**Islam in Modern Europe**

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Religious values and beliefs have been one of the greatest impacting variables to politics and society within European history. It is responsible for many cultural distinctions seen throughout various European states due to its role in the development of social norms and values. This correlation can be directly seen through the variety of art, music, and architecture that defines these countries. This impact of religion also had a indirect effect on the governments and judicial institutions through the influencing of social norms. Some of the most dynamic periods of European history, such as the crusades and the inquisition, highlight this connection of religion and politics. This is why I believe to fully understand a government or society, you need to first not only understand the history of the culture, but also the religious history and values of that culture. This understanding can also give insight to the reason behind many conflicts, even if they are not directly religiously based.

The majority of religious conflict within Europe has been along the line of Catholicism and Protestantism. This was due to the amount of authority that was placed within these religious institutions. During the 20th century, Europe had dark period of Anti-Semitism running rapid across the continent due to the destruction seen in WWI. This prejudice was for the most part eliminated after the world witnessed the sufferings of the holocaust. Today, there is a new religiously based division occurring in Europe with the recent increase of the Islamic faith into European culture. This division is not based upon Muslims and Christians as one might expect, but rather between Islamic values within an increasing secular culture. Although, the European Islamic community only makes up around five percent the population, they are a quickly growing minority within Europe. (Cerari 452) This segment of European population has its highest concentration within the UK with 1.6 million Muslims, Germany with 3 million, and finally France with a Muslim population of 4.5 million. (Cerari 452) This large influx of the Muslim population has not only brought cultural diversity to these regions, but also has increased social and religious tensions within Europe.

The main source of this conflict is due to the dependency, or rather the lack of dependency, of religious based values and beliefs. This increasing lack of religious dependency to bring about lawfulness and social order is commonly referred to as secularization. It has it origins with the age of enlightenment seen during European development. From this point it culminated into many of the political and social theories ascribed by the social philosophers of the 19th century. These minds that paved the way to secularization include Spencer, Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and Freud. Even though they have various approaches and theories, they all concluded that religion would become less significant to societies, especially industrial societies. (Pippa 3) It is obvious that this idea would conflict within the Muslim community due to the value that majority of Muslims have towards the importance of religious adherence to social order. The world “Islam” itself means a complete submission and adherence to the will of God or Allah.

Secularization does not only apply to religious beliefs, but also religious participation and values. Religious participation does not only apply to attending a religious institution, but rather also includes personal participation such as prayer and meditation. In a survey done regarding European religious participation between 1981 and 2001, roughly 2% of the population regularly attended religious services and only 2.3% personally prayed outside of church services. This can be attributed to the lack of religious values of these populations, with only 2.8% claiming a personal importance of religion.(Pippa 41) In contrast to this lack of religious adherence, many Muslims pray at least three times every day at prescribed times towards Mecca while regularly attending services at their local mosque. I believe that this dramatic contrast of religious values and participation may be the direct cause towards the tensions between Muslims and other Europeans. This could cause Muslim populations to observe not only the ethnic differences that they hold, but rather see a moral conflict that would possibly make them resist any assimilation into European culture. In contrast, I believe that these differences could also cause a lack of acceptance by traditional European populations towards Muslims. This would be due to an inability to understand why Muslims ascribe to such strict religious rules and values, while viewing many of these practices as primitive and outdated.

Now, one may ask why has then been such a decrease in religious dependency and adherence throughout Europe? Even further, why is there such a dramatic difference between the European Muslim community and the rest of Europe? These questions can be resolved simply examining the social theories I touched on earlier in the context of the Muslim community. The social philosophers of the 19th century prescribed that with more advances in technology and industry, populations would become less and less reliant on religion for civility, and more upon their governmental institutions. This theory has proven true in today’s world as more and more developed societies have become more secular. The proof of this pattern can be seen when observing religious practices between different types of economies around the world.

A survey was conducted between agrarian, industrial, and postindustrial societies in context of their population’s personal religious practices. When asked if they regularly attended religious services, 44 percent of the population in Agrarian societies replied with yes. When the same question was asked to the populations of industrial and postindustrial countries, the number dropped to 25 percent and 20 percent respectively. This same pattern was seen when asked if they prayed daily, with a slight increase in numbers in all three populations. However, the most dramatic difference was seen when they were asked about the importance of religion. In agrarian societies, the population responded with a whopping 64 percent claiming that religion was very important. Industrial populations responded with 34 percent, and only 20 percent of people in postindustrial societies claimed this religious importance. (Pippa 58)

With much of Europe now being postindustrial, it is clear to see that their increased secularism was bound to happen eventually. And with many Europeans being able to track their family lineage back past agrarian periods, the dissolving of religious dependence came naturally. However, this is not the same case for many Muslims throughout Europe. Majority of the Muslim population are either immigrants or are the first generation of immigrants. This is due to the mass work based migration in the 1960’s of immigrants from former European colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. (Cesari 452) Many of these workers were not only Muslims, but were coming from underdeveloped economies that had a dependent relationship with religion to keep social order. With many of the immigrants having ties to these underdeveloped societies, it is clear that they would inevitably also have strong ties to their religious values. This difference in religious dependence could possibly be the reason behind the tensions felt between Muslims and traditional Europeans.

Even with these inevitable differences, there has still been a dramatic growth of the Islamic faith throughout Europe. This is once again due primarily from migration, with the Muslim demographic not only being one of the youngest, but also one of the fastest reproducing. (Cerari 452) The third largest Muslim population in Europe can be seen in the United Kingdom. In 2001, there were an estimated 1.6 million Muslims living in the U.K. This was nearly a three hundred percent increase within only 20 years, with the Muslim population being only at 533,000 in 1981.(Pauly 98) This shows the large immigrant growth that had occurred throughout the latter half of the century, but Muslim roots in the region date back to over three hundred years ago. Due to Britain’s vast empire, it was constantly beings introduced to new cultures. During this time period the East India company recruited sailors from there colonial regions known as lascars, and this opened the door for Islam to first meet British society.(Pauly 98) Following the usage of these foreign sailors, permanent communities began establishing themselves throughout Britain. These communities were comprised of populations from Yemen, India, Iraq, and Egypt, and were responsible for building the first British mosques in 1870. (Pauly 98) However, the Muslim communities were still an extremely small segment of the U.K.’s population.

This number saw its first vast increase after India’s independence from Britain in 1947. This independence also brought the separation of Pakistan and India, increased destabilization to the region, and wars throughout Kashmir. (Pauly 98) These hardships, mixed with promises of employment in British factories, marked the first massive wave of immigrants from Asia that lasted through the 1960’s. Following this period, there was a second wave of Islamic immigrants. They too would be fleeing the destabilization and wars following colonial independence. However, these immigrants came from the minority groups being persecuted in Kenya and Somalia. In the late 1960’s and early 70’s, over 200,000 immigrants from these regions were arriving in hopes for a better life.(Pauly 99) Along with this influx, over 100,000 Bangladeshis arrived throughout the 70’s, pushing the numbers of this second wave over 350,000 within only 20 years. From the 1980’s to the present, a diverse range of Muslims have arrived in the U.K. helping to boost the numbers past 1.6 million. (Pauly 99)

The majority of Muslims residing in the United Kingdom come from either Pakistani or Bangladeshi decent. In demographic terms, these populations are dramatically younger, and reproduce twice as fast as the British majority. With numbers like these, it is clear that these Muslim communities will inevitably keep growing at a much faster rate and therefore, will have a much larger impact upon British culture. However, this dramatic growth is nowhere to be seen in the context of these communities relative economies. Within these communities are some of the lowest wages and standards of living in all of the U.K. Within the UK, number of men that are working toward a substantial wage sits roughly at 70 percent within Pakistani communities, and this number jumps to 90 percent higher in Bangladeshi communities. Once compared to the 28 percent throughout the rest of the U.K., the disproportion becomes clear.(Pauly 102) This can mainly be attributed to the combination of a growing population within these communities, along the decrease of industry and jobs as the U.K. shifts to a postindustrial market.

The second largest populations of Muslims in Europe reside within Germany, and estimates range anywhere from 2.8 to 3.24 million. (Pauly 65) Much like the waves witnessed in the U.K., there were also waves of Muslims coming to Germany for employment opportunities. The first large flow of Muslim immigrants into Germany happened in 1961. That year Germany signed The Employment Agreement with Turkey due to the demand of cheap labor from Germany’s growing industries.(Pauly 65) These immigrants were mostly young males that came to Germany for higher wages than could be found in their own towns. Like majority of European states that were using this practice of guest workers, Germany assumed that these workers would eventually return back to their country of origin. However by the time the German guest worker program had ended in 1973, the Muslim population already had exceeded over 700,000.(Pauly 68) Instead of returning back to Turkey at this point, the majority stayed within Germany and took advantage of the family reunification programs in Germany. Throughout the 1970’s, many families from Turkey reunited and boosted the Muslim population to well over a million by 1980.(Pauly 68)

This growth rate steadily increased with the population growing by 30 percent within only two years. Due to this trend and the OPEC crisis effect on the economy, German lawmakers enacted legislation to slow down the process of family reunification and encourage these guest worker families to return to Turkey. This vastly slowed down the growth of the Turkish populations, but had less effect upon the Muslim demographic as a whole.(Pauly 69) Due to political instabilities throughout the Middle East and South Asia during the 1980’s and 90’s, Germany saw their second mass migration of Muslim immigrants. Although, many of these immigrants traveled to Germany for employment, many came escaping the violence and political persecutions within these regions. By the end of the 90’s, the Muslim population in Germany had already exceeded 2.5 million.(Pauly 69)

Even with this second flow of Muslim immigrants from various countries, nearly 75 percent of the Muslim populations are from Turkey. The majority of these Turkish immigrants are ethnically Turkish, but they also are comprised of over 400,000 Kurdish immigrants that left Turkey due to persecution.(Pauly 69) Yet much like the Muslim immigrants in the U.K., the Muslim population in Germany also suffers from wage and employment discrimination. This can especially be seen when observing the blue collar and manufacturing job rates within Germany. Nearly 90 percent of Muslim workers in the German economy are employed in traditionally blue collar positions. (Pauly 71) Further, the amount of Muslims working in the manufacturing field is nearly 20 percent higher than the rest of Germany. What is truly disturbing, is that Muslim workers make an average of 700 marks less than a traditional German in the same position.(Pauly 72)

These inequalities stretch much further than employment, with problems seen both in Muslim’s political representation, and the quality of their education. A recent study showed that German students were twice as likely to obtain their high school degree, and received 4.5 more years of education than their Turkish counterparts. This trend can also be seen among college admissions with Germans beings twice as likely than Turkish students to be accepted.(Pauly 71) However, this is not a problem of discrimination as much as it is a problem regarding culture. Since the majority of German Muslims are in fact Turkish immigrants, many of these families still have strong ties to their former culture. Therefore, many Turkish students are not fluent in the German language, and this makes assimilation and education even more daunting for German teachers. On the lines of Muslim political representation, only two Muslims have been elected to the German parliament. However, these officials led the fight to grant citizenship to the second and third generation children of guest workers. This would not only ensure citizenship to much of the Muslim community, but would also assist in providing these generations an ability to participate within German democracy.(Pauly 73)

The last country I will be examining will be France, who has by far the largest Muslim population in Europe. The number of French Muslims hovers somewhere around 4.5 million and continues to grow. France has had a history of great acceptance for its immigrant communities. This is mainly due to the fact that the majority of initial immigrants came to France from other European countries due to France’s constant demand for labor. However after WWII, majority of French immigrants were coming from areas that were predominantly Muslim. Due to the decolonization in Africa and the civil war throughout Algeria, many were forced to flee from these areas. These immigrants and refugees arrived in France looking for either a better standard of living or to escape the violence engulfing the region.(Pauly 36) Much of the incredible growth seen in France during the 1960’s can be attributed to these immigrants who provided a low cost work force for the growing French industry. However, much like Germany after the oil crisis in the early 1970’s, the French enacted legislation in 1974 to halt this influx of foreign workers. Due to this legislation, Muslim immigrants acted fast to reunite their families and moved their relatives to France. Between 1975 and 1982, Muslim immigrants surpassed the number of European immigrants for the first time in France‘s history.(Pauly 37)

Much like the Muslim communities throughout the rest of Europe, the French Muslim communities were growing in numbers. However, they also were experiencing the same economic and social inequalities seen in these same countries. This was once again due to a lack of assimilation into French culture, mainly due to strong residual ties to their North African heritages. However, these problems have been somewhat addressed through many Pro-Muslim political organizations developing throughout the 1980’s. These Islamic organizations include both the Federation National des Musulmans de France (FNMF) and the Union des Organizations Islamiques de France (UOIF).(Pauly 41) Further, the French government also has taken formidable steps to insure Muslim integration and acceptance. For example, French Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement, formed a governmental- Muslim council to improve French Muslim relations in the April of 2000.(Pauly 41)

Unfortunately, even with all of this progress, the task to bring unity to the Muslim community and the rest of Europe is a daunting one. In case of France, there has been much controversy regarding legislation that was recently passed involving Islamic faith. During July of 2010, the French Senate passed a bill to prohibit Muslim women to wear the traditional veil, also known as a niquab, in public. This bill was developed by the French conservative party, led by the President Nicolas Sarkozy.(Ganley) The measure was passed overwhelmingly through the French Parliament, and would dictate fines for women wearing the veil. This inevitably has caused much anger and tension on both sides, even though it would only effect approximately 2,000 women.(Ganley)

The conservative party advocates that this measure was passed to ensure that French values prevail and are available to all women. The anger from the Muslim community however, stems from the right to practice their religion freely, even if their religious faith is in contradiction with French norms. This conflict between the French government and the Muslim community is nothing new, but rather has been going on for over 20 years. In 1989, the disagreement began when three Muslim girls attempted to wear their headscarves to a French public school. These students were initially excluded from class but this decision was retracted after much national debate over the issue.(Pauly 33) Further in 2004, the French National Assembly passed a measure that banned all types of religious symbols from public schools.(Pauly 33)  
 This instance in France highlights how the western ideal that religion should be separate from government, can at times contradict another western ideal, being the freedom to practice ones religion. As in the US, these two rights can appear to contradict at times, and therefore can cause heated debates with no clear victor. But this is not the only instance when liberal ideas pertaining to individual rights come in conflict with Islamic culture. Another right that has been at the center of a 20 year long debate would be the freedom of press. In the January of 1989, Muslims throughout the U.K. demonstrated against British author Salman Rushdie for his novel, *The Satanic Verses*. Muslims around the world advocated that this literature was highly offensive, due to how the author portrayed both the Prophet Muhammad and Islam as a whole. These tension elevated to a point that an Iranian cleric demanded the authors execution in a decree known as a Fatwa.(Pauly 94)

Along these same lines, there is the infamous controversy surrounding a Danish cartoonist, Kurt Westergaard’s depiction of the prophet Muhammad. To Muslims, any depiction of the prophet in physical form is forbidden due to preventing anyone from worshiping of the prophet himself. Kurt Westergaard however, believed that both the freedom of speech and press should not be suppressed at all due to a minorities’ personal beliefs. After Danish authorities learned of a plot to assassinate Kurt, several newspapers reprinted the cartoon and have felt even more backlash. (Olsen) This incident has highlighted not only the growing tensions between Danish society and its Muslim community, but also the conflict of ideals between western democracy and ideals of the Islamic faith.

These tensions have been going on for the past 30 years, but have been increasingly magnified after the September 11th attacks of 2001. While European governments have implemented more anti-terrorist legislation, Islamic terrorist activities have been becoming a much more common occurrence. This can be seen in both the Madrid train bombing of 2004, and the London train bombings in 2005. Both of these attacks have been linked to the September 11th attacks through the terrorist group known as Al-Qaeda.

Further, it has been estimated that roughly 1 to 2 percent of European Muslims are associated with some form of an Islamic terrorist organization. There also have been strong suspicions that groups from Iraq have been actively recruiting throughout Europe. Since 2001, E.U. nations have arrested nearly ten times more terrorist suspects that the United States. (Cesari 455) On an even darker note, according the FBI statistics, hate crimes towards Muslims have increased by 16 times from 2000 to 2001.(Cesari 35) These attacks have not always been physical, but also includes the wide spread use of verbal attacks and discrimination against the Muslim community.

The terrorist attacks of September 11th have caused much harm towards the Muslim communities residing in democratic nations due to the fear that flourished afterwards. But even with these increased fears and tensions, the attacks also brought awareness to both the Nation of Islam and the discrimination felt by many Muslims. It is clear that many of these problems are not based upon religious values, but it grows at a much deeper historical level. European colonialism in practice made third world regions dependent upon the European market through the exportation of cheap raw materials. During the 19th century, Europe saw an industrial boom where they needed cheap labor from factories and where able to turn to their previous colonies for this work force. These immigrants were essentially part of the back bone of European industry, all the while living in substandard conditions.

Do to this advanced economic development, many of Europe’s religious and social norms also began to develop. However, in the case of many Muslims, these social and religious developments were never allowed to flourish due to the desperation and deprivation being felt. So as Europeans became more secular as they move to a postindustrial market, many Muslims are still stuck in the mentalities of a religiously based agrarian society. This is naturally going to cause turmoil due to the conflicts of ideals and structures that form these different societies. While Muslims need to come to an understanding and an acceptance of democratic ideals, I believe majority of European societies need to reflect upon their past.

First of all, Europe should already be aware of the dangers that surround religious stereotyping and the discrimination of a certain culture or religion. European nations also need to come to an acceptance that much of their prosperity is directly tied in with the Muslim community. That much of Europe’s advances were only able to occur through their use of colonies and guest workers of these regions. Most importantly, Europeans need to understand that the only reason why Europe holds these democratic ideals is through the economic developments that occurred at the expense of these Muslim communities. Europe can no longer just point and scream at Muslims to catch up and become more liberal, but rather should act with understanding and compassion. An understanding that some of these religious tensions are not necessarily due to the religion itself, but are rather a reflection of economic tensions.

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