

<https://doi.org/10.46991/hc.2023.19.1.261>

**Middle East Wars and The Refugee Crisis in Europe of the Last Decade:
The Interaction of Islam and Post-Christian Civilization in the West**

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Key words: Islam in Europe, clash of civilizations, refugee crisis, secularism, postmodern religiosity, religious studies.

In his prominent and much-criticized book, “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order” (edited in 1996), Samuel Huntington claimed that the major civilizations were incompatible. For him so long as Islam remains Islam and the West remains the West, the fundamental conflict between the two great civilizations will continue to define their relations in the future. Now in the situation of the wars of the last decade a huge number of refugees from the Middle East has entered Europe bringing Islam with them. Was Huntington correct writing about the clash of Islam and the West or on the contrary is Western civilization now infected by Islam? Why doesn't the West resist the Islamic culture? On the one hand it is easily giving up Christian values and on the other hand is not at all attracted by Islam. What is the religious situation in Europe at the present time and what guarantee may there be of European civilization surviving in the situation of the refugee crisis? Are there any parallels between the situation in European Union and that in Armenia? The present episode of interaction of civilizations is going to be discussed from the point of view of Religious Studies.

Մերձավոր Արևելքի պատերազմները և փախստականների ճգնաժամը Եվրոպայում վերջին տասնամյակում: Իսլամի և հետքրիստոնեական քաղաքակրթության փոխազդեցությունը Արևմուտքում

Էլիզաբեթ Տայվանե

Լատվիայի համալսարանի աստվածաբանության ֆակուլտետի դոցենտ

Հիմնաբառեր՝ Իսլամը Եվրոպայում, քաղաքակրթությունների բախում փախստականների ճգնաժամ, աշխարհիկություն, հետմոդերն կրոնականություն, կրոնագի-տություն:

Իր հայտնի և լայնորեն քննադատված «Քաղաքակրթությունների բախումը և փոփոխվող համաշխարհային կարգը» գրքում (հրատարակվել է 1996 թվականին) Սամուել Հանթինգթոնը

History and Culture. Journal of Armenian Studies, Vol.-1(19), 2023, pp. 261-269



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Received: 26.01.2023

Revised: 19.02.2023

Accepted: 15.06.2023

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Ближневосточные войны и кризис беженцев в Европе последнего десятилетия. Взаимодействие ислама и постхристианской цивилизации на Западе

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Ключевые слова: ислам в Европе, столкновение цивилизаций, кризис беженцев, секуляризм, постмодернистская религиозность, религиоведение.

В своей известной и широко критикуемой книге «Столкновение цивилизаций и изменение мирового порядка» (изданной в 1996 году) Сэмюэл Хантингтон утверждал, что основные цивилизации несовместимы. По его мнению, пока ислам остается исламом, а Запад остается Западом, фундаментальный конфликт между двумя великими цивилизациями будет продолжать определять их отношения в будущем. Сейчас, в ситуации войн последнего десятилетия, в Европу прибыло огромное количество беженцев с Ближнего Востока, принося с собой ислам. Был ли Хантингтон прав, когда писал о столкновении ислама и Запада, или, наоборот, западная цивилизация теперь заражена исламом? Почему Запад не сопротивляется исламской культуре? С одной стороны, он легко отказывается от христианских ценностей, а с другой стороны, его совершенно не привлекает ислам. Какова религиозная ситуация в Европе в настоящее время и какая может быть гарантия выживания европейской цивилизации в ситуации кризиса беженцев? Есть ли параллели между ситуацией в Евросоюзе и в Армении? Современный эпизод взаимодействия цивилизаций будет рассмотрен с точки зрения религиоведения.

* * *

Introduction. This present short research is focused on the consequences of the Middle East Wars and the refugee invasion of Europe in the last decade. Its main theme is discussing the interaction of Islamic civilization and post Christian environment with a special focus on the religious aspect, not the

political, economic or any other aspects of this area. The present reflection is based on two premises. The first one concerns the already mentioned Middle East Wars and Refugee Crisis in Europe. The second one is the discussion about the clash of civilizations suggested by Samuel Huntington in 1996 in his controversial book, “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order”. The main question is if Huntington was right to discuss the question of the clash of Islam and the West or on the contrary is Western civilization now infected by Islam? Making use of the phenomenological structural analysis two different cultural paradigms, i.e., the Islamic one and the European one, will be compared in the present paper.

Refugee Crisis in Europe of the Last Decade. The war in Syria beginning in 2011 had a purpose of dealing with a humanitarian crisis. Half a million of the population of Syria were murdered and approximately 12 million left their homes. More than 6 million (6.8 million) have had to flee their country since 2011. Germany is the European host country with the largest number of refugees, with more than 620 thousands [Syria Refugee Crisis Explained, 2022]. To summarize approximately 1 million Syrians became immigrants into Europe. [Gogitidze, 2021]

Beside the situation in Syria, the wars in Iraq (2011-2017) and in Afghanistan (2001-2021) should also be mentioned. The most significant portion of refugees has moved to the European Union from Syria (according to the statistics of 2017 they were 28%), Afghanistan (15%) and Iraq (10%). The remainder of the refugees have arrived in Europe from Albania, Pakistan, Nigeria and Kosovo (approximately 3-4% each). The first countries among those accepting refugees in European Union were Germany (circa 45% of refugees from Middle East), Hungary (8%), Italy (8%) and Sweden (7%). It is common knowledge that the refugees from the Middle East and Africa integrate into the labour market with difficulties and in many cases provoke intercultural conflicts including the well-known episodes of terrorism in France, Germany, England and Belgium. [Trofimova, 2017, 142-143]

What is the present situation? According to the information received from the former German Government Migration Advisor Gerald Knaus, the number of refugees who cross the European border from Turkey this year is extremely low, nevertheless the process of inner migration of the refugees from the Middle East in Europe is considerably large. The refugees who lived in bad conditions in Greece move from one part of the EU to another. At the same time there is a significant number of the refugees from Northern Africa into Europe this year. They mainly come from Libya. Many Libyans die in the central Mediterranean. [Refugees in Europe: Where they come from and where they want to go, 2022]

The Reception of Islam in Europe. In his prominent book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* Samuel P. Huntington writes:

By the early 1990s two-thirds of the migrants in Europe were Muslim, and European concern with immigration is above all concern with Muslim immigration. The challenge is demographic - migrants account for 10 percent of the births in Western Europe, Arabs 50 percent of those in Brussels - and cultural” [Huntington, 1996, 200]. In respect to France Huntington quotes an American journalist

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saying that “the hostility is directed mostly at Muslims. The word "immigré" is virtually synonymous with Islam, now France's second largest religion.¹

Huntington admits, that “European societies generally either do not want to assimilate immigrants or have great difficulty doing so. [...] Hence, sustained substantial immigration is likely to produce countries divided into Christian and

Muslim communities” [Huntington, 1996, 204]. Referring to various reasons he predicts that, “so long as Islam remains Islam (which it will) and the West remains the West (which is more dubious), this fundamental conflict between two great civilizations and ways of life will continue to define their relations in the future even as it has defined them for the past fourteen centuries” [Huntington, 1996, 212]. The question is, was Huntington right to speak about the clash of Islam and Western civilization or, on the contrary, will Islam influence Western religious mentality and will Europeans step by step convert to Islam?

In order to answer this question, it would be important to start with the religious situation in Western Europe. On the one hand we receive information about the increasing number of Europeans in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and other countries who convert to Islam [See, for example, Kern, 2012]. The most popular reasons for the conversion are the "lack of morality and sexual permissiveness" and the "unrestrained consumerism" in Europe. At the same time the European, especially German “converts, taking an absolutist approach, are often easily led into extremism” [Kern, 2012]. By the way the same dynamics with the conversion and extremism is noticed in Latvia. [Vilkmanis, 2022]. Many women, especially in Spain, convert to Islam wedding Muslim men. Beside women in Spain “an increasing number of inmates in British prisons are converting to Islam. [...] Many disillusioned youngsters are becoming attracted to Islam by the prospect of getting better food and superior treatment at the prison” [Kern, 2012].

A psychologist Anastasia V. Korchagina discusses the reasons of conversion to Islam in Russia. For her there are three most popular reasons: the search for the meaning of life, the simple and understandable teaching of Islam and marriages with Muslims [Korchagina, 2018, 379].

Despite the mentioned factors, Islam is the most unpopular Eastern religion in the West. As the professor of Sociology at the University of Aberdeen, Steve Bruce admits, “we have at least a decade from the late 1960s in which Islam could, like Hinduism and Buddhism, have been treated as a repository of exotic spiritual resources, but it rarely was” [Bruce, 2017b, 110]. An expert in the field of Religious Studies Joantine Berghuijs exploring the so called multiple religious belonging in Netherlands, discovers that the number of those who combine Christianity and Islam is low as well. [Berhuijs, 2017, 30]

Despite the unpopular character of Islam among Westerners, the number of Muslims in Europe is increasing and not thanks to European converters. According to the Pew Research Center, “in Europe overall, even if all Muslim migration into Europe were to immediately and permanently stop – a zero

¹ B. A. Roberson, "Islam and Europe: An Enigma or a Myth?" Middle East Journal, 48 (Spring 1994), p. 302; New York Times, 5 December 1993, p. 1; 5 May 1995, p. 1; Joel Klotkin and Andries van Agt, "Bedouins: Tribes That Have Made it," New Perspectives Quarterly, 8 (Fall 1991), p. 51; Judith Miller, "Strangers at the Gate," New York Times Magazine, 15 September 1991, p. 49. (In Huntington, 1996, 200.)

migration scenario – the overall Muslim population of Europe would be expected to rise by 2.5 percentage points, from the current level of 4.9% to

7.4% by 2050. This is because Muslims in Europe are considerably younger and have a higher fertility rate than other Europeans.” [Europe’s Growing Muslim Population, 2017]

On the one hand Europeans don’t resist any foreign cultural viruses and easily give up their Christian values. They are converting churches into concert halls [Jenkins, 2007, 36] and are ready to mix Christianity with any other belief. On the other hand, they are not attracted by Islam. What is the reason for such a contradiction?

Secularization, the Post-Modern Order of Things and Tolerance in Europe. It is common knowledge that Europe has entered the age of secularism. As the Russian philosopher S. Horuzhy indicates, in 18th-19th century Christianity and Europe were identical notions. Two centuries later, on the threshold of the 20th – 21st century Europeans have changed their mind. The authors of the Constitution of the European Union haven’t even mentioned any eternal meaning or Christian roots of the European culture. Now Europe has endowed the status of the post-Christian Europe [Horuzhij, 2011].

Europeans are intensely forgetting the Christian vocabulary. According to my observation many young people, Latvians or Russians in Latvia, considering themselves Christians, don’t any longer recognize the main ideas of Christian doctrine. For example, they choose to substitute the idea of *sin* and *salvation* by the notion of *karma* and *reincarnation*. An expert in History and Religious Studies from Penn State University, Philip Jenkins, mentions the same ignorance in European society. “One British poll found that over 40 percent of respondents could not say what event was commemorated by Easter.”¹ According to the information from the Pew Research Center the least religious countries in Europe are Czech Republic (78,4% of non-believers), Estonia (60,2%), Latvia (45%) and Netherlands (44,3%) [Least Religious Countries 2022, 2022]. As Philip Jenkins notes, the “decline has been far more marked in formerly Protestant areas, such as Britain or Denmark, than in nations with a strong Catholic heritage” [Jenkins, 2007, 29].

Philip Jenkins admits that secularism is linked to economic growth, modernization and growing social status of women, that in its turn increases the level of divorces in families and decline in family size in West European nations. The European Union experiences the birth dearth crisis [Jenkins, 2007, 44-45]. It’s worth to remember the already mentioned high immigrant fertility rate in Europe.

The sign of the religious crisis in Europe is the decrease of church attendance. As a conservative British writer Danny Kruger states, “More than 70 per cent of us claim to be Christian. But only four per cent of us go to church on Sundays”.² Philip Jenkins referring to Grace Davie thinks that “presently, strict secularism is very advanced among cultural and political elites, but has not yet made enormous inroads among ordinary people.” It lets Jenkins speak about “believing without belonging” [Jenkins, 2007, 64]. The question is if this *believing* has a capacity to stand for preservation of European civilization.

Experts in the field of Religious Studies in Europe representing the post-modern vision of religion, consider religion to be a hybrid mixture of changing cultural and social aspects, such as ritual,

¹ According to Philip Jenkins between 1970 and 2005 in England, “the Church closed 1,700 of its structures, over 10 per cent of the total. Some have been demolished; developers have transformed others into warehouses and apartments, spas and pubs.” (Jenkins, 2007, 37).

² Danny Kruger, “There’s Plenty of Life Left in the Churches”, *Daily Telegraph*, October 13, 2005. (In Jenkins, 2007, 28.)

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The Two Paradigms: Islam Versus Post-Christian European Values. The non-popularity of Islam in Europe and the occasional conflict between Islam and post-Christian Europe has a small number of reasons. Firstly, immigrants coming from Middle East have two basic values: religion and ethnocentricity. Immigrants create religious institutions that help them to transmit the values of their societies. Usually, they try to find a familiar religious institution in a foreign region they arrive in, “promoting a sense of community and ethnic identification.” [Jenkins, 2007, 51-53]

Europeans representing the host countries on the contrary are not any longer endowed with the religious norm and ethnicity. On the contrary, they close, demolish and transform their churches, producing secular laws and proclaim the post-cultural and post-ethnic order of things. Latvian philosopher and expert in Islam Māris Kūlis underscores that in the situation of post-modernism, we have chosen *freedom* and not the *truth*. There are many freedoms in Western society, and everybody has his own truth. President Putin also is free to have his own truth, nevertheless in order to follow the only truth it is necessary to get rid of freedoms [Islāma Terorisms un Postmodernie Rietumi. Saruna ar Māri Kūli, 2021].

Hence, the immigrants have difficulties to integrate Western society because of the conflict between the religious truth and secular law, as well as between ethnocentricity and post-national strategy. On the other hand, the secularized Europe doesn't accept the Muslim order of things. As Ian Buruma notes, “forgetting how recently most Europeans abandoned their own religion, people regard Muslim devotion as deeply “un-European”.¹

The second reason of the conflict is the attitude to the border between the religious and the secular realm in Islam and in the West. Huntington writes:

[...] the causes of this ongoing pattern of conflict lie not in transitory phenomena such as twelfth-century Christian passion or twentieth-century Muslim fundamentalism. They flow from the nature of the two religions and the civilizations based on them. Conflict was, on the one hand, a product of difference, particularly the Muslim concept of Islam as a way of life transcending and uniting religion

¹ Ian Buruma, “Cross Purposes,” *Guardian*, January 7, 2006. (In Jenkins, 2007, 259-260.)

and politics versus the Western Christian concept of the separate realms of God and Caesar. [Huntington, 1996, 210]

The third reason of the conflict is the intense individualism in Europe. As Steve Bruce explains,

Islam is precisely the sort of religion that the denizens of the New Age milieu reject. One of the defining characteristics of New Age epistemology is that the believer determines his or her truth. [...] A second difference is that, for all its internal divisions, Islam is far more coherent and consistent in demanding a certain way of life than the more variegated Hinduism and Buddhism. [...] And both of those elements – conformity and public display – are unpopular with the followers of holistic spirituality”. [Bruce, 2017b, 112]

Is it possible to preserve the European civilization from extinction? The period of interregnum in the West is rather hazardous because the old order of things does not work any longer and the new order does not work yet [Islāma Terorisms un Postmodernie Rietumi. Saruna ar Māri Kūli, 2021]. The suggestion of conservative authors is to go back to Christian heritage. As Māris Kūlis notes, unfortunately such a strategy is utopic. Nationalist movements are also too weak to perform the task. [Islāma Terorisms un Postmodernie Rietumi. Saruna ar Māri Kūli, 2021] Being aware of the birth dearth crisis in Europe the prognosis for European survival is pessimistic. At the same time, as Steve Bruce underscores,

the most religious societies in the West are the most religiously homogenous: Poland, Ireland and Greece. [...] The three Baltic states share similar political histories and have much else in common but they differ in degree of religiosity and it is Lithuania - the least religiously diverse that remained the most religious. [Bruce, 2017a, 609]

According to the statistics the most religious countries in Europe today are Romania, Armenia, Georgia, Greece, and Moldova. Poland also made the top ten, as did Portugal. [Pew: Romania Is Now Most Religious Country in Europe, 2018]

Conclusion and the edifying connotation. Hence, it is underscored that in the situation of a refugee crisis Western Europe does not resist the culture of Islam and is ready to give up Christian values. Being tolerant of Islamic culture Europeans simultaneously do not wish to be influenced by it. Although there are certain social groups in Europe converting to Islam, the latter is the most unpopular religious tradition in the West. The reasons for that are as follows: there is a deep conflict between the religious norm in Islam and secularism in the West; there exists a contradiction between the ethnocentricity of the refugees and the post-ethnic paradigm in Europe; the only truth accepted by Muslims is in contrast with the various freedoms in the West; an important Islamic standard of oneness of the religious and secular law is not compatible with the separate realms of God and Caesar in Christian culture; belonging to a religious community is important for the refugees, whereas believing without belonging to a religious community is cultivated in Europe; finally, the strong discipline for everyone in Islam is in the conflict with the Western individualism, that in its turn, presupposes unlimited freedom in beliefs and religious practice.

Մերձավոր Արևելքի պատերազմները և փախստականների ճգնաժամը Եվրոպայում վերջին տասնամյակում: Իսլամի և հետքրիստոնեական քաղաքակրթության փոխազդեցությունը Արևմուտքում

What is the edifying connotation of the present reflection? In the present political situation Armenia together with Artsakh experience military violence from Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia whilst, at the same time, host a huge number of Russian immigrants. Armenia should make use of its homogenous and profound religiosity as a weapon against the extinction of the nation and the state. In order to survive the Armenians should stand firmly against the foreign cultural viruses, preserving the traditional values of the Armenian Apostolic Church and let Armenia stay a mono-national and mono-religious country.

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