

JOCELYNE CESARI, “WHY THE WEST FEARS ISLAM- AN EXPLORATION OF MUSLIMS IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES” (NEW YORK: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2013)

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Abstract

Jocelyne Cesari's book, "Why The West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies," delves into the complex relationship between Islam and Western liberal democracies. Cesari, a professor at the University of Birmingham and a senior research fellow at Georgetown University's Berkley Center, explores how globalization, secularism, and immigration shape the experiences of Muslims in the West. Her work examines the roots of Islamophobia and the political and social challenges faced by Muslim minorities in secular democracies. By analyzing contemporary Islam and its intersection with Western values, Cesari provides a nuanced understanding of the fears and misconceptions surrounding Islam in liberal societies. Her research offers valuable insights into religious pluralism and the integration of Muslim communities, making it a crucial reference for scholars and policymakers interested in Islam and democracy.

Keywords: Jocelyne Cesari's "Why The West Fears Islam" explores the intersection of Islam and liberal democracies, addressing Islamophobia, secularism, and the integration of Muslim minorities.

Author's Introduction



Jocelyne Cesari is professor of religion and politics at the University of Birmingham U.K, senior research fellow at George Town University's Berkley center on religion, peace and world affairs. She teaches on contemporary Islam at the Harvard Divinity School and directs the Harvard interfaculty program “Islam in the West” hosted at the “Alwaleed” Islamic studies program. Her research focuses on Islam and globalization, Islam and secularism, immigration and religious pluralism. Her most recent books are: *The Islamic Awakening: Religion, Democracy and Modernity* (England: Cambridge University press, 2014), *Why The West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Her book “*When Islam and Democracy meet: Muslims in Europe and United States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) is a reference in the study of European Islam and integration of Muslim minorities in secular democracies. She edited 2015 handbook of European Islam. She coordinates a major web resource on Islam in Europe:

<http://www.euro.Islam.inf>¹

Introduction to the Book

In “why the west fears Islam – An exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies”² Jocelyne Cesari explores, analyzes, and compares the state of affairs of Muslims in France, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and the USA. The book examines issues of Muslim identities in these countries, probes into the ugly thicket of prejudice and resentment that



considerable segments of the dominant population, the media, and many politicians harbor against Muslims, and discusses Muslim civic engagement and participation. Cesari, a political scientist, examines recent dynamics of securitization in Europe and North America and reviews, debates about the compatibility of Islam and Western secularism. Considerable parts of the book are based on a research project that included 55 focus groups in Paris, London, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Boston, a very detailed survey conducted among Muslims in Berlin, and a thorough reading of available survey data (e.g. Pew, Gallup). Cesari's book is less an ordinary monograph about Muslims and their experiences in these five countries, but rather a rich source book about, in particular, the situation of Muslim civic and political participation in the five countries. The book has 381 pages. It consists of two main sections and eight chapters. About half of the book are appendices that provide plentiful data about the focus groups, Berlin survey and figures, for instance formal political participation of Muslims, lists of European Representative Bodies of Islam, overviews of "Islamopedia: A Web-Based Resource on Contemporary Islamic Thought," or "Salafis in Europe," and finally a list of "Fatwas from Salafi Websites.

Summary of the Book

After the 9/11 attacks in the U.S, the 3/11 explosions in Madrid and the 7/7 bombings in London, Muslims in the U.S and Europe faced increasing social and political discrimination as well as pressure to fully "integrate" into western societies. Amidst the hysteria, however, emerged significant, yet largely unanswered, research questions. How Muslims are currently perceived in Western societies? Do Muslims themselves feel that they are unable or unwilling to integrate into liberal democracies? Jocelyne Cesari systematically tackles each of these questions in this volume. Cesari points out that Western societies have often depicted Muslims as either unable or unwilling to integrate and that Islamic symbols such as "headscarves", mosques and minarets" are viewed as rejection of Western democratic values or as a "direct threat to the West"³

Based on five years of extensive fieldwork in five countries (the U.K, the U.S, France, Germany and the Netherlands), this book is a product of a wealth of information gathered from focus groups. This work tries to offer a comprehensive explanation as to how "symbolic national boundaries" meant to place Islam and Muslims "outside of these boundaries" are created and reinforced in these Western contexts.

In the introduction, Cesari cautions that any conclusions drawn from surveys that indicate that Western publics are uncomfortable with Islam and Muslims are potentially suspect, given how many of their questions are given extremely nuanced and easily manipulated. For example, there are significant differences in the levels of hostility expressed depending on if respondents are asked questions that associate Islam with violence or terrorism, as opposed to relating the issue of Muslim integration in broad social arenas like education and immigration. Public opinion also appears to support the perception that Islam and Muslims belong in the internal enemy class as well as the external enemy class, which views Muslims as the main source of international terrorism.

Part 1 of the book presents the reader with excerpts from several discussions held by different Muslim focus groups from London, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Boston. The groups organized by Cesari with Islam in the West program at Harvard University, discussed topics about religiosity and political involvement, as well as whether group members felt there had been an increase in anti-Muslim sentiments following 9/11, to gain insight into Muslims' actual lived experiences. External polls data is incorporated into these discussions to show trends, but Cesari clearly explains the difficulties in ascertaining baseline levels of religiosity through polls alone.

Simply calculating the frequency of mosque attendance is not adequate. The focus groups highlight this, and show that there are wide variations among self-identifying Muslims as to the definition of a good Muslim, the importance of Islamic practices, feelings toward interreligious marriages, experiences of anti-Muslim discrimination, and attitudes toward civic participation and politics. Sometimes there are too many topics covered in the short space provided for the focus group excerpts from the book, which leads to abrupt shifts, but overall the collective framework succeeds in demonstrating the striking varieties of Islam within Western Societies.

After providing the results and survey data that offer insight into real Muslim lives, in part 2 of the book she puts before us the question “How are the symbolic boundaries that place Islam outside created or reinforced?” The answer Cesari reaches is outlined in what she refers to as four “symbolic boundaries” that are: “externalize Islam in the West”:1, “Securitization”:2, “Secularism”:3 and “Salafism”:4. These factors are detailed in chapter 6, 7 and 8 respectively. A brief summary of these factors is described as follows:

Externalization of Islam

The book examines themes of the culturalization of Islam, and the increasing securitization that foster an externalization of Islam. Cesari traces the emergence and growing currency of “scientific” anti-Islamic discourses that trickle down into popular debates. She examines the culturalization of citizenship and the ill-fated creation of citizenship courses/tests that aim at “reforming” Muslim training have come under scrutiny, as governments fear their teachings and influence, and seek to desperately contain them. The author traces how especially visible Muslim practices (e.g.: the hijab) are targeted and controlled (e.g.: hijab or niqab bans) by governments. She reports about how imams and their professional hypersensitive topic/undertaking in all five countries. She outlines debates about “How Islam questions the Universalism of western secularism,” and notes that governments are caught in an ongoing process of finding and creating Muslims that best fit their mold of liberal citizens. She identifies several fields/topics which create tensions in the philosophical encounters between liberal states and pious Muslims and their communities. Cesari notes that dominant visions of and lines between the private and the public are one such fault line. Dominant liberal/secular definitions hold that religion is a private affair, while Muslims carry their religiosity into the public sphere (e.g. visibility of the headscarf). Similar, but more dramatic are debates about the nature and use of shar’ia (based) regulations or legal procedures. Cesari points out that several factors influence the externalization of Islam. In Western Europe, where a large majority of Muslims have an immigrant background and low socioeconomic status, the crisis of the welfare state and pauperization of the middle classes contribute the demonization of Islam. For these reasons, a substantial body of literature on body on labor, immigration, and welfare policies, argues that immigration can be a disadvantage for a recipient state while at the same time an advantage for immigrants themselves. In other words, immigrants are able to get employment in these countries, but existing labor markets are then strained due to the influx of additional workers, which overall adds to the pressure of welfare budgets in these states. These structural conditions indeed influence the externalization process. However, they cannot explain why integration policies are increasingly evaluated in cultural terms and, therefore, are perceived as a failure, even when they have not failed.

Securitization

The securitization of Islam is the direct result of especially 9/11 terrorist events. The integration of Muslim immigrants has been a political agenda of European democracies for several decades. In the United States the main issue is security. Cesari argues that Western governments have used the securitization of Islam as a tool to reinforce the “externalization of Islam.”⁴ In Europe, a paradox exists: while political actors “seek to facilitate the socioeconomic integration of Muslims, antiterrorism and security concerns fuel the desire to compromise liberties and restrict Islam from the public space”⁵ Politicians have been able to speak in terms of security, and present Islam as a menace outside of the domain of normal political structures. They have done this to justify “political measures indirectly terrorism, such as immigration policies, and administrative limiting Islamic practices.”⁶ The author points out that these discourses are not merely the creation of politicians, academic have added to the rising tide of anti-Islamic discourse , thus contributing to its legitimation.⁷ One outcome of this has been an increase in policies aimed to restrict immigration(in Europe) and place restrictions on Islamic practices, such as buildings mosques, and minarets, limiting access to Islamic education, bans on the hijab and niqab, and anti- shari’a law in the United States.⁸

Secularization

Third, with reference to secularism, Cesari underlines its ideological and counter-religion aspect in European history. The clashing “essentialized West” and “essentialized Islam”⁹ reinforced each other; the first claims universalism, ignores the “other” and “demonizes Islam,”¹⁰ the latter also adopts the rejectionist view of the West, a view, the author refers to as Salafization (to be explained below as the fourth factor) Outside aspects of the intense conflict between some versions of European secularism and Islamic norms is freedom of expression, body attire, and individualism. The common understanding of European secularism allows the cartoon caricatures of the Prophet of Islam, liberates the individual from any signs of regressive features that do not look liberating, like the wearing of the veil or burqa, and views that individualism does not restrain individual desires because of metaphysical or spiritual teachings. These three examples are viewed differently by Islam and Muslims: cartoons can be offensive, provocative, and disrespectful; the veil or burqa are spiritual expressions, and so is religious individualism that teaches certain manners of conduct and traces some broad boundaries of liberty.¹¹ All of these factors have raised concerns that “Islamic practices from dress code to minaret as seen as a major challenge to the private/public dichotomy.”¹² External displays of religious identity, such as wearing a veil, are viewed as being at odds with secularism and modernity, because they violate the principle that within a secular society, religion should be confined to the private sphere. These views have further reinforced the “the Islamic versus the West” discourse.

Salafism

Fourth, a global reach of Wahhabism and generous funding of Salafi movements and schools in the West and worldwide by Saudis have made it the standard image of Islam that the media depicts-while it hardly speaks of institutional and national religious bodies that have been founded in Europe by the state, like the French Council of the Muslim Faith or the German Islam Conference.¹³ The Salafi rejection of modernity, democracy, Islamic representative bodies set up by the state, prioritization of the community over the individual, and their strict adherence to Islamic law and women’s code of conduct make them stand on the opposite side of what the West stands for.¹⁴ These views fuel the West vs. Islam dichotomy and breed essentialism. Against these broad exclusive views, through what she calls an “immersion approach” that

reaches Muslims directly, and not through secular vs. salafi perspectives and their media representatives, Cesari reaches interesting results that give a different image of how Muslims live their religiosity in the West.

Despite the positive results of the fieldwork, Cesari stills, notes that even in case of successful socioeconomic and political integration, the above mentioned four factors of externalization keep the boundaries between Islam and the West strong.¹⁵ She ends the book with a critique of the Western liberal-secular structure that she described as a historical experience that Islam's presence has unveiled and challenged. The author gives the French model of laicite` as an ideological and counter-religion narrative of secularism. She quotes the Catholic American Congressman Brain Higgins, who says that his country is "Christians-Judeo-Islamic" and not only "Christian-Judeo."¹⁶

Critical Analysis

1. This is a very interesting and well grounding book based both on primary and secondary data, discussing all the major themes that dominate public debate, for example, liberalism, secularism, terrorism, integration policies and so on... addresses principally to the academic community (scholars, researchers, students) who will absolutely be benefited both from the appendices and exhaustive notes at the end of the book.
2. Cesari shines in presenting the material in a clear and direct manner that will appeal to a wide range of readers. At around 150 pages of information packed text, the book is both accessible and illuminating. Much as the Gallup poll's project offered the first major undertaking on the opinions of Muslim countries with significant Muslim populations, her book present the first comprehensive investigation on the opinions of Muslims in the West. By adding the voices of Muslims rather than simply analyzing Islam in the West, she has provided an important contribution in deconstructing the myth of the incompatibility between Islam and liberal democratic societies.
3. Cesari presents an overwhelming range of data that students and scholars of Muslim societies and Islam in the West in particular, as well as multiculturalism policy-makers, should find valuable.
4. This work is a sharp critique of both ideological secularism that is anti-religious, or Islamophobic, and Islamic Salafism that is anti-Western. With data grounded in fieldwork in five major western countries, the work undoubtedly challenges weakly informed judgments and raises the level of research in the field. Still the four critical notes mentioned below have also challenged these data and open them for further examination: Ultimately, Cesari argues that "the symbolic integration of Muslim within national communities would require a dramatic change in the current liberal secularist narratives. It is a daunting task, but it can be done."¹⁷ This said, four critical notes, among others, according to Mohammed Hashas, can be underlined here for further reflections and comparative purposes.

First, while Cesari has been preoccupied with fieldwork in a certain space and time, the results she reaches match to a large extent, not to say exactly, the theological endeavors that Muslim scholars and theologians-imams have been trying to achieve in the last two decades. This is, the results found in this fieldwork go in line with different tendencies of the emerging Western Islamic thought, which figures like Tariq Ramadan, Tareq Oubrou, Yhya Pallavicini, Amina Wadud, to name but some, have contributed to through their writings and public debates. A theological grounding of Cesari's results according to these thoughts, could be more silencing and challenging to anti-religious secularism and anti-West Salafism.

Second, Muslims in the Islamic majority societies have been debating similar issues that current Muslims in the west are dealing with for the last two centuries, and they do not seem to have reached a clear point in the debate. The ongoing revelations of the so called Arab-spring are but a recent example of this unsolved debate over Islam and modernity, and their compatibility, or not. Islam in the west appears to have gone steps into the debate, and may, consequently, be inspiring as well as challenging to the debate in Muslim majority and the Arab world in particular.

Third, as representatives of the second and third generations of Muslims in Europe, the Muslim youth, according to Cesari, are more religious. On the one hand, their references of religiosity have to be studied further: is it web Islam, Salafi Islam, intellectual Islam or spiritual/sufi Islam? On the other hand, if their religiosity is not Salafi/literalist, is at the same time modern life? Then what kind of religiosity is it? Put differently, what kind of Islam is it? What does it preserve and what does it change to adapt its religiosity to modern life? Is it more spiritual, or interior and thus more private and less visible, or is it visible, public, liberal and rationally more challenging to both anti-religious secularism and literalist Salfism. These are the some of the issues that require further examination.

Fourth, the religiosity of the youth that Cesari speaks of appears to be one that is adaptive to European context, but exceptions often make their own stories, and may challenge a lot of the data the fieldwork presents. A current challenging exception is the participation of some European Muslim youth in the ongoing Syrian civil war. A number of states like the U.K, Denmark, and the Netherlands have shown extreme concern about this tendency, primarily from security perspectives. The involvement of European Muslims in Arab-Islamic affairs outside Europe challenges Cesari's findings that the idea of the Ummah was not mentioned at all during her fieldwork with the discussion groups.¹⁸

5. The structure of the book into two distinct sections reads like two separate articles rather than a cohesive whole. The book would have benefited from greater integration and conversation between the data and the analysis. Questions that emerge from the initial chapters are not engaged until the second half of the text. Other puzzles are not probed at all. For example, in the surveys and interviews, Cesari draws the reader's attention to significant gender groups in Muslim men and women's religious, social, and political practice, but leaves the examination of these differences virtually unexplored. In the concluding sentences of the book, Cesari brings forth a few-counter narrative to the prevailing dialogue of equating Islam with danger and otherness. As these alternative voices are important in understanding the dominant discourse and may shed light into breaking the cycle of fear of Islam in the West, the analysis could have been enhanced by

- introducing these marginalized voices earlier in the narrative. However, these limitations are small in comparison to what the book has to offer.
6. At some places Cesari has portrayed a very wrong image of Islam, for instance first; she remained unjustified to present Islam, Islamic values and Islamic symbols in her book. There is a current obsession with mainstream media and academic discourse pertaining to Islam and the West. Muslims are routinely portrayed as terrorists even though many are either totally innocent of the charge or are more innocent than many of their antagonists who aggress against them. "Muslim terrorism" is a medium and think tank byword, even though one would be hard pressed to find the equivalent term of Jewish, Christian, Hindu or Buddhist terrorism in usage. Certain institutions and individuals with known agendas and backings have been instrumental in fabricating and perpetuating misinformation, exaggeration, and previously disqualified and refuted misunderstandings and slanders. "Islam is a religion of peace" is based on such on reality which cannot be denied because it is an eternal truth. The root of the word Islam is "salam" which means peace, so it means "peace and safety". Allah Almighty calls his being to the "House of peace". Allah says in the Holy Quran: "To you be your religion, and to me my religion."¹⁹ According to this verse one can live according to his own religion of once own choice. This shows the great importance. Islam attaches to such values as mercy and compassion. Unfortunately, because of the Middle Eastern events of the last couple of decades Islam has been branded by the media as a religion of violence...this is totally wrong and against all the facts. It is just like saying that the Catholic Church promotes violence and terrorism due to Irish Republican armed activities. Islam is a religion of peace in its fullest sense. Islam says "murder of one person is the murder of all humanity."²⁰ This wholly depicts the picture of a religion which always protests the inhumane behavior of the individuals of society. Islam not only gives rights to Muslims but it also supports the rights of nonbelievers.
 7. Second; she is unjustified to depict woman's hijab. She regards it as a sign of oppression, a kind of tomb and a kind of horror. Hijab, or veil, takes the center stage whenever there is battle between truth and falsehood. It has always been a sensitive issue, but it recently received a great deal of attention due to legislation and proposed legislation in several European countries (e.g., France, Germany) that ban its use in government institutions as well as educational institutions. For women who wear hijab out of religious conviction, the truth is obvious and indisputable. For others with limited knowledge or understanding of Hijab, it can be confusing. Every Muslim woman is required to wear a scarf or some sort of head covering and loose-fitting, modest attire. This is not a means of controlling a woman's sexuality or suppressing her, but rather, a means of protection. It implies by dressing this way she will not be seen as a mere sex symbol, but will be appreciated for her intellect. Furthermore, it will not subject her to harassment. It is interesting to state the head covering for women is not an Islamic innovation, but was also practiced by Judeo-Christian women centuries earlier, and yet is laughed at by the West today. Hijab is a test for the Muslim woman. It is clear from the Qur'an and the Hadiths that hijab is a religious obligation, which a woman has to

undertake. There is no scholarly difference at this point and the Muslim Ummah has applied it for over 14 centuries. When a Muslim woman wears hijab, she is obeying and submitting to Allah. The following verses of the holy Qur'an refer to the obligatory nature of hijab: "And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which (necessarily) appears thereof and to wrap (a portion of) their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed."²¹ Also Allah says: "O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful."²² This is an innate desire that is exacerbated by wanton display and tamed by modesty and covering. In the chapter of Al-Ahzaab mentioned above, Allah Almighty Says what means "That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused."²³ Thus, one of the functions of hijab is to protect women from abuse and harm. This particularly includes various forms of sexual abuse and harassment, which are prevalent in societies in which few women cover. Men often get mixed signals and believe that women want their advances by the way they reveal their bodies. The hijab, on the contrary, sends a signal to men that the wearer is a modest and chaste woman who should not be annoyed.

8. Lastly, Cesari is unjustified to depict Salafi school of thought. She is of her opinion that Salafies have rejected all ideas that are deemed western, maintaining a strictly revivalist agenda. In this light, Islam serves as a counter cultural voice that rebukes Western culture. Contrary to her opinion, Salafism, in representing a methodology espousing the aspiration toward a pristine Islam has been a positive force. There was a time in the 90s when the Salafi methodology, as represented by popular international English-speaking clerics, attracted large segments of Western youth. Some positives of the Salafi movement are: Primacy of the Sacred Texts. The Salafi methodology of taking recourse to the Qur'an and Sunnah challenges Muslims to approach the Sacred Texts for guidance and understanding, and not just spiritual blessings. This is in stark contrast to some other traditionalist schools that discourage their adherents from deriving any meanings or rulings for fear of misunderstanding them, so much so that some Muslim sects claim that ḥadīth books should never be read except by specialists and perhaps even discourage an active and academic study of the Qur'an. Encourages critical engagement with modern customs and cultures in light of the Qur'an and Sunnah, with a marked emphasis on solid evidence, as opposed to what Shaykh so-and-so said or what one's forefathers practiced. As such, Salafism appears to be liberated from the confines of 'cultural Islam', offering an avenue toward an unadulterated universal Islam that transcends time and place, and is true to that practiced at the time of revelation. It

eschews the syncretism of superstitious practices prevalent in folk-versions of Islam, such as the unfounded veneration of saints or the invoking of other than God for one's needs. In this regard, it can be said that Salafism aims to offer a pristine, unmolested framework within which the rituals of Islam ought to be practiced.

Conclusion

In sum, this book contains a wealth of information, including public survey results from Gallup, Pew and other organizations, regarding Europeans and American attitudes towards Muslims. This information serves as a valuable resource for seasoned Scholars studying Muslims in the West. The information included in the book can serve as a valuable resource for scholars studying Muslims in the West. However, it may not be appropriate for beginning students, as general knowledge about the topics discussed is required to understand the context of the material. The author seems to expect the audience to be to be familiar with the terms used, as they are not clearly and fully defined. For example, she does not discuss the distinctions between the hijab and niqab , or the meanings of the fatwa. Sometime the presentation of the data takes precedence over readability, resulting in confusing or obtuse organization. Cesari, also remained unjustified to present Islam, and Islamic symbols in this book. Moreover, the challenge with attempts to provide one theoretical explanation that encompasses different social contexts is quite clear: it is hard to discern one reason to the rationale of why Islam is feared in different western contexts, since western countries have policies and social contexts that vary greatly. Despite these challenges, this book brings us closer to understanding the conditions under which Muslims live in a number of Western societies, which makes this contribution a worthy addition to the growing scholarship on Muslim communities in Western societies.

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