

***“Eastern Muslims” and “Western Liberals”: Ne’er the Twain Shall Meet?***<sup>1</sup>

By Chris Wright

Among the many competing visions of Europe’s future, two in particular have a strong hold on the academic and the “policy-analytical”<sup>2</sup> mind. The reason for the appeal of these two visions, both of which I’ll describe momentarily, is that they have the characteristics of overarching narratives, indeed of “metanarratives,” to quote Jean-François Lyotard.<sup>3</sup> John Stephens defines a metanarrative as “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.”<sup>4</sup> The great monotheistic religions are metanarratives; Marxism-Leninism is a metanarrative; Francis Fukuyama’s famous thesis about the end of history is a metanarrative. Postmodernists like Lyotard argue that metanarratives as such are unsound, oversimplifying, intellectually dishonest. It seems more circumspect, however, to say that, while one should always be suspicious of a belief-system that claims to be the definitive interpretation of a diverse set of social phenomena, such theories should not be forbidden *a priori*. They should simply be evaluated on their merits, tested in the crucible of empirical reality; they should be treated like any other hypothesis. It may, after all, be the case that there *are* broad historical tendencies and trends, and accordingly that a so-called metanarrative (which picks out these tendencies) may be true, i.e. may be a satisfactory scientific interpretation of the world.

Let us, therefore, consider the two abovementioned theories and not scorn them because of their ambitiousness. The first is defended in Mark Leonard’s (unacademic) book *Why Europe Will Run the Twenty-First Century*.<sup>5</sup> Leonard’s vision of the future is actually three related visions. First of all, he argues, the EU-model of governance and regional economic integration represents the future: more and more areas of the world will find it necessary to do as Europe has done and “form a common market with coordinated macroeconomic policies in different sectors, [for example] foreign trade, agricultural, industrial, and fiscal.”<sup>6</sup> Europe has paved the way: the successes of the EU have inspired such institutions as NAFTA in North America, MERCOSUR in South America, ASEAN in Southeast Asia, SAARC in South Asia, APEC in the Pacific region, and so on. Globalization has proceeded to such a point, in fact, that regional organizations like the EU have, arguably, become *structurally* necessary for global stability, so much so that they may gradually eclipse the nation-state in importance. This narrative of the decline of the nation-state and the rise of regional and interregional organizations is sometimes conflated with the second “vision” I just

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<sup>1</sup> [This is a student paper from 2008, which accounts for its flaws. Such as its length. And its political naïveté.]

<sup>2</sup> By that term I’m referring to the so-called policy analysts who so eagerly and prolifically offer their interpretations of politics to the educated public.

<sup>3</sup> See Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Stephens, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children’s Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998), 6.

<sup>5</sup> (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

mentioned, namely that Europe, being the most successful of these regional units, will succeed the United States as the world's superpower, or at least will have no trouble holding its own against China and America in the twenty-first century. And the new age of Europe will approximate Kant's ideal of "perpetual peace," precisely because of the nation-state's decline and regionalism's rise.

The third aspect of this first narrative is the spread of liberal democracy and social equality around the world. Global integration in capitalist conditions arguably generates pressures toward political liberalism insofar as it necessitates some sort of rule of law, relative social and political stability—since businesses are averse to investing in unstable regions—significant freedom in the market, and, partly as an outgrowth of these factors, measures to ensure a degree of individual liberty. Arbitrary, repressive, unpredictable governance can hinder capitalist development; therefore, arbitrary and repressive governments tend, in the long run, to be undermined as capitalist development progresses. (To say that they *tend* to be undermined isn't to discount that contrary tendencies may reinforce authoritarianism.) Parliamentary democracy, on the other hand, is promoted, in part because social and political stability may be difficult to achieve if the vast majority of the population is denied a political voice. Later in the paper I'll speculate further on why capitalism—in the long run—seems to give birth to formal democracy.

The foregoing, then, constitutes one popular narrative. Its predictions of the future are optimistic.

Contrasted with these encouraging prophecies are the apocalyptic ones that take their cue from Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis, which is the framework for the second theory I want to examine. In the age of Al Qaeda and Bush's "war on terrorism," the most popular narrative in the Huntingtonian vein is the one that emphasizes the clash between Islam and the West. Bruce Bawer's hyperbolic book *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam Is Destroying the West from Within*<sup>7</sup> is symptomatic of this thinking, which sees Europe's problems with Muslim immigrants as, first, a sign of the threat that radical Islam poses to liberal democracy and Western civilization, and, more specifically, a threat to the very existence of Europe as we know it. That the West will prevail in this epic struggle is, according to these observers, by no means a foregone conclusion. Liberal democracy and global integration are perceived as "delicate flowers," the flowers of the West, which must be protected at all costs from the gathering tempest of Islamism.

As I have summarized these two grand narratives, they might not strike one as very scientific or plausible. Nor might it appear that they are necessarily opposed to each other, given that, by and large, they apply to two different realms of social reality: the first presumes to locate inherent tendencies in the global economy and politics toward regionalism, toward international, cooperative management of economic and political affairs, toward liberal democracy and a reduction of the sort of conflicts (territorial, economic, armed) that have historically been engendered by the nation-state system; the second largely ignores the economic tendencies of global capitalism and focuses on the conflicts between cultures that result from globalization. If

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<sup>7</sup> (New York: Doubleday, 2006) See also Robert Spencer's *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003), a book as laughable as Bawer's.

formulated in a certain “scientific” way, I believe these two positions *can* be compatible with each other. Nevertheless, they come into conflict if the encounter between the “West” and “Islam” is exaggerated, as it often is, to the point of being called *the* fundamental issue of our time, *the* major consequence of globalization, *the* tendency that overrides all others.

I’ll argue in this paper that the so-called threat posed by Islam (to Europe and to Western society as a whole) is not as dire as Huntington and others suggest. Indeed, there is essentially no “threat” at all. The first narrative I described above is far more cogent and explanatorily powerful than the second. I will establish this claim initially on the basis of a few theoretical considerations but in particular by looking at recent developments in the Islamic world that are more consistent with our “optimistic” than our “pessimistic” narrative. In the paper’s second section I’ll explain why I believe that Europe, which is often portrayed as a cauldron of cultural conflict, is not particularly endangered by its Muslim population. This fact will, again, militate against any Huntingtonian theory.

The major lacuna in this paper will be the lack of attention devoted to the decline of the nation-state. I hope, however, that my analysis will at least “obliquely” support the hypothesis of [the nation-state’s relative decline](#).

### The Islamic World

Samuel Huntington’s book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* has been devastatingly criticized since its publication in 1996, and I won’t rehash all its faults here. The only reason I mention it is that it is the classic statement of a mode of thinking that has become wildly popular in the years since September 11, 2001, to the extent that the book’s thesis is now a part of the collective consciousness of the West, indeed of much of the world. Huntington expressed it in his original *Foreign Affairs* article in 1993 as follows:

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.<sup>8</sup>

The main “clash” that people pay attention to now is between the Muslim and the Western “civilizations,” but Huntington also distinguishes between the Confucian, the Hindu, the Latin American, the Japanese, the Buddhist, the Slavic-Orthodox, and the African civilizations.

Huntington’s analysis is extremely oversimplified and crude; he basically ignores the messy concreteness of socioeconomic reality in favor of making sweeping generalizations about

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<sup>8</sup> Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993).

religions, cultures and “civilizations”—concepts so abstract as to be nearly empty.<sup>9</sup> And yet the framework he defended has millions of adherents in, especially, Europe, the U.S., and perhaps certain Muslim countries. The question “Why?” is not hard to answer: oversimplified metanarratives are attractive in that they reinforce the believer’s self-identity and allow him to classify and thus “understand” a huge variety of phenomena.<sup>10</sup> They simplify the world. This in itself is not a vice; every theory is something of a simplification, and humans could not function without simplifying their world to make it intellectually manageable. The very act of conceptualizing involves an element of “simplifying.” But there are good simplifications and there are bad simplifications, “true” simplifications and “false” ones.

The minuscule kernel of truth in Huntington’s theory is that people from different societies can potentially, under certain conditions, develop hatred for each other, for the “Other,” and become violent in their hatred. This is what has happened in the case of some radical Muslims in the Middle East, Europe, and other regions; it is also what happened to many Americans after September 11<sup>th</sup>, when the country rose up in fury against the Other and advocated annihilation of the Middle Eastern “enemy.” This fact of *potential* hostility towards people not from one’s own society or “civilization”<sup>11</sup> has been true throughout history; it is not new to the post-Cold War world. But such hostility is by no means always a reality: usually, in fact, it is not. Most Americans are not *hostile* but rather *indifferent* towards Latin American society (or “civilization,” in Huntington’s terminology); they are not hostile towards traditional Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, or Japanese culture. But many *are* towards Muslim societies, or at least certain aspects of them; and some Muslims are hostile towards the so-called West. The interesting question, then, is, “*Under what conditions* does a ‘clash’ break out between people of different backgrounds, ideologies, or cultures?” Huntington and his followers essentially ignore this question.

It is useful to recall here the wisdom of Marxism as filtered through Barrington Moore, the famous sociologist. In his classic *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, he chastises sociologists and historians who use “cultural,” as opposed to socioeconomic, explanations—people like Huntington and everyone else who blames Muslim “culture” for the problems of terrorism, immigrant-assimilation (or lack of it) in Europe, etc. The problem with cultural explanations, argues Moore, is that they imply a conception of “social inertia” that is unsound:

There is a widespread assumption in modern social science that social continuity requires no explanation. Supposedly it is not problematical. Change is what requires explanation. This assumption blinds the investigator to certain crucial

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<sup>9</sup> For succinct criticisms of Huntington, see the following: Edward Said, “The Clash of Ignorance,” *The Nation* (Oct. 4, 2001); Sandra Buckley, “Remaking the World Order: Reflections on Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*,” *Theory & Event* 2, No. 4 (1998); Carl Gershman, “The Clash within Civilizations,” *Journal of Democracy* 8, No. 4 (October 1997).

<sup>10</sup> **[This explanation, of course, is inadequate, in that it says nothing about the utility of Huntingtonian propaganda to political and economic power-structures in Europe and the United States.]**

<sup>11</sup> It’s worth noting that this fact is totally vacuous, because hostility is “potential” everywhere, not only between cultures. Indeed, it is *actual* everywhere: intraculturally, interpersonally, intrapersonally, etc.

aspects of social reality. Culture, or tradition...is not something that exists outside of or independently of individual human beings living together in society. Cultural values do not descend from heaven to influence the course of history. They are abstractions by an observer, based on the observation of certain similarities in the way groups of people behave, either in different situations or over time, or both... To explain in terms of cultural values is to engage in circular reasoning. If we notice that a landed aristocracy resists commercial enterprise, we do not *explain* this fact by stating that the aristocracy has done so in the past or even that it is the carrier of certain traditions that make it hostile to such activities: the problem is to determine out of what past and present experiences such an outlook arises and maintains itself...

The assumption of inertia, that cultural and social continuity do not require explanation, obliterates the fact that both have to be re-created anew in each generation, often with great pain and suffering. To maintain and transmit a value system, human beings are punched, bullied, sent to jail, thrown into concentration camps, cajoled, bribed, made into heroes, encouraged to read newspapers, stood up against a wall and shot, sometimes even taught sociology. To speak of cultural inertia is to overlook the concrete interests and privileges that are served by indoctrination, education, and the entire complicated process of transmitting culture from one generation to the next...<sup>12</sup>

Just as “cultural values” are transmitted from generation to generation only if very specific socioeconomic and political conditions obtain—and hence it is these *material conditions* that do much of the explanatory work vis-à-vis any given social phenomenon—so masses of people see it as a “cultural value” to destroy the “Other” largely because the concrete, material, political conditions in which they live have somehow encouraged them to desire the Other’s destruction—or, rather, have encouraged them to *invent* an Other that has to be destroyed.

Therefore, let’s set aside the hypothesis of a clash of cultures: it has no explanatory value, it is question-begging. It isn’t even really a true hypothesis: it simply states the problem that has to be explained, namely why it is that so many Muslims have become hostile to the West, and how this conflict is likely to unfold.

But what narrative can take its place? We all crave a narrative (in every facet of our life), but we also want it to be *true*, i.e. an explanation of the world. Can we replace Huntington’s sterile question-statement with something like a true narrative of the modern world?

One venerable narrative, dating from 1848, suits our purposes. The world has in recent years sloughed it off and let it molder by the wayside, but too many of its prophecies have been vindicated for persistence in this neglect to be reasonable. I am referring, of course, to [Marxism](#)—or, to speak more prudently, a revised and updated version of Marxism. To mount a defense of this system would require a [book](#); here I will present only a skeletal sketch of one aspect of its account

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<sup>12</sup> *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 485, 486.

of capitalist development, an account that supports the ideas I attributed to Mark Leonard above.<sup>13</sup> This sketch, supplemented with a little history, should enable us to put in perspective the challenge posed by radical Muslims to Western society.

Karl Marx was the first to predict what everyone by now recognizes as a truism: capitalism will eventually spread across the entire world, for it is inherently expansionist.<sup>14</sup> What the economic reasons are for its tendency toward explosive growth need not concern us. What matters is that, from its humble beginnings in feudal England and the Netherlands, the capitalist mode of production established itself first in Western Europe, then in North America, and then slowly, brutally, in Russia, Japan, Latin America, Africa, India, and so on, and it is still expanding (or consolidating its prior advances) to this day—into China and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, remoter parts of Africa and South America, and it has a long way to go in Russia and India. What is important for us to notice is that its evolution has not been peaceful: at every step of the way it has faced violent resistance, and it has used violence itself without compunction.

Consider Russia during the last decades of the Tsarist regime. Industrial capitalism was just beginning to force itself on a society that was still semi-feudal, in which the immense majority of the population consisted of peasants who had recently been freed from serfdom. (Serfdom was abolished in 1861.) One has but to read, e.g., Maxim Gorky's autobiography to get a sense of how miserable life was then for the destitute masses. In 1917, the sufferings of the peasants, the factory workers and the soldiers were at a peak and the country was descending into chaos. The Tsar abdicated, a Provisional Government was formed, and the party that ended up gaining power was the one supported by many of the peasants, the soldiers and the workers, namely the Bolsheviks. The masses hated what they had seen of capitalism, so, naturally, they supported a party that promised to rid the country of capitalism.

Every region of the world has had to come to terms, in its own way, with capitalist encroachment and the inevitable undermining of traditional social structures it entails. The "clash of civilizations," in this sense, has been going on at least since the 1300s, when nascent capitalism started emerging in the interstices of feudal society. Centuries later it came into contact with other areas of the world, such as China and India, initiating an era of world-convulsions. China in particular has had a turbulent history for the last century and a half. For instance, in reaction to the empire's economic problems, social unrest, and political humiliation at the hands of the Western powers, the Taiping Rebellion broke out in the 1850s. Its inspiration and unifying ideology was not Confucian or Buddhist; it was Christian. The rebellion failed, so the imperial regime straggled

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, on one construal, the ideas *constitute* an aspect of (watered-down) Marxism.

<sup>14</sup> See the *Communist Manifesto*: "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere... The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization... It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image." Marx's main mistake was that [he got the timeline wrong](#).

on until 1911, when a revolution toppled it and Sun Yat-Sen declared China a republic. But the country remained unstable: the majority of the population continued to live in poverty and misery, and after decades of ideological and military conflicts the Communists came to power. Mao Tse-Tung went a long way toward erasing China's traditional social structure with his Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, but by the 1970s China's leaders understood that they had to adopt capitalist reforms if their country was to survive. So now, like Russia and India, the nation is integrating itself into the capitalist world order.

In whatever area of the world you investigate, you find that people cope with social change by using the tools they have at hand. Ideologically, for example, people adhere to whatever belief-system provides the narrative they find most persuasive and most comforting in light of their social conditions. A peasant in Latin America might cope with poverty and oppression by embracing a left-wing Christianity; an intellectual in the same society might subscribe to Marxism because it provides a counter-narrative to the hegemonic "neoliberalism" and because of its fruitfulness for activism. Millions of Russians after the Revolution repudiated Christianity in favor of Marxism because the Bolsheviks offered hope to remedy Russia's ills and restore national pride. In the Middle East, on the other hand, Marxism had less success in part because there already existed a powerful ideological consolation and a counter-narrative to the West's, namely Islam. And the reason there has been both widespread opposition to the West and a revival of religion is not that there is any supposed necessity of inter-"civilizational" conflict or the presence of a Middle Eastern cultural "essence" or of massive cultural inertia, but simply that—as with Russia, China, India, and other countries—specific socioeconomic and political events and conditions have fostered discontent.

Before looking at these conditions, it may be helpful to state once more the argument of this paper. In brief: the resurgence of Islam in the past decades is due ultimately to societal upheavals—and imperialist domination—accompanying the long transition from tribalism and feudalism to capitalism. This broad claim should be uncontroversial. Since the 1400s, every society progressing towards mature capitalism has experienced ideological and political revolutions/reactions. Europe had its Reformation, which lent religious legitimacy to the bourgeois work-ethic by portraying it as a divine commandment<sup>15</sup>—and then, later, there were democratic revolutions, fascist reactions, and so on, all expressions of forces unleashed by economic and structural change. Russia and China had their early gropings toward capitalism, followed by Communist reactions, followed by a second attempt at capitalist transformation. And the Islamic world has had its flirtations with Arab nationalism, with socialism, with constitutional monarchies, and with Islamism. Upon surveying all the wreckage, one sees that the societies that have achieved greatest stability and a genuinely "mature" capitalism, namely the United States, Western Europe, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and a few other countries, are liberal democracies. Perhaps one could find counter-examples, but the inductive evidence is compelling: liberal democracy seems to be highly suited to mature, stable capitalism. I'll speculate later on the reasons for this, but, in any

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<sup>15</sup> Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is an interesting elaboration of that Marxist thesis (notwithstanding the book's common designation as "un-Marxist").

case, the fact supports the hypothesis that inherent in capitalism is a long-term “tendency” toward liberal democracy. What I will argue, therefore, is that as capitalism continues its penetration of the Islamic world we will see more struggles to birth democracy and liberalism and to reject theocracy and Islamism. In the end, the entire world is marching (very slowly!) toward, on the one hand, liberal democracy and social equality for all groups of people, and on the other hand, a relative decline of the nation-state and the rise of regionalism and globalism. My discussion of Europe in the second section will bear out this thesis by showing that Muslims are not the danger there they are sometimes thought to be.

To resume the thread: what have been the specific causes of the worldwide strengthening of Islam? (Identifying the causes will allow us to make a prognosis.) First we have to distinguish between four aspects of the phenomenon: (1) political regimes that, to varying degrees, are associated with Islam, for instance Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan; (2) mainstream Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, who are more “extreme” than the majority of believers but less extreme than the bin Ladens and al-Zawahiris; (3) the fringe fanatics in every Muslim society, the jihadists; (4) the masses of ordinary believers, comparable in most respects to ordinary Christians in the United States. To some extent these effects do not all have the same causes, and their fates correspondingly will diverge.

Many works have been published explaining the nature and causes of each of these four phenomena;<sup>16</sup> here I will only touch upon the circumstances associated with the latter two. In his excellent book *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Fawaz A. Gerges gives a detailed history of the rise of recent anti-American jihad, as distinguished from jihad against local Muslim rulers (in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, etc.) who are viewed as corrupt and beholden to the West. What is important for our purposes is, first, that no form of jihad has been “structurally inevitable” in the way that, e.g., the expansion of capitalism and the consequent spread of liberal-democratic ideologies are. On the most basic level, Islamic extremism has been a reaction to “the failure of secular governments to promote good governance and economic advancement in most Muslim countries.”<sup>17</sup> More specifically, the jihadist movement is

nourished on a diet of political persecution and suffering... The bloody history of official torture and persecution perpetuates a culture of victimhood and a desire for revenge and enables the movement to mobilize young recruits and constantly renew itself. Arab/Muslim prisons, particularly their torture chambers, have served as

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2000); Henry Munson, *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (Binghamton, New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1988); Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). The origins of the contemporary Islamic revival can be traced to the late 1960s, with the humiliating Arab defeat in the Six Day War and the popular hatred of inept, brutal U.S.-backed dictators like the Shah of Iran.

<sup>17</sup> 2002 report on the “Causes of Islamic Extremism” from the U.S. Institute of Peace, at <http://www.usip.org/peacewatch/2002/6/extremism.html>.

incubators for generations of jihadis... As long as Muslim governments violate the human rights of their citizens and sanction abuse, they will continue to breed radicalism and militancy.<sup>18</sup>

In large part, therefore, it is governments' *policies*—including the United States', which supports many autocratic regimes<sup>19</sup>—that are responsible for jihad. If different policies are followed, it is conceivable that the support for jihad among young Muslims will diminish.

Secondly, the common perception that Islamic extremism is a well-organized, semi-monolithic movement is completely false. Even such groups as Al Qaeda (during its heyday before the Iraq war) are poorly organized, "amateurish" in fact.<sup>20</sup> "Personalities in jihadist circles are more important than organization..."<sup>21</sup> For instance, the picture that emerges from the 9/11 Commission Report is that before 2001, Al Qaeda was practically synonymous with Osama bin Laden.<sup>22</sup> Gerges agrees: "Al Qaeda was—and still to a lesser extent is—synonymous with bin Laden and his close confidants, with no independent institutional anchor... It is unlikely to survive [bin Laden's] demise..."<sup>23</sup> The salient feature of the global jihadist movement is its reliance on *personalities*, on charismatic individuals like bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. This fact has obvious implications with respect to the long-term institutional durability of jihadist groups.

The fragmented and amateurish nature of jihadist networks unfortunately does not prevent them from occasionally inflicting high casualties in their attacks. The world was reminded of this by the Mumbai tragedy of November 2008, in which over 170 people were killed. It appears to have been an unusually well-coordinated series of attacks. "An attack of this nature," writes Bill Roggio, a military blogger, "cannot be thrown together overnight. It requires planning, scouting, financing, training, and a support network to aid the fighters."<sup>24</sup> Speculations abound that the Pakistani government or Pakistani militant groups were involved.<sup>25</sup> As of this writing, the truth has not been uncovered.

Days after the Mumbai attacks, a report was released by the Congressional Commission on the Prevention of WMD-Proliferation and Terrorism that gave a dire prediction: "Without greater urgency and decisive action by the world community, it is more likely than not that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gerges, *op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> For elaboration of that claim, see Robert Dreyfuss's *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Gerges, *op. cit.*, 41.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> The Report is available at <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Gerges, *op. cit.*, 39, 40.

<sup>24</sup> "Mumbai attack differs from past terror strikes," *The Long War Journal*, November 28, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Cf., e.g., the Associated Press article "Police: Pakistani group behind Mumbai attacks," November 30, 2008, available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27940231/>.

<sup>26</sup> Joby Warrick, "Nuclear or Biological Attack Called Likely," *Washington Post*, December 2, 2008.

“Nuclear terrorism is still a preventable catastrophe,” but to prevent it would require a dramatic toughening of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, among other provisions.<sup>27</sup>

In short, despite their usual incompetence, terrorist groups remain capable of wreaking destruction and undermining social progress. However, there is nothing *inevitable* about Islamic terrorism. It is loathed, not supported, by the immense majority of Muslims. (See below.) Despite decades of violence it has failed to obtain access to weapons of mass destruction, and it may be forever stymied in that objective if governments can coordinate effective policies. Moreover, recruits for terrorism will be ever harder to find if the counterproductive policies of past and current governments are remedied. “The volume of Saudi volunteers for *jihad* in such places as Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon appears to have markedly shrunk...[primarily because] the fading of Iraq as a terrorist paradise and the increasing effectiveness of policing elsewhere have produced a more hostile global environment for jihadist radicals.”<sup>28</sup>

Now, given the social conditions in many Muslim countries, it would be understandable if a high proportion of Muslims were attracted to fundamentalism, indeed to violent extremism. Consider these conditions:

For more than five decades, the peoples of the Middle East and the Islamic worlds have lived in a vortex of social change. Once rural if not tribal, they now seek a better life in megalopolises so polluted that the very act of breathing is dangerous to their health. Except for the wealthy minority, there is little but squalor. The extended families, that massive network...that once provided the foundation of Middle Eastern society, are beginning to crumble... Social despair is paralleled by economic despair. Middle Eastern universities are bursting at the seams, but there are few jobs for graduates... A narrow class of merchants, speculators, and industrialists has become inordinately wealthy under the new economic order, but the masses have not. Things have become worse, not better...<sup>29</sup>

“With governments as oppressive and ineffective as they are corrupt, it is only natural that many Muslims have sought salvation in their religion.”

And yet, as has been documented repeatedly, the vast majority of Muslims in the Middle East are not Islamists and certainly not jihadists. Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer estimate, based on surveys, that 75% of Muslims are quite moderate, 20% (in Egypt and Lebanon, at least) would feel comfortable living in an Islamic theocracy, and the remaining 5% is split between non-believers and “fanatics.”<sup>30</sup> The Pew Research Center reported in 2005 (at the nadir of the war in Iraq, when anti-Americanism was at its peak) that Muslim attitudes toward terrorism and jihad had

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> “The Struggle Against al-Qaeda,” *The Economist*, October 23, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Monte Palmer and Princess Palmer, *Islamic Extremism: Causes, Diversity, and Challenges* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 18, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 25.

become increasingly *negative*: “in Turkey, Morocco and Indonesia, 15% or fewer now say [suicide attacks] are justifiable; in Pakistan, only one-in-four now take that view (25%), a sharp drop from 41% in March 2004; in Lebanon, 39% now regard acts of terrorism as often or sometimes justified, again a sharp drop from the 73% who shared that view in 2002.”<sup>31</sup> Gerges concludes that “bin Laden and his transnationalist cohorts have lost the war of ideas—the struggle for Muslim minds.”<sup>32</sup> Again, this is particularly significant in light of the public relations disaster that was the Iraq war.

It appears likely, moreover, that with the election of Barack Hussein Obama, anti-Americanism will decrease throughout the Islamic world, even fewer recruits will be available for jihad, and American foreign policy will be less counterproductive than it was under George W. Bush. For example, Obama has vowed to end the Iraq war, a promise that Muslims overwhelmingly support and a policy that could end up indirectly defusing sectarian tensions in Iraq. Similarly, a more conciliatory stance than Bush’s toward Iran might strengthen moderates and reformists in that country.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, frustration with Islamic regimes is palpable. According to recent polls in Iran, 84% of university students are dissatisfied with the clerical state and only 6% of students watch or read religious materials.<sup>34</sup> One analyst argues that Islamism has already failed in Iran.<sup>35</sup> The younger generations—i.e., people under the age of 30, who constitute over 60% of Iran’s population<sup>36</sup>—have been utterly disillusioned by the reactionary government. “Power has corrupted religious institutions and discredited the idea of Islamic values in government.”<sup>37</sup> Economic problems have contributed to the frustration: most urban men and women have at least a high school education, but “data from 2005 show that while 90% of men have left school by age 23, it is not until age 29 that a corresponding percentage of men have found employment. The situation for young women appears bleaker: while their levels of educational attainment do not differ greatly from those of their male counterparts, the same data set shows that even by their late 20s, only 20% of them are employed.”<sup>38</sup> The popularity of Western culture—be it fashion, music, movies, even ideologies—stokes the ferment for change.

The Saudi Arabian government, too, is facing popular pressure. As in Iran, there are demographic problems: population growth averages about 3.5% annually, which means that the country must create between 260,000 and 500,000 new jobs every year, which is not happening.<sup>39</sup> Since the number of foreign workers continues to rise, the number of unemployed among locals

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<sup>31</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248>.

<sup>32</sup> Gerges, *op. cit.*, 270.

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Bahram Rajaei, “The Political Evolution of the Islamic Republic and U.S. Foreign Policy After September 11,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, No. 1 (2004).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Graham E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 105.

<sup>36</sup> Reported by CBS, at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/01/25/eveningnews/main669223.shtml>.

<sup>37</sup> Fuller, *loc. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> Reported by the Brookings Institution, at [http://www.brookings.edu/events/2008/0710\\_iran.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/events/2008/0710_iran.aspx).

<sup>39</sup> Jean-François Seznec, “Stirrings in Saudi Arabia,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, No. 4 (2002).

does as well. Widespread political corruption is another source of discontent among the populace.<sup>40</sup> Many women, too—who cannot vote or drive cars—are demanding change: while they constitute more than half of all university graduates, they represent about 5% of the kingdom’s workforce.<sup>41</sup> Progress is being made, though: King Abdullah, who is supportive of reform, proclaimed in 2008 that he would issue a royal decree giving women the right to drive.<sup>42</sup> And in 2005 Saudi Arabia had its first-ever municipal elections across the kingdom. Officials say that in the 2009 elections, women will be allowed to vote.<sup>43</sup>

Like Saudi Arabia and Iran, Pakistan has a population whose majority does not support its government’s traditional friendly relations with Islamists.<sup>44</sup> Historically, despite the state’s manipulations on behalf of Islamic parties, they have usually captured less than 8% of the vote in elections,<sup>45</sup> a trend that continued in the elections of February 2008.<sup>46</sup> Ideology seems less important to most Pakistanis than quality of life. And the latter is poor: one-third of the population lives in poverty; only 35% is literate; health care and other social services are in decline while the annual population growth rate is 2.7%.<sup>47</sup> The majority will support whichever political party can improve their social and economic position. And politicians recognize this, which is why they are increasingly pragmatic rather than ideological. Vali Nasr compares political trends in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey and other countries to European Christian Democracy in the twentieth century: “Muslim Democracy” takes whatever it can use from Islam and from liberal and secular ideologies, whatever it needs in order to gain power and get things done.<sup>48</sup> The tremendous success of anti-Taliban, anti-Islamist parties in Pakistan’s recent elections shows that the populace supports this strategy.

One could list for pages and pages, hundreds of pages, such reasons as the foregoing to think that liberalization and democratization represent the future of the Islamic world. One could also, of course, list recent events that might suggest the opposite. But this exercise would have little value. Social development is a complex process, full of setbacks and incremental advances. What I am concerned with is the long-term direction of historical evolution, not the daily record of protest movements and political reactions.

The issue of gender equality, for example, can be analyzed from a variety of perspectives, some of them more relevant to this paper than others. What is relevant, first of all, is that Islam itself, as laid out in the Koran, does not require political, economic or social subordination of women. Indeed, when it was founded in the 600s, Islam had a very progressive influence on gender

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4397615.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4397615.stm).

<sup>42</sup> Faiza Saleh Ambah, “Saudi Women See a Brighter Road on Rights,” *Washington Post*, January 31, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4252305.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4252305.stm).

<sup>44</sup> Husain Haqqani, “The Role of Islam in Pakistan’s Future,” *The Washington Quarterly* 28, No. 1 (2004-05).

<sup>45</sup> Frédéric Gare, “Pakistan: The Myth of an Islamist Peril,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (February 2006), at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/45.grare.final.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/02/musharraf\\_protaliban.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/02/musharraf_protaliban.php).

<sup>47</sup> Haqqani, op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Vali Nasr, “The Rise of ‘Muslim Democracy,’” *Journal of Democracy* 16, No. 2 (2005).

roles. In pre-Islamic Arabia women were treated as little more than chattel, or inheritable property;<sup>49</sup> the Prophet tried to establish greater equality for them in his writings and in reality. Thus, feminists have pointed out that, while the Koran does distinguish between men and women, it does not argue that men are more *valuable* than women.<sup>50</sup> Nor does it “strictly delineate the roles of woman and the roles of man to such an extent as to propose only a single possibility for each gender.”<sup>51</sup> The Koran is not a rigid, dogmatic, legalistic document; it is rich, full of poetic ambiguity and inconsistency. Yet it is infused throughout with a spirit of open-mindedness and generosity.

More important, though, is the fact that any ideology can and will be reinterpreted continually in the light of social conditions. A group of people that is committed to a particular ideology or religion but finds some of its provisions unpalatable given material circumstances will either ignore those provisions or explain them away. Young Catholics in Europe and Latin America ignore the Church’s dictates on birth control but consider themselves good Catholics anyway. Why do they ignore the Church in this matter? Because they want the freedom that others have, they want to be in control of their own lives, they want opportunities and independence—just like Muslims growing up in modernizing, globalizing, democratizing societies. The mere popularity or “resurgence” of Islam in itself says almost nothing about the concrete directions of social evolution, because Islam is a living creed, as mutable as Christianity, a creed that reacts and changes in response to such developments as high unemployment, political oppression, the spread of information technology, the decline or the rise in private investment. Even if there were some sort of “objective” incompatibility between Islam and gender equality, that fact would foreclose neither the equalizing of gender relations in Muslim countries nor the possibility of millions of Muslims’ favoring women’s empowerment.

Thirdly, we can look at the empirical data. With respect to gender relations, what is happening in places like Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria?<sup>52</sup> Again, the differences between nations are vast; generalizations are risky. For instance, women’s participation in the labor-force is high in predominantly Muslim Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, while it is low in the Middle East.<sup>53</sup> However, we can at least outline trajectories of change.

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<sup>49</sup> Mohammed Ali Syed, *The Position of Women in Islam: A Progressive View* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Karin Ask and Marit Tjomslund, eds., *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations* (New York: Berg, 1998), 30.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>52</sup> Throughout this paper I am disregarding Iraq and Afghanistan, simply because the social and political situations there are volatile and new developments may emerge in response to the new regimes. I am also not considering the Central Asian countries, partly because to do so would unduly lengthen the paper and also because the legacy of the Soviet Union complicates matters.

<sup>53</sup> *Women in Islamic Societies: A Selected Review of Social Scientific Literature* (2005), 3. This is a report prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress; it is available at [http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/Women\\_Islamic\\_Societies.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/Women_Islamic_Societies.pdf). See also Shireen Hunter and Huma

Consider, first of all, a phenomenon that has upset many secularists: women's return to veiling in certain Muslim countries over recent decades. It is argued that veiling symbolizes the control of men over women's sexuality—since its purpose, ostensibly, is to safeguard women's "honor"—that it is incompatible with women's rights, and therefore that its continued popularity in some areas of North Africa and the Middle East (as well as in Europe and North America) bodes ill for the prospects of social equality in those regions. This stereotypical Western perspective, however, overlooks the phenomenon's complexity.

In some areas, it is of course common that girls and women are forced by their male family members to wear the veil. Iran and Saudi Arabia require that women veil themselves. These facts are regressive, and they hearken to the forms of oppression that have plagued women for thousands of years in the Arab world. However, the veil itself—which, by the way, is not an Islamic tradition inasmuch as it (1) pre-dates that religion and (2) is not explicitly prescribed in the Koran<sup>54</sup>—is not regressive, because it has different meanings depending on the socioeconomic and cultural context. It may symbolize oppression in Western eyes, but many women who wear it do so precisely because they find it liberating. It frees them, for example, from male stares, from the objectifying gaze of males in the street. "Being totally covered," says one Egyptian woman, "[lets me] feel more free, purer, and more respectable."<sup>55</sup> "It is a personal statement: My dress tells you that I am a Muslim and that I expect to be treated respectfully, much as a Wall Street banker would say that a business suit defines him as an executive to be taken seriously."<sup>56</sup> From one perspective, in fact, the veil is a tool of radical feminism. "Some young Muslim feminists consider the hijab and the nikab [two forms of the veil] political symbols, too, a way of rejecting Western excesses such as binge drinking, casual sex and drug use. What is more liberating: being judged on the length of your skirt and the size of your surgically enhanced breasts, or being judged on your character and intelligence?"<sup>57</sup>

The veil is not a purely religious symbol. It also has significance for class relations, in that it "allies modest middle-class women" and differentiates them from the lower class.<sup>58</sup> In some countries, such as Egypt, it serves to voice protest against an unpopular "secular" government.

Moreover, many women wear the veil partly because it helps legitimize their presence outside the home, their presence in universities and professional occupations. It makes it harder for them to be condemned by a still-conservative society for doing things that are not conservative. By adopting Islamic dress, that is, women "are carving out legitimate public space for themselves."<sup>59</sup> They are embracing their autonomy, not negating it. This 'religiously expressed'

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Malik, eds., *Modernization, Democracy, and Islam* (Washington, D.C.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), 102 ff.

<sup>54</sup> See Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Sharazad Tells Her Story* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003), 20, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Ask and Tjomsland, op. cit., 63.

<sup>56</sup> Yvonne Ridley, "How I Came to Love the Veil," *Washington Post*, October 22, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ask and Tjomsland, op. cit., 64.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 61.

trend towards female empowerment is evident also in the fact that Islamist women are now invading the mosques, previously a male sphere: they defiantly enter the main part of the mosque, the men's part, and the men are "defenseless [because] the process is taking place within the legitimate dominant culture."<sup>60</sup>

Women are fighting for their rights all across the Islamic world. It should neither surprise us nor disconcert us that they sometimes do so through religious channels, for instance by becoming aggressive Islamists or by choosing to wear the veil even when their governments and their husbands disapprove of it. We may not like it that through the veil they often express their opposition to "Western culture"—but let's not forget that hundreds of millions of bona fide "Westerners" dislike the very things disliked by millions of Muslims, namely the objectification of women, sexual liberalization, a popular culture that promotes violence, a perceived vacuum in spiritual life, and such "unethical" practices as homosexuality and abortion. People in the Islamic world can articulate their opposition in their dress, unlike Westerners, and this practice can make them seem alien to us, as if they are the Other, the Enemy; but many, perhaps most, Americans and Europeans have the same qualms about modern society as most Muslims do.

Consider the issues of homosexuality and abortion. Political propagandists like to point out that large majorities of Muslims in nearly all countries think that both practices are immoral, an observation that is supposed to demonstrate the undemocratic, regressive nature of Islam. They fail to point out that most Christians agree with Muslims on these points.<sup>61</sup>

As for gender equality, studies have actually shown that highly religious Muslims in Southeast Asia are *more* likely to support equality than less religious Muslims.<sup>62</sup> The opposite is true in France and Spain: the more Christian one is, the more likely one is to oppose gender equality. Education, however, is a significant variable in both Islamic and Christian countries, insofar as it encourages egalitarian attitudes.<sup>63</sup>

Sexual freedom is another issue that supposedly separates the "Islamic" from the "Western" world. The reality, however, is far different from what American newspapers would lead you to think. Aside from the fact that one cannot generalize over countries as different as Morocco and Malaysia, Algeria and Syria, it is worth noting that even Iran is undergoing a "sexual revolution."<sup>64</sup> Premarital sex, sexual experimentation, promiscuity, adultery are rampant in cities like Tehran. The Iranian-American anthropologist Pardis Mahdavi has collected some telling data (as described in *The Nation*):

Adultery, for women, is punishable by stoning in Iran, but fully half of Mahdavi's married, female research subjects are unfaithful to their husbands; for many of them, picking up lovers is a regular form of recreation. And despite the legal

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., Edward Bomhoff and Mary Gu, "Malaysia's Muslims: The First World Values Survey" (2008), available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1206558>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Laura Secor, "Stolen Kisses: Iran's Sexual Revolutions," *The Nation*, November 25, 2008.

requirement that women in Iran cover their hair and hide the curves of their bodies, fashion obsesses the women in Mahdavi's study. They apply layer after layer of makeup, and they find ways to make the hijab as sexy as the skimpy summer attire of Western women... Iranian doctors, parents, educators and even institutions are bending to the forces of change...<sup>65</sup>

Mahdavi's study, published as *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution*, concentrates on upper-middle-class Tehrani youth, but that makes its findings no less significant. The punishments for partying, dating, having premarital sex and adopting Western fashion are usually not very severe, ranging from one or two nights in jail to a whipping. More encouragingly, the government now requires young couples to attend classes on family planning, where they are supposed to learn about disease transmission, contraception, mental health, even female sexual pleasure.<sup>66</sup>

In Saudi Arabia, the capital city of Riyadh has become a Mecca for homosexuals. It is a "gay heaven," according to one man who has lived there since 2000.<sup>67</sup> Sodomy is officially punishable by death, but "the kingdom leaves considerable space for homosexual behavior" as long as it isn't too public. The same is true of lesbianism: "there's an overwhelming number of people who turn to lesbianism," says one Saudi woman.<sup>68</sup> The reason is that sex-segregation makes heterosexual dating difficult. Frustrated men and women turn to their own sex for satisfaction. This leads to some confusion about their religious identity, but not as much as one would think, for the Koran is surprisingly reticent on the subject of homosexuality. It considers sodomy a sin but neither devotes much space to the subject nor prescribes punishments. Gay Muslims often rationalize their behavior by telling themselves that God is merciful. Presumably, then, God would also forgive other transgressions:

Private misbehavior is fine, as long as public decorum is observed. Cinemas are forbidden, but people watch pirated DVDs. Drinking is illegal, but alcohol flows at parties. Women wrap their bodies and faces in layers of black, but pornography flourishes.<sup>69</sup>

Last, what do most Muslims think about democracy and human rights? The answer should be evident from the foregoing, but it is instructive anyway to look at polls. A Gallup poll published in 2008 that surveyed over 50,000 Muslims in 35 nations and claimed to represent the views of 90% of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims indicated that what Muslims (including many radicals) most admire about the West is its democracy and its technology. The majority want guarantees of freedom of speech, and they don't want religious leaders to have a role in drafting constitutions.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Nadya Labi, "The Kingdom in the Closet," *The Atlantic*, May 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

John Esposito, one of the authors of the book in which the poll was published, has said, “Muslims want self-determination, but not an American-imposed and -defined democracy. They don’t want secularism or theocracy.” (Again, many Christians share this hostility toward secularism.) Ninety-three percent of those polled, incidentally, called themselves “moderate” Muslims.<sup>70</sup>

In December of 2008, WorldPublicOpinion.org published the results of a survey it had conducted in seven Muslim nations, viz. Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Iran, Indonesia, the Palestinian Territories, and Azerbaijan. The topic was the role of the United Nations. On average, 63% of respondents thought that the UN should have the authority to enter countries to investigate human rights violations; 76% thought the UN should have the right to authorize military force to stop a country from supporting terrorist groups; 70% of Iranians (and smaller majorities in Indonesia, Azerbaijan and Turkey) thought the UN should be “significantly more powerful” than it is.<sup>71</sup>

In another survey, a majority of Middle Eastern Muslims (64% on average) thought that globalization and international trade are good for themselves and their countries, although they were concerned about the effects of trade on the environment and job security.<sup>72</sup>

Such statistics indicate that the social values of people in the Middle East do not differ widely from those of Westerners. It is worth remembering, too, that the “Islamic” world is as diverse as the “Western” world. Some people reject liberal values; many embrace them wholeheartedly. Many women wear the veil; many dress like ordinary American women, in shorts or tight jeans. If you walk down a street in Damascus or some other Syrian city, you’ll see women dressed completely in black as well as women who have donned “the latest fashions freshly arrived from French and Italian boutiques.”<sup>73</sup>

Trends toward female empowerment are observable not only in the ‘cultural’ sphere of public opinion and fashion but in the economic sphere as well. Let us note, first of all, that a generation ago the average woman in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) raised more than six children, while today she can expect to raise half as many. (The number is even smaller for women in their early twenties.)<sup>74</sup> Partly as a result of this, women’s participation in the labor force in MENA has grown by 50% since 1960. The growth rate was a high 5.3% during the 1990s.<sup>75</sup> In Saudi Arabia, one of the more conservative countries, women’s labor-force participation went from 16.5% in 1990 to 24% in 2000; in Iran it went from 22% to 30% during the same years.<sup>76</sup>

With active encouragement from their governments, women have been spending more years in school (which has helped to lower fertility-rates and increase workforce participation).

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<sup>70</sup> The information in this paragraph comes from the BBC article “Most Muslims ‘desire democracy’” (February 27, 2008), available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7267100.stm>.

<sup>71</sup> The report can be found at <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnaficara/index.php?nid=&id=&lb=brme>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Herbert L. Bodman, Nayereh Tohidi, eds., *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998), 102.

<sup>74</sup> *Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Public Sphere* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2004), 58.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Among the total population in MENA over the age of 15, the average years of schooling rose from less than a year in 1960 to 5.3 years in 1999—the largest gain of any region in the world. For women, the increase was more dramatic: from 0.5 to 4.5 years... In 1970, women made up only 16.4 percent of literate adults. By the year 2000, they accounted for more than 50 percent... [University] enrollment rates rose from around 9 percent in 1990 to almost 14 percent in 1997... And by 2000, women outnumbered men entering local colleges and universities in many MENA countries, including Lebanon, Oman, and Qatar.<sup>77</sup>

Without going into details, the trends are clear.

As a middle class is born and pressures toward political reform mount, a nascent civil society is developing in the Middle East. In countries like Syria and Iran it is not yet much to speak of, but dissident groups, both liberal and conservative, are gaining support everywhere. Women are agitating for rights, students are rejecting the ways of their parents—a generation-gap is noticeable all over the region.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, it is noticeable from Morocco to the United Arab Emirates, and beyond to Iran and Pakistan. Change is accelerating.

What are we to conclude from this brief discussion? It looks as if the Islamic world's experience parallels Russia's, China's, India's, sub-Saharan Africa's, and Latin America's. All these regions have been "colonized" by capitalism and are continuing to be colonized by it, albeit no longer under the mantle of Western colonialism. And they have all reacted to it in their unique but broadly similar ways, corresponding to their unique social conditions and the specific forms that their "colonization" has taken. Each region has had to respond somehow to the massive destruction of traditional social relations, be they tribal, feudal, familial, and so on, as well as the poverty, famine, class inequality, and ethnic tensions that have directly or indirectly followed the supplanting of pre-modern social relations by exploitative capitalist ones. In retrospect, this process of reaction and adjustment was bound to be agonizing and agonizingly protracted. One hundred and fifty years after the abolition of serfdom, Russia is still developing a coherent and stable institutional framework for capitalism; 150 years after the Taiping Rebellion, China is finally achieving the same goal; African and Latin American nations have had their own horrific legacy of colonization to overcome. Regarding the Middle East, the presence of Israel has exacerbated enormously the already formidable problems of modernization and democratization, contributing to the region's authoritarianism as well as its anti-Americanism and the Islamic revival after the Six Day War in 1967.<sup>79</sup> [...] In the coming years we will surely continue to see

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 29, 30, 32.

<sup>78</sup> See, e.g., Laura Secor, op. cit.; Jim Alterman, "Libya's Generation Gap," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, February 2006; and "Middle East Youth: A Generation in Flux," available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4726173.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4726173.stm).

<sup>79</sup> See Palmer and Palmer, loc. cit.

radical or moderate Islamists maintain power and win elections in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries, but, as has happened with Iran's clerical state and Saudi Arabia's monarchy, the Islamists will eventually lose the support of the population in the face of economic stagnation, political oppression, enforced gender inequality, and rampant corruption. Democratization will gradually, if painfully, spread.

One wonders why liberal democracy follows capitalism in this way. In the short term, of course, it does not: centuries of struggle were necessary for stable democracy to be established in the West, and in the meantime we had fascism, Nazism, and other unsavory forms of government. "Illiberal," "totalitarian" democracy has existed too,<sup>80</sup> for instance in Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. But this sort of "democracy" is unstable, insofar as it tends to become authoritarian very quickly and eventually 'manufactures discontent,' which finally results in societal upheavals. Be that as it may, it is obvious that capitalism, especially in its early stages, need not correlate with democracy.

In the long run, however, there is indeed a correlation, an 'emerging' of liberal democracy out of capitalism. Is this connection merely a historical accident, or does democracy somehow grow out of the positive tendencies of capitalism? Unfortunately I cannot consider this question in detail here. I would suggest, however, with Göran Therborn, that democracy emerges not from capitalism's positive tendencies but from its *contradictions* (in Marxian terminology). This was true, at least, with respect to the original struggles for democracy in the West. In brief, the most important factor was probably the creation of a working class that had a vested interest in extending the franchise to all people, in achieving social equality as far as it was able:

Legal emancipation of labour and the creation of a free labour market, industrialization, concentration of capital are all intrinsic tendencies [of capitalism] which simultaneously lay the basis for a working-class movement of a strength and stability inachievable by the exploited classes of pre-capitalist modes of production. In accordance with Marx's analysis of the growing contradictions of capitalism, the working class is, *ceteris paribus*, strengthened by the advance and development of capitalism...<sup>81</sup>

Historical scholarship testifies to the role of the working class in, for example, extending the franchise to women, and generally in bringing about democratic change in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe and America.<sup>82</sup> And to a great extent this is still true, for example in Latin America. Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia in 2005 after popular protests and

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<sup>80</sup> See Hunter and Malik, *op. cit.*, 90.

<sup>81</sup> Göran Therborn, "The Rule of Capital and the Rise of Democracy," *New Left Review* I, No. 103 (1977).

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, *ibid.* Cf. also Therborn, "The Travail of Latin American Democracy," *New Left Review* I, No. 113–114 (1979); Mary Nolan, *Social Democracy and Society: Working Class Radicalism in Düsseldorf, 1890–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Ruth Berins Collier, *Paths Toward Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and South America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

movements against the neoliberal regime. He was himself once a poor farmer; the poor farmers brought him to power; after elected, he led an effort to revise the Bolivian constitution so that it would be friendly to the indigenous poor. Venezuela too has made notable moves toward democracy in recent years, again on the basis of mass demonstrations and sustained activism by the indigenous poor in support of Hugo Chavez. Such examples of the continued importance of working-class activism to democratization could be multiplied.

New elements, however, have been added in this age of globalization. New pressures toward democracy and liberalism. They are almost too obvious to point out: (1) the masses' easy access to information about comparatively prosperous and "free" societies such as the U.S. Television, the internet, radio, movies, and popular culture in general broadcast seductive images of a vibrant society—and raise political issues of equality and liberty—to people all over the world, who become progressively discontented and finally demand egalitarian reforms. Their governments can resist for a while, but not forever. (2) The intensifying of private and public investment in the economy, which leads to a higher demand for skilled and unskilled workers, which leads to a higher supply of them, which is made possible and is followed by an increase in education—and all this empowers the populace vis-à-vis its repressive government. (3) International political pressure on authoritarian regimes to reform themselves, to end their violations of human rights. (4) The rising need to coordinate economic and financial regulations, enter trade agreements, etc., with liberal democracies like the U.S. and European countries—and, in general, to integrate the national economy with the economies of "free-market democracies."

Summing up, one might say that, while the recent revival of Islam is not going to die out any time soon, the influence of religious fundamentalism is waning relative to the dynamic of capitalist integration and democratization. The former is reactionary and without hope; the latter is the future, as it has been for centuries.<sup>83</sup>

### Europe and Muslims

The purpose of this paper is to deflate Western paranoia about the Islamic world. To that end, I have argued against the idea of a clash of civilizations, except insofar as the spread of capitalism has indeed been undermining pre-modern social structures (in the West, too) ever since its inception. I have argued that the Islamic world is not some sort of monolithic threat to modernity, that Islam is not "essentially" reactionary or repressive merely because it has been used to legitimize such regimes. Virtually any ideology can be manipulated in this way, for example Christianity. No ideology is ever the primary "cause" of a social structure; Islam, therefore, should not be blamed for the social and economic conditions that obtain in the Middle East. In fact, the blame lies far more with the imperialist policies of the United States during the Cold War, when authoritarian governments were propped up as bulwarks against Communism and other American "enemies." Underdevelopment, political oppression, poverty, widespread anti-Americanism and

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<sup>83</sup> Incidentally, this applies to Christian fundamentalism too. Like the Islamic variant, it is basically a doomed attempt to dam the flood of global integration and stop the erosion of traditional social structures.

the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and jihad were the results. I have also argued that Muslim terrorism, which (according to polls) is as hated in Muslim societies as in the West, is not the apocalyptic threat it is sometimes thought to be. Unless governments fail to take it seriously and let it flourish—which is unlikely—it will probably not destabilize the world much more than it already has by instigating Bush’s misadventure in Iraq. It is disorganized, amateurish, fragmented, reliant on a few charismatic personalities because it lacks a coherent set of institutions. Its history is a record of blunders, accidents, miscalculations, and the occasional fortuitous success.

Furthermore, I have argued that, under the pressure of globalization, the Islamic world is starting to experience a wave of democratization and liberalization. ‘Mature’ capitalism is beginning to establish itself not only in Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, and other such “advanced” nations, but even—tentatively—in parts of Egypt and Pakistan. [...]

In short, the long-term future looks fairly bright. To corroborate this vision I will consider the situation of Muslim immigrants in Europe, which is often cited as proof that the West is “under attack” by a dangerous, reactionary thing called “Islam.” Less hyperbolically, it is thought that the Muslim presence “could be a huge long-term threat to Europe,”<sup>84</sup> i.e. to Europe’s social unity, and could thus lead indirectly to a decline of Europe on the international stage, which in turn could endanger a liberal-democratic world order. As we will see, these predictions are overstated.

First of all, what exactly is the problem under consideration? It has been stated a thousand times in the mainstream media and the scholarly literature: Muslim communities in Europe are not integrating themselves into the dominant secular, liberal-democratic order, a fact that is both cause and effect of social tensions. That is, Muslims increasingly identify not with Europe or their country of residence but with Islam—a phenomenon that is especially pronounced in the younger generation.<sup>85</sup> “Many Muslim communities are turning inward and rejecting European institutions and traditions.”<sup>86</sup> Large proportions of non-Muslim Europeans, for their part, are hostile towards Muslims. The Pew Research Center reported in September of 2008 that, among the respondents to its polls (1,000 people in each country), 52% in Spain, 50% in Germany, 46% in Poland, 38% in France, and 23% in Great Britain had negative views of Muslims.<sup>87</sup> More concretely, a 2003 Ipsos poll in France indicated that 25% of French Muslims—but 75% of those under the age of 25—thought the values of Islam were incompatible with those of France, while 62% of the general French population shared that view.<sup>88</sup> The European values in question seem to be those of “gender equality; sexual liberalization; and the principles of compromise, egalitarianism, and identification with the state.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> “Forget Asylum-Seekers: It’s the People Inside Who Count,” *Economist*, May 8, 2003.

<sup>85</sup> Timothy Savage, “Europe and Islam: Crescent Waxing, Cultures Clashing,” *Washington Quarterly* 27, No. 3 (2004).

<sup>86</sup> Barbara Franz, “Europe’s Muslim Youth: An Inquiry into the Politics of Discrimination, Relative Deprivation, and Identity Formation,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18, No. 1 (2007).

<sup>87</sup> The report is available at <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=262>.

<sup>88</sup> Timothy Savage, op. cit.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

The usefulness of polls, however, is limited, partly because the public's views are subject to change from year to year. (For example, the Pew Research Center's findings in 2006 were more encouraging than those in 2008. Among Muslims, in fact, the findings were striking: in France, Germany, Spain and Great Britain, Muslims were more positive than the general public about the way things were going in their countries. Also, in general they were far more concerned about unemployment than about cultural or religious issues such as women's roles and the decline of religion.<sup>90</sup>) Demographic data are more reliable. According to the U.S. Department of State's *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom 2003*, there are more than 23 million Muslims in Europe, almost 5% of Europe's population. Timothy Savage summarizes other statistics:

The Muslim birth rate in Europe is currently more than three times that of non-Muslims... By 2015, Europe's Muslim population is expected to double,<sup>91</sup> whereas Europe's non-Muslim population is projected to fall by at least 3.5 percent. Looking further ahead, conservative projections estimate that, compared to today's 5 percent, Muslims will comprise at least 20 percent of Europe's population by 2050. Some even predict that one-fourth of France's population could be Muslim by 2025 and that, if trends continue, Muslims could outnumber non-Muslims in France and perhaps in all of western Europe by mid-century... [A]s important as the dramatic increase in the Muslim population is the dramatic decline of the general European population, which, according to UN projections, will drop by more than 100 million from 728 million in 2000 to approximately 600 million, and possibly as low as 565 million, by 2050.<sup>92</sup>

It must be kept in mind that these numbers, which might initially seem alarming, will probably have little effect on European stability unless there are coordinated social movements among millions of Muslims to fight liberal democracy, gender equality, egalitarianism, and European integration. Or, alternatively, there could be, for instance, increasingly widespread and destructive riots in response to discrimination, which might lead to the election of far-right governments that would only exacerbate the problem.

Probably the most immediate cause of concern for Europeans is the perceived spread of radical Islam among young Muslims, which has resulted in such violent episodes as the terrorist attacks in London on July 7, 2005, the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004, the rage ignited by Danish cartoons of Mohammed in 2006, and the terrorist plot of 2006 involving planes leaving London's Heathrow airport. Counterterrorism officials estimate that 1 to 2 percent of European Muslims are involved in some type of extremist activity (which isn't necessarily violent).<sup>93</sup> Given

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<sup>90</sup> <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=254>.

<sup>91</sup> The U.S. National Intelligence Council, however, projects that it will double by 2025. The report can be viewed at [http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF\\_2025/2025\\_Global\\_Trends\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_2025/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf).

<sup>92</sup> Savage, op. cit.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

the public's fear of terrorism and suspicion of Muslims, it is not surprising that headscarves, which have become increasingly popular among young Muslim women, have provoked controversy in France and Germany, nor that many people support greater restrictions on immigration.

Let's look more closely now at what is happening in Europe. Why do many Muslim communities segregate themselves from the larger population to an even greater extent than other immigrant communities do? Why do they cling to traditional Islamic values? Why has terrorism increased? Barbara Franz gives a succinct, and I think correct, answer: "Europe's current Islamic alienation...is more about Marx than Mohammad or bin Laden."<sup>94</sup> It is more about political and socioeconomic alienation than religion per se.

Indeed, the "Marxist," "materialistic" approach is merely common sense. The facts speak for themselves: in Britain, for instance, Muslim communities are concentrated in the most deprived urban areas.<sup>95</sup> The current unemployment rate for Muslim men is nearing 40 percent, with economic inactivity at 50 percent. One-third of British Muslim children live in households where none of the adults is employed, households where depressive attitudes prevail, where the social circles are narrow and conservative. In France, Muslim enclaves have a 30% unemployment rate among 21- to 29-year-olds; incomes are 75% below the average. The Turkish community in Germany has an unemployment rate of 24%, while 50% in urban centers live in "financially precarious circumstances." All these Muslim communities derive originally from guest-worker programs established after World War II, when Europe needed foreign labor to fill factory jobs. Like Mexican communities in the United States, they began in poverty and have not yet, after two or three generations, transcended their poverty.<sup>96</sup> In conditions of overcrowded housing, poor health and low educational qualifications, despondency and identity crises are common.

The problem of poverty is reinforced by the problem of discrimination. The riots in France of October, 2005 had nothing to do with Islam, as shown by the inability of Muslim organizations to stop the violence and by the fact that churches and synagogues were not intended targets. They took place in working-class suburbs populated by North Africans; they were triggered by the deaths of two boys being chased by the police; and they were a response to racism. Discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in the employment, housing and education sectors is extremely common throughout Western Europe.<sup>97</sup> The youths who perpetrated the riots in France were frustrated not with a secular society but with socioeconomic structures.

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<sup>94</sup> Barbara Franz, *op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> Most of the information in this paragraph and the next is taken from Javaid Rehman, "Islam, 'War on Terror' and the Future of Muslim Minorities in the United Kingdom: Dilemmas of Multiculturalism in the Aftermath of the London Bombings," *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, No. 4 (2007), and from Barbara Franz, *op. cit.*

<sup>96</sup> Robert Leiken, "Europe's Immigration Problem, and Ours," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 15, No. 4 (2004). For a good overview of the history of Muslims in Europe, see Jørgen S. Nielsen's *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

<sup>97</sup> See the 2006 report on 'general' racism published by the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia, at <http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/ar06/AR06-P2-EN.pdf>. There is also a report on Muslims alone, at [http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/material/pub/muslim/Manifestations\\_EN.pdf](http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/material/pub/muslim/Manifestations_EN.pdf).

The immigrant children should go to school in the *banlieues* and should think about their future. Many do just that. Only, this does them no good. Whether they drop out of school at 15 or graduate high school with honors—they will remain jobless either way. And if one nevertheless makes a career, say as a graphic designer or revenue officer, he will still remain a second-class French citizen. The bouncer will not let him into the disco in Saint Germain on Friday nights.<sup>98</sup>

For people who do not daily encounter hostile looks and discriminatory practices, who are not forced to be apologetic simply because they choose to wear clothing that is deemed un-Western, and who are not bombarded by propaganda constantly reminding them they are the Other—the potentially dangerous Other—it is difficult to imagine what such a life must be like. Especially if such discrimination coexists with poverty, with a lack of opportunities, with no prospect for social advancement.

Add to all this the disastrous foreign policy of the United States and Britain, which has infuriated Muslims around the world. There is no question that the Iraq war has been a recruiting tool for terrorists in Europe, nor that it has inflamed the resentment of many European Muslims toward the West.

It is a social-psychological fact that when one is rejected by a community for some reason, e.g. because one is perceived as belonging to a different religion or ethnicity than the community, one may well react to this rejection by choosing to identify more strongly than before with the religion or ethnicity in question. It is a defense mechanism, a way of maintaining self-esteem in the face of rejection. To protect your sense of self, you spit contempt right back at the people who have contempt for you. If there is another despised community into whose fold you can retreat for comfort, you are all the more likely to use the defense in question, i.e. to consciously *choose* the identity that the Other has thrust upon you without your consent. And anyway, there is little else left for you: your identity has been decided in your enforced ostracism. This is partly what has happened with Arabs and Muslims in Europe. For decades they have been trampled under, discriminated against, even as they tried to minimize their otherness by adopting the ways of their host countries. But now, in this age of information technology, of globalization, of constant media-generated reminders of the chasm between the prosperity of the few and the indigence of the many—the chasm between the *promise* and the *reality*—and an age when anomie afflicts nearly everyone, the prosperous no less than the persecuted, and *cosmic lostness* seems stitched into the very fabric of society, some members of the younger generation of European Muslims have decided to accept the roles that Europe's social structure has pigeon-holed them into. They have decided to wear the headscarf, to sneer at the decadence and inhumanity of Western culture. [...] What is needed is not a renewal of intolerance toward immigrants, a “cracking down” on immigration, a “zero-tolerance” policy toward “urban violence,” but a concerted and coordinated effort across Europe to fight discrimination, to renovate desolate housing projects, to revitalize

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<sup>98</sup> Alex Capus, quoted in Franz, op. cit.

urban economies, to create new jobs through public works programs, to integrate Muslims into politics.

That is the only possible solution: integration. *Assimilation*, or a mass repudiation of Islamic identity, is surely not necessary, but integration is. The alternative is continued segregation, and segregation has never fostered social stability. On the contrary, we have seen that various forms of segregation are the main cause of the problem—or, rather, are the problem itself.

Perhaps the reader will object that the prospects for a decline in discrimination against Muslims are not good, given that Muslims have suffered from discrimination ever since their arrival in Europe decades ago. (Actually, centuries ago.) [...]

The evidence leads one to believe that some discrimination against Arabs and Muslims will persist in Europe until the majority of Muslims have become part of the middle class. However, since discrimination is a major reason why Muslims have trouble improving their economic circumstances, it appears that we face a “catch-22.” The best way out of the problem is the path followed by the United States from the 1960s to the present day: a civil rights movement and a forceful intrusion by European governments into civil society on behalf of the underprivileged. “Affirmative action” programs are necessary.<sup>99</sup> European leaders would be well-advised to examine in detail the measures enacted by the U.S. government to overcome racism—as well as the successes and failures of these measures. [...]

Islam and the West are not enemies. They are not even entities: they are abstractions with no explanatory value. “Islam” has far more in common with “Christianity” than “Christianity” has with the “West.” Analysts should talk less about “values” and “cultures,” or “cultural values,” and more about the real conditions on the ground that drive people to behave as they do. Huntingtonian thinking is jihadist thinking, it is “us” versus “them” thinking, “right” versus “wrong,” and it obscures all the real issues. Barrington Moore said it best: to rely primarily on cultural themes in one’s explanations—as Osama bin Laden does, as George W. Bush does, as Samuel Huntington does—is to create “a strong conservative bias under the color of scientific neutrality and objectivity”<sup>100</sup> (if, that is, it is done in a relatively sophisticated way). On the other hand, both truth and compassion are to be found in the Marxian narrative.

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<sup>99</sup> According to the Congressional Research Service’s report on “Muslims in Europe: Integration Policies in Selected Countries” (2005), affirmative action programs have not been instituted but are starting to be considered. The European Commission recognizes the need for aggressive policies to integrate Muslims into society and is finally making a concerted effort to coordinate such policies across Europe. The report is available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33166.pdf>.

<sup>100</sup> Moore, *op cit.*, 485.