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DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

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THE "ISLAMIZATION" OF EUROPE
VERSUS THE "EUROPEANIZATION" OF ISLAM

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CONTENTS

The thesis contains 211 pages, 8 tables, 11 figures, a list of references with 425 titles and 9 annexes.

Keywords: *Islam, "Islamization", "Europeanization" religious consumerism, pop-Islamic culture, intergenerational dynamics, ethnicity,* **GlocIslam***, identity, immigration, integration, Islamophobia, multiculturalism, post / neo-colonialism, religiosity, secularism, social media, urban space, transnationalism,* **umma***.*

PREAMBLE: Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

Being exposed more than ever to social change, the Muslim world became a privileged field of observation and investigation. Similarly, Europe's connection with its Muslim minorities has been currently influenced by stress and change for the past few years representing the favorite topic of academic studies and forums for political and civic debate. "Old" Europe is thus seen profoundly transformed by the encounter with contemporary Islam – an Islam that is reappropriated, interpreted, and revitalized in political and cultural terms by a new generation of Muslim actors. In line with the global priorities, this thesis aims to examine the latest concerns about the Muslim immigration in Europe and how Islam, as a religion, practice and identity is constructed and imagined by Muslim immigrants or by those with an immigrant background of European cities within the contexts of postcolonialism and information society.

Specifically, the thesis is built around the following **objectives:**

1. Examination of the new concerns about Muslim immigration in Europe and the impact of different integration models proposed by the European policies on the European Muslim minorities;

2. Transnational comparative exploration to how Islam is constructed and imagined by Muslim immigrants and their descendants in European urban contexts;

3. Highlighting the intergenerational differences of building personal and social identity and mapping the dynamics of expressing religiosity;

4. Analysis of the new subcultures emergence of the young post-diasporic Muslims as urban expressions of reactivism to stigma and discrimination.

In accordance with the set of objectives, the thesis intends to

answer the following **research questions:**

- Can we talk about some form of demographic Islamization of Europe and how justified is the fear of turning Europe into *Eurabia?*

- Are the tensions between "indigenous" European populations and Muslim immigrants and their descendants due to a fundamental conflict between cultures based on distinct civilizational values?

- How do Western European states manage diversity, or choose to integrate differences and promote social cohesion?

- How do the public expressions of Muslim identity and belonging negotiated into the secular urban society of the host country look like?

- What is the background of emergence of the neo-Islamic identity of young European Muslims?

- What are the ways of intergenerational interaction and what are the representations and perspectives on culture, ethnicity and religion of Muslim minorities in Europe?

This thesis is in **an intergenerational, transnational, and multiethnic comparative project**, simultaneously employing three generations of European Muslims immigrants and post-migrants, and correlating data collected from three urban centers of England, France and Germany. This multilevel research involved the investigation of the contextual variations of the national designs of institutional incorporation of Islam and local dynamics of patterns of religious attachment and practice, which allowed the interconnected understanding of the various aspects related to the European Islam and the issue of religious identity, thus confirming the overlaying and variability of belonging to various localities, globalities and mobilities.

CHAPTER I: Introduction ... in *Phaenomenon Islamicum*

This chapter describes the general public perception of Islam and Muslims within the European context. Far from going through a smooth and peaceful process of immigration, adaptation and accommodation, the eruption of Islamic presence within public life disrupts the common collective imaginary and the self-perception of both Europeans and Muslims so that, for the last two decades, we witness how the self-evidence of the Islamic signs and symbols in the European public life has become a major source of cultural dissonance and political dispute.

Obviously, the crossroads between Europe and Islam is not a new phenomenon: a long and deep history of trade, wars, colonization and immigration waves profoundly shaped the relationships between Muslims and Europeans. Yet there is something new in this contemporary meeting between the two (including the ways in which history is remembered by current discourses), namely proximity, which causes all comfort provided by geographical distance to be lost. The veil in schools, *burqa*o on streets, mosques and minarets visible in the urban landscape testify to the presence of Muslims actors in everyday life. On the other hand, the displacement and reterritorialization of Islam in Europe amend religious practices, now forced to stand out in a secular environment, the Islamic law now discussed outside an Islamic state and the everyday experiences, now experienced from the perspective of a minority group. This reality forces the public sphere to pass the test of public debates at risk of being poisoned by the politics of fear and suspicion regarding the irreversible "Islamization" of Europe or, by contrast, the "Europeanization" of Islam by blurring its cultural and axiological content.

CHAPTER II: Europe *versus Eurabia*

The increase of emigration from Muslim countries, the international politicization of Islam and the emergence of social anxieties directed to the Muslim world turned these communities in the focal point of discussions regarding the "risks" of intercultural contact, and the negative and often biased publicity converted Islam into a symbol of the problems related to ethnic minorities and immigration. In many European countries with a high degree of visibility for Muslim communities, genuine feelings of insecurity and fear were in conjunction with endemic concerns about uncontrolled immigration and the transnationalization of Islamic terrorism and the reterritorialization of the Muslim immigrants came to be connected in the public imagination, either with the politics of terror, or with claims of religious visibility that clashes with fundamental interpretations of the Europeans on gender and nationality. In light of this reception, the second chapter is devoted to how diversity is received and integrated.

Host societies included immigrants and approached ethnocultural plurality in different ways, but they were mostly either in favor of a pluralist-multicultural approach or of the Republican-assimilationist vision. But while many countries are successfully incorporating a diversity of cultures, the cultural pluralism often leads to tensions and conflicts, many fueled by clashing theses composing an image of Europe transformed into *Eurabia*. This chapter warns against such rhetoric and advises on an informed and nuanced approach to the subject.

CHAPTER III: Muslim Identities – between Belonging, Attachment, and Change

Chapter three explores the perceptions and experiences of Muslims in Europe, including socio-cultural preferences, strategies for adaptation to discrimination, marginalization and psychological distress, considering how each of these ways of belonging creates their own spheres, spaces and ways of interaction, participation and meaning – with permutations and combinations – both within and beyond the frames of European nation states.

In recent years, an increased mobilization of European Muslims regarding their religious identity can be seen, many of them finding in Islam not only answers to search for a sense of identity, but also a sense of empowerment, which is denied to them by their marginalized existence. This kind of "empowerment-by-stigmatization" bears witness to the fact that these religious communities have both the capacity to strengthen the sense of belonging and enhance public activism, which becomes particularly important in a time when social pressures encourage a withdrawal of religion in private.

Certainly, the identity construction involves not only self-perception, but also how others perceive the subject, which makes it an interactive social process. Everything, from European culture and regional specificities, global change, media coverage and informational developments to everyday interactions prove a certain degree of influence, which, to an extent, has a serious impact on the practice of Islam and their identity as Muslims.

CHAPTER IV: Construction of Identity for Young European Muslims

The postmodern framework of the knowledge society aggregated around transnational processes, relocation and advances in information technology, involves the young generation of European Muslims in a open dynamic and complex approach of constructing the meaning for identification and differentiation that redefines identity in a syncretic and hybrid manner. In this process, a new style of religious life develops in the large metropolitan urban settings among young Muslims. The urban spaces are now witnessing the aggregation of a new youth subculture, in a combination of religion and consumerism which is reflected in reinterpretative, aesthetic expressions of Western popular culture, manifested, among other things, through explicitly religious rap or urban fashion with pious slogans or mural spiritual art. Thus, the normative references and traditional concepts of Islamic thought are transplanted outside the theological world and transposed on the secular frames of this new and urban-based Islamic identity attesting to the rise of a pop-Islamic culture and of an alternative consumer culture industry. Therefore, the fourth chapter of this thesis aims to elaborate how this essentially urban neo-Islamic identity engages the young Muslims in a reassessment of the meaning resulting in a revived Islam, engaged in a pious process of revalorization the individual, which through his strength and visibility can instill a certain devotion and respect to a global desirable product and transform a trivial act of consumption in an committed act of faith.

CHAPTER V: Methodological Considerations

Chapter five is focused on the methodological considerations that support this thesis. Considering our goal to explore in depth the opinions of the Muslims respondents, we opted for a qualitative approach hoping that the richness and complexity of data will allow a smooth and deep understanding of the processes underlying subjects' self perception and will offer the real measure of social interactions. Incorporating three case studies, selected according to specific criteria – ease of access, demographic composition and specific integration policies – derived from the documentary stage, preliminary to the exploratory stage, the research used a data collection, analysis, integration and inference kit built on the principles of complementarity. The empirical evidence in each case study were generated from focus groups and individual unstructured, semi-structured and "life story" type interviews.

Participants from three European cities – Leicester, Lille and Berlin – representatives of three generations of Muslims from Pakistan, Algeria and Turkey were strategically selected as subjects of the seven focus groups and 42 individual interviews to enable a triple intergenerational – interethnic – transnational comparative analysis. Participants were recruited from the recommendation of experts or through reputational case selection *via* chain referral sampling. This resulted in parallel multilevel samples for each each of the three cases. Extracted data were compared and correlated with information derived from the documentation stage to form typologies and explanatory models on which the answers to the taken research questions were based.

CHAPTER VI: *Islam made in Europe*: Exploratory Prospects

The last but one chapter lays the applied prospects of interaction with the research group. Specifically, the heterogeneity of histories and narratives (collective and individual) transposed on the three contemporary urban geographies was thoroughly investigated through the contexts and experiences that facilitate the design of identity and belonging employment. The findings highlighted the various, original, and highly involved ways in which the European Muslims build their personal identity and Islam, as well as the importance of national (local, respectively) contexts in this identity process.

The contemporary European Islam is an ambivalent construction, both traditional and modern, bearing a dual meaning, both communitarian and individual and multiple possibilities of manifestation – from customary traditional forms to cosmopolitan performances. Various ways "of being a Muslim" and varying degrees of assumption and valuation of ethnicity in the three surveyed cities as well as for the three explored generations were discerned from the received replies. Considering the three levels of comparison, the most significant differences were noted on the generational side. Although the identification strategies with Islam significantly differed within the analyzed areas, major disproportions were recorded, including the ethnic characterization, particularly on the generational segment II – III. Not surprisingly, the overall layout of this thesis is one in which Islam varies significantly, which suggests that there is not a European Islam, but European Muslims.

FINAL REFLECTIONS: European Muslim *versus* Muslim in Europe

This research is an attempt to map, at least partially, the features of Islam in contemporary Europe, to demonstrate the many ways of being Muslim and to reveal the contradictions and questions they face.

In accordance with the proposed objectives and in terms of research questions we proved that:

1. demographics do not support the thesis of Europe's "Islamisation";
2. although present, the tensions between the "indigenous" European populations and the Muslim immigrants and their descendants are not due to a fundamental conflict between cultures based on distinct civilizational values;
3. Western European countries employ different approaches to managing diversity and integrating differences which, in turn, distinctly influence European Muslim minorities;
4. public expressions of Muslim identity and belonging are negotiated in accordance with secularism, postcolonialism and manifestations of "knowledge society";
5. the construction of personal and social identity and the dynamics of expressing religiosity are partially intergenerationally determined;
6. neo-Islamic identities of young European Muslims emerge as urban expressions of reactivism to stigma and discrimination.

Conceptually, this thesis is based on a dialectical of "Europeanization" and "Islamization" forms. In its inclusive purpose that we assigned, the "Europeanization" was analyzed in terms of its multidimensional approach entailing micro- (individual psychosocial

experiences, such as the sense of belonging, self-esteem), meso- (group behavior) and macro- (social involvement, manifested, for instance, by civic engagement, voluntarism) levels. By contrast, we are now witnessing a sociological paradox behind the phenomenon of "Islamization". Not the distance, but, on the contrary, the familiarity and proximity to modern forms of life, education and politics are those that trigger a return to radical religious identity and its political expressions. But as this approach, which brings with it unfulfilled promises of equality and social justice deepens, the inequity and injustice are feeling increasingly acute. This risk, I believe lies at the core of understanding religious radicalisms in the twenty-first century Europe.

The specter of Islam has haunted the European public debate in the last two decades, constantly shaping the ever-dynamic, always-evolving meaning of the unique word that binds us together: European. But in the end, we must not ignore that behind generic terms like "Islam" or "Muslims," there are, in fact, real people who deserve a fair and unbiased approach, translated into real and sustainable policies. Therefore, in a time like this, where the Muslim community is regarded with such mistrust and suspicion, we must not forget that there is an Islam in Europe as much as there is a Europe in Islam. So, this thesis, through its modest "positivation" approach, hopes to contribute to the recovery of the human dimension so that Muslims would cease to be "them" and become part of a plural "us".

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Alexandra – Violeta Gheorghiu
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