

# Islam in the Modern Era and the Social Reflections in Macedonia

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**Abstract:** *Islam in its great diversity, from the past to the present, represents a challenge to Western civilization and culture. Despite the large presence in the media, and the large number of Muslims in Western societies, for many it remains little known. On the one hand, for several decades, the complex international political situation in the Middle East is causing not only ethical issues and raising civilization related questions, but also almost everyday media stigmatization of Islam and Muslims. On the other hand, the multilateral problems faced by the contemporary and increasingly multicultural western European societies impose on the same societies a new reflection on their cultural identity and values both in relation to themselves and in relation to the increasing number of Muslims living there and their cultural and religious values. On the other hand, the great cultural, political and religious diversity of Islam in this era of globalization is increasingly coming to the fore and necessarily requires a sophisticated and multi-dimensional approach. Without this approach, it is impossible to understand all the above factors. In addition, the Islamic concept that naturally belongs to this area is a vast wealth that needs to be cultivated and brought into the social flows in Macedonia. As Córdoba in Spain was the epitome of medieval European multiculturalism and inter-religious understanding, today, Skopje, Tetovo, Gostivar, are experiencing the vivid metaphor and paradigm of privileged encounters of conflict-avoidance due to differences and the civilization of peace. Moreover, it is not pretentious to say that the presence of Muslims in the Republic of Macedonia is a historical treasure and a valuable cultural and religious component in the contemporary society in Macedonia. Muslims in Macedonia, in a European perspective, must consider a proper representation of Islamic cultural civilization principles to harmoniously combine the objective values of Western European and Islamic traditions harmoniously. In this way, they will become a valuable paradigm challenge - both for modern European society and for the Islamic world, but also for Muslims in Western Europe, who sometimes seem disoriented between the "two worlds" in which they do not recognize themselves and can once and for all contribute to the other party at a higher extent.*

**Keywords:** Society, Macedonia, Meta-social capital, mutual respect.

## 1. Introduction

Islam in its great diversity, from the past to the present, represents a challenge to Western civilization and culture. Despite the large presence in the media, and the large number of Muslims in Western societies, for many it remains little known. On the one hand, for several decades, the complex international political situation in the Middle East is causing not only ethical issues and raising civilization related questions, but also media stigmatization of Islam and Muslims almost every day. On the other hand, the multilateral problems faced by the contemporary and increasingly multicultural western European societies impose on their societies a new reflection on their cultural identity and values both in relation to themselves and in relation to the increasing number of Muslims living there and their cultural and religious values. On the other hand, the great cultural, political and religious diversity of Islam in this era of globalization is increasingly coming to the fore and necessarily requires a sophisticated and multi-dimensional approach. Without this approach, it is impossible to understand all the above factors. My primary intention is to offer some orientational reflections for the possible multiple paradigmatic value of Islam in the contemporary context, especially for the society in Macedonia. It is indisputable that Islamic religion and civilization in the era of globalization are an integral part of world history and culture, and therefore it is inevitable for the original idea of Islam to be reflected in the integration of the approach itself in a constructive manner with a basic spectrum of mutual respect and the concept of coexistence, not just through the prism of a constant latent threat or rivalry.

In fact, it seems that today Islam in many ways serves as a kind of hermeneutic key, which can be re-read, reinterpreted, expanded, and perhaps effectively returned to the understanding of Western civilization, especially in the Western European tradition. In addition to clarifying the place and role of Islam and Muslims in those societies.

From this starting point, we must look at Islamic faith through a triple paradigm: first as the historical-political paradigm in the civilization context of globalization, then as a socio-religious paradigm of today's European societies, and as a theological paradigm, especially as a reflection on modern thinking. Each of these paradigms sets out numerous thoughts and practical challenges that make us relevant to modern understanding of Islam. Finally, one cannot ignore the fact that Islam and Muslims have a paradigmatic value for the society in Macedonia, and hence the way how the historical and cultural attributes of Islam can highly contribute to the modern society in Macedonia.

### Islam as a historical paradigm and meta-social capital in Macedonia

The Islamic and Western cultures along with civilizations share nearly fourteen centuries of common history. This history was often infiltrated by wars and conflicts that signify the interaction of ideas and collective consciousness. The Western medieval image of Islam as a heretical religion and of Muslims as conquerors of a "Christian Europe" or, on the other hand, the Muslim image of the West, viewed through the prism of crusades or colonial imperialism, continues, unwittingly or consciously, to hold many mutual prejudices, based on ignorance and fear of the other. Such prejudices, unfortunately, conceal many positive examples of respect and coexistence in the past and periods of rich

cultural and economic exchanges, especially in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, between the Arab-Islamic and Western Christian world in the Mediterranean [1]. But the modern development of the West, will mostly take place outside and without the presence of the Islamic world, which will have its consequences. The birth of Islamic nations in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and their political turmoil between reformism, authoritarianism, modernism and the continued interference of Western politics in the Middle countries to the East for their own interests, the economic-technical and political globalization that imposes "apartheid" among rich and poor countries, including many Muslims and so forth are merely some of the reasons leading to the culmination of tensions between the western and Islamic world [2]. This tension has reached its dramatic culmination with the terrible assassination on New York on September 11, 2001, after which the perception of the world and history can no longer remain the same and require thorough reassessment.

If, on one hand, technical and economic globalization has imposed a kind of Western superiority over the rest of the world; on the other hand, the planetary encounters of cultures and religions that accompany globalization gave the West a glimpse into its own relativity of culture and civilization. The place of Islamic civilization in the context of contemporary globalization paradigmatically urges the west to expand its view of its own culture and history. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a globalized era, during which the whole world became a "big village," history cannot be understood as static and only in one way - not only in a Eurocentric-Christian point, nor as anthropocentric and Islamo-centric. On the contrary, history should be seen in a dynamic and interactive sense, as the common good of all people whose greatest wealth manifests itself with an exchange of ideas that will illuminate innumerable differences and pave the way for mutual understanding and respect. In other words, human history is not an epoch or monopoly either of the East or of the West, neither to Islam only or Christianity only, it belongs primarily to all people who are an integral part of humanity and to the ones involved in events and circumstances that are much with a wider range. Paradigmatically, the value of Islam in the globalization context of the world, is particularly significant because Islam, in connection with its structural differences, calls for the general socio-economic, geopolitical or cultural and civilizational issues to be accessed with a special approach, considering the specifics of each context. Globalization itself does not have to be negative - in some ways, it can be successfully analyzed with the logic of universalism, a rule that is neither foreign to Islam nor Christianity. It should be emphasized that universalism should not only be used for economic prosperity but should also consider the development of the ideas of peace and spiritual bodily peace of mankind.

In the politicized and extreme media-exposed context of the so-called, "Conflict of civilizations," Islam indirectly calls for a new understanding of the cultural identity, which does not have to be a source of conflict, but a common wealth of humanity. That call, which is shared both in Islam and Christianity, is against all the dominant crises of civilization or the "civilization of hatred and death", and is concentrated in the paradigm of building a civilization of love "of a

civilization for the spiritual and bodily liveliness of man" on the basis of the common values of peace, solidarity, justice and freedom, in which social gathering and mutual understanding between religions can of course play a major role [3]. Before the dangers of individualism and relativism imposed by globalization, Islam, and the religious awareness, equally emphasize the need for a dialogue between cultures and civilizations and the importance of preserving cultural and religious identity, which is an incentive for a Muslim believer or a Christian, who are not afraid to engage in the global progress [4].

Human history is indeed a mystery that in a miraculous way reflects individually, as a mystery to every human being, individually. The three monotheistic or "Abrahamic religions" - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - believe that God revealed Himself precisely in human history and that at every moment He is present in Time and Space - these monotheistic religions carry shared responsibilities for this history. On behalf of the general belief in One God, more than ever they are invited to become examples of wisdom and justice that will contribute to soothing the violence that took place across history and keep in order the decent image of man, in order to preserve the human environment and for the world to transformed into a space of spiritual unity.

#### **Islam as a socio-religious paradigm for society in Europe and their authenticity in Macedonia**

Muslims, starting from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are no longer only present in their authentic environments, as is the case in the Balkans. But they become more and more populated in Western European societies, initially as workers, and then their families join them as well. Consequently, there is a great mosaic and variety of cultures and nations in Europe: the Maghreb nations and other African populations in France, Turks in Germany, Indians and Pakistanis in the UK and other ethnic groups scattered across different countries. Although it is difficult to know the exact number of Muslims in Europe - because in many European countries religion is not recorded in the census - on the whole it is estimated that today the European Union is home to about 16 million Muslims (about 3.25% of the total number of 492 million inhabitants of the EU), and as a whole in the European continent there are about 35 million Muslims. Islam with about one billion and 300 million believers (about 22% of the 6.3 billion world population) becomes the second religion to many European countries. Such statistics, at the same time, cause numerous political and socio-religious challenges. On one hand, Europe is certainly a challenge to Islam and Muslims, as they, along with the members of religious minorities, should integrate into the new society. Secular and democratic conditions, which are often very different from the situation in the countries of origin, often call upon Muslims to reinterpret their cultural traditions and religious practices from their original ones. On the other hand, Islam and Muslims are also a major challenge for Europe, especially after many failed strives for a calm and peaceful society, that is called upon to examine its identity and value system, and to try to adapt its institutions and laws as much as possible, with the demands and needs of the growing Muslim population. These requirements are sometimes very complex and sometimes

they can shake the foundations of the customs of some Western European societies.

Although the issue of inadaptability of Islam to secular society and the basic democratic principles is being addressed at larger extent, this includes freedom of thought and expression - speech (referring to the case of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, published in September 2005 in Denmark and the overwhelming controversy they caused in the world!). It is more than necessary to consider the values of Western societies and how they practice the fundamental principles of human rights, equality, freedom, tolerance and solidarity as well as the position of the other party within the very same value system [5]. It is important to note that by the late 1970s, Muslims in Europe were discussed exclusively through a socio-economic prism. Muslims, including the intellectual civilization tradition of Andalusia, have an important paradigmatic contribution to today's value system of Europe. If this statement is true, then the question of the role and position of religion in today's postmodern society should be raised again along with the question of values based on transcendental principles and the meaning of human existence and the existence of God altogether. Secularization has caused many problems to the Church and Christianity in Europe, and from many circles it is accepted and despite this, in the European context today, it offers the best conditions for multiculturalism and religious pluralism in a social sense, yet this should be re-examined, especially the double standard of secularization, in which a person as individual is one, and yet socially quite different. So individually, he is a believer and socially should be indifferent to religion. To put it mildly, this causes a great deal of discord in the personality of man. In order to avoid that dimension of secularity, contrary to the popular primordial opinion, secularization began to be understood as the desacralization of society, that is, secularization - as a socio-political organization that promotes independence between secular and religious authorities for the purpose of civil equality - it should not interfere with secularism - which, for ideological reasons, rejects or suppresses religion from the social community. In fact, it is accepted by all that there is a spiritual and religious heritage of Europe, in which Islam undoubtedly belongs to. If it is undoubtedly considered that Europe was built based on a Judeo-Christian, or Biblical tradition and a Hellenistic heritage then it should also be acknowledged that cultural and civilizational Islam was present since a very early age in Europe, and the main illuminators of the European rebirth have been educated in the benches of the buildings of Cordoba, Granada and Seville. Islam does also belong to Greek thought in its own way, since it is more than clear that Islamic culture and religion can find their rightful place in the new, multicultural and multi-confessional Europe. Instead of essentialist logic as the only alternative that offers Europeanisation of Islam as a prevention of the potential "Islamization of Europe", it would be more constructive to offer and say that in Europe, Christians and Muslims are called for cooperation and witness their own personal and common spiritual and moral values in building a peaceful and secure society. It is essential to promote mutual understanding of the coexistence that will nourish the hermeneutics of diversity and otherness, and not the assimilation and suppression of the identity of the other. The unity in diversity, which in the

Quranic terminology is presented by the concept of *tearuf* [6] (mutual gnostic experiential knowledge), which according to the most, is one of the basic principles of humanism that can also become a password that will open the door to a new, pluralistic Europe.

### **Islam and Muslims in Macedonia as a paradigm for modern European society and Muslims in Europe**

The main difference between Muslims from the Balkans or the so-called "Southeastern Europe" (Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia) and Muslims in Western European societies is that Muslims in these areas are authentic inhabitants of the respective countries. Although Islam in these areas expanded to a much larger extent after the arrival of the Ottomans, at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, historical documents prove that minor Muslim communities existed even before the Ottoman army had arrived [7]. Islam and Muslims, from their territorial position in Macedonia, in some way reconcile all paranoid paradigms: they are not "enemies" of Western civilization and culture, but instead are considered as a structural element, despite being a minority; unlike most Muslims in Europe, Muslims in Macedonia are integrated into the historical, cultural, political and social conditions in which they are found. The multi-cultural and multi-confessional society in Macedonia can be an important example for Europe and European Muslims about the opportunity of peaceful coexistence of diversity. These differences have coexisted for centuries and with respect for one another. This respect is not a theoretical analysis of dialogue and communication, but instead it is the mutual sharing of happiness and woe.

And in the theological sense, Muslim thinking in the society in Macedonia is presented as exceptionally open for dialogue, in accordance with its Hanif-Matuidi tradition. The theological concept of Muslims in Macedonia in relation to other parties, promotes a positive Islamic thought, open to scientific discussion and contemporary trends [8]. Although after 1990s there might have been isolated cases of an arrogant representation of religious postulates by certain individuals, under no circumstance do they represent most Muslims in the society in Macedonia. In addition, the Islamic concept that naturally belongs to this area is a vast wealth that needs to be cultivated and brought into the social flows in Macedonia. As Córdoba in Spain was the epitome of medieval European multiculturalism and inter-religious understanding, today, Skopje, Tetovo, Gostivar, are experiencing the vivid metaphor and paradigm of privileged encounters of conflict-avoidance due to differences and the civilization of peace [9]. Moreover, it is not pretentious to say that the presence of Muslims in the Republic of Macedonia is a historical treasure and a valuable cultural and religious component in the contemporary society in Macedonia.

Muslims in Macedonia, in a European perspective, must consider a proper representation of Islamic cultural civilization principles to harmoniously combine the objective values of Western European and Islamic traditions harmoniously. In this way, they will become a valuable paradigm challenge - both for modern European society and

for the Islamic world, but also for Muslims in Western Europe, who sometimes seem disoriented between the "two worlds" in which they do not recognize themselves and can once and for all contribute to the other party at a higher extent.

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- [6] Концептот на *mearyф* е основното правило по кое се разликува човекот од другите створениа. Концизно е презентирано во 13. ајет на сурето/поглавјето Хуџурат во Куранот каде што се вели: „О луѓе! Ние ве создадовме, навистина, од еден маж и од една жена, и Ние одредивме да бидете народи и племиња, за да се запознавате. Најблагородниот кај Аллах, навистина, е најбогобојасливиот. Аллах, навистина, е Зналец и Известен!„Куран, Хуџурат, 49:13.
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