


Global Islam: A Sociological Study of Muslim Integration and the Challenges of Multiculturalism in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Objective: In the 21st century, globalization, migration, and multiculturalism have shaped the experiences of Muslim minorities in Western societies. This study explores the sociological aspects of Muslim integration, focusing on the challenges and opportunities Muslim communities face in multicultural settings.

Methods and Materials: Using qualitative research methods, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), case studies, and key-informant interviews (KII) with 15 Muslim immigrants from the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Scotland.

Findings: The findings reveal key barriers to integration, including employment discrimination, restrictions on religious clothing, difficulties in securing housing, limited access to halal food, and workplace discrimination. Furthermore, Islamophobia and negative media portrayals exacerbate societal tensions, leading to identity crises among young Muslims.

Conclusion: Despite these challenges, Muslim communities employ various coping mechanisms, such as interfaith dialogues, advocacy initiatives, and community-driven support systems.

Keywords: Muslim minorities, integration, multiculturalism, Islamophobia, qualitative research

1 Introduction

Globalization, migration, and variety are shaping a challenging terrain that the 21st-century Muslim world, or Ummah, is crossing. Islam's presence in different cultural, ethnic, and national settings provides particular experiences and difficulties of assimilation and identity, since it has more than a billion followers globally. Historically, Islam has shown incredible cultural absorption and adaptability. Other societies have shaped Islamic culture

from early conquests in Persia and the Byzantine Empire to its influence on Africa, Europe, and Asia. This vibrant interaction has spread Islam all around and enhanced Islamic heritage.

Recent studies have shown the double influence of globalization on Muslim minorities—both positive and detrimental. Though it encourages stereotyping and monitoring, especially in Western countries, it also supports transnational Islamic networks and improves advocacy via digital platforms (Ahmed & Cesari, 2020; Ali, 2021). The

transfer of the Muslim population to Western countries has sparked debate on integration, diversity, and identity negotiation. While preserving their religious and cultural identity, Muslim communities may find themselves adhering to present societal norms in host countries. Much research emphasizing the advantages of intercultural interactions and the growing social conflicts has centered on this contradiction (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017).

A major source of worry is the media's portrayal, which shapes public views of Islam and Muslims. According to Ahmed and Matthes's (2017) meta-analysis, Western media usually portrays Muslims from a security perspective, therefore marginalizing stories from Muslim-majority nations and supporting negative stereotypes (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). Such portrayals aggravate the more common trend of Islamophobia—a problem aggravated by political rhetoric, false information, and prejudiced laws. Bayrakli and Hafez (2022) see a worldwide rise in Islamophobic events, which particularly harm Muslim young people socially and psychologically (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2022).

Structural inequalities make integration even more difficult. 2024 research by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) found that more than half of Muslims (47%) said they had suffered racial discrimination, up from 39% in 2016. The results illustrate the issues Foner and Alba (2021) underlined, who contend that although cultural variety is recognized, meaningful integration depends on addressing ongoing inequalities (Foner & Alba, 2021). Khan et al. (2023) highlight ongoing school inequalities and assist curricular changes, including inclusive cultural and religious stories (Khan et al., 2023).

Many multicultural countries still promote diversity and inclusion despite these challenges. Most people in the United Kingdom enjoy their multi-ethnic society; hence, the present national mood favors multiculturalism (Le, 2024). Research by Malik and Hamid (2023) emphasizes grassroots projects, such as interfaith conversations and community involvement programs, as ways to foster social cohesion and combat discrimination (Malik & Hamid, 2023).

Modern literature criticizes the shortcomings of multicultural programs, especially when they use symbolic rather than structural strategies. According to Ahmed et al. (2022), tokenism could overlook more profound exclusion (Ahmed et al., 2022). Especially for Muslim women, many policy frameworks still lack research on the nexus of race, religion, and gender (Bano, 2023). Moreover, the part of populist politics in reducing diversity has attracted increased

focus as academics like Jones and Dawkins (2022) show how political discourse usually depicts Muslims as a danger to liberal democratic values (Jones & Dawkins, 2022).

An important field of study is second-generation Muslims and Muslim adolescents who struggle with cultural negotiation, racial profiling, and identity dualism. Patel and Siddiqui's (2022) research shows how people mix Islamic values with modern society standards, utilizing social media, which they use as both a weapon for empowerment and a platform susceptible to extremist influences (Patel & Siddiqui, 2022). This emphasizes the need for better knowledge of young people's agency in the larger integration and identity development framework.

In the internet age, transnational Islamic groups' power has changed. Social media channels are stages for progressive and conservative ideas (Ahmad & Riaz, 2021). Though these networks promote worldwide Muslim unity, they also raise questions regarding the spread of extremist stories (Yusuf, 2023). At the same time, local religious leaders are tackling local problems with help from worldwide networks, showing a complicated interaction between the global and the local in forming Muslim experiences (El-Amin, 2023).

Because of these many obstacles and changes, policy-oriented studies have started to encourage more inclusive and flexible frameworks. Elshamy and Rahman (2022) underline the need for cooperative policymaking, including governments, civil society, and Muslim communities. Among the main suggestions are media changes to fight negative stereotypes, culturally appropriate education, and the use of anti-discrimination legislation (Elshamy & Rahman, 2022). According to the Global Policy Institute (2023), effective integration models in Canada and New Zealand provide significant analysis relevant to many settings (Global Policy Institute, 2023).

This study explores the sociological aspects of Muslim integration in other nations by studying the obstacles and solutions to overcome them. By interacting with historical viewpoints, modern research, and current policy debates, it seeks to address the following study questions.

RQ:1 What key factors hinder Muslim immigrants' integration in Western societies?

RQ:2 What are the main challenges Muslim communities face in multicultural societies, and how do they address them?

2 Methods and Materials

The study was conducted by interviewing participants online. Qualitative methods were employed in the study. At first, 50 participants were selected using the random sampling method, and 15 were finally selected. Data saturation was ensured when determining the number of participants, so no new important information was left out. Four data collection techniques were used: In-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), case study, and key-informant interviews (KIIs).

A total of 15 direct interviews, two (2) focus group discussions, four (4) case studies, and one (1) key-informant interview were conducted in the study. A complete checklist was created before the data collection, and the data was collected with the consent of the participants. No personal information was collected in the study to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents. At first, initial contact was established with the participants, after which they provided specific schedules. Interviews were conducted online using Messenger, Imo, and Google Meet as scheduled, lasting 20-35 minutes. The participants in the study were from Muslim minority communities living in various countries in Europe and the United States. They included five in the United States, three in Switzerland, five in England, and two in Scotland. All were permanent citizens of that country, but all were born in Bangladesh and belonged to the Muslim community. The participants were between 20 and 60 years old. The study only included Muslim minorities in Europe and America, as these groups face particular social and cultural challenges, which were related to the main theme of the study.

There were some challenges in collecting the data. It was not easy to interview the participants on time. In some cases,

there were internet connectivity issues, which disrupted the interview process. Some respondents initially hesitated to discuss sensitive topics but were later reassured of their comfort. Furthermore, observing the participants' non-verbal expressions was impossible since the study was conducted online. The thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. All interviews were recorded and then turned into writing. Since all the participants spoke Bengali, all the data was translated into English and cross-checked to avoid mistakes. The coding was done manually for data analysis, so that the key points could be identified. After the coding, the relevant theme was determined and linked to the study's main question. In the initial phase, open coding was done, and in the next phase, the axial coding method was applied, which helped form the theme.

Ethics were followed to preserve the privacy and rights of the study participants. The personal details of the participants were not disclosed. Their consent was obtained after they were informed about the purpose of the study. In addition, the social and religious context of the Muslim minority was considered with sensitivity. Lastly, the highest transparency and academic standards were maintained in the collection and analysis of data, so that the research results are accurate and acceptable.

3 Findings and Results

From the study's first question (RQ:1 What are the key factors that hinder the integration of Muslim immigrants in Western societies?), seven themes emerged. The themes are as follows:

Figure 1

Key factors that hinder the integration of Muslim immigrants in Western societies

Employment Discrimination

Discrimination in Housing

Restriction on Religious Clothing and Symbols

Workplace Issue Regarding Prayer

Social Reaction to Wearing Hijab

Limitations of Halal Food

Islamophobia and Hate Crimes

3.1 Factors that Hinder the Integration of Muslim Immigrants in Western Societies

3.1.1 Theme 1: Discrimination in employment

Discrimination in employment is a common problem where individuals are subjected to injustice because of their religious identity or name. This is especially true in Muslim and Christian communities. In this, the person does not get a job despite his qualifications.

One respondent, who was looking for a job in Germany, said:

"If I apply with my real name, I do not get a call, but if I use a European name, I get a call! "

Another Muslim worker, who works for an organisation in the UK, said:

"I asked for a special place in the office for my prayers, but they said it would cause problems for others. I cannot pray again, which frustrates me. "

3.1.2 Theme 2: Discrimination in the Rent of Housing

Discrimination in renting houses is usually due to religious dress or ethnic identity. Some landlords or housing authorities decide based on religious identity when renting homes.

A Muslim woman who lives in France said:

"The first thing he asked me was, 'Am I wearing a hijab? And then there is no home! "

A Muslim woman said:

"Every time I went to look for a house, I was denied my hijab, which caused problems for my family. "

3.1.3 Theme 3: Restrictions on Religious Clothing and Symbols

Restrictions on religious clothing or symbols are a major problem for Muslims, especially in France, Germany, and other Western countries. In France, there are cases of individuals being deprived of their freedom by being banned from wearing the hijab or even religious symbols.

One woman said about the hijab ban in France:

"The government wants us to be united. However, our clothes are banned! What kind of policy is this? "

A Muslim woman in France said:

"The freedom to choose my clothes is my fundamental right, but when it is banned, I feel I am being prevented from being included in society. "

3.1.4 Theme 4: Problems with Prayer in the Workplace

Following religious practices, especially praying, can cause many obstacles in the workplace. Especially in Western countries, where religious freedom is recognized in the workplace, some organizations are not tolerant enough in this regard.

A Bangladeshi Muslim man, who works in the UK, said:

"I asked for a place to pray in the office, but they said it would cause problems for others. "

The institution creates discrimination that does not help him when he wants to observe customs.

A Muslim man said:

"My faith compels me to pray, but I cannot do it in the office, which lowers my morale and performance. "

3.1.5 Theme 5: Social Reactions to Wearing the Hijab

The social reaction to the wearing of the hijab is an important issue, where a Muslim woman with religious symbols faces different attitudes and reactions in society.

One respondent, a woman who lives in Sweden, said:

"When I wear the hijab, people look at me differently. I am lost, but I am losing myself! "

Another Muslim woman said:

"Wearing the hijab makes me valued differently in society, but it is part of my faith. "

3.1.6 Theme 6: Limitations of Halal food

Restriction of halal food is a common problem, especially in offices or public places, where social participation of Muslims is hindered due to alcohol and other non-Muslim foods.

One of the Canadians said:

"There is always a party. I do not participate, so I cannot build relationships with colleagues. "

3.1.7 Theme 7: Islamophobia and Hate Crimes

Islamophobia, which results from religious hatred and distrust towards Muslims, is a major social problem at present. It is a form of hate crime that undermines the safety and security of the Muslim community.

A Muslim who lives in the United States said:

"People think I am a terrorist. People make comments on the street. "

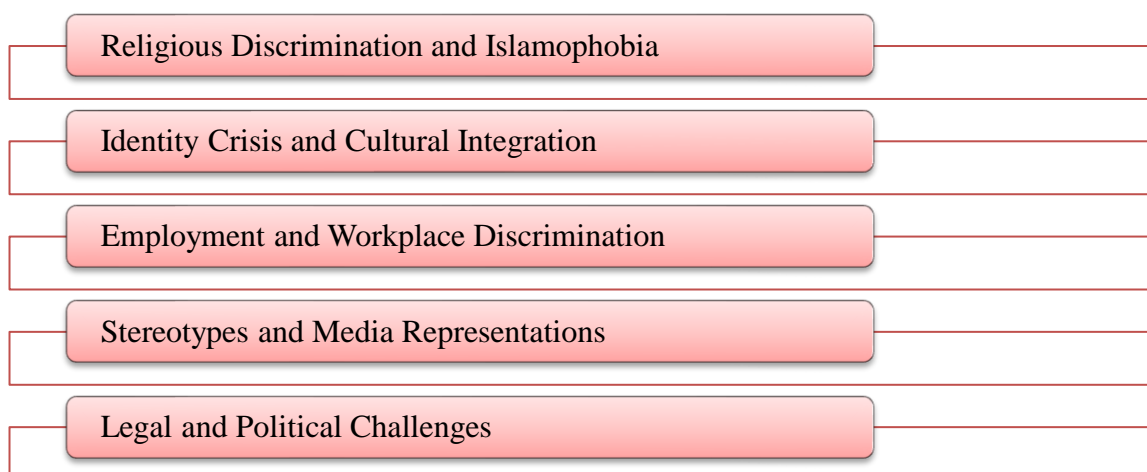
"Another respondent said,"

"I saw a Moroccan family, whose house had" Terrorist go back "written on the wall, saying: This is very sad for us because we are just following our faith, but we have to endure hatred as a punishment. "

Five themes emerged from the study's second question (RQ:2 What are the main challenges Muslim communities face in multicultural societies, and how do they address them?). The themes are as follows:

Figure 2

Main challenges Muslim communities face in multicultural societies



3.2 Religious Discrimination and Islamophobia: Experiences of Muslims

Islamophobia has emerged as a serious social problem in the contemporary world, especially among those who are ostensibly Muslim, who are often subjected to discrimination and negative attitudes. Studies have shown that Muslims in Western countries face verbal harassment, discrimination in the workplace, and social deprivation.

3.2.1 Theme 1: Religious Discrimination and Islamophobia

Negative attitudes towards Muslims have become particularly pronounced due to their dress and religious practices.

One respondent shared her experience: *"I wear a hijab, and that is why I am often targeted. One day, a woman on the subway told me, 'Go back to your country,' but I was born*

here!" She added, "Even some teachers at the university avoid my speech, and I feel like I have to prove myself over and over again compared to my non-Muslim classmates."

Another respondent shared a similar experience: "My manager told me I had to cut my beard to get a promotion. He says it looks 'amateurish' and makes customers uncomfortable." He continued, "It felt like I had to choose between my religion and career."

3.2.2 Theme 2: Identity Crisis and Cultural Integration

Dual identities pressure many young Muslims living in Western societies. On the one hand, they want to retain their religion and culture; on the other, they want to build solidarity with the mainstream society.

"Sometimes I feel like I am living two lives. At home, my parents want me to follow our traditions, but at university, I have to be different to fit in with my non-Muslim friends. I love my culture and religion, but I also want freedom. My family wants me to get married soon, but I want to focus more on my career. Balancing the two worlds is difficult."

3.2.3 Theme 3: Employment and Workplace Discrimination

Muslims are discriminated against in the job market and do not have adequate opportunities for religious practice in the workplace.

"I have found that if I use my middle name, which sounds Western, I get more interview calls." Another shared, *"My company refused to provide a separate prayer place. I was once reprimanded for praying during a break. I feel like I am not welcome here."*

3.2.4 Theme 4: Stereotypes and Media Representations

The media often presents Muslims in a negative light, giving rise to social prejudices.

"Most of the time, Muslims are portrayed as terrorists or oppressed women."

"Another's experience:" "When I post about my religion on social media, I get a lot of hateful comments calling me an extremist supporter."

3.2.5 Theme 5: Legal and Political Challenges

Discriminatory laws and policies are being made for Muslims in many Western countries, pushing them to the margins.

"Some European countries are banning the hijab and limiting the provision of halal food in schools."

"I was denied citizenship because I refused to shake hands with an officer," one man said. It was an amazing experience for me. "

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Previous studies have extensively documented how discrimination in employment, housing, religious practices, and social integration hinders Muslims' full participation in multicultural societies (Esses et al., 2017; Foner & Alba, 2008). This section critically discusses the key themes that emerged from the study about the existing body of research.

Discrimination in employment is a pervasive issue for Muslim immigrants, as illustrated in the study's findings. Respondents reported being denied job opportunities based on their religious names or dress, echoing findings from previous research (Lassalle & Raco, 2020). Studies have shown that employers often exhibit implicit biases against Muslim applicants, particularly those with Arabic or Islamic-sounding names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Moreover, the lack of accommodations for religious practices, such as designated prayer spaces, contributes to exclusion and marginalization (Ghumman & Ryan, 2013). Such workplace discrimination negatively impacts the well-being and economic stability of Muslim immigrants, reinforcing their disadvantaged position in society.

Housing discrimination against Muslim immigrants has been widely discussed in academic literature. The findings of this study align with the work of Verhaeghe et al. (2017), which suggests that Muslim applicants are more likely to be rejected for rental housing than non-Muslim applicants, particularly when they wear visible religious attire such as the hijab. This type of discrimination contributes to social segregation and limits the ability of Muslim immigrants to integrate into their host societies (Verhaeghe et al., 2017). The experiences shared by respondents in this study underscore the role of religious identity in shaping access to housing, reinforcing previous studies that highlight the intersectionality of race, religion, and socioeconomic status in determining housing opportunities (Hargreaves, 2016).

The restriction of religious clothing and symbols, particularly in countries like France and Germany, reflects ongoing debates about secularism and multiculturalism (Bowen, 2007)s. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that highlights the discriminatory nature of policies banning the hijab or other religious attire

(Joppke, 2009). While proponents of such policies argue that they promote secularism and social cohesion, they often disproportionately target Muslim women and limit their ability to participate in public life. The exclusionary effects of such policies contribute to the alienation and stigmatization of Muslim communities (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014).

Lamophobia and social prejudices remain significant barriers to the integration of Muslim immigrants. Respondents reported experiences of verbal harassment, stereotyping, and social exclusion, which align with previous studies on anti-Muslim sentiment in Western societies (Allen, 2010; Poynting & Mason, 2007). The media plays a crucial role in perpetuating negative stereotypes about Muslims, often associating them with extremism and terrorism (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). Such representations fuel public fear and hostility, making it difficult for Muslim immigrants to establish a sense of belonging in their host societies.

The findings of this study highlight the struggles of young Muslims in balancing their religious and cultural identities with the expectations of mainstream society. Previous research has documented how second-generation Muslim immigrants face unique challenges navigating dual identities (Zhou, 1997). They often experience pressure from their families to adhere to traditional cultural values while striving for social acceptance in Western societies. This dual identity conflict can lead to feelings of alienation and stress, as noted in studies on identity negotiation among Muslim youth (Goforth et al., 2014).

Authors' Contributions

Not applicable.

Declaration

None.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The author reports no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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