

INFLUENCE OF MUSLIM RELIGION AND CULTURE ON THEIR INTEGRATION IN EUROPE

Examples: Mosques and dress code

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Introduction

Globalization of the world and greater opportunities for many people to change their place of living gave option for many Muslims to move and settle down in Europe. Sometimes reasons for migration to Europe wasn't just because of the jobs or better way of life, but because they wanted to escape from war torn countries or they were political refugees. Many of them stayed in Europe even when their conditions were not satisfying, because conditions in their countries were much worse.

Encounters between Muslims and Europeans are not just product of situation and activity in the last couple of decades. They had many encounters which some of them were bloody and brutal, but some of them produced great artists or scientists. One of the major encounters was during the Arab army's expansion. Results of crusaders and the Reconquista also produced various different experiences among Muslims and Europeans as well. Those experiences were sometimes positive and peaceful, but on the other hand they sometimes ended up in violence and armed conflicts. Whenever these two religions and cultures would have collided, they would try to prove that their religion is above the other one.

One of the most influential encounters was during the colonial expanding of European countries and their empires. This encounter left a huge mark on Muslim societies and their knowledge and understanding of European culture. During the colonial rule western societies tried to gain wealth and resources that didn't belong to them, and created negative opinions in Muslim world about European understanding of Muslim culture and religion. There is one more encounter that still lasts and it is a result of relations and outcome of World War II. Things that have marked this period where creation of Israel and settlement of Muslims in western societies.

More recent Muslim sources speculate that the current estimate of Muslim in Western Europe (Austria 100,000; Belgium 250,000; Denmark 60,000; France 3,000,000; Germany 2,500,000; Greece 150,000; Ireland 5,000; Italy 500,000; Luxemburg: 1,000; the Netherlands 408,000; Norway 22,000; Portugal 15,000; Spain 450,000; Sweden 100,000; Switzerland 100,000; and the United Kingdom 2,000,000) (John I. Esposito, 1999., p. 604.)

These figures are the result of post colonial relation and product of colonial takeover of the Muslim resources, economic as well as cultural. Among first groups that have arrived in nineteenth and twentieth century were Muslims from North Africa that were recruited to fight on the side of French army during colonial wars. For example First migrants in Netherland and UK came from their former colonies Indonesia, Surinam and South Asia and Africa. In the post war years Europe needed more labor workers and that was the reason why many of Muslim migrants searched for their place in Europe. However European governments thought that after they are finished with their jobs and activities in Europe the they would come back to their own countries. Many of them did, but most of them didn't have a place or job to return to, so they stayed even if they didn't have good jobs or better life in general. Number of Muslim in Europe increased with higher numbers of asylum seekers from Middle East and Southeastern countries of Europe such as former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Kashmir etc. The oil boycott and Arab- Israeli conflicts contributed to economic depression in 1973. And the product of all of that were too many laborers without particular skills and knowledge.

European governments offered tried to send many Muslim back to their countries and offered help for that, but most of the Muslims didn't have anything to go back to, so they decided to stay and started to build their communities inside their host countries.

MOSQUES

Muslims in Europe saw the opportunity to expand their faith and believes, as they had enough freedom to do so. Freedom to propagate their faith brought various opinions among Muslims and Europeans if this is the good way to expand their faith. Many Muslim weren't approving modifications and new ways of expanding their faith, because Muslim migrants in Europe had to adjust their possibilities at that moment to the conditions they were into. These conditions included lack of money and funding to build

new mosques or sometimes they had to use Christian's churches in which they established their own. Migrants in their communities used to send their children to Christian school in order to give them proper education and knowledge, which was not that desirable among Muslim migrants, especially among more radical Muslim migrants. Many Muslim migrants see their faith as a way of purifying European societies that are individualistic, selfish and without strong ties to any religion or believe.

The majority of Muslim migrant laborers in the West- whose primary focus was the country they left behind, where they hoped to return with enough assets to restart their lives-demonstrated very little interest in establishing Islamic institutions. Once they decided to settle and raise families in the West, their concern centered on maintain their children in the faith and creating space for communal activities (John I. Esposito, 1999. p. 615.).

When Muslim migrants started to arrive in large number and to settle down, they had to build some sort of places for gathering and connecting. Those places could have been some mosques or maybe some sort of Islamic schools. Either way they had to be funded somehow. Most of the mosques were funded by countries of Muslim migrants. In some cases they were funded by private Islamic institutions, but they weren't favored by the countries of Muslim migrants. Creating and funding of those Islamic institutions and organizations was a difficult job, but one of the problems was that most of the Islamic migrants didn't have the opportunity to face with the same problem before. This is not just funding problem but rather adjusting and understanding of how to improve status of Muslim migrants in a completely new environment. With adjustments they made them also directly or indirectly changed they practice of religion or faith. Whatever they did the influence was mutual, they changed they practice, but they also changed European understanding and attitudes toward Muslim's religion and culture.

Muslim migrants were depended on host countries and their legal systems and policies considering increasing number of Muslim migrants. Some states provided tax free policies and funding help for building mosques, and other were less tolerant to Muslim migrants. Important question was acceptance of domestic citizens and their knowledge, tolerance and attitude towards their new inhabitants. Number of mosques is increasing for the past couple of decades, and with their increase there are more question that are emerging. One of them is what do the Muslim immigrants do in mosques? Is this just the place for teaching and praying or this place could be used for something else? The main question among politicians and general public is rise of Muslim extremism and could mosques become a place for recruiting young and new Muslim migrants to serve to some radical groups. Building these mosques is not always funded from familiar countries or institutions. There are some speculations that certain

mosques are funded by radical and militant groups, so in order to built mosques host governments and Muslim migrants have to be sure where does this money come from. Since most of the migrants were poor, they weren't able to fund these mosques by themselves and they were hoping to get funds from any organization without asking where that money comes from. Usually they relied upon host governments such as Norway, France, Sweden, and Netherland that contributed with their funds and helped building new mosques. Muslim migrants were also helped by the numerous Christian denominations.

For example there are more than 1,000 mosques in France, 350 in Netherlands, 40 in Norway etc. Muslim migrants were facing another problem and that one was lack of professionals that could be leaders, teachers or spiritual leaders in Islamic institutions and mosques. Some of those institutions are under jurisdiction of foreign countries such as Directorate for Religious Affairs in Ankara, Turkey. There is also a division among Muslim migrants on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, or language, since Muslim migrants came from various different countries with differences in believes and practice of Muslim religion and culture. Those differences are not just specifically connected to European Muslims, because those distinctions exist in their country of origin.

Mosques and Islamic institutions today became a place for Muslim migrants to gather and to share their experiences and problems among other migrants that are facing with same problems and challenges. They are not just places for debate about difficulties of living in foreign countries, but they also became a place for celebrations, meetings and making new relationships. This is a place where new generations of Muslim migrants can gather and learn more about countries, religion and culture where their parents come from. This is very important because many of the new generations of Muslim migrants don't visit mosques or practice their faith.

This number is increasing and many reports are saying that Muslim migrants are going to mosques less and even if they are going to the mosques they are not practicing their faith as they should. When they spend one year in European country they will start to be less religious, and this might be the result of their opportunity to get education. When they get proper education they are becoming more self reliant and more individually oriented than before they came to Europe. Presence of Muslim migrants has become more evident with increased number of mosques and that presence is causes various reactions from domestic citizens. Mosques are changing the structure and appearance of Europe and European cities and this can be understood differently. Experts and intellectuals are divided on this question. Those who are against further expansion of mosques are saying that increasing number of them could be

understood as a clear sign of Muslim presence in Europe and western world. One of the examples is a plan to build a mosque with capacity over 12,000 Muslims in London that will be one of the biggest and visually present buildings in London itself. This could lead to serious problems among Muslim and non Muslim citizens and maybe even violence, that could have been seen in Sweden.

DRESS CODE

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 18 says:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Whether, Muslim, or individual of any kind of religion, is wearing religious and cultural symbols it is considered to be an element of the right of freedom to express themselves and to manifest their religion or belief. Each individual should be free to decide whether to wear specific symbols and dress themselves respecting the rules and on the basis of personal religious convictions or cultural customs. Even special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief has said: “The burden of justifying a limitation upon the freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief lies with the state. Consequently, a prohibition on wearing religious symbols which is based on mere speculation or presumption rather than on demonstrable facts is regarded as a violation of the individual’s religious freedom.”¹

The right to manifest religion or believe can be limited by specific law. That law can be used just in case if religion signs are danger for the society and are necessary to protect public safety. Several European states which include France, Italy, Belgium and Britain are involved in legal, social and also political disputes over the dress-codes of Muslim. And they already used their right to change the law which also includes Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One of the famous examples is France. France’s council of state already declared an “unfavorable opinion” about the *burqa* in public spaces. The second of the many examples is Belgium. Belgian MPs agreed that the “integral veil” should be banned. This was the eventual result of a gradual process whereby the *hijab* became condemned as a form of oppression of women. At the same time, Belgium’s internal political divisions have come into play in relation to the

issue; the lower house of parliament voted in 2010 for a bill to prohibit clothes that do not allow the wearer to be identified (including the *burqa* and *niqab*), but a governmental crisis halted the bill before it could become law.

The problem of dress code is usually attacking Muslim women. Women who wear the face veil, headscarf or burqa are center of the attention in many European Parliaments and is subject to negative connotations.

The *jilbab-plus-niqab* "twin-set" is becoming increasingly popular across the world. It is not a general Arab, or Asian, or Balkan custom. It represents an imported product of globalization, the *jilbab-plus-niqab* was "created" and is popular by young Muslim women who are educated and who lived for a long time in Europe. Usually it is *jilbab-plus-niqab* combination that is appearing in Europe, rather than the *burqa*. But the *burqa* tends to be an easier way to public reaction. ("The *burqa* covers the full body, with an embroidered opening for the eyes; the *niqab* is a veil of different colours, often black, covering the nose and the mouth only; the *hijab* is a scarf covering the head, loose or tight, of all sorts of colours (for instance black in Iran, bright in Malaysia, patterned in Turkey), and wrapped and knotted in different fashions under the neck or behind the head; the *jilbab* is normally a dark long dress or cloak, going from the head to the feet, usually covering other clothes underneath." (Sara Silvestri, 2010))

A widespread problem and non understanding and ignorance of Muslim population can be attached to all other problems that the world is dealing with. Behind all this issues there are many more basic as - globalization, migration, financial crisis, national identities, secularism in society. The problem of Muslims can just underlie and connect in the same time so many of these big international issues. There is one other question that is opening in this topic. If there are so many countries as Belgium, France, Britain and others who are aggressive in terms of not allowing everybody their religious signs, what is happening with all values of cohesive society? Maybe a collective reflection, discussion and solution can be found if there is more respect of the individual.

When the religious practice of one group comes into public issues there is big possibility that it will come into conflict with other religion. The way to find proper balance between the two is necessary as to avoid further problems in society. The human rights framework can be useful in determining this balance and finding a practical solutions.

CONCLUSION

Presence of mosques will definitely become more noticed and more questions are going to be asked. Mosques as symbol of Muslim world, and former empires that have tried to conquer Europe will cause attention as much of the experts and citizens themselves.

The problem of Muslim women and their dress code is one of the major questions in the terms of religious freedom and respect of other human rights. The balance between Muslim religion dress codes and religion in the new country where they are settled has to be balanced. It is important as for not making anybody less "normal" or more afraid in new (or even old) environment. This problem may cause in future more violence because of the people who were underestimated for a long time and who will not be silent for ever. The countries who are proclaiming great importance of human rights and freedom have to consider these problems on more serious level than they are doing it now.

It is difficult to determine which country are Muslim migrants loyal to and which country they consider as their own. This arrival of Muslim migrants could be understood as a new way of colonization of Europe, because with their increased number they are indeed changing European cities and cultural structure of Europe. These changes could lead to positive outcomes, but also to violence and struggle among Muslim migrants and native inhabitants as we could have seen on some European cities. To solve these problems it is necessary that host governments make new policies and changes that will give the opportunity to the Muslim migrants to practice their religion, but also to keep domestic citizens satisfied. This can be solved with new regulation and better organization as much as architecturally and organizationally.

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