

INTRODUCTION

The Prolific Assassin

Had it been an ordinary homicide, it would scarcely have been mentioned in the local Amsterdam press, let alone in the global media. But this was no ordinary murder, for the victim was famous, the assailant was Muslim, and the motive appeared to be revenge. Yet despite the intense international coverage, many observers remain unaware that the Dutch-Moroccan murderer had Americans in mind as he planned the gruesome attack.

On the morning of November 2, 2004, exactly 911 days after the September 11, 2001, attacks on America, 47-year-old Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh great-grandnephew of the artist Vincent van Gogh, was riding his bicycle to work along an Amsterdam boulevard. Racing up beside him came another bicyclist, a young man dressed in traditional Moroccan garb. Without warning, the stranger suddenly revealed a handgun, aimed, and fired. Swerving off the road, Van Gogh leapt off his bike and ran, but the assailant kept shooting, hitting his target several times. The bullets might have been enough to kill, but the assassin was not finished. He rushed at Van Gogh, wielding a butcher's knife. "Don't do it," Van Gogh pleaded, but without hesitation the stranger stabbed him repeatedly and slit his throat. The incident occurred so quickly that the perpetrator, 26-year-old Mohammed Bouyeri, could still have fled the scene with a chance of escape. Instead, he removed a five-page note from his pocket, placed it over Van Gogh's torso, and plunged a second knife into the bloody corpse, pinning the note to his victim's body. Police chased Bouyeri through a nearby park, exchanged fire, and captured him only after shooting him in the leg. Several days later, the text of Bouyeri's elaborate note was made public. In its conclusion the assassin wrote, "I have no doubt that you, O America"—along with Europe—"will surely

fall.”

The motive behind Van Gogh’s murder seemed clear. Only a few months before, the controversial filmmaker had directed Submission, a movie depicting the treatment of women in Islam. The images he showed could hardly have been more inflammatory. The film, which tells the story of a Muslim woman who is beaten by her husband and raped by her uncle, included four nearly naked women, covered only by transparent robes. Their bodies bore whip marks and had Quranic passages affirming a man’s right to beat his wife painted across them.

Most commentators assumed that Van Gogh was killed in retaliation for his film. But if Bouyeri was simply taking revenge against Van Gogh for the film, as was widely believed, then why did he address the United States in his murder note? No Americans produced the film. No Americans acted in it, and few Americans even saw it.

Breeding Terrorists

No one is born a terrorist; terrorists are bred. Some are shaped by societal exclusion, convinced they are unwelcome in their own homelands. Others are seduced by sermons of hate, the hapless adherents of perverted preachings. Though all are born neutral, they turn to terror in search of something larger than themselves. Theirs is a spiritual quest gone horribly wrong. Such may have been the case for Van Gogh’s assassin. Bouyeri was born and reared in “Satellite City,” a working-class Muslim ghetto on Amsterdam’s western fringe. A college dropout and one-time journalist, Bouyeri had once written in praise of Holland’s multiculturalism, but unable to find steady work, he turned to petty crime. After 9/11, he proved an easy recruit for the Hofstadt Cell, a group of young men who gathered at the Al-Tawheed mosque in his neighborhood, reading the radical writings of Syrian cleric Sheikh Abu

Khaled. Before long, Bouyeri had donned the traditional Arab robe (the djallabah), moved out of his family's apartment, and increasingly saw America and the West as enemies of Islam.

As word of Van Gogh's assassination spread quickly across Amsterdam, some 10,000 Dutch thronged into a city square in shock and protest. In the days that followed, Holland was racked by anti-Muslim attacks. Muslim schools were bombed, children terrorized, and several mosques were set ablaze. To outside observers, the sudden burst of violent animus in a traditionally peaceful country seemed incongruous. But the Van Gogh affair and its aftermath reflect trends underway long before the Madrid train bombings of March 2004 or even America's 9/11. The Dutch case symbolized the social tensions mounting across Europe between a burgeoning young, religious Muslim population, on the one hand, and a fearful, secular, ethnic European populace, on the other.

Seven months after the slaying, Bouyeri was sentenced to life in prison. (There is no death penalty in Holland.) At his trial, he showed no remorse for his crime, insisting he would do it again if given the chance. Clutching a Quran, he declared, "the law compels me to chop off the head of anyone who insults Allah and the prophet."

Europeans were horrified by the brutal murder of Van Gogh and the anti-Muslim violence that followed it. But Bouyeri, unfortunately, is not an aberration. He and his cell are simply the logical result of a long-term cultivation, a process in which many cultural and economic forces are at play. While the West has slept, even after the wake-up call of 9/11, religious extremists from Muslim states have been actively enlisting Western men like Bouyeri, hoping to breed future Osama bin Ladens. Europe's failure to integrate its Muslims, combined with America's battered image in the Muslim world, has left too many Western Muslims easy prey for violent dogmas. This volatile European fault line, where Western failures meet Islamic extremism, is America's Western front in the war on terror. Until America and

Europe adopt new strategies, it will increasingly become the incubation ground for breeding Bin Ladens.

Muslim Europe: The Case for America's Failure

Walk along London's Edgeware Road, where many shops are Arab-owned, and you will find bookstores with radical literature calling for jihad against America. Enter some Marseilles homes, and you can hear preaching against the American way of life. From the Algerian districts outside of Paris to Turkish enclaves around Berlin, one can easily tap into a font of hatred toward America. The Hamburg-based hijackers of 9/11 showed how this hostility threatens American security. The terrorists who blew up Madrid's commuter train on March 11, 2004, were not solely targeting Spanish civilians; they aimed to gain Spain's withdrawal from Iraq, in hopes of leaving U.S. forces isolated. The same motives appear to have inspired the suicide bombers on London's underground in July 2005. The daily attacks on U.S. soldiers in Iraq--some traced to European Muslims--are reinforcing the lesson. Europe is becoming fertile ground for Muslim militancy, and America is its prime target.

Richard Clarke, the U.S. government's former counterterrorism chief, divides the Muslim world into concentric circles. The largest, outermost circle contains all of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims, who for the most part are absorbed in their daily lives, repelled by terror and extremism. The innermost circles consist of the hardened fanatics, a relatively small group Clarke estimates at between 50,000 and 100,000. These are the jihadists bent on the West's destruction, against whom force is the most common response. But it is the second circle in between that is of the greatest concern for a hearts-and-minds campaign. Under the right circumstances, some could be persuaded to lend support to extremism, and others might join terrorist cells. On the other hand, with a wise approach, they could just as readily support America. These Muslims, those in the second circle, are the ones whose support

the United States and Europe urgently need to attract.¹

America's appeal in the Muslim world has rarely been lower. An extensive Pew Research Center survey on global attitudes in 2005 found that majorities in Muslim countries hold negative views of the United States, including in those nations the United States calls its friends. A mere 23 percent of Pakistanis and 21 percent of Jordanians have a favorable opinion of America. In Turkey, a <SC>NATO<SC> member and key U.S. ally, only 17 percent support the U.S.-led war on terror, and in 2004, a Pew survey found that a stunning 31 percent of Turks believed that suicide attacks on Americans in Iraq were justifiable. That same study reported that 55 percent of Jordanians and 65 percent of Pakistanis held favorable views of Bin Laden.²

Unfortunately, America's battered image extends throughout Europe, where young Muslims are flocking to extreme views.³ In one large-scale study of Turkish-German Muslims in their twenties and teens, almost one-third agreed that Islam must become the state religion in every country. Even though they live in Europe, 56 percent declared that they should not adapt too much to Western ways but should instead live according to Islam. almost 40 percent stated that Zionism, the European Union, and the United States threaten Islam. Perhaps most disturbing, just over one-third insisted that if it serves the Muslim community, then they are ready to use violence against nonbelievers.

America's unpopularity mixed with rising Islamist fundamentalism would be a dangerous combination under even the best of circumstances. But added to this volatile mixture is a demographic time bomb. Muslim populations are exploding. Conservative estimates project that Muslims will be the majority in major German, French, and Dutch cities within a generation. France is already home to 5 million Muslims, almost 10 percent of its total population. Holland, once a safe haven for refugees, will be deporting 26,000 asylum seekers, many of them Muslim, in an effort to stem the rising tide of its

Muslim underclass. At the same time, the birth rates of ethnic Europeans are imploding, exacerbating fears that Muslims will one day become a dominant majority. Without coherent, thoughtful integration strategies, the consequences will be dramatic. For Europe, it could mean continent-wide unrest of the kind that racked France in November 2005, when weeks of car burnings raged across French suburbs. It could mean divisive social fragmentation, or a total reordering of the welfare state. For America, the effects could be as dangerous as the fraying of transatlantic ties or the recurrence of terrorist attacks at home.

Throughout the EU, more than 15 million Muslims are living, working, raising families, building homes, and starting businesses in lands where capitalism, democracy, and freedom are the norm. American TV shows, films, and products are readily available. American news media is overwhelmingly accessible. If America cannot attract Muslim hearts and minds along this Western front, it has little chance of appealing to them in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, or beyond.

Ambi-Americanism

Fortunately, the story of Europe's Muslims and their views of America is far more complex than the raw survey data and violence might suggest. Bouyeri's act in no way represents the sentiments of most of Europe's Muslims. Yet neither are Europe's Muslims enamored of mainstream European or American culture. Theirs is a highly mixed bag of attitudes and beliefs. Torn between two polarizing extremes, Muslim Europe exists in a state of layered ambivalence: ambivalent toward America, toward Europe, and toward mainstream European and American cultural values. Above all, many are uncertain whether and how Islam can coexist within the expanding EU. Will the EU remain a "Christian Club," treating Muslim cultures as alien to the continent, or will Muslims find their future as well-integrated,

equal members of European society?

Opinion within Muslim Europe is divided. Although their parents and grandparents retain strong attachments to their ancestral homelands in the Muslim world, Europe's younger Muslims are torn between two new identities. One is European: secular, modern, and middle-class. The other is pan-Islamist: a global community, united under God. Both identities possess powerful appeal, but only one is turning Muslims against America and mainstream European society.

Opinion is divided not merely among European Muslims, but also for individual Muslims. Because many Muslims are conflicted when it comes to America, it makes little sense to speak of "anti-Americanism." To be truly against America is to hate the entire nation: its people, its products, and its policies. Only a tiny fraction of the world's populace holds such extreme views, and no charm offensives are likely to alter the dogmatic opinion of such fanatics. But the vast majority of Muslims (and indeed many non-Muslims in Europe and around the world, as well) are ambivalent toward America, drawn to some of its characteristics and repelled by others. For this reason, it makes more sense to speak of ambivalent-Americanism, or, ambi-Americanism for short.

The roots of ambi-Americanism and ambi-Europeanism extend far beyond the occupation of Iraq or America's Israel policy. Most Muslims, like most ethnic Europeans, are of two minds toward America. They are attracted by America's appealing traits--its freedoms, openness, technological prowess, educational institutions, economic opportunities, and some of its cultural exports--but at the same time they are also repelled by many of its other traits, embodied in its perceived lack of social justice, consumerism, sexualization of women, and putative hypocritical foreign policies.

There exists among younger European Muslims a growing sense that Europe and America are spiritually empty. Islam is providing a powerful magnet to those youth, who crave greater meaning to

their lives. They are finding in Islam a sense of fulfillment that they have not found in mainstream European culture. Throughout this book, you will meet young Muslims and hear their tales of discovering the grace of God. Many of these are in fact conversion stories, for while the young people in question were born into Muslim homes, they were not observant. Once they came of age as young adults in Europe, they felt the need for something more.

Individual Muslims generally are able to hold their conflicting opinions of the United States in a precarious balance, but three proximate factors are tipping the scales against America. First, fundamentalism is on the march across the continent. Its zeal is fed by a host of factors, nourished by radical imams in the local mosques and fanatical fatwas propagated on the Web. But the European states themselves are often fanning the fundamentalist flames by publishing inflammatory cartoons, enacting anti-terror legislation which many view as anti-Muslim, or by banning symbols of Islamic faith, such as headscarves in schools and the workplace. Second, high Muslim birth and immigration rates are not only providing a growing pool from which extremists can draw, they are also fueling ethnic European fears.

Third, globalization is hindering integration. Networks like the Qatar-based al-Jazeera and the Internet bring news of suffering Muslims to living rooms in Berlin and Paris. As Muslim-produced news media graphically depict beleaguered Muslims from Chechnya to Kashmir, from the Philippines to Afghanistan, and from Palestine to Iraq, Europe's younger Muslims increasingly identify with those perceived victims, especially as they themselves feel alienated from European society. They commonly see America as backing their oppressors--the Russians against the Chechens, the Israelis against the Palestinians. Muslim anger and alienation often fuse with a sense of betrayal and the conviction that America is the enemy.

Between Bigots and Bin Ladens

The Van Gogh murder and its violent aftermath revealed the two extremes that threaten to wrench Europe apart. At the one end stand Muslim-hating bigots, bent on excluding or expelling Muslims from European society. At the other are the would-be Bin Ladens, religious zealots who hope to lure young Muslims to their cause. Sandwiched between these bigots and latent Bin Ladens are the overwhelming mass of Europe's 15 million Muslims, searching for their proper place on a continent that does not always feel like home.

This is a book about identities, both of ethnic Europeans and of Europe's Muslims. The first group is struggling to accept that it truly lives in an immigration society, one that is changing and being changed by its new arrivals. As they grapple with all the implications of absorbing "foreign" peoples, Europe undergoes the spasmodic growing pains familiar to Americans from centuries past. The second group is struggling just as much, searching for a Muslim European role on the EU stage. Muslim Europeans are diverse, multi-ethnic, and divided in so many ways. Their future within Europe is anything but certain.

Breeding Bin Ladens profiles some of Europe's younger Muslims at a critical fork in the road: one trail leads them to Western integration, the other sets a course for alienation and possible extremism. It traces their steps as they navigate an identity minefield in search of a cultural "third way."

While this book tells the story of America's image in the Muslim world as seen from inside the second circle, it is also the story of Islam's future in the West. In these pages you will travel to the hotspots where national security and national identity collide--in the streets and mosques of Europe. Through in-depth interviews, I present the honest, anguished, sometimes harsh thoughts and feelings of

Europe's younger Muslims, giving Western readers access to a foreign world right in their own backyard.