NEW PARADIGMS OF IMMIGRATION: MULTICULTURALISM, ASSIMILATION AND INTEGRATION OF ISLAM IN EUROPE

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Abstract:*The recent global increase in cross-border mobility due to the relaxation of immigration laws and the Status of Refugees, unrestricted access to information, global media and transportation networks has increasingly enabled more and more people to leave their homeland and relocate in new, mostly western, host countries. This has lead many of the monocultural Western societies in becoming, voluntarily or not, multicultural, which fueled a mixture of debates and public policies focused mainly on the specificity of cultural behavior as a insuperable prerequisite that renders impossible the occurrence of any harmonious and natural integration of immigrant communities in Western societies. Increased immigration from Muslim source countries, politicisation of Islam and the rising social anxieties directed to Muslim communities have turned these communities into the focal point of discussions on the "risks" of intercultural contact and, negative, and, often biased, media coverage has converted Islam into a symbol of the issues related to ethnic minorities and immigration. In this context, the readiness of Europe to coexist with its Muslim communities, to integrate or assimilate them, or alternatively, to allow them the preservation of their culture is increasingly being discussed and, accordingly, the ability and willingness of immigrants to change or adapt to European standards and host culture is frequently being questioned. This author's intention is to reconsider and propose applicable models of analysis and management, in connection with the post-national contemporary priorities, of how governments can restrict immigrants' rights to engage in cultural or religious practices, often deemed incompatible with the values of the host society, without undermining the civil rights and values that liberal states seek to promote.*

Keywords: assimilation, civic integration, international migration, multiculturalism, Muslim minorities.

Europe is today deeply transformed by its encounter with contemporary Islam – an Islam that is reappropriated, interpreted, and revitalized in political and cultural terms by a whole new generation of Muslim actors. Similarly, Europe's relationship with its Muslim communities is placed under considerable stress and revaluation, raising important issues for policymakers in terms of cultural diversity and social cohesion. Certainly, we can observe multiple differences of integration and accommodation of Islam, sometimes even in the same country, consequently, is impossible to outline a unified model applicable and valid for all cases (Vertovec, 1998), mainly because the forms of incorporation of immigrants are closely related to colonial history, the emergence of nation states and the policies of inclusion and exclusion on grounds of citizenship and therefore can not be transposed from case to case. However, it is possible for studies to reveal similarities that might help build relevance beyond particular contexts (Carrera, 2006; Doomernik, 1998 Favell & Geddes, 1999; Vermeulen, 1997).

Parameters of Change: Europe, Islam and Transnational Migration

International migration is a complex subject, the more so, since no country is exempt from its effects. Indeed, virtually every country is either a country of origin or a country of transit or destination, or all three simultaneously, for migrants in search of new opportunities.

Massive displacements of populations due to natural disasters and conflicts, but primarily significant and constant flows of migrants drawn by the prospect of improved economic, political, and social conditions, have led international community and individual states to review existing policies on international migration and generate new ones and along with them, new paradigms for understanding and explaining the phenomenon.

International migration is not new – for centuries, people have moved from place to place, in search of a better life and new opportunities but it is only recently that the phenomenon has gained unprecedented relevance (Castles & Miller, 2009). Currently, 214 million people, or roughly 3.1 % of the world population, live outside their country of origin, mainly in the Western world (International Organization for Migration, 2010, World Bank, 2011). This has lead many of the monocultural Western societies in emerging as multicultural. Now, more than ever, diversity is quintessential to global and domestic policy agenda and for day-to-day interactions.

In addressing the topic of Muslims in Western Europe, it is common to closely connect the analysis of Islam to the immigration debate, given that most European Muslims are either immigrants themselves or have a background of such nature. With the understanding that this is a nuanced issue, that is in many ways country-specific, in terms of ethnic composition, internal dynamics, cohesiveness and degree of integration into the host society, a rough estimation1 shows that there are somewhere between 15 and 17 million Muslims in Western Europe and about 7.5 million in Central and Eastern Europe (excluding Russia), located mainly in Bulgaria (12%), Belgium, France, Austria, Switzerland, Holland and Germany (5-7%) (with small communities also present in Greece, Denmark, Finland and Sweden and certain countries in the Balkans) (Pew Research Center, 2010).

With the universal realization of the magnitude and impact of transnational migration upon states, it is important to recognize that Muslim immigration is of necessity a central issue within the broader context of European Islam, for both governments and nationals, and comes with its own set of challenges and opportunities. One of the main challenges relates to the subsequent ethno-cultural plurality and the various ways in which the host societies have chosen to manage the resulting diversity. Although many paradigms of integration have been applied in an attempt to manage the diverse reality of European Islam, most countries have favored either a pluralist-multicultural approach or a republican-assimilationist vision (Castles et al., 2002). But both multiculturalism and assimilation are now questioned in terms of ability to provide a successful frame for managing and integrating Islamic difference in European democracies. While some claim that the French model of assimilation failed (Silberman et al., 2007), others comment on the implicit essentialism of multiculturalism and the prospective risks of cultural, religious and linguistic recognition – the so-called "balkanization", that is the creation of parallel societies that would limit social cohesion (Barry, 2001; Bauböck et al., 1996; Baumann, 1999; Parekh, 2006; Süssmuth & Weidenfeld, 2004).

Lately, as the view that holds multiculturalism as inadequate for managing and integrating diversity gains ground (Barry, 2001; Joppke, 2004; Sartori, 2002; Vasta, 2007), an increasing number of European countries have rejected the multicultural approach – now

1 Given that some European countries do not collect data on the religion of their citizens and that data on Muslim population in Europe are generally extrapolated from statistics on immigration or taken from censuses (UK), there are some significant statistical variations in terms of Muslim demographics.

considered too passive and tolerant of cultural differences – and turned to a variation of "tough" liberalism requiring a more comprehensive acceptance of the norms and institutions pertaining to the host society. Terrorism and urban riots added a security dimension to multicultural relations and further pushed the balance in favor of active integration policies incorporating obligations along with rights. This leaves room for questions about the extent to which governments can restrict immigrants' rights to engage in cultural or religious practices deemed incompatible with the values of the host society, without undermining the very civil liberties and values that liberal states seek to promote (Joppke, 2012). While not incompatible with the values of tolerance and mutual respect for ethnic and cultural and religious diversity, these integrationist policies still mark a departure from the original meaning of multiculturalism which involved support and recognition of the distinctiveness of minority communities. Although it is premature to consider a general withdrawal of multicultural policies in practice, it is obvious that we are witnessing a wave favoring civic integration measures, combined with a strong emphasis on the role of citizenship (Baubock et al., 2006; Bauböck et al., 2007; Castles & Davidson, 2000; De Groot & Vink, 2010; Favell, 2001; Joppke, 2007; Joppke & Morawska, 2003; Modood, 2007; Modood et al., 2006; Parekh, 2006; Soysal, 1994; Weil, 2001).

The critique of multiculturalism, even by those who see it as normatively desirable (Koopmans, 2010), and the need to reassess it, and perhaps reform it, as a paradigm of integration (Kelly, 2005), have led, political actors and scholars alike, to reconsider other models applicable in the analysis and management of the new realities. One of them is obviously assimilation, under which, according to researchers who have an interest in this process, we can fit the whole phenomenon of migration and most of its consequences (Alba & Nee, 1997; Brubaker, 2001; Morawska, 1994). But since assimilation is based on the idea of monoculturalism and full adoption of norms and values of dominant society that renders the minority group culturally indistinguishable from the dominant society, it is as open to criticism as it is inapplicable in terms of normativity[2]. In fact, the abolition of cultural diversity beyond the private sphere implies a failure in acknowledging the complexity of plurality and the fact that individuals visibly subscribe to diverse and multiple identities. Although favors a cohesive and inclusive society, the ideal of cultural homogeneity is basically impossible to attain since the forced concealment of differences may, actually, result in their enforcement (Grillo, 2007; Haddad & Balz, 2006; Silberman et al., 2007).

However, there are some who argue that renouncing multicultural policies is of a more declarative nature and the magnitude of "conversion" from multiculturalism is greatly exaggerated (Kymlicka, 2012). And although the word multiculturalism is largely extinct from political rhetoric, this is rather an exercise in avoiding the denomination than a real departure from its principles, as it was replaced with terms like "diversity", "pluralism", "intercultural dialogue", "communitarian cohesion" (McGhee, 2008; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). There are also those who claim that both traditional models of integration are no longer viable, but have evolved along with the post-national contemporary priorities (Carrera, 2006),

2 Assimilation is largely understood as having a utopian finality – basically a society in which members are to be culturally indistinguishable from one another (in terms of nationality, language, attitudes and perception of identity). Practically, the process implies the absorption of immigrants into the host society's culture, a society supposedly homogeneous prior to the immigration.

into what some call ”neo-assimilationism” or ”neo-multiculturalism” (Favell, 1998; Vasta, 2007), which are nothing but a hybrid multiculturalism with assimilation inferences. Practically, this view is found in the current trend of management models, which, adapted to the particularities of each country or region, reconciles cultural diversity with social, economic and political cohesion (Modood & Werbner 1997), striving to grant immigrants and minorities the same civil rights and socio-economic opportunities as the majority, while capitalizing on critical valorization of diversity. This type of approach is what Parekh proposes when he argues in favor of an idea of identity that is not “defined in terms of rigid and aggressively guarded boundaries” but rather enables a creative and interactive multiculturalism (2006: 372) or, in the terms of Modood (2007), a “civic multiculturalism” (Bloemraad, 2006; Giddens, 2007; Meer & Modood, 2009).

As it was previously shown, both perspectives have their supporters and detractors, and while it is necessary to undertake a critical approach towards both positions, we must also be aware that the presence of differences does not necessarily imply inequality and that multiple ethno-cultural affiliations are not incompatible with social cohesion (Grillo, 2007; Modood, 2007 , Meer & Modood, 2009; Parekh, 2006). Therefore, when support for diversity is manifested in a framework of social justice and political equality, and when all members of society are allowed to fully participate in the public space, the result is a more cohesive, yet plural, civic community.

Beyond the Migration Discourse: Possibilities for Dialogue and Action

As it seems, both multiculturalism and assimilation, as two different forms of integration, have been criticized and challenged due to their inefficiency in managing diversity and achieving social cohesion. On the one hand, the politics of assimilation promise equality of universal rights and entitlements for individual citizens, but the voluntary secular myopia to religious difference and the total lack of support for cultural diversity beyond the private sphere imply a failure to acknowledge the complexity of plurality and have led to a politics of denial, where cultural groups who do not conform to the prescribed national prototype are marginalized and alienated. The “cultural mosaic” model, on the other hand, recognize cultural pluralism, encouraging identity politics, but the absence of a common frame of communication can foster processes of essentialisation and segregation, jeopardizing fundamental principles of equality and social cohesion (Taylor, 1994; Young, 1990).

As the traditional paradigms are found lacking, alternative and innovative integrative models are brought to the attention of the political and academic world. For some, the answer seems to lie in the form of Euro-Islam, an intellectual construct with integrative finality for the European Muslim minority (AlSayyad & Castells, 2002). Both challenged and approved, Euro-Islam is a concept still under negotiation but worth mentioning and exploring, particularly from the opposing perspectives of Bassam Tibi and Tariq Ramadan. Bassam Tibi's Euro-Islam is a secular approach defined by a call, not for multiculturalism or a monoculture, but for a plurality of cultures. Monoculturalism, as he sees it, leads to assimilation and discrimination, while multiculturalism is based on cultural relativism or nihilism (2002: 45). Tibi argues that change and religious reform, supported unanimously by the European Muslims (2008: 189) and backed by a “de-ethnicization” of European identity, are prerequisites for a feasible Euro-Islam (2002: 32). His version of Euro-Islam is meant to offer

a liberal version of Islam, acceptable to both Muslim immigrants and European societies, an Islam adapted to civic culture and to modern secular democracy (2002: 17). Tariq Ramadan proposes his own meaning of the term Euro-Muslim, advocating for a type of integration of Muslims in Western democracies that allows the full expression and immersion of Islam in the European ethos (Ramadan, 1999; 2004).

Integration is a three-way process that involves a substantive interaction between immigrants, the country of emigration and that of immigration. Such process will not only impact on the perspective and lifestyle of immigrants, but will also cause structural changes, both in the country of origin and in the host society, and even though each model has its own merits, the practical implementation should be carefully considered, as its implications are deep and extend beyond the European framework. Now that North African Muslim nations push for democratic change – a movement that has Europe's full support and backup – the "old" continent must show caution in developing its integrative policies in relation to the North African diasporic communities, as both exclusionism and populist politics of assimilation, can lead to a web of hypocrisy and political contradictions on its stated values. It can further be argued that Europe has never been too tolerant of its immigrants and a case could be made that it has a long history of aversion towards the non-European alterity. Meanwhile, the immigrant Muslims are not vastly accustomed to or religious and cultural pluralism, let alone to democratic tolerance. There is, therefore, more than enough room for intercultural misunderstanding and tension that need to be appeased by inspired and timely decisions. Under these circumstances, governments and academia must strive to find the paradigm that best suits the political and social needs of all actors. For this to happen, a genuine consultative process must be employed, in the spirit of a true "dialogue of cultures" that should aim at recognition of both difference and interdependence.

In the end, regardless of the discursive manner in which we decide to approach the situation of Muslims in Europe, it is crucial to assume a twofold compromise between host and immigrant population, as to reach a mutually acceptable *modus vivendi*, through maintaining differences while reducing them to acceptable levels, in a common cultural and legal framework. For, as noted by Nye (2001), to create a truly integrated society is not enough to assign a space for "the other", but the transformations that contacts and cultural exchanges are likely to generate must also be accepted.

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