Conspicuously, Islam has become a key concern in most European societies with respect to issues of immigration, integration, identity, values and inland security. As the mere presence of Muslim minorities fails to explain these debates convincingly, new questions need to be asked: How did «Islam» become a topic? Who takes part in the debates? How do these debates influence both individual as well as collective «self-images» and «image of others»?

Introducing Switzerland as an under-researched object of study to the academic discourse on Islam in Europe, this volume offers a fresh perspective on the objective by putting recent case studies from diverse national contexts into comparative perspective.

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Introduction

SAMUEL M. BEHLOUL

The now extensive research on Muslims in Western Europe has undergone several changes in its processes in recent decades. Before the new quality of the – no longer temporary – Muslim presence in Western Europe was pointed out in the 1980s (Gerholm/Lithman 1988), it was almost exclusively migration sociologists who dealt with the immigrants from Islamic societies in Western Europe.

Research focused on issues of social integration, family reunification, labor laws, living conditions, and education. The immigration and multiculturalism discourse mainly took place without explicit reference to religion. Initiated by the Rushdie Affair in Britain and the first *affair du foulard* in France, both taking place as early as 1989, the religious difference of migrants from Islamic societies only gradually entered the consciousness of science, politics, and the public in the 1990s. In general, studies that have emerged since that time can be assigned to the following five groups with regard to their content and focus:

1. One type of study provides insight into the origin, development, and goals of Islamic organizations in Western Europe (Feind-Riggers and Steinbach 1997; Lewis 1994; Amiraux 2001; Jonker 2002; Lemmen 2002; Humayun 2004).

2. From the mid-1990s and especially after 9/11, questions about the socio-political dimensions and implications of the presence and dealings with Muslims in Europe increasingly became the focus of scientific and public interest. Keywords such as ‘Islamism’ and ‘fundamentalism’ became the particular focus of attention (Heitmeyer et al. 1997; Bielefeldt/Heitmeyer 1998; Roy 2002; Ulfkotte 2003).

3. Closely linked to this question is the question of the emergence of a ‘European Islam’ and its future institutional form, which has long been the focus of
research on Islam (Dassetto 1996; Roy 1998, 1999; Ramadan 1999c, 2001; Levau et al. 2001; al-Sayyad and Castells 2002; Tibi 2002; Leggewie 2004; Bielefeldt 2003). In recent years, this research context has seen a consolidation and incorporation of various debates and issues: from the value and integration debate to educational and legal issues to questions of internal security (Bundesministerium des Inneren 2003).

4. While these debates more or less circle around the question ‘Europeanisation of Islam?’ or ‘Islamisation of Europe?’, more recent, mostly sociologically oriented studies are predominantly based on a qualitative approach. They particularly emphasise dialectical interaction processes between Muslims and their respective majority societies (Cesari 2004) and empirically elaborate on the development of individual Muslim identities (Schiffauer 2000; Tietze 2001; Frese 2002; Göle and Ammann 2004; Jonker and Amiraux 2006). In recent years, studies and individual contributions related to gender have also emerged in this thematic context, focusing on the explicit life practices and processes of religious identity formation of Muslim women in the West (Klein-Hessling et al. 2000; Klinkhammer 2000; Karakasoglu-Aydın 2000; Nökel 2002; Gerhard and Jansen 2003; Jonker 2003a, 2003b).

5. The concept of ‘transnational migration’ introduced by Bash et al. in the US in the 1990s (Bash et al. 1994), according to which migrants interact and identify with several nation states or communities through cross-border and transnational practices of communication and mobility, thus contributing to the development of transnational communities or to the formation of transnational spaces, was also taken up in the area of research on Muslim immigrant groups in the West. In recent years, studies on the effects of ‘societies of origin’ on Muslim immigrants in Western Europe and their transnational connections have emerged (Mandaville 1999, 2001; Trautner 2000; Allievi and Nielsen 2003; Sahli 2003).

These thematic foci show that the production of knowledge about Islam and Muslims in the West is not just a purely academic discourse. Rather, it encompasses virtually all socially relevant topics. The immigration and integration discourse, inter-religious dialogue projects, discourse on the religious education of children, naturalisation, the identification of the relationship between religion and state, the freedom of art, the religious and cultural heritage and identity of Europe, the architectural design of public spaces, and, not least, discourse on security issues – all of these individual discourses – and this applies particularly to the period after 9/11 – have been linked in one way or another to the ‘Islam issue.’
Conspicuously, Islam has become a key issue in most European societies with respect to issues of immigration, integration, identity, values and inland security. As the mere presence of small Muslim minorities (usually ranging between 3 and 7%) fails to explain these debates convincingly, new questions need to be asked: How did ‘Islam’ become a topic? Who takes part in these debates? How do these debates influence both individual as well as collective ‘self-images’ and ‘image of others’?

The very title of this volume, *Debating Islam: Negotiating Europe, Religion and the Self*, contains two key insights. On the one hand, it is drawing on the fact that current Western-European Islam debates have a totalising character with regard to the discussed content and questions. On the other hand, the book’s title should express that this debating is not a mere ‘discussing.’ Rather, debating here has a normative character, insofar as ‘discussion’ implies the presupposition and (re)production of certain subjectivities, categories and matters. Therefore, ‘debating’ is understood as a discursive social practice characterised by power relations and whose actors follow and shape certain epistemic conditions of speaking about and reflecting on religion, and thereby develop certain strategies for (re)producing the self and other(s). The empirical examples from different social contexts in Western Europe which are discussed in this volume, show that in secular Western Europe, religion plays a pivotal role for normative demarcation and identity building strategies. This applies both at the individual and the collective level. To exemplify what power relations dominate the current Western-European Islam debates and how these debates influence individual and collective self-images and images of others, the book is divided into three thematic areas (more specific overviews precede each of the three parts).

In the first part, “Rules and roles”, the diversity of socio-political contexts and conditions under which current Islam debates take place – from laicism and republicanism to gender dimension and criminal law – is analysed and discussed, using selected Western-European countries as examples (Switzerland, Britain and France). As well as highlighting the question of women’s rights as one of the more powerful normative regulators of Western-European debates on Islam, this section also shows that seemingly clear concepts such as French laicism and British multiculturalism may trigger unexpected self-representation and boundary making strategies in the context of the Islam debates.

The contributions of the second part, “The one facing the many: Conversion to Islam and transformation(s) of identity”, focus on the phenomenon of conversion to Islam. Due to the ambivalent perception of converts to Islam as bridge-builders or radical ‘newborns,’ the issue of conversion in recent years has gained
increasing attention both in academic research and among policy makers. The contributions in this part analyse the role and strategies of converts to Islam in terms of their respective reconfiguration of religious difference, religious authority, and political loyalty in the context of the normatively charged demarcation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ specific to debates on Islam.

The contributions of the third part, “The many facing the other (within)”, centre on the question of the collectivist images of self and others within the Islam debates. The contributions stem from one of the most striking discursive patterns of Western-European debates on Islam: the construction of a supposedly homogeneous ‘we’ vis-à-vis a supposedly homogeneous ‘other.’ The contributions critically examine the alleged uniqueness and homogeneity of these constructions. Using the example of three different national contexts with various forms of political control regarding religious and minority issues (Austria, Switzerland, and Denmark), unexpected dynamics of discursive interaction and communication processes are presented both among the various actors within a ‘we’ as well as between the actors of a ‘we’ and an ‘other’ for collectivities otherwise perceived as homogeneous.

Compared to the previous research on debates on Islam in a Western-European context, the innovative approach of this volume consists of the following two features: First, it introduces the under-researched case of Switzerland into broader European research about Islam in Western-European countries, and especially about the different Islam debates going on in these countries. In doing so, this volume offers a fresh perspective on the issue of Islam debates by putting recent case studies from diverse national contexts into comparative perspective. Second, the book specifically addresses the epistemic conditions under which Islam is generally thematised and perceived as a problematic religion within Western-European Islam debates.

The research done so far about the Western debates on Islam – as mentioned above – has been distinguished by a variety of analytical approaches. Numerous studies have repeatedly shown that in the aftermath of the events of 9/11, religious affiliation abruptly became the centrally perceived criterion of otherwise very culturally disparate migrant groups from Muslim countries in the West (cf. Sen 2006; Tezcan 2006; Spielhaus 2006; Behloul 2010). Nevertheless, few attempts have been made to ask, on the one hand, why has become a unifying interpretive category of differing ethno-cultural migrant groups in secular democracies in the context of dealing with immigrants from countries shaped by Islam religion, and, on the other hand, to explore which understanding of religion in general underlies the Western debates on Islam.

The following analytical introduction therefore attempts to present the specific epistemic anchoring of Western-European debates on Islam. It specifically
addresses the understanding of religion which the current debates on Islam are based on, and defines the development of this understanding within the context of Western-European religious and church history. A diachronic comparative perspective will demonstrate how a particular understanding of religion took shape in Western Europe starting in the seventeenth century, the core of which was no longer the question regarding the truth of religious dogmas or the authenticity of the holy scriptures. Due to traumatic experiences with religious conflicts in the seventeenth century, questions concerning the development potential of a religion increasingly took centre stage, namely in terms of their potential for peace or conflict and their compatibility with modern development. This evolutionary-essentialist understanding of religion, which stems from an ideal image of a ‘real’ religion, I argue, also forms the epistemic context of current debates on Islam in Western Europe.

‘REAL’ RELIGION AND PERCEIVED ‘DEFICITS’ OF ISLAM

Muslim and non-Muslim participants alike in the Islam debates repeatedly stress that Europe has a particular view and image of Islam that has been influenced by historical experience with the Islamic world on the one hand (for example the Crusades and the expansion of the Ottoman Empire), and socio-political developments in the Islamic world over the last decades (such as religious radicalisation and terrorism) on the other. They go on to assert that this image and understanding of Islam is the main reason why Muslims are perceived in the way they are in the Western Europe of today, and why they have become the subject of heated and emotional public debates in the first place. However, a less frequently asked question pertains to the understanding of religion in general which underpins the current preoccupation with Islam and Muslims, and categorises them as problematic. This is astonishing inasmuch as what has now become a massive proliferation of literature on Islam in the West repeatedly comes to the critical conclusion that, in the wake of the events of 9/11, religious affiliation has become the central homogenising criterion of the way ethnically and linguistically heterogenous groups of migrants from Islamic countries are perceived in the West (cf. Sen 2006; Tezcan 2007; Spielhaus 2006; Tiesler 2006; Behloul 2010) and that the issue of religion per se has come to feature ever more prominently in societal discourse as a whole.

The most striking characteristic of the debates on Islam in Western Europe is their tendency to emphasise its deficits. They focus on Islam’s perceived shortcomings in relation to the expected level of developmental timeliness of a religion today in terms of its compatibility to secular notions of peace, gender equal-
Ity, freedom, individuality and integration into secular legal systems. This pertains both to the significance of religion within society and the relationship between individuals and religion.

It is notable that within the framework of the ‘Islam Issue’, people in the West generally do not talk about Islam in the same way as it is factually presented by the presence of immigrants possessing a Muslim perspective, i.e. multifaceted in terms of culture and language. Rather it is discussed according to the political perspective, merely how it is expected to become or how it cannot become at all. Although such forms of positive and negative essentialisation of the Islam perspective differ from one another in a diametric sense, they both follow the postulate of a ‘real religion’ which, following a linear modernisation pattern in terms of the acceptance of new normative paradigms (individuality, gender equality, freedom), inevitably stands in a constitutive relationship to the societal developments and achievements of modern times. What is striking in this respect is the way in which public debates often refer to ‘moderate’ Islam as distinct from radical Islam or Islamism. This is in striking contrast to the extreme rarity of references to ‘moderate Buddhism’ or ‘moderate Hinduism’. So what are the structural preconceptions and criteria for such characterisations? It is inadequate to simply ask which specific image of Islam, conditioned by negative experiences with the Islamic world in history and the present time, underpins Western-European debates on that faith. Such an approach does not take into account that within the framework of the current debates on Islam the issue of religion per se, rather than merely that of Islam, has become a new focus of attention. One must therefore go a step further and try in general to identify the normative presuppositions that govern the way people talk about and reflect on religion which are informing the current debates. Debates on Islam in Western Europe must therefore be analysed from the perspective of an understanding of religion that has its roots in the specific religious and, in particular, Christian history of Western Eu-

1 In this respect Islam is faced with four definitions of itself: 1) Islam as a deficient religion because it has not yet reached the levels of enlightenment of Christianity; 2) Islam is and will remain deficient because its very nature, which makes it more than merely a religion, means that it is, unlike Christianity, fundamentally unsuited to such a development; 3) by its very nature Islam has already anticipated modern social developments. It does not require further development, needing only to return to its primordial roots, and 4) Islam is a social, moral and ethical alternative in a society whose values have decayed. This position in particular is specific to converts to Islam and to young and old Muslims alike who rediscovered their faith in God, experiencing religious and spiritual awakening.
rope. After all, the tradition of religious criticism, which was so influential in the emergence of modern Europe, gave rise to plausibility structures in respect to the way religion is regarded and its significance within a state. These plausibility structures shape a society’s perception of its own religion just as profoundly as that of foreign religions. What is more, they establish the society’s ‘own’ religion as the normative model for foreign religions, in this case for Islam.

To help the reader understand the structural presuppositions behind the debates on Islam in the West post-9/11, the focus of this book will thus be on the following key issues: How do ‘religion’/‘Islam’ and ‘religiousness’/‘Islamicity’ become topics of socio-political debate? Under what historical and ideological conditions do such debates occur? Who takes part in the debates and dictates them in a normative and content-related sense? And how are these debates ultimately incorporated into an individual and a collective ‘self-image’ and ‘image of others’ by Muslims and non-Muslims respectively?

A view of current Western-European debates on Islam as a discourse (in the Foucauldian sense) on religion gives rise to two essential implications. The first of these is that different political and academic discourses have at different times taken place in Europe in connection with the concept of religion and have shaped the object of discourse –namely, religion – accordingly and filled it with normative content. With regard to European religious history in particular, Friedrich Tenbruck stresses that “by virtue of a shared general conception of all religions [Europeans were able to] talk in general terms about religion and its nature and function amongst themselves and across linguistic barriers” (Tenbruck 1993: 37).2

The second implication consists in investigating the question of pre-structure, that is, the epistemic conditions behind discourses on religion that manifest themselves in current debates on Islam.3 After all in post-9/11 debates on Islam the issue of religion per se, rather than merely that of Islam, gained a completely new and, for many observers, unexpected discursive intensity as a

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2 The translation from the German original is mine here and for all following citations unless otherwise indicated.

3 According to Michel Foucault, a specific epistemological configuration underlines all discourse, causing the discourse to always follow certain thought and knowledge structures. Such structures regulate, at a given point in time, how something is spoken about and how it is not. Debates do not form any self-contained entities, thematically or chronologically, in and of themselves. Current debates are much more likely to reproduce earlier debates and, at the same time intersect with thematically different debates (cf. Foucault 1973: 261).
specific model for explaining societal processes and behaviours amongst both individuals and groups. Above all from the Western-European perspective, the question of the ‘how’ of religious understanding in the context of current debates on Islam appears still more relevant. The relevance becomes apparent, if, on the one hand, reference is made to the problem of the exclusively religious categorisation of migrants from Muslim backgrounds and their descendants in the West. The relevance of posing this very question lies, on the other hand, in the fact that, as Rolf Schieder indicates, in a Europe profoundly influenced by the devastating consequences of the Thirty Years’ War, “the necessity of a definition of the relationship between politics and religion for the preservation of the peace [forced] the formation of a discursive space that continues to this day to define the effects of statements on religion.” As Schieder goes on to say by way of conclusion, “Since the seventeenth century the concept of religion has been a political one” (Schieder 2001: 11).

Possibly the most significant characteristic of the transformation undergone by the post-Reformation Western-European understanding of religion, i.e. from the sixteenth century onwards, was the increasing displacement of dogmatic theological doctrine, of true versus false worship, by ideas concerning the contribution of religion(s) to the general good of society and the cause of modernisation. This new-era Protestant, secular understanding of religion subsequently became the normative framework for European religious discourse, initially at the inter-denominational (Protestantism v. Catholicism) level and then, from the nineteenth century, increasingly also between religions. It goes without saying that we also come across the normative criterion of the compatibility of a ‘true’ religion with the generally accepted societal secular values (freedom of opinion, democracy, tolerance, peacefulness, individual freedom) in the context of Western-European debates on Islam in the post-9/11 era.

If we are to locate current debates on Islam in the historical context of European arguments over the phenomenon of religion in general and the institution of the Church – the Catholic Church in particular –, in the wake of which a specific religious understanding emerged that continues to manifest itself in the current debates on Islam, we need look no further than the period since the early seventeenth century. For ecclesiastical politics in the period from the end of the sixteenth and, in particular, the seventeenth century were characterised by constant disputes within the Protestant churches and between the denominations. What became known as the Thirty Years’ War came to define almost the entire first half of the seventeenth century. That the Thirty Years’ War was not a purely religious conflict is beyond doubt (cf. Krusenstjern 1999). However, the permanent legacy of its devastating effects was the emergence of a specific discourse about religion. This discourse revolved primarily around the key question of how
to define religion and politics in such a way as to maintain peace. And, as far as occidental religious discourses are concerned, it remains dominant to this day. Likewise specific to the reflections on religion taking place in the current era is the accentuation of individual and political rationality versus tradition and dogmatism as an indispensable foundation for reliable understanding and action.\(^4\) The ascent to the pre-eminence of rationality, which was conditioned by the political-religious developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and the question of perfect compatibility between ‘rational insight’ and ‘religion’ as a generally indispensable criterion for the truth of a religion – in this instance meaning the socio-political usefulness of a religion – offer key insights into the location of current debates about Islam in the historical context of Western religious discourses. This development does more than just bear witness to the discursive interweaving of socio-political framework conditions on the one hand and the definition of the functional content of religion on the other. It also permits to draw a parallel to the current debates on Islam that are likewise being conducted against a background of socio-political and religious-cultural conflict and are exercising a decisive influence on the way religion is understood. This influence makes itself felt, for instance, in the fact that the criteria by which a religion is judged as being true today are its potential to bring peace and its compatibility with secular democracy rather than the truth of its scriptures or of its images of God.

The emergence of the correlation between reason and religion as an essential normative criterion for the ‘rightness’ of a religion led also in the eighteenth century to the development of a general concept of religion as a generic term, against whose normative content every historical formation of positive religions was to be measured. The use of a general conception of religion from the eighteenth century as a generic term must likewise be viewed in the context of the specific European religious-political situation of the age. In view of the denominational fragmentation of European Christianity, one of the purposes of this development was to create a unifying generic understanding of what Christianity actually was. On the other hand, this meant that it was possible to speak appro-

\(^4\) In particular the heated debate on ritual circumcision of Muslim boys in 2012 in Germany made it clear how Islam is perceived as being a (still) archaic and irrational religion. In the wake of such debates in which religions are being assessed on the basis of their adaptability to modern social developments, religions become quickly designated as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (cf. a series of articles by renowned authors under the common caption “Was ist eine gute Religion?” [What makes a good religion?] in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, March 2006 to May 2007).
priately of the non-Christian religions and cultures which were emerging ever more strongly into popular consciousness, albeit only in relation to ‘the religion’, which stood above the religious diversity of individual faiths (cf. Wagner 1986; Feil 1997; Haussig 2003; Matthes 2005).

Although the generic term ‘religion’ came to occupy an inherently critical position with respect to all historical forms of positive religions, Klaus Hock emphasises a consistent ambivalence in the concept of religion in the age of Enlightenment. This ambivalence was to be found in the fact that on the one hand an ideal type of religion, i.e. a ‘religion per se’ became a medium of criticism for every specific form of positive religion whilst, on the other, having no tangible historical form itself, it was immune to any religious criticism, allowing it to be reinterpreted as the medium of justification for a claim to absoluteness (cf. Hock 2002: 12). Hock cites the specific example of the application of the general concept of religion to the history of Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

On the one hand, the use of the general concept of religion is fundamentally opposed to the claim of Christianity to a position of supernatural, ‘absolute’ pre-eminence outside of history, and the Christian religion is relegated to the same level as all other specific religions and represented within the framework of the same world history. On the other, historical evolutionism in combination with the notion of ‘religion’ as a general concept in the singular led to the emergence of new ways of justifying Christianity’s claim to absoluteness: through the assumption that ‘religion’ undergoes a linear process of development and strives in this manner for realisation in the world, the claim being that Christianity, as the most highly civilised and developed form of religion, comes closer to this ideal than all other world religions. (Hock 2002: 12)

The normative scheme that was created here and that represents Christianity – at least with regard to its degree of enlightenment and general modernity – as superior to all other religions played a decisive role as the epistemic framework of the religious discourses of the nineteenth century. However, the actual distinguishing feature of this understanding of religion shaped by new-era

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5 According to Friedrich Schleiermacher, Christianity represents ‘the’ religion of religions, the religion of mature and responsible humanity, in comparison with which all other religions – Schleiermacher uses the example of Judaism – are characterised by an immaturity in contradiction to the ideal of the actively religiously mature individual (cf. Ehrhardt 2005: 55).
Protestantism was that ‘religion’, in the course of its transformation into a generic term as an autonomous Christian way of life, began to oppose itself to the ‘church’ as the upholder of the religious order. ‘Religion’ gradually became a term used to denote a lived Christian reality alongside the established ‘church’ (cf. Matthes 1989: 198). So, in connection with the Reformation concept of a direct relationship between the divine and the Christian individual, ‘religion’ as a generic term across the denominations became an internal Christian medium of normative demarcation between individual piety and faith on the one hand and an institutionally (ecclesiastically) defined and administered faith that permitted no exercise of individual freedoms on the other.

At this point it is interesting to observe how this new-era Protestant, secularised understanding of religion defined the Western-European perception of the Islamic world and the discourses between Catholics and Protestants in the nineteenth century. Some of the semantics and normative demarcations between what is one’s own and what is foreign encountered there are also to be found in the current Western-European debates on Islam.  

The following brief historical

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6 In this context, it is revealing to note that the nineteenth-century expansion of European colonial powers, especially France and Great Britain into the Arabic-Islamic world constituted more than merely a military and political challenge to this area. Surely of much greater significance was the cultural challenge that accompanied the colonial powers, spurred on as they were by their optimistic confidence in technical and scientific progress.

This new shift in the balance of power led to the forcible opening of a new discursive space between the Western and Arab-Islamic worlds. This came to be essentially characterised by the antagonistic juxtaposition (defined and pursued by the West) of enlightenment and scientific-technical progress on the one hand and Islam on the other. The ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution became the new normative *tertium comparationis* for the definition of the relationship between Islam and the West. As is the case in the current Western-European Islam-Debates, the Western-European perception of Islam in the nineteenth-century paid scant if any attention to questions of theological truth, correctness of the portrayal of the divine and authenticity of revelation that were characteristic of Christian-Islamic religious discourses up until the Reformation. Instead it revolved around the question of the capacity or incapacity of a religion to modernise and the ability or inability of its adherents to integrate into modern society. The frame of reference was increasingly provided by temporal values. This phenomenon also clearly manifests in argumentation of the most prominent Arab reformist thinker of the nineteenth-century
comparative overview of the anti-Catholic discourse in the Protestant-dominated countries of Europe in the nineteenth century is relevant to an understanding of current debates on Islam for the following reason above all. For, in the nineteenth century, we observe in Western Europe the same kind of synchronicity of two opposing tendencies that is also discernible in the Europe of today. The beginnings of the emancipation of many parts of society in the nineteenth century from the religious (i.e. ecclesiastical) context, especially in matters of world view, went hand in hand with a ‘religious turn’ in respect of ways of dealing with new and radical socio-political changes. The need for a reinforced sense of superiority and normative self-view led, as we will see below, in the denominationally mixed societies of nineteenth century Western Europe, to an intensification of the role of religious denominational criteria of belonging in the way people perceived both themselves and those alien to them.

We can observe, as explained further below, a similar development in the Western Europe of today: a historically unique loss of relevance of religion, i.e., of ecclesiastical religiosity above all, on the one hand and, on the other, an ‘Islamic turn’ in respect of the perception of immigrants from societies shaped by Islam.

**AN ECHO FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

In the interests of a comparative historical perspective it should at this point be noted that the understanding of religion at issue here also dominated the discourse between Catholics and Protestants in the same period, i.e. the nineteenth century. Clear examples of this are furnished by the nineteenth century anti-Catholic discourse in the Protestant-dominated countries of Europe, particularly in Germany and Switzerland, and the contentious issue of Catholic immigration into the USA in the same period. It must be admitted that the German and American Catholicism discourses of the nineteenth century took place under different socio-political conditions. And yet, what both discourse contexts had in common was, on the one hand, the situation of Catholicism as a minority denomination – much like the Western-European Islam of today – and, on the other, the suspicion directed against Catholics that they were by virtue of their religion somehow disloyal and anti-modern. The double exclusivity of the new understanding of religion, according to which the religion of free and mature citizens could find

full expression only in Christianity and, to be more precise, in its Protestant form, led to the normative exclusion of Catholics (and, for that matter, Jews) from the project of civil society in the nineteenth century (cf. Behloul 2012).

From a general point of view it can be seen that in the nineteenth century in Europe, against a backdrop of profound social and political changes, a new area of tension opened up for the phenomenon of religion: a simultaneous crisis of religious relevance (especially of church-bound religion), on the one hand, and religious renaissance, conditioned by discourses on modernity, identity and nation state, on the other. There can be no doubt that the sustainable changes in modern society brought about by migration, urbanisation, industrialisation and, last but by no means least, the emergence of competing world views, created new kinds of legitimacy problems for religion. In the nineteenth century therefore, the need for reinforcement of a sense of superiority and a normative self-view led – in spite of the increasing loss of the relevance of religion – to a hardening of denominational lines in the area of perception of self and other.

A similar synchronicity of two opposing tendencies can also currently be observed in Western societies. While many parts of society have for some decades now been emancipating themselves increasingly from their religious (in Europe, Christian) context, the religious scene is becoming more pluralised and complex. Most recently, as the Western-European preoccupation with and problematisation of Islam and Muslims has shown, the overemphasis of religious affiliation in various fields of public discourse has gained fresh relevance from a normative point of view.

In current Western-European debates on Islam in the post-9/11 era, we are again encountering the essentialist-evolutionist understanding of religion that emerged, as we have seen, under the specific ecclesiastical-political conditions of European religious history since the sixteenth century and defined the content of the discourse on religion in the nineteenth century on both inter-faith and inter-denominational levels. The question of the social usefulness of religion corresponds to the linear development and modernisation model that is characteristic of this understanding of religion. In other words, the question is as to how a religion should be constituted if it is to be capable of inclusion into a modern society.

This understanding of religion is being deployed in various ways as a discursive weapon in current debates on Islam and can be found in the internal and external ascription strategies of the participants in the discourse.

It may be conceded that current debates on Islam in individual Western-European states such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Scandinavian countries, Austria and Switzerland are expressive of different political positions and reveal different thematic emphases. And yet all of them are based on the same reactive pattern: an ultimate defence of liberal and democratic societies
against the fundamentalist and patriarchal customs of a religion that is perceived as alien and non-European. This defensive reflex does not in all cases take exactly the same form. It is either exclusivist, in cases where, for instance, Islam is generally held by virtue of characteristics immanent to its system to be resistant to modernisation, or it takes an inclusivist approach, where, in accordance with the modernising schema discussed above, any reference to the possible inclusion of Islam in society assumes that it must undergo modernisation in accordance with the Christian model. What both the exclusivist and inclusivist strategies of the political regulation of the Islam issue have in common, however, is the discovery of religion as a new identity marker.

NEGOTIATING ISLAM

‘Real’ Islam as a threat

In terms of their content, Western-European debates on Islam are dominated by specific normative terms of reference that fix Islam in either an antagonistic or a constitutive relationship to the values of modern European societies. Where earlier discourses on religion were characterised in general by their restriction to intellectual elite circles, in late modern, democratic society European/Western debates on Islam have become a subject of general public concern. Therefore follows that a vastly greater number of actors – not just the scholars or religious authorities, whether Muslim or non-Muslim – are participating in the process of negotiating what constitutes ‘real’ Islam.

In the context of the 2009 Swiss minaret initiative, for instance, every citizen with voting rights was called upon to decide whether or not the building of minarets should be forbidden in Switzerland. The vote on 29 November 2009 had been preceded by months of debate on socially acceptable interpretations and practices of Islam. The minaret debate in Switzerland was a particularly revealing example of the phenomenon of the link between religion and socio-politically relevant issues, based on the very question of the ‘nature’ of an socio-politically ‘acceptable’ religion, which is so characteristic of the understanding of religion in the modern era.

The question of the visible presence of religious symbols, whether buildings or garments, in the immigration countries of Western Europe not only accounts for big headlines, but it also engages courts and political institutions. The increasingly visible infrastructural and symbolic presence of Muslims in the public spaces of Western societies is perceived varyingly in each of those societies as provocative or even as a threat to the survival of the normative framework of society. Since 2006 the issue of building minarets in Switzerland gradually became
a political issue. On May 1, 2007, a Swiss popular initiative/referendum, entitled “Against the building of minarets” (the “Minaret Initiative”) was officially launched by the populist Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP; Swiss People’s Party) and the very small evangelical Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union (EDU; Federal Democratic Union). In July 2008 the initiative was formally established.

The initiators of the minaret ban (the Egerkingen Committee) saw it as their mission “[to] prohibit a religious-political symbol of power that rejects religious tolerance, so that religious freedom be guaranteed to all (Anon., n. d.: 2; my translation; original emphasis]”. These few lines indicate that the initiators were acting on the assumed opposition of Islam – understood as a socio-political order – to the normative framework of the Swiss majority society. On the initiative’s own website (www.minarette.ch), posted in a compilation of texts under the title of Argumentarium gesamt (Body of arguments), a simplistic causal connection was made between Islam – which is already represented as inherently problematic – and the minaret as its most visible expression (Egerkinger Komitee 2007, 1sqq.).

In summary, the “Body of arguments” relied on four levels of reasoning (Qur’an, sunna, Sharia and jihad), which were placed in a mutually conditional relationship. By means of selectively chosen content from the Qur’an and historically contingent claims from sunna7 there was demonstrated both the unalterable and normatively exclusive nature of Islam and the absolute obligation those contents impose on every Muslim regardless of his or her origin or cultural background. Islam as defined in the Argumentarium in its alleged essence inevitably corresponds with normative conflict as a result of the presence of Muslims in the West in general. This was then exemplified in a generalising perspective by means of deliberately selected individual cases, such as the bombings in London (7 July 2005) and the riots in the Parisian suburbs between the police and youths originating from the Maghreb (October/November 2005). Special emphasis was placed on the fact that the criminals of London and the rampaging youth of Paris were third generation migrants (ibid. p. 7; p. 28-30). In this way, apparently, the allegedly unconditional commitment to Islam (essentially reduced to individual, historically conditioned assertions) would gain ever more importance for its followers (regardless of location, time and generation; id., 6f.). The exclusivity and absolutism of Islam now find their most visible expression in the minaret: “The minaret is, so to speak, the spearhead of Sharia – of another law, one diametrically opposed to our own democratically created rule of law” (ibid.). Thus, so goes the conclusion, minarets “[…] are not to be rejected due to build-

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7 E.g. on the relationship of Islam to Judaism and Christianity, and the relationship between man and woman; id., 14-24.
ing code considerations but because they are symbols of religious and political claims to power that threaten religious peace” (id., 12).

Once the causal link between minarets and Islam’s ‘claim to power’ is accepted along with the latter’s social and political consequences, one must conclude according to the minaret opponents, that not supporting a minaret ban means acting irresponsibly towards one’s own country’s concerns. The promoters even formulate this ‘civic duty’ positively: “Those who reject minarets as a sign of religious and political claims to power are stating that they respect freedom of religion and worship and also that they concede an equally high priority to the safeguarding of religious peace in Switzerland” (ibid). Accordingly, the federal government and the cantons were also reminded by the initiative committee, citing Article 72 of the Swiss Federal Constitution, of their duty to “safeguard religious freedom in the country” (ibid.).

‘Real’ Islam as an opportunity

A second approach to the issue of Islam to be found in the negotiation of what makes a real, i.e. socially and politically acceptable religion is the position paper of the Christlich-Demokratische Volkspartei (CVP; Christian Democratic People’s Party), published under the title “Freedom of religious beliefs and integration – using the example of Swiss Muslims” (CVP 2006).

Like the initiative for the prohibition of minaret-building, the position paper also expresses a commitment to the maintenance of religious peace. In contrast to the exclusivist orientation of the ‘argumentarium’ of the initiative for the prohibition of minaret-building, this position paper takes an inclusivist approach. This is evinced as early as the introduction, in which it is stressed that “the actual threats to our culture [...] do not come from the values of others” but from “indifference, loss of moral compass, unbridled consumerism and materialism”(id., 3). Religious communities are accordingly called upon to “participate in a spirit of partnership” in a “public discourse” on socio-politically relevant questions (ibid.).

The approach of the position paper reflects the party’s aspiration at strengthening prevention and dialogue at one and the same time. Its rationale therefore combines the generally observed potential for conflict inherent in globalisation processes and with the specific reference to the issue of the political instrumentalisation of this potential for political ends as it has already been the case in Switzerland.8

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8 The ‘Islamisation’ of immigrants from Muslim societies corresponds to an ‘Islamisation’ of public debates in Switzerland on issues which in themselves are not
In contrast to the ‘Body of arguments’ of the anti-minaret initiative, the CVP’s position paper is characterised by a clear attempt to reflect the issue of Islam’s socio-political place in Switzerland in a more subtle and sophisticated way. This strategy with its inclusivist leanings finds clear expression in the position paper where the difference between Islam and fundamentalism or, as the case may be, between religion and cultural tradition is constantly stressed. This is the case, for instance, with regard to the issues seen in public debates on Islam as pertaining specifically to that faith, such as religiously motivated violence, the relative positions of men and women, child-rearing and, in general, the disposition toward modernisation in Islam.

Now, irrespective of such differentiation – or perhaps precisely because of it, the position paper, like the ‘argumentarium’, albeit from an opposing position, is basically characterised by an attempt to define the essential nature of religion. The introduction to section 3, whose declared aim is the explication of the principles of Islam, stresses that “a distinction must be made between religion and cultural tradition” (id., 9). Possible value-based conflicts, such as regarding the position of women in Muslim societies, are accordingly attributed to tradition rather than identified with the religion itself. As it negotiates the spectrum of differences between ‘religion’ and ‘tradition’, the position paper is at all times at pains to stress, as the heading of 3.3 indicates, the “clear difference between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism” (id., 10).

directly related to religion or concretely to Muslims. In recent years in Switzerland the so-called ‘Islamic question’ has not only dominated initiatives and votes on different issues but has also had a significant influence on their outcomes. This was very clearly expressed, to give an example, in 2004 in the context of the referendum on two proposals for naturalisation reform. The proposals concerned facilitating naturalisation for the second generation of foreign youths descended from migrants and the automatic acquisition of Swiss citizenship at birth for the third generation. Although the referendum did not concern Islam and Muslims, the opponents of the proposed reform reduced the vote to the issue of the future presence of Muslims in Switzerland based on the growth in the number of Muslims in Switzerland over the last thirty years. In numerous newspaper advertisements, the opponents of the reform (especially the Swiss People’s Party, SVP) warned that, in the event of the adoption of both naturalisation proposals, a radical shift in demographic majorities in Switzerland in favor of Muslims by 2040 would occur. Thus, according to their reasoning, Muslims would make up seventy percent of the Swiss population by the year 2040.
The analogy between the religious discourses of the nineteenth century and the current debates on Islam reveals a reproduction in the Western-European debates on Islam of the social, ecclesiastical-political and cultural motives that established themselves in the post-Reformation European understanding of religion and that the ideas of ‘authentic’ religion to its socio-political usefulness or, alternatively, potential for risk. The dominant issue here is not the question of the theological truth of a religion but, instead, the issue of its capacity or incapacity to modernise and, by association, the question of the normative capacity or incapacity of a religion and its followers to integrate into society. True to this linear modernisation schema, the CVP also emphasises in its position paper that (‘real’) Islam and secular modernity are not mutually exclusive. We encounter the same epistemic framework for the language used to discuss religion, as exemplified above, in the discourses on the Islamic world and Catholicism in the nineteenth century.

‘ISLAMIC TURN’ AND MUSLIM ACTORS

As has been stated and illustrated above, the new-era Protestant secular understanding of religion has been incorporated into the current debates on Islam as a discursive weapon by participants in the discourse through various lines of argumentation, all expressing a certain perception of the self and others. The ‘Islamic turn’ which abruptly began in the wake of 9/11 in the context of an explicit perception of immigrants from societies shaped by Islam in line with the criterion of religious affiliation, is having a transformative effect on the action and self-presentation strategies of Muslim participants in the discourse. Irrespective of their relationship to Islam and the diversity of its traditions, immigrants from societies shaped by Islam are in the context of the ‘Islamic turn’ being confronted with the explicit or implicit demand that they should offer ‘specificly’ Islamic solutions to ‘specificly’ Islamic problems. The majority society dominating the discourse is in the process setting the criteria for the negotiation of what a socially and politically acceptable Islam actually is, a trend which is ultimately reflected in the self-presentation strategies of Muslim actors to the public and their communication with that same public. A good example of this is the self-presentation of Muslim organisations on the internet. The following shows an example from the Swiss context.

The Vereinigung Islamischer Organisationen in Zürich (VIOZ, Association of Islamic Organisations in Zurich) conducts intercultural and inter-faith dialogue on its internet site as one of its central tasks, in the execution of which it
intends, as the site explicitly says, “to make a contribution to social and religious peace in and around Zurich”. In its declaration of principles, adopted by the VIOZ in March 2005, the organisation states its objective of representing Islam’s view of itself within Swiss society. The principles state the organisation’s engagement “1. For democracy and the rule of law, 2. For peace, 3. Against violence, 4. For human rights, 5. For equality of opportunities, 6. For integration, 7. For inter-religious dialogue” followed by “8. Our faith, 9. Our religious duties, 10. Our aims”. It is striking that the first seven principles, beside supplying the normative context of action of the VIOZ, are at the same time placed in a constitutive relationship with the Islamic faith. This not only places ‘authentic’ Islam in an affirmative relationship with the canon of values of the Swiss majority society, it is even seen to be founded in those same values (VIOZ 2005; 2).

However, along the distinguishing criterion of ‘authentic’ and ‘abused’ religion, expression is given not only to the view that ‘authentic’ Islam must necessarily be in a constitutive relationship with the normative framework of the majority society. It can even be said that the requirements of ‘authentic’ Islam give rise to a call to mission to Muslims when, in the text of the declaration of principles, they are called upon as Muslims to “actively serve the common good in their daily lives” (id., 3). Likewise basing their stance on the idea of ‘authentic’ Islam, the initiators of the anti-minaret initiative cited above came to the opposing view that Islam actively prevents Muslims from accepting the values of the majority of Swiss society.

**DEBATING ISLAM AS A SEISMOGRAPH FOR SOCIAL CHANGES**

The comparative historical contextualisation of current debates on Islam within European arguments about religion in the post-Reformation era shows that phases of social and political changes and crisis are also always articulated in discourses on religion. As was the case in the European and American Catholicism discourse of the nineteenth century, a specific situation of social changes and unease in Europe is also being articulated in the current debates on Islam. The immigration of people from societies shaped by Islam to Western Europe has since the late 1990s increasingly triggered discourses on the consequences of this immigration for the future religio-cultural, political and normative identity of Europe. As was the case in the discourses on religion of the

nineteenth century, the current discourses on Islam are not purely religious. They are instead revealing themselves to be loci of intersection of different discourses of socio-political relevance. When viewed from this perspective, discourses on religion also represent a kind of seismograph of social changes and transformational processes.

In the nineteenth century, in the wake of the dramatic changes to the socio-cultural and socio-political situation at the level of overall societal discourse, religion was forced into the straitjacket of a new normative relationship with the spirit of the age. At the denominational level this triggered, on the one hand, a new dynamic in the discourse on the ‘essence’ of religion: the question at issue was the constitutive contribution of religion to the newly emerging normative framework of a secular society in the throes of transformation. On the other hand, the requirement imposed on members of minority denominations and religions (Catholics and Jews) to declare their loyalty to this framework went hand in hand with the constitutive contribution at issue here.

Just like the Catholics of previous centuries in societies dominated by Protestants, the minority groups in Western Europe of people from societies shaped by Islam, extremely heterogeneous in their cultural and religious practices, are confronted with the challenge of being required to offer ‘specifically’ Islamic solutions to problems identified as pertaining ‘specifically’ to Islam so that they may win the prize of normative inclusion in their respective societies of residence as ‘Muslims’ (and not just as Turks, Albanians, Pakistanis or Arabs etc.).

The fact that religious affiliation has in the post-9/11 age become the sole category of perception and judgement of a particular minority may well appear confusing for at least two reasons. The first of these is that most of the problem areas attracting such intense interest in the context of current Western-European debates on Islam do not actually bear much relation to the cultural diversity of groups and the broad spectrum of individual ways of life followed by people of Muslim origin in the West. The second is that Western-European democracies see the separation of religion and politics as one of the unique features of their normative self-conception. The members of a society are accordingly not perceived in the first instance or even exclusively in terms of their religious affiliation or assessed for their capacity or incapacity to integrate on the basis of religious criteria. In this light, the reduction, specific to debates on Islam, of individuals and groups to a religious affiliation that has ossified into normative essentialism appears at first glance even to be anachronistic. Religion in the West

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10 For more on the inter-relation between the anti-minaret initiative and the immigration or foreigner discourse in Switzerland cf. Behloul 2009.
may very well have become one sub-system among many and no longer be in a position either to symbolically represent or to use its authority to establish the normative nature of overall societal relations. Nevertheless, religion – or, to be more precise, its discursive appropriation by a great number of actors – appears in times of increasing uncertainty with regard to concepts like the nation or the secularisation of final boundaries that give rise to images of self and other – as a useful tool for boundary making strategies beyond ethnic origin and skin colour.

Seen in this light, especially under the conditions of dwindling cultural certainty, the increasing tendency to call into question previous ideological narratives and the pressure of social change, the medium of a detraditionalised and deculturalised ‘real’ religion is an appropriate indicator. It indicates one’s own degree of progress and enlightenment and is at the same time suitable for use as a projection screen vis-à-vis the ‘other’ which, precisely for religious reasons, cannot attain to this degree of development or, in the best-case scenario, can but has yet to do so. When viewed from this perspective, religion might also in the future retain its relevance as a medium of cultural and normative self-affirmation and understanding. Against this backdrop, the empirical examples discussed in this collection under the programmatic title Debating Islam. Negotiating Europe, Religion and the Self show us the way Europe is handling religious and cultural diversity today.

REFERENCES


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