

The EUROPEAN PUBLIC DEBATE on ISLAM



In the aftermath of the Swiss referendum on minarets, European countries have debated simultaneously on how Muslim immigrants could make more strenuous efforts to integrate into European society and reassert their loyalty to national communities in order to avoid conflict with European religious and cultural traditions.

As consequence, many politicians questioned the actual merits of multiculturalism and supported the very explicit rejection of cultural differences perceived as divisive.

The present study investigates political speeches on Muslims integration. What has emerged is a new consensus reaffirming the respect for diverse cultures and religions but demanding political conformity with European cultural “values.”

The aim of this consensus is not to fight the conditions of “social exclusion” but to regulate Muslim immigrants through “civic integration.”

It is precisely when Islam is perceived as illiberal that multiculturalism is most needed to promote mutual understanding

Aims of the research

There are three primary aims of this study:

- 1) to identify how political speech on Islam finds consensus, acceptance, and legitimacy on the national and transnational levels and turns up simultaneously in the mass media and other forms of public discourse;
- 2) to identify which arguments have been conducive to discourse shift from a “liberalism” of nondiscrimination and equal opportunities to a “new” liberalism of power and discipline.
- 3) to ask how Islam and Muslim immigration is debated simultaneously across Europe and to look at this public debate as an indicator of Europe’s political transformation.

Methodology

The central tenet of the research design is the conviction that an analysis of discourse is necessary to understand how language participates in the shaping of political relations. For this reason, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been selected because it systematically explores discursive practices in wider social and economic structures embedded in the public sphere.

In addition, a case study approach is chosen to investigate the existence of a common public discourse in three countries that are commonly taken as representatives of divergent approaches—the “multicultural” United Kingdom, “assimilationist” France, and “segregationist” Germany.