

Europe's Muslim Population: Frustrated, Poor and Divided

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Byline: By YOUSSEF M. IBRAHIM

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Body

In the streets rising from Marseilles's old port, couscous is easier to find than croissants. Cockney neighborhoods in London are now bazaars for **Muslims** from Bangladesh. Muezzins call Turks to prayer from new minarets in Cologne.

With 10 million to 13 million **Muslims** living in Western Europe, conservative and far-right politicians, including some voices in the French presidential campaign, have appealed to prejudice against the **Muslim** presence.

"France must firmly oppose clandestine immigration," Jacques Chirac, the conservative French presidential candidate, said recently. "Too often the laws of the republic are openly flouted."

Americans would find many of the European slogans familiar: Legal and illegal immigrants are taking your jobs, ruining the neighborhood, hurting the schools, increasing your taxes, swelling the welfare rolls, making the streets unsafe. And some politicians play on Europeans' fears of terrorism rising from the **Muslims** in their midst.

But five weeks of interviews in France, Germany, Britain and the Netherlands, where the largest concentrations of **Muslims** from Asia, Turkey and North Africa live, reveal a far more complex portrait.

Scores of interviews with **Muslim** immigrants who came to Western Europe to work in the 1960's, and with their children who were raised in Europe, depict a **population** that is **divided** and traumatized, weakened by unemployment and humiliated by dependence on social welfare.

The interviews described a **Muslim population** stymied by cultural values it does not share, having done little to integrate over the years. Many in the older generation, now largely retired or unemployed, appear disconnected from the societies they live in. Rather, they are trying to reconnect with the one they left behind, watching television programs broadcast by satellite from their native lands.

Adding to the cultural dissonance, their sons and daughters are no longer connected to **Muslim** tradition, many seeking to adopt the views and values of European society. In fact, most **Muslims** in Europe are not political or even particularly religious -- a silent majority who want simply to carry out their lives as best they can.

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Still, the anxiety about **Muslims** has been raised to the level of geopolitics. This year the Secretary General of NATO, Willy Claes of Belgium, pronounced militant Islam as important a strategic threat today as the Soviet Union was before Communism imploded in 1989.

"At the moment, I'd say the fantasy part of the perception of militant Islam as a menace in Europe is greater than the reality," said Francois Burgat, an expert on militant Islam at the National Center for Scientific Research at Aix-en-Provence, France.

The fears, however exaggerated, have been fed by the arrest in Europe of scores of **Muslim** militants, mostly from North Africa, on charges of stockpiling weapons and explosives for use back home.

Islam's recent and highly visible presence in Europe has run into resistance, analysts say, for many reasons: bigotry, the religious zeal of some **Muslim** immigrants, the inability of some new arrivals to adapt to a dominant European culture, the alienation that is common among **Muslim** youths.

Divided

Opposing Values Generate Tensions

In Heerlen, a Dutch town of 35,000 near the German border, Sheik Ahmed Ali Saroukh fidgeted with a cup of tea in a grimy factory that was transformed seven years ago into Masjid Al Nour, the Mosque of Light, as he pondered how to turn the town into a center of Islam.

The preacher, who came to Heerlen about five years ago from Morocco, wants to put up a minaret on the building, topped by a loudspeaker to broadcast the call to prayer five times a day, starting at dawn.

He advocates that Dutch women who are teachers in Heerlen wear a veil in schools when teaching **Muslim** children and that boys be segregated from girls. He also wants the local hospital to build a mosque for the handful of **Muslim** patients who end up there and serve them meat prepared under Islamic regulations. There are about 750,000 **Muslims** in the Netherlands, out of a total **population** of 15 million.

"The fact that they allow us to have mosques does not mean they love us," Sheik Saroukh said, stroking his graying beard. "On the contrary, they fear us. The proof is they are fighting us every step of the way as we try to claim our rights. They have different values from us. The Dutch man and his wife work. They raise dogs, not children. We want our women to raise children and stay protected at home."

While Sheik Saroukh attributed the failure to achieve his goals to Dutch discrimination, his principal obstacle is Heerlen's deeply **divided population** of 2,500 **Muslims** from Morocco, Turkey and some Arab countries, many poorly educated and unemployed, heavily dependent on the generous Dutch welfare system.

The sheik's mosque attracts a minority of older-generation Moroccans. But whether it is a small **Muslim** community in nearby Aachen, Germany, or a large one like the estimated 150,000 largely North African **Muslims** in Marseilles, France, religious militancy has widened the generational **divide**.

Mohammad el-Jashi, 32, a Moroccan mechanic technician who lives in Venlo, the Netherlands, wants to become part of Dutch society.

"Sometimes militants here ask for ridiculous things, like segregated schooling," he said. "We didn't have that in Morocco. I went to a mixed school until I left at 15 to join my father. My heart remains in Morocco, but my head says we stay here where my family is better off."

And in Heerlen, a breakaway group of **Muslims** established their own mosque in space lent by a liberal Christian missionary center a few blocks away on Putgraaf Street. There, a 32-year-old Palestinian named Khalil Shahine was contemptuous of Sheik Saroukh.

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"Before conquering Europe for Islam, which is a hope, we should concentrate on building up our weak, illiterate societies, our people, with education and knowledge," Mr. Shahine said.

Mostapha Dalouj, 36, a physicist by training who accepted a job as social worker in Venlo after learning Dutch but failing to land a job in his area of expertise, said that repeated rejection was pushing him to avoid assimilation into Dutch ways.

"I came by choice from Morocco, equipped with a fair idea of Western societies," he said. "But until now I can't understand what they mean by integration. I want to be a Muslim living in Holland. But that does not mean I want to melt completely in this society and disappear, which is what the Dutch want. When I say that I speak to my children in Arabic, they answer: you are a racist. I am just trying to teach them some of the tradition."

Amizian El Hussein, 51, an unskilled Moroccan laborer, came to the Netherlands three decades ago. "I don't know if we changed or the Dutch have changed," he said. "When I came here I didn't think much of religion. Like most who came here, I was illiterate, but the living was good and there was no friction. They treated us well, and we behaved better than the young generation now."

"I now find myself praying regularly," he added. "My children have had problems in school. Some have dropped out. So now, when I look back, I can't blame it on the Dutch really, but it is true they have become resentful of foreigners and we are not doing as well as we used to."

Integrated

A Job Can Make All the Difference

Leila Yehiawi, 36, a sociologist in Marseilles, is a daughter of an illiterate Algerian father who is now retired from working as a laborer. She is part of the second generation that has emerged as the heart of Europe's Muslim communities.

Unlike many of her generation, she is highly educated and successful. Fluent in French, which she speaks with a native Marseilles accent, Ms. Yehiawi considers herself well integrated but deeply committed to the North African immigrants who did not make the transition into French society.

She works as a teacher and counselor at Lycee Jacques Raynaud, a vocational training school whose 250 students are largely Muslims who dropped out of other schools.

"My students accuse me of being a traitor because the image I reflect is one of success in an atmosphere of failure," she said. "Many of these kids come from homes where both parents are unemployed. They are lost as second-class citizens to whom France is inaccessible. Some adopt Islam as an exhibitionist factor to signal discontent, but, in reality, they are yearning to be equal citizens. Their problem is idleness and deprivation."

But of her own eight brothers and sisters, only two have jobs. "This high rate of unemployment is new, and it is the problem facing our communities -- not Islam, not militancy and not what is happening in Algeria," she said. "Work is the backbone of integration. The lack of it leaves a fertile ground for exploitation by fundamentalists."

Salah-Eddine Bariki, a 43-year-old Algerian who works at Radio Gazelle, a local station broadcasting ethnic programs in Marseilles for minorities, said it was absurd that Muslim communities could be the bedrock of an Islamic revolt.

There are an estimated 150,000 Muslims in Marseilles, with 43 places of worship. But a recent survey of foreigners living in France by the National Institute of Demographic Studies, which polled 13,000 people over eight months, found that 68 percent of those from Algeria considered themselves to have no religion.

Only 10 percent said they practiced Islam regularly, and 22 percent occasionally. Half of the men and a quarter of the women between 18 and 25 said they were involved in a relationship with a French-born person, and 87 percent of those born to Algerian parents considered French their mother tongue.

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The problem, Mr. Bariqi said, is not Islamic militancy but unemployment, in a country where more than 12 percent of all workers are jobless, with far more than that unemployed among the immigrants.

Hans Korz, a 58-year-old Dutch coordinator of welfare and rehabilitation consultant for the government in Venlo, said the same was true in the Netherlands, where unemployment is about 8 percent.

"Among immigrant youths, largely Turks and Moroccans, it is 60 percent for those between 17 and 25," he said. "The problem is not social, cultural or ideological. It is economic in the first place."

Many Moroccan immigrants, however, say that part of the problem lies in the resistance of Dutch society to foreigners who want to become part of it.

Feared

A Few Militants Fuel Suspicions

Despite lack of evidence that militants have made significant inroads, some officials believe that Europe is in danger of being taken over by a wave of fundamentalism.

Patrick Lalande, a Paris prosecutor who specializes in terrorist affairs, said such thinking dominates French and other European government circles. Indeed, over the last year France, Germany and Belgium have arrested or expelled close to 200 Islamic militants on charges of subversion and arms trafficking.

The most important activity by such militants is logistical support -- buying weapons or sending faxes on behalf of armed groups in Algeria and fundamentalists battling the Governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and countries in the Persian Gulf region.

Members of one such group, the Algerian Fraternity in France, which included Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians and one Egyptian fundamentalist, were arrested in France in July. Some members were found near the French-Spanish border loaded with arms and military uniforms on their way to Algeria. But most of those expelled were thrown out for nonmilitary activities like fundamentalist propaganda.

"We are facing a sort of Islamist international assault made up of networks of militants with connections to fundamentalist countries including the Sudan, Afghanistan and Iran," Mr. Lalande said. He said the militants' focus was not France or Europe, adding, "I think their main objective is to take over North Africa."

One way in which France has tried to cope with its estimated five million Muslims, the largest population in Europe, is to encourage what it calls "French Islam" -- promoting, through progressive Muslim preachers born in France, a modern, secular outlook for the religion.

It is still a modest effort, and far from successful. The French-appointed imam of the mosque of Paris, Dalil Boubaker, often says there is no contradiction between Islam and living in a secular society.

This approach has yet to prove convincing to orthodox believers. On the other hand, Muslim militants have yet to prove they can attract a significant following.

Sheik Mohammad Abelhadi Doudi is a staunch supporter of the Islamic Salvation Front, which is battling to establish an Islamic state in Algeria, and administers a mosque in Marseilles. He says that after more than a decade of trying, his militant version of Islam is simply not enough to win adherents who are unemployed, speak French and are exposed to "temptations" of Western life.

"If I give a young man a Koranic verse, does it solve his problems?" he said. "No. I have been doing this for 14 years, but it's like sowing the sea. Even if there are fruits, they are small and bitter. Islam cannot breathe freely in the West."

NEXT: Western Europeans react to Muslims in their midst.

Graphic

Photos: France has promoted a new version of Islam among its five million Muslims, the largest Muslim population in Europe. This mosque is one of the 43 in which many of the 150,000 Muslims in Marseilles worship; A Muslim student works in the metal shop at Lycee Jacques Raynaud, a vocational school with 250 Muslims in Marseilles. "Work is the backbone of integration," said Leila Yehiawi, who teaches there. (Photographs by Gary Matoso for The New York Times) (pg. A12)

; Chart/Map: "WHERE THEY ARE: Main Muslim Enclaves"

FRANCE -- 5 MILLION

An estimated 5 million Muslims, mostly from North Africa, out of a total population of 57 million, mainly concentrated in Paris, Lyons and Marseilles.

GERMANY -- 2 MILLION

About 1.9 million Turks and Kurds, the great majority of them Muslim, and about 250,000 Bosnian refugees, out of a total population of 80 million. Mainly concentrated in Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Munich.

BRITAIN -- 1 MILLION

About 1 million Muslims, 775,000 of them from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh, mainly in London, Birmingham and Bradford, out of total population of 58 million. There are also communities of Egyptians, Iraqis, Moroccans, Palestinians and Yemenis in London. (pg. A12)

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