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Europe and its Muslim "Strangers"

Combating the challenges faced within the socio-cultural

integration process

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Abstract

The relationship between Europe and Islam has always been a subject of cultural controversies. The increasing Muslim migration flows in Europe during the last decades, together with the recent sharp manifold crises and dramatic events that took place around the globe, have exposed a great uneasiness with regards to the presence, accommodation and socio-cultural integration of Muslims within European societies, leading to divergences over cultural and religious matters, and thus phenomena of panics and of deep communal segregation among populations. As a consequence, there has been an explicit renouncement of multicultural policies and a subsequent shift into the concept of civic integration as a model of accommodation at a European level, progressively understood in a strict and more assimilative sense. This prevalent shift, however, brings to the forefront serious concerns over the management of cultural and religious diversity, as it seems to have a negative and disproportionate impact on the lives and consciousness of Muslims in their European societies of settlement. Meanwhile, and in order to provide alternative solutions, the Council of Europe has developed the theory and practice of interculturalism as a more coherent approach to migrant integration. Focusing on the European context and especially in the countries of Belgium and Greece, this thesis aims to reflect on the current challenges faced by Muslims within their European socio-cultural integration process, suggesting, at the same time, that a combination of critical multicultural policies and of intercultural dialogue could positively affect the smooth inclusion of Muslim communities in Europe.

Keywords: European values; Islam; culture; religion; moral panic; Muslims; migration; integration; civic integration; assimilation; multiculturalism; interculturalism; human rights;

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Abbreviations

EU   European Union

CoE   Council of Europe

TCNs   Third-Country Nationals

ECtHR   European Court of Human Rights

NGOs   Non-Governmental Organizations

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

MSF   Médecins Sans Frontières

ECRI   European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance

IOM   International Organization for Migration

AI   Amnesty International

HRW   Human Rights Watch

CEOOR   Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism

"...a stranger inhabits us: it is the hidden face of our identity, the space that ruins our resting place, the moment where understanding and instinctive fellow feeling become swallowed up. Recognizing the stranger within ourselves, we are spared from hating him in himself. A symptom which renders precisely the "we" problematic, perhaps impossible, the stranger begins when the awareness of my difference arises and reaches its completion when we acknowledge ourselves all to be strangers, rebels from ties and communities."

Julia Kristeva[1]

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[1] From Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 22

I.   Introduction

1.1.   A first glance at the topic

The massive arrival of Muslim refugees and immigrants into European territories and the way Europe is dealing with their accommodation brings back to the forefront socio-political concerns over immigration, social cohesion, and cultural and religious diversity. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, there has been an evident backlash against Muslim minority communities residing throughout the Western sphere. Such a backlash has been reinforced by a series of dramatic events perpetrated in the name of Islam, targeting the "heart" of the European capitals during the last decades. As argued by many scholars, these events have reignited the debate of Muslims and Islam in Europe, strengthening to a big extent the European "far-right" position over immigration and socio-cultural integration.

In the light of this debate, several influential politicians have trumpeted the so-called "death of multiculturalism", reflecting a general fear, disappointment and a declination of the integration policies and of a vision of a more open and diverse Europe. This, however, should not be disentangled from the recent sharp economic crisis that took place around the globe, and the rise of right-wing parties in many European countries. Populist leaders around Europe took advantage of these dramatic events, claiming that "Islam is a threat that seeks to undermine liberal democratic institutions, values and practices"[2], and thus contribute to radical discourses about the alleged "Islamization of Europe"[3]. The effects of this trend have been projected into migrants, who could easily turn into scapegoats for many of the societal and economic problems, bringing, at the same time, to the surface deep-rooted nationalist and colonial representations.

European liberal democratic states have been dealing for a long time now with claims for recognizing cultural and religious rights. The rapid settlement of Muslim communities into the European territories, as well as the ardent flows of Muslim newcomers in both the Northern and Eastern parts of Europe, has led to an increase of their visibility in the public space and a deeper demand for recognition of their rights. It should be argued, however, that these demands for recognition are, to a certain extent, denied by many of the European liberal states. The 2011 France's law banning the *burqa* in public, which was followed by the successive banning of full-face coverings in public by Belgium, have been acknowledged by many as typical examples of the denial of religious freedom and a contravention of both

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[2] P. Statham and Jean Tillie, 'Muslims in their European societies of settlement: a comparative agenda for empirical research on socio-cultural integration across countries and groups', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2016, p. 178

[3] N. Vanparys, D. Jacobs and C. Torrekens, 'The impact of dramatic events on public debate concerning accommodation of Islam in Europe', *Ethnicities*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2013, p.210

countries' commitment to the promotion of human rights. Integration issues with regards to Muslims arise, and tend to emphasize on divergences over cultural and religious aspects. There is a general intolerance over immigrants and a pervasive belief that "Islamic culture is alien, making it difficult to reconcile with basic Western values of democracy, state religious neutrality and gender equity"[4]. As a consequence, one cannot but notice that this position is also reflected in the process of socio-cultural integration within the European area, which gazes into assimilationist integration measures, even from countries that used to tend towards multiculturalism, such as the Netherlands or the United Kingdom. However, moving towards a stricter and a selective sense of integration, in which the space for cultural and religious pluralism is limited, while at the same time the voices of the affected population are growing, could place the whole integration process in danger and challenge its actual purposes.

Given that the perceived and actual problem is the accommodation of Islam as a religion and cultural practice in Europe, the fierce debates on the failures of multiculturalism revolve around the problematic of accommodating the religious differences and values of Islam, which are incompatible with the secularity and the equivalent so called "European values". Accordingly, endless political debates about women wearing headscarves, building of mosques, funding of Islamic schools, and actual or alleged cases of Islamic extremism are fueled in the public media, creating strong dividing lines along religious differences between Muslims and non-Muslims.

As argued before, the last two decades brought about mistrust and an attack to the concept of multiculturalism as an integrating theory. Despite the absorption of various key aspects of multicultural policies by several European governments, the term has turned into a controversial policy and theory. It has been criticized for "failing to create integrated, cohesive societies, for accommodating immoral cultural practices and favoring cultural relativism"[5]. Respectively, there have been multiple calls for a stronger sense of integration and social cohesion[6]. Even the fact that diversity policies still constitute part of the integration project, the shift towards a restrictive civic sense of integration in many European countries is prevalent. Hard and soft containment measures have also been imposed on immigrants, and especially Muslims, reflecting an age which is based not on openness, but essential closure. Amidst such a situation, there have been organized efforts to respond to the critics of

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[4] J. G. Reitz, 'Integration of Muslim minorities: Is it about religion?', *Inroads*, vol. 38, 2015, https://inroadsjournal.ca/integration-of-muslim-minorities-is-it-about-religion/ (accessed 18 June 2020)

[5] C. Stokke and L. Lybaek, 'Combining intercultural dialogue and critical multiculturalism', *Ethnicities*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2016, p. 72

[6] One characteristic case is the enigmatic concept of "Living together", first emerged by the ECtHR in the landmark case S.A.S. vs. France, on the French prohibition of wearing the full-face veil in public, and under which the ECtHR has the capacity to justify state limitations of certain human rights, such as the right to religious manifestation.

multiculturalism and propose alternative solutions that could be proved more cohesive. In 2008, the CoE launched the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*[7], proposing that multiculturalism be replaced by interculturalism. Pointing to the deep segregations in multicultural communities, interculturalism arises as a promising theory that could contribute overcome processes of segregation which are vivid in culturally diverse societies.

The complex nature of socio-cultural integration of Muslim communities into European societies has occupied scholars, politicians and actors in the field for decades. Against expectations, it can be supported that the way Europe is dealing with cultural and religious diversity instead of bridging the gap between Muslims and "host" societies, is rather widening it. Communal segregation and ghettoization are phenomena omnipresent within multicultural societies, the strengthening of which includes several risks concerning the identities of the populations and the entire integration process as such. It is therefore of crucial importance a re-examination of the socio-cultural challenges of integration, especially today, where the number of Muslims immigrants is on unprecedented increase.

1.2 Research aims and scope of the thesis:

Islam has been culturally transformed into a field of controversy between politicians, policy makers, majority populations and immigrants of Muslim origin across European countries. As argued, the main issues are generally detected on the core values and norms Muslims are carrying with them to their new societies of settlement. Notwithstanding, it is vital to note that referring to Muslims as if they are a single category with specific norms and values, when in reality Muslims constitute a remarkably heterogeneous category of people from different countries of origin, generations and Islamic faiths and customs, is a generalization stemming from the general imagination of Islam as a single concept and a construction which is indicative of the problematics of the current study.

This lack of acceptance for cultural and religious differences among them creates various concerns in regards to the socio-cultural integration process. First, the perceived discrepancy, alongside with several other important parameters, is affecting the whole process of integration within the European area, which tends towards assimilationist policies and a stricter sense of integration that places impediments to the smooth inclusion of people into society. Secondly, the problems concerning the peaceful coexistence and social interaction between Muslims and the majority population range from indirect avoidance of Muslim people to direct hostility, and thus phenomena of segregation within multicultural cities become more intense. Given that "integration has become the main way to talk about migrant

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[7] Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: "Living Together As Equals in Dignity"*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 2008

inclusion in European academic debates"[8], and a fruitful management of which can actually improve the standard of living of many Muslims in Europe, this study is shedding a light on the challenges of socio-cultural integration of Muslim communities into European societies in an effort to explain why such a process encounters strong obstacles and move beyond the substantial inter-societal gaps between the populations. Accordingly, several questions arise, the main of which are the following:

(i)   To what extent the manifold challenges posed by the current geopolitical context, as well as the current position of European countries, which is reflected through strict assimilation integration policies and an explicit renouncement of multiculturalism, impacts the religious and cultural identity of Muslims in their European societies of settlement?

(ii)   Why European countries, through the implementation of different policies of socio-cultural integration, are failing to integrate populations that have immigrated? How are cultural and religious factors associated with the perceived non-integration of Muslims and what is the main impact of this failure on the lives and consciences of both the Muslims and the majority population?

(iii)   Is there any alternative approach? How could European countries move towards a more cohesive approach that would contribute to the smooth inclusion of Muslim communities into their societies?

In order to study such a complex topic, this thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter II begins with an analysis of the specific Islamic migration to Europe. It investigates the relationship between European and Islamic cultural and religious values, as well as considers that the current environment of rising social insecurity, which is linked to a general authoritative tendency in the European area, has led to the emergence of a moral panic phenomenon surrounding Muslim communities. Chapter III gives some important insights to the notion of integration and its various models in Europe, with a notable emphasis on the current European shift to the concept of civic integration. It examines the management of these different approaches to integration by European countries and their impact on the lives of Muslims. Chapter IV focuses on the case studies of Belgium and Greece, analyzing the challenges these countries face with regards to the immigration, visibility, and socio-cultural integration of Muslim communities. Lastly, Chapter V attempts a review and a reevaluation of the current approaches to integration. It holds the view that more multicultural and intercultural policies rather than more assimilationist may have a better impact on the identity of Muslims, and attempts to determine whether these approaches could actually accommodate

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[8] P. Statham and Jean Tillie, 'Muslims in their European societies of settlement', p. 178

the distinct needs of the affected population and contribute to a genuine reconciliation among people.

This thesis is focusing on the European context. In addition, as both the northern and southern European societies are nowadays facing serious and of different nature challenges in terms of cultural integration of Muslim communities, a study of the cases of Belgium and Greece is an attempt to get an insight into the challenges of integration applied on a national level. Both of these countries are interesting cases because they face fundamental differences and challenges in the presence and integration of Muslim immigrants. Belgium is a country that has addressed postwar immigration flows and has a long tradition in accommodating Muslim minorities. It is also a really intriguing case to analyze due to its internal particularities in regards to its integration policies. In contrast, Greece emerges as a special case with less experience in integrating immigrants, but with an extremely high number of immigrants and refugees entering into its territory in the last years and intense phenomena of xenophobia. Despite the fact that "integration did not become a priority or an explicit objective of migration policy until 2005"[9], there have been many developments since then that have led to a political will in accommodating ethnic and religious diversity. Meanwhile, the different background and intense cultural debates in regards to the integration of Muslims in the two countries reflect the current European restrictive shift, and thus allow the examination of a wide range of integration issues that can cover the aims of this thesis and help to the formation of a more cohesive approach.

1.3 Research Methodology:

This research will be conducted under a multi-dimensional approach, combining a variety of sources, including literature from the fields of migration studies, political studies, legal studies, sociological and anthropological studies, surveys and reports of NGOs, about Muslim socio-cultural integration in Europe. In addition, soft-law international texts mainly from the European Union and the Council of Europe will be used.

For the purpose of identifying and analyzing the challenges faced within the European integration process, theoretical and practical examples will be given. A focus on the cases of Belgium and Greece, apart from the theoretical analysis, requires also a field-based research. This will be mainly developed through an examination of the mass media in these countries, structured interviews with Muslim people residing in their societies, as well as with representatives of NGOs working in the field of socio-cultural integration. However, it is important to note that due to the current difficult circumstances of the Covid-19, and thus

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[9] D. Anagnostou et al., Report on *Local Government and Migrant integration in Greece*, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, 2016, p. 21

limited time and means, the sample of such a field research will not be representative in order to measure the impact of the European integration policies on the religious and cultural identities of Muslim communities. Instead, a more qualitative research will be attempted which is also important for the aims of this study. Nevertheless, the sample should not be considered as a measurable since it is not representative.

II.   Muslims and the West: the emergence of Controversies

This chapter gives some important insights on the relationship between Europe and Islam. 2.1 will give a brief history of the Muslim presence in Europe in order to explain the specific nature of Islamic migration and the complexities that it brings upon. 2.2 draws on the construction of Europe and Islam as two cultural opposites who often question each other's values and considers the current political debate that focuses on this antagonism. 2.3 puts emphasis on the crises that have struck Europe during the last decades and aims to analyze the devastating impact such challenges may have on international migration and the lives of Muslim migrants in their areas of residence. Lastly, 2.4 centers on the representation of Muslims in today's European societies and analyzes their situation through the lens of a moral panic perspective.

2.1   The entry of Muslims in Europe: "Strangers" at our doorstep

The presence of Islam on the European continent is not a new phenomenon. According to scholars, "vibrant Muslim communities and polities have known European territories as their homes for numerous generations and have left their indelible mark in the landscape, culture, and memory of European societies"[10]. Since the second half of the 20th century, there has been a slow but continuous immigration to Western Europe, which has recently climbed due to the intensified flows of refugees and migrants from Asia and Africa as a result of the proliferation of civil wars and various other economic, demographic and environmental factors.

The period following World War II left millions of people displaced and in dreadful economic conditions. Subsequently, migration upsurged in Europe as dozens searched for new lives and better opportunities after the war. At the same time, decolonization encouraged many colonists to travel. Thus, many South Asians brought themselves to the United Kingdom and North Africans to France[11]. As argued, "Some of them even had passports of the former colonial country. They knew the language but were not acculturated enough for the

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[10] S. A. Sofos and R. Tsagarousianou, *Islam in Europe: Public Spaces and Civic Networks*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.28

[11] D. Voas and F. Fleischmann, 'Islam moves West: Religious Change in the First and Second Generations', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 38, 2012, p. 527

European social and economic life"[12]. In addition, labor unskilled male migrants were recruited on the basis of international bilateral agreements to work in the reconstruction of European economy. That was, for example, the case between Germany and Turkey. During that time, France and Belgium welcomed a considerable group of Algerians and Moroccans in their territories. Their status was that of guests until their return to their home countries. However, the 1970s economic crisis, which was widely created by the increase of the price of oil, forced European governments to discontinue unskilled migrant labor programs[13] and thus many migrant laborers left unemployed. Soon enough they became aware of their financial impossibility of returning to their home countries, as well as that if returned, there would be almost no chance of their returning back to Europe. Despite the restrictive immigration policies implemented, many migrants stayed and brought their families to join through family reunification policies that were foreseen in migration conventions. These processes ushered in a new realization among Muslims and non-Muslims, the one of a permanent settlement in Europe. Along with the impacts of the Iranian revolution of 1979, and the general turmoil occurring in many parts of the Muslim world in that period of time, an important number of Muslims refugees and asylum seekers arrived in the West, and specifically the Western Europe.

With regards to the immigration of Muslims to Southern European countries, it is a more recent phenomenon. Since the late 1980s, countries such as Italy, Greece and Spain have turned into hosts of a great number of migrants from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. This number stems primarily from Morocco (to Spain) and from Egypt and Albania (to Italy and Greece)[14]. Especially in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Communist regimes in eastern and central Europe, this number increased abruptly, leading to the rapid transformation of these countries from emigration poles into immigration ones[15].

Over the years, the Muslim immigrants in Europe tend to be families eager to settle permanently rather than being into a mobile labor status. Moreover, what is remarkable is a gender shift into the demographics of migrants. Until the 1970s, the immigrant population comprised mostly male individuals. This substantially changed with family reunification policies, as well as the migration and entry of women into the labor force, often searching for work in domestic services, small industries and agriculture. Despite the integration policies introduced by various European governments since the mid 1960s, the settlement of Muslim

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[12] G. J. Kaczynski, 'Muslim migration and identity in Europe', *Hemispheres Studies on Cultures and Societies*, no. 24, 2009, p.42

[13] A. Duderija and H. Rane, *Islam and Muslims in the West: Major issues and debates*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 35

[14] D. Voas and F. Fleischmann, 'Islam moves West, p. 527

[15] A. Triantafyllidou, 'The Political Discourse on Immigration in Southern Europe: A Critical Analysis', *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 10, no. 5, 2000, p. 374

immigrants into the European territories has not been easy. European governments have tried to control and reduce migration through various methods, including stricter deportation policies and rough requirements for the acquisition of permanent residency or citizenship.

In recent times, and especially since the summer and fall of 2015, hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers entered Europe due to a number of crises across the Middle East and North Africa, leading to the creation of the "refugee crisis". The Syrian conflict, as well as other insecurities in the Middle East contributed to one of the worst displacement crises taking place into the bastions of Europe. According to the UNHCR statistics, over one million people made it into the EU zone in 2015[16]. The predominant majority is Syrian, and most of the rest come from Iraq and Afghanistan. Until today, the mass flows remain intense, and estimates foresee that the number of people attempting to reach Europe is not expected to slow down any time soon[17]. Facing this endless influx of refugees and asylum seekers from some of the most unstable places of the world, and from countries where Islam is the main religion, the voices of those warning about the possible political, cultural and security risks are growing and thus the European political and social systems get polarized. Furthermore, present negative attitudes towards Muslims in Europe have been re-awakened and have a huge impact on the lives of both the already existing Muslim populations and the newcomers. Within this context, the integration of these masses into Western European democracies represents an enormous future task[18].

It is important to note that the nature of Islamic migration to Europe is very specific. This recent wave of migration is thoroughly different. One of the main reasons is the fact that it originates from Asia and Africa. The new "stranger" has a different culture and religion, something that has become increasingly visible in recent years. During the first decades of their immigration, the status and presence of Muslims were particular. Europe was primarily seen as a place to work and earn money, and not as a permanent area of residence. G.J. Kaczynski notes that "It was then a sort of invisible Islam which is also indicated as the latent presence of Islam"[19]. The arrival of relatives strengthened the community life and contributed to a return to Islamic principles and practices. Hence, in the following generations, they started to become more visible and get involved in the local culture. The younger generation, through its participation in the education system and in various aspects of public life, started

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[16] UNHCR Operational Portal Refugee Situation, '*Mediterranean Situation* ', *UNHCR Operational Portal Refugee Situation*, January 2020, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean, (accessed 9 May 2020)

[17] Medecins Sans Frontieres , 'Overview of the Refugee Crisis in Europe', *Medecins Sans Frontieres*, https://www.msf-me.org/overview-refugee-crisis-europe, (accessed 9 May 2020)

[18] A. Tausch, 'Muslim immigration continues to divide Europe: A quantitative analysis of European social survey data', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2016, p.38

[19] G. J. Kaczynski, 'Muslim migration and identity in Europe', *Hemispheres Studies on Cultures and Societies*, no. 24, 2009, p.43

to integrate and interact with the local communities. Such a change, however, with the visibility of Islamic symbols along Muslims presence did not leave local communities untouched. "With visible involvement of Muslims in local cultures in Europe, the transformation of the European public sphere becomes a subject of debate since the change can clearly be seen"[20]. Consequently, this context of interaction, as well as the current massive arrival of newcomers, is shedding a light on Islam, which is progressively becoming more and more tangled in the European cultural, economic, social level and consciousness. Within a European public sphere, which is different in its nature in relation to the Islamic one, reactions among locals to the aforementioned visibility of Islamic rules, values and symbols emerge. The presence of Muslims challenges the political and cultural order of the European nations, who realize that there is a strong need to deal with the "stranger" entering at their doorsteps.

2.2   Europe and Islam: Two cultural opposites?

The above historical sketching of the arrival of Muslims in the European area since the second half of the 20th century has not only inflamed a crisis, as European countries are trying to deal with the massive arrivals, but also created divisions between political elites and citizens over how to cope with the relocated populations who are perceived as genuinely different. The turn of the 21st century has been a catalyst for the relations between Europe and the Muslims residing in its territory. The 9/11 harrowing events, as well as the subsequent terrorist attacks and confrontational affairs have sparked once again the debate of Muslims and Islam in Europe. The current debate is concerned with Muslim immigration to Europe, cultural conflicts and Islamic values and symbols. These evolutions have, to an important extent, justified the position of some scholars, and most notably Samuel Huntington[21], that there is a cultural fault line between the West and the Orient and that there is a remarkable clash between the two.

During the years 2010 and 2011, leaders of three dominant European countries, namely A. Merkel, D. Cameron and N. Sarkozy proclaimed the so-called "death of multiculturalism" on the grounds of incompatibility of values between Europe and Islam. More specifically, in October 2010 Angela Merkel announced characteristically to the Muslims of Germany: "Now we obviously also have Muslims in Germany. But it's important in regard to Islam that the values represented by Islam must correspond with our constitution…What applies here is the constitution, not shari'a…Our culture is based on

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[20] A. Soliman, *European Muslims Transforming the Public Sphere: Religious participation in the Arts, Media and Civil Society*, London, Routledge, 2017, cited in D. D. Duman, 'Islam's increased visibility in the European public sphere: A real crisis?', *The Ethnic and Religious Future of Europe*, vol. 28, 2018, p. 69

[21] S. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, p. 22-49

Christian and Jewish values and has been for hundreds of years, not to say thousands"[22]. Some months later David Cameron claimed that European countries must resile from "passive tolerance" and embrace an "active, muscular liberalism"[23]. Respectively, Nicola Sarkozy declared the failure of multiculturalism stating that "We have been too concerned about the identity of the person who was arriving and not enough about the identity of the country that was receiving him … Of course we must all respect differences, but we do not want a society where communities coexist side by side"[24].

It's been almost 10 years since then but the debate has not changed much, it's probably even more polarized. In 2018, Pew Research Center's survey found that most Western Europeans declare willing to accept Muslims as neighbors, but at the same time there is no consensus on whether Islamic values are compatible with national values, especially among Christians[25]. In a more recent survey by pollster Yougov on the compatibility of Islam with the values of European societies, it is found that "substantial portions of Western respondents in the survey perceived a clash between Islam and the values of society in their country. This included nearly half of the respondents in France (44%) and Germany (47%), and a plurality in the United States (36%) and Britain (38%) who chose this statement"[26].

In an effort to identify what really stands behind these perceptions and attacks on multiculturalism, Markha Valenta is referring to the "politics of bad memories" or maybe "a politics of invented memories", which in her words, "presents us with a public memory of shocking change, where an imaginary life of stable tranquility and mutuality was suddenly disrupted and scuppered by the arrival of people with values from other civilizations and cultures"[27]. The question of immigration in our days, as S. Rakovic claims, is frequently being evaluated in terms of culturalized national self-understanding of the notion of the native, as well as examined through the same culturalized lenses within Europe as a whole[28]. That implies that Europe as an entity, both within the EU discourses and outside them, is perceived

[22] S. Brown, 'German Muslims must obey law, not sharia: Merkel', *Reuters*, 2010, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-muslims/german-muslims-must-obey-law-not-sharia-merkel-idUSTRE69552W20101006 (accessed 10 May 2020)

[23] Gov.Uk, 'PM's speech at Munich Security Conference', *Gov.Uk*, 5 February 2011, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference (accessed 10 May 2020)

[24] Daily Mail reporter, 'Nicolas Sarkozy joins David Cameron and Angela Merkel view that multiculturalism has failed', *Daily Mail*, 11 February 2011, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1355961/Nicolas-Sarkozy-joins-David-Cameron-Angela-Merkel-view-multiculturalism-failed.html (accessed 10 May 2020)

[25] Pew Research Center, 'Being Christian in Western Europe', *Pew Research Center*, 29 May 2018, https://www.pewforum.org/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/ (accessed 10 May 2020)

[26] J. Rogers de Waals, 'Western/MENA attitudes to religion portray a lack of faith in common values', *Yougov-Cambridge Centre for Public Opinion Research*, 2019, https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2019/02/03/westernmena-attitudes-religion-portray-lack-faith- (accessed 10 May 2020)

[27] M. Valenta, 'Multiculturalism and the Politics of Bad Memories', *openDemocracy*, 20 March 2011, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/multiculturalism-and-politics-of-bad-memories/ (accessed 11 May 2020)

[28] S. Rakovic, *Culturalized Europe and its Muslim Subcultural Other: The Structure of Socio-Political Representation of the Europe-Islam relationship*, PhD diss., Ljubljana, Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, 2011

as a political and a cultural concept. Accordingly, when the issue of Islam enters the European political and public discourses concerning its compatibility with Europe, "both Europe and Islam often get essentialized and imagined as cultural opposites"[29]. Drawing on the aforementioned statements, and when conceiving Europe and Islam as two different cultural entities that may well fall in the realm of the imaginary, a research on the relationship between the two opens a window to broad horizons of thought.

Europe as a political, territorial and cultural entity has been a study of various scientific and political examinations and interpretations. It has also been a subject of imagination, too. Since the ancient times, Europe has been shaped as a grand narrative, and has been socially constructed in relation to something that is located outside of its territory, something foreign. Travels, discoveries and colonial settlements in the Orient as of the beginning of the 19th century until the end of World War II have helped "to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience"[30]. Edward Said in *Orientalism* describes how Europeans portrayed the Orient as inferior and uncivilized. But most importantly, he argued that it was also simultaneously about defining Europe as its opposite: superior and civilized. Orientalism, therefore, capitulates for many how their culture, religion and ethnicity are so often reduced to a stereotype, causing their culture to be misunderstood and their humanity to be overlooked. And even today, this style of thought continues because it is ingrained in how we see other peoples and cultures. In a correlation with Islam and Europe, what becomes visible is a strong boundary between the two, and an undoubted distinction between "Us" and "Them". In order, however, to make this distinction and draw such a boundary, a well defined value system has been established, and a depiction of Europe as a space with shared values that are clearly seen as genuinely different from the values of other regions, in this case Islamic values. The process of post World War II Europeanization has as its ultimate aim the realization of a space with "shared norms and beliefs" as the base of a European hybrid identity. With a view to forget its harsh past, united Europe hastened the procedure of diminishing differences among Europeans by encouraging discourses on the ground of a common historical culture and heritage. According to Rakovic, "the issue here is not whether this heritage is real or imagined, but how the discourse on heritage shapes the politics of imagining the Us"[31]. The construction and narratives of Europe as a symbolic entity "involve legends and ritualization of togetherness"[32]. That means, though, that within a process of defining what "Us" is, thereby what Europe is, a parallel process of defining what "We" are not is taking place. So, such symbolic forms of the

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[29] Ibid., p. 7
[30] E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25[th]edn., Penguin books, 1979, p. 2
[31] S. Rakovic, *Culturalized Europe and its Muslim Subcultural Other*, p. 44
[32] Ibid., p. 46

European imaginary also incorporate a corpus of imaginaries that are opposite to Europe. The drawing of boundaries between the European and the non-European help Europe define itself with reference to a certain culture and a specific universalized set of norms and values that come in opposition to foreign ones. The "Other", therefore, arises as an outsider in terms of values.

The matter of Islam as a religion and a cultural reference point comes into conflict with the construction of Europe as a whole. The presence of Muslims in European societies has turned into a public anxiety on a national level, as well as on a European level, and this has affected European Muslims across generations. Bhikhu Parekh notes that the first generation of European Muslims "were Pakistani, Indian, Algerian, or Moroccan Muslims, not Muslim simpliciter, but rooted in the culture of their homelands"[33]. He then claims that the second generation of young Muslims that have grown up in European societies, "did not share their parents inhibitions and diffidence, and knew how to find their way around well in the political system. More importantly, they increasingly begun to define themselves in exclusively religious terms, not as Pakistani or Algerian Muslims as their parents had done, but simply as Muslims"[34]. Thus, it is perceived a homogenization of Muslims residing in Europe on both a national and a European level through the creation of transnational networks, and this is extremely important for the creation of a Muslim identity. Among them, many feel and conceptualize Islam as a way of life and a cultural reference point. Despite the great diversity among Muslim countries and communities, there are common values, shared expectations, beliefs and destinies. The Islamic notion of *umma*, which constitutes a universal entity, puts emphasis on unity among all Muslims across space. For Muslim communities living across Europe, "*umma* becomes an ethnicized community on which the constructed identity rests. This case of self-awareness as an Islamic *umma* refers to an imagined community"[35], which is not static and thus, "constantly renewed"[36].

Two, therefore, great narratives become visible, namely Europe and Islam, and the powerful relationship between the two creates heated debates and controversies. Strong boundaries are being drawn between both of these imagined concepts. These boundaries, as stated, "are seen not as constant and fixed, but as dynamic and constantly redrawn and porous"[37]. European and Muslim imagined communities[38] often question each other's values

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[33] B. Parekh, *European Liberalism and the Muslim Question*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2008, p. 6
[34] Ibid., p. 8
[35] B. Tibi, 'Ethnicity of Fear?: Islamic Migration and the Ethnicization of Islam in Europe', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationality*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2010, p.131
[36] S. M. N. J. Kabir, 'Islam, Democracy, and the Question of Coexistence', *Islam and Civilizational Renewal ICR Journal*, vol.2, no. 3, 2011, p.505
[37] S. Rakovic, *Culturalized Europe and its Muslim Subcultural Other*, p. 11

and at times are seen as cultural opposites. To be a European in essence means to embrace universalistic ideals that go beyond national identities, whereas to be a Muslims in essence is practiced through activities and actions that challenge these European universalistic ideals. The dominant discourse on the relationship between them is focusing on the perception about the "clash of civilizations". Nevertheless, it is important to note that when speaking explicitly of a relationship between two different cultures is problematic, since both of the imagined communities encompass a variety of diverse interpretations and understandings[39]. In the case of Muslims residing in European societies, the principal cultural system is viewed as hegemonic whenever the host society is meddling with their lives, norms and values. Within this context, many Muslims feel detached from the people and the society they live in due to various restrains in their favoring way of life. On the other hand, the way Europeans interpret Islam as a religion and a cultural reference point, influences their views of Muslim minorities, and this has both political and social consequences for the relationship of the two, and sometimes leads to ethnic and cultural clashes.

Religion is often at the heart of the controversial and stormy debates about the Muslims presence in Europe, especially with respect to the extent to which they embrace secularism. The secular nature of western European societies is an undoubted characteristic of their self-identification, which has led to pressures over the privatization of religion and a great difficulty in recognizing it in public life. Even so, one cannot ignore the pervasiveness of religion in European societies. The fact that European countries have distinct national identities and have enacted different institutional adjustments to deal with the relationship between the church and state comes to assert this view, but to some extent, all democratic societies are guided by the principles of neutrality and secularity, terms that are imbedded in their national constitutional traditions. Therefore, many in Europe still identify themselves with Christianity, and follow its prescripts through the implementation of core customs and traditions. The prevalence of secularism in Europe does not mean that it erased specific cultural characteristics of Christianity, but rather that it displaced it in the private sphere or public cultural remembrance. For Europeans, the role of Islam in the political and social life of their societies is seen as a big obstacle to the cultural integration of Muslims and a great cause of incompatibility between them. The argument that Muslims do not strongly support secular values leads to the belief that religious values are likely conflicting with secular ones.

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[38] Here the notions of the "European imagined community" and of the "Muslim imagined community" are borrowed by B. Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" in his work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London and New York, 1983

[39] A generalization, though, emanating from the general imagination of Islam and Europe as single concepts is indicative of the problematics of the current study.

In addition, Europe is perceived as the motherland of democracy and human rights, which Europeans spread around the world. There is a huge ongoing debate whether Islam is compatible with democracy and human rights, and this viewpoint is principally based on political Islam, shari'a, women's position in Islamic countries etc[40]. Basic distinctions on the human rights discourse between Europe (or the West) and Islam is that European values are deeply individualistic, putting the rights of the individual first, whereas the fundamental values of Muslims are deeply communitarian, presenting the duties of the community in priority[41]. In addition, there are many those who argue that Islam is a monolith and that the authoritarianism and conservatism of Islamic societies on many domains is irreconcilable with democratic beliefs and practices[42]. However, generalizations of Islam could be proved dangerous if not critically deployed. There is no doubt that there are many and diverse interpretations and realities of Islam, and that many of them prove to be highly restrictive and conservative, but in that case there are equally many realities of the West and Europe, too. Even in Europe, human rights standards and democracy are not equally enjoyed by all, and those deprived often get marginalized and excluded from the public sphere.

To sum up, clear cultural and political distinctions between Europe and Islam have been made and strong boundaries are drawn by both of the imagined communities as cultural reference points. This, in fact, is because European and Muslim communities meet, blend with each other, influence and very often oppose to each other, and that leads to profound transformations of their nature. Didier Fassin states that, "it is precisely because these changes are taking place that tensions arise"[43]. However, such cultural readings of difference are influencing and affecting the interaction between the populations and the way people live within European societies, and may result in communal segregation and marginalization of Muslims in their European residencies.

2.3   Muslims trapped within European "crises"

As extensively supported, Europe is challenged by multiple "crises". Undoubtedly, one of them is the sustained "economic crisis", the protracted economic stagnancy of the euro zone and the subsequent recession in Greece and the countries of Southern Europe. A second

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[40] See, for example, the work of S. M. N. J. Kabir, 'Islam, Democracy, and the Question of Coexistence', *Islam and Civilizational Renewal ICR Journal*, vol.2, no. 3, 2011, or the work of A. A. An-Na'im, 'Human Rights in the Muslim World: Socio-Political Conditions and Imperatives- A preliminary inquiry', *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, vol. 3, no. 13, 1990

[41] *Human Rights from the Perspective of Maqasid*[online video], Presenter T. Ramadan, Granada, Spain, CILE Center, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwHDmJj2O6k (accessed 8 August 2020)

[42] M. Moaddel, 'The Study of Islamic Culture and Politics: An overview and assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 28, 2002

[43] D. Fassin, 'The social construction of Otherness', in S. Bonjour, A. Rea, and D. Jacobs (eds.), *The Others in Europe*, Belgium, Editions de l' Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2011, p.119

much-talked crisis is widely perceived as a "terrorist crisis", a widespread feel that European citizens are at any place and at any moment exposed and susceptible to an external threat, or a fatal terrorist attack, presumably by Islamists. A third one is the ongoing "refugee crisis", the idea that Europe has turned into a hotbed of an endless arrival of refugees and migrants from various and diverse backgrounds. All the three alleged crises have created a heavy burden for governments and citizens of the European continent, let alone the TCNs and the newcomers, who have found themselves in between such detrimental times.

From 2008 onwards, European countries, and especially the southern ones, have been devastated by dramatic economic crises, which have brought falling GDP, an upsurge in unemployment and successive governmental cuts to welfare and public services. It is an acknowledged fact that when such economic crises take place, this has an immediate effect on the lives of people, and surely a disproportionate impact on the lives of migrants. C. Finotelli and I. Ponzo highlight that "crises are a source of change"[44]. Extreme economic conditions, such as increasing unemployment and cuts to public services, can certainly be linked to immigration. They can lead to intense social insecurity, which can provide a fertile ground for the rise of populism and xenophobia. In the case of Europe, this prospect became the norm, although to varying degrees depending on the country. The financial crisis has had as a direct consequence the rise of far-right populist parties in Europe. Strategically associating migration with various socio-economic problems, far-right populist parties have generally benefited and gained support whilst expressing anti-immigrant views. ECRI, in its 2016 report, cautioned characteristically:

"Years of economic and social policies driven by an austerity agenda have left many European citizens with a deep-seated fear and anxiety … Existing fears and rising uncertainties have been captured by a number of nationalistic and xenophobic populist movements across Europe, which managed to promote a political climate in which foreigners are portrayed as a threat to one's own identity, culture and economic prosperity"[45].

Until today, this political landscape has not weeded out, but rather intensified. This was also reflected in ECRI's latest report in 2019, in which it was noticed "a further rise of ultra-nationalistic parties in some countries", and the continuation of "a growing sense of insecurity in certain parts of the population"[46]. At this point, it should be noted that the implications of

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[44] C. Finotelli and I. Ponzo, 'Integration in times of economic decline, Migrant inclusion in Southern European societies: trends and theoretical implications', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 44, no. 14, 2018, p. 2303.

[45] ECRI, *Annual Report on ECRI's Activities*, 2016, p.9 https://rm.coe.int/annual-report-on-ecri-s-activities-covering-the-period-from-1-january-/16808ae6d6 (accessed 11 June 2016)

[46] ECRI, *Annual Report on ECRI's Activities*, 2019, p. 7-8, https://rm.coe.int/ecri-annual-report-2019/16809ca3e1 (accessed 11 June 2020)

the sustained economic crisis on people's minds regarding foreigners shall not be disentangled from the implications of the terrorist crisis, and mainly jihadist terrorism.

Since the 9/11 horrific events in New York and Washington, and especially after the 2004 and 2005 bombings in Madrid and London, there has been a deepening and widening "securitization" process in Europe, which has transformed the nature of the EU as a counter-terror actor. According to Javier Argomaniz, the need for increasing European counter-terrorism cooperation came due to "the transnational character of the threat, the networked presence in Europe of violent Islamist groups and the worrying phenomenon of radicalization of some second and third generation European Muslims"[47]. The succeeding terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam, as well as dramatic events such as the murder of Theo Van Gogh and the Danish cartoon controversy, fueled serious concerns about Islamic extremism and were rapidly accompanied by the adoption of a wave of strict counter-terrorism measures by European states. The year 2015 came as a confirmation of the indicated fears, as proved to be the peak year for terrorist activities in the European area in the last decade[48]. The 2015 Islamic attacks in Paris led to the immediate introduction of a state of emergency in France, which was since then repeatedly renewed. In 2017, a new directive on combating terrorism was adopted by the EU[49], raising the issue of terrorism as a high priority of Europe. However, it is important to note that these national and international responses to terrorism by European states have had manifold ramifications on the lives of people and migrants, the free exercise of fundamental freedoms, as well as the general debate regarding the accommodation of Islam in Europe. Quickly after the adoption of the new EU directive, the European Network Against Racism warned that this directive "runs the risk of undermining fundamental rights and having a disproportionate impact on ethnic and religious communities"[50]. In addition, it highlighted that since the introduction of the state of emergency in France, "human rights NGOs have reported 3,594 raids on houses, mosques and prayer halls as well as house arrests, resulting in 6 criminal investigations for terrorism and only one ongoing trial … many innocent Muslims are targeted mainly on the basis of their religious practice, with no evidence pointing to their involvement in any criminal act"[51]. Similar acts are also observed in other European countries. In the meantime, and within this context, populist leaders over

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[47] J. Argomaniz, 'The European Union Post 9/11 Counter-Terror Policy Response: An Overview', *RIEAS:, Research paper*, no. 140, 2010, p. 5

[48] Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2019: Measuring the impact of Terrorism*, Sydney, November 2019, p. 3, http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/11/GTI-2019web.pdf (accessed 12 June 2020)

[49] *European Parliament and Council directive on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA,* Official Journal of the European Union L88/6, 2017

[50] European Network Against Racism, 'EU counter-terrorism law opens door to discrimination and human rights abuses', European Network Against Racism, 16 February 2017, https://www.enar-eu.org/EU-counter-terrorism-law-opens-door-to-discrimination-and-human-rights-abuses-1306 (accessed 12 June 2020)

[51] Ibid.

Europe arrogate these horrific events and radical discourses to stigmatize Muslims, influence people to treat them with suspicion, and "routinely warn against the alleged Islamization of Europe"[52]. Consequently, it becomes visible that beneath such events and discourses regarding the accommodation of Islam in Europe lie deep societal impacts, the danger of which for the Muslim communities is tremendous.

Unfortunately, the refugee crisis came to be added as another extra burden, deteriorays the situation significantly. The fact that the peak year of the refugee crisis coincided with the peak year of the terrorist crisis has surely impacted the situation of migrants, and especially Muslims. Whereas many across Europe embraced refugees and asylum seekers with acts of solidarity, from distributing warm clothes to offering shelter and saving lives at sea, other confronted them with suspicion and hostility. The rising intolerance associated with migration led to various islamophobic trends. Populist politicians once more used islamophobia as a tool to mobilize people for their personal benefit, such as winning elections. Creating carefully dividing lines among people against the "imagined" threat, the incompatibility of values between Christian countries and Islam, as well as sharing hatred, they were able to achieve such a mobilization. That was the case, for instance, for many of the right-wing populist parties in Western Europe, and in particular for the ones in Eastern European countries. Poland's, for example, MP of the ruling Law and Justice Party Dominik Tarczynski's disqualification of Muslims, as well as the government's refusal to accept refugees and migrants of Muslim background[53] is a clear sign of such an islamophobic trend. On the other hand, the unified official reaction in Europe by member-states, although differentiated, was linking the refugee and security crises. This was also depicted in the political cycles of the EU. The 2014 European Parliament elections pointed out Jean-Claude Junker as Commission President, who subsequently set out in April and May 2015 two European agendas, one on security[54] and one on migration[55], threading these two issues together. What follows after is a gradual construction of fences at the borders between the EU and the non-European states, the high-tech surveillance, and a general deficiency by European states to fulfill the basic needs of immigrants and refugees.

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[52] N. Vanparys, D. Jacobs and C. Torrekens, 'The impact of dramatic events on public debate concerning accommodation of Islam in Europe', *Ethnicities*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2013, p.210

[53] *Here's why Poland takes in millions of migrants …just not Muslim ones*[online video], The Newsmakers, TRT World, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYSX2vI7oPk (accessed 2 July 2020)

[54] European Union: European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *The European Agenda on Security*, 28 April 2015, COM(2015) 185, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu_agenda_on_security_en.pdf (accessed 11 June 2020)

[55] European Union: European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *A European Agenda on Migration*, 13 May 2015, COM(2015) 240, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf (accessed 11 June 2020)

Nonetheless, the management of the refugee crisis constitutes a demanding task with manifold complexities. This process initiated also a big debate on the notion of European identity and a broader understanding of the EU as a whole, and that was expressed by the High Representative of the EU Federica Mongherini in 2016, who declared publicly that "the refugee crisis puts our identity to the test"[56]. Such a statement brings us back to concept of European imaginaries that are shaping the practices and decisions at an EU level and undoubtedly at a national, too. Nicholas de Genova analyzes the migrant and the European identity crises through the lens of "race", noting that "the current constellation of "crises" presents precisely what can only be adequately comprehended as an unresolved racial crisis that derives fundamentally from the postcolonial condition of "Europe" as a whole"[57].

The above analysis of the threefold European "crises" provides a broader understanding of the conditions under which Muslim communities live today in Europe, as well as the multiple implications these crises have provoked to their everyday lives and consciousness. It can be strongly supported that the European context, instead of being preoccupied towards the smooth inclusion of the vulnerable, is rather inclined to exclusionary forms. Moreover, this context has also created a fertile ground for racism to penetrate and get consolidated. Through such processes, the lives of "Others" are heavily affected and determined to a great extent. Meer and Modood observe that "while Muslims are increasingly the subject of hostility and discrimination, as well as governmental racial profiling and surveillance, and targeted by intelligence services, their status as victims of racism is frequently challenged or denied"[58].

Understanding the anti-Muslim sentiment is particularly important under these circumstances. Zick et al. focus on the concept of social dominance orientation, which analyzes the extent to which those people that support social hierarchies between groups tend to reject demands of social equality and incline into prejudices. They support that "people who belong to higher status groups justify the existing hierarchies with prejudices"[59] such as racism or sexism, and they assume from their research that "people from groups whose status in terms of power, influence or money is low can gain advantages by distinguishing

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[56] *The refugee crisis puts our identity to the test* [online video], Presenter F. Mongherini, Brussels, 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_nb/2559/The%20refugee%20crisis%20puts%20our%20identity%20to%20the%20test%20-%20Federica%20Mogherini%20in%20the%20EP (accessed 12 June 2020)

[57] N. de Genova, 'The "migrant crisis" as racial crisis: do Black Lives Matter in Europe?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 41, no. 10, 2018, p. 1765

[58] N. Meer and T. Modood, 'Refutations of racism in the "Muslim question"', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 43, no. 3-4, 2009, p. 338

[59] A. Zick, B. Kupper and A. Hovermann, *Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination: A European Report*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, 2011, p. 139

themselves from groups even further down the ladder, for example immigrants"[60]. Such a study describes why people belonging into some specific social categories could face much more enmity than others, and that depends on the position they have in hierarchy. It also explains, in our case, why Europeans can be more xenophobic towards Muslims than other social categories. In Europe generally, the result of the multiple crises, alongside well-rooted perceptions and impressions, leads to the portrayal of Muslims as the demonized "Other" that is presented as dangerous and further incapable in integrating into society. It also leads to a significant disproportionality in response to those challenges, as the objective reality is seriously distorted in the eyes of the local populations by various international and national actors, who augment the actual problems. This distortion I will aim to present in the next section, which sees Muslim's current situation from a moral panic perspective.

2.4   Moral panics in today's societies

Although the stereotypical representation of Islam in many European societies and political circles goes back as far as the era of discoveries and colonial settlements, in recent years it has developed and gained momentum under the conditions of dramatic events and periods of crises, as well as great challenges associated to the management of cultural and religious diversity. Anti-Muslim feelings have cultivated through the years a big range of public anxieties. Representations of Muslims have been negative, and most of the times Muslim people are viewed either as a threat or as victims within and beyond European contexts. European leaders and citizens are often dangerously reacting to this alleged "enemy"- the presence of who is perceived as tainted- and thus contribute to a social phenomenon amounted to panic.

The sociological concept of moral panic was firstly developed by the South-African sociologist Stanley Cohen in his book "Folk Devils and Moral Panics" in 1972, to describe the British public reaction around the conflict between two youth subcultures that brought widespread attention in mid-60s in Britain[61]. According to the author, moral panics occur more frequently in contexts of intense social transformation, when "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests"[62], and as a direct consequence of this disseminated sense of social threat, they often result in disproportionate measures. Very important to any interpretation of moral panic are definitions of outsider social groups, which are "presented in a stylized and stereotypical

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[60] Ibid.

[61] These were the "Mods" and the "Rockers", two youth subcultures who combined elements of fashion, music, and motorcycling.

[62] S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The creation of the Mods and the Rockers*, 3[rd]edn., London and New York, Routledge, 2002, p.1

fashion"[63], and are seen as a specific danger to social order. In this sense, minorities and other underprivileged groups tend to be the main target of moral panics.

Cohen explained this phenomenon with the use of a model of stages of development. Crucial to these stages is the role of the mass media. Mass media constitutes a key actor arousing widespread public concern which can amount to a panic. The media coverage, as analyzed by Cohen, consists of three topics: exaggeration and distortion, prediction, and symbolization. Exaggeration and distortion refer to the use of a great amount of sensational headlines, as well as the use of melodramatic vocabulary by mass media, magnifying and distorting the actual threat. Thereinafter, prediction relies on the assumption that the events reported would undeniably take place again and be followed by worse consequences. Lastly, symbolization depends on various key features, such as words, images, fashion or lifestyle, that are turned into symbols of a specific deviant status.

In addition, there is another essential actor in the process of the creation of a moral panic, and that is the role of the so-called "moral entrepreneurs". "Moral entrepreneurs" can be individuals, groups, or even organizations engaged in persuading society to establish and enforce rules that are in accordance with their personal moral beliefs. Their role is crucial in raising public awareness of the societal problem and putting pressure to social control agents, such as the police, or judges to adopt harsher measures that target the accused, or "folk devils" as Cohen names them. As stressed, "these agents have an interest in perpetuating the anxiety"[64]. Testa and Armstrong explain that the danger these entrepreneurs explicate may have existed for long period and not be regarded as precarious. Therefore, "hostility toward the folk devil can be small and/or muted, and then suddenly be amplified"[65].

It becomes, therefore, intelligible that various actors can contribute to the creation of a moral panic and that any discourse on it can often be speculative and thus unsubstantiated. What is always important in these cases is to try to address the roots of the societal problem and reveal the social injustices hidden. It is worth noting that since Cohen's analysis, the concept of moral panic has increased in frequency in many European societies and has served as a tool to analyze different social problems. Such an analysis is particularly relevant in order to shed light on the way scapegoating operates, as well as politics of terror. The case of Muslims in today's societies can unquestionably be analyzed through the lens of a moral panic perspective.

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[63] Ibid., p. 1

[64] P. Jenkins, *Pedophiles and priests: Anatomy of a contemporary crisis*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, cited in A. Testa and G. Armstrong, '"We Are Against Islam!": The Lega Nord and the Islamic Folk Devil', *Sage Journals*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2012, p. 6

[65] A. Testa and G. Armstrong, '"We Are Against Islam!": The Lega Nord and the Islamic Folk Devil', *Sage Journals*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2012, p. 7

The multiple crises that struck Europe during the last decades have led to a gradual increase in generalized prejudice against Muslims. Especially in the aftermath of European dramatic events, it has been observed a sudden amplification and magnification of this prejudice. Depending on people's social and cultural context, their attitudes and behaviors are highly influenced by their perceptions of "others" and the expectations they have towards them. These perceptions are greatly shaped by the information transmitted to them through the mass media. However, as analyzed, in some cases the information transmitted could be "a distorted reflection of reality"[66]. There has been a vast amount of academic literature that shows how Muslims and Islam after periods of crises are usually depicted stereotypically and with prejudice in European mass media. For example, in the period of 2018, the Centre of Media Monitoring of the Muslim Council of Britain conducted a study about the way British media reports on Muslims and Islam, concluding that there is a serious problem of representation[67]. Reviewing more than 10,000 print articles and broadcast clips quoting Muslims and Islam, they revealed that "59% of all articles and 43% of all clips associated Muslims with negative behavior", "over a third of all articles misrepresented or generalized about Muslims", and "terrorism was the most common thing"[68]. In another analysis made by A. Tornberg and P. Tornberg in 2016 to examine patterns of representation around the words Muslims and Islam in Swedish social media, they found that Muslims are depicted "as a homogeneous out-group, embroiled in conflict, violence and extremism"[69]. In like manner, Oboler in 2016 made an investigation of how facebook is being used as a tool for the normalization of islamophobia[70]. Conducting a qualitative analysis of 349 posts on facebook, he detected a variety of themes that present Muslims as a "security threat" (e.g. depicted as terrorists and rapists), a "threat to public safety", a "cultural threat" etc. Noting that the power of social media today is immense, and the desirable message is expressed through posts, images, videos, and other virtual ways which are then spread virally on different platforms, it turns out that this environment is thus way riskier than many other forms of traditional media.

Nevertheless, mass media is not the only key actor in scapegoating. Among others, political conservatisms and far-right politicians often use racist and islamophobic language to depict Muslims, legitimizing and normalizing in this way discrimination against them. The

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[66] E. Pece, 'The Representation of Terror and Moral Panics: The Media Frames of the European Press', *Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2018, p. 87

[67] Centre of Media Monitoring, 'Quarterly Report on State of Media Reporting on Muslims and Islam', *Centre of Media Monitoring*, 8 July 2019, https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CfMM-Quarterly-Report-Oct-Dec-2018.pdf (accessed 18 June 2020)

[68] Ibid*.,* p. 5

[69] A. Tornberg and P. Tornberg, 'Muslims in social media discourse: Combining topic modeling and critical discourse analysis', *Discourse, Context & Media*, vol. 13, part B, p. 133

[70] A. Oboler, 'The normalization of islamophobia through social media: Facebook', in I. Awan (ed.), *Islamophobia in Cyberspace: Hate Crimes go viral*, Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 41

2018 European Islamophobia report[71] includes almost all EU member state's islamophobic statements of politicians to provide a general analysis of the problem in European countries. Statements such as "Islam is a danger" by the former Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini in Italy, "Islam is deadly" by the Dutch politician Geert Wilders in his campaign video, or "They are like locusts, they destroy everything around them wherever they are!" by the vice-chair of the SDP party in Czech Republic Dominik Hako, are typical examples of the current European public discourse.

It seems, therefore, that the current environment is carefully structured to produce an amplified cultural and religious demonization of Muslims, promoting, at the same time, a tension in the dynamic relationship between Muslim populations and members of the majority culture. According to Greg Noble, "a highly moralized rhetoric of good and evil has become increasingly strident in Western political discourse in the last decade or so", which has "asserted a hardening of boundaries between good and bad, between law-abiding citizens and wrongdoers, endemic to a global culture of fear"[72]. This rhetoric, at the time of writing, is further deepened amidst Covid-19 pandemic, which brings along its passage into the surface the strong boundaries between the two "opposite" populations and reveals the deep structural inequalities in many European societies. And without doubt, authority figures and politicians use moral panics as a means to justify disproportionate measures against the alleged "folk devils" for the risk they pose, and thus restrict their equal participation into society, which is, after all, Cohen's final stage of development.

III.   The socio-cultural integration process: In search for cohesion

Dealing with migration and the accommodation of immigrant communities is a demanding and difficult task with diverse, and sometimes conflicting aims. This chapter sheds light on the way European countries manage socio-cultural integration through the analysis of key aspects of the different models of integration. 3.1 dives into the concept of integration and focuses on the evolution of two of its possible approaches, multiculturalism and assimilation. 3.2 centers around the increasing European civic integration turn, and puts emphasis on the nationalistic and gender aspects of it. 3.3 aims to explain why the management of the different approaches to integration in Europe reveals significant inconsistencies and misconceptions. Lastly, 3.4 follows the public debate on the emergence of

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[71] SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, *European Islamophobia Report 2018*, https://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EIR_2018.pdf (accessed 18 June 2020)
[72] G. Noble, 'Where's the moral in moral panic?: Islam, evil and moral turbulence', in G. Morgan and S. Poynting (eds.), *Global Islamophobia: Muslims and Moral Panic in the West*, Ashgate, U.K., 2012, p. 215

interculturalism as an alternative approach and emphasizes its beneficial elements with regards to Muslims accommodation.

3.1   The concept of integration: From multiculturalism to assimilation?

As a consequence of the continuous arrival of migrants from diverse cultural backgrounds and customs, a number of concerns about how European societies deal with immigration and the accommodation of newcomers arise. The management of immigration is closely associated with the notion of integration. According to R. Penninx, "the experience and policies of different countries with integration reflects their experience and policies of immigration"[73]. Hence, the way a country views and manages immigration has a direct impact on its capacity to deal with the accommodation and inclusion of immigrants in its society.

Integration is a concept with various and multidimensional components. There are many definitions of integration, and very often conflicting ones, which makes the term ambiguous. IOM stresses that "while the term "integration" is one that is understood differently depending upon the country and context, it can generally be defined as the process of mutual adaptation between the host society and the migrants themselves, both as individuals and as groups"[74]. Integration, therefore, is conceived as a mutual process that requires time and effort from both the newcomers and the host society. Another clear definition of integration is offered by Süssmuth and Weidenfeld, who perceive integration as "the process of becoming an accepted part of a foreign society and of accepting that society, based on the principles of equality, human rights, diversity and inclusion. The most important factor of integration is acceptance and that means maintaining a positive perception and appreciation of diversity"[75]. In the same direction, and analyzing in depth, Paul Scheffer notes that "integration conceived as a reciprocal process confronts society with profound questions about what is means to be a citizen"[76]. This last definition links integration with fundamental questions of citizenship that compel European societies reflect on their past, on themselves, and decide upon an image they want to present to the immigrant population. Respectively, the immigrant population should go through a similar process, through which they will determine

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[73] R. Penninx, 'Integration of Migrants: Economic, Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions', in M. Macura, A. L. MacDonald and W. Haug (eds.), *The New Demographic Regime: Population Challenges and Policy Responses*, United Nations Publication, 2005, p. 137, http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/_docs/pau/PAU_2005_Publ_NDR.pdf (accessed 22 May 2020)

[74] International Organization for Migration, *IOM and Migrant Integration*, Geneva, 2012, https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/What-We-Do/docs/IOM-DMM-Factsheet-LHD-Migrant-Integration.pdf (accessed 23 May 2020)

[75] R. Süssmuth and W. Weidenfeld, *Challenge integration: Living together in a Europe of diversity*, Bertelsmann Stiftung and Migration Policy Institute, 2015, p. 12, file:///C:/Users/Me/Downloads/docl_18239_710001208.pdf (accessed 23 May 2020)

[76] P. Scheffer, 'New Challenges for an Open Society', *Cambio Rivista Sulle Transformazioni Sociali*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2012, p. 40

the way in which they perceive their relationship with the host society. The concept of integration, and thus citizenship creates confusion as it affects multiple areas of life, from freedom of expression and religion to the education system and welfare provisions. In order to find ways to live together and improve the quality of society as a whole, self-examination on behalf of both the European states and newcomers is a necessary step.

Subdividing integration in three dimensions, namely economic, social and cultural integration, this study focuses on the last two. Cultural integration puts emphasis on the adherence to and knowledge of local culture and values. Borrowing the definition of the English anthropologist E. B. Tylor, culture is understood as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"[77]. These elements help people communicate with each other and share their beliefs, experiences and expectations. According to scholars, the dimension of cultural integration is proved to be one of the most debated ones and the one that draws most confusion and controversies as a notion. This is because, "not only there are normative doubts about the requirement to adopt the majority culture, but a more general doubt exists about the existence of shared, homogeneous, easily distinguishable and coherent majority cultures to which migrants should integrate"[78]. In regards to the notion of social integration, it focuses on many areas of social life and further assumes the "presence of a cohesive, non-segregated society in which significant interaction is normally possible between all sectors of the population"[79]. This assumption strives to create a fertile ground for social co-habitation, through which different cultures and traditions can peacefully interact and co-exist with each other. In general, it can be supported that cultural and social integration are concepts inextricably linked to each other. That happens because it is really difficult to draw a demarcating line between the two. Migrant integration involves both social and cultural elements, and so the concepts tend to overlap sometimes.

Despite the various definitions and interpretations, there is a general ambiguity with regards to the concept of integration. That is because different models and approaches of integration have been applied with subsequent different aims. What kind of integration do we want to achieve? That is a crucial question that arises whenever someone deals with integration issues. Two of the possible approaches to integration which have been thoroughly discussed are multiculturalism and assimilation. If by assimilation we mean that migrants should adapt to or become absorbed by the culture and way of life of the host society, then

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[77] E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art and custom*, vol. 1, London, Murray, 1871, p. 1

[78] A. Rea et al., *Governing diversity: Migrant Integration and Multiculturalism in North America and Europe*, Editions de l' Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2018, p.9

[79] Ibid., p. 10

integration is conceived as a one-way process and not a process of a mutual adaptation between migrants and the host society. In this case, assimilation constitutes a demanding approach, as it presupposes that migrants become similar to the majority populations. Robin Wilson, reflecting on the notion of assimilation, stresses that "in this model the individual citizen is treated as an abstract rights-bearer, offering fidelity to the state in reciprocation"[80]. Integration, within this context, and as was previously defined, is decisively opposed to assimilation. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, does not determine that migrants or minorities shall achieve similar cultural characteristics to the majority, and rejects the idea of single consistent national culture. According to Tariq Modood, multiculturalism is "the idea that equality in the context of "difference" cannot be achieved by individual rights or equality as sameness, but has to be extended to include the positive inclusion of marginalized groups marked by race and their own sense of ethno-cultural identities"[81]. As a polysemic term, multiculturalism has both normative and descriptive uses and is open to various interpretations. It emphasizes the rise of a new political visionary centered on the concepts of "difference", of "identity", that define "what is" in society and "what should be" in society. In general, most definitions of multiculturalism embrace the idea that cultures of distinct groups must be recognized, as well as equal rights should be attributed to all the groups. The idea of "recognition" constitutes an integral part of the multicultural theory. As Nancy Fraser puts it, the politics of recognition could involve "recognizing and positively valorizing cultural diversity and could also involve the wholesale transformation of societal patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication in ways that could change everybody's sense of self"[82]. In this sense, integration is considered to be a mutual process concerning the relations of both the majority and migrants within complex plural societies.

Integration as a notion is strictly linked with processes of nation-building and with the early policies that regarded migrants as a constituent part of the future population[83]. World War I is considered by Joppke and Morawska[84] as a decisive moment in the assertion of immigrant assimilation, as the national projects of the time required that immigrant populations living in different cultural contexts should give up their particular characteristics and become part of the national culture in order to gain acceptance. The period following

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[80] R. Wilson, *Meeting the Challenge of Cultural Diversity in Europe: Moving beyond the Crisis*, Cheltenham & Northampton, Edward Elgar, 2018, p. 37

[81] T. Modood, 'A Multicultural Nationalism?', *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2019, p. 234

[82] N. Fraser, *From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Postsocialist" Age*, in N. Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Conditions*, 1st edn., New York & London, Routledge, 1997, p.15

[83] A. Rea et al., *Governing diversity,* p. 13

[84] C. Joppke and E. Morawska, *Integrating Immigrants in liberal Nation-States: Policies and Practices*, in C. Joppke and E. Morawska (eds.), *Towards Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 4

World War II discouraged Western states from such cultural assimilationist and nationalizing practices. That was partly due to the atrocious consequences of Nazism and the consolidation of a united Europe based on democratic and pluralistic principles. According to Will Kymlicka, from the 1970s until the mid-1990s "there was a clear trend across the Western democracies toward the increased recognition and accommodation of diversity through a range of multicultural policies and minority rights"[85]. These type of policies, as he highlights, were supported both by domestic actors in some states and by international organizations, and suggested a "rejection of earlier ideas of unitary and homogeneous nationhood"[86]. However, it is important to note that in most European states, the design and implementation of integration policies started solely when the realization that immigrants and their families would permanently stay in Europe was captured.

Since the mid-1990s, and especially during the following new decades, there has been a remarkable change with regards to integration policies for migrants. It has been observed a clear backlash of multiculturalism and a subsequent restrictive trend in migration and minority policies across Europe, suggesting to a great extent a reiteration of aspirations of nation-building and a set of common values and identities presented by the European states. This clear shift has been discussed by many as a return to assimilation. Such a backlash is mainly driven by the prevalent role of international terrorism and the rise of far- right wing politicians. Fears among the majority populations have been gradually spread from multiple sides, and people tend to express that the accommodation of cultural diversity is already threatening their way of life and belonging. Prominent political figures on the far-right side, such as the Dutch MP Geert Wilders, or the Italian President of Lega Nord Trentino Alessandro Savoi, have articulated powerful criticisms on multiculturalism and Islam, accusing ruling politicians for failing to appropriately deal with the massive influx of Muslims, and thus their unsuccessful multicultural strategies. However, as described above, this retreat is also reflected among the center-left political movements that initially praised multiculturalism policies. Social democratic parties in Europe have condemned multiculturalism on the basis of failing to support and benefit the targeted minorities. The main claim for this condemn is that it "has failed to address the underlying sources of their social, economic, and political exclusion and may have unintentionally contributed to their social isolation"[87]. Consequently, European countries decided to shift their attention to an alternative discourse that puts great emphasis on the concept of "civic integration", which will be thoroughly discussed in the following sections.

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[85] W. Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure and the Future*, Washington DC, Migration Policy Institute, 2012, p. 71

[86] W. Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure and the Future*, p. 71

[87] Ibid.

3.2   The European civic integration turn

The fact that migrant integration constitutes one of the most demanding policy affairs of our century has compelled Europe consider and develop an overall policy intended for integrating migrants in their receiving societies. At a European level, with the Treaty of Amsterdam adopted in 1997, the EU could impact, for the first time in its history, the integration of TCNs. Despite the absence of an explicit reference to the concept of integration, the EU aimed to establish a common immigration policy that would grant TCNs rights and obligations equivalent to the ones of EU citizens, as well as was able to take appropriate steps to tackle discrimination on the basis, among others, of racial or ethnic origin and religion or belief. In the years that followed, the perception of a general failure by European countries to integrate migrants into receiving societies has led to a definite turn in policy orientation towards the embrace of the concept of civic integration. Between the years of 2004 and 2016, the European Commission issued a set of documents addressing the integration of TCNs into the EU area, laying in this way the ground for the reconstruction of a European agenda on civic integration.

The 2005 Communication Agenda[88] is regarded as the first step at an EU level to establish a new policy framework for integration through the agreement on common basic principles (CBPs). Under this framework, all the principles rely on the first one, which defines integration as a "dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member-States"[89]. Based on this principle, the rest focus on the ways immigrants and receiving societies shall carry out the process of the mutual accommodation. On the part of the immigrants, they are expected to "respect the values of the European Union"[90], to participate and contribute to the host society with their "employment"[91], and gain "basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions"[92]. On the part of the receiving societies, they are required to make "efforts in education"[93], allow immigrants' access to public and private institutions, as well as to the democratic process through anti-discrimination policies[94], create possibilities for "frequent

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[88]European Union: European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *A Common Agenda for Integration: Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union*, 1 September 2005, COM(2005) 389, https://eur
lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2005:0389:FIN:EN:PDF (accessed 11 June 2020)
[89] Ibid., p. 5
[90] CBP2
[91] CBP3
[92] CBP4
[93] CBP5
[94] CBP6, CBP9

interaction" between the populations[95], and lastly guarantee the "practice of diverse cultures and religions … unless practices conflict with other inviolable European rights or with national law"[96]. Indeed, this set of principles, and especially CBP4, along with the 2011 Communication Agenda[97] and 2016 Communication Action Plan[98], which were supplementing and intensifying the 2005 Communication, have inspired member-state's adjustments for civic integration policies.

Across Europe, there has been a rapid dispersal of the idea and practice of civic integration. In this line, influential scholars like C. Joppke have supported the weakening of distinct national models and a convergence in immigrant integration policy[99]. However, others have rejected this idea, supporting the view that distinct national models with regard to migrant's integration have not vanished and continue to exist. S. J. Larin notes that European civic integration policies are in a number of cases best assumed as "a kind of symbolic politics"[100]. Despite the adoption of similar integration programs by member-states, it is a fact that they are not legally binding, they do not involve "strictly guided coordination from the European Union level"[101], and therefore member-states are not forced to move towards this specific direction. In any case, and even the significant similarities and/or variations identified by member-states, civic integration arguably marks a characteristic turn in terms of migrant's accommodation.

Whilst not a force model of integration, but better understood as the political and institutional process that member states are implementing, European civic integration policies open a new window of theory and practice, manifesting that successful inclusion into a host society relies not only on economic and political integration, but also on individual engagements to national and universal characteristics, such as country knowledge of history, language and institutions, as well as liberal and social values, which point to cultural

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[95] CBP7

[96] CBP8

[97] European Union: European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *European Agenda on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals,* 20July 2011,COM(2011) 455 final, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0455&from=EN (accessed 11 June 2020)

[98] European Union: European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals,*7 June 2016, COM(2016) 377 final, https://www.refworld.org/docid/576aa9be4.html(accessed 11 June 2020)

[99] C. Joppke, 'Beyond National Models: Civic Integration Policies for Immigrants in Western Europe', *West European Politics*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2007

[100] S. J. Larin, 'Is it really about values?: Civic nationalism and migrant integration', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2020, p. 128

[101] D. Jacobs and A. Rea, 'The end of national models?: Integration courses and citizenship trajectories in Europe', *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* (*IJM*S), vol. 9, no. 2, 2007, p. 265

integration. Nonetheless, S. W. Goodman highlights that "unlike models of cultural integration, which focus "near(ly) exclusively on the extent and ways in which migrants" attitudes and behaviors approximate to the host society (or sections of it), the objective of civic integration is not transforming culture affinities or assimilationist uniformity but promoting functional, individual autonomy"[102]. In order to encourage commitments to values and other civic skills, governments have set up a broad range of measures, including classes, tests and contracts. These measures can be put in use prior to arrival, prior to the grant of permanent residence permit, or even prior to the grant of citizenship, and for specific types of migrants they are obligatory. Civic integration classes put great emphasis on the host society's language, history and values. Participation to the courses can be either mandatory, which means that migrants need to complete the required classes in order to obtain the desirable status; either preparatory, signifying that presence to the classes is not necessary but is advised as the performance is evaluated for the grant of the status, or voluntary, which means that attendance is not necessary because performance is not evaluated for the grant of the status. According to Larin, "most states that require course completion do not charge for participation, whereas those that only encourage participation usually require participants to pay a fee"[103]. With regards to tests, a number of countries demand migrants to pass one or more tests in order to proceed with family reunification procedures or grant temporary residence. In most cases, this means that they need to express a certain level of language competence, as well as some country knowledge. These tests in a few cases should be completed abroad and prior to arrival or in other cases after arrival in the receiving country. In addition, some countries demand contracts after the entry of migrants into their territory. Through a written or an oral declaration, "migrants formally commit to participate in integration activities and respect the state's laws and values"[104].

Overall, civic integration policy as a development has become a powerful area of study, with civic integration requirements to increase significantly among European countries. Per Mouritsen et al. argue that this development should be best understood as an "ideological turn", because "it expands good citizenship into personal conduct and values, shifts the responsibility for integration from the state to individuals and institutionalizes incentivizing and disciplining integration processes[105]. However, there is a general confusion with regards to the term, and that happens in the "absence of a theoretically precise definition for civic

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[102] S. W. Goodman, 'Integration Requirements for Integration's Sake?: Identifying, Categorizing and Comparing Civic Integration Policies', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 36, no. 5, 2010, p. 754

[103] S. J. Larin, 'Is it really about values?: Civic nationalism and migrant integration', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, p. 129

[104] Ibid.

[105] P. Mouritsen, K. K. Jensen and S. J. Larin, 'Introduction: Theorizing the civic turn in European integration policies', *Ethnicities*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2019, p. 595

integration with respect to the larger realms of integration and citizenship policy-making"[106]. This is also reflected on the fact that civic integration policies are significantly different in all countries in terms of "who they target (scope), what they require (demandingness) and which legal status they guard (sequencing)"[107]. Given these distinctions, whether civic integration policies, expressed with such requirements, can produce effective results for integration is an hypothesis to be tested. Meanwhile, Goodman states that in the absence of a clear articulation of how civic integration is applied, "citizenship requirements may appear unnecessarily cultural and integration may seem unnecessarily statist"[108]. After all, the obligatory and punitive nature of the trend of civic integration, with its subsequent increase and tougher requirements over the years, reflects the understanding of integration in a more restrictive sense, and this has multiple implications for all the main actors involved.

3.2.1 Nationalistic interpretations of civic integration

Nowadays, there is a huge ongoing academic debate whether European civic integration policies, as expressed and implemented, carry or not a nationalistic connotation. Among scholars, Joppke has extensively supported the view that the convergence toward the new civic agenda of integration takes place within the bosom of liberalism. According to his understanding, liberal values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law, cannot be marked as national peculiarity, nor can they enforce a cultural integration, because the way civic policies are designed makes them confined to these liberal values. Although he concedes that the way the European civic integration agenda is implemented at the national level often entails illiberal and even repressive instruments, he nonetheless asserts that "civic integration is mostly within a liberal register"[109]. On opposite sides, various academics critically challenge this interpretation and argue that while ideas of political liberalism are placed in heart of the civic integration agenda, nationalism shall not be rejected as a key factor behind such national projects. This thesis takes the stance of the latter, supporting that Muslim's socio-cultural integration within civic national integration projects often takes place within the maintenance of a nationalistic connotation, and may act as an exclusionary strategy of this specific group.

The shared political values discourse that defines the wide scope of the civic integration policies promoted by Western European countries is quite problematic and

[106] S. W. Goodman, 'Integration Requirements for Integration's Sake?', p. 755

[107] S. W. Goodman, *Immigration and Membership Politics in Western Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, cited in P. Mouritsen, K. K. Jensen and S. J. Larin, 'Introduction: Theorizing the civic turn in European integration policies', p. 596

[108] S. W. Goodman, 'Integration Requirements for Integration's Sake?', p. 756

[109] C. Joppke, 'Civic integration in Western Europe: three debates', *West European Politics*, vol. 40, no. 6, 2017, p. 1170

paradoxical in a sense. One of the main problematic areas here is the construction of identities. It is generally supported that immigrants and ethnic communities must become part of the universalistic value system, and thus embrace liberalism as an identity. However, contrary to Joppke's allegations, these universal values they are expected to respect and adhere to are in many cases framed as national by European states, who often portray them as the achievement of a specific nation. This, of course, creates a contradiction in terms, because universal values cannot signify a cultural peculiarity. Jensen and Mouritsen, while reflecting on this issue, claim that this universal value system is not only seen as essential, but as "ours", because it is "put at the service of defining a national "we""[110]. And indeed, radical political figures of some European states today argue that their countries' secular, liberal democratic way of life is difficult to be attained by those who were never raised and socialized in similar democratic environments and to whom liberal principles and ideas are almost impossible to perceive and tolerate. Such arguments usually target certain ethnic groups, and especially Muslims, who are depicted as incapable of integrating because they have origins from "a purportedly "un-civic" culture"[111].

While the argument that universal values are not able to influence national sentiment is theoretically valid, in practice it can actually be deplored. Even though integration in Europe is articulated in a liberal sense, and hence countries converge around the same universal values, the way national politicians and decision-makers understand them and institutionalize them varies significantly among nations. That happens because national politicians put emphasis on different liberal values, focus on different historical origins, and thus "have particular ownership of some liberal values, which provides an ample base to mobilize national sentiment"[112]. This sense of peculiarity expressed by European states fortifies a cultural distinct national identity, which reflects significant cultural differences among nations. Therefore, the argument of Mouritsen et al. that in reality we have "a civic nationalist conception of membership that appeals to shared political values but defines those values through the culture of the state's national majority" seems noteworthy. School curricula, despite actions towards the promotion of intercultural classrooms, place importance on national histories, on the language, and the culture of the majorities. So do other public institutions, and especially churches, which favor Christianity above other religions. This is also reflected on the various restrictive civic integration agendas, with the difficult language requirements, as well as the tests that require knowledge of a country's history and customs. And even if they do not demand cognitive appropriation, they intentionally imply a

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[110] K. K. Jensen and P. Mouritsen, 'Nationalism in a Liberal Register: Beyond the "Paradox of Universalism" in Immigrant Integration Politics', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2017, p. 837
[111] S. J. Larin, 'Is it really about values?, p. 134
[112] K. K. Jensen and P. Mouritsen, 'Nationalism in a Liberal Register', p. 841

homogenization to be used for civic purposes. Such homogenization, however, has multiple effects for ethnic communities. Although the European civic integration policies do not mainly point out ethnic or religious traditions, they echo "identity reactions-for example, to stories of Islamic religious practice, radicalism, urban unrest and ethnic segregation"[113]. The way civic integration is implemented involves the displacement of certain communities' practices. Muslim communities in their everyday lives are deeply incorporated by living standards and social relations which are linked to the majority culture. In this sense, "civicness, when defined very comprehensively, does conflict with traditional Islam, leaving in place only (religious) culture as heritage, identity and emotional-aesthetic attachment"[114].

In sum, it becomes visible that European civic integration policies, even their appeal to universal liberal values, can cultivate and mobilize a national identity, and thus to carry a nationalistic connotation. The rise of mandatory civic requirements has brought to the forefront essential questions of how membership and belonging are to be understood in the European area. Hence, civic integration can be achieved only by those individuals who are willing to commit themselves and adhere to the customs and norms of the host country. While European countries no longer impose cultural assimilation in a straightforward way, they often give incentives to it through restrictive civic courses, tests and contracts. It is a fact that they increasingly try to defend prevalent public values against the claims of certain ethnic groups, and mainly Muslims. However, this kind of political rhetoric and action, which focuses on cultural differences and is expressed in the words of liberalism, is often racist and functions as a form of excluding a specific group, Muslims.

3.2.2 Giving a gender dimension to civic integration

Another important element placed in the heart of the modern civic integration agenda is the theme of gender equality. A careful examination of the way this theme is implemented by different European countries triggers several questions, such as the following: What kind of equality between women and men is promoted and implemented within the civic integration policies, and how Muslim women and men are targeted by such policies? As will be explained, within the new civic vision there is a huge contradiction when it comes to women's integration. This contradiction stems primarily from the representations of migrant women and men, as well as the self-representation of European nations, which are offered to immigrants. In the West in general, immigrant women's image has been socially constructed in a fixed and static sense. The timeless rhetoric that Muslim women are in need to be saved

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[113] Ibid., p. 837

[114] P. Mouritsen, K. K. Jensen and S. J. Larin, 'Introduction: Theorizing the civic turn in European integration policies', p. 602

has entrenched stereotypes of both genders, with Muslim women to be seen as passive and powerless subjects, the absolute victims of the oppressive nature of Islam and traditional patriarchy, and Muslim men as aggressive and domineering. This rhetoric, which is largely spread across Europe, has fueled heated debates in some countries, hindering Muslim's rights to freedom of religion and expression. In addition, it has clearly inspired civic integration policies.

The focus on gender equality and women's rights by civic integration came as a natural continuity of the expressed failure of multiculturalism and the alleged danger that religious communities, and especially Islamic ones, pose to European values and secular states. Sara R. Farris, in her thorough study on the notion of femonationalism[115] shed light on the gender dimension of civic integration policies across EU member-states in order to outline the basic philosophy underlined. She developed that, while the theme of gender equality is a pillar of the European civic integration programs, great emphasis is put on the essence of motherhood and the role of women as "proper" mothers, or "cultural reproducers of the nation"[116], and not as individual and social actors, and concluded that the new civic integration contributes to the persistence of unequal gender relations. And indeed, looking how gender equality is expressed within the various civic integration programs in Europe, one can see such a reflection. For example, in the Netherlands, the first country to introduce civic integration measures, and the one with some of the most restrictive requirements, the materials concerning the Basic Civic Integration Examination Abroad[117] mention gender equality as a key value of Dutch society. The film 'Naar Nederland', which is one of the most important components of the exam preparation, and consists of various elements of the life in the country, such as history, ethics, language, work, family etc, devotes a really long section to the crucial role of women in their child upbringing and education. While, on the one hand, there are many references to the emancipatory character of women, with topless images of women sunbathing on the beaches, on the other hand they are targeted as the fundamental vector of integration. As explained in the movie, the best child rearing comes from the mother, who is taught how to become a proper "Dutch" parent in order to integrate the second generations. Therefore, it is observed that the Dutch civic integration program is rather

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[115] According to Farris, "Femonationalism refers both to the exploitation of feminist themes by nationalists and neoliberals anti-Islam campaigns and to the participation of certain feminists and femocrats in the stigmatization of Muslim men under the banner of gender equality". See S. R. Farris, In *the name of women's rights: The rise of femonationalism*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2017, p. 4

[116] S. R. Farris, *In the name of women's rights: The rise of femonationalism*, p. 102

[117] For information regarding the Dutch process of the examination abroad, see the website of the Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, *Naar Nederland*[website], https://www.naarnederland.nl/en/coursematerial#handbook (accessed 24 June 2020)

assimilative and promoting a traditional sexual division of labor. France can also be offered as a good example, where integration has taken the shape of a mandatory "republican integration", understood in history as the proper antidote against the increasing "communalism" of immigrants. Through the establishment of the *Contrat d'Accueil et d'Integration*, which promotes a stereotypical image of immigrant women as the absolute victims of gender-based violence, a result of their cultural or religious affiliations, it is a fact that gender equality gains a prevalent role as a key component of the country. However, within the booklet "Living in France"[118], the main document informing migrants for their contractual requirements, the notion of "good motherhood"[119] also attains great attention. Accordingly, civic integration programs of other European countries follow similar gender equality rhetoric, whereas in reality they strongly consolidate the traditional division of labor, creating in this way confusions and contradictions regarding the prominent position immigrant women have in society.

Therefore, while civic integration policies aim to promote the emancipation of women, it is proved that this civic integration agenda, a blend of nationalist and liberalist ideas, is not only discouraging women's rights, but rather views women as redeemable subjects who have a specific purpose and position in society. On the one hand, the focus of these policies on the representation of immigrant women as passive victims in need to be saved clearly targets Muslim women. On the other, their emphasis put on the familiarization of women with the culture and norms of the host society, as well as their role as mothers who need to carry these norms to their children and subsequently the next generations, is an evident sign of the cultural assimilation of migrant communities and thus, the exclusion of cultural difference.

3.3   What has gone wrong?

The aforementioned analysis of migrant socio-cultural integration and the way it is understood, transformed and implemented in the European area through the years reveals significant complexities. To deal with cultural diversity is undoubtedly not an easy task. The emergence of a united Europe devoted to the promotion of universal norms and principles showed that assimilation as an approach to integration had no longer position in the gulfs of Europe. That was partly because the traditional perception that the newcomer should fully embrace the customs and norms of the host society could not be supported any further, as no one could clarify what discerned national particular values from each other, and most of the

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[118] Direction Generale des Etrangeres en France, *Living in France*, Ministere de L'Interieur, 2016, file:///C:/Users/Me/Downloads/Livret_Venir-vivre-en-France_sept2016_EUK.pdf (accessed 25 June 2020)

[119] S. R. Farris, *In the name of women's rights: The rise of femonationalism*, p. 99

assimilationist claims inevitably slipped to universal values forms. And indeed, as Wilson correctly notes, "in as far as assimilationism makes a relativistic claim as to a national "ethos", which must be distinct from similar claims by other states, this cannot by definition be compatible with universal norms"[120]. Hence, contemporary globalized societies have proved that assimilation, especially when perceived in a "thick" form, is essentially not capable of dealing with diversity in a non-discriminatory and non-exclusive sense.

In contrast, multiculturalism as a concept and another approach to integration has fueled many controversies over the years. One of the main criticisms is that multicultural policies, with their emphasis on the recognition of collective rights to the detriment of the individuals, have led to the creation of communal dividing lines which in their turn have led to a lack of interaction between populations, and so the emergence of phenomena of cultural segregation and ghettoization. In addition, other criticisms contend that within multiculturalism, equality has been heavily overshadowed by politics of difference, and thus fragmented identity claims have become impediments to universal equality claims[121]. However, the concept of multiculturalism is very often misunderstood. For C. Taylor, "anti-multicultural rhetoric in Europe reflects a profound misunderstanding of the dynamics of immigration into the rich, liberal democracies of the West … the European attack on multiculturalism often seems to us a classic case of false consciousness, blaming certain phenomena of ghettoization and alienation of immigrants on a foreign ideology, instead of recognizing the home-grown failures to promote integration and combat discrimination"[122]. And indeed, in many European countries, the general perception that multiculturalism only signifies the existence of different cultural communities in a society, without their subsequent participation and integration into this larger society is a common misunderstanding. This perception urged many in Europe to denounce multiculturalism, declaring that it has essentially failed. Nevertheless, as John W. Berry highlights, "it has not failed because it has not even tried"[123]. Looking at the German denunciation of multiculturalism by Chancellor Angela Merkel, as well as the French one by the former President Nicola Sarkozy, one can see a surprising discrepancy, as both of the countries had never followed an official national multiculturalism policy. This retreat, when observed carefully, is due to a perception problem and is closely related to Islam and Muslim immigrants. Joppke, in this regard, notes that

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[120] R. Wilson, *Meeting the Challenge of Cultural Diversity in Europe: Moving beyond the Crisis*, Cheltenham & Northampton, Edward Elgar, 2018, p. 57

[121] Brochmann et al. , *Immigration Policy and the Scandinavian Welfare state 1945-2010*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 22

[122] C. Taylor, 'Interculturalism or multiculturalism?', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 38, no. 4-5, 2012, p. 414

[123] J. W. Berry , 'Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies: A Comparative Perspective', in A. Rea et al. (eds.), *Governing diversity: Migrant Integration and Multiculturalism in North America and Europe*, Editions de l' Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2018, p.33

"whenever political leaders pronounce multiculturalism dead and wish to move beyond it, central to it is a deep suspicion that the integration of Muslim immigrants and especially of their offspring has failed"[124].

In reaction, and for these reasons, the new direction highly focuses on liberal universal values that have to be spread and shared by all the immigrant and newcomer populations. European civic policies progressively put emphasis on culture and have as their main problem the integration of Muslim communities. Cultural concerns center around specific cultural practices, such as honor killings, forced marriages or the wearing of headscarves, which reveal the illiberal influence of Islam and Muslim cultures, and are oppositional to European values of gender equality. Hence, civic integration, or even "muscular liberalism" as in the case of Britain, as the official alternative of multiculturalism, is a reflection on how to most effectively deal with this problem of Muslim integration, as well as the problem of immigration. It has been supported that the difficult civic integration and citizenship tests very often intend to "examine the candidate's moral and ethical views"[125], in order immigrants to be accepted in a liberal society. Such tests, of course, and whenever taking place, violate essential liberal values and can be viewed as substantially illiberal. It is a fact that patriarchal or homophobic perceptions are not exclusive to Muslims, but are well-consolidated among many native citizens, and are often tolerated in liberal societies. In addition, it is also argued by various scholars that this illiberal character of civic integration policies usually functions as a means of migration control, which helps European states to control and limit the entry of non-integrative family immigrants[126].

Consequently, an examination of how these different models and approaches to integration succeed one another, are proclaimed and implemented exposes significant inconsistencies and misconceptions. As Castles et al. proclaim, "All of the different approaches to incorporation have proved problematic in one way or another, so that by the early 21st century there appeared to be a widespread "crisis of integration"[127]. Today's definite shift to civic integration is considered a novelty. The way liberal democratic states manage cultural diversity on a national level is undoubtedly changing. However, the same is not true when looking at the local level. Despite the so-called retreat from multiculturalism, many European countries continue to maintain multicultural policies at other levels of governance.

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[124] C. Joppke, 'The Retreat is Real-but what is the Alternative?: Multiculturalism, Muscular Liberalism and Islam', *Constellations*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2014, p. 288

[125] Ibid., p. 290

[126] See, in this respect, and among others, the work of C. Joppke, 'Beyond National Models: Civic Integration Policies for Immigrants in Western Europe', p.5, or S .J. Larin, 'Is it really about values?: Civic nationalism and migrant integration', p.133

[127] S. Castles, H. de Haas, and M. J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 5th edn., New York and London, The Guilford Press, 2014, p. 270

Laura Reidel conducted an interesting study about the retreat from multiculturalism, focusing on the cases of Canada and the Netherlands. She found that, even the proclaimed retreat from multicultural norms at a national level, in both countries there is strong evidence at sub-state and supra-state levels to maintain such multicultural norms[128].

Moreover, European countries have various obligations to supra-state organizations, and thus are subjects to human rights standards, as well as the guidance that these organizations provide for the management of cultural diversity. Supra-state organizations, rather than supporting an obligatory sense of integration, with subsequent emphasis on national customs and norms, they promote a mutual adaptation between migrants and the host society. Among other organizations, the CoE, in order to move beyond this global multiculturalism debate and respond to the critics of multiculturalism, it worked towards the promotion of an alternative solution that could be proved more cohesive, and proposed that multiculturalism be replaced by interculturalism. The notion of interculturalism and the power it has as a potent alternative will be analyzed in the following section. However, as long as at a national European level a hardening form of civic integration is on the rise, will these efforts, displaced at the local level, be enough in order to overcome processes of segregation and contribute to the smooth inclusion of Muslim migrants into European societies?

3.4   Interculturalism as an alternative

The affirmed "crisis of integration" urged multiple national and international stakeholders to think about and work towards the establishment of new directions for policy in the European area. The year 2008 is considered as a benchmark for the management of cultural diversity. That year, in which the CoE finally launched the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, was also nominated by the EU as the year of Intercultural Dialogue. Appreciating that the previous philosophies of managing integration and cultural diversity were no longer sufficient, this new thinking strived to achieve a more coherent policy framework.

The new intercultural concept, as was conceived by the CoE, framed the management of cultural diversity in three ways. First, interculturalism is grounded on the shared universal values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. While not explicitly stated, it promotes an individualistic conception of the society as a whole. Intercultural dialogue, arguably the main characteristic of interculturalism, puts emphasis on individuals. As proclaimed,

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[128] L. Reidel, 'Beyond a State-centric Perspective on Norm Change: A Multilevel Governance Analysis of the Retreat from Multiculturalism', *Global Governance*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2015

"Individual human dignity is at the foundation of society. The individual, however, is not as such a homogeneous social actor. Our identity, by definition, is not what makes us the same as others but what makes us unique. Identity is a complex and contextually sensitive combination of elements"[129].

However, while the focus is on the individual, when interculturalism is translated into policy, it also depends, much like multiculturalism, on groups, encouraging governments to enable dialogues between ethnic and religious communities. In the white paper, culture gains a prominent role of diversity policies, as "freedom to choose one's own culture is fundamental"[130]. Zapata Barrero understands culture as "as an expression of personal identity, which must always been seen in dynamic and open terms"[131]. People should feel free to decide their culture and religion, because culture constitutes an essential element of human rights. Nonetheless, cultural practices incompatible with universal norms, such as forced marriages, honor killings or female genital mutilation are all categorically condemned in the paper. Secondly, the vision identifies a robust framework essential to provide a favorable space for intercultural integration. It builds on democratic architecture, reciprocal recognition and impartial treatment. This new intercultural approach, which is differentiated from previous models, mentions that,

"Unlike assimilation, it recognizes that public authorities must be impartial, rather than accepting a majority ethos only, if communalist tensions are to be avoided. Unlike multiculturalism, however, it vindicates a common core which leaves no room for moral relativism. Unlike both, it recognizes a key role for the associational sphere of civic society where, premised on reciprocal recognition, intercultural dialogue can resolve the problems of daily life in a way that governments alone cannot"[132].

Thirdly, the intercultural concept approaches integration as a "two-sided process"[133], claiming that strategies for integration shall cover all areas of society, and shall take into account migrant's dignity and distinct identity at the implementation of integration policies.

Interculturalism, therefore, emerges as a promising approach to affirm cultural diversity and focuses on communication, on a genuine dialogue between different cultural, ethnic and religious communities. In such an intercultural dialogue, as Stokke and Lybaek

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[129] Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: "Living Together As Equals in Dignity"*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 2008, p. 18

[130] Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, p. 18

[131] R. Z. Barrero, 'The three strands of intercultural policies: a comprehensive view- A critical review of Bouchard and Cantle recent books on interculturalism', *Gritim- UPF: Working Paper Series* no. 17, 2013, p.9

[132] Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, p. 20

[133] Ibid., p. 11

note, "people meet as human beings rather than as abstract citizens … it is an open and reflexive exchange of views based on mutual understanding and respect, which aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices, and personal growth and transformation"[134]. Within interculturalism, civil society is identified as a key player to facilitate a conducive and safe space for dialogue. According to Robin Wilson, "the work of integration depends for its legitimacy and its realization on the engagement of civil-society organizations, and individual practitioners on the ground"[135]. Intercultural integration, in order to provide results, needs to be put into practice. It needs to be put into education, into social work, into the job market. Through positive interaction between individuals and groups, its main aim is to cancel out processes of segregation and exclusion that apparently take place in culturally diverse societies.

IV.   A dive into the national context: Belgium and Greece as case studies

This chapter sheds light on the issue of Islamic visibility in the public spheres of Belgium and Greece. Accordingly, the challenges of immigration, representation and socio-cultural integration of Muslim communities within these societies will be thoroughly discussed. In addition, insights of Muslim immigrants and NGO practitioners in the field of socio-cultural integration will give a further reflection of the current situation in both countries.

4.1   Islam in the Belgian context

With a complex national history and a long tradition in accommodating Muslim minorities, Belgium arises as a particular case with regards to the integration of Islam. Although Muslim presence in Belgium is observed since the 1920s and the Second World War, a major wave of Islamic immigration started in the 1960s as a result of the large-scale recruitment of foreign labor which was executed by the Belgian authorities of the time. Having no link with any Muslim country, as well as no resort to its former colony, Congo, Belgium lacked labor. For this reason, in the summer of 1964 it made two official immigration agreements with Morocco and Turkey and later with Tunisia and Algeria in order to recruit workforce. It should be noted that in contrast to other European countries, Belgium encouraged immigrants to bring their families along and promoted integration. This had as a consequence the growth of Muslim population and thus the gradual visibility of

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[134] C. Stokke and L. Lybaek, 'Combining intercultural dialogue and critical multiculturalism', *Ethnicities*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2018, p. 75
[135] R. Wilson, *Meeting the Challenge of Cultural Diversity in Europe: Moving beyond the Crisis*, p. 101

Islam in the big cities. As argued, "Morocco was, by far, the country that would send the most people to live and work in Belgium"[136]. Consequently, Muslims living in Belgium have mainly a Moroccan or a Turkish background. However, among them there are plenty of other identities such as Albanians, Egyptians, Pakistanis, as well as the more recent immigrants from the Northern African countries. All of them have contributed to the diversity and complication of the country's Muslim landscape.

Regarding the actual number of Muslims currently living in the country, it is really difficult to calculate it and get a reliable figure. Information on the religious affiliations of the population is not contained in Belgium's national statistics, and so estimates are based on the number of migrant people and their descendants from countries where Islam is the major religion. Of course, such estimates may not always be accurate, as among these people some may associate themselves to other religions, or simply be non-religious. Nevertheless, according to a very recent estimate for 2020, the possible figure of those identified as Muslim is about 810.000, corresponding to 7.5% of the national population[137]. Pew Research Center's 2017 survey showed that Belgium is among the top ten destination countries for Muslim migrants, and estimated that between the years 2010 and 2016, 57% of 230.000 migrants coming to Belgium were Muslims[138].

As about the issue of faith, Belgium has a Catholic background and a strong conflict between Catholics and defenders of secularism. In legal and technical terms, "Belgium is a separatist country in which the separation of church and state is applied in line with the principle of the state's lack of competence in religious matters and the independence of religious faiths"[139]. Nonetheless, agreements with several others religious faiths have been signed by Belgium and have led to their collaboration with the state, as well as their grant of autonomy and recognition in the public domain. In 1974, Islam was officially recognized as a state's religion. In that respect, Belgium was the first European country to give Islam a public status. Such an acknowledgement, of course, boosted the increase of the Muslim population in the country, and especially through family groupings, leading to the identification of Islam as Belgium's "second religion".

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[136] T. de Raedt, 'Muslims in Belgium: a case study of emerging identities', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2004, p. 14

[137] T. Sealy and T. Modood, *Country Report Belgium*, GREASE Religion, Diversity and Radicalization, October 2019, p. 6

[138] Pew Research Center, 'Europe's Growing Muslim Population', *Pew Research Center*, 29 November 2017, https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/ (accessed 5 July 2020)

[139] C. Torrekens, 'Islam in Belgium: From formal recognition to public contestation', in M. Burchardt and I. Michalowski, *After Integration: Islam, Conviviality and Contentious Politics in Europe*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2015, p. 155

The institutionalization of Islam in Belgium has been a really long and difficult process. Originally, the formal management of Islam was assigned to the 'Islamic and Cultural Center of Belgium', coordinated by Saudi Arabia. However, the process of institutionalization was not carried out until the 1980s for several reasons, the most important of which was Belgium's lack of diplomatic interest, as well as disapproval of the legitimacy of the 'Islamic and Cultural Center' among Muslim associations in the country, that denied its role and considered its coordination by Saudi Arabia as not taking into account that the majority of Muslim communities in Belgium were especially of Turkish and Moroccan origin[140]. The period of the 1980s was decisive, as it made the presence of Muslims visible, and led to development of a Muslim identity. As a result of this new reality, it was proposed that a 'Council of the Belgian Muslims' should be set up. Nonetheless, fear among the Belgian authorities about the possible establishment of Islamist organizations led to a lack of political consensus and the beginning of negotiations. Only in 1996 and after many delays, the negotiations led to the formal recognition of the 'Temporary Muslim Executive of Belgium', which two years later took the green light to organize elections for the establishment of a permanent 'Executive'. Despite this step, the authorities proceeded to security investigations on the candidates, in order to get reliable information for its non-radicalism[141], creating in this way a climate of distrust between the state and the 'Executive'. In general, the process of institutionalization of Islam in Belgium has been a huge struggle with multiple kinds of problems. As stressed by Torrekens, there were suspicions on behalf of the Belgian authorities on the possible involvement of radical Islamists within the elections. In addition, internal oppositions between ethnic groups, but also between different approaches to Islam contributed to this[142]. In 2002, the 'Executive' was replaced by a new one, the elections of which in 2005 led to further opposition between the ethnic groups this time, as the Turkish Muslims won the most seats and thus the representation of the Muslim population. Consequently, it has been observed a real struggle within the institutionalization process in the passage of time, the outcome of which has revealed "the limited capacity of European societies to understand a religion that has not developed along the lines of the clerical model of an organized hierarchy such as the Christian Church"[143]. Since 2014, the process has changed once again and a new 'Executive' has been set up. Today, Islam is considered as one of the most important parts of immigration, and is seen as the main source of social, cultural and economic problems that hinder the smooth inclusion of Muslim communities into the Belgian society.

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[140] C. Torrekens, 'Islam in Belgium: From formal recognition to public contestation', p. 155
[141] Ibid., p. 157
[142] Ibid., p. 158
[143] Ibid., p.159

4.1.1 Belgium in between divergent positions over the achievement of socio-cultural integration

Migrants' accommodation and integration in Belgium is a highly sensitive and contentious matter. Belgium, in the words of Kymlicka, and cited by the academic Corrine Torrekens, is best understood as a "multination state"[144]. That means that it is a federal state which is divided and organized pursuant to territorial and linguistic lines. The three regions, namely the Flemish region, the Walloon region, and the Brussels region, are socio-economic entities with jurisdiction over policies associated to their territorial issues. Respectively, the three communities, namely the Flemish community, the French community, and the German community, are cultural and linguistic communities with control over policies associated to various personal services. As a consequence, the core nation of the Belgian state is constituted from these national entities, with each having its own cultural identity and distinct political privileges.

When it comes to immigration and immigrant's integration policy issues, the already complex and divided Belgian cultural and political landscape gets even more puzzled. It is generally considered that the federal state deals with the management of immigration policy in a rather strict sense, deciding on matters of citizenship and residence rights[145]. The management of immigrant's integration was traditionally promoted by the regions, which had full legislative and executive power over their jurisdictions, such as on processes of reception, and the advancement of equality policies for migrants and ethnic communities[146]. Since the 1980s, though, competence over the accommodation and integration policies has been assigned to the Francophone and Flemish communities, and today immigrant's integration policy is handled by the Flemish community, the Walloon region and the French Community Commission of the Brussels-Capital Region, with each following a distinct policy line. Nevertheless, despite the presence of the three different migration policy lines, only two big political debates take place with regards to migrant integration policy, a Flemish and a Francophone one, with both of them having traditionally dissimilar philosophies and taking diametrically divergent positions. It is therefore clear, as Dirk Jacobs notices, that "there is no such thing as "one Belgian national model" for migrant integration"[147].

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[144] Ibid., p.154

[145] I. Adam and D. Jacobs, ʻDivided on Immigration, Two models for Integration, The Multilevel Governance of Immigration and Integration in Belgiumʼ, in E. Hepburn et al. (eds.), *The Politics of Immigration in Multi-level States: Governance and Political Parties*, 1st edn., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 66-67

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., p. 66

The Flemish integration model is overall inspired by the Dutch multicultural model[148]. It is generally considered as fostering emancipation due to its promotion of a recognition policy, with the recognition of cultural differences of the diverse ethnic communities. That is expressed, for instance, through the public financial support for migrant's organizations and associations that advance their culture of origin, or the award, for example, of holidays to students depending on their personal religion. This favorable role given to migrant's cultural organizations, as scholars underline, "is related to the central role played by cultural organizations in the Flemish movement for emancipation from cultural domination by francophones"[149]. Such a recognition concept, however, does not take place on the other side of the country, the French speaking one. Wallonia's and Brussels' integration model is inspired by the French republican model and tends to be more color-blind assimilationist[150]. Within this model, emphasis is put on social and economic inclusion, whereas no will exists for the recognition of ethno-cultural communities as particular entities, and thus no recognition of their collective identity in the public domain, or public economic support. For a more precise reflection of the situation in the French-speaking side, Torrekens notes that it has been observed a "growing opposition between multiculturalists in favor of a more inclusive approach towards religious and ethnic identities in the public sphere and defenders of "laicite" fighting for the inscription of this principle in the Belgian Constitution"[151]. In Wallonia since 1996, there has been an integration policy that encourages social activities, such as vocational trainings, literacy classes, and actions that include intercultural encounters. For them, to combat the social disadvantages that migrant's face is more important than encouraging cultural activities. Brussels-capital follows almost the same approach in its great effort to support social cohesion. However, it is important to note that Brussels implements two different integration policies under the same region, a Flemish and a Francophone one, and this, as stressed, "without any institutional and little intergovernmental cooperation"[152].

In sum, it becomes clear that the immigrant's choice of residence in Belgium is highly affecting his/her rights and duties. The immigrant socio-cultural integration policies are divergent and considerable different if living in Flanders, Wallonia, or Brussels. Today, where a stricter sense of integration is also noticeable in Belgium, and which will be

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[148] C. Torrekens, 'Islam in Belgium: From formal recognition to public contestation', p. 159

[149] I. Adam, M. Martiniello and A. Rea, 'Regional Divergence in the Integration Policy in Belgium: One Country, Three Integration Programs, One Citizenship Law', in A. Rea, E. Bribosia, I. Rorive and D. Sredanovic (eds.), *Governing diversity: Migrant Integration and Multiculturalism in North America and Europe*, Editions de l' Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2018, p. 238

[150] C. Torrekens, 'Islam in Belgium: From formal recognition to public contestation', p. 159

[151] Ibid., p.159

[152] I. Adam and D. Jacobs, *Divided on Immigration, Two models for Integration*, p. 76

explained in the next section, the immigrant's preference of residence has various and diverse consequences for their social and cultural quality of life.

4.1.2   A gradual slip into cultural assimilation

From the end of the 1990s, the clear image of Belgium divided into two cultural and political communities with opposing views on immigrant integration and religious pluralism is gradually interrupted. During that time, as it already happened in the Netherlands, Flanders experienced the same multicultural backlash, and thus turned into a more restrictive and assimilationist stance. They were examining a compulsory integration program for immigrants, which and was finally put in place in 2003. Emulated from the Netherlands, the Flemish Degree on Civic Inclusion makes participation for most non-EU newly registered immigrants to the integration program compulsory and aims the promotion of "a certain degree of language and cultural assimilation"[153]. Such a debate on the failure of migrant's integration, which was followed by the subsequent attacks on multiculturalism, as well as the 180 degree turn from Flanders, can be mainly explained by the rise of a far right-wing party, the Vlaams Bloc, with an evident anti-immigrant view, as well as the influence of a nationalist party with a clear discourse against Islam. The civic integration program has two main objectives: "autonomy", in its first part, and "full participation" in its second[154]. Within the first part, migrants need to undertake, among others, a social orientation course which focuses on teaching them about the fundamental "Flemish values and customs". Failure to comply with the program's obligations is penalized with a fine that can reach up to 5,000Euros. In 2006, the civic integration policy law was revised for the first time and since then other revisions and modifications have followed. In 2013, the level of the language achievement was raised to A2, whereas in 2016, the new Flemish authorities put in place obligatory integration tests that required passing an A2 level in Dutch[155]. In case of failing to pass the tests, immigrants do not receive the certificate for integration and thus, are not able to apply for Belgian citizenship.

In the beginning of the 2000s, the governments of Wallonia and Brussels were trying not to associate themselves with the restrictive immigrant integration policy in Flanders that was connected to pressures from forces of the far-right. However, since 2003, there were "widespread claims in the French-speaking part of the country for a policy approach in line with the Flemish philosophy"[156]. In 2011, members of the parliament of the Francophone Liberal Party proposed a new law intending to establish a contract of integration and

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[153] C. Torrekens, 'Islam in Belgium: From formal recognition to public contestation', p.160
[154] I. Adam, M. Martiniello and A. Rea, *Regional Divergence in the Integration Policy in Belgium*, p. 239
[155] Ibid., p.239
[156] Ibid, p. 240

participation for Wallonia and Brussels. Consequently, as of July 2013, Brussels established a Reception Program for New Migrants in the Brussels Capital Region[157]. This program was also organized in two stages, an informatory one about the program and rights and duties of migrants, and an administrative one about the various opportunities for language classes, vocational trainings and citizenship courses. Notwithstanding, this reception program was free and not obligatory, as Brussels is a bilingual region. So was the Flemish civic integration program in the city. Nevertheless, it should be noted that since 2017, an additional amendment making the reception program obligatory was approved also in this region. Accordingly, Wallonia's reception program as of March 2014 is similar to the one in Brussels and consists of two stages. In that case, only the first stage was compulsory, but in 2016 Wallonia made the whole program compulsory for all non-EU newcomers. It furthered insisted on the concept of emancipation, as in Flanders, and the immigrant's learning of the core values and customs of the host society. The fine for non-compliance with the program is up to 2.500Euros.

Meanwhile, a similar assimilationist stance was also noticed at the federal level. In 2011, there was legislation on the ban of wearing the full veil, and the legislation concerning family reunification was toughened, in order to control immigration and tackle arranged marriages[158]. In addition, the 2012 restrictive citizenship law with the emphasis on the "sufficient will to integrate"[159] and the incorporation of cultural conformity as an objective was also another sign. This law was defended by both the right and left-wing parties and encountered numerous criticisms.

Consequently, as noticed, Belgium's federal stance, the introduction of civic integration programs in Flanders, as well as in Wallonia and Brussels a decade later, marks a clear shift towards a more restrictive and assimilationist integration policy. While traditionally the Francophone and Flemish parts had divergent integration models, it has been observed a convergence towards a strong emphasis on mandatory civic integration. According to Xhardez, this convergence from Wallonia part happened without "Wallonia becoming more involved in sub-state nation-building activities, without any change in the architectural features of the country, nor a far-right wing party break-though in the francophone political system"[160]. In order to understand the reasons behind this recent shift, she and various scholars denote that Wallonia was influenced by the process of Europeanization, the relevance of the politicization of immigration, as well as the massive arrival of asylum

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[157] Ibid., p. 241

[158] C. Torrekens, 'Islam in Belgium: From formal recognition to public contestation', p.160

[159] I. Adam, M. Martiniello and A. Rea, *Regional Divergence in the Integration Policy in Belgium*, p. 239

[160] C. Xhardez, 'From different paths to a similar road?: Understanding the convergence of subnational immigrant integration policies in Belgium', *Regional Studies*, 2019, p. 3

seekers in 2015[161]. In general, and despite their convergence, when comparing the three regional policies, it has been stated that the main difference is found on the emphasis of the cultural dimension and the emphasis on the social dimension[162]. In Flanders, the focus on the cultural dimension has become a crucial aspect of the current debate, whereas in the French-speaking part, insistence is on social cohesion and inclusion, rather than cultural conformity. Of course, as was stated by various scholars, when such emphasis is put on the cultural dimension by European states, the communities targeted by this persistence on national values and customs are primarily Muslims[163]. In Belgium, and mainly in the Flemish side with this change of viewpoint, as Adam et al. stressed, they intend to take the position of "defender of Belgian "norms and values" and defender of secularism against the demands of Muslim Belgian citizens, a position that was already theirs before 1995"[164].

4.1.3 Cultural rights at stake: The bans on the full veil and Flemish proposals for a ban on the wearing of the burkini

The "veiling debate" is not a new phenomenon in Europe. While in Belgium it first appeared concurrently with the French debate in 1989 and concerned students in public schools, it vigorously reappeared since 2009, following the Flemish community's decision to officially ban it in its schools, as well as the French-speaking center-right party's declarations in favor of an equivalent ban. However, apart from the several internal political affairs and disturbances regarding the practice of the veil, the wearing of the full veil has received enormous media and public attention. In 2010, propositions for a ban of the full veil coming from different political parties led to the adoption of the so-called "anti-burqa Bill"[165], a bill forbidding clothes that prevent the persons wearing them to be identified. This bill was passed urgently and was approved almost unanimously. According to Torrekens, there was "neither emergency, nor a growing number of Muslim women involved with this religious practice"[166]. Banning the full veil across all Belgian public spaces, and with a fine up to 25Euros, as well as a prison sentence up to seven days, Belgium became the first country in Europe to pass such a law. Nevertheless, exactly after its adoption, the country's internal political crisis resulted in the collapse of federal government. Eighteen months later the issue was reopened, supported by the same different political parties, and was finally passed by the House of

[161] Ibid.

[162] I. Adam, M. Martiniello and A. Rea, *Regional Divergence in the Integration Policy in Belgium*, p. 243

[163] Ibid., p. 244

[164] Ibid., p. 249

[165] E. Bribosia and I. Rorive, 'Insider Perspectives and the Human Rights Debate on Face Veil Bans', in E. Brems (ed.), *The Experiences of Face Veil Wearers in Europe and the Law*, Cambridge Studies in Law and Society, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 165

[166] C. Torrekens, 'The ban of the full veil in Belgium: between populism and Muslim visibility restriction', in C. Maille, G. M. Nielsen & D. Salee, *Relieving Democracy: Secularism and Religion in Liberal Democratic States*, Brussels, P.I.E- Peter Lang, 2014, p. 57

Representatives in April 2011. While various NGOs and international human rights organizations such as AI or HRW expressed their concerns and invited Belgium to review the law and cautiously reconsider it before making a definite decision, it should be noted that none of these organizations, or even Belgium's equality body - CEOOR, was consulted by the public authorities. Surprisingly, in the summer of 2017, the ECtHR came to uphold Belgium's ban on full veils through the case of *Belgacemi and Oussar vs. Belgium*, supporting that the ban under the law of 2011, despite the controversies it triggered and the risks it carried, "could be regarded as proportionate to the aim pursuit, namely the preservation of the conditions of "living together" as an element of the "protection of the rights and freedoms of others"[167].

A huge debate was, thus, opened once again, with a variety of arguments put forward by the defenders of the law and those against it. As Bribosia and Rorive note, "Burqa bans debates are stuffed with human rights rhetoric"[168]. One of the main arguments by the defenders was the depiction of the full veil as a political sign associated with religious extremism and proselytism. In this respect, multiple national actors did not hesitate to support this view. Torrekens points out that in their eyes, the full veil is seen as "a Trojan horse, an issue instrumentalized by fundamentalist Muslim groups to test and push the limits of the democratic order"[169]. Another strong argument was related to the gender dimension, and regarded the full veil as a symbol of women's oppression. For them, wearing the *burqa* or the *niqab* reveals an essential opposition to modernity; it suggests the refusal of European values and in particular the values of gender equality. In addition, it is seen as an impediment to women's emancipation and cultural integration. However, such arguments, as Moors states, "are variants of the colonial trope of "the oppressed Muslim woman" who needs to be saved by an enlightened Western government from the pressures of her male kin, husband, or the Muslim community at large exert on her"[170]. Respectively, plenty of other justifications have been supported, many of which focusing on security dimensions and connecting the wearing of the full veil with public security threats. For Moors, "this emphasis on security is part of a broader trend towards a control state"[171].

Before getting into the opposite sides, it seems relevant to mention that for various reasons, a really small amount of actors, and especially Muslim actors, spoke out to denounce the law. This can surely be seen as a sign of their weakness and lack of access to the media. It

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[167] *Belgacemi and Oussar v Belgium* (App no 37798/13) ECHR 11 July 2017

[168] E. Bribosia and I. Rorive, 'Insider Perspectives and the Human Rights Debate on Face Veil Bans', p. 167

[169] C. Torrekens, 'The ban of the full veil in Belgium', p. 65

[170] A. Moors, 'The Dutch and the face-veil: The politics of discomfort', *Social Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2009, p. 402

[171] Ibid., p. 404

is observed that those against the ban, instead of presenting new arguments, they rather challenged the already expressed ones by the defenders. Consequently, they disputed the link of the full veil with public security threats saying that there is no evidence to demonstrate such link, and they challenged the gender dimension stating that "the issue of equality between men and women cannot be mobilized in this debate without touching on other distinctive practices like the simple veil, the priesthood etc"[172]. Regarding the gender dimension, AI proclaimed that "a complete ban on the covering of the face would violate the rights to freedom of expression and religion of those women who wear the *burqa* or the *niqab* as an expression of their identity or beliefs"[173]. Soon, various other human rights organizations came to support this rhetoric. Moreover, many of the opponents, such as the Belgian equality body, expressed their concerns for the validity of the law and its compatibility with international human rights conventions, as well as its proportionality. Again, AI declared that "restrictions on human rights must always be proportionate to a legitimate goal. A total ban on full-face veils would not be"[174]. This means that a general ban could be questioned as discriminatory as it disproportionately impacts Muslim women.

Despite the furious debates on the ban of the full veil, the aftermath of the 2016 terrorist attacks in Belgium came to put Muslim coverings back in the spotlight. Subsequently after the attacks, Flemish politicians of the N-VA party proposed, among others, a ban on the wearing of the burkini (a swimsuit that is worn by Muslim women) all across Flanders' swimming pools and public beaches. While this proposal has not been put into effect, it certainly aims a further limit to freedom of religion in Belgium. The person behind this proposal was Nadia Sminate, a Flemish member of the parliament, who argued that, "I do not think women want to walk around on the beach with such a monstrosity in the name of their faith. …If we authorize the burkini, we marginalize the women of the society"[175]. In the same statement, she also stressed that "We live in Flanders, and we make the rules. If we say that we have to draw borders and have our norms and values complied with, we have to also do it"[176]. Her proposal was quickly supported by many other Flemish politicians, and especially Theo Francken, who stated that "We have, as a democracy, the right to say that burkinis are

[172] C. Torrekens, 'The ban of the full veil in Belgium', p. 70

[173] Amnesty International, 'Belgium votes to ban full-face veils', Amnesty International, 30 April 2010, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2010/04/belgium-votes-ban-full-face-veils/ (accessed 9 July 2020)

[174] Ibid

[175] E. Jabrane, 'Flemish Moroccan Politician Calls for burkini ban in Belgium', *Morocco World News*, 18 August 2016, https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2016/08/194558/flemish-moroccan-politician-calls-burkini-ban-belgium/ (accessed 9 July 2020)

[176] A. Lyoussi, 'Belgique: Nadia Sminate, Députée D'Origine Marocaine, veut une interdiction totale du burkini', *Le 360*, 2016, https://fr.le360.ma/monde/belgique-nadia-sminate-deputee-dorigine-marocaine-veut-une-interdiction-totale-du-burkini-83883 (accessed 9 July 2020)

not acceptable"[177]. It becomes, therefore, clear that such a proposal to ban the burkini stems from the social construction of Islam as a threat to Belgian democratic values and customs. According to Willem Vancutsen, "the burkini need not be banned because the dress itself was a threat. It had to be banned because of the interpretation made of the religion it belongs to"[178].

To sum up, Belgium's engagement in processes to ban the full veil, as well as Flemish attempts for a ban on the burkini, reveals a general discomfort with regards to the visibility of Islam in a secular public space. It is also connected to feelings of fear that associate Islam with extremism and, thus, a constant anxiety by the national majority to be "under threat of Islamization"[179] . However, for such a discomfort to take place, the current global context, as well as the rhetoric of populist, far-right and liberal politicians, contributed to the discourse of the incompatibility of Islam with European values and customs. As Torrekens highlights, "In banning the full veil, the Belgian public authorities made a clear movement towards indicating that such practices cannot be tolerated anymore"[180]. In a different line, Moors notes that "attempts to ban the full veil need to be seen within the context of a trend towards the culturalization of citizenship"[181]. And especially in Belgium, a country where two different cultural identities exist together and struggle to cohabitate, such cultural debates on values inflame further debates on identity matters. In the light of this distinct context, "symbolic" bans, such the full veil or the burkini, contribute to national feelings of unity and national belonging, often based on the idea of the nation as an imagined community with a shared history and values.

4.1.4   What about people? Talks with Belgian representatives

The above complex and increasingly intolerant, in some respects, Belgian environment towards Islam is also reflected in the various interactions between Belgian majority and Muslim communities. While in Belgium Islam has a public status and native citizens have for long peacefully co-existed with Muslim communities, the multiple crises striking Europe during the last decades have contributed to the construction and the spread of fear among the society, which was even more intensified by the use of the mass media.

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[177] Theo Francken's statement, cited in W. Vancutsem, 'Freedom of religion and the securitization of religious identity: An analysis of proposals impacting on freedom of religion following terrorist attacks in Flanders', *Global Campus Human Rights Journal*, vol. 2, 2018, p. 53
[178] Ibid., p. 54
[179] C. Torrekens, 'The ban of the full veil in Belgium, p. 71
[180] Ibid., p. 72
[181] A. Moors, 'The Dutch and the face-veil: The politics of discomfort', p. 394

"*The pictures that circulated in the Belgian media during the crises became even mainstream now, when articles on migrants are published. A migrant is mostly shown as poor, on the street, sad, needy, worried… and mostly shown in big groups of men. This is not the reality, but it does affect the mindset of Belgians that fear from people from abroad "invading their safe space". The communication on radicalized Muslims entering our country disguised as refugees didn't lack impact either*" (Interview 1)

, mentioned Helga, team-support member of the International Catholic Organization JRS Belgium. In the same line, Hajib, Vice-President of the Collective against Islamophobia in Belgium (CCIB), notices that

"*there is also a lot of hate speech on social networks and websites (…) the representation of Muslim communities in the media and the news is fuelling a vision of the community to show them as a problem and it's true, that on the question of refugees, we were very astonished to see that they introduce them as Muslim refugees, showing that we need to be afraid by refugees, but we need to be more afraid because these are Muslim refugees, refugees from Muslim countries*". (Interview 2)

Such a representation of Muslim communities by the Belgian media is not one-sided, but is also associated with the rise of populist and far-right wing parties, such as N-VA and Vlaams Belang in the Flemish side of Belgium, that carefully take care of creating a general hostile environment around Muslims, and especially on the question of security and intercultural dialogue, in order to reach a change of mindset in the society. And they succeed, as recorded discrimination against Muslim people has rapidly increased in the last years. Only in 2019, the CCIB, which contributes mainly to 20-25% of what will be recorded by UNIA, the independent public institution that combats discrimination and promotes equal opportunities of Belgium, dealt with 80 cases related to islamophobia, as Hajib stressed. He noted that the main victims are women, so this constitutes also a gender issue, related to the institutional bans on the headscarves, but also with decisions to fight terrorism activities.

These instances of discrimination, as well as the reflected slip into cultural assimilation are surely putting social pressure on Muslims and impacting their smooth inclusion into the society. As Hajib highlighted,

"*What I heard in the Muslim communities, and is dangerous for the universal values we share, is that we speak all the time about the freedom of choice and freedom of life and freedom of a lot of things, but when these people choose to live in their own religious background, we show a lot of rejection. Saying that you are not enough integrated, you need to make more effort, for the young Muslim is very hard to make the difference between the*

speeches and the reality. And then he says, ok, if the freedom is the same for everyone, you need also to accept for me to live in the way I want".

This perception for the Belgian state, coming from within the Muslim communities in Belgium proves to be very dangerous. Restrictive integration policies tend to create an exceptional situation for this specific group, the impact of which especially for young Muslims is enormous. Hajib, in this regards, mentions that

"*When you see the impact, to have the feeling that you have like a "stranger" in your own society and you appoint it as a problem, for me, I have the psychological resources to face this situation, but I think for a young European with a Muslim background is very hard to face the situation because the message is clearly "you have no place in our society and you are the problem of the society and maybe the solution is for you to go outside the society""*.

This approach on behalf of the Belgian society can, thus, lead to a possible avoidance of the contact of Muslims with the host society, and even the development of a possible radicalization among young Muslims. The low social status and hatred against young Muslims well created in Belgium is regarded as a push factor from the country and pull factor for their recruitment in radical groups. According to Hajib, radical groups

"*try to attract the young people and give them the good position in the society, the position where they can promote the vision of the society they have, and they can use violence to promote this, and they can also kill other people*".

Consequently, it becomes visible that a restrictive environment, and the treatment of Muslims as a problem of the Belgian society, hides dangerous parameters that could prove to be detrimental to national safety, the smooth inclusion of Muslim communities, as well as the relations between the populations. The peaceful coexistence of diverse populations, once in Belgium, is now strongly disturbed. The only way to overcome such distance between the populations, for Pieter-Paul, visitor in closed detention centers, is to "*meet other people, listen to them, be open, accept the otherness of the other, create spaces of encounter and cultivate dialogue to understand one another ... and then we will notice that they are human beings just like we are with the dream of a better life*". (Interview 3), whereas for Helga, the inclusion of Muslim migrants into the Belgian society can be succeeded only by "*giving confidence, and showing respect for every person as a whole, nothing more is needed if this is the dynamic on all levels (administration, education, etc)*".

4.2. Islam in the Greek context

Unlike other European countries, the case of Greece in relation to Islam constitutes a peculiar case. While Muslim immigration to Greece is a recent phenomenon, there is a long and uneasy relationship with Islam that dates back to the country's Ottoman past. It is important to note that in the northern part of the country resides a small indigenous Muslim population of approximately 110-120.000 people. It is commonly mentioned as the Muslim minority of Western Thrace and its status and rights are determined by the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. This officially recognized minority is made up of three diverse ethnic groups: Turks (the largest), Pomaks and Roma. These Muslims, despite being for decades the victims of discrimination and marginalization, have Greek citizenship and enjoy full civil and religious rights, including the Islamic family law (Shar'ia). However, these rights and privileges are only limited to the area of Thrace, and thus lost outside of it. In reality, due to the political confrontation between Turkey and Greece, the current internal situation of the Muslim minority in Thrace is really precarious, and the area still "remains one of the most underdeveloped in the European Union"[182].

With regards to immigrant Muslims, despite signs of their arrival at the beginning of the 1970s, a large scale wave of immigrants came in the 1990s, metamorphosing for the first time Greece as a country of reception of immigration. This new wave, closely linked to the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, as well as to economic and geopolitical factors in Asia and Africa, has brought new dynamics to a country that was for long perceived as homogeneous. It is observed that the biggest movement of people came from Albania; however, a significant number of Muslim immigrants have come from countries such as Pakistan, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia and Afghanistan. As Antoniou notes, "immigration from the above-mentioned countries is in most cases a male experience"[183]. Like in the case of Belgium, estimating the total number of Muslim migrants in Greece is almost impossible. In this respect, Tsitselikis stresses that "extant figures are questionable, because either they allow a large segment of migrant groups to slip through the official statistics, or they represent migrants by using categories (such as ethnicity or citizenship) that may be misleading for both the state authorities and the migrants themselves"[184]. However, by 2014, it is estimated that in Greece about 4.7% of the population

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[182] D. A. Antoniou, 'Muslim Immigrants in Greece: Religious Organization and Local Responses', *Immigrants & Minorities*, vol. 22, no. 2-3, 2003, p. 164

[183] Ibid., p. 156

[184] K. Tsitselikis, *Old and new Islam in Greece: From Historical Minorities to Immigrant Newcomers*, Leiden and Boston, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2012, p. 160

is Muslim[185]. This population, exempting the indigenous, mainly resides in Greece's biggest cities, such as Athens and Thessaloniki, and is generally regarded by the public as cheap labor, conducting low-paid jobs in seasonal harvesting of crops or in manual labor.

Despite the long presence of Muslim inhabitants in the country, as well as some group's integration into the Greek society, the state has an uneasy relationship with Islam and its visibility in the public sphere. This is due to the fact that religion constitutes a considerable element of the Greek national identity. In the case of Greece, there was never a separation of the state and church and the bond between them "owes much to the latter's emergence as a national institution"[186]. Whereas the constitution and various international treaties officially protect religious freedom, Greek Orthodoxy prevails as a religion and the Greek Church holds an advantaged position as a legal entity, as well as sustains the right to control the actions of all the other "recognized" religions, such as Islam and Judaism. Hence, on the basis of this Orthodox Christianity, Greek national identity was powerfully built. It "has been historically constructed, partly at least, in opposition to a Muslim "Other", and Muslim populations living within the country's borders have been historically associated with Turkey and the Turks"[187].

It becomes, therefore, evident, that the arrival of Muslim migrants brought about a new religious reality in Greece, which produced, at a first place, feelings of intolerance and racism on the part of the local majority, and at a second, feelings of solidarity. As Tsitselikis notes, "taken into account the historical past of the Greek-Turkish controversy through religion, whereas Islam is traditionally and ideologically associated with the "enemy other" of the Ottoman past, immigrant Islam is constructed as an alien element to the host society and national ideology"[188]. Respectively, for Ibrahim, a Muslim Greek citizen of the Muslim minority of Western Thrace,

"*The fact that Greece has Turkey next to it plays a big role to perceptions of Islam. The Greek-Turkish has always been an issue. I believe that is why there is no tolerance for the visibility of Islam in the country*" (Interview 8)

In the same line, Sofian, a Moroccan intercultural mediator of the local NGO Praksis, mentions that

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[185] Pew Research Center, 'Number of Muslims in Western Europe', *Pew Research Center*, 2 December 2014, https://www.pewforum.org/interactives/muslim-population/ (accessed 17 July 2020)

[186] P. Hatziprokopiou and V. Evergeti, 'Negotiating Muslim identity and diversity in Greek Urban Spaces', *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 15, no. 6, 2014, p. 609

[187] Ibid., p. 609

[188] K. Tsitselikis, *Old and new Islam in Greece: From Historical Minorities to Immigrant Newcomers*, p. 159

"*The history of Greece with the Turks has left a wound since then that is not easily forgotten, and is still carried by all generations. They have the Muslim "other" as the evil. And in the mind of the Greeks, is that if Muslims become many, they will slaughter us*" (Interview 6)

Consequently, addressing the inclusion of Muslims in the Greek society has always constituted a difficult task.

4.2.1 Greece in an effort to stabilize a socio-cultural integration model

Despite the rapid increase of immigration since the 1990s, the question of immigrant integration into the Greek society "did not become a priority or an explicit objective of migration policy until 2005"[189]. Instead, the Greek policy framework until then mainly focused on the control of migration. At that time, integration was promoted by the government only for those categories of migrants that had ethnic Greek descent, whereas the settlement and integration of all the other migrants was not facilitated and regarded as undesirable. Law 3386/2005 on the "Entry, Residence and Social Integration of TCNs on Greek Territory" is regarded as the first law document to introduce the idea of migrant integration. Within this law, integration is conceived as the equal participation of immigrants in the country's economic, social and cultural life, while providing for respect of the rights of migrants, as well as the obligation to respect the fundamental norms and values of the Greek society. For migrants to acquire a long-term residence status, the precondition was to have a basic knowledge of Greek language, history and culture. This law, clearly influenced by the EU's 2005 Common Basic Principles, opened a window for a Greek civic model of migrant integration in accordance with the European discourses. However, the country's minor experience in integrating immigrants, as well as its reluctance to encourage the socio-cultural inclusion of immigrant populations within its territory, did not allow for the establishment of a cohesive policy approach. For this reason, Greek integration policy has been heavily "characterized as underdeveloped, but also, containing elements of political patronage towards migrants"[190]. Only in 2010 state policy changed with the adoption of a new citizenship law that unfolded citizenship to the second generation, made easier the naturalization for first-generation immigrants and gave local voting rights to migrants residing in Greece for 5 years or more. According to Anagnostou et al., this law "was the most important and politically challenging attempt to promote their social integration in Greece"[191].

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[189] D. Anagnostou et al., *Local Government and Migrant integration in Greece*, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), 2016, p. 21

[190] G. Mavrommatis, 'The rise of a hesitant EU host? Examining the Greek migrant integration policy and its transformation during the crisis', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2017, p. 5

[191] D. Anagnostou et al., *Local Government and Migrant integration in Greece,* p. 21

Nevertheless, the Council of State declared the law as unconstitutional and thus it was withdrawn.

After the withdrawal of the citizenship law, a new framework for integration began to take form. The new government finally issued in 2013 the first *National Strategy for the Integration of TCNs*. It is worth mentioning that this strategy was positively aligned to the assimilationist model, as proclaimed that "the integration of TCNs must be gradual and smooth, in order to correspond to the capabilities of the Greek state and to the ability of assimilation into the Greek society"[192]. Some months later, along with the issuance of the National Strategy, the government also adopted a new Code for Immigration and Social Integration (Law 4251/2014). It is an updated version of the 2005 law that codified all immigration stipulations. Within the new Code, migrant's integration is conceptualized on the same grounds with the previous 3386/2005 law, putting at the same time great emphasis on the obligation on the part of migrants to respect the norms and values of the Greek society. This updated version reflected the influence of the various European discourses on migrant integration. It reaffirmed the country's influence of the European civic integration turn, but also contained elements of the multicultural model, as policies and actions for the integration of migrants shall also respect the fundamental rights of TCNs and their cultural differences[193]. The most significant change of the Code was the ability to convert national long-term permits for TCNs residing in Greece for more than ten year into European long-term resident permits. As Mavrommatis notes, "what this convertibility does is to put on hold Greek State's own integration criteria for awarding the European long-term residence status (language learning, knowledge of history, society and polity)"[194]. Consequently, this new integration policy, implemented amidst the economic crisis, is conceived as an "exit policy"[195], intending the management of migration flows of all TCNs through the facilitation of intra-European mobility.

Recently, in an effort to stabilize a socio-cultural model, the left government presented a new *National Strategy for Integration.* The latest integration model, as presented by the Ministry of Migration Policy in July 2019, is closer to the multicultural model, and as highlighted, "is adapted to the dynamics, particularities and peculiarities of Greek society and state"[196], having as its ultimate goal " the achievement of interculturalism"[197]. This conceptual

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[192] General Secretariat of Population and Social Cohesion, *National Strategy for the Integration of TCNs* (Ethniki Stratigiki gia tin entaxi twn politwn tritwn xwrwn), Athens, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, p. 53
[193] Greek Law N° 4251/2014, article 128
[194] G. Mavrommatis, 'The rise of a hesitant EU host?', p. 9
[195] Ibid., p. 10
[196] Ministry of Migration Policy, *National Strategy for Integration*, Athens, 2016, p.12
[197] Ibid.

reference for the Greek integration model, which is in sharp contrast with the previous one based on assimilation, is considered to be a positive step towards a more coordinated approach. The strategy foresaw a number of measures in regards to the integration of immigrants and refugees into the society, and enhanced the role of the local authorities in this process. Nonetheless, immediately after its publishing, there was a change of power after the general elections of July 2019. Since then, the new center-right government has avoided commenting on the National Strategy adopted by the previous one, and instead is focusing on matters of security and public order, while at the same time integration policies do not seem to be high on the agenda. As stressed by Dimitra, social worker at the ESTIA accommodation and integration program of the local NGO Arsis,

"*The current political faction pursues a policy that emphasizes discrimination. It wants to strengthen it in order to weaken the migration flows in the country, but also to lead to despair and the people who are already here. It is not something expressed in an extreme right-wing way, it is something hidden*" (Interview 4)

Respectively, Foteini, local program coordinator at the ESTIA program of the NGO Praksis, argues that

"*The current management of migration and integration on behalf of the Greek state leads to the illegal passage. We do things that do not help. (…) We do not have school integration classes for kids to such an extent that they can respond. It seems that the whole system doesn't help. It does not help also the adult part afterwards. There are no programs that have to do with Greek lessons. I cannot require a person to integrate into a country when he can't learn the language. The structures of education, the structures of health, are all inadequate.*" (Interview 5)

In general, it should be noted that the Greek migrant integration policies present a big contradiction between rhetoric and actual policy acts. While integration talk emphasize the existence of a liberal state that promotes inclusion, in reality there is absence of targeted integration actions and migrants depending on their descent are treated differently than what is rhetorically stated. In this sense, Mavrommatis highlights that "whatever the talk on integration, actual policy always remained assimilative in all aspects of public life"[198]. However, it would be unfair to say that there haven't been efforts for the implementation of a cohesive approach. Since 2005 there have been many developments towards the accommodation of ethnic and religious diversity. However, these efforts have been

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[198] Ibid., p. 6

fragmentary and not long-lasting. So far, a Greek socio-cultural integration model has not been stabilized.

4.2.2 Tensions over religious rights: Controversies to the construction of a formal mosque

The increased visibility of immigrants of Muslim background in Greek public spaces challenges discourses of Islam in the country. Issues on the presence of religion in public spaces, as well as the place of Islam within contemporary Greek urban spaces are highly discussed. As in many other European countries, where cultural diversity is negotiated and still provokes conflicts and tensions, in the case of Greece controversies have centered on issues of religious freedom, and more specifically, the development of mosque buildings. According to Hatziprokopiou and Evergeti, mosques "become the most visible architectural manifestation of religiosity, difference or multiculture … they provide not only religious services but also a sense of cultural continuity and a range of community functions"[199]. However, as Islamophobia is at the heart of today's European societies, mosque construction processes often trigger powerful opposition.

Within the particular Greek context, where Orthodoxy is directly linked to the state, and its religious architecture is omnipresent in public spaces, the Ottoman architectural legacy remains out of sight. Noting that Athens is the only European capital with no establishment of an official mosque, the demand for its construction by various Muslim communities in the city has become a general symbolic claim and a matter of necessity. A stated by scholars, "The origins of the "mosque debate" date back to the 19th century, and its recent resurgence in the late 1990s revealed historically exclusionary perceptions of Islam and has been ultimately linked to the presence of new Muslim immigrants"[200]. In the passage of time, there have been many plans and relevant legislation by Greek authorities for the construction of a formal mosque in the city of Athens. However, all the indicated proposals encountered vivid reactions by a variety of national stakeholders and the Orthodox Church, and were thus postponed. Finally, the severe economic crisis in the country had blocked any discussion on the matter. Only in 2017 the Greek parliament finally approved a provision to hasten the processes for the construction of a central mosque in Athens. Finally, after numerous delays, the construction took place and in June 2019 a formal mosque opened its doors in the area of Votanikos in Athens. However, until today, it lacks an *imam*, and thus is not yet open for prayer.

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[199] P. Hatziprokopiou and V. Evergeti, 'Negotiating Muslim identity and diversity in Greek Urban Spaces', p. 606-607
[200] Ibid., p. 615

Given this absence of an official place of worship, Muslim communities have formed a number of informal mosques to gather and pray. Notwithstanding, most of these places of worship are improper places, as they are simple apartments, basements, garages or storerooms that lack the necessary architectural characteristics of a mosque. The animosity concerning the creation of an operational mosque, as well as the gradual increase of practicing Muslim immigrants, led on November 2010, during the festivity ending the Ramadan, to the first peaceful protest organized by diverse Muslim communities, over the absence of a formal mosque in Athens. On this day, thousands of Muslims gathered and prayed in central public spaces, demonstrating in this way their active demands for equal rights and making their religiosity visible in the wider society. While in general the protest was tolerated by the public opinion, in Attiki square, members of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn, along with other ultra-conservatists, encircled the square and violently insulted the demonstrators by spreading xenophobic leaflets, lifting Greek flags and taunting Muslim immigrants[201]. As confessed by Afif, a Tunisian immigrant protester,

"*During these days here in Athens we found a pig, the head of a pig in front of an informal mosque. And then I saw in Pireos papers on the ground, they were in Greek but I could see the picture of a mosque and like a Red Cross on it*" (Interview 9)

This first public protest, a clear challenge of religious diversity, did test the limits of tolerance in a country that was for long perceived as homogeneous. It is expressed that "as soon as Muslims demanded the construction of an official mosque in Athens, their difference as a religious minority was articulated and became visible, challenging national homogeneity"[202]. In the aftermath of the events, Greek authorities decided to prohibit prayer in open public spaces, and instead conceded a big stadium for such assemblies, demonstrating therefore the generalized intolerance towards cultural and religious diversity.

Commenting on this negation of the Greek state to provide Muslim communities with cultural and religious rights, Foteini claims that it is due to the general perception that

"*If we provide them with more services, we keep a population that will in some way alter the Greek identity, the Greek culture, or the religion, and in the end we will be trampled by the Muslims. That is exactly the bad thing. It is not possible to be in a country that has a high number of Muslim refugees for years and to have burial sites on in Evros area or not to have an official mosque in the city. This is unacceptable. (…) If you do not give it to them, they will*

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[201] G. Dama, 'We demand the building of a lawful Mosque', *Eleftherotypia*, 17 November 2010, http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=224594 (accessed 19 July 2020)

[202] A. Triantafyllidou and H. Kouki, 'Muslim immigrants and the Greek nation: The emergence of nationalist intolerance', *Ethnicities*, vol. 13, no. 6, 2013, p. 717

do it at informal places, and they will do it maybe illegally, and they will do it probably not in the right way."

At the time of writing, despite the minimal steps taken towards the grant of religious rights for Muslims in the country, tensions between Turkey and Greece have led to a gloomy political environment with regards to religious matters. The controversial decision of R.T. Erdogan to convert Hagia Sophia, the emblematic former Christian cathedral and current Istanbul museum into a mosque, has received strong opposition and criticisms among Greek citizens, as well as the condemn of the Greek state. Immediately after this decision, the regional governor of northern Aegean asked for the suspension of funding for the restoration project of the Valide mosque of Mytilene, a protected monument since 1981[203], and it will not be surprising if other similar gestures take place. Therefore, it becomes notable that such political decisions tend to shift the general discourse towards a direction of closure and intolerance, and may have a greater impact on the relations between the majority Greek population and Muslim communities.

4.2.3   Immigrant intolerance on the rise: a strong shake on the relations between Muslims and Greeks

During the last years, intolerance as a phenomenon is on the rise across European countries challenged with variant issues of diversity that are associated with migration. According to Greek scholars, "Greece is a telling example of how ideas, practices and discourses of exclusion emerge within a modern liberal nation state founded upon democracy"[204]. Within the Greek context, where national identity has been historically constructed in rejection to the migrant, and specifically Muslim "other", intolerance "appears to be rooted into conceptions of nationhood"[205]. However, taking into consideration that cultural and religious diversity had not been a matter of concern in the country until the recent past, the increase of immigration in relation to the severe financial crisis has brought about a growing intolerance in the shape of a reactionary nationalism. This intolerance was expressed with the strong vote for the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn, whose violent activism involves "physical assaults, attacks against migrant properties and verbal aggression at predominantly

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[203] Thesspress, 'The North Aegean Regional Governor Requests a Suspension of Funding for the Restoration Project of the Valide Mosque', *Thesspress*, 14 July 2020, https://www.thesspress.gr/diakopi-chrimatodotisis-tou-ergou-apokatastasis-tou-valide-tzami-zitise-o-periferiarchis-v-egeou/?fbclid=IwAR3LQU8YFglaL8bwLRLqxgtmj48YkYICfdpcEQhrEeroHrz4hEhDLwboiCY (accessed 19 July 2020)

[204] A. Triantafyllidou and H. Kouki, 'Muslim immigrants and the Greek nation', p. 714

[205] Ibid., p. 722

Muslim, non-white migrants of Asian, Middle Eastern and African origin"[206]. In this respect, Dauda, a Muslim North African immigrant living in Athens, shared his experience

"*I was once hit by a member of the Golden Dawn. I was on the subway in Victoria, coming out of the subway, and there was a guy following me behind my back. I didn't know who is it this person. I turned to see but he didn't show me his face back. He told me "follow me". He said, "I'm a cop". I said, "Ok, I have my paper". Then he replied to me "I don't wanna see". So then I said ok, on my own way I said, "Please, can I see your ID? So I can follow what you are telling me". In the moment that I said can I see your id I received a hit on my mouth, yes, they hit me on my mouth, I started bleeding"* (Interview 10)

This type of violence and rejection of the migrant "stranger" has even more intensified since the burst of the refugee crisis and the accumulation of a very high number of mainly Muslim refugees in the country. The massive flows in relation to the seedy conditions in which refugees live have provoked the rage of a large portion of the population, which is fueled by nationalist's increased violent attacks against Islamic visibility. For example, in a migrant camp in northern Greece, a nationalist group recently planned to hold a barbeque with pork and alcohol. By claiming that "Our homes and communities are turning into ghettos, and we will not stand for it"[207], they intended to target Muslim refugees and show their opposition to the constant flows of "illegal migration". At the same time, the continuous flows in Greek islands have created an unprecedented situation. The warm welcoming and the solidarity shown to refugees in the beginning of the crisis has now transformed into anger and rising discomfort. Especially after the moment that Erdogan opened Turkey's borders to refugees, the relations between locals and newcomers have deteriorated significantly, to the point that local officials and Greek residents on several islands were blocking boats full of refugees to disembark on the shores, and were fiercely hitting members of NGOs helping them[208]. According to the regional governor of Lesvos, the situation at the moment in the island is "a powder keg ready to explode"[209]. As Dimitra stated,

"*The world is divided now. What matters and has created discomfort in the native population is not the increased flows, but the fact that people no longer leave as they used to. They*

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[206] L. Karamanidou, 'Violence against migrants in Greece: beyond the Golden Dawn', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 39, no. 11, 2016, p. 2002

[207] A. Carassava, 'Greek nationalists' pork-and-booze barbeque targets Muslim refugees', *Deutsche Welle*, 8 November 2019, https://www.dw.com/en/greek-nationalists-pork-and-booze-barbecue-targets-muslim-refugees/a-51173677 (accessed 23 July 2020)

[208] SKAI, 'Explosive climate in the islands: Video of an attack on NGO members in Lesvos', *SKAI*, 1 March 2020, https://www.skai.gr/news/greece/ekriktiko-to-klima-sta-nisia-vinteo-apo-epithesi-se-meli-mko-sti-lesvo (accessed 23 July 2020)

[209] J. Higgingbottom, '"It's a powder keg ready to explode": In Greek village tensions simmer between refugees and locals', *CNBC*, 2 March 2020, https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/01/refugee-crisis-in-greece-tensions-soar-between-migrants-and-locals.html (accessed 12 July 2020)

accumulate here, in a country that has had a very bad and vulnerable economic situation for years. And the part of religion counts. One thing that Greeks are afraid of is the erosion of religion and population proportionately as a quota"

Unfortunately, the new government's approach to immigration, instead of bridging the gap between the populations, is rather widening it through the implementation of tough policies to the new influx of Muslim refugees and their general very negative portrayal in the media. Strict deportation policies, combined with denial of access to free healthcare for migrants are the current rule in Greece. In addition, a huge public debate linking Islam to the domination by the Ottoman "enemy" seems to prevail. In November 2019, among others, a current conservative MP, C. Bogdanos, declared that refugee flows that enter Greece "bore the hallmarks of an enemy invasion" and that Western civilization is at "serious risk of being diluted by symptoms of creeping shari'a"[210]. Such treatment and representation of Muslim refugees and migrants puts them in an unease position and makes their accommodation precarious. As expressed by Afif,

"*Muslim people here and Arabs specifically we are a bit aggressive because we expect the worst, especially now with the new government which is not open to migrants. So, we are already in a defense mode, you know what I mean? We are ready to have a fight. And for us, we are already in a defense mode because we have seen awful things. We feel discrimination not because we do something but because we are Muslims. So people are afraid sometimes, you know?*"

This feeling on the side of the Muslim population reflects the current hard-line stance by the newly elected conservative government. At this point, what is dangerous is the transformation of this feeling to a possible radicalization. In this respect, Dimitra comments that

"*Restrictive policies are a state of violence that will often result in violence with a different expression in a person's daily life. They can carry great intensity. Wretchedness brings bad results, so yes radicalization is to be expected. Just this misery that they will experience, because the impact is on the native population, it is understood that it will respectively bring opposition to the perpetrators who are at the same time the real victims. There is, therefore, a perpetual cyclical course*".

To this effect, Sofian also is worried with the possible results of this stance. He warns that

"*In Greece, the treatment and restrictive policies will push Muslim people to ghettos, to poverty, to doing something very bad, because they are receiving something very bad from*

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[210] A. Carassava, 'Greek nationalists' pork-and-booze barbeque targets Muslim refugees'

the state. When they have nothing to lose, one's mind can easily change. (…) When you are in a period of crisis, in a miserable situation, you can easily be led to bad paths. You understand? Some will become radicals. Living marginalized, and for many years sometimes in small closed societies of their own, they lose their identity. The current situation, as things have been strictly done, is pushing people there, in small ghettos, and I am afraid that nothing good will come out of it, out of this pressure."

Hence, it becomes understood that the generalized shift to intolerance does have a great impact on the identity of Muslim migrants into Greek society, as well as to the relations between the populations. While faced with multiple challenges, the current stance of the country with regards to the management of immigration and socio-cultural integration is a symptom of a weak national system that has failed to embrace cultural diversity and address the needs of the old and new migrant populations. It seems that in the Greek case, the classical nationalistic dichotomy between "us", the Western civilization, and "them", people of the world of Islam, still prevails, creating in this way obstacles to the arrival of an actual change. Such a change, as Sofian reassures, can only happen if

"we make Muslim people love the country in which they live. The current policies don't do that. And this is very bad. It's bad to feel that the country you want to integrate doesn't want you in the end. (…) First, language learning structures must be made because they do not exist. Language helps a lot, as well as the provision for their integration to the job market. We also need to focus on young children, to have more organized policies that integrate them smoothly into the social fabric. In addition, coordinated efforts by the municipalities to organize celebrations and events, and invite Greeks to come and meet the different "Other". Such events are very nice, with music and food. Taste also helps. By trying the food, people realize that the other is not a "stranger", but that they have things in common and are very close. We need contact, knowledge, and understanding."

4.3 The outcome of the two countries' challenges

The above analysis with regards to the challenges Muslim communities face within their socio-cultural integration process in the countries of Belgium and Greece reveals the existence of a big divide in integration issues between the two countries, and more specifically, outcomes. While Belgium as an old European immigration country has developed a more organized integration policy framework, Greece as a new immigration country has lacked a coherent framework for integration. The different timing and immigration experiences of the two countries seem to justify this gap. Through the years, Belgium has managed to consolidate an integration philosophy, despite the divergent positions and its transformation in time. This cannot be said for Greece, which has not yet

achieved to establish an integration philosophy. The sudden and unprecedented inflows of mainly Muslim migrants and refugees in the southern country caught it unprepared. That is also why the focus is put on the control of migration, instead the management of integration. This, of course, does not mean that the migrant's integration process in Greece has not been a matter of public concern, but given the great challenge of the control elements, integration issues are less central to public debate. The result, therefore, is the absence of a stabilized socio-cultural integration model. However, as explained above, there are also many other reasons behind this absence. The country's lack of a coherent integration approach is considered to be a product of a "mono-cultural (prevailing *ius sanguinis*) and mono-religious (prevailing Orthodox Church) national self-understanding"[211]. Hence, it is understood that the integration process in Greece in comparison to Belgium constitutes a much more difficult and unstable task.

However, the current geopolitical context with the multiple crises has created a fertile ground for the very negative representation of Muslim communities in both countries. Terrorism, in relation to the burden of the refugee crisis have cultivated fear among the Belgian society and state, which in turn has led to a misrepresentation of Muslims and a stricter sense of socio-cultural integration. The same can be supported for Greece, which, along with the economic crisis, as well as national identity issues, has held until today an unfavorable position towards Muslim's presence and accommodation. This convergence on the negative portrayal of Muslim communities, not a unique element of the two countries but a European one, entails dangerous parameters for the smooth inclusion of Muslims and the peaceful coexistence of the majority populations and immigrant communities. As ascertained by civil society practitioners in the field in both countries, restrictive policies disproportionately impact Muslim communities and hide the risk of radicalization among the populations.

At this point, it shall be noted that diving into the two cases, one can find plenty of divergences and similarities on the way the presence and accommodation of Islam is handled. As supported, the result of two diverse histories and experiences on the matter reveals a diametrically different understanding of Islam in the public sphere. This exact different background and different nature of the challenges faced in regards to the integration of Muslims in Belgium and Greece helps us comprehend a wide range of socio-cultural issues Muslims generally face in Europe. For the case of Belgium, it is observed that the cultural aspect of Islam seems to be more at stake than the religious one. Due to the public status of

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[211]H. Cebolla-Boado and C. Finotelli*, '*Is there a North-South divide in integration outcomes? A comparison of the integration outcomes of immigrants in southern and northern Europe', *European Journal of Population*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2015, p.81

Islam as a religion, and thus the absence of basic problems such as the construction of formal prayer halls, the general discomfort centers on the "veiling debate". In contrast, the Greek context deals with the exact opposite challenges. While cultural rights such as the wearing of the veil are treated positively by the Greek state and Church, fiercely debates arise on the religious aspect of Islam, and specifically on the construction of formal Islamic prayer halls. Nonetheless, whatever the form it takes in each context, the actual problem is the visibility of Islam in the public sphere. In Greece, where there is an unease between secularism and Orthodoxy, and thus religious symbols are permitted everywhere, banning the veil is not an easy task. In contrast, the secular nature of Belgium puts pressure over the privatization of religion, and therefore religious symbols are not tolerated in public.

In sum, the growing intolerance of the visibility and integration of Islam in Belgium and Greece, the outcome of the current reality, is a typical issue in Europe in general. Due to this, European countries have taken restrictive measures and policies to deal with its existence, changing to a great degree their socio-cultural integration philosophies. However, this general stricter sense of integration is most of the times incompatible with the democratic and liberal values European states are founded, and does also negatively impact the quality of life of Muslims inside these societies. In the light of this, it seems that a more coherent approach is needed in order to combat such challenges. Today, in times of great uncertainty and instability, is there an actual alternative?

V.   How to move beyond?

5.1   The need for a more coherent approach in today's times of crisis

It has become more than clear that the unceasing crisis in which Europe has found itself is testing its limits and capacities. The multiple strikes together with the new waves of migration from culturally diverse regions have led to an undoubted transformation of its nature. Perceptions about the dangers and failure of Islamic integration give a widespread sense that Europe is faced by an existential threat. As a result, managing the growing Islamic diversity into the gulfs of distinct European countries has turned into a great challenge of the continent. Europe, in its effort to confront such a challenge, is pushing itself into controversies and an ever-increasing closure, instead of openness.

As the traditional dominant models of immigrant integration, assimilation and multiculturalism have been highly debated and no more have traction, the definite shift to the concept of civic integration, and through its punitive and restrictive implementation, seems to negatively and disproportionately impact ethnic and religious minorities, promoting in this

way a policy of exclusion instead of inclusion. For this reason, a holistic and coherent approach is needed in order to address the complex migration situation in Europe.

At a first place, what seems to be needed is more familiarization with the immigrant conditions. In other words, an effort to understand the manifold reasons that led these people to come to Europe. Such a familiarization with the immigrant's conditions can help majority populations overcome their fears and enter into a relationship with them. Accordingly, a brave and powerful decision regarding the kind of integration achieved should be taken by European countries, and more effective policy tools shall be designed so as to deal properly with cultural diversity and social cohesion in this very diverse continent. As Taylor correctly notices, to overcome the challenge of cultural diversity, "we need not only specific policies, conferring skills, like the national language, opening access to various jobs and positions, barring discrimination, and so on. We also need an articulated account of what we are doing- we need to articulate what the new culture will be, and the way it differs from the old. We need to give some expression to the new footing on which we want to be with each other, having set aside the inequalities and exclusions which characterized the old world. We need a narrative of the transition we 're trying to bring about"[212].

The new alternative of intercultural integration that has emerged over the last two decades marks a positive change in this field and opens up possibilities for actual progress. When interculturalism is translated into policy, migrant individuals as well as collective actors, have the opportunity to make their voices be heard, interact with majority populations, and thus get included smoothly into the society. Intercultural dialogue, especially today, in times of great fear and anxiety, is a valuable tool that can help people acknowledge differences, develop meaningful relationships, and thus reconcile with each other. However, alone intercultural dialogue is not enough.

Multiculturalism as an approach to integration has been heavily criticized for cultivating a perceived distance between different populations. It has been criticized for what interculturalism has been build for, the bridging of this gap between cultural diverse groups. It is true that in its "thick" form, multiculturalism entails the risk of essentializing minority groups. Nonetheless, if applied in a critical form, it acknowledges minority struggles and promotes their equal recognition to the majority population. Muslim communities today, in the aftermath of all the dramatic events, need to speak for themselves and be heard, explain the oppression they experience, raise their demands, negotiate with the majority, and lastly accommodated smoothly by the European states. And for this, multiculturalism is essential in encouraging their accommodation. According to T. Modood, "multiculturalism is not a

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[212] C. Taylor, 'Interculturalism or multiculturalism?', p. 416

politics of separatism; on the contrary, it is a politics of diversity and pluralism"[213]. It is a concept closely linked to the notion of national identity. In his view, "it is about creating a new, ongoing "We" out of all the little, medium-sized and large platoons that make up the country"[214]. Without such a constant reconstruction of national identity, multiculturalism is deficient, and thus susceptible to allegations about its emphasis on separatism and segregation. As he states,

"Society cannot be reduced to individuals and so integration must be about bringing new communities, and not just new individuals, into relations of equal respect. This means challenging racism and Islamophobia and so on, not by denying that there are groups in society but developing positive group identities and adapting customs and institutions that enable that."[215]

The relationship between interculturalism and multiculturalism has fuelled intense and long-standing debates in the gulfs of academia, with various scholars commenting on the differences between the two concepts. There are many those who claim that interculturalism is more oriented towards communication and interaction among groups, it is perceived as less "groupist" than multiculturalism, or that in cases where multiculturalism tends to be illiberal and relativistic, interculturalism is expected to criticize illiberal cultural practices[216]. However, the emergence of interculturalism as a response to the failings of multiculturalism should not distort or misinterpret the multiple positive sides of multiculturalism as a theoretical and practical concept. Both of them, at least in their liberal forms, share a common point, as they dismiss cultural assimilation and embrace cultural diversity and respect for ethnic, cultural and religious practices that are in accordance with liberal democratic values. One very important semantic difference between the two concepts is mentioned by Taylor, who says that "within the dual goal of recognizing difference and achieving integration, 'inter' places great emphasis on the latter"[217]. Indeed, the substance and benefits of interculturalism as a new theory and practice that promotes integration are eminent, but without recognition of difference, an important aspect of multiculturalism, the smooth inclusion of immigrant communities is difficult to be achieved efficiently. For this reason, this thesis takes the stance that a combination of the positive aspects of the two concepts, namely

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[213] T. Modood, 'A Defense of Multiculturalism', *Soundings*, vol. 29, 2015, p. 62

[214] T. Modood, *Multiculturalism and Integration: Struggling with Confusions*, Italy, European University Institute, 2011, p. 3

[215] Ibid.

[216] N. Meer and T. Modood, 'How does Interculturalism contrast with Multiculturalism?', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2012, p. 177

[217] C. Taylor, 'Interculturalism or multiculturalism?', p. 417

a critical form of multiculturalism along with intercultural dialogue, could lead to a change for the better in terms of ethnic socio-cultural integration.

The case of Muslims in European societies revealed the great obstacles of integration and pushed for the emergence of constructive approaches. However, due to the current "civic" shift in integration policies, strongly promoted at a national level, multicultural and intercultural approaches have been limited at the local level, and that creates confusion. In this respect, various scholars, such as Cantle, have focused on the importance of the local level in the detriment of the national. By devaluing national laws, campaigns, or integration policies made at a national level, they overemphasize the benefits of local integration. Nevertheless, all levels are important in order to achieve a coherent approach that will smoothly integrate minority communities into European societies, and especially the difficult Muslim ones. And as Mansouri and Modood come to remind, "the local is always situated within the national… the local must be seen as additive to the national not as substitutive"[218]. Consequently, if there is strong will for the inclusion of these communities, this would require the abandonment of harsh and assimilative policies, and the elevation of multicultural practices and intercultural dialogue at all levels of governance in the design and implementation of an effective integration model.

VI.   Conclusion

In an attempt to capture the current complex and tough political environment regarding the accommodation and socio-cultural integration of Muslim communities in Europe, as well as the everyday challenges these communities face within their European areas of settlement, this thesis started with a dive into the history of Muslim migration and the notions of Europe and Islam as cultural entities, in order to identify the reasons behind the general environment of uneasiness, which has immensely intensified today as a result of the manifold crises.

As an undeniable fact, today's relationship between Muslims and Europeans is clearly influenced by the historic cultural and political distinctions between Europe and Islam as cultural entities. The relationship of the two has drawn strong boundaries and consolidated perceptions concerning the presence and attitude of the "Other" in the public space. Hence, even before the taking place of dramatic events associated with Islamism, there was already divergent value rhetoric and system, as well as a negative image of Islam and Muslims in the

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[218] F. Mansouri and T. Modood, 'The complementarity of multiculturalism and interculturalism: Theory backed by Australian evidence', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2020, p. 7

minds of Europeans, stemming from deep-rooted nationalistic and colonial representations that regarded the Orient as inferior and uncivilized.

The various changes in the global geopolitical context came to reinforce this view. The rise of the new millennium marked an era of anxiety and fear, which was consciously and unconsciously projected into the Muslim element of Europe. This uncertainty, along with disproportionate reactions, has led to a moral panic phenomenon surrounding Muslim presence in European societies, which, depending on the intensity of the crisis each time, is fluctuated accordingly. Of course, the situation as about the representation and standard of living of Muslims in European countries is different, and this is due to the internal particularities of each context. However, as a general rule, the current position of Europe reflects a period of essential closure.

This is explicitly mirrored in the management of immigration and socio-cultural integration of diverse immigrant communities. The denouncement of multiculturalism from the three dominant European leaders in the beginning of this decade and the subsequent increasing European shift to the model of civic integration in a noticeable obligatory and more restrictive sense confirms such a period. It is observed that despite the absence of a theoretically precise definition of civic integration, the way it is usually implemented by European countries, negatively and disproportionately affects the religious and cultural identity of Muslims. That is because civic national integration projects often take place within the maintenance of a nationalistic connotation, requiring the displacement of certain communities' cultural practices. Therefore, it can be supported that even the articulation of civic integration in a liberal understanding, there are evident signs of the cultural assimilation of migrant communities, and thus its practice as an exclusionary strategy of Muslim's cultural difference.

However, and as has extensively supported, there is still space for multicultural and intercultural practices, even if this is to be at a local level. Nonetheless, as the current reality shows that Muslim's socio-cultural integration is not positively managed by European states, and thus largely impacts their identities, it is of crucial importance that strategies which valorize cultural diversity take a more prominent role and become nationally driven. Multicultural and intercultural strategies contain some very positive elements for the management of socio-cultural integration, and as this thesis supports, a critical combination of their exact beneficial elements can actually improve the standard of living of many Muslims in Europe and bring a desirable change for the better. Such a change will be essential not only for the Muslim immigrant communities, but for the European native populations also, who

could replace the fear with more favorable feelings, and thus live in harmony with their immigrant neighbors.

The focus on the countries of Belgium and Greece as case studies aimed to demonstrate a deeper reflection of the situation faced at a national level. Such a dive into the national context revealed great challenges, as well as many obstacles in regards to the immigration, representation and socio-cultural integration process of Muslim immigrant communities. In both countries, restrictive immigration and integration policies take place, cultural and religious aspects of Islam are at stake, and Muslim communities are substantially impacted by the growing intolerance of their integration and visibility in the public spheres. Noting that this unfavorable treatment entails dangerous parameters, one of the most important highlighted is the radicalization among young Muslims, but also among native populations, it seems that a review and a reevaluation of the policies applied, as well as a reorientation of their socio-cultural integration philosophy is indispensable.

At this point, it should be noted that the fact that this thesis has focused only on the Greek and Belgian cases implies some limitations on its scope, particularly in which concerns the generalization of the conclusions achieved through these case studies. The very diverse nature of the European context is subject of such limitations. However, through an analysis of these two very different cases, it is attempted an indicative taste of the current reality and the different challenges Muslims face in Europe in general. Given that this gloomy picture of Muslim communities is not a particular Belgian or Greek trait, but instead a European one, it shall be noted that if Europe wants to be compatible with the democratic and liberal values it proclaims, it shall further reflect on itself and definitely take a different stance on this matter.

VII.   Bibliography

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VIII. List of interviews

Belgian and Greek NGOs

Interview 1: Helga C., Team Support member of the international Catholic organization Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Brussels, Belgium

Interview 2: Hajib El H., Vice-President of the Collective Against Islamophobia in Belgium, asbl (CCIB)

Interview 3: Pieter-Paul L., Visitor in detention centers of the international Catholic organization Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Brussels, Belgium

Interview 4: Dimitra M., Social Worker at the ESTIA program (Emergency Support for Integration and Housing of Refugees), of the NGO Arsis-Association for the Social Support of Youth, Thessaloniki, Greece

Interview 5: Foteini K., Local Program Coordinator at the ESTIA program (Emergency Support for Integration and Housing of Refugees), of the NGO Praksis, Thessaloniki, Greece

Interview 6: Sofian F., Intercultural Mediator at the ESTIA program (Emergency Support for Integration and Housing of Refugees), of the NGO Praksis, Thessaloniki, Greece

Interview 7: Caroline S., Researcher at the Center for Socio-Political Research and Information-CRISP, Brussels, Belgium

Muslim minority members and immigrants

Interview 8: Ibrahim S., 29 y., Muslim Greek citizen of the Muslim minority of Western Thrace, Thessaloniki, Greece

Interview 9: Afif B., 30 y., Tunisian living in Athens for more than 10 years

Interview 10: Dauda C., 34 y., Sierra Leonean living in Athens for 14 years