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Islamophobia and Xenophobia in Post-2015 Migration Europe: A Sociopolitical Analysis

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Abstract: The post-2015 migration crisis in Europe has catalyzed significant shifts in political, social, and cultural dynamics, particularly regarding Islamophobia and xenophobia. Existing fears and the development of new divisions among European societies have been reinforced by the migration of more than one million refugees who are predominantly Muslims. This article analyses how the confluence of migration flows, political rhetoric, media images, as well as popular opinion has led to the rise of Islamophobia and xenophobia in Europe. It contends that the phenomena are not merely reactions to the demographic change but are constructed through political discourses, media discourses and institutional policies. Through the examination of the role of right-wing populist movements, mainstreaming of anti-migrant discourse, and institutionalisation of exclusionary policies, the paper will assist in understanding the dynamics of the role that migration plays as a significant inclusion and exclusion battlefield of national identity and security. The paper also discusses how civil society resistance and solidarity emerged as an alternative to the division and fear promoted by political elites. Finally, the article also recommends not only more inclusive migration policies and media literacy campaigns but also anti-discrimination actions to curb the worsening Islamophobia and xenophobia in post-2015 London.

Keywords: Islamophobia; Xenophobia; European Migration Crisis; Right-Wing Populism; Civil Society Resistance

1. Introduction

The summer of 2015 became a historical event in the history of the European continent as more than one million asylum seekers reached the European coasts, many of them escaping the war-ravaged Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other conflict-prone countries [1,2]. Humanitarian, even at its onset, was easily transformed into a structural and ideological crisis or otherwise a test to the founding policy of the European Union (EU) in terms of solidarity, human rights and free movement. This wave of refugees can be popularly known as the European migration crisis that revealed tremendous cracks in the European political system and the opinion of the masses, as the gaps between member states in terms of policy response and sharing of the burden widened, as well as the storylines about the European identity and belonging [3].

When it first occurred, a lot of European citizens and leaders expressed sympathy. The then Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, became an icon of accepting the refugees as she declared on opening the borders to hundreds of thousands of refugees with the phrase: *Wir schaffen das* (We can manage this). Examples of such humanitarian stands can be noted in Sweden, Austria and Southern Europe. But this unity has soon been crushed under the infectious mood of fear, nationalism, and cultural protectionism. With the increase in the arrival numbers--and especially after the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015), Brussels (2016), and Berlin (2016) -- a culture of paranoia and aggression became established in the civil debate. Refugees and particularly Muslims have been associated with terrorism, incompatibility and social disturbances by politicians and in media. The story changed to sympathy and isolation [4,5].

Under these circumstances, the two interconnected social trends, Islamophobia and xenophobia, became the characteristic peculiarities of the post-2015 European sociopolitical environment. Islamophobia, which is described as irrational fear, hatred or prejudice towards Islam or Muslims, predated significantly in Europe, but it has aggravated significantly following the arrival of refugees. It has, over the years, been perpetuated and justified by the media discourse, political discourses, as well as the policy of the state. At the same time, xenophobia in its wider definition, fear (or dislike) of foreigners, has risen in populist equivalents and popular perception as a reasoned issue, but in much of the discourse in the popular and governmental perception turns out to be an interest in not overstressing the national budget, crime or even national identity [6,7].

Although these two phenomena can be analytically differentiated, they often coincide in the European reality, especially when the migrant or the refugee is specified as Muslim or Arab. This intersectionality adds complexity to the process of making policy, it undermines the principle of democracy, and in a broader sense, it increases polarization of society. Anti-migrant sentiment is not just the natural response to the social pressure brought by demographic change; ideological currents behind it are more historically concerned with globalization, the transition to postcolonial identity, and the ability of Europeans to cope with cultural diversity in the realm of nationalism. Moreover, these fears are not the same everywhere on the continent, the most virulent form being found in countries such as Hungary or Poland where a comparatively limited population of migrants has been met, by an equally vibrant anti-immigration agenda, in contrast to the UK or France which are highly multicultural societies, where matters are discussed in terms of integration, secularism, and social cohesion. Institutional implications have also been involved with the politicization of Islam and migration. Far-right and right-wing populist parties in the different EU member states have become electorally strong by exploiting anti-migrant sentiments and Islamophobia. Slogan-driven campaigns, such as the one on the ideas of protecting Europe, the prevention of its Islamization, and the campaign of making Europe safe once again, have established the formerly peripheral ideologies in the mainstream. Policies are keeping up: border walls, refugee camps, bans on the headscarves and the burqa, mosques spied upon, limits to halal foods and religious education, all are becoming standardized on the issue of national security or the cultural heritage [8,9].

In this background, this paper explores the social and political processes which have facilitated the emergence and entrenchment of Islamophobia and xenophobia in post-2015 European migration. Instead of addressing these attitudes as some single prejudices or emotional responses, the present study puts them in the context of a larger sociopolitical, media and policy environment. It will seek to demystify how the fear of the Other is constructed, distributed and codified in discourse and law. It also aims at noting how civil society actors, migrant communities, and grassroots movements have been fighting these narratives, calling in favor of inclusive policies and human rights-based approaches.

The critical research questions of the given investigation are the following:

1. Which structural, historical, and political issues have led to the emergence of new peaks of Islamophobia and xenophobia in Europe since 2015?
2. What are the different discourses which are created and recreated by the various media, political players, and the state about Muslim migrants and immigration, that of non-Europeans?
3. How have European societies differed in their attitudes towards others, but also how have the civil societies and the activism communities been counteracting the exclusionary politics?

This paper is multidisciplinary, building on both political science studies, sociology, media studies and migration studies. It is a combination of discourse analysis of political speeches and media, as well as statistical information provided by Eurobarometer, NGO reports and hate files databases. The German, French, Hungarian and Swedish case studies will make it possible to have a comparative feature of the variation of the response to migration and multiculturalism at the national level. The theoretical approach relies on both concepts of securitization theory and the social identity theory, as well as the postcolonial approach, to comprehend both the rhetoric and policy form of fear and exclusion [10-14].

In the end, the present article insists that the origins of Islamophobia and xenophobia in post-2015 Europe lie less in demographic change than in the process and construction of political rhetoric, institutional procedure, and media framing. Then any current efforts aimed at handling them should not only be based on some superficial tolerance campaign but must dig deeper into the structural and ideological foundations of the exclusions. By so doing, the current study will add to the scholarly debates that continue to exist concerning migration, identity, and the future of European integration during the time of uncertainty, contestation, as well as pluralism.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, the conceptual and analytical base is provided to get an idea of how Islamophobia and xenophobia have grown in post-2015 migration Europe. Instead of considering these as isolated or spontaneous responses to population transformation, this paper considers these processes as being socially constructed, politically instrumentalized and rooted in ideology. To examine this complexity, three major elements will be examined: first, (1) definitions and distinction between Islamophobia and xenophobia, second, (2) pertinent theoretical perspectives explaining the rise and maintenance of either, and third, (3) the application of the theoretical perspectives to the European post-2015 scenario [15].

2.1. The meaning of Islamophobia and Xenophobia

2.1.1 Islamophobia

The term Islamophobia describes irrational fear, hate, and prejudice of Islam or Muslims. It is worse than interpersonal bigotry because it includes systemic practices of discrimination, exclusion, and hostility, which are encoded in legal, media, and policy systems. One terrifically influential report took place in 1997 by the Runnymede Trust, which considered Islamophobia as not only unreasoned hostility towards Islam but also the practical consequences of such hostility to unfair discrimination against Muslims as individuals and communities. Researchers such as Chris Allen (2010) note that Islamophobia works in the same way as racism because Muslims are racialized using visible indicators (e.g., headscarves, beards, Arabic names) and approached as a monolithic, threatening community. It tends to present Islam as a religion that cannot mate with Western values of growing secularism, democratic practices and gender equality.

2.1.2 Xenophobia

Xenophobia, however, has a more general meaning and implies fear of outsiders, immigrants, or other culturally different individuals. It does not always have to be associated with religion, but built upon nationalistic, ethnocentric or even economic uneasiness. Xenophobia in the European context of the migration process is usually based on asylum seekers and immigrants of the Global South, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. Although xenophobia may include Christians, Jews or secular people, in the post-2015 setting, it has hit the Muslims, thus overlapping with Islamophobia.

2.1.3 Intersectionality

It is imperative to realize the connection between Islamophobia and xenophobia. Most migrants are not only ethnically alien but also Muslim. In such a way, they emerge to be objects of a twofold stigma, racialized as non-European and culturalized as anti-modern or uncivilized. This intersectionality, the fusion of the various axes of identity (religion, race, nationality) that all constitute the sources of discrimination, is the subject matter of this paper's analysis.

2.2 Essential Theory Perspectives

In order to apply three key theoretical approaches to explain the dynamics of how Islamophobia and xenophobia are generated, perpetuated, and embedded within institutions, this paper will refer to securitization theory, social identity theory, and postcolonial/Orientalist theories [16,17].

2.2.1 The Theory of Securitisation

Studied by Barry Buzan, Ole W, and Jaap de Wilde (1998), the theory of securitization assumes that problems become security concerns not due to their inherent risk, but because they are so named through speech acts of influential agents (e.g. politicians, media, institutions). During such a framing process, the usual edicts of politics are cast aside, the extraordinary procedures are justified, as are surveillance, border closure, detention, or involvement of the military.

Migration was securitised in the post-2015 European context with a heightening concern being seen after a series of terror attacks in Paris (2015), Brussels (2016) and Berlin (2016). Asylum seekers, especially Muslims, started to be mixed up with terrorism, extremism, and social unrest by politicians and the media. Through this story, governments gained the opportunity to put in place restrictions on asylum, strengthening of borders and an increase in surveillance surrounding Muslim communities, which could easily be justified as aimed at national security. The securitisation theory can therefore be considered as a method of studying the mobilisation and institutionalisation of fear [18].

2.2.2 Theory of Social Identities

Social identity theory, a theory developed after the work by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), depicts how a person takes a certain part of his or her self-identity into consideration of the group to which he or she belongs. It assumes a tendency of human beings to categorize the world into the in-group (us) and the out-group (them). This categorization produces corollaries of favouritism on the in-group and prejudice of the out-group.

According to this theory, in the migration context, it could be helpful to understand why the natives of Europe can perceive their Muslim migrants as culturally out of place, whose presence poses a threat to national identity, values, or social unity. Migrants are reduced to such a symbolic status of fear or decline, thanks to the mechanism of othering, where there might not be many social contacts between natives and migrants. The political elites have used this dynamic by drumming up solidarity of by them against them tactics to advance exclusionary policies [19].

The social identity theory also explains the fact that feelings of threat can be atypical with regard to exposure. As an example, those countries, which reluctantly accepted refugees, such as Hungary or Poland, had the most anti-migrant attitudes, as the threat of an alien out-group was conceived but not felt.

2.2.3 Postcolonial and Orientalist approaches

Orientalism (Edward Said, 1978) is an outstanding study in which the author comes forward with a critical analysis of how the oriental world has been portrayed by the West, especially the Muslim world, as exotic, inferior, backwards and dangerous. Still ingrained in the colonial history of Europe, these representations continue to loom in the present discourses and determine the attitude towards Muslims and their representation.

Postcolonialism reveals modern Islamophobia as not only a novel response to migration but a series of centuries-old efforts and perceptions of non-Westerners, the most notable of them being Muslims. It highlights the issue of cultural imperialism, as through it, the European secularism, liberalism, and gendered norms are perceived as universal, whereas the activities of Muslims are represented as regressive or dangerous. An instance is when people argue about matters such as hijab or even halal food, but it is rarely about the feasibility of these things, but symbolic borders: who fits in Europe, and who does not. Such an approach is especially applicable when it comes to taking apart media accounts, school curricula, or even political rhetoric in which the identity of Muslims is defined as being incompatible with so-called European values. It also assists in the criticism of initiatives such as veil bans or mosque surveillance as extensions of colonial rule in the pretence of liberal secularism [20-22].

2.3- Applicability to the Research Context

These three aspects of focusing, namely, securitization theory, social identity theory and postcolonial critique, are not mutually exclusive, rather complementary.

- The securitization theory allows understanding the securitization of Islam and migration in terms of security problems, which justifies the adoption of restrictive policies.

The social identity theory explains the formation of a polarized opinion in society and the scapegoating experienced by groups of people.

Postcolonial theory reveals underlying cultural and historical ideologies of Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric.

In combination, they leave room to examine at various levels: elite discourse (politicians and media), institutional policy (laws and regulations) and societal attitudes (surveys and hate crimes) and, moreover, acknowledge legacies of history and symbolic representations.

These frameworks will organize the structure of the other sections of the paper, especially the review of media discourse, political mobilization and grassroots resistance. The anchoring of discussion in long-established theories helps the study to avoid the use of anecdotal explanations but presents a systemic narration of how fear and hostility towards migrants and the treatment of migrants, especially Muslim migrants, have become some of the norms of European societies today.

3. Media and Public Discourse

In this section, the author draws attention to the role of the media and the role of political discourse in Europe in developing, distributing and exacerbating Islamophobic and xenophobic stories because of the 2015 refugee crisis. Nevertheless, the media is not a simple, indifferent mirror of such opinion; it helps to shape how people perceive the issue by positioning migrants and Muslims in a specific way, choosing what stories to tell, emphasizing and obscuring some details. Such a route of representation is a key element of the social construction of fear, difference and national identity.

In this discussion, the analysis will be presented in three sections as follows: (A) how the major media depict Muslim refugees and migrants; (B) the role of social media and digital spaces in spreading fear and hate; and (C) the counterpoint of the humanitarian discourse [23,24].

3.1 Framing of Muslim Migrants and Refugees by the Mainstream Media

3.1.1 Narratives of threat

Since 2015, both the mass European media, especially tabloids and some right-wing publications, have made refugees the common place of national security, cultural purity and the public good. In particular, Muslim men are conventionally depicted as:

- Security threats, particularly in a post-terrorist attacks area such as that witnessed due to the Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016) attacks.
- Sexual threats, which are associated with the sensational reporting of the New Year holiday events of rape in Cologne, Germany (2015/2016).
- Cultural dangers, which were revealed as either reluctant to assimilate or hostile to European liberalism (gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, etc.).

The words, which are typically used, like flood, swarm, or invasion, contribute to a feeling of unbearable and unrestrained harm and strengthen the fear instead of empathy [25].

3.1.2 Dehumanisation and stereotyping

Aesthetic presentation is also involved. Refugees tend to be depicted as mask-like masses, young, male, and violent, which leaves the diversity of real asylum seekers, such as women or children, as well as minority people, at risk. This is part of the dehumanization process that involves reducing multidimensional human beings into one thing, which is a threat.

Although not explicitly hostile, a tendency to exoticizing or generalizing the Muslim culture features in many media representations, further establishing the view of the world divided into us and them. The persistence of Muslim silence in reporting also excludes the community which it is being written about.

3.1.3 Media Difference in Region

Western and Northern European media (as an example, Germany (Bild), the United Kingdom (Daily Mail), France (Le Figaro), etc.) incline to a balance between security fears and human-interest stories, in liberal press in particular. Conversely, the media of Eastern Europe, e.g. Magyar Id (Hungary) or Gazeta Polska (Poland), tends to be allied with anti-immigration regimes and deliberately promote Islamophobic and/or xenophobic content, particularly when there are only a few real refugees available [26,27].

3.2. The Significance of the Digital and Social Media

3.2.1 Algorithmic Amplification and Echo Chambers

In contrast to the traditional media, social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and YouTube, enable people to choose and support their own opinions, which are frequently reinforced by ideologically like-minded communities. The algorithms tend to prioritize content that causes fear, anger, or moral outrage, which boosts the popularity of hate speech, conspiracy theories, or misinformation disproportionately.

3.2.2 Far-Right Mobilization

Action by far-right actors emphasizes the ability to use social media to influence the discourse process without passing through editorial control. Such movements like “Refugees Not Welcome” or even their conspiracy theory like the “Great Replacement” (Muslims will outnumber and replace the Europeans) have thrived. Cultural defence has brought Islamophobia through memes, viral videos and shocking content as a strong insertion tool.

3.2.3 Internet Bullying and Extremism

Threats, doxing, and hate campaigns are common causes of online harassment among Muslims and pro-migrants. Meanwhile, there are instances of online radicalization of users, particularly social youth, who go from being sceptical to becoming extremists. Social media is therefore used as a medium of expression as well as that of indoctrination [28].

3.3. Contested Discourses: Humanitarian Narratives and Inclusive Narratives

Nevertheless, several civil society members, journalistic bodies, and artists have tried to oppose Islamophobic and xenophobic narratives, even though fear-laden accounts are in the dominant position.

3.3.1 Humanitarian Framing

The same has been the case with media houses such as The Guardian (UK), Der Spiegel (Germany), Le Monde (France), which have also shown the refugees as the victims of war, human trafficking or environmental meltdown. Photo essays and documentaries, and personal interviews help make migrants more human and demonstrate their strong spirit and beneficial role in society.

3.3.2 Resistance voices

Major and independent platforms have been used by Muslim journalists, scholars, and activists to counter

stereotypical representations and express the true story and establish coalitions. The visibility of the migrant voices is increased through such campaigns as Refugees Welcome, I Am Muslim Too, or the activities of artists, such as Ai Weiwei and Badiola.

3.3.3 Limitations and obstacles

Less frequent and factful narratives however, have not always managed to reach large masses due to media gatekeeping, digital silos or political defiance. Polarized contexts can simply reject humanitarian narratives as naive or politically partisan, and the critical press are denounced as traitors or members of the liberal elite.

On the whole, media and popular discourse play a pivotal role in the analysis of how Islamophobia and xenophobia have been on the rise in Europe since 2015. The normative media almost always portray Muslims as security or cultural threats, and the digital platforms allow hatred and fear to spread virally. But they are also the fields of struggle: alternative histories and opposition groups provide a counter-imaginary based on empathy and pluralism. This section, therefore, prepares the reader for the following portion of the paper that shifts to political response and institutional process as discourse is converted into policy and governance.

4. Institutional and Political Reactions

Although media discourse is significant in influencing the institutionalization of laws, policies, and practices helps in forming public opinion against the migrants and Muslims takes place within the political domain. The migration wave of 2015 and its aftermath provoked a set of deep political changes in Europe, with the increase of populist politics, the mainstreaming of Islamophobia and xenophobia, and the reorganization of the politics of immigration as well as asylum. This is the area of study that reflects upon the three dimensions, which are all connected, including the (A) political rise of the far right and the mainstream appropriation of anti-migrant rhetoric, (B) constraining changes in migration/integration policies, and (C) the European Union changing measurements in member-state reactions [29-31].

4.1 Co-optation and Mainstreaming of the Far-Right

Action 4.1.1 Rise of Right-Wing Populism

The extreme right parties in Europe have grown their electorate base enormously since 2015, harnessing Islam and immigration-related anxieties and identity. The Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, The Rassemblement National (formerly Front National) in France, Lega Nord in Italy, Fidesz in Hungary, Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Austria and the Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland have all advertised nativist, anti-liberal globalist and culturally protectionist programmes, with their political discourse tending to transfer the notion of an existential threat of national and European civilization to Muslim migration [32].

Such parties play on social divisions, focusing on economic discontents (e.g., unemployment, housing), as well as cultural anxieties (e.g., Islamization, demographic change), making immigration a symbolic issue of division. Their stories touch on a wider resentment of liberal multiculturalism, EU membership and the sense that the elites are out of touch with the common people [33].

Mainstream Party Adaptation

What is most interesting is that not only do mainstream centre-right but even centre-left parties have taken to using far-right language and promoting more far-right policy positions to win back some electoral support. For instance:

- **France:** Successive governments have proposed anti-religious symbol legislation, aimed at Muslim clothes in the name of *laïcité* (secularism).

Denmark: The historically social democratic administration had taken an aggressive anti-migrant stance, such as deportation initiatives and offshore asylum procedure.

- **Austria and the Netherlands:** The centre-right parties have advocated assimilation through integration that assimilates the process into subjects like language proficiency and citizenship examination, which tend to discriminate against Muslims.

The solidification of xenophobia and Islamophobia in core politics damages democratic pluralism and makes more empowers extremists [34,35].

4.2 Restrictive Change in Policy: The transition of Protection to Exclusion

4.2.1 Retrenchment of the Asylum Policy

Following the 2015 crisis, there was an emergence of the more deterrence-oriented policies on asylum in the country of many EU. Measures included:

- Border closures and fences (e.g. Hungary, Slovenia and Austria);
- Outsourcing by transit countries, including the EU-Turkey Deal (2016), where control of the borders is

outsourced in exchange for financial and political compensation;

- Fast-tracked deportation initiatives, which are usually conducted with little or no transparency or process of due process.
- Temporary protection which substitutes for comprehensive refugee status in status, thus restricting privileges and entitlements.

These policies were rendered in the name of security, national interest, or sustainability of the system, but in most cases, they unfairly singled out Muslims, not mentioning those of Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in particular.

4.2.2 Incorporation through Cultural Conformity

Whereas certain nations could sustain strong integration patterns (e.g., Sweden, Germany), others started following trends of coercive assimilation when rights could only be achieved through the adoption of the so-called values of a host country. Examples include:

- Compulsory language and civic classes;
- Gender norms, secularism, and loyalty towards European culture are behavioural expectations;
- Religious surveillance and control, such as the closing of mosques, monitoring of speeches made by imams and restrictions on foreign religious funding.

This change is part of an increase in the perception of Muslim migrants as not just new people arriving in Europe, but as culturally suspect beings, a population to be dealt with, not one to be embraced [36].

4.3 EU divided Role

4.3.1 Gridlock of Policy and Inequitable Burden Sharing

The effort of the EU to organize a common solution to the refugee crisis was not successful. The refugee relocation plan of 2015, created to resettle the refugees in the member states more proportionally, was met with fierce resistance by some countries, such as Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, that did not even accept quotas, claiming that the decision exists due to national sovereignty and cultural incompatibility [37].

This then created a mid-western separation that burdened the frontline countries of Greece and Italy, among others, and that created tensions and internal divisions within the Union.

4.3.2. To cope with the migration pressure,

The EU grew more dependent on externalization measures, where non-EU countries would be paid so as to limit migration movements by the time they reached Europe. Examples of this include -EU-Turkey deal, Libyan migration deals and the co-salvaging of the Tunisian coast guard.

At the same time, the EU border agency, Frontex, significantly increased its mandate and financial resources, and assumed a more militarised role of surveillance and control of external borders. Critiques have, however, blamed this securitized approach on sidelining refugee protections and contributing to violations of human rights in transit countries.

4.3.3 Intrapersonal Values in the Union

The issue of migration has brought into the fore sharp conflicts between the legal and normative promises of the EU (e.g. non-discrimination, asylum, freedom of religion) and the nationalist or exclusionary practices embraced by certain of its member states. The cases of headscarf prohibition, bias speech act and deportation are examples of how Islamophobia is not only a social issue but also a constitutional one that impacts the material of European life and government.

5. Societal Reactions and Civil Resistance

At a more grassroots level, in the context of the rest of the population of post-2015 Europe, Islamophobia and xenophobia have been lived in the opinions and practices of ordinary citizens. This part is an analysis of the opposite social reactions to the refugee crisis and the outflow of migration. It touches upon 3 dimensions which connect to each other (A) the transformation of the public opinion and its determinants, (B) the surge of hate crime and discrimination against Muslims and migrants, and (C) the flourishing of solidarity and civil resistance movements that filter the exclusionist ideologies [38,39].

5.1 The Opinion of People: Fear, Division and Polarization

5.1.1 Eurobarometer and national trend of the surveys

The migration attitude that exists within the public has varied significantly throughout the European continent and has been dependent upon the forms of media coverage and political pandering, economic factors and social interaction with migrants. As Eurobarometer surveys carried out in 2015-2022 show: A great percentage of Europeans considered the problem of immigration among the three most the problems that the EU faced, particularly in 2015/2016.

Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland were among the countries that showed a high level of resistance to taking in the Muslim refugees, even though they did not accept them in terms of numbers. On the other hand, there was in the beginning a less hostile reception in more open societies such as those in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands, but this increased with time, particularly in cases of high-profile criminal events or integration polemics.

5.1.2 Factors of Bad Attitudes

A few arguments can be brought forward that justify the increase in hostility towards Muslim migrants:

- Cultural distance: The respondents who consider Islam inseparable from European values would more likely uphold restrictive migration policies.
- Security issues: The association of Islam with terrorists, usually advocated by the media and political elites, proves to be a cause of fear and legitimisation of exclusion.
- Social-economic insecurity: Unemployment, housing crisis, and recession contribute to the discourse of migrants taking away jobs and stealing welfare.
- Geographical distance: Surprisingly, ill sentiments are least held in well-known places of poor interaction with migrants because, as it has been observed, imagined lives are more entrenched than lived lives [40].

5.1.3 Age, Education and Ideology

Attitudes are also affected by demographic variables:

The younger individuals, the urbanites, and those with a higher education as compared to the others, have held more inclusive and tolerant periods.

Older citizens, rural population, as well as follow the nature of conservative or nationalist political parties, tend to exhibit fear, resentment, or reject Muslim migrants.

Such a divide leads to the conclusion of a profound cultural and generational divide over Europe in the context of questions about national identity and multicultural coexistence [41].

5.2 Discriminatory Practices Discriminatory Practices Hate Crimes

5.2.1 Rise in the Incidents of Islamophobia

After the refugee crisis in 2015 and the series of terrorist attacks in several nations, the level of hate crimes against Muslims and individuals assumed to be Muslim increased significantly. These included:

- Abuse through word-of-mouth, cyber-threats, and embarrassments in the streets;

Physical Attacks, especially on Hijab Wearing Women;

- Destruction of mosques, Islamic quarters and graveyards.

As an example, Germany in 2017 alone reported more than 1,000 acts of Islamophobia, and France recorded more attacks against women wearing an Islamic dress following political discussions on secularism.

5.2.2 Discrimination at the Institutional Level

In addition to the street violence, there is also structural discrimination: Muslims and migrants have poor access to education, employment opportunities, housing and are disproportionately stopped and searched by police:

In France and the Netherlands, researchers find that Muslims who have Muslim-sounding names are much less likely to be invited to a job interview when they have the same qualifications.

- Muslim school children are the target of bullying and stereotyping, and the teachers who work with them usually do not have inclusization training.

The police services in such countries as Austria and the UK have been accused of racial profiling and over-policing of Muslim groups.

This kind of discrimination not only represents a violation of personal rights but also sparks alienation and marginalization, especially among the young generation [42,43].

5.3. Civil Society and Solidarity Resistance

Even though there is segregation and hate, numerous European organizations and citizens have come out to fight against migrants and Islamophobia. These initiatives include both grassroots activism and institutional advocacy.

5.3.1 Humanitarian and Volunteer Mobilisation

Thousands of European volunteers, in 2015-16, have been assisting refugees with food, shelter, medical care and legal aid. Initiatives like:

Refugees Welcome; Germany;

“Solidarity Cities”, Spain, Italy;

Interfaith and interfaith support networks;

These NGO had assisted in fighting state indifference and created communal narratives of mercy and common humanity.

5.3.2 Anti-Racist and Islam-Centric Activist

Muslims have been ever more self-presenting, creating their advocacy groups, legal defence agencies and media coalitions. The campaigns, including:

- I Am Muslim Too (France and UK),
- Collectif contre l'Islamophobie France (CCIF),
- Muslim Women's Network (UK),

... aim at fighting the misinformation, advocating for reform of the policies, and giving platforms to the voices of actual Muslims in a public space [44,45].

5.3.3 Education, Art and Culture

It is also important that artists, filmmakers and instructors have helped shape and change the minds of the people. Stereotypes are fought with the help of documentaries, theatre plays, exhibitions, and school curricula, which point out the benefits brought in by migrants and create empathy between different generations and cultures.

Such cultural interventions, even though less apparent in the mainstream politics, are a crucial area of activism and reimagining of stories.

The reaction of society to the migration of the post-2015 period in Europe is characterized by antagonism and contradiction. On the one hand, one can see the rise of fear, polarisation, and animosity, which are reflected in the attitude of people in the street and hate crimes, as well as structural discrimination. Grassroots resilience and civil solidarity consist of forceful counter-narratives, on the other hand, that are based on empathy, justice, and pluralism. Such are competing social currents that will define the future of European identity, democratic inclusion and intercultural coexistence [46-51].

In the last part of this article, the author switches to general considerations and policy recommendations, wondering what can be learned and what options can be offered to a Europe that is dealing with diversity and fear.

6. Conclusions

Since the migration crisis that hit Europe post-2015, isolation of the Muslim presence and populace has been an element on the political, social and cultural agenda. We investigated the area of intersection of migration flows, political aspects, framing narrative in media, society, and response to the growing number of refugees, especially coming to countries with a Muslim majority. The resultant finding was the fact that Islamophobia and xenophobia are not just a byproduct of the demographic changes, but it is rooted in the historical, ideological and political processes.

Another major aspect which was found in this study is that political rhetoric and media discourse have built and legitimized Islamophobia and xenophobia as systematic and accepted components. The emergence of right-wing populism has made migration into a political issue, and to gather larger support, propaganda and rhetoric such as Islamophobia and xenophobia are employed. This rhetoric has especially been effective in the face of global security fears, economic insecurity and national identity-related issues. Exclusionary policies have been found on the far right, but mainstream immigration policies have encouraged both moderate and left parties to transgress.

In addition, news agencies, especially those in Western and Eastern Europe have been quite instrumental in determining the discourse of refugees. Muslim migrants have in most instances been demonized as a threat to national security, culture and social cohesion thereby enhancing negative opinions among the populace and social divisions. Generally, this framing has been crowned with hate crimes, mob harassment, and institutional discrimination of Muslims and migrants.

Though a universal increase of Islamophobia and xenophobia has been realized, anti-globalisation movements on both grassroots and institutional levels have started to occur. Interfaith networks, civil society organizations, and humanitarian groups have played a critical role in offering direct services to migrants and destabilizing hostile narratives. It is not only the government action that has been resisting the negative image, but it is also the action of Muslims and migrant communities themselves who established their organizations to protect their rights and enforce policy changes and be the authentic voices during the public debates. Such initiatives have played a crucial role in producing counter-discourse to fear rhetoric that has taken over the mainstream discourse.

On top of that, cultural programs, including art exhibits and documentaries, have been useful in humanizing refugees, showing their tribulations and their contribution to society in Europe. These attempts, despite the more powerful influence of the anti-migrant opinions on the social environment, remain a crucial component of the struggle with Islamophobia and xenophobia.

6.1 Implications of Policies and Suggestions

Since the rooted problem of Islamophobia and xenophobia in post-2015 Europe is deep-rooted, its solution must be conducted on a multi-level and multi-faceted basis. Based on the evidence provided in this study, the recommendations which are presented below can be seen as the way towards a more integrative and tolerant European society.

1. Rethinking Migration and Integration Policies

The European policy-makers have to go beyond securitized migration approaches. Policies must not only be concerned with border control and detention, but rather they must emphasize humanitarian values where refugees will be provided with safe passage, asylum procedures should be conducted lawfully, and migrants should be integrated in a manner that upholds their dignity and leads to mutual respect for one another. The EU needs to strengthen a collective migration system that supports refugee protection and works on the underlying causes of migration, which are war and the climate crisis.

2. Media Literacy and Counter-Narratives

Governments and civil society organizations ought to invest in media literacy to question xenophobic and Islamophobic content, especially on social networks. Such campaigns must focus on underlining the value of the subtle, even-handed depictions of migrants and counter the promotion of misinformation. Moreover, media sources should also be held responsible in advancing inflammatory rhetoric and instead embrace more inclusive and diversified representation (of migrant communities).

3. The Study of Discrimination through Education

The curricula offered by the public education systems of Europe ought to include intercultural understanding and tolerance, as well as migration history in Europe. An inclusive young population can be developed in the future by imparting knowledge among the youth on the existence of good influences by migrants and enabling cross-cultural societies. The discriminatory prevention policies in school and employment, like the programs against racial profiling and the aid to the migrant-led educational activity, are essential to both the institutional and interpersonal discrimination.

4. The Enhancement of Social Cohesion by the Means of Integration Programs

Instead of trying to assimilate the migrants into an unchanged national identity, the European governments must be multicultural and inclusive in their integration policies. These programmes are to be based on social cohesion, where immigrants will have the opportunity to acquire language skills, get jobs and participate actively in civic matters. The government must also collaborate with the local population by holding enlightenment programs and various communal activities between the migrants and the non-migrants to help lower the social tensions in society.

5. Hate Speech and Hate Crimes: Legal Protection

In the European Union, hatred of Muslims and migrants should be severely punished by the law. The national governments ought to secure the existence of strict legal arrangements to safeguard the vulnerable communities and bring the mischievous individuals and groups who commit world hate crimes to justice. Also, one should strive to strengthen the mechanisms of reporting hate crimes should be strengthened and, in digital space in particular, the materials with an Islamophobic and xenophobic tone are issued and discussed unopposed.

6. Enhancing Political Responsibility and the Safeguarding of Democratic Principles

In the face of growing far-right, European political leaders should keep populist urges at bay and ensure fidelity to human rights and democracy. There should be accountability for rhetoric that seems to divide and bring about an action to promote social justice by politicians. Political parties ought to encourage inclusive policies and discourage migration from being utilized as a divisive matter. The emergence of the fear of Muslims and the fear of foreigners in contemporary Europe in the aftermath of 2015 poses a serious threat to the European process of integration as well as to human rights. But it is also a possibility to consider the values that will characterize Europe in the 21st century. What Europe needs to understand is that its diversity is one of its key strong points, as religious, cultural, and ethnical diversity makes Europe a much stronger continent, and the future of Europe is in the inclusive, human-oriented policy that respects the dignity and deserves the effort everyone makes, no matter who they are and what they bring to the table.

As the processes associated with migration and integration proceed to change, European communities must

repossess the narrative away from exclusive groups and embrace the need to create a society that is indeed diverse and beyond equality, justice, and solidarity are merely ideals, but are lived experiences that are part of our daily routine.

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