

The New Muslim Religious Brokers in European Cities and Politics of Muslim Citizenship

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On the basis of the research into active social citizenship amongst the new Muslim religious brokers in Brussels and London, this paper explores the transition from the politics of Muslim identity to the politics of Muslim citizenship, a major change in the public mobilisation of Islam in Belgium and Britain. It argues that this move has been closely linked with the development of civic consciousness among certain segments of the Muslim populations in Europe and the construction of a new type of identity – ‘Muslim civicness’ - which is characterised by strong support for the national projects, activism beyond Muslim symbolic boundaries, emphasis on the similar rights to other citizens and obligations vis-à-vis all the citizens regardless of their religious adherence.

The outgoing Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, one of the country's organisations which aimed to represent British Muslims vis-à-vis the government¹, announced during his valedictory speech on 4 June 2006 that ‘the age of the politics of Muslim identity is over’, and called for Muslims to engage more actively in non-Muslim civil society (Sacranie 2006). The sociological research on Islam in Europe shows, however, that the age of Muslim identity politics is far from yet over and that some Islamic organizations continue to take the ‘Muslim power’ approach (Modood 2003), mainly nourished by despair at the victimization of Muslims in different places around the globe; with the aim of attracting new followers.² At the same time, and here the former Secretary General of the MCB has a point, one may observe a growing trend amongst the Muslim organizations to move from a politics of identity, which is preoccupied with difference and otherness, towards a politics of identity that increasingly emphasizes also elements of sameness. An analogous

1 For more information about this and other Muslim organisations in Britain claiming to represent ‘the country's Muslims’ vis-à-vis the government see Pędziwiatr 2007.

2 One such organisation is, for instance, Hizb ut-Tahrir. For more information about the organisation see Taj-Farouki 2003, Wiktorowicz 2005, Karagiannis & McCauley 2006.

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observation is made also by one of the editors of “European Islam: Challenges for Public Policy and Society”, Amel Boubekeur, who points out that ‘the cultural and religious otherness’ is no longer the privileged means of expressing contestation by the political Islam in Europe (2007: 40). The key observation in the research into religion and active social citizenship amongst young organized Muslims in Brussels and London on which this paper is based was that one may see in both analysed countries and cities not only a development of a civic consciousness among certain segments of their Muslim populations (Bousetta and Jacobs 2006: 32-33), but also a construction of a new type of identity - Muslim civiness - and a move from the politics of Muslim identity, largely based on the emphasis of ‘otherness’, to the politics of Muslim citizenship that increasingly stresses also elements of ‘sameness’. This has been done by young Muslims inter alia ‘reversing the stigma’ associated with Islam and engaging with a ‘positivisation of the religion of their parents’.³

I am going to argue that the aforementioned change in the public mobilization of Islam in Europe is not so much related to the recent pressures on European Muslims to prove their loyalty and attachment to their societies⁴, but is above all a result of the re-definitions of the notion of citizenship, and of the fact that the largest Muslim communities in Europe are constituted today by a majority of people who are born and bred Europeans. The objective of this article will be to explore some processes behind a move from the politics of Muslim identity to the politics of Muslim citizenship.

Identity Politics and Citizenship

Before I do so, let me clarify some of the key notions used in the text and shed some light on the main features of the research which constitutes the basis for this paper. One such key notion is that of identity politics, a highly disputed concept both in politics and in theoretical writing. In a large sense identity politics refers to any political mobilization around a particular identity, be it ethnic, religious, civic, sexual (gender and sex equality, the gay rights movement) or functional (e.g. labour movement centered around the workers as a defined category) (Calhoun 1994). In this paper the concept is used primarily to refer to the mobilization of young European Muslims in which the notion of citizenship plays an important role. This last concept assumes that membership in a legally constituted political community should rest on a principle of formal equality. The principle of equality has been commonly defined in terms of a particular understanding of civil, political and social rights. The notion of positive freedom, understood as social rights, was introduced

3 These strategies are explored in depth in Pędziwiatr 2010.

4 However partially it might be influenced by the securitization of debates about Islam in Europe

into the concept of citizenship by T.H. Marshall (1950). One of the major drawbacks of the very influential Marshallian theory of citizenship is that it fails to address such salient issues in contemporary heterogeneous societies as the politics of ethnicity and diversity. This issue was addressed, *inter alia*, by Pakulski (1997) and Delanty (2002), who have argued that a fourth dimension (apart from civil, political and social) of citizenship could be culture. They have pointed out that today there are other kinds of exclusion which cannot be accommodated by a model of social rights. The recognition of these forms of exclusion has committed many people to the view that policies of universal equality would not be adequate and that therefore some kind of radical differentiation is necessary in the recognition of the group rights⁵ (e.g. Young 1990, Kymlicka 1995, Isin and Wood 1999).

The emphasis on the last component of citizenship may also be found in the scholarship of Bryan Turner, who argues that citizenship confers not just a legal status but also “a particular cultural identity on individuals and groups”. He aptly notices that the main focus of citizenship struggles has shifted in recent decades from class to claims to cultural identity and cultural history. Today’s struggles have been not about the access to the means of production, but *inter alia* about sexual identities, gay rights, gender equality and aboriginality (Turner 1997: 8). I believe that with the advancement of the diverse European born generation of Muslims into the public sphere, and with the refusal of some of them to privatise Islam, we could also add religion to this list. Furthermore, I agree with Nilüfer Göle and Tariq Modood who point out that Muslims emerging into identity politics generally follow the example of ethnic minorities, women, gays and lesbians in seeking space for their heritage and values in both the public and private spheres (Göle 2003: 812, Modood 2003: 102). The children of immigrants born in Belgium and Britain have been learning to take advantage of citizenship which is today one of the two, (besides the human rights) main discourses of entitlement. This exposes the growing tension between the discourse on equality (on civil, political and social levels), as a classical preoccupation of citizenship and the recognition of difference, (equality on the cultural level) as a contemporary engine of citizenship.

The important question is: why has citizenship been such a valuable political tool for allowing various groups to make different demands? The answer can be found in the scholarship of T.H. Marshall who, in his classic exposition, spoke of “an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievements can be measured and towards which aspirations can be directed” (1950: 29). It is thus nothing else but this ‘ideal citizenship’ that Muslims in various European countries have had in mind when demanding, for instance, that state authorities allow Muslim girls to wear hijabs at

⁵ It refers to rights specific to particular groups of people (e.g. women, ethnic and religious minorities) which protect and enable realisation of the particular needs interests and priorities of these groups. These are the rights, which Isaiah Berlin saw as embodiment of the third form of freedom.

school or to provide financial support to Muslim schools. The politics of citizenship has increasingly been a politics of recognition, in which claims are made for cultural rights and Islam has begun to play an important role in that politics.

This politics of citizenship has been almost entirely urban politics. Numerous scholars have pointed out the close relationship between the city and contemporary citizenship. Michael Ignatiev, for instance, maintains that

to speak of citizens is to speak of cities. It is in the city where we live as civic beings: it is the urban environment that releases in every minute the sensation of belonging or not belonging to something called political society (quoted in Bianchini and Bloomfield 2001: 110).

Also James Holston (1999: 189) emphasizes the importance of the urban experience for contemporary citizenship. He argues that as long as there are diverse populations residing in specific places, and with new politics of identity and difference “the cities are challenging the nations, separating themselves and even replacing them, from an important space of citizenship to alive spaces, not only of their insecurities but also in their emergent ways”. The aforementioned authors share with many other scholars around the globe the same conviction that, although one of the essential purposes in the construction of a nation has been to disassemble the historical priority of the urban citizenship and to substitute it with a national citizenship, cities keep on being the strategic place for the development of the citizenry. That is also one of the reasons why the research which constitutes the basis for this paper has been carried out in two cities: Brussels and London.

In the course of the research the author has interviewed more than 50 young Muslim Brusselers and Londoners active within Muslim and wider civil society. The key informants, both women and men were selected from within the emerging new Muslim brokers; social actors of the second and third generations who participate directly or indirectly in the processes of decision making that are important for the future of Muslim and wider communities. The interviews concentrated in particular on these young Muslims (between the 20 and 38 years old) who try, through various projects, to tackle some of the issues faced by their communities and societies and thus at least partially solve the problem of collective uncertainty.⁶ Through their social engagement, the young Muslim men and women begin to play, in the analysed countries, a role of the new religious brokers.⁷ The research looked particularly closely at the activists of Ligue Islamique Interculturelle de Belgique (LIIB) and Présence Musulmane (PM) in the case of Brussels and of the Islamic Forum of Europe (IFE) and City Circle (CC) in the case of London.

6 For an overview of scholarship on local elites see, for example, Tilleux 2003.

7 By religious brokers I mean individuals who play a key role in the articulation of the identity narrative, discourse.

The oldest organizations in the two cities (i.e. LIIB, created in 1996, and IFE, set up in 1988) are structured around mosques in which members of the first generation still have significant authority. They are relatively progressive in comparison with some other Muslim establishments in the two countries (one may, for instance, hear khutbas or sermons in French and English, respectively, and women are not discouraged from participation in religious and non-religious activities) but are rather conservative by Western standards (e.g. strictly obeying the rules of purdah). The later organizations (PM, founded in 1996, and CC, set up in 1999) are neither attached to any mosques nor have any close links with the transnational religious movements. In contrast to the LIIB, which has close links with the Ikhwan Muslimun, and the IFE, which has links with Jamaat-i Islami, the PM and CC like to emphasize their organizational and intellectual independence.

Apart from the interviews with activists of the above mentioned organisations the author has also conducted interviews with members of other Muslim associations in order to more accurately locate the key material within a wider spectrum of Muslim identity politics in both cities. Thus, a limited number of interviews were carried out with members of Federation of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations, Al-Qawthar, L'Humanité Sans Frontiers, Astrolabe and De Click in Brussels and activists of Muslmaat, Young Muslim Organisation, Muslim Association of Britain, Islamic Society of Britain and Hizb-ut Tahrir in London.⁸

Key Dimensions of Muslim Civicness

One of the most significant shifts in the mobilisation of Islam in Europe clearly visible in my research material is a slow though persistent move from the politics of Muslim identity to the politics of Muslim citizenship. This move has been closely linked with the development of a civic consciousness among certain segments of the Muslim populations in Europe, observed *inter alia* by Hassan Bousetta and Dirk Jacobs⁹ (2006: 32–33), and a construction of a new type of identity – ‘Muslim civicness’. This is a form of identity which prevailed amongst the members of the new Muslim religious brokers in Brussels and in London. It has been emerging from the shadows of ‘emancipatory politics’, and mixing elements of Muslimness with those of active citizenship. It is an identity which has numerous features of a ‘project identity’ defined by Castells as “a situation when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in their society, by so doing seek the transformation of overall social structure” (ibid). Before I point out the key features of the Muslim

⁸ For detailed conceptual and methodological information about the research and its informants see Pędziwiatr 2010.

⁹ Bousetta and Jacobs observe that, paradoxically, the radicalism of the jihadist discourse of bin Laden and his followers has stimulated a form of civic consciousnesses among Muslims.

civicsness as the project identity it is worth remembering that some segments of the Muslim populations in Europe remain characterised by the opposite of the project identity, which I call 'uncompromising Muslimness'¹⁰, that is an identity that is generated by actors who feel that they are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination. This kind of identity-building named by Manuel Castells as 'resistance identity' leads to the formation of communes and constructs forms of collective resistance against dominant identities (Castells 2004: 9). Although it is traditionally utilised within minority groups, one may also observe it among majority groups. A form of such resistance identity is, for instance, 'defensive identity', which is constructed when members of the majority or a dominant cultural group feel threatened by the presence of other cultures (e.g. 'aggressive little Englandism').¹¹ I believe the Muslim identity in Europe, which tries to resist the assimilationist pressures of the non-Muslim societies and their largely secular institutions by building trenches of resistance and survival and withdrawing from the mainstream social life can be seen as another example. A significant proportion of Muslims, who are involved in this kind of identity building, are those who cannot find their place in the 'runaway world', or those who are disempowered by stigmatizing representations of Islam. The case of many of them matches perfectly the classical explanation of the phenomenon of stigma by Erving Goffman, who argued that "the discrepancy between individual's virtual and actual identity, when known about or apparent, spoils his social identity; it has the effect of cutting him off from society and from himself so that he stands a discredited person facing an unaccepting world" (1968: 31).

The first and foremost feature of Muslim civicsness is that it fairly strongly supports national narratives. Its supportiveness for the national projects is not limited only to the emphasis of the importance of the identification with other compatriots, but also stresses the significance of the emotional attachment to the country in which one is living, its territory and various elements of the national culture, including national ceremonies and rituals. Thus, it quite firmly upholds the national identities and like the traditional accounts on citizenship (e.g. Marshall 1950 or Brubaker 1988) it links citizenship with a nation.

Probably most clearly this feature of Muslim civicsness is portrayed in the statement of one of my interviewees from Brussels who said "I am a practising

10 The key features of such identity are: dismissal of national projects (at the level of depth of citizenship), activism largely within Muslim symbolic boundaries (at the level of extent of citizenship), emphasis on the right to the difference and prioritisation of the obligations towards Muslim ummah (at the level of content of citizenship). For more detailed analysis of 'uncompromising Muslimness' see Pędziwiatr 2010.

11 Charles Husband analysed the construction of such defensive identity during the Rushdie affair through inspection of several newspapers. The editorial of one of them observed, referring to the anti-Rushdie demonstrations, for instance, that 'we do not burn books in this country, even symbolically' (1994).

Muslim and a practising Belgian.” (Khalil, male, 27) For this interviewee, as well as many others, religious and national identity did not contradict each other, but on the contrary, they were mutually reinforcing. That is also why many of them liked to say similarly to Kadir (male, 31) that “I am very comfortable being British and Muslim.” In their views the national and religious aspects of identity were largely overlapping. Consequently some of them strongly opposed more rigid definitions of secularism which exclude religion from citizenship. Hadijah (female, 35), for example, stated: “you cannot cut someone in the middle and say that this part belongs to the citizenship and that to religion. Muslimness and citizenship are inseparable entities”. In general they proposed to view the two ‘entities’ as functioning in harmony with each other and opted for the pluralistic definition of identity, assuming the possibility of possessing multiple and hybrid identities. If they did distinguish between the two identities, like Rashid (male, 27) who pointed out that “spiritual identity is vertical and the civic one is horizontal”, they did so only to stress that they closely and positively interact with each other.

Moreover the support for the national narratives that characterised most of my interviewees in Brussels and London involved also their strong emotional attachment to their countries and localities. The significant support for the effective identification model of citizenship (Weithman 2002: 14) amongst my British and Belgian interviewees was one of the evidences of such attachment. Here, however, it is important to note that when my interviewees were stressing that they should be viewed as part and parcel of British and Belgian societies they subscribed not to the unitary concept of a nation¹², which does not leave a room for particular identities, but to the pluralistic definition of this term that takes into account the existence of such identities within a larger ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991). The porousness of the boundaries of the Belgian and British national identities clearly helped my interviewees to claim ‘being the same’ and yet ‘being different’.

By supporting the national narratives the members of the emerging Muslim elites did not cease to identify with their co-religionists in other parts of the world. The sense of empathy and solidarity with Muslims living in other parts of the world was particularly strong amongst the British Muslims. The majority of my interviewees perceived the worldwide ummah as a community united by common beliefs, ethics and morality, rather than as a form of political and religious authority. For them also identification with other believers of Islam in the world did not exclude the identification with other compatriots. In their opinion these two identifications were not mutually exclusive and it was perfectly possible to be at the same time attached to their religious and national community.

At the level of the extent of citizenship, the research participants who did not mind calling themselves ‘practising Muslims and practising Belgians/Britons’ were

12 For more information about the concept of a nation conceived in this way see Brubaker 1988.

characterized above all by the social activism which transgressed Muslim symbolic boundaries and aimed at improving wider society. The gathered research material portrays some of the projects undertaken by the members of the emerging new Muslim elites in Brussels and London, which clearly went beyond the traditional *dawah*¹³ and creatively engaged with wider society: raising money for hostels for homeless in London, joining the campaign for the 'living wage', feeding Brussels' homeless and organising screening-debate sessions in the local cultural centre¹⁴. These examples illustrate how Muslim civicness manifests itself in practical terms. The young Muslims involved in these kind of projects were also happily volunteering for non-Muslim NGOs such as, for instance, Amnesty International, Greenpeace and Citizens Organising Foundation. For many of them it was not that important whether it was 'an Islamic cause', but above all they wanted to be sure that it was 'a just cause'. They were willing to lobby not only for Muslim causes, but also for non-Muslim ones. This impartiality was, for example, stressed by Murad (male, 34) who said "...if a Jew is attacked, Muslims have to fight with the injustice done to him as if he was a Muslim (...)." The interviewees willing to engage in the fight for non-Muslim causes were also more likely than others to talk about the non-Muslim issues that should be fought for. If they spoke about injustice in the world they did not concentrate only on Muslims in such places as, for instance, Palestine, Chechnya or Uzbekistan, but saw the problem of injustice much more globally and not limited only to their co-religionists.

At the level of citizenship rights Muslim civicness manifests itself above all in a strong emphasis on the right to sameness or full inclusion in the 'nation'. The vast majority of the new Muslim brokers stressed that they would like to more fully participate in the 'sameness' and to be included in the more flexible and open conception of 'us'. While maintaining their religious identity they wished to be recognised not only formally but also in practice in all dimensions of social life as citizens equal to others. They wanted their presence in the midst of the Belgian and British society to be banalised, or 'taken for granted'. They believed that banalisation of their religious otherness might provide them with enough room to more openly manifest their religiosity and at the same time to be active citizens. If they called for the right to difference they framed such requests very carefully so as not to set themselves aside from wider society. They were also ready to resign from some of the privileges acquired by other religious groups (e.g. right to the state-funded religious schools). By and large, their requests had a character of acculturative demands rather than dissociative ones.

One of the major features of Muslim civicness at the level of citizenship obligations is that it puts emphasis on the importance of caring for all the members of the

13 Literally in Arabic "making an invitation" – usually denoting invitation to Islam or call to Islam. Muslim missionary activity.

14 All these projects are described and analyzed in detail in Pedziwiatr 2010.

society regardless of their religious allegiance, or on having obligations vis-à-vis all the citizens without distinction of creed. In other words, it stresses that in everyday activities one should not only care about his or her co-religionists, family or kin, but also about other members of society. Numerous young Muslims interviewed in the course of the research, for instance, pointed out that they had obligations not only towards members of their own religious community, but also towards other members of wider society, and asserted that the latter obligations were equally important as the former. Nabihah (female, 28) in Brussels, for example, argued that “(...) Our work should profit not only Muslims but also others.”, whereas Samar from London said that “The obligation of a citizen is to contribute to the society: to do something meaningful. Not only make a difference to my life, but to make a difference to lives of others.”

The opinion of Thaqib (male, 20) from London that “Being a good Muslim and a good citizen is synonymous” points out yet another significant feature of Muslim civicness, namely that this identity frames and/or situates the demands of the faith; to which those of citizenship are highly compatible. Most of my interviewees in Brussels and London believed that if these demands were at times not compatible, then such sporadic incompatibilities were easily solvable. Moreover, many of them also argued that their religious convictions pushed them to fulfil citizenship obligations with greater attention and that religion made citizenship obligations more meaningful to them. The gist of this idea was captured by Khalil (male, 27) who spoke about Islam as “an engine of citizenship”. In his view, which was widely shared by my interviewees in Brussels, as well as in London, it was religion which gave a deep meaning to such rudimentary civil/civic duty as, for instance, casting a ballot. It also underpinned numerous more abstract civic obligation such as, for example, honesty, helpfulness, truthfulness, justice, industriousness, etc., which unlike the civil obligations cannot be enforced by the law.

Muslim Civicness as a Project Identity

Having pointed out the most significant features of Muslim civicness, it is time to shed more light on this identity that is being developed by numerous young Muslims in Europe and which was particularly popular amongst my interviewees. The popularisation of this identity has been one of the major factors contributing to the significant shift in the mobilisation of Islam in Europe from the politics of Muslim identity to the politics of Muslim citizenship. As I have argued earlier, Muslim civicness bears many traits of the ‘project identity’ (Castells 2004: 9). Muslim civicness redefines the social position of Muslims engaged in its development and transforms social structures mainly by challenging the traditional public-private sphere divide (e.g. the popular understanding of the role of religion in the public

life) and by calling for the transformation of the existing power structures between the 'established' and the 'outsiders' (Elias & Scotson 1965).

According to the dominant narrative, the public sphere is not a privileged domain of religion, and especially so, if it is a religion of a relatively newly established minority group.¹⁵ As Talal Asad reminds us, religious practice and belief are highly welcomed (since without the idea of religion the concept of the secular cannot exist) but mainly in the private sphere or in the space where it cannot threaten political stability and the liberties of a 'free-thinking' citizen (2003). By asserting the importance of Islam not only in the private sphere but also in the public one, my interviewees clearly transgress the boundaries drawn by modern liberal states. By the very fact of mobilizing politically along religious lines they de-centre a fundamental public-private distinction of a modern liberal state, which sees religion as a matter of personal rather than public concern. At the same time they do not call for the total abolition of this distinction, like some more radical believers, but for its rebalancing. They seek a gradual transformation of the existing structures, rather than revolutionary change. By emphasizing the importance of religion not only in the private domain but also outside of it, they also suggest that political secularism is not religiously neutral and, as such, it should not be taken for granted. As numerous feminist scholars have shown (e.g. Benhabib 1992, Fraser 1992, Lister 1997 and Voet 1998) the assumption that difference must be privatized works as a 'gag-rule' to exclude matters of concern to marginalized and subordinated groups (such as, for instance, women) who want erstwhile private gender relations to be the subject of collective deliberation and reform. Thus, what would earlier be called 'private' matters have become the basis of the struggle for equality.

By extension, *toute proportion gardée* (proportions kept), the same might be said of the religious practice of European Muslims. Their political integration in terms of equality inevitably involves challenging the existing boundaries of the public realm. As Tariq Modood (2004: 247) notices, such integration essentially flows from the process of discursive engagement, as marginal groups begin to confidently assert themselves in the public space, and others begin to argue with and reach some agreement with them. The focus of this process of discursive engagement is on participation in a discursive public space, while equality becomes defined as inclusion within a political community, not in terms of accepting the rules of the existing polity and its hallowed public-private boundaries, but rather in terms of some redefinition of the existing rules and boundaries. In this respect the advances achieved, for instance, by feminism (with its slogan 'the personal is the political')

¹⁵ It is not without importance which religious group strives for more room in the public sphere. Some newly set up Christian evangelical communities find it much easier to claim such a space than, for example, Muslim groups. The former ones are, in fact, re-claiming it, while the latter one claiming it the first time in the history of the analysed countries.

have acted as benchmarks for subsequent groups, such as Muslims, who have introduced new categories of identity into politics .

The meaningful engagement of young European Muslims in a discursive public space has above all been possible due to their possession of substantial cultural capital. Embodied and institutional cultural capital¹⁶ has enabled members of the emerging new Muslim elites in Brussels and London to choose between different courses of action and to move beyond the formal to participatory forms of citizenship. In other words, substantial cultural resources (if not in the institutional forms - formal education - then in the embodied one resulting from the fact of going through the process of socialisation in the given country) have allowed them to enact their citizenship status or to take up a role of citizen and engage with it creatively from within their religious tradition. These resources have allowed them to become subjects without distancing themselves from one of the major sources of authenticity that they have at their disposal, namely their religion. Their sense of agency, or the belief that they can act, has been visibly strengthened by the possessed cultural capital. Acting as a citizen, especially collectively, as Ruth Lister rightly notices, in turn fosters such a sense of agency (1997: 38).

The form which they could enact, that is legal citizenship, is also of crucial importance. The role of a citizen enabled them to present themselves as equal and, to some extent, similar to others around them and thus, provided them with a significant tool to challenge the 'established', and try to at least minimally shake their domination in the discursive public sphere. As Elias and Scotson (1965) demonstrate in their study of 'Winston Parva' in East Midlands of England, this domination is not easily shakeable since the communal feelings of belonging and ownership, membership of important community roles, integration into informal (and formal) local networks and local knowledge, and many other resources give established groups the upper hand in the 'relations of definition' between themselves and newer groups. All of these power resources also enable the established to make their evaluations stick and, as the practice shows, these evaluations are rarely favourable to those who are 'less established'. This is because established groups tend to generate 'group charisma', or a sense of their own superiority as a group, based on a 'minority of the best' as part of their social and self-identity. Their self-image tends to be based on evaluations rooted in the best aspects of the group whilst ignoring other elements that might contaminate such an image and, as such, it forms an important aspect of the group's internal solidarity and sense of community. This 'rosy' self-image of the established is sustained through the vital mechanisms of communal 'gossip' and everyday conversation. Established

¹⁶ Both terms are used in the sense given them by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) that is as "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; individual's 'culture' or 'cultivation' assimilated or acquired over a long period" (embodied cultural capital p. 243-245), and as "educational qualifications" (institutionalised cultural capital p. 248)

groups produce 'praise-gossip'¹⁷ when discussing their own group, but use 'blame-gossip'¹⁸ to describe other groups, which they do not consider as 'one of theirs' or 'established enough' (ibid).

European Muslims, viewed by many 'established' Europeans as outsiders, are often targets of stigmatizing labels. Their relative lack of substantial power resources (as a whole group), leaves them vulnerable to the gossip and stigmatization of more powerful groups. Over time, some of them come to accept and take on the stigmatized form of identity created for them by the 'established'. They come to see their own group as inferior and see themselves as inferior people, idealizing and imitating the established's behavioural codes, manners and so on in order to raise their valuation of themselves. This, according to Elias and Scotson, reduces their power chances even further by reinforcing claims to the superiority of the established. Furthermore, the generational transmission of stereotypes ensures that 'outsiders' are continually reminded of their inferior status (ibid).

The aforementioned scenario, however, does not take into account the fact that 'outsiders' with the passage of time also start (faster or slower¹⁹) to acquire some power resources and are not doomed to accept forever stigmatising labels. This is clear, for instance, when comparing the situation of the Black people in America in 1950s and in 2009, when the African American candidate Barack Obama became a new incumbent in the White House. The example of African-Americans who, more than half a century ago, started to actively challenge their negative stereotypes and create their own positive evaluations (e.g. 'black is beautiful')²⁰ also demonstrates that the outsiders-established relations are not easily erasable and are often part of the long-term process of social change over many generations. Moreover, these long-term processes are subject to a reversal of present trends, rather than being simply linear pathways which once embarked upon become somehow inevitable.

In the analysed cases of Muslims in Belgium and Britain one may also observe a process of a narrowing of the gap between their own and the established's power. At the same time many of the established continue to view their Muslim

17 'Praise-gossip' means that the best elements perceived by the established group form the basis for discussion and evaluation whilst negative elements are not openly discussed. (Elias & Scotson 1965: 92-93)

18 'Blame-gossip' is exactly the reverse, as outsider groups are discussed and assessed in terms of what are considered to be their worst elements. (Elias & Scotson 1965: 92-93)

19 This largely depends on the structure of a given society. One may expect that in a society with high social mobility such a process should be relatively fast. The state and to a lesser extent supranational bodies (e.g. European Commission, United Nations) act as important mediators in the relations between the 'established' and the 'outsiders'.

20 The shifting balance of power between white and black groups in America is clearly explored, with the usage of the established-outsiders framework, by Dunning 2004. For an analysis of the civil rights movements from the social movements' perspective see McAdam et al. 1996 or McAdam 1999.

compatriots born in Europe as outsiders. The new Muslim religious brokers possess some power resources that allow them to at least partially reduce the scale of the 'blame-gossip' generated by the established. Those who are developing Muslim civicness have learnt to reject the stigmatising labels of the established without rejecting the whole system created and largely run by them.²¹ This seems to be an efficient strategy for redefining their position in societies, which is a key goal of project identities. Armed with legal citizenship, substantial civic skills and other resources, they are beginning to quite successfully 'break into the bounded Britain and Belgium'.²² They are beginning to achieve some success not only in contesting the hegemonic constructions of the cultural and religious boundaries of the British and Belgian nations, but also in opposing elements of the 'blame gossip' generated by the established. The first task they accomplish, for instance, by demonstrating their in-depth knowledge of Belgian and British society and profound affection to their respective countries. Challenging 'blame gossip' is done by writing to local and national newspapers or appearing in TV and Radio programmes and correcting some of the fairly widespread derogatory images of Muslims and Islam.²³

In conclusion, however, it must be stressed that the relative success achieved by Muslim groups in shaking the domination of the 'established' in the discursive public sphere and re-balancing the relations between themselves and non-Muslim Belgians and Britons are not definite and irreversible. On the contrary, these achievements can be erased fairly easily and the significant gap between the power chances of the 'outsiders' and the 'established' can be re-created. This was particularly noticeable after the terrorist attacks committed in the name of Allah on 11 September 2001 (USA), 11 March 2004 (Spain) and 7 July 2005 (Britain).²⁴ The attacks marked the point when one could clearly observe an increase in the 'blame gossip' trying to force as many people of Muslim faith as possible to accept 'group disgrace'. At the same time, after the attacks it was possible to see numerous symptoms of a reversal of the process leading to the more equal balance of power between the established and outsiders. Interestingly, these temporary reversals in the processes of power re-balancing seemed not to discourage members of the Muslim communities already involved in the public

21 Those who develop uncompromising Muslimness, on the other hand, tend to reject not only the stigmatizing evaluations, but also the whole system within which they are generated.

22 This expression I have borrowed from Sean McLoughlin (1997) analyzing how representations of belonging of the Muslim in Bradford challenge the hegemonic constructions of the racial, cultural and religious boundaries of Britain.

23 How widespread such images are in Belgium and Britain may be gleaned from, for example, Allen and Nielsen 2002 or EUMC 2006.

24 One could add to these list of 'turning points' in the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the West the religiously motivated murder of Theo van Gogh on the streets of Amsterdam on 2 November 2004. Although of much smaller scale, this event had a tremendous impact on the collective memory of not only the Dutch, but all Europeans since for the first time a European Muslim of Moroccan origin kills his compatriot in the name of supposed defense of "honour of Islam".

sphere from even more active involvement. The members of the emerging new Muslim elites were particularly successful in turning the stigma associated with their religion into a source of empowerment or 'group charisma' rather than 'group disgrace'. This has been happening in the situation of increasing politisation of Islam in Europe which has resulted also in the growing demand for knowledge about Islam and Muslim populations in Europe and elsewhere. Some of this demand has been met by a growing number of scholars studying various kinds of processes within the European Muslim and other Muslim populations. There is, however, not only a continuous demand for an expert knowledge on Muslim populations, but also for the opinions of all types of community representatives, ranging from the internationally acknowledged Muslim leaders, through self-proclaimed religious leaders to ordinary believers or Muslim *Monsieurs* and *Madames tout-le-monde*. This is a niche to which many Muslims active in all kinds of Islamic organisations have been taping into. My interviews with young Muslims in Britain and Belgium show that they are fully aware of this demand and consciously take advantage of the occasions it creates. This is, for example, clear in the following statement by Rana (female, 36): "Since 9/11 there are more people who want to know about Muslims and Islam, so it gives a good opportunity for those who practice Islam to show what really Islam is about".

The young Muslims as those who are absolutely fluent in French in the case of Brussels and in English in the case of London have some advantages over the religious leaders educated abroad and not fully mastering the countries' languages. Again my research shows that some of the young Muslims are fully aware of this advantage. One of my interviewees said "We live the transitory phase between the first generation and future generations, and we begin to understand that we have become a kind of a relief group. So they (e.g. journalists – KP) ask us because it is much easier for them from the linguistic point of view... So we have gone with difficulties through this passage between the transmission of religion by silence to the obligation of almost automatically becoming actors". (Faisal, 33) At the same time some of my interviewees complained that the opportunity to inform the public about Islam has been opened up only for some discourses on Islam and talked at length about the disillusionment with the media coverage of Islam and anxiety related to the growing anti-Muslim sentiment.²⁵

It is important to stress that the channel of 'empowerment-through-stigmatisation' is only open for those members of the Muslim communities who possess the necessary tools to deal with the stigma resulting, for instance, from the traumatic events. This also proves the phenomenon of the double capacity of cultural traumas observed by numerous scholars (Sztompka 2002, Alexander et al. 2004), which in spite of their immediate negative, painful consequences, show

²⁵ Other forms of empowerment of new Muslim elites through Islam and activism in Muslim organizations are explored at length in Pędzwiatr 2012.

their positive, functional potential as forces of social becoming.²⁶ On the whole, my interviewees possessed the necessary resources to turn the stigmas, such as those resulting from the aforementioned traumatic events, to their advantage. Those who were engaged in developing Muslim civicness even in the most unfavourable circumstances took pains to stress a strongly held religious belief and used Islamic practice in order to interact more effectively with the rest of society. The late Ottavia Schmidt di Friedberg described such attitudes, which characterised also some of her interviewees, as ‘riding the tiger’ (2002: 89). In my opinion this metaphor aptly captures not only the risks involved in maintaining such an attitude, but also the difficulty in using one of the major emerging global symbols of contestation of the West (i.e. Islam) to interact with the members of European (Western) societies.

Conclusion

The February 2008 cover of Time Magazine (vol. 171, no. 6) featured faces of members of the European Muslim elite and some of my interviewees with the title ‘Europe’s Muslim Success Story’. Today this ‘success story’ is shared only by a small proportion of the European Muslims and members of their communities, while the majority experiences serious levels of exclusion and disadvantage. The improvement of the situation of the Muslim communities in Europe will depend not only on the effective struggle against at least some of the forms of exclusion and disadvantage faced by the members of these communities, but also on the results of the Muslims’ efforts to re-invent and re-position themselves as citizens and full members of the European polities. The latter objective is particularly difficult to attain. Before European Muslims achieve this goal they will need to work tirelessly to reconstruct popular images, assumptions and representations of their religion and their communities within wider societies. The members of the new Muslim elites have been already doing so and they will surely not rest until they achieve some tangible results.

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²⁶ According to Sztompka the ‘constructiveness’ or ‘destructiveness’ of such an ambivalent social phenomenon as trauma depends on four major factors: the strength of initiating traumatogenic change, the gap between old and new cultural syndrome, the size of the traumatized groups, the scope of individual resources (education, connections, rootedness, financial capital), and the openness of the channels of mobility, which allow individuals to escape the traumatized groups or social positions and liberate themselves from trauma (2004: 194)

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