the ontological distinction between immigrant and host will be eroded, as the host society consumes the immigrants. (This consumption is not purely metaphorical, for the commercialisation of aspects of the immigrant experience, particularly in areas of cuisine and costume, are often cited as examples of how immigrants are being integrated into society, since their food and clothes are being sold to the general public). It assumes that, over time, immigrants will integrate into the host culture. The degree of integration into the host culture ranges from uncritical assimilation (in which the immigrant disappears without a trace into the host society) to equally untheorized hybridization (in which the immigrant ends up being a hyphenated and hybridized member of the host community, i.e. adding colour and cuisine to the host society). Whatever route they take, these immigrants will find that all roads lead to their eventual elimination as distinct populations. Furthermore, the act of consumption by the host will not substantively transform the host – the host remains the same. It is the immigrants who are chewed up and digested. This trope manifests

itself in the speeches of politicians and the commentaries of opinion-makers as exhortations to immigrants to speed up the process of assimilation by eliminating whatever practice is considered to be the current cause of moral panics – e.g. arranged marriages, ‘matriarchal’ households, cultural schizophrenia, or youth delinquency.

Fourthly, the form of this integration can be represented in discrete and successive stages called generations. A generation is one of the key units of analysis in this type of narrative. Generations are considered to be permanent units by which the immigration experience can be accounted for while continuing to maintain the status of immigrants. Generational differences are articulated as the crystallization of changes that immigrants are supposed to go through over time. Each generation marks the progress towards integration into the host community. The immigrant imaginary presents a picture analogous to the way in which tadpoles are transformed over time into full-grown frogs. The use of the concept of generations within the immigrant imaginary performs two functions. First, it prevents the completion of the process of immigration. The prefixing of ‘first’, ‘second’ or ‘third’ to generation defers the moment when the immigrants can be considered settlers, i.e. fully part of the society in which they reside. The ethnically marked ex-colonial settlers become permanent immigrants. This act of freezing the immigrant to the moment at which he or she gets off the plane (or boat) has the effect of reinforcing the essentialization of the immigrant, since, regardless of how many generations have passed, the immigrant remains an immigrant, and the process of immigration remains without an end. Thus, the moment of assimilation is continually deferred, and the immigrants’ relationship to the society in which they reside, remains that of newcomers. Second, the concept of generation works to de-historicize ‘immigrants’, to remove them from the currents of history, and thus excludes any political aspects of the ‘immigrant’ experience. ‘Generations’ is deployed as a temporal category that removes any political dimension from causal explanations. In other words, time is spatialized through the notion of generation. So the differences between the “first” generation and “second” generation are narrated as being due to the differences in assimilation into the host society and not as changes in historical context. The immigrant, over time, is to be transformed into a member of the host society (but, as was pointed out above, the transformation is never complete and constantly deferred).

The immigrant imaginary has a wide circulation both in academic and popular culture. It provides the tools by which the identity of ‘immigrants’ can be regulated and disciplined. It makes available the subject positions open to the immigrant communities and the conditions that underlie that opening. It is through the use of the

idea of the immigrant imaginary that the usual stories about Muslims in European plutocracies are written and disseminated. Issues of cultural schizophrenia are read as forms of generational conflict, the notion of dual allegiances (e.g. currently, the “problem” of being Muslim and Western), cruelty to animals, domestic violence and, of course, arranged marriages, provide policy-makers, professional provocateurs and academics with a steady diet of shock horror stories and statements. The immigrant imaginary is essentialist, teleological, and ultimately xenophobic. While, ostensibly, it has prided itself in its ability to narrate the transformations arising out of the migration process, its ontology subverts its epistemological ambition. It is a paradigm of social change that is unable to account for change except as a teleology. It is an attempt to understand social identities, which rests upon a pre-given “whatness” that is immutable and that determines the behavior of both immigrants and hosts. Ontically based analysis cannot provide a resolution of the Muslim question, since it leaves out any consideration of the processes of subject formation – of both Muslimness and Europeaness; processes which are at the forefront of current social developments. It is only by taking this ontological dimension into account that we can engage fully with very idea of European Islam. In other words, a European Islam that is not reducible to geographic or ethnographic descriptions requires an articulation between Europe and Islam at a conceptual level.

There are two phases to this exercise: firstly, an implicit list is made of values which are associated with Europe and with Islam, and then these values are put to Muslims to be imported into their guided engagement with Islam so as to produce a European Islam. The difficulty, of course, arises with trying to come up with characteristic values for the European or Islamicate enterprises, which invariably amount to little more than narcissistic fantasies dressed as essential truths. As nearly all projects to articulate European Islam assert the primacy of the European enterprise, they necessarily depend on listing a cluster of values or cultural practices which are considered to be characteristic of European societies. Hence, calls to share values always demand of Muslims transformation of Muslim practices, but European societies are required only to tolerate Muslims. Secondly, these values are then used to exclude practices associated with Muslims. Thus it was that in 2006, Charles Clarke, the then British Home Secretary, in a speech in Washington declared four core beliefs of Islamists as totally antithetical to “Western Civilization” and as such no Western government could ever accommodate them. These included, and hence precluded any compromise on, the defence of freedom of speech, of gender equality, and opposition to the *shariah* law and to the establishment of the caliphate.

The idea that European societies are characterised by freedom of speech or gender equality is open to qualification on account of the fact that freedom of speech is restricted not only through legislation (e.g. Holocaust denial), but also through 'sociological' factors, such as oligopolistic control of media. Similarly, gender equality is also undermined by various cultural factors. Nor is it clear that the distinction between Islamists and others can be organized in terms of the opposition or acceptance of freedom of speech or gender equality. The attempt to intimidate Al-Jazeera, or legislation introduced in the UK against the 'glorification of terrorism', all point to the far more complicated positions in which the trope of 'freedom of speech' operates in the age of the 'war against terror'. As for gender equality, the institutionalized gender apartheid of Saudi Arabia has never been a significant hindrance to the description of the Saudi regime as moderate. Gender equality becomes, rather, a means of legitimating post-colonial 'humanitarian' interventions (Hirschkind and Mahmood, 2002).

The arguments for a European Islam, however, neglect the persistence of Orientalism and instead focus on 'progressive, modern values' embedded in European (Union) social practices. Specifically, it is argued that Western practices such as freedom of speech, democratic constraints on exercise of arbitrary power, and the *de facto* (if in many cases not *de jure*) separation between religious and state institutions allows Muslims to experiment in thought and deed about their creed, to reflect upon it in an atmosphere free from opprobrium and that this creates conditions for an Islamicate glasnost. European Islam could act as the vanguard of reform in the rest of the Muslim Ummah.

This idea, however, is based on a rather generous understanding of Europe's 'democratic culture' and the attitude of European authorities in relation to Islam. The reason why European governments' comportment towards Islamicate intellectual developments was one of benign neglect was because they did not consider such developments to have any more significance than developments in astrology: a set of esoteric practices of no general consequence. In this, there was a clear difference with the governments of Muslimstan, for whom Islam remained of crucial importance, and thus were unwilling to allow the free-flowing development of its interpretive literature. This argument in favour of European Islam sees differences between Western and Non-Western attitudes to Islam in terms of a difference in cultural values rather than different political and security interests. No government in Muslimstan, even the most resolutely 'secularist', could afford an attitude of benign neglect towards developments in Islamic thinking. This can be seen clearly in Kemalist states, whose much-vaunted separation of church and state is only

accomplished by total expansion of the state to absorb all so-called religious institutions. Kemalist secularism is not a separation of mosque and state but rather the complete destruction of any independence of the mosque and its total internalisation within the bureaucratic structure of the state. It can also be clearly seen in the way in which, in the wake of the 'war on terror', Western plutocracies have increasingly sought to control and direct Muslim debates and interpretations of Islam. Secret police surveillance of Muslim intellectuals, regulation and censorship of Muslim freedom of expression, use of torture (often out-sourced), extra-judicial measures, are all practices that are being used against Muslims in Europe as well as in Muslimstan. Increasingly, the difference between the European Union and Muslimstan in relation to the degree of autonomy permitted to Muslim articulations of Islam, is quantitative rather than qualitative, a matter of scale and degree. The space of autonomous development of Islamicate interpretations has radically shrunk. European Islam cannot be the name of an interpretation of Islam that arises from the free play of Muslim debate and engagement.

The articulation of a European Islam proceeds from a denial of the universality of Islam, and its subordination to Europeaness. European Islam becomes another instance of Orientalism in which Islam acts as counter-factual mirror to narcissistic fantasies of Europeaness and exceptional grandness. Specifically, two major points can be made in relation to the project of European Islam:

Firstly, the project begins by accepting (either implicitly or explicitly) that Islam is a religion, and religions are basically what Western Christianity becomes following the Wars of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Islam, because it does not fit in this idea of religion, is therefore deviant or immature, and needs to be refashioned so that it will accord with this European based Enlightenment definition of religion.

Secondly, this Enlightenment conception of religion is based on a series of assumptions which sees European history as universal history. In other words, developments in European cultural practices are assumed to have relevance for all other cultural formations. This can be clearly seen in the arguments which are often presented in favour of secularism. Secularism's supposed benefits can be grouped under three broad headings:³⁴

- Epistemological arguments based around the claim that without secularism there can be no scientific progress, and without scientific progress there could be no technological advances. In this sense, secularism as an epistemological category rather than a social one can be described as denoting a shift from an episteme

³⁴ For details of this argument see Sayyid, 2009.

centred on God to one centred on Man (sic). The core of the argument is that secularism de-legitimizes the claims of religious authorities to control the production of knowledge, and creates the conditions for the rejection of ontological claims founded on sacred narratives in favour of a scientifically approved ontology.

- Secularism is necessary to ensure civic peace and social harmony and to prevent religious passions from getting out of hand. By separating religion and confining it to the private sphere, secularism prevents differences in religious opinions from becoming the source of conflicts that would engulf a society's public space. Religious differences become matters of individual taste and therefore have little impact upon the organisation of social life at large. In addition, secularism prevents contending groups from making appeals to supernatural forces as a way of reinforcing their positions and keeps all parties on an even playing field in which debate cannot be short-circuited by such appeals.

- Secularism presents the necessary pre-condition for the exercise of democracy – which, following Lefort's useful understanding, is based on keeping the space of power empty (1986: 279). The removal of God allows the space of power to be emptied. The claim being that democracy is a government that is ultimately based on the idea of the 'sovereignty of the people', regardless of how this idea is expressed in reality (e.g. in Britain, it is the parliament which is sovereign not the people; however, the power of parliament derives from the people). Popular sovereignty seems to preclude any place for the idea of a sovereign God or sovereign priesthood. Thus the benefits of secularism help to define modernity itself. Modernity, of course, remains a narrative about Western exceptionalism (Sayyid, 2003: 101-102), and thus secularism becomes a marker of Western identity. The epistemological, civic and democratic arguments for secularism are formulated as part of a narrative of Western exceptionalism.

European Islam is an Islam that can be accommodated within the Western notions of secularism and its presumed benefits. Specifically, the applicability of the three main arguments for secularism and their relevance for Muslims can be challenged by focusing on the experience of autonomous Islamicate cultural formations – that is, those cultural formations that existed prior to the colonial enframing of the planet. In other words, the shift from Western to Islamicate societies seemingly undermines the universal claims for secularism.

So, for example, the idea of an epistemological case for secularism rests upon a conflict between science and church – a conflict that is often symbolized by the trial of Galileo. But the absence of an organized Church, made such clear demarcations between authority of religion and science difficult to draw within Islamicate societies.

Perhaps more importantly, the epistemological case for the benefits of secularism is based on the assumption that the understanding of the Divine in Islamic and Nasrani discourses is homologous. In the Christological conception of Divine, the Man (sic) and God occupy the same ontological plane, thus human endeavour can potentially compete with the Divine. The conjoining of human and divine spheres - as described through the category of incarnation in which divine and mundane fuse in the body of Christ - no doubt helps to sustain a perspective in which human and divine exist in the same dimension. Thus narratives of divine causality and intervention are locked in a zero-sum game with narratives that centre on human agency. As a consequence, science and religion continually collide within Nasrani discourses. Within Islamic interpretations the divide between Divine and human cannot be bridged. Islamicate reflections on the nature of the Divine have been very consistent in maintaining the gap between human and Divine spheres – a gap that is wide and permanent. This contrast between Nasrani and Islamicate discourses on the Divine cannot be seen as essential or foundational, since differences in reflections on the Divine indicate contingent conversations within various hermeneutic traditions, and not the uncovering of specific essences which are 'hard-wired' within Christianity or Islam. After all, many of early Nasrani sectarian disputes often had a Christological element (e.g. controversies between those who accepted the interpretations of the Council of Chalcedon, and those who did not such as the Arians, Nestorians and Monophysites).

The case for secularism as necessary for civic peace is largely based on extrapolating from the European experiences of the Wars of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation to make a general point about the relationship between civic peace and de-politicization of religious belief. As it has been pointed out, there is no direct analogue to sectarian warfare of such intensity and scale in Islamicate history and thus the idea that civic peace is only possible if religion is confined to the private sphere cannot be simply read from Islamicate history.³⁵ Indeed, it is possible to make the very opposite case: the retreat of religion from the public sphere in Islamicate history has been most often associated with the breakdown of civic peace. For example, the often admired secularist order in Turkey was imposed from the top, upon an exhausted war-weary population. The secularism of the Turkish republic was not a response to demands of the Turkish masses but rather the desire of the Kemalist elites and their authoritarian project of Westernization. Secularism in the

³⁵ The closest approximation is the conflict between the Fatmids and Abbassids. However, the infrastructural capacity of both Abbassid and Fatimids political orders were not sufficient to produce such an intensive form of violence - as experienced in the wars of religion in Europe.

context of Islamicate communities has often meant de-Islamization, and for most part has been imposed either by colonial regimes or Westernizing regimes. And these projects have all served to increase rather than reduce social conflict. Empirically, the scale and intensity of violence in Muslim countries which have been ruled by avowedly secular regimes has been such that it would not inspire much confidence about the relationship between secularism and civic peace.

The argument that secularism is a necessary pre-condition of any political system of popular sovereignty ignores the possible ways in which popular sovereignty can be finessed, from the example of various constitutional monarchies to the suggestion by Mawdudi and others who re-described popular will as being vice regal rather than sovereign. In other words, the sovereignty of the Divine is an elaboration of the centrality of God to the cosmos but cannot be practical sovereignty in the formulation suggested by Carl Schmitt ('the sovereign is who decides upon the exception') if for no other reason than that the idea of a monotheistic version of the omnipotent and omniscient God does not allow for the Divine to have any exception.

It would seem that the meaning of secularism is perhaps to be found in attaching and articulating very different historical developments to the Plato-to-NATO sequence that encapsulates Westernese. The articulation of a global Muslim subjectivity, by threatening to reveal Plato-to-NATO as historiographical convention rather than history, contributes to the provincialization of Europe's final vocabulary. In the context of Muslims living in Western plutocracies the staples of the 'immigrant imaginary' becomes strained, as categories such as religion, minority, 'race' and others are seen more and more as part of the Plato-to-NATO sequence. The validity of this sequence rests upon the exercise of coloniality.

The final argument made in favour of a European Islam is made not because of the benefits of such an interpretation of Islam for Muslims at large, but in terms of the benefits for an actually existing Europeaness. It is argued that articulation of European Islam is necessary to further integration and social cohesion. European Islam will enable Muslims in European to become European Muslims. That is, Muslim becomes another life-style adding to the superficial diversity of other life-styles available in Western plutocracies: McMuslims for McWorld. The Muslim subject position is simply colonized by European expectations and demands of what a good Muslim should be. This good European Muslim, it is argued, is not only necessary to preserve social cohesion in Europe's urban centres. A good European Muslim is also the true essence of what a good Muslim should be. The idea of Euro-Muslims distinct from other Muslims is based on the assumptions of an underlying supremacist discourse. It fails to acknowledge the possibility that universal values

and notions of good life can be generated from any historical community, that they do not require the slavish imitation of the royal road to wisdom pioneered in Western extremity of the Asian landmass. This way, when well-meaning Muslims and non-Muslims assert that Islam is a religion of peace, they deny ability of Muslims to write their own history, that is, a history that does not read like something cribbed from Western history. Surely, the best response to those Islamophobes who insist upon the bellicose nature of Islam itself is not to counter such charges with attempts to show the peaceful nature of Islam, but rather to assert that Islam is Islam and the duty of Muslims is not to soothe the fantasies of Islamophobes but to show how these fantasies say more about Europeaness than Muslimness. Ultimately, European Islam is based on maintaining and reinforcing the distinction between West and Non-West which is constitutive of the colonial enframing of the world. It seeks to regulate and discipline Muslim demands for autonomy by reference to Europeaness.

If Islam is not a religion in the manner that the European Enlightenment's hegemonic discourse would demand, then how are we to understand it? Perhaps one way would be to see Islam as inaugurating a distinct narrative. Islam begins with series of revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad (570-632) during the 610s (CE). The nature of these revelations has a family resemblance to many tropes found within the cultural milieu of the Nile to Oxus region, which can also be found at work in Jewish and Nasrani sacred stories. Islam orders these narratives of Abrahamic monotheism, placing itself as the culmination of a sequence of revelations associated with a diverse group of prophets, including figures such as Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Islam inaugurated a new semantic universe, which succeeded initially in radically transforming large parts of the Afroeurasian landmass so that themes that continued beyond the arrival of Islam could only do so through a cultural lexicon dominated by the venture of Islam. Islam is a language as well as a historical sequence by which Muslims can project themselves into the past and the future. Around this narration and constant re-narration of this sequence a community becomes sedimented. The Muslim Ummah, like other major historical communities, is able to generate the universal from the cultivation of its "own" language games. It is not clear what the articulation of a European Islam would achieve apart from maintaining and reinforcing the frontier between Europeaness and Non-Europeaness, since a European Islam to be viable would have to be distinguished from a non-European Islam. As it has been pointed, the 'violent hierarchy' between Europeaness and non-Europeaness is constitutive of Western racism (Hesse and Sayyid, forthcoming).

The idea of European Islam, then, belongs to an Age in which the ability of Muslims to write their history was constrained by the Westphalian order in which nation-states were able to regulate flows of peoples and information. A European Islam is difficult to sustain in the context of a planet unified by economic integration and U.S unipolarity. Attempts to fit the various mobilizations in the name of Islam in a European shaped hole do not recognize the postcolonial temper of the times. The movements and struggles for Muslim autonomy have become globalized. In the struggle for Muslim autonomy, the various attempts to produce domesticated interpretations of Islam are unlikely to be successful. The fate of European Islam is unlikely to be any different than the fate of a Saudi Islam or an Anatolian Islam; Islam has escaped to the general field of Muslim discursivity. Only a liberation of Muslimness and the establishment of overarching political structures able to house the global character of Muslim subjectivity is going to be successful in regulating the wars of interpretations being waged around Islam. Such structures are only likely to be established in the name of Islam itself.

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