# THE CRISIS OF CIVILIZATIONAL PARADIGM: CO-RADICALIZATION OF ISLAMIST AND POPULIST GROUPS IN EUROPE

*Europe is facing several problems, some of which revolve around the issues of migration and integration of third-country nationals. Civilizational and culturalist paradigms seem to have poisoned how many European citizens have perceived Muslim-origin people. In this short intervention, Islamophobism, populism, nativism, Islamism, radicalization, extremism, violence, and terrorism are among the issues to be discussed, deliberated, and communicated. This intervention attempts to elaborate the destructive nature of the civilizational paradigm in Europe, leading to the co-radicalization of Islamist and right-wing populist groups.*

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I n different parts of Europe, security measures for counterterrorism are perceived as disproportionately targeting Muslims, leading to stigmatization and the spread of stereotypes, creating diverse challenges in their everyday lives. There is a need to discourage the conflation of Islam with violent extremism. Law enforcement agencies frequently have insufficient knowledge and capacity to recognize crimes motivated by anti-Muslim hatred. This leads to systematic under-reporting and, as a result, an underestimation of the magnitude of hatred targeting Muslims.

Anti-Muslim hatred, including hate speech and discrimination against young people of Muslim background or Muslim communities (including refugees arriving in Europe), contributes to exclusion and holds the risk of further reinforcing religious radicalization of children and young people.[1] While the European response to terrorist activities must be provided in a highly targeted manner by judicial, prosecution, law enforcement, and security services, the endogenous root causes should be tackled at the national and, in particular, the local level in the daily living environment of children and young people by ensuring their full and equal access to decent living standards and social rights, including education and training. Relevant strategies need to respect human rights to avoid inciting further resentment.

Politically motivated violence designates the use of violent means to achieve political objectives. Political violence is widespread across cultures and ideologies, from any kind of terrorism to armed struggle performed by political organizations or even display of violence during protests perpetuated by small factions. Political violence remains a pivotal challenge to governments and state agencies to this day. More specifically, one can identify two main issues relevant to policy makers but still, constitute a theoretical puzzle to social scientists. These are, namely, issues pertaining to the increasingly endogenous nature of terrorist threats such as 'homegrown terrorism' and 'foreign fighters', and to the parallel rise of antagonistic, violent political factions, literally feeding on each other's actions as in intergroup co-radicalization processes, such as between Islamist groups and far-right ones.

## *What is Radicalisation?*

Though the term 'radicalization' is mainly associated with Islamist and white-supremacist groups nowadays, it has been in circulation for several centuries. Let us take a look at the history of the term. Defining radicalization has been problematic within social sciences. Radicalization implies a direct support or enactment of radical behavior and therefore begs the question: how does one define extreme behavior?

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[1] "European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)" https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commis-sion-against-racism-and-intolerance

As social sciences have grown more interested in understanding and explaining contextual and societal nuances cross-culturally, what appears to be radical, or core truth becomes very difficult to answer.

> **❝***The meaning of the term had a different turn in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. Since then, radicalization is mainly perceived as an individualized process by which 'lone wolfs' became active agents of terrorism on the one hand, and home-grown terrorism and online radicalization became more widespread on the other hand.***❞**

The term 'radical' comes from the Latin word *radix* (root), and radicalization literally means the process of 'going back to the roots. It refers to roots – of plants, or words, or numbers. By extension from botanical, etymological, and mathematical usages, early modern thinkers described radical when they went to foundations, fundaments, first principles, or what was essential. The mainstream definition of radicalism, such as the one given in the Oxford dictionary, sees it as "the beliefs or actions of people who advocate thorough or complete political or social reform."[2]

The term 'radical' was already in use in the 18th century, and it is often linked to the Enlightenment and the French and American revolutions of that period. The term became widespread in the 19th century only when it often referred to a political agenda advocating through social and political reform. As such, radicalism comprised secularism, pro-democratic components, and even equalitarian demands such as egalitarian citizenship and universal suffrage. Afterward, an association between radicalization and left-wing violence was maintained throughout the 1960s to designate civil rights activists and rioters of the May 1968 uprisings. It is only from 2000 and especially 2010 that the word 'radicalization' started to change in its current meaning as a process leading to violent action in general, especially with regards to Islamist terrorism.

Dominant neo-liberal regimes of representation are more likely to make everyone, including policy makers, media experts, and scholars, interchangeably use the term 'radicalism' together with 'extremism', 'terrorism', and 'fundamentalism'. A thorough analysis of all these terms can easily convince the reader that they are all different from each other. Radicalism is undoubtedly different from the others

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[2] Oxford Dictionary, available at https://www.lexico.com/definition/radicalism, last accessed 15 May 2022.

as it conveys a process by which radicalizing individuals try to demonstrate their opposition and criticism to the detrimental effects of the status quo. This is why the root causes of radicalization should be assessed better before it is simply labeled as destructive as extremism and terrorism.

The term 'radicalization' was perceived in the 1970s and 1980s as socio-political opposition to the notions of capitalism and democracy. The meaning of the term had a different turn in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. Since then, radicalization is mainly perceived as an individualized process by which 'lone wolfs' became active agents of terrorism on the one hand, and home-grown terrorism and online radicalization became more widespread on the other hand.

In the aftermath of 11 September, the U.S. initiated a global war on terror, first in Afghanistan in 2001 and then in Iraq in 2003, to fight back against Al-Qaeda and its adherents. In March 2004, the so-called 'home-grown terrorists' took the stage in Madrid, bombing the central train station. Following such deadly attacks in Madrid (2003) and London (2005), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued various resolutions addressing to the growing importance of home-grown terrorism and its root causes.

The so-called "refugee crisis" erupting in 2015 has caused a turn in the transformation of debates on 'home-grown terrorists' to 'foreign fighters'. Since then, the discussions on radicalization in the European public space have been about those on the path to becoming foreign fighters and returning home. In addition to the rise of debates on 'home-grown terrorism' and 'foreign fighters' since 9/11, another essential element needs to be analyzed: the processes of co-radicalization between right-wing extremists and Muslim extremists, or in other words, between Islamophobists and Islamists. The term co-radicalization springs from the observation that intergroup hostility generates intergroup conflicts through ideological extremization. These intergroup conflicts tend to perpetuate themselves through reciprocal threat, violence, and extremization cycles.

### Co-Radicalization in the Post-9/11 Period

The cycles of co-radicalization sometimes led to intractable conflicts and explain the parallel rise of antagonistic violent extremist factions, such as the conflicts between Islamist groups *and* white supremacists. Such escalation cycles have been anticipated across Europe in the aftermath of 9/11. On the one hand, the wave of terrorist attacks in European cities in the 2010s has created a strong resentment against the liberal refugee policies of some European states. On the other hand, the threatening atmosphere created by far-right extremists against Muslim minorities

could explain why youngsters from Muslim backgrounds would increasingly turn to extreme forms of religious ideologies (i.e., Wahhabism and Salafism) and, for some of them, to *Islamist* terrorist organizations.

> **"***Multiculturalism and republicanism are two different forms of managing diversity in Europe and elsewhere. Ethno-cultural and religious relations have become securitized after 11 September 2001.* **"**

Terrorism is no longer a novel phenomenon, nor is it limited to Islamist groups and ideology. However, indeed, Islamist-driven terror attacks have lately been on the rise, along with right-wing terrorism, which had declined significantly from 1995 to 2001. In fact, both right-wing and Islamist terrorist attacks seem to display some correlation and respond to one another more strongly after the 11 September attacks. There might be many reasons behind this correlation, or co-radicalization process, ranging from the growing impact of social media on radicalization and co-radicalization to the changing definition of politics from being about consensus to being about dissensus. In other words, co-radicalization between right-wing and Islamist terrorist groups has become more prevalent after the year 2001 in Europe.

Today, young radical Muslims and other Muslim-origin youngsters are becoming politically mobilized to support causes that have less to do with faith and more to do with communal solidarity. The manifestation of global Muslim solidarity can be described as an identity based on vicarious humiliation. European Muslims develop empathy for Muslim victims elsewhere in the world and convince themselves that their exclusion and their co-religionists have the exact root cause: *Western rejection of Islam*, which partly leads to the co-radicalization of some segments of native and Muslim-origin youths. The process of co-radicalization leads some Muslim groups to generate alternative forms of politics based on radicalization, violence, religiosity, and extremism. To that effect, the quest for identity, authenticity, religiosity, and violence should not be reduced to an attempt to essentialize the so-called purity. Rather, it is a form of politics generated by alienated, humiliated, and excluded subjects. In this sense, Islam is no longer simply a religion for those radical individuals. It is also a counter hegemonic global political movement, which prompts them to defend the rights of their Muslim brothers and sisters across the national boundaries.

### *Separate Communities in the Making*

Since the 1970s, many Muslim-origin immigrants and their descendants have been encouraged to socially, politically, culturally, and even economically, mobilize themselves within their ethno-religious frameworks through constructing isolated communitarian parallel communities to protect themselves against the perils of globalization. The construction of isolated parallel communities has brought about two very important consequences in many European societies. On the one hand, it has reinforced ethno-religious boundaries between majority societies and migrant-origin groups leading to different forms of ethnic competition in the urban space, especially among the working-class segments of local communities. On the other hand, it has strengthened the process of alienation between in-groups and out-groups leading to the decline of intergroup contact. The decline of intergroup contact provides a fertile ground for the spread of Islamophobic sentiments and Islamist radicalism.

Islamic parallel communities manifest in European countries such as France, Germany, England, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands (countries with colonial or semi-colonial backgrounds) are not the result of the conservatism of Muslims, but rather their reaction to the structural and political mechanisms of exclusion. In other words, religiosity is too important to be limited to the beliefs of said minorities, because what may lie beneath religiosities are the structural problems of racism, discrimination, Islamophobia, xenophobia, injustice, poverty, and unemployment.

Although it is without doubt that social and class tensions erupt from such structural problems, some state administrations, populist parties, the media, and even intellectuals, intentionally or unintentionally make wrong diagnoses of, and misrepresent, the issue to the public, which in turn make it almost impossible to solve it. Is it their cultural differences, their anti-integrationist, reactionary attitudes, and their Islamic identity that consider fighting against Christianity and European civilization a religious duty that takes Muslims to the street? Or are their mass-opposition and social movements manifest a resistance against almost two centuries of colonialism, exclusion, racism, xenophobia, and the more recent conditions of poverty? Answers to these two essential questions illuminate how individuals, institutions and the state approach the problem. Those who answer the first question positively find the Islamic, the culturally different, and the ethnically diverse "problematic" by nature. For them, the "Others" are expected to eliminate their differences and become assimilated into the dominant civilization project. Movements such as Pegida, Combat 18, Identity movement, the Soldiers of Odin, and those who appeal to the Great Replacement discourse are among such actors in Europe. Those who respond positively to the second question are the ones who have

made the diagnoses concerning the root-causes of self-isolation of Muslims; that is racism, structural inequalities, injustices, stereotypes, colonialism, orientalism, and deep-rooted institutional and intersectional discrimination. Liberal and critical minded individuals and groups are such actors in Europe.

As the processes of de-industrialization since the late 1970s and the rise of inequalities in politics, education, labor market, health services and judiciary increasingly alienate Muslims from the majority societies, they have come to hold on to religion, ethnicity, language, and tradition, whatever they believe cannot be taken away from them, even more tightly. Discrimination in everyday life has become common for many Muslim individuals and communities in Europe. FRA Survey on Muslims held in 2017 clearly reveals that Muslims in Europe often suffer discrimination when looking for a job, hampers their meaningful participation in society.[3] The same survey also found out that Muslims' names, skin color or physical appearance prompt discrimination against about half of the respondents when looking for housing, work or receiving healthcare.[4] Populist political parties lately indulge in deliberate misreadings, which result in the syndrome depicting that Muslims are "enemies within" who must be eliminated. Given the problematic representation and statisticalization of immigrants and Muslims in the media and political sphere, the issue runs into a dead-end. When all the misinterpretations and misevaluations add up, it is easy to see how smoothly "neighbors next door" can be turned into "enemies within".

Populist parties and movements often exploit the issues of parallel communities, migration, and Islam. They portray them as a threat against the welfare and the social, cultural, and even ethnic features of a nation. Populist leaders also tend to blame parallel communities of Muslims for some of the major problems in society, such as unemployment, violence, crime, insecurity, drug trafficking and human trafficking. This tendency is reinforced by using a racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic and demeaning rhetoric. The use of words like 'influx', 'invasion', 'flood' and 'intrusion' are just a few examples. Many public figures in Europe have spoken of a 'foreign infiltration' of immigrants, especially Muslims, in their countries. Some political leaders even predicted the coming of *Eurabia*. This mythological future continent will replace modern Europe, where children from Norway to Naples will allegedly learn to recite the Quran at school, while their mothers stay at home wearing *burqas*. Some populist political party leaders such as Éric Zemmour, Marine Le Pen, Thierry Baudet, Alexander Gauland, and Viktor Orbán even talk about the "Great Replacement" conspiracy in Europe. Referring to the growing visibility of

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[3] FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017). *Second European Union Minorities.*

[4] FRA, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017). *Second European Union Minorities*, p.9.

Muslims in the European space, some right-wing populist leaders effectively deploy the fear of Islam as a great danger in the foreseeable future. Referring to a white-supremacist slogan coined by a right-wing French writer, Renaud Camus (2011), such right-wing populist leaders simply want to make their followers believe that a global elite is actively replacing Europe's white population with people of color from non-European countries.[5]

Some right-wing populist politicians began to unmask the immigration of Muslims as an integral part of a deliberate strategy of Islamification.[6] To support such a claim, such politicians may refer to a whole range of Arabists, orientalists, political scientists, journalists, and politicians who may boast a reasonably solid reputation such as Bat Ye'or, Bernard Lewis, Oriana Fallaci, Samuel Huntington, Hans Jansen, Pim Fortuyn, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Such populist politicians have also openly criticized Islam by aligning themselves with the liberal and civilizational attitude towards certain cultural issues such as the emancipation of women and homosexuals. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has also deplored that a growing number of political parties in Europe exploit and encourage fear of Islam and organize political campaigns which promote simplistic and negative stereotypes concerning Muslims in Europe, and often equate Islam with extremism and terrorism.[7]

### *Civic Participation and Interculturalism: Muslims as Equal Citizens!*

The current tendency to define integration of migrants and their descendants in many European countries is towards reducing integration to cultural assimilation, which corresponds to a process portrayed by the return of assimilation and homogenization. One could challenge such a tendency in at least two ways: *Firstly,* one could say that this is a rather outmoded definition of integration, which fails to include structural, political, civic, marital, identificational, and behavioral components of integration. *Secondly,* one could also argue that the integration of migrants and their descendants can no longer remain a one-way process in the age of globalization.

In many European countries, the major component of the definition of integration specifically targets the notion of active civic participation. Integration is considered to be insertion of migrants into the society in accordance with major guiding principles: a) assimilation where the 'public order' demands this; b) promotion of the best possible fitting in according to the orientating social principles which support the culture of the host country and which are related to 'modernity', 'emancipation'

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[5] For the Great Replacement conspiracy see Renaud Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement* (Paris: David Reinharc, 2011).

[6] The term 'Eurabia' was first introduced by Bat Ye'Or, whose real name is Gisell Litmann, an Egyptian-born British citizen and key figure in the UK-based Counter-Jihad Movement (CJM), living in Switzerland.

[7] See Resolution 1743 (2010). http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?file-id=17880&lang=en

and 'true pluralism'; and c) respect for the cultural diversity-as-mutual-enrichment in all other areas.

Multiculturalism and republicanism are two different forms of managing diversity in Europe and elsewhere. Ethno-cultural and religious relations have become securitized after 11 September 2001. Relations between states and minorities are seen not as a matter of normal democratic debate and negotiation, but as a matter of state security. The state has to limit the democratic processes of political participation, negotiation, and compromise to protect itself. The state of securitization of minorities in general, and Muslims in particular, is likely to lead to the rejection of minority political mobilization by the larger society and the state. Hence, the securitization of ethno-cultural and religious relations erodes both the democratic space to voice minority demands, and the likelihood that those demands will be accepted.

In the European context, the same factors that push for multiculturalism concerning historic minorities have also generated a willingness to contemplate multiculturalism for immigrant groups. However, immigrant multiculturalism has run into difficulties where it is perceived as carrying high risks with regard to national, societal and cultural security of the majority society. Where immigrants, especially with Muslim-origin, are coupled with violence, terrorism, extremism, honor crimes, drug use, drug trafficking and human trafficking, and are seen as potential carriers of illiberal practices or movements, and as net burdens on the welfare state, then multiculturalism also poses perceived risks to the shared moral principles of the nation. This perception can reverse the forces that support multiculturalism.

The debate about the failure of existing forms of integration of migrants and their descendants as well as of historic minorities is not only restricted to the critique of multiculturalism. Difference-blind republicanism, the other model of managing ethno-cultural and religious diversity, also has remarkable shortcomings. The republican model has set out to create politically equal citizens without regard to religion, language, race, ethnicity, and gender. However, it seems that the model does not acknowledge the politics of recognition generated especially by migrants of Muslim background, ignores the cultural, religious, and ethnic differences emphasized by minorities, and adopts an assimilation policy, all of which serve to show that the republican project and its values are under threat. These demands, voiced by migrants, minorities, and Muslims, and left unresolved by some republican states, clearly show that these republics at hand need to be democratized. In other words, the reel republicanism might need to be reformed along the egalitarian claims of migrant origin people and ethno-cultural and religious minorities affiliated with a

true republican rhetoric underlining equality, justice, and rights in all spheres of life including politics, education, labor market and culture.

On the other hand, the interculturalist paradigm presumes that cultures are human-made, dynamic, mixed, and syncretic entities that are subject to a process of constant change, exchange, and interaction with other cultures. Cultures are formed in accordance with individual needs and constrained by social, political, geographical, ecological, and economic conditions. Hence, this approach is more applicable to the contemporary state of a globalized world in which cultural boundaries are constantly changing due to communication and transportation technologies. Interculturalist paradigm differs from both models. Interculturalism as a paradigm manifests itself in various ways both at national and local level integration policies. At the national level, the relevant policy dimensions in which we can observe the manifestation of an intercultural perspective include primarily citizenship and education. In education policies, intercultural perspective is relevant for targeting the needs of pupils coming from a different ethno-cultural and religious background.

Currently most European countries are far from having an established intercultural perspective in their education policies. However, some countries are in the process of changing and monitoring their curriculum so that students can learn more about cultural diversity throughout their day and in specific subjects such as citizenship education. Australia, Belgium, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom are some of those countries. The efforts are focused on intercultural pedagogy, multilingualism, second language teaching and adult education. Intercultural training is also crucial in health services considering that guidelines can promote practitioners and service providers to take account of migrants' experiences and specific situations and respect for different beliefs, religions, and cultures.

In several European languages, the terms *multiculturality*, *multiculturalism*, and *interculturalism* are often confused and are interchangeably used. *Multiculturality* is a descriptive term referring to the existence of several cultural or ethnic groups within a society with their distinct identity and traditions. It refers to a societal system that focuses on the interactions of the different ethno-cultural and/or religious groups in a given territory. *Multiculturalism* by contrast is a normative and political term, which ideologically dictates that different communities should not be forced to integrate but rather be allowed to maintain their ethno-cultural and religious identities and live in 'parallel societies' within a single state. Multiculturalism has been used as a policy label and as a political science concept to clarify different policies and ideas about how to deal with ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity based on group rights. Multiculturalism can be defined as a widely different set of ideas and policy

programs that promote the incorporation and participation of immigrants and ethno-cultural and religious minorities into society, considering their modes of ethno-cultural and religious difference.

On the other hand, interculturalism is the critic of the multiculturalist approach. It focuses on individuals rather than groups. Interculturalism helps to create discussion, negotiation, and actual engagement between individuals from different cultures and religions. The intercultural perspective acknowledges a multitude of cultures that may co-exist within a society. Individuals are seen as the carriers of different cultures, so intercultural communication involves the discussion between individuals who belong to different ethno-cultural or religious groups. This discussion is not private in the way it takes place within a family, but instead it is a public discussion that can take place in a school or workplace. The difference between *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism* can be seen in the importance that the former puts on group identities and the incorporation of not only the individual but also the group into society. At the same time, the latter focuses on individual difference only. Anthropologically speaking, the interculturalist approach is more accurate because it maintains that ethno-cultural and religious identities are not given, but instead that individuals create them in a constant process of being and becoming, or in other words in discussion, negotiation and interaction with others. The interculturalist approach complies with the syncretic notion of culture in global anthropology, which is critical to the traditional holistic notion of culture that traps cultures within distinct social compartments containing separate sets of shared meanings and values.

In this sense, the interculturalist paradigm is in line with the principle of active civic participation in contemporary societies in which social and political participation of individuals should be prioritized on an equal basis at local, national and transnational levels. Civic participation requires people to work collaboratively with those who may be different from themselves to address common issues and to achieve a common purpose. Intercultural competence encompasses awareness of differences and commonalities, understanding of issues when working across differences, and skills that build capacity for shared goals.

### *Conclusion*

The defense of religion, tradition, culture and past by religious, nationalist, nativist, or populist individuals has become a radical stance today. This radical stance can be interpreted as a reactionary form of resistance against the perils of modernization and globalization experienced by both self-identified Muslim youths and native

youths who are labeled as far-right extremists in Europe. Both Islamist revival and right-wing populism can be regarded as outcries of those who feel pressurized by the perils of modernization and globalization. Then, one could also assess these protests as *struggles for democracy* rather than threats to democracy.

It seems that radicalization provides such socio-economically, politically, spatially, and nostalgically deprived youths with an opportunity to build an imagined home away from the one that has become indifferent, alienating, and even humiliating. Radicalization then becomes a regime of justification and an alternative form of politics generated by some Muslim youth and native youth to protect themselves from day-to-day discrimination, humiliation, and neglect. They believe that speaking from the margins might be a more efficient strategy to be heard by those in the center who have lost the ability to listen to the peripheral ones. As Robert Young pointed out, it is not that 'they' do not know how to speak (politics), "but rather that the dominant would not listen."[8]

Civilizational paradigm has been prevalent in Europe over the last three decades since the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s. It has become even stronger in the aftermath of 9/11. Such a civilizational paradigm has made things even more complicated regarding the integration of Muslim-origin immigrants in Europe. It was argued in the text that both republican and multiculturalist forms of integration have both become civilizational projects in the sense that they contribute to the reproduction of ethno-cultural and religious minorities in Europe. The reason for that is that they are both far from identifying and framing migrant origin individuals as civic agents. They rather essentialise the migrant origin individuals as "Muslims", a label that is far from reflecting the social, individual, cultural, ethnic and denominational heterogeneity of individuals at stake for many decades. Interculturalism in this sense is a better way of incorporating migrant-origin individuals with the members of majority societies since the term originally talks about individuals but not groups, and also presumes that culture is dynamic and integration is a two-way process.[9]

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[8] Robert J. C. Young. *White Mythologies* (New York: Routledge, 2004).