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Migration and Muslim Cultural Identity:  
Living as Outsiders, Inside Europe  
by  
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## Abstract

This research paper is a summary of an MA thesis submitted to the Kimmage Development Studies Centre, in 2010. The objective was to explore whether geographical migration has an affect on the cultural identity of Muslim migrants living in Ireland. Set against the socio-political backdrop of the terrorist attacks of 2001 and the subsequent “war on terror”, Europe and other parts of the Western world have experienced a polarisation of Muslim cultural identity and Euro-Christian cultural identity. Reductive identities and stereotyping in the past decade have contributed to the growth in perceived ‘terror’ and the ever widening culture gap.

With an interest in interculturalism, my aim was to assess whether migration affects change on Muslim cultural identity and if it contributes to the perpetuation of cultural ‘Othering’. I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with Muslim migrants in the Dublin area and an additional eight questionnaires.

Findings from my primary research suggested the experience of being a cultural ‘Other’ is significant. It also suggested that religious identity in a migrant context may serve the dual purpose of both ‘spiritual guide’ and as a means of ‘self-recognition’. Finally, my research indicated that the Muslim migrant experience in Ireland is significantly shaped by the multi-ethnic nature of this community.

**Keywords:** 'Muslims', 'Migrants', 'Migration', 'Culture', 'Cultural Identity', 'Interculturalism'

## 1. Introduction and Outline

In my research I analysed the affects of geographical displacement on the cultural identity of Muslim migrants living in Ireland, and assessed, whether migration shapes Muslim cultural identity? Central to my research was the construct of the ‘Other’ and how in a Western, “post 9/11”, security conscious society, Muslims frequently are cast in the role of ‘other’ or ‘outsider’.

Living close to the distinctly multi-ethnic Sunni Mosque on Dublin’s South Circular Road, I am aware of the growing Muslim community. However there is an almost complete disconnect between the non-Muslim and Muslim communities. It is what Wood and Landry call “a casual routine of avoidance” (2008, p.319).

At an international level, media-led debate continues to focus on right wing Political Islam. This gives rise to what Brian Murphy calls “the politics of fear” (2007, p.50). Anti-immigration and right wing sentiment have gained momentum in the past decade and we are witnessing a growing political antipathy towards Muslim migrants in particular. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2010, Geert Wilders and the anti-Islamic Party for Freedom in the Netherlands came third in the general election securing 1.5 million votes. According to journalist Vanessa Mock of *The Independent World*, his remarks were “more security, less crime, less immigration, less Islam – that is what the Netherlands has chosen” (2010).<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2. Concepts Outlined

The three concepts central to my research are,

(i) Migration (ii) Cultural identity and (iii) the ‘Other’.

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1 Following the 2014 European elections, Wilder's Party for Freedom (PVV) represents the 4th largest party in the Netherlands, securing 12.2% of the vote. While this represents a decline in support since 2010, he continues to garner significant public support for his party.

## **2. Concept 1: Migration**

The issues specific to Irish immigration may be different to the current debates taking place within other European countries, on account of Ireland's relative inexperience, emphasis on first generation migrants and the eclectic ethnic mix of migrants in Ireland. However there is certainly a lot to be learned from the experience had in other territories. It is for this reason I will look at the migration policies and practice exercised by two European countries - the United Kingdom and France, both with a significant Muslim population and a long history of immigration.

### **2.1. Multiculturalism in the United Kingdom**

Multiculturalism as an immigration model has become the widely accepted goal for British society. It was founded on the liberal thinking of Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins in the 1960's. He said it is not "a flattening process of uniformity" but the promotion of "cultural diversity and mutual tolerance" quoted in Mac Éinrí (2007, p.223). Multiculturalism strives to recognise and respect cultural difference and promote tolerance and is strongly associated with the principles of cultural relativism or cultural particularism. Schnapper describes it by saying "multiculturalism finds its origins in a society that sees itself made up of groups and communities rather than individuals" (1994, p.27).

#### **2.1.1. Criticisms of Multiculturalism**

##### **Reification of Culture**

Mac Éinrí says while Britain attempted to address forms of racism, it did this within a framework which was "based on the reification of ethnic difference" (2007, p.223). The reifying of culture involves viewing culture as something absolute and ultimately unchanging. It has a limited view of culture as existing within the 'overt realm' – all that

is seen, said and done. As opposed to acknowledging the ‘covert realm’ - the intangible aspects of culture that informs our values, beliefs and fears.

### **Multiculturalism and Stereotyping**

Mulhern talks about the “monocultural face of multiculturalism” (2009, p.43). He argues that the “multiculturalist appeal to diversity has the paradoxical effect of promoting customary stereotypes even if it deplors their negative effects” (2009, p.42). A multiculturalist tendency assumes that a given group have only *one* particular way of behaving. Cagler explains that difficulties arise when multiculturalism aims to secure the survival of cultural communities in a migrant context, as it “implies an institutionalization of culture in the public sphere, a freezing of cultural difference and a reifying of cultural communities” (1997, p.179). Therefore, the experience of migration for the migrant is an encounter with the stereotyped ‘self’ as projected by the host community. As Taylor says “our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others” (1994, p.25). While multiculturalism does aim to ‘recognise’ culture, it cannot help but to reduce and fix cultural difference; and ultimately give rise to stereotyping.

### **Power and Inequality**

Another criticism of multiculturalism is the way in which it negotiates power and exercises equality. In support of the multicultural approach to equality Tariq Modood says “a new concept of equality [is] one in which the issues of ‘representation’ have not just to do with numbers in various categories of people in certain jobs or positions of power, but with ‘representation’ as the public imagining of groups as groups” (2002, p.117). Mulhern however describes ‘diversity’ and an emphasis on cultural ‘difference’ as being “a historically constituted relation of organised inequality, dominations and subordination” (2009, p.41). Critical thinkers on diversity and multiculturalism suggest that the emphasis on ‘difference’ only serves to distinguish between majority and minority communities, with the power always resting with the hegemonic majority. Lentin argues that “multiculturalist and interculturalist politics are anchored in a liberal

politics of recognition and difference...and is failing to intervene in the uneasy interface of minority and majority power relations” (2001, p.3).

## **2.2. Assimilation and the French Model**

French notions of assimilation draw heavily on the principles of cultural universalism. It adopts a long term approach, where migrants are incorporated into the receiving society. However unlike Britain, it does not publicly support the recognition of cultural difference. French assimilation means that citizenship is based on “a contract between the individual and the state” (Mac Éinrí 2007, p.219) that, “the policy of integration at an individual not collective or ‘community’ level remains an intrinsic part of the Republican compact” (Schnapper 1994, p.151).

### **2.2.1. Criticisms of French Assimilation**

#### **Public Sphere / Private Sphere**

In 2004 a law was passed concerned with the separation of church and state which banned the “conspicuous” wearing of religious symbols in all state schools. This legislation was replaced with new legislation on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2010 which introduced a complete ban of the Burqa and Niqab in all public places. France’s Lower House of Parliament voted in favour of the ban with a majority of 335 votes to 1. One critic of the privatisation of religious expression is Hobsbawm. He argues that “religion as the ritualization of life...as a common bond of communities – is so widespread throughout history that it would be a mistake to regard it as a superficial phenomenon, or one destined to disappear” (2010, p.144). A truly secular state in my mind, is one that exercises tolerance and supports a multiplicity in faiths, not one that criminalizes individual practice.



## **Power**

The assimilationist model once again raises the issue of power. Castles says that many immigrants in France “are no longer willing to accept assimilation when it brings neither social equality nor protection from racism” (2000, p.138). There is an inherent contradiction at the heart of French assimilation, in that it promises individual equality but continues to allow exclusion, ghettoisation and racism.

## **Universalism as Reified Culture**

There is also the issue that no culture or identity is ever truly ‘universal’. The universal “is no more than a particular which at some moment has become dominant” (Laclau 1996, p.50). Laclau goes on to argue that the universal cannot exist *without* the particular and this is the foundation of democracy. He explains, “if democracy is possible, it is because the universal has no necessary body and no necessary content; different groups instead, compete among themselves to temporarily give their particularism a function of universal representation” (1996, p.57). And French republican secularism is arguably nothing more than a particularism with a universal representation. While particularism risks reifying culture, universalism denigrates difference on a global level, and that in itself is an expression of reified culture. Wood and Landry in their critique say “the West too must face up to the paradox that its reverence for its own liberal secularism born out of the Enlightenment, can breed its own fundamentalism” (2008, p.10).

## **2.3. A Model for Ireland**

The debate around inward migration and integration of Muslims and other migrants is relatively new to Irish society. This allows us the distinct advantage to learn from the experiences and mistakes made in other territories. Do we for example propose to adopt an assimilationist perspective that is typical of France? Or would Ireland be better suited to the multicultural perspective long associated with Britain? What is clear though is that we have to reevaluate the makeup of Irish society and what constitutes the cultural “we”.

Mac Éinrí says that not only is the debate in its infancy, but that the country is adopting “an unthinking and untheorised version of the UK model” (2007, p.216).

## **2.4. Concept 2: Cultural Identity**

Cultural identity can be defined in many different terms; ethnicity, faith, gender, profession, nationality and in many cases as being that which we are not. Sen says “a person has to decide on the relative importance to attach to the respective identities, which will depend on the exact context” (2006, p.19), i.e. ‘where’ you are, and ‘when’ you are. Two prominent markers of cultural identity and difference are (i) religion and (ii) nation. Firstly I will discuss religion as a marker of cultural identity with attention to its relevance to Muslim migrants.

### **2.4.1. Religion as a Marker of Cultural Difference**

Religion as a marker of cultural difference is communicated through ritual, symbolism and shared beliefs. Mulhern says “customary difference is most strongly confirmed in the plane of religion, whether as doctrine, as worship, as spiritual observance or as sanctioned behaviour” (2009, p.42).

#### **2.4.1.1. Islam: Heterogeneous or Homogeneous**

Ernest Gellner in his book *Nationalism* says the “the roots of Islam are in the transcendent and not in the soil” (1997, p.84) and also that “Islam appears capable of competing successfully with nationalism, whether or not it is in control of the state” (1997, p.89). I think the temptation is to qualify Islam as occupying a singular cultural identity, while it is probably more accurate to say, within Islam “there are several cultures sharing one religion” while in secular states “there are several religions within one culture” (Bowie 2006, p.24).

Sen (2006) in his book *Identity and Violence* warns against the dangers of reducing Muslim identity to the lowest common denominator and that “being a Muslim is not an overarching identity that determines everything a person believes” (2006, p.65). Sen’s criticism is not purely one of a descriptive mistake, but says that denying Muslims plural identities “is significant in the battle against the politicization of religion” (2006, p.71) and “has serious implications for policies for peace in the precarious world we live in” (2006, p.75). One of the reasons why Muslim cultural identity is homogenized and stereotyped in the minds of Western secular society is because Islam is believed to challenge the values of Western states. Schnapper says “the anxiety and opposition to the presence of Muslims are felt about their commitment to modern democratic societies and about their ability to integrate into European nations” because “the practice of [the Muslim] religion goes beyond the strictly religious domain” (1994, p.148).

#### **2.4.2. ‘Nation’ as a Marker of Cultural Difference**

##### **What is a Nation?**

The most obvious difference between ‘religious identity’ and ‘national identity’ is one of imagined or real borders, even though both share what Anderson calls the creation of “imagined communities” (1983, p.15).

The nation as something “imagined” is a thesis most commonly associated with Benedict Anderson (1983) and his book *Imagined Communities - Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. In it he explores the idea of the nation as an imagined political community and as “being both inherently limited and sovereign” (1983, p.15). As being defined not only by geographical boundaries but also by social boundaries. He says it is imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion” (ibid.). The imagined community offers what Anderson calls “fraternity” and “comradeship” (1983, p.16). It offers more than anything else a sense of belonging in the same way that religion engenders a sense of belonging or membership.

Theorists like Gellner (1997) propose that Islam signifies an “imagined community” on account of shared religious belonging.

#### **2.4.2.1. Transmission of the Imagined Nation**

If the strength of national identity depends on something as ephemeral as the ‘imagination’, how is a sense of real belonging sustained? Ultimately it is done with symbols – through them we recognise ourselves, with what Anderson calls “cultural artifacts” (1983, p.13). This is what in many societies is called ‘culture’ or ‘heritage’. Gellner in his book *Nationalism* says that “culture is the perpetuated and sometimes transformed and manipulated, bank of acquired traits” (1997, p.3). Acquired traits are represented in two ways, (i) the overt or tangible realm – with flags, symbols, anthems and traditions and (ii) the covert or intangible realm – values, norms, beliefs, and prejudices. But it is through “acquired traits” that a united and homogenous community is created and sustained. Nowhere else is religious identity more similar to national identity than in its use of “acquired traits”. That is, the invention and transmission of identity through symbols, traditions and beliefs.

Hobsbawm says that the invention of tradition will “occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p.4) - When we fail to ‘recognise’ ourselves, “acquired traits” and symbols take on greater importance. This is certainly relevant to the controversial banning and policing of religious dress in France and the debate around permitted and forbidden symbols.

#### **2.5. Concept 3: The ‘Other’**

The role of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ is part of the ancient human narrative. Richard Kearney in his book *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* says the human experience and most ideas of identity “have been constructed in relation to some notion of alterity...where we

discriminate against the Other in favour of the Same” (2003, p.66). In essence there is no ‘us’ if there is no ‘them’.

There are two primary reasons why society constructs the ‘Other’.

- (i) As an aid to the construction of the ‘self’.
- (ii) As a social scapegoat.

Hobsbawm says “collective identities are defined negatively” (1996, p.40). It is a defining process that belongs to a world of binary opposites. The anatomy of the ‘Other’ belongs to a social taxonomy that alters according to existing requirements. As Norval points out, “there is no ‘givenness’ or ‘naturalness’ to forms of identification” (1996, p.68), there is only an ‘us’ that exist in a ‘now’ that require an opposing ‘them’.

It is in opposition to the ‘Other’ that a “horizontal comradeship” is formed, as discussed in Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. He says “it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings” (1983, p.16). A dynamic of ‘us’ against ‘them’ creates cohesion and a bond amongst ‘us’ that is otherwise difficult to generate. As Huntington says in *The Clash of Civilisations*, “we know who we are only when we know who we are not, and definitely when we know who we are against” (1996, p.20). For example looking at the categories of ‘East’ and ‘West’, Anceschi et al. would argue that “the concept of the ‘West’ as civilisational category has arguably been strengthened by the reappearance of a certain discourse on Islam” (2009, p.1). This is done Anceschi et al. say, by presenting Islam as a “transnational political phenomenon” (2009, p.506).

The use of the ‘Other’ to create an idea of a united ‘we’ is not uncommon. Take Muslim migrants in France for instance, Malik argues that “the transformation of Islam in the French political imagination in the eighties has less to do with the nature of Islam than with problems of French decline...and the fragmentation of national identity” (1996, p.195). Secular, individualistic societies like France and also Ireland, are experiencing a

deviation from the traditional “imagined community”. Paradoxically, it is through the emergence of a threatening ‘other’ that the “horizontal comradeship” is realigned. It offers a nation the opportunity to re-state its shared values and boundaries.

### **2.5.1. The ‘Other’ as Scapegoat**

Michael Welch (2006) in his book *Scapegoats of September 11th* describes the process of ‘scapegoating’ as “a social psychological defence mechanism against confronting the real source of the frustration...it provides emotional relief for people racked with fear and anxiety” (2006, p.4). In a “post-9/11” globalised world, the enemy to Western democracy and capitalism is no longer Communism from the East, but Islamic ‘fundamentalism’ from the Arab world. The terror mindset has garnered considerable currency in the world of politics and the Muslim migrant I believe, has provided many European countries with a proficient scapegoat. We only have to look at the anti-Islamic slogans of right wing politicians such as Geert Wilders of the Netherlands.

What is ‘scapegoating’? Bo Petersson describes it as “the process by which one or several persons are ascribed the blame for the incidence of bad luck, diseases, misfortunes and sins” (2009, p.461). It also as Kearney points out, “furnishes communities with a binding identity” (2003, p.26). Scapegoating generally occurs for two main reasons, (i) as a response to insurmountable or disorientating fear (ii) as a survival mechanism when resources or safety is under threat.

Referring to the headscarf controversy in France, Emmanuel Terray (2004, p.118) explains that,

When a community fails to find within itself the means or energy to deal with a problem that challenges, if not its existence, then at least its way of being and self-image...it will substitute a fictional problem which can be mediated purely through words and symbols, for the real one that it finds insurmountable.

Terray argues that racial exclusion and isolation are the real problems in France and that the headscarf issue has fulfilled the role of “fictive problem” (2004, p.121). It is pertinent to ask, how will the subsequent 2010 ban on the Hijab and Niqab address the real problems French society faces with racial exclusion and inequality?

### **2.5.2. Stereotypes**

Hall presents the function of stereotyping as being one of imposing order on a seemingly chaotic world, “stereotypes arise when self-integration is threatened. They are therefore part of our way of dealing with the instabilities of our perception of the world...to preserve our illusion of control over the self and the world” (1997, p.285). It is then not surprising that supposed security threats and increased immigration give rise to a greater inclination to stereotyping. In essence, stereotyping is about ascribing ‘difference’ in the pursuit of meaning and control.

### **2.6. Conclusions of Literature Review**

The three central themes (i) migration (ii) cultural identity and (iii) the construction of the ‘Other’ have been explored in general terms in this section and inform my primary research with Muslim migrants in Ireland. The international perspective on each of the themes inform the breadth of my enquiry. The main points of enquiry as informed by this review of literature are:

- What is the translocational migration experience of Muslim migrants in Ireland?
- To what extent is Muslim ‘cultural identity’ shaped or changed by the migrant experience?
- Is there an experience amongst Muslim migrants in Ireland of being cast as cultural ‘Other’?

### **3. Research Methods and Approach to Research**

In my research I aimed to foster a level of understanding and insight into the main issues that were of concern to Muslim migrants in the area of cultural identity and notions of belonging. I aimed to achieve this through qualitative, inductive analysis with an interpretivistic viewpoint. This research is deductive in so far as the purpose of the research is not to articulate a pre-formed proof, but to address relevant unanswered questions.

Through non-probability sampling, I conducted 12 semi structured interviews in August of 2010 with migrants from the Muslim community - 7 men and 5 women. These represented the ethnic diversity of this community coming from Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Algeria, Latvia, Brunai, Pakistan Morocco, The Gambia and India. I also conducted a questionnaire with a Dublin based Muslim community from Pakistan of approximately 8 male contributors. Ages of all contributors ranged from early 20s to late 50's.

### **4. Findings and Analysis**

The findings in this research paper represent only a sample of the findings from the complete thesis.

#### **4.1. Migration - Immigration Policy and Integration**

On a policy level Ireland appears to position itself somewhere between the *Gasterbeiter* guest worker model associated with Germany, and the non-invasive *laissez faire* approach associated with Britain. Most contributors favoured the Irish system as compared to other European countries like the UK or France. However it should be noted, the negative



association with other European immigration policies and Ireland's relative success, may reflect nothing more than other territories abject failure. As one man said to me "*this may come as a surprise, but Irish people are actually the least racist people in Europe!*" We may be viewed as one of the least racist countries in Europe but that does not mean we do not have an issue with racism.

A 2009 OECD report says "the German experience is a lesson in the law of unintended consequences" (Keely, p.27). Similarly, Irish immigration policy lays emphasis on the first generation migrant, even though it is frequently amongst the second generation that the experience of exclusion and racism is most pronounced. And so while a number of my research contributors favoured Irish immigration policy over British and French policy, will this continue to be the view of 2nd generation Muslim migrants in Ireland?

#### **4.2. Cultural Identity - Raising Children**

Wright says, culture is not a 'thing' it is a "political process" (1998, p.13). And nowhere is the 'process' of culture more evident than in its transition from generation to generation. It reinforces who you are and what you hope to become. Child rearing in a migrant context addresses the controversial issues of (i) cultural particularism – retaining what is unique and distinct about your culture and (ii) cultural universalism – introducing cultural 'norms' that relate to 'common' cultural values or values of the host society.

Mac Éinrí argues, cultural particularism is "based on the reification of ethnic difference" (2007, p.223). One contributor, a young mother, told me "*you have to teach them [children] that you are different...you are in this country but you don't forget who you are*". However culture as 'lived', is never fixed. One father who has brought up his children in Ireland talks about the challenges of intergenerational cultural differences. "*The parents are still rooted in the culture and the children want out of the culture...it can be devastating and cause a split in families*". It represents a cultural power dynamic of majority and minority, of defining and redefining what culture is. The experience of

intergenerational cultural differences amongst Muslim migrants relates to Hall's view which says cultural identity is about "becoming as well as being" (1990, p.392). Although studies of inter-generational cultural differences have been carried out in other geographical territories, it would be of interest to conduct such a study in Ireland.

#### **4.2.1. Between Cultures**

Transitional culture, challenges ideas around 'power', 'belonging' and 'ethnocentrism'. One mother says of her adolescent children who have grown up in Ireland that "*they find themselves between cultures. They know they are Muslims but they are not accepted here and when they go to my country they are not accepted there*". This relates to the power dynamics of minority/majority and how a transitional identity can mean belonging to multiple minorities and no significant majority.

#### **4.2.2. Migration and Evolving Religious Identity**

Contributors were asked how, if at all, has the process of migration affected or influenced their religious identity or religious practice? Migrant identities as 'disrupted identities', are frequently forced to renegotiate the relative importance of each identity e.g. gender, nationality, faith, profession etc. As Sen says "the relative importance to attach to respective identities...will depend on the exact context" (2006, p.19).

A number of contributors spoke of a feeling of isolation as a Muslim in a non Muslim country. One man told me "*I was away from home, different country it was difficult to cope...Islam makes me feel closer to home*". This is the experience of a disrupted identity, removed from all that is familiar. Disruption compromises a person's ability to 'recognise' themselves. MacGréil (1996) talks about Irish attitudes to religion and the "principle of propinquity" - the aligning of groups of people to those with the closest religious affiliations to themselves. This is also true of the Muslim migrant experience as reflected with a preference to live within a Muslim community.

It was interesting to hear a number of women interviewed talk about their “*faith becoming stronger*” on account of migration and also introducing new religious practice and symbols such as wearing the head scarf. Hobsbawm (in Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) talks about the invention of tradition and how difficulties in recognising ourselves (possibly on account of migration) give rise to what Gellner calls “acquired traits” (1997, p.3) and the increased importance of certain meaningful symbols or practice. In the context of disrupted migrant identities, religion and religious symbols can help create a sense of cohesion, fraternity and community - a means of self-recognition. The 2010 banning of certain religious dress in France in my view, works towards compromising a means of cultural ‘self-recognition’. Perhaps this was the implicit intention?

#### **4.2.3. The Affects of Time**

‘Time’ it could be argued is as significant to religious identity as is ‘place’. By ‘time’ I mean political and social time. In a “post 9/11” world Islam has been politicised and I would argue vilified in Western consciousness. What are the affects of this? One woman said “*I found that Muslims in Ireland became more conservative and more religious after the 9/11 events*”. Micheál MacGréil talks about the emergence of “defensive ethnocentrism” (1996, p.96) amongst Irish people on account of British “offensive ethnocentrism”. It could be argued that the politicisation of Islam by Western thinking has resulted in a level of “defensive ethnocentrism” within Islamic thinking.

#### **4.2.4. Diversity and the Multi-National Muslim Community in Ireland**

On the subject of national identity and Islamic identity, Gellner (1997) and Ruthven (1984) argue that Islamic identity transcends national difference. The Muslim community in Ireland however is significantly multi-national in proportion to its relative size, for example, according to 2006 Census (CSO, undated) there are 32,539 Muslims drawn

from an estimated 130 different nationalities<sup>2</sup>. Contributors describe the eclectic mix of nationalities in the Mosque in Dublin and also the culturally specific interpretations of Islam. Gellner and Ruthven deny the existence of culture within religion and reduce a varied philosophical tapestry ‘Islam’, to a narrow homogenous stereotype. To view Islam as a homogenous group is to not differentiate between what one contributor called “*living Islam and Quaran Islam*”. Culture it could be argued has a meaningful role to play in the lived experience of religion.

What are however, the affects of living within a multi-national Muslim community, in a relatively small non Muslim country? Some people spoke about it as an enriching and learning experience others spoke about increased isolation and powerlessness. One contributor told me “*I don’t feel a sense of connection to the Muslim community here. After prayers I take my shoes and go back to work*”. The “imagined community” as theorised by Anderson (1983), sustains a perceived connection between individuals or groups; it relies on shared values and a sense of fraternity. Some of the contributors’ comments led me to believe that the complication of cultural differences compromised the imagined communion that one might expect to exist within a Muslim migrant community.

I do think however, this might be dependent on power dynamics; whether as a migrant you belonged to the Muslim ethnic *majority* or the Muslim ethnic *minority*. A contributor belonging to an Arabic ethnic majority told me “*in the Mosque you are all the same*”. While this represents a sense of “imagined community” that may not exist amongst Muslim ethnic minorities. One woman told me “*I am a minority within a minority...I am treated differently by the [Muslim] majority...some people they don’t treat you with respect*”.

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2 The full breakdown of those 130 nationalities/groupings was not published on the CSO website, due to confidentiality reasons. Therefore only a smaller list of specific nationalities were published with the other nationalities being combined into other nationality groups i.e. "Other African", "Other Asian" etc. (see CSO, undated)

The Muslim migrant community in Ireland is a growing community made up of many cultures and nationalities. I would argue that it is important for non-Muslims to understand the true diversity of this community and the challenges faced by those who are an ethnic minority within a religious minority.

### **4.3. The Other**

‘Insider’ and ‘outsider’ dynamics are culturally inevitable, with political and economic factors dictating who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’. One man interviewed with reference to the Irish experience of racism said “*the experiences that some migrants are having in Ireland today...I think what is happening to these people [migrants] is revenge*”. Another contributor said, “*if it’s not the Jews it’s the Muslims, if it’s not the Muslims it’s the Gypsies*”. The questions that should be asked are, what purpose does ‘othering’ of migrant Muslims serve the host Irish community? And assuming the ‘dangerous Muslim’ is a “fictive problem” (Tarray 2004, p.121), what are the ‘real’ problems it is masking? These are questions that can only be fully answered by undertaking further research with the non-Muslim Irish community.

#### **4.3.1. The Media**

The media could be considered one of the most effective means of maintaining the “imagined community” and defining the parameter of the collective “we”. Many of the research contributors when talking about the experience of stereotyping and racism made direct reference to the damage done by the media and its role in promoting xenophobia and an irrational fear of Muslims. Other contributors suggested that information disseminated by the media was not in the interest of public service, but purely for commercial gain. “*The media know that Islam is a controversial topic and they can make money*”. At a recent conference in Dublin the ‘International Islamic Leadership Justice and Peace Conference’, media consultant Farhana Ismail said “it is time for us [Muslims]

to be mainstreamed”. The representation of Muslims should include the central majority and not only those that occupy the extremes, i.e. ‘the good Muslim’ and ‘the bad Muslim’.

#### **4.3.2. Consequences of Stereotyping and Racism**

Finally I want to highlight two significant consequences of negative stereotyping and racism. The first being internalised oppression. Sean Ruth describes oppression as being “the systematic mistreatment of members of one group by members of another group” (1988, p.434). Internalised oppression is when the oppressed group come to accept their oppression as truth and use against themselves the methods of the oppressor. For example one contributor told me they accepted and understood why employers would discriminate against them. Another person expressed concerns about vulnerable people who “*suffer*” on account of negative stereotyping. These and other responses indicate a level of anxiety or internalised oppression. Taylor says, “our identity is shaped by the recognition...or the misrecognition of others” (1994, p.25). One of the consequences of internalised oppression is the narrowing of identity and the acceptance of a stereotype as being the truth.

Another significant consequence of negative stereotyping and racism is the emergence of conflict and hate. Amartya Sen warns against “politicization of religion” (2006, p.71). With reference to Huntington (1996) and *The Clash of Civilisations* Sen says “recent theses about clashing civilisations have tended to draw much on religious difference as a central characteristic of different cultures” (2006, p.59). However Huntington’s belief that we will only know who we are, when we know who we are against, is certainly reflected in the views of some of the contributors. As one man said “*when you don’t respect me you don’t accept me, this is how hate starts and brings all the Muslims together*”. And another contributor said “*the more the media attack Islam...the more followers it has*”.

In addressing the negative affects of ethnic stereotyping, racism and cultural ‘othering’ we need to interrogate and challenge assumptions around cultural identity, including Irish identity. Not doing so will mean that “civil society has been the loser, precisely at a time when there is a great need to strengthen it” (Sen 2006, p.83).

## **5. Conclusion**

Cultural identity as a representation of the way in which we see ourselves, both collectively and individually, is in no way fixed and is susceptible to trans-locational change. Based on my research, three prominent indicators of the affects of migration on Muslim cultural identity are:

- (i)** Religious commitment - Religion and culture as two deeply interconnected concepts, means that alterations to the cultural environment can also affect changes in religious practice.
- (ii)** Transference of culture - The transference of Muslim cultural identity from one generation to the next indicates the level of commitment to, and the perceived need to protect and preserve Muslim identity when in a non Muslim environment.
- (iii)** Assumed power - Migrants as cultural minorities experience a loss of power. However, pertinent to my research, it is relevant to consider the minority/majority power dynamics that also exist within the multi-ethnic Muslim community in Ireland. The experience of being an ethnic minority within a religious minority represents an absolute loss of power.

### **5.1. Consequences of ‘Othering’**

Ireland as a country has indeed redefined its “frontiers” and values in the course of one generation. It represents a redefining of the national “we”. This is done by reformulating not only what we stand for, but also what we stand against. Perpetuating irrational fear and the continued ‘othering’ of Muslim migrants has serious “implications for policies of peace” (Sen 2006, p.75). Emphasising “cultural clashes” and “civilisational” categories as outlined by Huntington (1996) and practiced by the international media, will only inhibit the creation of a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Migration is an inevitable part of the economic and social process called globalisation. It represents the exchange of ideas, technology, culture, but also fate; a perception that what happens ‘elsewhere’ can also happen here. As Sen says “when a hazy perception of culture is combined with fatalism about the dominating power of culture, we are, in effect asked to be imaginary slaves to an illusionary force” (2006, p.103). The migrant debate and in particular, the Muslim migrant debate, has generated an illusion of ‘terror’ and tends to focus on a formulated suspicion of Islam. The greatest risk that migration poses to Irish society, is in the perpetuation of irrational ‘fear’ and how this may contribute to a widening cultural gap and the narrowing of communal identity.



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