**Islamism in Europe**

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The presence of sizeable Muslim communities in Western Europe is a relatively new phenomenon, largely the product of waves of immigration that began after World War II. While size and composition vary significantly from country to country, today virtually all European countries host a Muslim minority and, while no official data is available, most estimates put the number of Muslims living in Western Europe at about 15 million.[1] This new Muslim presence has created some of the problems that often come with any large immigration wave: financial difficulties for the newcomers and tensions with the native population. While some of these issues are common to other immigrant groups in Europe, others are unquestionably peculiar to Muslim communities.

Many of the tensions that have arisen around the Muslim presence in Europe over the last decades have more or less clear religious undertones. Some of them are unquestionably due to the fear, ignorance and intolerance of some Europeans towards Islam or, in many cases, any religion. But another crucial factor generating tensions is the presence of Islamism/political Islam, in all of its different manifestations, within Muslim communities in virtually every European country. Borrowing Peter Mandaville's definition, Islamism can be defined as "forms of political theory and practice that have as their goal the establishment of an Islamic political order in the sense of a state whose governmental principles, institutions and legal system derive directly from the shari'ah."[2] But it must be said that political Islam is a global and highly flexible movement, taking different manifestations in different environments. It therefore must be taken into consideration that the characteristics, agendas, dimensions and challenges of Islamist movements in Europe are significantly different from those of their counterparts in Muslim-majority areas.

Forewarnings of the existence of this problem had surfaced at the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s. In 1989 the Muslim world's rage against Salman Rushdie had been sparked by protests and a book burning organized by Muslim organizations in the British city of Bradford.[3] In 1995 militants linked to the Algerian Armed Islamic Group – many of whom had grown up in France – orchestrated a string of bombings throughout France. In the second half of the 1990s networks of jihadists, mostly linked to outfits in North Africa, were dismantled in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Great Britain. Yet, despite all of these warning signs, few Europeans grasped the magnitude of the problem until the 2000s. Events such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks (whose ringleaders were radicalized in Hamburg), the 2004 Madrid train bombings and assassination of Theo van Gogh, the 2005 London bombings and scores of other thwarted attacks and dismantled terrorist networks have revealed the presence of

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[1] The exact number is highly debated and is virtually impossible to establish with certainty. 15 million is the number estimated by the 2004 U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom Report, as well as by a 2005 study by the Pew Research Center entitled *An Uncertain Road: Muslims and the Future of Europe*. A 2009 Pew study put that number at 17 million (see http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Mapping-the-Global-Muslim-Population.aspx).

[2] Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007): 57.

[3] Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West: Islamic Movements in America and Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 126-46.

a sizeable number of European-based Muslims who have embraced jihadist ideology and are ready to use violence for it.

Yet jihadist terrorism is only the tip of the iceberg, the most visible manifestation of the extremely diverse and ever evolving political movement that is Islamism. Keeping in mind the unavoidable oversimplification of this categorization, one way of differentiating Islamists is according to their *modus operandi*. This yields three subcategories: violent rejectionists, non-violent rejectionists and participationists. Violent rejectionists, often referred to as jihadists, are individuals and networks that, often linked to or inspired by al Qaeda, reject participation in the democratic system and use violence to advance their goals. Non-violent rejectionists are individuals and groups that openly reject the legitimacy of any system of government not based on Islamic law, but do not, at least publicly and openly, advocate the use of violence to further their goals. Finally, participationists are individuals and groups that adhere to that strand of Islamism that advocates interaction with society at large, both at the micro-level through grass roots activism, and at the macro-level through participation in public life and the democratic process.

Each of these components of radical Islam has a different presence, structure, and *modus operandi*. Each, consequently, presents a different kind of challenge to Europe. And while Europeans are finally paying attention to the jihadist threat and have begun to devise new solutions to contain it, they still have only a limited understanding of the other two segments of the movement.

## Violent rejectionists

Individuals who espoused some of the most militant interpretations of Islam began to establish a presence in Europe in the mid-1980s. Their numbers were reinforced at the end of the decade and during the first years of the 1990s, as small groups of so-called "Afghan Arabs" (veterans of the Afghan *jihad* against the Soviets) and other committed jihadists who had escaped prosecution in the Middle East and North Africa settled in Europe. Exploiting the freedoms of the West, these violent Islamists continued to support their groups' activities in their countries of origin through propaganda, fundraising, and recruitment.

In the beginning most of these groups limited their interaction to the superficial rhetorical endorsement of their respective struggles but remained divided by nationality, each focused on fighting regimes in their countries of origin. Yet by the second half of the 1990s, several of them began to gravitate toward the orbit of al Qaeda, embracing its message of global *jihad*. A key role in this cross-pollination of ideas and methods among jihadist groups was played by some of Europe's most radical mosques, such as London's Finsbury Park Mosque, Milan's Islamic Cultural Institute, Vienna's Sahaba, or Hamburg's al-Quds, which became popular meeting points for radicals from all countries.[4]

After the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan the core al Qaeda organization struggled to control its cells and affiliates worldwide. While a certain level of coordination still existed,

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[4] Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 2005), Part I.

European networks began to operate more autonomously, still loyal to al Qaeda's ideology but virtually independent in their day-to-day operations. As they became more independent, these European cells progressively began to change their focus. Global conflicts such as those in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq continued to attract the attention of European jihadists, many of whom traveled to regions where al Qaeda was battling American forces. Nevertheless, while still perceiving themselves to be part of the global jihadist movement, the networks operating on the ground in Europe started to pay more attention to their immediate environment. Viewing all Western countries as hostile to Islam, both those that joined American efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq and those that did not, they began to focus their wrath on all of them, often placing an equal emphasis on global political affairs and domestic issues involving tensions between local Muslim communities and native populations. Therefore, in the eyes of jihadists operating in Europe, countries such as Spain, the United Kingdom and Italy bore equal guilt for discriminating against their Muslim populations and for having sent troops to Iraq. And even countries that had distanced themselves from American efforts in the Middle East were now considered enemies, because their media criticized Islam and, more generally, because their societies were not Islamic.

Moreover, European jihadist networks have experienced a generational change over the last few years. Most of today's militants, particularly in northern European countries, are second-generation Muslim immigrants in Europe (with a small but significant number of converts). This development has brought changes to the worldviews and agendas of the new networks. Even though they feel a strong sense of alienation from the European society into which they were born, these young men are more closely linked to their host European countries than to their ancestral lands, of whose customs and language they are often ignorant. Therefore, while they are concerned about the plight of the global *umma*, they are equally if not more affected by events that take place in their own backyard. Seeing the world through the lenses of the most radical interpretations of Islam, they believe that Islam is under attack globally and that actions in defense of it can take place with equal justification and effectiveness in the West or in Muslim lands.

Such an attitude has been perfectly summarized by a 2004 report by the AIVD, the Dutch domestic intelligence agency, which warned that "within the local networks in particular in the Western world (especially in Europe) al Qaeda's ideology is interpreted in an even more extremist way than by the al Qaeda's leadership itself. Often the actors in the networks are not really driven by strategic tactical considerations; they see themselves as participants in a mythical, apocalyptic final battle with Evil (the Western world) in the context of which, in principle, all exponents of Evil (in fact any Western citizen) should be destroyed."[5]

From an operational perspective, the current panorama of jihadist networks in Europe is an extremely diverse one and can be visualized as a continuum. At one extreme, we find homegrown groups: small clusters of mostly European-born radicals with no ties to external groups and that act with absolute operational independence. At the opposite end of the spectrum, we see compartmentalized cells contained in a well-structured network and subjected to a hierarchical structure, as was the model of jihadist groups operating in Europe in the 1990s.

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[5] AIVD, *From Dawa to Jihad: The Various Threats from Radical Islam to the Democratic Legal Order* (The Hague: AIVD, 2004), p. 28.

Between these two extremes is a whole spectrum of realities, positioned according to the level of autonomy of the group. The most common model seems to be that of the July 7, 2005, London bombers: a small group of young men, most of whom were born and raised in Europe, who know each other either from the mosque or from the neighborhood and become radicalized in Europe.[6] Some of these locally groomed jihadist "wannabes" travel abroad to gain from various al Qaeda–affiliated groups the necessary bomb-making expertise that will allow the group to jump from an amateurish cluster of friends to a full-fledged terrorist cell.

Patterns vary from country to country. British authorities, for example, believe that there are around 4,000 terrorist suspects and 200 jihadist networks spread throughout the country.[7] Countries such as France or Spain report smaller yet extremely active jihadist scenes, while in countries such as Greece or Portugal the phenomenon is marginal, affecting only a dozen people. In some cases, there are opposite trajectories. Dutch authorities, for example, claim to have recently witnessed, after a spike in 2004–2005, a significant decrease in the level of jihadist activity on their territory, from a couple of hundred known militants to a few dozen. German authorities, on the other hand, have monitored over the last five years a worrisome surge in the number of individuals who have radicalized, obtained training in Pakistan, and been involved in terrorist activities.

Providing exact numbers of the number of jihadists in Europe is an almost futile exercise for two main reasons. First, it is evident that authorities cannot possibly have the complete picture of their local jihadist scene and know all cases. Second, it is difficult to exactly define who is an active jihadist. Is a militant who fought in Bosnia in the early 1990s and has lived quietly in a Western European city since then a jihadist? Should a European who fights with al Shabaab in Somalia and have no intention of coming home be counted? In substance it can be said that only a statistically small number of European Muslims, possibly around 10,000 (but this number is imprecise at best), are committed jihadists. Yet terrorism has always been a small numbers game and the presence of a few thousand individuals ready to use violence represents a major security concern for the Continent. Moreover, there are indications that larger numbers of young European Muslims, while not fully embracing jihadist ideology, adopt some of its frames and ideas.

## Non-violent rejectionists

A complete rejection of Western values and a proclaimed desire to establish an Islamic state worldwide are the characteristics not only of jihadist groups, but also of several seemingly non-violent movements and organizations operating in Europe. Many of these groups can be more or less loosely linked to Salafist ideology.[8] Salafism preaches a return to a mythical Islamic golden era that can only be obtained by referring to the only unadulterated sources: the Quran

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[6] House of Commons, *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005*, May 11, 2006, pp. 13–21.
[7] Kevin Sullivan "At Least 4,000 Suspected of Terrorism-Related Activity in Britain, MI5 Director Says," *Washington Post*, 6 November 2007.
[8] For more on Salafism, see: Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

and the hadith. Salafism is "not only scripturalist but also literalist," arguing that Muslims should behave exactly how the pious forefathers of Islam behaved according to these sources.[9]

In Europe, as elsewhere, Salafists are not a unified movement. Rather, they are split between various currents due to doctrinal differences and leadership struggles. Some are quietist, isolating themselves from society, while others (do) advocate involvement in society and politics. Most refute violence, at least in Europe, but some do not and are better categorized as violent rejectionists—the lines are in some cases blurred. Salafism has been able to attract a growing number of European Muslims through its claims of simplicity, meaning and moral superiority. As argued by Dutch scholar Roel Meijer, "in a contentious age, Salafism transforms the humiliated, the downtrodden, disgruntled young people, the discriminated [against] migrant, or the politically repressed into a chosen sect (*al-firqa al-najiya*) that immediately gains privileged access to the Truth."[10]

Other ideological movements operating in Europe can be put in the category of non-violent rejectionists. One of the most organized among them is Hizb ut-Tahrir (Liberation Party, HT). Founded in East Jerusalem in the early 1950s, HT has developed into a global movement with branches on virtually all continents.[11] HT's worldview is simple: all the solutions to man's political, economic, cultural, and social problems are to be found in Islam, and the only way for humanity to achieve justice is to abandon any man-made system (including democracy) and establish a Caliphate encompassing not only today's Muslim world, but the entire globe[12].

HT officially aims at disseminating its ideology and challenging the existing status quo without resorting to violence.[13] Its rhetoric is sophisticated and skillfully tailored to the ears of Western Muslims. HT, in fact, does not simply appeal to the disaffected masses of unassimilated European Muslims. Members of HT tend to be highly educated young professionals who are second-generation Muslim immigrants in Europe, and their ranks are buttressed further by a small cadre of converts. The organization's members are active in spreading HT's message through an unrelenting propaganda effort. This includes websites and publications in various European languages, leaflets in Muslim neighborhoods and in front of mainstream mosques, and conferences regularly held throughout the continent and attended by thousands of sympathizers.[14]

Salafis and HT generally stop short of expressly advocating violence, at least in the West. Their literature and speeches state that Islam is under attack, that Muslims have a duty to defend their fellow Muslims worldwide, and that they must establish the Caliphate in order to mount this

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[9] Meijer, "Introduction," in ibid, page 4.

[10] Ibid, page 13.

[11] According to the Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain website, available at http://www.hizb.org.uk/hizb/who-is-ht/prominent-members.html . Accessed 15 February 2008.

[12] Zeyno Baran, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, report published by the Nixon Center, December 2004, available at: http://www.nixoncenter.org/Monographs/HizbutahrirIslamsPoliticalInsurgency.pdf.

[13] Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain website, available at http://www.hizb.org.uk/hizb/who-is-ht/our-method/our-method.html. Accessed 15 February 2008.

[14] Most European branches of HT run sophisticated and frequently-updated websites. See, e.g., the websites of HT Britain (http://www.hizb.org.uk/hizb/), Denmark (http://www.globalkhilafah.com/), and Holland (http://www.expliciet.nl/component/option,com_frontpage/Itemid,1/).

defense. However, they refrain from specifying exactly how Muslims should do so. Nevertheless it can be argued that, while not openly endorsing violence, they provide powerful ideological tools to radicalize Muslims. The jump from embracing the Salafist or HT worldview to committing violent acts in order to further their goals is, according to many, a short one. For this reason, these groups are often identified as a "conveyor belt" to terrorism.[15] And, to be sure, there are reasons for hesitating to put many Salafists in the "non-violent" category. In such a heterogeneous movement some do advocate violence, in some cases even in Europe, making the difference to violent rejectionists paper thin. But, overall, most Salafists (at least those that are commonly referred to as "political Salafists", as opposed to "jihadist Salafists") are not engaged in violent acts in Europe.

How big is the presence of non-violent rejectionists in Europe? As for violent rejectionists, definitional challenges and the impossibility of having a complete knowledge of the scene hamper any effort. The challenge to define a non-violent rejectionist is particularly intense. Is somebody who regularly visits Salafi websites a non-violent rejectionist? And somebody that does it only occasionally? How can (and, some would argue, should) authorities know about individual beliefs if there is no immediate reason to estimate they will lead to violence? In a nutshell, it is very difficult to estimate the size of all Islamist subcategories.

German authorities, while fully aware of the limitations of their calculations, have attempted to do so in regard to Islamist groups operating on their territory. The country's intelligence agencies estimate that Germany is home to some 30,000 participationist Islamists, some 4,000 Salafists, and some 1,140 individuals who could be considered violent jihadists.[16] Some of the most notorious among German Salafist groups, like Millatu Ibrahim, Einladung zum Paradies, Die Wahre Religion and DawaFFM, have been the targets of various actions by German authorities.

While the fact that every European country presents its own dynamics cannot be overemphasized, it can be argued that similar portions among the various Islamist subcategories exist in the other European countries. Non-violent rejectionist groups exist in different countries with different characteristics, and many of them operate at a local level without much interaction with like-minded entities in their country or abroad. An exception is the network related to HT's spinoff al-Muhajiroun. While formally defunct, the London-based group has given birth to a variety of entities operating in several European countries and often adopting the moniker Sharia4 (Sharia4Belgium, Sharia4Denmark and so on). Often composed of just a few dozen individuals, these al-Muhajiroun spinoffs manage to attract significant public attention due to their provocative initiatives and ability to manipulate the media. It must be said that many non-violent rejectionists are not part of a formal organization but rather belong to informal clusters congregating at the margins of some mosque or in private circles without attracting much attention.

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[15] Zeyno Baran, "Fighting the War of Ideas," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2005.

[16] The number for the participationists is released in the agency's publicly available annual reports (for example see page 181 of the 2008 report); the number of Salafists is derived from personal interviews with German officials and Sabine Siebold, "German police raid scores of radical Islamists' homes," Reuters, June 14, 2012; the number of jihadists is derived from *Radikalisierungsprozesse im Bereich des islamistischen Extremismus und Terrorismus*, report by the Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Inneres und Sport/Verfassungsschutz, May 2012, page 9.

**Participationists**

At the bottom of the pyramid is the numerically most significant component of political Islam in Europe: the Muslim Brotherhood and other "participationist" Islamist movements such as the South Asian Jamaat-e Islami (whose influence is largely limited to Great Britain) or the Turkish Milli Görüş (headquartered in Germany, but active in all European countries with a sizeable Turkish population). Unlike rejectionists, such organizations have made a conscious decision to avoid unnecessary confrontation and have instead opted for a clever and flexible policy of engagement with the European establishment.

The history of participationist Islamist organizations in Europe began approximately fifty years ago, when many members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were often fleeing persecution in their home countries, spent significant amounts of time or permanently settled in various European countries. These "European Brothers" founded some of the first Muslim organizations in the West, which at the time of their foundation were little more than student organizations with a few hundred members. At that point, most of these individuals and organizations simply aimed at spreading the Brotherhood's ideology to the small number of Muslims living in Europe, while focusing their political efforts on influencing their native countries in the Middle East and North Africa.[17]

Yet by the end of the 1980s, the European Brothers began to view the Muslim presence in the West differently. Top Brotherhood scholars started to redefine some centuries-old religious qualifications, stating that the traditional distinction between *dar al Islam* (land of Islam) and *dar al harb* (land of war) did not reflect the current reality. While the West could not be considered *dar al Islam* because *sharia* was not enforced there, it could not be considered *dar al harb* either, because Muslims were allowed to practice Islam freely and were not persecuted. The scholars decided, therefore, that it was possible for them to create a new legal category. They concluded that the West should be considered the *dar al dawa* (land of preaching), a territory where Muslims live as a minority, are respected, and have the affirmative duty to spread their religion peacefully[18].

The implications of this decision go far beyond the merely theological aspect. By redefining the nature of the Muslim presence in the West, the Brothers also changed the nature of their own role in it. The characteristics of this new role are precisely outlined in the seminal book *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*, published in 1990 by the top Muslim Brotherhood ideologue Yusuf al-Qaradawi.[19] Qaradawi devotes a large section of his book to the presence of Muslim minorities in Western countries and the unprecedented opportunity that this phenomenon may represent for the Islamist movement, which, in Qaradawi's words, can "play the role of the missing leadership of the Muslim Nation [*umma*] with all its trends and groups" in guiding and shaping the minds of Muslim immigrants living in the West. While the Islamist movement can exercise only a limited influence in Muslim countries, where hostile regimes keep

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[17] Lorenzo Vidino, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Conquest of Europe," *Middle East Quarterly* 12:1 (Winter 2005), pp. 25-34.

[18] Xavier Ternisien, *Les Frères musulmans* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), pp. 190-2.

[19] Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase* (Swansea, UK: Awakening Publications, 2000).

it in check (at least when Qaradawi wrote his treaty), Qaradawi realized that the Brotherhood may operate freely in Europe where, thanks to its activism and ample financing, it can now overshadow other currents of Islam.

Qaradawi has a simple recipe for how the Islamist movement can become the guide of Muslim communities in the West: "Try to have your own small society within the larger society," says Qaradawi, "your own Muslim ghetto." The Egyptian cleric advocates the creation of a web of Islamic centers, think tanks, magazines, mosques, and conferences so that the Islamist movement can spread its politicized version of Islam among Western Muslims. At the same time, Qaradawi advocates moderation and relative openness when dealing with non-Muslims. At least in these early stages, he writes, confrontation can only damage the movement, whereas displaying a moderate façade will allow the Brothers to operate under the radar screen.

A second goal common to all European Brotherhood organizations is the designation as official or *de facto* representatives of the Muslim community of their country. Becoming the preferred—if not the exclusive—partners of European governments and elites would serve various purposes. One, publicly and proudly declared by the Brothers, is to positively contribute to the future of European society. Highlighting common values, the Brothers, in fact, present themselves as a moderate force encouraging Muslims to simultaneously participate in society and spread their Islamic principles, which, ultimately, benefit everybody.

Yet, the European Brothers seem to have additional purposes attached to the establishment of a preferential relationship between them and European governments. Despite their unrelenting activism and ample resources, in fact, the Brothers have not been able to create a mass movement and attract the allegiance of large numbers of European Muslims. While concepts, issues, and frames introduced by the Brothers have reached many of them, most European Muslims either actively resist the Brothers' influence or simply ignore it. The Brothers understand that a preferential relationship with European elites could provide them with the financial and political capital that would allow them to significantly expand their reach and influence inside the community.

By leveraging such a relationship, in fact, the Brothers aim at being entrusted by European governments with administering all aspects of Muslim life in each country. They would, ideally, become those whom governments task with preparing the curricula and selecting the teachers for Islamic education in public schools, appointing imams in public institutions such as the military, the police or the prison service, and receiving subsidies to administer various social services. This position would also allow them to be the *de facto* official Muslim voice in public debates and in the media, overshadowing competing forces. The powers and legitimacy bestowed upon them by European governments would allow them to exert significantly increased influence over the Muslim community. Making a clever political calculation, the European Brothers are attempting to turn their leadership bid into a self-fulfilling prophecy, seeking to be recognized as representatives of the Muslim community in order to actually become it. Finally, the position of representatives of European Muslims would allow the Brothers to influence European policymaking on all Islamic-related issues. While having their say on the crafting of domestic policies can be very important, the European Brothers seem to

have placed an even higher value on influencing foreign policies. Once again the writings of Yussuf al-Qaradawi perfectly encapsulate this vision.

Understanding the crucial role that the policies of European governments play in the struggle between Islamist movements and their rivals for the control of Muslim countries, Qaradawi declares that "it is necessary for Islam in this age to have a presence in such societies that affect world politics" and that the presence of a strong and organized Islamist movement in the West is "required for defending the causes of the Muslim Nation and the Muslim Land against the antagonism and misinformation of anti-Islamic forces and trends."[20] In other words, Qaradawi argues that the European Brothers find themselves with the unprecedented opportunity to influence European public opinion and policymakers on all geopolitical issues related to the Muslim world. And indeed, over the last twenty years, the European Brothers have consistently tried to take advantage of their position of influence to advance Islamist causes. From private meetings with senior policymakers to mass street protests, from editorials in major newspapers to high profile conferences, they have used all the material and intellectual resources they possess in order to advance the Islamist point of view on several issues, from Palestine to Afghanistan, and on the nature of the Islamist movement itself.

From the beginning of the 1990s, the European Brothers began to implement this new strategy specifically designed for the West. The small organizations created by Brotherhood "pioneers" have grown significantly in size and independence. In essence, there is no formal Muslim Brotherhood organization in any European country. Yet it is fair to say that virtually all European countries operate organizations and networks with historical, financial, personal, organizational and ideological ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic revivalist movements worldwide. What is being termed as the "European Brotherhood" is essentially a fairly small, informal network of activists tied together by marriage, business ties, old friendships, and, most importantly, a shared vision. Each organization belonging to the movement acts independently, adapting its actions to the environment in which it operates, but a foundation of commonly accepted principles and goals unites all of them.

These organizations, such as the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF), the Islamic Society of Germany (IGD), and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) have gained positions of prominence within their countries' Muslim communities. Even though their conservative and politicized interpretation of Islam is generally not shared by the majority of Muslims residing in Europe, Brotherhood-linked organizations have often managed, through activism and foreign funding, to overshadow other Muslim organizations, become the favorite partners of most European governments and, consequently, often develop into the *de facto* representatives of local Muslim communities. Non-Islamist organizations, lacking the financial resources and political shrewdness of participationist organizations, struggle to make their voices heard.

Assessments of the European Brothers closely resemble those of the global Islamist movement, with analysts split between optimists and pessimists. More specifically, optimists argue that the European Brothers are simply a socially conservative force that, unlike other

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[20] Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase* (Swansea, UK: Awakening Publications, 2000).

movements with which they are often mistakenly grouped, encourages the integration of European Muslim communities, offering a model through which Muslims can live their faith fully and maintain a strong Islamic identity while becoming actively engaged citizens. Pessimists see a much more sinister nature in the European Brotherhood. Thanks to their resources and the naiveté of most Europeans, they argue, the European Brothers are engaged in a slow but steady social engineering program, aimed at Islamizing European Muslim populations and ultimately at competing with European governments for their allegiance. The pessimists accuse the Brothers of being modern-day Trojan horses, engaged in a sort of stealth subversion aimed at weakening European societies from within, patiently laying the foundations for their replacement with an Islamic order. According to pessimists, officials of Brotherhood-linked organizations have astutely realized that their most fruitful approach is to cozy up to European elites and gain their trust. They are taking advantage of European elites' desperate desire to establish a dialogue with any representatives of the Muslim community and putting themselves forward as the voices of European Muslims, then using the power and legitimacy that comes from such interaction to strengthen their position inside the community.

Government officials and experts are irremediably split on the assessment of the movement, creating a complex, often chaotic situation in which institutions swing erratically between actions that reflect both optimistic and pessimistic views of the movement. Some governments have engaged Brotherhood organizations as reliable partners while others or, in some cases, those very same governments that at one point embraced them have publicly accused them of being a social and security threat. In substance, no European country has adopted a cohesive assessment followed by all branches of its government. There is no centrally issued white paper or set of internal guidelines sent to all government officials detailing how European Brotherhood organizations should be identified, assessed, and eventually engaged. This leads to huge inconsistencies in policies, not only from one country to another but also within each country, where positions diverge from ministry to ministry and even from office to office of the same body. It should be noted that there are significant differences from country to country in terms of both the presence of Muslim Brotherhood offshoots and attitudes of local governments towards them.

## Positions towards conversion to Christianity

Even though some dissent, traditionally the majority of Islamic scholars have indicated death as the punishment for renouncing Islam. Some scholars argue that if the convert is not "seditious", that is, does not make his conversion public and therefore seek to undermine the Muslim community, death is not necessary. Yet there is no question that most Islamic sources see conversion as one of the gravest choices a Muslim can make. Islamists of all stripes, whether in Europe or in Muslim majority areas, wholeheartedly embrace this position.

If there should be little doubt that rejectionists, the most radical wing of the Islamist movement, adopt these views, some have thought that participationists would have a different perspective. Yet an analysis of the participationists' most authoritative sources dispels this notion, as a 2006 *fatwa* issued by Qaradawi exemplifies. Firstly, Qaradawi identifies conversion from Islam to other faiths as a Western conspiracy, indicating that "the ugliest intrigue the

enemies of Islam have plotted against Islam has been to try to lure its followers away from it."[21] He then strongly criticizes Christian "missionary invaders" who attempt to convert Muslims to Christianity. Such criticism, while not directly a violation of religious freedom, seems to be rather hypocritical, since *dawa* among Christians has been one of the cornerstones of the European Brothers' activities for decades and has been advocated by Qaradawi himself in lengthy treatises and in many of his lectures in Europe and North America.

But the most revealing part of Qaradawi's *fatwa* on freedom of religion comes when he clearly identifies leaving Islam with either minor or major apostasy.[22] The former is that committed by those who consider Islam as a private matter. In that case, Qaradawi says the apostate should be punished only with a "discretionary punishment." But he is inflexible against those who commit major apostasy: those who publicize their conversion and, even worse, attempt to persuade others to leave Islam. Such individuals, argues Qaradawi in clear terms, must receive the death penalty. "No community accepts that a member thereof changes its identity or turns his or her loyalty to its enemies," states Qaradawi. "They consider betrayal of one's country a serious crime, and no one has ever called for giving people a right to change their loyalty from a country to another whenever they like." To him, leaving Islam is like committing treason, because Islam is not a religion, the choice of which, in modern Western society, is left to the individual. Leaving Islam is committing treason against a political community and Qaradawi goes even further, stating that negligence in punishing apostates jeopardizes the whole community.

Some European-based Brothers are consistent in explaining that the ideas of Islamist thinkers such as Qaradawi are limited to the movement's vision for an Islamic state to be created in any place where Muslims represent the majority. Therefore, they argue, if Qaradawi is adamant that apostates should be killed, the European Brothers have consistently stated that such doctrine is not applicable in the West. The European Brothers have not repudiated Qaradawi's analysis expressly or, more often, tacitly, endorsing his view that those who leave Islam should be killed because they commit a sort of treason. They have simply stated that such punishment is only to be applied in an Islamic state and not in the West. *Trends*, a magazine published by the Islamic Foundation of Leicester, stated, for example, that leaving Islam is like treason because "Islam is not just a religion but a system for organizing human life. It is an ideology and Muslims are soldiers who carry forward this truth."[23] But the magazine clearly stated that a Muslim living in Britain is free to convert because Islam in Britain is not established and the death penalty can only be applied in an Islamic society. Similarly, a *fatwa* issued by the al-Qaradawi-led European Council for Fatwa and Research stated that "executing whoever reverts from Islam is the responsibility of the state and is so to be decided by Islamic governments alone."[24]

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[21] Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "Apostasy: Major and Minor," *Islamonline* (http://www.islamonline.net/English/contemporary/2006/04/article01c.shtml), April 2005.

[22] Gudrun Krämer, "Drawing Boundaries: Yusuf al-Qaradawi on Apostasy," in Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 200-209.

[23] Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims* (London: IB Tauris, 1994), pp. 191-192.

[24] European Council for Fatwa and Research, *First Collection of Fatwas*, translated by Anas Osama Altikriti,. Date unspecified.

These positions lend themselves to two opposing interpretations. For some, the European Brothers are making a commendable effort to contextualize Islamist teachings to Western reality and labeling them as "fundamentalists" for simply following the letter of the Quran is simplistic and unfair. For others these positions reveal the incompatibility of the views of the Brotherhood with liberal democracy. Moreover, according to some pessimists, they betray the movement's real nature. While trying to reassure Europeans with statements about their embracement of democracy and human rights, the European Brothers at heart believe in the same vision outlined by Qaradawi. Aware of the repercussions that openly endorsing such positions would have, they engage in a sort of *outsourcing of radicalism*. Critics, in fact, accuse the European Brothers of playing a deceitful game in which they let non-European-based thinkers say what they really think about thorny issues such as democracy, women's rights and religious freedom. By spinning, downplaying, or refusing to elaborate on such statements, the European Brothers maintain their status of acceptability with European elites. Yet, by maintaining their affiliations with those who make such comments and disseminating their writings within the Muslim community they are capable of tacitly endorsing them without compromising themselves.

The dissemination and mainstreaming of these views by the European Brothers arguably has a certain impact on the European Muslim population. Threats against European Muslims who leave Islam are commonplace. A study by the British think tank Policy Exchange has revealed that 36% of British Muslims aged 16 to 24 believe that a Muslim who abandons Islam should be punished with death, a percentage much higher than the 19% of over 55s who share the same belief.[25] It is obviously impossible to directly and empirically link the growth of these views to the actions of the Brothers or, for that matter, any other Islamist group, but there is no question that such groups espouse, justify and disseminate them.

## Conclusion

This article sought to provide an inevitably simplified and generalized overview of Islamist networks in Western Europe.[26] It goes without saying that dynamics vary significantly from country to country and even from city to city within the same country. There are groups that can only to some degree be considered Islamist[27] and several that fluctuate between the sub-categorizations used in this paper. It must also be noted that Islamism, in all its manifestations, is an extremely dynamic ideological movement. While some of its core ideas and visions are immutable, there is no doubt that many groups in the participationist and, to a lesser degree, the non-violent rejectionist camp, have radically changed some of their views and tactics over the last thirty years and are even more likely to do so in the future years due to the increasingly central role taken by European-born Muslims within them.

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[25] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6309983.stm.

[26] The paper also has the inevitable flaw of overlooking Shia militancy in Europe. Both Hezbollah and organizations directly linked to the Iranian government operate in various European countries, yet it must be said that the vast majority of Islamists operating in Europe are Sunnis—a direct reflection of the sectarian makeup of European Muslims.

[27] One example would be the Tabligh-i Jamaat, a transnational missionary organization tracing its origin to South Asia that has a significant influence in several European countries. See Muhammad Khalid Masud, ed., *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal* (Leiden: Brill,. 2000).

It is very difficult to foresee the developments of political Islam in Europe, both in the immediate and, *a fortiori*, distant future. All the elements of the tripartite Islamist pyramid have contributed to a capillary dissemination of the Islamist message. For example, while only a minority of European Muslims embrace Islamist ideology, whether in its jihadist or in its other forms, Islamist ideas and terms have become mainstream among large segments of European Muslim communities. It seems nonetheless fair to state that the most extreme fringes of the movement, while unquestionably posing a security threat that is unlikely to completely disappear any time soon, do not seem poised to attract anything more than a tiny fringe of European Muslims. In light however of the post-Arab Spring rise to power of Islamists in various Muslim-majority countries, a different assessment could be made of Muslim Brotherhood-inspired and Salafist groups based in Europe.