Muslim Immigrants and Religious Identity: Western Europe
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Introduction

The majority of immigrants that make up Western Europe today are Muslims. Prompted by post World War II guest programs in Europe and perpetuated through technology and increased connections, this unintended mass immigration of Muslims has brought the Muslim population in Europe to about 15 to 20 million—approximately 4 to 5 percent of the total population. Further, the National Intelligence Council estimates that Europe’s Muslim population will double by 2025 (Leiken 2005, 121-122). With this increase comes specific challenges, and recent events show that there are tensions between the Muslims of Western Europe and their host societies.

On March 11, 2004 a series of coordinated bombings attacking the commuter train system in Madrid, Spain killed 191 people and wounded another 1,800. It was determined that these attacks were led by an al-Qaeda inspired terrorist cell. Demonstrations and protests occurred after this horrendous incident. On November 2, 2004, Theo van Gogh, a major Dutch film director, was murdered due to a film he made that was critical of the treatment of women in the Koran. He was murdered by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch-Moroccan citizen with alleged terrorist ties to the Dutch Hofstad Network. In the aftermath of this assassination, there were a total of 106 violent incidents in November against Muslim targets, according to the Dutch Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. On July 7, 2005, a series of coordinated suicide attacks occurred in the United Kingdom. These bombings targeted civilians using London's public underground transport system during
its morning rush. Fifty-two people were killed and over 700 people were wounded. There were a total of four suicide bombers, two of which made videos describing their reasoning for the attacks: they were “soldiers” fighting for Islam. On September 30, 2005, twelve editorial cartoons depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad were published in a Danish newspaper. The Danish Muslim organizations that objected to these cartoons reacted by holding public protests to raise awareness of these controversial cartoons. This led to Islamic protests across the Muslim world, some of which escalated into violence. Together, these events illustrate definite tensions and problems with Western Europe and its Muslims.

In our post 9/11 world, events like these cause nation-states to fear that they are breeding homegrown jihadists, causing policymakers to focus on their country's security measures. The root of these tensions, however, goes much deeper than just a failure in security measures. One must analyze the foundation and root of these tensions and the violence that is occurring between immigrants and their host societies. Analyzing this origin is important because events like the ones described above have negative consequences for Muslims and Islam around the world. This paper will argue that the root of these tensions is due to Muslim immigrants identifying primarily with their religious identity over their national identity. This paper will analyze the link between Muslim migrants turning towards their religious identity and how the state and public affect this within host countries.

**Literature Review**

Patti Tamara Lenard defines the term integration in her article, “What Can Multicultural Theory Tell Us About Integrating Muslims in Europe?”, as being used to refer
to whether new immigrants have possessed legal, social and economic access, and that this access is equal to the access non-immigrants have. If immigrants do have access equal to that of non-immigrants, they are defined as being integrated. Lenard states that integration is a two-way street, and not only must host societies rely on just the immigrants to try and integrate but also that the state must be prepared to make accommodations in ways that facilitate this integration. Both sides need to pull their weight if an integration policy is to succeed. Lenard acknowledges that the process of integrating Muslims is slow across Europe, and this is evident by their “low levels of skill and education and their persistent socio-economic marginalization, even into second and third immigrant generations” (Lenard 2010, 309). Many scholars address the integration process that has been conducted in Western European nations for their immigrants because it has failed to work.

Amel Boubekeur in “Time to Deradicalise?” states that part of the reason why there is an apparent failure of thirty years of European social policies aimed at integrating Muslims is that these policies were usually designed without their input. It is important for Muslims to be drawn in to participate, and they should not only be heard when there is a security threat. There is a clear gap between the political elites in Europe and the controversial reality of European Muslims. There is not a lack of wanting to integrate by the Muslim population. Boubekeur states their reaction to certain crisis demonstrates their desire to be an active citizen, and they are just internalizing the values of the European political culture.

Bernard Brown agrees with Boubekeur in “Europe’s Muslims: a Foreign Policy Issue” by stating that the violence occurring in these Western European nations is an act of expression by Muslims and that they truly desire to be integrated into European societies.
The various events that have been occurring around Europe should be viewed as warning flags. Muslims are not integrating as quickly as previous waves of immigrants have. Of the Muslim in Western countries, it is said that ten percent consider themselves fully integrated. Approximately the same amount (ten percent) considered themselves in an adversarial relationship with their host countries. The rest claimed to be pulled back and forth between the two extremes. Overall it is agreed by scholars that integration in terms acceptable to the majorities in host countries still remains difficult to achieve.

Ruud Koopmans sheds light on the notion that integration policies and organizations made at a local level is of key importance for migrant integration. In "Migrant Mobilisation and Political Opportunities: Variation Among German Cities and a Comparison with the United Kingdom and the Netherlands," Koopmans states that it is at the local level where migrants and their host society interact and it is local policies that can effectively address the problems of specific migrant groups. It is easier for migrants to identify with their local society as opposed to the national society.

When Muslim immigrants have trouble identifying with their host societies, this can cause them to turn to their religious identity. Jonathan Laurence argues in “Muslims and the State in Western Europe” that second and third generations who have been expected to assimilate into their host societies have instead discovered their religious identity in their new societies. Laurence cites surveys that prove that many of these young people who are part of these generations identified more with their inherited religion than with their nationality, place of residence, or even gender. It is groups of Muslims that do not have much else that look to Islam as a form of identity affirmation.
Danièle Hervieu-Léger agrees with Laurence regarding young Muslims and their religious identities, especially within France. In “Islam and the Republic: the French Case,” she states that for the young, whom are the most vulnerable to threats of exclusion, religion can become an area for them to construct an identity and to conquest dignity. Islam allows young Muslims “to transform enduring exclusion into difference willingly embraced” (Hervieu-Léger 2007, 204). Hervieu-Léger notes that these young Muslims are choosing to have these religious identities rather than inheriting them. Young Muslims she interviews describe their present religious identity in terms of individual, voluntary appropriation. More importantly she discusses a study done by Farah Khosrokhavar, which confirms that the young who are turning to this religious path of self-construction are ones who are economically and socially excluded. These young Muslims tend to feel hated by a society that does not make room for them. This form of Islamization is just these young Muslims trying to reshape the meaning of their own lives, according to Hervieu-Léger. “Social necessity becomes religious virtue” (Hervieu-Léger 2007, 215).

This social exclusion that is developing in these host societies is a clear problem. As previously stated, integration is a two-way process. Ariane Chebel D'Apollonia discusses how host societies can negatively affect this integration process in “Immigration, Security, and Integration in the European Union.” Interaction between the minority and majority groups is what overall determines the outcome of the entire integration process. D'Apollonia uses the data from a report by the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). The EUMC did a report on Islamophobia in the EU after September 11th, 2001; this report confirmed that there has been a growth in xenophobic attitudes and incidents within the EU. The EUMC reported that Islamic communities have
become the target of growing hostility. All of this proves that host societies are not receiving these Muslim immigrants well, and that there is a negative public opinion about Muslim immigrants.

This negative public opinion can force immigrants to feel like they need to stick together and can lead to the creation of ethnic concentrations. Bernard Brown states that, since the early 1980s, there has been a tendency toward immigrant populations forming in concentrated areas, which leads to increased tendency for immigration problems. In “Europe’s Muslims: a Foreign Policy Issue,” he states that ethnic concentrations can be found all throughout Western Europe. For example, 48 percent of the population in Amsterdam was of foreign origin in 2005. The average for the German cities of Stuttgart, Frankfurt and Nuremberg was 38 percent. In Oslo, approximately one-third of the population is of foreign origin. With France, which is known for having the largest Muslim population in Europe, Brown went further in depth. Breaking up France into communes, Brown noted that in Ile-de-France as many as three-fourths of young people were of foreign origin in the year 2005. In Seine-Saint-Denis, one out of six young person was from Sub-Saharan Africa. In Blois, it was determined that one-third of the young people were of foreign origin in the year 2005, and of this one-third 80 percent were Muslim. This proves that ethnic enclaves do exist within Western European countries.

The work of the above scholars proves that the variables I will use in my analysis do exist, as well as illustrate a general link between the failure of integration policies and the recent tensions and events that have been occurring in Western Europe between host societies and its Muslim immigrants. This paper will argue that there is more to be analyzed in regards to these tensions, and propose that there may be an antecedent
variable between the failure of integration policies and hostile public opinion and the resulting tensions and violence. Literature is lacking on analyzing the possible link between Muslim immigrants choosing to identify to their religious identity over their national identity and the tensions that this may create. It is conceivable that integration policies and public opinion all affect Muslims choosing their religious identities, which then leads to national tensions within Western European countries. This link is worthy of further study, and would fit in well with the rest of the literature on the general subject of Muslim immigrants in Western Europe.

**Methodology**

The question this paper will try to answer is as follows: Why are Muslim immigrants choosing to relate primarily to their religious identity over their national identity? Therefore, my dependent variable will be Muslim immigrants turning to their religious identity. I will examine two independent variables: the state’s reception of Muslim immigrants and the public’s reception of Muslim immigrants. The state’s reception of Muslim immigrants can be demonstrated through incorporation policies of the host country. The public’s reception of Muslim immigrants can be determined through public opinion polls of the Muslim immigrants within the host society. Overall, I have two hypotheses that I will be attempt to prove with this analysis. Hypothesis One (H1) is that the failure to properly integrate Muslim immigrants via state incorporation policies will cause Muslim immigrants to turn to their religious identity over their national identity. Hypothesis Two (H2) is that an overall negative public opinion about Muslims immigrants within a host society will cause Muslim immigrants to turn to their religious identity over their national identity. This paper will analyze three different cases within Western Europe.
The countries I choose for my case studies are France, Germany and Great Britain. All three of these countries have a significant amount of Muslim immigrants within their population. None of these countries execute the exact same type of incorporation policies toward their immigrant population, but all three are deeply affected by Muslim populations.

I will examine the dependent variable by looking at the percentage of Muslims within Western European countries that consider religion to be their central identity. I will also be looking at the percentage of Muslims that think the Islamic identity among Muslims in their country is growing. This data can be found in a Pew Global Attitudes Project survey. The name of the survey I will use is “Few Signs of Backlash From Western Europeans,” I released on July 6, 2006. The Pew Global Attitudes Project is a reliable series of public opinion surveys encompassing a wide range of subjects. The 2006 Global Attitudes Survey was based on national samples and the survey was conducted either by telephone or through face-to-face interviews. The margin of error for my case studies was between 4-6 percent.

I will examine my first independent variable, the state's reception of Muslim immigrants, through the analysis of literature regarding the incorporation policies of my chosen case studies. I will discuss the different approaches my case studies take when integrating their immigrant into their societies. I will examine my second independent variable, the public's reception of Muslim immigrants, through two different surveys. The first is the same survey used for my dependent variable, “Few Signs of Backlash From Western Europeans” by Pew Global Attitudes Project. For this part of my analysis, I will use information on the percentage of the general public that is worried about Islamic extremism in their country and how Muslims view their experiences with Europeans. I will
also look at data dealing with the percentage of how many Europeans are hostile towards Muslims. The source I use is from the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA). Under their national profiles there is a “Social Regulation of Religion” section. The ARDA coded International Religious Freedom Reports from the 2003, 2005, and 2008 reports. I will be using two coded sections from the “Social Regulation of Religion”. The first is “societal attitudes toward other or nontraditional religions”. The way it is coded is as follows: 0= open and tolerant; 1= isolated discrimination; 2= negative just in certain regions or toward certain religious brands; 3= hostile. The second question I will use from this section of the ARDA is “are citizens intolerant of ‘nontraditional’ faiths?” Both of these questions will help analyze the general public reception of nontraditional religions within my cases.

There are limitations to this methodology. The problem with looking at integration policies is that there is a lack of any comparative or systematic data. As with all surveys, one should always bear in mind that the question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys could bring about errors and a bias with the outcomes of opinion polls. Ideally, I would go out and create my own survey that would be exclusive to my research topic. Since this is not a viable option, I must depend on other surveys that deal with different aspects of my variables and apply them to my research variables as best I can.

Analysis

Germany

Germany has a population of of 82 million people, of which 68.2 percent is Christian and 8.5 percent is Muslim (thearda.com). Germany is considered to be a relatively reluctant land of immigration. This reluctance is evident by its lack of formal policies regarding the benefits immigration may have for Germany’s economy. Because of its reluctance to
embrace immigration as a means to boost the economy there was no clear integration path. In general, Germany has a medium level of cultural integration policies, meaning religious and cultural group rights (Minkenberg 2008, 53). It is also important to note that because Germany is a federal state there are important differences between regions. The incorporation approaches within Germany are very different between liberal cities and conservative cities (Koopmans 2004, 450). Germany is viewed as having substantial regional variation when it comes to cultural group rights for migrants.

The data for my second independent variable, public reception of Muslim immigrants show that there is a general negative opinion about Muslims in Germany. According to Graph 1, 51 percent of Muslims in Germany view Europeans to be hostile towards them. This is the highest percentage out of all the case studies. What is most interesting about this data is that despite a perceived hostile environment, Germany has the lowest percentage (19 percent) of Muslims that actually had a bad personal experience.
This data also coincides with the ARDA data. According to the Social Regulation of Religion data, Germany received an overall 3 for “societal attitudes toward other or nontraditional religions. This coding of a 3 means that Germany is an overall hostile environment. For the question of whether citizens are intolerant of “nontraditional” faiths within Germany the general answer was “yes and more than one case”. In 2006, 40 percent of the general German public was very concerned about Islamic Extremism within Germany. This is a 5 percent increase from the previous year’s survey. Overall, the data leads to the conclusion that, in general, there is a negative public perception of Muslims within German society. Germany has an overall medium level of cultural integration policies and is considered to be restrictive when it comes to immigration. Germany is, in general, considered to have hostile societal attitudes towards Muslims. Graph 3 demonstrates that 66 percent of Muslims in Germany consider their central identity to be Muslim, as oppose to being a German citizen. Compared to Christians in Germany (33 percent viewed Christianity as their central identity) there is a significant difference. Graph 4 shows that 84 percent of German’s general public feel there is a very or fairly strong Islamic identity among Muslims in their country. This data strongly suggests that a majority of Muslims within Germany are choosing to identify with their Islamic identity over their national identity.

**France**

France has a total population of 63.7 million. Of this total population, an estimated 5 to 6 million Muslims live in France- approximately 8 to 10 percent of the total population (thearda.com). Unlike Germany, France has a long history of immigration due to its republican tradition. France has low-level of cultural integration policies (Minkenberg 2008, 53).
The position France usually takes on the cultural group rights of its migrants is a monist or assimilationist position (Koopmans 2004, 452). France shows that this assimilationist approach can be combined with a very open citizenship regime on the individual level. Naturalization in France acts as a tool for assimilation (Koopmans 2004, 452). France is viewed to be a moderate state when it comes to dealing with immigration policy (Minkenberg 2008, 53).

Graph 1 shows the data for public reception of Muslims within France. France has the lowest percentage (39 percent) for all three countries of its Muslims that view Europeans to be hostile. However, France has the highest percentage (37 percent) of Muslims who said they had a bad experience with Europeans. The ARDA data concludes that France is an overall hostile environment when it comes to societal attitudes toward other or nontraditional religions (received a 3 in the coding process). In response to the question regarding whether citizens are intolerant of “nontraditional” faiths, France received an overall “yes and more than one case”. France’s general public’s concern over
Islamic extremism within its country actually decreased from 2005 to 2006, as shown in Graph 2. Overall, France is the least concerned with Islamic extremism when compared to Germany and Great Britain.

Graph 3 shows that more Muslims within France relate to their Islamic identity (46 percent) over their national identity (42 percent). These percentages have only a 4 percent difference, which is the lowest out of all three countries. It should be noted that among the Christians in France, 83 percent of them claimed their national identity to be their central identity—this is the highest among all three nations by 24 percent. Among the general population in France and French Muslims, there is a general agreement that French Muslims have a very or fairly strong Islamic sense of identity (76 and 75 percent). This data is shown in Graph 4. This data strongly suggest that more French Muslims are relating to their religious identity over their national identity.

Great Britain

Great Britain has a total population of about 62,348,447. Of this total population approximately 3 percent are Muslim. Great Britain has been a net immigration country since 1983 (Layton-Henry 2004 318). After Germany and France, the United Kingdom has the third largest foreign population in Western Europe. Regardless of their large foreign population, the British governments have always lacked in having a clear philosophy for the integration of these foreign populations (Layton-Henry 2004, 328). This is partly because Great Britain only recently—since World War II, has viewed itself as an immigration country. The British government takes the stance that people migrate because it is in their own interest to do so; therefore it is up to them to bear the costs and to adapt into the British society (Layton-Henry 2004, 318). British policymakers assume that
immigrants will assimilate on their own. Great Britain has a reactive integration policy as opposed to a proactive and planned one. Overall, Great Britain is considered to have moderate cultural integration policies (Minkenberg 2008, 53). Great Britain is a centralized state and therefore has a narrower range of local variation for its integration policies (Koopmans 2008, 451).

Graph 1 shows that 42 percent of Muslims in Great Britain believe Europeans are hostile towards Muslims. According to Graph 1, 28 percent have actually had a personal bad experience with Europeans. The ARDA data concludes that Great Britain has hostile (coding of a 3) societal attitudes towards other or nontraditional religions. Great Britain was also considered to have intolerant attitudes toward ‘nontraditional’ faiths on more than one case. Graph 2 shows that 42 percent of Great Britain’s general public is very concerned with Islamic extremism. This percentage is the highest out of all three countries. This percentage has increased by 8 percent from the previous year. Thus, there is a generally negative public reception of Muslims within Great Britain.

Graph 3 shows that 81 percent of Muslims in Great Britain identify his or herself as being Muslim first instead of identifying his or herself as a citizen of Great Britain first. This is the highest percentage out of all three countries. To compare, the majority of Christians (59 percent) within Great Britain consider their national identity to be their primary identity. According to Graph 4 approximately 79 percent of Great Britain’s general public feel there is a very or fairly strong sense of Islamic identity among Muslims in Great Britain. This shows that not only do well over the majority of Muslims relate primarily to their Islamic identity but that the public recognizes and witnesses a strong presence of Islamic identities within their country. All of this data strongly suggests that a great deal of
Muslims within Great Britain are relating primarily to their religious identity over their national identity.

These three cases show that, in general, Muslims are identifying with their religious identity over their national identity. France is the one country has did not have a majority; only 46 percent of their Muslims claimed their central identity to be their Islamic one. I still consider this to be a significant number especially since 83 percent of its Christians relate to their national identity over their religious identity. In general each state does some sort of incorporation policy proving that there is some sort of reception of Muslim immigrants within host societies. These integration policies, which differ from country to country, are seen as generally failing by scholars in the field. This supports H1, the failure to properly integrate Muslim immigrants via state incorporation policies will cause Muslim immigrants to turn to their religious identity over their national identity. In general, all three cases were considered to have hostile public environments for people of other or nontraditional religions. The public reception in Germany, Great Britain and France are generally negative. This leads me to conclude that Muslims are feeling excluded due to societal attitudes towards them. If Muslims are having a difficult time being accepted by their society, it is only natural that he or she find another social medium that will accept them and help his or herself to create an identity. The social medium that these Muslims are finding to be most accepting is a religious one, thus, leading them to view themselves as Muslims over German, French or British. This data and conclusion supports my H2, an overall negative public opinion about Muslims immigrants within a host society will cause Muslim immigrants to turn to their religious identity over their national identity. Though the correlations I have found are not necessarily causal, I believe the correlations are
significant enough to suggest that Muslim immigrants relating primarily to their religious identity is an important factor to consider as the root of current tensions.

**Conclusion**

I took great care to find data that was as consistent as possible across all three of my case studies so that I could come up with the most accurate conclusions possible. The link between Muslim immigrants choosing to identify with their religious identity over their national identity and the affects state reception and public reception of Muslim immigrants has on this dependent variable has in general proved to be existent. This supports my argument that there is an antecedent variable to be analyzed between the incorporation policies and tensions in Western European countries. Due to my limitations within my research I believe it to be beneficial for more scholarly work to be done on this religious identity variable. Though incorporation policies vary among these three Western European countries there does not appear to be an over all successful incorporation policy. Integrating immigrants should be considered as a higher priority among policymakers. The failure of integration causes immigrants to feel as though they are not culturally and socially part of their new host country pushing Muslim immigrants to rely on their religious identity. This increase in Muslims relating primary to their Islamic identity is likely a root cause of the tensions with Western European countries. However, due to recent violence, the issue is not exclusive to the root of the tensions, but also to how these tensions can be eased. This is a difficult question to address because there is no uniform solution. Each country needs to recognize the problem and work with immigrants to create a solution that best fits with its background history, its outlook on policies and its current problems with Muslim immigrants.
Work Cited


