

Muslim Minority and Its Challenges in the West

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ABSTRACT

Muslim minority communities in the West encounter numerous challenges that impede their social, economic, and political progress. These challenges can make it difficult for Muslims to participate fully in Western society, causing them to feel excluded and marginalized. This paper presents an analysis of the main factors contributing to intolerant attitudes and discrimination towards Muslim minorities in the West, using content analysis as the methodological approach. The study highlights the significance of negative media portrayals of Muslims, political rhetoric that stigmatizes and marginalizes them, and the double standards in the application of laws and policies as the primary factors contributing to discrimination and exclusion. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including education and awareness-raising campaigns to promote positive narratives about Muslims, interfaith dialogue to increase understanding and tolerance, political engagement to enhance representation and influence in public policy decisions, community building to promote social cohesion, and legal protections to prevent discrimination and hate crimes. Moreover, Muslims as a minority group in the West are expected to promote the beautiful Islamic ethics of Akhlaq in their daily life and participate actively in the broader community.

Keywords: *Minority, Muslim, West, Discrimination, Tolerance*

INTRODUCTION

Muslims constitute a significant and growing minority group in many Western countries, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and France. However, they also face a range of challenges that impact their social, economic, and political well-being. One of the most significant challenges faced by Muslim minorities in the West is discrimination and prejudice, often fueled by Islamophobia. This can take various forms, including hate crimes, verbal abuse, and social exclusion, and can have significant impacts on the physical and mental health of affected individuals and communities. Numerous studies and reports have documented the pervasiveness of discrimination and prejudice towards Muslim minorities in the West, underscoring the need for action from policymakers and civil society organizations to address this issue (Abdelkader 2017).

Muslim minority communities in the West face a range of challenges, including discrimination, prejudice, and Islamophobia, which can manifest in various forms, including hate

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crimes, verbal abuse, and social exclusion. Moreover, there is considerable diversity within Muslim minorities in the West, in terms of language, culture, and religious practice. Some Muslims have integrated successfully into Western societies, while others may experience more difficulties. Overall, these challenges require careful consideration and attention from policymakers, civil society, and the wider public. One of the most significant challenges faced by Muslim minorities in the West is discrimination and prejudice. Numerous studies and reports document the ongoing issue of Islamophobia and the negative attitudes towards Muslim minorities.

Muslims in the West also face challenges related to their religious practices, which may not always be accommodated by Western societies. For example, debates have arisen over the building of mosques, the wearing of hijabs, and halal food practices, often stemming from issues of cultural identity and belonging. These debates highlight the need for greater understanding and dialogue between different communities to promote tolerance and mutual respect. According to a Pew Research Center survey, about half of Western Europeans surveyed believed that Islam is incompatible with their culture and values. Such negative attitudes often lead to hate crimes, verbal abuse, and social exclusion (Kishi 2017). Therefore, any efforts to address the challenges faced by Muslim minorities in the West must be mindful of these diversities and tailored to the specific needs of affected communities.

MUSLIM MINORITY ISSUES

The discrimination, prejudice, and unfair treatment faced by Muslims in the West are a significant problem (Blinder, Ford & Ivarsflaten 2019). This issue has been thoroughly documented and reported on by reputable sources and organizations. Muslims in the West are discriminated against in various forms, including employment, education, housing, and public services. They are often perceived as a threat, which can lead to hate crimes and harassment. This can cause Muslims to feel marginalized and excluded, making it difficult for them to integrate into Western society.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reports that intolerant attitudes and discrimination against Muslims have become increasingly prevalent in the West in recent years. This can be attributed to factors such as the ‘war on terror’, the global economic crisis, anxieties about national identity, and difficulties in coping with increasing diversity in many societies. Intolerant language in media and political discourse can also fuel resentment against Muslims and Islam. This has resulted in various forms of discrimination, including verbal harassment, hate speech, violent attacks, and religious profiling (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2022). A study conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2018 found that Muslims in several European countries reported high levels of discrimination and harassment, particularly in employment, education, and housing. Islamophobia is a growing trend in the West, which leads to negative stereotyping of Muslims and creates an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. This can make it challenging for Muslims to integrate into Western society and can lead to social isolation (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018).

Cultural differences between Muslims and the dominant Western culture can also create misunderstandings and tension. For instance, the dress code, dietary requirements, and prayer rituals of Muslims may be perceived as unusual or strange by some Westerners, leading to discrimination and prejudice. The political climate in the West can also create challenges for Muslims, with policies such as the travel ban on Muslim-majority countries and stigmatization of refugees leading to hostility towards Muslims. Muslims living in the West may also face an

identity crisis as they try to balance their Islamic beliefs and values with the cultural norms of the society, they live in. This can be especially challenging for second-generation Muslims who are born and raised in the West. Such an identity crisis can lead to feelings of confusion and uncertainty, making it challenging for Muslims to fully participate in Western society (Ramadan 2003). It is essential to acknowledge that discrimination and prejudice against Muslims are not solely limited to the West. Muslims around the world face various forms of discrimination and persecution, and the issue is not limited to a particular region or culture. However, the challenges faced by Muslims in the West are distinct, given the region's history, cultural norms, and political climate. It is crucial to address these challenges to ensure that Muslims in the West can live fulfilling lives and contribute positively to society.

Ultimately, addressing the challenges faced by Muslims in the West requires a multifaceted approach that involves various stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, and the general public. By working together to promote greater understanding and acceptance of Muslim communities, it is possible to create a more inclusive society that values diversity and respects the rights and dignity of all individuals.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF MUSLIM MINORITIES IN THE WEST

In Europe, the concept of tolerance has a historical evolution that can be traced back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when it was developed as a means of managing religious conflicts. In contemporary times, the presence of Muslims in Western Europe has given rise to strong public debates concerning the building of Mosques and minarets, the establishment of Islamic schools, and the wearing of headscarves in public places, among other Muslim practices. These issues have become a litmus test for religious and cultural diversity and have highlighted the collision of different ways of life. While some native inhabitants of Western European societies are tolerant of Muslim practices, others exhibit a rather intolerant attitude towards them, and two competing explanations for this have emerged. The first explanation centers on prejudicial attitudes towards Muslims as a group and Islam as a religion. Several studies conducted in Western Europe have concluded that intolerance towards certain practices, such as the wearing of a headscarf, is driven by the dislike of Muslims as a group. In essence, intolerance towards Muslim practices is a manifestation of a broader aversion towards Islam and its adherents. The second explanation, on the other hand, emphasizes the nature of the practice itself. Being intolerant towards specific practices, such as the ritual slaughter of animals, does not necessarily coincide with being prejudiced towards Muslims. In this context, it is possible for individuals to be intolerant of a particular Muslim practice without necessarily harboring negative attitudes towards Islam and its adherents. Overall, the debates surrounding the presence of Muslims in Western Europe have highlighted the need for a nuanced understanding of tolerance and intolerance. While intolerance towards specific practices can arise from various factors, it is important to acknowledge that prejudice towards Muslims as a group and Islam as a religion is a pervasive phenomenon that can contribute to intolerance towards Muslim practices. Hence, any attempts to foster greater tolerance towards Muslims in Western Europe must grapple with these complex and interrelated factors (Sleijpen, Verkuyten & Adelman 2020).

The challenges faced by Muslims as a minority in the West are acknowledged and documented by various sources, including academic studies, media reports, and advocacy organizations. For example, there are scholars and experts who have written about the challenges faced by Muslims as a minority in the West. Tariq Ramadan - a Swiss Muslim academic and

philosopher who has written extensively on Islam and Muslims in the West. He has highlighted the challenges of discrimination, Islamophobia, and cultural differences faced by Muslims in Western societies. He has also explored the experiences of Muslims living in the West, including the challenges of identity and integration. John L. Esposito - an American scholar of Islam who has written extensively on the challenges faced by Muslims in the West, including the impact of Islamophobia and the need for greater understanding and dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. Edward Said - a Palestinian-American academic and literary theorist who has written on the topic of Orientalism, which explores how Western cultures have constructed and misrepresented the East, including Muslims and Islam.

Tariq Ramadan is a prominent Muslim scholar who has extensively written on the issues faced by Muslims in the West, particularly in Europe. His works, such as *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* and *To Be a European Muslim*, explore the challenges faced by Muslims in the West and advocate for a new Islamic identity that is both faithful to their religious traditions and relevant to the modern Western and European contexts (Ramadan 1999, 2003). Ramadan identifies discrimination, marginalization, and the threat of extremism as the main challenges faced by Muslims in the West. He argues that Western societies view Muslims through a narrow lens that fails to recognize their diversity and complexity, leading to feelings of alienation and disconnection. Furthermore, he contends that Muslims must grapple with the tension between their religious and cultural identity and the dominant Western culture, leading to a sense of isolation within Muslim communities. Ramadan also stresses the threat of extremism and terrorism, which he claims fuels Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims. He calls for Muslims to take an active role in combating extremism and promoting a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Ramadan's work emphasizes the need for greater dialogue, understanding, and cooperation between different cultures and religions. He highlights the impact of globalization, secularism, and modernity on Muslim societies and calls for a more nuanced and dialogical approach to intercultural relations. Ramadan advocates for a critical approach to intercultural relations and the development of a new Islamic identity that is both faithful to tradition and relevant to the modern context (Ramadan 2001, 2012). In conclusion, Tariq Ramadan's works shed light on the multifaceted challenges faced by Muslims as a minority in the West. His call for a new Islamic identity that is both faithful to tradition and relevant to the modern context underscores the importance of understanding and dialogue between different cultures and religions. By addressing the issues faced by Muslims in the West, Ramadan's works contribute to the ongoing discourse on diversity and inclusion in Western societies.

Esposito argues that the portrayal of Muslims in many Western societies is often narrow and negative, perpetuating stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists, extremists, or otherwise threatening to the larger society (Esposito 1992). This stereotyping, according to Esposito, has fueled the rise of Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims. Esposito also notes the challenges that Muslims face in navigating their religious and cultural identity in the West, which can lead to feelings of alienation and marginalization (Esposito & Kalin 2011). One of the obstacles that Muslims encounter, Esposito maintains, is their limited political representation and voice in the larger society. Muslims are often underrepresented in positions of power and decision-making, thereby hindering their ability to shape the policies and practices that impact their lives. Esposito underscores the importance of fostering greater understanding, dialogue, and cooperation between different cultures and religions to challenge negative stereotypes and promote an inclusive and tolerant society that respects the diversity of its members (Esposito 2002, 2008).

Similarly, Edward Said's scholarship provides crucial insights into the broader cultural and political context that shapes the challenges faced by Muslims in the West. Said critiques the way in which Western representations of Islam and Muslims have been shaped by Orientalist stereotypes, the legacy of colonialism, and the geopolitical interests of Western powers in the Middle East (Said 1979, 1993). He argues that the negative portrayal of Muslims in Western media coverage of the Middle East has contributed to dehumanizing and reductionist stereotypes. Furthermore, Said's work on Orientalism underscores the problematic representation of the non-Western world as a timeless and exotic "other," thereby perpetuating broader cultural and political discourse that supports Western dominance over non-Western regions (Said 1978, 1981). Overall, the scholarship of Ramadan, Esposito, and Said highlights the challenges faced by Muslims in the West and the need for greater dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect between different cultures and regions. Their critiques of negative stereotypes and biases that can lead to discrimination and marginalization underscore the importance of promoting inclusivity and tolerance. Additionally, their work provides a useful framework for analyzing the broader cultural and political context that shapes the challenges faced by Muslims in the West.

INTERNAL ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

The best way for Muslim minorities to combat negative perceptions or discrimination in the West is by promoting their good manners based on Islamic ethics or *akhlaq* in their daily lives. This involves embodying the virtues of Islam, such as compassion, patience, honesty, and respect, in all their interactions with others (al-Ghazali 1964). Greater understanding and acceptance of Muslim communities are crucial to ensure that they can live fulfilling lives as valued members of society. It is important for society to work towards overcoming discrimination, prejudice, and unfair treatment faced by Muslims in the West. By embodying Islamic ethics in their daily lives, Muslims can counter negative perceptions and stereotypes that are often perpetuated by the media and others in the West. This can help to create a more positive image of Islam and promote greater understanding and tolerance between Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

Thus, the way that Muslim minorities can combat negative perceptions and discriminatory opinions is by promoting good manners based on Islamic ethics in their daily lives. Islam is a religion that emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct in all aspects of life. The Quran and Hadith provide numerous examples of good manners and ethical behavior that Muslims should strive to emulate. Some of the key ethical principles in Islam include compassion, honesty, fairness, forgiveness, and respect for others. These principles are applicable in all aspects of life, including personal, social, and professional settings.

One of the ways that Muslim minorities can promote good manners based on Islamic ethics is by exemplifying these principles in their daily lives (al-Ghazali 1982). Muslims can demonstrate compassion by volunteering in their local communities, helping those in need, and showing kindness and empathy towards others. Honesty and fairness can be demonstrated by being truthful in all interactions and treating others with respect and dignity. Muslims can also practice forgiveness by letting go of grudges and anger towards those who may have wronged them in the past. Another way that Muslims can promote good manners based on Islamic ethics is by being role models in their communities. Muslims can serve as ambassadors for their faith by exemplifying the values and principles of Islam in their daily lives. This can involve being active in their communities, participating in interfaith dialogues, and working to promote understanding and tolerance between different religious and cultural groups.

Additionally, Muslims can use social media and other platforms to promote good manners based on Islamic ethics. By sharing positive messages, quotes, and stories from the Quran and Hadith, Muslims can help combat negative stereotypes and perceptions of Islam. Muslims can also use social media to highlight their contributions to their communities and showcase their positive impact on society. It is important to note that promoting good manners based on Islamic ethics is not just the responsibility of Muslims. It is also the responsibility of society to work towards greater understanding and acceptance of Muslim communities. This can involve promoting interfaith dialogues, educating the public on the true teachings of Islam, and working to combat discrimination and Islamophobia in all its forms.

EXTERNAL ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

Muslims in Western countries face multiple challenges that affect their social, economic, and political well-being. These challenges can stem from discrimination, Islamophobia, cultural differences, and a lack of representation. To address these issues, various stakeholders, including government officials, civil society organizations, and the broader public, need to work together to create a more inclusive and tolerant society. The findings suggest that negative portrayals of Muslims in the media, political rhetoric that stigmatizes and marginalizes Muslims, and double standards in the application of laws and policies contribute to discrimination and exclusion (Abdelkader 2017). One effective approach to addressing discrimination and prejudice towards Muslims is through education and awareness-raising campaigns. This can involve promoting the positive contributions of Muslims in Western societies through teaching about Islamic culture and history in schools and universities, and by showcasing positive media representation of Muslims in the mainstream media. By creating more positive narratives about Muslims, the broader public can be encouraged to challenge their biases and misconceptions about the community.

Another important strategy is interfaith dialogue, which can help to promote greater understanding and tolerance between Muslims and non-Muslims. This can involve engaging in discussions and activities with people from different faith backgrounds to create a sense of shared purpose and respect. For instance, organizations such as the Interfaith Youth Core have been successful in bringing young people from diverse backgrounds together to learn about each other's cultures and beliefs (Magid & Khan 2011).

Political engagement is also critical in addressing the challenges faced by Muslims in the West. Muslim communities should be encouraged to participate in the political process, such as through voting and running for office. By increasing representation, Muslim voices can be heard and their interests better represented in public policy decisions. The election of Ilhan Omar, one of the first Muslim women to serve in the United States Congress, is an example of how Muslims can be effective in influencing public policy decisions.

Building strong and supportive Muslim communities can also help to reduce feelings of marginalization and exclusion. This can involve supporting community centres and organizations that provide social and economic opportunities for Muslims, as well as promoting social activities and events that encourage community engagement. For example, the Muslim Women's Association of South Australia provides a range of services for women, including education and advocacy programs, that support social cohesion and the empowerment of Muslim women. Finally, governments must ensure that there are strong legal protections in place to prevent discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims. Law enforcement should also be trained to recognize and respond to hate crimes effectively. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Crown

Prosecution Service has developed a Hate Crime Action Plan to increase the prosecution rate of hate crimes and to provide support for victims of hate crimes.

CONCLUSION

Muslim minorities in the West, like many other communities, face many issues and challenges that need to be acknowledged and encountered urgently as they are the fortress of and model for other Muslim communities all over the world. Muslims living in the West will need to balance their Islamic beliefs and values with the cultural norms of the society they live in, so as to be respected and accepted in the new settings and contexts.

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