

CHAPTER 1

The Numbers Debate

Muslims are the largest religious minority in Western Europe. Today there are more than 11/12 million Muslims living in the major countries of the European Union, and Muslims constitute almost 3 percent of the total population in Europe.¹

Six countries stand out in particular for the high number of Muslims who call them home: France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Greece. In each of these countries, anywhere from 4 to 7 percent of the current population is Muslim. With the exception of Greece, these countries experienced massive influxes of immigrant manual laborers during the 1960s. In Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, Muslims constitute about 1 percent of the total population. And in the south, Italy and Spain—which currently have more or less the same ratio of Muslims to Europeans—are quickly becoming the new destination of choice for Muslim immigrants.

The ethnic diversity of European Muslims is striking. Arabs constitute the most numerous ethnic group, with some 3.5 million, 45 percent of which are of Moroccan origin, living in Western Europe. The second largest ethnic group is the Turkish, with more than 2.5 million individuals scattered throughout Europe. The third largest group, with more than 800,000 people, is immigrants from the Indian subcontinent: India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh.

It is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on Muslims since, in most European countries, religious affiliation is not a question on population censuses. Only place of birth and country of origin give any hint of religious allegiance. France's 1999 census showed 1.3 million immigrants out of a total of 4.3 million, from North Africa. The census also indicated a growing number of immigrants from Turkey (200,000).² In terms of calculating the number of

Muslims living in France, children born in France to immigrant parents, as well as immigrants who took French citizenship in earlier periods, should also be added to these statistics. This brings the estimated number of France's Muslim population to more than 4 million. France is thus one of the most important European countries in terms of the issue of Muslim minority populations.³ In Germany, the most up-to-date statistics show almost 3 million Muslims, with the overwhelming majority coming from Turkey (70 percent), even though, due to the recent upheavals in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the number of Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims is also on the rise. This is also the case in Austria and the Netherlands, which have been similarly affected by the recent conflicts in the Balkans. They have also experienced the consequences of the more distant conflicts that have occurred in Somalia, Iran, and Iraq. After war broke out in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Germany took in more than 300,000 Bosnian refugees, while Austria took in 70,000. In its 2001 census, Great Britain, making an exception to its policy of not asking individuals to state their religion or their ethnicity, for the first time included a question on religious and ethnic affiliation. According to the results of this census, 1.591 million Muslims are living in Great Britain, most of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin (658,000 and 260,000 respectively).⁴ The younger generations increasingly claim British citizenship, due to the fact that a large proportion of children are born on British soil, and today more than 450,000 Muslim children are educated in the British school system.

A further problem in estimating the number of Muslims in Europe is a result of the difficulty in getting an accurate number of conversions from country to country. The number in each country also tends to vary depending on who is doing the reporting.⁵ According to a study conducted by Telhine at the Mosque of Paris, 1,689 conversions were recorded in France between 1965 and 1989.⁶ In the Netherlands, the number has been estimated at 2,000,⁷ and from 3,000 to 5,000 in Germany. The phenomenon of conversion affects certain countries more than others. In Spain, for example, the number of Muslims is anywhere from 300,000 to 500,000, of which 3,000–5,000 are converts. A nostalgia for the Andalusia of Muslim Spain, brought back to life by the presence of immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East, has contributed to the attraction of Islam in the Iberian peninsula.⁸ It is in the United States, however, that the phenomenon of conversion has had the greatest impact by far.

As in Europe, censuses in the United States do not include questions of religious affiliation: nonetheless, the most current estimates put the number of Muslims in the United States at approximately 6 million. The numbers debate is even more contentious in the United States, particularly since September 11.

In October of 2001, a scholar at the University of Chicago published his independent findings indicating that only 1 percent of the population in the United States (i.e., 1.9–2.8 million people) was Muslim.⁹ In the tense climate after September 11, these findings became the subject of much public debate and polemic. The debate reached its peak after they were republished by the American Jewish Committee, a Jewish lobbying group, with the implication that they were attempting to minimize the importance of Islam in America. From there, a battle of numbers began between the representatives of several prominent American Jewish and Muslim organizations.¹⁰ This discrepancy in estimated figures illustrates the ideological stakes involved in the official definition of the Muslim community, stakes that have incidentally risen after September 2001. The difficulty of conducting an accurate census also shows the extent to which the gathering of data is influenced by ideology, particularly as it is Muslims who generally produce the most information on American Islam. A counterexample serves to illustrate this situation. In the pages of the *New York Times* during the month of October 2003, several Islamic organizations expressed their indignation that one of the most important post-September 11 surveys on Arabs and Muslims in the Detroit area was conducted by a research team from the University of Michigan, and not by a Muslim organization.¹¹ For lack of better options, our study follows the most common estimate of 4–5 million Muslims, including Muslims of all origins and ethnicities, currently living in the United States.

What is particular to the American situation is that almost half of all Muslims in the United States (46 percent according to a 1994 estimate¹²) are converts. Even more significant, *vis-à-vis* the situation in Europe, is that the majority of these converts come from within the Afro-American community. Thirty percent of these African American Muslims adopted Islam while serving prison terms in, following the model of such figures as Malcolm X or Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, the former Black Panther once known as H. Rap Brown. Another 56 percent of Muslims in the United States, as in Europe, come from a variety of countries and ethnic origins. Unlike in Europe, however, Arabs are not at all the dominant minority (12.45 percent of all U.S. Muslims), and are far outnumbered by ethnic groups from the Asian subcontinent (24.4 percent). After that come immigrants from Africa (6.2 percent), Iran (3.6 percent) and Turkey (2.4 percent).¹³

The Three Phases of Muslim Minority Presence in Europe

Islam's status on the two continents displays both similarities and differences. One difference stems from the long history between Europe and the Muslim

world. In essence, European Muslims constitute a postcolonial minority culture, in that they come primarily from countries formerly colonized or dominated by the most influential European countries. Thus it is that in France, the statistical dominance of North African (Maghrebi) Muslims is entirely a product of France's former colonial empire. Indeed, Muslim presence has been a factor in the French political and social life since the beginning of the twentieth century, when Algeria was still part of France. The influence of colonial history is also seen in the resilience, and even the expansion, of the Harki community, the group of Algerians who fought alongside the French army during Algeria's war of independence, and who emigrated to France with their families in 1962.

The beginnings of the Islamic presence in Great Britain are similarly linked to British colonial expansion in India.¹⁴ During the latter part of the eighteenth century, the British East India Company hired manual laborers for their ships from Indian ports. Some of these hired hands were Muslims. Islamic presence grew still further after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Large numbers of Yemenis and Somalis also emigrated to England by way of the Port of Aden. These Yemeni communities established themselves in Great Britain, creating *zawia* (Sufi brotherhoods) and even importing a sheikh to oversee them.¹⁵ It was only after the 1960s and 1970s, however, that mass immigration from Pakistan and India truly began. By the 1970s and 1980s, Bangladeshis made up the plurality of Muslim immigrants.

Even the history of Islam in Germany is linked to the imperialist projects of the Kaiser: who, toward the end of the nineteenth century, looked to strengthen the fledgling German state by means of special economic and diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶ The result was a significant presence of Muslims in Berlin in the years leading up to World War I. Obviously, Germany cannot boast of having had a colonial empire; nevertheless, the close relations between Germany and the Ottoman Empire go a good way toward explaining the Turkish mass immigration to Germany. In the Netherlands as well, though the Muslim population there is much more diverse (mainly from Tunisia, Morocco, and Turkey), colonial history played a role with the hiring of Surinamese laborers.

These colonial, later postcolonial, origins of Muslim presence in Europe has a direct bearing on the perception of Islam in European culture. In particular, it explains the "delay effect" in European understanding: that is, how long it took Europeans to recognize that Islam has become a permanent fixture in the religious landscape. How else to explain the fact that Muslims have been present in the main countries of Europe for half a century, and yet it is only in the past three decades that Islam has emerged as a cultural and

religious phenomenon? Three migratory movements have contributed to the creation of the Muslim minority in Europe. The first spans the period from the end of World War II to the beginning of the 1970s, and corresponds to the arrival en masse of workers from the Third World and Eastern Europe, in response to the reconstruction of the European economy and the need for manual labor in the postwar period. The arrival of these Muslims was thus the result of a conscious policy of immigration, drawn up between industry and the most powerful European states. Several agreements regarding the importation of workers were signed between the governments of Muslim and European countries: France signed an agreement with Algeria in 1968 in addition to agreements with Morocco and Tunisia in 1963; Germany signed agreements with Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), and Tunisia (1965). Islam was thus incarnated, in this period, by the anonymous and silent mass of unskilled laborers working in industry and the tertiary sector. Largely on the fringes of society, living in groups with their own, separate, social spaces, their primary goal was to earn as much money as possible and then return home. As long as they could, they held off the arrival of their wives and children. Thus their own denial of the social and religious consequences of their migration dovetailed with the prevailing view—in the host countries as much as the countries of origin—that this migration was only a temporary one. One should also keep in mind just how much the ideologies of the time emphasized ideas of nationalism, anti-imperialism, or socialism, but not at all Islam, as a means of mobilizing and giving voice to migrant workers.

The oil crisis of 1974 signaled the end of this period of reconstruction and European economic prosperity. The process of Muslim immigration, however, continued, entering a second phase in which families formerly split apart by migration were reunited. In the 1980s throughout Europe, the doors slammed shut for the masses of unskilled immigrant workers. At the same time, however, the number of women and children coming from Muslim countries increased dramatically. The reuniting of families on European soil marked a decisive change in the nature of the relations between Muslims and Europeans. For the Muslim, this resulted in the increase of opportunities for interaction outside the workplace. The movement of Muslims from the segregated environment of the workers' dormitory to the integrated (i.e., not completely Muslim) public housing project, has the effect of opening up the migrant worker's world. Immigrant workers now found themselves coming into contact with representatives of the school system, members of the bureaucracy, and social workers. It was no longer possible to think of oneself as a worker in transit: the signs of permanency were numerous and irreversible. Educational, consumer, and of course religious needs were added to

economic concerns. The creation of prayer rooms in the 1970s was the first visible sign of this change in Muslims' conditions and mind-set. After having been all but nonexistent in the preceding decades, prayer rooms began to pop up like mushrooms in Paris, Marseille, London, Bradford, and Berlin. By the end of the 1990s, there were more than 6,000 mosques in Western Europe.¹⁷ The 1980s were thus a crucial decade for the advent of Islam as a new religion in the heart of European cities.

These aforementioned prayer rooms would become central in the development of the various forms of Islamic social and religious life. Marriage, burial, circumcision, Qu'ranic teaching, pilgrimages, religious festivals: everything begins in the mosque, or at least in contact with the mosque. In the 1990s, a new phase in immigrant society began with the increased visibility of mosques and their demand to be recognized as public buildings, equal in status to temples, churches, and synagogues. These demands have elicited a general debate on the institutionalization and self-representation of Islam in Europe. Numerous coalitions, councils, federations, and committees of all kinds are currently being established whose aims are to establish a line of dialogue with the representatives of public authority, and to define, bit by bit, what shape the different varieties of native European Islam might take.

For the European, Islam's progress in establishing itself as a permanent feature of European culture has been and continues to be a difficult phenomenon to accept. For many decades, Muslims were exclusively perceived as temporary guests relegated to the fringes of society. Their evolution—from foreigner to permanent resident to citizen—has been a troubled one, particularly as it signals the definitive end of Europe's universalist and imperialist pretensions, and puts colonized and colonizer on equal footing. Thus the initial reaction of many Europeans to Islam's establishment in Western culture, even at the institutional level, was resistance, if not outright rejection. It should be recalled that many European countries initiated, without much success, several programs to return immigrants to their countries of origin. In France, the Stoléru Law of 1979, also known as the Law of One Million (since the law offered 1 million French centimes, or about \$1,733, to every immigrant who decided to return to his country of origin), failed in its goal of encouraging Algerian immigrants to repatriate.¹⁸ On November 28, 1983, the German government passed a similar law, with a financial incentive of 10,500 DM per adult (about \$6,600) and 1,500 DM per child (\$953). Between 1983 and the first half of 1984, approximately 250,000 foreigners, most of them Turks, left Germany. In the United Kingdom, the turning point for immigration policy was the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1961, which imposed the first restrictions on immigrants from the

former empire who wished to set up residence in British territory. In 1964, the Minister of Labour put an end to the right to work that so many unskilled workers on British soil had previously benefited from. The consequence was that many immigrant husbands and fathers had to send their families back to the country of origin, forcing the families to change their entire way of life.

The third phase in the history of Muslim immigration to Europe begins with the waves of refugees and asylum-seekers in the 1980s. The severe restrictions placed on legal immigration to Western Europe, as well as the upheavals in the dying Soviet Union, are the two most important causes of this third wave of immigrants in general, and of Muslim immigrants in particular. Germany was particularly affected in this third phase. Between 1980 and 1990, 60,000 Afghans, 110,000 Iranians, and 55,000 Lebanese came to live in Germany as refugees. After Turks, refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina comprised the second largest group of Muslim immigrants (340,000). Immigrants continued to pour into Germany even after the German government changed Article 16 of the Constitution to stipulate that immigrants entering the country via a third country considered safe (such as Bulgaria, Gambia, Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, but also, and notably, Turkey) were not eligible to claim refugee status.

Close to 70,000 Bosnian Muslims also headed for Austria. Italy and Spain were also affected by the waves of refugees, and by the end of the 1980s had themselves become established countries of Muslim immigration. If it remains the case that Italy lays claim to one of the smallest immigrant populations in Europe, it is also true that it has the highest percentage of non-Europeans—as well as, it seems, of illegal immigrants. Out of the more than 1,600,000 foreigners who were living in Italy in 2001, 600,000 (37%) came from Muslim countries.¹⁹ In Spain, the arrival (or perhaps the return) of Islam has been due to an influx of illegal immigrants from North and Sub-Saharan Africa. These waves of mostly poor and young immigrants have become a point of tension in Spanish-Moroccan relations, and has resulted in tragedies like the boats filled with illegals that regularly sink in the waters of the Strait of Gibraltar.

This dawning of European Islam has occurred just as Islam is emerging as a social movement and a political force both in the Muslim world and on the international stage. Significantly, the 1980s was also the decade in which conflict broke out between Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, and Iran for the domination of the Muslim world. In this intense battle, Europe became a target of missionary and proselytizing efforts, as the massive increase in the distribution of petrodollars to Europe for the creation of mosques, Islamic

schools, and university chairs attests to. This activity should nonetheless be seen in the context of the diversity of branches and movements that divide up Islam in both Europe and North America. While the influence of Saudi doctrine is an established fact, it is nonetheless just one of the many options offered to European and American Muslims, and is very far from holding uncontested sway in the Muslim community. The real question is to determine just how, and how much, sectarian literature—in the form of books, brochures, free Qu'rans, and so on—contributes to the shaping of Islamic behavior in Europe. (See parts II and III for a discussion of this topic.)

Islam in North America: "Deferred Visibility"

The Islamic revival taking place in Muslim countries has also had consequences for the visibility of Islam in the United States. On the other side of the Atlantic, however, this visibility takes a different shape than in Europe. In the 1970s, immigrants from the middle classes and the intelligentsia of Muslim countries began to arrive en masse. Though there had been a Muslim presence in the United States at least since the eighteenth century with the arrival of African slaves, Islam's history in America really begins with the voluntary migrations of the nineteenth century. From 1875 to 1912, Muslim migration was essentially made up of families or individuals fleeing economic or political hardship in their country of origin, principally in the rural areas of Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon. These immigrants settled in mid-sized towns, finding employment in the mines and factories or making a living as itinerant merchants.

The second wave of immigrants occurred between 1918 and 1922, and the third over the course of the 1930s. These groups of immigrants were largely made up of people fleeing the economic depression and the political crises that followed World War I and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the countries of the Middle East. A fourth wave occurred after World War II, and concerned not only countries in the Middle East but also India, Pakistan, Turkey, and the Balkans. In contrast to the previous waves of immigrants, these new arrivals, better-educated and more well-off than their predecessors, came primarily from the urban centers of Muslim countries. This difference in socioeconomic status meant that they were better equipped, both intellectually and culturally, to resist the assimilationist forces that had made all but invisible the preceding generations of immigrants.

The fifth wave of immigration began in 1965 during the Johnson administration. In this period, the United States relaxed its quota policy, and immigration was no longer held to a strict standard of quotas and limits by

country. This easing of restrictions allowed highly qualified Muslims from Africa and Asia to enter the country in large numbers. This trend in immigration continued to go strong, and conservative estimates before September 11 put the number of immigrants arriving from the Middle East and Africa at 35,000 per year. Each major crisis in the Muslim world has translated into the relocation of populations to the United States: the Six Days War of 1967, the Iranian revolution of 1979, the problems in Lebanon and Pakistan—and, closer to home, the conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

Despite the long-standing presence of Muslims in the United States, Islam's visibility in American society is a relatively recent phenomenon, a result of the religious dynamism of the two most recent waves of immigrants. The Muslim immigrants of the first part of the twentieth century were more concerned with defending various secular ideologies than with promoting Islam. In this period, the Arab-Muslim world was fighting for its independence from the West by borrowing the West's dominant ideologies: nationalism and socialism. Since the 1970s, however, the new arrivals, particularly those from the Indian subcontinent, have thrown themselves into religious activities of every kind: the building of mosques and madrasas, publishing religious literature, and engaging in lobbying efforts. In the 1990s, more than 2,300 Islamic institutions were counted in the United States, of which 1,500 were mosques or Islamic centers. American society is undergoing a definitive and visible process of Islamicization, and an assessment of the situation of Muslim minorities in a non-Muslim society is indeed beginning to take shape.

This rise of Islam after 1965 encountered neither hostility nor real surprise on the part of American society, since from the outset it established itself within the normal context of U.S. inclusiveness toward new groups, within the framework of American civil religion. Islam did become an object of international attention after the 1980 hostage crisis at the American Embassy in Teheran, but there was nonetheless a distinction made between Muslims in the United States and Muslims abroad, a distinction that had a positive effect on the identity construction of the Islamic minority. Even the antiterrorist law of 1996 did little to halt this development. This dissociation of domestic and international political agendas was profoundly altered, however, by the events of September 11. From that moment on, Muslims living on American soil have been the victims of surveillance and suspicion as part of the "War on Terror." As noted above, the Muslims of Europe were already quite familiar with this perception of domestic Islam as a kind of fifth column, long before September 11. The idea of collusion between the enemy outside and an enemy within is perfectly illustrated by the creation of the

“Vigipirate” plan after the Paris subway bombings of 1995, attributed to the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The cultural corollary to this security measure is the general suspicion of all forms of Islamic religiosity, particularly when it comes from the youth of the poor suburbs.

Understanding the condition of Muslims in the West means taking into account the particular political and cultural contexts of the respective Western countries, and to show how these contexts act upon the identities, practices, and collective actions of Muslims. Thus, the different forms of nationalism and secularism in Europe and the United States are also crucial factors in the evolution of Muslim culture.