

Title—The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History
Author—Rita Chin
Year—2017

Categories: Political, Migration, Europe
Place: Western Europe (Britain, France, & Germany)
Time: 1945-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Rita Chin's *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History* seeks to provide historical context to the modern debates within Europe regarding the growing anger toward migrant communities. Chin notes how the question of how European nationals deal with racial and ethnic diversity has become increasingly inescapable, especially in the post 9/11 climate and exacerbated by the rise of homegrown terrorist acts since 2010. Chin looks primarily at the period since the end of World War II and crafts a comparative study between the major Western European powers, with a focus on Germany, Britain, and France. Chin reveals there was a growing intensity to identify immigrants as bearers of alien cultures, rendering them 'inassimilable' to the nation that spread across Western Europe in the 1980s. In particular, she highlights the headscarf affair in France and the Rushdie affair in Britain, both in 1989, as the culmination of this growing belief. Chin argues that these events drew attention to Islam as the common cultural and religious tradition among the various immigrant groups across the continent. Chin asks the question: how did the growing preoccupation with religion as a central marker of ethnic and racial difference interlink with concerns about gender relations and sexuality? Specifically, she underscores how Europeans wondered whether tolerating Muslim cultural practices required them to ignore what was perceived as gender discrimination.

Chin chooses to focus on the Rushdie affair in Britain and the headscarf affair in France as case studies to represent the growing backlash against European multiculturalism. She argues Rushdie affair in 1989 served as the catalyst for stern public statements about the proper way to be British. She reveals how the affair seemed to pit immigrants, Muslim immigrants in particular, against the national 'values.' Chin explores how British Muslims protested against the novel and made calls for its banning using the language of European liberalism and democratic principles. She claims that the British response to the affair helped to establish new forms of cultural nationalism. Chin underscores that the affair served as the moment for many Europeans when Muslim immigrants merged into a single, distinctive category. Her discussion of the headscarf affair also emphasizes the conflation of all Muslim migrants into a monolithic, inassimilable group, but with a stronger focus on questions of gender and sexuality.

Chin claims the growing emphasis on culture pushed political struggle toward the recognition and preservation of difference. She notes that a crucial strategy in arguing for the failure of multiculturalism is the treatment of Muslims as a monolithic group. Chin posits that for European nations to fully live up to their democratic principles, they must embrace a radical reorientation in their patterns of collective understanding and self-representation.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Economic boom in the immediate postwar period allowed the growing migrant populations to go largely unnoticed by European states, until oil crash in 1973
- Dominant image of European homogeneity until the postwar period is largely a myth