

MUSLIMS IN EUROPE: IDENTITY CRISIS BETWEEN “EUROPEAN” AND “ISLAMIC” VALUES

Gyulnara Gadzhimuradova

Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO),
Federal Scientific Research Center of the Institute of Social and Political Studies
of the Russian Academy of Science
e-mails: gadzhimuradova7@gmail.com

People and Nations are trying to answer the most important question they can face: who are we?¹

Abstract:

A world in constant motion, in a state of migration turbulence, presents humanity with new challenges and risks. Globalization is a blessing or a tragedy for humanity, occasioning the problem of how to preserve one's identity, remaining “one's own among strangers” while, at the same time, not becoming “a stranger among one's own.” Integration processes in the world today are met with resistance by multidirectional processes that encourage a critical engagement with all spheres of life in modern society in order to counteract forces of depersonalization and the disappearance of one's identity – one's self – as expressed in the preservation of one's ethnic group, culture, religion, and so on. This is especially evident in attempts at preserving identity within Muslim communities in European countries.

Given the growing Muslim population in Europe, it has become obvious that “European” and “Islamic” values are opposed in the context of preserving one's own identity, which is increasingly manifested in a religious

context. Europe today has become a hostage of its values, which are despised by many of the immigrants who have poured into its borders. These are tolerance, political correctness, multiculturalism, democracy, and freedom of speech, among others, which are perceived as weakness and indecision. Eastern mentality, habits, and traditions are sometimes very different from European ones. The author examines the transformation of Muslim identity and the compatibility of “European” and “Islamic” values. The article also presents the opinions of various researchers on this issue, and provides possible scenarios for the trajectory of events, given continued intercultural contact through immigration and given the stakes and state of this collision of values.

Key words: Globalization, integration, migration crisis, identity, “Islamic” and “European” values.

1. Introduction

The era of globalization has blurred borders not only in terms of the simple movement of peoples and individual citizens, but also in the sense that self-awareness of one's own identity has become hazy. Paradoxically, the growth of objective integration trends (globalism) in the world, which lead to interconnection and interaction in all spheres of modern society, has also been accompanied by a parallel, no less stable process of resistance; individ-

¹ Huntington S. The Clash of Civilizations and the Transformation of the World Order // New Post-Industrial Wave in the West: Anthology / Ed. B.JI. Inozemtseva. M., 1999.P. 532.

ual ethnic and cultural communities in different regions and countries have opposed the myriad manifestations of globalization in the economy (anti-protectionist global free trade initiatives) and spiritual sphere (erasure of cultural traditions and identities). The fear of losing one's culture, identity, and uniqueness under globalist conditions, which is shared by many people and communities, is also manifested at the state level, with states proclaiming defense of their national identity and their national and state interests in an increasingly globalized world. As such, humanity itself faces a dilemma. On the one hand, self-awareness and a sense of cultural identity have increased. On the other hand, mutual exchange between people, nations, and civilizations has significantly expanded.

The growth of national self-awareness and the focus on self-identification can be seen as a defensive reaction to the 'standardization' of social life. Cultural diversity and national identity are under threat today, as globalist trends increasingly impose a single form of life and system of values as the only true and valuable model to aspire to and to emulate. Hence, the natural reaction of nations is to defend themselves and their uniqueness. The growing anti-globalist tendencies are linked to the fact that people do not want to be representatives of a common, faceless world, but rather bearers of a specific ethnocultural, national community.

The problem of identity is multifaceted. It includes the semantic and metaphysical questions: "Who are we?," "What is a person?," "What is the value and meaning of a person's existence?" In other words, the process of globalization (and its impact on cultural identity) makes relevant the question of the deepest foundations of genuine human existence.

In Europe, the boundaries between communities formed over centuries of living together have traditionally been porous, with communities retaining their identity while sharing certain values common to the West. By contrast, this tradition does not exist between the West and the East. , Between Europe and the rest of the world, there has been more limited intercultural interaction and exchange, particularly regarding high-stakes and deeply personal matters of religious belief. Of course, modern life has brought about many changes, but rarely in terms of the cultural codes and deeply-held traditions and beliefs of different civilizations. Thus, two dominant forms of global civilizational processes – globalization and the commitment to traditional identities –

remain incompatible, particularly in the context of East-West relations.

In addition to a Muslim religious identity, Muslims have many other identities: local, national, regional, tribal, linguistic, ethnic. Islamic identity takes on meaning in connection with these concomitant factors, which may condition and determine each other. Therefore, in developing an understanding of identity, an important role is played by the juxtaposition of "self" and "other." Depending on the political, socioeconomic, or other aspects of one's situation, the individual can bring to the fore different context-dependent identity traits – these may be salient even without contrast to an "other." As such, it can be said with confidence that there is no true central identity or single aspect of identity that defines the self without remainder; there exists only cultural strategies of self-definition and meaning-making that can be used when faced with a variety of situations.

The individual develops his political and social viewpoint within the framework of his internal consciousness or identity, and projects it onto and through political and economic institutions. For Muslims, this means that national identity is often expressed through Islamic symbols and values.

2. Islam in contemporary Europe

Worldwide, the Muslim population is growing around two times faster than the non-Muslim population. The average annual growth rate of the Muslim population is 1.5 percent compared to 0.7 percent of the non-Muslim population. According to preliminary forecasts, by 2030, the Muslim population in Europe will exceed 58 million people, and its share of Europe's population will be 8 percent.² Today, Islam is the largest religion in Europe after Christianity in terms of its representatives. Muslim communities in Europe differ significantly from each other in terms of country of origin, language, religious preferences, customs, traditions, and socioeconomic status, among other categories.

Modern Europe faces a great challenge: Muslim migrants are either very poorly integrated or not integrated at all into their country of residence. This is facilitated by a fairly low level of educational attainment. For example, the number of children who drop out of school is significantly higher among Muslims than among other groups of the population (including other immigrants). The low performance

² The Future of the Global Muslim Population. Projections for 2010–2030. – Pew Research Center. 2011.

of Muslims in education can be partly explained by widespread socioeconomic limitations for Muslim students and by a lack of social mobility. Due to existing social relations in which Muslims are branded with a certain (often negative) image from birth, young Muslims are convinced that they will not be able to succeed even if they have a good education. In addition, the school system in Europe raises many issues for Muslims, including school dress codes, lack of religious education, school curricula with a secular character, and coeducational instruction in schools. It should be noted that the growth of modern forms of communication and media have not contributed to more rapid integration since many migrants maintain much closer contact and ties with their homeland than with the host country. They may invest more time in keeping up to date with events in their homeland than they do in getting to know the country that is supposed to be their “second home.”

Today in Europe it has become possible to speak of the emergence of so-called “European Islam.” European Muslims consider themselves citizens of European countries; many were born in Europe and have absorbed “European values.” They may be Europeans who have converted to Islam but have not abandoned their European way of life. One of the problems caused by the growth of the Muslim population in Europe is related to questions of identity and self-identification. This problem concerns both Europeans in general and European Muslims in particular. When Muslims assume a European identity, they may find themselves torn between two lifeworlds: On the one hand, they belong to a certain ethnic group, represent a certain country, and are considered part of the Muslim umma, and on the other hand, they feel that they belong to a particular European country of which they are citizens.

Increased migration forces people of different cultures and different faiths to live side by side and actively interact with each other. In regard to this, the question of the compatibility of Islam with democratic norms and the acceptance of “European values” by Muslims has long been overdue in Europe.

Immigration problems in Europe itself are also twofold: The most energetic and talented leave, while the birth rate of those who remain is very low. Moreover, immigrants from low income countries do not have enough education to fill these vacancies, and their reproduction rates are quite high.

Islam in Europe can be viewed as a heterogeneous and diverse phenomenon. On the one hand, there

are Muslims living in Europe who peacefully practice traditional Islam. On the other hand, there are adherents of radical Islam and its different forms. Muslims today are scattered throughout Western Europe and live mainly in large industrial cities. According to rough estimates, by 2010 the number of Muslims in Europe exceeded 12 million people, and in 2015 their number exceeded 20 million people. The Muslim population is concentrated to a large extent in the three main EU countries- Germany, France, and the UK. According to the World Bank, in 2009, there were 4,026,000 Muslims in Germany, 3,554,000 in France, and 1,647,000 in the UK.³ It is difficult to determine the exact number of the Muslim population since most Western European countries, such as France, avoid the question of religious affiliation when conducting a census.

The migration crisis of 2015-2016 led to a rapid increase in uncontrolled migration and accelerated the formation of closed, isolated communities (ghettos). The French and German practice of turning “Muslim” areas into de facto autonomous enclaves only reinforces their isolation, makes it difficult for them to access traditional state institutions, and further contributes to the marginalization of Muslims. Examples of self-isolated Muslim communities are, for example, Molenbeek and Skarbek in Belgium, Rinkeby in Stockholm, Sweden, or the Tingbjerg district in the Danish capital, Copenhagen. Once in Europe, these people become marginalized, existing in a limited space, and because of this, the interpenetration of their own cultures takes place within the Muslim community itself. Therefore, in Muslim communities, the differences between people from different countries are somewhat blurred, and members of these communities become more monolithic. This process is quite smooth and painless, because all communities are united by a common religion – Islam, based on traditional values, focused primarily on Dar al-Islam, i.e. the space regulated by the laws of Islam (Sharia).

A significant number of Muslims in Europe deliberately refuse to accept the Western way of life, and the morals and values of Europeans. In modern Europe, the religious system of values has been replaced by a secular one, and the priority of values has changed from religious to secular ones. European identity is no longer based on Christian values, but on so-called “European values.” The concept of

³ Interactive Data Table: World Muslim Population by Country. URL: <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population23/>

“European values” for many Europeans has now become a fetish or, as Yu. Fedorova has rightly noted, “a kind of theoretical construct that allows Europeans to declare their identity and isolate themselves from representatives of another culture that produces a different set of value imperatives” (Fedorova, 2014). In Europe, it was initially assumed that Muslim migrants would share the Western European system of values – democracy, cultural and religious freedom, individual desire for well-being and self-realization – and that differences would be erased in no more than two or three generations. This has not happened. On the contrary, there is a growing trend towards cultural and territorial self-segregation among Muslims who have entered the country, their children, and grandchildren.

The increasing number of mosques established every year plays an important role in migrants’ advocacy of “Islamic values.” For example, in Hamburg in 2013, the building of the Lutheran Church and the adjacent 44-meter tower with a land plot were sold to the al-Nur Islamic center, which intended to open a mosque in this space. In recent years, Methodist, Lutheran, and Catholic churches have been transformed into mosques in Berlin, Dortmund, and several other cities. In Germany, more than 400 Catholic and 100 Protestant churches have been closed since 2000. Since 1990, according to the Evangelical Church of Germany, at least 277 Protestant churches have been sold or demolished. There are hundreds of mosques in the country, and more than 120⁴ are under construction. This suggests that religion remains the basis of the identity of Muslims in the West.

3. European Muslims and Muslims in Europe: the problem of “values”

The majority of Muslims living in Europe resist assimilation because they are strongly attached to “Islamic values” and are convinced of the advantages of their mores and customs. At the same time, they enjoy many aspects of Europeans’ lives: a high level of consumption of goods and services, honesty, clean and safe cities, thirst for knowledge, politeness. But some of the European customs are absolutely unacceptable to them; they cannot, in particular, accept the “liberal values” that are so dear to Europeans. In the eyes of some Muslims, these values look like permissiveness and licentiousness. This applies primarily to family and marriage rela-

tions, in particular same-sex marriage, certain rights and freedoms, and feminism. The majority of European Muslims are increasingly intolerant of certain “European values” such as gender equality, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, ensuring the rights of sexual minorities, and so on. Islam for them is not just a religion with its pillars of faith; Islam is a way of life that includes ethical norms, social behavior, customs, and traditions that have remained unshakable for centuries. Therefore, anything that, in their opinion, does not comply with the norms of Islam is harmful and alien.

Religion is exactly what allows one to not dissolve in another civilizational paradigm and to preserve one’s ethnic and other identity. According to Olivier Roy (2004) “Muslims are experiencing the deterritorialization of Islam. When they turn to religion, they are more attracted to other ways, including neo-fundamentalism. Neo-fundamentalism has found ground among the rootless Muslim youth, particularly among the second and third generations of migrants in the West.” At the same time, according to G. Heinzon, (2003), a professor at the University of Bremen (Germany), in the growing Islamic population of Europe, the problem of self-identification of young Muslims is increasing.

In his book *What it Means to be a European Muslim* (1999), Tariq Ramadan, a Professor at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), rejects the division of the world into Western and Muslim, as well as the confinement of Muslims in voluntary ghettos. He further insists on bringing the followers of Islam living in Europe closer to European culture. Calling themselves Muslims living in Europe, people deliberately reject the reality surrounding them as alien; but calling themselves European Muslims, on the contrary, emphasizes that they belong to both Islamic and Western civilization. For Muslims, Islam consists of general principles of existence. Every Muslim accepts the five pillars of the faith,⁵ regardless of what tradition they follow. According to T. Ramadan, it is necessary to distinguish between the principles of Islam and its traditions, which may be different considering the history and culture of the people, as well as the laws of the country of residence. Islam is one, but there are many diverse cultures in which it is practiced. There is a place for unity and diversity in Islam. We can’t help but agree

⁴ <http://www.islam.ru/news/2015-09-04/34624>

⁵ Some religious scholars also speak of the sixth pillar of faith. Most often talking about sixth pillar of Islam they mean Jihad which is from a theological point of view “the struggle against one’s own passions.”

that when we talk about European, Canadian, American, and Western Islam, “European” or “Western(ized)” refers to culture, while the principles set out in the Qur’an remain religious. Arab culture is not the culture of Islam, because religion and culture are not coterminous entities.

According to another researcher, B. Tibi (2001, p. 208), Euro-Islam is an attempt at the creation of a liberal form of Islam acceptable to both migrant Muslims and European societies, consistent with European ideas of secularism and individual citizenship. In other words, Euro-Islam is an Islam that is culturally adapted to secular European societies, just as, for example, Islam in Africa is adapted to local African cultures. Accordingly, “Euro-Islam should be compatible with liberal democracy, individual human rights and the requirements of civil society ... Euro-Islam should be directed both against assimilation and against ghettoization.”

Today, European leaders are discussing important problems, such as the preservation of “European values” through the process of Muslim assimilation and their adoption of these European values. But in fact, under the guise of protecting European values, there is a process of promoting neoliberal values that are not always understood – even by Europeans – and that have replaced traditional Christian values. These largely secular values of post-industrial society are associated with the legalization of same-sex marriage in most European countries, children’s social protection (which may have applications that some consider excessive), ideas of tolerance (which often discriminate against the indigenous population), active and public promotion through various platforms (competitions, festivals, etc.) of transgender people, or people with non-traditional sexual orientation (for example, the participation of Conchita Wurst in the Eurovision song contest), and others. These conflict with conservative beliefs, like those held by traditional Muslim and Christian communities. Therefore, it should not be taken for granted that this new citizen with conservative values will necessarily tolerate local laws and norms of behavior, such as feminism and same-sex marriage. And it should be kept in mind that the promotion of neoliberal values (under the guise of European values) is deeply incompatible with “Islamic values,” which are based on traditional, conservative values and attitudes.

Does this mean that identity transformation, and thus cultural integration, takes place only in terms of accepting or rejecting “values”? I believe that the

solution to this issue lies in the sphere of a broader discourse. When we talk about those *European Muslims* who are already integrated into the country of their residence, they often do not face the question of “values” or identity very sharply because they have several sets of values rooted in their various coexisting identities. For example, a person may be at once a Muslim, a Shi’ite, a Syrian, a European, a Parisian, and so on. And in each part of his identity there is no doubt, neither for him, nor for others. If he perceives these identities critically, then he is consciously aware of, and understands, the values he holds, which may be “European and “Islamic.”

But when it comes to *Muslims in Europe*, the situation is slightly different. These are people who contrast themselves and their way of life with people of a different culture and identity, creating a comfortable environment around themselves that reproduces a small sense of their homeland with its laws and regulations. It is here that identity takes shape or changes, depending on a personal understanding of the “self” and “other.” As such, the marginalization and identity crises of young Muslims in Europe who feel alienated from local society create favorable conditions for recruiting young immigrants to extremist and terrorist organizations. The problem of the radicalization of young Muslim Europeans has become obvious, and has become particularly acute against the background of the conflict in Syria and Iraq, where hundreds of young men and women with European citizenship have left Europe and flocked to territories controlled by jihadist groups. The radicalization of European Muslims, and their desire to return to their origins rooted in a distorted understanding of Islam is also at the core of the problem of finding one’s identity.

Against this background, O. Rowe’s postulate about the transformation of modern Islam into post-Islam is of great interest. In this transformation, the relationship between religion and politics is altered, and the superiority of the political over the religious is given in the name of religion itself. If religion used to define politics, now politicians use religion to achieve certain goals in the name of religion. It can be said that identity in Islam is no longer determined by religion, but by political goals. And probably, the juxtaposition of the values of different cultures is merely a means of political manipulation of various influential groups. Such interplay between religion and politics gives rise to the identity crisis within those who subscribe to “Islamic values,”

which can be interpreted differently depending on the political environment.

Conclusion

The modern globalizing world is faced with the need to find new approaches to the relationship between religious and cultural communities. In the last decade, in particular, in connection with the migration crisis of 2015–2016, the issue of self-identification of European Muslims has become particularly important. The problem of European Muslims holding onto their religious and legal traditions has become one of the key issues in the political discourse of many European countries.

We can observe a counterreaction to the factors of globalization both in the Muslim communities of Europe and among the autochthonous population. And this brings to the fore the problem of identity, which is, in my opinion, the code of self-preservation of ethnic groups, nations, and entire states. But the indicators of identity preservation are not only related to national identity; they may also be commitments related to religion, culture, traditions, or something else. Failing to account for these and other complexities, the policy of multiculturalism has not had a positive effect, and in most countries has proven to be a failure.

The persistent policy of integration has raised the problem of self-identification of Muslims. If the first generation of immigrants pursued the goal of survival outside of their country of origin, and therefore had to integrate, then for the second and third generations of young Muslims, the problem of identity is important. Throughout this process, “European values” have come into conflict with “Islamic values”, which has given birth to an identity crisis.

But regardless of that, all people living in Europe will have to continue to live next door to each other and seek strategies for inter-civilizational and intercultural dialogue. And to live in such proximity with each other, it is important for all parties to understand, tolerate, and have mutual respect, as well

as the ability to defend the “self” without thereby denying the “other.”

Today, no one questions the fact that Islam has become an integral part of Europe. Therefore, it is necessary that we find an opportunity to reconcile “European” and “Islamic” values. Perhaps Euro-Islam can be the compromise that will help young Muslims successfully integrate and become full citizens without losing their identity. But this scenario is possible only with certain efforts on both sides, “new citizens” and native Europeans. Robert J. Pauly’s (2004) words serve as confirmation of this, for he argues that “the integration of Islamic communities in the context of a fully unified Western Europe requires joint efforts on the part of both Muslims and their predominantly Christian neighbors in the EU member States” (2004).

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