Old Fears, New Threats

Uriya Shavit

One rain-soaked evening, in a bus stop on the road leading to a castle overlooking the picturesque German town of Marburg, an especially frank piece of graffiti caught my eye: "To hell with Islam!" In this remote, pastoral setting, the words at first appeared out of place. But in today's Europe—and in Germany in particular—this sort of attitude toward Islam should come as no surprise. Since the September 11 attacks in America, and the subsequent terrorist attacks by al-Qaida on European soil, the continent has witnessed a rising tide of hostility toward Muslims living there, from violent rhetorical outbursts to physical attacks on mosques and businesses.[1]

This hostility has, in turn, increased the widespread sense of discrimination already felt by most Muslim immigrants in Europe. In a recent field study of German Muslims, for example, interviewees described difficulty finding work, prejudice against their children at school, and obscene remarks frequently hurled at them on the street. Finally, they described the obstacles they face trying to observe their religious commandments (likely related, among other reasons, to the fact that Islam, unlike Judaism, is not an officially recognized religion in Germany). Mahmoud, a twenty-six-year-old of Indian extraction who volunteers as a preacher in a local mosque, recounted a job interview for a position as a social worker that began with a

lecture on democratic values and the rights of women. Twenty-two-year-old Nadia from Morocco recalled what one of her Christian friends said to her when she explained her strong feelings of religiosity: "To be a true Muslim now, you have to wear an explosive belt." And Haled, a thirty-year-old footballer of Tunisian ancestry, talked about the cries of "dirty Muslim" directed at him on the pitch, saying that he fears for his life and that of his wife, a Christian who converted to Islam.[2]

It is hard to avoid comparing this new animosity toward Muslims to the traditional manifestations of a much older hatred—anti-Semitism. The fear of a minority that practices an unfamiliar form of worship and is believed to be worming its way into Christian or Western culture, undermining its values, shaped the relationship between Europe and the Jews in its midst for hundreds of years. This comparison between "Islamophobia" and classic anti-Semitism is much favored among European politicians, intellectuals, and human rights workers who are trying to prevent, or at least mitigate, the "culture war" that is being waged on the continent.[3] This concept is embodied in the Warsaw Declaration, adopted by the Council of Europe on May 17, 2005, which condemned "all forms of intolerance and discrimination, in particular those based on sex, race, and religion, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia."[4] Opinion columns in major European newspapers now regularly claim that "Muslims are now getting the same treatment the Jews had a century ago."[5] The temptation to draw parallels between past and present is unquestionably strong—but is it justified? There are certainly some notable points of similarity between prewar European anti-Semitism and the enmity directed toward the Muslim immigrants living in Europe now. However, there is a quintessential difference between the two: The fear of a Jewish conspiracy against European civilization had no basis in fact, whereas fear of the expansionist ambitions openly expressed by senior figures in the Muslim-Arab world, and shared by some ordinary Muslims, is not groundless. Understanding this difference is of crucial importance if one wishes to properly assess the nature and magnitude of the challenge certain interpretations of Islam pose to Europe, and to deal with this challenge accordingly.

II

One of the most striking points of similarity between European anti-Semitism—both the classic and modern varieties—and the current hostility towards Muslim immigrants is the conspicuousness of Jews and Muslims, a factor that exaggerates the presence of the minority "other" in the eyes of the majority "self." Traditional antipathy toward Jews was fed to a great extent by their obvious dissimilarity from other Europeans. Before the Emancipation, the Jews were confined to ghettos, kept commandments that were alien to Christians, spoke a language of their own, and adopted distinct modes of dress. Although the Jews were relatively few, the concentration of the Jewish population in a small number of areas and their foreign appearance ensured that every encounter between Christian and Jew would be indelibly engraved in the former's memory, giving him the impression that the Jews were far more numerous than they actually were. The post-Emancipation "new Jews" who tried to integrate into European society at the end of the eighteenth century may have been similar in outward appearance to the Christian majority, but their assimilation into general society and culture was incomplete, while their considerable and often publicly visible achievements in various fields—science, literature, banking—and their prominent involvement in radical social and ideological movements far outweighed their relatively small population, giving birth to stereotypes bristling with suspicion and jealousy. Whether he shut himself off from non-Jewish society or assimilated into it, the European Jew was perceived as a representative of a minority whose size and influence was exaggerated in the extreme by European Christians; a delusion enthusiastically adopted by anti-Semitic propaganda.

A somewhat similar situation exists today regarding the Muslim community in Europe. Most European Muslims arrived on the continent after World War II as immigrant workers needed to provide the postwar revival

of the industrial and service sectors with cheap manpower. Like most immigrant communities, they settled in the more affordable residential neighborhoods of large cities. Because of these social and economic factors, European cities developed entire neighborhoods overwhelmingly populated by immigrants—modern ghettos of a sort. Anyone passing through these areas would be confronted by such sights as hundreds of men thronging the local mosque or a row of restaurants and grocery stores with signs proclaiming "Halal" (food prepared according to Islamic law) in Arabic.

Like traditional Jews, some Muslims are distinguished by their dress, and it is no coincidence that public fear of the rise of Islam in Europe regularly coalesces into a debate over head coverings.[6] A woman wearing a *hijab* (headscarf), or *niqab* (veil), and most certainly one enshrouded in a *burqa* (complete body covering), is inescapably visible on a busy European street and is likely to be perceived as a sign of a significant Muslim presence, even if, statistically speaking, she represents a marginal phenomenon. Thus, in November 2006, on the eve of general elections in Holland, the government declared its support for a ban on the wearing of the *burqa* in public areas. Although 6 percent of the population of Holland is Muslim, the number of women in the country wearing the *burqa* is estimated to be little more than a hundred.[7]

The conspicuousness of the small Muslim minority, like that of observant Jews, serves as a lightning rod for feelings of fear and hatred. However, this issue taken alone is not sufficient to explain why Jews and Muslims *in particular* became the primary targets of European xenophobia. It is important to note that the Jews were not alone in being alien to Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The Gypsies, for example, were also perceived as "strangers," but while they aroused hatred and persecution, they were never considered an existential threat to Christian civilization or pestilential carriers of a diseased culture maneuvering to take power.[8] In the same manner, there are non-Muslim "others" whose presence in the human and cultural landscape of European societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century is eminently conspicuous: The

skin color of Africans living on the continent is no less glaring to the eye than the Middle Eastern appearance of many Muslims, and the traditional Sikh head covering is no less striking than the *hijab*.

It is not, therefore, the specific external signs of the Muslim presence that arouse feelings of fear and aversion, but rather what they represent to the European collective consciousness. That is, it is the *resonance* projected onto them by non-Muslim Europeans. The explanation for Islamophobia is to be found, therefore, not in simple xenophobia, but in one of Islam's more abstract features, and one which it shares with Judaism: The fact that it is a religion and a nation capable of being imagined, even from afar.

The Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua's article "An Attempt to Identify and Understand the Roots of Anti-Semitism," which had enormous repercussions when it was published in the journal *Alpayim* some two years ago, may cast some light on this issue.[9] Yehoshua claims that the primary reason for the enduring historical phenomenon of anti-Semitism is to be found not in Christian doctrine, envy of Jewish success, loathing aroused by Jewish business dealings as moneylenders, or disgust at the Jew's "backward" existence in the ghettos, but rather in the fact that at the heart of Jewish identity there is a double thread of religion and nationality. Beginning with the period of the Babylonian exile, Jewish identity coalesced around a national-religious existence that belonged more to the realms of thought and imagination than to tangible reality. Thus the Jews were given "the possibility, of which they took full advantage, of remaining in voluntary exile without losing their identity."[10]

> This element enables a Jew to transfer in his imagination—virtually—essential and basic elements of his national identity, like territory, language, and even a framework of natural national solidarity, from the active and living nationality to the religious life and its ceremonies, and to preserve them for thousands of years as if they were real and actual.
>
> The physical territory of the land of Israel was preserved as a symbol or metaphor of the holy land in prayer or in religious ceremonies. The national language became a holy language and acted not as a living and

practical language but as a rabbinical one or one reserved for prayer. The institutions of self-determination, sovereignty and the military became symbols and metaphors that the Jew was able to alter and knead in different spiritual commentaries (but not as a fact active in reality) as he wished and as he needed.[11]

The Jew's particular ability to live physically in one nation while belonging to another in the abstract—one whose members had no common territory or governmental institutions—allowed him to integrate into a foreign cultural and political environment, true, but it also provoked powerful antagonism. The elastic nature of Jewish identity, says Yehoshua, is the root of anti-Semitism:

> The fact that a Jew recognizes certain clear, virtual fundamentals makes his identity flexible, fluid, lacking clear boundaries, and difficult to identify; enables virtual activity equivalent to that of a non-Jew to accrue to it, for better or worse, which can be associated with this identity more easily than with other identities defined and delineated by territory, a language, and the traditional elements that create identity. This association is usually achieved according to the needs of the one associating, in fantasies, fears, or various desires on the basis of which the superstructure of religious arguments and contentions is erected.[12]

According to Yehoshua, the Jewish nation is a unique phenomenon; a combination of nationality and religion that exists intact in the Jewish imagination even when Jews are living dispersed, landless, and without self-determination on the terrain of other nations.[13] But is this really a phenomenon that has no counterpart? An examination of the development of Islam from its beginnings until our own time reveals that it is not.

What the prophet Muhammad established in 622 following the *hijra* from Mecca to Medina was not only a religion, but also a nation: The Nation of Islam, or *ummah* (the word for nation in Arabic and Hebrew is identical). Muhammad demanded that his followers accept not only the Sacred Book, its fundamentals of faith, and its binding laws, but also allegiance to a

sociopolitical group obedient to the authority of a single ruler and prepared to take up arms when necessary. Thus the fundamental principle of Islam was the idea of religion and state as an indissoluble unit.

The nation Muhammad founded was exceptional in that it was not a function of social status, ethnicity, or territorial location. The only condition a man must fulfill to become a Muslim is his willingness to convert to Islam. Sovereignty over the Islamic nation is granted not to a king or to the collective that comprises the Islamic nation, but to Allah alone. The principle—absurd to Western ears—that a man can belong completely, politically as well as religiously, to the Islamic nation, even if he does not live under Muslim rule, derives from this essential concept.

In its early years, the Islamic nation was a tangible entity. It numbered several hundred of Muhammad's followers, each of whom knew their leader and each other as flesh-and-blood human beings. But within a few decades, the nation's conquests had become so extensive that, out of necessity, it became an imagined nation. The Muslim in Syria, the Muslim in Egypt, and the Muslim in Spain, while all belonging to the same political-religious community, could verify this belonging only through the abstract belief that the sacred text they read, the laws they obeyed, and the wars they were embarking on were held in common by Muslims they had never seen and would never see.

A mere three hundred years after the establishment of Islam, the physical Muslim nation that had become an imagined Muslim nation split into a myriad of sub-kingdoms, which differed from each other not only in their leadership, but also in their theological outlooks and legal systems. But while the Muslim domain was splitting up into separate, occasionally mutually hostile entities, the idea of the Islamic nation as a united religious-political community retained its vitality. The competing Muslim kingdoms did not see themselves as autonomous units, each with a manifest ethnic and territorial identity, but rather as faithful representatives of the supra-ethnic and supra-territorial Islamic nation. The last of these kingdoms, the Ottoman Empire, was not "Turkish" in the sense in which Westerners commonly and mistakenly

refer to it. It characterized itself as the embodiment of the Islamic nation, and as it grew weaker, it came to rely more and more on that concept.

The breakup of the Ottoman Empire after World War I led to a change in the way the Islamic nation was perceived and imagined. From the ashes of the empire rose territorial nation states in which Islam played a secondary role. At the beginning of the twentieth century, therefore, for the first time since its establishment, the Islamic nation lacked any territorial entity that could claim to represent it. Islam lost not only its unity, but also the competing political entities that purported to embody that unity.

Muslim clerics could not tolerate such a state of affairs; it violated the fundamental Islamic principle that the Islamic nation is one unified religious and political framework. Reaction to the Muslim political reality that followed World War I was almost instantaneous, and, at its most forceful, it was a fundamental negation of the existing order. For clerics and radical intellectuals like the Pakistani Abu al-Ala al-Maududi and the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, the entire concept of the new territorial nation states was *jahili*, or non-Islamic, and therefore wholly illegitimate.[14] They demanded a restoration of the unity of the Muslim nation and the return of Islam to its rightful place as the supreme regulatory structure of all aspects of life, including politics. Because even more moderate clerics were bound by this fundamental principle, the regimes in Muslim nation states were compelled to pay lip service to it—whether by bankrolling institutions that theoretically embodied the unity of believers, employing rhetoric that boasted of the existence of the Islamic nation, or providing fiscal and political support to Islamic religious organizations throughout the Muslim and Western world.[15] Nonetheless, in the absence of any real political power or military capability, the Islamic nation remains a purely imagined entity; it exists only in *fatwas*, in homiletics, and in pan-Islamic conferences. As such, it is an idea, the perfect image of a mythical past, separate from the circumstances of the present and its practical dictates.

The situation of the Islamic nation is thus analogous in several important respects to the situation of the Jewish nation following the Babylonian

exile. That is, it is a nation that exists on a purely imagined level; but even as an imagined nation it contains a set of beliefs, symbols, and yearnings that retain enormous power over its members' allegiances and identity.

As fate would have it, the period during which the Islamic nation became a purely imagined nation, devoid of any tangible political dimension, also witnessed the mass immigration of millions of Muslims to the West. Ironically, living conditions in the Western world made the concept of an imagined Islamic nation far easier to accept. Whereas the dictatorships that hold sway over many parts of the Islamic world suppress their more radical clerics and restrict their ability to speak in the name of the Islamic nation, the open and liberal environment of Western societies allows considerable freedom of thought and expression. The Muslim immigrant in London, Paris, Amsterdam, or Berlin can therefore present himself as and behave like an active member of an imagined Islamic nation without fear of the violent and often murderous reprisal facing his counterparts living in dictatorial nation states.

There are reasons to doubt the extent to which Europeans who fear Islamic immigrants and their possible intentions are aware of these dynamics. However, even the most complex issues of identity and allegiance can sometimes be perceived instinctively and unconsciously. The European senses that the Islamic identity is unlike that of other minorities living in his midst, and therefore he fears it.

Suspicion, it must be noted, is not reserved for Muslim immigrants alone. Italian, Polish, or Indian immigrants living in Germany are also "others," and their attitudes and values, as well as their identification with their country of origin, are not necessarily considered positive attributes by native Germans. For this reason, German law requires immigrants to give up their original nationality if they wish to become citizens. Despite these fears, however, the Italian, Polish, or Indian "other"—and similarly the Iranian, Turkish, or Syrian "other," insofar as the dominant aspect of his identity is national-territorial—has a well-defined and easily recognized identity. This identity is separate from but similar, ideologically as well as ethically and

legally, to the structure of German national identity; it is easily delineated and therefore easy to deal with.

But the "other" who associates himself with the Islamic nation is different. He does not have a foreign passport, and therefore it is impossible to demand that he give up his original citizenship. His identity is fluid, ever-changing, and multi-faceted. He belongs simultaneously to two nations, one real and one imagined. Like the Jewish minority, the Muslim "other" is an object upon which a myriad of negative images and emotions can be projected. In this sense at least, anti-Semitism and hostility towards Muslim immigrants share a common basis.

<p style="text-align:center">III</p>

However, there are crucial differences between the Jewish and Muslim concepts of the imagined nation. A discussion of these differences requires us to tread carefully, but there is no avoiding it.

One of the most basic tenets of modern anti-Semitism is the fear that the "pure" national identity will be "hijacked" by the Jew. This fear is quite groundless, however. Judaism, by its very nature, is an introverted identity without a proselytizing tradition; even dedicated converts must undergo a difficult process to become part of the community. The primary desire of the "old Jew" was that the non-Jew would leave him in peace and allow him to live his life in as autonomous a manner as possible; whereas the desire of the "new Jew" was that his Jewish identity would not be an obstacle to his own social integration. The conversion to Judaism of Christian Europe has never been a Jewish objective. The illusory and fluid identity of the Jew is what enabled the anti-Semite to ascribe intentions to him that he did not have; to imagine the Jew as a corrupting agent whose aim was to deprive Christian Europe or the ethnic nation state of its "true" nature.

On this point the Muslim outlook is radically different from the Jewish one. The imagined nation of Islam nurtures universal aspirations; it seeks to encompass all mankind, and no special effort is required to become a part of it. In fact, according to Islam, all people are born Muslims but are led astray by growing up in an imperfect—i.e., non-Muslim—environment. The non-Muslim who joins the ranks of the Islamic nation does not "adopt" the religion of Muhammad, but "returns" to it. Therefore, the Muslim considers it a religious and moral imperative to help draw those estranged from Islam toward the truth.

This axiom assumed a special significance as a result of Muslim immigration to Europe. For thirty years, Islamic scholars have been forced to contend with the voluntary presence of Muslims in Christian-secular societies. On the one hand, this is an intolerable state of affairs from the point of view of religious law, since it leaves the fate of the Muslim immigrant in Europe and his ability to keep his faith in the hands of infidels. On the other hand, it is simply a *fait accompli*; whatever the rulings of religious scholars, millions of immigrant Muslim workers are not going to forsake the countries in which they enjoy a certain measure of economic security and prosperity and in which they have established their homes.

One of the most popular strategies adopted by Muslim religious authorities in response to this challenge has been to represent the immigrants as the ambassadors of the Islamic nation; as pioneers entrusted with a holy mission. This approach is eminently logical: If all men are destined to recognize the truth of Muhammad's prophecy and become part of the Islamic nation, and if fate has decreed that millions of Muslims should emigrate to Europe, then it must be assumed that Allah has sent these immigrants to Europe in order to offer Westerners an alternative to their decadent and degenerate lives. Accordingly, Muslim immigrants should not be considered traitors who have forsaken their nation; quite the opposite—they are blessed messengers charged with the momentous task of fulfilling the divine mission of the nation.

These theories represent the consensus which current Muslim-Arab thinking has reached regarding emigration. They appear regularly in Muslim-Arab theological and legal texts that examine the Muslim presence in Europe. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for example, an Egyptian specialist in religious law based in Qatar and considered to be the most influential of the present generation of Sunni scholars, replied to a question about the duties of a Muslim living in the West thusly: "They must remember that the call of others to Islam is not confined to scholars or sheiks, but to every faithful Muslim."[16] Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, the leading Arab Shi'a scholar, makes a similar declaration: "We expect you [the Muslim immigrants] to be over there the callers for Islam, so that new positions will open for us and so that you open new prospects for Islam."[17] He continues by recommending that immigrants learn how a person from their host culture thinks and the strengths and weaknesses of that way of thinking so as to be better able to influence him.[18] Egyptian born Muhammad al-Ghazali, one of the most outstanding contemporary Muslim scholars, conceives of the possibility that hundreds of thousands of immigrants "will not only keep their faith but will become pioneers in spreading it, if the Muslim nation wants this and will work toward achieving it."[19] Hamdi Hassan, who lectures on communications at al-Azhar University in Cairo, perceives the Muslim presence on European soil as proof that the spread of the Islamic faith has graduated from the defensive stage of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to a new phase of dissemination.[20] And Muhammad al-Hanni, chairman of the Dar al-Ri'aya al-Islamiyya organization in London, believes Muslim immigrants represent the potential for establishing an "alternative civilization" in the West, the decline of which we are now witnessing. When Western civilization crumbles, he argues, the Muslims will be the natural heirs to its technological legacy but will invest it with their superior principles.[21]

Western observers and commentators are sometimes tempted to characterize this Muslim-Arab attitude as a response to recent policies of Europe and the United States (and certainly Israel). It is not. The perception of

the immigrant as a pioneer in the service of the Islamic nation was already formed twenty-five years ago, when the first generation of immigrant workers on the continent was beginning to establish itself. Moreover, those who disseminate this idea are not only extreme or fringe characters; quite the opposite. Al-Qaradawi, al-Ghazali, and Fadlallah, for example, are considered progressives on all social and scientific matters. Al-Qaradawi is a prominent proponent of the concept known as *wasatiya*—freely translated as "the middle way"—which is a concept of Islam that balances materialism and spirituality, progress and tradition, the individual and society. Muslim immigrants in the West pay heed to his *fatwas* specifically because he is perceived as someone who does not ignore the demands of real life.

The desire or duty to bring Christians into the bosom of Islam is not the only point that divides Judaism and the Islamic nation. There is also the question of territory; that is, the territory toward which the political and religious yearnings of the nation are directed.

For the Jews, this territory was always the land of Israel and only the land of Israel. Only there could Jewish autonomy be realized; only there could the Jewish Temple be established; and only there was it possible for a Jew to keep every one of the 613 commandments. It is true that Jewish institutions were established in Europe that enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. The Sanhedrin, convened at the order of Napoleon Bonaparte in October 1806, was an example of such an institution. But its purpose was not to establish Jewish self-determination on foreign soil—on the contrary, it was intended to establish a bridge between the requirements of halacha and the civic duties of the Jews as citizens of France; that is, to facilitate the creation of a French-Jewish identity. The Sanhedrin's leaders proclaimed their subservience to French law and exalted the emperor. They made no claim, however abstract, on France, and retained the idea that the land of Israel was the only place in which Jewish autonomy could exist.

Almost one hundred years later, Zionism transferred the abstract latter-day yearnings for Jewish sovereignty to the concrete arena of politics. However, even in the realm of the concrete, the autonomy that Zionism

demanded for the Jews was confined within narrow borders. Even in the few instances when Zionism entertained the possibility of territorial autonomy outside the land of Israel, it set its sights on relatively remote regions with clear territorial boundaries and, most importantly, far from Europe. There were, perhaps, some grounds for the European fear that the Zionist Jew living in the Europeans' midst held allegiance both to his present country and to his historic homeland, but they had no reason to believe that he had any intention of claiming autonomy over any part of the continent.

The establishment of the State of Israel left this reality unchanged. The French Jew may occasionally identify himself with both Israel and France, and this double identity may well cause him political and moral problems; but in this he is no different from members of many other minority groups who retain their links to their native land, real or imagined.

Islam, however, demands a different kind of autonomy. The imagined Islamic nation does not at present reside in any one place, but it imagines itself everywhere. It aspires to an autonomy that embraces the entire world. In the realm of the imaginary, London is no different from Mecca or Paris from Medina. All of these are Allah's domain and, therefore, also the Islamic nation's domain.

This is the background against which the world-encompassing political claims of some current Muslim-Arab clerics are developing. Al-Qaradawi calls on Muslims in the West to act on behalf of their brothers suffering in Palestine, Kosovo, Chechnya, and elsewhere.[22] The European Council for *Fatwa* and Research, established in London on March 29, 1997, and led by al-Qaradawi, stated that the condition for Muslim participation in the political process of any Western country was to serve those Muslim interests which could not be served by any other means.[23] A similar tenet was expressed by Fadlallah.[24] The political duty of a Muslim living in Europe is not limited, therefore, to a defined territory or a specific society; it is anchored in his status as a member of the universal Islamic nation and in his recognition that this alone guides and defines his actions on a global scale.

This perception of the imagined Muslim nation as a global phenomenon is supported by recent technological developments, especially the new transnational media of satellite television and the Internet. These media allow Muslims across the globe to participate simultaneously in the imagining of their nation even though they live in different countries, or even on different continents. For some Muslim scholars this is no coincidence; they believe that the appearance of the Internet and satellite television is part of the divine plan, and the task that Allah has assigned to these media is to serve the word of Islam and expose it to all mankind.[25]

On this basis, Muslim clerics and commentators are setting up Internet sites and television channels with a twofold purpose: To allow the entirety of the world's Muslims, including those in the West, to imagine themselves as a collective which is daily building one nation, and to put a sophisticated means of indoctrination at the disposal of Islam. When al-Qaradawi broadcasts his weekly religious program on Al-Jazeera, it is viewed by Muslims worldwide at the same moment; and when the Internet portal IslamOnline.net, operating under his supervision, publishes its global news reports focusing on the Islamic aspect of events—whether the subject is politics, culture, or sports—they are read by Muslims all over the world simultaneously; and when al-Qaradawi's European Council for Fatwa and Research publishes its *fatwas* in books or on the Internet, they touch those who are in the process of imagining a transnational Muslim identity.[26]

Therefore, the Westerner who feels that Islam is a threat to his identity—whether as a believing Christian, a liberal democrat, or the citizen of a territorial nation—is not simply engaging in paranoid speculation. Contemporary Muslim-Arab thinking has most certainly set itself the task of converting Europe to Islam—and it is doing so explicitly, openly, and without hesitation or ambiguity. The Westerner is correct when he perceives this form of Islamic thinking as a threat to his own autonomy and his right to self-determination within defined territorial borders. The imagined Islamic nation is nurturing aspirations toward a global hegemony, an aspiration it promotes using the mass media—and its followers, wherever they are, are required to work on

behalf of these aspirations. This is the crucial difference between the Jewish and the Muslim imagined nations: It is the fluidity and flexibility of Jewish identity that makes it possible for the anti-Semite to project his darkest fears onto the Jews and to attribute to them the desire for world domination. The enduring popularity of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and innumerable other theories regarding a Jewish "conspiracy" stem from this source. But Islam's ambition to spread its rule over the entire world is not a fantasy of paranoid or prejudiced Europeans, but an accurate perception of what leading Muslim-Arab thinkers themselves openly preach.

<p style="text-align:center">IV</p>

There is no escaping the obvious conclusion: From a purely ideological point of view, European fear of Islam is not mistaken. The Muslim believer living on the continent is potentially exposed to an ideology that imposes upon him a religious and political duty to proselytize Christians and impose the rule of the Islamic nation everywhere possible, including Europe itself.[27]

But life is more complicated than the abstract theories of clerics. In the real world, most (though not all) Muslim immigrants in Europe are not rallying to the cause of the Islamic nation, or are rejecting it outright. One of the major reasons for this difference between theory and practice is the weak religious sentiments of many immigrants. Although they claim their affiliation with Islam as the foundation of their identity, this declaration is often empty of content; they seldom go to mosque, they do not observe the commandments and prohibitions of Islamic law (such as abstaining from alcohol), and pay no heed to "the good of the Islamic nation" when making political judgments. Their relationship to Islam is purely spiritual—bordering on folklore—and has no public expression. In Germany, for example,

according to the four largest Muslim organizations in the country, only an estimated five hundred thousand out of 3.4 million Muslims attend Friday prayers in mosques and prayer rooms. Such attendance is the minimum criterion for an active Islamic identity.[28]

Another prominent obstacle is the ethnic link that many Muslim immigrants feel toward other frameworks of identity—foremost among them the territorial nation state into which they were born, their mother tongue, and the religious school they attend. In all the largest countries in Europe, the Muslim immigrant population is fragmented into majority and minority groups based around national affiliation. Although Islamic religious and cultural institutions are open to all, immigrants and residents from Turkey will prefer to pray in a mosque with a Turkish orientation, whereas Moroccan immigrants will attend mosques with a Moroccan orientation, and so on. These frameworks are further fragmented into subcultures in which diverse variations on Muslim theory and practice abound; these phenomena—whether they reflect a maximalist attitude regarding the vision of a Nation of Islam or not—actively express the imagined Nation of Islam's lack of unity and the inability of those who adhere to it to free themselves from other, less expansive forms of identity.

One must also note the limited access immigrants have to the media which disseminates the concept of an imagined Nation of Islam. In theory, satellite television and the Internet make it possible for the spokesmen of that nation to overcome all territorial and ethnic obstacles to the spread of their creed. But in reality, this is often not the case; second-generation immigrants who know no Arabic whatsoever or have only a partial command of the spoken language have difficulty understanding the writings and sermons of the Muslim-Arab intellectuals who preach in the rarified and difficult literary Arabic of religious texts. There are obstacles of a more technical nature as well: In Germany, for example, the law requires every landlord to approve the installation of satellite dishes by tenants if these tenants hold foreign passports. Second-generation Muslim immigrants with German

passports frequently have their applications refused, among other reasons because the landlord is afraid that a building festooned with satellite dishes will look like "immigrants' quarters," thus lowering its market value.

The most serious impediment, however, to complete identification with the Nation of Islam as a cohesive religious-political identity is that many immigrants are fully cognizant of the fact that it is a dangerous idea. This understanding has produced its own concept of Muslim identity—one that seeks to curtail, if not deny outright, the political and missionary aspects of Muslim-European identity. The religious importance of the literature may not be on a par with that of the great religious authorities of the Muslim-Arab world, but it has far-reaching public repercussions.[29]

Even among those immigrants who, staunch in their faith and active in their communities, can envision a global Islamic nation, there are many who consciously decide to reconcile their faith and their desire to integrate into the non-Muslim societies in which they live. During field research I conducted among German Muslims, many of those questioned testified to their attempts to integrate the two worlds, often well aware of the fact that this integration forces them to live out an internal contradiction. Far from wanting to "Islamize" their neighbors, they are seeking recognition and respect from a society that frequently considers them backward and primitive. Hassan, a thirty-one-year-old computer student, emigrated in 2003 from Morocco to Darmstadt. During his studies, he fell in love with a half-Russian German Catholic and married her. When I asked him about the role he assigns to himself as a Muslim in German society, he answered that he has no such role. "Nowadays, there's the Internet, television; we don't need people to preach about Islam like they did five hundred years ago," he said. "Islam is not a secret. It's open to anyone who wants to know about it." Omar, fifty-three, separated and a father of three, immigrated to Germany from Egypt in 1985. He is an admirer of Sheikh al-Qaradawi's approach to sharia and quotes the sheikh's vision of a Europe that will gradually become Islamic because of the willing consent of its population. "It was Allah's promise to

the prophet that Islam would spread," he says. But he rejects the ruling that requires him to vote in German elections according to Muslim interests. "I respect al-Qaradawi's opinion in theory, but there is a reality. There is no such thing as voting in the interests of the Muslim nation. I live here, my children live here, I want to vote in the interests of the society in which I live." Masrour, a twenty-seven-year-old software engineer whose family emigrated from Pakistan to Germany in 1985, is a member of the Ahmadiyya sect (considered heretical by mainstream Islam). Among his other activities, he has developed an Internet site in German that tries to explain why the wearing of a headscarf is compulsory in Islam and why this does not prejudice the rights of women. During our meeting, he declared: "I can certainly say that my duty as a Muslim living in Germany is to get those who are not Muslims to see Islam as the true religion. There is nothing illegitimate about that. When a guest is invited to your house, it is legitimate for him to argue with you that Fanta is tastier than Coke, or if it's good or bad to smoke. If the visitor convinces you—what's wrong with that?" But when I asked if he was aware of the difference between an argument about one aspect of a way of life, like the relative quality of soft drinks, and undermining that way of life itself, he replied: "Yes. And that is why it is called a vision. I am aware that my vision is possible only insofar as it is impossible."

V

The road to the realization of Islamic prophecy is long and strewn with great obstacles. But this cannot obscure a simple truth: In order for this nation to turn the majority and minority groups in Europe onto a sure collision course, it is not necessary for the majority of Muslim immigrants—or even a particularly large part of them—to imagine themselves part of it and act as its emissaries. It is enough for a small but determined and ever more powerful minority to gain ground.

The European Muslim on his way to the mosque is different from the European Jew on his way to the synagogue. He represents a *potential* member of an imagined community that envisages the West as Muslim and Islam as the new world order. To fear such an eventuality is not pure xenophobia; it is firmly grounded in reality.

The challenge that Muslim thinking poses to European society is not simple, especially because the memory of anti-Semitism reverberates in the collective European consciousness. Europe knows just how short the distance is from alarmist newspaper articles about a foreign minority infiltrating the nation to a murderous outburst against that minority; from abuse hurled at people in the street because their beliefs and external appearance are different to an actual pogrom. Indiscriminate, blind, arrogant, and chauvinistic hostility toward Islam and Muslims is a phenomenon that Europe must denounce and correct, if it wishes to prove that it really has learned anything from its past.

But there is another warning that history has given Europe: Dangerous ideas should not be ignored because only a very few are loyal to them. Today, Europe is once again witness to the growing power of an ideology that despises territorial borders, undermines the liberal political system, and rejects Western concepts of human rights. There is indeed cause for alarm. As restricted and minimal as its influence may be, the imagined Nation of Islam

is not just an idea; instruments of immense power have been pressed into its service. If Europe closes its eyes, if it chooses to label all critical analysis of Islam and its adherents as a xenophobic equivalent to anti-Semitism, that imagined nation, left without resistance or opposition, may very well succeed in undermining the foundations of the order in which it functions.

Uriya Shavit is a historian of the Middle East researching Islam in Europe for the Minerva Foundation, a subsidiary of the Max Planck Society. His book The Wars of Democracy: The West and the Arabs from the Fall of Communism to the War in Iraq *will be published this year by the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. His last article in* Azure *was "The Road to Democracy in the Arab World" (*Azure *26, Autumn 2006).*

Notes

1. For documentation and analysis of manifestations of discrimination, hostility, and even violence against Muslims and Muslim institutions in recent years in Europe, including Germany, against the background of their Muslim identity, see European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, *Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia*, 2006, www.libertysecurity.org/IMG/pdf_Manifestations_EN.pdf.

2. The research was based on interviews with eighteen Muslims from different communities in the federal state of Hessen between December 2006 and July 2007, and on observations of sermons and seminars in community centers and mosques. The interviewees were assured that their full names would not be revealed, apart from those who held official posts.

3. See, for example, the conference of the Holland-based UNITED (a European network against nationalism, racism, and fascism and in support of migrants and refugees), which was held in May 2005 in Rieti, Italy, under the banner "Dissolving

---

Barriers: Intercultural Dialogue in Europe." One of the discussions held during the conference was on "Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism: Building a Dialogue," and among other things discussed was the similarity between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Europe, between the victims of Islamophobia and those of anti-Semitism, and the responsibility of the media for hostility to Muslims and Jews alike. See www.unitedagainstracism.org/pages/repriet.htm#99.

4. For the text of the declaration, see www.coe.int/t/dcr/summit/20050517_decl_varsovie_en.asp.

5. Maleiha Malik, "Muslims Are Now Getting the Same Treatment Jews Had a Century Ago," *The Guardian*, February 2, 2007.

6. On March 15, 2004, French President Jacques Chirac signed a law prohibiting the wearing of items of clothing or symbols clearly expressing religious affiliation in public schools. The law was vaguely worded but specifically intended to prohibit the wearing of headscarves in class following the polemic that had gripped France since 1989. For a discussion of the law and the controversy surrounding it, see John Richard Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton: Princeton, 2007). Throughout 2006, there was a searching public debate in Britain on the subject of headscarves and veils. The debate became heated following the declarations of Jack Straw, a senior Labor member of parliament, who said that he did not approve of women coming to meetings with him with their faces covered by a veil. For a review of the subject in the popular press, see, for example, Jon Gaunt, "Why These 'Leaders' Are a Pain in the Burkas," *The Sun*, October 17, 2006; Ulrika Jonsson, "Veil Row May Stifle Debate," *News of the World*, October 8, 2006. The subject was also the center of debate in Sweden, where the minister of integration and gender equality, Nyamko Sabuni, proposed a ban on girls under the age of fifteen wearing headscarves in school. Arguing for the ban, she said, "If they want to be here, they must make an effort to fit in with the society in which they are living." Sarah Lyall, "From a Minority in Sweden: Fit In," *International Herald Tribune*, January 13, 2007. The wearing of headscarves, especially in class, is also a controversial subject in Germany, and it is not permitted in some federal states that have responsibility for education. The negative reaction to Islamic dress also finds its way into the press and literature, including children's literature, where the covering of the head is presented as an expression of Muslim backwardness and insularity. The German book *Headscarf*, for example, tells the story of a young girl of Turkish extraction who enjoyed a liberal education when she lived with her grandmother in Turkey but was required to wear a headscarf and obey the oppressive Muslim way of life when she moved to Germany to live with her father, her stepmother, and her fanatical brothers. See Patricia Mennen, *Headscarf* (Germany: Ravensburger Buchverlag, 2006) [German].

7. "Dutch Government Backs Burqa Ban," *BBC*, November 17, 2006, http:news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6159046.stm.

8. According to the racist hierarchy of the Nazi ideology, the "Gypsy problem" was not comparable with the "Jewish problem," because the threat posed by the Gypsies to the German people was less. Moreover, the Nazis differentiated between different "Gypsy types." On this topic see, Michael Zimmermann, "Jews, Gypsies, and Soviet Prisoners of War: Comparing Nazi Persecutions," in Roni Stauber and Raphael Vago, eds., *The Roma: A Minority in Europe* (Budapest: Central European University, 2007), pp. 44-45.

9. A.B. Yehoshua, "An Attempt to Identify and Understand the Roots of Anti-Semitism," *Alpayim* 28 (2005), pp. 11-30 [Hebrew].

10. Yehoshua, "An Attempt," p. 24.

11. Yehoshua, "An Attempt," p. 24.

12. Yehoshua, "An Attempt," p. 27.

13. The concept of an "imagined nation" on which Yehoshua relies is identified with the book *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson, originally published in 1983. The term has been given exaggerated meanings, some of which distort its original intention. It should be stressed that Anderson used the expression to indicate not a false entity that does not exist, but a real community whose establishment is connected with the ability of its members to imagine themselves as belonging to one nation through common texts and images. The Jews imagined themselves in the modern age as belonging to one nation, even though they were scattered to all four corners of the globe. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: *Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1993).

14. See Abu al-Ala al-Maududi, *Islam and Jahiliyah* (Beirut: Mua'sasat al-risala, 1975), pp. 17, 35-46 [Arabic]; Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Damascus: Dar al-'Ilm, n.d.), pp. 3-6, 9-10, 21-22, 30-31 [Arabic]. The latter book was first published in 1964.

15. Among the most important of these was the Muslim World League (Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami), established in Saudi Arabia in 1962 as an umbrella organization for religious activities—that is, religious dissemination—throughout the world; and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, established in Rabat, Morocco in 1969 after a deranged Jew tried to set fire to the Al Aksa mosque. The organization set itself the task of promoting cooperation between Islamic countries, fifty-five of which joined it.

16. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "Duties of Muslims Living in the West," Islamonline.net, May 27, 2007.

17. Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, *Challenges of the Immigrant Between Rootedness and Modernity* (Beirut: Dar al-Malak, 2000), p. 82 [Arabic].

18. Fadlallah, *The Challenges of the Immigrant*, p. 106.

19. Muhammad al-Ghazali, *The Future of Islam Outside Its Lands: How Shall We Think of It?* (Amman: Orient Public Relations, Publishing, and Translation, 1984), p. 154 [Arabic].

20. Hamdi Hassan, "The Role of Information Activities in Supporting the Image of Islam and Muslims in Europe," in *The Muslims in Europe*, a collection of lectures delivered at a conference held in Vienna on May 12-14, 2000, under the auspices of the president of the Austrian Republic (Cairo: Dar al-Bayan, 2002, first edition), p. 312 [Arabic].

21. Muhammad al-Hanni, "The Role of Islamic Cultural Institutions in Europe in Strengthening the Muslim Individual," in *The Identity of Muslims and Their Culture in Europe,* a collection of lectures delivered at a conference held in Chateau Chinon in France on May 7-9, 1993 (Rabat: Manshurat al-Munathama al-Islamiya Lil-Tarbiya wal-'Ulum wal-Thakafa, 1995), p. 135 [Arabic].

22. Al-Qaradawi, "Duties of Muslims."

23. *Decisions and Religious Edicts of the European Council for Fatwa and Research* (Cairo: Dar al-Tawzi'ah wal-Nashr al-Islamiya, 2002), p. 95 [Arabic].

24. Fadlallah, *Challenges of the Immigrant*, p. 334.

25. See, for example, Ja'afar Sheikh Idris, "Da'awa… and Advanced Communication Technologies," in *Al Bayan* 146 (February 2000), www.jaafaridris.com/Arabic/aarticles/dawa.htm.

26. The portal Islamonline.net operates from Egypt and is managed in Qatar. Around one hundred people work for it, and it defines its goal as "the creation of a unique and global Islamic website." The portal is a combination of news reports from an Islamic angle and religious instruction and *fatwas* in all areas of life. It claims to have a million visitors a day. The most popular of the Muslim portals according to the rating company Alexa.com is the strict Wahhabi Islamway.com, which offers a choice of sermons as well as guidance for new Muslims and instructions on how to bring non-Muslims into Islam. At any given moment, the portal, operating out of Saudi Arabia, displays the number of visitors to it from every country on earth as evidence of its global network and the unity of all Muslims. The satellite television network Iqra, which broadcasts round-the-clock programs of sermons, ethics, and Koran readings, is the best-liked of the satellite networks that devote themselves to religious broadcasts. The network was set up in 1998 by the Saudi media tycoon Salah Kamal as part of the ART Arab television network and in response to accusations that Arab satellite television dealt more with entertainment than with education in religious values. After being perceived initially as too dry and scientific, it began to include more popular sermons in its broadcasts and gained a loyal audience.

27. This may provide a partial explanation for the attraction to classic anti-Semitic claims among those Muslim clerics and preachers most faithful to the global perception of the Islamic nation. What makes concepts like "world Judaism" and books like *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* so central to the contemporary world of Islam? Unquestionably, hatred of Israel has something to do with it, but no less than that, in Muslim discussion of "world Judaism" there is a certain amount of enchantment. The Jewish political-religious nation is perceived as a nation endeavoring to act globally, and is portrayed in Muslim eyes as a model to be imitated. Al-Qaradawi, for example, remarks in his *fatwa* on the Muslim duty to work for the Islamic nation in Europe, "Nowadays, we see the Jews, from the four corners of the world, championing and backing Israel, and we call on all Muslims in all parts of the world, saying that it is high time to champion the cause of their Muslim *Ummah*." See al-Qaradawi, "Duties of Muslims."

28. For the data, see Peter Carstens, "Islam in Deutschland," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitug*, May 2, 2007 [German].

29. For example, Tariq Ramadan, an Islamic scholar who is one of the most distinguished spokesmen for European Islam (and enjoys special status, among other reasons, because of his family connections—his grandfather was Hassan al-Bana, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood), proposed that the duty of *da'awa* imposed on every Muslim immigrant should be a passive one, expressed by the proper manner in which he behaves towards others. See Tariq Ramadan, "Europeanization of Islam or Islamization of Europe?" in Shireen T. Hunter, ed., *Islam, Europe's Second Religion* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002), p. 213. Similar ideas are put forward by Amr Khaled, the Egyptian television preacher currently living in Birmingham, England, and one of the most popular personalities in the Muslim world. He calls upon Muslim immigrants to take an active part in the life of the local community, to help others irrespective of their religious affiliations, and to be useful to the Nation of Islam by improving its image in Europe rather than attempting the conversion of Christians. The speech he gave in Germany on "Integration in Islam," originally in Arabic, was translated into English and German, and was extremely well received by Muslim immigrants in Germany. For the German version, see: Amr Khaled, *Integration of Islam: On the Roles of Muslims in Europe* (Nueremberg: Andalusia Verlag, 2005) [German].