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RESEARCH ARTICLES

"Being a Muslim" in France: The Case of Turkish Immigrants

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Abstract. In this article the "Muslim Question" of France in terms of Turkish immigrants, who are the subjects of a relatively recent migration movement compared to other immigrant groups in France, was examined. The findings that support the study are based on a qualitative research conducted in Paris between 2014 and 2015. In the first chapter of the study, the focal point was a critical interpretation of formation of the "Muslim Question". Whether this question is a fiction or based on solid facts was another subject tackled in this chapter. In the second chapter, by focusing on the migration process of the Turkish immigrants, the experiences of Turkish immigrants who are struggling to form a hybrid identity by acting within a social structure without ignoring the origin country codes. The basic argument of the article, however, is that the integration policies imposing themselves as the absolute truth should be put aside and at the same time a common culture should be created, also the Muslim origin immigrants should not ignore every criticism as for being "Islamophobia" and they should revise their attitudes in this regard.

Keywords: France, Paris, Immigrant, Turkish, Islam, Muslim, Integration

Introduction

Since 1980s, we have been witnessing two different discourses with a clear contradiction on migration and border issues in the US and the EU countries: On one side globalization based on change of things, on the other side, security discourse. While the first talks about the weakening of the borders, the other is based on renewing the security functions and strengthening the borders to prevent the passing of "unwanted" elements. Nowadays we can talk about an increase in favor of the latter (Ceyhan, 1997:236). Despite the atmosphere surrounded by the security discourse, some scholars give voice to alternative approaches instead of this separation. The first results of the research that has been carried out since 2013 by the political scientist François Gemeine, who has been a lecturer at the universities of Paris and Liege, give





voice to an alternative opinion against those who emphasize "border". According to Gemenne (2015), the mobilization of immigrants in the labor market does not have a structure that will scare local (French) players. Those who migrate are employed either in low-qualified fields (construction, restaurant etc.) or high-qualified fields (football player, engineer etc.) and there is in fact difficulty of finding people to work in these sectors in France. In addition, there is a need for a dynamic population due to the concentration of economic activity in services sector and entrepreneurship of migrants increase new job fields. We are witnessing that the presence of borders does not annihilate migration. It seems as a more rational policy to transfer the astronomical sums of money spent on border security in Europe to other fields, for example the finance of integration programs. Though a "borderless" Europe looks like a utopia in terms of realpolitic, the opinions suggested by Gemenne can be read as the anti-thesis of security understanding in imagining another Europe.

Considering the current immigration debates in Europe, in an atmosphere where security is the principal discourse, it is shaped around two phenomena that are in a relationship with each other. The first is the "refugees" reflected by the visual media in a dehumanized way accompanied by images of mass immigration especially during summer months; the second is the "Muslim immigrants" who have been on the agenda for quite a while after the Paris attacks. Taking into account the geography where the majority of refugees came from and their religious affiliation, we have been witnessing that both phenomena are sometimes discussed by the public with a similar rhetoric. The decisiveness of the language used when defining the issue also determines the nature of the policies created on migration. Approaches produced towards this case which are formulated with the titles "refugee question" and "Muslim question" usually have acute qualities. As of its current image, Europe, which is struggling to produce solutions from an atmosphere dominated by fears, is gliding towards security policies. While saying this, we need to keep in mind that leaning against the perception of a homogeneous Europe will prevent us from seeing the diversity within Europe.

Within the limits of this article, we will be trying to examine the reflections of "Muslim question" today over immigrants from Turkey who are the actors of a migration movement to France that has taken place recently and has no colonial history. We used a descriptive and immigration-oriented approach, based largely on the situation of immigrants from Turkey in the host country, rather than comparison in this article based on the results of a qualitative study. The work on which the article is



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based on was carried out between 2014 and 2015 in the Evry region where immigrants from Turkey live intensively within the borders of Paris. By living in the same place for 10 months in the same neighborhood as immigrants, some details that are hard to obtain, such as unemployment, children's education, relationships with neighbors, living in community, business organizations, worship activities, etc., have been found. Apart from ethnographic observation, the other basic research technique of our study was semi-structured in-depth interviews. With the help of a questionnaire consisting of about 60 questions, we tried to get information about immigrants' immigration process, working life, daily life activities, political participation, suburb life and identity issues.

"The Muslim Question" of France

The "Muslim question", caused by settled Muslim immigrants born in Europe or legalized as a result of immigration waves is loaded with today's traces as well as traces from the past.1 Settled Muslims are described as "internal affairs" of

¹Today, immigration worries Europe, especially France because of its Muslim population. For a long time immigrants have been involved in the economic life of France as "migrant workers" and "docile" actors. Post-1980 equality demands and anti-racism mobilizations (the anti-racist march "Marche pour l'egalite et contre le racisme" that started in Marseilles in 1983 and ended in Paris), where the identity of the new generations was at the center, and the increase of immigrants' visibility in the public arena have brought about debates. At the same time, as the transformations that took place in the Islamic geography were shown in the visual and written media, these discussions rapidly evolved into the mention of Muslim immigrants with the word "problem". In this period (from the beginning of 1970 to the end of the 1980s), which opened the way for Islam to be constructed in an imaginary way on television that reinforced this image, we come across three events: First, the oil crisis and the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979. After the crisis, immigrants turned into problems that had to be resolved and "foreign" and "French" discrimination began on television. Seeing "Islam" behind immigration and the media's handling with the view that this does not comply with the French society. The second is the death fatwa against Salman Rusdie in 1989, and finally the wishes of three girls to enter the school with hijabs in the same year. After these events, the increasing frequency of Islam's presence in the television and media and its coming to the centre of the French society have sparked debates that are identity-based and centered on Muslim immigrants. The entry of Islam into the dining rooms in France happened due to the frequent showing of the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1978-1979 on television. Amazing long beards and black sheets accompanied the French dinners for many weeks. Audiences encountered both unusual images and new words such as "molla", "veil", "shi", "sunni", "sharia" when politicians and intellectuals started to participate in programs to explain this situation. We see the themes of "Islam in France" and "suburban youth" come to the fore in

the 1990s. On the other hand, we can talk about the influence of political events such as the debates on "Islam-West" controversy with the demolition of the Berlin wall and the First

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Europe in response to the immigration which crystallizes on the refugee issue and describes the outside. The fact that most of the people actively involved in the Paris attacks came from immigrant Muslim families and were European-born brought together a series of questionings. The fact that, the "new" type of jihadists grew up "inside the house" unlike previous experiences made the problem complicated. We can say that the controversy on "Islam" within France is roughly proceeding on two axes. The first axis is the thesis voiced by the culturalist camp that European values and Islam are not possible to reconcile and that Islam's essence is an obstacle to this. The second axis, on the other hand, centers on a critical thought and is shaped by why the republican values (valeurs republicaines) cannot create a melting pot and how the suburbs in which the practice of spatial exclusion is produced turn into alternative identity spaces.

In the political arena, we can think of the rhetoric of the National Front, which we are sure is represented by the first tendency, sometimes to the extent of xenophobia.2 The second tendency is the views of the ruling socialist party, which

Gulf War and the Second Algerian War (1992-1997). The September 11 attacks on America emerged as the most important event in the formation of the language of the 2000s (Deltombe, 2005).

As an example of xenophobia discourse of the National Front, we can give Marine Le Pen's resembling those, who performed salaats on the streets because mosques did not have sufficient place, to the Nazi invaders in 2010: "Sorry, but some people like talking about the occupation and the second world war. Let's talk about the occupation. There is an occupation here yes, but not by tanks and troops; it is an occupation by people" (Liberation, 20.10.2015). Le Pen is being prosecuted for hate crime because of this speech. At the same time, praying on the streets is banned by a law issued in 2011. The immigration phenomenon, on the other hand, has become one of the favorite themes of nationalism in the political arena. When we look at French nationalism, the heritage it carries has bonapartism, anti-semitism (antidreyfusisme), bourgeois fascism (le fascism, Vichy, petty poujadisme) bounlangism.(Boulangisme is an anti-parliamentary movement during the third Republican era, by General Boulanger between 1886-1889. The reasons for the emergence of the movement were the great economic crisis and the feeling of loss to the Germans in the Alsace-Lorraine region problem.) We can say that today's nationalism is fed from these sources. We can describe this new nationalism as "populist nationalism". It began to appear in the political scene considerably due to the start of debates on the issue of immigrants by the French public in the 1980s. Actually, their program is quite simple: to send the immigrants from the country. Three important principles, to be taken in relation to the immigration problem, presented by Bruno Megret (one of the influential figures of the National Cephen in this period) on November 16, 1991 are as follows: The first is stopping all new immigration. The second is organizing repatriations (cancellation of 10-year residence permits, repatriation of unemployed persons, cancellation of bilateral repatriation agreements) and, finally, preventing the secret or illegal entry of immigrants into the country by taking serious security measures. (Gastaut, 2000: 121, 135).



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we can consider in light of its historical mission. The right-wing rhetoric of some administrators' in immigration policies after the attacks and the legal changes they wish to impose (such as the termination of the citizenship of dual citizens born in France involved in terrorist incidents) make us think that way. The socialist party is criticized by other leftist structures for its policies sliding towards "right" and for not being able to put into effect a structured and radical program to solve the employment problem of "popular classes" (they are represented today by mostly young people and the immigrant population in the suburbs), police violence in the suburbs and the participation of non-French citizens in local elections. Besides, former Prime Minister Valls' and former minister of economy Macron's views that support neoliberal policies justify criticism. Remi Lefebvre (2015), political science professor, emphasized that the Socialist Party has increasingly turned its view on suburbs into an instrument of electoral tactics in an interview with La Monde newspaper. According to Lefebvre, leftist thinking ignored democracy and the ones related to its symbolic definition when approaching the suburbs by making a hierarchical classification of problems and giving priority to economic and social problems. The fact that Hollande was not able to fulfill his promise that non-French citizens would be able to vote and local Muslim opinion leaders in the suburbs have very little active presence within the party open the social distance between the Socialist Party and the suburbs, even turn this distance into a political and cultural abyss. In the 1960s, all the variations of the left wing embraced migrant workers on the same side of the class war in terms of practicing internationalist principles, which offered the possibility of an alternative integration model against the church and the republic. However, the facts that the "socialist party", representing the mainstream left, started to apply neo-liberal politics after a period which we can call as its "surrender" to its "opponent", it was not able to solve the problem of unemployment and started to defend some rightist policies about immigrants (despite being party in opposition) ambiguated the difference between the right and "mainstream" left.

Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohammed (2013) stated in their Islamophobie that "the elites" also made a great contribution to this issue. According to the authors, the construction of Islam as a problematic structure in the French public has come about through the influence of the French elites. When describing the elite, they classified it as a heterogeneous group rather than a homogeneous one. According to them, elites are high bureaucrats, politicians,





media leaders and scientists, and they are the most prominent actors in the production of the "Muslim question". Despite all the diversity between them and the disagreement between the fractions, the interesting thing is that this is the point where the elites unite (Hajjat and Mohammed, 2013: 103).3 The authors also point out the existence of many works by sociologists and historians to shed light on the immigrant problem, and do not link the origin of this problem to the electoral victory of the Front National in the early 1980s. The "Population and Immigration Directorate" (Direction de la population et des migrations), established in 1966, the majority of which was constituted by the civil servants returning from the Algerian war, pointed out that the new institutional culture created in order to regulate the flow of migration is the primary place to examine for the immigrant problem.

Nowadays when the debate on Islam in the public continues increasingly, there are also scholars who approach to the issue more calmly. Apart from the dominant paradigm, an alternative approach was expressed by French political scientist and Islamic movement activist Olivier Roy and anthropologist Alain Bertho. The views of the two experts complement each other in terms of understanding the motivation behind the radicalization and those who are involved in the ISIS. According to Roy (2015), culturalist and third-worldist approaches to understand the issue that is covering the media scene are insufficient to grasp the true dimensions of the problem. According to him, the situation of French young people, of Muslim origins or later became Muslims, who became radicalized since the 1990s is not the radicalization of Islam but the Islamization of radicalism. After mentioning that this radicalism should not be interpreted as a sectarianism, Bertho (2015), stated that it is more correct to describe the issue by saying "Islamization

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³ At this point the authors showed similarities in the attitudes of different social groups to immigrant workers occupying a factory in Tolbot-Poissy in 1984. The fact that right-wing trade union member workers who did not participate in the strike protested the strikers and shouted "Arabs to the oven" (les arabes au four), "negros to the sea (Les noirs a la mer!), the minister of the leftist government said "you will see twelve hours of torture", the boss wanted to label the strikers as Islamist fundemantalists, the media spread the footage of praying strikers and the socialist government perceived the issue in terms of religion rather than showing class solidarity were all important in the construction of the Muslim problem. Before closing the parentheses, we can say that one of the most effective instruments of the governments, which are inadequate in solving economic and social problems of today, to attract public attention to other subjects is the "immigrants". This approach, which aims to prevent possible alliances, may work in the short term, but it will lead to the sharpening of cultural camps in the long run and will create huge problems in managing the communities that have been diversified through immigration.



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of the radical rebellion" rather than the radicalization of Islam. Another example is the work of Nilüfer Göle (2015). The definition of "ordinary Muslim"4 (musulmans ordinaires) that Göle expressed starting from the daily routines in different cities of Europe suggests a new formation in which the effort of European Muslims to reconcile their modern lifestyles and beliefs was blended with Western civilization and its cultural codes. Apart from the perception of "Islamist" in terrorist activities, the Muslim profile, that is, "ordinary Muslim", who has no problem with the values of the society they live in and expresses him/herself through a kind of hybridization, provides a good framework for describing immigrants from Turkey.

Being a Muslim from Turkey in France

Turks' migration to Europe is relatively new compared to other immigrant groups when they are considered together with the migrations of Asians and Black Africans. When we look at the character of this migration, it has two distinguishing properties. The first is that it is a recent wave of migration, and the second is that there is no colonial relationship with France. The migration of Turks to France gained massive character with the labor agreement signed in 1965. The population in Turkey's inadequately industrialized areas mostly participated in immigration activities. Within this framework, rural origins dominate the socio-economic structure of the first generation of Turkish immigrants coming to France in the early 1970s. The main source of motivation of this migration based on single male profile is economic:

"I came by train in 1973. The employer came here with us. He is a factory owner; a hundred men work in his factory. The man took us from labor exchange organization in Istanbul with ten people and caught the train and came here with us. On the way, we ate cheese and bread...they built houses like dormitory. They

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⁴ "Ordinary Muslims" have a pluralistic structure. The ethnic range of women and men, between the ages of 19-45, whom we can include in this category is wide. This range includes Pakistani, Turkish, Algerian etc and different professions. The adjective of "ordinary" refers to actively participating in social life while performing religious practices in everyday life rather than a passive subject in the social structure. They are aware of the codes of the source country, but at the same time they do not abstain from being visible by melting in the dominant social structure. They may even develop behaviors in accordance with the cultural codes of the country they live in. While they are overly proud to be free in the UK, they can be surlier in France. In addition, they do not object to owning the cultural values of the dominant society with their "halal" way of life. Halal hi-pop, halal delicatessen, non-alcoholic diploma ceremony, etc. "



have kitchen. They have bathrooms, toilet. They have rooms, both single and double. Near the factory. We first settled there. We don't know even one word of French. The factory was not in Paris. 300 km outside Paris. After working there for two years, I brought the kids. There were not enough workers then. While working in construction sites, construction site chiefs were competing with each other to transfer workers from each other. For example, the hourly wage here is 5-6 Francs. Another says that it is 7 Francs... There is unemployment...At that time, for example in Peugeot, 30 thousand people were working. 20-25 thousand people were working in Citroen. 30 thousand people were working in Simka. Now, in these factories, 3-4 thousand people are working..." (Male, 66).

Migrations continued until 1974, when formal employee recruitment was stopped. After this date, there was an immigration practice that continued with family reunions and illegal ways. With the addition of women to Turkish migrants, the majority of whom were male, as a result of family reunification and the involvement of children who were born in France to the families, immigrants from Turkey began to appear more often in the public arena:

"I came in 2000. After leaving the school, I entered the coal factory. After that I started peddling. There are suburban trains between Istanbul and Gebze; I was a peddler in those trains. I used to sell chocolates, bagels, waffles ... Also I was a waiter in a tiny restaurant. The last time I was a waiter was when I was coming here. My father brought us through illegal ways. My father did not have the paper when I came here. I came here and my father received the paper. My father actually lived in France for a while from 1985-1990 for the first time. Then he returned to Turkey. He stayed in Turkey for 3-4 years and then came back here. He could not live there anymore so he came here again. I came here in 2000 and my mother and brother came here a year later. One of my brothers was already benefiting from family unification. I had a sister; she also came here from illegal ways...When I first came here, there was no proper working environment. There were times when I did not work for 2 years. Since we did not have any papers, we were very little".(Male, 28)

As Turkish migrants became more visible within the society, academic interest began to be directed towards them. The earliest study on Turkish immigrants is based on interviews carried out by Riva Kastoryano(1986) with Turkish families ("Etre Turc en France"- Being a Turk in France) and this work is a descriptive work full of rich information from the family structure of the first-comers to everyday life practices. Based on extensive data set on Algerian, Portuguese, Moroccan, Hispanic, African, Asian and Turkish immigrants, the



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quantitative studies of Michele Tribilat (1995,1996), who influenced the formation of Turkish perception in France, are most famous. Based on the results of the survey, she considered Turkish immigrants as an "exception". She defines the Turkish immigrants as the least integrated immigrant community in French society, based on the ability of Turkish immigrants to use the French language, their marriage practices, the tendency to live in the same place, and so on. The evaluation of Turkish immigrants as a closed "community", based only on quantitative evidence, was criticized. Although we found some outcomes which had similarities with Tribitlat's framework during our literature research; we can easily say that this approach which treats Turkish immigrants as a homogeneous population and does not include the source country accounts for only a part of the truth. Although Turkish immigrants have characteristics that deserve to be defined as a closed community through the cultural and social spheres, we can easily say that they are integrated with local markets in the economic field. Even if we look at it from the perspective of our subject, we can say that Muslim identity and European values led to some hybridization.

"There are a lot of problems in France ... but it is also different to look at the world from Paris. For example, there are serious differences between my old and current religious views. I used to read anti- Christian or anti-Jewish verses from the Quran when I was a political Islamist in my childhood years in Turkey; then I needed to question those verses two or three years ago. When I questioned, there were changes in my ideas. No one here can cut off anyone's throat in the name of Allah... According to my findings, there are two types of Muslim: European type and Eastern type ... To give an example, I would never cut a man's head in the name of Allah. We have no intention to change this world by force, we need to learn how to live together. I did not have an aim to make people Muslim here. But when I go to Turkey, my friends ask me about how many of foreigners I have made Muslim. I don't care about people's religions. This is asked directly. This question does not come from only a person. If I lived there, maybe I would ask the same question to someone coming from the West. But this question is not asked among people who try to live Islam here ... I witnessed the courtesy I had not seen in Muslims in Turkey on the first day I came here. You get shocked when you get health care in a hospital. Despite everything we criticize, in my opinion the cultural values of Europe are at the top of the world . "(Male, 40)

The definition of "European Type of Islam", uttered by an imam in addition to the above statements, is very strongly parallel with Göle's "ordinary Muslims". We can talk about a Turkish immigrant profile that does not forget about their





cultural and religious baggage but accepts the values of the place they live by transforming those values. Especially in terms of the potential for creating an alternative identity against established culture, the relationship between strong Muslim values and young people does not go beyond the symbolic level at some points (Kaya, 2006). A study on 285 young people in France showed that young people's perception of "fasting" is complicated: the feeling that they get out of debt by fasting on the first and last days of the month of Ramadan is prevalent in half of the young people who practice fasting. Non-political Islam has a more moderate place among the young Turkish people in the daily life, without denying their cultural significance (IRTIS-DABBAGH, 2001: 318-19). In the recent studies on young people who live in the urban fringes in France and radicalize, it is stated that the number of Turkish "immigrant" children is low in this group. The fact that family control dynamics are tight, the multitude of the fellow citizens who live in the same region, and the presence of Turkish entrepreneurs who can move freely in the labor market are underlined as the obstacles to the radicalization of the young people of Turkey. These features we have mentioned led to their being marked as a society resistant to integration until twenty years ago, but now they have become the indicators of a more positive image. However, the fact that the young Turks have remained between the two cultures, like their peers, constitute the other side of the truth:

The young Turkish people express themselves as Muslims. The future of those who do this is brighter. Things get worse for those who cannot do this. "If milk rots, it becomes cheese; if meat rots, it becomes poison". I do not have a problem with the French people. The French have the rules of good manner. However, the people from our country cannot behave like them. When you are separated from your own culture, everything is upside down. There arises a type that even the French cannot accept. Most of the families are not aware of this danger. The elders make their children insatiable saying "I did not have anything when I was a child." I did not have that, but my child should have it. I did not wear it, but my child should wear it... There are many problems ... (Male, 40)

The Halal lifestyle gives the immigrants flexibility in everyday life in softening the rigidity preached by religion. The Halal lifestyle and the organization of economy according to it is a "European" initiative looking for the possibilities of living together without denying the identity for some of the Turkish immigrants. The "halal business" has been liberated from the orbit of a conservative political ideology, and has become widespread in France, with economic interests and



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home country nostalgia (Tapia, 2005: 99). Halal is, in fact, a matter of central importance, from neighborhood relations to eating and drinking habits outside. As Göle points out, "halal" can be read as a kind of acceptance of established cultural values. Almost all of the immigrants we talked to stated that despite the fact that they have non-Muslim colleagues in business life, their relationship between them is limited to business only. In Gilles Kepel's work in the 1980s, the answer given to the question "Would you accept if your non-Muslim neighbor invites you for a dinner?" by a Turkish immigrant to the question is quite influential in terms of reflecting the mindsets of the Turkish immigrants:

"You asked such a question that it is beyond my depth. In fact we would not go. But it would be wrong to perceive this as fanaticism. The reason why we would not go is that our food would not be cut according to Islamic conditions. We eat meat after it is cut according to the Islamic conditions. They are certainly not dirty. They are clean and obey the rules of their religion. But they eat the meat that is prohibited by our religion. On the other side, they drink wine with their meal ... you can definitely say that drinking is not compulsory. I probably would not want to upset my friend who invites me, but I do not want to eat the food that is not prepared according to the conditions of my own religion. It is best not to go rather than upset my friend "(Kepel, 1987: 35-36).

It is one of the characteristics of the Turkish immigrants to search for ways to live side by side with other people without forgetting their origins and excluding other cultures. The administrator of an association in Paris emphasizes the importance of the "Democratic-integration" model in creating a common public space:

"You need to be an individual here. The new person created by democratic integration is important to us. Just like the Bretons defend democratic values in France without denying their identity, we can do the same. Dissolving the values of the country you came to with your own values ... In our view, democratic-integration is a model of creating a common culture together by respecting cultural values. It is a process that continues by opening out rather than closing inside. It is the building of a joint equal life" (Male, 48).

Conclusion

Although Turkish immigrants are "reluctant" to enter French social and public life, there is a need for more comprehensive frameworks to explain this,

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rather than essential reasons. The experiences of the Turkish immigrants in France, which were tried to be explained by concepts such as "staying within the community", "resistance to integration" and "Turkish exception" especially in the early migration literature, cover a period of approximately fifty years. Both the length of the process and the heterogeneous nature of the arriving migrants necessitate a more dynamic look.

In the suburbs where religious-referenced radicalization accompanied by a sense of ethnic and cultural exclusion is common among young people, in an atmosphere where unemployment figures are high, anxiety about the future increases and the length of attendance to school decreases, the greatest risk is the hierarchical integration policies that impose itself as the absolute truth from outside. One of the most important consequences of our research is the necessity of subjecting the politics which tend to see a single color when looking at the suburbs to a critical reading. We can say that it does not comply with the suburban reality to regard all of the "Muslims", who develop a "performance" -based relationship with Islam in a more secular dimension apart from the forms known, as radicals.

We also think that it must be underlined that Muslims, who are the subject of the immigrant debate over Islam, have responsibilities in creating a common public culture as well as their neighbors. Slurring over any criticism brought on by the Europeans by keeping the argument of the Islamophobia and the negative memory of the colonial past alive limits the possibility of criticizing within the neighborhood. We believe that there is a need for a perspective that takes into account the new reality apart from the arguments saying that terrorism and Islam cannot be brought together or Islam is essentially a religion of peace that were voiced by the Islamic sections especially after the attacks in November 2015. It is clear that a dialogue that is not imposed and a language for understanding and learning is one of the most important instruments in the creation of an alternative publicity in Europe, which has fallen into awe of the "refugee" issue and has introduced fear-based and democracy-abusive practices after the attacks.

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