Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

GLOBAL MUSLIM DIASPORA:
Muslim Communities in Non-Muslim Countries

WORKSHOP on "Muslim Diaspora: Prospects
and Challenges for Global Peace and Prosperity"
12-13 May 2018 Istanbul, Turkey

The Global Muslim Diaspora Project

- The Global Muslim Diaspora Project started in September 2016 as an interdisciplinary working group composed of researchers of various disciplines from
  - the Social Sciences University of Ankara (ASBU), and
  - the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC).
- The GMD Project aims to
  - Identify and better understand the profiles, experiences, attitudes of, and prospects for Muslim communities living in predominantly non-Muslim countries
  - Increase the visibility of such communities relying on primary and secondary data
  - Define and discuss the concept of a «Muslim Diaspora»
  - Identify the Muslim diasporic communities as significant actors and include their own voices in the discussion, instead of treating them as mere statistical figures and passive objects of other debates.

The Global Muslim Diaspora Project

- The more specific objectives of GMD include:

  - To create an inclusive and up-to-date database in the form of an interactive map- Global Muslim Diaspora Atlas
  - To initiate a global discussion in order to advance mutual understanding and cooperation among countries.
  - To contribute to the efforts of host countries towards better understanding, engaging, and integrating their Muslim communities.
  - To highlight the profile and importance of the global Muslim diaspora communities at a time that Islam and Muslims occupy a central place in international politics.
  - To incorporate different views and perspectives from Muslim diaspora communities, host country public authorities, relevant academic centers, and NGOs.

The Global Muslim Diaspora Project

- To provide such a comprehensive portrait of Muslim communities, a mixed-methodology was employed in the research:
  - **Desk research** through which a comprehensive review of existing data sources was conducted.
  - **Field research** in selected countries through which primary data concerning the above mentioned main themes were collected. As they will be described in further detail below, to get a comprehensive picture from different primary sources, the field studies included;
    - **Interviews** with key individuals such as academic experts on the field, host country policy-makers, and key representatives from Muslim diasporic communities,
    - **Workshops** in which representatives from a wide range of Muslim NGOs participated, and
    - **Surveys** with ordinary members of the Muslim communities in each context.

The Global Muslim Diaspora Project

- Which criteria were considered in choosing the countries for primary research?
    - The size, both absolute and relative to the host country population, of the Muslim community in the country;
    - Diversity of the Muslim community reflecting a plurality of ethnic, cultural, religious backgrounds
    - Significant differences in the migration histories of the selected countries, particularly in relation to the migration of Muslim communities (e.g. colonial migration, labour migration, asylum-seeking, etc.)
    - Significant differences in the legal and political contexts of selected cases that reflect different approaches to (Muslim) immigrants in their country via integration and multiculturalism policies.
- So, the first «pilot» group of countries for fieldwork were
    - The UK, Germany, and France.
    - London, Berlin, and Paris.

The Concept of DIASPORA

- No universally agreed-on definition
- The Greek noun diasporá derives from the verb diaspeirein, a compound of
  - "dia" (over or through) and
  - "speirein" (to scatter or sow).
- In all of its various uses, diaspora has something to do with scattering and dispersal.
- To the ancient Greeks, diaspora seems to have signified mainly a process of destruction.
- In its original Greek sense, then, diaspora referred to a destructive process, rather than to a place, a group of people, or a benign pattern of population dispersal.
- It was in Jewish history that diaspora assumed its most familiar form.
- Displacement, exile, and longing for a homeland were the central features of this narrative.

The Concept of DIASPORA

- The Oxford English Dictionary defines diaspora as
    - "the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel",
    - then it adds "the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland" and "people who have spread or been dispersed from their homeland".
- From referring to a single historical experience, today the concept is used to refer to a very wide range of groups:
    - Armenian diaspora
    - African diaspora
    - Chinese diaspora
    - Turkish diaspora
    - Muslim diaspora?
- Some people are very critical of this 'open definitions': «if everyone is a diaspora, then no one really is a diaspora»
- Others have tried to embrace this widening of the concept, with identifying some core features of diaspora

The Concept of DIASPORA

- Robin Cohen, in his *Global Diasporas*, lists common features of a dispora as follows:
    - Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
    - Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
    - A collective memory and myth about the homeland including its location, history and achievements;
    - An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
    - A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long period of time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
    - A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and
    - The possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

The Concept of DIASPORA

Main types of diaspora	Main examples in Cohen's book, Global Diaspora	Also mentioned and notes
VICTIM	Jews, Africans, Armenians	Also discussed: Irish and Palestinians.
LABOUR	Indentured Indians	Also discussed: Chinese and Japanese; Turks, Italians, North Africans.
IMPERIAL	British	Also discussed: Russians, colonia powers other than Britain.
TRADE	Lebanese, Chinese	Also discussed: Venetians, business and professional Indians, Chinese,
DETERRITORIALIZED	Caribbean peoples, Sindhis, Parsis	Also discussed: Roma, Muslims andother religious diasporas.

The GMD FINDINGS

- Muslim Diaspora?
    - Concerning the self-perception of the Muslims in this research, there were a wide variety of responses
        - No, a Muslim diaspora does not exist
        - There is not «a Muslim diaspora» but several «Muslim diasporas»
        - Yes, there is a Muslim diaspora
    - Those who said that there was no Muslim diaspora suggested
        - The perceived negative connotations of the concept of diaspora,
        - The lack of necessity for organization as a diaspora,
        - The diversity of the Muslim communities,
        - Potentially negative implications of employing the concept of Muslim diaspora.
    - Those who said that there was a Muslim diaspora suggested
        - Regardless of ethnic background, languages spoken, or theological beliefs held; Muslim communities are unified by Islam and their religious identity.

The GMD FINDINGS

- The National Context Matters Significantly
  - The national context is significant in understanding how the Muslim communities organize their lives, perceive the outer world, and form their relationship with their various collective identities.
    - Not only the Muslim communities living in any one location consist of a considerable ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic diversity, just to name a few;
    - but also the lives, experiences, demands, and troubles of Muslim communities are shaped by and manifested through the national context in which they live.
  - This includes the historical background, political and legal structure, the dominant understanding of subjective matters such as national identity and sense of belonging, as well as the economic structure in which Muslim identities and lives are formed, negotiated, and re-formed.
  - The UK, Germany and France illustrate this point

The GMD FINDINGS

- Main Issues of Concern to the Muslim Communities in Europe
  - Lack of Unity and Representation
    - Over-fragmentation, lack of communication and interaction amongst Muslim communities
    - Not being able to speak with a single voice
  - Discrimination and Violation of Rights
    - Although there is formal and legal equality and constitutional guarantees for non-discrimination; it persists in practice
  - Islamophobia and Racism
    - A growing trend of Xenophobia, Islamophobia and racism targetting Muslims disproportionately
  - Negative and Stereotypical Representation of Muslims
    - Negative and superficial representation of Muslims, particularly in Media
    - Association with terror, fundamentalism, and violence
  - Education of Children

The GMD FINDINGS

- Generational Differences and Process of Integration
  - First generation Muslims are immigrants who moved from their countries of origin
  - The second or third generations, however, were born and raised in these countries, despite often being referred to as immigrants
  - Significant Differences, Significant Implications
    - Command of Language and Familiarity with the System
    - Level of Integration
    - Out-group Social Interaction
    - Multiple Identities
    - Transnationalism and Relations with communities in other countries

The GMD FINDINGS

- Vernecularization or Localization of Muslim Identities?: Efforts for a British or German Islam.
  - There were a great variety of understandings and interpretations concerning the "Muslim way of life" within the diaspora.
  - The diasporic experience means that other interpretations are often more visible and more integrated, and the pace of change and hybridization is faster due to the more fluid context of self-identification that is prevalent for Muslims in the diaspora.
  - The host country institutions also appear to be pushing in the direction of vernecularization or localization of Muslim identities.
    - Nationalist reflexes in trying to curb the influence of various countries of origin on the Muslim communities living in their countries
    - Efforts for more cohesion and integration

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthening the Sense of Unity amongst Members of the Global Muslim Diaspora:
  - Firstly, the sense of unity among diaspora Muslims could be strengthened through emphasizing their commonalities and similarities with other Muslims, rather than differences and peculiarities.
    - This is more of a discursive recommendation suggesting that the language used needs to underline the common denominators of all Muslims.
    - Moreover, policy-makers should avoid imposing their own vision of the 'True Islam', or the correct or authentic way of life for Muslims.
  - Secondly, the strength of an identity increases when it faces a strong rival/other identity or hostility from outside.
    - policies that aim to strengthen the sense of unity amongst Muslim communities need to emphasize the fight against common challenges of discrimination and Islamophobia.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engaging Muslim Communities in the Diaspora:
  - Muslim communities living across non-Muslim countries are increasingly bein gorganized through civil society organizations and wish to be able to communicate and cooperate with national and international actors.
  - policy-makers wishing to engage the Muslims in the diaspora needs to consider these communities as active agents with well-articulated interests, demands, and agendas; not as passive subjects.
  - Many well-intentioned and generously funded projects and programs fail because they did not engage with the Muslim communities.
  - It is essential when engaging the Muslim communities in the diaspora to take their immense diversity into account
    - any initiative that is perceived to belong to or targets a single community will significantly narrow down its appeal
    - Initiatives should refrain from putting different Muslim communities in a context of competition with one another

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engaging Different Stakeholders:
  - Muslim communities in the diaspora occupy a central position in terms of national and international politics.
  - Therefore, effective policies concerning these communities require the engagement of diverse actors, particularly the host country's national and local governments.
  - Smooth social, economic and political integration of Muslim diasporic communities, a peaceful multicultural cohabitation, and intercultural dialogue are all common objectives for the receiving governments, sending governments, as well as local, national and international NGOs.
  - Policy-makers need to consider the differences stemming from national contexts which largely shape the experiences of Muslim communities through political, legal, and economic systems in engaging different stakeholders

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Raising Awareness:
    - Policies and initiatives that aim to raise awareness concerning the Muslim identity would be highly beneficial for Muslim communities in the diaspora.
    - Particularly, awareness should be raised that Muslim identity is not an obstacle for the integration of immigrants and Muslim minorities.
    - One of the most significant findings of this study is that members of Muslim diasporic communities do not find a contradiction between their Muslim identities and their sense of belonging to the United Kingdom or Germany.
    - This is in stark contrast with the argument that Muslim immigrants are generally unable to integrate into non-Muslim societies.
    - The demonstrable fallacy of this argument needs to be highlighted in the eyes of relevant stakeholders as well as the wider groupings of host country society and Muslim communities everywhere.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Youth are the Future: Targeting Second and Further Generations:
  - There is an obvious generational difference between the first and second/third generations regarding their integration, language competency levels and their less introvert profiles.
  - The second generation has less organic links with their migrant ethnic and national identities.
  - In other words, they have hybridized identities which strengthen their communication patterns with other Muslim communities together as well as non-Muslim communities.
  - To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Muslim youth their ghettoization should be prevented. Their integration should be encouraged without losing Muslim values.
  - For a more global integration of the Muslim youth scholarship programs could be useful to synergize their efforts worldwide

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Contributing to the Healthy Representation and Coverage of the Muslim Diaspora:
    - For less stereotypical presentations of Muslims in the national and international media, policy advisory bodies, like Brookings and Carnegie, should be established to work on Islamic world events, members, changes, and also the core doctrines of Islam.
    - Their work should be supported by the academic emphasis of the relevant theology and sociology departments/research centers.
    - These institutions have role to play in presenting Islam in a positive manner t non-Muslim communities.
    - In addition to conventional media, a serious focus should be placed upon social media, particularly for non-Muslim youth.
    - In parallel, serious measures should be taken against the websites and other online sources that encourage Islamic radicalization.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Counter-Islamophobia measures: Essentially, Islamphobic tendencies are the result of the lack of basic knowledge on Islam and Muslim practices.
  - In countering the fundamentals of Islamophobia there is a need for improved education.
  - Strengthening Muslim NGOs would be a useful contribution to the legitimization of Muslims, as well as raising public awareness on human rights and freedom of religion.
  - To aid European countries, Muslim countries should also carry out political initiatives for extending national and regional anti-discrimination laws, legislate specifically for legal protection from discrimination in public services, law enforcement, education and welfare provision, and adopt and adjust protection from religious discrimination in line with European Union laws.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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