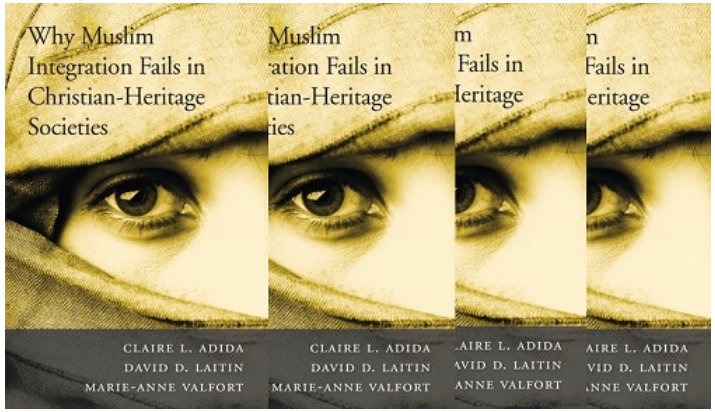

"WHY MUSLIM INTEGRATION FAILS IN CHRISTIAN-HERITAGE SOCIETIES" – BOOK REVIEW

26 Haziran, 2018 ETNİK VE DİNİ YAPILAR, Misafir Yazar, YABANCI DİLDE YAZILAR 1574

Jose Miguel Dias Rocha

The belief that Muslim immigrants cannot integrate into Western societies with a Christian heritage[1] is widespread among many citizens of the host societies. There are some alarming statistics proving it. In France, according to a survey developed this year by Sciences Po University, 60% of French think that Islam is a threat to the French Republic[2]. The situation in the United Kingdom is not considerably different. More than half of Britons (56%) believe that Islam is a "major" or "some" threat to Western democracy[3].

By the same token, the majority of German society makes a connection between Islam and discrimination against women (82%), fanaticism (72%) and propensity to violence (64%)[4]. These findings (in the three countries with the largest Muslim populations in Europe) are in consonance with some alarming signs coming from the United States of America where, for instance, nearly one-fifth of the citizens said they would support denying their country's Muslims the right to vote[5]. The tensions between the host societies and the Muslim populations in the West are undeniable and for some they are the proof that Samuel Huntington was right when, in his famous book "Clash of Civilizations"[6], he suggested that after the end of the Cold War the conflicts over cultural and religious identity would be dominant in global politics.

This represents a propitious context to analyze "Why Muslim Integration Fails in Christian-Heritage Societies"[7], a book written by Claire L. Adida, David D. Laitin, and Marie-Anne Valfortthat that intends to answer two questions. First, whether Muslim immigrants from Muslim-majority countries are discriminated against by the host societies in Christian-heritage countries – in other words, the authors try to show if there is a discrimination due to religion per se (Islamophobia). Second, in case the answer is yes, the aim is to understand what the reasons behind that discrimination are, figuring it out if that is a rational (or, at least, partly rational) attitude by the rooted populations in Christian-heritage societies.

In order to do that, the researchers carried out several interviews, experiments and surveys focused on the situation in France (there are almost 6 million Muslims in the country, the one with the largest Muslim population among all Christian-heritage societies[8]) and then, based on two other surveys – done by other institutions/scholars –, they were able to conclude that the results obtained in France were consistent with the reality in other seventeen Western European countries and in the USA.

Using a unique methodology to isolate the religious factor from other kinds of discrimination, the authors compared a "group of Senegalese immigrants from two ethnolinguistic communities who immigrated to France at the same time and for the same economic reasons, and who are split among Muslims and Christians" (p. 29) to verify whether the obstacles to integration that Muslims face in Christian-heritage countries would be lower if they were Christians.

When it comes to analyzing the situation in the labor market, the conclusion is that human resources (HR) recruiters condition their choices on the religion of applicants. The researchers created three comparable resumés (two from women with an obvious Senegalese name: one with a well-known Muslim first name, and another with a Catholic first name; and one from a woman with a popular/classic French name). The results are straightforward: the French candidate with no obvious immigrant background and the Christian French citizen of Senegalese origin were systematically favored over the Muslim one. That is reflected in the fact that, within the two studied Senegalese ethnolinguistic communities, the mean net household income for the second and third generation Senegalese Muslims immigrants is 1,500 euros per month, while for the second and third generation Senegalese Christians it stands at 1,900 euros. The difference is striking if one takes into account that the first-generation migrants from those communities arrived in France with similar socioeconomic status.

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Mümin Bumin SEZEN
NEW DEAL; WHY AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT ACT AND NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL RECOVERY ACT FAILED?

Süleyman ERDEM
TERÖR ÖRGÜTÜ ÜYELERİNİN RADİKALLEŞME SÜREÇLERİ

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In addition, the authors used experimental games, related ethnographies, and surveys to investigate how people with French parents and grandparents (dubbed FFFs) interact with the Senegalese Christians and Muslims. Those methods allowed the researchers not only to figure out that, considering gender, age, race, education, family income, and religion, the latter is the most important factor why FFFs individuals associate with others, but also to understand the causes of religious discrimination.

In the book, it is recognized that there are three main characteristics feeding rational Islamophobia in France. The first is related to religious norms. Several HR directors claim that they experienced Muslim workers trying to proselyte other workers and sanctioning other Muslims for their religious behavior. The visible expression of their religious affiliation, especially the use of the headscarf, in a country that attaches great importance to the concept of laïcité (the majority of the French population thinks that religion should be relegated to the private sphere), the Ramadan fast, the five times daily prayer, and food restrictions are also seen as threats to workplace harmony and productivity.

The second has to do with (male-favored) gender norms. The researchers show that Muslims have less favorable attitudes toward women (and gender equality) and also act less generously toward them compared to matched Christians and the Western societies in general.

Last but not least, Muslims in France have a significantly worse command of French than matched Christians. The (more likely) lack of fluency in French among Muslims immigrants is a factor that can lead to HR personnel to be more skeptic toward candidates who profess Islam.

That does not mean that evidence of nonrational Islamophobia is not overwhelming. Based on their research methods, the scholars were able to conclude that FFFs are more altruistic to their coreligionist (Christians). Additionally, during the experiments it was clear than FFFs discriminated against Muslims even when they did not expect those particular (Muslim) individuals to be hostile towards them and that as the proportion of Muslims around FFFs increases, the rooted French distaste for Muslims rises (the authors call this the "Hortefeux effect", since once this former French minister of interior said: "When there's one [Muslim], that's OK; it's when there's a lot of them that there are problems").

All of these findings made the scholars come to the conclusion that "both Muslim immigrants and rooted French act negatively toward each other, and this is mutually reinforcing" (p. 14), in what they call "a discriminatory equilibrium". It works as follows (p. 108.): first, "Muslim immigrants display behaviors that feed into French statistical discrimination against them in the labor market"; then, "rooted French exhibit unprovoked taste-based discrimination against Muslims; and "third, Muslims, perceiving more hostility in France, separate more from the host society than do their Christian counterparts" (a trend that is observed not only among first but also among second and third-generation immigrants). Therefore, the responsibility for this vicious circle must be shared by both

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generation immigrants). Therefore, the responsibility for this vicious circle must be shared by both Muslim and non-Muslim French, the researchers argue.

But one can't confine this reality to France. Relying on two surveys (the European Social Survey and the Detroit Arab American Study) the authors extrapolated their findings beyond France, by noting that the other Western European countries and the USA are also locked in a discriminatory equilibrium. In these Christian-heritage societies, there is "a significant and intergenerationally robust disadvantage faced by the Muslims" (p. 147).

The last chapter of the book is probably the most interesting one. There, the authors outline a line of policy recommendations aimed at ameliorating this issue in France. Their proposals encompass simultaneous interventions at three levels of French society: the micro (the level of the individual citizen), the meso (the level of French secondary institutions) and the macro (the level of the State).

At the micro level, the researchers say that broadcasting studies showing that "rooted populations discriminate against Muslims even when they do not expect any particular hostility from them may help citizens (recruiters included) resist more effectively their present tendencies toward discriminatory behavior" (p. 152). Another (controversial) proposal is that of asking Muslims not to give names to their children that are exclusively Muslim. In their opinion, that would make it harder for the society in general to identify them as "Muslims" and hence discriminate against them for that reason.

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At the level of secondary institutions (the meso), at the level of the firm it is recommended: that French firms should provide their recruitment teams and managers with diversity training sessions (to raise awareness of nonrational discrimination and of the fact that diversity improves group productivity – and therefore the companies' economic performance – as it provides a huge variety of perspectives and skills); the creation of public organizations able to monitor discriminatory procedures; and the creation of a "diversity-compliant" label to firms committed not to discriminate based on ethnicity and religion. At the same time, Muslim workers should accept some things that can go against their religious principles, such as: "employees must agree to take orders from superiors no matter what their sex; Muslim waitstaff must agree to handle bottles with alcoholic beverages or serve pork to customers; employees, save for absences due to flex time (…) must attend scheduled meetings during regular work hours even if they conflict with time of worship; and employees must be willing to show their faces to clients and fellow workers" (pp. 161/162). Be that as it may, the authors suggest the implementation of new firm protocols addressing the most common requests from Muslim employees. At the level of educational institutions, it is proposed: some curricula changes, emphasizing progress and positive reinforcement; more discussion among students in the classrooms, allowing them to discuss what they've learnt; and some ways to improve the relationship between school and parents, increasing parents' awareness and involvement and, that way, the children's behavior and educational achievement.

At the macro level, the researchers analyze whether it is best to adopt either a multiculturalist or an assimilationist approach[9]. The conclusion is that "compared with multiculturalism, assimilationist policies reduce divergence in cultural norms between Muslim and Christian immigrants. Concomitantly, assimilationist policies reduce the divergence in the discrimination these immigrants face in their host countries" (p. 180). The authors consequently come up with the idea of creating citizenship contracts so that the immigrants can understand the core values of their host country and be given the necessary tools (like free language training) to become full productive citizens.

Moreover, the scholars underline the need of the Muslim community not to engage in behaviors perceived by the host population as challenging laïcité and gender equality.

Considering everything, "Why Muslim Integration Fails in Christian-Heritage Societies" is a seminal work on Muslims (lack of) integration in the West, especially on the way that, by using a quite innovative methodology, it isolates religion from other (possible) sources of discrimination and, then, proposes solutions to mitigate the problems faced by both host societies and Muslim immigrants. The books brings a sense of urgency in order to cope with the discriminatory equilibrium, "a self-reinforcing process, which at best sustains discrimination and at times even exacerbates it" (p. 14) and for which both Muslim immigrants and native French should be accountable.

José Miguel DIAS ROCHA – Erasmus Volunteer for SASAM
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[1] The authors of the book analyzed in this article adopted Bartlett's definition of "Christian-heritage societies" to encompass the countries and their settler offshoots which were part of the area of Christendom, during the High Middle Ages, recognizing papal authority and celebrating the Latin liturgy. (See page 217.)

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Sahipkıran; 1 Aralık 2012 tarihinde kurulmuş, Ankara merkezli bir Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezidir. Merkezimiz; a) Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin ülkesi ve milletiyle bölünmez bütünlüğünü savunan; ülkemizin her alanda daha ileri gitmesi ve milletimizin daha müreffeh bir hayata kavuşması için elinden geldiği ölçüde katkı sağlamak isteyen her görüş ve inanıştan insanı bir araya getirmek, b) Ülke sorunları, yerel sorunlar ve yurtdışında yaşayan vatandaşlarımızın sorunlarına yönelik araştırma ve incelemeler yaparak, bu sorunlara çözüm önerileri üretmek, bu önerileri yayınlamak, c) Tespit edilen sorunların çözümüne yönelik ulusal veya uluslararası projeler yürütmek veya yürütülen projelere katılmak, ç) Tespit edilen sorunlar ve çözüm önerilerimize ilişkin seminer ve konferanslar düzenleyerek, vatandaşlarımızı bilinçlendirmek, amacıyla kurulmuştur.

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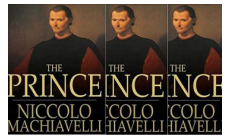

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