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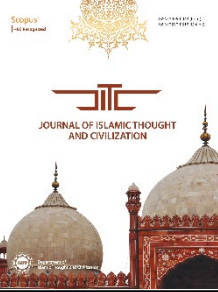
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Origin of Islamophobia in Europe: A Case Study of Hungary

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Abstract

The attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) in 2001 proved to be a turning point in the relationship between Islam and the West. Subsequently, the United States (US) invaded Iraq to avenge the tragedy. The US called its militaristic venture into the Middle East as an "act against terror." This invasion triggered a political crisis in the Middle Eastern countries. This situation was further aggravated by the Arab Spring, which occurred in the Middle East in 2011. The Arab Spring created problems in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Tunisia. Political instability in the Middle East has forced Arab people to immigrate to European countries. The increase in Arab immigrants in the early 21st century fueled Islamophobia in Europe. Hungary is one of the European countries that has accepted many Arab immigrants. This study discusses the relationship between the rise of Arab migration and the increase of Islamophobia in Europe, particularly in Hungary. A qualitative research approach was used to analyse various government and non-government reports and literature. This study argues that the increasing population of Arab immigrants in Europe has led to the emergence of right-wing political movements. These movements play a major role in carrying out Islamophobic propaganda in European social and cultural life.

Keywords: Arabs, Europe, Hungary, immigration, Islamophobia, Islam, Middle East, populism

Introduction

Viktor Orban's victory in 2010 elections as the prime minister was an important milestone for the Hungarian politics. Formerly, Orban held the same position as prime minister between 1998 and 2002. In his victory speech, Viktor Orban called his victory "revolutionary." This victory was followed by an increase in executive power as a result of controlling 2/3 of the parliamentary power.¹ He is a representative of the right-wing political forces. These political forces have arisen in Hungary due to the increased number of Middle Eastern immigrants. Viktor Orban has admitted that he is an "anti-immigrant" prime minister. According to him, the European Union (EU) has failed to address the immigration problem and criticized the EU for allowing waves of immigrants into the European region. Orban stated, "We are Europe. The EU is not Brussels, but Vienna, Budapest, Warsaw, Berlin, and Madrid. Brussels is not our boss."²

Orban's victory and the dominance of the right-wing political movement in Hungary have fueled the sentiment of Islamophobia since the early 21st century. Islamophobic attitude in part of Hungarian society is an outcome of the anti-immigrant campaign run by the right-wing political groups to win over Viktor Orban. The Fidesz Party is a right-wing group that campaigned for the anti-immigrant policy in Hungary. Movements like these have also encouraged xenophobic attitudes in the country.

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¹Anna Szilagy, and Andras Bozoki, "Playing it Again Post-Communism: The Revolutionary Rhetoric of Viktor Orban in Hungary," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 18, no. 1 (2015): 3.

²Mariann Ory, "Viktor Orban: "I am an Anti-immigration Politician," *Hungary Today*, July 28, 2022. <https://hungarytoday.hu/viktor-orban-i-am-an-anti-immigration-politician/>

The Pew Research Center stated that in 2016, as many as 72% of the Hungarian society did not like Muslims. This percentage was very high when compared to the rate of dislike attitude towards Muslims in the EU which only reached to 43%.³ Media also greatly influenced this anti-immigrant attitude and became a propaganda tool for the Fidesz Party. Research showed that the Fidesz has played a major role in controlling the media and conducting massive propaganda.⁴

Anti-immigrant propaganda has been conducted in a structured and massive manner. The Islamophobia phenomenon and anti-immigrant attitude are not only happening in Hungary but also in most of the European countries. Consequently, analysis of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments must be conducted in a regional context. Meanwhile, the Hungary case study is also critical in understanding this problem from a micro perspective.

As defined by the United Nations, "Islamophobia is a fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement, and intimidation of Muslims..." It can also occur to non-Muslims when they are perceived by others with hatred as Muslims.⁵ The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) defines the term as "a combination of hate, fear, and prejudice against Islam, against Muslims, as well as against anything associated with the religion, such as Mosques, Islamic Centers, Holy Qur'ān, Hijāb, etc."⁶

This study discusses the refugee crisis and the rise of Islamophobia in Europe, especially in Hungary. Europe has a long history of interaction with Islam. The Holy War that occurred centuries ago was an important event that marked a milestone between Europe and Islam. The two elements, Europe and Islam are often seen as contradictory. Samuel Huntington even mentions the meeting between Islam and the West as a 'civilizational conflict.'⁷

Meanwhile, in his book titled as 'Islam and the West', Bernard Lewis describes how Islam has a prolonged hostile relationship with the West. Lewis sees the relationship between Islam and the West, particularly the Christian world (Christendom) from the perspective of rivalry. Islam is "a world empire and world civilisation extending to three continents, occupied by many different races, including the ancient Egyptian civilisations and the Fertile Crescent, which soon penetrated Iran and North India." This is then contrasted with Christianity which, although universal, is limited to Europe.⁸ Lewis also emphasized that the jihad concept changed the Christian world regions, such as Byzantium under Islamic rule.⁹ Huntington and Lewis's analysis emphasizes on the religious conflict between Islam and Europe. They ignored the realist factors caused by the practical and political interests. They also ignored the role of world order and international relations in this conflict. Consequently, this study discusses why Europe faced a refugee crisis at the beginning of the 21st century.

³Peter Kreko, Bulcsu Hunyadi, and Patrik Szicherle, "Anti-Muslim Populism in Hungary: From the Margins to the Mainstream," accessed July 19, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/anti-muslim-populism-in-hungary-from-the-margins-to-the-mainstream/>.

⁴Szilagy and Bozoki, "Playing it Again," 7-8.

⁵"International Day to Combat Islamophobia: 15 March," *United Nations*, accessed January 25, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/anti-islamophobia-day>

⁶"Islamophobia," *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, accessed January 25, 2024, https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=182&p_ref=61&lan=en

⁷Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 20.

⁸Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8.

⁹Lewis, *Islam and the West*, 10.

1.1 Research Questions

1. How does the EU's relationship with Middle Eastern politics create a refugee crisis?
2. What is the relationship between refugee crisis and Islamophobia in Hungary?
3. How are political elites running propaganda campaigns for anti-refugees and Islamophobia in Hungary?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Islamophobia

Several scholars have conducted research on Islamophobia and the refugee crisis in Europe. The book edited by John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin describes the challenge of Islamophobia in the 21st century. Esposito said that Islamophobia is a global phenomenon. This phenomenon was proven by the 2004 United Nations (UN) Conference, organized by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan with the title "Confronting Islamophobia: Education for Tolerance and Understanding."¹⁰ Ibrahim Kalin sees Islamophobia as a term regarding "acts of intolerance, discrimination, unfounded fear, and racism against Islam and Muslims."¹¹ In this study, Kalin shows the limits of multiculturalism as a response to Islamophobia. As stated by Kalin, the emergence of Islamophobia in Europe and the United States shows that multiculturalism "has reached its limits in the current debates over Islam and Muslims."¹² However, the debate about multiculturalism has occurred among the Western liberal scholars and intellectuals. Nevertheless, Islamophobia's emergence shows that multiculturalism created by the Western liberal thinkers cannot stem from the anti-Islamic attitude that occurred in the early 21st century.

Christopher Allen's study shows that Islamophobia received attention in Europe and the United States long before the WTC bombing in 2001. Allen stated that the concept of Islamophobia was introduced in 1925 by Etienne Dinet and Slima Ben Ibrahim in their study *Acces de Delire Islamophobe*.¹³ Since then, there were attempts to state that Islamophobia arose from research conducted by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) at the end of 1980. The *Oxford English Dictionary* also states that the word 'Islamophobia' appeared for the first time in *Insight* magazine, published in the US.¹⁴ The debate about the Islamophobia concept in the West shows that scholars, intellectuals, and policymakers in the European countries have paid attention to this term for a long time.

Nevertheless, Christopher Allen believes that the concept of Islamophobia has a long history marked by the European intellectual interest in 'Islamic Studies.' The emergence of Western academic interest in Islam encouraged Western scholars in studying Islam sponsored by the state.¹⁵ This study cannot be termed as academic because it has a substantial bias in assessing Islam. Edward Said labeled this study as Orientalism and the reviewers are termed as Orientalists. Under the discipline of Orientalism, European scholars placed themselves in a dominant position in order to explain the Eastern world. Hence, such studies become controversial due to the presence of significant bias. This oriental bias is still very much prevailing and has even been used as a propaganda tool to strengthen

¹⁰John L. Esposito, "Introduction," in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, ed. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxiii.

¹¹Ibrahim Kalin, "Islamophobia and the Limits of Multiculturalism," in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, ed. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 4.

¹²*Ibid.*, 5.

¹³Christopher Allen, *Islamophobia* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 5.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 13-15.

Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments in the 21st century. Two other studies also point to Orientalism as the origin of Islamophobia. Badrane Benlahcene makes this the main focus of his study, "Orientalism as a Cultural Root of Western Islamophobia."¹⁶ Muhammad Tariq and Zafar Iqbal, who also agree with this view, tried to examine a new type of Islamophobia in the West by analysing a number of studies in *The Independent* and *The Washington Post* that exhibit different manifestations of Islamophobia both traditional and new in Britain and the United States respectively.¹⁷

The works mentioned above focus on Islamophobia in the West and do not specifically discuss Hungary in this context. Yilmaz's study shows that there are three essential keys to observe increase in Islamophobia. The first factor is that immigrants represent a high proportion of the population.¹⁸ Islamophobia emerged with the refugees entering Europe and the US. They are considered a threat to the local population's existence. This condition then in turn increases anti-immigrant attitudes and Islamophobia. The second factor is the existence of a skeptical, secular, and agnostic attitude toward religion.¹⁹ This attitude has many roots in various ideologies in Europe. In the 21st century, social media also plays an essential role in the spread of agnostic views tending to be hostile to religion, including Islam. The last factor is the foreign policy of Western countries towards the world situation.²⁰ For example, the US invasion policy in Iraq has created a sense of hostility towards Islam in the US itself. Western countries' war against the ISIS terror group has also contributed to Islamophobia. In the context of life in Europe, especially in Hungary, the rise of immigrants is an inevitable background behind Islamophobia.

2.2 Refugee

Western scholars have also studied the emergence of Islamophobia and the refugee crisis in Hungary. These two problems cannot be separated from the ideology that populism's emergence helped accelerate Viktor Orban's return to power in 2010. Robert Csehi's study of the politics of populism in Hungary shows the impact of populism on policy and politics in Hungary since 2010. The emergence of populism echoed by the Fidesz Party and Viktor Orban came into power that resulted in the decline of democracy in Hungary. Orban controlled parliament with 2/3 majority of the votes.²¹ Viktor Orban and the Fidesz Party used anti-immigrant and Islamophobic narratives to reinforce the ideology of populism. As is known, the ideology of populism emphasizes the antagonism between "the people" and the "elite." Populism claims to defend the "people" against the domination of the "elite." The immigration and Islamophobia issues were vital for Orban to gain popular support. Orban's government is fighting for the elitist narratives supported by elites in the EU.²²

¹⁶Badrane Benlahcene, "Orientalism as a Cultural Root of Western Islamophobia," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2021).

¹⁷Muhammad Tariq, and Zafar Iqbal, "Neo-Islamophobia: A New Western Social Order," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2023): 133-156.

¹⁸Ihsan Yilmaz, "The Nature of Islamophobia: Some Key Features," in *Fear of Muslims? International Perspectives on Islamophobia*, ed. Douglas Pratt and Rachel Woodlock (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 24.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Robert Csehi, *The Politics of Populism in Hungary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 20.

²²Ibid., 4.

Paula Berger's study shows how Viktor Orban's government dealt with the immigrant issues. Orban opposed attempts by the EU to divide immigrants into member states.²³ Immigrants' entry into Hungary has been closely related to the membership status of the country in the European organization since 2004. Since then, Hungary has had to commit to EU agency policies regarding immigrants, namely the European Asylum Support Offices. The EU's immigrant policy is based on the Dublin Convention of 2003.²⁴ Paula Berger also points out Hungary's policies of restricting immigrants. In 2015, the Hungarian government issued regulations focusing on security issues, thereby limiting immigrants from other countries to cross the borders.²⁵ Paula Berger argues that Hungary's immigration policy is based on the Common European Asylum and Migration System. However, the sub-area regarding asylum and regular and irregular migration does not cover all the refugee migration in Hungary. Thus, the country formulated its own national policies.²⁶ These national policies are certainly driven by the ideology adopted by the government in power. In this case, populist ideology is decisive in the immigration policy.

Andras Szalai and Gabriella Gobl discussed in their study the security approach taken by the Hungarian government in treating the immigrants. The two authors show how Hungary is directed to see immigrants as a threat to the national security.²⁷ This study states that security campaigns continue when the government's popularity is low. Consequently, Szalai and Gobl showed that domestic motivations influence security campaigns for immigrants more.²⁸ While discussing the recent anti-immigration policy of the Hungarian government, the above works do not focus on the relationship between the influx of refugees to Hungary and the spread of Islamophobia which is the main focus of this study.

3. Methodology

The primary sources of this research are reports provided by the governmental and non-governmental organizations. The European Islamophobia Report, for example, focuses on growing Islamophobia in Europe. This annual report has published various researches, surveys, and analyses on Islamophobia since 2015. This report's editors are Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez. They gathered reports by several scholars from all across the EU to analyze various Islamophobic phenomena that occurred in Europe one after another. Hungary is one of the countries that has been analyzed in the European Islamophobia Report. The report by Hungarian scholar Zsolt Sereghy analyzed the intensity of Islamophobia in the country. Furthermore, the report by Sereghy also adds a chronology of activities related to Islamophobia from year to year.²⁹

In this study, the authors have looked more at Islamophobia and the immigrant crisis in Hungary from a global perspective. Textual analysis is being used to understand the relationship between the political crisis in the Middle East, the increase in migration, and Islamophobia in Hungary.

²³Paula Berger, "Hungary's Asylum and Migration Policy: Change in Three Stages," in *Politics and Society in Hungary: (De) Democratization, Orban and the EU*, ed. Ellen Bos and Astrid Lorenz (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2023), 200.

²⁴Ibid., 194.

²⁵Ibid., 196.

²⁶Ibid., 202.

²⁷Andras Szalai and Gabriella Gobl, *Securitising Migration in Contemporary Hungary* (Budapest: Center for EU Enlargement Studies, 2015), 2.

²⁸Ibid., 28.

²⁹Zsolt Sereghy, "Islamophobia in Hungary: National Report 2015," in *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (Istanbul: SETA, 2016), 226.

4. Discussion

4.1 Arab Spring and Immigration to Europe

The immigrant crisis that creates Islamophobic sentiments in Europe cannot be separated from the Middle East's political crisis. The Arab Spring is an Arab political movement sought to overthrow the dictatorial governments. This phenomenon occurred in late 2010 and early 2011. The Arab Spring movement began in Tunisia through a street vendor named Muhammad Bouazizi's demonstration, who opposed the government because the country's economic conditions were terrible and the government's repression against the people was increasing. On December 17, 2010, the trader set himself on fire as a protest against the government.³⁰ The protests against the Tunisian government soon spread to several Arab regions. Demonstrations also occurred in various Arab regions such as Egypt, Libya, and Syria. The protests caused significant political turmoil and threatened the position of the influential Arab leaders. Hosni Mubarak from Egypt and Colonel Qaddafi from Libya are the two Arab leaders that were brought down by the anti-dictator demonstrators.

Instability over the political turmoil in Arab countries since 2010 has significantly impacted Middle Eastern countries and Turkey. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad's government fought against the demonstrators who wanted him to step down from the presidency. The civil war that occurred in Syria sacrificed many citizens. Maoz noted that 130,000 people died in this war as a result of which, many Syrians migrated abroad.³¹ Research by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2015 stated that since March 2011, more than four million Syrian refugees have fled from their homeland.³² UNHCR data for May 2023 shows that the number of refugees from Syria has swollen to 5,303,457.³³ They are scattered in various countries, both Middle Eastern and European. Research by Chiara Denaro shows that several Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey have accepted Syrian refugees.³⁴ Turkey is the non-European country that welcomed the most refugees from Syria. As of May 2023, data from UNHCR shows that Turkey has accepted 3,388,698 refugees. These stats declare that 63.9% of Syrian refugees are in Turkey. The second country receiving the most of Syrian refugees is Lebanon, with 805,326 Syrian refugees. Among, the other countries that received the most refugees were Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt.³⁵ Apart from Syria, there were also refugees from Libya migrating to various Arab regions, especially Egypt and Tunisia.³⁶

Syrian and Libyan refugees have not only made Middle Eastern countries and Turkey their destinations but they also made Europe the destination for their migration. Refugees have used

³⁰Mark L. Haas, and David W. Lesch, "Introduction," in *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, ed. Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch (Boulder: Westview, 2013), 1-9.

³¹Moshe Maoz, "The Arab Spring in Syria: Domestic and Regional Developments," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Pathways Toward Terrorism and Genocide* 7, no. 1: 52.

³²Chiara Denaro, "The Reconfiguration of Mediterranean Migration Routes after the War in Syria: Narratives of the 'Egyptian Route' to Italy (and Beyond)," in *Migration, Mobilities and the Arab Spring: Spaces of Refugee Flight in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Natalia Ribas-Mateos (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2016), 72.

³³"Syria Regional Refugee Resposn", UNHCR, accessed July 19, 2023, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>.

³⁴Denaro, "The Reconfiguration", 72.

³⁵"Syria Regional."

³⁶K. Koser, "Migration, Displacement and the Arab Spring: Lessons to learn," last modified March 22, 2012, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/migration-displacement-and-the-arab-spring-lessons-to-learn/>.

various routes, including the one through Egypt and Turkey, but their main intention was to reach Europe. The immigration route from these two countries to Europe has a long history. Refugees traveling via the Egyptian route usually depart from several coastal cities, such as Damietta, Rosetta, Port Said, and Alexandria. They used to reach Europe via Greece or Cyprus in 2005 and 2006. However, this route is hazardous and often has a high death rate.³⁷ Whereas, Turkey is a destination for refugees and a transit point for Middle Eastern refugees to continue their journey to Europe.

Turkey cooperated with the EU and regulated the EU Admission Agreement in order to control and manage the immigrants. The agreement was ratified by the Turkish parliament in June 2014. In the agreement, Turkey "agreed to accept the return of all the immigrants (Turkish and foreign nationals) who reach EU territory through Turkey irregularly." Conversely, the EU is also committed to granting possible privileges to Turkish citizens going to Europe without a visa.³⁸

Germany became one of the main destinations for the Middle Eastern migrants. Research by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) shows that Germany ranks second as a country favored by the immigrants after US. Refugees from Syria have also entered Germany in large numbers. In October 2014, Germany held an international conference on Syrian refugees.³⁹ Germany's role in accepting refugees did not only occur after the Arab Spring. Since World War II, Germany became a destination for refugees. In 2014, Germany was the country of destination for the most asylum seekers in the EU. There are 175,000 applications for asylum seekers wishing to enter Germany. This number constitutes 61% of the total asylum seeker applications in the EU. This is the highest number in Europe in terms of asylum seekers, followed by Italy (8%), France (6%), Austria (5%), and Great Britain (4%).⁴⁰

Juran and Broer's research in 2015 shows that the highest number of asylum seekers in Germany came from Syria. 90% of Syrian asylum seekers are registered in Germany. This number is 85,500 out of 102,400 asylum seekers in the EU. After Syria, the other asylum seekers are from Iraq (73%), Afghanistan (57%), Albania, and Kosovo.⁴¹ This data shows that most immigrant asylum seekers in Germany are Syrians who were expelled from their country due to the civil war that began in the early Arab Spring era.

Refugees from the Middle East then received various responses from residents in European countries. In Germany, there was a negative response towards refugees from the Middle East, especially Syria. In 2014, there were large demonstrations with racist undertones to reject the refugees seeking shelter. The refugees were scattered in various cities of Germany. The demonstrators declared resistance to the 'Islamization' of Europe.⁴² The same happened in various European countries, such as Italy, France, Austria, Great Britain, and so on. The report from the European Network Against Racism shows that there have been several anti-immigration

³⁷Denaro, "The Reconfiguration," 78.

³⁸Hafsa Afailal, "Euro-Mediterranean Relations in the Field of Migration Management: Contrasting Morocco and Turkey as Case Studies," in *Migration, Mobilities and the Arab Spring: Spaces of Refugee Flight in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Natalia Ribas-Mateos (Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2016), 59.

³⁹Christoph H. Schwarz, "Refugees from Syria as 'Guests' in Germany: The Moral Economy of German Refugee Policy in 2014," in *Migration, Mobilities and the Arab Spring: Spaces of Refugee Flight in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Natalia Ribas-Mateos (Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2016), 106-107.

⁴⁰Sabrina Juran, and P. Niclas Broer, "A Profile of Germany's Refugee Populations," *Population and Development Review* 43, no. 1 (2017): 1.

⁴¹Ibid., 3.

⁴²Schwarz, "Refugees from Syria," 106.

demonstrations in Italy. They refused asylum seekers' presence. In November 2014, the far-right Casa Pound movement led protests on Lake Iseo. They denied the presence of 12 asylum seekers near the town of Sulzano. Also, in May 2016, there was a demonstration by 10,000 people in Rome, Italy. They rejected the immigrants with the slogan, "Stop the invasion! This is my home."⁴³ Urban locals in Austria also staged anti-immigrant protests, particularly against Muslim immigrants. This is because the Austrian government places asylum seekers in areas with limited experience interacting with other immigrants.⁴⁴

The rejection of asylum seekers and immigrants from the Middle East by the Europeans is usually accompanied by anti-Islamic attitudes. In Germany, there were demonstrations against "Islam" and "Muslims" and calls for "Puti," or white supremacy. In 2017, Anne-Esther Younes stated that the German media also contributed to increasing Islamophobia by depicting 60-80% of Muslims and Islam as related to physical violence, attacks on gender, religious fanatics, fundamentalists, and socially and culturally backward.⁴⁵ France is also a European country experiencing Islamophobia. In 2021, the French Ministry of the Interior reported a 32% increase in anti-Muslim behavior. Anti-Muslim actions in France increased from 129 in 2019 to 171 in 2021.⁴⁶

4.2 Immigrant Crisis in Hungary

Hungary is a country located in the central Europe. This country has experienced occupation by imperialists, such as the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburgs, and the Soviet Union. The Ottoman state occupied Hungary between 1541 and 1699. This indicates that contact between Hungary and Islam dates back a long time ago. Hungary has several well-known scholars of Islamic studies, such as Armin Vambrey, Ignaz Goldziher, and Gyula Germanus.⁴⁷ The Habsburgs and the Soviet Union also occupied Hungary. Consequently, Hungary's resistance was conducted against Muslim, non-Muslim, and communist countries.

Immigrants massively entered Hungary from around 1989 to 1990. They are primarily the ethnic Hungarians from neighboring countries. Zsuzanna Vidra stated that the first wave of immigration occurred during the communist era in the 1980s. Hungarians of Romanian origin entered Hungary during the second wave that occurred in the 1990s.

The third wave of immigration to Hungary occurred during the Yugoslav War. At that time, Yugoslavia was divided into several countries and the ethnic Hungarians also migrated to Hungary.⁴⁸ The number of immigrants entering Hungary until 1998 was between 13,000 and 16,000. Since 2004, this number has increased because of Hungary's membership in the EU. In 2005, the number of immigrants entering Hungary was 25,000. This number increased with the introduction of the new

⁴³"Racism, "Racial Discrimination and Migration in Italy 2015/16: Research Briefing," *European Network Against Racism*, accessed January 26, 2024, https://enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/italy_research_briefing_final.pdf

⁴⁴M. Wagner, and Lukas Rudolph, "The Backlash Against Asylum Seekers in Austria," accessed May 19, 2023, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/backlash-against-asylum-seekers-in-austria/>.

⁴⁵Anna-Esther Younes, "Islamophobia in Germany: National Report 2017," in *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (Istanbul: SETA, 2018), 250.

⁴⁶Kawtar Najib, "Islamophobia in France: National Report 2021," in *European Islamophobia Report 2021*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (Istanbul: SETA, 2022), 242.

⁴⁷Zsuzanna Vidra, "Countering Islamophobia in Hungary," in *Countering Islamophobia in Europe*, ed. Ian Law, Amina Easat-Daas, Arzu Merali, and S. Sayyid (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 124.

⁴⁸Vidra, "Countering Islamophobia," 124.

Immigration Law, namely Act I of 2007 on the Admission and Residence of Persons with the Right of Free Movement Residence. This spiked the immigrations in 2008 to 35,000.⁴⁹

Migration from abroad to Hungary has created a mixed response from local Hungarians. Research conducted by the TARKI Omnibus Survey between 1992 and 2012 shows a trend of xenophobia and xenophilia in Hungary. As specified by the survey, xenophobia peaked in 1995 and strengthened in 2014. Xenophobia is the attitude of not liking the foreigners. Meanwhile, the survey also showed that 82% of local Hungarian residents refused the admission of Arab migrants, 79% refused the Chinese, 75% refused the Russians, and 71% refused any ethnicity from Romania.⁵⁰ In the third half of 2015, Eurostat stated that the most significant number of asylum seeking refugee applications were registered with Germany and Hungary, reaching 108,000 applicants, or 26% of applicants to the EU.⁵¹ This shows that xenophobia already exists along with the immigrants' influx to Hungary.

The anti-immigrants and xenophobic attitudes in Hungary are mainly directed at Arab community groups. The crises in Syria, such as the civil war and the emergence of ISIS, have prompted migration waves from Syria to Europe. Hungary is one of the countries targeted by Syrian refugees seeking asylum. Nevertheless, the Hungarian government is stringent in allowing Syrian immigrants to enter its territory. In 2016, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) found that refugees who wanted to enter Hungary from Serbia without permission were sent back to the border, including women and children.⁵² The Hungarian authorities also limited the number of refugees who could enter the transit zone. Such restrictions trapped hundreds of immigrants and asylum seekers in bad conditions.⁵³ This further on gave rise to violence perpetrated by the Hungarian authorities against refugees at the border.⁵⁴

Hungarian authorities, led by Orban, seek a solution to prevent asylum seekers' influx from Syria. One of Orban's efforts was to create an agreement with the Republic of Turkey, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Orban supports Turkey's Operation Peace Spring against the Kurdish YPG terrorist movement. Turkish authorities claim that the operation against YPG terrorists in Northern Syria in October 2019 was to create a "safe zone" on the border of Northern Syria and Turkey, in which the Syrian refugees would be placed.⁵⁵ Orban supports the operation because it can reduce the number of migrants from Syria who want to enter Hungary. However, Orban's stance differs from the EU's condemnation of Turkey's operations against the YPG in northern Syria.

The anti-immigrant attitude that emerged in Hungarian society did not occur naturally. It is also not rooted in the mentality of society itself. Xenophobia, also followed by Islamophobia, emerged as a result of Hungary's socioeconomic problems in the early 21st century. After the Soviet Union

⁴⁹Iren Godri, Bela Soltesz, and Boroka Bodacz-Nagy, *Immigration or Emigration Country? Migration Trends and Their Socio-economic Background in Hungary: A Longer-term Historical Perspective* (Budapest: Hungarian Demographic Research Institute, 2014), 13.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 18.

⁵¹Sereghy, "Islamophobia in Hungary: National Report 2015," 230.

⁵²"Hungary: Migrants Abused at the Border," Human Rights Watch, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/13/hungary-migrants-abused-border>.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴"Rise in Anti-immigrant Violence at Hungarian Border, Says NGO," Infomigrants, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/43262/rise-in-antimmigrant-violence-at-hungarian-border-says-ngo>.

⁵⁵Giorgio Cafiero, and Sina Azodi, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis Brings Turkey and Hungary Closer Together," last modified December 23, 2019, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://mei.edu/publications/syrian-refugee-crisis-brings-turkey-and-hungary-closer-together>.

collapsed, Hungary became a country that entered into a transition to a capitalist economic system. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Hungary underwent privatization. Furthermore, Hungary has also received foreign investment since 1995. In 2001, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was 7,444 dollars. Meanwhile, in 2008, it increased to 9,500 dollars. In 2008, 79% of foreign investment in Hungary came from EU15 countries, mainly Germany (25%), the Netherlands (14%), and Austria (13%). On the other hand, US is the largest foreign investor outside of European countries.⁵⁶ Rising capitalism and foreign investment have also created socio-economic inequality within Hungarian society. Those marginalized in the capitalist system cannot compete in the new system. One of the marginalized groups in Hungarian society is the Roma group.⁵⁷ This group is marginalized because the capitalist system cannot provide them good education. They lived in remote geographical areas, have a few job opportunities, and lose access to middle-class jobs, and experience racism from employers and others.⁵⁸

4.3 Islamophobia in Hungary

The emergence of strong xenophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes in Hungarian society in the early 21st century created opportunities for populism and right-wing movements to grow and achieve political victory. Orban's triumph as Hungary's prime minister since 2010 has broadened the country's Islamophobia and anti-immigrant stance. The Muslim community in Hungary is one of the communities affected by populism and right-wing political campaigns. The Middle East crisis and Islamophobia in Europe have worsened the image of Islam in Hungary. In 2015, an Islamic militant group attacked a Parisian cartoonist named Charlie Hebdo. The attack was caused by Islamophobia expressed by Hebdo through the drawing of cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*).⁵⁹ The attack on Charlie Hebdo prompted Viktor Orban to sympathize with him. He participated in the Paris Freedom March in response to the attacks on Hebdo. Orban stated, "We have to stop immigration; this is a Hungarian opinion".⁶⁰

The Muslim community in Hungary is very much affected by the Islamophobia campaign conducted systematically through right-wing politics. Data taken in 2011 stated that 5,579 Hungarian citizens were Sunni Muslims. This number is minimal, only reaching 0.056% of the Hungary's total population. Among them, most admitted that they were of Hungarian ethnicity (73.4%), while the rest admitted that they were of Arab ethnicity.⁶¹ As specified by Zsolt Sereghy, until 2015, there were two recognized Islamic organizations in Hungary, namely the Hungarian Islamic Community and the Hungarian Muslim Church. One other organization, the Islamic Church, had its license revoked in 2012.⁶² The year 2015 can said to be an Islamophobia milestone in Hungary and the root cause of it is the Viktor Orban's support for Charlie Hebdo in Paris.

The difference between Hungary and the EU regarding refugees is quite sharp. The EU wants member states to accept more refugees, while Hungary wants to stop accepting the refugees. This anti-refugee rhetoric continues to be promoted by the Orban government, thereby strengthening

⁵⁶Godri, Soltesz, and Bodacz-Nagy, *Immigration or Emigration Country?*, 20.

⁵⁷Ibid., 21.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Tangi Salaun, "Charlie Hebdo Attackers Killed to Avenge Prophet Mohammad, French Court Hears," *Reuters*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-france-charliehebdo-trial-idUKKBN25S6B1>.

⁶⁰A. Jambor, "Hungary's politicians react to Paris attacks," last modified February 25, 2015, accessed Juli 22, 2023, <https://www.boell.de/en/2015/02/26/hungarys-politicians-react-paris-attacks-proposals-restrict-immigration-and-freedom>.

⁶¹Sereghy, "Islamophobia in Hungary: National Report 2015," 228.

⁶²Ibid.

Islamophobic sentiments. This then created a loss for the small Muslim community in Hungary. The anti-refugee and Islamophobia campaigns are also a diversion from Hungary's domestic economic, social, and political problems.⁶³ The Islamophobic sentiment is also strengthened by global terror incidents, such as the bombing in Brussels in 2016 that killed 32 people. The attack was done by jihadists from the IS group.⁶⁴ In June 2016, there was also a bomb attack in Istanbul. These incidents contributed to strengthening the Islamophobic sentiments in Hungary.

The Media plays an essential role in arousing Islamophobia. Hungary's ruling Fidesz party has played a major role in controlling media and dominating the media coverage. The government's control over media was evident in the closing of the leftist newspaper *Nepszadadsag*. This newspaper was considered against the government's anti-Islam and anti-migration narratives.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the internet also provided opportunities for the spread of Islamophobia. Several sites were indicated to advocate the anti-Islam and anti-immigrant ideas.⁶⁶

Discourse about race and religion became a common practice in the Hungarian media. Due to this, the Islamophobic and anti-refugee discourses were strengthened in the public sphere. Zsuzsanna Vidra stated that media framing of Islamophobic narratives consists of two approaches. The first approach is a physical security approach, while the second is a symbolic security approach.⁶⁷ The discourse propagated in the first approach is to portray Islam and Muslims as a physical threat to Hungary's security related to incidents of terrorism in the name of Islam. In the second approach, media framed this idea that Islam and Muslims have a different culture from Hungary. Vidra stated that media played a crucial role in spreading the image that "migration is seen as part of the Islamization of Europe, posing a threat to European and Christian civilization and ultimately to Hungarian identity."⁶⁸

This media-cultural approach also concerns the Hungarian authorities, who see Islam as a threat to Europe and Hungarian identity. Since becoming prime minister in 2010, Viktor Orban has masterfully played up the identity discourse to gain public support. Orban protects the "unique" Hungarian identity from "outside" threats. Orban once stated, "We love our culture, nurturing and protecting our independence, we love a strong family, think about our traditions and history uniqueness, celebrate our heroes and love our homeland above all."⁶⁹ Orban's statement is a response to the "multicultural" spirit of the EU, disliked by the right-wing movement for bringing refugees to the Hungarian border. This narrative is also reinforced by the right-wing European scholars who believe there is a civilizational clash between Islam and Europe.

Consequently, right-wing groups always see Islam as threatening to European culture. The Fidesz party, for example, links Islam and refugees with crime and terrorism. They also see Muslims

⁶³Zsolt Sereghy, "Islamophobia in Hungary: National Report 2016," in *European Islamophobia Report 2016*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (Istanbul: SETA, 2017), 270.

⁶⁴"Brussels Attack Suspects Say West's Bombing of IS was 'Tipping Point'," VOA News, last modified April 12, 2023, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/brussels-attack-suspects-say-west-s-bombing-of-is-was-tipping-point-/7047712.html>.

⁶⁵Zsolt Sereghy, "Islamophobia in Hungary: National Report 2017," in *European Islamophobia Report 2017*, ed. Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez (Istanbul: SETA, 2018), 318-319.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷M. Yakovlev, "Exploiting the Closest "Enemy": How Hungary's State Media Takeover Paved the Way for One of the Most Extreme Perpetrators of Islamophobia," October 15, 2019, accessed July 22, 2023. <https://www.media-diversity.org/exploiting-the-closest-enemy-how-hungarys-state-media-takeover-paved-the-way-for-one-of-the-most-extreme-perpetrators-of-islamophobia/>.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹Kreko, Hunyadi, and Szicherle, "Anti-Muslim populism in Hungary."

as a group expanding and “imposing its culture on Europeans and wanting to establish an Islamic state.”⁷⁰

The Islamophobic narrative was launched in Hungary to prevent Middle Eastern refugees from entering the country. One of the forms of Islamophobic propaganda also involves the anti-Soros movement (George Soros is a United States-Hungary based philanthropist). Soros is considered to be planning to Islamize Europe by opening Europe and Hungary to Muslim refugees.⁷¹ In a radio program, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen stated that the "Soros Plan" was an attempt to "hate Christian values." He also stated that the Soros Plan should be held responsible for the migrant crisis that "imports millions of Muslims."⁷² Furthermore, Semjen also linked the arrival of Muslim immigrants with terror incidents occurred in several European cities, such as London, Brussels, Marseille, Berlin, Stockholm, and Malmö, which have high immigration rates.⁷³

Hungarian Muslim groups did respond to Islamophobic campaigns against Islam and Muslim refugees. However, being a minority, they do not have enough aspirations to be heard. One of the Muslim organizations that voiced Muslim solidarity is the Hungarian Islamic Community (MIK). This community criticized the xenophobic and Islamophobic attitudes of the Hungarian authorities. One of MIK's criticisms was directed at the city authorities of Asotthalom, who prohibited mosque construction, muezzin's call for prayer, niqab, and burkini wearing.⁷⁴ The Asotthalom municipal authority stated that the decision was made to “protect the community and its traditions from mass settlements from outsiders.”⁷⁵ Hungarian Islamic organizations are not in a strong position to defend Muslims against the Islamophobic campaign, so Muslims in this country live in worry and fear. Violent acts have also been committed against the Muslim community in Hungary in line with anti-refugee and Islamophobic campaigns. Disruptions of worship houses have also occurred in Hungary.⁷⁶

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) pays serious attention to the spread of Islamophobia in the Western countries. They seek to raise international awareness about the dangers of Islamophobia and encourage the efforts to combat it. The OIC has been producing annual reports on Islamophobia since 2007 and has also urged the United Nations to document religious hostility and violence influenced by hatred of Islam and Muslims.⁷⁷ The OIC observes that Islamophobia in the Western countries is intertwined with issues of racism, xenophobia, and immigration. This hatred of Islam also has historical roots in the hostility between the West and Islam, which requires historical reconciliation as an important way to resolve it.⁷⁸ In its 2018 report on Islamophobia, the OIC

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Sereghy, “Islamophobia in Hungary: National Report 2017,” 313.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴“Hungarian Muslim Group Criticises Town's 'Xenophobic' Decrees,” *The Guardian*, last modified November 28, 2016, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/28/hungarian-muslim-group-criticises-towns-xenophobic-decrees>.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶P. Peachey, “Hungary's Muslims Fear Fallout from Anti-Islam Rhetoric,” *The National News*, March 10, 2018, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/hungary-s-muslims-fear-fallout-from-anti-islam-rhetoric-1.711823>.

⁷⁷Tajwar Ali, and Haseena Sultan, “Emerging Role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in the Global Governance since 1969,” *Cogent Arts and Humanities* 10, No. 1 (2023): 9.

⁷⁸Şerif Onur Bahçecik, “Internationalizing Islamophobia: Anti-Islamophobic Practices from the Runnymede Trust to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation,” *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 5, No 1, (July 2013): 158.

mentions the rise of right-wing political movements and the rejection of immigrants in Hungary as well as how extreme leaders such as Victor Orban are unabashedly voicing “illiberal democracy” in Europe.⁷⁹ The report also states that many people in Hungary who are against Islam have never actually met Muslims throughout their lives and their hatred is largely influenced by mass media coverage.⁸⁰ Despite these efforts, Islamophobia continues to grow in Hungary and other Western countries. However, the discourse about Islamophobia as a danger also continues to resonate in the international community.

5. Conclusion

The presence and rise of Arab migrants to Europe have not always been welcomed with humanist acceptance, but also with increasing Islamophobia. This research finds that this latter attitude has been magnified in the wake of the Arab Springs, which has driven an increase in the number of Arab immigrants to European countries. The swelling number of Arab immigrants is seen by some Europeans as a serious threat to their cultural and religious identity. The pervasive feeling of threat among European society is sometimes exploited by certain political parties to achieve populist electoral victories, all of which contribute to the growth of Islamophobia. In this regard, Victor Orban and his party in Hungary have become a symbol representing Islamophobia in that country and also in Europe. The presence of Muslim migrants in Europe has been described by Orban as inimical to the region's identity and culture. Because of this, Orban and his party campaigned and issued anti-migrant policies which in turn sparked anti-Muslim sentiment. This situation has created pressure on Hungarian Muslims, who have seen themselves marginalized by a society geared towards a homogeneous cultural identity.

Orban's government has built a narrative that stigmatizes Arab migrants as invaders, and this is affecting the existing social order in Hungary. Islamophobia finds its legitimacy through this narrative. Muslim citizens are not only viewed differently, but their contributions are negated and their place in Europe questioned. The Hungarian government has disrupted the principles of human rights and equality that have long been touted as values of European society. This attitude of the Hungarian government not only has an influence domestically but also has an impact on Hungary's relations with the European Union. This stance constitutes opposition to freedom of movement and human rights, and therefore creates friction in the European Union. The swing of Hungarian political mood towards right wing extremism has left the values driving the European project in a vulnerable position. These developments should provide encouragement for European leaders to contemplate their situation and to re-examine their own commitment to the implementation of human rights and multiculturalism. They need to identify and eliminate Islamophobia and protect all citizens, regardless of their different origins and beliefs. Without serious efforts to confront divisive politics, Europe will no longer be able to see itself as a bastion of humanitarian and democratic values.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

⁷⁹“Eleventh OIC Observatory Report on Islamophobia,” Organization of Islamic Cooperation, accessed January 25, 2024, 61 https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2018/11th_Annual_Report_on_Islamophobia_English.pdf.

⁸⁰Ibid., 104.

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