

**Title—How the Workers Became Muslims: Immigration, Culture, and Hegemonic Transformation in Europe**

**Author—Ferruh Yilmaz**

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Categories: Islam, Migration, Integration, Culture, Politics

Place: Denmark

Time: 1945-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Yilmaz's book is focused on the discourse around Muslim immigrants in Denmark. Specifically, he is concerned with the shift from identifying immigrants with their home nation state to referring to all immigrants as 'Muslims.' He tells a story about the culturalization of discourse and the production of Muslim immigrants as a distinct ontology that displaced the old hegemonic structure in Denmark. The book is about Denmark, but he encourages it to be seen as a case study that can be used to understand the dynamics and state of European public discourse(s) on European national identity and immigration. He notes how Europe has been steadily moving to the right over the question of Muslim immigration. Yilmaz argues the right's ability to adopt a successful hegemonic strategy has led to the reconfiguration of the internal fault lines in European societies. He asserts that the mainstream Left's adoption of neoliberal orthodoxies created a political void where discontent with the system was no longer represented in the mainstream political system. His main argument is that the new immigrants were relabeled as 'Muslims' after the 1980s as a result of political articulation—they did not arrive as Muslims, nor did many identify as such. Although not all non-Western immigrants are Muslims, the word 'immigrant' would automatically trigger 'Muslim' in the minds of Danes. This discourse relies on the assumption that earlier European immigrants were culturally similar and were easily assimilated into host societies, whereas the new non-Western, especially Muslim, immigrants with their essentially different culture threatened the core values of Western liberal democracies.

The focus is not on the racist discrimination of immigrants, but more generally on how the culture, understood as a totality of traditions, norms, and values, is used to ontologize immigrants; an ontologization that reshapes the social horizon and realigns various social and political groups in relation to a new ontological structure of society. He posits that the unending problems with Muslim immigrants creates an impression of impending danger and the presentation of Muslim immigrants as an impending cultural threat creates a sense of cultural sameness across the sociopolitical spectrum vis a vis Muslims. His data comes primarily from two major sources: newspaper articles from five Danish newspapers from the September to November period of 1984, 1986, and 1987 and qualitative interviews conducted in the summer of 2001 with thirty-nine ethnic Danes. He seeks to analyze how the political discourse in Denmark moved to the right via immigration questions in less than three decades. A main theme of the book is that the repeated crises around Muslims are used to rally people from different political and social groups around some 'core values' that 'unite us.' The recasting of immigrant worker as Muslim immigrant shifted the terrain for political struggle from economy to culture, which has subsequently pushed the political discourse to the right.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- The political Right's ability to adopt a successful hegemonic strategy has led to the reconfiguration of the internal fault lines in European societies
- The new immigrants were relabeled as 'Muslims' after the 1980s as a result of political articulation in Denmark
- It is the culturalization of discourse that turns a right into a cultural value