Chapter 1

Introduction: Islamic Controversies in the Making of European Public Spheres

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In this volume, we study some of the controversies surrounding visible practices of Islam that take place in different public spheres across Europe. We focus on controversies that break out over the issues raised by Muslims who practice their religion and want to be recognized publicly for their religious difference. The public nature of these controversies implies and concerns social actors from all walks of life, rather than being limited only to those who are pious Muslims. Around a particular theme of converse, diverse actors with different voices and positions in relation to Islam emerge, including secular Muslims as well as non-Muslims, but also those who define themselves critically as “ex-Muslims” or as anti-Islam, producing new alignments and oppositions. In this sense, the controversies surrounding Islam change the established frameworks of European publics. We investigate the diverse manifestations of Islamic difference in the current context with a shared problematic around the notion of the public sphere. On the one hand, there is the need to describe the particularity of the historical moment and, on the other, to establish a conceptual framework, with both being intimately connected. We seek to explore the modes of encountering, confronting and connecting that are staged in public. New conceptual tools are required to study Islam in this particular point in time in which the sociological paradigm of immigration falls short of grasping the new dynamics of integration.

All the chapters in this volume give priority to the post-migration period from the end of the 1980s to the present day. We can broadly distinguish three stages to account for social and cultural changes in the phenomenon of immigration (Leveau 1998; Cesari 2004). The first stage is marked by the figure of the immigrant, the solitary male worker, with a status of foreigner, temporary guest-worker, gastarbeiter. The second stage is characterized by the settlement of the immigrant worker with his family. The figure of the “Arab boy” in France, for instance, is an outcome of this stage, representing the second-generation youth, who have no intention to return to their country of origin, yet who have not yet acquired the social credentials for integration into the host country. The Arab boy is perceived as a potential trouble-maker, a deviant, with problems of education and unemployment (Guénif-Souilamas and Macé 2006). Whereas in the first stage, social problems inherent in the living conditions and the legal status of workers are addressed, in the second stage, language learning and children’s education
become the priority for the politics of integration. Only in the third stage does the issue of religion become predominant. The new figure of the “veiled Muslim girl” at schools illustrates this new turn (Göle 2005). The figure of the immigrant thus changes from the working-class male and the unemployed youth to young schoolgirls. Islam becomes an issue at this stage of post-immigration that links together categories of gender and religion. We situate our inquiry in this third stage at a moment where the “visibility” of Islam becomes of central importance as Muslims manifest their religious difference publicly.

To broach this third stage, I propose highlighting the notion of the public sphere and the different modes of visibility of Islam so as to define the field and the problem that will be the subject of our investigation. The notion of the public sphere enables us to study the dynamics of encounters and confrontation, leading us to question the interface between private and public, personal and intercultural. How do Muslim actors reinterpret their religious piety in secular European contexts? Who are the Muslim figures with access to public spheres? What are the symbols and practices that become visible, ostentatious, even disturbing in the eyes of the majority? How is this difference perceived publicly and what controversies does the visibility of Islam in the European public space trigger? The question of the arrival of “new actors” is not limited to their expression in public life; it also poses the question of their representation in the political system. Although the relationship between the public sphere and the political realm warrants further exploration, especially as the participation of Muslim citizens in political life is in progress, this volume is dedicated specifically to the study of Islam in the public domain.

How are we to define the public sphere through the prism of Islamic difference? We cannot reduce Islam’s dominant place in public debates to a sheer consequence of the media coverage given to it – it does not arise simply from media distortion or focalization. Certainly, the media participates in shaping the public agenda with regard to Islam – it can reinforce stereotypes and seek to communicate the sensational, building up “the Muslim problem” and sowing “social panic” (Dayan 2003; Macé 2007, 2008). Unquestionably, Muslims today are in the media spotlight, yet we cannot explain the phenomenon of the appearance of Muslims in the public spheres solely as a result of media coverage. This would be to deny any capacity to express agency or public manifestation on the part of Muslims. The public sphere cannot be confused with the media space. The latter amplifies the way in which the public views a phenomenon, while the public sphere reflects the interplay between the public and personal, intimate spaces. The visibility of Muslims in public spheres concerns both self-presentation and the perception of the other. Public spheres are the places of this articulation – of face-to-face meetings, encounters and confrontations. There is never a perfect connection between the subjective meaning that actors ascribe to their own practices and the perception of it by others; misunderstanding is intrinsic to this communication. Some of the meaning is always lost in crossing from the subjective to the public – a loss that is inherent to this kind of translation.
The notion of visibility pinpoints a far more complex reality than typical media stereotyping is capable of capturing and conveying.

The public sphere also points to the private space, as it is where the actor crosses – even sometimes, as with Muslims, transgresses – the boundaries between public and private, between inside and outside. However, the departure of the individual from the private to the public sphere is always connected to the way in which we organize the intimate and the private; what we hide, and the parts of the body that we allow to be seen, but also the meanings we give to emotions, words and taboo subjects. Since the Renaissance, we find in Europe a *jeu d’etiquettes*, a play of propriety, which distinguishes between honorable and dishonorable body parts and calls to mind the need to conceal emotions, not to let certain parts of the face appear in a natural fashion, such as the mouth, through the use of coded signs, masks and make-up.1 The Western feminist movement proposes alternative labels and advocates liberty through a different set of rules for the body: stop wearing corsets, loosen one’s hair, wear men’s pants and so on. The body becomes the platform on which women’s identity politics knocks down former markers of decency and brings down sexual taboos, thereby enabling women to break free from the private domain.

The emergence of Muslim actors in Europe signifies another reorganization of the boundaries between the private and public domains, inside and outside, sacred and secular. The body parts to be concealed change, Islamic norms on modesty are raised, and sexuality remains the central marker of the boundaries between private and public, as well as between religious and secular. The case of young generations of Muslims participating in diverse youth associations in France and in Italy illustrates the centrality of the issues of Islamic gender regimes and romantic love for the construction of the pious self. The search for reconciling their commitment to Islamic norms and the desire to participate in mixed gender contexts compel these young Muslims to question both Islamic and liberal grammar of sexual encounters (Maddanu, Chapter 16, this volume).

### Beyond the Paradigm of Identity

We can identify the moment at which we intervene in the field of study of Islam in Europe by three axes of simultaneous developments: the formation of new subjectivities and forms of Muslim piety; the emergence of the visibility of Islamic difference in European public spheres; and discord over the norms of communal life. For each of these axes, I have elaborated the conceptual tools for analyzing and understanding these developments based upon my research project on “the role of

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1. In the hearings of the National Assembly on the burqa, Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen (2009), Professor of the History of Modern Art at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, noted that while Western civilization believes in revealing the face, as the vector of the soul, heart and personality, in reality it always develops *jeux d’étiquettes* that veil it in other ways.
Islam in the making of the European public sphere.” This volume is an outcome of two international conferences, which were conceptualized as an extension of my research project to different case studies and disciplinary approaches.

With regard to the formation of new religious subjectivities, it is important to go beyond the paradigm of identity which served as a fecund heuristic category for studying new social movements in the 1970s but which falls short in the task of studying contemporary public expressions of Islam in Europe. By focusing on the public and private domains, we observe a series of renegotiations between the exigencies of Islamic ethics and secular life in the construction of subjectivities and articulations between different modes of visibility concerning modesty and piety. Rather than having a fixed and solid identity experienced in a collective and political form, Muslims are in a state of continual pursuit of piety, which is not given but is acquired through constant self-training (Mahmood 2005). The realization of piety and the construction of a pious self requires a self-scrutiny and coded practices for disciplining the “nafs” (the soul and the body in Islamic thought). These meditative and disciplinary practices guide their conduct in both the personal and public domains. In other words, what we try to do is not to do away with the problematic of identity entirely, but to redefine it through its translation into the ethical behaviors and aesthetic forms of the religious mode of life. Living as a Muslim in a secular context means living in a state of constant reflexivity, in a perpetual coming-and-going between subjective piety, private life and day-to-day experiences. This pendular movement creates tensions, readjustments and renegotiations in various cultural, artistic and commercial domains.

It is the notion of “halal” that best crystallizes these tensions in the encounters and confrontation between Islamic ethics and secular life. Halal recasts the issue of knowing how to live up to the prescriptions of one’s religion and keep up one’s piety in a secular age. How can one maintain one’s piety, discipline one’s “nafs” and control one’s urges and desires? How can one conform to Islamic ethics, when they are tested daily by liberal mores and secular laws? In the current European context, the notion of halal is revitalized through the particularity of Muslims’ experiences. We witness the Europeanization of halal that no longer concerns only the consumption of meat. The nuances between the terms halâl, the original Arab version, and halal, the more recent Europeanized version, reflect contrasted meanings (Id Yassine, Chapter 14, this volume). The new European version of halal is understood as permission, a lawful extension into new areas of life and pleasure that Muslims seek to enjoy. Halal certification makes these areas compatible with Islamic prescriptions. This new Islamic certification under the label of halal enables European Muslims to penetrate and to appropriate secular realms of life and pleasure. It even becomes a tool for satisfying mimetic consumerist desires for European tastes and products, like champagne, foie gras and sausages. Indeed, halal certification is at the disposal of Muslims who want to enter into areas of life hitherto “off limits,” thereby creating new commercial opportunities and markets.

We have a tendency to think of the public sphere as a pre-established entity, an abstract place for argumentation. However, there is also a physical, spatial
dimension to this notion. Public space puts the emphasis on the physicality of the public sphere. The Islamic presence bring into focus spaces such as beaches, swimming pools, public gardens, art galleries and markets, as they become sites in which competing norms are disputed. We observe the entry of Muslims into unexpected domains of life that they were not hitherto permitted to enter. In addition to the visibility of the veil in schools, burqinis (the Islamic swimming suit, the term coined using a combination of “burka” and “bikini”) in swimming pools and mosques in cities, Islam in public spaces also extends into areas of art, commerce and finance. Muslims in Europe today penetrate these distinct areas of life with a halal certification that allows them to observe their religious prescriptions. Such examples illustrate how Muslims take part in European life and reinterpret the norms and practices of their own religion through their interactions with European norms and practices.

In the same vein, “Halal art” seeks to promote a certain Islamic ethics of communication and presentation of the self on the theatrical stage (Jouili, Chapter 11, this volume). In this alternative art form, actors and spectators seek to create public modes of appearance and interaction, all the while remaining within the circle of licit, halal authorization. In their representations and repetitions, the actors of halal art seek an alternative “distribution of the sensible” that conforms to the Muslim codes of modesty. The halal circle defines the norms of what is forbidden. However, these prohibitions are constantly rethought and rearticulated in a reflexive manner in every enactment, dramatization and theatrical experience of Muslims. The theater thus becomes the place for the inventive reformulation of Islamic mores.

The access of Muslims to new areas of life through halal certification has triggered tensions throughout European societies. This also creates intra-community tensions among Muslims, who are forced to reflect on their urge to enter European modes of life and simultaneously remain in obedience to Islamic prescriptions. On the one hand, there is the self-questioning by Muslims of their entry into these areas of life whilst bringing the tenets of Islamic ethics along with them. On the other hand, there is also the perception of this difference by others – the public at large. Studying public spheres and spaces enables us to bring together the two facets of the subjective religiosity of Muslims and its public perception, with both sides challenging each other and sometimes colliding into one another. We thus witness the appearance of a particular form of Islam in Europe that triggers the Europeanization of public debates blurring national distinctions in the co-opting of Muslims’ claims for being recognized as equal citizens while keeping their religious distinctions. The debates over the introduction of Sharia councils in England

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2 According to Jacques Rancière (2004), the notion of the “distribution of the sensible” signifies the intersection of aesthetic practices and politics. What is sensed and perceived is determined and regulated by the established social order. Social groups and artistic forms that do not have the same share of the “distribution of the sensible” can potentially question the established order and change it.
and in France are cases in point that show how two very distinct conceptions of law become more similar in their modes of accommodating Islamic normativity (Bras, Chapter 12, this volume). The differences between legal traditions seem to weaken and converge together as they confront the challenge of regulating Islamic normativity. New dynamics of Europeanization are in progress with regard to responses to the issues raised by Islam.

**From the Notion of Conflict to the Notion of Controversy**

Studying controversies enables us to grasp the two sides of the same coin: confrontation and interaction. Controversies attest to the fact that the European publics are not indifferent to the appearance of Islamic difference. I favor here an agonistic approach of the public sphere that is open to conflict and not merely determined by consensus-making. The public sphere is not solely a receptacle to which newcomers must themselves conform in order to gain access; it also provides a democratic site where newcomers can argue over their places and their norms. The appearance of *différend* is characteristic of a democratic public sphere and is not symptomatic of its dysfunction. Indeed, an agonistic notion of the public space allows us to approach it as a site to which actors try to gain access in order to manifest their difference and dispute the majority’s norms for collective life. From this perspective, the notion of controversy becomes a privileged methodological tool for studying the discord that simultaneously confronts and binds the different actors together.

What is the *dissensus* that divides European citizens over the question of Islam today? What is the nature of this disagreement? What are the sociological or philosophical languages that can help us render an account of this divide? The notion of conflict is often used in sociological approaches that privilege the study of social and economic inequalities, closely tied to an analysis of class struggle in industrial societies. It has gained ground through Marxist thought and has been taken up again in the literature of new social movements that contest the established order. Instead of the notion of conflict, I think it is more useful to apply the notion of controversy. The notion of conflict refers to modes of collective, group action, while controversies include personal, individual voices and public

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3 The notion of *différend*, developed by Lyotard (1993), is a conflict that cannot be settled due to the absence of a ruling judgment applicable to both arguments under consideration. When two expressions “in a heterogeneous system are not translatable the one to the other, there is a *différend* between these expressions (or between the categories to which they belong), because they are heterogeneous” (1993: 10). *Différend* applies not only to verbal expressions but also to silences that function as negations, to *phrase-affects* (1993: 29). I use this notion, going beyond the discursive domain, to indicate all the practices, forms and norms that seem to be untranslatable to European imaginaries and languages at this precise moment in time and which thus provoke controversies.
figures that do not share common interests and opinions. Studying controversies allows us to see the sudden emergence of new actors in unexpected places, in contrast to the study of conflicts, which observes actors in already-existing spaces: the factory, the family and so on. In this volume, the focus is on the disruptive effects of Islamic differences in unprecedented spaces. Unlike conflicts between two well-defined parties (boss–worker, man–woman), controversies potentially concern all citizens, the public at large.

Controversies break away from common sense, from what is consensual in the public space. The public space brings together actors who arrive at consensus, but it also carries the promise of the possible appearance of the différend and dissensus (Lefort 1994). It is this agonistic aspect of the public space, which is receptive to the staging of disagreements and discord, that informs us about the nature of the emergence of Islamic difference in Europe. By emphasizing the integral agonistic aspect of the public sphere, we seek to establish an understanding of the modalities of the transformations in Europe’s public cultures. A consensual approach to the public sphere risks placing the emphasis on legislation, on shared norms, before allowing time and space for exploration, for action and interaction between actors. In this volume, we focus on studying the interconnections and intersubjectivities in the process of confrontation and controversies.

The arrival of Muslims with their religious differences in European public life is a challenge for democratic pluralism. The Islamic difference is not easily framed within the established perspective of cultural pluralism, religious freedom or personal rights discourse. Neither multiculturalism nor liberalism provides an answer as to how Islamic difference should be accommodated. It is perceived and reacted to as an “aberration” to the extent that it breaks away from the prevalent consensual norms. If we consider the consensus to be “all generally accepted opinions at a given time in a given environment, contrary views appear as individual aberrations” to be corrected (Remaud, Chapter 2, this volume). Controversies compel us to go beyond the consensus in recognizing individual agonistic opinions, which are not necessarily aberrations in need of correction.

Islamic difference is not expressed merely in a discursive register; it is also staged in performative and visual manners, creating pictorial “aberrations,” so to speak. Controversies about Islam have a visual dimension in that the staging of the body and of religious symbols that are perceived as nonconformist with the secular norms and understandings of Europe. In this sense, the use of the notion of controversy is most fecund in its contribution to an understanding of the nature of Islam’s disruptive effects, which produce a whole range of emotions. Beyond the rational discourse of argumentation, there is a series of irrational reactions and affects that are mobilized around these controversies, which include feelings of insecurity, invasion, fear, phobia, injury, humiliation, resentment and anger. For instance, face-veiling as a religious bodily practice and strong marker of gender segregation in public transgresses embodied conventions about bodily orders and freedoms, and thus provokes strong reactions which often elicit an emotional response ranging from fear through open disgust to fascination (Amir-Moazami,
Controversies about Islam therefore destabilize the functioning of the reason-based publicness, which is defined by secular boundaries. The possibility of a faith-based publicness and a public sphere ruled by religious norms trigger reactions of rejection.

The public sphere is not a disembodied and neutral space: it is shaped by actors and their range of actions and emotions. There is a materiality to public spheres that refers to very specific physical spaces: streets, gardens, passages, cafes and so on. Public spaces in which people gather together and urbanity – the architecture and organization of cities – are tightly linked. But apart from the spatial dimension, the public sphere also conveys an abstract meaning and entity, functioning as an ideal democratic space that is broader than the political space, bringing together citizens in a community of debate. Jürgen Habermas (1991), in his pioneering work, brought to light these two aspects of public sphere: the abstract and the concrete. Based on the study of literary cafes as concrete places where literate classes debate societal issues, he demonstrates the emergence of a public sphere that is linked in a wider sense to the democratic ideal. However, in spite of this promise of an “open space,” accessible to all citizens, in reality, the public sphere has lines of inclusion and exclusion, with imposed norms, which can be altered by the terms of the debate (Calhoun 1993). In order to clarify these two strata, which are intrinsic to the notion, we can distinguish between the public sphere and the public space. Controversies take place in physical places, like the school, the mosque, the theater and the market. These places become sites visible to the public gaze insofar as Muslim actors dispute their boundaries and norms. It is this disruptive effect of religious difference that confers a public character on these places. Islam becomes controversial and part of a more general democratic debate occurring at the level of the public sphere. The latter is not limited to the national territories; the Islamic controversies circulate across the national frontiers of European public spheres. The national boundaries and the national language community that underpins the public sphere are transcended. Islamic controversies acquire a European feature, fostering a transversal public sphere. Actors, themes and symbols all circulate in different national contexts and are debated across European publics.

Controversies, while being sources of division, also place different actors in closer proximity to each other. In the debates, we see figures that are foreign to each other interacting over controversies, creating unprecedented public gatherings. It is in this sense that controversies contribute to creating new publics. Debates call forth new public spokespersons, produce cleavages, but also generate new alignments. Not only are the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of the public sphere being redefined; its complete reorganization is also in progress. We are seeing new female figures of Muslim immigration emerge and secular Muslim voices are beginning to be heard. Sometimes surprising pairings form in the production of films or publications of books in criticism of Islam or Muslim immigrants. We can cite the film Submission (written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and produced/directed by Theo Van Gogh, 2004), which brings together
the controversial figure of the Dutch intellectual and the legendary symbol of the female “immigrant,” who became a congresswoman, a feminist and a world-renowned atheist activist. In a similar vein, in Germany, the publication of the book *Germany is Abolishing Itself* created an alliance between its author, Thilo Sarrazin, a respected financial leader and member of the SPD party, and Necla Kelek, a feminist and secular spokeswoman of Turkish origin. The different life stories of “natives” and “immigrants”; representatives of their national culture and those seeking to establish new roots; men and women; Muslims and atheists all intersect, finding themselves connected in a “snapshot” around a controversy, sharing in the same story, sometimes even in the same tragedy (as in the case of the assassination of Theo Van Gogh after the release of the above-mentioned film in 2004). These encounters, alliances and confrontations, debates and acts of violence form a new European history. Controversies create collages and assemble diverse actors, cultures and spaces.

Studying public controversies enables us to anchor our study in a specific place but also in the present time. However, the notion of contemporary is problematic insofar as this contemporaneity is relative to power relations – power relations between traditional and modern, religious and secular, Muslim and “native.” The master narrative of modernity consists in creating a sense of the contemporary through a specific cultural orientation, stemming from Western history. The anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983) has revealed the hierarchical use of time in the narrative of modernity, noting how it accords contemporaneity to some and not others. There are different time constructions competing with each other. Controversies intensify this link to chronopolitics, disputing the right to contemporaneity.

Controversies take place in the present, but sometimes mobilize repressed memories, thereby triggering the re-emergence of ancient controversies. The Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad refer to a contemporary controversy, but we also know that the image of the Prophet and its description has been a source of tension between Islamic and Western cultures since the Middle Ages (Tolan, Chapter 9, this volume). We need historical as well as theological perspectives in order to better understand the layered reality of controversies over the representation of Muhammad. The common and largely shared assumption about Islam being inherently hostile to images is questioned by Naef in Chapter 8 of this volume. Focusing on Islamic theological debates, she argues that rather than being rooted in a presumably unchanging Islamic essence, the figural representation becomes an issue with the advent of the print media, and the recent controversies over the “clash of images” are the result of new practices and readings introduced by modernity.

We also observe the kinds of controversies that are contagious and recurrent from one public sphere to the other, each time reviving the original “founding” controversy. For instance, although the Danish cartoons affair is now outdated, it still resonates as a reference point through other recent controversies over the images of the Prophet Muhammad. It is therefore important to revisit the cartoons
controversy, which has generally been considered merely as an issue of free speech and regarded as a legal matter. In Chapter 10 of this volume, Laegaard focuses on the non-legal terms of this controversy and goes beyond the framing of the dispute in terms of freedom of expression and blasphemy. By putting the notion of “civility” at the center of his analysis, he questions the potential and the weaknesses of the existing public spheres.

The headscarf affairs and then the wearing of the full veil, the burqa, are controversies taking place on European soil. But they also refer to a history of Muslim secularization in Muslim countries, which are marked by the abandonment of the veil. In this context, we speak of its resurgence since the 1980s for some Muslim women in the “return of the veil” or “re-veiling” movements, which represents a break from the Islam of the 1920s in Muslim majority countries. The linguistic repertoire concerning this controversy is also influenced by the history of Christianity and Western feminism. We cannot understand the debates over the veil without taking a retrospective look at the beginnings of feminism and the struggle of Western women against religion and against the Church’s hold over their lives and bodies. If in France the issue of veiling is central, in Scandinavia the big question triggering controversies over the Muslim presence is about homosexuality. We note how the counterculture of the 1960s determines the ways in which European countries react to Islam’s relations to women’s issues.

The notion of controversy incites us to integrate different rhetoric, grounded upon different historical experiences. Although controversies first appear to be current events in connection with the media – even sometimes disappearing, as ephemeral debates – they give us the keys to understanding a collective life in gestation. Contrary to studies that see controversies only through the magnifying glass of the media, here we seek to give them an anchoring and thickness that reflects the texture of collective life. Collective life is staged in the current events of controversies. Through their disruptive effects on the social order, controversies provoke debates, produce new actors and repertoires of action, and engender simultaneously synchronic and diachronic assemblages.

The emergence of the visibility of Islam and the manifestation of Muslim actors in European public life are often studied as a symptom of the failure of immigrants to integrate or as the absence of reforms in Islam. The emergence of Muslim actors and the manifestation of religious difference in the European public spheres are certainly disruptive signs for the established secular order, but are not necessarily reducible to pathological symptoms that can be linked to a religion or a phenomenon of immigration. On the contrary, in this work, these manifestations are studied as a mode of public agency and as an act of citizenship on the part of the actors. According to Hannah Arendt (1981), it is in staging their difference in public that actors perform a gesture of citizenry. It is through the courage to manifest their presence and difference in public that actors as “ordinary heroes” become citizens. In Arendt’s approach, citizenry does not precede recognition; on the contrary, it is through manifesting our difference that we become citizens. The presence of Muslims in the public space must be understood as a mode of public
agency. However, I am not attempting to argue that this agency arises from an Islamic political movement in the sense of a collective and organized action with a well-defined ideology; rather, I introduce a differentiation between the public and the political modes of agency. This mode of public action links the personal to the public and creates a disruptive effect in staging difference, bringing different topics into the public and changing social imaginaries.

Dissimilar Yet Peers

At a theoretical level, controversy is believed to unfold among peers, among those who are recognized for their scientific and literary authority and are thus able to formulate and discuss their views. At a sociological level, what is the status of peers in the controversies over Islam in Europe? In these debates, are Muslims recognized as peers, as legitimate interlocutors? Must “peers” be “similar”? It is this tension between peers and those dissimilar to them that creates new dynamics of confrontation in European democracy. In manifesting their presence and their difference in public spaces, Muslims become peers of European citizens, but they become peers by expressing their dissimilarity. Their difference is not a pre-established category, but is created in their public manifestation. Difference does not precede their action, but takes shape in their public emergence.

The public space is a place of encounter for a multiplicity of actors and views. It is the place for actors to stage the choreography of social life, which is in a constant dispute for the orientation and production of norms. Imagining the public space as neutral, ruled by predefined and fixed norms, signifies the negation of the actor’s ability to improvise and the dismissal of the dimension of drama associated with renewal, new stories, new forms of action and new actors. The Islamic presence reminds us through different controversies that the public space is not neutral, but rather is based on the tacit norms of the majority. We see dissensus appear with each controversy. The public space maintains an important relationship to the political field. It is in the public space that the improbable in politics can emerge through discussions of taboo issues, consensual or simply taken-for-granted matters that are being raised in the public consciousness, usually through dissident voices, anachronistic practices and active minorities. In its democratic ideal, the public sphere enables the contradiction of hegemonic narratives, creating the différend through which we become aware of taboo, ideologized and unthought-of issues. However, this opening up of the public space, this invitation to debate is not without its limits. On the contrary, the public space has boundaries; there are those who are invited and those who are excluded. Some subjects are heard, while others are silenced. The image of Speakers’ Corner in Hyde Park, where any passing person or resident of the city is allowed to speak, is too idyllic to be real.

Public spheres bear the stamp of state power, of its authorities and laws, with states seeking to control and regulate public spaces by putting in place measures of power to control the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Government methods
seek to create citizens, in this case Muslim citizens who will conform to the host society. We see Muslim public figures appear, preferably secular Muslims or otherwise religious representative bodies, being invited to occupy the public space. In Germany, the Islamic Conference marks a turning point in the position of the state towards Muslims and Islam. In 2006, Wolfgang Schäuble, then Minister of the Interior, organized the first round table on Islam that sought to establish a dialogue between the state and the Muslim community in Germany. It brought together state representatives of the Länder and municipalities as well as Muslim associations and personalities (Amir-Moazami 2011). We see in this initiative, in the solicitation of potential Muslim spokespeople, the emergence of new voices and the creation of a new category as “secular Muslims” in public debates (Abay 2012). In France, we can cite the example of the Stasi Commission in the aftermath of the first headscarf affair in 1989. It was created in response to the demand for a reliable authority and was made up of intellectuals, historians and civil society actors who could give their “expert opinion” on the question of laïcité, which was supposedly under threat from Islam. We see through these examples how public debate is initiated and organized by political power; how the selection of auditioned players operates; and how experts weigh in on the debates, providing an explanation and scientific legitimacy for legislation.

Muslim actors constitute themselves in the manifestation of their difference and challenge the established order, but they do not entirely escape being shaped and filtered by modes of governance and experts in power. We observe different layers of power at work, differentiated public circles with strategies for the visibility and invisibility of actors. The process of elaboration and negotiation of norms does not operate in a space of total liberty, but is crisscrossed by an arsenal of power relations, including the field of knowledge. Through controversies, new, ambivalent figures appear, namely secular Muslims, intellectuals, theologians and so on. We also observe the emergence of a new vocabulary containing Arabic terms such as hijab, fitna, Sharia, fatwa, etc. A differentiation between secular and observant Muslims emerges through these controversies. Therefore, the controversies are not simply vectors of opinions, but actually create a public domain through the arrival of new figures, new lexicons and new forms of action. At the level of actors, we see both autonomy and creativity, but also solicitation. It is in the process of interaction with the state power and larger society that actors of Islam are formed. It is thus through the interplay of social recognition and power relations that the visibility (and invisibility) of the Muslim actors finds its place in the public space.

4 During the societal debates on the wearing of the headscarf in public schools in 2003, a parliamentary commission was formed on July 3, 2003. The “Stasi Commission,” named after the commission chair and then Minister of Education, Bernard Stasi, was set up to examine the application of the principle of secularism in France. Based on the Commission’s report, the government issued a law on March 15, 2004 banning the Islamic headscarf, along with other religious signs, from public schools.
The Judeo-Christian Roots of European Identity

How can we define the eligibility of Muslim actors for fully-fledged citizenship? Under what conditions do the Muslims become the peers of their fellow citizens? Considering these questions in tandem with the age-old "Jewish Problem" can give us the keys to understanding the issue of religious difference in relation to European history. With the Enlightenment, it is in the name of the Universalist European modernity that the Jews progressively confined their religious identity to the private sphere and consequently made their Jewishness invisible (Arendt 1944; see also Raz-Krakotzin 2001). In the case of Arab Jews, the strategies of invisibility implicated a break from the Oriental origins to have access to Europeanness. And the definition of Europeanness implied a process of construction of the Jew as the internal and theological enemy on the one hand and the Arab as the external and political enemy on the other (Anidjar 2003). In a similar way, we note the power of this Universalist narrative of modernity to perpetuate and require autochthonous Muslims of Europe, namely the Bosniaks, to break with their "Oriental", namely Ottoman and Muslim roots (Velioglu, Chapter 19, this volume) in order to be recognized as Europeans.

Controversies surrounding Islamic visibility in the public spheres led to a need to redefine the Europeanness and triggered a series of reactions that can be explained as the fear of the loss of Europe’s particularity or being invaded by an emerging foreign religion. Especially controversies over mosque constructions reveal this anxiety. As Avcioglu (Chapter 5, this volume) argues, unlike other religious buildings that are seen as inherently or "naturally" European, the mosque is still read by those who oppose it as a marker of another, alien set of cultures and nationalities. And what lies behind this resistance to accept the mosque-form is the generic fear of seeing the European city, which is conceptualized and experienced as the opposite of the Oriental city, dissipate. In a similar vein, Allievi (Chapter 6, this volume) demonstrates how conflicts over the construction of mosques are connected to the symbolic appropriation of territory and its symbolic imprinting. For him, Islam is a transitional object which represents and signifies the pluralization of society. Very few of those opposing the presence of mosques or prayer halls would claim to want to prevent anyone from praying; rather, the issue is connected to the feeling of the loss of homogeneity or the hegemony of Judeo-Christian traditions. Whether or not there should be a reference to Judeo-Christian values in the European Constitution was the subject of intense debate among the Member States of the EU before it was refuted by the leadership of France. These examples enable us to depict the changing self-presentation of Europeans in their encounters with different facets of Islam. European self-presentation goes back to its civilizational roots, but the notion of civilization shifts from Universalistic tones towards European distinctiveness and exceptionalism. The growing visibility of Islamic difference and the controversies it prompts lay bare the unspoken tacit equation between Europe and its Christian heritage. The former Pope Benedict XVI, in his lecture in 2006 at the University of Regensburg, invited citizens to
embrace their Christian heritage. In this controversial speech, the Pope claimed that, unlike Islam, the context of the tradition of Christian faith has the virtue of using reason and cherishing rational values – a tradition that stems in his view from the harmony and the “inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry” (Benedict XVI 2006). A wide range of intellectuals from different fields also become more receptive of their religion and turned towards the defense of Christian values.

Furthermore, the debates on the Judeo-Christian roots of Europe bring forth Spain’s Islamic past. The image of the Moorish Empire is considered either the proof that Islam is an inherently violent religion that invaded Spain in the eighth century or as a legacy of Convivencia, the practice of mutual tolerance and respect that characterized relations between the Muslims, Christians and Jews of al-Andalus. The debates on Europe’s Judeo-Christian identity can contribute to current scholarly conversations on religious pluralism within Western societies, and particularly to debates on the place of Muslim minorities within Europe (Hirschkind, Chapter 18, this volume). On the other hand, the heritage of Andalusia as the locus of interreligious harmonious cohabitation is subject to criticism and various questions: can the Muslims do it again? Did they in fact do it? Can they coexist in and with Europe as they did – and if they did – in the Middle Ages? Can they now, perhaps for the first time, be integrated (Anidjar, Chapter 17, this volume)?

Apart from encouraging the revisiting of Judaism as one of the cultural roots of Europe, controversies surrounding the visibility of the Islamic difference increasingly interrogate European Jews. Regarding the similar issues such as halal and kosher, Sharia and Beth Din courts, and more recently the controversy in Germany regarding circumcision, Jews are increasingly called forth to participate, often against their will, to the debates over religious rights and practices in secular contexts. The French controversy over the ritual slaughtering in particular created a stir amongst the Jewish community, forcing rabbis to defend their long-gained rights to kosher food (Bergeaud-Blackler, Chapter 15, this volume).

Concluding Remarks: A New Public Culture?

How can the case studies in this book lead us to a new way for rethinking difference and pluralism in Europe? In relating the controversies to the discussions about “Public Culture,” we aim to broaden our understanding of Islam and to provide a fresh look at the disturbances caused by the Islamic presence in Europe. Our objective is to go beyond the approaches brought forth by the sociology of immigration and integration, as well as by the normative discourses of multiculturalism, and observe at the ground level the emergence of a new social fabric in confrontation with Islam. There is an implicit intellectual engagement behind this project. I believe in the democratic potential of the public sphere as a site for mediating, confronting differences as well as exploring new pluralist
imaginaries. We need to address the issue of democracy from the prism of sociological processes and seek out the possibilities of turning confrontation into a process of co-penetrations. Since the post-1968 period, our sociological perspective has been shaped by the politics of identity and multiculturalism, and we currently face new challenges, both intellectually and politically. We need to decipher the nature of confrontation, the disruptive effect of Islam in secular modernity and the conditions under which the confrontation does not lead to exclusionary dynamics but to mutual borrowings and creative metamorphoses. What are the conditions for interaction and communication that can turn confrontation into a process of cultural interpenetration? How can the public sphere be a site for linking culture and politics, fostering cultural innovation and political pluralism?

However, we should also ask the question whether the public sphere still functions as the locus of democracy. The ideal public sphere is conceptualized as a foyer of democratic and dialogical space (Habermas 1991). In modern times, communication technologies accelerate the global, transnational dynamics of the public sphere, whereas the political sphere remains national. The acceleration of communication brings different cultures and people into closer contact, but this process does not lead in a peaceful and linear way to democracy. How can we revisit the relationship between democratic politics and the dialogic public sphere? The political field is constrained by the nation, while the public sphere stretches easily to other levels and to different publics. Facilitated by communication technologies, controversies relating to Islam and their visual representations circulate at uncontrollable speeds, spreading to national, European and even global levels. Public spheres are open to stereotypical representations, to provocation, to violence and visceral, sensory politics that attempt to break down appeals to reason. By appealing to personal sentiments and eliciting the visceral and the emotional, the public sphere can turn into a place plagued by prejudices. We should remember that European democracies have emerged by making a distinction between opinion and truth, by advocating the use of reason in public debate. The current political populism threatens this European tradition of the “enlightened public.” The public sphere is at risk of losing its role as the ideal expression of democracy and becoming a place of common sense, of the sacralization of public opinion and of the contagion of the sensational and scandalous.

Islamophobic movements find fertile ground in the promotion of the politics of fear. Anti-Islamic discourse is based on equating the public sphere with the nation. Such discourses tend to close off the public sphere. Through their multiple linguistic, cultural and religious belongings, the presence of Muslims defies the national boundaries of the public sphere. It is around the theme of Islamic visibility, in large part, that collective passions and public debates are mobilized today. The headscarf at school, the burqa in the street, the mosque in the city and the minarets in the landscape indicate the presence of Muslim actors in daily life, but also place the debate over the secular norms of common space on the public agenda. These questions put the public sphere to the test of democracy. The tendency towards a closed national public sphere, which has a level of appeal in some sections of
European societies that affirm their identity against Islam, threatens the freedom to debate and explore norms of collective life.

In this respect, can the notion of “cosmopolitan” help us to rethink politics beyond national boundaries? Can it be helpful to opening it toward a certain heterogeneity of belongings that surpasses national identities? At its core, the European project offers the possibility of politics beyond nation states. However, today we see a kind of exhaustion with the ideal of this union. The notion of “cosmopolitan” can give new life to the European project. But how can we transform the notion of cosmopolitan to the cosmopolitical, giving it political force (Balibar, Chapter 3, this volume)? We often reproach cosmopolitanism for being too neat, for lacking depth, for often carrying an element of nostalgia and for being the monopoly of the privileged classes. Consequently, the notion seems politically weak. We can decentralize our regard and examine the experience of Bosnia to see whether cosmopolitanism always corresponds to the secular and Christian world. In current debates, we see an equating of cosmopolitanism and secularism, and indeed even of global liberalism. And yet, from the viewpoint of the Ottoman Empire, it is the reverse: it was the process of national secularization that put an end to Ottoman cosmopolitanism. We must introduce into the debates on cosmopolitanism the heritage of the Eastern world and the figure of the Jew, the Armenian and the Greek, as well as the new figures of cosmopolitan Muslims. It remains to be seen whether we can escape the nationalist closing down of the public sphere by introducing the notion of “cosmopolitics.”

One thing is certain: we should reconsider the tenets of European secularism in the light of emerging religious pluralism that the visibility of Islamic difference crystallizes at this point in time. As Cesari (Chapter 4, this volume) argues, most of the controversies surrounding the presence of Muslims in European public spaces relate in fact to the opposition of private convictions versus public behaviors, a distinction which is the result of the Western secularization process. As the concept of good political order and social virtues was disconnected from Christian ethics and the world became divided between the immanent and the transcendent, a believer in the transcendent is expected to keep it to himself and not let belief influence the political or social practices in which he engages. Within this European secular framework, Muslims are seen either as non-compliant with the principle of secularism or as privileging collective rights over individual rights. In this regard, the debates over the introduction of some parts of Sharia law to the British legal system can provide the potential for understanding individual agency in the light of growing religious pluralism in Europe, as well as opening up the notion of justice to debate. Billaud (Chapter 13, this volume) gives an empirically grounded account of everyday interactions in various British Sharia councils and studies the ways in which Islamic agency asserts itself through ethical disciplining. Muslims making use of Sharia councils seek to cultivate an ethical self by actively engaging with the values, norms and codes of conduct they perceive as essential to the nurturing of their faith. They provide an alternative understanding of justice and struggle to define alternative conceptions of “the good.” The various dimensions of
Islamic legal practices point to the Muslims’ quest for keeping a balance between religiously licit acts while remaining within the boundaries imposed by the “law of the land,” the legal system of their host countries.

It is imperative to acknowledge that we are no longer living in one-language community societies with monocultural idioms. We need cultural translations, shifts between different language codes and moral norms, providing a new set of vocabulary and concepts to better grasp in-between practices and subjectivities. In putting the notion of the public sphere at the center of the analyses, I intend to go beyond the politics of identity and multiculturalism, and stress the process of encounter, interaction and confrontation among actors in search of shared practices and values. From this perspective, the definition of the public sphere needs to distance itself from the national community and open up to the multiplicity of perspectives. Arendt’s (1983) notion of the public sphere can be heuristically fruitful in terms of adopting an approach that privileges the multiplicity of views, horizontal ties between actors and the visibility of differences. A public sphere inclusive of cultural differences means complexity and the existence of diverse layers of meanings. We need to broaden our approach to agency and include different forms of visibility, signs and symbols, cultural and artistic performances, subversion and humor. As much as we need the public sphere for communicative democracy, we need alternative spaces, where, retreating from the mainstream hegemonic public spheres, we can turn confrontation of differences into cultural criticism, playful action and social creativity through reflexivity and humor.

References


