

INTEGRATING SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN IN TURKEY THROUGH RE-INTERPRETING FRENCH EXPERIENCE

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Introduction

Turkey faces serious challenges in integrating Syrian refugees into Turkish society. The Syrian refugees have reached a huge number in Turkey (3.2 million as 29th December 2016). Turkey's humanitarian and benevolent approach has limited international support (550 million United States dollars). Turkey has spent 25 billion US dollars for them, 0.37 % of Turkey's national income has been spent for refugees (*Syrians in Turkey: Social Acceptance and Harmony report by Immigration and Politics Research Centre at Hacettepe University*) (www.milliyet.com.tr/Yazdir.aspx?aType=HaberDetayPrint&Article|D=2374476).

33 % Syrians are illiterate, Syrian university students 5.6 %. At least 500 thousand Syrians work as cheap labour. The number of Syrian children at school age is 968 thousand. 550 thousand go to school (172 thousand to state schools and the rest to temporary education centres) (*Syrians in Turkey: Social Acceptance and Harmony report by Immigration and Politics Research Centre at Hacettepe University*) (www.milliyet.com.tr/Yazdir.aspx?aType=HaberDetayPrint&Article|D=2374476).

If France and French Muslims are interrogated demographically, the following could be mentioned: It is forbidden to ask about race, ethnicity or religion of the residents of France in French law. Therefore, it is impossible to officially statistically say the exact reliable number of French Muslim(s) (women). It is approximately over 5 million. They are mostly Algerian and Moroccan (<http://www.understandfrance.org/French/Issues/#ancre2235863>).

Method

French Sociologist Alain Touraine conducted a detailed research study about identity and belongingness of French Muslim women with the support of French government in 2007. The findings and results of the research and Touraine's perspective could be re-interpreted to gain insights about prospective identity and belongingness of Syrian refugee women in Turkish society and whence some inferences could be drawn about the future of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Some of such inferences could be based on relevant theoretical grounding in the Literature Review and whence they could be discussed in the Discussion.

Literature Review

Living in a specific country has stronger impact on immigrants' belief system than the religious faith itself. This supports the integration theory (Inglehart & Norris, 2009, p.8).

However, as multiculturalism asserts immigrants will tend to live under the influence of their original culture in situations in which distinctive differences exist between original culture of the immigrants and their host culture. Furthermore, alienation may not diminish in the second and third generation Muslim youth in the West (Inglehart & Norris, 2009,p.11).

The basic differences between Muslim immigrants and Western societies are in religiosity, gender roles and sexual norms. Furthermore, sexual liberalisation, democratic political culture and women's equality are domains in which Muslim immigrants have disagreement. Existential insecurity, xenophobia, intolerance may be replaceable with cultural pluralism, cultural diversity, diversity of lifestyles even in relatively homogenous cultures such as France and Sweden (comp. Inglehart & Norris, 2009, p.18-19).

Alain Touraine's findings and the results he obtained in the end of his research do not affirm the Clash of Civilisations theorised by Samuel Huntington. Muslim women in France subject of his research and generalisable French Muslim women lead their lives in an ambivalent axis: they are nationally and culturally French and as origin and belongingness Muslim. However, Muslim French women are both "French" and "Muslim." They are loyal to Islam but refuse the introversion imposed by Muslim community. They prioritise education but refuse discrimination at school. They love their parents but they refuse arranged marriage and virginity control. They are loyal to France and freedom of speech in France but they exhibit and critique discrimination (comp. Touraine, 2007, pp.205-207).

Muslim community is the largest demographic and religious group in France. French Muslims is the best integrated group compared with other Muslim groups in European countries. They have adopted French traditions and elements including perfect command of French language as part of their identity (Canan-Sokullu, 2016, p.109-11). However, bans against headscarf, veil, full (or facial) veil (burqa) caused a kind of social un-rest or social problem potentiality among French Muslim (women). Moreover, there was tension between French nationals and French Muslims. This was observed in 2013 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/22/frances-headscarf-war-attack-on-freedom>).

Though French laicism and Anglo-American secularism have common premises and grounding, there are in differences in some aspects in practice. Scholar Denis Lacorne says the following about French laicism and American secularism in a speech he made at Stanford University:

If by secularism – in France, we say laïcité – is meant the neutrality of the state, the rejection of an established church, respect for freedom of conscience and all existing religions, then there is no real difference between the two societies. But what one could call the boundaries of tolerance are not the same. French laws and courts do prohibit the wearing of Islamic veils in public schools and the full facial veil in the public space. These laws, which are not always enforced, are controversial ...”

Toleration of hijab in public zone is one departing point in the two systems. Regulation of public zone as no way to religious symbols as acceptable is the practice in France.

Turkish Republic could achieve very interesting syntheses in building up a nation-state: integrating a "nation" definition of French origin in harmony with the understanding of

Ernest Renan and “national economy” of German origin. Another synthesis was on political plane: also based on the transformations of Ottoman reforms since nineteenth century, a “laic” state in a country where a vast majority of people was Muslim could be set up for the first time in world history (Kazgan, 2013, p.34). Democrat Party whose party programme was in harmony with global system won the elections (1950) in the years when the United States set off to set up a global system (Kazgan, 2013, p.64). Democrat Party started to try to follow trans-Atlantic model of liberalism. 1980’s with radical socio-economic reforms and transformations was a turning point to depart the social philosophy based on “social state” in Western Europe and democracy model underlying it (comp. Kazgan, 2013, p.103). The long-time conservative democrat mainstream which has been in Turkey is power is inclined to fill the centre in the political wing (Sözen, 2014, p.131).

According to Suda (Güler) (p.159, 2016), in spite of the claim of Enlightenment tradition to propose a universal liberation vision to liberate humankind in every domain and free them from the chains, conservative ideology emphasises specific traditions, customs and perspective of history shared by people. It is very difficult to understand the new flourishing of conservatism which is a kind of opposition to modernity in the postmodern age which emphasises scepticism and relativity and the dependence on local and specific.

Discussion

Turkey has turned down French model for laicism. Bans on headscarf and covered dressing have been abolished in Turkey. Whether Syrian women with covered dressing would adapt Turkish identity and belongingness without ambivalent hesitation is difficult to estimate. However, they must conform to the secular legal system in Turkey including Turkish Civil Code and Surname Code and thereby monogamy must be the lifestyle if they are planning permanent stay in Turkey. Moreover, more sociological studies and studies on immigration sociology about their adaptation, integration into Turkish society and acculturation process are required for the estimation of their prospective identity and belongingness in Turkey. They have come to Turkey when conservative democrats were in power. How conservative democracy will affect their prospective identity and belongingness is an issue to be studied from the perspective of political sociology.

On the other hand, Turkey tends to differ from Western societies in terms of religiosity, gender roles and sexual norms especially for conservative sectors of society. New millennium witnesses the rising conservative democrat political mainstream in Turkey. It could further be claimed that conservative values in Turkey have been rising. It could be inferred from the quotations in the Literature Review, handling mechanisms concerning the issues in relation with gender roles, equalisation of women and sexual norms in Turkey do not fully overlap with the existing conditions in the West and do not fully overlap with Western mentality, because traditional conservative values in Turkey may not compromise with modernity, the liberation in gender roles, equalization of sexes as part of conservative ideology as quoted in the Literature Review. Rather conservative democrats propose social values with historical perspective and traditional customary grounding. Whence such liberal values are questionable and are not resolved just like in the West in conservative sectors of

Turkish society. However, conservatism is just one lifestyle in Turkey. Western minded lifestyle with liberal values about gender roles, sexual norms, women's equalisation, and sexual liberalisation co-exist. Turkish politics in general promises respect to all lifestyles. Syrian refugee women's belongingness and identity within Turkish culture in accompany with their Islamic belongingness and identity would be different from those of French Muslim women whom Alain Touraine researched.

Syrian refugee women in Turkey could be entitled with positive discrimination for employment; they must be given such rights as free child care, nursery school, kindergarten to support them when they work. Mothers are cornerstone for integration as they bear, reproduce and spread culture. Thereby, Syrian refugee women must be prioritised in access to education, Turkish culture and language and work. Employment of Syrian refugee women is essential. It is an important starting point. It is also important to include young Syrian refugee girls in Turkish education system and accreditate their former education in Syria. Turkish preparatory school before starting high school must be compulsory for young Syrians.

Turkish Language Teaching for Foreigners departments must be developed quantitatively and qualitatively in Turkey. Foreign Language Teaching departments (English, French and Arabic) must cooperate with Translation Studies departments. More than Arabic medium higher education both for Turks and Syrians, academic Turkish teaching to Syrians and Turkish medium higher education must be developed. Syrians must be able to speak Turkish as perfectly as Muslim community in France is able to speak French. Young Syrian girls and women who will have been highly educated through Turkish higher education system could maintain as the Syrian elite who could cooperate and collaborate with Turkish authorities for the needs, desires and problems of Syrian refugees who will stay in Turkey as long as the civil war and international clash and other problems in their homeland have come to an end.

Conclusion

The most urgent need for Syrian refugee population in Turkey is preparing legal framework and relevant legislation to recognise legal status to all Syrian refugees and enacting it with proper practice so that Syrian refugees could be subject to some legal rights and duties such as full access to education, access to work opportunities and they could benefit from such rights as valid identity, surname, et cetera either for temporary or permanent stay. The surname and legal marriage dilemma of Syrian women which stem from polygamy which is illegal and illegitimate in Turkey should be solved from legal standpoint as Turkey is a state of law by Constitution. Instead of polygene marriage, monogamy must be the lifestyle in accordance with Turkish Civil Code and Surname Code for permanent stay. Adopting Turkish legal system is a must. Syrians who would like to stay in Turkey permanently must adapt Turkish culture from this standpoint, too.

Syrian refugee women must be prioritised to access education, jobs even social security. They are the starting point to have full command of Turkish language and culture. These are important cornerstones for permanent stay in Turkey with Turkish citizenship.

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