

Islam and Political Islam in the National Perspectives of the Northern European Countries

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This paper will consider the attitudes adopted towards Islam and political Islam in Scandinavia, the Benelux countries, the United Kingdom and Germany. As elsewhere in Europe, such attitudes are not simply a result of formal analysis and experience of the Islamic world and of the political and religious constellations which have developed there, particularly since 1967.

In two of these countries, at least — the United Kingdom and Germany, not to speak of the Benelux countries — attitudes have been influenced by the interactions between national populations and migrant communities as well as by the ethnic origins and practices of such communities. Furthermore, national attitudes are not a simple integrated response to the issue of Islam and its political implications but reflect a complex nexus of responses and ideas which themselves reveal internal social differentiation as well as the external experience of Islam, whether within the national context or beyond it.

An important part of this nexus also reproduces the colonial experiences of the countries concerned — a particularly important factor with regard to the United Kingdom.

Attitudes towards Islam

There is a clear distinction, throughout all of Northern Europe, between the attitudes expressed by opinion-formers and intellectuals towards Islam and the Islamic world and those typical of public opinion and the mass media. This distinction becomes clearer the further south and west opinion is sampled: in other words, it is least evident in Scandinavia and most intense in the United Kingdom (Ireland, however, is an exception to this rule, partly because of its relative isolation from the Islamic world and because of a close identity between Irish republican experiences and aspirations and those of the Arab world, particularly the PLO and Palestinians). Another general factor is that the dominant influence in shaping opinions towards Islam and political Islam has been the contemporary history of the Arab world. The result is that there is often a confusion between Arabs and Islam and, except in Britain and, to some extent in Germany, the two categories are seen as identical. Even where there is plenty of indigenous evidence that the Islamic world is far wider than the Arab world, there is still a marked tendency to assume that it is the Arab world which is essentially coterminous with and paradigmatic for the Islamic world overall.

The migrant communities in Northern Europe

In Britain, for example, Muslims from the Indian sub-continent outnumber Arabs by almost 5:1, since, according to a special census carried out in 1986 — there has been no other since and the general census figures do not easily reveal accurate figures over ethnicity — there were 505,000 from the sub-continent, made up of Indian Muslims (84,000), Bangladeshis (64,000) and Pakistanis (357,000), together with 99,000 East African Asians, many of whom are Muslim, to 121,000 Arabs and 50,000 Iranians, out of a total Muslim migrant population of 936,000. In Germany, in 1989 there were 1.5 million Turks compared with only around 80,000 Arab migrants (the vast

majority being Moroccans and Tunisians) and a further 113,000 Arab (22,000 Lebanese and 9,000 Syrians and 9,000 Jordanians, the majority of both groups actually being Palestinians) and Iranian (73,000) refu-

Migrants in Britain, Germany and the Scandinavian countries
(actual numbers; most recent figures)

	GERMANY (01.12.92)	NORWAY (01.01.94)	SWEDEN (31.12.93)	DENMARK (01.01.93)	BRITAIN (08.1990)
Turks	1,854,945	5,865	35,713	33,653	26,597
Iranians	99,069	2,217	51,047	8,248	32,292
Moroccans	80,278	2,954	3,629	3,214	9,073
Algerians	14,373	—	—	—	3,672
Tunisians	28,075	—	2,510	—	2,417
Pakistanis	32,197	11,418	2,637	6,259	639,390 ^a
Bosnians	19,904	201	18,054	—	—
Others	196,098	16,672	66,050	—	169,427
Total	2,324,939	39,327	179,640	51,374	882,868
Total migrants	6,495,792	216,177	963,172	180,103	3,078,289
%age Muslims	35.79	18.19	18.65	28.52	28.68
%age Maghrib ^b	5.34	7.51	3.42	6.26	1.72
Total Pop. ^c	81,966,000	4,332,000	8,773,000	5,205,000	54,888,844 ^d
%age migrants	7.92	4.99	10.98	3.46	5.61

^a includes 162,835 Bangladeshis; ^b Maghribis as a percentage of Muslims; ^c mid-1994 estimate; ^d 1991 census figure (Egyptians are the largest North African group at around 20,000 persons).

Sources: Befolkningens bevægelser (Denmark)

Ausländer am 31.12.1992 in Deutschland nach der Staatsangehörigkeit (Germany)

Invandrare och utvandrare (Sweden)

Utlendingsdirektoratet (Denmark)

Encyclopædia Britannica 1994

OPCS, 1991 Census.

gees — a ratio of just under 1:8. In the Netherlands, the ratio of Turks (176,500) to Moroccans (139,200) — the two groups which made up the majority of the 405,000-strong Muslim migrant population in 1989 — was 1:1.3 and in Belgium North Africans dominate in the Muslim population — 250,000-strong in 1989 with 123,000 Moroccans, 11,000 Algerians and 7,000 Tunisians, compared to 72,000 Turks. In the Scandinavian countries, the Muslim populations are much smaller, with around 51,000 in Denmark, more of half of whom are Turks, 180,000 in Sweden and 40,000 in Norway.

One point that is immediately evident from these figures is that, except for Belgium and the Netherlands, the general assumption of Northern European populations that the Islamic world is coterminous with the Arab world does not correspond to the reality of the migrant populations living amongst them. In general, non-Arab Turks, Iranians and Pakistanis form the majority of these Muslim migrant communities and, where there is a substantial Arab community, it is often composed primarily of Lebanese (53,469 in Germany and 22,295 in Sweden, for example), Iraqis (21,576 in Sweden) or Jordanians (12,597 in Germany). It is also worth noting that, with the exception of Sweden, none of the countries under discussion has above 10 per cent of a migrant population (United Kingdom: 5.8 per cent migrant population, of which 1.2 per cent are Muslim; Belgium: 9 per cent migrant population, of which 2.2 per cent are Muslim; Netherlands: 4.8 per cent migrant population, of which 2.5 per cent are Muslim). There is thus a factor other than experience of migrant communities which creates the popular impression of the Islamic world, its culture, politics and contemporary history. In this respect, Northern Europe is very different from France and the Mediterranean European world where Arab- or Berber-speaking North African migrants are by far the dominant group within the migrant communities.

A third general point is that these migrant groups, whatever their ethnic origin, clearly stimulate prejudice towards Islam and the Islamic world, whatever their own attitudes and modes of behaviour may be. It

was striking, for instance, how, in Britain, attitudes towards Muslim concern over Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*, were very largely conditioned by televised scenes of the book being symbolically burnt in Bradford. Similarly, the crisis over Iraq and Kuwait in 1990-91 was seen as a reflection on Muslims and their values, rather than a comment on the nature of inter-Arab politics and related western concerns. As a result, popular feeling in Britain over the issue tended to be directed against the large Asian Muslim population in the country — even though their fellow-countrymen were amongst the victims of the crisis! There were similar reactions in Germany over German relations with Libya and Iran in the 1980s and 1990s. Here, perhaps, the most striking case was the racism that erupted in the early 1990s against the Turkish community in Germany — officially stated to be under two million-strong but privately estimated to be far more numerous than this.

Migrant organisations

Often migrant attempts at creating community organisations stimulate social tensions, particularly if the organisations concerned are explicitly or overtly religious in nature. The actual effect that these movements have is also a function of the official attitude adopted towards migrant communities. If there is a basic policy of integration or an official view that rejects claims to special recognition by minority groups, then community organisations tend to generate additional tension because of official attitudes. Interestingly enough, although this has been a problem in France, it is much less the case in Northern Europe.

Britain and the Scandinavian countries tend to accept the existence of ethnic and confessional minorities within the fabric of state and society and even to grant them a degree of special status. In Germany, the problem has been largely ignored until recently because of the fiction that Turkish migrant workers, in particular, were "guest workers". In other words, their presence in Germany was temporary and no special conditions would then be necessary to accommodate them within the

structure of the state. The consequences of this approach are to be seen in the current wave of popular anti-migrant feeling throughout the country, for which the activities of the extreme right are only a partial explanation. The Netherlands has tended to follow the Scandinavian and British models, whereas Belgium has taken its lead from France.

Germany — Not surprisingly, the most complex pattern of Muslim migrant organisations are to be found in Germany and Britain. In Germany, they are predominantly to be found amongst the Turkish community, although the North African communities do have access to the “Amicales” (*widadiyyas*) — government-based and sponsored organisations which act as both means of political control and social service provision at the same time. In some cases, there have also been spontaneous organisations of community mosques, as has happened with the Egyptian community in The Hague. Sufi orders are also active in Belgium and the Netherlands, including the Tabligh, Deobandi and Brehwi from South-East Asia and Pakistan and the Darqawa and Alawi from the Middle East and North Africa. The Surinamese in Holland have also created the Jama’at Ahle Soennar Nederland, which is based in The Hague. However, none of these bodies has the complexity or the links with the country of origin as is the case with the Turkish community, where the structures created in Germany have been replicated in The Netherlands as well. It should be noted that these organisations, however, have to be seen against the Turkish-German accords designed to encourage Turkish migrant remittances to Turkey for the creation of commercial ventures there as part of migrant resettlement. In other words, the complexity of Turkish migrant organisations in Germany indicates that the assumptions of migrant return on which German migration policy is based are false.

The major organisations are based on Islam and, until the late 1970s, were based on banned movements in Turkey itself. One of the most prominent, based in Cologne, was the Arrupa Islam Kùltür Merkezleri Birliđi (Verband Islamischer Kulturzentrum eV) which was linked to the

banned Süleymançı movement. Another, primarily based in Berlin, where it enjoyed the support of half the population there and which was close to the Turkish National Salvation Party (MSP), was the Arrupa Milli Görüş Teskilatı. It split in the early 1980s into two factions, with the new faction, led by Çemalettin Kaplan, being close to Iran. A more widely based organisation, which goes back to the First World War but which was re-organised in the 1970s and controls 28 *madrassahs* (medresses — religious schools) around Germany is the Nurçuluk movement. This keeps a low profile and is primarily concerned with cultural matters. All three of the above organisations are Sunni in confessional nature. Up to a quarter of the Turks in Germany, however, are Alevi (heterodox Shi'a, similar to the Bektashi Order). They have little formal organisation and live in considerable fear of the Turkish government.

Attitudes towards migrant organisation in Germany changed in 1980, however, because of the Iranian revolution and the army coup in Turkey itself. The Turkish government and the German government decided to co-operate in redefining migrant organisations. This was done via a Turkish government bureau — the Department for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), attached to the prime minister's office. This was, in essence, the revival of an old idea, tried in the 1970s, when the Diyanet had created an overseas branch. The Diyanet itself had been created in the 1940s, as part of a government initiative against Islamism. The new Diyanet initiative involved the transfer of 80 Turkish officials to Europe to monitor the more than one thousand mosques that had developed there. In Germany, the Diyanet insisted that only approved *imams* be appointed to the mosques there — a move which the German government supported.

The next move by the Diyanet was to confront the Süleymançı movement in Cologne. It founded a rival to the Süleymançı organisation there, the Diyanet İşleri Türk-Islam Birliği (DİTİB). It seems to have been a move welcomed by most Turks, for, according to a 1980s survey, two-thirds of the Turkish community wanted nothing to do with the Süleymançı movement or with the MSP movement but attended

mosques and wanted their children to be given religious education. By 1984, 200-250 mosques were linked to the Diyanet and all Turkish migrant organisations were cooperating with it. This included the local representatives of the Turkish trade unions which rejected all contact with Islamist organisations. The situation in Austria, where there are less than 100,000 Muslim migrants, the majority of them Turks is similar to that in Germany, although Diyanet has relatively little influence.

Apart from migrant organisation links with the German and Turkish governments, skeletal links have also grown up with the Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany. The Federation of Protestant Churches (EKD) appointed a liaison official at the end of the 1970s, a move which has been followed by all regional churches. As far as the Catholic church is concerned, the Order of White Friars set up a document centre, CIBEDO, in 1979 and a joint Church-Muslim Working Group now meets regularly, bringing together the churches and Muslim organisations. One problem that confronts state-Muslim organisations — and, by extension, church-Muslim relations as well — is that the German state retains the right to set teaching standards in religious schools. Muslim organisations reject this supervision, particularly as it is seen to be antagonistic to Quranic and mosque schools.

The United Kingdom — In Britain, the growth of Muslim organisations — outside the “Amicales” sponsored by the North African governments — has been fostered primarily in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. By 1985 there were estimated to be 338 mosques controlled by Islamic movements dominated by the Deobandis and the Brelwis, who were often in conflict with each other, a tendency that continues today (as recent events in Luton have demonstrated). In addition, there were two cultural organisations: the Ahl-i Hadith, based mainly in Birmingham, which sought to proselytise and wanted separation from the mainstream non-Muslim society; and the Jama’at-i Islami which brought together four separate organisations — the Leicester Foundation, the Muslim Educational Trust, the United King-

dom Islamic Mission and, after 1976, the Dawat ul-Islam for Bangladesh. These were all concerned with education and the provision of religious facilities for the community.

However, given the fact that the Muslim community in Britain is extremely complex and heterogeneous, since the country is not only a migrant recipient country but also a traditional political haven for the Arab and wider Muslim world, as well as a major centre of Middle Eastern political and cultural activity, a series of covertly and overtly political organisations also appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They were influenced by Muslim countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Libya and Iran, with Saudi Arabia supporting the Muslim World League — Rabita, Libya supporting the Dawa and Iran supporting the Muslim Institute. The Pakistani Jama'at offered support to the International Centre for Islamic Studies, as well as to the four institutions mentioned above. The Egyptian-based Ikhwan Muslimin was linked to the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS). There were also two cover organisations — the Council of Mosques of the United Kingdom and Eire, which was supported by the Saudi-backed Muslim World League, and the Council of Imams and Mosques which was Libyan-backed and linked to the Brelwi movement. Both bodies were profoundly weakened by the Salman Rushdie affair and the more radical wing of the Islamic movement was taken over by the Pakistani-dominated and Iranian-backed Muslim Parliament.

The dominant institution, of course, is the Regent's Park Mosque and the Islamic Cultural Centre which is Saudi-controlled and tries to lead the British Muslim community — against Libyan, Iranian and Pakistani resistance. Converts to Islam also play a significant role in Britain, both in *sufi* orders, such as the Darqawa, and in education where the Islamiya Trust, run by Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens), has set the pattern of burgeoning Muslim religious education which, so far, receives no official support from the state although such support is provided to Jewish, Church-of-England and Catholic schools. The Shi'a community (mainly Iraqi and Iranian) has its own organisations, of which the Al-Khoe'i

Foundation is the major representative. The Shi'a and Sunni communities are linked by the Sharia Council, a body of imams headed by Dr Zaki Badawi, a former imam of the Regent's Park Mosque. This body issues *fatwas* on behalf of the Muslim community over issues of Muslim practice in a British context. Its writ is not universally accepted and it is in implicit competition with the Muslim Parliament in this respect.

Links with the churches are, as in Germany, skeletal, with the British Council of Churches considering formal links only in 1976 at the time of the Festival of Islam — a major cultural event in London financed by Kuwait. At that time, an umbrella organisation, the Committee for relations with peoples of other faiths was founded. The United Reform Churches set up a sub-committee for Islam within their Committee on Mission and Unity. In 1987, the Interfaith Network for the United Kingdom was set up but has achieved little in terms of inter-faith reconciliation. In short, Muslim organisations in Britain, as in Germany, have become inward-looking, not just because of doctrinal imperatives but because formal linkages with parallel organisations inside the host community have not been fostered or encouraged, either by civil society or by government. Where government interest has been apparent, it has mainly been to exploit possibilities of political control, rather than social or cultural integration or association.

Despite this pattern of complex interlocking structures — most highly developed in Britain but also evolving in Germany — the reality of links between migrant community and host society in Northern Europe is far more prosaic and discouraging. There has been little willingness, except, perhaps, in Scandinavia, to actively promote integration of such communities, either on the basis of the *état communautaire* or the *état laïque**. In Sweden, for example, the

* The terms have been proposed by Gilles Kepel to distinguish between the British pattern where ethnic communities are socially integrated as communities and thus preserve their cultural distinctiveness (*l'état communautaire*) and the French model of cultural integration.

200,000 Muslims have sixty community organisations grouped into three different umbrella organisations supported by government — the Forenade Islamiska Forsamlingar i Sverige (FIFS), the Sveriges Muslimska Forbund (SMuF) and the Islamiska Kulturcenterunionen (IKUC). In part, this results from specific incidents, such as the Rushdie affair in Britain or the Iranian links with local organisations in the 1980s in Germany and the earlier Rote Armee Faktion-extremist PLO activities in the 1970s. It is also, however, a consequence of deliberate government neglect and populist antagonism. The result today, in Britain at least, is the growth of radical Islamist movements, such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir*, which emphasises the divisions between migrant community and host society, rather than seeking to reduce them — thereby feeding directly into elite and populist antagonism towards politicised Islam, whether in Europe or outside the Union.

Elite attitudes towards migrants and the Islamic world

Outside the issue of the colonial experience, where applicable, three factors seem to have been critical in influencing opinion amongst European political and cultural elites towards the Islamic world. The earliest is undoubtedly the Arab-Israeli conflict and the spill-over of terrorism connected with the conflict into Europe that occurred during the 1970s and the early part of the 1980s. This was associated with a generalised semito-philism which identified Israel as the victim in the conflict until the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Thereafter opinion shifted slowly away from this position, particularly after the outbreak of

* This was founded in Beirut in 1951 by a Palestinian Ikhwan supporter and seeks the restoration of the Islamic polity of the Rashidun caliphate. It operates in the Middle East and North Africa through subversion of military personnel as part of *jihad* and is banned throughout the region. In Britain it is a mass organisation enjoying widespread support amongst Pakistani youth, particularly in higher education.

the *intifada* in the Occupied Territories in 1987 and the Oslo Accords of September 1993. The Islamic world was seen generally as threatening, vengeful and aggressive in this context. Today many of these paradigms persist, modified only by the fact that attitudes towards Israel have shifted from seeing it as a victim to it also being seen as aggressive and inflexible over the issue of peace in the Middle Eastern region.

The second such factor arose from the context of the Islamic revolution in Iran which was largely interpreted by observers in Northern Europe who were not specialists in Middle Eastern or Iranian affairs as an experience in clerical obscurantism and traditionalism which underlined the inherent brutality of Islamic doctrinal systems. No attempt was made to distinguish between Sunni and Shi'a traditions, nor to appreciate the very specific political circumstances, stretching back to the 1906 constitutional crisis and the discovery of oil in 1908. These impressions were profoundly strengthened by the Salman Rushdie affair which seemed to embody all the violence and intolerance that many intellectuals felt typical of the Islamic world — even when they were knowledgeable of both that world and of Islam itself. Once again, events in Europe often seemed to support such views, not least the proselytising of Iranian and Shi'a views of Islam throughout migrant communities in Europe, particularly in Germany and France.

The third major factor has been the end of the Cold War and the triumphalism associated with the successful war against Iraq to force it to abandon its annexation of Kuwait. Although Iraq is a state based on a secular ideology, the manipulation of Islamic symbolism by the Saddam Hussain regime during the six month-long crisis added to the prejudices which already existed towards the Muslim world. The end of the Cold War had introduced a power vacuum in the Arab world, which had long survived on an associative balance of power between its members within the context of the antagonistic balance of power between the two super-powers. Now it seemed to most Arab leaders that the only choices open were to become Western clients or face isolation and aggression, as

occurred to Iraq, Iran and Libya. Arab reactions to this situation have, to a large extent, fed the sense of triumphalism that attended the end of the Cold War and, even at a leadership level, has been re-directed against the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Western governmental demands for economic and political change, in terms of economic liberalisation, democratisation and respect for human rights within the Middle East (such demands elsewhere, particularly in the Far East, have been much more muted) have fed the deep-rooted suspicion and dislike of the Islamic world that has developed during the previous decades, not least during the 1980s. It is not so much a question of whether Northern European states actually base their diplomatic attitudes to their counterparts in the developing world which is important. It is more the fact that normative attitudes are set by elite views of the paramount importance of such factors in determining whether or not normal state-to-state relations can be entertained that determines the climate for governmental action.

To some extent, these sentiments of disdain for the Islamic world have acquired respectability through arguments put forward in the United States by Samuel Huntington, suggesting that the future will involve a clash of civilisations, with Islamic civilisation likely to be the first antagonist. The first fruits of this attitude were manifested by the former Nato secretary-general, Willy Claes, in his remarkable statement that Islam could pose as great a threat to Western interests as had been posed by Communism. It is difficult to escape the suspicion that, behind these rationalisations over Western attitudes towards the Islamic world lies a deep-felt Western need for a Manichean world system, in which Islam is now cast in the position once occupied by Communism.

This is a sentiment that pervades both policy-making institutions and opinion-formers within the political elites of North European states, although instruments articulating state policy, particularly foreign ministries, tend to take a more pragmatic approach. Indeed, as the decade of the 1990s has progressed, many of the more value-loaded principles applied to diplomacy have been quietly dropped.

Nobody today would expect a member of a European Union troika mission to suggest that the Union would "...incorporate respect for human rights and the promotion of democracy" into its links with Asia, as Jacques Poos did in 1991, except at the most formal and rhetorical level. At the same time, the European Parliament, which does not have direct responsibility for policy-formulation, can feel free to express widespread sentiment throughout Europe by calling for an improvement in Turkey's human rights record before it would ratify its proposed customs union with the European Union.

Of course, it can be objected that there is nothing specifically "Northern European" in these views. This is, of course, true. However, it is also the case that, in Southern Europe, amongst states with a Mediterranean policy dimension, attitudes are far more closely attuned to the interactions that exist between the littoral states and civilisations of the region. Even if the idea, beloved of some South European intellectuals, of a common Mediterranean culture is put to one side, there is still a complex range of social, political, economic and even cultural interactions of a kind that does not and cannot exist in Northern Europe. On the other hand, Northern European states and elites tend to take a more abstracted attitude towards the Islamic world, drawn, in part, from a shared Anglo-Saxon vision which has now extended into the Germanic and Nordic sphere and even finds its echoes in France and the Benelux countries. This involves common assumptions about the ideological justifications for preferred modes of liberal economic and political organisation, together with shared concepts over the imposition of international order. Whilst this attitude is most typical of Britain, it is also shared by the German political elite and finds echoes in Scandinavia as well.

Mass attitudes

Many of the ideas that permeate the elite communities of Northern European states are also shared by the wider arena of public opinion. In addition, the close proximity in terms of residence and occupation

between indigenous national communities and migrant communities has intensified many of these reactions, as has the growth in right-wing racist and anti-immigrant movements in Britain, Belgium and Germany. There is a degree of liaison between such groups now which is growing as they exploit modern means of communication and this also feeds into popular attitudes towards Muslim migrants in Europe and, by extension, towards their belief systems.

It should not be forgotten that around 4.3 million of the 10 million migrant workers in Europe overall are Muslims and that they are often more easily identifiable as alien groups than those from other European countries or from the Slavic world. Competition over housing and employment has long been a source of popular disaffection and obvious symbols of Islam — mosques and Islamic schools, in particular — provide an immediate target for prejudice. This has been particularly the case in Britain, where considerable resentment has been aroused by Islamic schools seeking state aid — as is already provided for Jewish and Christian schools. Tensions within Muslim migrant communities — between Deobandis and Brelwis or Naqshbandis in Britain, for example, or between Turks and Kurds or between the Sulaymançı, the Milli Görüş, the Nurçuluk or the Diyanet movements in Germany — are also seen as evidence of what the Islamic world is really like.

These popular attitudes of dislike and prejudice have been profoundly encouraged by the popular press, particularly in Germany and Britain. This is a process which goes back to the terrorist violence of the 1970s which, in Germany and Belgium, at least, was linked to indigenous clandestine and violent movements of protest — the Baader-Meinhof Group and the Rote Armee Faktion — which often used both the Arab world and Eastern Europe as a logistics and training area. In Britain the counterpart was the behaviour of Libya in the early 1980s in hunting down Libyan dissidents which culminated in the 1984 St James's Square siege and, earlier, in the storming of the Iranian embassy in London. Both developments fed on the highly

publicised activities of extremist Palestinian groups, all of which were roundly condemned without any attempt at understanding the background causes by the populist media throughout the 1970s. This sentiment has now been powerfully reinforced by the received wisdom, which first came to prominence during the 1980s in Britain and the United States, that terrorism is, by definition, merely criminal and may not be justified or even explained in terms of real political issues. No credence is ever given to the powerful imbalance of force between those who make use of terrorism and those against whom it is directed, even though this might provide insights as to how a terrorist threat could be dissipated.

Undoubtedly, however, the most important factor in demonising the Arab and Muslim worlds in the popular imagination throughout the 1980s was the Iranian revolution and the subsequent siege and hostage crisis of the American embassy in Teheran. This, and subsequent incidents in the Middle East, provided the material for a sustained campaign in the Western media, particularly in the United States and Britain, against the Arab world and against Islam which culminated in the Rushdie affair. The campaign was intensified by the right-wing arrogance which came to characterise much popular discourse, in the Anglo-Saxon world, at least, during the 1990s and did much to reinforce the image of Islam as violent, vengeful and obscurantist. Increasingly little attention was given to the causes of violence in the Islamic world, particularly the Middle East, as the decade wore on, merely the fact of violence, which became indissolubly associated in the Western populist imagination with Islam itself.

The issue of political Islam

Political Islam, as a significant phenomenon within the Islamic world, only became evident to majority opinion in the states of Northern Europe during the 1980s, although it was an important factor in the region from 1967 onwards, when it gained ground as a viable ideologi-

cal alternative to Arab nationalism and other socialist or capitalist models in the wake of the Arab failure in the 1967 war with Israel. Once again, it was the Iranian revolution which provided the initial impetus, but it was the aftermath of the invasion of Lebanon which codified Western images of political Islam around the activities of Hizbullah and the taking of Western hostages. This image was, once again, one of violence, mixed in with intolerance and intense anti-Western attitudes. It was typified by the destruction of the US Marine barracks in Beirut, when a close parallel began to be drawn between political Islam and terrorism.

This was an extremely potent association, since both Britain and Western Germany had had plenty of experience of domestic terrorism during the 1970s and 1980s, with the IRA in Northern Ireland and the Baader-Meinhof experience in Western Germany. In Britain, too, a generalised attitude towards terrorism had been inculcated during the 1980s, according to which terrorism, in whatever form, had nothing to do with political issues and was simply an example of criminal behaviour. It was, therefore, a security issue and did not require any kind of policy formulation or review. It was, furthermore, by definition, extra-state activity and was also to be condemned in those terms alone — states being construed, in the right-wing rhetoric popular at the time and since, as being incapable of such behaviour provided they enjoyed democratic government.

The populist response

Developments in the 1990s have done little to shake this conviction. For West Germany, the trauma of having to deal with the Mughniya faction of Hizbullah over the release of German hostages in Lebanon, together with the embarrassment caused by the activities of German firms in Iraq and Libya, has created a level of official and popular intolerance of Islamist movements. In Britain, the growth of domestic Islamist movements such as the Khalifah movement, which stems from

a similar movement created in 1924 in the Indian subcontinent, and the Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Liberation Party) which appeared in Britain in 1985 and which derives from a movement created in Beirut in 1952 by a former member of the Ikhwan Muslimin have done much to create a prejudice against political Islam at a popular level. A recent conference organised in Wembley Stadium by Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami, which has an Arab leadership but which is particularly active amongst university students from the sub-continent communities, was not only monitored by the security services fearful over a potential terrorist threat but was condemned in the press for anti-Semitism and incitement to violence.

Against this domestic background it is easy to see that current developments in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and the Occupied Territories, all of which involve an allegedly violent threat to state order by political Islam, are viewed with considerable trepidation by the mass media and by public opinion in a kind of demotic endorsement of Huntington's thesis. Indeed, even the more serious press indulges in similar comment, as occurred in the *Sunday Telegraph* on November 13, 1993 in an article which attacked the Tunisian an-Nahda leader, Rachid Ghannouchi. The attack was considered so extreme that it is now the subject of a libel action.

Press comment in general highlights the issue of Islamist violence and the Islamist obsession with public morality or the behaviour of women. It completely overlooks the other aspects of political Islam which are particularly important in the context of North Africa — the growing differentiation of different Islamist movements, the growing body of theoretical literature, particularly on Islamic economics from movements such as the Tabligh-i-Jamaat or the Jamaat-i-Islami in Pakistan and Britain, or the growing role of Islamist movements in the provision of social services in states where the state itself has failed to meet such needs. It has, in other words, no awareness of or interest in what Giles Kepel has called "Islam from below" — the attempt to capture control of society in Muslim countries, rather than, as in the

1980s, attempting to capture control of the state. Political Islam is, in short, seen as alien and hostile to Western society and values by public opinion in Northern Europe.

Official attitudes

Governments and the political elites of Northern Europe have generally adopted a more complex approach to the issue of political Islam. Although its supposed intolerance and propensity to violence is deplored and condemned, most observers are aware of the differentiation that has occurred in recent years between different groups. Thus, although the French government until the 1995 elections condemned both Britain and Germany for harbouring Islamists from Tunisia and Algeria — a theme reiterated by the governments of the countries concerned and by the Egyptian government — both governments, along with those of Scandinavia and Holland, have insisted on their obligation to grant political asylum to threatened persons in such movements. Thus Rachid Ghannouchi of an-Nahda now resides in London as a political refugee, together with a group of other Tunisians, some of whom were involved in plots against the Bourguiba regime. Rabah Kebir, one of the most senior external leaders of the FIS, lives in Germany and one of his lieutenants, who has been granted diplomatic status, is based in Belgium.

The German government, moreover, has also established good relations with Iran, to such an extent, indeed, that there was recently a major scandal when Ali Fellaian, the head of Iran's security services, was able to make a semi-official visit to Germany where he met his counterparts. Indeed, there is a general assumption amongst the governments of Northern Europe that they will have to deal with Islamist movements in government in the future, particularly in North Africa, and that, although they do not relish the prospect, they are prepared to engage in normal relations with such governments, should they come to power, or should such movements gain a role in government.

There are, however, certain basic requirements for such a situation to be achieved. All governments are agreed on the necessity for future Islamist governments to abide by existing treaty obligations and for them to demonstrate respect for basic human rights.

Thus there is no real concern over a possible an-Nahda participation in a future Tunisian government, although this is considered to be extremely unlikely. Nor would Ikhwan participation in the Egyptian government be viewed with great alarm. As far as the FIS in Algeria is concerned, all Northern European governments consider that dialogue is the only way in which the crisis can be resolved and implicitly accept that the policies of repression favoured by the *eradicateur* faction inside the Algerian government is hardly likely to be successful. No government considers that other Islamist factions in Algeria — Hamas or Nahda — represent a viable alternative. There would, however, be great concern were the GIA to be actively involved in any future government. Although the German government appears to be concerned over the possibility of a “domino effect” if an Islamist government were to come to power in Algeria, this is not a fear shared by the British authorities. Nor have the Scandinavian governments voiced such anxieties, although they have been voiced in Holland and by social democrat intellectuals in Germany.

One of the major concerns of any future government in North Africa which is either controlled by Islamists or in which Islamists play a significant role is that such a government continues to meet its debt repayment obligations and to follow basic economic policies based on liberalisation and restructuring. An-Nahda and the FIS have demonstrated that this would, in general, be the case. Another, albeit lesser, concern arises over the question of democratic participation and respect for human rights. This was last seen in the collective *démarche* made by European Union ambassadors to Teheran over the Rushdie case. Teheran’s eventual refusal to provide the guarantees required — as a result of its own internal weakness and the adverse effect of American trade sanctions — did not lead to a breach in diplomatic

relations but simply to a European promise, led by Britain and Germany, to try again at some future date. It is likely that the attitude towards North African states, were Islamists to come to power, would be very similar.

There are anxieties that Islamist movements would not be able to cope with the complexities of government in North Africa, both because of lack of governmental experience and because of their general failure to articulate political programmes that deal with issues beyond public morality issues. Indeed, the FIS's original programme in 1991 deliberately took a moderate stance on all such issues. Conceptually, however, the most difficult issue for Northern European governments is whether or not an Islamist movement in power will accept the concept of electoral removal from power and the process of democratic choice, however it is articulated. All the major movements in the region have indicated that they do accept such principles and Northern European governments, in consequence, must now consider whether they are prepared to allow such commitments to be put to the test. Of course, it is Britain and Germany which have taken the lead in this respect, although the Scandinavian countries and Holland have taken a particular interest in issues of human rights and democracy. In this respect they may differ from their partners in the South of Europe and in North Africa itself.

The policy vacuum

At the same time, North European governments within the European Union recognise that they do not have to face the direct implications of political Islam along the South Mediterranean shore, unlike the governments of Southern Europe. There is, thus, a general reticence to take too obvious a policy lead within the European Union on the issue. The Barcelona Conference initiative, which defined the content of the global Euro-Mediterranean partnership policy in November 1995, is seen in Northern Europe very much as a South European

priority. North European states have acquiesced in it since the Essen Declaration, reacting negatively only over the proposed funding for the next five-year financial protocol — proposed by the Commission at 5.5 billion ecus, compared with 7 billion for Eastern Europe, but reduced at British insistence to 4.7 billion (only 42 per cent above the previous five-year protocol figure). South Mediterranean policy within the Union thus becomes part of a system of “trade-offs” in which Northern Europe accepts Southern European priorities in return for Southern Europe accepting unpalatable issues such as convergence and monetary union on Northern European terms.

As far as the ideology of political Islam is concerned, a very similar pattern of response can be discerned, particularly at governmental level. Partly because of their internal problems — to which North European governments have reacted by tightening immigration restrictions whilst trying to defuse social tensions — most North European statesmen would argue that a process of political integration is the only way in which the tensions of the Middle East and North Africa can be eased. In practice, however, their support for this integrative model is restrained by the generally accepted requirement that no integration of movements espousing violence can be accepted; an attitude that runs directly counter to political realities in the region. This means that Northern European states have no properly formulated policy towards the issue; on the one hand they favour negotiation with Islamist movements, provided they are not engaged in violence, on the other, they support governments trying to eradicate such movements through violence on the grounds that they espouse violence — which is itself a consequence of political exclusion!

There is, in effect, an abdication of governmental responsibility in Northern Europe. This is born of anxiety over domestic xenophobia and the growing conflict between a public opinion, which is growing increasingly intolerant of moral deficiencies in the developing world, and governments which have to deal with political and diplomatic realities. It is amplified by the failure of an effective policy-making

apparatus within the Commission which can generate a coherent political response on the part of the European Union which member-states will support. It is defined by the willingness of Northern Europe to allow Southern European states to set the pace in Mediterranean policy development and is encapsulated in the contradiction between toleration of the Algerian model of repression of political Islam in practice and the promotion of an integrative model in diplomatic discourse. In essence, Northern European states would be happiest with the Moroccan solution; the controlled and restricted integration of political Islam into the formal political arena under strong, centralised government which itself stood above the clash of ideology.