



**ISLAMOPHOBIA**  
IN EUROPE



**OCTOBER**  
**2020**

A RECENT CASE  
OF MOSQUE CLOSURES  
OCCURRED IN FRANCE  
FOLLOWING THE MURDER  
OF PROFESSOR SAMUEL PATY



**Care**

Argus. International Observatory  
of Migration and Human Rights

**Cover design and layout**

© Argos

**Cover photo:** 1313 Muslims.

**Author:** Jean-Pierre Jeannin | 2013

[Flickr].

Our views seek to investigate the social, economic, political and cultural phenomena surrounding human migration in different areas of the world, with the aim of defending the universality of human rights.

We observe the migratory processes by looking at their structural causes, the vulnerable populations, the various actors involved and the possible strategies of alarm, denunciation, follow-up and resolution of cases.

We focus on the specialized production of reports, maps and pedagogical contents, which serve as tools for research and action, and which can be useful to social, academic, civil and multilateral organizations.

The evocation of the ARGOS myth -the one with multiple eyes- inspires us to observe, with a plurality of perspectives, the migratory phenomena and the possible recommendations that guarantee free human mobility in conditions of equality and non-discrimination.

Beyond the conflictive past between Christians and Muslims, as well as the most recent colonialist experience, the relationship between Europe and Islam is currently nourished by the conflicts between Muslim-majority countries and Western powers during the second half of the 20th century, in the first place. Then there is the phenomenon of migrations originating in these countries, with Europe as one of their main migratory destinations, as well as the growing stigmatization, since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, of Muslim people, or people coming from Muslim-majority countries without necessarily being practitioners of that religion.

The current chapter of Islamophobia in Europe accelerated substantially with the refugee crisis that started in 2015 as a result of the intensification of the civil war in Syria, a conflict ironically spurred by member countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and which by then intensified with the expansion of the so-called Islamic State.

In parallel, the terrorist attacks that took place in Paris also in 2015, one at the Bataclan theater and the other at the headquarters of the satirical weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo, as well as many other episodes of this nature that have been recorded in various countries of the European Union during the last two decades, have only reinforced the identification of the Muslim population with terrorism. The next step is the identification of these same people with immigration, despite the fact that a significant part of European Muslims were born in Europe.

Most worryingly, this whole process goes hand in hand with the growing popularity of extreme right-wing parties and movements in countries throughout the Western world, including northern, southern and eastern European countries. Numerous extreme right-wing groups throughout Europe are

united in their rejection of immigrants of the Islamic religion, such as the Identitarian Movement and Generation Identity, among other groups, and they tend to spread to various countries in the region.

Likewise, the emergence and strengthening of political parties with access to spaces of power, such as Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, Vox in Spain, Rassemblement National in France, the Lega in Italy, etc., is observed with concern.

The case of Vox is very transparent in identifying Islam with terrorism. In the recent Catalan election campaign of 2021, the party published a video in which images of construction of mosques and Islamic religion classes in schools follow one after the other with images of the August 2017 attack that occurred on the Ramblas in Barcelona. Thus, the full identification between religion, childhood and criminal behavior that seeks to alarm the population and predispose it against a particular human group is transmitted<sup>1</sup>.

More worrying is when extremist and Islamophobic political parties actually form governments, and push their reform agendas. Viktor Orban in Hungary is one case. His government had no problem expelling refugees from Syria, and penalizing with imprisonment anyone who helped undocumented people to apply for asylum. Regarding refugees from Muslim-majority countries, they were considered by the Executive as invaders, and claim the right as a country to refuse to receive Muslims.

However, expressions compatible with Islamophobia, sometimes camouflaged as security policies, are not exclusive to extreme right-wing movements. On the contrary, parties

---

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://elpais.com/espana/2021-01-28/twitter-cierra-la-cuenta-de-vox-por-incitar-al-odio-contra-los-musulmanes.html>

considered democratic have certainly taken actions to try to contain or control the daily life of Islamic communities where immigrants live.

The control, supervision and closure of mosques are not considered outrageous actions when taken by governments of indisputably democratic parties, even though this could be a clear violation of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, established in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A recent case of mosque closures occurred in France following the murder of Professor Samuel Paty in October 2020, but since 2015 about thirty mosques have been closed already<sup>2</sup>. On these actions, the question always arises as to whether this type of collective punishment is appropriate and just, or whether it is simply retaliation incompatible with the rule of law.

Particularly symptomatic of a conflictive relationship with Islam in Europe is the banning of the full-face veil, with varying degrees of severity, in a dozen countries of the continent, but led by France and Belgium, which imposed their respective legislation in this regard since 2010. Likewise, we have the prohibition of wearing religious symbols in certain public spaces, which, although affecting practitioners of any religion, was specifically motivated by the political agenda aimed at controlling the behavior of members of Islamic communities.

More recently, the discussion on Islamic separatism in France highlights a potential source of discord between social groups belonging to the same national body, where the Muslim profession of faith, present in about six million people in that country, is intimately related to immigration, as well as to the real difficulties for their social integration. The fight against

---

2 Available at: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-10-24/francia-pone-las-mezquitas-bajo-la-lupa.html>

Islamic separatism, promoted by President Macron, meets with resistance among spokesmen of the Muslim community. In such a way that the French government has been promoting regulations to exercise strict control over the financing of mosques, as well as greater surveillance of sports or cultural organizations of Muslim communities, which does not seem to indicate that there is a harmonious coexistence. It is also true that President Macron himself recognizes a share of responsibility of the State in the isolation of certain communities<sup>3</sup>.

Specifically in relation to the stigmatization of Muslims, it is striking that often members of the resident Islamic communities or citizens of European countries are compelled to apologize for crimes committed by their terrorist co-religionists, whereas criminal responsibilities are supposed to be individual. This treatment is not usually applied to terrorists when they profess some variant of Christianity, and whose attacks have also been recorded in recent years.

To a large extent, what is reflected here is an uneasy relationship between Europe and Muslim people, whether they are migrants or not, but this debate has consequences for the reception and integration of new migrants or refugees from Muslim-majority countries.

This conflictive situation is not on the verge of a solution in the short term. To a large extent, the difficulties in integrating the immigrant population, whatever their origin, could be at the root of this situation. In the end, what is at stake is the full enjoyment of human rights for everyone, and more specifically, guaranteeing the enjoyment of civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights of immigrant communities in the European Union.

Finally, it would be advisable to treat terrorist actions in a more balanced way, making it clear at all times that they

---

3Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-54621839>

are the responsibility of individuals who must be tried and sentenced according to the law, just as manifestations of terrorism coming from other social groups or other political orientations are usually treated, and to avoid stigmatizing entire communities that generally comply with the law of the countries in which they live.



## REFERENCES

*BBC Mundo* (2020), “Beheading in France: what is “Islamist separatism”, the term at the center of the debate after the murder of Professor Samuel Paty”. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-54621839>

*El País* (2021) “Twitter blocks Vox account for ‘inciting hatred’ against Muslims”. Available at: <https://elpais.com/espana/2021-01-28/twitter-cierra-la-cuenta-de-vox-por-incitar-al-odio-contra-los-musulmanes.html>

\_\_\_\_\_ (2020) “France puts mosques under the magnifying glass”. Available at: <https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-10-24/francia-pone-las-mezquitas-bajo-la-lupa.html>

