

“Civic Responses and Cultural Identity Dilemmas of the Second Generation of Balkan Muslims in Time of Illiberal Democracy”

Abstract for the General Public

After a series of terrorist attacks occurred respectively in France and Austria in 2020, an anti-Muslim atmosphere re-emerged from the depths of the European societies. Earlier global ties with political Islam have casted dark shadows on European Muslims, although their young generations have leveraged the effects of illiberal democracy at the personal and community level. To a large extent, they are less likely represented by Islamic associations and movements seeking out group-specific cultural rights. When they mobilise as Muslim believers, they perform their religiosity differently from previous older generations. When compared with European Muslims residing in Southeast Europe, they are likewise afar from those same-age Muslims living in the historical lands of origin. Overall, levels of political representativeness and (mis)trust toward liberal democracy show an inconspicuously different, yet culturally relevant, civic actorness among youngest Muslims in Europe.

Given the above, this research project aims to explore the experiences, perceptions and sensibilities in civic practices and responses of the second generation of European Muslims from Balkan émigré families to illiberal democracy in Europe. Assuming that young European Muslims from sizable Balkan families are first and foremost concerned with integration and democracy, this research proposal contends that this generation of Balkan Muslims is more likely to stand for secular values and liberal stances than older Bosnian, Albanian or Turkish-speaking families that appeared since the 1990s in Western Europe.

With the aim to conduct a 36-month period of investigation, this research will bear upon a data collection of first-hand information and knowledge directly from the second generation of Balkan Muslims. Through in-depth interviews to be conducted in Bremen (Germany), Antwerp (Belgium) and Warsaw (Poland), it is aimed at executing a comparative qualitative study from within three Europe-wide metropolises that may reveal minority disenfranchisement vis-à-vis the evolution/underdevelopment of civic practices and responses among young European Muslims of Balkan origin. In light of the heterogeneity of the communities to investigate, the methodological adoption of an ethnographic sensibility will be employed to facilitate to look at three different ‘demois’ which constitute a potential base for the future of European ‘demoicracy’ at the micro-level. In-depth interviews will be conducted through a semi-structured, theme-guided questionnaire in line with the methods of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The latter would help to excavate counter-historical family memories, re-articulate religious and civic identities, and provide a glimpse of Europe’s political and cultural landscapes with regard to how European Muslims claim stake in their localities while constructing connection of civic solidarity and tolerance.

Therefore, this research has the scope of venturing the parapet of the hegemonic, anti-colonial and post-colonialist discourse on European demos by exploring the ways the second generation of Balkan Muslims enact civic practices and responses to daily identity dilemmas and horizontal relations of continuous cultural negotiation. Hence, this research raises the following questions: how do European Muslims of second generation perceive themselves vis-à-vis rampant democratic backslidings in Europe? How do they see, perceive and understand the shrinking framework of democracy in which multicultural dialogue and integration are dangerously hijacked by nativist discourse and intolerance? To what extent they experience “otherness” at the grassroots level?