Islam and Transnationalism

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This paper forms the introduction to a special issue of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies on 'Islam, Transnationalism, and the Public Sphere in Western Europe'. Taking as its starting point the seminal volume edited by Gerholm and Lithman—The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe (1988)—the paper reviews continuities and changes in European Muslim communities and their relationship with others. Drawing extensively on case studies based on anthropological research in four European countries (Britain, France, Germany and Italy), the paper first examines the problematic character of the category 'Muslim', and identifies ways in which Islam in a European context can be considered transnational. It then explores how the question of living as a Muslim in Europe is being addressed in the context of transnationalism, considers whether there is an emergent 'European Islam' or 'European Muslim' identity, and ends with consideration of the problems and prospects for Islam in European public spheres.

Keywords: Europe; Islam; Migration; Public Sphere; Transnationalism

Background

This special issue on ‘Islam, Transnationalism and the Public Sphere in Western Europe’ originated in a workshop at the University of Sussex in January 2003. Although ‘transnational Islam’ is a global phenomenon, we focus on four countries (France, Germany, Italy and the UK) with significant Muslim minorities of varied background and orientation where Islam is an iconic, political, social, cultural and religious phenomenon. We would not claim that only these European countries are important, still less wish to ignore Islam in a wider arena, but their different histories, institutions and ideologies of dealing with difference (immigration policies, multiculturalism), and an extensive body of empirical data, mean they offer considerable scope for comparative enquiry.

Kepel (1997: 48) has noted the lack of social scientific interest in Muslim populations...
in Europe, qua Muslims, prior to the 1980s. The publication in 1988 of a path-breaking collection edited by Gerholm and Lithman entitled *The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe*, however, signalled a major change. A strength of that book was its documentation of the wide range of national and regional groupings of migrants, and hence varieties of Islam, that had emerged on the continent. Ethnic and doctrinal diversity, reflected in organisational diversity, meant that nowhere did a single group embody ‘the’ Muslim community. In fact, the latter did not exist, and this frequently posed problems for receiving societies. Attempts by sending-society governments to form ‘their’ Muslims into communities and represent them was a further complication. Nonetheless, although the book stressed diversity in the Muslim population and in the environments within which possible expressions of Islam (collective and individual) occurred, the contributors also held that there was a common desire to ‘make a place for Islam’ (Joly 1988), in countries which to a greater or lesser extent espoused pluralistic principles. What that pluralism meant in practice varied hugely. It was an emergent phenomenon, the outcome of a multiplicity of international, national, and perhaps above all local and specific accommodations on a range of issues which Waardenburg (1988) described as ‘test cases’, e.g. *halal* meat or headscarves.

With the publication of the Gerholm and Lithman collection and later studies, the Islamic presence is now well documented across Europe, with a forbidding empirical, analytical and polemical literature in on Britain, France, Germany and more recently Italy. Retrospectively, one may observe continuities but also significant changes. The ten million plus Muslims in Western Europe (Vertovec and Peach 1997a) are now more widespread (e.g. in Italy and Spain) and come from a wider range of societies of origin (e.g. the Balkans, Central Asia) than even 15 years ago, with many refugees from Muslim countries in Asia and Africa. The Muslim implantation, however, is not just wider, but deeper. The demography is changing: more women, children, families. This is not an entirely new phenomenon. In Britain and France family migration was well established in the 1970s, and a second generation (e.g. in France *les beurs*) was already evident in the early 1980s, if not earlier. Although (male) circulatory migration of the kind practised by many West Africans continues to be important, the Muslim presence is now predominantly a family one, with many implications for housing, health and educational systems in receiving countries which in varying degrees are implementing neoliberal economic and social agendas, running down state welfare provision. Though many are now long-term migrants and/or have been born and brought up in the countries of immigration, the relationship with the society of origin has not, however, diminished—on the contrary—and this is one way transnationalism enters. The significance of transnationalism, or what is now understood as the transnational character of Islam and of migrant populations who espouse it, was not fully apparent or appreciated 15 years ago, and remains under-researched despite studies which have placed Islam in the context of globalisation (e.g. Ahmed 1992; Ahmed and Donnan 1994a).

There are other national, international and global changes, too, not least the shock of ‘9/11’. Anyone writing in this field is inevitably conscious of what ‘9/11’ signifies, but that event (and what followed) was only one factor (albeit an important one) in a
longer-term set of processes. Among the most important of these has been the heightened salience of Islam, especially ‘Islamist’ and ‘fundamentalist’ versions, as a religious, social, cultural and political force. Certainly, in my own study of immigrants in Lyon in 1975–6, Islam, while not irrelevant to their lives, was not at the forefront of their concerns (Grillo 1985). These were to do with housing, jobs, health and social services, and increasingly their children’s education. At the time there was one mosque, hidden in a side street and little frequented; the Imam, described as a harki, paraded for the 14 July celebrations. Whether ‘re-islamisation’ or ‘Islamic revival’ or something else (and this is partly a matter of ideology, partly an empirical question), there is no doubt that the public visibility of Islam and its significance for Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe has increased quite dramatically. One instance of this (consequence and cause) was the way in which Middle Eastern states (oil-rich, with Muslim rulers) began after the 1970s, for mixed motives of religion, charity and politics, to recycle petro-dollars into the Muslim infrastructure in Europe, notably through the financing of mosques and other Muslim organisations (see inter alia Allievi 1996; Cesari 1998; Kepel 1987; Nielsen 1999). As Gerholm (1994: 206) reminded us, ‘an authentic Muslim life demands an extensive “infrastructure”: mosques, schools, butchers, cemeteries’, and this has been widely achieved, often, as he also said, with considerable difficulty.

The changing nature of the Islamic presence with its now established infrastructure, coupled with the global changes outlined above, perhaps explains why we now observe not just a cautious probing for a ‘place’ for Islam, but more fundamental demands for recognition, accompanied by serious questions about whether it is possible to be a Muslim in Western countries, and if so what kind of a Muslim might one be. These debates, among Muslims, among non-Muslims about Islam, and in dialogue and argument between them, oscillate between various ideological poles in ways discussed below. Dilemmas surrounding Islam in the public sphere and questions of citizenship are central. What does it mean to be a citizen of France, Britain etc. and a Muslim? What demands do Islam and Muslims make on the notion of citizenship in the countries of Europe, and vice versa, what demands on Islam and Muslims are made by (different) concepts of citizenship in Britain, France, Germany, Italy etc? And what of ‘European’ Islam, and ‘European’ Muslim identity? All this in the context of what has been described as a ‘crisis of trust’ between Muslims and non-Muslims, on both sides of an apparently deepening divide, exacerbated to the nth degree by the events of ‘9/11’.

Problematising ‘Muslim’

Both ‘transnational’ and ‘Islam’ are problematic terms. Take the latter first. How useful is ‘Muslim’? This question neatly encapsulates a number of long-standing academic and theological issues which continue to have considerable resonance.

Diversity within Islam (national, ethnic, religious etc.) has been widely documented and discussed (see inter alia Ahmed 1992; Cesari 1998; Gerholm 1994; Karam 2004; Soares 2000; Vertovec and Peach 1997b; Zubaida 2002 for recent examples). Many Islamic scholars (Western and non-Western) and practitioners interpret that diversity
as representing different inflections of an essential Islam, in different locations. An alternative view is that there is not one Islam, but many. Islam is a highly diverse religion (like Christianity), with many varieties. Muslims in Europe manifest most of them, and sometimes claims to be ‘Muslim’ might be contested by other Muslims who consider some beliefs and practices heretical, perhaps not really Islam at all. As Katy Gardner (personal communication) has put it: for some Muslims, the ‘Other’ is a Muslim (again like Christianity). These may be theological rather than sociological issues, but they matter to Muslims themselves, not least in debates about Islam in/of Europe—see below.

‘How useful is the term ‘Muslim’?’ also reflects the view that a devotee of Islam has many identities besides a religious one (gender, class, ethnicity, age, nation etc.), and it is inappropriate to treat the religious as the deepest, most defining, most authentic representation of that person’s subjectivity, or the subjectivity of any religious collectivity to which they belong. Cultural, in this case religious, essentialism poses major theoretical problems (Grillo 2003), but it must be accepted that for some people (outsiders, insiders, Muslims, non-Muslims) a person’s essence is captured by their religion. Though it is important not to essentialise ‘Muslim’, we must understand that essentialising is a social fact which analysis must take into account and explain. This may, of course, expose us to the danger of reflecting the categories of current religious and political rhetoric, allowing them to define our problematic and leading us to ignore other, more significant ways of constituting the object of inquiry (see similar debates about ‘race’ or ‘culture’). Many anthropological categories are, however, always already rhetorical and political and analytical. Thus terms such as ‘British Muslim’, initially perhaps suspect from an analytical perspective, but salient in the lived experience of the people concerned, are also of considerable importance because, for example, their analysis provides an insight into how social and ethnic categories (‘Islam’, ‘Muslim’) emerge or are produced within multicultural institutions and practices developed in different ways in societies such as Britain, France, Germany or Italy. Thus the category ‘Muslim’, though problematic, cannot not be rejected.

Problematising ‘Transnational’

What constitutes the transnational dimension of Islam? This is both a theoretical and an empirical question. To summarise a swathe of literature, transnationalism refers to social, cultural, economic and political relations which are between, above or beyond the nation-state, interconnecting, transcending, perhaps even superseding, what has been for the past two hundred years their primary locus. Specifically, within anthropology, transnational used in a migration context refers to people, transnational migrants (‘transmigrants’) who in the simplest formula ‘live lives across borders’.

Many of the religious practices discussed here are indeed undertaken by people who are living lives across transnational space. Nonetheless, Muslims (like other transnationals) still find themselves operating in a national, or indeed ‘plurinational’ world. Islam lived transnationally continues to be framed by national contexts, though
the extent to which it does or should do so is a matter of contention among both academics and Muslims (and among Muslim academics). There are, however, three ways in which Islam might be described as transnational (Bowen infra has a slightly different formulation, see also Amiraux 2004).

1. Transnational Islam=Islam within transnational circuits

This is illustrated by Riccio and Soares (both infra) in papers dealing with West African transmigrants in Italy and France. Those involved are mainly male circulatory migrants with families in the villages or towns of Mali, Mauritania and Senegal. They live and work temporarily, though on a long-term basis, in France and Italy, seeking eventual return to the country of origin with which they maintain multiple social, economic and, most pertinently, religious ties. They are transnationals whose lives are ‘anchored’ (Riccio) in West Africa. Wolof-speaking migrants (Riccio) are members of the Mourid Sufi order, while Pulaar-speakers (Soares) are Tijaniyya. In religious and organisational terms the two are similar, the crucial relationship that between a charismatic religious leader (saint/master), and devoted followers. This relationship operates across borders, linking followers in West Africa and in the migrant diasporas in Europe and further afield. Organised in religious cells in the countries of emigration (e.g. the Mourid dahiras), the orders provide devotees with a moral framework bolstered by visits by transnational religious ‘superstars’ (Soares) from West Africa. The relationship also organises flows of resources, in the Mourid case deployed to make the Senegalese city of Touba, the site of the Mourid founder’s revelation, a major commercial and religious centre, and the location of the largest mosque in sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Transnational Islam=Islam within a bi-national/plurinational framework

Mourid and Tijaniyya orders are international (situated in many countries), and transnational, following migrants’ transnational circuits and linking up diasporas. Their adherents are therefore oriented to relationships across transnational space. But they are not post-national. Those living and working abroad are also bound (legally, economically, politically) by the circumstances of two nation-states: where they reside (‘here’, France and Italy), and whence they came (‘there’, Senegal, Mali, Mauritania). Their orientation is thus ‘bi-national’ or ‘plurinational’ (Salih 2003), towards two or more nation-states.

Several papers deal with Muslims caught up in such bi-national nexuses of countries of origin and settlement (France–Algeria, Britain–Pakistan, Germany–Turkey, Italy–Morocco). Kosnick (infra), for example, discusses an extract from a TV programme for Turkish (Alevi Muslim) migrants in Germany which alternates images from both countries in commenting on the political situation of adherents. There, as in Henkel’s account (infra) of Turkish Islamic discourse in Germany, it is impossible to understand the debates without taking into account their bi-national framework and focus. This dual orientation means that Turkish migrants are sometimes addressing
the non-Muslim German population (in the Alevi case to affirm the acceptable nature of their Islam, as against others’ ‘extremism’), sometimes fellow Turkish Muslims, with a mixed religious and political bi-national agenda.

The extent to which such dual agendas are pursued, however, varies considerably. Iranian Sufis in Britain (Spellman infra), have relatively little to do with other Muslims or with addressing British institutions, but are heavily concerned with the situation in Iran and with the internationally distributed Iranian exile community, notably in the United States and Germany. Pakistani Muslims (Werbner infra) seem fully engaged with British institutions through mosques, British political parties, participation in local government etc. This would seem partly a function of their settlement in Britain (including their dominant presence in certain localities). Iranian migrants are refugees (relatively widely dispersed across London), hoping for an eventual return to Iran, however unrealistic this might seem. French Muslims of North African origin (Bowen) are also extensively concerned with their situation in France. Like Pakistanis in Britain, they are well into the second or even third generation of (family) settlement. By contrast, Pulaar-speaking West Africans, who have been coming to France for some 40 years, were—until families began to arrive—circulatory migrants with relatively little stake in French society, and religious leaders often advised them against participating in the French public sphere.

3. Transnational Islam—the umma

Iranian Sufism is an exilic Islam, based in many countries, oriented to a diaspora linked through religious practices which make full use of modern technology to actualise the community (see Spellman, this issue). Another way in which a transnational Islam manifests itself is through an orientation not towards a particular migration circuit or diaspora (Iranian, Turkish, Wolof-speaking etc.) but towards the imagined community of Muslims at large either within one society or across many.

There are numerous examples of the ‘transethnicisation’ of Islamic populations in countries such as Britain, and elsewhere. By ‘transethnicisation’ I mean the emergence of an identification (‘British Muslim’, ‘musulman français’), covering all strands of Islam from the point of view of religious doctrine and practice, and national and ethnic origin. ‘Muslim’ thus becomes a kind of ‘supertribal’ category, as that term was used in urban African anthropology. There is an imagined coalescence of peoples of different origin and background under the heading ‘Muslim’. They are ‘represented’ (and may well represent themselves) categorically as ‘Muslims’ (often in an essentialist manner) and be endowed with (or promote) ‘representatives’ to speak for them. (See Antoun’s account (1994: 174) of a Jordanian student in Leeds whose previous religious studies in Cairo brought him to prominence among the Pakistani Muslims whose mosque he attended.) In the British case, certainly, this is partly a function of British multiculturalism and emergent systems of ethnic representation, especially when religions (= festivals and holidays) are presented as a crucial marker of identity in the multicultural curriculum in schools, and classroom activities are built
around their recognition and celebration. But it is also a response to local and international crises involving Islam(s) at large especially since 1989: Rushdie Affair, Gulf Wars, Palestine, Kashmir, Chechenya, and so on through 9/11 (see Werbner 1994, 2002).

Such watershed events strengthen the sense of local and global religious identities on the part of Muslims themselves and on the part of national authorities responding to them. In the months leading up to the Iraq War, for example, the language of British ministers was full of references to ‘British Muslims’, what sort of people they are and what they think. In an article in the Guardian (15 January 2003), entitled ‘Defender of his faith’, the Egyptian-born Zaki Badawi was described as the ‘unofficial leader of Britain’s Muslims’, his particular take on Islam characterised as a ‘voice of reason’. Badawi is, of course, but one voice among many ‘British Muslims’, or in the ‘British Muslim Community’ (both these phrases are problematic). The construction of such transethnic categories (and their representation in institutional and symbolic senses) is inevitably a dialectical process, working both from inside and out. It involves how Muslims have come to think about themselves, how the institutions of British society (including those associated with multicultural practices) have conceived them (locally and nationally), and how the two interact.

Transethnicisation may also be observed to a certain degree in France, though the ethnic, not to say racial, antipathy that exists between North Africans and black West Africans sometimes disrupts the process (Soares). Timera (1996: 162), who attributes such antipathy (or ‘condescension’; Diouf 2002: 151) to different perspectives on Islam, notes that black Africans, concerned at the way that ‘Arabs’ (a term conflating Arabs, Berbers, Turks, Pakistanis, Iranians etc.) dominate Islamic institutions, created their own organisation (Fédération des associations islamiques d'Afrique, des Comoros et des Antilles) to fight their corner (see also Diouf 2002). The development of a transethnic Muslim community in France or elsewhere must therefore confront realities embedded in historic national or ethnic relations and in divisions within Islam. As Werbner points out in her paper in this special issue, the Islamic population in Britain

remains nationally and ethnically divided. Despite wishful talk of the emergence of a ‘British Islam’, even today there are Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Arab mosques, as well as Turkish and Shi’a mosques, and the language of sermons and even supplicatory prayers in the Pakistani mosques, whatever their tendency, is Urdu rather than Arabic.

Such nationally-bounded transethnic Muslim collectivities need further investigation. So does the contemporary umma, the ‘nation of Islam’, the ‘totality of all Muslims’, irrespective of place or origin. This ideal of a transnational Muslim community has always had great appeal, perhaps more so now than ever. The imagined umma (Roy 1996) is referenced constantly across the globe in (Islamic) newspapers, books, TV stations, mosque sermons, manifestos, Koranic lessons, and the Internet (what Haddad and Smith 2002a: xvii, call ‘virtual Islam’). As Nielsen (1999: 136) suggests, modern communications offer ‘the solidarity of the ummah a tool of a practical strength which traditionally only the annual pilgrimage at Mecca
was able to elicit’ (see Kosnick in this issue for the use of media by Turkish Alevi Muslims in Germany). Bowen (*infra*) locates transnational Islam within this ‘public space of reference and debate’, with its network of scholars, conferences and websites (see also Ahmed and Donnan 1994b: 18). This transnational space, where ‘Arabic serves as the background language, Islamic texts and norms are the starting point for all discussions, and local issues are discussed against that shared normative and linguistic background’ (Bowen), encompasses but extends beyond Europe to include scholars and authorities throughout the Arabic-speaking world.

Documenting how this transnational elite of Islamic scholars and teachers influences thinking on Islam and its practice in all parts of the world is extremely important, but we also need to know what happens in ordinary and everyday conversations. As Roy points out (1998: 31), the ‘imaginary ummah’ is abstract and deterritorialised; it manifests itself in rhetoric and endless Internet debates. By contrast the communities formed by many Muslims in Europe are local and concrete. The way in which young men and women from all corners of the Islamic world are prepared to rally, fight and die for the cause of Islam in Afghanistan, Bosnia or Chechenya is very striking and in modern times comparable only to the appeal of socialism or communism in its heyday, as in the Spanish Civil War. What influences (local and global) led three youngsters from the quiet English suburb of Tipton to follow a trajectory (the ‘trajectory of intensified identity-led politicised religiosity’, Werbner calls it) which ended in Guantanamo?

The lived experience of the umma in the popular and everyday seems poorly documented. How is it actualised rather than simply imagined? Khan (2000: 38) seems to argue that for most Muslims in Britain it remains largely symbolic compared with the reality of the ‘day-to-day issues they face as ordinary citizens’. Moreover, the actualisation of the umma is constantly confronted with national and sectarian differences (Eickelman and Piscator 1996). Against the exuberance of students of cultural studies, and the wishful thinking of the leading lights of cosmopolitan intellectual diasporas, we should remember once more that to say transnational is *not* to say post-national (Grillo *et al.* 2000).4

### From ‘Making a place for Islam’ to ‘How to live as a Muslim’

When I asked Mehmet if he was planning to stay in Germany he answered without hesitation: ‘yes, of course’. And then, after a little break, he added ‘as long as we can live here as Muslims’ (Henkel, this issue).

A key motif of Islam in Europe in the 1980s identified by anthropologists and others was encapsulated in Joly’s phrase ‘making a place’ (1988, see also Metcalf 1996). Muslims sought room, figuratively and literally, for the practice of Islam and Islamic practices, seeking to extend the boundary of recognition through ‘test cases’ (Waardenburg 1988). The current period may be characterised as follows.

Claims for Islamic recognition are more widespread and pressing. 1989 was a turning point with the Rushdie Affair in Britain and the headscarves affair in France
iconic of a more thrusting Islam. (There is much still to be said about headscarves; see Bowen, Salvatore *infra* and Bowen 2004.) In these cases the position taken by some Muslims was interpreted and resisted in the West as representing the expansion of ‘fundamentalism’, then still popularly understood mainly as a Shi’ite phenomenon. Demands for Muslim schools or the re-ordering of schools to take on board Muslim requirements (e.g. on mixed education) may also be seen in this light. These demands, which partly reflect the consequences of settlement and access to citizenship, are by no means univocal. There is, rather, widespread debate about what it means to be a Muslim in Britain, France, Italy, Germany etc., and how one might live as a Muslim in the West. Moreover, because this is happening in the context of the heightened public presence of Islam in many countries within and outside the Islamic world, links may be made with similar debates occurring globally and transnationally, for example with what is being said and done about veiling. Moreover, such examples are available to anyone. Another feature of the contemporary context is that everything Muslim is increasingly under scrutiny by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Partly in response to what are seen as aggressive local demands of Islamism, partly in response to widespread concerns about the loyalties of the Muslim population, governments are increasingly monitoring and making demands on their Muslim citizens, in the wider context of a ‘backlash against difference’ (Grillo 2003; for Scandinavia see Wikan 2002).

Debates about what it means to be a Muslim occur along one or more familiar ‘poles’ or axes: secular–Islamist; public–private; modernity–tradition; believing–belonging; closed–open and so on. In France, as Bowen (2004) notes, there is now widespread agreement that what is at stake is the development of an ‘Islam de France’ rather than ‘en France’, that is to say an Islam which is incorporated in some fashion into the fabric of French society rather than one which happens to be located and practised in France. This is something quite remarkable in the context of French republicanism. Not all Muslims would accept that what they are after is an Islam de rather than en (West Africans might demur), and, as Bowen (2004: 44) observes, there is certainly no agreement on what the de actually means:

For some [it] connotes an Islam of piety, without the antiquated trappings of Islamic law, and with less emphasis on the practices of prayer and sacrifice. For other Muslims it inspires an effort to rethink Islam in a European context without compromising on either its core principles or its norms and practices. For many non-Muslim French people it means cultural ‘assimilation’ to French language and culture or social ‘integration’ into a ‘mixed’ society.

Bowen (2004) characterises Muslims in France as ‘caught between two competing sets of social norms’, between ‘nationally-differentiated’ and ‘more universalistic’ orientations or discourses articulated through different organisations, mosques, scholars, journals, schools, and language use. There is a spectrum: at one end France (‘French language, French norms, and social laïcité’); the other, the wider world of Islam (‘Arabic language, pan-Islamic religious norms, public religion’). Bowen (2003: 39) calls these ‘monist’ and ‘pluralist’ conceptions, and what is at stake is the location of Islamic norms in a European context.
Another aspect of the opposition described by Bowen between an Islam integrated into the fabric of non-Muslim society, and one self-consciously excluded from it, is signalled in his observation (2004) that in some meetings he attended in France he detected a sense of ‘Islam being centered somewhere else’. This would certainly be true for adherents of the India-based, but world-wide, Tablighi Jama’at which ‘promote[s] religious enclaves of correct beliefs and behaviour’ (van der Veer 2001: 7–8), and which recruits in France (Cesari 1998; Diouf 2002; House 1996) as well as among the South Asian diaspora. The Islamic practices of Pulaar- and Wolof-speaking migrants in France or Italy, and Iranian Muslims in Britain, present a similar image. It is tempting to suggest that this enclaved Islam is typical of Sufist theology and practice, though this is not entirely convincing (consider Pakistanis in Britain). Such enclavement may, however, bring advantages. By constructing itself as a ‘neutral and apolitical space’ (Spellman infra), Iranian Sufism can represent itself, and be seen as, the acceptable face of Islam (see also Ahmed 1992: 159; Gerholm 1994: 201; Helicke 2002: 185; Kosnick infra; and Nielsen 1999: 95 on the representation of Alevi Muslims in Germany). Similarly, French authorities encourage the Tijaniyya order: ‘West African Islam’, says Diouf (2002: 157), ‘does not exhibit the “muezzin syndrome” as confrontational Islam is referred to in France’.6

One response, then, is to keep oneself as far apart as possible from the decadence of Western society and its temptations (Werbner refers to ‘Muslim self-segregation’). This seems to be the lesson of what Riccio (infra) calls the ‘Afro-Muslim critique’ of Italian society. Demonstrating the continuity between contemporary perspectives and those prevalent in Senegal’s colonial past, Riccio locates this critique in the discourse surrounding the notion of the *toubab*, the European, lacking dignity, and having no god but money. But Western values are a temptation and it is difficult to live as a Muslim in a country such as Italy and avoid corruption by its culture. (Soares in his paper refers to children sent back to Africa because of concerns about bringing them up and educating them in France). Mouridism offers protection and a solution to the clash between Wolof moral dignity (*jom*) and Western materialism.

Much of Bowen’s data come from Islamic intellectuals and scholars, who may not be based in the Hexagon, indeed who are often transnational. As noted earlier, the role of such intellectual, scholarly and theological superstars in the formation of Islamic ideas, beliefs, practices and institutions within and across nation-states provides a route into an understanding of the *umma*. There is much to be said about how some (like Zaki Badawi in Britain) emerge as ‘representing’ Islam. There is, however, a need to discover what Muslims not of the intellectual and scholarly elite think and do about the problems of steering a tricky path between an orientation which on the one hand might be thought to lead to Islamism, and on the other to *laïcité*. What or who points them in one direction rather than the other? Generation is one factor, but there is also doctrinal and ethnic diversity, the differences between varieties of Islam related to place of origin and hence the ethnic origin of the immigrant population.

The opposing orientations of France and the Islamic diaspora reflect, though in no simple way reproduce, the opposition of ‘*laïcité*’ and ‘religion’ in French thought and practice. Though specific to France, they are of more general relevance, pointing to
oppositions such as that between secular/Islamist or modernity/tradition. Another, if related, difference is discussed by Werbner (infra) in her account of the South Asian (Pakistani) Muslim population in Britain. There are two alternative orientations. One emphasises change and hybridity and the contesting of ‘traditional’ family values, the other is conservative, patriarchal and Islamic. These give rise to two very different public arenas in which discussions of Islam are located, though in both discourses family and gender are important, and perhaps the two are partly defined in terms of their opposing takes on these issues. (The family is the battleground, ideologically and in practice.) This leads her to write of: ‘two alternative visible diasporic public spheres in Britain’. One is located in the culture industry and ‘tells a story of … hybridity and cosmopolitanism, of inter-generational conflict, inter-ethnic or inter-racial marriage, family politics and excesses of consumption’. The other is a ‘local diasporic public sphere, almost entirely hidden from the gaze of outsiders’, which by contrast with the more relaxed Sufism of an earlier period is characterised by ‘the wearing by women of burqas, elaborate veils, North African-style headscarves, and of beards by men, [and] a total abstinence from drinking alcohol’. There are thus, for young people, ‘two competing trajectories’, of the kind that are apparent elsewhere in Europe, and it would be interesting to have a Bowen-like take on Britain and a Werbner-like take on France, where material on beur and post-beur youth is readily available.

Towards a European Islam?

There are, then, many ways of living as a Muslim in Western societies, some more quietist, some more secular, some more clamorous, some more negotiatory. It is here that the idea of a ‘European Islam’ comes in. It has been the subject of much recent discussion encompassing three issues: ‘European-Muslim’ as a (hyphenated) personal or collective identity; trans-European linkages of Muslims in Europe; and the construction of an ‘Islam d’Europe’ as a set of Islamic ideas, institutions and practices specific to the European context.

Any account of Muslim identity in Europe must stress diversity. Muslim intellectuals in France (Bowen) are seeking a path between Islamism on the one hand, and laicity on the other, as does Zaki Badawi in Britain. Some Asian youths may espouse hybridity and the rejection of essentialised differences, but their elders cling to essentialism and conservatism—burqas, beards, no booze: the world does not consist of Homi Bhabhas and Arjun Appadurais. There may be convergence around newly constructed transnational identities (especially in fields such as popular music that attract the attention of cultural studies), but there is also Islamism and ‘tradition’.

Salih’s informant, Said, whose reflections on these and related issues she documents in her paper in this issue, is someone who would reject simple oppositions in favour of more complex constructions, considering himself European, Muslim and left-wing:

Rather than providing a safe refuge that provides dignity against a prevailing feeling of marginalisation, Islam represents, in Said’s life, one of multiple identifications. Said reconciles his quest for recognition as Muslim with an active political identification and
engagement with universal values, suggesting that there is no opposition between the
two.

This quest leads him to search for an identity as a European Muslim, ‘rather than
simply a Muslim in Europe’, through participation in an emergent European-Muslim
transnational public sphere as a member of the Commission for Inter-religious
Dialogue within the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (see also van der
Veer 2001: 8). This route via a trans-European network of Muslims, Said believes,
‘bypasses the national context and its backward and traditional ways of conceiving of
Muslims’ identities and alliances’. Said thus ‘embodies the emergence of a post-
national generation of European Muslims’.

As Salih shows, however, the search is difficult (‘far from being simple acts of
bricolage, these processes of identity renegotiation are deeply painful and conflictual’).
Salvatore (infra) likewise emphasises the difficulties:

The frequent answer to […] reassertions of secular orthodoxy is not a hybridisation of
identities (French, Muslim), intended as bricolage and narcissistic display, but a
laborious and daily work of reconstructing viable strategies of survival in settings
caracterised by tensions between different cultures or traditions, and even more
between the state’s monitoring and educating function and the partial autonomy of
socio-religious actors.

This also shows why it is often unclear what a European Muslim identity might
such an Islam is defined (inter alia) by its minority status (see also Khan 2000 on
Britain). There are many historical precedents for this and many models for what
Muslims in such a situation should/might do. One of these revolves around the idea of
compromise. Henkel (infra) observes that the possibility for compromise is grounded
in the Islamic notion of dâr al-sulh (domain of contract, negotiation). There is a classic
opposition in Islamic thought between those territories in which Islam (the body of
Islamic law, the Shari’ah) prevails (dâr al-islam), and those where it does not (dâr al-
harb, domain of war), and the opposition between the two is what many think Islam is
about. The dâr al-sulh concept, however, argues that there are territories in which
Islam is not dominant, but which nonetheless are ones in which Muslims are able to
live, or can negotiate a position more or less favourable to the practice of their faith
(see also Nielsen 1999: 86 on the concept of dâr al-’ahd, territories where Muslims
have a protected status). It is this idea, presumably, which informs French Muslims
(and Muslims elsewhere in Europe) in their debates with the French and other states
over the status of Islam, and in their internal debates about the possibility of a ‘fiqh de
France’ or indeed a ‘fiqh d’Europe’, which would establish the propriety of, for
example, mortgages (see Bowen 2004).

Shari’ah refers to law, fiqh to its interpretation, the jurisprudential tradition, and it
is within this space that some scholars would seek ‘points of rapprochement between
French and Islam norms’ (Bowen 2003: 48). Literal readings of the Koran and sunna
are not the only guides to behaviour; there is also ijtihad, independent reasoning
European Islam, young Muslim men and women are reclaiming the concept of ijtihâd
... not as a special right of scholars but of all Muslims’ (see also Naguib 2002: 169 on young people in Norway). This is the route advocated, in different ways, by influential Islamic scholars such as Mohammed Arkoun, Fatima Mernissi and Tariq Ramadan (Roy 1998: 21; see also Bowen, Salih, infra, and Karam 2004). The concepts of *dar al-sulh* and *ijtihad*, and the practices that arise from them (with many transnational implications), are of obvious importance in the current context and demand further investigation of the kind that Bowen has undertaken in France.

Live religiously what the secular law does not forbid, says the Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan (cited in Roy 1998: 23). In an episode reported by Bowen, a young Muslim woman ‘in danger of losing her employment [was advised] to seek an accommodation with her employer that would allow her some degree of headcovering’ (see also Bowen 2004, on Larbi Kechat, and Kechat 1998). In a country like Britain, says Khan (2000: 37), ‘Compromise [is] inevitable’; and most Muslims are ‘reconciled to the idea of working and operating within the system’ (2000: 41). Zubaida (2002) describes such persons as ‘accommodationists’ who ‘consider Islam to be part of a plural, multicultural society, and seek recognition within it as Muslims alongside Christians and other religions’. They are likely to be in the forefront of campaigns for Muslim recognition, but also encourage inter-religious and intercultural dialogues (Roy 1998: 33). For others, however, the world of Sufism (‘private enough to fit into the Western social order ... public enough to remain an echo of the total Islamic order’, Gerholm 1994: 201) may provide the basis for accommodation.

Compromise, then, would seem to signal a way forward for an Islam d’Europe, but there are alternatives. One, much touted in France, is the individualisation of religious practice, albeit extended through the concept of an ‘imaginary ummah’, which Roy (1998: 26–7) argues may become a key feature of European Islamic religiosity, even if this risks Islam becoming a personal bricolage. Along similar lines is the trajectory of a ‘secularised Islam’, which stresses a general belief in the values of Islam and an Islamic identity, without too much concern for practice, that observers have noted among young people of Muslim background, born, brought up and educated in France (Cesari 1998; Diouf 2002: 156; see also Vertovec and Peach 1997a: 40). Islam often seems marginal to those for whom a more generalised youth culture is of greater significance (Diouf 2002: 156–7; House 1996: 222). Zubaida (2002) calls them ‘dissenters’. Working class, with poor qualifications:

They are the typical alienated youth of the banlieue in France, and of the deprived northern cities of England. They are generally disenchanted with their parents’ social and cultural styles, but at the same time alienated from the society into which they have been socialized by education and general orientation. They suffer from prevalent racism, exclusion from job opportunities and cultural impoverishment.

As Zubaida (2002) and Cesari (1998) observe, these are the people for whom a radical, militant Islamism may have appeal, though in fact, as Werbner (2002) points out, ‘young Islamist activists are as a rule educated and relatively privileged. In Tipton, one of the prisoners taken was a law student, the other a computer student’.

There are, then, numerous answers to living as a Muslim in Western society: Islamism, militant, clamatory, seeking as much space as possible within Western
society (perhaps demanding its conversion); at the opposite end of the spectrum, a quasi-secular Islam, reducing it to bare essentials; a quietist repli sur soi; negotiation and compromise, ‘working out ways of being Iranian Shi’a Muslims in London’, as Spellman puts it. How these alternative trajectories are reached; how they vary from country to country, Islam to Islam, ethnic group to ethnic group, generation to generation; and how the task of working out an appropriate way to live as a Muslim in Britain, France, Germany or Italy—all pose different problems, give rise to different solutions, for women and men, and all require further detailed comparative analysis.

Islam and the Public Sphere

‘Crucial is the shaping of the public sphere and the deployment of Islamic arguments in it’ (van der Veer 2001: 10). Vertovec (1996, and with Peach 1997a) is one of the few scholars to link accounts of Muslim communities of immigrant origin specifically with debates about the public sphere in Europe, though he is mainly concerned with Britain, and with matters affecting the family, education, and religious discrimination. Vertovec and Peach (1997a: 6) point out that since the late 1980s Muslims ‘have collectively engaged with, and had considerable impact upon, the European public sphere’.

As indicated above, there has been an increase in the level of organisational activity, and changes in the way that associations have interacted with local and central governments and in the extent to which there has been recognition of an Islamic voice. For Britain, Vertovec (1996: 170–3) traces the shift in the scale and scope of interventions by Muslims from the provision of halal meat (in the early 1980s), through debates about multicultural education (e.g. in Bradford in the mid-1980s), to the Rushdie Affair, the Gulf War, and beyond (e.g. the ‘Muslim Manifesto’ of the early 1990s). Cesari (1998) notes similar shifts in France. Until the late 1970s, Islam in France kept very much to itself (as in Lyon), but following the Iranian revolution, and changes in the law of associations introduced by the Mitterand presidency, the 1980s witnessed a more open expression of a collective Islamic identity (increasingly articulated through mosques and Islamic centres). There was a refusal to restrict Islam to the private sphere; a collective, public affirmation of an Islamic identity. In both France and Britain, and elsewhere, there was the continuing problem of representation. The watershed events and test cases were important. In Britain, the Rushdie Affair ‘catapulted the Bradford Council for Mosques onto the national stage’ (Lewis 1997: 104). In France, the celebrated/infamous headscarves affair had a similar effect. Although these made national or international headlines, it was, as previously, the quotidienn issues of religious practice, Muslim family life, education and language that continued to be the main sites of contestation and debate (on all sides).

In the final part of the collection Salvatore, who has also contributed extensively to discussion of the European public spheres (NB plural), and Islam’s place within them, takes a more theoretical view of the historic role and continuing significance of religion in the formation of nation-state(s) in Europe. Religion of course means the
Christian faith (or more broadly the Judaeo-Christian tradition) which defines (in equally broad terms) a set of values concerning person, family, community, society, God, nature etc. Christianity (itself diverse) is not, of course, the only source of these values, and Christian values and those of, say, the Graeco-Roman and humanist traditions, of the Enlightenment (secularism, laïcité), and of liberalism do not always converge. In complex ways, however, these together define the nature of the public sphere, and the place of religion within it, and constitute the hegemonic ideals of the self-defined, and generally formally secular, liberal democracies of Europe (see Roy 1998: 32).7

The sense that there are core European values is very strong, as for example in discussions in the EU Commission and the Council of Europe of ‘European identity’ (Shore 2000). They emerge constantly in current political rhetoric in many European countries (not least Britain and Scandinavia), and are integral to the ‘backlash against difference’. The role of (the Christian) religion in defining the form of, and core values hegemonic in, the public sphere in Europe means that it is easy to exclude Islam: there is no space for Islam in such a public sphere. Thus, politicians and churchmen in Italy, for example, can readily extrapolate from these values their incompatibility with Islam. Consequently, the ‘clash of civilisations’ makes sense to some politicians (like Italy’s Silvio Berlusconi). This makes the idea that Europe is a dar al-sulh, within which accommodation might be sought or negotiated, seem like hopeless idealism. Relatedly, if European identity is defined in such a way as effectively to exclude Muslims, then the prospects for someone like Said seem very poor.

Prospects may not, however, be as bleak as they seem. The public sphere is not as uniform, homogenous and totalitarian, or as hostile to Islam, as the above representation suggests. Salvatore advocates ‘hybridising the notion of the public sphere’, as this would at least do justice to the complexities created by the presence of Muslim citizens in European societies. In fact, the hybridisation or pluralisation of the public sphere is already occurring. To adapt a term implied by Werbner, just as there are ‘segmented diasporas’, there is also a ‘segmented public sphere’, as her own paper shows. Henkel and Kosnick observe that Turkish Muslims often report finding it easier to live as a Muslim in Germany (and other Western liberal countries) than in Turkey. There is already a multiplicity of public spheres in which Muslims participate: local, national and plurinational, European, international and transnational, some specific to Muslims or migrant/ethnic minorities, some not, some relatively closed, some relatively open. Certainly questions of legitimacy, authority and hegemony remain, as do questions about the extent to which these various spheres overlap or intersect, and specifically, in the present context, whether those public spheres which one might designate ‘Muslim’ dialogue with others.

This, however, poses difficult questions about the way in which existing forms of multiculturalism found across Europe (which have contributed to processes of transethnicisation and identity formation) might also contribute to the broadening of ideas about ‘core values’ and systems of representation, and of the public sphere generally, and cope with the complex transnational situations and relationships discussed in this JEMS special issue.
Notes

[1] The workshop was funded by the Anthropology Department and the Sussex Centre for Migration Research. This introduction draws on contributions by workshop discussants Asu Aksoy, Nadje Al-Ali, Jane Cowan, Geert de Neve and Katy Gardner, and comments by Ben Soares and James Fairhead.

[2] See inter alia Allievi and Nielsen (2003); Alsayyad and Castells (2002); Kepel (1987); Lewis and Schnapper (1994); Nielsen (1992, 1999); Nonneman et al. (1996); Runnymede Trust (1997); van Koningsveld and Shadid (1996); Vertovec and Peach (1997b); Vertovec and Rogers (1998); Wiervorka (2003); also special issues of Esprit (1998) and Current Sociology (2000). See also contributions to Ahmed and Donnan (1994a); Haddad and Smith (2002b); Karam (2004); Metcalf (1996); and http://www.nocrime.org/pages/isleuro_en.html/.


[4] Not discussed here is the effect of transnational migration on the understanding of Islam. As Asu Aksoy asked in the workshop debate: does transnationalism engender a more questioning, reflexive approach? Or the reverse? Transnationalism, of course, is not a singular phenomenon, and the closed circuit transnationalism of (some) Mourid traders in Italy, placed at a certain point in an international division of labour, is very different from that experienced by transnational Islamic scholars.

[5] As indeed was the ‘consultation’ about the status of Islam in France undertaken by the French Government in the 1990s (Bowen 2003). A comparison might be made with the nineteenth-century concordat between the French state and the Jewish consistory (Grillo 1998).

[6] The prominence of Sufism among immigrants in Europe is no coincidence given its popularity with those sections of the population in West Africa, Turkey, Pakistan and Bangladesh from which many come. Iranian Sufis are different to the extent that the vast majority are refugees rather than economic migrants, often with middle-class backgrounds. Certainly the role of Sufism in the construction and representation of Islamic identity and practice in Europe needs further exploration.

[7] Nielsen (1999) has a different view of religion in the European public sphere, and Nonneman (1996: 19) stresses differences between Eastern and Western Europe, e.g. in the space they have made available for ethnic minorities.

References


http://www.nocrime.org/pages/isleuro_en.html


