

# **“Muslim immigrants don’t try to get exposure of host culture”**

Friday 21 January 2011, by [FAROOQ Adnan](#), [ROALD Anne-Sofie](#) (Date first published: 21 October 2010).

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***Renowned historian of religions, Anne-Sofie Roald is a professor at the University of Malmö, Sweden; program director at Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen, Norway, and author of Women in Islam: The Western Experience. She poses a multidimensional personality and her research interests varies from Islamic movements, gender issues in Islam, Muslim immigrants in Europe (particularly in Scandinavia) and multiculturalism to the issues of religious minorities. In a telephonic conversation with Viewpoint, we tried to get her expert opinion about immigration, Muslim-immigrants and problems faced by both majority society and minority groups. Read on:***

**Adnan Farooq - Is present day immigration different from historical patterns? Explain how, if yes?**

Anne-Sofie Roald - It depends on which country or area you are talking about. In the US it is different from other parts of the world. If you speak of Sweden, the answer is yes. Previously (before the 1960s) the immigration was mainly labour migration. This is also true for the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s. After 1980s, the immigration is mainly humanitarian. Within EU there is still labour immigration and in the last few years the state made labour immigration from countries outside Europe possible upto a certain extent.

**Is there any difference in impacts on host country’s economic and social structure if we compare labour migration and humanitarian migration?**

Yes there is. Labour immigrants during 60’s came here with pure economic intentions. Now Europe is suffering high unemployment rate, humanitarian immigrants coming here now are usually facing the same problem. Situation has changed rapidly. So it is becoming the society where immigrants don’t see any incentive in learning language and culture. Due to economic insecurity, they prefer to live in groups with the people of same origin. Hence, they don’t try to go out and get exposure of host culture and majority society; simply they don’t see any benefit in it.

It creates problems on both sides. People living under marginal conditions will suffer obviously but majority society will endure misfortune too in many ways. You see, Nordic countries are built on the firm basis of loyalty; you pay the taxes properly and in return you get all social benefits including free education, health care, social security etc. Immigrants living under marginal conditions are not contributing in this system; they are just taking but not returning in any form. They are perceived as not being loyal to the country and the system. This situation leads to collective frustration for majority society who is paying taxes for the facilities enjoyed by immigrants. That’s not a healthy sign. And as many people believe, most of the right wing groups are popping up from this frustration.

During 80's Sweden had a strong structure of welfare society and then it suddenly changed during last two decades. This transformation within system has given birth to irritation for majority group. Though, this group is still living in comparatively good conditions but they feel that their life is getting worse.

**According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "the gravest effects of climate change may be those on human migration as millions are displaced by shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and severe drought". Can we predict huge immigration towards North from South due to climate change in near future?**

When it comes to challenges like water shortage, floods, droughts or shoreline erosions; poor communities become easy victims of these climate changes. The rich can escape droughts and floods far more easily than others. On the other hand, people who migrate towards Europe don't belong to poorest class of society but rather from middle class. They can afford to migrate here but it's not easy for poor. So I think there will be environmental migration only from South to another country of South and we might see a lot of refugee camps in Africa and other underdeveloped areas in near future.

Has globalization facilitated or complicated the process of immigration?

It depends on how you define globalization and which aspects of globalization are meant. The new globalised communication has facilitated it with contact between various people etc.

**Human movement as well as displacement for various reasons remains higher from one country of South to another country of South. Still it seems it is a problem from flow of migrants from South to North? Is it a mediated picture?**

Of course displacement with the South is more than from South to North. However, due to the welfare state aspects of North countries, it is a different aspect in the two regions.

**Islamophobia is on the rise in Europe? Is it failed integration on the part of European governments or is it Muslim diaspora to blame or both?**

Both!!!!!! Most Muslims integrate well in society. However some Muslims confirm many of the prejudices held by non-Muslims and the non-Muslims tend to see only those who confirm the prejudices. Among the Muslim immigrants, mostly a particular class (uneducated, unprivileged people from rural and undeveloped areas) tends to confirm these prejudices. People who once belonged to lower middle class or some even to middle class in their home countries (countries in South) become underclass for many reason i.e. they don't have social network, they are not integrated in core society, lack of education and so on.

On the government's part, there are some loopholes also. In the beginning when an immigrant comes here, he or she has to wait for two three years to get permission for job and to enjoy the facilities of system given to all citizens on equal basis. So for a couple of years, system totally excludes that person from society which is not healthy for that individual. It is then difficult to get into the system after years of inefficiency.

When it comes to human rights and equal rights for everyone, Sweden can be considered among the best countries. Two Muslim women, in city Malmö where I live, are driving public buses while wearing head scarf. They are totally protected and facilitated by government and you won't find this kind of example anywhere else or maybe in Malaysia. Scandinavian countries show very paternalistic attitude towards all citizens without any discrimination which certainly creates positive feelings in the minds of immigrants. But on the other hand, immigrants have tendency to live together among

other immigrants in suburbs owing to the easy procedure to get an accommodation here. Their kids go to the schools with other kinds from immigrant families but not with kids from majority group. This creates discrimination and leaves a negative impact.

When it comes to countries like Germany, I feel that there is resistance from government also. But this problem particularly lies with society not with state most of the times.

**Can we expect any change in Swedish government's immigration policies in near future since recent elections have seen a rise of neo-Nazi parties in Sweden?**

I don't think it will change the situation or would have any long lasting impact on governmental policies. Far-right nationalist party here (Sweden Democrats) came with a lot of promises and promises they have. They are not only against immigrants but they have other issues on their agenda also like welfare state, medical care, pensioners etc. If they are allowed to participate in politics actively then they will have to deliver and I think they wouldn't be able to manage or keep their promises. If they are taken seriously from the other political parties, it will be obvious that they would not be able to deliver as their promises are too generous. As it is now they can escape political responsibilities, as the other parties marginalise them in the Parliament. This will, I believe, create a situation where they will be regarded as victims. This might give them more votes in the next election.

**It's not unusual to hear about honour killings among muslim immigrants here in Europe. Do you see it as failure of social integration or identity crisis?**

It has to do with social integration. For example, Sweden is very expressive country where women rights are well preserved and gender equality is given high priority. Many immigrants particularly Muslims think that Scandinavian countries are good to live but they have problem with their children in this society of freedom on many levels. It is a big quest for immigrant parents to keep their children within the minority group. Many people involved in honour related violence have come from rural and undeveloped areas of Pakistan, Jordan, Somalia, Palestine and Kurdistan. They are mostly uneducated, underprivileged and living with the standards of their country of origin. So I must say that that it's a class based problem. Honour based violence can be associated with a particular class but it is related to identity crisis and social integration also.

We shouldn't ignore the religious factor too, as a researcher I have to keep in mind all the factors involved. People take this issue religiously also; they want to keep women in their group, in the walls.

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**P.S.**

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\* Adnan Farooq did his Masters in Political Science and has worked with daily The Nation, Lahore and daily Jang, Lahore. He has also volunteered for Milieudefensie, Amsterdam. Friends of the earth, Europe, on environmental issues. He has been working with ON FILE, an Amsterdam-based publication run by journalists from all around the world. He studied Conflict Resolution at University

of Amsterdam and is living in Paris. He is the editor.