

# Europe, Migration and the 'Muslim Question' in Troubled Times

The northwestern tip of the 'Old World' faces a grave test of humanity. Historically, after the Migrations of Peoples in Antiquity, today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, human mobility of enormous diversity and mass forces European states and societies to radically change. The fact that the source of this mobility is mostly from the eastern borders of *Fortress Europe* and/or former colonies adds a separate and sensitive historical dimension to the issue. The fierce public debates, which seem as if these great waves of immigration came out of history, make the issue even more intractable. An anti-immigration and xenophobic language, which has gradually become mainstream in the media and political discourse, serves to increase social polarization day by day. Of the groups most affected by this situation are the diverse Muslim communities, whose existence in the continent dates back hundreds of years. Today we can say with certainty that Europe must face a very critical and urgent problem, which, in fact, is rooted in the ethical discussions of 'human dignity' : that is the 'Muslim Question'.

Let's take a closer look at the three main concepts and their implications that inform the main arguments of this article. Perhaps the most ambiguous of these three and the one that has undergone the most meaning shift in the historical process is 'Europe'. The borders of 'Europe', both politically and geographically, are still quite vague. In addition, the 'old continent' is both fragmented and despite all political efforts, a consensus has not been reached on what a common 'European' identity means. Of course, we do not have to interpret these as mere disadvantages. As a matter of fact, each may also be read as an advantage. But here is the critical point: who is the *authority* to do this reading and interpretation? The 'sovereign Europe', the peoples or the capitalist oligarchs? Whether a politico-social will can be made out of uncertainties and diversity depends on the complex network of relations between the elements that make up that diversity and a kind of harmony created within that network. Throughout its hundreds of years of history, Europe, as the field of such a struggle, has to provide a kind of harmony in order to continue its co-existence with the 'new' elements introduced today.

Similar to 'Europe', 'Muslims' have never been a monolithic community throughout their history. This is actually one of the most prominent factors explaining the historical dynamism and vitality of Muslim societies. Even today, the vast Islamicated geography stretching from the Atlantic coast to the coasts of South China and Indonesia, Kazan to South Africa and Java indicates that important phenomenon. All engineering efforts to monopolize and standardize this diverse human geography have been met with resistance in some way. At the intellectual level, Muslims' interpretation of this diversity and plurality as a natural manifestation of their understanding of freedom is another expression of how valuable they find it. On the other hand, the very existence of Muslim communities in Europe dates back to almost as old as the history of Islam itself. In fact, the 'old continent' is not *stranger* to what Muslims have done on its lands in almost every field. From the cities of Spain and Portugal to Malta and Sicily, from Budapest, where the Danube flows through, to Sofia, to Odessa, the Black Sea port city in the north, to Athens and the Peloponnese, to the beautiful olive-grove towns of Crete and Cyprus, Muslims are among the most important communities that have shaped Europe throughout a long history. When we think of this intertwined history and *convivencia* experience, it would be incomplete to explain the dynamics behind the management of a cosmopolitan metropolis like London by a Muslim mayor just by looking at post-colonial processes.

As to the third concept at the title of this article, 'migration', one can easily assert that this phenomenon is as old as the history of humanity. The free *movement* of human beings on earth constituted the beginning of the humanity's adventure at the same time. Large and small scale human movements have always triggered the changes and transformations that make history. On the other hand, 'movement' or 'action' is both the cause and the result of human existence at the same time. So the phenomenon of 'migration' in this sense refers to a philosophical-political and ethical process, which covers all human actions that include a *march*. *It is an ethical process* due to it involves *pain* and *hope* simultaneously. It is the *welcome* and *encounter* in this process that gives meaning to both pain and hope. Reception and encounter, on the other hand, are entirely human and ethical in all aspects. Thus, in the migration process, pain and hope cease to be a mere personal experience and turn into a 'social relationship' as Ludwig Wittgenstein puts it.[1] Every form of social relationship is based on or legitimized by some kind of ethics and etiquette. Therefore, the complex and multidimensional phenomenon called 'migration' also reveals a state of consciousness that points to an ethics of etiquette and responsibility, which requires it equally.

The past half century, especially, has witnessed developments that need to be carefully considered in terms of global and mass human movements and their consequences. While these developments, on the

one hand, unveiled the heavy and inhumane face of the systematic policies of capitalist globalization and neoliberal transformation; on the other hand, they also opened the door to some possibilities and opportunities that one might not notice at the first glance. It is certainly true that today Europe's borders have turned into the world's deadliest borders – let's just remember the thousands of deaths in the Mediterranean since 2014. The European Union (EU) spends billions of Euros to protect the *Fortress of Europe* from foreigners and immigrants. To Turkey to hold Syrian and other Middle Eastern refugees, whose numbers range from four to five millions; to Morocco to protect Ceuta and Melilla, Spanish *enclaves* in North Africa; to Libya to prevent migrants from crossing the Mediterranean and to detain them in detention centres that are under the control of militia forces; and to Niger to close the Sahara road, it pays a real fortune.[2] Yet the Union cannot be said to have been successful in its immigration policy, which is completely devoid of moral foundations. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants have crossed borders and reached Europe since 2014-2016, when the humanitarian crisis was at its deadliest.

Feeling helpless in the face of great socio-political and ethical challenges, the neo-Empire now clings to different strategies of othering and marginalisation, since the legacy that has remained behind after the dissolution of the classical colonial rule has not been confronted yet. The 'Muslim other', who was an old external enemy in Europe, has turned into an internal enemy and even a 'traitor' after the colonial period. As a neo-Empire strategy, anti-Muslim racism and *demonization* of Muslims and Islam, rising on the ground of the new 'Muslim question', has become a systematical policy by gaining institutionalization in many European countries, especially in France. These new 'invaders' are the source of many of the fundamental problems that are surrounding contemporary European societies, from inequality to homelessness.[3]

While the 'Muslim question'[4] is getting more dangerous globally and in the West day by day, it is vital to understand the intellectual-ethical approach underlying the problem. The illusion of sovereignty has long been a burden on the white man's shoulders. He attributes to it a sacred mission. The theological-political imagination of sovereignty, which is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is once again confronted with the historical-humanly-moral understanding of 'human dignity'. When you sacrifice 'human dignity' to any form of sovereignty, nothing will be left of *man*. So in our age of ambiguities, the most urgent responsibility of the human being will be to undertake the will to put forward a common law of humanity on the basis of 'human dignity'. This will is nothing but the power of existence that will be displayed in the face of different forms of sovereignty that threaten humanity during his *walk* starting from his *first action* on earth and extending to eternity. The possibility and/or opportunity mentioned at the beginning of this article points to such a free will that the 'Muslim other', who was seen as the colonial object once upon a time, will manifest in the new-Imperial centres to live together on the basis of equality. This is also an action of responsibility for the future of all humanity and for the *coming* of another Europe.

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[1] In his masterpiece *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Wittgenstein argues that 'pain' is a form of 'not a mere personal experience but a social relationship' (Oxford: Blackwell, p. 120).

[2] See Ian Urbina, "Europe's secretive system to keep out immigrants", *Le Monde diplomatique* (English edition) January 2022; Benoit Breville, "Goes around, comes around", *Le Monde diplomatique*, December 2021.

[3] Nikos Papastergiadis, "The Invasion Complex: The Abject Other and Spaces of Violence", *Geografiska Annaler* 88 (4), 2006, pp. 429-442.

[4] For more details on the 'Muslim question', see my last paper: "Batı'nın 'Müslüman Sorunu': 21. Yüzyılda Batı'da Müslüman Varlığı ve Yüzleşmeler", *INSAMER Rapor* 155, Mart 2022: <https://www.insamer.com/tr/batinin-musulman-sorunu-21-yuzyilda-batida-musulman-varligi-ve-yuzlesmeler.html>