In October 1998, The Middle East and West Europe Centers of the University of California at Berkeley jointly sponsored a two-day symposium, ‘Islam and the Changing Identity of Europe: Culture, Politics and Citizenship in an Era of Globalization’. The programme focused on the deep ideational changes which have been taking place in Europe due to the Muslim populations which have sprung up in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and elsewhere. The symposium explored political and cultural aspects of the emerging identities of these relatively new citizens—how they view themselves and how they are viewed by non-Muslim Europeans, as well as how the relatively indigenous populations of Europe are being forced to rethink their own collective identities, both as Europeans and as citizens of specific countries.

In their symposium prospectus and introductory remarks the organizers argued that these are no longer migration issues in the traditional sense, because most Muslims in Europe are no longer migrants. Muslim populations have been present in Europe for several generations, although many Europeans have been slow to recognize that Islam is now a European religion. Paul Lubbeck (UC Santa Cruz) discussed the economic and sociological issues facing Europe, particularly those issues pertaining to Islamic networks and the challenges they present to citizenship claims. Lubbeck noted that the contributions of future Muslim migrants to Europe’s economy, and hence to its global competitiveness, will not reside primarily in menial labour. Rather, migration trends from Muslim majority countries to European form of Islam, is emerging, but he argues both the inevitability and the desirability of retaining non-European heritages and promoting cultural diversity. Finally, how powerful a force is Islam in determining identity? Some suggest that other factors – such as ethnic, national, regional, tribal, class or economic identities – can often be stronger than religion. The identities of Europe’s Muslim populations are not fixed but vary in both the short term and historically.

Several speakers cautioned against relying on attributing causality to Islam, noting that there are important differences amongst Muslims in Europe – especially between Islamic activists and secularists. While many Muslims resist Euro-American post-industrial culture on moral grounds, they often thrive in the infra-structure of globalization, which is the product of capitalism. In any case, there was general agreement that both Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe are articulating new citizenships and new ethnicities through a continuing diachronic process of global integration.

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