culturally-specific formulations and trajectories of the Western social imaginary are necessarily applicable to, and beneficial for, the world’s social majorities that lay principally outside of the West is precisely the prerequisite — indeed the *sine qua non* — of the legitimization of alternative, counter-hegemonic histories and narratives. Only in the present situation wherein the epistemological and ontological claims of the West have begun to experience self-doubt on a large-scale, and only where Adorno’s and the Frankfurt School’s indictment of Western Enlightenment, modernity, and rationality as the leading culprits for the problems of mankind and civilization has finally been taken seriously, can a “reactivated Islam” achieve the centrality in the world system that it does. In this context, Islamism is able to assert itself as a powerful contender for the loyalties of a significant portion of the world identifying with meaningful resistance to injustice and the desire of a more egalitarian world order.

Sayyid’s book is undoubtedly thought-provoking and replete with new insights. One hopes that both the stubborn, cliché-laden orientalists as well as the materialist anti-orientalists will read it and benefit from its enormous erudition and much-needed correctives to the scholarship that currently exists. *A Fundamental Fear* will also serve as an eye-opener for the ‘Westoxicated,’ so-called Muslim liberals who have long taken the universality of the Western notions of modernity, secularism, rationality, and nation-state for granted and have defined the fundamental problematique of their societies in terms of “what went wrong” with Islam or Muslims.

Junaid Ahmad

★★★★


The various models of integration of Muslims immigrants into Western societies have become something of a burning topic since the recent dramatic events in France. In this timely, rich and detailed book, Jocelyne Cesari examines with great authority the possibility of “Muslim immigration to Europe and North America as the foundational moment of a new
transcultural space, which still remains to be analyzed” (p. 5).

Immigration from Islamic lands to the United States took place over a century or so from the late 1800s to our own times, attracted an immigrant with a certain level of education and economic means to conform to the conditions of the Green Card and, was assimilationist to the point where it was considered “possible to be both an active Muslim and an American citizen without experiencing a conflict of values” (p. 1). European Muslim immigration, on the other hand, was a very different and very varied story; the result of a long European history of conflict with Islam and the more recent European colonisation of Islamic lands. Some contact dates back to the end of the 18th century, but mass immigration began after the Second World War when large numbers or poor, unskilled workers from North Africa, Turkey, India and Pakistan were imported to help with post-war reconstruction. By the 1980s Italy, Spain, Austria and the Netherlands had also become destinations of Muslim settlement as refugees and asylum seekers sought haven from the political upheavals caused by the demise of the Soviet Union. While the various European states had vastly different models of accepting Muslim immigration, Orientalist thinking re-emerged in most European societies as it became evident that the immigrants were not seasonal but had come to stay; the Turk was again at the gates of Vienna. The European reaction of hostility and negativity towards Muslims, “the enemy without” was in marked contrast to that of the United States which, up until the events of September 11 and the beginnings of the War of Terror, had been remarkably conciliatory.

Cesari examines in great detail one of the major problems confronting Muslims in both the US and Europe at this point — the loss of control over identity. Muslims began to be defined by the mega-narrative of the dominant culture and by international events, facilitating the emergence among those alienated of the identity politics of the oppressed victim. Islamic revival came to be associated with global terrorism by increasingly fearful American and European populations, forcing Muslims to retreat into positions of either total acceptance of the host culture, or avoidance of it by retreating into a social and intellectual ghetto or resistance to it by taking an opposing stance of one kind or another. In Europe this situation is exacerbated by the views of the extreme Right in various countries which paint Islam as an unyielding force, and who see ‘over-foreignization’ as a threat to the Western values of Christianity, Roman Law, and the Enlightenment. This is particularly marked in Germany and France; the German model seeing German-ness and nationhood as an ethnicity passed down by blood lines, whereas the French model sees French-ness as citizenship, the concept of which has no space for the ‘other.’ Islamic
cultural heritage is incompatible with French cultural tradition; “the foreigner cannot be relieved of this incompatibility by becoming a citizen” (p. 34), an attitude sadly illustrated by the recent riots in France. In the United States, on the other hand, where the concept of the trans-national had formally been the norm, the development of Islamophobia takes the form of a threat to religious values. The current prominence and influence of the Christian fundamentalist lobby has managed to replace the ‘evil empire’ of the Soviets with ‘demonic Islam.’ Thus the War on Terror is seen as the defence of Christian values and Jeffersonian democracy, which the United States has the manifest destiny to protect and propagate.

It would have been useful to have had more detail on the differences inherent in the various national approaches to Muslim immigration in Europe. Cesari does illustrate the differences of response between the German model of ethnicity, the French citizenship and the British acceptance of minorities, to mention only the major players, but it would seem that they are so different in themselves as to make a comparison of ‘Muslims in Europe and the United States’ somewhat problematic.

The book provides us with a detailed analysis of the other grand themes in the confrontation between Muslims and the West and examines to great effect the extent to which the secular institutions of the West affect the main debates within an evolving Islam. Is Islam inimical to democratic institutions and the separation of Church and State? Is sharī‘ah law theocratic and immutable? How do Muslims relate to the ‘other’? Is there the same space for the ‘other’ in Islam as Islam requires of the West? What will be the long term effects in Western societies of global Islam and the emergence of a pan-Muslim identity? How can Muslims counter the influence of Salafī and Wahhabī absolutism and puritanism in permissive Western society? And what of the problem of the apostate? And the urgent need to address the status of women?

But indications of an evolution in Islamic thinking are emerging as “residence in the West,” Cesari tells us, “often gives a new dimension to debates” (p. 159). The number of scholars trained in Muslim lands who are now to be found in American and European universities and institutions and who benefit from the freedom of expression that the West affords are beginning to reshape and change the debate. The Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) has approached the thorny question of the literal reading of sacred texts with the following words: “Islam began to decline as soon as the Qur’ānic text was considered as something absolute, independent and divorced from the historic context” (p. 163). Rached Ghannouchi, a Tunisian scholar living in London, considers that there are no good Islamic governments at the present time, but that “the necessities of good Islamic governance” are all
fulfilled in the West (p. 162). Tariq Ramadan sees the true meaning of *Shari'ah* as the taking of the good and rejection of the bad and that this can be achieved equally in the West as in Muslim societies. Even though these are radical views for the vast majority of Muslims and are expressed only by a small number of scholars in America and Europe, they are available to the generations of Muslims born and educated in the West. A frank exchange of views, which would have been extremely difficult a generation ago, is now becoming a possibility.

The book addresses the crisis that engulfs contemporary Islam as it comes to terms with the problems and opportunities of modernism in the West and, while it mentions the effects of Western policies on Muslim attitudes worldwide, it does not discuss in depth the crisis of spiritual and moral confusion in which the West also finds itself. Cesari gives us a very measured and dispassionate account of the results of Western actions on Muslim opinion. But the rage and powerlessness felt by most Muslims at the abuse of the asymmetry of power and the humiliation of Islam by Western foreign policy is impossible to exaggerate. Reports of torture and human rights abuses, and the contempt epitomized by the ‘stuff happens’ attitude of the current American administration to the appalling human tragedy in Iraq makes it quasi impossible for those Muslims alienated and marginalized to turn anger into argument. Why use the democratic process when it is so often hypocritically flaunted by the people purporting to advocate and defend it?

Tariq Ramadan has pointed out that Islam is first and foremost a great spirituality, a deep faith and a way of living. While the political and cultural differences with the West are the crux of this book’s narrative and the discussion on ethnicity and religion highly relevant, the spirituality of Islam as a way of life in Western society is of the utmost importance as the global resurgence of religion can no longer be ignored. The great French thinker René Girard (1923– ) has brilliantly exposed the ambiguity that exists between what is sacred and what is violent and it is urgent that the critical examination of the violence and literalism in the sacred texts which has begun in Judaism and Christianity now be pursued by Islamic thinkers.

While Christianity is regressing into literalist absolutism in its fundamentalist guise, putting it onto a collision course with the similar strain in Islam, and while the pews are emptying and we speak of the post-Christian age, Christianity is re-emerging in force in the form of action in social justice and issues of non-violence and peace; a position which is no doubt closer to its original mission of loving one’s neighbour. A Christian recognition of the

---

1 All reference to Tariq Ramadan are given a from a public lecture that he delivered at Bradford University, England, November 21st, 2005.
divine in Islam is emerging as is a sense of the fundamental ‘otherness’ of the other and the beauty of diversity. ‘We made you nations and tribes in order that you know each other’ the Qur’ān (49:13) tells us. “Diversity,” Tariq Ramadan so insightfully commented, “when accepted, is a great richness, when rejected, is a threat.”

So is Cesari correct in postulating that we are witnessing a “foundational moment of a new transcultural space?” Yes, we are, when we can see that our faith is not beyond that of others but side by side with it; when we can appreciate the changing face of the West and realise that we are not alone in defining what is a German, an Englishman, a Frenchman, an American; when we have the vision to see that a new civilisation is being born, albeit in confusion and with convulsions, then we have the foundations of a new transcultural space. It is happening, but we are in for the long haul.

Sheelah Treflé Hidden

★ ★ ★