

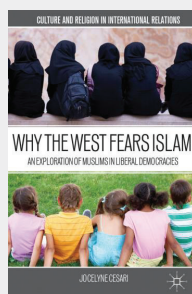
## Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracy

By Jocelyne Cesari

New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, 381 pages, \$85.00, ISBN 9781403969538.

Reviewed by Petra Kuppinger

IN *WHY THE WEST FEARS ISLAM*, Jocelyne Cesari explores, analyzes, and compares the state of affairs of Muslims in France, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and the USA. The book examines issues of Muslim identities in these countries, probes into the ugly thicket of prejudice and resentment that considerable segments of the dominant population, the media, and many politicians harbor against Muslims, and discusses Muslim civic engagement and participation. Cesari, a political scientist, examines recent dynamics of securitization in Europe and North America and reviews debates about the compatibility of Islam and Western secularism. Considerable parts of the book are based on a research project that included 55 focus groups in Paris, London, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Boston, a very detailed survey conducted among Muslims in Berlin, and a thorough reading of available survey data (e.g. Pew, Gallup). Cesari's book is less an ordinary monograph about Muslims and their experiences in these five countries, but rather a rich source book about, in particular, the situation of Muslim civic and political participation in the five countries. About half of the book are appendices that provide plentiful data about the focus groups and Berlin survey, and figures and trends about, for instance formal political participation of Muslims, lists of European Representative Bodies of Islam, overviews of "Islamopedia: A Web-Based Resource on



Contemporary Islamic Thought,” or “Salafis in Europe,” and finally a list of “Fatwas from Salafi Websites.”

In chapter one, Cesari lists common prejudices against Muslims in Europe and North America and provides abundant evidence of how individuals, groups, politicians, and surveys illustrate widely held beliefs and assumptions like “Islam is incompatible with Western and national values,” or “Muslim do not, cannot, and will not integrate.” The chapter is a long (and unfortunate) list of prejudices, Islamophobic statements, and popular resentments. Part one of the book, under the heading: “In Their Own Voices: What Is It to Be a Muslim and a Citizen in the West” (Chapters 2-4), presents copious empirical data (focus groups, Berlin survey) about how Muslims construct, understand, and situate their identities, religiosities, and religious and cultural practices. Cesari probes into her participants’ sense of community and belonging with regard to their neighborhoods, religious communities, national contexts, national Muslim communities, immigrant or ethnic communities, and the global *umma*. Throughout the book Cesari uses shorter subsections where she introduces themes and arguments and provides rich quotes and materials from her research. She analyzes her participants’ multi-layered sense of “we” that shifts based on contexts and experiences. She examines the effects of discrimination and

exclusion, but also the meaning and value that Muslims give to citizenship and political and civic participation. Part two of the book, "Structural Conditions of the Externalization of Islam" (Chapter 5-7), examines themes of the culturalization of Islam, and the increasing securitization that foster an externalization of Islam. Cesari traces the emergence and growing currency of "scientific" anti-Islamic discourses that trickle down into popular debates. She examines the culturalization of citizenship and the ill-fated creation of citizenship courses/tests that aim at "reforming" Muslim immigrants (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands). Cesari reports about how imams and their professional training have come under scrutiny, as governments fear their teachings and influence, and seek to desperately contain them. The author traces how especially visible Muslim practices (ex: the *hijab*) are targeted and controlled (ex: *hijab* or *niqab* bans) by governments. Mosque constructions remain a hypersensitive topic/undertaking in all five countries. Cesari outlines debates about "How Islam questions the universalism of western secularism," and notes that governments are caught in an ongoing process of finding and creating Muslims that best fit their mold of liberal citizens. She identifies several fields/topics which create tensions in the philosophical encounters between liberal states and pious Muslims and their communities. Cesari notes that dominant visions of and lines between the private and the public are one such fault line. Dominant liberal/secular definitions hold that religion is a private affair, while Muslims carry their religiosity into the public sphere (e.g. visibility of the headscarf). Similar, but more dramatic are debates about the nature and use of *shar'ia* (based) regulations or legal procedures. Simplistic understandings of the *shar'ia* combined with prejudices and political ideologies have purposefully and success-

fully been used in various western contexts to misrepresent Muslims and intensify resentments against them. Finally, Cesari reflects about how the "salafization of Islamic norms" influenced the "externalization of Islam." In the face of the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, this chapter is particularly timely and relevant. The book predates the emergence of ISIL, but Cesari mentions dynamics and actors that became relevant in this context. She discusses "renewed forms of Pan-Islamism" and traces the growing hegemony of Salafi voices on the internet. The powerful Salafi discourse neatly combines with dominant Western views, as both insist on the binary opposition of an essentialized Islam and an essentialized West. Cesari concludes "this visibility of Salafism leads to the confrontation of two opposite tropes. One comes from the dominant Western society, which seeks to posit Islam as its enemy, backward and incompatible with Western values of modernity, equality, and freedom. The other is the Salafi trope, in which the West is regarded as the enemy of Islam, Western developments as corruption of the Muslim faith, and Western influences as a threat to Islamic purity" (137).

The remaining 150 pages of the book consist of thirteen appendices that provide immensely useful further data for subsequent analysis. Some concern the focus groups. Almost 70 pages are dedicated to the Berlin survey (86 questions; 157 participants). Appendix No.12 "Fatwas from Salafi Websites" provides an overview of recent *fatwas* about diverse topics, like artificial insemination or cosmetic surgery. While some *fatwas* make for an interesting read, the collection seems somewhat random and is not well-explained or contextualized.

Cesari's book is a very readable account of Muslims' experiences between resentment

and active civic participation in the five countries. Cesari provides an overview of Muslim voices and experiences; she chronicles stubbornly prejudices, misrepresentations, and discrimination that Muslims face. She includes valuable quotes, numbers, and figures, as well as details from legal contexts. She introduces plentiful statements by Muslims about their overall positive sentiments about their countries. For example, in her evaluation of the Berlin data a pattern emerges that those who define themselves as pious, mosque goers, or members of mosque communities are more likely to participate in other civic activities (e.g. in schools, neighborhoods). One weak point of the book, but this is in not the author's fault, is the overall vague definition of the term Salafi that characterizes recent treatments of the phenomenon. There are growing numbers of self-identified Salafis or Salafi groups, but the larger scenery remains vague. This vagueness undermines the usefulness of *fatwas* in the appendices. To bring more clarity to these debates is not Professor Cesari's single-handed responsibility, but that of the larger scholarly community.

On a minor note, I found the book's title somewhat misleading. While Cesari dedicates space to the discussion of why indeed

“the West fears Islam,” she provides comprehensive materials about the successful participation of Muslim in their countries, and their sense of trust and support for these countries and many institutions, regardless of experiences of discrimination. Cesari's chapters chronicle how Muslims arrived and became part of their countries, despite prejudices. Perhaps a title like “Why Muslims are good Western citizens” catches less readers' attention...

Jocelyne Cesari's *Why the West Fears Islam*, is a worthwhile read and a valuable report about Muslims' lives and civic position and participation in France, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and the USA. Beyond describing and analyzing the lives of Muslims between prejudice, political suspicion, and engaged citizenship, Cesari offers her readers a glimpse behind the scenes of an ambitious trans-continental research project, and she provides some of her data to the reader for further reflection and analysis. The book is a very timely and worthy contribution to scholarly, political, and public debates about the role and participation of Muslims in the West. The book is a very informative read and valuable source book for scholars, but it is also accessible to a larger interested educated public or policy makers.