

CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

Are We At War With Islam?

U.S. Global Engagement

Jocelyne Cesari, David C. Speedie

Transcript

Introduction

DAVID SPEEDIE: I'm David Speedie, director of the program on U.S. Global Engagement here at the Carnegie Council. It is my singular pleasure to welcome here today an old friend and one-time colleague, actually, Jocelyne Cesari.

Jocelyne is a senior fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs and visiting associate professor in the Department of Government at Georgetown University. She also directs the Islam in the West Program at Harvard University and the Berkley Center's Islam and World Politics program.

I just learned that you have now been appointed the head of a new department at the University of Birmingham in England.

JOCELYNE CESARI: Yes, a new chair on religion and politics at the University of Birmingham, associated with a new Center for the Public Understanding of Religion as well. I'm very happy with that.

DAVID SPEEDIE: A true trans-Atlantic mission, and an important one.

JOCELYNE CESARI: Yes.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Jocelyne's research focuses on religion and international politics, Islam and globalization, Islam and secularism, immigration and religious pluralism. Her new book, *The Awakening of Muslim Democracy: Religion, Modernity, and the State*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2014, is based on three years of research on state-Islam relations in Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, and Tunisia. She is the author of [many other publications](#). She is a frequent commentator on such important matters as the title of her recent book also, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Islam in Liberal Democracies*, published in 2013.

Let me say also that, last and by no means least, she is a member of our own resident [Global Ethics Fellows](#), an international network of distinguished scholars who spearhead the academic discussion of the ethical dimensions of international affairs.

With that mouthful, Jocelyne, welcome to the Carnegie Council.

JOCELYNE CESARI: Thank you. Thank you for this very detailed and long introduction.

DAVID SPEEDIE: It was a lot to introduce.

Discussion

DAVID SPEEDIE: In discussing our agenda for this conversation, you came up with an arresting question, which I would like to lead with. That is, are we at war with Islam? Or perhaps, to turn it around, is Islam at war with us? Obviously there is a lot in the press from the [ISIL](#) [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] extremists operating basically from North Africa to Yemen. What is the state of affairs? Is this a war?

JOCELYNE CESARI: It seems like that, in the sense that we are witnessing every day killings of people who just happen to be from other religions because some Muslim fighters have decided that they are associated with either the United States or Europe or some authoritarian regime that is supported by the West. Clearly, if you look at the rationale and justification for international fights and terror attacks in the last 15 years, you can clearly say that there is a justification about being at war. Some Muslims feel that they have to fight the West.

But I would not like to limit the question to this, I would say, unilateral relationship. I think also we have to be very aware that some Westerners also feel at war with Islam. Having studied extensively the situation of Muslims in Western Europe, I can tell you that the discourse of intolerance is on both sides, on the side of Muslims and on the side of non-Muslims that feel threatened and fear the expansion of this religion in what they consider the cradle of liberal democratic secular values. So I think we have to be aware that the fear is mutual.

This, I think, is even more worrisome, in the sense that what I have witnessed in the work I do is not so much that the Muslims are against the West because they have an understanding of what the West is; I think they have more of an essentialized vision of the West. If you listen to, the leaders of [al-Qaeda](#) and now [ISIL](#), you can hear that the West is more, as we say in our academic jargon, a *topos*. It's more like an abstract place where you project some anxiety or attitudes about corruption, deprivation, sexuality, promiscuity. So there are lots of things here that are defining the West in the discourse of radical groups that do not reflect the whole reality of the West.

When we hear that in the West and in Europe, people get very anxious, because they associate this transnational discourse with the reality of Muslims living next door. There is now also, from the citizens in Europe and, to a certain extent in the United States, concern that being a Muslim and being a neighbor or fellow citizen of a non-Muslim can also raise questions of intolerance and civil war.

So I think we have really to address seriously, politically these two anxieties. I'm a little more than disappointed, I would say, but concerned that these two anxieties are not really addressed as such. We tend to discard them. I hear lots of Muslims saying, "This is not Islam," which can be justified on different grounds, but it is not sufficient. I see lots of young people across cultures, across nations, either Muslim-majority countries or Muslim-minority, attracted by the discourse of [ISIL](#). So what do we do? It's not enough to say it's not Islam. If it does have appeal, we have to address why and how this is appealing as a message of Islam.

In the same way, when we hear intolerant discourses about Islam in Europe, we tend to discard them as Islamophobic or intolerant or representing a very small fringe or pocket of marginalized Europeans. I have to say also that this is not the case. You have lots of people, beyond, I would say, the people on the extreme right or marginalized groups, identifying with some extreme right group that there is a concern about the status and legitimacy, of Islam when it comes to gender relations, when it comes to relationships with non-Muslims, when it comes to the status of sexual minorities

that have to be addressed.

I am concerned that these two extremes that actually, in some paradoxical way, are also fitting the mainstream discourse on Islam in the West are never really addressed or taken into account.

DAVID SPEEDIE: So it's a much more complex question than simply religious difference. It penetrates into so many elements of basically everyday living. You have used the expression also the "ghettoization" of Islam—I think that may be what you are referring to here—as an alien, incompatible entity in terms of Western core values. This really does seem to be almost an existential face-off here in terms of the European extremes.

JOCELYNE CESARI: In the American media and also the political landscape, we became aware of the political danger of Islam after 9/11. It was there, but it was always pushed back in some areas, like Iran or in the Middle East in general. The 9/11 attacks made this question central in the way that Americans are dealing, not only with Muslim-majority countries, but the status of Muslims among us. This is one thing.

At the same time, in Europe this question has been discussed for far longer than that. If you think of the [Rushdie affair](#), if you think of the [hijab crisis](#), the headscarf crisis in France, it started in 1989. There was some [bombing](#) of the metro in Paris in 1995, in the name of Islam, because there was at the time a [civil war](#) in Algeria between the state and Islamists. So this is something that has been present in the European societies for longer.

Of course, 9/11 has increased the questioning. When I talk about the ghettoization of Islam, I am not talking about Muslims. We have to give credit in this regard to European politicians that have tried in the last 20 years multiple integration policies.

DAVID SPEEDIE: But you have also written about—and I would like you to elaborate a little on this—the distinction between what you call symbolic and sociopolitical integration of Muslims in Europe. You talked about giving some credit to European political leaders. Are we to conclude that *laïcité* (separation of church and state) in France, multiculturalism under [New Labour](#), especially, in Britain—are these successes, failures, too early to judge?

JOCELYNE CESARI: Again, the distinction is internal sociopolitical integration. Efforts have been made. It doesn't mean that they have been completely successful. What we see emerging across Europe are pockets of excluded areas where it happens that Muslims are the majority of people—not all the time, but they are. So there are still questions about the sociopolitical integration. If you look also at the political representation of Muslims, it is still very low. The exception is the United Kingdom, where you have a very dynamic Muslim political class at the local level, much less at the national level, but even so, you have people in the House of Lords.

If you look at the political representation of Muslims in Germany, in the United Kingdom, in the Netherlands, it is still very, very limited. I think it's part of the lack of acknowledgment or recognition of Muslims as part of the citizenry, part of the national scene.

The symbolic integration goes deeper than that. It is about the incapacity to acknowledge Islam as part of our different national narratives, and the exclusion of Islam from the recognition that goes with other religious minorities or religious groups across Europe. There is indeed the question of the legitimacy status of Islam in public space. What we have witnessed in Europe in the last 20 years is really a greater concern about the visibility of religious signs in general, but it is directly related to the fact that Muslims are now very visible believers in the public space. So the whole question about

pushing away in our dress codes, even the question on *halal* slaughtering, even circumcision, have come because of the presence of Islam.

But the fact is that it does affect all other religious groups. I will give you two examples.

When the French voted in 2004, the law that is officially entitled the Prohibition of Religious Signs in Public Schools, they had the *hijab* in mind. What happened was that the Sikhs came out and they said, "What do we do with the turbans?" The French didn't think of it, but, "We are sorry, we cannot make exemptions."

So this kind of vision that religion has to be limited to your place of worship or your home is a very, very reducing way of being religious, because you are also religious in your social life. That is what Europeans have a hard time to understand. It varies. I would say the French have the most resistance, recalcitrance to accept the visibility of all signs in public space. I would put on the opposite side the British, who are a little more inclusive when it comes to visibility of religious signs. In the middle you have different kinds of discussions and accommodation.

The other example of this influence of the attempt to reject Islam out of public space and the influence on other religions is when the Germans had a parliamentary discussion to ban male circumcision. They were thinking only of Muslims.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Not Jews.

JOCELYNE CESARI: Exactly. That's why the Jewish minority came out into the public space and said, "So what do we do?" Because of that and because the Jewish situation actually mobilized people globally, more than the Muslim one—which is interesting—they renounced this bill.

DAVID SPEEDIE: The French situation in 2004 you mentioned. What about crucifixes in the classroom? Was that also to be—

JOCELYNE CESARI: There is a lot of discussion about the crucifix. If you have a big cross—if you have just a little one, you are asked to put it under your shirt. There are lots of discussions about that.

DAVID SPEEDIE: That is an interesting comment about Islam as part of a new national narrative, the idea of belonging, the idea of identity, and so on. I remember some years ago now a comment by a young Muslim Frenchman living in maybe the 23rd arrondissement north of Paris, the Muslim-majority areas that you have described. His comment was, "I'm French, but the French don't know I'm French." I think that was a very, very revealing comment, not necessarily a political statement, but a really profound self-identity.

JOCELYNE CESARI: Yes. This is attested by lots of surveys in the book you mentioned of 2013. We did focus groups among Muslims in Paris, London, Berlin, Amsterdam, and also Boston because we wanted an American counterpart. What came through very strongly was the fact that you have Muslims in France, second, third, fourth generation, and they complain that they are French, that they have no connections whatsoever anymore with the cultures, the language of their parents or country of origin, of their grandparents, but they are still considered as alien. This is a marker or stigma that they really resent on a daily basis.

The marker has evolved. It used to be you were North African, or, as we say in France, *Maghrebian*. You used to be South Asian in the United Kingdom, with no particular distinction between being

Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi. Now all these ethnic or cultural markers have disappeared and you are all Muslims, without taking into account again the diversity of how to be a Muslim. What is at stake in this clash of, I would say, inverted negative images is that the diversity of the groups disappears and the tensions among Muslims—what is it to be a Muslim, what is the truth in Islam—all this diversity really disappears.

I would say the danger is also that the radical Muslim groups, the Islamic groups, are doing the same. They see the West as the same, from the [Crusades](#) to [Obama](#), while we know that the European history, the European leadership is also different from the American one, that the situation in Europe is different. But they do not see that.

I talk a lot sometimes to policymakers in the United States, and they have the conviction that radical Islamic groups know and understand them. They don't know them. They have no understanding whatsoever of the social dynamic, the historical dynamic, or the political specificity of the United States. For them, the West is still again this abstract *topos* that is discriminating against them, that has tried to exterminate Islam since the Crusades.

Why does it work? Because they are not insisting only on the imperialistic project. It is not about military occupation or economic domination. It is about the West wants to destroy the soul of Islam.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Of course, this is the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, and this, it seems to me, is a profoundly fundamentally ethical question. You are dealing with—as you said, these aren't immigrants in most cases. They are French. They have been living for generations in France and the United Kingdom and the Netherlands forever, and Germany. It seems profoundly unethical to simply almost dismiss awareness of things by, as you say, ignoring the fact that there are different kinds of South Asians, Moroccans are not Algerians, and so on and so forth. So it is at heart an ethical question.

JOCELYNE CESARI: It is, but what I can witness is a choice, which is to choose the short term and the electoral cycle over a more, I would say, painful and courageous position, which would be the long term, which is to socialize the new generation in a different historical framework.

I'll give an example of how the narrative can change. For me, it's the United States before and after the [Civil Rights Movement](#). You can argue that until the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans are not part of the national narrative. The society is very segregated. The symbolic integration in this regard was to include them in the fabric and the history of the American nation. Does it mean that racism has been solved? Of course not. We are, unfortunately, witnessing everywhere, every day, acts of racism against African Americans. But it means that the expectation is that this is not good.

DAVID SPEEDIE: This is not the norm.

JOCELYNE CESARI: Exactly. What I see with Islam is that this kind of critical and negative opinion about the discrimination is not there. Actually, it's seen as good. In Europe it would be like they deserved it because, after all, this religion is not a real religion. It's an ideology of terror.

I have heard the same kind of argument in the United States, not from the mainstream politicians, but others resisting the creation or the building of mosques. You had this [anti-sharia movement](#) in the United States that I found fascinating, lots of states taking what they call a preemptive ban of sharia law. This is fascinating because Muslims in America never, unlike some European Muslims, have claimed the necessity of sharia. It was struck down by the Supreme Court because it is [anti-Constitutional](#) to particularly target one religion.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Let me, if I may, challenge something that you have written, to some extent. That is, in discussing *Charlie Hebdo*, you made the comment that sometimes what happens in a situation like this is not just funny critiques, but blatant insults. What about the point of view that says, unfortunately, there is a certain thing in Western democratic society where even blatant insults are quite allowed, from *Jonathan Swift* on? Jonathan Swift in the 18th century wrote some outrageous things designed to insult, quite frankly, and shock. If you look at a publication like *Private Eye* in Britain, for example, with which I am sure you are very familiar, *Private Eye* cavalierly insults the monarchy, the Church of Rome, the Church of England, and so on and so forth. This is, then, part of an accepted, received cultural tradition.

Does this mean that this is really something that is insoluble as far as Muslim populations are concerned?

JOCELYNE CESARI: It is a very good question. Again, if we look at what Muslims are doing and saying beyond the anxiety or anxious discourse, what we see is—take the *cartoon crisis*, for example. The surveys we have show that most Muslims felt offended by the cartoons. Does it mean that they wanted to act against the cartoonists? Most of them didn't want to.

But you are pointing out something that is not here yet in the discourse of the Muslim leadership, which is still a sort of leadership that has been trained on models coming from the Muslim-majority countries. Most of the leaders, the imams, are not ready to have what we call the "buffered self": "Of course this is offending me, but I live in a society where I have to put up with it because people are free to say and express whatever they want."

I can say that the leadership of Muslim groups in Europe—a little less in the United States in this regard—is not ready to deal with that. If you look at the attitudes of the Danish *imams* at the time, they are the ones who *exported* the issue to Saudi Arabia, which shows you this kind of international influence.

The problem for Muslims in Europe is that the leadership is not national. It is not specific to all European countries. You have lots of connections between the situation in Europe and transnational Muslim leadership, which has since become very politicized. The cartoons became a global crisis once this Danish imam brought the question to Saudi Arabia.

So this is happening all the time. I think it does create concern from the non-Muslim fellow citizens that indeed these Muslims are not up to par on this social contract where you have to accept the fact that your basic and fundamental values can be insulted. It is a real question.

The problem is when you confuse also the critique with the insult. Lots of Muslims would say, "We have nothing against a critique of Islam. What we cannot accept is a very bad, negative"—but more than negative; creating harm or damage to the symbols or concepts of our religion.

You see I have already shown three differences here, the people who say, "I am offended and I don't do anything"; the people who say, "I cannot accept the insult, but I accept the critique"—so you have lots of nuances among Muslims themselves. The problem again is that the Muslim leadership doesn't reflect this diversity.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Just two quick reflections on that. First, it's something of an evolutionary thing. We are not at a stage yet where Muslims in Europe can accept this. It comes from the leadership. I am assuming also that when you speak of the exportation of insults, of outrage from Copenhagen to Riyadh, you are not just talking about Salafist imams. This is much more mainstream.

JOCELYNE CESARI: No, but it is also a challenging time, where being a Muslim in Paris or London has also repercussions in Rabat and now in Syria or Iraq. ISIL has been very good at instrumentalizing the crisis of Muslims in Europe or in the United States as a reason or justification to recruit. This makes things much more complicated. I would say that Muslims have to address an issue that is very difficult to address, which is the impoverishment of the Islamic tradition, for reasons that are not linked to Islam itself, but to two things that happened that I explain in the book of 2014.

One is that the Islamic tradition became reconstructed and redefined by the building of the nation-state, in a way that we didn't take into account. In the survey we did about the state-Islam relation, it was striking to see that even in a so-called secular country like Turkey, the ways of being a Muslim and being a citizen were put together in a way that excludes being Alevi, being Kurd, being Shia. This is a problem.

The problem is that the Muslim clerics of the traditional establishment became civil servants. They are paid by the state. The mosques are controlled by the state. The institute of training has been restructured by the state. If this is not politicizing Islam—and we cannot address that, because political Islam, as we know it as an Islamic movement, is a second iteration of this fundamental creation of what I call religious nationalism. If Muslims do not address that and if they do not take back or take ownership again of their Islamic tradition that before the nation-state was independent—the caliph didn't form the *ulamas* (elite Islamic scholars). They had their own endowments. They had their own institute of training. They were pretty independent. The caliph could ask them to instrumentalize *fatwas*, but otherwise nobody was putting control on what they were doing. So the tradition was more plural and pluralistic than we think it was.

This nationalization of Islam explains also the focus on politics. To be a Muslim, is it to be a citizen, to be a fighter, to be a jihadi? It's part of the consequences of this connection between being a national and being a Muslim of a certain thread. I think this is something that is not really addressed today.

The evolution of Al-Azhar University is an excellent example of this nationalization. Before [Nasser](#), Al-Azhar is an Islamic university for the whole Sunni world, not only for Egypt. Nasser comes and nationalizes Al-Azhar. Today everything that is said at Al-Azhar comes from double control by the state. The state put its hand in restructuring the curriculum. The [grand mufti](#) is nominated by the Egyptian state and so on and so on. There is no independence.

Al-Azhar said about ISIL, "We condemn the acts, but we do not consider them outside the fold of Islam," which is something that has to be addressed. The only ones who have done more critical work, actually, are the Shia clerics. They have said clearly that these people are not Muslims anymore.

When you have this kind of timidity, this kind of inhibition related to political concerns, I do not think that this is independent theological thinking.

DAVID SPEEDIE: We'll get to ISIL in a moment, but I do have just a couple of more questions on Europe, if I may. This, to some extent, has been covered already, but another U.S.-based scholar, [Yascha Mounk](#), has said, and you are probably familiar with this quote: "Two seemingly opposite sentiments can stand side by side: the conviction that Muslims should become full and equal members of European democracies, but also the unabashed determination to defend these democratic societies against Islamic fundamentalist extremism."

This is a tension and a—

JOCELYNE CESARI: I completely agree. This is a dilemma of European societies and politics today. There is a need to integrate Muslims, but there is no real thought given to integrating Islam, because today we are living, in Europe, in what I call a "securitization" of Islam, in the sense that showing some piety or signs of piety of Islam is not seen as a legitimate religious claim or demand; it is seen as a politicized act connected to the extremist wave and atrocities conducted by a group like ISIL.

At the time of the [campaign](#) against the minaret in Switzerland, there was a poster that pretty much summarized this securitization. There is a demand to build a mosque with a minaret. Theoretically and legally, it has to be addressed within the framework of religious freedom and what the regulations are for any place of worship to be built. It became a national discussion because the mosque was seen as an attack against Swiss national identity. The poster shows the Swiss flag with minarets like missiles coming out of the flag, and in the middle you have a woman completely clad in black, like a *burqa* type.

So what does it say? It says that expressing your Islamic religiosity in the Swiss context means you are at war with Switzerland. It means that you are a danger to the security of the country.

That is the problem here. We have to disconnect the question of extremism—it does exist—with the claims of being a legitimate religious group. That's what I call the symbolic integration. In my experience until now, there is no courageous political discourse, from the left to the right, that really addresses this question. It's a danger, because it fuels the tension I was mentioning between the extreme right and the attempt of extreme radical groups from outside to recruit young Muslims.

DAVID SPEEDIE: And that leads to the last question on Europe specifically. Along with Islamophobia, or however one wants to describe it, the [crisis in the Eurozone](#), the displeasure and reaction against bureaucracy in Brussels, and then, of course, the [financial crisis](#) of a few years ago has led to the rise of ultra-right groups across Europe. We have done a lot of [research](#) on this, and [reporting](#), and [sessions here](#) at the Council. We are involved in a major project. An edited volume of this will be appearing later in the year.

There is a range from the relatively—I say relatively—non-extremist or nonviolent groups, such as [UKIP](#) [UK Independence Party] in Britain, through the [Front National](#) in France and the [Party for Freedom](#) in the Netherlands, to [Jobbik](#) and [Golden Dawn](#), basically neo-fascist groups, in Hungary and Greece. Obviously there is not just an anti-Muslim agenda here: anti-Jew, anti-gay, anti-Roma, anti-immigrant, and so on and so forth. This must complicate the picture as far as the Muslim question is concerned.

JOCELYNE CESARI: It does. I would say that extreme right groups and movements have always been present in Europe. They have gained more visibility recently, but even if you look at the National Front, as a political party, they have been getting 15, 20 percent of the French vote for more than 25 years now. This is not negligible.

Having said that, what I have witnessed in Europe is that this entire Islamic discourse—you are absolutely right—was not about Islam as such, but was also anti-immigration, anti-Europe. The portion that I call the culturalization of all these issues—it's immigrant issues because they are Muslim; it's urban development issues because in the ghettos we have Muslims—when the root cause is not in the socioeconomic structures anymore but in the cultural aspect of the people involved.

This component of the extreme right movement is now shared across the board. That is what is bothering. If you listen even to the more anti-Muslim discourse today, with this identity component,

they come from the left and from feminists. They would say, "We are not racist. We have nothing against immigrants." They had the pro-immigration discourse in the 1970s, the 1980s, early 1990s. But since the visibility of Islam, what they are saying is, "We are protecting ourselves against values that are a danger to our core liberal democratic morality or norms."

I think this is a danger here. If you listen to the anti-Islamic discourse, it is not anymore the monopoly of the extreme right. It is shared now across the political spectrum in Europe, and it is part of the danger.

DAVID SPEEDIE: ISIL: You have written somewhere that, in a sense, one may equate radical Islam with communism and the radical left, back to the 1970s, even going back, I would say, to the 1930s, where you had people becoming members of the Communist Party, perhaps for reasons not wholly that they identified with the teaching of [Marx](#) and [Engels](#). Is there a similarity now with ISIL in the sense that this is just an opportunistic entity for people to adhere to in a sort of extreme protest against something, rather than really believing in a group that is manifestly, grotesquely brutal in its practices?

What is the success, I guess, of ISIL in Europe, is what I'm asking.

JOCELYNE CESARI: In Europe, young Muslims are attracted to ISIL because of the narrative. I would make a difference here between the people in the combat zone, like in [Syria](#) and [Iraq](#), who are obviously joining ISIL for a more strategic kind of purpose—for example, we know that ISIL has recruited lots of the former supporters of [Saddam](#), who are far from being religious. So in this sense, you are right that there is an instrumentalization of ISIL resources and logistics.

For the people in Europe, it's different. Really what attracts them is the narrative. ISIL and al-Qaeda, in this regard—which is still important, if you think the two [Kouachi brothers](#) that acted in Paris against *Charlie Hebdo* were actually following more al-Qaeda than ISIL. The attraction of the narrative is again to provide an explanation for this lack of symbolic integration. It is about giving meaning to this continuous feeling, "I do not belong. I do not fit in." This feeling cannot be associated with socioeconomic exclusion. Actually, what we see is that the people who are the most vulnerable are the people who could be in social mobility toward middle class, who can be more educated. It is about people who don't think they fit.

Then you have to take into account the whole context. It is also people who do not belong to strong professional, communal, or religious communities. The Kouachi brothers were coming from foster care. They had no strong family, ethnic, or religious network around them—a very striking parallel with the [Tsarnaev brothers](#) who committed the [Boston attack](#). It's the same thing.

It gets to this counterintuitive conclusion that having a strong, vibrant religious community around you may prevent this extremism, in the sense that what we are witnessing is an individualized approach to the discourse and self-empowerment.

When they come into contact with recruiters, this is very easy then. So this is a very important reason. It's about people who are like the illegitimate children of European society, when you think that you have brothers and sisters that are more—and you are like the, excuse me, bastard of the family. How do you reorganize yourself in a way that makes sense, and when you are also attracted to religion?

The complication here comes from the fact that most of the jihadi we know are Salafi today, from al-Qaeda to ISIL. The problem is you have a Salafi global discourse on Islam that says that they are

not political, that they don't preach violence—what I call Salafi here is the globalization of the Wahhabi discourse coming from Saudi Arabia. The problem is, you need political courage to address that. It is intolerant in its conception. It is anti-Western. When you think that being a good Muslim is being anti-Western, you have already the seed planted in your mind. What ISIL has said is it's not enough to try to withdraw from the society; to be a good Muslim, you have also to be a fighter.

If you do not have a strong community around you, it is very easy—the Kouachi brothers were watching the YouTube video of this imam, who was an American Muslim that went to Yemen and was killed by a drone, [al-Awlaki](#). So we are not talking here about people who are connecting with the traditional clerical establishment. We are talking about people who are connecting with a politicized version of Islam that is more attractive because it is said in the sort of terms of ideology of resistance. Once you get that and that you live in an environment that you don't think you are part of, it does trigger this kind of attraction.

DAVID SPEEDIE: We are coming to the end of our time, but this is such a rich topic and such an important one. It does lead to the question of belonging and of being the illegitimate child and so on. The appeal, therefore, of ISIL seems to me to lead on to perhaps one last thing that reflects more on the Muslim world as a whole, not just Muslims in Europe. You said that ISIL said something very simple and very important: "We are not the traditional state. We are different."

This goes back to the whole Muslim experience, I think you said, since the end of the Ottoman Empire.

JOCELYNE CESARI: I think that that is the key point here. The Islamic tradition was affected and restructured in a very political way by the nation-state, as I said. The whole traditional establishment became completely discredited. I just mentioned Al-Azhar. The young people cannot just accept Al-Azhar, because it's a political discourse. When you have the text of the Friday sermon, the *khutbah*, sent by fax—maybe now by email—to all mosques everywhere, the traditional establishment has lost the connection as an authentic, credible religious voice. The room has been filled by these activists, these young people, who do not have traditional training, but have a political vision, and they are attracted to Islam as a way to resist. That's how it goes.

The Salafi global influence gives them credentials, because the Salafi looks like the traditional authentic Islam. If you look at [bin Laden](#), you would say this is a traditional Muslim man. Why? It has nothing with tradition. This has to do with—Wahhabism was a reform of Islam in the 18th century. The role of Salafi and Wahhabism has been to destroy the tradition.

So the connection of that, the discredit at the national level of the traditional establishment, and the globalization of the Salafi thinking, which is in its inception an anti-Western theology. I don't have time to explain, but it means that women have to be treated differently than Western women, sexuality has to be treated differently, you cannot be a citizen. This is what people are getting, a Salafi interpretation or discussion, every day in Europe.

I am not saying that the Saudi clerics are not sophisticated. Of course they may be, but in the reality of what is going down—because people go online, the young people. When they want to know, "What do I do? What do I have to do?" they go online, find websites where you have this very practical approach, and everything becomes *haram*, forbidden, or *halal*, permitted. So it's very easy. It fits on one Twitter line. That's what people want. And they look authentic. The discourse, the doctrine comes from Mecca and Jeddah. The role of Saudi Arabia as a soft power on global Islam has been neglected politically. Again, you need political courage to address it.

DAVID SPEEDIE: That's a topic for a whole other session. But one absolutely last thing. Your book, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Islam in Liberal Democracies*—we are, after all, sitting in New York. You did a lot of polling, focus groups, and so on for this book. What would be the essential differences between attitudes in the United States, to the extent that this can be generalized, and Western Europe? What were your chief findings?

JOCELYNE CESARI: The chief finding is a difference in the religious landscape of the two continents. What we find is the same way of young Muslims who want to be Muslim. It doesn't mean that they want to practice everything, but they feel a strong connection to Islam, and they still have a strong connection to the major beliefs of the religion. They do accommodation and negotiation on a daily basis, complaining about the weakness of the Islamic leadership to accompany them in this journey. Either they have the discourse of the country of origin or the Salafi discourse. Sometimes they don't want that.

The most critical were the women, saying, "When I go to a mosque, I don't feel part of it, " because it is still a very male-oriented, not only space, but discourse and way of looking at Islam. So this is shared.

In the European space, young Muslims do not find equivalent forms of religiosity from other non-Muslim groups. The Europeans, even the youth, tend to be more secularized or disconnected from religion than young Americans. The difference is in the fact that when you have polling, the Muslims in Europe say, "Yes, I am religious, and I am a citizen or a national," and you have most of the other Europeans saying, "I am not religious. I don't believe in God."

In my sense, the problem in Europe is this gap. It makes the visibility of Islam even more problematic, because they look like the only ones, while in America you have other active religious groups, on the issues of morality, sexuality. So they don't feel particularly discriminated in this regard. They will question the security issue, but this is more an institutionalized approach. On a daily basis, they don't feel like they don't fit in. Religion is part of what makes you a good citizen in this country, so they will emphasize that.

What we have seen since 9/11 is an attempt to create a relationship between religious groups, different religious groups, at the local level, while this opportunity doesn't really exist in Europe for Muslims. Most of the time they have to interact with secular organizations. In my opinion, it makes a big, big difference here.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Our guest has been Dr. Jocelyne Cesari.

Jocelyne, having listened and interacted for this last hour, I can't tell you how pleased I am, and I'm sure others are, that you will be occupying important positions on both sides of the Atlantic to articulate research on this. It has been a wonderfully rich hour of conversation. Thank you so very much.

JOCELYNE CESARI: Thank you for inviting me.

Audio

In Europe, both non-Muslims and Muslims need to honestly confront and contend with the stereotypes, anxieties, and resentments they have about each other, says Professor Cesari in this probing conversation on Muslims in Europe.

Video Clips

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