

Introduction

Over the last few years, integration has become a hot topic in parliament and policy forums, in the media and academia and in intellectual and literary circles. But much of what has been discussed starts from the majority vantage point. Little attention is paid to the views of minorities. Furthermore, in much of the discourse 'integration' is used as a coded means of making insinuations and venting prejudices about Muslims in ways that stigmatise and humiliate them.

One of the aims of this report is to rectify the imbalances and counter the prejudices by examining the 'integration debate' from the vantage point of Europe's diverse settled Muslim communities.¹ It considers whether the 'very term *integration* has come to mean quite different things to those who see themselves as the reference point and those who see themselves described as "the problem".² It tests government integration measures against the yardstick provided by the EU in its 2004 statement Common Basic Principles: a 'dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States'.³

Contrary to the popular view, which tends to homogenise the Muslim experience, the national, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds of European Muslim communities are extremely diverse. The first stage of the project, which was conducted over a twelve-month period, involved a literature and data review to ascertain the exact diversity of the Muslim experience, and the socio-economic problems specific Muslim communities face.⁴ The European Union Monitoring Centre (EUMC) estimates (conservatively) that there are around thirteen million Muslims living in Europe today (3.5 per cent of the total population).⁵ As the largest Muslim communities are to be found in France (3,516,824), Germany (3,400,000), the UK (1,588,890) and the Netherlands (945,000), it seemed right to focus our research there. But it was important also to provide comparisons with countries with smaller Muslim minority communities, such as Austria (338,988)⁶ and

non-EU Norway (66,578). The second stage of the research involved consultations in these countries. In-depth interviews were conducted with key individuals, mostly face-to-face and a few by phone.⁷ In France, all our participants were brought together at a roundtable discussion in Paris conducted by journalists Naima Bouteldja and Victoria Brittain.⁸

Following this consultation, we researched European integration policies, past and present. Comprehending the specific debates in different European countries, requires an understanding of political philosophies which evolved in each country – not least the varying conceptions of secularism. Questions of identity, rights and sovereignty are bound up with citizenship, nationality and histories of migration.⁹

Section One provides a short overview of systems of post-second World War labour migration to Europe, the subsequent settlement of Muslims from diverse ethnic, national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the considerable social and economic problems these first-generation migrants faced in a period when there were no official integration policies. (The legacy of past failures is explored further in Section Three.) What emerged consistently from the consultations as the major problems in public discourse were first the confusion between integration and assimilation and second the racial superiority and Islamophobia inherent in many initiatives.

Hence, Section Two examines the interplay between the media, the market, political parties, public intellectuals and private think-tanks and the ways in which these various actors are advancing an assimilatory agenda under the guise of integration. In the post-September 11 world, the media situate integration within a framework which represents Islam (and Muslims) as a threat. This feeds into the assimilationist logic of political parties and other interest groups, which then seek a return to monocultural societies based on cultural homogeneity. Academics, writers, intellectuals and Muslim celebrities who favour assimilation are then presented as 'expert witnesses' in the integration debate. In the process, all the problems of the Muslim community come to be viewed through a religio-cultural lens and the socio-economic causes of exclusion and marginalisation are ignored.

Section Three looks at government measures to promote integration and community cohesion, particularly via citizenship and immigration reform.

The centrality of citizenship rights in ensuring Muslim communities' full participation is highlighted, as is the fact that a large proportion of Europe's Muslim communities do not have such rights. We question whether a top-down approach to integration, which builds compulsion, threat and discrimination into citizenship and immigration reforms, undermines some of the positive potential for genuine integration. We also examine 'cultural selection' within naturalisation processes and the re-adoption of discredited socio-psychological approaches to race relations such as that based on measuring 'social distance' between migrant and 'host'.

Section Four examines church-state relations with Islam, the widely different understandings of secularism across Europe and how secularism can act as a barrier to integration. The integration of Islam as a religion, given equal recognition with Catholicism, Protestantism and Judaism, is an entirely different project from integrating ethnic minorities that are Muslim, but, too often, the two are confused. The way that some governments have resorted to laws banning the headscarf and religious symbols, suggests that the logic of threat, not challenge, informs the approach to equality of status.

Section Five examines the dominant structural, societal barriers to integration and those which emanate from within communities – pointing out the possibilities for removing such barriers. Applying the EU's formula of integration as a two-way process, the report argues that changing Muslim attitudes and practices is symbiotic with changing society's political and cultural traditions hostile to difference and open to racism. Young Muslims will not engage in institutions that are perceived to be discriminatory and self-criticism and transformation within Muslim institutions will become much easier once the climate of Islamophobia is lifted.

The research reveals that despite, or perhaps because of, the stigmatising of Muslims at home and abroad, there is now in fact a far higher degree of participation in the political process and civil society by young Muslims in Europe than ever before. The clash in Europe is not between civilisations (Islamic versus western) but between individuals (of whatever ethnicity, religion or political persuasion) who accept a civil rights framework for discussing integration and those who do not.

References

1. Our research could not cover in full the experiences of the newer refugee communities. However, many of our participants were concerned about the refugee experience and referred to it.
2. John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the state and public space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).
3. Originally, the main focus of the project involved examining the structural, policy barriers to integration, but, as the research progressed, it became increasingly clear from our participants that the primary barrier to integration was seen as Islamophobia and the debate around integration itself.
4. We decided not to replicate here data and sources available in two recent comprehensive studies of Muslims in Europe: *Muslims in EU Cities: background research reports* produced by the EUMAP programme of the Open Society Institute which has downloadable reports on Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, The Netherlands and Sweden (see www.eumap.org/topics/minority/reports) and *Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia*, EUMC, 2006, produced by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, Vienna. General information on comparative educational attainment can be found in *Where immigrant students succeed: a comparative review of performance and engagement in PISA*, 2003, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. On issues relating to rights and welfare across Europe see *Migration, Citizenship and the European Welfare State* by Carl-Ulrik Schierup, Peo Hansen and Stephen Castles, OUP, 2006. The Raxen focal point for each EU country is a useful source of data. Further references to Muslim experience in terms of employment, housing, health, etc in specific countries under study here, can be found in the references to Section Five.
5. The EUMC, since incorporated into the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, states that Muslims are inadequately captured in demographic studies due to serious deficiencies in the availability and quality of demographic data. See 'Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia' (Vienna, EUMC, 2006).
6. We had not originally planned to cover Austria in this report. But an opportunity to do so presented itself in the course of the project.
7. We tried, wherever possible, to carry out interviews with a cross section of key individuals – national or local politicians, academics, teachers and community workers. These were selected in consultation with BME/anti-racist groups with which the IRR's European Race Audit had already built up a working relationship. All direct quotes not otherwise attributed are from our interviewees.
8. Some of that discussion has already been published in Naima Bouteldja, "Integration", discrimination and the Left in France: a roundtable discussion', *Race & Class* (Vol 49, no 3, 2008).
9. The project has drawn particularly on the seminal works of migration professor Stephen Castles, cultural anthropologists John R. Bowen and (the late) Marianne Gullestad and international human rights expert Kathleen Cavanaugh.