

# THE FALL OF MULTICULTURALISM IN EUROPE AND MUSLIMS



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While the traces of Muslims in Western Europe were wiped off to some extent with the fall of the Andalusian civilization in Spain, an attempt was also made to dispel their existence in Eastern Europe by the occupations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, this situation reversed within the last 100 years and especially since the 1950's. After being destroyed in the World War II, Europe needed a great amount of manpower to reconstruct itself and improve the infrastructure rapidly. To do so, Muslims were intensively moved to Western Europe, especially to the UK, France, and Germany, to meet the cheap labor force demand. Muslims also inclined to other countries in time.<sup>1</sup>

The Muslim population which wasn't seen as a problem then is now seen as a sign of a major crisis. Movements of migration which are seen as more of a problem of the globalism, affect political, economic and sociological dynamics of governments in various ways. Because rich frac-

tions of Europe aren't willing to share their wealth with these workers, a content-wide movement of hostility against the Muslim and foreigners is on the rise in European communities, whose welfare levels are many times higher than that of the rest of the world. This problem that the European Union (EU) is facing, displays a growth parallel to the rise of the number of migrations from outside of this region. Making lots of arrangements in this regard, Europe tried to shape its own politics about the migration flow.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, it is hard to talk about a common politics of European countries regarding the immigrants and this remains a serious subject of discussion in the union.

## **Multiculturalism and Being a Multiculturalist**

Multiculturalism as a new approach, according to the conceptual framework, dates back to the oldest ages when the mankind existed. Throughout



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the history, people interacted with communities that are different from themselves, in terms of politics, economy and many more fields, and coexisted with various groups. Thus, while it is known that multiculturalism is not a new thing in the field of history, it expresses the coexistence of individuals who have different cultural, ethnic, religious, and philosophical backgrounds, in modern societies in the manner of nation-state model.<sup>3</sup> Multiculturalism requires the recognition of present differences of all individuals in political and public areas. Three types of approaches regarding this concept were asserted. These are:

- Multiculturalism as a reality
- Multiculturalism as an ideology
- Political multiculturalism

The approach of reality emphasizes the suitability of taking steps for the national minorities of Europe in the field of politics. Ideological approach defends taking steps to acknowledge variety. As for political approach, it underlines the acknowledgment of all minorities, not limiting the changes in the legal area, and applying the changes in social life.<sup>4</sup>

The ideology of multiculturalism, on the other hand, is normative. It contributes to multiculturalism and argues that the coexistence of different groups, who protect their values, in a nation where a social harmony, as well as social and economic equality, are provided, is important.<sup>5</sup>

## The Outlook of Multiculturalism in Europe

The amnesia that Europe is experiencing caused the emergence of the understanding which argues that the 19th century Europe was much more homogenous and especially the immigrants who came to the country after WWII caused some deep cracks in terms of society. Besides this, many academics claim that Europe became much more multicultural in consequence of the migrations that it received from outside of the region. These claims which are correct to an extent, are deficient in reality.

For example, only half of the population was able to speak French during the French Revolution. There were some major differences in lifestyle between the poor fraction who lived in the countryside of France and the people who lived in urban areas. Similarly, in the Victorian Era of the UK, there were some large gaps between the working class and people who resided in cities, in regard to culture.

The perception of “master and slave”, which was present back then, is a tangible indicator of the differences in the society. Therefore, that perception prevented individuals from having a friendly relationship. The thought that the lack of integration of immigrants is greater when compared to earlier periods; is also a product of the historical amnesia of Europe. For instance; in 1903, the UK complained about the immigrants’, who came to European countries, the tendency of living according to their own lifestyles. The British Administration tried to stop the flow of Jewish migration with a law that it issued in 1905 on the grounds that individuals who migrate to the region still live according to their own religious style and cultural tendencies. It is still debated whether contemporary Europe is more pluralist than the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. This situation is about the change of what people extract from variety. In other words, the perception that earlier communities were far more homogeneous because the way that modern people depict the social differences changed; left a mark on their minds. However, this situation reversed; and Europeans always tended to discriminate and outcast some groups. In earlier periods, this tendency was towards the poor fractions of their own community; afterward, it shifted to different groups based on religion, race, and gender in the modern era.<sup>6</sup>

In today’s Europe, cultural variety feeds on different sources. First of these is the national or local minorities.<sup>7</sup> These groups who maintain their existence and have a wide range of rights and freedom are culturally under protection. Individuals belonging to these groups see themselves apart from the majority and demand autonomy or self-determination. Northern Ireland and Basques

can be shown as an example of this situation. Another source of multiculturalism in Europe is the immigrants. The immigrants, whose numbers rise with the Family Reunification Policy, are named “immigrants” in Holland, “immigrant workers” in France, “foreigners” in Germany, and “racial minorities” in the UK.<sup>8</sup>

## The Fall of Multiculturalism in Europe

Communities with different types of ethnicities and religions developed a new kind of resistance thanks to their consciousness of “Being aware of oneself” which emerged as a result of globalization; against the nation states which have common history, language, religion, culture, and the idea of future.<sup>9</sup> The evolution of concepts like equality and freedom, which belong to the modern era, to a state where it includes sociocultural field; and the thoughts of individuals who think that the only way that they can have status and reputation is getting recognized at a social level; made aforementioned resistance even sharper. Thoughts and ideologies which started to move freely due to the communication and mutual interaction which increased as a result of cultural globalization with complex economic structures; accelerated individuals’ process of being aware of oneself. However, this situation is causing unconformity between politic and cultural structures in communities that live under nation-state model in the modern world.<sup>10</sup>

While lots of approaches are asserted about how the problems that were caused by ethnic variety which stands up against the world as a fact which is hard to reject; Europe that makes its moves to create especially a common language and history, carries out various movements to protect its cultural heritage and to solve the problems of “national minorities” and “immigrants” with a minimum damage. How successful Europe at doing this is open to discussion.

A short time ago, many Europeans saw the multiculturalism as a way out for the solution of societal problems. Hence, the fact that the Islamophobic protests, racism, and hostility against foreigners

reached a high level is an indicator of the necessity for this viewpoint. However, in the system which keeps on changing and transforming, the way national and populist discourses find the response at a grassroots level negatively changed the EU’s multiculturalist approach, which is implemented even though very slowly. Discourses about dangers of multiculturalism belonging to the former president of the UK, David Cameron and Chancellor of German, Angela Merkel resulted in the rise of the right wing which surrounded Europe from end to end.<sup>11</sup>

The way people believe that immigrants who come from outside of the region cannot completely adapt to the community lies behind this sudden change of viewpoint of the EU on multiculturalism.

According to this point of view, immigrants that haven’t adapted to the community are posing a threat to the European civilization and this situation denudes the communal unification and undermines the national identities. However, the research regarding the violent events, social injustice, and inequality shows that the problem of Europe doesn’t stem from multiculturalism, yet it arose from “Multiracism”. European countries followed different multiculturalist policies for the foreigners who reside within their borders. Accepting that specific countries have variety in them, these policies also indirectly suppose that this variety ends at the border of minority communities. Trying to institutionalize variety by labeling people according to their ethnicity and culture, Europe became successful at leading the divisions that it created. For instance, Germany encouraged immigrants to live in the country instead of giving them citizenship. It rejected the citizenship of Turks and other ethnicities which filled the needed labor force after WWII by treating them like they are strangers. Today, only 800.000 Turkish people in Germany among 3.000.000 was able to receive citizenship. On the other hand, France refused to apply multiculturalist policies and became persistent on forcing all of its citizens to adapt to its secular traditions. For example, the main reason behind the distress of



Muslim people regarding Hijab stems from the fact that the French prefer assimilation policies to pluralist policies. All of these approaches that were adopted by Western countries resulted in the same consequences throughout Europe; divided communities, alienated minorities, and resentful citizens.<sup>12</sup>

## Muslims' situation

Since 1970 till now, the perception of EU countries regarding the fact that immigrants pose a threat to European culture hasn't changed; on the contrary, it increased exponentially. Europe's prejudicial and violent attitude, especially towards individuals who have Muslim identity, has been on a rising line. The fact that fascism wave is proceeding in Europe similar to the one in 1930 caused negative attitude towards immigrants especially Muslims to grow into a worrisome level.

In contrast to EU's thought that they would leave after meeting the employment shortage; the fact that Muslim people became locals in the region by taking their families with them was an unsettling development for Europe which inspects the world with its own imperialist paradigms. Since that time, the EU hold them responsible for any kinds of crime, unemployment, sickness, poor conditions in public services. Ethnic-centered and racist tendencies became prominent in the European public opinion and their policies.

Most of these anti-Islamic discussions are introduced to the global public opinion as if they are disputes that the EU discusses by laying its cards on the table. The reality, however, is that the immigrants, especially Muslims, are forced to believe that Europe's politic, economic and social problems can only be solved by adapting to the dominant cultures. In other words, Europe, which has always been prejudicial against the Muslim throughout the history, is trying to justify this motto of its: "*To solve societal problems, integrational policies regarding immigrants should be adopted*".<sup>14</sup> What is known, on the other hand, is that Europe is following assimilationist policies against the immigrants under the name of integration. These policies that are followed by

the West against the Muslim, is also about the worries that it might lose its core values. Europe is still afraid of Islamist conquerors who are still organizing attacks on itself.<sup>15</sup>

It is claimed that the change in Europe's multiculturalist policy stemmed from its worries regarding security. The Iranian revolution of 1979, the violent events of marginal groups in the Middle East and September 11 attacks that took place in 2001 are shown as reasons why Muslims are seen as a threat to the European community. The claim that the fear of Muslims, which was conceptualized under the name of Islamophobia, became a phenomenon after the mentioned events; is correct to some extent, yet still lacking.

Europe has always seen the religion of Islam and its followers as threats throughout the history. Islam had started to affect major regions of Syria, Spain and the Christian Roman Empire and exhibited inclinations of Arabization in geographies that it reached, not only religiously but also culturally. Within this period, Europe, which perceived Islam as a religious, social and military threat; insulted the prophets of Islam in their writings and drew caricatures that depicted religious ritual of Islam as an object of derision, intentionally tried to deform the verses of the holy book of Muslims and drew pictures that depicted Muslim individuals as half human and half animal creatures.<sup>16</sup> In other words, even though the alienations, violent attacks and racism in the West are seen peculiar to today; when politic and sociological attitude of Christianity towards Islam is taken into account, they all can be clearly seen as déjà vu.<sup>17</sup>

As for the modern era, the major effect of the Gulf war can easily be seen on how the West concentrated on the Muslim immigrants. After this war, the gap in "the enemy image" that formed following the fall of the USSR, was filled with Saddam Hussein and all Muslims that were living in Europe were accused by being shown as supporters of Saddam Hussein.<sup>18</sup> The Islamic threat that was intentionally created by Bush administration, caused the escalation of violent



attacks, discrimination, and alienation against the Muslim in Europe and the West which categorized this threat as a fundamentalist approach and claims that it is not in accordance with the liberal and socialist ideologies of European civilization. Identification of Islam with polygamy, hand-severing, stoning men and women who commit adultery and circumcising women, with media's intentional support, is the reason why Muslim people experience the problem at the social level. Similarly, the fact that all Muslim people are associated with groups that marginalized in the Middle East and how a type of Muslim that is ignorant and wasn't able to adapt to the society is placed against the viewpoint of modern Westerners made the Muslim immigrants and the locals come face to face.<sup>19</sup> *Satanic Verses*, a book that was written by Salman Rushdie, the intervention of the USA to Libya and the ongoing Israeli siege in Palestine politicized the issue of "Muslims in Europe" for both sides.<sup>20</sup>

Aside from the history of Christians against the Muslims and their politic codification; the problem of "Sharing welfare" in modern era caused the rapid escalation of tension between the locals of Europe and the immigrants, especially the Muslim. Xenophobia, racism and Islamophobic movements that started to rise in Europe after the 2008 crisis, are indicating the reluctance of Europe about sharing its wealth.

Beyond the political and economic division, another reason there is a disagreement between the West and Islam is because Europe which lost its perception of "holiness" due to the secularization process that it had gone through, expects from people who believe in Islam to do the same. However, on the contrary to the Christians, Muslim people protected the holy elements of itself in the regulation of social and moral lifestyle. Furthermore, the value attributed to the holy components by Muslims is much more than that it used to be. On the other hand, Westerners adopted a sarcastic attitude towards the values of Christianity and they also expect from Muslims to develop a manner similar to theirs. This situation results in a problematic state which is hard to get

rid of, between the two communities; and the tension between two sides is gradually growing. Despite this, one side is still persistent on forcing secularization; the other side which feels offended and thinks that its values are denigrated reacts to this with violent events and various protests.<sup>21</sup> The events that took place in 2005 in Denmark due to the controversial caricatures are the clearest examples of this situation.

On the other hand, the way that Muslim people claim rights in every field in Europe since the 1980's till now, their request of access to any kind of right such as living their religion and performing their religious responsibilities and the fact that they exist in public area with symbols like "mosque" and "hijab" are bothering the secular West. Therefore, being discussed by young and old alike, Islam became an issue, in Europe, for which people couldn't find a way of reconciliation.<sup>22</sup>

While Westerners keep on claiming that the only way for the solution of the problems in the social area is secularization of Muslims, Muslims demand prayer areas, halal meat, Islamic solutions for the language of religious education and schools. This stems from the need of Muslims for emphasizing their religion against the culture which is trying to dominate themselves.

In an environment, which is claimed to be secular but is actually available to any kind of Christian ritual, growing identity consciousness of Muslims is another factor in the escalation of Islamic demands. Even though the activities of Muslims in Europe most of whom came to the region as refugees and work at jobs that the locals don't prefer are not in direct proportion to their quantitative growth, their situation is relatively better. No matter how they are hindered in political, social and economic channels and exposed to physical and psychological violence under the influence of Islamophobic discourses and hostility; Muslim people don't refrain from demanding their rights loudly. Even though this is generally carried out as an opposition to the sovereignty within the scope of laws, it is not as easy as it is written.

## Sonnotlar

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- <sup>4</sup> İsa Kösen, Taşkın Deniz, "Avrupa'da Çokkültürlülüğün Çöküşü ve Milliyetçiliğin Artması", p. 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Kadir Canatan, *Avrupa'da Ulusal Azınlıklar*, *Yarın Yayınları*, İstanbul, 2013, p. 18.
- <sup>6</sup> Kenan Malik, "The Failure of Multiculturalism Community Versus Society in Europe", *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/failure-multiculturalism>.
- <sup>7</sup> Canatan, pp. 28-29.
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- <sup>13</sup> Ron Haleber, "Kızıl Komünist Tehlikenin Yerini Alan 'Fanatik Müslüman' İmajı"; Kadir Canatan, *Avrupa'da İslam*, Beyan Yayınları, İstanbul, p. 202.
- <sup>14</sup> Canatan, pp. 28-29.
- <sup>15</sup> Nilüfer Göle, *Gündelik Yaşamda Avrupalı Müslümanlar*, (Çev. Zehra Cunillera), Metis Yayınları, İstanbul, 2015, p. 130.
- <sup>16</sup> Göle, pp. 129-130.
- <sup>17</sup> Franco Cardini, *Avrupa ve İslam*, (Çev. Gürol Koca), Literatür Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2004, p. 3.
- <sup>18</sup> Haleber, "Kızıl Komünist Tehlikenin...", pp. 204-205.
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- <sup>20</sup> Goody, p. 131.
- <sup>21</sup> Göle, pp. 128-129.
- <sup>22</sup> Göle, p. 261.