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Forum: General Commission 4: Culture

Issue: The issue of xenophobia in culture with a special emphasis on the West

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Introduction

Discrimination- containing all possible applications in that regard- is one of the most impactful forms of human rights violations as a whole. Not only does it affect several individuals each and every day, but it also is really perplexing to track down and get to the root of it. Discrimination and xenophobia are thereby extremely interdependent as concepts.

Xenophobia- having its earliest citation from 1880- is a relatively new phenomenon that broadly defines the outcomes of harsh and often violent manifestations of intolerance. It thereby constitutes an umbrella term for many other terms regarding discriminatory acts primarily associated with but not limited to racism. The terminology was made popular by Henri Tajfel during his work on the social identity theory. The theory was key in terms of identifying in-group and out-group aspects of social interactions which ultimately resulted in the sociology of inequality to thrive. Due to this, significant historical occurrences contributed to perpetrating different forms of discrimination-vastly including xenophobia- amongst social groups or populations from different countries with each other.

Governmental institutions often do not and cannot act on it to confront the impacts of xenophobia, disregarding the applications of hostility and deeply entrenched prejudice within governmental bodies themselves. With regards to culture, the issue at hand gets even more complex as xenophobia in culture is extremely ambiguous; thereby making such implications even harder to detect and tackle accordingly.

Definition of Key Terms

- Xenophobia: The term derives from the Greek word xenos (meaning stranger) and phobos (meaning aversion). It is used for describing the fear of strangers as well as all aspects associated with being “foreign”. These may include people, values, customs, beliefs, artifacts differing from those of one’s own culture and so on.
- In-group: In sociology, in-group corresponds to a social group within which a person psychologically identifies themselves with; the party which imposes xenophobia in a xenophobic interaction.
- Out-group: Out-group is the social groups out of the in-group; groups to which xenophobia gets imposed.
- Racism: Dislike of others on the basis of racial differences
- Theophobia: Fear of God and religion
- Islamophobia: Fear, dislike and hatred of Islam
- Anti Semitism: Fear, dislike and hatred of Jews. Though it somewhat collides with Judaism the religion, this particular pattern of behaviour is more related to racial grounds.
- Christophobia: Fear, dislike and hatred of Christianity.
- Cultural integration: Blending of multiple cultures often by means of migration or other external political factors when it happens on a large scale.



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- Affirmative action: Affirmative action is a policy in which an individual's color, race, sex, religion or national origin are taken into account to increase opportunities provided to an underrepresented part of society.
- Prejudice: dislike of others or particular traits without obtaining proper knowledge on the particular issue
- Stigmatization: Devaluation of others seen as deviating from socially desirable standards or norms
- Ethnocentrism: Dislike or dismay towards ethnically and/or culturally different individuals or groups of people.

Background Information

As aforementioned in the beginning, xenophobia is a relatively new term to sociological research and applications. Yet, the correlation between social aspects and xenophobia is quite palpable. Therefore, the determinants of xenophobia are already clearly identified. The following parts of the report will go into those determinants as well as regional focus proposed within the nature of the issue at hand.

Cultural Determinants of Xenophobia:

Culture and xenophobia are interdependent due to the fact that what triggers xenophobic notions is the cultural aspects attached to a particular group of people or simply individuals. The three most predominant cultural determinants of xenophobia are religious grounds and perversion of language.

Religion perhaps is the biggest determinant in terms of cultural aspects of xenophobia. With the rise of Islamophobia in the 21st century primarily due to international presence of terrorist organisations like Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda. Though such entities are mostly involved in the ongoing Syrian Civil War, they are known by the citizens of Western countries through their executions, kidnappings and armed attacks in public places. For instance, on September 11 2001, nineteen Al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked multiple planes and crashed them against several buildings in the United States, including the New York World Trade Center complex and the Pentagon. Moreover, On January 20 2017, Syrian authorities revealed that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), also known as Daesh, militants had destroyed part of the Roman amphitheater in the ancient city of Palmyra. The attacks were carried out as a result of the increasing influence of Islamic fundamentalist leaders, like Osama Bin Laden, who declared the “holy war” against multiple Western countries. Yet, such demonstrations do not just get comprehended with regards to the terrorist side of them. The fact that such terrorist organizations attribute themselves to a particular religion or sect (Islam and Sunni sect of Islam in our case) make non-Muslim masses of people attribute those terrorist organizations to Islam accordingly. Therefore, religious grounds within terrorism can cause xenophobia to develop.

Xenophobia also pervades the language and the attitudes of the speaker of respective languages through the utilization of words and phrases that are designed to somehow separate two or more cultural entities into two. Even the terms that are used to clarify the distinction between the in-group and the out-group in given instances work their way to divide groups. By the motive of making the “us” and “them” sides of issues, parties involved get even more distinct to the extent that it causes a further chaos to emerge into a set of ongoing crises. Unfortunately, this was what happened and still is what is happening in the Syria Civil War. The main two sects of Islam in the region- Alawism and



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Sunni- being divided further goes on to show exactly what was mentioned. Moreover, the recent dismay stated by various states of the United States of America (USA) of Spanish somehow “taking over ” is a concrete example of xenophobia with regards to linguistic grounds. With the trend of Hispanic immigration into the USA, both people and the state governments seem to be alarmed by the mere possibility of Spanish somehow undertaking English. This “language issue” has pushed immediate action to be taken in order to ensure that English stays as the primary language of use as it is. In the California State Constitution, the document promises to “take all steps necessary to ensure that the role of English as the common language is preserved and enhanced.” In spite of the slight impact of such legislation, their mere existence goes on to show the misconception that constitutes a major xenophobia instance for the USA.

Cultural Intolerance and National Stability:

Referring to a collective’s ability to protect itself from threat or attack, national security is a must have and ties in closely to cultural intolerance. In order to provide a good environment for the cultures within a nation to coexist a country must have national stability. Within that, there can be many sub sections. National stability includes order and constancy in all sectors of a national institution.

Regarding the question at hand, cultural intolerance arises as a threat to national stability. Even in secular states, the presence of cultural practices can be considerably prominent. Moreover, there are concentrations of religious groups in certain regions of the world, creating a higher propensity for cultural intolerance. As one religious group becomes dominant in a society, others begin to be pushed aside as minorities. The problem with cultural intolerance relating to national stability is the safety of the citizens. Religious organizations can be prone to uprising and public backlash if they consider to be oppressed. Thus, the threat of cultural oppression is a big one when considering national stability. Additionally, it all ties back to the living conditions of the population. With conflicting cultural ideals in a country, it is very likely that groups have internal conflicts, that decrease the feeling of personal security.

The Holocaust:

The Holocaust, stemming from two words “holos” (whole) and “kaustos” (burned), is a set of genocidal acts that primarily took place in Germany and Poland. The mass murder of 6 million European Jews took place during the Second World War (1939-1945), under the German Nazi regime, and Adolf Hitler led the regime during the era of the Holocaust. Hitler believed Jews were an inferior race and a potential threat to German integrity and racial purity, for which he came up with the “final solution” and built concentration camps in Poland. The hatred towards Jews rapidly accelerated across the German population due to national misinformation and blockings imposed by the regime.

Anti-Semitism was already in place in Europe before Hitler came into power, despite the recognition of the term in the 1870s, evidence of hostility toward Jews was seen before the Holocaust were proven to have happened. When Roman authorities destroyed a Jewish temple in Jerusalem and forced Jews out of Palestine. The Enlightenment, as an era taking place during the 17th and 18th



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century emphasized cultural and religious tolerance, and in the 19th century Napoleon and many others legislated that ended tremendous restrictions on Jews.

In late 1941, Germans began to move Jews in the Polish ghettos to the concentration camps, starting with the “least useful” ones which could either be sick, old, weak, or very young. Outraged Warsaw civilians rose up and revolted, protesting against the frequent deportations, disease, and constant hunger; and was known as the ‘Warsaw Ghetto Uprising’. At Auschwitz, alone, more than 2 million people were murdered and a great amount of them worked in the labor camps with dreadful living conditions to which some died of starvation or disease. Non-consensual Medical experiments were also done in the process with twins and homosexuals, injecting them with different toxic substances such as petrol or chloroform and the actions of the scientist who experimented on these people was known as the ‘Angel of Death’.

After the Allies closed the concentration camps during the Second World War, it was impossible for the prisoners to go back to their daily lives. Most of them had abandoned their family or lost their homes to their non-Jewish neighbours. As a result, an increasing number of refugees scattered across Europe trying to find a home in the late 1940s. Elsewhere, Holocaust perpetrators were put for prosecution in the Nuremberg Trials of 1945-6, headed by the Allies, and the Nazis were prosecuted. In order to resolve and find a home for Jewish refugees, the Allied powers have adopted a provision for the creation of Israel in 1948. Starting in 1953, the German government paid individual Jews as a way to recognize the German people's fault and responsibility for crimes committed in their name during the Holocaust.

Black Racism in America:

In the mid 1500s, European sailors began to bring black Africans to America as slaves. Many West Africans were kept slaves, usually prisoners of war, criminals, or low-ranking members of caste systems. American slave markets were considered to be the worst and most deadly, with two out of five West African slaves died on the march to the Atlantic coast where they were traded to European slavers. The ships in which the slaves were carried between America, Europe, and Africa were in terrible conditions, and the slaves were all held in the bottom floors, locked in coffin-sized racks; a third of the slaves transported would perish during the journey.

In America, they were offered at markets to wealthy white people, who wanted plantation laborers primarily. Slave owners had many privileges and control over their employees, and they could torture them even though they thought it to be the best; most of the penalties were cruel and barbaric, and motivated by the doctrine of white supremacy that had been instilled in Americans from the very beginning, the black race was perceived to be inferior. Slave communities were also split up at times, and given these struggles, they still built a healthy community where they formed family ties with those who still worked with them. Religion was also not available for Africans, and they were forced to turn to Christianity; however, in the 17th and 18th centuries, certain blacks obtained their independence and other essential freedoms, such as property, established their own types of worship. Significant economic and infrastructural improvements were also rendered by African Americans when they operated on bridges, canals and industrial development. Frederick Douglas, a young black laborer with a fortunate ability to read, managed to escape from Massachusetts, where he was able to become a powerful lecturer in the growing abolitionist movement. Other than this, during the beginning of the Civil War, many northern blacks volunteered themselves as soldiers to serve for the Union of the South and the North, seeking to liberate their slaves in the South.



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Black people began to build their own temples, colleges, bought land, and eventually voted in government. But the black emancipation came with a reaction from many Southerners. Ku Klux Klan leaders, white supremacists, organized terrorist attacks and lynchings against Black people, and destroyed their houses, colleges, and churches. When the Northern troops finally left in 1877, the perceived 'white power structure' returned to the South. African Americans were prohibited from citizenship, and Southern states published the popular 'Jim Crow Laws,' which enforced the exclusion of blacks from white society; Blacks were once again under continuous threat of violence.

The Effects of Cultural Destruction with the Continuation of Xenophobic Motives

Culture can make people feel connected with certain values, customs, beliefs, and religions; so, cultural heritage can naturally provide a sense of unity and allow people to get a better understanding of previous generations and where they came from. Unfortunately, most of the results of the attacks made by extremist groups and of the violent action taken against cultural heritage sites seem to negatively affect the country as it is seen in recent history that these succeed to cause negative political, financial, social and cultural progression within the country and the international community. Moreover, in a smaller scope, societies get negatively affected when there is a loss of such authentic and unique sites in many ways such as the loss of their perception of what culture means and their traditions. The customs that are connected to cultural heritage such as mosques, churches get affected when they are under destruction. These customs connect the society together and they evoke the feeling of what it means to belong somewhere. This unity and even the sense of belongingness get disrupted this way. From an economic point of view, the country is largely damaged, considering the fact that most probably the cultural heritage sites are remarkable tourist attractions, especially if the site damaged is a part of World Heritage Sites.

Timeline of Major Events

| Date | Description of the Event |
|----------------|--|
| 1870 | First recognition of the concept “Anti-Semitism”. |
| 1939-1945 | The Second World War during which early 6 million European Jews were murdered |
| 1941-1942 | The Nazi forces began to displace Jews in the Polish ghettos to the concentration camps. |
| March 17, 1942 | The first mass gassing at the camp of Belzec. |



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| June 1945 | Nuremberg Trials at which villains of the Holocaust were held for trial. |
| 1948 | Allied powers endorsed the creation of the Jewish State of Israel. |
| 1960 | Turkish workers were transported to Germany for the creation of a workforce in the region. |
| 31 August- 8 September 2001 | World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was held. |
| November 2014 | The referendum concerning the independence of Catalonia got outlawed by Spain, which was reiterated in 2015; won and deemed illegal once again. |

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The United States of America:

Having dealt with racism for a long time, the nation still struggles to comply with the notion of a fully non-discriminatory atmosphere. Counter-discrimination acts are generally through positive discrimination methods which also upset many citizens. For instance, affirmative action is a policy that aims to provide underrepresented identity groups more favourable access to certain benefits, jobs, promotions, or admissions to educational institutions. 35th president of the USA, John F. Kennedy, was the first person that used the term “affirmative action” in Executive Order 10925 (“Equal Opportunity and Diversity”). Yet, such an application was not well-received by all portions of the nations as it was perceived as cutting of the access of the Asian American to provide the black community with increased standards, hence it was found to be contradictory.

Germany:

Germany is the nation where the Holocaust was ignited. The event had a remarkably deep impact upon the society with regards to paying more attention to combatting antisemitism and all other forms of religious discrimination in place. However, the Holocaust is the only major case of xenophobia in the region. In late 1960s, Turkish workers were transported to Germany to benefit from the cheap labour considering that it is the post-war era. Yet, the Turks brought their own culture with them to the German society, leaving an array of disputes between the German and the Turk. Currently, it seems that German Turks have been integrated into the German society while having several specific characteristics attached to them.

Spain:

In Spain, the Catalan Independence Movement emerges as the most recent act involving xenophobia in culture. Catalonia-containing several different tourist attractions within itself- is among the wealthiest portions of Spain. Before the Spanish War, it was fully independent. After the war, they



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were oppressed by General Franco. With several referenda conducted with regards to the formation of a brand new Catalanian state, the Spanish government deemed respective referenda illegitimate; meaning that they will not be taken as legally binding by the Spanish. Yet, with his current writing and comments on the issue, the 131st president of Catalonia is a little far-fetched in terms the language used to bash the Spanish. He thereby is accused of being xenophobic towards the rest of Spain with a highly malicious anti-Spanish tone in his speeches and writings.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

The idea of a body which will have the aim of making the international community cooperate to protect heritage always existed. Therefore, emerging after World War I, the League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation was founded in 1922, making the later titled UNESCO the successor of itself. UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a specialized United Nations agency established in 1945. The ultimate purpose of the agency is to contribute to promoting international collaboration in education, sciences, and culture to increase universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and human rights. It thereby plays an important role in safeguarding cultural assets with regards to the destruction xenophobia might cause.

“Culture becomes the target itself to deny people’s cultural identity, to deny people dignity and also to destroy their social fabric and social life. In the last decade, cultural heritage has been increasingly targeted,” says Lazare Eloundou Assomo, UNESCO’s director for culture and emergencies, referring to the entire international community as to how crucial it is to cooperate in order to address the issue.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

- [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2015](#)

This resolution encourages member states to build cooperative measures to improve their respective governments’ understanding of xenophobia. It calls for governments to train their officials on identifying reasons for conflicts between different cultural communities.

- [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2013](#)

This resolution specifically focuses on the issue of racism where it highlights how previous and existing methods are used to combat racism. It restates the UN’s strategy and policy when it comes to racism and provides solutions to improve it.

Possible Solutions

As our world proceeds into a way more globalised entity, cultural crises concerning xenophobia can and will occur both internationally and intra-nationally. It is thereby really crucial to consider the endorsement of governmental action on the issue to tackle the parts within the nation. For the international part, delegates may tackle the extent of international law to be further elaborated on defining the line between culture and human rights violations. Moreover, the importance of intercultural and interreligious dialogue should be emphasized as such decision makers will most definitely be influenced by the executive orders given by the particular religion they follow.

Useful Links For Further Research



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- <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=search&skip=0&query=xenophobia&coi=>
- https://www.jstor.org/stable/2783294?read-now=1&seq=4#metadata_info_tab_contents
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