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## The Possible Interconnectedness of Religious Populism, Stigmatization, Dehumanization and Hate Crimes and an Evaluation on Muslims in Russia

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### Abstract

Populist indoctrinations have been influencing peoples and shaping global and glocal policies for a very long time. But nowadays, the effects of populism increasingly play crucial roles in domestic policies and international relations. This research focuses on religious populism, stigmatization, dehumanization, hate crimes and violations of human rights. As a result of this research, it is suggested that there is possible interconnectedness between these phenomena. This possible interconnectedness increases the importance of these phenomena, since even the most basic violations of rights may result in creation of grave human right violations. It is reminded that religious populism indoctrinations may even lead to grave consequences like societal sterilization or crimes against humanity. Besides, the rights of Muslims living in Russia and some arguments about the contemporary conditions that they live in are examined. Finally, the importance of information and perception operations and related strategies emphasized.

**Keywords:** Religious Populism, Stigmatization, Hate Crimes, Media Deceptions, Islamophobia

## Dini Populizm, Damgalama, İnsandıřılařtırma ve Nefret Suçlarının Muhtemel Baęlantılılıkları ve Rusya'daki Müslümanlar Üzerine Bir Deęerlendirme

### Öz

Popülist telkinler çok uzun süredir halkları etkilemekte, küresel ve küresel-yerel politikaları řekillendirmektedir. Fakat günümüzde, popülizmin etkileri artan biçimde yerel politikalar ve uluslararası ilişkilerde önemli roller üstlenmektedir. Bu arařtırma dini popülizm, damgalama, insandıřılařtırma, nefret suçları ve insan hakları ihlallerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu arařtırma sonucunda söz konusu fenomenler arasında muhtemel baęlantılılıklar olduęu önerilmektedir. Bu muhtemel baęlantılılık, söz konusu fenomenlerin önemini arttırmaktadır; çünkü en temel ihlaller dahi vahim insan hakları ihlallerine sebep olabilecektir. Dini popülizm öğretilerinin toplumsal arındırma veya insanlıęa karřı işlenen suçlar gibi vahim sonuçlara yol açabileceęi hatırlatılmıştır. Ayrıca, Rusya'da yařayan Müslümanların hakları ve onların içinde yařadıkları güncel řartlar hakkındaki çeřitli argümanlar incelenmiştir. Son olarak bilgi ve algı operasyonlarının önemi ve ilgili stratejiler vurgulanmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dini Popülizm, Damgalama, Nefret Suçları, Medya Yanıltmaları, İslamofobi

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## Introduction

In this research paper, the phenomenon of populism will be evaluated considering the fact that populism, may lead to stigmatization, oppression, dehumanization and hate crimes. Consequently, religious populism may and possibly will consist of threats that may possibly cause violations of human rights.

This research paper briefly argues that religious populism strategies actually includes some hidden potential hazards and these negative factors affect societies and groups in very negative ways. The negative adverse effects may be diverse as oppression, stigmatization, dehumanization, hate crimes and violation of human rights.

After illustrating various populist practices implemented by various political or religious authorities, the other key concepts will be evaluated by using the views of relevant scholars.

This research work is built upon utilization of various research methods within various study fields. One of the core concepts, populism, is related with strategic communications and political science. To understand the current functions of populism, especially religious populism, a literature search was conducted in the relevant databases. The scientific scholar opinions were combined with empirical evidence illustrations. After the evaluation of religious populism, the other key concepts; stigmatization, dehumanization and hate crimes have been reinterpreted to emphasize the connections.

To generate a hypothesis about combining various notions and for the purpose of reinterpretation or interconnection, narrative literature review method is the generally preferred method to link together many studies on different topics (Baumeister and Leary, 1997). Literature review and narrative literature review together enable us to connect the root causes of various forms of human rights violations such as stigmatization, dehumanization or ethnic cleansing. It can be argued that the reviewed articles and some of illustrated narratives on human rights abuses may allow us to claim the connectedness of the phenomena. Populism propaganda speeches or indoctrinations can also be defined as narratives, the narratives to emphasize 'us' and 'them'. As a result of this research, an evidence based synthesis formulated arguing that the key concepts of these research are mostly interconnected. The argument that emphasizes the connections between religious populism, stigmatization, dehumanization and hate crimes will necessitate the suggestion of developing relevant preventive policies be designed by considering this connectedness.

Also, the interactions between the interconnected phenomena such as dehumanization and crimes against humanity will create a crucial perspective. This new perspective will lead us to evaluate the negative effects of relatively less important violation of rights such as stigmatization, as grave as the effects of relatively more important violation of rights such as ethnic cleansing, because of the possible links or interconnectedness.

Following the evaluation of reinterpreted connection between the key concepts, next step will be evaluation of the sociological status of Muslims living in Russia. The contemporary situation of these groups will be examined with the help of some reviews, empirical findings, historical and legal background information.

## Evaluations on Religious Populism, Stigmatization, Hate Crimes and Rights

Populism was described as the antagonism between the people and the elite (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2013). Whereas, Kirk Hawkins (cited in Gidron and Bonikowski, 2013) argues that populism is a Manichaeian discourse that assigns a binary moral dimension to political conflicts and Michal Kazin (cited in Gidron

and Bonikowski, 2013) defines American populism as the dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Considering these evaluations, it can be argued that populism is a method or an instrument to shape perceptions on built understandings.

The reason why populist practices are attractive to the politicians and leaders can be summarized as: “the populist practices arise from the failure of existing social and political institutions to confine and regulate political subjects within a relatively stable social order” (Carillo, 2018). Similarly, regarding populism and voter behaviour, Bart Bonikowski from Harvard University argues that, channelling social frustrations associated with rapid social change into deep resentments against immigrants and ethnic, racial, or religious minorities has proven to be profitable political strategy (Bonikowski, 2016). On the other hand, according to cultural backlash thesis, the “support for populism will be especially strong among those holding traditional values and retro norms, including older generation and the less-educated groups left behind by progressive cultural tides” (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). Considering these arguments, it can be argued that instead of populist indoctrinations or populist propagandas, it is advisable to focus on real societal problems, raise awareness and improve education levels of groups and societies.

More recently, populism practices evolved into various different forms of ‘us’ and ‘them’ constructions. Ernesto Laclau (cited in Gidron and Bonikowski, 2013) acknowledges this fact as; “the symbolic distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that constitutes populist discourse is an instance of relational ‘empty signifiers’ that can take on varied content, depending on social context. These categories gain their meaning through a process of ‘identification’ (i.e., classification), whereby specific social groups are construed as ‘the people’ (us) and pitted against oppressive ‘others’ (them)”

It can be argued that, populism instrumentalizes ‘us’ and ‘them’ antagonism to win the hearts of the target communities by manipulating understandings, perceptions and cognitions of the masses in any subject that they need any necessity. Populism may also be interpreted as an easy way to distract, rather than answering the questions and demands of masses related to societal problems by using polarizations of ‘us’ and ‘them’ antagonisms.

If we look from a different perspective, it can be argued that populism uses the victimization on one hand, and oppression on the other. In fact, oppression can be defined as “forcing something that is undesirable or harmful on a person or group; depriving a person or group of something that is needed, wanted, or helpful; or both. To be oppressive, it must also threaten or ruin a person’s mental or physical health, well-being, or coping ability” (Hanna et al. 2000). Thus, populism in general and religious populism specifically is phenomena that can deprive peoples from their values or beliefs and that can damage the real victims’ mental or physical health.

It can be argued that the utilization of victimization card can also be seen in the religious populism strategies. Archbishop Christodoulos, while being the head of the Holy Synod of the autocephalous Church of Greece and religious leader of the Greek Orthodox majority of the population, had been declaring that “the Greek people is always the blessed people of God” and “the Church is not speaking a word of its own”, “it is transmitting the word of God” (cited in Stavrakakis, 2002). Accordingly, one of the religious populism strategies by this Greek Orthodox Church can be summarized as Taggard (2000) puts it: “Greek Church populism - becomes ‘hostile to a discourse of rights because, by definition, rights are tools of the embattled minority, while populism sees the majority as embattled and blames the excessive deference of the state to right claims of minorities for this injustice” (cited in Stavrakakis, 2002).

Today, religious and racist populism is becoming more and more obvious and these masses have been feeling, acting and defining their identities according to the populist indoctrinations. There are studies emphasizing the crucial roles of media and elites in fuelling xenophobia (Fırıncı, 2017). One can try to understand the effects of

populism on the social groups by using slave and slave holder psychology. Within a community subject to populist indoctrination, 'us' part of the community can be compared to slaveholder whereas 'them' part of the community can be compared to slaves. Solomon Northup, who had experienced slavery himself, illustrates the psychology of the slave-master as:

"It is not the fault of the slaveholder that he is cruel, so much as it is the fault of the system under which he lives. He cannot withstand the influence of habit and associations that surround him. Taught from earliest childhood, by all that he sees and hears, that the rod is for the slave's back, he will not be apt to change his opinions in maturer years" (Northup, cited in Hanna et al. 2000).

Considering this perspective, it can be argued that it becomes very hard for the communities that had been subject to populist indoctrinations, to withstand the influence that surrounds them.

Considering these evaluations it can be argued that populist indoctrinations may lead the 'us' part of the communities see the 'them' part of the communities as the slave-masters see the slaves. And when we incorporate religion in this relationship we can understand religious oppression. For example prominent scholar Franz Fanon declared that religious oppression or forcing Christianity as seen in both Algeria boarding schools by French and in boarding schools for Native Americans in North America was not an attempt at setting free the native people but oppressing peoples as similar as using DDT, which is used to destroy parasites on crops (Fanon cited in Hilton, 2011).

On the other hand, populist indoctrination propaganda can be utilized to cover up the incapability and ineffectiveness of leaderships to control 'us' more easily. In this example, 'us' part of the community can be compared to controlled slaves. Considering this interpretation, propaganda tactics utilized before; like trying to convince slaves that slavery is preferable to freedom, revisionist history writing or enforcement of religious ideology can also be illustrated as the strategies that can be used to control populations (Hanna et al. 2000). These kinds of populist policies, propagandas, religious, racist indoctrinations must not be developed to control global or glocal perceptions and communities.

Furthermore, populist policies may result in serious adverse effects. As a result of populist policies, communities may suffer from grave damages. Citing from Davenport, Nugent (2018) argues that "organizations under siege in a targeted repression environment defensively change the structure of their organization and demands of loyalty from members in a manner which can alienate moderates, further polarizing it from other groups". Considering this fact, it can be argued that politicians must analyse the cost of polarization, feeding segregation and fuelling extremism that are the results of populist repression policies.

One of the most extreme example of 'us' and 'them' polarization and hate campaign can be seen in Serbian violence strategy which targets Bosniak Muslims. During the Serbian assault to Bosniaks, "many rape camps were established with the specific intention of forcibly impregnating Muslim women with 'Serbian seeds' in an effort to replace the ethnic 'other'" (Weitsman cited in Peltota, 2018). Societies, peoples, groups have been subject to various populist 'us' and 'them' narrations, propagandas from media every day. These are in fact, extremely dangerous policies risking peaceful coexistences.

It is an undeniable fact that the world today became more and more volatile and vulnerable to various kinds of conflicts and the perception of insecurity is widening among various communities. Alston (2017) argues that populism is operated partly by horror and irritation which is mostly related with 9/11 security concerns that have blended into an actual or constructed fear and hatred of foreigners or

minorities. Consequently, the threat perceptions have dramatically increased in recent years and that brings the normalizations of the states of emergencies (Alston, 2017). It can be argued that the fear and rage have been instrumentalized to implement various populism strategies and shape the cognitions of the masses.

These recent developments that lead to the rise of populism have been significantly affecting the human rights perceptions. It can be argued that the populist indoctrinations recently challenged the human rights phenomenon by the acts of nationalistic, xenophobic and obviously hostile agendas (Alston, 2017). On the other hand, it can be argued that there is not a clear and specific position determined by advocates of human rights yet. But there is no ground to lose hope and surrender to what populism brings.

Because it is not the era of losing hope on human rights and there is still need for human rights, it is time to re-evaluate innovative strategies considering the rise of populism (Alston, 2017).

Currently, there are various expressions of populism around the world but for our research; it is the most interesting to investigate the relationship of populism with religion. Martin Carillo (2018) argues that “the linking of politics and religion is born through a subject that is very accepted today in academia, populism”. He also emphasizes that “in Italy, as in Argentina, the mass media has begun to raise ideas about whether the Pope is a populist in the Catholic religion or whether his discourse has populist traits” (Carillo, 2018).

Now, an example from Hungary will be evaluated to understand a different kind of populism and religion relation. The populism implementations in Hungary will be enlightening since this will allow us to see a recent example of religious populism.

It is argued that, right-wing parties get political support and legitimacy from churches, the churches are appointed to operate educational, health and social care centres on government-funded budgets. Besides, politically well-received churches have been given official church status with all its advantages, but their politically less obedient counterparts have been stripped off it (Bozoki ve Adam, 2016). It can be argued this policy can be interpreted as, the politicians seem to suggest some kind of bribe to religious authorities to gain religious legitimacy for their actions. This strategy seems utterly unacceptable.

The relationship between populism and religion is very complex in the case of Hungary. Bozoki and Adam illustrates their analysis regarding religious populism in Hungary as:

“Radical right-wing populism employs a quasi-religious ideological construction through which it attempts at mobilizing a wider social spectrum: ethno-nationalism. This surrogate religion offers a politicized (nationalist and paganized) understanding of Christianity and elevates the concept of ethnically defined nation to a sacred status. Thus, religion is ‘nationalized’, and the universalism of Christianity is transformed to a particularistic, pagan vision in which faith appears to be not an individual but a tribal issue. ‘Nationalized Christianity’ also provides legitimacy for the ‘rationalized charismatic rule’ of authoritarian leaders, who represent exceptional characteristics but are nevertheless popularly elected. This rule is illiberal and anti-democratic even though it relies on (often manipulated) elections and other forms of politically conditioned popular participation” (2016, p.116).

The analysis can be interpreted as the misuse of religion and nationalism for gaining some political interests. These politicians are using sacred values of peoples but in return, they generally not contribute their societies as they declared. Besides, it is crucial to be alerted against surrogate religion.

After this informative example, it is better to illustrate the religious populism in Europe. Ionut Apahideanu describes religious populism as: “a native Christian collec-

tivity (nation or continental population), 'invaded' by Muslims, who are depicted holistically (Islam), antagonistically and normatively negative (as violent and retrograde); explicatively it accuses the corruption of national or EU political elites, who are supposed to have encouraged or at least turned a blind eye on the infamous Muslim immigration; prescriptively, it advocates the restriction of religious rights for Muslims (from banning the construction of mosques to prohibiting specific religious costumes such as female headscarves) and some kind of restoration and duly observance of Christian roots; analytically, massively building on Huntington's book, it exploits passions and emotions, as suggested by the very word 'phobia'; furthermore, it is profoundly antimodernist in that, as any type of (religious) populism, it rejects pluralism, minority rights and the very 'defining trait of contemporary progressive thought', i.e. 'the right to be different' – ethnically, linguistically, sexually, or in this specific case, religiously" (Apahideanu, 2014). It can be argued that this ideological indoctrination targets the basic human rights of Muslims. Consequently, it can also be argued that Huntington and similar scholars must be held responsible for their destructive indoctrinations.

On the other hand, Andrew Arato (2013) argues that it was wrong to assume that Machiavelli's *Prince* was justification of dictatorship. We are not sure if this popular piece was written to legitimize dictatorship but this argument is inspiring. If we think in a similar perspective, is it acceptable to think that some global or glocal 'academicians' or 'influencers' indoctrinate popular ideologies to legitimize their strategies and prepare societies for some global or glocal strategies? The real philosophers, the real academicians and the real influence leaders must be supported to overcome the challenges and to cure the wounds that the global populists caused.

One more negative aspect about religion in societies, especially in Western societies is stigmatization. In fact, stigmatization culture or stigmatization policies, are the real obstacles challenging national cohesiveness, not the religious others.

A research on the effects of religious stigma on Muslim minorities illustrates important findings. Jonas R. Kunst et al. (2012) emphasizes that; as experiences of religious stigmatization reinforce Norway and Germany Muslims' perceived discrepancy between being a Muslim and being a member of their nations, they seem to be torn between their willingness to become integrated members of their nations and their wish to protect their religious affiliations.

As the populist strategies fuel the stigmatization and following stigmatization, hate crimes against minorities becomes normal for the oppressors. A recent protest, by a small group in a small city illustrates a brief example. Recently, about 200 women have taken part in a rally in Newcastle UK, to highlight abuse and harassment they say they face on public transport. Their complaints include; being regularly called a 'terrorist' by other passengers or various abuses on trains and being attacked in the street (BBC News, 2018).

Historical experience allows us illustrate the negative effects that stigmatization may cause. For example the eugenics movement in America in early twentieth century and the efforts of several research groups and organizations, such as the Eugenics Research Association (ERA), the Eugenics Society of Northern California, and the Human Betterment Foundation (HBE) led to laws in several states criminalizing the reproduction of numerous groups of individuals (Hilton, 2011). Even Adolf Hitler credits the eugenics' laws of several American states while aiming to create a 'master race' (Black cited in Hilton, 2011). Stigmatization may cause serious damage to societies, groups or states. These kinds of government policies or global policies supporting stigmatization must be prevented.

To prevent religious stigmatization, politicians and strategists must fight against fear-mongering media campaigns and narrations against Muslims. Kunst

and his colleagues argue that “As fear causes avoidance, and avoidance prevents people from challenging their prejudgments and stereotypes, we consider political campaigns promoting contact between religious groups as a suitable and powerful tool to decrease religious intolerance” (Kunst et al, 2012).

Thinking on religious populism, another negative aspect is dehumanization. “Treating groups monolithically - seeing people not as individuals but only as members of their (stereotyped) group - is a form of dehumanization” (Burrell and Barsalou, 2015). When a group of young men ransacked a prayer house near Moscow, beating badly the imam and shouting ‘there is no place for Muslims in Russia’, it can be argued that they were dehumanizing Muslim Russians (Myers, 2005). Similarly, when Slovak prime minister, Robert Fico, was telling that “Slovakia was no place for Muslims” (The Conversation, 2016), he was also dehumanizing Muslims.

If we search for the role of dehumanization, some historical information will be inspiring. Hilton (2011) argues that “similar to the oppression in Algeria by the French, the indigenous Native Americans of North America were forced to endure countless massacres, attempts at cultural assimilation, dehumanization, sterilizations, and denials of nearly all rights and freedoms”. He further emphasizes the role of dehumanization as: “... the genocidal actions against the Native American people were a result of dehumanization, for the guilt and shame normally accompanying these actions would be greatly reduced if the Native Americans were considered less than human” (Hilton, 2011). Considering these facts, it seems crucial to prevent and punish dehumanization practices in order to eliminate their populist and propagandist grave consequences.

Religious populism, repression, stigmatization, dehumanization are affecting societies also by causing negative symptoms like increasing hate crimes. Hate crimes are “crimes that manifest evidence of prejudice based on race, gender and gender identity, [emphasis added] religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, including where appropriate the crimes of murder, non-negligent manslaughter; forcible rape; aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation; arson; and destruction, damage or vandalism of property” (Hate Crime Statistics Act, 2010). Governments, philosophers, scholars and most importantly the forces that control global and local media must fight against populism to prevent the rise of hate crimes.

Similarly, hate speech is destructive. Hate speech is prohibited and criminalized by International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination adopted in 1965, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted in 1966 but politicians, leaders and media have been constructing hate speech campaigns. For example before and during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, “the media played a major role in supporting and inciting ethnic hatred and violence against Tutsi and moderate Hutu. Public and some private media were used in distilling hate, inciting violence and encouraging Hutu to kill their countrymen Tutsi. The hate propaganda was accompanied by direct calls for the extermination of the Tutsi” (Timmermann cited in Mafeza, 2016). The question is who directs and controls global, local media networks and media policies. For Germany, we have some clue from a right-wing author. Udo Ulfkotte’s book was titled ‘Corrupt journalists: How politicians, intelligence services and high finance control Germany’s mass media’ (Ulfkotte cited in Witte, 2017). Consequently, it can be suggested that there must be effective control mechanisms to control the forces or parties that control media.

In conclusion of this chapter, it can be argued that the reinterpretation of the phenomena; religious populism, stigmatization, dehumanization, sterilization and hate crimes may allow us to construct a hypothesis that emphasize the link and connectedness of these phenomena. Religious populism may create genocides or it can just create some basic forms of dehumanization. Whereas stigmatization may create social sterilization policies or it can just create some basic forms of discriminations. But the core suggestion is raising awareness on the possible links, connectedness and grave consequences of these phenomena which mostly underestimated by contemporary politicians and religious leaders.

After evaluating the phenomena related with human rights, it is now time to turn our attention to brief evaluation of societal conditions of Muslims living in Russia.

### **Brief Historical Background Information about Muslims in Russia**

Islam came to Russia in the seventh century. Followers of Prophet Muhammet (pbuh) came to Russia 22 years after he left earthly life. The Muslim community in Russia is now 25 million people strong and continues to grow. Most Muslims in the country live in the Moscow region and other major metropolitan areas such as St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, Grand Mufti of Russia Sheikh Rawil Gaynetdin has declared (Teslova, 2018). This brief research is partly about evaluating the policies regarding the Muslims living in one of the most powerful country in the world, Russia.

The research question is whether the Muslims in Russia are subject to human rights abuses or they have been equally treated citizens with dignity and equal rights as being one of the earliest communities of the Russian history. The paper will illustrate some evidences that can help to interpret the policies whether there is religious freedom or religious repression.

To begin with, the argument stating that Russians see Muslims as the enemy of Russian culture will be presented. According to Batunskij (2003, cited in Prazauskas); the Russians fought the Tatars in 1376, 1399, 1411, 1431 and this was the main reason why Muslims were increasingly regarded as principal enemies and described in negative terms in early Russian literature. Batunskij also argues that; during Tataro-Mongol rule, the Russians were not forced to adopt Islam, and even Russian Orthodox missionaries were allowed to spread their faith among the Golden Horde, while Russian principalities preserved a fairly wide autonomy but nevertheless, the Muslims were regarded, as the principal enemy of the 'true', i.e. Russian Orthodox faith.

Similarly, Professor Paul Goble, a former CIA member and a professor at the Institute of World Politics argues that the Russian mythology about the Tartar yoke or the Mongol yoke is mostly a lie because it serves nationalist purposes, and when the Mongols conquered Russia, they were not Muslim yet. They were Nestorian Christians and Khazarite Jews (Goble, 2012).

Whereas Algis Prazauskas (2005) argues that after Ivan the Terrible conquered the khanates of Astrakhan and Kazan, he dealt harshly with the Muslim population. Kazan was virtually demolished, all mosques were destroyed, and Tatars were banned from the town. An archbishopric was founded in Kazan with the purpose of converting Tatars to the Russian Orthodox faith. Attitude towards Islam remained negative for a long time and Muslims were regularly subject to conversion efforts until the late 18th century. Unfortunately Soviet ideology implemented militant atheism, since mid-1920s mosques were destroyed, mullahs were forbidden to preach, and thousands of them were exiled or executed. 30,000 mosques were closed or destroyed, and 14,000 Islamic religious schools were closed (Arzt, 1998 cited in Prazauskas 2005).

More recently, in 2009, an American briefing report for the American Government's Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe illustrated the plans of Russian government to be incredibly repressive toward Muslims. During the briefing, Professor Paul Goble, a former CIA member and a professor at the Institute of World Politics declared that; Mr. Rogozin— Russia's Ambassador to NATO— "said that there needed to be an alliance between the Americans, the Europeans and the Russians against the threat from the South. And there was no question to what that threat was. It was Islam" (Goble, 2012).

On the other hand, a recent article from the Religious Board of Muslims of the Russian Federation illustrates a strategy for the Muslims in Russia. In this paper, Mukhetdinov (2016) argues that prominent Muslim scholars in Russia such as H. Faiz-khanov, Sh. Marjani and M. Bigiev and Ismail-bey Gasprinsky “understood that, firstly, more intimate cooperation was needed between Orthodox and Muslims in order to strengthen their shared Russian identity, and secondly, that Muslims needed to reform their system of education in order to be competitive in the technological race”. It is not necessary to dig deeper on this issue, but Ismail-bey is actually known for his support to Pan-Türkism ideology.

One can wonder what the roles of Orthodox Church in Russian state’s policies are. Russian Orthodox Church’s spokesperson illustrates the role of Christianity in the government. In 2015 Vsevolod Chaplin said: “Not well known or understood in the West, the Russian Orthodox Church has been Russia’s chief source of spiritual identity for most of its 1,000-year existence. Though it was nearly destroyed by the communists, it has since rebounded sharply to become once again the Kremlin’s ideological bulwark” (Weir, 2015).

To sum up this section, it can be argued that the relations between Russian policies and Muslim communities and states have been going on for decades and the history may be interpreted as soft power or sometimes bitter hard power interactions.

### **Findings on Contemporary Rights of Russia Muslims**

Today, the constitution of the Russian Federation of 1993 guarantees that “freedom of conscience and religion, including the right to profess individually or collectively any religion or not to profess any religion, and freely to choose, possess and disseminate religious and other convictions and act in accordance with them” and prohibits “all forms of limitations of human rights on social, racial, national, language or religious grounds” (Akhmetova, 2018).

The Russian State legally guarantees the observance of the following rights of believers (Council of Muftis of Russia, 2018):

- freedom to practice religion individually and collectively;
- equality of religions before the law and the institutions of the state;
- participation of representatives of religious organizations in the discussion of upcoming state decisions affecting the interests of believers;
- freedom of religious activity, which includes:
  - free performance of collective and private religious rituals, and ceremonies, including holidays and in the month of Ramadan,
  - the creation of religious communities, organizations and centers,
  - ownership of religious objects,
  - free education of religion of children and adults,
  - the creation of scientific, educational and educational institutions and centers,
  - issue, export, import and distribution of religious literature, periodicals, video and audio products, and religious objects, preaching and educational work on the Internet,
  - free international contacts, free departure of Russian believers for religious training and pilgrimage,
  - charitable activities
  - providing conditions for healthy leisure of families of believers and children.

To briefly sum up this section, it can be argued that the approach of modern Russian state about providing religious rights seems good on paper theoretically except one issue.

Unfortunately, the document titled as “The Social Doctrine of Russian Muslims” illustrates the participation of Muslim Tatars to the combat operations against Muslim Turks which can be interpreted as a loyalty example. The participation to the battles against Muslim Turks at Pleven, Lovcha and Mountain Dubynak are also mentioned (Council of Muftis of Russia, 2018). It can be argued that this part of the document can be interpreted as promotion of nationalism within a religious doctrine.

### **Some of the Arguments, Suggesting That There Have Been Violations of Muslim Rights**

Some of the interesting findings from a Norwegian-Danish-Swedish Christian initiative’s recent Religious Freedom Survey can be listed as follows (Arnold, 2017):

- Russian laws restricting freedom of religion and belief have increased, as have prosecutions of people exercising this freedom.

- In North Caucasus, the authorities’ ‘counter-extremism’ strategy fuels local support for Islamists, resulting in a climate of fear in which freedom of religion and belief is severely limited.

- The most serious type of freedom of religion and belief violation is the use of ‘counter-extremism’ measures against people and communities exercising this freedom.

- Sharing beliefs is extremely hazardous and can result in assassination, particularly of those belonging to ‘traditionally Muslim’ ethnicities.

- In the North Caucasus republics the freedom of religion and belief situation is complicated by both the ongoing conflict in the region, and various repressive forms of Islam being imposed by both the insurgents and in Chechnya by Kremlin-backed local authorities.

On the other hand, UN Human Rights Committee declared that Russia should revise without undue delay the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity with a view to clarifying the vague and open-ended definition of “extremist activity”, ensuring that the definition requires an element of violence or hatred and establishing clear and precise criteria on how materials may be classified as extremist. It should take all measures necessary to prevent the arbitrary use of the law and revise the Federal List of Extremist Materials (UN, 2015).

A recent global trend is misusing authority by so-called anti-extremism measures. SOVA, Center for Information and Analysis, a Moscow based Russian non-profit organization conducts research work on such topics as nationalism, secular society and political radicalism provides reports and loads of other documents about misuse of anti-extremism (SOVA, 2018).

Recent Islamophobia report illustrates some findings about the recent discrimination regarding religious and cultural freedoms. Sorokin (2017) states: “since Russian media affiliated to the state often decry Islamophobia in Europe and portray it as a negative example, against the background of which the interreligious relations in Russia appear all in all harmonious, the rising controversy around the hijab thwarted this narrative. Leading political figures as well as grand muftis of the national Muslim spiritual boards remained strikingly inconspicuous. In 2013, President Putin rejected the hijab as not belonging to the tradition of Russian Muslims” (Sorokin, 2017).

Hijab has various definitions some of which can be used to define veil. Similar to modern politicians, it was the French back in time of colonialism, who followed a strategy against the use of veil for the cultural destruction of Algerians and to gain control of Algerian women, the 'pivot' of Algerian society (Fanon cited in Hilton, 2011). Whereas recently, a United Nations Committee of independent human rights experts from around the world, stated that French full-body veil ban violated women's freedom of religion. The experts declared that the state has not demonstrated how the full veil presents a thread itself for public security to justify this absolute ban (UN, 2018).

On the other hand, Islamophobia Report also underlines the recent killings of Muslim imams. It is emphasized that to date; five assassinations of imams that took place in the Stavropol region between 2012 and 2016, have remained unresolved. According to report, in 2016, Imam Ravil Kaybaliev was killed, continuing the tragic list of murders in the region. Kaybaliev was a fervent critic of the Yarov Bill (about controlling religious activities and anti-terror) , and the prohibition of the hijab by the Stavropol administration (Sorokin, 2017).

There is another dimension of religious populism about Muslims. This can be interpreted as creating delusion to control Muslim masses. "Russia blessing Kadirov, is basically using Islam to legitimize his rule. If he cannot give them economic well-being, he is giving them the biggest mosque in Europe" (Hunter, 2012) illustrates this argument.

Also, Russian policies regarding the international conflict areas will suppose to affect Russian Muslims. Since most of the conflict areas that the West intervenes are Muslim populated areas, these coalition interventions affect Muslim populations in Russia at least emotionally. As a result, Russia must design careful strategies regarding its role in international arena. Professor Mark Katz (2010) argues as: "although Moscow has so far succeeded in keeping its policies toward the North Caucasus from becoming a rallying point uniting the broader Muslim world against Russia (like Soviet intervention in Afghanistan did in the 1980s), Moscow's good relations with most Muslim governments and opposition movements will not necessarily prevent the rise of Islamic opposition inside Russia or the Muslim republics of the former USSR" (Katz, 2010). It can be argued that the Russian strategy regarding the Muslims inside and outside of Russia may affect the relations between the Russian governments with the Muslims. For example, "the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the most volatile of the entire Caucasus region" (Hedenskog, Holmquist and Norberg, 2018). Russian support to a possible Armenian aggression or a possible Serbian aggression in Serbia-Kosovo-Bosnia conflict may probably be unwelcomed by Russian Muslims.

### **Some of The Recent Findings, That May Be Interpreted as Equality**

A recent Islamophobia report illustrates also some positive improvements regarding the Islamophobia in Russia: "Strict law enforcement has equally, arguably to the expense of freedom of expression, reduced the margin of tolerance for critique against 'traditional' religions, including Islam. Openly racist, xenophobic or Islamophobic Internet sites have been blocked, and the media has become more cautious in reproducing xenophobic and Islamophobic stereotypes. On the other hand, Islamic communities that are not considered 'traditional' are stigmatized as extremist, and their members thrown under the bus of the justice system" (Sorokin, 2017).

There are some statements of supreme Muslim officers supporting the Russian government. For example, in 2015, Talgat Tajuddin, the Supreme Mufti of Russia, presented Russian president Putin his ideas on the accession of Israel and Syria to Russia to extend Russia to Mecca. He said: On the Day of National Unity, after representatives of traditional religions laid flowers and congratulated Vladimir Vladimirovich, I turned to him: with Israel, as with the Crimea, do? According to Tajuddin, who leads the portal Proufu.ru, Putin laughed and replied: Mufti-Khazrat, we will think. There's

no need to think here, you have to take it. Let Russia be up to Mecca. It is the will of Allah that people live together in friendship, love and harmony, said the mufti. Hall responded to his words with laughter and applause. (Lenta.ru, 2015).

It is also important to see the international cooperation and education activities of Muslim leaders in Russia. According to a recent report; during the 3rd International Academic and Theological Conference 'The Spiritual Silk Road Great Humanistic Traditions and Current Challenges', the religious leader of Russian Muslims, Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gaynutdin, met the high-ranking Chinese delegation led by the Chairman of the Islamic Association of China (IAC), Hasan Fa Min and declared that Chinese and Russian Muslims are developing cooperation and carrying out a number of joint projects (Russia Mufties Council, 2018). Russian Muslims also co-organize projects like constructing greater Silk Road cooperation. Recently an international conference organized and scientific reports published. The cooperation project was focused on the Islamic factor in the integration processes of the Great Silk Road (Spiritual Board of Muslims in Russia, 2018e).

On the other hand, recently Russian president declared his support for the improving Islamic education to the Muslims to fight against 'destructive ideas'. The reason for this policy can be found in his words as: "even destructive ideas, can only be fought with the help of other ideas". "The president vowed to support Islamic religious education through partnerships with major state-backed universities and research centres" (Aleyev, 2018).

Similarly seeing that the Russian Muslims organise academic conferences and publishing academic theology journals illustrates good implementation examples for equality. For example III International Scientific Theological Conference 'The Spiritual Silk Road Great Humanistic Traditions and Challenges of Our Time' was organised in cooperation with Kyrgyzstan Muslims (Spiritual Board of Muslims in Russia, 2018a). Also, the academic journal of Islam in the Modern World allows its readers getting information from various different perspectives regarding religion (Spiritual Board of Muslims in Russia, 2018b). Also, institutions providing higher education on Islam can be helpful to the development of better understanding of Islam. Moscow Islamic Institute provides theological education at university level (Spiritual Board of Muslims in Russia, 2018c).

Interestingly, Muslims in Russia seem so strong that they can inspire the leaders of Muslim majority countries. For example, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Abdullah II, during his visit to Moscow, said that the strong voice of the Russian moderate Islam is the hope for the world Ummah (Spiritual Board of Muslims in Russia, 2018d).

## Conclusion

*...Ya know they murdered X, and tried to blame it on Islam ...  
(from the song: "Wake Up", Rage Against the Machine, 1992)*

Prominent scholar Carl Schmitt argued in 1922 that "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts..." (Schmitt cited in Arato, 2013). Contemporary religious populism strategies, policies provoke us to think if western states have been returning to Christianization of governance by becoming more and more post-secular states. For example German state orders all government buildings to display a Christian cross (Khan, 2018). Russian President Putin declared that "Christianity is the root of Russian identity" (Valente, 2018). On the other hand, The Washington Post reported the blessings of assault rifles of Russian Armed Forces by Russian Orthodox priests with a title of "The Christian zeal behind Russia's war in Syria" (Tharoor, 2015). Regarding the western civilization, the question may be if the post-secular, post-Enlightenment

arguments have increasingly been shaping religious populism strategies and have the western leaders and strategists been directing their social policies and international relations more and more according to religious populism?

On the other hand, the global negative indoctrinations against Muslims are mostly transferred via global news companies, Hollywood movies, soap operas, biased scholars, politicians and other venues. It is argued that “neo-Orientalist discourse deliberately wishes to impose some kind of distorted, ever hegemonic, and intersubjective constructs of Islam and the Muslim World” (Kerboua, 2017). The power of negative storytelling has been utilized for this purpose. This must be changed. Alex Kronemer and Daniel Tutt emphasize the power of positive storytelling and argue that “attitudes about Muslims and Islam will change fastest through heterogeneous representations in media, television, film and other venues” (cited in Burrell and Barsalou, 2015).

Instead of populism, leaders, philosophers or politicians must develop policies to promote empathy to Muslims or any minority groups. Apathy must be prevented. As George Bernard Shaw puts it: “The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them but to be indifferent toward them; that’s the essence of inhumanity.” (Adam Waytz, cited in Burrell and Barsalou, 2015).

It can be argued that one of the most crucial aspects regarding religious populism and hate campaigns may be being aware of media deception and false flag operations that are utilized to shape perceptions and populist strategies. An example may be constructing anti-Muslim hate by taking positions designed to outrage wider community while pretending to be Muslim. By mentioning false flag information campaign used during 2014 Sydney Lindt Café siege terror event, Andre Oboler emphasized that one of the approaches of anti-Muslim haters is “to pretend to be Muslim while engaging in explicit support for terrorism and violence” (Oboler, 2016). It can be argued that citizens all around the world must be aware of false flag operations, media disinformation, deception, fear-mongering and hate campaigning strategies.

On the other hand, it can be argued that, most of this phenomenological research aimed to illustrate the possible effects of religious populism. These effects will possibly create stigmatization at least. Various kinds of religious populism strategies may be spread via various information channels. Authorities must provide reliable information sources within this era of information warfare.

One of the core argument of this research may be the reinterpretation of the phenomena; religious populism, stigmatization, dehumanization, sterilization and hate crimes, which may allow us to construct a hypothesis that emphasize the link and connectedness of these phenomena. Religious populism may create genocides or it can just create some basic forms of dehumanization. Whereas stigmatization may create social sterilization policies or it can just create some basic forms of discriminations. But the core suggestion is raising awareness on the possible links, connectedness and grave consequences of these phenomena which are mostly underestimated by contemporary politicians and religious leaders.

On the other hand, the research provided a contemporary outlook of the Muslims living in Russia within a brief human rights perspective. The database searches and empirical evidences illustrate various interesting facts about religious populism or human rights regarding these societies. The history of interactions between Russian government and its Muslim communities may be interpreted as bitter hard power struggles or inclusive soft power policies. The interesting research findings provided by this research are presented to the readers’ interpretations.

In conclusion, this research suggested the links and possible interconnectedness of phenomena; religious populism, stigmatization, dehumanization and hate crimes. This argument will necessitate raising awareness on the crucial importance each of these phenomena and the suggestion of developing relevant preventive poli-

cies, designed by considering this connectedness and the importance of strategic communication strategies.

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# MEDIAD

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## Dini Populizm, Damgalama, İnsandıřılařtırma ve Nefret Suçlarının Muhtemel Baęlantılılıkları ve Rusya'daki Müslümanlar Üzerine Bir Deęerlendirme

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### Geniřletilmiş Özet

Ayrımcılık, ötekileřtirme ve nefret suçları gibi insan hakları ihlallerinin insanlıęın varoluřundan itibaren süregelmekte olduęu; ancak artan iletiřim imkânları, geliřen stratejiler ve yoęunlařan çatıřmalarla artan göçler gibi nedenlerle çağımızda bu ihlallerin daha da fazla arttıęı veya bu ihlallerin daha da fazla farkına varıldıęı iddia edilebilir. Bu arařtırma, daha önce literatürde genellikle ayrı ayrı arařtırılan dini populizm, ayrımcılık, damgalama, baskı, insandıřılařtırma, nefret suçları, toplumsal arındırma ve etnik temizlik gibi kavramları bir arada incelemektedir.

Çalıřmanın konusu olan populizm, halk ve elitler arasındaki karřıtlık olarak tanımlanmaktayken Kirk Hawkins, populizmin siyasi çatıřmalara ikili ahlaki boyut atfeden bir söylem biçimi olduęunu iddia eder. Kazin ise 'biz' ve 'onlar' arasındaki ikicilięi Amerikan populizmi olarak tanımlar. Populizm çeřitli formlara evrimleřmiř olup Ernesto Laclau populizmi oluřturan 'biz' ve 'onlar' söyleminin belirli bir anlamının olmadıęını, toplumsal řartlara baęlı olarak deęiřken muhtevalar içerebileceęini, bu kategorileřtirmenin ise çeřitli sınıflandırma ve tanılama süreçleriyle anlamlandırıldıęını iddia etmiřtir. Martin Carillo ise populist uygulamaların siyasetçilerce sık bařvurulan bir yöntem olmasını; siyasi öznelerin görece istikrarlı bir toplumsal düzende tutulmaları ve tanzim edilmeleri konusunda mevcut toplumsal ve siyasi kurumların bařarısız olmasına baęlar.

Bu çalıřmadaki veriler deęerlendirildięinde; populizm uygulamalarıyla inřa edilen çeřitli 'biz' ve 'onlar' karřıtlıklarıyla algı, anlayıř, bilinç güdümlenmeleri ile kitlerinin kalplerinin kazanılması amaçlanabildięi iddia edilebilir. Dięer taraftan ayrımcılık, kutuplařma, ayrıřma ve düşmanlařmaya yol açaabilir. Populizm 11 Eylöl saldırıları sonrası, Alston'un ifade ettięine benzer řekilde korku, iritasyon, güvenlik kaygıları ile nefret ve yabancı düşmanlıęı unsurlarını içerebilir. Carillo'nun da ifade ettięi üzere günümüzde din ve siyaset iliřkisi, populizm için çok cazip ve kabul gören bir konudur.

Ionut Apahideanu'nun Avrupadaki din populizmi ile ilgili tespitleri din populizmine gösterilen güncel raębet hakkında özet bir bilgi sunabilir. Din populizmi ile oluřturulmaya çalıřılan algı örnekleri olarak; yerli Hıristiyan topluluęunun Müslümanlarca 'iřgal' edilmesi tasviri, İslam'ın düşmanca, saldırgan ve gericici olarak tasviri, Avrupa elitlerinin Müslüman göçüne göz yummaları sebebiyle yozlařmış oldukları tasviri, Müslümanların dini haklarının kısıtlanması, camii inřalarının ve bařörtüsünün yasaklanması talepleri gösterilebilir.

Dini yaftalama veya damgalama ise dięer bir hak ihlali çeřitidir. Örneęin Almanya ve Norveç'te Jonas Kunst ve meslektařlarınca yapılan arařtırma sonucunda; Müslüman azınlıkların damgalama sonucu içerisinde yařadıkları toplumun bir üyesi olmakla Müslüman olmak arasında, uyumsuzluk algısı içerisinde kaldıklarına deęinilmiřtir. Britanya'da gerçekeřtirilen bir eylemde ise Müslüman kadınlar toplum içinde kendilerine

müteakip zamanlarda 'terörist' şeklinde hitap edilmesi veya fiziksel saldırılarda bulunulmasına dikkat çekmeye çalışmıştır.

Burada medyanın önemi ortaya çıkmaktadır. Korku tellallığı yapan medya, dini damgalamaya hizmet edebilmektedir. Kunst ve meslektaşlarının da belirttiği üzere korku, sakınma ve uzak durmaya yol açar, uzak durma ise kişilerin önyargılar ve klişelerle mücadelesini önler. Dini tahammülsüzlüğün azaltılması için farklı düşünce grupları arasında iletişimin özendirilmesi önerilir.

Medya, uluslararası anlaşmalarda yasaklanmasına rağmen bazı durumlarda nefret söyleminin yayılmasında da rol oynar. Örneğin 1994 Ruanda soykırımında medya, etnik gruplar olan Tutsi'lerin yanı sıra ılımlı Hutu'lar karşıtı etnik nefret ve vahşeti destekleyip kışkırtmıştır.

Burada sorulması gereken asıl soru medya ve iletişim kanallarını kimin yönlendirdiği veya kontrol ettiği olabilir. Çünkü medya kanalları vasıtasıyla popülizm söylemleri, hedef kitlelerin algılarını ve perspektiflerini şekillendirebilir.

Çalışmada ele alınan nefret suçları ise; ırk, cinsiyet, din gibi önyargılar temelinde gerçekleştirildiği belirlenen cinayet, tecavüz, kundaklama, eşya yağmalama ve vandallık gibi suçları ifade etmektedir.

Çalışmada literatür araştırmasının yanı sıra anlatı araştırmasına da kısaca yer verilmiştir. Yapılan literatür taramasından edinilen bilimsel veriler dikkate alındığında araştırma konusu kavramlar arasında bağlantılılık olabileceği iddia edilmektedir. Örneğin dini popülizm sonucu etnik temizlik gibi çok vahim sonuçlar doğabileceği gibi görece daha hafif ihlal olarak nitelenebilecek ayrımcılık da doğabilir. Nefret suçlarının kökeninde damgalama olabileceği gibi popülist 'biz' ve 'onlar' anlatıları veya tarihsel damgalamalar da rol oynayabilir. Bu çalışmada; popülist söylemler, damgalayıcı tarih anlatımları ve insan hakları ihlal edilen mağdurların deneyim anlatılarına da kısaca yer verilmiştir. Bu veriler doğrultusunda literatürde daha ziyade ayrı ayrı ele alınan ayrımcılık, dini popülizm, damgalama gibi yukarıda değinilen hususların, çeşitli seviye ve bağlamlarda karşılıklı etkileşimlerinin, bağlantılılıklarının ve hatta kimi zaman sebep-sonuç ilişkilerinin bulunduğu iddia edilmektedir. Bu bağlantılılık sebebiyle görece daha ağır bir hak ihlali olarak kabul edilebilecek etnik temizlik gibi bir suç, bu suçla bağlantılı sebep-sonuç ilişkisi içindeki görece daha hafif bir hak ihlali sayılabilecek insandışılaştırma, damgalama ve hatta dini popülizmi etnik temizlik kadar vahim bir suç yapabilecektir. Bu sebeple günümüzde iletişim araçları ve stratejileriyle yoğunlukla kullanımına şahit olunan en basit popülizm söylemleri, dini popülizm söylemleri, ayrımcılık ve damgalama gibi ihlallerin çok daha vahim etkileri olabileceği değerlendirilerek bu politikaların incelenip tedbir alınmasına çok daha fazla önem verilmesi gerektiği iddia edilebilir.

Bu çalışmanın diğer bir amacı da Rusya'da yaşayan Müslümanlara yönelik hak ihlalleri iddialarının kısaca ele alınmasıdır. Bu amaçla tarihi sosyolojik temel ve arka plan araştırması, güncel yasal hak ve yükümlülüklerinin incelenmesi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Hak ihlalleri olarak nitelenebilecek çeşitli verilerin yanı sıra, Rusya'daki Müslümanların eşit haklara sahip olduğuna delil oluşturabilecek çeşitli araştırma bulguları sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dini Popülizm, Damgalama, Nefret Suçları, Medya Yanıltmaları, İslamofobi