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Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue Beyond the Crisis Frame: Muslim Agency and the Contestation of European Identity

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1. The 'Crisis' in Question: Europe's Crisis of Self

Entitled *Constructing the 'European Muslim Crisis': Discourse, Policy, and Everyday Realities*, this Special Issue was born from a critical imperative: to move beyond the taken-for-granted assumption of a 'Muslim crisis' in Europe and to instead interrogate the very assembly of this narrative. The original call for papers invited scholarly contributions that would deconstruct the framing of the 'Muslim question' as in a perpetual state of emergency, exploring its origins and consequences for policy, public discourse, and the lived experiences of diverse Muslim communities. As this collection demonstrates, the term 'crisis' is not a neutral descriptor of an objective reality. It is a dominant and productive political frame and a discursive tool that shapes perception, legitimises state action, and profoundly reorders and complicates the association between European states and their Muslim populations. It is a lens through which difference is magnified into threat, and religious practice is scrutinised as a potential vector of social and political instability.

The nine papers gathered here respond to this call with remarkable depth and breadth. Taken together, they offer a multi-sited and methodologically diverse deconstruction of the 'crisis' paradigm. Their collective thesis is that what is persistently framed as an internal problem *of* European Muslims—a crisis of integration, loyalty, or compatibility with 'secular'-liberal values—is more accurately understood as a crisis *for* European Muslims, produced by a confluence of external pressures, historical legacies of colonialism and Orientalism, and contemporary political projects. This introduction, however, seeks to push this analysis further. It argues that the 'European Muslim Crisis' is, at its core, a misnomer. It is, in fact, a European crisis *per se*, a crisis of identity, ideology, and post-colonial conscience, which is experienced acutely by its Muslim populations but is fundamentally a product of Europe's own long-standing internal contradictions (Asad 2002). The 'Muslim question' serves as a convenient and visible terrain upon which Europe's deeper anxieties about its own changing identity, its waning geopolitical influence, and the fraying of its foundational liberal–democratic consensus are played out. This fraying is not incidental but symptomatic of what Wendy Brown (2019) identifies as the hollowing out of democratic principles by neoliberal rationality, creating a vacuum readily filled by nationalist and authoritarian impulses. The 'Muslim' thus becomes the figure against which a fragile and increasingly illiberal European character is fortified.

The collection systematically shifts the analytical gaze from the so-called 'Muslim question' to a more pressing 'European question': one that probes the continent's evolving identity, the limits of its ideologies, and its capacity to navigate religious and cultural

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plurality in an era of profound geopolitical and social change. The contributions reveal that the 'crisis' narrative is not merely a descriptive failure but a *productive* political tool. It manufactures a specific type of Muslim subject—the suspect, the unintegrated, the potential extremist—who then becomes the legitimate object of strengthened governance, surveillance, and control. This framework serves to justify policies that would otherwise be deemed reactionary or discriminatory (Pauly 2016). The 'crisis', therefore, is not an event to be resolved but a continuous political instrument used to manage and limit a minority population. In this sense, the 'crisis' is a mechanism of racial governmentality (Goldberg 2002), a mode of power that extends the colonial logics of people management into the heart of the present-day European metropole. It operates not only through overt coercion but also through what Achille Mbembe (2019) terms 'necropolitics', rendering certain populations, marked by their perceived religious and racial difference, as disposable and their social existence as threatening. This Foucauldian logic of producing the very subject it purports to manage is central to the entire edifice of the 'crisis'.

This introduction will navigate the terrain mapped by the contributors and expand upon it with insights from recent research and policy developments. It begins by examining the architectures of the 'crisis' narrative, exploring the symbiotic relationship between media representations—both traditional and digital—and political communication. It then turns to the sovereign gaze of the state, analysing the various policy instruments, from overt securitisation and racialised biopolitics to the subtler coercion of 'values-based' citizenship, through which this narrative is operationalised. Following this, it pivots to the lived realities of European Muslims, highlighting not only the intersectional nature of their identities but also the diverse forms of agency they employ, from creating digital counter-narratives to forging new artistic and intellectual movements. Finally, the introduction addresses the profound impact of recent geopolitical events, particularly the post-7 October 2023 escalation of the Israel–Palestine conflict, which has opened a new and volatile frontier in the formulation of the European 'Muslim question'. In concluding, it will reflect on the collection's broader implications, arguing that understanding the 'European Muslim Crisis' as a European crisis of self is essential for developing meaningful research and thought on the future of the continent.

2. Architectures of a Narrative: Media, Politics, and the Spectre of the Muslim 'Other'

The creation of the 'European Muslim Crisis' is not a spontaneous phenomenon but a methodically assembled narrative, built and sustained through the prevailing institutions of media and politics. The papers in this collection illuminate the machineries through which this narrative is forged, revealing a symbiotic relationship where political agendas and media frames reinforce one another, creating a potent feedback loop that solidifies the image of the Muslim 'Other' in the public imagination. This process has been supercharged by the rise of digital media, which has created new vectors for the rapid dissemination of Islamophobic tropes and facilitated the growth of transnational far-right networks.

Media institutions play a pivotal role in setting the terms of public debate, and as Irfan Raja's paper, "The British Broadsheet Press and the Representation of 'The Mosque' in the Aftermath of Post-7/7 Britain", demonstrates, their portrayal of Islam and Muslims is often far from neutral. Analysing coverage in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* in the two years following the 2005 London bombings, Raja finds a consistent pattern of depiction that frames the mosque, a central institution of Muslim community life, not as a place of worship, education, or social gathering, but as a primary site of radicalisation and a "security threat". This narrative effectively renders the mosque and, by extension, observant Muslims, "incompatible" with secular British society. This is achieved through

specific representational strategies. For instance, the media disproportionately focuses on a handful of fringe "hate preachers" like Abu Hamza al-Masri, granting them a platform that vastly outweighs their actual influence within the Muslim community. This selective amplification creates a distorted public image where the exception is presented as the rule, and the actions of a few are used to pathologise the many (Poole 2002; Richardson 2004). This process aligns with classic theories of moral panic, whereby a group is identified as a threat to societal values, becoming a 'folk devil' upon which broader social anxieties are projected (Cohen 2011).

While Raja's work focuses on the UK, this pattern is replicated across the region. In the Nordic countries, for example, media representations and public discussions often portray Muslim communities and their religious practices as a threat to secular homogeneity and social cohesion (Äystö 2024). In France, media narratives frequently reinforce the state's Islamophobic policies by framing mainstream Islamic practices as 'separatist' or 'extremist' (Louati and Syeda 2022). This continental trend has been exacerbated by the rise of digital Islamophobia. Online platforms have become fertile ground for the spread of anti-Muslim hate speech, where derogatory language and offensive terms are used to denigrate Muslims (Levin 2022). Research has shown that online hate speech serves as a catalyst for offline action, with virtual threats often materialising into real-world attacks, particularly against visibly Muslim women (Easat-Daas and Zempi 2024). Furthermore, social media algorithms can amplify Islamophobic content, creating echo chambers that reinforce prejudice and normalise hate.

This media-cultivated landscape provides fertile ground for political actors to weaponise Muslim distinctiveness for strategic gain. Özge Onay's paper, "Brexit's Illusion: Decoding Islamophobia and Othering in Turkey's EU Accession Discourse among British Turks," provides a formidable case study of this process. Onay argues that the 2016 Brexit movement strategically exploited the prospect of Turkey's—a predominantly Muslim nation—accession to the European Union. This was not a peripheral issue but a central plank of the Leave campaign's rhetoric, which skillfully linked anxieties about immigration and national sovereignty with deep-seated fears of Islam and its alleged links to terrorism. In this thesis, Turkey was constructed as the quintessential 'Other', a demographic and civilisational threat waiting at the gates of Europe. This political strategy draws directly from the well of Orientalism, as theorised by Edward Said (1978), though the construct has been updated for the twenty-first century. It now fuels, and is fuelled by, the international conspiracy theory of the 'Great Replacement', which posits that white, Christian European populations are being deliberately replaced by non-white, Muslim migrants (Camus and Lebourg 2017). Once confined to the political fringe, this narrative has become a central and often thinly veiled trope in mainstream political debate, evocatively illustrating the weaponisation of demographic anxiety.

The mobilisation of anti-Muslim sentiment is a hallmark of the rise of far-right populist parties across Europe. These parties, from the Rassemblement National in France to the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany and the Party of Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, have made cultural and sometimes religious objections to Muslim immigration a central part of their platform. Crucially, their rhetoric has increasingly been adopted by mainstream parties, signalling a significant shift in the European political landscape. Anti-Muslim attitudes have become a proxy for a host of other cultural grievances, including anxieties about gender equality, secularism, and national identity. This mainstreaming of Islamophobia is a key symptom of the broader crisis of European liberalism. As liberal democratic consensus weakens, politicians across the spectrum have found it electorally advantageous to embrace illiberal rhetoric and policies that target minority populations.

A crucial insight emerges when comparing Raja's analysis of the post-7/7 period with Onay's study of the Brexit campaign a decade later: the remarkable adaptability of Islamophobic tropes. The object of fear shifts, but the underlying subject, the Muslim, remains the constant menace. In the immediate aftermath of the London bombings, the threat was framed as internal, located within the physical, local spaces of British mosques. A decade later, during the Brexit debate, the threat was externalised and reconfigured. It was no longer primarily about radicalisation in a Leeds mosque but about the potential influx of millions of Turkish Muslims. This demonstrates that the 'crisis' is not tethered to a single, static issue like terrorism. Instead, it functions as a *floating signifier* (cf. Hay et al. 2013), a versatile political tool that can be attached to whichever anxiety—be it national security, border control, or cultural identity—is most politically salient at a given moment. The figure of the Muslim becomes, in the language of affect theory, a container for 'sticky' negative emotions, such as fear and disgust, which are then circulated within the body politic to consolidate an embattled 'us' against a threatening 'them' (Ahmed 2013). This reveals Islamophobia not as a mere reaction to specific events, but as a structural and enduring feature of European political discourse, an affective economy of hate that is capable of adapting its form to suit the needs of the time.

3. The Sovereign Gaze: Securitisation, Policy, and the Governance of Muslim Life

The discursive configuration of the 'European Muslim Crisis' is not merely an academic or media spectacle; it is translated into tangible state policies that regulate, discipline, and govern the lives of Muslims. This process, often termed the securitisation of Islam, involves framing Islam and Muslim practices as an "existential threat" to the nation's core identity or security, thereby justifying "extraordinary measures" that often bypass the norms of liberal democratic politics (Buzan et al. 1998; Cesari 2009). The papers in this collection offer a comparative perspective on these modes of power, but a broader analysis reveals a Europe-wide trend towards increasingly illiberal forms of control that are symptomatic of a deeper crisis within European liberalism itself. This authority extends beyond security to a form of racialised biopolitics, where the state seeks to manage the very life of its Muslim population, defining what constitutes an acceptable, 'integrated' Muslim subject.

The logic of securitisation operates by constructing Muslims as a suspect community, justifying heightened surveillance, restrictive legislation, and discriminatory practices. This is not just a speech act but a policy-making process that affects immigration laws, anti-discrimination measures, and security policies. However, the state's intervention goes deeper than mere security. It constitutes a form of biopolitics, where the state actively seeks to regulate and shape the religious, cultural, and social life of its Muslim inhabitants. This is a *racialised* biopolitics because it targets a group defined by a combination of perceived religious and ethnic characteristics, drawing on long-standing colonial and Orientalist tropes. The goal is to produce a 'good Muslim' who is politically docile and culturally assimilated, while pathologising the 'bad Muslim' who adheres to mainstream religious practices. As compellingly articulated by Mahmood Mamdani (2005) in the context of the 'War on Terror', this binary has been thoroughly adopted within European policy, becoming the central organising principle for control over Muslim life. The state, in effect, reserves the right to define authentic Islam, rewarding those who conform to its secularised, privatised model and punishing those who do not.

This is most starkly exemplified by France. In their paper, "French Islamophobia: How Orthopraxy Is Conceptualised as a Public Peril", Christina Lienen and Samir Sweida-Metwally detail a process of "institutionalised Islamophobia". They argue that the French

state, under the guise of *laïcité*, thoroughly redefines mainstream Islamic orthopraxy, such as wearing the hijab or consuming halal food, as signs of 'extremism' or 'separatism'. It then actively promotes a state-sanctioned "French Islam", stripped of its core theological and practical commitments, as the only acceptable form of Muslim expression. This represents a direct and pervasive form of biopolitical control, where the state seeks to remake the religious subject in its own image. This is not an isolated French phenomenon but the most extreme manifestation of a broader European trend.

A more subtle, but no less potent, approach is found in the UK and Germany, which can be described as 'values-based' governance. This paradigm, often referred to by scholars as 'civic integrationism' (Joppke 2007), represents a decisive and coercive turn in European integration policy. This model is explored in two papers. Muzaffer Can Dilek's "Reconciling British Values with Professional Identity" examines the impact of the legal requirement for teachers to promote 'Fundamental British Values'. Similarly, Hira Amin, Linda Hyökki, and Umme Salma's paper, "The European Muslim Crisis and the Post-October 7 Escalation", analyses how Germany has incorporated questions about Israel's right to exist into its citizenship tests. In both cases, citizenship is transformed from a stable legal status into a continuous performance of loyalty to a set of state-defined values. This creates a precarious position for Muslims, who are perpetually required to prove their allegiance and whose character is subjected to constant scrutiny.

This shift towards values-based citizenship is a key policy development across Europe (Gobel et al. 2018). It represents a move away from multicultural models of mixing towards a more assimilationist logic. New citizenship and integration laws in countries like France increasingly emphasise a commitment to "the principles of the Republic" and proficiency in the national language as prerequisites for settlement and naturalisation. While framed in the neutral language of civic values, these policies disproportionately target Muslims and function as a mechanism of exclusion, constructing them as culturally and ideologically alien. This approach is a direct symptom of Europe's own identity crisis; unable to define a positive, inclusive European identity, states resort to defining it negatively, against the imagined 'Other' of the unintegrated Muslim. A third model, which Oleg Yarosh terms 'soft securitisation', is evident on Europe's periphery. In "Negotiating Wasatiyyah: Soft Securitisation and Civic Activism in Ukraine", Yarosh describes a context where the state distinguishes between 'good', indigenous forms of Islam and 'bad', foreign-influenced Islam, thereby creating a hierarchy of acceptability. While less totalising than the French model, it still represents a significant form of state surveillance.

Despite their national specificities, these models of authority reveal a striking convergence in their underlying logic. Whether through overt re-engineering of religious practice, the imposition of value-based loyalty tests, or the selective targeting of organisations, the ultimate goal is the production of a "moderate" Muslim subject. This suggests that the 'European Muslim Crisis' is less a crisis *of* Muslims struggling to integrate and more a crisis *of the European state* confronting communities it perceives as ungovernable in their authentic forms. The state's response is not to adapt its own models of citizenship or secularism but to attempt to remake the Muslim subject into a more manageable entity.

4. Lived Realities: Intersectionality, Agency, and the Negotiation of the Everyday

While state discourses and policies attempt to impose a monolithic and often pathologised identity upon European Muslims, the lived realities of these communities are infinitely more dynamic and resilient. Shifting the focus from the top-down gaze of power to the bottom-up standpoint of everyday life, the papers in this collection challenge homogenising narratives and reveal a rich tapestry of experience shaped by intersectionality,

agency, and the constant negotiation of identity. This approach resonates strongly with the scholarly framework of "lived religion", which prioritises the practices, beliefs, and material realities of ordinary people over the formal doctrines and structures of religious elites (Hall 1997; McGuire 2008; Ammerman 2021). We see how European Muslims are not merely objects of state policy but are active subjects who are creating new forms of community, culture, and resistance.

The very category of 'European Muslim' is an abstraction that obscures a vast diversity of ethnic, sectarian, migratory, and class-based identities. Sayed Mahdi Mosawi's paper, "Everyday Lived Islam among Hazara Migrants in Scotland", evocatively illustrates this by focusing on a less visible community: Hazara Shia refugees from Afghanistan. Mosawi's ethnographic research highlights how the intersection of minority religious status (Shia), minority ethnic status (Hazara), and refugee status profoundly reconfigures religious practice. His work provides an empirical case for the necessity of an intersectional analysis, one that understands, in line with Kimberlé Crenshaw's (2013) seminal work, that systems of power such as racism, religious discrimination, and state policies on migration are not separate but interlocking, producing unique and compounded forms of subordination and experience. For his interlocutors, resettlement in a secular, pluralistic context leads not to a reinforcement of rigid group identity but to a more "individualised, privatised, and elective" form of Islam. This finding directly challenges the state's securitising gaze, which tends to view Muslims as a "single solidary group" and imagines religious communities as enclosed and resistant to change.

European Muslims are neither a monolithic group nor passive recipients of state policy or media discourse; they are diverse and active agents who interpret, resist, and reshape their circumstances. An example of this agency is found in Zehra Yılmaz's "Reimagining Ummah: The Role of Third-Generation Immigrant Women in the Transformation of Turkish Islam in Europe". Yılmaz's fieldwork in the Netherlands reveals a generational shift driven by young, third-generation Turkish–Dutch women. Rejecting the nationally bound and culturally enclosed "Turkish Islam" promoted by their parents' generation, these women are pioneering an "'opening up' strategy". They are moving towards a more spiritual, deterritorialised, and transnational understanding of the *Ummah* that transcends ethnic and national loyalties. This represents a form of gendered agency, where women—often stereotyped as the passive bearers of tradition—emerge as the most dynamic transformers. This agency is also increasingly visible in the digital realm. European Muslims are using social media to create *counter-narratives* that challenge dominant Islamophobic discourses. These online spaces function as vital 'counterpublics' (Fraser 1990), alternative arenas of speech where marginalised groups can formulate and circulate their own interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. These digital diasporas (Brinkerhoff 2009) allow for the formation of global communities of solidarity, the sharing of alternative perspectives, and the organisation of political action. Campaigns using hashtags to defend Islam following terror attacks, for instance, demonstrate how digital platforms can be used to contest negative media frames and build a positive alternative to extremist propaganda. Beyond resistance, these digital spaces are also sites of cultural production. European Muslim artistic and intellectual movements are flourishing, with artists, writers, and thinkers creating works that explore the complexities of hybrid identities and contribute to a richer, more pluralistic European culture. These movements challenge the binary of 'Muslim' versus 'European', demonstrating that these identities are not mutually exclusive but can be creatively and productively intertwined.

Living within a pervasive 'crisis' narrative exacts a significant psychological toll. Muzaffer Can Dilek's paper applies Anthony Giddens's theory of ontological security to understand the subjective experience of Muslim teachers in England. Giddens (1991) de-

fines ontological security as a sense of continuity and order in one's self-identity and social environment. Dilek finds that the constant scrutiny of their loyalty and the securitisation of their professional identity places Muslim teachers in a "fragile position", grappling with profound ontological *insecurity*. This insecurity manifests as a deep ambivalence, with some teachers adopting an uncritical stance towards policies like 'Fundamental British Values' in a search for safety, while others engage in resistance at the cost of further alienation. This framework robustly captures the human cost of the 'crisis' construction, revealing how it destabilises the very sense of self and belonging for those it targets.

These varied responses—individualisation, transnationalism, digital resistance, and artistic creation—expose a fundamental paradox at the heart of the European state's project of control. The intense pressure to conform to a singular, state-defined model of the 'good Muslim' does not produce homogeneity. Instead, it paradoxically generates greater diversity and fragmentation in lived religious and political expression. The state's standardising impulse fractures the community, pushing individuals and groups in multiple directions. Yılmaz's third-generation women look beyond the nation-state to a global *Ummah*. Mosawi's Hazara migrants retreat into a privatised, individual faith. Dilek's teachers are caught in a debilitating bind between conformity and resistance. In each case, the state's attempt to engineer a compliant, integrated national subject backfires, producing outcomes that are far more unpredictable than intended.

5. After the 7th of October: Palestine as the New Frontier of the European 'Muslim Question'

The period since the original call for papers was issued has been dominated by a geopolitical event of seismic significance: the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, and Israel's subsequent devastating genocidal violence in Gaza. This has not created a new crisis but has acted as an immense accelerant, radically intensifying the pre-existing dynamics of the 'European Muslim Crisis' and opening a new, volatile frontier for the invention of the 'Muslim question'. The conflict has become a new litmus test for loyalty and belonging, enhancing the widespread securitisation of pro-Palestinian activism and a documented surge in Islamophobia across the region.

The paper by Amin, Hyökki, and Salma, "The European Muslim Crisis and the Post-October 7 Escalation," in this Special Issue provides a systematic analysis of this new reality. They show how the Israel–Palestine conflict has been weaponised as a new and potent "yardstick to demarcate the European, civilised 'us' vs. the Muslim 'Other'. This is operationalised through concrete state policies. In the UK, the government has updated its definition of extremism to encompass non-violent ideologies and pro-Palestine activism, as well as proscribing specific non-violent and Palestinian activist groups as 'terrorist'. In Germany, the state has moved to include questions on Israel's right to exist in its citizenship tests, making allegiance to Germany's *raison d'état* a prerequisite for naturalisation. These actions continue broader European processes of securitising pro-Palestinian support. Across the continent, governments have responded to mass protests with measures that include protest bans (particularly in France and Germany), police crackdowns, and the weaponisation of anti-terrorism legislation against activists. This has created a chilling effect, particularly for Muslim civil society organisations, which face heightened surveillance, funding cuts, and, in some cases, outright dissolution. A key discursive strategy in this process is the deliberate conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism, a move that serves to delegitimise criticism of the Israeli state and frame solidarity with Palestinians as a form of hate speech. This political manoeuvre attempts to foreclose the very possibility of a position, articulated by thinkers such as Judith Butler (2012), that draws upon Jewish ethical traditions to critique Israeli state policy and advocate

for cohabitation. This environment has predictably led to a documented and alarming surge in Islamophobic incidents across Europe, as the figure of the pro-Palestinian protestor becomes a new focal point for anti-Muslim animus.

The response from European Muslim communities to this intensified pressure has marked a significant evolution in their political engagement. The final paper in this collection, on "The Muslim Vote Campaign in the UK", analyses this shift through the lens of Social Movement Theory. The paper argues that The Muslim Vote (TMV), a British pressure group, emerged by capitalising on a "political opportunity structure": widespread voter fatigue with the two main political parties. Part of this voter fatigue emerges from a profound anger within Muslim communities at the Labour and Conservative leaderships' unwavering support for Israel's military actions. TMV successfully mobilised resources, including decades of community organising experience and a new generation of politically savvy youth, and framed its movement around venerable, resonant ideas of justice for Palestine and the intercontinental solidarity of the *Ummah*. Its success in the 2024 UK General Election, where it helped unseat several high-profile Labour MPs in constituencies with large Muslim populations, signals a potential paradigm shift in British Muslim politics. It represents a move away from traditional loyalty to the Labour Party and towards a more assertive, strategic, and issue-based model of electoral participation (Akhtar 2024). This development can be understood using the framework of New Social Movement Theory (NSMT), which posits that contemporary movements are often driven by issues of identity, culture, and human rights rather than purely economic grievances. TMV exemplifies this, mobilising a collective identity around a moral and political cause that transcends traditional class-based politics.

The post-7 October conjuncture marks a crucial evolution in the establishment of the 'Muslim crisis'. The primary threat narrative is shifting. While the figure of the Muslim as a *potential terrorist* has not disappeared, it is being supplemented by the figure of the Muslim as a *disloyal political subject*. The danger is no longer framed solely in terms of physical violence but in terms of ideological subversion. The new policies emerging in the UK and Germany are aimed at policing thought, speech, and political allegiance. The emergence of a potent political force like The Muslim Vote is a direct response to this shift. European Muslims are no longer simply defending their right to be religious in private; they are asserting their right to be a political constituency that can hold the state accountable in public. This represents a fundamental challenge to a European political order that has long sought to depoliticise Islam and confine it to the private sphere.

6. Advancing Islamophobia

While the analyses in this collection contribute significantly to the understanding of structural and cultural Islamophobia, the intellectual and political landscape remains partially obscured by a resilient liberal consensus. This consensus often insulates a specific variant of anti-Muslim sentiment from critique, framing it not as prejudice but as a principled defence of secularism, free expression, or gender equality (Kundnani 2021; Farris 2017). This "liberal Islamophobia" does not rely on the crude tropes of the far right but operates through a more subtle, yet pernicious, logic that constructs Muslims as a unique challenge to the normative foundations of European modernity (Mamdani 2005). It thrives within a framework where the criticism of Islam and Muslims is positioned as an act of intellectual courage, thereby enriching a particular intellectual landscape while simultaneously reinforcing the marginalisation of the very communities it purports to analyse. This phenomenon creates a difficult terrain for anti-racist scholarship, where challenging this form of Islamophobia can be misconstrued as an attack on core liberal values, such as freedom of speech or feminist principles (Scott 2018). The result is a bifurcation in the discourse, where

overt bigotry is condemned while its more sanitised, intellectually legitimised counterpart is permitted to flourish within mainstream political and academic circles.

This "enlightened" form of Islamophobia functions by establishing a clear binary between a supposedly rational, progressive, and secular European self and a dogmatic, patriarchal, and irredeemably traditional Muslim other (Asad 2003). Within this schema, mainstream Islamic practices—from veiling to dietary observances—are interpreted through a hermeneutic of suspicion and presented as evidence of a refusal to integrate or an allegiance to values incompatible with democratic life. This discursive strategy is particularly evident in debates surrounding the French model of *laïcité*, which has been deployed to justify coercive state policies that disproportionately regulate the lives of Muslim women (Selby 2016). The intellectual architecture of this position draws upon a specific reading of the Enlightenment, one that is weaponised to pathologise Muslim identity and demand a form of assimilation that necessitates the renunciation of public religious expression. Consequently, a climate is fostered where anti-Muslim positions are rendered intellectually defensible, provided they are articulated within the accepted lexicon of liberalism, a dynamic that ultimately serves to normalise discriminatory attitudes and policies.

The theoretical and practical application of an explicitly anti-racist framework to confront Islamophobia remains underdeveloped, a limitation that hampers the pursuit of genuine social justice. For decades, European anti-racist theory and activism have predominantly focused on colour-based racism, leaving them ill-equipped to fully conceptualise and combat the phenomenon of cultural racism, of which Islamophobia is a primary manifestation (Sayyid 2022; Lentin 2004). The persistent categorisation of Islamophobia as a matter of religious intolerance rather than a racial project is a critical error, as it fails to apprehend how Muslims are racialised as a distinct and threatening group, irrespective of their individual piety or national origin (Garner and Selod 2015). This theoretical lacuna means that policy interventions are frequently misdirected, focusing on interfaith dialogue or education about religion, while leaving the underlying structures of racial governance untouched (Goldberg 2009). A truly anti-racist approach would move beyond a "culture-blind" or "colour-blind" liberalism and instead directly confront the ways in which the state and its institutions produce and manage racialised populations (Bonilla-Silva 2017).

Consequently, the continued absence of a robust, mainstreamed, anti-racist analysis of Islamophobia ensures that fundamental questions of equality, equity, and fairness remain inadequately addressed. When Islamophobia is perceived merely as a critique of ideas, the systemic disadvantages experienced by Muslims in employment, housing, and the justice system are obscured or explained away as the consequence of cultural failings or a lack of integration. This deflects from the reality that Islamophobia functions as a technology of race, allocating privilege and penalty along lines of perceived civilisational belonging (Meer 2015). Achieving substantive social justice requires a paradigm shift: one that moves the debate from the terrain of theological dispute or cultural anxiety to the solid ground of racial equality. For fairness and transparency to be realised, the operations of liberal Islamophobia must be made visible and challenged not as a legitimate viewpoint in the marketplace of ideas, but as a sophisticated and exclusionary racial ideology that impedes the full citizenship and participation of millions of Europeans (Sian 2019). This shift is an essential prerequisite for any meaningful advance towards a genuinely plural and equitable society.

7. Conclusions: Beyond the Crisis, the European Crisis per se

The nine papers assembled in this Special Issue, alongside the broader research incorporated into this introduction, collectively fulfil and extend the intellectual ambition set out in the original call: to critically deconstruct the 'European Muslim Crisis'. By systematically

moving from the discursive architectures of the crisis narrative to the state policies that operationalise it, and finally to the diverse and agentic lived realities of European Muslims, this collection de-naturalises the concept of 'crisis'. It exposes it not as an objective social reality but as a contingent and deeply damaging political project. More fundamentally, it reframes the entire debate, arguing that the 'European Muslim Crisis' is a projection of a much deeper, internal European crisis.

This is a crisis of identity, where post-colonial European nations struggle to define a positive, inclusive sense of self in an era of globalisation and demographic change, resorting instead to defining themselves against a racialised Muslim 'Other'. It is a crisis inherent within liberalism, where the language of tolerance, pluralism, and individual rights masks the advancement of parochial, assimilationist policies that prioritise security and cultural homogeneity. It is also a crisis of conscience, where the unresolved legacies of colonialism continue to shape existing power relations, reproducing patterns of supremacy that pathologise and discipline minority communities. The framing of Muslims as the 'problem' is a political strategy of displacement, a way for European states to avoid confronting these profound internal failures. Muslims are not the cause of such a crisis; they are the screen onto which the crisis is projected. The implications of this collection extend into several core academic debates. For the study of secularism, it reveals European secularism is far from a neutral principle but a discriminatory tool of governance. For the study of integration, it demonstrates the failure of top-down, 'values-based' assimilationism and points to the need for new models of citizenship that can accommodate genuine heterogeneity. For the field of Muslim Studies, it offers a series of nuanced, empirically grounded accounts that move beyond monolithic conceptions of 'European Islam'.

Finally, this collection opens up several vital trajectories for future research. The emergence of new political formations like The Muslim Vote calls for longitudinal studies on their sustainability and impact on national politics. The comparative analysis of different securitisation models invites further research into their effects on Muslim civil society. The proliferation of digital Islamophobia and online counter-narratives requires urgent scholarly attention and, perhaps most broadly, the critical analysis of evolving legal definitions of 'extremism' and 'values' demands continued vigilance, as these concepts have intense consequences for the civil liberties of all citizens. The 'crisis' may be a construction, but its effects are real. It is the task of critical thinking—to which this Special Issue hopes to have contributed—to continue to expose the logic of that invention and amplify the voices of those who live within its shadow. More than this, critical scholarship must contribute to dismantling the architecture of this shadow and articulating alternative and emancipatory political futures. It must challenge the post-colonial melancholia that grips the region and instead work towards the vision of a genuinely plural Europe (Gilroy 2004).

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List of Contributions

1. Amin, Hira, Linda Hyökki, and Umme Salma. 2024. The European Muslim Crisis and the Post-October 7 Escalation. *Religions* 15: 11852.
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