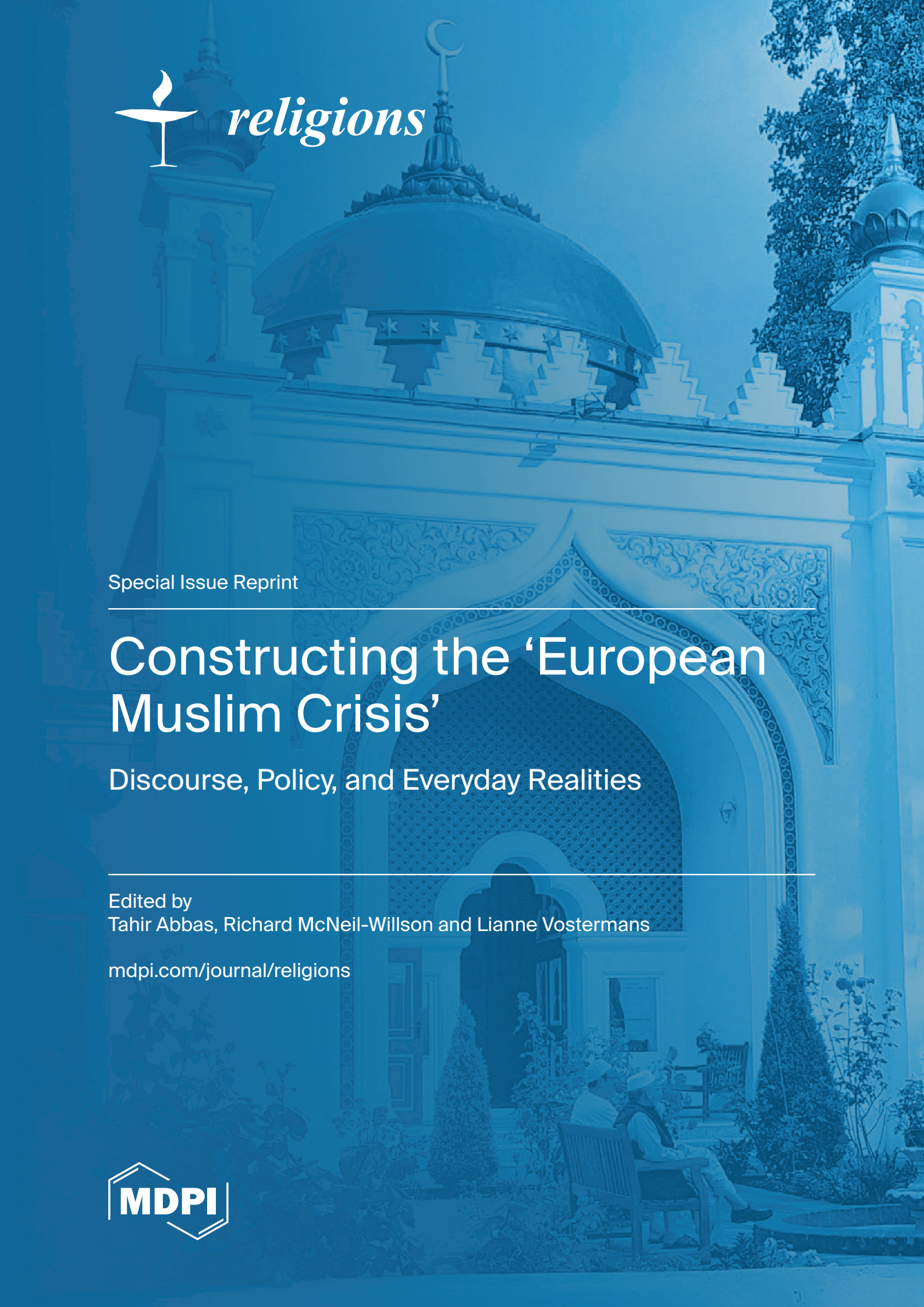


religions

Special Issue Reprint

Constructing the ‘European Muslim Crisis’

Discourse, Policy, and Everyday Realities

Edited by
Tahir Abbas, Richard McNeil-Willson and Lianne Vostermans

mdpi.com/journal/religions

MDPI

Constructing the 'European Muslim Crisis': Discourse, Policy, and Everyday Realities

Constructing the 'European Muslim Crisis': Discourse, Policy, and Everyday Realities

Guest Editors

Tahir Abbas
Richard McNeil-Willson
Lianne Vostermans

MDPI

Basel • Beijing • Wuhan • Barcelona • Belgrade • Novi Sad • Cluj • Manchester

Guest Editors

Tahir Abbas
School of Law and Social Sciences
Aston University
Birmingham
UK

Richard McNeil-Willson
School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures
University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh
UK

Lianne Vostermans
Institute of Security and Global Affairs
Leiden University
The Hague
The Netherlands

Editorial Office
MDPI AG
Grosspeteranlage 5
4052 Basel, Switzerland

This is a reprint of the Special Issue, published open access by the journal *Religions* (ISSN 2077-1444), freely accessible at: www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/7R53832XG8.

For citation purposes, cite each article independently as indicated on the article page online and as indicated below:

Lastname, Firstname, Firstname Lastname, and Firstname Lastname. Article Title. *Journal Name* **Year**, *Volume Number*, Page Range.

ISBN 978-3-7258-6226-9 (Hbk)
ISBN 978-3-7258-6227-6 (PDF)
https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-7258-6227-6

Cover image courtesy of Tahir Abbas

Contents

About the Editors

Tahir Abbas

Tahir Abbas, FAcSS, is Professor of Criminology and Global Justice at Aston University, UK. He was formerly the Professor of Radicalisation Studies at Leiden University. His recent articles appear in journals such as *Journal of Political Ideologies*, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. A Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences (UK), Abbas works at the intersection of security, identity, and social change in contemporary Europe.

Richard McNeil-Willson

Richard McNeil-Willson is Lecturer of Global Muslim Studies at the Alwaleed Centre, Islamic and Middle East Studies, University of Edinburgh, UK. He specialises in critical approaches to counterterrorism and counterextremism, including research on contentious activism, Islamophobia and state repression in a European context. He is also the co-editor of the *Handbook of Violent Extremism and Resilience* (2023) with Anna Triandafyllidou.

Lianne Vostermans

Lianne Vostermans is Senior Researcher at OpenHorizon (Norway) and Research Fellow at Leiden University, Netherlands. Her research examines the dynamics of (violent) social and political mobilisation, with particular attention to how emotions, identity, ideology, religion, organisational networks, and opportunity structures interact. She is the author of *Beyond Faith and Fury: Rethinking 'Religious Violence' in the Lebanese Civil War*, which is forthcoming with IB Tauris.

Preface

This Reprint, developed from a Special Issue of the journal *Religions*, addresses the pervasive and analytically problematic construction of a 'European Muslim crisis'. The subject of this collection is the critical examination of how political, media, and security discourses formulate the presence of Muslims in Europe as a societal threat or a 'question' requiring urgent governance. Our purpose is twofold: First, we seek to deconstruct the frameworks that sustain this crisis narrative, investigating its consequences for policy and for the Muslim communities targeted by it. Second, the volume aims to illuminate the varied, agentive, and often innovative responses from European Muslims themselves, progressing analysis beyond securitised perspectives. The motivation for this collection stems from an observable gap in the scholarly literature, which frequently focuses on state-level anxieties rather than the nuanced, everyday realities of Muslim populations. We intentionally adopted a wide scope, inviting contributions that explore the governance of religion, the specificities of institutionalised Islamophobia, the dynamics of securitisation, the complexities of identity formation under pressure, and the role of civic activism. The contributions analyse these phenomena across diverse national contexts, demonstrating that the 'crisis' is not a monolithic European experience but a series of specific, contested local encounters.uch a role.

This collection demonstrates that the 'crisis' is manufactured. It is addressed to scholars, policymakers, and postgraduate researchers engaged in sociology, security studies, criminology, public policy, and Islamic studies. The work presented here does not offer simple conclusions; rather, it provides empirically grounded research into how European Muslims navigate varying national models of secularism, multiculturalism, and state control. The articles examine the intersections of religion with race, ethnicity, and migration, as well as the specific roles of Muslim organisations and the internal gender dynamics within debates on Islam in Europe. Through focusing on these realities, this Reprint challenges the foundations of the crisis discourse and offers a more rigorous foundation for future research.

Tahir Abbas, Richard McNeil-Willson, and Lianne Vostermans
Guest Editors

religions

MDPI

Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue Beyond the Crisis Frame: Muslim Agency and the Contestation of European Identity

Tahir Abbas [1,*], Richard McNeil-Willson [2] and Lianne Vostermans [3]

[1] Department of Society and Politics, School of Law and Social Sciences, Aston University, Birmingham B4 7ET, UK
[2] School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9YL, UK
[3] DRIVE Project, Institute of Security and Global Affairs, Leiden University, 2511 DP The Hague, The Netherlands
* Correspondence: t.abbas@aston.ac.uk

1. The 'Crisis' in Question: Europe's Crisis of Self

Entitled *Constructing the 'European Muslim Crisis': Discourse, Policy, and Everyday Realities*, this Special Issue was born from a critical imperative: to move beyond the taken-for-granted assumption of a 'Muslim crisis' in Europe and to instead interrogate the very assembly of this narrative. The original call for papers invited scholarly contributions that would deconstruct the framing of the 'Muslim question' as in a perpetual state of emergency, exploring its origins and consequences for policy, public discourse, and the lived experiences of diverse Muslim communities. As this collection demonstrates, the term 'crisis' is not a neutral descriptor of an objective reality. It is a dominant and productive political frame and a discursive tool that shapes perception, legitimises state action, and profoundly reorders and complicates the association between European states and their Muslim populations. It is a lens through which difference is magnified into threat, and religious practice is scrutinised as a potential vector of social and political instability.

The nine papers gathered here respond to this call with remarkable depth and breadth. Taken together, they offer a multi-sited and methodologically diverse deconstruction of the 'crisis' paradigm. Their collective thesis is that what is persistently framed as an internal problem *of* European Muslims—a crisis of integration, loyalty, or compatibility with 'secular'-liberal values—is more accurately understood as a crisis *for* European Muslims, produced by a confluence of external pressures, historical legacies of colonialism and Orientalism, and contemporary political projects. This introduction, however, seeks to push this analysis further. It argues that the 'European Muslim Crisis' is, at its core, a misnomer. It is, in fact, a European crisis *per se*, a crisis of identity, ideology, and post-colonial conscience, which is experienced acutely by its Muslim populations but is fundamentally a product of Europe's own long-standing internal contradictions (Asad 2002). The 'Muslim question' serves as a convenient and visible terrain upon which Europe's deeper anxieties about its own changing identity, its waning geopolitical influence, and the fraying of its foundational liberal–democratic consensus are played out. This fraying is not incidental but symptomatic of what Wendy Brown (2019) identifies as the hollowing out of democratic principles by neoliberal rationality, creating a vacuum readily filled by nationalist and authoritarian impulses. The 'Muslim' thus becomes the figure against which a fragile and increasingly illiberal European character is fortified.

The collection systematically shifts the analytical gaze from the so-called 'Muslim question' to a more pressing 'European question': one that probes the continent's evolving

identity, the limits of its ideologies, and its capacity to navigate religious and cultural plurality in an era of profound geopolitical and social change. The contributions reveal that the 'crisis' narrative is not merely a descriptive failure but a *productive* political tool. It manufactures a specific type of Muslim subject—the suspect, the unintegrated, the potential extremist—who then becomes the legitimate object of strengthened governance, surveillance, and control. This framework serves to justify policies that would otherwise be deemed reactionary or discriminatory (Pauly 2016). The 'crisis', therefore, is not an event to be resolved but a continuous political instrument used to manage and limit a minority population. In this sense, the 'crisis' is a mechanism of racial governmentality (Goldberg 2002), a mode of power that extends the colonial logics of people management into the heart of the present-day European metropole. It operates not only through overt coercion but also through what Achille Mbembe (2019) terms 'necropolitics', rendering certain populations, marked by their perceived religious and racial difference, as disposable and their social existence as threatening. This Foucauldian logic of producing the very subject it purports to manage is central to the entire edifice of the 'crisis'.

This introduction will navigate the terrain mapped by the contributors and expand upon it with insights from recent research and policy developments. It begins by examining the architectures of the 'crisis' narrative, exploring the symbiotic relationship between media representations—both traditional and digital—and political communication. It then turns to the sovereign gaze of the state, analysing the various policy instruments, from overt securitisation and racialised biopolitics to the subtler coercion of 'values-based' citizenship, through which this narrative is operationalised. Following this, it pivots to the lived realities of European Muslims, highlighting not only the intersectional nature of their identities but also the diverse forms of agency they employ, from creating digital counter-narratives to forging new artistic and intellectual movements. Finally, the introduction addresses the profound impact of recent geopolitical events, particularly the post-7 October 2023 escalation of the Israel–Palestine conflict, which has opened a new and volatile frontier in the formulation of the European 'Muslim question'. In concluding, it will reflect on the collection's broader implications, arguing that understanding the 'European Muslim Crisis' as a European crisis of self is essential for developing meaningful research and thought on the future of the continent.

2. Architectures of a Narrative: Media, Politics, and the Spectre of the Muslim 'Other'

The creation of the 'European Muslim Crisis' is not a spontaneous phenomenon but a methodically assembled narrative, built and sustained through the prevailing institutions of media and politics. The papers in this collection illuminate the machineries through which this narrative is forged, revealing a symbiotic relationship where political agendas and media frames reinforce one another, creating a potent feedback loop that solidifies the image of the Muslim 'Other' in the public imagination. This process has been supercharged by the rise of digital media, which has created new vectors for the rapid dissemination of Islamophobic tropes and facilitated the growth of transnational far-right networks.

Media institutions play a pivotal role in setting the terms of public debate, and as Irfan Raja's paper, "The British Broadsheet Press and the Representation of 'The Mosque' in the Aftermath of Post-7/7 Britain", demonstrates, their portrayal of Islam and Muslims is often far from neutral. Analysing coverage in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* in the two years following the 2005 London bombings, Raja finds a consistent pattern of depiction that frames the mosque, a central institution of Muslim community life, not as a place of worship, education, or social gathering, but as a primary site of radicalisation

and a "security threat". This narrative effectively renders the mosque and, by extension, observant Muslims, "incompatible" with secular British society. This is achieved through specific representational strategies. For instance, the media disproportionately focuses on a handful of fringe "hate preachers" like Abu Hamza al-Masri, granting them a platform that vastly outweighs their actual influence within the Muslim community. This selective amplification creates a distorted public image where the exception is presented as the rule, and the actions of a few are used to pathologise the many (Poole 2002; Richardson 2004). This process aligns with classic theories of moral panic, whereby a group is identified as a threat to societal values, becoming a 'folk devil' upon which broader social anxieties are projected (Cohen 2011).

While Raja's work focuses on the UK, this pattern is replicated across the region. In the Nordic countries, for example, media representations and public discussions often portray Muslim communities and their religious practices as a threat to secular homogeneity and social cohesion (Äystö 2024). In France, media narratives frequently reinforce the state's Islamophobic policies by framing mainstream Islamic practices as 'separatist' or 'extremist' (Louati and Syeda 2022). This continental trend has been exacerbated by the rise of digital Islamophobia. Online platforms have become fertile ground for the spread of anti-Muslim hate speech, where derogatory language and offensive terms are used to denigrate Muslims (Levin 2022). Research has shown that online hate speech serves as a catalyst for offline action, with virtual threats often materialising into real-world attacks, particularly against visibly Muslim women (Easat-Daas and Zempi 2024). Furthermore, social media algorithms can amplify Islamophobic content, creating echo chambers that reinforce prejudice and normalise hate.

This media-cultivated landscape provides fertile ground for political actors to weaponise Muslim distinctiveness for strategic gain. Özge Onay's paper, "Brexit's Illusion: Decoding Islamophobia and Othering in Turkey's EU Accession Discourse among British Turks," provides a formidable case study of this process. Onay argues that the 2016 Brexit movement strategically exploited the prospect of Turkey's—a predominantly Muslim nation—accession to the European Union. This was not a peripheral issue but a central plank of the Leave campaign's rhetoric, which skillfully linked anxieties about immigration and national sovereignty with deep-seated fears of Islam and its alleged links to terrorism. In this thesis, Turkey was constructed as the quintessential 'Other', a demographic and civilisational threat waiting at the gates of Europe. This political strategy draws directly from the well of Orientalism, as theorised by Edward Said (1978), though the construct has been updated for the twenty-first century. It now fuels, and is fuelled by, the international conspiracy theory of the 'Great Replacement', which posits that white, Christian European populations are being deliberately replaced by non-white, Muslim migrants (Camus and Lebourg 2017). Once confined to the political fringe, this narrative has become a central and often thinly veiled trope in mainstream political debate, evocatively illustrating the weaponisation of demographic anxiety.

The mobilisation of anti-Muslim sentiment is a hallmark of the rise of far-right populist parties across Europe. These parties, from the Rassemblement National in France to the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany and the Party of Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands, have made cultural and sometimes religious objections to Muslim immigration a central part of their platform. Crucially, their rhetoric has increasingly been adopted by mainstream parties, signalling a significant shift in the European political landscape. Anti-Muslim attitudes have become a proxy for a host of other cultural grievances, including anxieties about gender equality, secularism, and national identity. This mainstreaming of Islamophobia is a key symptom of the broader crisis of European liberalism. As liberal

democratic consensus weakens, politicians across the spectrum have found it electorally advantageous to embrace illiberal rhetoric and policies that target minority populations.

A crucial insight emerges when comparing Raja's analysis of the post-7/7 period with Onay's study of the Brexit campaign a decade later: the remarkable adaptability of Islamophobic tropes. The object of fear shifts, but the underlying subject, the Muslim, remains the constant menace. In the immediate aftermath of the London bombings, the threat was framed as internal, located within the physical, local spaces of British mosques. A decade later, during the Brexit debate, the threat was externalised and reconfigured. It was no longer primarily about radicalisation in a Leeds mosque but about the potential influx of millions of Turkish Muslims. This demonstrates that the 'crisis' is not tethered to a single, static issue like terrorism. Instead, it functions as a *floating signifier* (cf. Hay et al. 2013), a versatile political tool that can be attached to whichever anxiety—be it national security, border control, or cultural identity—is most politically salient at a given moment. The figure of the Muslim becomes, in the language of affect theory, a container for 'sticky' negative emotions, such as fear and disgust, which are then circulated within the body politic to consolidate an embattled 'us' against a threatening 'them' (Ahmed 2013). This reveals Islamophobia not as a mere reaction to specific events, but as a structural and enduring feature of European political discourse, an affective economy of hate that is capable of adapting its form to suit the needs of the time.

3. The Sovereign Gaze: Securitisation, Policy, and the Governance of Muslim Life

The discursive configuration of the 'European Muslim Crisis' is not merely an academic or media spectacle; it is translated into tangible state policies that regulate, discipline, and govern the lives of Muslims. This process, often termed the securitisation of Islam, involves framing Islam and Muslim practices as an "existential threat" to the nation's core identity or security, thereby justifying "extraordinary measures" that often bypass the norms of liberal democratic politics (Buzan et al. 1998; Cesari 2009). The papers in this collection offer a comparative perspective on these modes of power, but a broader analysis reveals a Europe-wide trend towards increasingly illiberal forms of control that are symptomatic of a deeper crisis within European liberalism itself. This authority extends beyond security to a form of racialised biopolitics, where the state seeks to manage the very life of its Muslim population, defining what constitutes an acceptable, 'integrated' Muslim subject.

The logic of securitisation operates by constructing Muslims as a suspect community, justifying heightened surveillance, restrictive legislation, and discriminatory practices. This is not just a speech act but a policy-making process that affects immigration laws, anti-discrimination measures, and security policies. However, the state's intervention goes deeper than mere security. It constitutes a form of biopolitics, where the state actively seeks to regulate and shape the religious, cultural, and social life of its Muslim inhabitants. This is a *racialised* biopolitics because it targets a group defined by a combination of perceived religious and ethnic characteristics, drawing on long-standing colonial and Orientalist tropes. The goal is to produce a 'good Muslim' who is politically docile and culturally assimilated, while pathologising the 'bad Muslim' who adheres to mainstream religious practices. As compellingly articulated by Mahmood Mamdani (2005) in the context of the 'War on Terror', this binary has been thoroughly adopted within European policy, becoming the central organising principle for control over Muslim life. The state, in effect, reserves the right to define authentic Islam, rewarding those who conform to its secularised, privatised model and punishing those who do not.

This is most starkly exemplified by France. In their paper, "French Islamophobia: How Orthopraxy Is Conceptualised as a Public Peril", Christina Lienen and Samir Sweida-Metwally detail a process of "institutionalised Islamophobia". They argue that the French state, under the guise of *laïcité*, thoroughly redefines mainstream Islamic orthopraxy, such as wearing the hijab or consuming halal food, as signs of 'extremism' or 'separatism'. It then actively promotes a state-sanctioned "French Islam", stripped of its core theological and practical commitments, as the only acceptable form of Muslim expression. This represents a direct and pervasive form of biopolitical control, where the state seeks to remake the religious subject in its own image. This is not an isolated French phenomenon but the most extreme manifestation of a broader European trend.

A more subtle, but no less potent, approach is found in the UK and Germany, which can be described as 'values-based' governance. This paradigm, often referred to by scholars as 'civic integrationism' (Joppke 2007), represents a decisive and coercive turn in European integration policy. This model is explored in two papers. Muzaffer Can Dilek's "Reconciling British Values with Professional Identity" examines the impact of the legal requirement for teachers to promote 'Fundamental British Values'. Similarly, Hira Amin, Linda Hyökki, and Umme Salma's paper, "The European Muslim Crisis and the Post-October 7 Escalation", analyses how Germany has incorporated questions about Israel's right to exist into its citizenship tests. In both cases, citizenship is transformed from a stable legal status into a continuous performance of loyalty to a set of state-defined values. This creates a precarious position for Muslims, who are perpetually required to prove their allegiance and whose character is subjected to constant scrutiny.

This shift towards values-based citizenship is a key policy development across Europe (Gobel et al. 2018). It represents a move away from multicultural models of mixing towards a more assimilationist logic. New citizenship and integration laws in countries like France increasingly emphasise a commitment to "the principles of the Republic" and proficiency in the national language as prerequisites for settlement and naturalisation. While framed in the neutral language of civic values, these policies disproportionately target Muslims and function as a mechanism of exclusion, constructing them as culturally and ideologically alien. This approach is a direct symptom of Europe's own identity crisis; unable to define a positive, inclusive European identity, states resort to defining it negatively, against the imagined 'Other' of the unintegrated Muslim. A third model, which Oleg Yarosh terms 'soft securitisation', is evident on Europe's periphery. In "Negotiating Wasatiyyah: Soft Securitisation and Civic Activism in Ukraine", Yarosh describes a context where the state distinguishes between 'good', indigenous forms of Islam and 'bad', foreign-influenced Islam, thereby creating a hierarchy of acceptability. While less totalising than the French model, it still represents a significant form of state surveillance.

Despite their national specificities, these models of authority reveal a striking convergence in their underlying logic. Whether through overt re-engineering of religious practice, the imposition of value-based loyalty tests, or the selective targeting of organisations, the ultimate goal is the production of a "moderate" Muslim subject. This suggests that the 'European Muslim Crisis' is less a crisis *of* Muslims struggling to integrate and more a crisis *of the European state* confronting communities it perceives as ungovernable in their authentic forms. The state's response is not to adapt its own models of citizenship or secularism but to attempt to remake the Muslim subject into a more manageable entity.

4. Lived Realities: Intersectionality, Agency, and the Negotiation of the Everyday

While state discourses and policies attempt to impose a monolithic and often pathologised identity upon European Muslims, the lived realities of these communities are infinitely more dynamic and resilient. Shifting the focus from the top-down gaze of power to the bottom-up standpoint of everyday life, the papers in this collection challenge homogenising narratives and reveal a rich tapestry of experience shaped by intersectionality, agency, and the constant negotiation of identity. This approach resonates strongly with the scholarly framework of "lived religion", which prioritises the practices, beliefs, and material realities of ordinary people over the formal doctrines and structures of religious elites (Hall 1997; McGuire 2008; Ammerman 2021). We see how European Muslims are not merely objects of state policy but are active subjects who are creating new forms of community, culture, and resistance.

The very category of 'European Muslim' is an abstraction that obscures a vast diversity of ethnic, sectarian, migratory, and class-based identities. Sayed Mahdi Mosawi's paper, "Everyday Lived Islam among Hazara Migrants in Scotland", evocatively illustrates this by focusing on a less visible community: Hazara Shia refugees from Afghanistan. Mosawi's ethnographic research highlights how the intersection of minority religious status (Shia), minority ethnic status (Hazara), and refugee status profoundly reconfigures religious practice. His work provides an empirical case for the necessity of an intersectional analysis, one that understands, in line with Kimberlé Crenshaw's (2013) seminal work, that systems of power such as racism, religious discrimination, and state policies on migration are not separate but interlocking, producing unique and compounded forms of subordination and experience. For his interlocutors, resettlement in a secular, pluralistic context leads not to a reinforcement of rigid group identity but to a more "individualised, privatised, and elective" form of Islam. This finding directly challenges the state's securitising gaze, which tends to view Muslims as a "single solidary group" and imagines religious communities as enclosed and resistant to change.

European Muslims are neither a monolithic group nor passive recipients of state policy or media discourse; they are diverse and active agents who interpret, resist, and reshape their circumstances. An example of this agency is found in Zehra Yılmaz's "Reimagining Ummah: The Role of Third-Generation Immigrant Women in the Transformation of Turkish Islam in Europe". Yılmaz's fieldwork in the Netherlands reveals a generational shift driven by young, third-generation Turkish–Dutch women. Rejecting the nationally bound and culturally enclosed "Turkish Islam" promoted by their parents' generation, these women are pioneering an "'opening up' strategy". They are moving towards a more spiritual, deterritorialised, and transnational understanding of the *Ummah* that transcends ethnic and national loyalties. This represents a form of gendered agency, where women—often stereotyped as the passive bearers of tradition—emerge as the most dynamic transformers. This agency is also increasingly visible in the digital realm. European Muslims are using social media to create *counter-narratives* that challenge dominant Islamophobic discourses. These online spaces function as vital 'counterpublics' (Fraser 1990), alternative arenas of speech where marginalised groups can formulate and circulate their own interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. These digital diasporas (Brinkerhoff 2009) allow for the formation of global communities of solidarity, the sharing of alternative perspectives, and the organisation of political action. Campaigns using hashtags to defend Islam following terror attacks, for instance, demonstrate how digital platforms can be used to contest negative media frames and build a positive alternative to extremist propaganda. Beyond resistance, these digital spaces are also sites of cultural production. European Muslim

artistic and intellectual movements are flourishing, with artists, writers, and thinkers creating works that explore the complexities of hybrid identities and contribute to a richer, more pluralistic European culture. These movements challenge the binary of 'Muslim' versus 'European', demonstrating that these identities are not mutually exclusive but can be creatively and productively intertwined.

Living within a pervasive 'crisis' narrative exacts a significant psychological toll. Muzaffer Can Dilek's paper applies Anthony Giddens's theory of ontological security to understand the subjective experience of Muslim teachers in England. Giddens (1991) defines ontological security as a sense of continuity and order in one's self-identity and social environment. Dilek finds that the constant scrutiny of their loyalty and the securitisation of their professional identity places Muslim teachers in a "fragile position", grappling with profound ontological *insecurity*. This insecurity manifests as a deep ambivalence, with some teachers adopting an uncritical stance towards policies like 'Fundamental British Values' in a search for safety, while others engage in resistance at the cost of further alienation. This framework robustly captures the human cost of the 'crisis' construction, revealing how it destabilises the very sense of self and belonging for those it targets.

These varied responses—individualisation, transnationalism, digital resistance, and artistic creation—expose a fundamental paradox at the heart of the European state's project of control. The intense pressure to conform to a singular, state-defined model of the 'good Muslim' does not produce homogeneity. Instead, it paradoxically generates greater diversity and fragmentation in lived religious and political expression. The state's standardising impulse fractures the community, pushing individuals and groups in multiple directions. Yılmaz's third-generation women look beyond the nation-state to a global *Ummah*. Mosawi's Hazara migrants retreat into a privatised, individual faith. Dilek's teachers are caught in a debilitating bind between conformity and resistance. In each case, the state's attempt to engineer a compliant, integrated national subject backfires, producing outcomes that are far more unpredictable than intended.

5. After the 7th of October: Palestine as the New Frontier of the European 'Muslim Question'

The period since the original call for papers was issued has been dominated by a geopolitical event of seismic significance: the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, and Israel's subsequent devastating genocidal violence in Gaza. This has not created a new crisis but has acted as an immense accelerant, radically intensifying the pre-existing dynamics of the 'European Muslim Crisis' and opening a new, volatile frontier for the invention of the 'Muslim question'. The conflict has become a new litmus test for loyalty and belonging, enhancing the widespread securitisation of pro-Palestinian activism and a documented surge in Islamophobia across the region.

The paper by Amin, Hyökki, and Salma, "The European Muslim Crisis and the Post-October 7 Escalation," in this Special Issue provides a systematic analysis of this new reality. They show how the Israel–Palestine conflict has been weaponised as a new and potent "yardstick to demarcate the European, civilised 'us' vs. the Muslim 'Other'. This is operationalised through concrete state policies. In the UK, the government has updated its definition of extremism to encompass non-violent ideologies and pro-Palestine activism, as well as proscribing specific non-violent and Palestinian activist groups as 'terrorist'. In Germany, the state has moved to include questions on Israel's right to exist in its citizenship tests, making allegiance to Germany's *raison d'état* a prerequisite for naturalisation. These actions continue broader European processes of securitising pro-Palestinian support. Across the continent, governments have responded to mass protests

with measures that include protest bans (particularly in France and Germany), police crackdowns, and the weaponisation of anti-terrorism legislation against activists. This has created a chilling effect, particularly for Muslim civil society organisations, which face heightened surveillance, funding cuts, and, in some cases, outright dissolution. A key discursive strategy in this process is the deliberate conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism, a move that serves to delegitimise criticism of the Israeli state and frame solidarity with Palestinians as a form of hate speech. This political manoeuvre attempts to foreclose the very possibility of a position, articulated by thinkers such as Judith Butler (2012), that draws upon Jewish ethical traditions to critique Israeli state policy and advocate for cohabitation. This environment has predictably led to a documented and alarming surge in Islamophobic incidents across Europe, as the figure of the pro-Palestinian protestor becomes a new focal point for anti-Muslim animus.

The response from European Muslim communities to this intensified pressure has marked a significant evolution in their political engagement. The final paper in this collection, on "The Muslim Vote Campaign in the UK", analyses this shift through the lens of Social Movement Theory. The paper argues that The Muslim Vote (TMV), a British pressure group, emerged by capitalising on a "political opportunity structure": widespread voter fatigue with the two main political parties. Part of this voter fatigue emerges from a profound anger within Muslim communities at the Labour and Conservative leaderships' unwavering support for Israel's military actions. TMV successfully mobilised resources, including decades of community organising experience and a new generation of politically savvy youth, and framed its movement around venerable, resonant ideas of justice for Palestine and the intercontinental solidarity of the *Ummah*. Its success in the 2024 UK General Election, where it helped unseat several high-profile Labour MPs in constituencies with large Muslim populations, signals a potential paradigm shift in British Muslim politics. It represents a move away from traditional loyalty to the Labour Party and towards a more assertive, strategic, and issue-based model of electoral participation (Akhtar 2024). This development can be understood using the framework of New Social Movement Theory (NSMT), which posits that contemporary movements are often driven by issues of identity, culture, and human rights rather than purely economic grievances. TMV exemplifies this, mobilising a collective identity around a moral and political cause that transcends traditional class-based politics.

The post-7 October conjuncture marks a crucial evolution in the establishment of the 'Muslim crisis'. The primary threat narrative is shifting. While the figure of the Muslim as a *potential terrorist* has not disappeared, it is being supplemented by the figure of the Muslim as a *disloyal political subject*. The danger is no longer framed solely in terms of physical violence but in terms of ideological subversion. The new policies emerging in the UK and Germany are aimed at policing thought, speech, and political allegiance. The emergence of a potent political force like The Muslim Vote is a direct response to this shift. European Muslims are no longer simply defending their right to be religious in private; they are asserting their right to be a political constituency that can hold the state accountable in public. This represents a fundamental challenge to a European political order that has long sought to depoliticise Islam and confine it to the private sphere.

6. Advancing Islamophobia

While the analyses in this collection contribute significantly to the understanding of structural and cultural Islamophobia, the intellectual and political landscape remains partially obscured by a resilient liberal consensus. This consensus often insulates a specific variant of anti-Muslim sentiment from critique, framing it not as prejudice but as

a principled defence of secularism, free expression, or gender equality (Kundnani 2021; Farris 2017). This "liberal Islamophobia" does not rely on the crude tropes of the far right but operates through a more subtle, yet pernicious, logic that constructs Muslims as a unique challenge to the normative foundations of European modernity (Mamdani 2005). It thrives within a framework where the criticism of Islam and Muslims is positioned as an act of intellectual courage, thereby enriching a particular intellectual landscape while simultaneously reinforcing the marginalisation of the very communities it purports to analyse. This phenomenon creates a difficult terrain for anti-racist scholarship, where challenging this form of Islamophobia can be misconstrued as an attack on core liberal values, such as freedom of speech or feminist principles (Scott 2018). The result is a bifurcation in the discourse, where overt bigotry is condemned while its more sanitised, intellectually legitimised counterpart is permitted to flourish within mainstream political and academic circles.

This "enlightened" form of Islamophobia functions by establishing a clear binary between a supposedly rational, progressive, and secular European self and a dogmatic, patriarchal, and irredeemably traditional Muslim other (Asad 2003). Within this schema, mainstream Islamic practices—from veiling to dietary observances—are interpreted through a hermeneutic of suspicion and presented as evidence of a refusal to integrate or an allegiance to values incompatible with democratic life. This discursive strategy is particularly evident in debates surrounding the French model of *laïcité*, which has been deployed to justify coercive state policies that disproportionately regulate the lives of Muslim women (Selby 2016). The intellectual architecture of this position draws upon a specific reading of the Enlightenment, one that is weaponised to pathologise Muslim identity and demand a form of assimilation that necessitates the renunciation of public religious expression. Consequently, a climate is fostered where anti-Muslim positions are rendered intellectually defensible, provided they are articulated within the accepted lexicon of liberalism, a dynamic that ultimately serves to normalise discriminatory attitudes and policies.

The theoretical and practical application of an explicitly anti-racist framework to confront Islamophobia remains underdeveloped, a limitation that hampers the pursuit of genuine social justice. For decades, European anti-racist theory and activism have predominantly focused on colour-based racism, leaving them ill-equipped to fully conceptualise and combat the phenomenon of cultural racism, of which Islamophobia is a primary manifestation (Sayyid 2022; Lentin 2004). The persistent categorisation of Islamophobia as a matter of religious intolerance rather than a racial project is a critical error, as it fails to apprehend how Muslims are racialised as a distinct and threatening group, irrespective of their individual piety or national origin (Garner and Selod 2015). This theoretical lacuna means that policy interventions are frequently misdirected, focusing on interfaith dialogue or education about religion, while leaving the underlying structures of racial governance untouched (Goldberg 2009). A truly anti-racist approach would move beyond a "culture-blind" or "colour-blind" liberalism and instead directly confront the ways in which the state and its institutions produce and manage racialised populations (Bonilla-Silva 2017).

Consequently, the continued absence of a robust, mainstreamed, anti-racist analysis of Islamophobia ensures that fundamental questions of equality, equity, and fairness remain inadequately addressed. When Islamophobia is perceived merely as a critique of ideas, the systemic disadvantages experienced by Muslims in employment, housing, and the justice system are obscured or explained away as the consequence of cultural failings or a lack of integration. This deflects from the reality that Islamophobia functions as a technology of race, allocating privilege and penalty along lines of perceived civilisational belonging (Meer 2015). Achieving substantive social justice requires a paradigm shift: one

that moves the debate from the terrain of theological dispute or cultural anxiety to the solid ground of racial equality. For fairness and transparency to be realised, the operations of liberal Islamophobia must be made visible and challenged not as a legitimate viewpoint in the marketplace of ideas, but as a sophisticated and exclusionary racial ideology that impedes the full citizenship and participation of millions of Europeans (Sian 2019). This shift is an essential prerequisite for any meaningful advance towards a genuinely plural and equitable society.

7. Conclusions: Beyond the Crisis, the European Crisis per se

The nine papers assembled in this Special Issue, alongside the broader research incorporated into this introduction, collectively fulfil and extend the intellectual ambition set out in the original call: to critically deconstruct the 'European Muslim Crisis'. By systematically moving from the discursive architectures of the crisis narrative to the state policies that operationalise it, and finally to the diverse and agentic lived realities of European Muslims, this collection de-naturalises the concept of 'crisis'. It exposes it not as an objective social reality but as a contingent and deeply damaging political project. More fundamentally, it reframes the entire debate, arguing that the 'European Muslim Crisis' is a projection of a much deeper, internal European crisis.

This is a crisis of identity, where post-colonial European nations struggle to define a positive, inclusive sense of self in an era of globalisation and demographic change, resorting instead to defining themselves against a racialised Muslim 'Other'. It is a crisis inherent within liberalism, where the language of tolerance, pluralism, and individual rights masks the advancement of parochial, assimilationist policies that prioritise security and cultural homogeneity. It is also a crisis of conscience, where the unresolved legacies of colonialism continue to shape existing power relations, reproducing patterns of supremacy that pathologise and discipline minority communities. The framing of Muslims as the 'problem' is a political strategy of displacement, a way for European states to avoid confronting these profound internal failures. Muslims are not the cause of such a crisis; they are the screen onto which the crisis is projected. The implications of this collection extend into several core academic debates. For the study of secularism, it reveals European secularism is far from a neutral principle but a discriminatory tool of governance. For the study of integration, it demonstrates the failure of top-down, 'values-based' assimilationism and points to the need for new models of citizenship that can accommodate genuine heterogeneity. For the field of Muslim Studies, it offers a series of nuanced, empirically grounded accounts that move beyond monolithic conceptions of 'European Islam'.

Finally, this collection opens up several vital trajectories for future research. The emergence of new political formations like The Muslim Vote calls for longitudinal studies on their sustainability and impact on national politics. The comparative analysis of different securitisation models invites further research into their effects on Muslim civil society. The proliferation of digital Islamophobia and online counter-narratives requires urgent scholarly attention and, perhaps most broadly, the critical analysis of evolving legal definitions of 'extremism' and 'values' demands continued vigilance, as these concepts have intense consequences for the civil liberties of all citizens. The 'crisis' may be a construction, but its effects are real. It is the task of critical thinking—to which this Special Issue hopes to have contributed—to continue to expose the logic of that invention and amplify the voices of those who live within its shadow. More than this, critical scholarship must contribute to dismantling the architecture of this shadow and articulating alternative and emancipatory political futures. It must challenge the post-colonial melancholia that grips the region and instead work towards the vision of a genuinely plural Europe (Gilroy 2004).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

List of Contributions:

1. Amin, Hira, Linda Hyökki, and Umme Salma. 2024. The European Muslim Crisis and the Post-October 7 Escalation. *Religions* 15: 11852.
2. Dilek, Muzaffer Can. 2024. Reconciling British Values with Professional Identity: The Pursuit of Ontological Security Among Muslim Teachers in England. *Religions* 15: 13534.
3. Lienen, Christina, and Samir Sweida-Metwally. 2025. French Islamophobia: How Orthopraxy Is Conceptualized as a Public Peril. *Religions* 16: 646.
4. Mosawi, Sayed Mahdi. 2024. Everyday Lived Islam among Hazara Migrants in Scotland: Intersectionality, Agency, and Individualisation. *Religions* 15: 9508.
5. Onay, Özge. 2024. Brexit's Illusion: Decoding Islamophobia and Othering in Turkey's EU Accession Discourse among British Turks. *Religions* 15: 49810.
6. Raja, Irfan. 2024. The British Broadsheet Press and the Representation of "The Mosque" in the Aftermath of Post-7/7 Britain. *Religions* 15: 115712.
7. Siyech, Mohammed Sinan. 2025. The Muslim Vote Campaign in the UK: Expanding Social Movement Theory. *Religions* 16: 119914.
8. Yarosh, Oleg. 2025. Negotiating Wasatiyyah: Soft Securitization and Civic Activism in Ukraine. *Religions* 16: 1816.
9. Yılmaz, Zehra. 2024. Reimagining Ummah: The Role of Third-Generation Immigrant Women in the Transformation of Turkish Islam in Europe. *Religions* 15: 91118.

References

Ahmed, Sara. 2013. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Akhtar, Parveen. 2024. Changing Pattern amongst Muslim voters: The Labour Party, Gaza and voter volatility. In *UK Election Analysis 2024*. Poole: Centre for the Study of Elections, Media and Parties, Bournemouth University.

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. 2021. *Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices*. New York: New York University Press.

Asad, Talal. 2002. Muslims and European Identity: Can Europe Represent Islam? In *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*. Edited by Pagden Anthony. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 209–27.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Äystö, Tuomas. 2024. Islam, race, and public discourse in Finland: Racialization and religionization. In *The Routledge Handbook of Islam and Race*. Edited by Zain Abdullah. London: Routledge, pp. 254–266.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2017. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 5th ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Brinkerhoff, Jennifer M. 2009. *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, Wendy. 2019. *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Butler, Judith. 2012. *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. 1998. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Camus, Jean-Yves, and Nicolas Lebourg. 2017. *Far-Right Politics in Europe*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Cesari, Jocelyne. 2009. Securitization of Islam in Europe. In *Muslims in the West After 9/11: Religion, Politics and Law*. Edited by Jocelyne Cesari. London: Routledge, pp. 9–27.

Cohen, Stanley. 2011. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. 2013. Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In *The Public Nature of Private Violence*. Edited by Marth Albertson Fineman. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 93–118.

Easat-Daas, Amina, and Irene Zempi. 2024. *The Palgrave Handbook of Gendered Islamophobia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Farris, Sara R. 2017. *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Fraser, Nancy. 1990. Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. *Social Text* 25/26: 56–80. [CrossRef]

Garner, Steve, and Saher Selod. 2015. The racialization of Muslims: Empirical studies of Islamophobia. *Critical Sociology* 4: 9–19. [CrossRef]

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gilroy, Paul. 2004. *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* London: Routledge.

Gobel, Matthias S., Verónica Benet-Martinez, Batja Mesquita, and Ayse K. Uskul. 2018. Europe's culture(s): Negotiating cultural meanings, values, and identities in the European context. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 49: 858–67. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
Goldberg, David Theo. 2002. *The Racial State*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers.
Goldberg, David Theo. 2009. *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
Hall, David D., ed. 1997. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Hay, James, Stuart Hall, and Lawrence Grossberg. 2013. Interview with Stuart Hall. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 10: 10–33. [CrossRef]
Joppke, Christian. 2007. Beyond national models: Civic integration policies for immigrants in Western Europe. *West European Politics* 30: 1–22. [CrossRef]
Kundnani, Arun. 2021. The racial constitution of neoliberalism. *Race & Class 63*: 51–69.
Lentin, Alana. 2004. *Racism and Anti-Racism in Europe*. London: Pluto Press.
Levin, Brian. 2022. Trends and Catalysts of Anti-Muslim Hate Crime and Bigoted Attitudes: A Multidecade Analysis. In *Islamophobia and Acts of Violence: The Targeting and Victimization of American Muslims*. Edited by Carolyn Turpin-Petrosino. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 173–98.
Louati, Yasser, and Seema Syeda. 2022. *Islamophobia in France: Causes, Responses and Lessons for the UK and Europe*. London: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
Mamdani, Mahmood. 2005. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. New York: Pantheon Books.
Mbembe, Achille. 2019. *Necropolitics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
McGuire, Meredith B. 2008. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Meer, Nasar. 2015. Racialization and religion: Race, culture and difference in the study of antisemitism and Islamophobia. In *Racialization and Religion*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–14.
Pauly, Robert J., ed. 2016. *Islam in Europe: Integration or Marginalization?* London: Routledge.
Poole, Elizabeth. 2002. *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. London: I.B. Tauris.
Richardson, John E. 2004. *(Mis)representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
Sayyid, Salman. 2022. *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonization and World Order*. London: Hurst Publishers.
Scott, Joan W. 2018. *Sex and Secularism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Selby, Jennifer. 2016. *Questioning French Secularism: Gender Politics and Islam in a Parisian Suburb*. Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer.
Sian, Katy P. 2019. *Navigating Institutional Racism in British Universities*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

religions

MDPI

Article

Brexit's Illusion: Decoding Islamophobia and Othering in Turkey's EU Accession Discourse among British Turks

Özge Onay

Criminology, Sociology and Social Policy Division, Loughborough University, Loughborough LE11 3TU, UK; o.onay@lboro.ac.uk

Abstract: The warnings about Turkey's not-so-near accession to the EU are explored as a strategic tool in the Brexit campaign, linking concerns about sovereignty and immigration compounded with the anxieties surrounding Islam and the threat of terrorism. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Edward Said's Orientalism and the unique perspectives gathered from British Turks, this paper sheds light on their nuanced responses. It uncovers strategies of disbelief and denial in the face of the constructed narrative that portrayed Turkey as an undesirable 'Other' with its predominantly Muslim population. A closer analysis of some British Turks' narratives is premised not only on the sacralised defence of the principles of Turkish westernisation but also on the socio-political reputation of the Islamic Ottoman past as almighty. The article equally contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between British national identity and discourses surrounding immigration, sovereignty, and Islamophobia within the context of Brexit, as well as the principles by which the privileges of modern, secular Turkey, as well as the demise of the mighty Ottoman image, are maintained. In a paradoxical manner, the act of denial only serves to affirm the Brexit campaign's narrative depicting Turkey as an undesirable 'Other' with a predominantly Muslim demographic.

Keywords: Brexit; Islamophobia; Orientalism; British Turks; Othering

1. Introduction

Since the official conclusion of colonial rule, the departure of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU) has arguably emerged as the most influential political event in shaping British narratives of both national and transnational identity (Koegler et al. 2020). This elusive event, which came to be known as The Brexit referendum (2016), capitalised on, *inter alia*, the perceived 'threat' posed by migration. It has given racism a free pass and public displays of xenophobia a broader acceptance from the parliamentary to the street level. It has bolstered populism, prejudice, and Islamophobia—yet instilled a sense of hope and renewal, not least among its apologists, lobbyists, and across sizeable sections of the British population (Koegler et al. 2020, p. 585). From post–9/11 through to post-Brexit, nationalism and racism come to be articulated hand in hand, and national belonging is racialised in the UK (Gilroy 2011; Saini et al. 2023). The past was represented through 'white, middle-class English/British' into which racialised others, i.e., "the rest", have been legitimated as 'strangers' in their own land. In other words, not only those who are first-generation immigrants but also those who have been naturalised and hold British citizenship have found themselves under the label of 'Other', an experience equally familiar to British Turks, descendants of immigrant Turks.

Turkey became a focal point in the immigration discourse due to UKIP—a populist Eurosceptic political party—that advocated for Britain's separation from the European Union through a contrarious advertisement video[1]. The video asserted that Turkey would join the EU by 2020, leading to the migration of 15 million people to EU nations, including the UK. The group of people used in the video was covertly associated and defined with the notion of terrorist and criminal organisations transiting from Turkey to Britain, inciting Islamophobic sentiments. Islamophobia has been a hot topic over the last 25 years, with growing convergence around the racialisation and homogenisation of Muslims and the negative representations and demonisation of Islam in Britain, requiring understanding Islamophobia in terms of the legacies of colonialism and institutional Islamophobia (Vakil and Sayyid 2023). In other words, exclusionary practices of Islamophobia at times move past the street level, working through to the conduct of conduct, enabling the problematisation of Muslims to achieve a massive shift in governmentality such as *the implementation of Brexit* (ibid., p. 48, emphasis mine). The statements in the UKIP's video, by and large, enabled the racialisation of Turkish people as 'Muslim' Other and garnered significant attention in the media, causing the immigration issue to be more closely linked to Turkey than to other EU countries like Poland or Romania. When probed further, the latter have been amongst the countries whose nationals have predominantly settled in the UK[2], thanks to the EU's free movement scheme (Türkmenoğlu 2022). In no sense can it be, therefore, comprehended that Turkey's position in discussions of its candidacy for the EU would have paved the way for the main leverage of the Brexit campaign. The persistent politics of race, racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia in today's UK not only framed Turkey as a perceived threat, echoing Orientalist views of the East as inherently dangerous to the West, but also resulted in British Turks' negotiation of their identities and Turkey's position around several axes such as Islam(ophobia), a secular Turkish image, a strong Ottoman Empire, and so forth. This, for some British Turks, translated into questioning their sense of belonging in the only country they have lived in, resulting in either scorning, denying or deflecting away Turkey's portrayal in the Brexit campaign as an unwanted Muslim 'Other'.

While the previous studies shed light on the impact of Brexit on the Turkey–EU relationship (Alpan 2019; Burak 2019; Ker-Lindsay 2018; Völkel 2019), the ways in which British Turks engaged with the Islamophobic and xenophobic dimensions of the Leave campaign are far lacking. The only exception to this is the PhD thesis of Babacan (2021), who addressed how some individuals reacted to the anti-Turkish rhetoric of the Vote Leave Campaign during Brexit by reinforcing their ethnic identity. He argued that this defensive response led some Turks in Britain to alter their political views, highlighting the complex relationship between perceived discrimination, ethnic identity, and political engagement (pp. 166–169). By way of the main argument of this paper, the perspectives of British Turks were not only shaped in the context and scope of British politics, where they live, but also by Turkey—from history and familial experiences and opinions passed through generations (Onay and Millington 2024). So the main objective of this article draws from two distinct perspectives: one from the likelihood of a sense of exclusion and unbelonging, stemming from anti-Muslim sentiments foregrounded by the Brexit campaign's use of Turkey, and the other from the longstanding, entrenched collective memories on Ottoman/Turkish Orientalism defining Turkish identity as different from a racialised and stigmatised 'Muslim' Other and as a product of the hegemonic westernisation project of the late Ottoman–early Kemalist[3] era. Examined in detail in the following sections, this work sheds light on the ways in which the Leave campaign's use of Turkey interrupted the sense of self of British Turks around various axes. This interruption is especially embodied in the form of disdain, denial, withdrawal, and deflecting away, which is too complex to be reducible to British politics per se. Accounts of British Turks necessitated rethinking the principles of Turkish secularism, progress, and Western modernism ingrained in the reflexive thinking of modern Turkish subjects in addition to the surge in Islamophobia in the current conjuncture UK.

2. Methodology

This study is an extension of my previous research built upon the nuanced experiences of racism and Islamophobia among British Turks, along with their perspectives on the concept of race, including whiteness. A discussion of the Brexit campaign was not included among the interview questions I had initially prepared. A few of my respondents, however, either demonstrated their stance against Brexit or recounted an instance in relation to Brexit in response to the interview questions listed below:

1. Have you ever felt that you have been treated unfairly in Britain?
2. To what extent has the perception of British people towards Turkish-origin people living in Britain changed since 9/11 or 7/7?
3. Have you ever withdrawn yourself from certain debates for fear of misinterpretation to avoid stigmatisation, Turkophobia, and Islamophobia? Can you give some examples? How did this make you feel?

The above-mentioned interview questions were intended to find answers to the following research questions:

What factors mediate the difference and belonging strategies of British Turks? And to what extent can these factors be associated with Islamophobia?

Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with British Turks living in England and Wales between 18 and 55 over twelve months. Eighteen women and twelve men were interviewed; only one respondent (out of choice) did not hold British citizenship. The snowballing sampling for this qualitative research was initially based on two criteria: self-identified 'Turks' whose parents originate from mainland Turkey and the residency period. The respondents of this research are all children of Turkish Muslim immigrants and have since retained Muslimness as their religious identity, independent of their levels of belief, sects, or practice of Islam. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to dig deeper into the participants' responses, allowing for the exploration of nuanced perspectives and the contextualisation of their self-assessments of many positionalities they hold, such as British, Turkish, Muslim, and so forth. The term 'British Turks' in this research refers to those who identify themselves as both Turkish and British, regardless of which identity outweighs the other. The idea of Turkishness has no reference to a hegemonic racial group (descent), dominant ethnicity (Turks or Kurds from Turkey), or religion (Islam).

As minorities are hard-to-reach populations, I initially assumed that my position as a Turkish Alevi[4] scholar would help me reach the Alevi Turkish and Alevi Kurdish diaspora, only to be shunned by the Alevi community on the basis that I initially researched Islamophobia amongst Sunni Muslim Turks in the UK. As for the Kurdish community from Turkey, this group has been the hardest to access. I managed to access only a few of them and realised their reception and experiences of racism and Islamophobia and the way they understand the reception of Turkey in British Politics are utterly different from Mainland Turks, necessitating a comparative approach. Hence, to stay within the scope of the study, both Kurdish and Alevi Diaspora were not involved in the study as separate groups, except for a few of my participants who defined themselves as Turkish and Alevi, next to their Britishness. However, all participants defined Islam as a part of their identity. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and each interviewee was given a pseudonym. The transcripts of the interviews were then submitted to inductive thematic analysis, which, by its nature, does not require predefined codes and anticipations of answers from the respondents (Braun and Clarke 2013). As the research progressed, while Brexit was not a predefined topic in the interviews, participants naturally integrated discussions about their identities, including aspects related to ethnicity, nationality, and Brexit, during the conversations.

2.1. Sovereignty, Colonialism, Islamophobia, Orientalism, and Other Narratives Underlying Brexit

In the June 2016 referendum, the United Kingdom (UK) chose to exit the European Union (EU). The rise of Euroscepticism in the UK can be attributed to various factors, with the Brexit campaign being shaped by discussions revolving around the economy,

immigration, *racism*, and the concept of national sovereignty (Gasimzade 2018, emphasis mine). Several arguments are sounded in this paper to understand the main drivers of Brexit in relation to the data and narratives of British Turks. It is, however, against the backdrop of a rise in anti-immigration and Islamophobic[5] sentiments in the country that British Turks almost experienced utter dismay and consternation at the negative portrayal of Turkey and its Muslim population as a viral threat. While the anti-Turkey campaigns in the Brexit process have attracted significant academic interest over the years (Gasimzade 2018; Ker-Lindsay 2018; Türkmenoğlu 2022), how some Turks, who were born and bred in Britain, tended towards disregarding and totally denying such 'otherisation' of Turkey still requires further research to fully understand its implications.

This trend echoes historical instances such as Margaret Thatcher's utilisation of fear of being 'swamped' by immigrants from the new Commonwealth and Pakistan in the context of post-colonial conditions in 1978. Thatcher's rhetoric tapped into existing racial tensions in the UK, amplifying anxieties surrounding immigration. We can argue that drawing on colonial and racial orders still shapes the myriad ways Muslims in Britain view themselves as unbelonging, requiring a historical lens presenting Islam and Muslimness as a monolithic phenomenon. While much of the debate on racism in the 1980s focused on the relationship between nationhood and racism (Solomos and Back 1996), it can be argued that the Brexit referendum was contingent on the relationship between diluting national identity, immigration, and Islamophobia. *The use of Turkey in Brexit*, a majority Muslim country, is undoubtedly the exploitation of Islamophobia for political gain (Grossman et al. 2020, emphasis mine). In probing further into the platforms that contributed to the amplification of the Islamophobic discourse, negative sensationalised media combined with the increased political polarisation in the UK equally contributed to Islamophobic dynamics, including comments of then Prime Minister Boris Johnson in a newspaper article in 2018 when he was a foreign secretary. He compared Muslim women who wear *burqa* or *niqab* to bank robbers and letterboxes, and this has caused its own 'spike' with a 375 per cent increase in Islamophobic incidents in the week following the article's publication (Sealy and Modood 2020). Sure enough, repressed anxieties surrounding empire nostalgia (and the colonial past) (Gilroy 2011), anti-EU and anti-Muslim sentiments, and a loss of certainty as to who is British mapped onto the factors for leaving the EU. Brexit has indeed revived the remains of the long-gone empire's narcissistic nationalism that has militated against the very idea of Europe (Koegler et al. 2020). As for the claims that millions of Turkish citizens would try to enter the UK after Turkey's (not-so-near for the time being) accession, leaflets were handed out in schools (see Figure 1 below). This occurred during a time of rising Islamophobia in Britain, partially influenced by a series of high-profile terrorist attacks not only in London and Manchester but also in France and Belgium. Bordered by Syria and Iraq, hence the alleged risk of terrorism, the prospect of Turkish membership in the EU stood at the forefront of the Brexit campaign. This environment might have potentially underpinned the direct portrayal of Turkey, with its majority Muslim population, as a challenge to the country's social cohesion and national sense of identity (Ker-Lindsay 2018), which was recognised by few British Turks, but on other occasions, the majority of my participants either put the blame on Eastern European migrants to the UK or ignored the marginalisation of Turkey as another Muslim 'Other'. Here, we observe Britain's Orientalist and Islamophobic fantasies about the threat of Islamisation displayed in militancy and terrorism (Yegenoglu 2012) and the neurotic response where Turks, as the Muslim 'Other', are positioned as undesirable. The latter was evidenced by the ways some British Turks completely denied the use of Turkey as leverage for anti-Muslim and anti-immigration.

Figure 1. On 22 May, Vote Leave published a poster of an open door fashioned from a passport with footsteps walking through it and the tagline 'Turkey (Population Seventy-Six Million) is Joining the EU'—one that was also re-used on social media platforms right up until the day of the referendum (Bale 2022).

2.2. Turkey's near Battle for Westernisation

The search for continual definition, redefinition, and authenticity is not peculiar to Britain, and Islamophobia is not only externally directed at Turkish people but equally characterised by Orientalist bifurcations between modernity and Islam in their parental home (Onay and Millington 2024). Therefore, the broader argument of this paper is that although the far-right UKIP went so far as to associate the prospect of Turkey's membership to the EU with a surge of (*potentially* Muslim) immigrants into Europe, it may be seen that some British Turks denied the existing correlations between the Brexit campaign and Turkey's quest for EU membership (Ker-Lindsay 2018). Second, and it is here that Ottoman Orientalism and conceptualisation of Islamophobia as a globally articulated phenomenon still informs much of how some British Turks viewed Brexit and its repudiation of Turkey.

It was against a general backdrop of constructing a 'modern' identity veiling Islam in the public sphere that perhaps no country has tried to 'Westernise itself' as much as Turkey. Anyone with ties with Turkey takes a slice of its contrasts, and so did the British Turks. As Chomsky (2008b) beautifully put it, Turkey's geopolitical position as a bridge between the East and the West is only the beginning of the numerous disparities in modern Turkey (Chomsky 2008a, p. xi). To understand the disparities, crises, and contrasts embedded in the contemporary Turk's mindset, one must return to the nineteenth century's *Tanzimat* (the reorganisation) reforms (1839–76). Lewis (1961) argues that the Tanzimat reforms, including the development of a large central bureaucracy, are often regarded as leading to the development of Turkish nationalism, with the primary objective being to take hold of the Ottoman Empire's multi-ethnic enterprise. The international events[6] aggravated the national sentiments already prevailing amongst Ottoman Christian subjects who tried to break free from Ottoman rule with the support of European powers (Somay 2014, p. 207).

The loss of the territories of the Ottoman Empire inadvertently necessitated the development of Turkish nationalism in the early 20th century, drawing the boundaries of its own national identity in the face of disintegration. In a similar fashion, Ottoman progressive and reformist intellectuals or bureaucrats made it necessary to ensure that turning its back to old traditions and past, instigating Western-style training both in education and the army, was necessary for salvaging the governing of the empire. Although it extends beyond the focus of this paper, it is important to acknowledge the undeniable impact of Orientalist trends in 19th-century Ottoman Empire (Eldem 2015). Nevertheless, Ottoman Orientalism was limited by the cultural and political legacy of a multicultural, ethnically diverse, and religiously pluralistic empire, which included various 'Orients', such as Arab, Kurdish, and

Islamic identities. Once the Turkish Republic was established by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (1923), there was no longer any harm in overtly pointing at the 'Orient' (Eldem 2015, p. 102). This historical context illuminates the mindset of some British Turks, shaping perceptions and responses to contemporary issues such as Brexit and narratives surrounding national and ethnic identity and Islamophobia.

Unlike Western Orientalism, which Edward Said explains as a Western style of dominating and having authority over the Orient (Said 1978, p. 3), Ottoman Orientalism, as understood by the early Republican elite, was not just a self-designation but also a means of asserting superiority over other nations and cultures considered less advanced. The embrace of self-righteous secularism during the reforms of the 1920s and 1930s further reinforced this perception. This mindset led to viewing elements traditionally associated with the 'Orient', such as Arabs, Kurds, and Islamic conservatives, as the primary factors responsible for the underdevelopment of the newly formed Republic of Turkey (Eldem 2015). The early Republican leaders, in their pursuit of a more Westernised and modernised Turkey, marginalised what they perceived as Islamic or religious influences, promoting instead an overarching Turkish identity aimed at achieving a "level of contemporary civilisation."[7]. In this context, the dominant form of Islamophobia as a conduct of conduct was predicated on Westernising modernisation and a globally racialised Western horizon in late Ottoman/early republican Turkey (Sayyid 1997; Vakil and Sayyid 2023).

It is apparent that in the Kemalist modernisation initiative, the terms modernisation and westernisation were largely interchangeable. Within this framework, cultivating strong ties with Europe naturally complemented the broader agenda of Westernisation. Indeed, these trends have become distinctly visible in the popular sentiments and attitudes towards Europe by the 21st century, especially in the nationwide discussion about Turkey's EU accession (Somay 2014). Unsurprisingly, Turkey was among the nations actively seeking participation in the formal European integration process, securing associate membership in 1963. The depth of this relationship, evolving from 1963 to 1999 until Turkey was officially acknowledged as a candidate for full membership, should not be underestimated. Significant trade and investment connections were established between Turkey and the EU Community, reaching a pinnacle with the endorsement of the Customs Union Agreement, which took effect at the close of 1995 (Öniş 2004). The question of whether Turkey belongs to Europe and European identity is still one of the persisting uncertainties and contrasts, and hence, Turkey's path to the EU is indeed a protracted journey. However, it is unsurprising that Kemalism's modernising ideology normalised the Turkish national identity with its practically built-in, innate quality of secular Europeanness[8]. While the focus of this paper does not explicitly address the tendency to prioritise secularism, it is pertinent to note its influence on Turkish political expressions, at least until the emergence of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002. The AKP's predominant Islamist discourse challenged the previously exclusionary nature of secularism. Despite Turkey's emphasis on secular modernisation, notably since the 1920s and 1930s, and its pursuit of liberal globalist policies, including alignment with the European Union (EU), as I will soon discuss, the country's path towards EU membership encountered significant scepticism due to its predominantly Muslim society. This tension underscores the complex interplay between secularism, Islamism, and Turkey's aspirations for European integration (Yegenoglu 2012). Whilst the EU elites have maintained an arm's-length relationship with Turkey for decades, putting its borders with other Muslim countries and its own 86 million subjects, Turkey's not-so-near accession to the EU was used as one of the most cited arguments of Brexit supporters, which was opposite to the Turkish experience, British Turks in particular, who have unambiguously adopted the West and Europe as their reference point. In other words, the constitution of European/Western/'Secular' identit(ies) ingrained in British Turks' collective memory resulted in dismay, denial, and complete disguise, as will be addressed in more detail below.

3. Analysis

Synthesis of Turkism, Islamism, and Modernism

Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924) was an Ottoman intellectual who hugely influenced Turkish nationalism, although he was of Kurdish origin. His sociocultural theory was influenced by Durkheimian sociology of the 19th century and, more often than not, by its central tenets of harmony and social order, which Gökalp recontextualised around a central problematic roughly from the mid-1910s, a period of transformation in Turkish society: constructing a viable synthesis of Turkism, Islamism, and modernism. Gökalp's Turkism was a tool to ease the transition from a multicultural empire to a nation-state. The Islamic ideal was less of a guide to action than an abstract sense of morality. The source of modernism, for Gökalp, had to be Western science and technology, keeping out Western individualism and liberalism (Ergin 2016, p. 83). Thus, Ziya Gökalp argued, 'the first rule of our social order should be this sentence: I am of the Turkish nation, of the Islamic umma, of Western civilisation' (Gökalp 1969, p. 64 cited in Ergin 2016, pp. 82–83). Drawn out of Gökalp's version of Turkishness, tainted by Turkish nationalism developed in the early 20th century, this section demonstrates multiple discourses illustrating how British Turks interpreted the UK's Brexit campaign.

Nazli's account expressed cynicism towards the Brexit narrative and accused the conservative party (also known as the Tories) of deliberately lighting on Turkey to pique fears about Islamism and mass migration:

> I always knew that the use of Turkey was a massive lie to get people to vote leave. Turkish people know Turkey doesn't have good enough standards to get into the EU. There were videos also at the time saying Turkish people wouldn't actually want to live in the cold and rainy UK (Laughing). Brexit is the biggest lie. Rather than the government blaming itself . . . [for its wrongdoings], it was easier to blame the EU and guess what? The migration is going up. I just find it all not logical with the Tories, and I find them racist. Remember Boris Johnson referring to Muslim women as letter boxes? That is my thoughts.
>
> (Nazli, 35 years old, Nutritionist, Leeds).

Nazli's quote reflects a critical perspective on the ways in which the Brexit campaign's exploitation of nationalist sentiments and scepticism against Muslim countries and Islam based on Turkey's application to the EU (even though it is readily apparent that Turkey is a long-term applicant and is unlikely ever to become a member) actually led more than half of those to vote to leave. Nazli assessed the possible implications of Brexit as a political strategy to cast a shadow over the rising discontent among British citizens (e.g., crumbling NHS) and the austerity politics of the conservative party. Towards the end of her quote, Nazli highlighted Boris Johnson's manifestly Islamophobic attitude towards Muslim women. This is cited to argue that the use of Turkish accession to the EU was merely a leverage tactic, playing into a broader narrative that emphasised concerns about British sovereignty—the notion of 'taking back control'—and purportedly neglected 'British Values' and 'British identity' (Wellings 2018). Nazli's poignant comments are crucial in unfolding the interplay of nationalist sentiments, political manipulation, and societal tensions that fuelled the Brexit campaign. Her quote shed light on how the exploitation of fears and prejudices, exemplified by the misleading portrayal of Turkey's EU accession, played a significant role in shaping public opinion and ultimately influencing the outcome of the referendum. As she aptly highlighted, the blame-shifting tactics employed by political figures such as Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage only serve to obfuscate deeper systemic issues, including xenophobia and Islamophobia, and perpetuate racial and religious divisions within society.

Moreover, the findings from IpsosMORI, as cited in Bale (2022), provide empirical evidence supporting Nazli's insightful analysis, highlighting the significant impact of misinformation and manipulation on voter perceptions and decisions during the Brexit campaign. IpsosMORI found that while '45 per cent of respondents rejected as false the suggestion that a vote to Remain would see Turkey fast-tracked into the EU and its

population of (then) 75 million people granted the right to free movement to the UK, another 45 per cent believed it was true. Many of them, we can safely assume, went on to join the 52 per cent of British voters who, on 23 June, voted to leave the European Union' (p. 493).

Aslı, one of my older respondents, preferred to stick with her Turkish ethnic identity as a reaction to the discourses of the Brexit campaign:

> For many years, they have been scared of Turkey. It goes back to the Ottoman times, especially the French. . . they have always been scared of Turkey. Obviously, a vast number of Turkish citizens would flee through here. That is what they were scared of, too... but then it does not make sense because they opened doors to Romania and Bulgaria; these are not up countries like Turkey. And also, because Turkey is known to be a Muslim country, they are afraid of that. Because there are no Muslims in the EU, so obviously, there is that too; that's why the UK was scared of Turkey, and that is one of the reasons they have come out of the EU. Turkey might go into the EU for immigration reasons. Basically, they are also scared of the fact that the whole world will be Muslim in the future; it is scary that it will come down to politics in the end. The world as a whole knows that Turkey would fight for their flag to death; it is a commitment, and they know this. As the whole world knows, Turkey is a very powerful country.
>
> (Aslı, 55 years old, Working with Autistic Children, London)

Asli drew upon the institutional (or political) Islamophobia, rather than everyday Islamophobic incidents, to highlight unwanted 'Muslim' differences with its problematic characteristics that need to be removed and indicate the portrayal of Islam as a problem informing the roots of UK getting out of the EU (Khan 2023). She said little of the Brexit campaign's dominant discourses about the anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish programmes that were circulated to attract Leave voters. If anything, Aslı deflected attention by emphasising the taken-for-granted assumption of Turkish superiority embedded in the Ottoman Empire, economy, flag, and army. Aslı built her narrative of the hierarchy of Turkish–Islamic synthesis in a certain way to defy Brexit's use of Turkey and its Muslim population as a threat to British values and culture. She used the element of 'fear' as an antidote to cover up degrading perceptions of Turks/Muslims. Not only did she claim that it was the fear of 'invasion' of Britain by Turkish/Muslim immigrants that resulted in Britain's exit from the European Union, but through nationalist rhetoric and discourse, Aslı maintained the myth of Islamic and Ottoman threats to Christianity and Europe. Even though her perception of Brexit demonstrates misperceptions about Islam and Muslims as a threat to perceived British values, identity, and sovereignty, it also draws from the notions of Ottoman superiority and the intrinsic belief of Turkish identity as civilised and a part of Western civilisation rather than 'backward Muslims of the Orient'. The latter is a common trend amongst Turkish citizens. It is deeply rooted in Ottoman/early Turkish Orientalism, positing Ottoman Turkey and Islam as obstacles preventing Turkey from aligning with the West in its fullness (Çarmikli 2011, p. 8).

One might argue that the Brexit campaign weaponised Turkey's not-in-near-future accession to the EU to tie together the issue of immigration with the issue of sovereignty. Turkey was the perfect rhetorical weapon for encapsulating the narratives of the desire to leave the EU. The reason for this desire was twofold: first, 'a nostalgia for the imperial past, as the basis for calls to restore the nation's sovereignty and wrest back control of its borders'; and second was the annihilation of 'the spectre of a migration crisis tied with the looming threat of terrorism seen as indicative of Muslim presence' (Rhodes and Hall 2020, pp. 284–85). Perhaps, then, it was no surprise that Asli acknowledged the latter in accordance with what the media was telling the British community for the duration of the Brexit campaign, saying that a vast number of Turkish people would actually flee to the UK after its accession to the EU. This was, however, followed up by her hard-line stance insisting on the powerful and inviolable dominance of Turkey and its Ottoman past to

evade the associations of Turkey and Turkish people with negative immigrant stereotypes, correspondingly and implicitly including herself into the equation.

Ultimately, it is a fact that the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) actually released a broadcast warning voters about the possibility of Turkey (*population 86 million*[9], *predominantly Turkish Muslim)* being a member state by 2020 should they back Remain. We can rightfully claim that Turkey was cited considerably more than any other country in articles about immigration during the ten weeks of the referendum campaign and that 'the most negative depictions of non-UK nationals were of Turks and Albanians' (Ker-Lindsay 2018)[10]. Ironically, the overtly xenophobic portrayal of Turkey and its citizens at a time of rising anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain was downplayed by some of my respondents. Whilst commenting on Brexit, some at times defied the Leave campaign's propaganda that singled out the accession of Turkey to the EU as a primary factor in securing Brexit:

> It is so complicated, my opinion is if Turkey joins Europe, we enter the EU, and it has no bearing on the UK. It is not the UK's responsibility; I think we should join the EU; you know, all British people want to go to Turkey every summer they go to Turkey, so why would they incite a negative opinion? So, I do not think British people happened to create a hostile environment on purpose, not really. I also did not feel like I was unwelcomed during the Brexit campaign.
>
> (Erdal, 21 years old, Studying Pharmacy, Norwich/London)

Turkey's position as 'likely to be a member of EU' being effortlessly carved out in the Turkish mindset is based on historically nourished discourses around Turkish identity, Turkish Islamophobia, and the sense of it being culturally superior to other Muslim nations (Ergin 2016, p. 3). Above, a person with Turkish heritage, who was present in this particular setting where xenophobic and Islamophobic views were overtly repeated for ten weeks of the Brexit campaign, denied the perception that Turkey is cast as a straightforward representative of 'vilified undesirables' (Joseph 2020, p. 59). Against this Orientalist position, perhaps unsurprisingly, Erdal dehistoricised the populist Brexit narratives embodied in Turkey's negative portrayal and, if anything, reconstructed the image of Turkey as an appealing holiday hotspot for British people. Others simply implied instances of disbelief at the magnitude of concerns against a backdrop of Turkey's candidacy for EU membership. Azra, for instance, suggested that the primary focus of the Leave campaign was the understanding that 'we can do better by ourselves' rather than xenophobic views:

> I personally wanted to stay in the EU; I did not like to think about it like, 'Oh, Turkey is joining the EU; we should leave' I don't really understand any of them. I did not understand the rationale behind it, I understand why they have used it, but I have never thought about that whilst, you know, voting stay or leave. I did not think about that while doing that; I rather thought, 'Oh, it is just more beneficial to stay in the EU' [maintaining] white British. I mean, I don't think so; I don't think they have voted because of Turkey, thought 'Oh, these countries are joining the EU, so we should leave' I don't think that was their thought process; I think they just thought the EU as a whole which was not doing great at the moment, we can do better by ourselves kind of mentality.'
>
> (Azra, 17 years old, Studying Law and Business, London)

Azra's perspective emphasised that Brexit's underlying motivation was to safeguard "white Britishness" and resist diversity and immigration. This viewpoint aligns with the notion of maintaining a specific cultural and racial identity, which was a significant concern for many proponents of Brexit. In light of Gilroy's concepts, the idea of "white Britishness" can be examined through the lens of melancholy within the identity of white Britain following the decline of the Empire. Gilroy (2011) suggests that this decline has evoked a sense of loss and melancholy among white Britons, who once benefited from the power dynamics of imperial dominance. This melancholy arises from a shifting power dynamic, where the assured prosperity derived from exploiting other nations is now perceived to be under threat due to immigration and diversity within the UK. Azra henceforth rejected the

discourse on the 'undesirability of Turkish immigrants' upon Turkey's joining the EU at face value. She evidently reiterated the argument of the Leave campaign, which is encapsulated in the context of the 'we can do better ourselves mentality'. Garner (2023) argue that dominant groups reproduce themselves through power relations, that is, relationally. The rhetoric of the Brexit campaign was partly grounded (Bhambra 2017) in the legacies of the Empire and the myth of White British exceptionalism[11], promoting heights of *self-assured* and naturalised cultural superiority of white native Britishness (or Englishness) (Gilroy 2011; Garner 2012 emphasis mine). In other words, the colonial past based on English superiority and imperial melancholia has functioned as the basis for political claims in the present. This extract suggests that preceding discourses on sovereignty and autonomy were so ubiquitous and commonplace during the Brexit campaign that it was even established in the minds of immigrants and children of immigrants in Britain.

This tendency to think of Brexit seems to have resulted in a complete denial and disguise that helped the Turkish context to be masqueraded as irrelevant by British Turks. It ought to be noted that this understanding is the product of a historical process negotiated by British Turks in a double context: from within their country of family origin (Turkey) and from within their current country of residence (Britain) (Onay and Millington 2024). We should not forget that all my respondents were either born in or immigrated to Britain at an early age and raised by parents who emigrated from Turkey in the early 1970s and 1980s. And their parental home was firmly and concretely shaped through instruments of Orientalism, secularism, whiteness, and Westernisation (Bozdağlioğlu 2008; Cagaptay 2006; Göle 1997). Seen in this light, in Azra's mind, Turkish citizens' unwanted status based on race or modernity cannot necessarily underlay and underpin the motives behind Brexit. The formulation of a modernised Turkey, consolidated by the concept of 'whiteness' in the past two centuries, has transplanted Turkish people's perceptions to a large extent (Göle 1997). This might explain the difficulty in understanding why Turkey's EU membership was at the forefront of the Brexit campaign. This also unveils why the narratives of the respondents did not touch upon the fact that Turkey is the perfect instrument to mobilise Islamophobic sentiments for voting intentions. Developed around this blind spot, the next respondent showed vehement disbelief in the feasibility of putting Turkey on a poster with an image of a UK passport declaring that Turkey (population 76 m) is joining the EU (Figure 2):

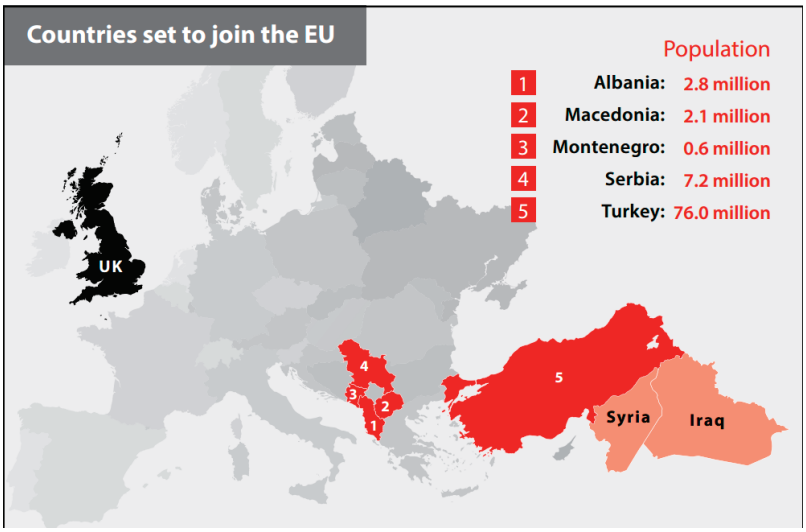


Figure 2. EU referendum: The Brexit campaign was accused of 'fanning flames of division' with a controversial map (Cowburn 2016).

> I have a memory, basically, it was in secondary school, during Brexit times, and what happened was people who promoted Brexit came to my school and handed

> out those leaflets, and I remember taking a look at the back of the leaflet; it was saying 'can you imagine Turkey joining the EU?' I was like, wow, because when I think about it, okay, I understand their viewpoint, what they might think. After all, obviously, Turkey has a large population and then a lot of problems there happening politically, and in other ways, so I can imagine so many people migrating to the UK. So, I still did not like the way they used Turkey, though. Can you imagine Turkey is joining, like aliens are coming... they did not have to print that way; it was on the leaflet... it is like, why did they feel the need to put that on. . . My Turkish friends and I talked about it later. Did they really do that?
>
> (Irem, 21 years old, Studying Medicine, Bridlington)

Here, rhetorical questions are asked to make a point rather than to get an answer. Irem uttered, 'Why did they feel the need to put that on. . . [. . .] did they really do that?' to emphasise the 'irrational' character of the Brexit discourse created around Turkey. Irem acknowledged the attitudes around immigration and Brexit based on the fact that Turkey abounded with the potential of new 'Muslim' immigrants to the UK. The way Irem addressed the impact of sensationalised portrayals of Turkey in the context of Brexit discussions echoes the historical background outlined in the previous sections, where the Ottoman Empire's multicultural legacy, its peculiar form of Orientalism followed by muscular Kemalist reforms, shaped perceptions of Turkey and its relationship with the West. The quote reflects on the discomfort felt upon encountering a leaflet insinuating Turkey's potential EU membership as a threat, akin to the arrival of aliens. This discomfort resonates with the historical shift discussed, where Ottoman Orientalism gave way to a more overt pointing at the 'Orient', the inferiority underpinning the unwanted status of 'Islam', in the era beginning from the Tanzimat reforms and stretching into the Turkish Republic era. Similar to other respondents, Irem could not fully juxtapose the concerns stemming from Islamophobia with Turkey and its candidacy to the EU. Irem's view was captured as a way of turning a blind eye to the fact that Turkey was not deemed to fit into the prospects of Western civilisation by Britain and, if anything, was merely placed alongside unwanted, inferiorised Muslim countries. In this mindset, Turkish people are viewed with suspicion, and Turkey is relegated to the position of an undesirable and unwanted Muslim country, which resulted in my respondents' disbelief and denial. After all, this feeling has long been absent from the Turkish mindset.

4. Conclusions

This article has shed light on the intricate interplay between the Brexit campaign and issues of sovereignty, immigration, and Islamophobia, particularly focusing on the discourse surrounding Turkey's not-so-near accession to the EU as a Muslim-majority country. Employing Edward Said's Orientalism as a theoretical framework, the study explored in depth the construction of an 'irrational' narrative about Turkey and its Muslim population within the Leave campaign's arguments that Turkish membership was a real prospect (Ker-Lindsay 2018). The analysis revealed the strategic use of populist narratives rooted in nostalgia for a perceived imperial past and the exploitation of fears related to the risk of terrorism in a *borderless* EU and being in the same union with Turkey and anxieties surrounding migration (Gasimzade 2018). The warnings about Turkey's EU membership were identified as a tactical tool in the Brexit campaign, intertwining concerns about sovereignty and immigration with anxieties about Islam. Through the accounts of British Turks, the research unveiled nuanced responses marked by dismay, disbelief, and denial in the face of the constructed narrative that portrayed Turkey as an undesirable 'Other' with its predominantly Muslim population. Therefore, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics between identity, politics, and discourses surrounding immigration, sovereignty, and Islamophobia against the background of Brexit's Leave campaign, which was shaped not only by British politics but also illuminated Ottoman Orientalism and the collective consciousness of Turkishness.

This article delineates two ongoing and unfinished nostalgic narratives converging on the Brexit discourse. In broad, stylised comparisons between Turkey and Britain, whilst the former has been intending to achieve full membership in the EU for decades, the latter voted to leave the EU in 2016, allowing one to put the whole issue of leaving and entering into the prospect of a future that is imaginary. I argued that in both Turkish and British mindsets, the European Union has been registered as a fantasy that informs the hegemonic national imaginary. On the Turkish front, accession to the EU is a natural counterpart of the broader project of westernisation, shaped in the Kemalist modernisation project initiated by Ottoman elites (Öniş 2004, p. 8) and consolidated by the customary obsession with the last remaining scraps of pride in the Ottoman Empire all at the same time. As far as Britain is concerned, the arguments are tied to the obsessive repetition of key themes, such as the loss of the former British Empire and the additional loss of certainty about the limits of national and racial identity that results from it (Gilroy 2004, p. 116); hence the 'independence' side appeals to the patriotic heart. The thinking of the Leave campaign is magical; it plucks a dimly remembered but glorified past (*that was as never as nostalgia makes it*) (Koegler et al. 2020, emphasis in original). Social unrest brought up with the expression 'Turkey (population 76 million) is joining EU' on the poster indicated that "if Turkey enters the EU, millions of Muslim 'Others' will be on our doorstep; hence, our welfare is under threat" (Türkmenoğlu 2022). In the realisation of hegemonic Orientalist construction positioning Turkey, Turks, and Islam as the 'Other' against 'us', the West, the Leave campaign's use of Turkey as leverage to gain votes shattered British Turks' sense of belonging, on occasion leading them to question their place in the UK, albeit in disguise, and the image of the modern, secular, Westernised Turkey, while at least for some, the latter was romanticised with the once potent position of the Ottoman Empire.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was approved by the University of York's ELMPS Ethics Committee on 19 October 2019.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 UKIP's controversial Turkey video

2 In 2021, there were approximately 4 million EU-born residents in the UK, making up 6% of the population and 37% of all those born abroad. The top countries of origin for EU-born residents are Poland (21%), Romania (14%), the Republic of Ireland (10%), Germany (7%), and Italy (7%). M. V. Cuibus (2023, November 20). EU migration to and from the UK. Migration Observatory.

3 Kemalism is the founding myth of the Turkish Republic, and secularism is an integral part of it. Kemalism inferiorised religion in terms of modernity and progress: in these terms, religion is "reaction", irtica, and conservative/backward. Being modem is being secular. Modernism and secularism are associated with Western models, extending to the minutiae of everyday life, such as dress, family relations, and personal comportment. Zubaida (1996).

4 Alevism is a mystical belief that is rooted in Islam and Sufism with some traditions of Christianity and Shamanism. That being said, some segments of the Alevi community argue that features of their belief and culture do not follow Islamic or other religious codes strictly. For simplicity's sake, I do not delve into further detail about atheist Alevis and Alevis who oppose Islamic religiosity but adhere to Turkish nationalism. A. Dudek (2017). Religious diversity and the Alevi struggle for equality in Turkey. Retrieved from., A. Akdemir (2016). Alevis in Britain: emerging identities in a transnational social space.

5 Islamophobia is a pervasive kind of racism. Its effect ranges from everyday slow-burning microaggressions to eruptions of violence and murder; its scope extends from classrooms and workplaces to neighbourhoods and state frontiers, from print and social media to the public square. Muslims find themselves framed by Islamophobia in the form of questions about national security, social cohesion, freedom of speech, gender inequality, and cultural belonging. Bhatti (2021).

6 The Ottoman Empire was the only Muslim great power. It was also the only Muslim state to rule over a vast Christian population, a great number of which resided in Rumelia. Throughout the nineteenth century the Great Powers—Austria-Hungary, Great

Britain, France, Russia, and the latecomers, Germany and Italy—engaged in a full-fledged struggle to win the hearts and minds of the Balkan Christians and thus draw them into their own sphere of influence. The Bulgarian revolt became an important step in a chain of events that would eventually result in the creation of a new state, Bulgaria. It could be argued that the April uprising in 1876 led directly to the outbreak of the Russo–Ottoman War of 1877–78, which would change the map of Europe and create a new balance of power in which Germany would play a leading role. A. Kilic (2014). The International Repercussions Of The 1876 April Uprising Within The Ottoman Empire. *Uluslararasi Suçlar Ve Tarih* (15).

[7] For a discussion of Turkish Orientalism from the 1920s to the present, see (Eldem 2015, pp. 226–69)

[8] The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) entered Turkey's political scene in 2002, established by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. With the increasing power and authoritarianism of religious government in Turkey since 2002, the concept of secular, also known as white Turk, has been denigrated by the current head of state, Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself, on the grounds that white Turkishness has always been the marker of the secular and Kemalist segment of Turks. Tayyip Erdogan, therefore, called himself a black Turk in 2003 in a report published by The New York Times. He said: 'In this country, there is a segregation of Black Turks and White Turks... Your brother Tayyip belongs to the Black Turks' (Brennan and Herzog 2014, p. xvi).

[9] This number does not indicate a definite or approximate number since Turkey is currently undergoing a demographic transition; it hosts 4 million refugees, and 3.6 million are Syrians. E. C. Auditors (2018).

[10] Moore and Ramsay (2017). UK media coverage of the 2016 EU Referendum campaign. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/cmcp/uk-media-coverage-of-the-2016-eu-referendum-campaign.pdf> (accessed on 22 May 2022).

[11] Gilroy contends that the collapse of the Empire has left a lingering sense of melancholy within the identity of white Britain. This melancholy stems from the shift in power dynamics, where the dominance once exerted over various races and nations is now directed towards the marginalisation of those who have sought refuge in the UK, referred to as the 'escaped' subjects (Gilroy 2004, p. 120). The British populace was assured prosperity through the British Empire and the exploitation of the Majority World, a trajectory that cemented an unchallenged belief in British racial superiority/exceptionalism (Anne Turner 2022).

References

Akdemir, Ayşegül. 2016. Alevis in Britain: Emerging Identities in a Transnational Social Space. Doctoral dissertation, University of Essex, Colchester, UK.

Alpan, Basak. 2019. The Impact of EU-based Populism on Turkey-EU Relations. *The International Spectator* 54: 17–31. [CrossRef]

Anne Turner, Victoria. 2022. Interrogating whiteness through the lens of class in Britain: Empire, entitlement and exceptionalism. *Practical Theology* 15: 107–19. [CrossRef]

Auditors, E. C. 2018. *The Facility for Refugees in Turkey: Helpful Support, but Improvements Needed to Deliver More Value for Money*. Luxemburg: European Union.

Babacan, Muhammed. 2021. Young Turks in Britain and Islamophobia: Perceptions, Experiences and Identity Strategies. Ph.D. dissertation, Bristol University, Bristol, UK.

Bale, Tim. 2022. Policy, office, votes–and integrity. The British Conservative Party, Brexit, and immigration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48: 482–501. [CrossRef]

Bhambra, Gurminder K. 2017. The current crisis of Europe: Refugees, colonialism, and the limits of cosmopolitanism. *European Law Journal* 23: 395–405. [CrossRef]

Bhatti, Tabetha. 2021. *Defining Islamophobia: A Contemporary Understanding of How Expressions of Muslimness are Targeted*. London: The Muslim Council of Britain.

Bozdağlioğlu, Yücel. 2008. Modernity, identity, and Turkey's foreign policy. *Insight Turkey* 10: 55–75.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2013. *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., pp. 1–400.

Brennan, Shane, and Marc Herzog. 2014. *Turkey and the Politics of National Identity: Social, Economic and Cultural Transformation*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Burak, C. O. P. 2019. *Countdown for Brexit: What to Expect for UK, EU and Turkey?* New York: JSTOR.

Cagaptay, Soner. 2006. *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who Is a Turk?* London and New York: Routledge.

Çarmikli, Eyüp Sabri. 2011. Caught between Islam and the West: Secularism in the Kemalist Discourse. Ph.D. thesis, University of Westminster, London, UK.

Chomsky, Noam. 2008a. *Interventions*. London: Penguin Books.

Chomsky, Noam. 2008b. *Kerim Yildiz Foreword by Noam Chomsky*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.

Cowburn, Ashley. 2016. EU referendum: Brexit campaign accused of 'fanning the flames of division' with controversial map. *The Independent*, June 6.

Cuibus, Mihnea V. 2023. *EU Migration to and from the UK*; Migration Observatory. Available online: https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/eu-migration-to-and-from-the-uk/ (accessed on 8 April 2024).

Dudek, A. 2017. *Religious Diversity and the Alevi Struggle for Equality in Turkey*. Jersey City: Forbes.

Eldem, Edhem. 2015. The Ottoman Empire and Orientalism: An awkward relationship. In *After Orientalism*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 89–102.

Ergin, Murat. 2016. *"Is the Turk a White Man?": Race and Modernity in the Making of Turkish Identity*. Leiden: Brill, Vol. 95.

Garner, Steve. 2012. A moral economy of whiteness: Behaviours, belonging and Britishness. *Ethnicities* 12: 445–64. [CrossRef]

Garner, Steve. 2023. Not in a Relationship. In *The Oxford Handbook of Superdiversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 359.
Gasimzade, İlhama. 2018. Brexit: The impact on the United Kingdom and Turkey. *Uluslararası Beşeri Bilimler ve Eğitim Dergisi* 4: 1–10.
Gilroy, Paul. 2004. *After Empire*. London: Routledge, Vol. 105.
Gilroy, Paul. 2011. The closed circle of Britain's postcolonial melancholia. In *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern*. New York: Springer, pp. 187–204.
Gökalp, Ziya. 1969. *Türkçülüğün Esasları*. İstanbul: Varlık Yayınevi.
Göle, Nilüfer. 1997. Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The making of elites and counter-elites. *The Middle East Journal* 51: 46–58.
Grossman, Michele, Vivian Gerrand, and Anna Halafoff. 2020. Australia: Diversity, neutrality, and exceptionalism. In *Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 296–308.
Joseph, Tiffany. 2020. Race, ethnicity, and documentation status have brightened boundaries of exclusion in the US and Europe. In *Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Racism*. London and New York: Routledge.
Ker-Lindsay, James. 2018. Turkey's EU accession as a factor in the 2016 Brexit referendum. *Turkish Studies* 19: 1–22. [CrossRef]
Khan, Kamran. 2023. The Perceptions of Sharia: Beyond Words and Intentions. In *Media Language on Islam and Muslims: Terminologies and Their Effects*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 225–41.
Kilic, Ayten. 2014. The International Repercussions Of The 1876 April Uprising Within The Ottoman Empire. *Uluslararasi Suçlar ve Tarih* 15: 11–45.
Koegler, Caroline, Malreddy Pavan Kumar, and Tronicke Mariena. 2020. The colonial remains of Brexit: Empire nostalgia and narcissistic nationalism. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56: 585–92. [CrossRef]
Lewis, Geoffrey. 1961. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Moore, Martin, and Gordon Ramsay. 2017. UK Media Coverage of the 2016 EU Referendum Campaign. Available online: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/cmcp/uk-media-coverage-of-the-2016-eu-referendum-campaign.pdf (accessed on 22 May 2022).
Onay, Özge, and Gareth Millington. 2024. Negotiations with whiteness in British Turkish Muslims' encounters with Islamophobia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1–22. [CrossRef]
Öniş, Ziya. 2004. Turkish modernisation and challenges for the new Europe. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 9: 5–28.
Rhodes, James, and Natalie-Anne Hall. 2020. Racism, nationalism and the politics of resentment in contemporary England. In *Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Racism*. Solomos: Routledge, pp. 284–99.
Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*, 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books.
Saini, Rima, Michael Bankole, and Neema Begum. 2023. The 2022 Conservative leadership campaign and post-racial gatekeeping. *Race & Class* 65: 03063968231164599.
Sayyid, Bobby S. 1997. *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*. London: Zed Press.
Sealy, Thomas, and Tariq Modood. 2020. The United Kingdom: Weak establishment and pragmatic pluralism. In *Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 46–56.
Solomos, John, and Les Back. 1996. *Racism and Society*. New York: Springer.
Somay, Bülent. 2014. *The Psychopolitics of the Oriental Father: Between Omnipotence and Emasculation*. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer.
Türkmenoğlu, Ahmet T. 2022. Orientalist Traces in the Brexit Referendum: A Semiotic Analysis on the Brexit Posters. *Erciyes İletişim Dergisi* 9: 57–75. [CrossRef]
Vakil, AbdoolKarim, and S. Sayyid. 2023. Towards a Grammar of Islamophobia. In *Media Language on Islam and Muslims: Terminologies and Their Effects*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 29–56.
Völkel, Jan C. 2019. The impact of Brexit on the European Parliament: The role of British MEPs in Euro-Mediterranean affairs. In *Brexit and Democracy: The Role of Parliaments in the UK and the European Union*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 263–91.
Wellings, Ben. 2018. Brexit and English identity. In *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit*. London: Routledge, pp. 147–56.
Yegenoglu, Meyda. 2012. *Islam, Migrancy, and Hospitality in Europe*. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer.
Zubaida, Sami. 1996. The survival of Kemalism. *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien*. Vol. 21, pp. 291–96, Online since 5 May 2006, Connection on 8 September 2020. Available online: https://journals.openedition.org/cemoti/571?lang=en (accessed on 8 April 2024). [CrossRef]

religions

MDPI

Article

Reimagining Ummah: The Role of Third-Generation Immigrant Women in the Transformation of Turkish Islam in Europe

Zehra Yılmaz

Department of International Relations, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Van 65090, Turkey; zehrayilmaz@yyu.edu.tr

Abstract: For decades, the traditional precepts of "Turkish Islam" have defined the community structure for Turkish immigrants in The Netherlands. Today, spiritualism rather than Islamic morality is emerging as the more compelling religious practice among young people, especially among women who are looking to break out of their culturally enclosed communities. This study uses the terms "enclosure" and "opening up" as metaphors for immigrant participation in Dutch society and suggests that religious Muslim women immigrants are both the founders and dismantlers of the two metaphors. Through their own narratives, women are shown to challenge and resolve social compartmentalization, and the role of cultural transmission through "*Ummahtism*" (the global Islamic community) is detailed as it is reinterpreted in Europe by Dutch–Turkish women. The findings of this paper are based on field research conducted in The Netherlands between September 2020 and April 2022.

Keywords: Turkish Islamism; The Netherlands; women; integration policy; Ummah

1. Introduction

This article argues that Turkish Islam in Europe, which was shaped through national ties, has begun to dissolve due to rising criticism among third-generation young women and that national ties were replaced by a new understanding of Ummah. In conducting this discussion, the role of Turkish Islam in the integration of Turks living in The Netherlands since the 1964 Turkey–Netherlands worker recruitment agreement is specifically addressed. Turks were among the earliest immigration groups to The Netherlands and remain the most prevalent, with a population of approximately 420,000 people[1]. However, compared to other immigrant groups and as corroborated by Turkish immigrants themselves, Turks in The Netherlands have the lowest level of interaction with those outside their communities. The relatively large size of the population and the fact that most live with their families minimize the need for any outside contact, although such cultural isolation is reflected in problems with economic integration; for instance, the unemployment rate of Turkish immigrants is higher than the overall unemployment rate in The Netherlands (Tol and Akbaba 2016). Political integration is another area of concern, since cultural isolation may translate to a lack of participation in the political structure of the host nation. The *Denk Party*[2], founded by the Turks, is a clear indication that Turkish immigrants differed politically from the Dutch.

In The Netherlands, 85% of Turks are Sunnis and 15% are Alevis. Sunni Muslims are further divided into two subgroups, i.e., secular and religious Muslims (Yükleyen 2012, p. 12). It is important to note that those mosques that were established under the concepts of Sunni Islam, such as the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), the *Milli Görüş*, the *Süleymanlı*, and other Islamic groups, exhibit significant resistance to the integration of Turks in The Netherlands, both socially and politically. Since the intergenerational transmission of cultural identity through education programs in mosques is identified in this study as having political characteristics, the scope of this research is focused on

political rather than social reasons for the limited interaction of Turkish immigrants with other communities in the country.

Specifically, the study shows how the "enclosure" strategy of Turkish immigrants has its origins in the Turkish Islamist tradition and not only functions to preserve the culture but has been adopted to prevent their assimilation into the greater majority population. The relationship between the "enclosure" strategy, a policy aimed at preventing Turks from entering Europe, and Turkish Islam is analyzed, and the "opening up" strategy taking the place of the "enclosure" model is shown as a parallel process to the elimination of Turkish Islam from Europe, as evidenced by attitude changes across generations. The sustainability of this approach is criticized, and the study claims that the "enclosure" strategy is being replaced by a tendency towards "opening up". Based on ethnological fieldwork, it is argued that the decline of Turkish Islamism in Europe is linked to generational changes in religious attitudes and evolving social ideals, especially among religious women.

Postulating that it was women who initiated this "opening up" process, the study shines a spotlight on third-generation Turkish women who have become alienated from the "homeland" and, by extension, from "their people". To use the Islamic terminology, it is increasingly difficult for them to pursue the idea of the global "Islamic Ummah", which in turn affects the sustainability of Turkish Islamism in Europe. It is maintained that women, as the bearers of Islam in the diaspora as well as in Turkey, are the main actors behind Ummah, since it is these women who are calling attention to the new crisis of Turkish Islamism by problematizing the dominant discourse of "tradition" in Turkish Islamism. One of the most important names mentioned in the article in the context of women and nationalism is Partha Chatterjee. The article analyzes how, in Chatterjee's Third World nationalism, the roles of femininity, which have the task of protecting core values against Western tendencies, unexpectedly deconstruct the national bond in Turkish Islam in the diaspora.

2. Methodology

The analyses conducted for this study are based largely on ethnological field research conducted in The Netherlands between September 2020 and July 2021,[3] while certain shortcomings of the study were addressed during two further 10-day visits in October 2021 and April 2022. An ethnological approach was preferred for the study rather than a top–down view of the subject, since ethnological research better illuminates the internal dynamics of societies without homogenization (Augé and Colleyn 2005; Monaghan and Just 2007). The article focuses on women who organized themselves through the mosque, and several Turkish mosques were visited across the country where the researcher participated in women's meetings and religious festivals. The researcher also stayed in the home of one of the education supervisors in a Turkish mosque, conducting conversations with her and her female guests on different topics, all of whom were educators at Turkish mosques. Further information was gathered via various online chat groups. The experiences, observations, and information gained and collected through this fieldwork form the basis of the arguments in this article. As an additional source of data, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 people, most of whom were women, with a significant proportion of those identifying as Turkish Muslims. While some of the interviews were carried out face-to-face, others were conducted through various online platforms as an adaptation of field research methods to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic[4]. One-on-one interviews lasted an average of two hours, although some of the respondents were met a second time when more than two hours were needed to complete the interview. Training sessions offered by different Turkish Islamic groups were attended, as well as conversations organized by both these groups and the Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Turkish Republic (*Diyanet*).

In addition to interviews, the focus group discussions took place in mosques and were conducted in the form of face-to-face meetings or online as courses and seminars. In total, there were three focus group meetings in which 10 Turkish women participated. Each

focus group meeting lasted an average of 90 min, and none were recorded at the request of the participants. In addition, an online course on women and Islam was organized by an institute for religious education for Turkish Muslims in The Netherlands, in which civil law and women's rights were discussed with the participants. A total of nine students participated in the course, of which only one was male, and all were second-generation Turkish immigrants.

A significant proportion of these research meetings were conducted in the Dutch cities of Leiden, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam, while one was held in Tilburg and one in The Hague. Most of the group meetings that involved participatory observation were in Leiden. Since research was conducted in Leiden, the first women that researchers contacted were those who came to the Turkish mosques in Leiden. Through these relationships, the researcher reached the other interviewees in a snowballing contact process. Although Leiden is close to major cities such as The Hague and Amsterdam, it is a smaller center and hosts a smaller Turkish population. The Hague, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam are where most Dutch Turks live, and the Turkish community is therefore more well organized in those cities. It must be stated, however, that the respondents in Leiden were more open to criticizing the policies produced by the center due to their relative distance from the central organizations in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, and they were thus a key source of information in this study. The researcher's acquaintances from Turkey who worked with Islamic organizations in The Netherlands provided additional contacts for this study. After all interviews have been transcribed, the discourse analysis method was used for evaluation.

3. Historical Grounds of Turkish Islam

As both political and social touchstones, Turkish–Islamic traditions have an impact on the integration process of religious Sunni Turks in The Netherlands, and one must first look at the historical and intellectual foundations of Turkish Islam to understand the impact on immigrants. In Turkey's political tradition, nationalism, conservatism, and Islamism are interchangeable (Bora 1999, p. 8). There is a strong tendency towards continuity between Islamism and nationalism. For nationalists, "Turkishness" is defined not as a nationality based on language and assimilation but as a mixture of race and faith; in other words, if you are of Turkish descent and Muslim, you are Turkish (White 2014, p. 58). Although race has come to the fore in defining Turkey's national identity, Ziya Gökalp, an important academic on the topic of Turkish nationalism, sees it not as an Islamic belief system but as the core of Turkish cultural identity[5]. N. Shmunel Essenstadt also points out that the success of Turkish nationalism is largely based on the pre-existing, deeply rooted Islamic identity (Eisenstadt 2003, p. 446).

The close association between Islam and nationalism is longstanding and was evident as far back as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the promises of restoring old powers and cultural significance, an ever-present feature of nationalism, have long been heard (Bora 1999, p. 24). One important Islamist thinker, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, made a connection between Islam and Turkishness, saying, "Turks began to think after they accepted Islam", and only after this acceptance "did they begin to weave bright protoplasms of civilization" (Akıncı and Şafak 2013, p. 262). He contends that Islam has deteriorated in Turkey since the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, embraced the Arab world, but he claims that if Islam becomes powerful in Turkey, it will also become powerful in the Islamic world.

Having such prevalent nationalist discourse in Turkish Islamism has greatly hindered the development of an Ummah consciousness and understanding of the Ummah, which is one of the basic terms of Islamism. The perception of the Ummah by Turkish Islamists is not characterized by the assumption that Turks are simply part of the Islamic Ummah collective nation but instead forwards the assumption that Turks are the leaders of the Islamic Ummah. This perspective reconstructs the Ottoman Empire as a source of inspiration for the imaginary, unified Ummah. It is believed that by reviving the idea of Ottoman civilization, the missing aspects of Ummah will be fulfilled (Karakoç [1988] 2009, p. 4). İsmail Kara, a

prominent contemporary Islamist thinker, says that the "Ummahism" discourse, whose internationalist dimension has increased in Turkey with post-World War II Marxist socialist influence, has weakened concepts such as homeland, state, and land in favor of religion, and he criticizes such Ummah approaches. Kara laments that this aspect of Ummahism, which at first glance appears to be rallying and encompassing, is in fact weakening and detrimental to the group, and [that effect] is not emphasized enough (Kara 2005, p. 37). Although Turkish Islamism has seemed excited about certain developments in other parts of the Islamic world, such as the 1979 revolution in Iran or the strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood grassroots organization in its defiance against the state in Egypt,[6] ultimately the discourse that has dominated Turkish Islamism is one that protects the state and secures its perpetuity, while claiming that Turks are the overall leaders of the Islamic community. Kara explains this quality of Turkish Islamism by drawing upon Rumi's[7] metaphor of a pair of compasses, which states that as long as one steady compass remains permanently fixed on the geography of Turkey, the other can move around and observe other Islamic geographies or sources other than Turkish Islamism (Kara 2020). However, it is of utmost importance that a steady compass remain permanently fixed on Turkey if any possible drifts in Turkish Islamism are to be prevented.

Kara's claim is not unfounded. Islamists who consider the Ottoman Empire's historical legacy to be a reference point believe that Turkey can become the political leader of the Islamic world and that shifting the compass either away from Turkey or away from the state bears significant risks for the course of Turkish Islamism. Given the new global contexts of Islamism, however, efforts to keep the compass fixed on Turkey have become untenable. Turkish Islamism found its way by merging with nationalism after World War I, when nationalist movements were on the rise in the Third World[8], but globalization now eclipses the local/national,[9] and Turkish Islamism is struggling to adjust. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904–1983), Nurettin Topçu (1909–1975), and Sezai Karakoç (1933–2021), the founders of Turkish identity in the early days of the Republic, present Turkish Islamism as a requirement of Turkishness within an interpretation that can be summarized as Islamism under the larger umbrella of nationalism. Kısakürek's poem "The Great Eastern Anthem" (*Büyük Doğu Marşı*) begins with the line "The liberated People chosen by God" (*Allah'ın Seçtiği Kurtulmuş Millet*), illustrating the hyperbolic meaning he ascribes to the place of Turks within Islamism.[10]

Moreover, "anti-Westernism" and "anti-modernism", or more moderately put, criticisms of the West that have arisen from a defensive stance, have been the centerpiece of Turkish Islamist ideology from its very beginnings. The Islamist attempt to come to terms with Western modernity and Turkish Westernization has long focused on a negative and negativistic discourse aimed at cleansing society of the "contaminating" effects of Westernization and questioning Western dominance in world politics (Çınar 2018, p. 182). Dealing with the question of modernization and Westernization has been one of the greatest challenges to non-Western nationalist movements (Bora 1999, p. 23). Topçu, Karakoç, and Kısakürek stand out in this regard as Turkish Islamists who advocated the empowerment of Islam to protect it from Western influence. They further championed the denial of Westernism based on Islamic morals and civilization. In this sense, Kısakürek's "selective" thesis that encourages Turks to make use of "only the technological developments originating in the West, without surrendering the moral values of Islam"[11] is a central argument for Turkish Islam. Karakoç concurs with Kısakürek and supports the claims that the nation that can best lead the Islamic world by bringing it together under its aegis is Turkey (Karakoç [1988] 2009, p. 183). The Ottoman Empire is usually regarded as the "society of the Ummah" and is associated with the golden age of Islam, surpassed only by the time of the Prophet and his companions (Yıldız and Çıtak 2022, p. 10). Topçu goes on to define the relationship between Islam, Turkishness, and morality, claiming that the "religion of the people is one that has molded people's morals, customs, and hearts and has become the direction and source of Turkish Islamic civilization, and that religion is Islam" (Topçu 1997).

In the process of Turkish modernization, it was necessary to adapt to European developments and to keep up with innovations to ensure the existence of the state. On the other hand, an important question was posed on how a nationalistic and religious society could preserve its values in the face of these changes. At this point, the status of women became a popular topic in discussions of Turkish modernization, and an archetypal model woman emerged, one who took advantage of the opportunities of modern life while preserving her national values. In fact, establishing and emphasizing a relationship between morality, family, and women proved to be useful in filling in the ideological gaps of Turkish Islam. Instead of criticizing or resisting the political and economic system of the West, the preservation of Turkish–Islamic culture, which is centered upon family and women, and resistance to Western ideologies then came to the fore.

Fatma Aliye, a Paris-educated writer who spoke fluent French and who sought to protect "national values", is a key name among the Turkish Islamic ideologues who were vocal on women's issues.[12] According to Aliye, Islam and Turkishness were intertwined, and like other Turkish Islamic thinkers, the protection of the state was her priority, although she also strived to inform Europe about the "correct" Islam (Kızıltan 1993, p. 66). Aliye attaches importance to women's education mainly in support of their role in raising children and therefore in developing society (Aliye 2012, p. 79), which is typical of the nationalist understanding in which the ideal woman is an actor in broader social development through traditional work such as their child-rearing obligations (Kandiyoti 1996).

Fatma Aliye claims that Islam can respond to the demands of the modern world and challenge Muslims who find themselves exposed to Western "aggression" (Bahadır 2018, p. 88). She further suggests that religion should not be considered an obstacle to scientific progress or women's rights, as it is enough to turn to Islamic sources to realize their importance (Aliye 2016). Fatma Aliye's ideas can be considered a summary of the Turkish Islamic view of women, and her thoughts reflect those of Partha Chatterjee on Third World nationalism. Chatterjee, an anthropologist and leading academic in the subject of nationalism, explains the family–woman connection and culture in postcolonial nationalist ideology, and she contends the nationalist movement distinguishes between the material and spiritual spheres (Chatterjee 2002, p. 28). For Chatterjee, the "outside" world is represented by the material sphere of economics, state affairs, science, and technology; it is the sphere in which the West has proved its superiority and the East has submitted (Chatterjee 2002, p. 22). Accordingly, the superiority of the West in these fields should be recognized and even mimicked. However, instead of mimicking the West in its entirety, a national understanding means it is necessary to highlight cultural differences from the West to some extent. The place for accentuating these differences from the West in anti-colonial societies is the spiritual sphere (Chatterjee 2002, p. 22), wherein the family is seen as the standard bearer and locus of cultural differences. Chatterjee points out that gender relations is the pivotal axis along which the fear of modernity and the need to distance oneself from the colonial West are balanced. The discourse of nationalism defines social and moral principles for the positioning of women in the modern nation–state (Chatterjee 1989, p. 241), so the material sphere is labeled as the domain of men, while the spiritual sphere is conceptualized by women since their gender is responsible for the protection and representation of culture.

The idea of women as exponents of culture was adopted by thinkers looking to establish Turkish Islam's relationship with the West as they steered the course of Turkish nationalism. Of course, Turkey was never a colonial state—a fact repeatedly emphasized by Turkish nationalists—but as a country in which late nationalism developed, the Turkish version had similar characteristics to Third World nationalism (Aktoprak 2016, p. 5). When Turkish Islam was reincarnated among the diaspora, an analogous nationalist project was implemented among the immigrants. Today, Muslim women living their lives in Western European countries have adopted the Turkish–Islamic mission of preserving their religious and national ties. As one of the respondents of the present study[13] stated, Islamic morality

within the framework of "Turkish Islam" has served as a shield against Western cultures for immigrants who thought that they would one day return to Turkey.

4. Transnational Imaginations of Turkish Islam from Generation to Generation

Large communities of Muslims have emerged in Western Europe as a result of post-colonial emigration and labor migration after World War I (Yükleyen 2012, p. 37). During the two decades following the 1960s surge of foreign workers into The Netherlands, multicultural policies were put in place according to which ethnic groups were allowed to set up their own organizations. The intention was to ensure equal rights to migrants and to maintain recognition of their culture and identity (Carrera et al. 2017, p. 261). To this end, the government developed a consultative structure and empowered itself as a facilitator among different groups (Vasta 2007, p. 757). The implementation of this policy, which can be referred to as "multiculturalism" in the Dutch context, was left to the initiatives of the minority groups and their organizations within the limits of the general laws. Subsequently, a law was enacted allowing broadcasting in minority languages and the addition of subject courses on minority languages and religions to school programs, while also paving the way for the opening of Islamic schools and places of worship (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2009, p. 5). Today, Dutch multicultural policies recognize Muslims' group identity, and their organizations have developed cooperative relations (Laurence and Vaisse 2006). A different approach was taken in the early 1990s, however, with the enactment of an integration policy that emphasized the socio-economic participation of immigrants as "allochthonous"[14] people and other policies through which minorities were turned into citizens. According to De Koning (2020), Dutch policies shifted from multiculturalism to a new realism in the 1990s, especially after the events of 9/11 in the US and various bombings in Western Europe (De Koning 2020). Consequently, in The Netherlands, immigrants are now categorized on an individual basis rather than at a group level, and various policies have been revoked, including those permitting education in minority mother tongues in schools. Islamic communities and organizations responded in turn, offering social and religious services to meet the expectations of Muslims. They established mosques, educational institutions, foundations, associations, and media outlets.

Two dynamics are particularly decisive for immigrant Islamic life in The Netherlands. The first is the religious policy of the host country towards immigrants; the other is Turkey's domestic policies towards that group. After the reunification of Turkish immigrant families in the 1970s,[15] religious activities expanded as families worked together to build a community with its own social, religious, and economic infrastructure. It is clear that there is a linear relationship between Islamization and family reunification that included Turkish women's and children's arrival in Europe (Mazlum 2023, p. 157). In all meetings conducted with second-generation immigrants, both men and women repeatedly emphasized Turkish–Islamic culture and the importance of transmitting this culture to the third generation. Wendy Cadge and Elaine Howard Ecklun (Cadge and Ecklun 2007) claim that the ethnic and religious identities of immigrants tend to merge into a political identity, and this is certainly the case with Turkish immigrants.

Indeed, Turkish mosques in Europe have emerged as places for the transfer of this political identity to subsequent generations. Several Turkish Islamic organizations opened Islamic education courses in mosques in the Turkish language, thus ensuring the perpetuation of the language by successive generations. After deciding to raise their children in Europe in a Turkish–Islamist framework, the members of these organizations constructed new mosques and used them for intensive education for children aged 4–16. From this perspective, if ties with the old homeland of Turkey were to be severed, then the borders of the new homeland they were establishing in Europe would have to be redefined. In other words, the migrants' evident needs can be summarized as building a religious and ethno-national identity, passing on their culture to the second and third generations, and improving their economic prospects (Yükleyen 2012, p. 48). Thijl Sunier defines this process as "the migrantization of Islamic organizations" (Sunier 1999).

Against this backdrop, the moralist discourse of the Turkish–Islamist tradition served as the main basis for religious education. In reaction to their cultural separation from the homeland, religious education was embraced by the third generation, which mitigated alienation from Turkey. Religious education continues to this day, and the main aim was and is to protect the "national" identity through the principle of Islamic morality. In Turkish Islam, the moral dimension is more than an ideological one but extends into the fuller cultural identity (Yıldız and Çıtak 2022, p. 26). For instance, interviewees made clear their intention "to raise young people who embrace their religion and who know the Turkish language, as well as Turkish customs and traditions".[16] Second-generation Turkish Muslim immigrants in Europe have maintained their ties with Turkey, tending to visit Turkey once a year, to buy property there despite having no intention of moving, and to send their religiously obligated alms to Turkey. But, for the second generation, these tangible ties to the homeland still do not mitigate a lingering sense of belonging, neither in Europe nor in Turkey. That gap is addressed in part with educational activities for young third-generation Turks that help the second generation cope with their feelings of disconnection, since mosques and their religious education programs provide an ongoing connection to Turkey. As noted by Mieke Maliepaard, Marcel Lubbers, and Merove Gijsberts, second-generation Turkish immigrants continue to attend mosques regularly, following in the footsteps of their parents, but generally receive a more formal Dutch-style education compared to the first generation (Maliepaard et al. 2010).

For first-generation immigrants, most of whom came to The Netherlands under the workers' agreement signed with Turkey in 1964, the "homeland" is still Turkey, the place they were born. By the 2000s, first-generation migrants had started to reach their sixties and were voicing thoughts of being buried in Turkey when they die.[17] Most of them were uneducated, came from rural areas in Turkey, had a low socio-economic status, spoke little or no Dutch, and very few had any form of cultural relationship with The Netherlands (Güveli and Platt 2011). These factors had a long-term impact on the social and religious demands of Muslims in Europe (Yükleyen 2012, p. 46). In some respects, the remnants of the 19th-century Dutch pillarization system[18], which segregated religious populations in the political sphere, made it easy for Turkish immigrants to establish their own religious and cultural institutions. Nevertheless, while the second generation was more religious, it was also more integrated into Dutch society than the first generation (Fleischmann and Phalet 2012).

The second generation is composed mostly of immigrants who were either born in The Netherlands or who were born in Turkey and moved to The Netherlands at an early age. By the 2000s, this generation had reached their twenties or early thirties and had feelings of belonging neither to Turkey nor to The Netherlands. As a generation stuck between two worlds, they addressed their sense of homelessness by transmitting "spiritual" values based on the Turkish Islamic synthesis to the third generation, and any religious break between the first and second generations was thus prevented, along with any possible generational communication gap (Voas and Fleischmann 2012). For example, while the first generation suffered from having no mosques to attend, the second generation built many Turkish mosques and considered them their new homeland[19]. They both educated themselves in religion and saw the passing on of religious values to their children as an important intergenerational task. As mentioned, the education of this second generation in public schools strengthened their ties to the host country compared to the previous generation and led to permanent settlement (Yükleyen 2012, p. 47). Chereb contends that, compared to first-generation Turks who came to The Netherlands, the identity of the second generation is more hybrid and diverse, as it interacts with both Turkish and Dutch culture (Güner and Abbas 2024).

In this study, every interviewee from the second generation expressed a fear of being unable to protect their children from the supposed corrupt way of life in The Netherlands and/or spoke of the need to preserve their culture. What the Turks consider "assimilation" in Europe is the loss of the Turkish language and the traditions specific to "Turkish culture",

which has blended with Sunni Islamic culture. Therefore, religious education as offered by the Turkish mosques was viewed as the only way to tackle this problem, and the instillation of religious beliefs in the younger generation is seen as part of a "cultural repertoire" (Tilly 2006) filled exclusively by Turkish Islam. At the same time, Turkish lessons continued to be taught in the mosques. Second-generation women who had themselves been trained in mosques delivered most of the mosque education, usually as volunteers either for no pay or for very little remuneration.

Women from the second generation in particular took the lead roles in immigrant Turkish Islamic movements. In their European communities, where the family had the duty of protecting the values of the homeland, it was women who stood out more than men as the transmitters of culture as a side effect of their maternal and familial responsibilities. The continued presence of children in religious education classes in the mosques was mostly considered to be the responsibility of women. Women were thus able to establish a relationship with the mosques through their children, leading to participation in further courses themselves. All of the interviewers in the present study confirmed that it was women rather than men who were mainly involved in the events organized by mosques. This was attributed by some of the respondents to the better functioning of the women's subbranches of different organizations, while others claimed that it was because women were naturally more religious or that women simply had more free time on their hands than men. The responsibility for raising the next generation, however, was the main reason given for women becoming more involved with religious affairs.

Motherhood as an institution can be used to regulate and supervise first women and then the wider community (Öztan 2010, p. 115), and this strategy is observed within the Turkish community in The Netherlands. Saba Mahmood, who has written on the experiences of Egyptian religious women, claims that the behaviors of pious women are part of the "inhabited norms" they desire, which are based on patriarchic and religious culture, and that such activities actually structure the 'interiority' of their gendered subjectivity (Mahmood 2005). From the Mahmood's perspective, it can be said that second-generation Turkish women immigrants in particular have internalized and taken on the task of passing on culture and religion to their children through the role of motherhood. Paradoxically, it would seem that Turkish women involved in cultural activities meant to strengthen traditional female roles have in some ways become empowered by Islamization. Unlike first- and second-generation women, third-generation women tend to experience both Islamization and the pressure of cultural surveillance more intensely than men. As the group tasked with transmitting the culture to the next generation, women tend to be more critical both of Islamization and cultural surveillance. Women have become the main agents in the processes of Islamization and religionization in Europe by taking on the task of transmitting the connection to the homeland to succeeding generations. In this process, they have started to question the "enclosure" form of integration. The tension engendered by the intergenerational change within the movement, made visible particularly by women, in addition to the criticisms expressed by third-generation women about Turkish Islamism and the traditional structure it produces, have compelled the Turkish community in Europe to open up. In summary, the institutionalization of religion among Turkish immigrants made it more difficult for Turks to integrate into their society by making them introverted. However, the fact that institutionalization was being eroded by discussions about the new Ummah, especially by women, was a driving force for Turks to open up to the greater society around them.

5. The Closing in/Opening up Dilemma of the Turkish Community: What Comes First—The Ummah or National Belonging?

Since their migration to The Netherlands, Turkish immigrants have maintained their presence by means of "enclosure", that is, by remaining within a closed community in their country of settlement. The first-generation migrants had little choice in this regard, as neither The Netherlands nor Turkey had a program in place to prepare Turkish workers

for what was to come. In this period, especially for the more devout in the community, Turkish Islamism offered a framework by which the Turkish workers could gather in isolated communities and lead a life without needing to integrate into Dutch society. In this context, the terms "opening up" and "integration" are used in parallel. Integration here is understood as a person feeling that he/she belongs to the society in which he/she lives, and an integrated person both makes and demands regarding the future of the society and has the opportunity to express such demands. Fieldwork for this study revealed that Turkish Islamism served as a refuge for first-generation immigrants against issues that were outside their control and that they consciously resist integration still today. In this sense, they see themselves as different than Muslim Moroccans (Cadge and Ecklun 2007). According to one second-generation respondent:

> "The Moroccans seem to be more integrated into The Netherlands than Turkish immigrants. Why? Because they don't care about protecting their culture. We are not like the Moroccans. We always protect the Turkish Islamic culture; we will never give up on it."[20]

This sentiment was just one example of how the potential "loss of culture" was considered unacceptable and met with abhorrence by the Turks. During fieldwork interviews, it was common among second-generation Turks to use a hierarchical language in which they positioned themselves at the apex, above Muslim immigrants from other regions. In their view, the connection between Turkishness and Islam is an essentialized relationship, and it is what lies behind this attitude. They further differentiated themselves from other Muslim immigrants through references to their Ottoman past and repetitions of the widespread discourse that the Turks were never colonized (Bora 1999, pp. 16–17).

> "What can I learn from a Syrian in the name of Islam? I know Islam better than a Syrian because Islam came to Arab society, while the Turks chose Islam and ruled the Muslim Arabs for centuries."[21]

Meanwhile, the different ethnic and cultural identities of the immigrants, as well as their religion, made assimilation difficult in the eyes of the host society. Frank Van Tubergen, in his study of Moroccan and Turkish immigrants in The Netherlands, identified a negative relationship between religiosity and such aspects of everyday life as the level of social connectedness with the local Dutch people, inter-ethnic marriages, education, employment, and mastering the Dutch language (van Tubergen 2007, p. 759). Confirming Tubergen's argument, all of the immigrant Turks interviewed in this study spoke about protecting their children from the hegemonic culture in The Netherlands, or, in their words, from "culturelessness/degeneration" (*yozlaşma*). Respondents were terrified of the possibility of their children being exposed to the host culture and "losing" them as a result. The discourse of fear and othering was further reinforced when behavior patterns essentialized as Western, such as the freedom to engage in sexual intercourse outside marriage, legalized drugs, and same-sex marriage, were added to the mix. Respondents constantly described The Netherlands as an unsafe place for their children and themselves, and they felt responsible for providing their children with a safe habitat. This discourse continuously indicated a preference for a communal enclosure in which emphasis was placed on the family within the orbit of Turkish Islamic culture. In particular, the second-generation respondents were of the opinion that "in order not to dissolve as a minority community, you must protect and isolate yourself"[22]. For this group, continued cultural isolation was an immutable reality. In a Durkheimian sense, religion functioned as an instrument of social control over the younger generation, and especially women (Carol et al. 2019). Interviews further showed that women of the second generation took on the task of preserving and transmitting Turkish–Islamic culture. However, there are some objections among young women of the third generation who were expected to take on this role.

According to third-generation respondents, their relationships with both other Muslim immigrants and the Dutch were considerably different from those of the previous generations. Here, third-generation Turkish immigrants had more in common with the young

Muslims of other ethnicities than with second-generation Turkish Muslims. Born and educated in The Netherlands, they are fluent in Dutch, and their communications with the ethnic Dutch lack the tension felt by those of the second generation[23]. Furthermore, Turkish Islam and the Turkish political arena hold less importance for those of the third generation.

Throughout the study, the estrangement of the third generation from the politics and religion of Turkey was a source of concern for the previous generations. During interviews with second-generation respondents, one interviewee stated that "some young people have abandoned their religion altogether, while others have become too religious".[24] Statistically, studies report a slight general tendency towards secularization across generations among Muslims in Western Europe, as Muslim children on average appear less religious than their parents (Diehl and Schnell 2006; Kasselstrand and Mahmoudi 2020).

It is noteworthy that the abandonment of religion by young people was equally distressing as the emerging new religiosity. Although educated by the second generation, the third generation appears to have a significantly different interpretation of religiosity. In fact, during the fieldwork, it took longer to contact those of the younger third generation than those of the second generation. One reason for this was that the second-generation respondents were unenthusiastic about connecting such a researcher with young community members. It is possible that the second generation considered the building, protection, and dissemination of European Turkish Islam to be their responsibility and thus sought to limit the third generation from interacting with the world outside their community. While this was not carried out overtly, their discomfort with unsupervised communication with young people was apparent. A second reason for the reluctance to allow contact with the third generation was the tendency of youth to talk openly about themselves to outsiders, as their novel ideas were not recognized by the older community members. While the younger members of the third generation were critical of the wider Turkish community, they were still part of it, and like the older generations, they were careful not to reveal any existing tensions to outsiders.

Although all respondents maintained a level of secrecy and caution, in the interviews it was apparent that the enclosure strategy of the second generation aimed at "protecting their culture", which was based on the principle of "nation first, homeland first", was being replaced by a new discourse of "protecting Islam" and "Ummah first". For example, when I asked one third-generation female respondent what culture meant to her, she replied:

> "To me, culture means tradition. They [*culture and tradition*] are things that have been taught to us as part of Islam until today, but they have nothing to do with Islam. Islam should be purified from culture. Islam is Islam. It cannot be claimed by a particular culture."[25]

This criticism, which found widespread support among third-generation respondents, clearly expresses an objection to the Turkish–Islamic interpretation. As Güner and Abbas mention in their article, the new generation's tendency to distinguish between the patriarchal, "cultural" practices of the Turkish community and the "real" Islam that values women's rights can be seen as a practice of talking back (Güner and Abbas 2024, p. 9). Beyond that, it can also be said that this statement reveals that the third generation considered it necessary to become independent of the Turkish community in Europe and to open up to the Ummah with an individual understanding of religion. As one third-generation interviewee stated:

> "My mother wants me to attend the mosque regularly, but I cannot be of service to the mosque all the time. Being a Muslim does not just mean serving Turks, as we also have obligations to the Ummah. . .In essence, the world is bigger than the mosque, the world is in need of service. Serving only the mosque and the community is not an acceptable Islamic practice!"[26]

In The Netherlands alone, there are 150 mosques affiliated with the *Diyanet*,[27] while there are a total of 206 Turkish mosques, 140 Moroccan mosques, and 50 Surinamese mosques. Mosques are seen by immigrants as important institutions that provide national

ties. However, although there are no research data on this topic, it has been observed that young people's interest in mosques has decreased recently,[28] and this trend was seen among the interviewees. Although the Ummah requires solidarity between Muslims of all nations, ethnicities, and races, the division of mosques along ethnic–national lines, such as Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese, is an obstacle to cooperation (Yükleyen 2012, pp. 43–44). These disparate Islamic communities have an ambivalent relationship with each other since their relations are based on conflicting ethnic–national loyalties to the global community of the Ummah, as well as competition for resources (Warner and Wenner 2006). Furthermore, there is a direct link between the decline in young people's interest in mosques and the spread of the new understanding of the Ummah among young people.

For those of the third generation, the choice between collectivity and individuality further revealed a new religious interpretation among young people in Europe that is sensitive to their individual needs. The individuality of the third generation and the related transformation of the definition of religiosity were highly disturbing for the older Turkish generations in The Netherlands. The third generation's new understanding of religiosity not only included criticisms of institutionalized religion and the collectivity developed through it but also dismantled the concept of "enclosure"—a dismantling that unsurprisingly was led mostly by women as the group most oppressed by institutional structures. As Anthias and Yuval-Davis emphasized, the duties of maintaining cultural integrity and protecting and perpetrating cultural and ethnic values given to women, especially in a xenophobic environment, could also be a source of pressure and a means of surveillance of women (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). Consequently, through their cultural criticisms, third-generation women were trying to bring an end to this control and pressure. Although all girls and boys aged 4–16 received similar religious education, every interviewee from the Turkish community acknowledged that women were stricter in their adherence to Islamic rituals. After mentioning the meanings attributed to motherhood, one female third-generation respondent added the following to the list of the reasons why women were more faithful to Islam:

> "In our community, after reaching a certain age, men become more outgoing, while women, on the other hand, remain more within their own communities, being under stricter control. For this reason, more women engage in religious conversations and religious education, and consequently, are more informed about religious issues."[29]

While religiosity was considered safe for women and contributed to the continuity of the community, the women interviewees reported an important crisis that was not in line with the community's views, namely the turn to Ummahtism as a means of liberation from the community control described above. Third-generation women, particularly those seeking to unburden themselves from the expectations of the traditional Turkish community, seek freedom within the Islamic religion by embracing Ummahtism, and the Ummahtist worldview for these women is shaped by a spiritualist Islamic interpretation. Although at first it may seem like they have been influenced by the Islamic morality of Rumi or the Masnavi, both schools of thought being part of the Turkish–Islamist orthodoxy, the intellectual references of the third generation come from different traditions. Women seeking liberation instead follow religious thinkers like Yasir Qadhi, Nouman Ali Khan, Mufti Ismail Menk, and Yasmin Mogahed, who preach in English on YouTube and identify with spiritualism rather than mysticism. Following the 2000s, the Islamic morality passed down to the third generation from their parents evolved into spiritualism after reinterpretation by the new generation of Turkish Muslims in the West. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the two religious paths. While spiritualism calls on individuals to become more inward-looking and embrace the devout individual's relationship with the Western/Westernist/non-Muslim society, Islamic morality calls on individuals to return to their communities.

It was also apparent during the study that while third-generation Turkish Muslims were emerging from their closed community, they differed from previous generations by

communicating with other, non-Turkish Muslim communities. These discussions reflected the efforts of members of the third generation to respond to various problems by claiming Dutch–Muslim subjectivity with a pan-Islamist perspective. In seeking answers, the youngest generation is rapidly moving away from the national (*milli*) and taking refuge in the global (*Ummah*). In parallel to these changes, they define themselves as Muslims rather than as Turks.

6. Conclusions

After the settlement of immigrant Muslims in Europe, the connection between Islam and specific territories has become increasingly uncertain. The global dynamics of the modern era make it challenging for an interpretation of Islam devoid of national ties to establish itself in Europe. Turkish Islam is also affected by this shift. A significant factor is that immigrant Muslims, particularly those living in Europe, are becoming more open to interacting with both other Muslims and the non-Muslim societies around them. This interaction inevitably leads the younger generation to move away from national ties and towards Ummahism, a more global and flexible concept. As a result, both the interpretation of Islam and the understanding of the community established by Islam are undergoing radical changes with the new generation.

Interviews with three generations of Turks living in The Netherlands indicate spiritualism rather than Islamic morality is rapidly becoming the more compelling religious path for young people, especially among women who are looking to break out of their culturally enclosed communities. Upon encountering the West, Islamic morality implores immigrants to keep a tight grip on their own culture and close themselves in with members of their home nation in their host communities, whereas spiritualist Islamic interpretations suggest individuals open themselves to new community experiences by generating individualized approaches of how to live in the West as Muslim subjects, thus opening up new pathways to integration into their host nation. Spiritualism stands out as an important option for those situating themselves at the center rather than on the periphery of the society in which they live.

In fact, for the new generation, rather than a collective coming together of Muslims as in the tradition of the Ummah, being part of the global world of Islam appears to have become an idealized metaphor for individual liberation of young Turkish immigrants, and for them it is an idea that does not compromise their Muslimness. From the third generation's point of view, it is apparent that Ummah has neither defined borders nor distinct nationalist claims, and so it is impossible for any authority to emerge that will have total political power over the younger generation. In this regard, young people turn to an abstract definition of "Ummah" to legitimize their detachment from the community, with young women being the loudest voices expressing a desire for this detachment that liberates them from traditional community obligations.

Thus far, this new journey into international pan-Islamism has no legible "national" idea for the third generation, nor is there yet an organized movement they can readily join. Beyond the risks posed by the ontological category of Ummah for Turkish Islamism, i.e., the decline in popularity of its traditional practices, its redefinition by a new generation of Turkish immigrants who want a more individualistic interpretation of religion could be a major stumbling block for the future of Turkish Islamism.

Funding: The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and publication of this article: Zehra Yılmaz received financial support from TUBITAK for the research. The number of the project was 1059B191900630.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Acknowledgments: Thanks are due to Nadia Sonneveld and Katerina Dalacoura for their advice, and to Cheryl Jacklin-Piraino for her help in language revision of the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 Number of Turkish nationals resident in The Netherlands from 2010 to 2022. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1284990/turkish-nationals-population-netherlands/#:~:text=In%202021%2C%20there%20were%20422,thousand%20less%20than%20in%202021 (accessed on 1 February 2023).

2 It is a party founded in 2014 by Turks in The Netherlands against anti-immigration and Islamophobia. It is currently represented in the Dutch parliament with 3 MPs. See its program at https://www.bewegingdenk.nl/ (accessed on 4 February 2023).

3 The fieldwork was supported by a grant received from TÜBİTAK-BİDEP for the project numbered 1059B191900630, while the Van Vollenhoven Institute for Law, Governance and Society of the Leiden Law School hosted the study.

4 The period in which I conducted my fieldwork coincided with curfews in The Netherlands at certain times. Places where people could gather, such cafés and libraries, were periodically closed, and only a certain number of people were allowed to gather in houses. At these times I continued my semi-structured interviews online.

5 See these two books for Ziya Gökalp's approach on this subject: (Gökalp 1918) and (Gökalp 1923).

6 The translation of the works of Sayyid Qutb, Mawdudi and Hasan al-Banna into Turkish in the 1960s that gained popularity in Turkish-Islamist literature are reflections of this excitement.

7 Muhammed Celâleddîn-i Rumi (known as Mevlânâ in Turkish) was a 13th century Sunni Muslim poet, jurist, scholar, theologian and Sufi mystic. Although he was born in Belh, Khorasan in 1207, he spent most of his life in Konya, Anatolia.

8 Hannah Arendt, in the *Roots of Totalitarism* (9–68), states that nationalism ceased to be a major concern for Europe in the 20th century, and in fact it began to spread to countries outside of Europe. According to Arendt, in this new era, the rise of imperialism replaced the rise of nationalism in Europe.

9 In Turkish, the words *milli* and *ulusal* both mean "national". The concept of *milli* is Arabic in origin but is still widely used in the Turkish language. *Milli* and *ulusal,* however, also have their own political connotations. People on the right wing or with right leanings tend to use *milli,* while those who are left or left leaning use mostly *ulusal*.

10 "Büyük Doğu Marşı", https://www.antoloji.com/buyuk-dogu-marsi-siiri/ (access on 3 March 2023).

11 For a summary of Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's arguments on Turkish-Islamism, see (Kısakürek 1968).

12 For Fatma Aliye's views on women's issue, see the article "Nisvan-I İslam and Bir Fransız Muhariri", *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, (1896), 189.

13 Interview with P., 10 March 2021, Amsterdam, Zoom meeting.

14 Statistics on the immigrant population in The Netherlands, unlike other countries, are not based on nationality or country of birth, but rather ethnicity. The Dutch government debated the distinction between allochtonen (foreigners) and autochtonen (natives), allochtonen being the antonym of the Greek concept of "autochthon", which means native. Allochtonen in formal usage refers to people born outside The Netherlands, or at least to have a parent born outside The Netherlands. An additional distinction is made between Western and non-Western allochtonens, with Western immigrants comprising allochtonens from Europe (excluding Turkey), North America, Oceania, Indonesia and Japan, and non-Western immigrants comprising allochtonens from Turkey, Africa, the rest of Latin America and Asia.

15 In the first agreement between Turkey and The Netherlands, male workers from Turkey were temporarily admitted. After 1970s, however, it was found that these male workers chose to stay in The Netherlands permanently rather than temporarily and thus sought family reunification.

16 Interview with M., 6 April 2022, Rotterdam, face-to-face meeting.

17 Since The Netherlands is not seen as a territory of Islam, the first generation in particular could not consent to being buried there. With the establishment of Muslim cemeteries, burials began to take place in The Netherlands among those of the second generation. Nevertheless, both the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey and other Islamic communities continue to aid the transfer of bodies to Turkey for burial.

18 The verzuiling (pillarization) system, which was systematized from the 1870s to the 1920s and endured until the 1960s, is a social structure that is unique to The Netherlands. This structure acknowledges religious and cultural differences, but also puts forward a social contract that can hold these differences together. In the pillarization system, Dutch society is categorized into four different and isolated social groups: Catholic, Calvinist, Liberal and Socialist. Each of these four groups is called a pillar. The political system is built religiously and ideologically on these pillars (Kaya, *İslam, Göç ve Entegrasyon*...).

19 Currently, there are nearly 3000 mosques in Germany alone, from around 30 in the 1970s.

20 See Note 16 above.

21 Interview with A. 28 June 2022, Rotterdam, face-to-face meeting.

22 Interview with B., 30 May 2021, Leiden, face-to-face meeting.

[23] I do not suggest that the relationships between the Dutch and Turks are smooth today, however, the causes of tension are different for those of the third generation and those of the previous generations.

[24] Interview with F., 26 February 2021, Amsterdam, Zoom meeting.

[25] Interview with R., 28 May 2021, Leiden, face-to-face meeting.

[26] Interview with E., 22 May 2021, Leiden.

[27] "Şube Cami Adresleri", https://diyanet.nl/hizmetlerimiz/subelerimiz/sube-cami-adresleri/ (access on 12 December 2023).

[28] Muslims in Europe have now begun to hold such discussions among themselves, see: "Why are Young Muslims Disengaged with Mosques", https://urbanmuslimz.com/news/uncategorized/why-are-young-muslims-disengaged-with-mosques/ (accessed on 12 December 2023).

[29] Interview with Z., 18 October 2021, Leiden.

References

Akıncı, Mehmet, and Gökçe Nur Şafak. 2013. Necip Fazıl Kısakürek: Seküler Muhafazakarlıktan İslamcılığa. In *Türk İslam Siyasi Düşüncesi*. Edited by Mehmet Akıncı and Gökçe Nur Şafak. Ankara: Kadim Yayınları.

Aktoprak, Elçin. 2016. Postkolonyal Bir 'Dava' Olarak 'Yeni Türkiye'nin Yeni Ulusu. *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 71: 1–32.

Aliye, Fatma. 2012. *Levayih-I Hayat*. İstanbul: Kesit.

Aliye, Fatma. 2016. *Tezahür-ü Hakikat*. Konya: Çizgi.

Anthias, Floya, and Nira Yuval-Davis. 1992. *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour, and Class and the Antiracist Struggle*. London and New York: Routledge.

Augé, Marc, and Jean-Paul Colleyn. 2005. *Antropoloji*. Çankaya: Dost Kitabevi Yayınları.

Bahadır, İlknur. 2018. Fatma Aliye's Discourse of Woman in the Context of the Islamic Modernization and Tradition. Master's thesis, Cultural Studies, Sehir University, İstanbul, Turkey.

Bora, Tanıl. 1999. *Türk Sağının Üç Hali*. İstanbul: Birikim Yayınları.

Cadge, Wendy, and Elaine Howard Ecklun. 2007. Immigration and Religion. *Annual Review of Sociology* 33: 359–79. [CrossRef]

Carol, Sarah, Feya Peez, and Michael Wagner. 2019. Delinquency among majority and minority youths in Cologne, Mannheim and Brussels: The role of religion. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46: 3603–29. [CrossRef]

Carrera, Sergio, Elspeth Guild, Lina Voyliute, and Bard Petra. 2017. Towards a Comprehension EU Protection System for Minorities. Minority Protection. Available online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349477720_Towards_a_Comprehensive_EU_Protection_System_for_Minorities (accessed on 24 July 2024).

Chatterjee, Partha. 1989. The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question. In *Recasting Women Essays in Colonial History*. Edited by Kumkun Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. New Delhi: Kali for Women, pp. 233–53.

Chatterjee, Partha. 2002. *Ulus ve Parçaları*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Çınar, Menderes. 2018. Turkey's 'Western' or 'Muslim' identity and the AKP's civilizational discourse. *Turkish Studies* 19: 176–97. [CrossRef]

De Koning, M. 2020. The Racialization of Danger: Patterns and Ambiguities in the Relation Between Islam, Security and Secularism in The Netherlands. *Patterns of Prejudice* 54: 123–35. [CrossRef]

Diehl, Clauia, and Rainer Schnell. 2006. 'Reactive Ethnicity' or 'Assimilation'? Statements, Arguments, and First Empirical Evidence for Labor Migrants in Germany. *International Migration Review* 40: 786–816. [CrossRef]

Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. 2003. *Comparative Civilization and Multiple Modernities*. Leiden: Brill.

Ersanilli, Evelyn, and Ruud Koopmans. 2009. *Ethnic Retention and Host Culture Adoption among Turkish Immigrants in Germany, France and The Netherlands: A Controlled Comparison*. WZB Discussion Paper SP IV 2009-701. Berlin: WZB Berlin Social Science Center.

Fleischmann, Fenella, and Karen Phalet. 2012. Integration and Religiosity among the Turkish Second Generation in Europe: A Comparative Analysis Across Four Capital Cities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35: 320–41. [CrossRef]

Gökalp, Ziya. 1918. *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak*. İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları.

Gökalp, Ziya. 1923. *Türkçülüğün Esasları*. İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları.

Güner, Şerife Sena, and Tahir Abbas. 2024. Intersectional activism: Dutch-Turkish Muslim women 'talking back' to securitization and Islamophobia. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1–23. [CrossRef]

Güveli, Ayşe, and Lucinda Platt. 2011. Understanding the Religious Behaviours of Muslims in the Netherland and the UK. *Sociology* 3: 1–36. [CrossRef]

Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1996. Kadın, İslam ve Devlet: Karşılaştırmalı Bir Yaklaşım. In *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar: Kimlikler ve Toplumsal Dönüşümler*. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, pp. 108–32.

Kara, İsmail. 2005. *İslamcı Söylemin Kaynakları ve Gerçeklik Değeri*. Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce, Cilt 6. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, p. 37.

Kara, İsmail. 2020. Türkiye İslamla İlişkisini Yeniden Tesis Etmeden Yol Alamaz. *Perspektif*. October 17. Available online: https://www.perspektif.online/turkiye-islamla-iliskisini-yeniden-tesis-etmeden-yol-alamaz/ (accessed on 24 July 2024).

Karakoç, Sezai. 2009. *Dirilişin Çerçevesinde*. İstanbul: Diriliş Yayınları. First published 1988.

Kasselstrand, Isabella, and Satareh Mahmoudi. 2020. Secularization among immigrants in Scandinavia: Religiosity across generations and duration of residence. *Social Compass* 67: 617–36. [CrossRef]

Kısakürek, Necip. 1968. *İdeolocya Örgüsü*. İstanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları.
Kızıltan, Mübeccel. 1993. Tülay Gençtürk. In *Atatürk Kitaplığı Fatma Aliye Hanım Evrakı Katoloğu I*. İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, p. 66.
Laurence, Jonathan, and Justin Vaisse. 2006. *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: Islamist Revival and Feminist Subject*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
Maliepaard, Mieke, Marcel Lubbers, and Merove Gijsberts. 2010. Generational Differences in Ethnic and Religious Attachment and Their Interrelation: A Study Among Muslim Minorities in The Netherlands. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 3: 451–72. [CrossRef]
Mazlum, Mahmut. 2023. Reflections of 'European Islam' Discourse to Germany and Recognition of Turkish-Islam. *Bilig* 104: 153–78. [CrossRef]
Monaghan, John, and Peter Just. 2007. *Sosyal and Kültürel Antropoloji*. Çankaya: Dost Kitabevi Yayınları, p. 24.
Öztan, Ece. 2010. Göçmen Kadınlar and Anneliğin Düzenlenmesi: Amsterdamlı Türkiye Kökenli Kadınların Annelik Deneyimi. *Toplum and Bilim* 119: 111–40.
Sunier, Thijl. 1999. Muslim Migrants, Muslim Citizens: Islam and Dutch Society. *The Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences* 35: 69–82.
Tilly, Charles. 2006. *Regimes and Repertoires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Tol, Gönül, and Yasemin Akbaba. 2016. Islamism in Western Europe: Milli Görüş in Germany. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 12: 1–16.
Topçu, Nurettin. 1997. *Yarınki Türkiye*. İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, pp. 140–51.
van Tubergen, Frank. 2007. Religious Affiliation and Participation among Immigrants in a Secular Society: A Study of Immigrants in The Netherlands. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33: 759. [CrossRef]
Vasta, Ellia. 2007. From ethnic minorities to ethnic majority policy: Multiculturalism and the Shift of Assimilationism in the Netherland. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30: 747–65. [CrossRef]
Voas, David, and Fenella Fleischmann. 2012. Islam Moves West: Religious Change in the First and Second Generation. *Annual Review of Sociology* 38: 525–45. [CrossRef]
Warner, Carolyn, and Manfred W. Wenner. 2006. Religion and Political Organization of Muslims in Europe. *Perspectives on Politics* 4: 457–79. [CrossRef]
White, Jenny. 2014. *Müslüman Milliyetçiliği ve Yeni Türkler*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
Yıldız, Tunahan, and Zana Çıtak. 2022. The International in Turkish Islamist Thought. *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 51: 129–56. [CrossRef]
Yükleyen, Ahmet. 2012. *Localizing Islam in Europe: Turkish Islamic Communities in Germany and The Netherlands*. Syracuse: Syracuse University.

religions

MDPI

Article

Everyday Lived Islam among Hazara Migrants in Scotland: Intersectionality, Agency, and Individualisation

Sayed Mahdi Mosawi

The Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World, Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9LD, UK; mahdi.mosawi@ed.ac.uk

Abstract: The mainstream literature on the religiosity of Muslims in Europe often homogenises this diverse minority. This article diverges by focusing on a less visible ethno-religious minority within the Muslim population, specifically examining how Hazara Shia Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, resettled in the UK, live and organise Islam in everyday contexts. Addressing this gap, the research highlights the intersectionality of religion, ethnicity, and migration in reconfiguring religious practice. Grounded in the intersectional and lived religion approaches, this study contends that the religiosity of this Muslim minority undergoes a dynamic shift entwined with agency and adaptation in the new secular and plural context, becoming more individualised, privatised, and elective. Employing an ethnographic design, data are collected through semi-structured and key informant interviews, as well as participant observation, over 18 months of fieldwork across various council areas in Scotland. The findings illustrate reconfiguration, adaptation, and innovation in everyday Islam among this intersectional Muslim minority, identifying three main themes: the adaptation and reconfiguration of religious practices and rituals, the renegotiation of authoritative sources, and the navigation of intersectional identities and belonging since resettlement in the UK.

Keywords: everyday religion; Muslim minorities; lived Islam; intersectionality; religious identity; ethnic identity; migration; Muslims in Britain; Shia Islam in the UK; Muslims in Europe

1. Introduction

This article examines how Muslim migrants with an ethno-religious minority background[1] live and organise their religion in the everyday context of the UK. Addressing Muslim minorities' religiosity is significant and fills a critical gap in the field, which often homogenises the Muslim category and overlooks the diversity of backgrounds, practices, and intersectionality of identities within this category and migratory context.

The issue of Islam and Muslim practice has become hypervisible in public and scholarly discourses, particularly since the Rushdie affair in the late 1980s and the events of 9/11 and the 7/7 London attacks in the 2000s (Bleich 2009; Patel 2022). More recently, the increased number of immigrants from Muslim countries following the so-called 2015 refugee crisis has further intensified this focus (Duman 2021). In this context, public and political discourse conceptualises Muslims through a 'religioethnification' lens (Jeldtoft 2013b), where religious belonging and practice become key markers to identify and homogenise Muslims in Europe, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds in terms of citizenship, migration, ethnicity, or religious denominations. In the UK, this homogenised and essentialist discourse represents Muslims as 'Islamic migrants' who live their lives and religion within the confines of mosques and under the guidance of imams (prayer leaders), forming a 'parallel society' (Husain 2021) and a 'threat to the British way of life' (Stacey 2024) and security (Abbas 2018; Kundnani 2014).

In response to these public and political discourses, interdisciplinary works from the sociology of religion and migration have shown significant interest in the religiosity of Muslim minorities. They ask, 'what happens to the religious identity, belief, and practice

of Muslims who settle in Western countries? Do they, or their children or subsequent generations, gradually become more secular? Or do they react and become more religious?' (McAndrew and Voas 2014; Voas and Fleischmann 2012). However, the main body of literature tends to focus on organised, institutionalised, and public aspects of Muslim religiosity, such as attending rituals, prayers, fasting, or religious services in public places like mosques (de Hoon and van Tubergen 2014; Kollar et al. 2023), as well as reactive and revivalist tendencies (Molteni and Dimitriadis 2021) and the role of religiosity in radicalisation (Dawson 2021). Moreover, studies often reify the Muslim minority by focusing on vocal, authoritative figures such as imams, activists who 'live out their religiosity in the public space' (Jeldtoft 2011), and radical actors (Larsen 2020). When examining non-vocal cases, they tend to emphasise larger demographic profiles, such as Sunni Muslim immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh in Britain, and those of Turkish origin in Germany and the Netherlands (Hamid 2011; Maliepaard and Verkuyten 2018). These studies often conclude that Muslims are more religious and conservative compared to the native non-Muslim majorities, including British Christians and religious 'nones' (Lewis and Kashyap 2013).

This article diverges from the overarching discourse that neglects the heterogeneity of Muslim religiosity at the everyday level and the impact of different identities and power structures on living that religiosity. The study problematises the premise that treats Muslim minorities 'as if they are a single solidary group in the social world' (Statham 2024) and responds to Ammerman's call to include an 'intersectional' approach (Ammerman 2021) in the study of everyday or lived religious practices. In doing so, it focuses on the less studied everyday religious experiences of a less visible ethno-religious minority within the Muslim population in the UK, specifically the Hazara migrants from Afghanistan who resettled in Scotland. This diasporic community provides a significant case for studying Muslim minority religiosity due to their non-privileged status—ethnic/racial, religious, and migratory—in both their country of origin and the UK. In Afghanistan, a traditionally religious country with a Muslim majority, the ethnic minority of Hazara belong to the Shia denomination (also spelled as Shi'a, Shīa, Shi'ite, and Shiite)—specifically, the Twelvers—and have been subjected to religious discrimination and persecution (Saikal 2012). In the UK, a secular and multicultural context that simultaneously homogenises and securitises the Muslim category (Abbas 2020), they persist in their minority status compared to the major Sunni Muslim minorities and non-Muslim citizens.

Grounded in the intersectional and everyday religion approaches (Ammerman 2021; McGuire 2008a), this article contends that the religiosity of Muslim minority immigrants undergoes a dynamic shift entwined with agency and adaptation. It becomes more individualised, privatised, and elective in the new secular and multicultural context compared to the traditionally religious pre-migration milieu. The findings reveal three pivotal themes: the adaptation and reconfiguration of religious practices and rituals, the renegotiation of authoritative sources, and the navigation of intersectional identities and belonging since resettlement in the UK. This research provides a nuanced understanding of the everyday lived religious practices, identities and meaning-making of Hazara migrants in the UK. It contributes to the literature in the fields of Muslim religiosity in Europe and British Muslim studies by highlighting the plurality, intersectionality, and agency within the Muslim minority category. This study challenges the homogenised and essentialist views prevalent in public and academic discourses, emphasising the diverse and dynamic nature of Muslim minorities' religiosity.

2. Everyday Religiosity of Muslim Minorities in Western Europe

2.1. Theoretical Reflections

The concept of 'lived religion' or 'everyday religion' (Hall 1997; Orsi 2003) has gained significant traction within the sociology of religion (Ammerman 2007; Bender 2003; Neitz 2012), offering a critical alternative to traditional analyses that primarily focus on religious institutions and organisations. This approach shifts the focus to how faith and religion are 'practiced, experienced, and expressed by ordinary people in the context of

their everyday lives' (McGuire 2008a). Here, 'ordinary' people are non-religious experts who engage with religion, and 'everyday' implies embodied practices that occur in both the private and public spheres, through mundane routines and significant personal moments (Ammerman 2007). Understanding everyday religiosity thus requires analysing 'the empirical variation in practices oriented to sacralization, the institutions (religious and other) that facilitate such practices, and the resulting religious experiences and moral orders that emerge in specific times and places' (Edgell 2012).

Transnational migration is particularly significant in understanding the variation in lived religious practices due to the multiple settings and trajectories involved. Migrants transport multiple identities, religious backgrounds, and practices from one cultural and geographical setting to another, raising new inquiries about proper religious practice within majority host communities. In this everyday migratory context, 'being a 'good Muslim' requires a lot of interpretive activities' (Volpi and Turner 2007), making change and innovation inevitable (Ammerman 2021).

Building on these theoretical foundations from the everyday lived religion approach (Ammerman 2021; McGuire 2008a) and intersectionality (Boussalem and Hopkins 2020), this study extends the scope of the empirical variation in everyday religiosity by focusing on ethno-religious Muslim minority migrants in the UK who are not religious experts and are non-privileged individuals. These lay men and women engage in religious practices that may not necessarily align with the grand narratives of institutionalised religion and may not even appear overtly religious. Moreover, they have moved from traditional and religious contexts to secular and plural ones, where they navigate asymmetrical power relations and intersectional identities—ethnic/race, religious, gender, and migratory—as minorities within their everyday context. This intersectionality shapes their lived religious experiences in relation to both broader Muslim minorities and the non-Muslim majority context (Ammerman 2021; Stausberg et al. 2023).

2.2. Empirical Research

The empirical study of everyday lived Islam among Muslim minorities in Western Europe is a burgeoning field, marked by collaborative efforts beginning with the workshop on 'Forms and Elements of Muslim Religiosity' held in 2010 at Leiden University and the subsequent seminar on 'Everyday Lived Islam' in 2011 in Copenhagen (Dessing et al. 2013b). These initiatives culminated in key publications, notably 'Everyday Lived Islam in Europe' (Dessing et al. 2013a) and 'Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims' (Jeldtoft and Nielsen 2012), which originally appeared in a special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (Jeldtoft and Nielsen 2011). These foundational works critique the predominant focus on visible and organised expressions of Islam, advocating instead for attention to 'invisible' Muslims and the 'noninstitutional' features of their everyday religiosity, including personal spirituality, morality, and informal practices.

Using qualitative, ethnographic methods and quantitative surveys, scholars explore the dynamics of everyday lived Islam across diverse Muslim minorities, considering different ethnicities, genders, ages, and contexts. Jeldtoft (2012, 2013a), for example, examines 'new age' Muslims in Germany and Denmark who eschew formal religious contexts in favour of individual spirituality, meditation, and reiki healing. Kühle (2012) investigates non-organised but highly practising Muslims identified as Salafis in Aarhus, Denmark, while Hemmingsen (2012) observes non-organised Jihadi-Salafis during terrorism trials. Additional significant contributions include Schmidt's (2012) study of Muslim activism in Copenhagen's Nørrebro neighbourhood and research on Muslim women's faith and religious reinterpretations in the UK and Finland (Bokhari 2013; Silvestri 2012; Tiilikainen 2013). Collectively, these studies reveal the diversity, eclecticism, complexity, and fluidity of Muslim religious identities and practices, challenging simplistic categorisations of Muslims into 'organised'/practising and 'non-organised'/non-practising or private and collective religiosity.

Women's religious experiences are critically examined, exploring the intersectionality of faith and gender. Fadil's research (Fadil 2009, 2011) on Belgian Maghrebi women highlights their agency in navigating religious and secular emotional regimes. Focusing on non-practices like not fasting or handshaking, Fadil underscores their ability to adapt to multiple affective layers, challenging conventional understandings of religiosity. Tiilikainen's extensive work (Tiilikainen 2003, 2007, 2013) on Somali Muslim immigrant women examines how Islam plays a role in daily life management, particularly in relation to suffering and ill-health. This research reveals that these women actively redefine their religious meaning, with Islam both shaping and being shaped by their everyday experiences (Tiilikainen 2007). This tactical use of Islam is evident in their engagement with male-dominated religious interpretations and Finnish biomedical institutions (Tiilikainen 2013).

The impact of the socio-political environment on Muslim identities and practices is also another key theme in this scholarship. Jensen (2012) and Schmidt (2012) demonstrate how local and national contexts influence the fluidity of religious identities and the coexistence of individual and organised religiosity. Bevelander and Otterbeck (2012) identify a correlation between negative attitudes towards Muslims and right-wing populism in Sweden. Maliepaard et al. (2012) examine generational differences in ethnic and religious attachment among Dutch Turks and Moroccans, noting a decline in these identities among the second generation. These findings underscore the influence of socio-political factors on religious behaviour and identity, with less welcoming contexts being associated with reactive forms of religiosity (Connor 2012).

Despite these substantial contributions, gaps remain in the scholarship on everyday lived Islam among Muslim minorities with an ethno-religious background in Western Europe, particularly concerning Hazara migrants and their religious affiliations. The few studies that exist focus on Australia and the Middle East context, highlighting the adaptability and fluidity of their religious practices and identities in new environments. Parkes (2020) explores the religious beliefs and identities of three Hazara siblings in Australia, revealing paths ranging from deep religious commitment and pilgrimage to scepticism and entrepreneurial engagement. Similarly, Radford and Hetz (2021) illustrate the fluid nature of religious identity among Hazara migrants in Australia, influenced by their integration into broader society, with some maintaining strong religious ties and others shifting towards secular or culturally Muslim identities. In the Middle East, Glazebrook and Abbasi-Shavazi (2007) focus on pilgrimage to Imam Reza's shrine for Hazara Afghans in Mashhad, Iran, noting its role in reinforcing the Shia religious identity, providing spiritual solace, and influencing community cohesion and return intentions. This study significantly contributes to the existing literature by addressing a critical gap in understanding everyday Muslim religiosity at the intersection of ethno-religious identities in the UK context.

3. Methodology

This ethnographic study employed a combination of qualitative methods, including semi-structured and key informant interviews, as well as participant observation (Creswell 2014). The empirical research spanned 18 months, from 2022 to 2023, across various council areas in Scotland, including Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Dundee. Participants were selected based on their ethno-religious identification as Hazara and Shia Muslims, their Afghan citizenship background, and a minimum residency of three years in the UK to ensure they were established as ordinary residents.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants (six men and five women) to understand their lived experiences and narratives concerning religiosity and identity formation in the new context. These interviews emphasised how participants live and organise their religion in daily interactions and their self-identification and identification by others. Participant observation provided a nuanced understanding of everyday contexts and practices within natural settings (Jorgensen 2015). This involved attending diasporic ceremonies, religious commemorations such as Eid gatherings (Muslim feast

celebrations), and other communal events. Additionally, a key informant interview with an influential Hazara community member offered in-depth insights into the community's migratory trajectory and profile in Scotland.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 50 years and were categorised into two groups: younger generation (18–29 years) and mature generation (30–50 years). To protect their privacy, specific ages and cities of residence are not disclosed. Instead, participants are referred to by age category and gender using pseudonyms, each consisting of 'M' or 'F' to indicate gender (male/female), followed by a randomly generated three-digit number. Among the participants, seven were married, one was engaged, and three were single. Their legal statuses included leave to remain, British citizenship, and refugee status. Their employment status varied, with five employed, four students, and two unemployed.

Interviews were conducted in the participants' local language (Dari/Farsi), occasionally mixed with English according to preference. The length of residency in the UK varied from three to nine and a half years. The interviews lasted between one and a half to three hours. The interviews were transcribed and, along with observation memos and records, were analysed using thematic analysis. This technique facilitated data segmentation, categorisation, summarisation, and reconstruction to capture important concepts and patterns of practice, experience, and meaning-making within the qualitative dataset (Ayres 2008). The coding process included generating initial codes, identifying the main categories and themes, and conceptualising them.

Throughout the research, I positioned myself as both an insider and an outsider. Sharing a similar minority background with the participants helped build trust and rapport, facilitating a deeper contextual understanding of their lived experiences, culture, and religious nuances. This insider status enabled me to approach the data collection with empathy and mutual respect, enriching the contextualisation of their narratives. However, as an outsider and a researcher affiliated with an academic institution, I had to consciously address and mitigate potential power imbalances. I acknowledged this positionality by emphasising informed consent and ensuring transparency throughout the research process. The interviews were approached as social interactions, where power dynamics were minimised by fostering a natural and open dialogue. This dual positionality allowed me to balance empathy with critical distance, providing a nuanced understanding of the participants' religious practices and experiences.

4. Results

The analysis of the interviews and observation records identifies three main themes in how Hazara Shia Muslim migrants in Scotland practice and experience Islam in their daily lives. These themes include the adaptation and reconfiguration of religious practices and rituals, the renegotiation of authoritative sources, and the navigation of intersectional identities and belonging since resettlement in the UK. These themes are detailed in this section and are contextualised within the broader literature in the subsequent discussion section.

4.1. Reconfiguring Everyday Religious Practices

Everyday religiosity and religious practices, along with their associated meanings, are complex and contested among the participants. These dimensions are diverse and have shifted for the interlocuters over time, particularly since their immigration and resettlement in Scotland. Participants frequently recontextualised their lived experiences of everyday religiosity in relation to institutionalised practices common to various Muslim communities (e.g., daily prayers, fasting, Zakat (almsgiving), Hajj) and rituals specific to Twelver Shia Muslims (e.g., Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar, during which the Shia commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn, the third Imam of Shia Islam), Ashura commemoration). Before migration, all the participants practised these rituals in an organised manner, mainly through collective institutions like mosques and traditions. Post-migration, however, two trends emerged: more than half either demonstrated a decline in practising everyday rituals (one man, three women) or had not practised for over two years

(two men), while four participants (two men, two women) maintained regular practices, viewing them as Fard (compulsory).

Those who practise infrequently or are non-practicing share a common perspective: religious practices and rituals no longer hold a central place in their everyday lives post-migration compared to their pre-migration routines. Instead, they have adopted a more flexible and spiritual understanding of religiosity, where being a Muslim is primarily about adherence to spiritual and moral values rather than the everyday performance of religious rituals. Reflecting this idea, M470, a mature man over 40, who now only practices during Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, known for fasting) or Muharram, explains this idea:

> As a Muslim, my religion and practice are centred on humanity. I don't practise frequently like others do, except on special occasions like Ramadan or Muharram. I believe that God doesn't need my praying or fasting. When I am a good human and value humanity by not harming others or violating their rights, I'm a good Muslim even if I don't practise all the time. There's a saying that a house is incomplete without a window; I think religion is similar. True religiosity and Muslimness stress on more than rituals; they involve the human values. For me, religiosity is not limited to actions and is fundamentally about being a good person, which I strive to be.

This shift from ritual-centred religiosity to value-centred religiosity not only highlights the new meaning-making about religiosity but also the practicalities and individual choices participants face in their new context, necessitating a flexible and pragmatic approach to faith. Consequently, they prioritise non-religious matters over religious rituals in their daily lives. F210, a young mother, observed a decline in her religious performance and mosque attendance compared to her time in Afghanistan when she regularly participated in these activities. She emphasises that her responsibilities have increased in Scotland, as she is now busier with outside activities, including managing her children's school affairs, studying, and sports. As a result, she practices sporadically when possible, prioritising motherhood and personal tasks over rituals:

> Here, unlike in Afghanistan where I was mainly at home, sometimes I can't do all my prayers. There is no time. I have a tight schedule managing my children and going to sports. So, there is no time for praying each time or going to the mosque. I practice whenever I can, like in the evenings at home. There are mosques near us, but I think praying at home or in a mosque makes no difference. Maybe there is more Thawab (reward) for it, but God is with me everywhere, even if I can't practice all the time. So, there should be no problem with it.

The emphasis on spirituality and pragmatism is also shared by two men who do not practice. M434, a mature man under 40, considers himself to have grown up as a 'religious' Muslim but does not practice post-migration. He believes the essence of religion is about morality, which he adheres to. Now, his personal priorities, such as working and providing for his family, leave less space for religious rituals. Comparing his current religiosity with his life in Afghanistan, M434 notes:

> When I reflect on myself, and I should say, it is not only me but many others I see here, we've changed a lot in the way we were religious. For instance, if I may say, I am no longer fasting or praying. Maybe this unconsciously developed in my new life here, not practicing as I did routinely in Afghanistan. I have now adopted different habits. This doesn't mean I am not religious anymore. No! I consider myself a less religious person, not living as strictly as before. For instance, after coming to the UK, I started questioning the logic of fasting as others and clerics say, just to make God happy. The fasting hours are longer in Scotland, and if I fast and can't work properly or fulfil my family duties, would God be happy? I think God is happier when I serve my family and take better care of them.

Further probing into M434's narratives revealed additional reasons for the changes in his religiosity. In Afghanistan, collective institutions like family and community strongly influenced adherence to traditional religious practices. Immigration altered this collective emphasis and oversight. In the UK, the interviewee distanced himself from those collectivities and embraced an individual-centred discourse, where personal choice and pragmatism are prioritised over sacred rituals:

> I was a religious person in Afghanistan and regularly practised in an organised way. But this was not entirely personal; there was pressure to attend rituals like Muharram mourns, Nazr o Niaz [vow and distributing free food], and congregations. Some people performed daily prayers and fasting because their parents or families emphasised it. Since resettling in Scotland, I distanced myself from those religious spaces and found more freedom of choice. Even if I wanted to practise like in Afghanistan, nobody hinders me, and as a Shia, I can do it safely without worrying about being attacked during ceremonies or at the mosque. However, the distance and time spent here led me to develop a new habit of not practising like before. Migration made me more independent of family and community influences from Afghanistan, allowing me to think and decide better what to perform. There are no elderly family members here to pressure to practice daily or do it out of respect for them. I believe God is always watching me, regardless of practising. So, my current religiosity is more a personal choice.

In contrast to the less and non-practicing category, four participants (two men and two women) retained their everyday religious rituals in the new environment. These individuals exemplify the continuation of everyday religious practices and identification as Muslims. Practices such as praying, fasting, and attending Shia rituals are integral to their religiosity. They attend mosques when possible but emphasise maintaining their practices despite busy lives. F948, a young woman under 30, represents this category:

> In terms of practising, it is almost the same as when I was in Afghanistan, like praying, fasting, and giving Zakat. I did it there and here as well.

While it initially seems that F948's religiosity shows no change, further probing demonstrated that her regular practice tends to become an individual choice in the new context. She notes:

> I think I can't attend the mosque as frequently here. In Afghanistan, it was almost every day and very close to our home, but here I'm very busy with my studies, and the mosque is not close. But this is fine, and I maintain my practising even if it is at home or at the University prayer room. And even if sometimes I can't, I make sure to do Qadha [make-up prayer/missed prayer]. This is my duty as a Muslim. Another difference is that here, my practices have become more conscious. Previously, I was practising without understanding the meanings of those practices or the reasons behind them. I learnt it from my family, and they told me to do it, but here I researched and chose to perform them. I mean, here I'm living my religion based on the research I did myself and understanding the meaning of these practices, such as why as a Muslim I should pray, fast, or wear a Hijab.

Further discussion with F948 revealed that her individual understanding of religious practices is significantly influenced by interactions with other Muslim minorities and non-Muslim peers in educational settings. She elaborates:

> In my schools in Scotland, I encountered many questions from my non-Muslim friends about why I should pray or fast. Especially, I was asked all the time about why I wear a Hijab. They assumed my family made me do it. So, I started searching for the meanings of these practices and increased my religious knowledge to answer their questions. I told my friends it was my own choice to wear a Hijab and nobody forced me. I also had a close Muslim friend from

> Pakistan who is a very good friend and a good Muslim who also wears Hijab. We started a dialogue about our practices every day when we met, discussing what we do as Muslims. This was also very helpful for me.

4.2. Navigating Religious Authority: Tradition, Digital, and Personal References

The shifts in notions of religiosity among the participants encompass changes in religious practices as well as significant engagement in navigating and re-negotiating sources of religious knowledge and authority. Almost all the participants resettled in Scotland with prior engagement with authoritative religious sources such as the Quran, Hadith (traditions attributed to Prophet Muhammad and Shia Imams —legitimate successors of the Prophet—encompassing sayings, actions, and approvals or disapprovals), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Marja'e Taqlid (source of emulation), Sheikh and Mullahs (religious scholars), schoolteachers, religious books, family, and community elders. In Afghanistan, their socialisation as Shia Muslims occurred within a minority context where the state and public institutions recognised the Sunni Hanafi school as the official religion. Regardless of their current religious commitment, participants learned to read, recite, and memorise the Quran and Hadith, either through formal primary education or informal mosque-based courses. They also acquired knowledge about their Shia heritage, such as the Imams and traditions, through collective and traditional informants like family, ethnic ties, mosques, local schools and communities, and ritual commemorations like Muharram or religious Eid celebrations.

In the current migratory context, participants re-negotiate these collectivities and utilise new sources, asserting autonomy and self-interpretation or seeking guidance through the internet, digital applications, immediate families, and mosque clerics. Three male participants rejected Taqlid (emulation/imitation) and no longer adhere to a Marj'a. M155, a mature man with a higher education degree who does not practice or attend mosques, exemplifies the shift from institutional guidance to personal interpretation. During his youth in Afghanistan, local mosque Mullahs were his primary sources of religious knowledge. Now, he relies solely on his own A'ql (wisdom) and personal understanding of Sharia (Islamic law) sources, including the Quran and Hadith. He attributes this change to his increased education, his migration experience, and the political turmoil caused by the Mujahidin (Afghan fighters who resisted the Soviet invasion in the 1980s and were later involved in the civil war in the 1990s) in the name of Islam in Afghanistan:

> I attended the mosque in Afghanistan until I was a teenager. I accepted whatever the Mullah said during religious occasions like Khutbahs (sermons delivered by an imam (prayer leader) as part of Sharia and Islam. At that time, I had no education or migration experience to compare different perspectives. When the Mujahidin and Taliban took over, claiming to represent true Islam, their actions contradicted Islamic teachings and plunged the country into internal war. Since then, I haven't followed any Mullahs or religious figures. Instead, while at university, I studied, searched, and understood the Quran's verses and hadith myself. Now, I know I can decide for myself.

Other participants, whether experiencing a decline in or maintaining regular practices, use multiple sources to address inquiries about their religiosity. Questions often involve technicalities like prayer and fasting times or the amount of Fitriya [Zakat al Fitr] in Scotland. In this category, six participants (two men and four women) use online resources, especially Google, while three younger participants also consult their parents. Instead of relying on a specific Marj'a website, they screen information in English and Persian from various Shia sources, including those posted by Shia mosques in Scotland and the UK, as well as websites in Persian. F407, a young female student, highlights the challenges of determining prayer times and her reliance on a prayer times app:

> There hasn't been much that I don't know about my faith. I started practising early in Afghanistan, like other girls. So, when I moved here, nothing changed about praying or fasting style, but the timing did. In Afghanistan, it was easy;

> you could hear Adhan (ritual call to prayer) from mosques or TV channels. Here, I didn't know what to do at first. But then I found an app online and installed it on my phone. The app seems made for the Pakistani Shia community here, but it's useful for all. That's how I figure out prayer timing. Fasting was more confusing because timing is stricter, but I found information on the Facebook page of an Islamic centre. So, whenever I want to pray or fast, I use these.

F725, a mature woman who practices regularly, also finds using Google to be an effective way to find answers to her religious questions:

> I think it's easier today to find answers. There's no mosque close to where we live, and even if there was, I practice more at home. So, I just type my question into Google using my phone, and I find my answers there. It's much easier. You don't need to wait to ask anyone as we did before, during religious ceremonies where the Mullah discussed Ahkam [Islamic rulings]. Now, I find these online.

In addition to online inquiries, younger participants living with their families frequently seek religious guidance from their parents before turning to virtual resources. This intergenerational transmission of religious knowledge is evident in M439's experience. M439, a young man, exemplifies this practice by initially consulting his father on religious matters. When parental guidance is insufficient, he supplements it with online research:

> I feel very comfortable talking to my parents about my questions, especially my father. I ask him why I should pray, why I should practice certain things, or avoid what is Haram (forbidden under Islamic law). He explains without forcing me to do them. But sometimes they don't know the answer, like when I asked why boys start practicing later than girls. I looked for this online and I discussed what I found with them. So, we have handled everything together so far, and there hasn't been a big issue we couldn't manage.

Additionally, in four cases, participants expressed a preference for seeking assistance from a cleric for their religious issues. A young practicing woman considered this to be her last option, after consulting her family and conducting online research. In contrast, two practicing participants—one man and one woman—viewed clerics as their primary source of religious guidance. M434, a non-practicing man, noted that although he does not engage in regular religious practices or follow a Marj'a, he still considers consulting a cleric for specific rituals, like funerals. M434 explains:

> In Afghanistan, I asked my questions to religious A'lims (religious scholars). I would call them whenever I faced difficult questions, like when I wasn't sure whether something was haram or halal (lawful or permitted by Islamic law), and they would inform me. But here, I don't feel the need for such advice because I am now more mature and ethical, and I avoid actions I believe are wrong. Religion is also about ethics, isn't it? For example, if someone steals, I see it as immoral rather than just haram. So, I feel I was more influenced by religion in Afghanistan, but here my attitudes have changed. However, there is one aspect where I might still seek a cleric's help, which is conducting burials and FatihaKhani (funeral prayers and reciting Quran for the deceased). This is a sensitive issue, and if it arises, I may look for a cleric's assistance.

In their everyday migratory context, participants reconsider and utilise a broad spectrum of references for their religious interpretations, ranging from collective and traditional sources to digital and individual ones. This renegotiation and reinterpretation involve engaging with diverse sources of religious knowledge, highlighting a new process of identification that will be detailed under the subsequent theme.

4.3. Navigating Intersectional Identities

The interlocutors highlighted the complex interplay of multiple identities—religious, ethnic, national, and migratory—in their self-identification and how they are perceived

by others within the everyday context. Originating from a minority background within a Muslim-majority context, being a Shia Muslim is an internalised value intertwined with their cultural and ethnic identity as Hazara in Afghanistan. Participants frequently discussed their ethno-religious identification as Shia Hazaras and the persecution their community faces in their country of origin. M815, a mature man, contextualises this sense of belonging and the intersection of ethno-religious identities in their pre-migration context:

> Being a Muslim and a Shia is a value for me; this is how it is defined for us. I grew up with these values and lived with them all my life. Being Muslim is a religious value that has been passed heart to heart and generation to generation for us. So, of course, I know myself as a Muslim and a Shia. These become inseparable from our life and culture. Just because of being known as a Shia and Hazara, we have been targeted and massacred by Daesh [ISIS] and the Taliban. My folks even can't safely go to mosques or education centres for their rituals or studying.

In the new environment, the assertion of identity becomes more relational, hybrid, and context-dependent, influenced by interactions with non-Muslim majorities, other Muslim minorities, or Afghan diasporic groups. Participants noted that, in this context, when interacting with the non-Muslim majority, they are mainly identified as 'Muslim' or 'Afghan', rather than by their denomination and ethnic identities. M470, a mature man, explains that in everyday interactions, they are primarily perceived as Muslims, rendering their local ethno-religious identities invisible:

> In my daily life in Scotland, it's not really important if I am a Hazara or a Shia. Where I work, my clients have never heard about these. They only ask about my nationality—where I came from? When I say Afghanistan, they automatically think of me as a Muslim and don't know what a Shia Muslim is. Sometimes, I talk to them and share the stories about how our people are suppressed in Afghanistan. That comes as a shock to some of them.

The visibility of Muslimness as the overarching identity is more pronounced in the lived experiences of practicing women who wear the hijab. The hijab serves as a Muslim identity marker, subjecting them to the majority gaze and prompting inquiries about their religiosity. F948, a young woman, elaborates:

> Here, my local ethnicity (being Hazara) and denomination (Shia) are not known most of the time. I think people only know that I'm a Muslim when they see my hijab. Otherwise, if I don't wear it, how would they realise that I'm a Muslim or specifically belong to the Shia community unless they ask me? But with the hijab, I have received many questions from my classmates about this and other habits—what I'm drinking or eating and what not. So, I feel sometimes that I should explain everything each time. It's challenging, but I also learned more about Islam.

The ethno-religious identities of being Hazara and Shia, however, unlike the majority–minority interactions, become salient in minority–minority interactions, particularly when participants engage with other Muslims or the Afghan diaspora. Here, being Shia Muslim and Hazara serve as common identifiers, facilitating solidarity and networking within minority communities in Scotland. Participants reported developing new networks of friendship and contact with Muslims and Shias from Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq, as well as other Afghan ethnicities and Hazaras. This diasporic engagement allows Hazara migrants to assert their ethno-religious identities and cultural values in the everyday minority context. Six participants, both practicing and non-practicing (four men and two women), expressed their participation in other communities' cultural and religious programs. M434 provides a representative quote:

> While I'm not practicing myself, I take part in religious and cultural gatherings by Muslim communities in Scotland. Whenever I am invited, as they know I am a Shia Muslim from Afghanistan, I respect this and attend the events, like

> commemorations. This is because such gatherings are a part of my culture and my life. Like for Eid, it's a great opportunity to get together, support each other, and feel better. So, here I'm more engaged with other Muslim and Shia communities from everywhere that I had no idea about before, and this is good.

M434's emphasis on new identity formation and networking with other Muslim minorities is echoed by other participants and confirmed through observed events. During an annual religious gathering hosted by a Shia organisation in a Church Hall in Edinburgh to celebrate Eid after Ramadan, I met several Hazara migrants. At the event, one of them delivered a short talk, expressing excitement about the diversity of Muslim and Shia communities gathered in the Church and the inclusivity of the religious landscape in the UK. The speech also highlighted the plight of the Hazara Shia minority in Afghanistan, sparking an emotional expression of solidarity among the attendees. The migrant later shared feeling proud to voice the challenges faced by the community in such a diverse and inclusive faith-based gathering in Scotland.

5. Discussion

The results of this study illustrate the lived religiosity of Hazara migrants in the UK, focusing on their embodied practices, authoritative navigations, and religious identification. These findings present a significant case of an 'intersectional Muslim minority'—adapted from Stausberg et al. (2023)—based on the interplay of multiple identities, particularly ethnic/racial, religious, and migratory, in the reconstruction of their religious practices, experiences, and identities in the UK. The Hazara migrants in this study immigrated from Afghanistan, a multi-ethnic and religious society where Islam and the Sunni Hanafi school are recognised as the public and official religion. In this context, their ethnic identity as Hazaras and their religious identity as Shia Muslims distinguish them as an ethno-religious minority, resulting in historical discrimination and persecution. They shared their collective memory of this background, conveyed through popular culture, literature, Shia faith, and oral traditions (Phillips 2011). For most participants, their minority status was crucial to their decision to immigrate and take refuge in the UK. In the new society, they retain their minority status, identified as part of the Muslim minority, which in total comprises about 6 percent of the UK population (House of Commons Library 2024). Hazara migrants address their religiosity within legal and political structures emphasising secularism, individual rights, and pluralism, needing to determine how to be 'good Muslims' and develop appropriate strategies for living as a minority in a non-Muslim society (Abbas 2004).

The findings reveal significant changes in everyday religious practices and belonging, illustrating reconfiguration, adaptation, and innovation. This study captures a range of commitments to religiosity, from decreased practice to non-practice and regular practice. While the interlocutors shared a similar religious background and engaged with organised and institutionalised forms of religious practices pre-migration, their patterns and notions of religious observance became heterogeneous post-migration. This confirms Ammerman's concept of multiple 'religiosities', encompassing both traditional practices and new innovations (Ammerman 2007). A common theme among all the participants is the shift in their notions and perceptions of religiosity, regardless of their level of commitment. Living Islam became an individual choice rather than an ascribed identity. Participants chose their level of religiosity, determining whether or not to practice and what practices to engage in. This demonstrates their agency in reconfiguring traditionally inherited and socialised notions of Islam and Shia identity, which were closely mediated through family, community, customs, and habits in the pre-migration context. Post-migration, they utilised investigation, subjectivity, and agency in choosing how to be a Shia Muslim in a new minority context, whether non-practicing, less practicing, or practicing. This finding is consistent with Warner and Neitz's argument that religious affiliation is achieved rather than inherited and that pluralism can lead to both a decline in and strengthening of religious commitments (Neitz 1986; Warner 1993).

Participants experiencing a decline or leaving regular religious practices, mainly mature married men and women, exhibited a transition from ritual-centred religiosity to value-centred religiosity. Here, spirituality, morality, and pragmatism took precedence over regular observance of rituals like daily prayers, fasting, and mosque attendance. This notion of spirituality highlights the 'important qualitative differences in religion-as-lived' among the participants (McGuire 2008b). It underscores their 'religious eclecticism' and 'pragmatic concerns', offering a private 'space of their own to practice Islam on their own terms' (Jeldtoft 2012). Moreover, their selective engagement with embodied practices aligns with Davie and Wilson's conceptualisation of 'from obligation to consumption' in the European and British context, where individuals attend religious institutions based on choice rather than obligation (Davie and Wilson 2020).

For those who retained regular practice (including two young single individuals who arrived with their families during adolescence and two mature married individuals), this study highlights the significance of their quotidian interactions and religious identification as pious Muslims in public institutions like schools. In this minority context, where they face inquiries about their ritual practices and religious identifiers (such as the hijab for F948), they emphasise their choice, autonomy, and identity as practicing Muslims. This finding aligns with studies on 'reactive religiosity' among ethnic minority South Asian youth in the UK, who feel compelled to defend their Muslim identity (Khan 2024).

Participants also reconfigured their sources of religious authority post-migration, varying from rejecting institutional religious authority to stressing personal interpretation and utilising digital spaces, parental, and clerical advice. Three participants rejected traditional Marja'-e Taqlid and taqlid, stressing their wisdom, autonomy, education, and personal understanding of religious sources. Only one male participant adhered to taqlid, and four participants sought local clerical assistance for technical religious questions. This varied engagement broadens the scope of scholarship on Shia post-migration patterns in Europe, which often focuses on the retention and adaptation of transnational religious institutions, organisations, and their representatives in local contexts (e.g., Scharbrodt 2020; van den Bos 2020). Furthermore, the usage of digital applications and online spaces signifies the transformation of traditional religious authority by 'Cyber-Islamic-Environments' (Bunt 2018). Four of the six participants who used digital spaces were women, demonstrating how online resources provide an 'easier' option to address religious inquiries (e.g., F725). The younger generation often combines virtual resources with parental guidance, illustrating a pattern of intergenerational transmission of religious knowledge.

The participants' religious identification is multilayered and intersectional, entangled with their minority ethnic/racial and migratory status. Their hyphenated identities as Hazara Shias and Afghan Muslims influence their sense of belonging and identification, both pre- and post-migration. In the UK, their ethno-religious identity as Hazara Shia remains less visible compared to other Muslim communities with larger profiles, such as Sunni or Shia Muslims of South Asian backgrounds. However, their identity assertion becomes more relational, hybrid, and context-dependent, influenced by interactions with non-Muslim majorities, other Muslim minorities, and Afghan diasporic groups. In interactions with the non-Muslim majority, they are primarily identified as 'Muslim' and 'Afghan', with their denomination and ethnic identities becoming less visible. This overarching Muslim identity is especially pronounced for practicing women who wear the hijab, which serves as a visible marker of their religiosity and subjects them to the majority gaze. Conversely, their ethno-religious identities of being Hazara and Shia become more pronounced in minority–minority interactions, facilitating solidarity and networking within minority communities. This diasporic engagement allows Hazara migrants to navigate and assert their ethno-religious identities and cultural values in the everyday minority context, confirming the fluidity and context-dependence of their identity negotiation. This process aligns with Radford and Hetz's findings on Hazara immigrants in Australia, who also navigate multiple identities context-dependently (Radford and Hetz 2021), but further emphasises the intersectionality of these identities (ethnic/racial, gender, religious, and

migratory) in relation to religious identification and religiosity. This engagement in diverse networks highlights the dynamic interplay between agency and adaptation in the religious lives of Muslim minority immigrants in the UK.

6. Conclusions

This article examines the everyday lived Islam practiced, experienced, and expressed by Hazara migrants from Afghanistan who have resettled in Scotland, a less visible ethno-religious minority within the Muslim population in the UK. As an intersectional Muslim minority, Hazara migrants showcase the interplay of non-privileged identities—ethnic/racial (Hazara/Afghan), religious (Shia/Muslim), and migratory—and their agency in reconfiguring religiosity and a sense of belonging. Post-migration, the patterns of everyday religious affiliation and identification became heterogeneous and relational, demonstrating a variety of non-practicing, less practicing, and practicing orientations, facilitated by the dynamics of secularism, pluralism, and marginalisation.

Before migration, in Afghanistan, the religious experiences of this minority were mediated by collectivities such as institutions, traditions, and communities of beliefs, and they were subjected to religious persecution. However, the social and geographical dislocation resulting from migration provided opportunities for change and innovation in religious practice and identity (Knott 2016; Volpi and Turner 2007). While this study confirms that migration allows individuals more space to manoeuvre independently of the norms imposed by the collective, leading to weakened social control and the availability of alternative options for behaviour and outlook (Nielsen 2013), it further emphasises the intersectionality of identities and individual agency in the minority migratory context.

The change is evident in the tendency among participants to live everyday Islam in a more individualised, privatised, and elective manner. This shift includes innovations in transitioning from ritual-centred religiosity to value-centred religiosity, which emphasises spirituality, pragmatism, and personal autonomy. Additionally, participants utilised digital spaces to acquire religious knowledge, highlighting a significant transformation in the sources of religious authority. Post-migration religious identification is a complex and context-dependent process, involving both majority–minority and minority–minority interactions, where participants assert their agency to navigate multiple identities in relation to the non-Muslim majority and other Muslim minorities.

Building on the insights of this article, two areas are suggested for further research. First, a longitudinal study with a larger sample size could provide a more representative understanding of the changes, continuities, and innovations within ethno-religious Muslim minorities in the UK. Second, comparative studies of everyday Muslim religiosity within different Muslim minority groups with varied ethnic and religious backgrounds could offer valuable perspectives on the diversity and dynamics of Muslim practices and identities in multicultural contexts.

Funding: This research was funded by the Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World, University of Edinburgh. The preparation of this article was supported by a fellowship in partnership with Bard College, and partially funded by a grant from the Open Society Foundations.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This research is part of a project approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, University of Edinburgh, on 06/04/2022. The University of Edinburgh adheres to the UK Research Integrity Office Code of Practice for Research and the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all the subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data are not publicly available to protect the privacy of the research participants.

Acknowledgments: I would like to express my gratitude to all the participants who generously took part in this study and shared their experiences. I also extend my appreciation to the peer reviewers for their constructive comments and feedback.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

[1] I use the term 'minority' as defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which refers to a 'group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State and/or in a non-dominant position, whose members possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language' (Sironi et al. 2019).

References

Abbas, Tahir. 2004. After 9/11: British South Asian Muslims, Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, and the State. *American Journal of Islam and Society* 21: 26–38. [CrossRef]

Abbas, Tahir. 2018. Reconfiguring Religious Identities. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39: 161–65. [CrossRef]

Abbas, Tahir. 2020. Islamophobia as Racialised Biopolitics in the United Kingdom. *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 46: 497–511. [CrossRef]

Ammerman, Nancy T., ed. 2007. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. 2021. *Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices*. New York: New York Unviersity Press.

Ayres, Lioness. 2008. Thematic Coding and Analysis. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Edited by Lisa M. Given. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 867–68.

Bender, Courtney. 2003. *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bevelander, Pieter, and Jonas Otterbeck. 2012. Young People's Attitudes towards Muslims in Sweden. In *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. Edited by Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen. London: Routledge, pp. 169–90.

Bleich, Erik. 2009. Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West: Introduction. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35: 353–60. [CrossRef]

Bokhari, Raana. 2013. Bihishti Zewar: Islam, Text, and the Daily Lives of Gujarati Women in Leicester. In *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*. Edited by Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead. London: Routledge, pp. 55–68.

Boussalem, Alessandro, and Peter Hopkins. 2020. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*. Edited by Adam Possamai and Anthony J. Blasi. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Bunt, Gary R. 2018. *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Connor, Phillip. 2012. Contexts of Immigrant Receptivity and Immigrant Religious Outcomes: The Case of Muslims in Western Europe. In *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. Edited by Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen. London: Routledge, pp. 141–68.

Creswell, John W. 2014. *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

Davie, Grace, and Erin K. Wilson. 2020. Religion in European Society: The Factors to Take into Account. In *Religion and European Society: A Primer*. Edited by Benjamin Schewel and Erin K. Wilson. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., pp. 15–30.

Dawson, Lorne. 2021. Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflection on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Religious Terrorism (Part II). *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15: 2–22.

de Hoon, Sean, and Frank van Tubergen. 2014. The Religiosity of Children of Immigrants and Natives in England, Germany, and the Netherlands: The Role of Parents and Peers in Class. *European Sociological Review* 30: 194–206. [CrossRef]

Dessing, Nathal M., Nadia Jeldtoft, and Linda Woodhead, eds. 2013a. *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*. London: Routledge.

Dessing, Nathal M., Nadia Jeldtoft, Jørgen S. Nielsen, and Linda Woodhead. 2013b. Introduction. In *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*. Edited by Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead. London: Routledge, pp. 1–6.

Duman, Didem Doganyilmaz. 2021. Religious Identities in Times of Crisis: An Analysis of Europe. In *Routledge International Handbook of Religion in Global Society*. Edited by Jayeel Cornelio, François Gauthier, Tuomas Martikainen and Linda Woodhead. London: Routledge, pp. 432–43.

Edgell, Penny. 2012. A Cultural Sociology of Religion: New Directions. *Annual Review of Sociology* 38: 247–65. [CrossRef]

Fadil, Nadia. 2009. Managing Affects and Sensibilities: The Case of Not-Handshaking and Not-Fasting. *Social Anthropology* 17: 439–54. [CrossRef]

Fadil, Nadia. 2011. Not-/Unveiling as An Ethical Practice. *Feminist Review* 98: 83–109. [CrossRef]

Glazebrook, Diana, and Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi. 2007. Being Neighbors to Imam Reza: Pilgrimage Practices and Return Intentions of Hazara Afghans Living in Mashhad, Iran. *Iranian Studies* 40: 187–201. [CrossRef]

Hall, David D., ed. 1997. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hamid, Sadek. 2011. British Muslim Young People: Facts, Features and Religious Trends. *Religion, State and Society* 39: 247–61. [CrossRef]

Hemmingsen, Ann-Sophie. 2012. Salafi Jihadism: Relying on Fieldwork to Study Unorganized and Clandestine Phenomena. In *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. Edited by Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen. London: Routledge, pp. 92–106.

House of Commons Library. 2024. Constituency Data: Religion. Available online: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/constituency-data-religion/ (accessed on 5 July 2024).

Husain, ed. 2021. *Among the Mosques: A Journey Across Muslim Britain*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Jeldtoft, Nadia. 2011. Lived Islam: Religious Identity with 'Non-organized' Muslim Minorities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34: 1134–51. [CrossRef]

Jeldtoft, Nadia. 2012. Lived Islam: Religious Identity with 'Non-organized' Muslim Minorities. In *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. Edited by Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen. London: Routledge, pp. 25–42.

Jeldtoft, Nadia. 2013a. Spirituality and Emotions: Making a Room of One's Own. In *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*. Edited by Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead. London: Routledge, pp. 85–100.

Jeldtoft, Nadia. 2013b. The Hypervisibility of Islam. In *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*. Edited by Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead. London: Routledge, pp. 23–38.

Jeldtoft, Nadia, and Jørgen S. Nielsen. 2011. Introduction: Methods in the Study of 'Non-organized' Muslim Minorities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34: 1113–19. [CrossRef]

Jeldtoft, Nadia, and Jørgen S. Nielsen, eds. 2012. *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. London: Routledge.

Jensen, Tina Gudrun. 2012. Context, Focus and New Perspectives in the Study of Muslim Religiosity. In *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. Edited by Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen. London: Routledge, pp. 43–58.

Jorgensen, Danny L. 2015. Participant Observation. In *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Edited by Robert Scott and Stephen Kosslyn. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., pp. 1–15. [CrossRef]

Khan, Sabah. 2024. *Muslim Diaspora in Britain: Identity and Transnationalism among South Asian Muslim Communities*. Oxon: Routledge.

Knott, Kim. 2016. Living Religious Practices. In *Intersections of Religion and Migration: Issues at the Global Crossroads*. Edited by Jennifer B. Saunders, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, pp. 71–90.

Kollar, Rachel, Nella Geurts, and Niels Spierings. 2023. Religiosity and Electoral Turnout among Muslims in Western Europe. *European Political Science Review* 1–20. [CrossRef]

Kundnani, Arun. 2014. *The Muslims Are Coming!: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*. London: Verso.

Kühle, Lene. 2012. Excuse Me, Which Radical Organization Are You a Member of? Reflections on Methods to Study Highly Religious but Non-Organized Muslims. In *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. Edited by Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen. London: Routledge, pp. 77–91.

Larsen, Jeppe Fuglsang. 2020. The Role of Religion in Islamist Radicalisation Processes. *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 13: 396–417. [CrossRef]

Lewis, Valerie A., and Ridhi Kashyap. 2013. Are Muslims a Distinctive Minority? An Empirical Analysis of Religiosity, Social Attitudes, and Islam. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52: 617–26. [CrossRef]

Maliepaard, Mieke, and Maykel Verkuyten. 2018. National Disidentification and Minority Identity: A Study among Muslims in Western Europe. *Self and Identity* 17: 75–91. [CrossRef]

Maliepaard, Mieke, Marcel Lubbers, and Mérove Gijsberts. 2012. Generational Differences in Ethnic and Religious Attachment and Their Interrelation: A Study Among Muslim Minorities in the Netherlands. In *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. Edited by Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen. London: Routledge, pp. 216–37.

McAndrew, Siobhan, and David Voas. 2014. Immigrant Generation, Religiosity and Civic Engagement in Britain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37: 99–119. [CrossRef]

McGuire, Meredith B. 2008a. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McGuire, Meredith B. 2008b. Toward a Sociology of Spirituality: Individual Religion in Social/Historical Context. In *The Centrality of Religion in Social Life: Essays in Honour of James A. Beckford*. Edited by Eileen Barker. Surrey: Ashgate, pp. 215–32.

Molteni, Francesco, and Iraklis Dimitriadis. 2021. Immigrants' Religious Transmission in Southern Europe: Reaction or Assimilation? Evidence from Italy. *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 22: 1485–504. [CrossRef]

Neitz, Mary Jo. 1986. *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment within the Charismatic Renewal*. New Oberservations. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.

Neitz, Mary Jo. 2012. Lived Religion: Signposts of Where We Have Been and Where We Can Go from Here. In *Religion, Spirituality and Everyday Practice*. Edited by Giuseppe Giordan and William H. Swatos, Jr. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp. 45–55.

Nielsen, Jørgen S. 2013. Concluding Reflections: Everyday Lived Islam and the Future of Islamic Studies. In *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*. Edited by Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead. London: Routledge, pp. 163–77.

Orsi, Robert A. 2003. Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? Special Presidential Plenary Address, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42: 169–74. [CrossRef]

Parkes, Aidan. 2020. Afghan-Hazara Migration and Relocation in a Globalised Australia. *Religions* 11: 670. [CrossRef]

Patel, Ismail Adam. 2022. The Satanic Verses Affair: Problematisation of Muslims in Post-Colonial Britain. In *The Muslim Problem: From the British Empire to Islamophobia*. Edited by Ismail Adam Patel. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 175–210.

Phillips, Denise. 2011. Wounded Memory of Hazara Refugees from Afghanistan Remembering and Forgetting Persecution. *History Australia* 8: 177–98. [CrossRef]
Radford, David, and Heidi Hetz. 2021. Aussies? Afghans? Hazara Refugees and Migrants Negotiating Multiple Identities and Belonging in Australia. *Social Identities* 27: 377–93. [CrossRef]
Saikal, Amin. 2012. Afghanistan: The Status of the Shi'ite Hazara Minority. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32: 80–87. [CrossRef]
Scharbrodt, Oliver. 2020. Creating a Diasporic Public Sphere in Britain: Twelver Shia Networks in London. *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 31: 23–40. [CrossRef]
Schmidt, Garbi. 2012. Understanding and Approaching Muslim Visibilities: Lessons Learned from a Fieldwork-based Study of Muslims in Copenhagen. In *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. Edited by Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen. London: Routledge, pp. 107–20.
Silvestri, Sara. 2012. Faith Intersections and Muslim Women in the European Microcosm: Notes Towards the Study of Non-organized Islam. In *Methods and Contexts in the Study of Muslim Minorities: Visible and Invisible Muslims*. Edited by Nadia Jeldtoft and Jørgen S. Nielsen. London: Routledge, pp. 121–38.
Sironi, Alice, Céline Bauloz, and Milen Emmanuel, eds. 2019. *Glossary on Migration*. International Migration Law. No. 34. Geneva: International Organization for Migration (IOM).
Stacey, Kiran. 2024. More than Half of Tory Members in Poll Say Islam a Threat to British Way of Life. *The Guardian*. Available online: https://edin.ac/3SDO6x3 (accessed on 4 April 2024).
Statham, Paul. 2024. Challenging the Muslimification of Muslims in Research on 'Liberal Democratic Values': Why Culture Matters beyond Religion. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50: 203–32. [CrossRef]
Stausberg, Michael, Alexander Van Der Haven, and Erica Baffelli. 2023. Religious Minorities: Conceptual Perspectives. In *Religious Minorities Online*. Edited by Erica Baffelli, Alexander van der Haven and Michael Stausberg. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. [CrossRef]
Tiilikainen, Marja. 2003. Somali Women and Daily Islam in the Diaspora. *Social Compass* 50: 59–69. [CrossRef]
Tiilikainen, Marja. 2007. Continuity and Change: Somali Women and Everyday Islam in the Diaspora. In *From Mogadishu to Dixon: The Somali Diaspora in a Global Context*. Edited by Abdi M. Kusow and Stephanie R. Bjork. Asmara: The Red Sea Press, Inc., pp. 207–30.
Tiilikainen, Marja. 2013. Illness, Healing, and Everyday Islam: Transnational Lives of Somali Migrant Women. In *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*. Edited by Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft and Linda Woodhead. London: Routledge, pp. 147–62.
van den Bos, Matthijs E. W. 2020. Shiite Patterns of Post-Migration in Europe. *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 31: 1–22. [CrossRef]
Voas, David, and Fenella Fleischmann. 2012. Islam Moves West: Religious Change in the First and Second Generations. *Annual Review of Sociology* 38: 525–45. [CrossRef]
Volpi, Frédéric, and Bryan S. Turner. 2007. Introduction: Making Islamic Authority Matter. *Theory, Culture & Society* 24: 1–19. [CrossRef]
Warner, R. Stephen. 1993. Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1044–93. [CrossRef]

religions

MDPI

Article

The British Broadsheet Press and the Representation of "The Mosque" in the Aftermath of Post-7/7 Britain

Irfan Raja

Department of Marketing, PR, and Journalism, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds LS2 3AE, UK; i.raja@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

Abstract: The role of the mosque has become increasingly vital, particularly in contemporary societies such as Britain, where both the place and status of religion in public life are constantly discussed and debated. Indeed, in the contemporary period, the role of the mosque has several dimensions, ranging from a social space, educational and cultural exchange, and community cohesion centre to a knowledge hub. In this context, this paper suggests that a mosque should be seen as an independent religious institution, although these are influenced by and responsive to governments, elites, pressure groups, public bodies, etc. Using a thematic analysis of news items in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* over a period of two years (8 July 2005–7 July 2007), it finds that in the aftermath of 7/7, the mosque as a religious place and an institution for British Muslims is largely seen as incompatible and a threat to secular British society and that it is linked with radicalisation and terrorism. According to Quranic texts and revelations, it is indeed a fact that mosques are open to all. This is logical since God's mercy, love, and forgiveness are for all of mankind without any distinction, which is perhaps why the mosque has been the sacred house of God Himself. This study aims to reveal the development of visible hostility in some sections of the British media and political campaigns. Moreover, it intends to trace the determination and idea of the mosque as a religious place and an institution for British Muslims rather than only a place for worship. Finally, this study will argue the role of the mosque in promoting community cohesion and mutual understanding within the Muslim and other faith communities located in Britain.

Keywords: the mosque; British media; social space; community cohesion; 7/7 London bombings

1. Introduction

Ever since the end of World War I and II, the Middle East, predominantly a Muslim majority region, remains a focal point of the Western media and polity. More importantly, the Iranian Revolution (1979) brought Islam and Muslims into the Western media and political limelight. Thenceforward, a chronological record of the major events that occurred in the Middle East includes the Lebanon War (1982), the First Gulf War (1990), the New York attacks also known as 9/11 (2001), the Invasion of Iraq (2003), the London Bombings also known as 7/7 (2005), the Arab Spring (2010), the Syrian Civil War (2012), the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution and ousted Prime Minister Mohammed Morsi (2011–2012), the Yemen War (2014), and the ongoing war on Gaza, all labelling Islam and Muslims as problematic. Evidently, most sections of the Western press and broadcast media tend to associate Islamic faith, Muslims, their places of worship (mosques), and imams with terrorism, extremism, and radicalisation. In the past four decades, a long list of studies finds Western media representations of Islam and Muslims as noticeably negative (Said 1981; Poole 2002; Richardson 2004; Ameli et al. 2007; Poole and Richardson 2010). Afterwards, several mainstream studies reveal similar patterns in the Western media reporting of Islam and Muslims, which was predominantly destructive (Alsultany 2012; Moore et al. 2008; Piela 2016). Notably, Western media reporting on Islam and Muslims shows a consistent pattern. Several recent studies trace a recurring negative depiction of Islam and Muslims in the Western media (Ewart and O'Donnell 2018; De Rooij 2023; Ahmed 2024).

This reporting trend also shows how sections of the Western media mainly largely overlook the positive contributions of Muslims in Western societies but haste to mention their shortcomings. Too often, Western media establishes metaphors such as hijab-wearing Muslim women to symbolise oppression and extremism; Islam is a "dangerous", "backward", and "irrational religion", that poses "threat", to post-1950s and 1980s secular Western societies, and mostly it uses phrases "Islamist" and "Islamism" to misrepresent Muslims and their faith (Hanif 2021, pp. 75–271; Awan and Rahman 2016, p. 3; Moore et al. 2008, p. 14).

Correspondingly, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* have published a series of articles written either by their own analysts or by government officials and politicians in which "Islam", "Islamism", "Islamists", and "Islamic ideology" are presented as major "threats" to Britain (*The Daily Telegraph*, 12 July 2005; 2 February 2024; *The Guardian*, 22 July 2005; 22 February 2024). Evidently, the broadsheet reporting pattern as well as officials' rhetoric remains the same after almost 20 years.

Since 7/7, the British Muslims are routinely experiencing a distorted image in the sections of the British media. The significant question arises as to why the British media misrepresents Muslims, their faith, places of worship such as mosques, and even Islamic festivals and traditions such as Eid Al-Adha (the day Muslims sacrifice animals) as negative. Forlornly, in the aftermath of the London Bombings in July 2005, British Muslims came under the media spotlight, thus subjecting the role of mosques to public debate. Especially when Channel 4 broadcasted an episode of its current affairs programme "Undercover Mosques" in January 2007. However, despite a few complexities arising because of the London incident, mosques are seen as peaceful places that promote tolerance and cohesion in a diverse society. This study aims to reveal the realism behind the developing and noticeable hostility in some sections of the British media as well as in political and pressure group campaigns. Additionally, the purpose of this study is to trace the determination and idea of the mosque as a religious place and an institution for British Muslims. Finally, this study will discuss the role of the mosque in promoting community cohesion and mutual understanding between Muslims of other communities.

1.1. Background of Mosque

From the early days of Islam, the mosque has been seen not merely as a building of wood and stone but as a place of spiritual and inspirational gain, a facilitator of knowledge and community bonding. Hence, the multilayered purpose of the mosque is clearly visible, from sacred mosques in Makkah and Madinah to the rest of the early historic mosques in splendid cities under Muslim rule in Spain, the Indian subcontinent, the Balkans, North Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

The ancient mosques all over the world display the Islamic history of art and civilisation but even today they are seen as the legacy of Muslim rulers who promoted knowledge in their time by erecting great mosques that became universally known as leading educational institutions, such as the Al-Azhar University of Cairo (970–972). Notably, prominent Muslim scholars, scientists, and theorists were all once students in these mosques. Flood (2001) mentions the Caliph Al-Walid bin 'Abd al-Malik, who famously created the *Great Mosque of Damascus* as a treasure of its inhabitants. Although the presence of mosques in Europe dates to Muslim rule in Spain, they became known in the British Isles in the nineteenth century when early English converts and Muslim traders built a mosque in Wales. However, Shahed Saleem (2012) noted that the first purpose-built mosque was founded by Hungarian orientalist and linguist Gottlieb Leitner in 1889 in Woking, Surrey, as an educational institute (Saleem 2012). Thereafter, because of the influx of post-World Wars I and II Muslim migrant workers who came to work in the textile industry and resided in "inner towns" of England, mosques as places of worship and as religious schools began to emerge.

A list of scholars has established that the idea of "inner city" initially emerged in the United States and was brought to the United Kingdom, where it means "urban poor" (Andrews et al. 2021). The sections of the British media established associations of the

London bombers with mosques and routinely seen and presented mosques as places that harbor radical imams and hatepreachers who allegedly promote anti-Western thoughts in youth Muslims, which mainly builds a problematic image of mosques.

Also, some critics see British mosques are not open to everyone, and especially they think Muslim women are subject to restricting entry into mosques (Lewicki and O'Toole 2017; Cheruvallil-Contractor and Gilham 2023; Ahmed 2024). Most UK mosques offer a separate place for women to pray, while many mosques do not have separate places for women to attend the mosque. Some scholars put forward a logic, as men and women cannot concentrate on prayers, although Islam allows both to perform Hajj together. Correspondingly, Orthodox Jews and Christians also separate men and women while praying for similar reasons (House 1978; Hirsch and Reinman 2003; Luehrmann 2015). Recent theological debates on mosques among leading scholars and jurists have offered rational examples to respond to widespread misunderstandings about Muslim women's roles in mosques[1].

1.2. Development of the Mosque in Britain as a Place of Worship

Britain's first mosque was built in the 1860s at 2 Glyn Rhondda Street, Cardiff[2]. Since then, mosques have increased in Britain given the rise in the Muslim population. However, the historical records relating to the construction of nineteenth century mosques reflect the challenges to and struggles of Muslims, who confronted misconceptions, fear, and hostility regarding their proposal to build a mosque. This may have been a consequence of the confrontation between Turkey and Britain at that time, which in turn gave rise to negative feelings among some sections of the British public. Ansari (2011) presents a chronological record of the building of the *East London Mosque*, which was seen in the context of the confrontation between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. Relatedly, Ansari mentioned many British politicians, including the Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Sir Arthur Hirtzel, to oppose the idea of a mosque (cited in Ansari 2011, p. 11).

Evidence shows that since 9/11 and 7/7, Islam as a religion was connected to acts of terror, which in turn increased hostility to mosques in Europe that became targets of hate crimes and victims of vilification due to the belief that they were hubs of extremism. Worse was to follow when some European countries, such as Sweden and Austria, decided to ban mosque minarets in 2009. According to a *BBC* report of 29 November 2009 (BBC 2009), "more than 57% of voters and 22 out of 26 cantons—or provinces—voted in favour of the ban." In Britain, immediately after the 7/7 incident, Tony Blair announced a "12-point plan" to counter the threat of terrorism. The eleventh point on this list was the "Consultation on a new power to close a place of worship used as a centre for fomenting extremism" (*The Guardian*, 5 August 2005). This possibly applied to a few mosques where the government thinks a few elements of extremism exist in the form of allegedly radical imams such as Abu Hamza al-Masri. Notably, al-Masri was described as a "hatepreacher", "radical Islamist", "supporter of Sharia law", "hook-handed militant", "violent jihadist", and "terror glorifier" who had links with radical organizations such as al-Qaeda (*The Guardian*, 7 February 2006 and 15 November 2007). Importantly, the self-proclaimed cleric al-Masri was finally extradited to the US, where he faced terror charges and was found guilty, but it also revealed al-Masri was on the payroll of MI5 (*The Daily Telegraph*, 7 May 2014). The fact of the matter is that prior to the 7/7 bombings, MI5 knew two of the bombers who were under surveillance, but it failed to act (*The Guardian*, 11 May 2006). It is noteworthy that an ordinary British Muslim Mosque is not only a place of worship, but it also offers a range of services, including social spaces, community activities, including marriages and funerals, educational centers, seminars, conferences, and exhibitions venues, cafes, and restaurants.

Since then, several political and pressure groups, such as the BNP have organised campaigns to ban the building of new mosques in some areas of Britain. However, it is important to note that the BNP, as a neo-fascist group, has attacked Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Conservatives and has little influence in British politics. Notably, prior to the 7/7 incident, British mosques had never been seen as places for promoting extremist ideas, perhaps because sections of the press, politicians, public bodies, and pressure groups

had not seen mosques as exporters of extremism or the threat of terrorism. Unfortunately, ever since the 7/7 incident, mosques have been presented as places where British children are being radicalised.

More recently, British Prime Minister David Cameron unveiled a brand-new strategy to fight extremism, calling for the closure of mosques engaging in promoting extremism and radicalisation (see *The Independent*, 19 October 2015). As time passes, mosques have begun to see some pressure groups both within and outside the British Muslim community, such as the MWC (Muslim Women Council)[3], which has just a handful of members and has been lobbying for women-only mosques in Britain. However, it is imperative to consider that such groups and voices are not representative of the mainstream Muslim community, just as the BNP is not representative of British society. In fact, in many ways, the mosque as an institution has now become a victim of prejudice and interference never seen before on such a scale. Moreover, to some extent, because of a bad press and other factors such as the control politics of the government and mosque committees, particularly in the aftermaths of 9/11 and 7/7, the mosque, which was a source of comfort and tranquility, has increasingly been seen as a threat to secular values and as having links with extremists.

2. The Image of Mosques in the British Media: Myths and Misconceptions

In Britain, since the London bombings, most sections of the mainstream media frequently portray mosques, religious schools [Madrassahs], and other religious charitable institutions as negative and intolerant. For instance, most media reports carry images of mosques' crescents, domes, children reading the Qur'an, and mostly demonstrations outside mosques, often presenting people chanting slogans such as Allah-o-Akbar (meaning, God is great) and wearing headbands with similar captions. Such images produce certain specific messages, for instance, that mosques are problematic places and hubs of exporting radicalisation and extremism.

This representation is visible in the exhaustive work of Burhan Wazir, who toured distant places in Britain, visiting 1200 mosques and interviewing leading Muslim scholars, community leaders, and politicians. In his article *Mosques: Source of Spiritual Comfort, or So Out of Touch?* published in *The Times*, Wazir wrote, "Ever since the era-defining 11 September 2001, Britain's two million Muslims have been the subject of a series of cruel and damaging portrayals" (*The Times*, 26 July 2004). His point of view is acknowledged by many, as Humayun Ansari points out that "in many ways a new awareness of Islam in Britain—by Muslims and non-Muslims alike—has been heightened since 11 September" (cited in Wazir 2004, p. 4).

Wazir also finds that, since 9/11, mosques and imams have been widely seen as suspicious; for example, he reminds us of "the shoe-bomber", Richard Reid, a white convert who was linked to Finsbury Park Mosque in North London (ibid., *The Times*, 26 July 2004). Similarly, the perpetrators of the 7/7 bombings were frequently linked with their local mosques in Hyde Park and the Beeston area of Leeds [Grand Mosque] in news media reports. For instance, the *Evening Standard* (15 July 2005 and 15 June 2006), the *Manchester Evening News* (13 July 2005), and *BBC* local radio (July 2005) mentioned that Lyndsay Jermain, one of the four London bombers, went to Leeds Grand Mosque to pray. In the same pattern, the headlines in the *Evening Standard* [*Preachers 'Poisoned' mind of bomber*, 12 May 2006], *Daily Mail* [*Mosques taught my man to be a suicide bomber; 7/7 killer's mind was poisoned, says widow*, 24th September 2005], and *Financial Times* [*Activists blame mosques for lack of guidance*, 18 July 2005] indicate the irresponsible reporting of some sections of the press that submerges all positive efforts under one simple, negative account.

Ansari (2011) provides evidence of the negative media reports that were published during 7th–9th April 1970, particularly in *The Sun*, *The Times*, and *The Daily Telegraph*, representing Bengali Muslims as 'backward, fearful, and disliked' while the mosque was targeted thirty-eight times, resulting in the deaths of five Bengalis (Ansari 2011, pp. 44–46). Contrary to these newspaper reports, *The Independent* on 13th August 2005 published a headline that read: *London Bombings: The Truth Emerges; No link between July 7 and July 21 attacks; No evidence of a terror mastermind in Britain; xBombers radicalised in gyms.* This report eliminated the accusations that London bombers were brainwashed in mosques. In the same vein, in a report in *The Observer* published on 18th of June 2006, Urmee Khan reveals her remarkable experience of living in the Beeston Muslim community in Leeds, where the local mosques were trying to help disaffected young people in their communities who were seemingly engaged in unproductive activities.

However, despite few constructive portrayals of Muslims, evidence shows growing attacks on mosques are mostly the result of bad press[4]; hence, mosques are being increasingly linked with growing extremism, terrorism, and other social ills that help shape radical thinking. Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert's recent report *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: A London Case Study*[5] affirms that the rise in hate crimes against Muslims and the growing number of attacks on mosques are a product of news media reports that portray mosques as negative. Notably, this report was based on facts and resulted from empirical data. Unfortunately, one negative media report can easily undo all the hard work and efforts that may have taken far more energy and time than that required to write a few words.

For a case in point, let us now consider the front page of a local newspaper, *Asian Express*[6], which published a two-page story about a local right-wing activist, Gavin Boby, who has been presented as 'Proud' and 'Brave', as the headline reads *'MOSQUE BUSTER': Free advice on how to oppose Islamic places of worship!* The capital letter 'O' is designed, as seen in the attached scan copy, to suggest the 'hook man', probably Abu-Hamza Al-Masari, with a red cross suggesting 'no' to a mosque. On page 4 of the same edition, the newspaper carries another story compiled by Louise Healy called *Leaked Government Memo Claims Muslim Schools Promote Extremism;* the report further claims that the religious schools are parties to the promotion of radical thinking. In opposition to this is Emmeline Saunders' report (2009), which carries the opinion of leading British scholars that religious schools are performing above average compared to government schools (Saunders 2009, p. 1).

The London bombings caused huge damage to the image of the mosques in Britain. This was the result of some sections of the British media portraying mosques as suspicious and perhaps having links with extremism. The opposite is true since none of the people involved in those appalling acts were religious or active members of any mosque committees. Notably, in the Hyde Park area of Leeds, the Leeds Grand Mosque and Leeds Makkah Mosque (which also earned the title of a model mosque) run a series of community events, including iftar (fast-breaking) in Ramadan, Social gatherings such as Eid Day celebrations, seminars, conferences, and study circles are organised by active members of mosques. Thus, media accusations against mosques in relation to the London bombers are evidently weak.

Martin Hodgson (2007)'s article published in the Guardian stated that "evidence of extremism in mosques 'fabricated'" (*The Guardian*, 13 December 2007). Some may have attended mosques, but they did not participate in any Islamic gatherings or teachings in the mosque. However, one should acknowledge that Britain adopts a more tolerant policy towards Islam and Muslims in comparison to its European counterparts. Reviewing the literature on the media portrayal of mosques, it appears that in most cases the misgivings are the result of a lack of knowledge of Islam and Muslims, which generates misconceptions among non-Muslims, and this often occurs because of irresponsible reporting by some sections of the press (Ahmed 2003; Ghauri and Umber 2019; Suryandari and Arifin 2021). Robert Pape (2003) finds that most of the suicide attacks carried out during the period 1980–2001 and even afterwards were the result of social and economic deprivation and

political turmoil in certain parts of the world; they had no links with religion (Pape 2003, pp. 345–57).

Pape also dismisses the idea that these suicide bombers were religiously motivated since most of them were secular, such as Tamil Tigers, Kurdish Guerrillas, and several other groups. These narratives suggest that, in many ways, the role and place of the 'mosque' in European societies reflect some sort of religious discrimination because, so far, no groups within or outside Christian, Sikh, Jewish, or Hindu communities have asked for separate places of worship for women.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a thematic analysis approach to examine the role and place of British mosques in contemporary British society, particularly in the aftermath of the 7/7 incident. Thus, it also offers a critique of the misrepresentation of the mosque in the British Broadsheet Press. Notably, part of the database in this paper is derived from my doctoral thesis entitled 'Reporting British Muslims: The Re-Emergence of Folk Devils and Moral Panics in Post-7/7 Britain (2005–2007)', which was related to the image of the mosque in the British press, mainly *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, over a period of two years (8 July 2005 to 7 July 2007). For this purpose, I selected two British broadsheets, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, which are internationally well-known and are of two different political orientations, liberal and conservative views.

Thus, this study considered a two-part mixed approach that consists of both qualitative and quantitative methods. These methods are widely recognised and applied in academia in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and criminology. Since my research was based on representations of British Muslims in the British media, this study considers the thematic analysis method to be relevant and simple. Several leading studies have used content analysis (these include Miller and Brewer 2003, p. 43; Neuendorf 2002, p. 27; Payne and Payne 2004, pp. 51–52). Moreover, several studies have backed thematic analysis, particularly Braun and Clarke's approach (Braun and Clarke 2006), which is also functional in this study apart from the original thesis.

Initially, newspaper stories relevant to 'mosques' were collected using the search engine Lexis-Nexis, which is a reliable source of newspaper data gathering in comparison to other search engines such as the Pro-Quest and online archives (see Appendix A). Initially, I used the terms and phrases "Islam, Muslims, 7/7, and mosque" in the Lexis-Nexis search engine to record the influx of news coverage in two broadsheets, namely: *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. This exercise produced a large set of data comprising mosque stories as follows:

Total Number of Mosque Stories in the Sample

Years	*The Daily Telegraph*	*The Guardian*
2005	271	411
2006	246	384
2007	172	312

The decision was made to shrink the data and the time-period as the broadsheet selection was redesigned to obtain a maximal and close examination of the subject. I decided to omit the word 'mosque' as a connotation because it captures a large bulk of news stories about mosques mostly outside Britain. The total number of stories collected falls into three main categories: local mosque stories (England); stories relating to international mosques, particularly in the Middle East; and mosques related to 7/7, i.e., Finsbury Park

and local mosques in Leeds and London that were associated with the London bombers in some way.

The following Tables 1 and 2 show the different types of journalism discussing mosques, their roles, and their relevance to British society, particularly in the wake of the 7/7 incident in both broadsheets over the period of 8 July 2005–7 July 2007.

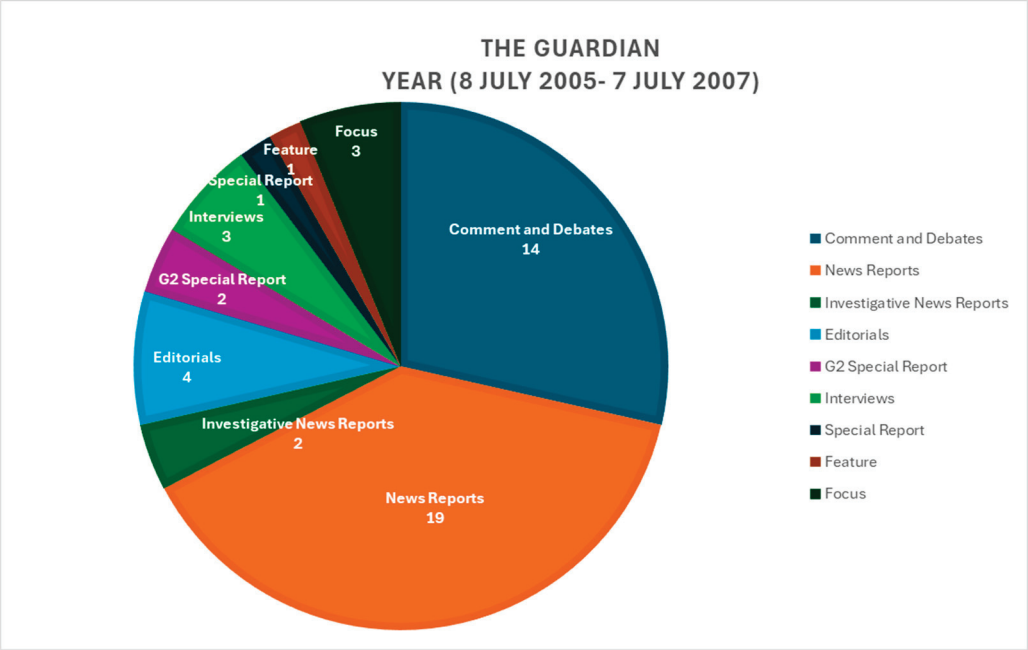
Table 1. The Guardian.

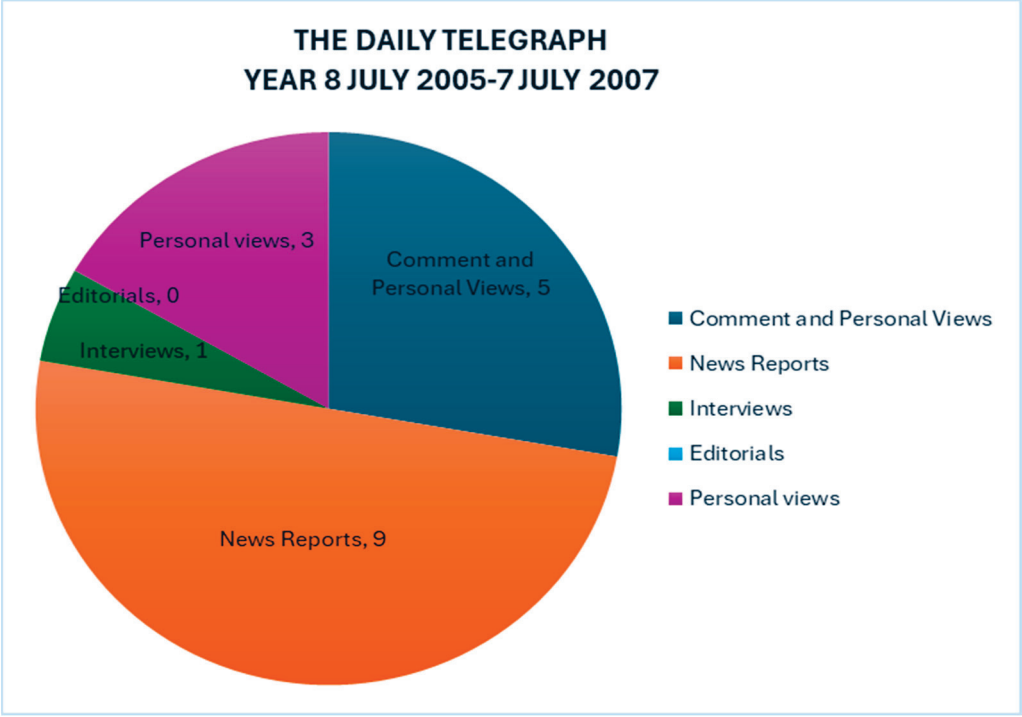
Types of Journalism	Year (8 July 2005–7 July 2007)
Comment and Debates	14
News Reports	19
Investigative News Reports	2
Editorials	4
G2 Special Report	2
Interviews	3
Special Report	1
Feature	1
Focus	3
Total	49

Table 2. The Daily Telegraph.

Types of Journalism	Year 8 July 2005–7 July 2007
Comment and Personal Views	5
News Reports	9
Interviews	1
Editorials	-
Personal views	3
Total	18

Drawing on the original data, I collected eighteen initial codes relating to mosques directly and indirectly and six sub-theme codes that all combine to form three major themes: security threat, incompatibility, and social space.





Dataset: The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph reporting (8 July 2005–7 July 2007).

The significance of the 7/7 event: significance for the context of the article:

On 7 July 2005, four suicide Muslim bombers attacked their own country of birth and residence, killing 52 and injuring over 770 innocent civilians, including Muslims in London. The incident is also referred to as 7/7, thus equate it to the 9/11 coordinated suicide attacks on New York. Notably, only two weeks later, four more attempted and failed attacks followed that changed the political landscape of the United Kingdom[7]. Following those events, the British media hurried to establish connections between perpetrators and mosques to suggest that mosques harbour and breed radicals and extremists. Furthermore, it uses phrases "Islamist" and "Islamic terrorism" for Muslim perpetrators to suggest perhaps Islam has inspired them to be terrorists. It is particularly noted that in the aftermath

of the 7/7, most sections of the British media purposely chose and disseminated images of mosques, minarets, crescents, children reading Quran, hijab-wearing women, and beard Muslims entering and praying in the mosques to suggest that these people are backward, incompatible, and a threat to our secular society. Most importantly, following the 7/7 bombings, hate crimes against the Muslims increased while Muslims became easy targets of racist abuse, verbal and physical attacks, mosques were vandalised and evidently Islamophobia became a normal behaviour.

Relevance of data sampling, timeframe and broadsheets selection criteria:

One key reason for the selected period (2005–2007) was to examine the reactions of the British broadsheet press in the aftermaths of the London bombings. It is important to note that three of the four bombers were born and bred in Britain and have attacked their own country of birth. Since then, the UK has constantly experienced several tragic incidents of terrorism; for example, the Glasgow Airport attack (2007), the Manchester Arena bombings (2017), and the London Bridge attack (2019), all involved Muslim youths. Arguably, it is a valid and relevant inquiry because terrorism is an ongoing challenge that is mainly centered on Muslims, as visible in the reaction of the British broadsheet press reporting. Notably, it appears that with every occurrence, the Western media reaction was identical in nature—that perpetrators have attended mosques. Why does mosque come into discussion? Have they attended university? College? Musical event? Thus, that makes a case of contextual associations, as Hitler, Stalin, and modern-day invaders may have attended churches and universities. As the West moves away from religion, liberal and conservative press outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* are more secular in nature and less considerate of faith, believing that socio-cultural problems have roots in religion. According to the *Press Gazette*[8] May 2024 report of the UK top ten news websites, both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* maintain fifth and ninth place, with readership of 20.7 m and 15.1 m, respectively. Both newspapers are politically aligned with Labour and Conservative supporters, where *The Guardian* is liberal and *The Daily Telegraph* is seen as a conservative paper. Overall, *The Guardian* has opposed wars in the Middle East, while *The Daily Telegraph* has supported the Iraq War, and currently it favours war on Gaza.

3.1. The Findings: Key Themes

3.1.1. Security Threat

Noticeably, both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* allocate more space and coverage to unpopular and self-styled Muslim Islamic scholars who were often presented as hate preachers, such as Anjem Chaudhary and Abu Hamza. Moreover, controversial figures and self-appointed experts on Islam and Muslims, such as former Muslims Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Ed Husain, receive extraordinary space that presents them as scholars of Islam. In turn, such patterns of reporting emerged to build a highly negative image of Islam because of these hate preachers' and self-appointed scholars' narratives of Islam. Such reporting had more to do with agenda-setting and was less concerned with presenting reality. Notably, in most types of journalism published in both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, the discussions and debates surrounding Islam, such as radicalisation, extremism, and the role of mosques were largely based on the views and opinions of the above-mentioned self-proclaimed experts and scholars.

Thus, narratives come into view suggesting that Islam advocates violence and hatred of non-Muslims and non-believers. For this article, I include Abu Hamza's portrayal in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, both of which presented him as a hate preacher. Abu Hamza was accused of "inciting murder and racial hatred" and "maintained he never helped al-Qaeda or other militant groups" (BBC 2014). The dataset shows that the sub-theme code "Hate preachers, Abu Hamza, Finsbury Mosque promote anti-Western feelings and radicalisation" appears 20 times in a total of 274 stories, with a frequency of 7.29%. In other words, in all the mosque-related stories published in both newspapers, Abu-Hamza appeared in $20/68 \times 100 = 29.41\%$. In the main, these reports suggest that Abu-Hamza, during his time at the Finsbury Park Mosque, radicalised youngsters and spread

hatred of Britain. He propagates his own version of Islam, denounces British politicians, and discredits Britain's system and its foreign policies. Particularly, the media reporting presented a blend of statements made by Abu Hamza and the authorities, which means a mixture of facts and assumptions.

Reviewing the press reporting on mosques, this study finds that the press establishes a link between 'extremists', 'fundamentalists' (including all other troublemakers) and the mosques. In the database, hate preachers appeared to receive more media attention and space compared to moderate voices. An example is the image of Abu-Hamza and his cemented connection with Finsbury Park Mosque. Both broadsheets described Hamza as a hatemonger and anti-Western, using derogatory language such as "hook." In one of *The Telegraph* comment pieces, Denis MacShane (2006) quotes David Blunkett's diaries in which "he refers to the arrest of the Finsbury Park radical Islamist imam, Abu Hamza, in January 2003" (*The Daily Telegraph*, 17 October 2006). Further, MacShane notes that:

> For months! For years, every other politician in Europe had been complaining about the failure of Britain to act against Hamza and the other ideologues of hate who were turning young Muslim minds-long before 9/11 or the Iraq conflict-into cauldrons of hate against democracy, and some, tragically, into self-immolating killers of innocent men, women, and children. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 17 October 2006)

Sean O'Neill and McGrory's (2006) study offer a chronological record of Abu-Hamza's alleged involvement in recruiting, spying, training, operating, and backing acts of terrorism and extremism in Britain from March 1994 to July 2005 (O'Neill and McGrory 2006, p. xvii). However, scholars are clearly divided on this subject. For example, Nick Kollerstrom[9] dismisses O'Neill and McGrory's (2006) narrative of Abu-Hamza based on his investigation (2011) that carries references to Nick Davies (2009) and Nafeez Ahmed (2006, pp. 158–67) in which Ahmed disputes the reputation and association of Abu-Hamza with various secret services such as MI5 (BBC 2014).

Overall, press reporting gives the impression that mosques harbour extremists and that people who go to religious schools are suspicious. Several scholars point out the creation of an environment that presents or perceives Islam as a 'threat or fear' and depicts its followers as 'terrorists', 'extremists', and 'fundamentalists' who attend mosques, which, according to many media outlets, spread hatred and extremism and propagate separation and violence in society (Baker 2006, pp. 90–95; Esposito 1999, pp. 45–50).

Apart from my own findings at a national level, Finsbury Park Mosque and Abu-Hamza generate a large volume of news stories in the broadsheet and tabloid press to an extent that ordinary people begin to see the mosque as a threat to security because it harbours radicals and extremists. In such different narratives, Finsbury Park Mosque was associated with "Londonistan", "Paris Metro bombings", and other terror-related activities. Consider one of several examples in which mosques are directly linked with extremism, terrorism, and other related wrongdoings. Steven Swinford (2011), a *Daily Telegraph* reporter, published a story under the headline: *WikiLeaks: how Britain 'became a haven for migrant extremists': When Finsbury Park Mosque opened nearly 20 years ago, it was intended to be a centre for peaceful worship, feted by the Prince of Wales and seen as an emblem of multi-cultural Britain.* He further refers to Guantanamo *WikiLeaks* files claim that

> By the late 1990s, the mosque in North London had become a "haven" for extremism, where disaffected young men from around the world were radicalised before being sent to al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. At least 35 Guantánamo detainees passed through Finsbury Park. . .Regent's Park Mosque, East London Mosque. . . (*The Daily Telegraph*, 25 April 2011)

However, these broadsheets also reported several incidents that mentioned British anti-terror police stop and search activities and arresting of Muslim youths near mosques. Hence, the British media may not have a direct role in stirring up hatred and prejudice against mosques, but the reporting approach and methods of representation clearly indicate

that most of those political groups and individuals who are hostile to mosques are in fact somewhat misled by the media. In addition, several studies raise concerns over the media representations of Islam and Muslims in Britain, particularly after the 9/11 and 7/7 incidents, such as Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005), Kabir (2010), and Sian et al. (2012). In my own study, the sub-theme code suggesting British mosques' linkage with the 7/7 bombers who used mosques as meeting points appeared in a total of 16 different types of journalism in the original dataset, i.e., $16274 \times 100 = 5.83\%$. A similar number of news stories relating to the image of mosques regarding the 7/7 incident can be expressed as $16/68 \times 100 = 23.52\%$.

Notably, in the aftermath of the 7/7 incident, both broadsheets presented mosques using various problematic labels, such as platforms that promote extremism and radicalisation among young British Muslims. Most importantly, the overall dataset shows that approximately 25% ($68/274 \times 100 = 24.81\%$) of all types of journalism talked about British mosques in the context of the 7/7 incident. Notably, the database results are evident of how broadsheets play an essential role in shaping public opinion of British mosques. Relatedly, several studies have noted the considerable influence of the press on the public's view of mosques in particular; these include (Baker et al. 2013; Haji et al. 2021; Sian et al. 2012; Hoskins and O'Loughlin 2010). Soon after the 7/7 bombings, Muslim images were typecast which evidently aided in the rise of anti-Muslim hatred, and Muslims were treated with suspicion in society (Ameli and Merali 2015).

Despite worrying negative media portrayals of Muslims, one might say that, of course, not all sections of the British media are responsible for stirring up hatred of and bigotry against Muslims. Notably, on a few occasions notable journalists have resigned from their news organisations because of those organisations' anti-Muslim hatred, and some news organisations acknowledge the positive roles played by Muslims. Examples include the following story: "Daily Star reporter Richard Peppiatt resigns in protest at what he says is the newspaper's anti-Muslim propaganda" (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2011). In the same vein, the British press offered a very positive portrayal of 'race murder' victim Tariq Jahan, father of 19-year-old Haroon Jahan, who appealed for calm in August 2011 at the height of tension between communities in Birmingham resulting from the racially motivated murders of three Muslim teenagers outside a mosque.

Simran Jeet Singh (2014) has compiled various data sources and writes that the ignorance of Islam is a prime reason for the shocking increases in hate crimes against Muslims in the West and America in particular (*The Guardian*, 9 September 2014). Singh's views are worth considering because, unfortunately, most sections of the mainstream press and broadcasters have failed to understand and educate people about the role of the mosque. The result is growing bigotry and opposition to the building of new mosques in various countries across Europe, including Britain, because some people see this as a sign of Muslims taking over Europe (see *The Economist*, 30 August 2007). This fear is becoming institutionalised in the sense that responsible people are using different political and media platforms to air such thoughts. Inayat Bunglawala quotes Alison Ruoff of *Premier Christian Radio*:

> If we want to become an Islamic state, this is the way to go. You build a mosque, and then what happens? You have Muslim people moving into that area, all the shops will then become Islamic, all the housing will then become Islamic and as the Bishop of Rochester has so wisely pointed out, and that will be a no-go area for anyone else. They will bring in Islamic law. We cannot allow that to happen. (Bunglawala 2008)

The most disturbing aspect is that many members of the media and politics constantly view mosques as a threat to secularism, even though many British people are not actively religious. While this article sheds light on the media portrayal of mosques, particularly in the aftermath of the 7/7 incident, it also includes a few illustrations of recent political campaigns in Europe and America to demonstrate how this threat is perpetrated. Instead of advocating a crackdown on those engaging in hate speech, the media has in fact singled

out the "mosque" as an institution that harbours extremists and spreads hatred of the West. This foments extremism among some young British Muslims.

Most of the reporting in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* about mosques reflects problematic narratives that create panic and fear of mosques among the public by suggesting that these places are sources of increasing radicalisation and extremism. This belief receives a great deal of currency in both broadsheets' reporting to the extent that Tablighi Jamaat has been accused of promoting extremism. Jamie Doward's report describes, "Tablighi Jamaat, an evangelical Islamic group which each year sends hundreds of young British Muslims to fundamentalist religious schools in Pakistan", and states that "two of the 7/7 bombers, Mohammed Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, attended Tablighi Jamaat mosques. Counter-terrorism sources say it is more likely that radicalised young Muslims are attracted to Tablighi Jamaat than the other way around" (*The Observer*, 5 November 2006). However, many scholars view Tablighi Jamaat as a harmless and peaceful spiritual movement, such as Coward and Smith (2004), Horstmann (2007), and Zubaida (2003). The newspaper assumptions of Tablighi Jamaat are mistaken, as it has millions of followers around the world, including Britain, and evidently, they are not involved in acts of terrorism.

Notably, George W. Bush and Tony Blair publicly admitted that God had asked them to invade Iraq (*The Guardian*, 7 October 2005). Surely, they used religion as a pretext to legitimise their massacres in Iraq and Afghanistan. How does Allah SWT (God) allow His creation to be killed? For argument's sake, if we reverse this position, are those terrorists serving the mission of their God not equal to the Western politicians? In fact, the West is not the only victim of terrorism; more Muslims are on the losing side. Another point is that Western politicians have played a huge role in promoting and sponsoring terrorism in the shape of state terrorism; the West is thus not just on the receiving end but is also contributing to terrorism. Again, a philosophical question arises: If terrorists have attended madrassas, isn't it also fair to point out the connection between warmongers and their institutions?

Paradoxically, most of the press reporting on mosques established links between the London bombers and mosques at home and abroad. Both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* writers and contributors assumed that the London bombers had travelled to Pakistan and attended madrassas, (mosque schools) there. Furthermore, *The Daily Telegraph* published several stories claiming that the London bombers were radicalised in Pakistani madrassas for example, (*The Daily Telegraph*, 4 September 2005 and 9 September 2006). Notably, British broadsheet reporting of madrassas comprises terms such as "terrorist factories", "terror schools", "Jihadists", "Wahabbis", and "radicalism", along with notions that "they teach hatred of the West." All these labels suggest that mosque schools are behind global terrorism. In the dataset, both *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* articles about madrassas and *Tablighi Jamaat* included derogatory language such as "Army of Darkness", and their numbers were often exaggerated (see *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 August 2006; *The Observer*, 24 September 2006). However, it is important to note that newspaper reporting is presumably based on statements and opinions and hence merely factual.

The fear factor is the key to the media representation of mosques and mosque schools, linking all social ills and troubles such as terrorism and radicalisation with these places. In recent years, several scholarly studies have observed the increasingly negative portrayal of madrassas and mosques (Bergen and Pandey 2006, p. 117; Cherti and Bradley 2011; Poole and Wiliamson 2021). As mentioned earlier, most of the anti-mosque campaigns have been a result of the negative portrayal of mosques: examples include (Ahmanideen and Iner 2024). As a result of negative media reporting, mosques are facing growing abuse, vandalism, threats, violence, and hate crimes (*ITV*, 2023). The Iram Sawar report found "Almost 90% of mosques across the UK have experienced acts of hate crimes" during the year 2022 (ibid.). Given the constant deceptive anti-mosque trends, it is relevant to consider two comic-strips that reflect how anti-mosque sentiments are prevalent among right-wing parties and individuals.

3.1.2. Incompatible

British mosques are often linked with controversial and sensitive issues such as radicalisation, extremism, cartoon controversies, veils, and sharia courts, bringing these places of worship and spiritual institutions engaging in several community-related activities into the media spotlight. Following the 7/7 incident, the belief that mosques are incompatible with the secular British way of life has gained considerable popularity. This has occurred mainly because of the negative and biased image of Islam that floats around in the media, politics and public spaces. In the last decade, several opinion polls, surveys, and think-tank reports have disclosed public perceptions that view Islam as negative and incompatible with British values. Mehdi Hasan (2015) puts it as follows:

> Depending on which poll you believe, a majority of Brits believe "Muslims create problems in the UK", link "Islam with extremism", and would be "bothered" by the building of a big mosque in their neighbourhood. Since 7/7, anti-Muslim hate crimes have soared. Mosques have been firebombed while headscarf-clad women have been physically attacked. (*The Guardian*, 5 July 2015)

Drawing upon the dataset (see Figure 1), it is evident that the sub-theme code "Islam preaches peace and harmony and has no link with terrorism", which suggests an open-minded view of Islam, appears a total of 16 times, meaning that $16/274 \times 100 = 5.83\%$ of the items of journalism in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* portray Islam positively. Notably, of these 16 types of journalism reflecting a positive image of Islam, *The Guardian* has published 11 stories, while *The Daily Telegraph* has published only five stories presenting a constructive image of Islam. However, within the period 5 July 2005–8 July 2007, I noticed that the sub-theme code "Islam link with terrorism, extremism, radicalization and women's issues", which is reflective of closed-mindedness, also appears 16 times, accounting for 5.83% of the total reporting in both broadsheets.

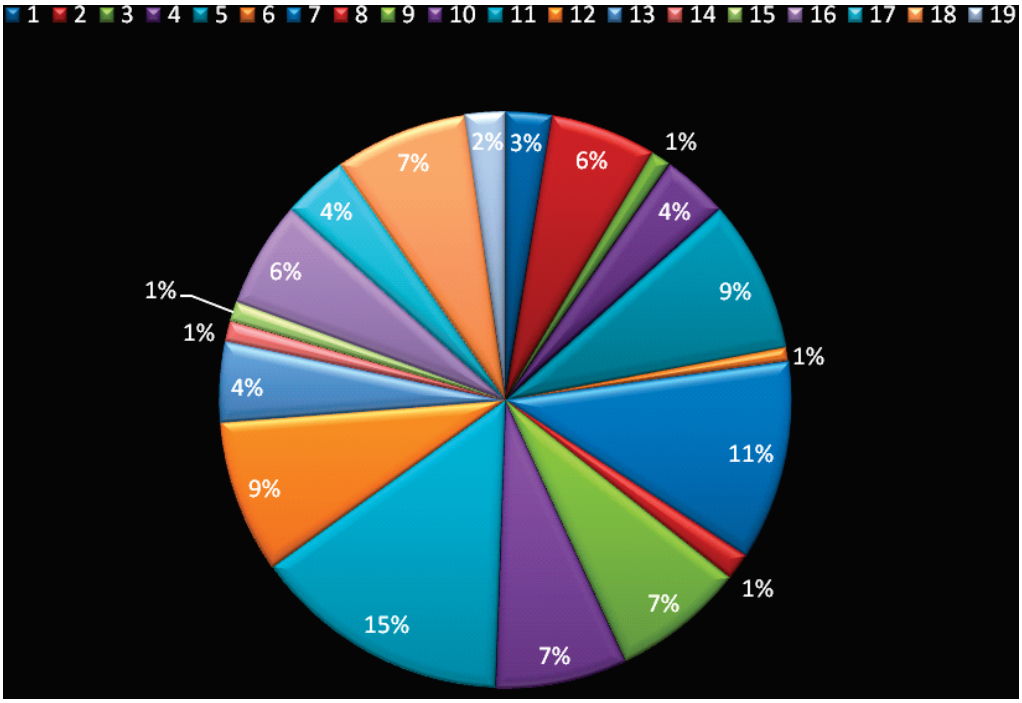


Figure 1. The above figure shows 19 sub-themes and their share in the making of a main theme "British Muslims are Incompatible with British Way of Life".

In the aftermath of the 7/7 incident, the focal point of the split and conflict of interest between Muslims and non-Muslims, there was great emphasis on the point that the Islamic values or way of life are incompatible with British values. Here, this means that a tiny minority of Muslims, such as veiled women, bearded men, and mosquegoers are often described as backward, outdated, and illiterate. Drawing on the database, it became evident that certain events, such as the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) cartoons controversy, the veil, sharia, and suicide attacks, immediately brought mosques into the media spotlight.

In February 2006, a few British Muslim organisations staged protests outside the Danish embassy in London while others gathered in local mosques to discredit the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* which published disrespectful and distasteful caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). At this point, both *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* ran a series of articles, special reports, comment pieces, and editorials mostly suggesting that British Muslims do not endorse criticism of their religion because they are not moderate and open-minded in comparison to their non-Muslim British fellow citizens. Further, a few writers and contributors of these newspapers suggested that British Muslims hate freedom of speech and are anti-Western and anti-democratic. Such views were perhaps due to the presence among the protestors of Omar Khayam, a drug addict dressed like a suicide bomber who was on parole and whose filthy behaviour terrified ordinary people. Moreover, his malicious behaviour resembled and equated to an incitement to murder in Victorian Britain.

In its editorial on 5 February 2006, *The Daily Telegraph* deplored the attitude of a handful of Muslim protestors who were chanting slogans such as "Freedom go to hell" and "Britain you will pay—7/7 is on its way." It wrote that those protesting were in fact in many ways "abusing—the freedom of protest and freedom of assembly that are foundation stones of British democracy. Yet, even as they exploited these hard-won liberties, they were calling for them to be abolished" (*The Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 2006).

Admirably, the British press, including *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, declined to reprint those repulsive cartoons in a solidarity campaign to defend freedom of speech alongside European newspapers. However, *The Daily Telegraph* writes in its editorial that it regards those images "as vulgar and fatuously insulting. However—and this is the crucial point—we reserve absolutely our right to make our own decision, free of threat and intimidation" (ibid.). Further, *The Daily Telegraph* criticises the attitude of Jack Straw, who condemns the Danish newspaper cartoon publishers but fails to discredit Muslim protestors (ibid.).

Despite *The Daily Telegraph's* view of the protestors, it states: "There is no excuse for gratuitous offence. . .some Muslims might like to consider how insulting their own views on women's rights, theocracy, and Western practices [are]. . .The offensiveness of these views is no reason to close British mosques or Islamic newspapers" (*The Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 2006). It is important to note that *The Guardian's* investigative report published on 11 February 2006 discloses that "A key role in organising the demonstration was played by an Islamist sect whose supporters have repeatedly been linked to violence and terrorism. . .Al-Ghurabaa, the organisation that takes credit for the protest" was a known problematic group (*The Guardian*, 11 February 2006). In addition, both newspapers defended freedom of speech and opposed the British government's idea of closing some mosques used by hate preachers to spread anti-Western feelings and the proposal to ban Hizbut Tahrir.

Overall, the cartoon controversies raise two important issues of concern to the West. The first is freedom of speech, and the second is the place of religion in secular Western societies such as Britain. Keith Laybourn (2024) pointed out that although such notions are true, Christian religion in Britain has also been subjected to frequent mocking and attacks. Laybourn mentioned George Jacob Holyoke, who coined the term secularism and was convicted of Blasphemy, felt that social order separated from religion (Laybourn 2024). Perhaps for some individuals, this situation reflects similarities between pre-modernism and postmodernism. For example, today in many societies, including the UK, it is considered inappropriate to kill someone for apostasy because many people considered religion[10]

as a private matter, but it is generally considered appropriate to kill someone for treason because it is a political matter. Similarly, in some places, it is not considered to invade a country for religious reasons, but it is considered appropriate to invade a country in the name of democracy. Moreover, in pre-1960s British society, public display of affection was seen as a bad practice, but it is now an accepted norm. Thus, British society has enormously changed its moral, social, and cultural norms and accepts others following them, whether right or wrong[11].

However, in the broader debate on the cartoon controversy, *The Guardian* also provided a platform to Muslim writers and contributors such as Fareena Alam, who condemned the cartoon protestors, arguing that their distasteful actions do not match the teachings and characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). Alam (2006) writes that "the principles on which the Prophet stood are much more generous than that. . ." (*The Guardian*, 12 February 2006).

She argues that the editors of the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* have shown the worst form of ignorance of Islam as well as hostility to it because the fact that they had "rejected cartoons lampooning Jesus three years ago on the grounds that they would offend their readers made their protestations of free speech seem cynical" (*The Guardian*, 12 February 2006). Hence, Alam concludes that "freedom of speech is not absolute. It has to be in service of something, such as peace or social justice. How have these cartoons, and the hypocritical defence of them, served these ideals?" (*The Guardian* 12 February 2006).

According to scholarly studies, it is evident that most media narratives on Islam in fact reflect what George Orwell called "Double Speak", meaning different standards of representation for different sets of people. As William Blum (2006) writes, "The Western world was shocked when Iran condemned Salman Rushdie to death because of his book they called 'blasphemous'. But the United States has also condemned blasphemers to death—Castro, Allende, Sukarno, and a host of others. . ." (Blum 2006, p. 40). Essentially, in all these debates, such as those on the veil and freedom of speech, which bring modernity into the discussion, the key point is ignorance of Islam. To be fair, the reverse of this assumption is also true.

3.1.3. Social Space

In contemporary Western societies, religious places play a significant role in bringing together people of faith communities. Several notable studies acknowledge that religious institutions and places such as mosques, churches, gurdwaras, temples, and synagogues provide social spaces for local faith communities and help people of other faiths integrate and socialise with groups and individuals from dissimilar cultures, religions, and social classes (Biddington 2021, p. 179; Numrich 2023, p. 157; McAndrew and Sobolewska 2015, p. 62). Overall, the types of journalism within the dataset published by both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* show that these broadsheets and their contributors, albeit to a diminishing degree, recognise the fact that mosques can play a significant role in community building and fighting extremism and radicalisation.

In the dataset, the sub-code theme "Mosques are promoting community cohesion" appears only three times, that is, $3/68 \times 100 = 4.41\%$ types of journalism in both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, with a ratio of 2:1 talk of mosques as a social space and community-bonding platform. Furthermore, within the dataset, only 1.1% of the journalism presents open-minded and positive views of British mosques. For example, mosques foster community cohesion and provide spaces for different groups within the community to mix.

In the aftermath of the 7/7 incident, *The Guardian* ran a two-part G2 special report called "One Friday", published on 1 November 2006. It featured 40 British Muslim men and women of different professional backgrounds around the country, including politicians, activists, teachers, imams, and doctors, exploring their experience of being Muslims in the wake of the July bombings in London. All the participants were asked to share their experience of a particular Friday and how it felt to be Muslim in Britain today. Almost

everyone mentioned the mosque and its significant role in their personal lives. Life for ordinary Muslims has become more challenging since the 7/7 incident, and it continues to be difficult with mosques being constantly accused of radicalisation and extremism. However, overall, the participants agree that the mosque is not just a place for prayers at Friday gatherings; it is in fact a platform that facilitates a sense of community. To clarify, this study uses "community" in a broader sense that includes Muslims of dissimilar ethnic backgrounds, non-Muslim neighborhoods, and includes interfaith work. Relatedly, Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra shares his experience of a particular Friday:

> I dealt with media requests. I went to a mosque for Friday prayer, where I had discussions with people about the veil and Iraq. I act as a point of contact in a community. Muslims are worried that their lives will become harder. (*The Guardian*, 1 November 2006)

In addition, at the government level, it has been acknowledged that mosques do have an influential role in community bonding, which might help to combat problems such as the growing sense of disengagement among young British Muslims who feel ignored and alienated within the broader society. A report published in October 2002 by the "Select Committee on Religious Offences in England and Wales" finds that mosques that serve as "religious centres" in fact undertake several different roles and offer a variety of services, such as "being simply a place to perform the ritual prayers to a comprehensive service to the local community encompassing religious education, social service, counselling, and adult education. Such mosques play an important part in the life of the local community" (Parliament Reports, 2002). Notably, several recent studies also identify similar recurring trends about the role of mosques in facilitating education, health, social, and economic welfare for Muslim communities, as well as fostering interfaith dialogue among Muslims and non-Muslims (Betul 2022; Mustafa et al. 2017; Karimullah 2023).

The Imam of Leeds Makkah Mosque, Qari Muhammad Asim (2011), writes that "the mosque is uniquely positioned in British society to offer guidance and practical assistance regarding real issues affecting the lives of young Muslims" (Asim 2011, p. 10). Asim went on to explain the growing importance of the mosque as a social space provider by fostering interactions among young people. He noted:

> As the Muslim community has changed and grown over the last 20 years, so has the role of mosques. The younger generation expects mosques to assume a more central role, moving away from a simple centre of prayer to a social space in the community with a role in helping Muslims integrate into the community and fight marginalisation. As a result of the changing needs of young Muslims, there are increasing numbers of mosques in the UK that are providing extensive services to the Muslim community. (Asim 2011, p. 21)

In present circumstances, most mosques acknowledge the need to provide a social space for the local community. In the aftermath of the London Bombings, Leeds Makkah Mosque and Leeds Grand Mosque are two of the best examples of social spaces available to local Muslims. In addition, most mosques offer a place for weddings, social gatherings, funerals, sports such as indoor badminton and table tennis, and evening classes for elderly people as well as children. More importantly, most mosques organise exhibitions, seminars, conferences, and cultural events designed to benefit local communities. In this regard, the Leeds Grand Mosque and the Leeds Makkah Mosque[12] in the Hyde Park area of Leeds are two relevant illustrations.

In this way, most mosques provide social space to people of different backgrounds and assist in the formation of interest groups within broader communities. In post-7/7 Britain, politicians and religious leaders have emphasised the need to develop a close-knit community that not only fosters cohesion but also shapes a much more cohesive society. From David Cameron's "Big Society" (2010) election manifesto to government policies such as "community cohesion", the idea is to develop cohesive communities (Dillon and Fanning 2011; Jones 2013; McCabe 2010). Unfortunately, some of the best efforts of the

British government to develop a strong sense of shared community have not produced the desired results. In the aftermath of the August 2011 London riots, several leading political and religious figures stressed the need to fix a broken society (*The Guardian*, 11 August 2011). Fairly speaking, the 1980s riots in Bradford and contemporary problems of disengaging Muslim youths also signal the breakdown of community. Hence, despite the positive role of religious institutes, there are emerging challenges for them to counter. Other religious communities, including Christians, Jews, and Hindus are facing the same challenges.

Indeed, a sense of belonging and a shared common goal can achieve cohesive community bonding. In this regard, on a broader level, the principles of Islam such as Salah (prayers), Zakat (charity), Hajj (pilgrimage), and Brotherhood are basically designed to bind all Muslims together, regardless of tribe, race, colour and ethnicity, into one *Ummah* or nation. The concept of one *Ummah*, derived from the Quran is in fact the best example of community cohesion (Ahmed 1975; Saleh and Baqutayan 2012). It is here that the Islamic principles together with the fine principles, of Christianity and Judaism, can help bind a society together based on shared and common goals, as occurred in Medina and medieval Spain. The historical archives indicate that this model was successful in Muslim Spain, Mughal India, the Ottoman Balkans, and Eastern Europe. Members of the world's major faiths, such as Christians, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists have all lived together peacefully.

The Historical Contextualisation and implications of Mosque coverage debates: Past to present (2005–2024).

This study is based on the representation of mosques in British broadsheets *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* report of the tragic event of 7/7, which occurred on 7 July 2005. Nearly 20 years on, this study's findings and observations within the historical context and the implications of the British media reporting of mosque debates emerged since then and have shown similar reoccurring patterns and trends. Given the ongoing concerns about rising Islamophobia and the excavating of Muslim exclusionary discourses in Western Europe, which revolve around issues of identity, belonging, religion, culture, and multiculturalism, as well as concerns about terrorism and counterterrorism, once again mosques have become a dominant feature of the media reporting. Notably, about 20 years ago, the British broadsheet press reporting on mosques reflected a focal point that Islam is a threat to Britain. The key debates that emerged were "modernity", "British Islam", "modern Islam", "moderate Muslims", "Sharia law", "jihadists", "radicals", and "caliphate". Relatedly, the word "Islamist" appears as a synonym for 'violent ideology' ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Qaeda, and Hizbut-Tahrir to Al-Muhajiroun in Britain. Within the dataset, the phrase "Islamist" denotes hate preachers, radicals, and extremists, such as Abu-Hamza al-Masri, Anjem Choudary, and Omar Bakri Muhammad, who have been accused of making hate speeches.

Despite considerable differences in the interpretation, presentation, and argumentation in reporting, both broadsheets held similar views of mosques that harbour radical imams and hate preachers to promote "Islamic ideology" and "anti-Western values". In various other articles and reports, *The Daily Telegraph* published the views of several commentators who repeatedly raised this concern that British radicals intend to replace secular values with Sharia law, which would happen under a caliphate. The fear of a caliphate was a prominent feature of both broadsheets, probably the London bomber's ringleader, and even today, al-Qaeda and ISIS radicals and terrorists wear a black band on their forehead, describing the coming of the caliphate which was a hallmark of the coverage of 7/7. Alongside the fear of radicals' attacks on public and defense infrastructure, their aim of establishing a caliphate frequently appeared in both newspapers.

The Dataset:

No.	Color	%Age Share	Sub-Theme-Code
1	Sky blue	15%	STC 46, "Britishness is our culture; our British values must be adopted"
2	Blue Lapis	11%	STC 39, "British Muslims have created social ghettos and live in parallel lives rooted in their cultural and religious beliefs/ideologies such as separate schools, veils, this leads to radicalisation"
3	Blue sapphire	9%	STC 32, "British Government promotes the idea of British Islam/Modern Islam/moderates (Sufi Islam, Council of Imams) to counter Islamic radicalism"
4	Orange carrot	9%	STC 49, "Engaging with Muslims include government initiatives such as road shows, reaching out in the community, combating Islamophobia, listening to Muslims leadership etc."
5	Orange apricot	7%	**STC 41**, "Hate preachers, Abu Hamza, Finsbury Mosque promote anti-Western feelings and radicalisation."
6	Purple	7%	STC 44, "British Muslims do not endorse 'Freedom of Speech' and criticism of their religion for example Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) cartoons"
7	Green	7%	STC 52, "British Muslims are victims for example bad press etc." (Sympathetic view)
8	Purple Orchid	6%	**STC 24**, "British mosques link with 7/7 bombers, meeting point, promoting extremism and radicalization, problematic labels, non-English speaking imams, etc. (close-Views)"
9	Red	6%	**STC 6**, "British Islamists, Sheikh Omar Bakri and his associates such as al-Qaradawi and Abu Izzadeen are anti-Western hate preachers who must be denounced and banned"
10	Light sky blue	4%	STC 29, "Hate preacher such as Anjem Chaudhary's statements"
11	Blue Cerulean	4%	STC 54, "Problems within the Muslim community for instance widely acknowledged leadership, imams and mosques, sectarian divide etc."
12	Purple violet	4%	STC 62, "Jack Straw veil controversy fuel Islamophobia in the British society"
13	Blue azure	3%	STC 20, "Londoners showed strength after bombings"
14	Blue arctic	2%	STC 4, "Islamist extremists and white imperialist racists are two identical troublemakers"
15	Orange yam	1%	**STC 25**, "Mosques are promoting community cohesion etc. (Open-minded Views)"
16	Green pear	1%	**STC 33**, "Radical Islam and Militant Muslims are also a challenge to Muslim regimes therefore the West must make an alliance with modern Muslims"
17	Green lime	1%	**STC 40**, "Representing Livingstone as hate preachers Qaradawi friend who hate gays, Jews, etc. closed views, anti-Semitic"
18	Pink	1%	STC 58, "Government select, promote and engage with like-minded British Muslims"
19	Red cherry	1%	STC 59, "Freedom of speech boundaries should be drawn in order to avoid confusion and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims"

The Guardian and *The Daily Telegraph* mainly presented the British mosques as negative. These newspapers associated mosques with extremism, radicalism, and terrorism and suggested that mosques are ideological warehouses that export violence and anti-Western sentiments. Overall, both newspapers offer mixed portrayals of British mosques in two sub-theme codes (STC 24, "British mosques link with 7/7 bombers, meeting point, promoting

extremism and radicalization, problematic labels, non-English-speaking imams, etc. (close-minded view)" and (STC 25), "Mosques are promoting community cohesion, etc. (open-minded views)". Despite the two newspapers' diverse opinions on mosques, the negative portrayals of mosques outnumbered the balanced views. The notion of mosques as places of community cohesion, which is an open-minded view of Islam, accounts for only 1.09% of the reporting in comparison to approximately 9% of the reporting space that links mosques with the 7/7 incident. In turn, much of the reporting on mosques in this dataset reflects closed views of Islam.

On a positive note, both newspapers recognise that extremists were banned from their local mosque committees on various grounds, including clashes with elders and imams. They also accept that mosques promote community cohesion by providing a space for different groups of Muslims such as Arabs, Asians, Africans, and white Muslims. Additionally, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* reported government officials and non-Muslim members of the community have visited mosques to foster social cohesion. Soon after the London bombings, most sections of the media, including these two newspapers, linked a few local mosques in Leeds and London with the bombers, suggesting that they had visited these places, and turned them into suicide bombers. Since then, the government has described Leeds Makkah Mosque and Cambridge Mosque as 'role models', suggesting that these two mosques are modern.

Almost, twenty years on, the findings of this study have become more relevant and valid as recent waves of attacks on mosques have increased following the 2024 UK riots. Once again, sections of the British media blamed Muslims for the troubles in Leeds and the killing of three innocent girls in Southport. Later, it appeared that the Roma community was behind the Leeds rioting, and an African Christian was involved in the barbaric slaughter of white girls. Coincidentally, the violent mobs attacked mosques in Southport, Liverpool, Belfast, and London, smashed windows, vandalized mosque buildings, threatened imams, and physically attacked bearded Muslim men and hijab-wearing Muslim women (*The Guardian*, 11 August 2024; *Daily Sabah*, 8 August 2024). Initially, soon after the 7/7 bombings, violent mobs attacked mosques in Leeds and London on the assumption that mosques nurture anti-Western discourses, host hate preachers and imams, and back radical and extremist ideologies that fuel hatred among young Brits. Initially, this study detected a systematic anti-mosque campaign within British broadsheets, the tabloid press, and sections of politics. Now, almost 20 years have passed, and the 2024 UK riots affirm how the British media's negative reporting aims to distort, demonize, and discredit Islam and Muslims by endorsing deeply rooted Islamophobia and anti-mosque narratives leading to attacks on mosques.

This study proposes that policymakers rethink their policy on Islamophobia and treat it equally with anti-Semitism to protect future generations of British Muslims and mosques. Additionally, this study argues that the British broadsheet and tabloid press narrative of mosques has played a huge role in shaping public opinion, especially among the youngsters (Gen Z), who were children at times during the 7/7 bombings. Nearly 20 years later, following the UK riots of 2024, they attacked mosques, believing that what they had been told about mosques—namely, that they are hubs of radicals and extremists who hate Britain—was true. Since 7/7, every incident has brought mosques under attack, even though the perpetrators are not Muslims but Christians, and no one has dared to attack churches. Notably, the British press was wrong and racist about the Iraq War, and once again, it is wrong on mosques.

4. Conclusions

Drawing on the British broadsheets' representation of mosques in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* over a two-year period (7 July 2005–8 July 2007), this study concludes both broadsheets perceive the role and place of mosques in secular British society through their own blurred lens that reflects mosques are incompatible and a security threat to British society. One of the key reasons for such a biased view is that broadsheets were reporting the

tragic incident of the 7/7 bombings that was carried out by perpetrators who professed to be Muslims. Relatedly, the broadsheets clearly focused more on a handful of radical imams in a few British mosques in comparison to a vast majority of the mosques and mosque attendees. Hence, a picture was painted that British mosques harbor extremists, radicals, fundamentalists, jihadists, and terrorists who are anti-Western and want to attack Britain. In doing so, the broadsheet's view of Islam and Muslims was based on those handful of radicals who were misinterpreting Islam for their own gains, as well as the few reporters who aim to get public attention by feeding them sensational news stories. Additionally, both broadsheets presented cherry-picked and out-of-context verses of the holy Quran to establish views that Islam limits the role of women in the society; mosque goers are religious people and misfits to live in a secular society.

Drawing on a dataset, this study detects a continuing derogatory image of mosques in both broadsheets. For clarity, this study admits that it is challenging to tell whether something is derogatory or factual, as the author has looked at what was written rather than examining whether it was right or wrong. Although the overall database also reflects the presence of some favourable views of mosques—i.e., that they provide a social space and play a significant role in community bonding this perspective was largely marginalised.

Evidently, in a considerable number of types of journalism, including news reports, features, and comment pieces, various writers, reporters, and commentators in these broadsheets mostly linked mosques in Leeds, Dewsbury, and London with the 7/7 bombers even though the perpetrators had been banned from their local mosques. A few local mosques were directly accused of harbouring radicals, extremists, and hatemongers, particularly the perpetrators of the 7/7 incident who were [supposedly] radicalised during their visits to madrassas and mosques in Pakistan.

In addition, the reporting also suggests that the bombers, used mosques as meeting points and places to distribute the jihadist literature and collect money. Based upon the findings, this study suggests that one way forward would be to make a clear distinction between hate speakers, self-proclaimed radical clerics, imams, and mosques as an institution while reporting. Overall, this study also notes that distorted images of mosques—such as the crescent, children reading Quran, and radical imams—denote the expansion of Islam in Europe, casting fear among the public to believe that their way of life is in danger; hence, mosques are seen as incompatible and a security threat. In the contemporary period of history, it is essential to review the discourse on mosques and consider them as established institution, like other private and public regulatory bodies.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: https://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/31087/.

Acknowledgments: The author is indebted to the late John Coast and Keith Laybourn, who initially voluntarily read the manuscript and provided feedback and guidance to continue further research and writing.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

This study is a thematic analysis based on a total of 68 types of journalism, including news reports, editorials, interviews, comments, debates, and personal views published in both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. These were selected from the main database of my doctoral thesis using "the following phrases and connotations: 'Islam, Muslims, 7/7, terrorism, extremism, and jihad' to collect stories relating to 7/7" (Raja 2015). It is important to note that the words 'terrorism, extremism, and jihad' were used prominently in the media in connection with the 7/7 event.

Notably, my overall doctoral thesis database consists of the following sample: *The Guardian* has 187 articles, and *The Daily Telegraph* has 87 articles, = 274. Apart from the 'Lexis-Nexis' database search engine, I also used the 'ProQuest' search engine and 'microfilm records' to ensure that every major development in terms of coverage of the 7/7 incident was captured in the dataset (Raja 2015). Regarding the representation of mosques in these two broadsheets, the key themes to have emerged in this paper resulting from the analysis of 68 different types of journalism are as follows: radicalisation and extremism; community cohesion; and hatepreachers.

For my PhD thesis, I initially read all the collected news articles carefully and then saved these types of journalism in two different Microsoft Word documents called *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph* sheets. I then established a codebook in which I recorded coding that resulted from a careful reading of the items, underlining specific phrases and words, noting down different topics, discussions and debates, facts and figures, studies referred to, and analytical concepts used within the text. I applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, which comprises six stages (see Braun and Clarke 2006, pp. 14–23).

These six stages are as follows: becoming familiar with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and, finally, producing a report that "indicates and validates the narrative in the dataset. It shows that themes are coherent, rational, and non-repetitive" (ibid., Raja 2015). In my doctoral thesis pilot study, a total of 62 codes emerged from the database.

However, for this study, I used 6 of the 62 codes collected in my doctoral thesis because they are relevant to this study and include the following: STC-5—"Islam and terrorism cannot be separated"; STC-24—"British mosques' link with 7/7 bombers, meeting point, promoting extremism and radicalisation, problematic labels, non-English-speaking imams, etc., (close-minded view)"; STC-25—"Mosques are promoting community cohesion, etc. (open-minded view)"; STC-26—"Islam preaches peace and harmony and has no link with terrorism, etc. (open-minded view)"; STC-27—"Islam link with terrorism, extremism, radicalisation, women's issues, etc. (closed-minded view)" and STC-41—"Hate preachers, Abu Hamza, and Finsbury Mosque promote anti-Western feelings and radicalisation". I combine both newspapers' stories relating to each code to record and analyse the frequency of occurrence.

For example, sub-theme codes that I used in this study relating to the mosque and its place in Islam and how Islam is perceived in the media are repeated as sub-theme codes 26 and 27; these are repeated equally 16 times when I combine both newspapers' reporting. An example of sub-theme codes and thematic analysis is shown below:

Newspaper	***The Guardian***
Type of Press Coverage	News
Headline	Mega-mosque falls foul of planning laws
Author Description/Affiliation	Jamie Doward, Home Affairs Editor
Type of Source	
Date	5 Nov 2006
Length	233 words
Link	http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/nov/05/religion.world (accessed on 15 March 2009)
(STC-24)	"British mosques' link with 7/7 bombers, meeting point, promoting extremism and radicalisation, problematic labels, non-English-speaking imams, etc. (close-minded view)"
(STC-27)	"Islam's link with terrorism, extremism, radicalisation, women's issues, etc. (closed-minded view)"

Theme-code/Theme Extracts: Based on these themes, I have analysed the whole dataset. Below is a sample analysis of sub-theme STC-25 in this study, which appears three times in the overall original dataset.

Sub-Theme Code	STC-25
Theme	"Mosques are promoting community cohesion. (open-minded view)"

Notes

1 See https://www.central-mosque.com/index.php/General-Fiqh/womenmosque.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).
2 See http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/uk_1.shtml (accessed on 17 August 2024).
3 For more details see http://www.muslimwomenscouncil.org.uk/ (accessed on 12 August 2024).
4 See https://muslimcensus.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/MuslimCensus-x-MEND.pdf (accessed on 11 June 2024).
5 For a detail report see http://centres.exeter.ac.uk/emrc/publications/Islamophobia_and_Anti-Muslim_Hate_Crime.pdf (accessed on 19 June 2024).
6 See http://www.asianexpress.co.uk/archives/Yorkshire/yorks_jan02-13/jan02-13.html (accessed on 17 Jue 2024).
7 See https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/197-london-bomb-attacks_en.pdf (accessed on 22 March 2010).
8 See https://pressgazette.co.uk/media-audience-and-business-data/media_metrics/most-popular-websites-news-uk-monthly-2/ (accessed on 1 September 2024).
9 See for more details, http://terroronthetube.co.uk/reviews-2/the-suicide-factory-abu-hamza-and-the-finsbury-park-mosque/ (accessed on 22 Ausgut 2024).
10 See https://humanists.uk/campaigns/religion-and-belief-some-surveys-and-statistics/ (accessed on 2 September 2024).
11 See https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/British-moral-attitudes.pdf (accessed on 22 Ausgut 2024).
12 See https://makkahmosque.co.uk/islamic-exhibition-connecting-cultures-event/ (accessed on 17 March 2010).

References

Ahmanideen, Gabriel, and Derya Iner. 2024. The interaction between online and offline Islamophobia and anti-mosque campaigns: The literature review with a case study from an anti-mosque social media page. *Sociology Compass* 18: e13160. [CrossRef]
Ahmed, Khurshid. 1975. *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*. Leicester: Islamic Foundation.
Ahmed, Mosadeq Nafeez. 2006. *The London Bombings: An Independent Inquiry*. London: Gerald Duckworth and Co Ltd.
Ahmed, Rehana. 2024. Muslim Cultures, Class and Controversary in twentieth-century Britain. In *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism*. Edited by Rehana Ahmed. Manchester: Manchester University Press. [CrossRef]
Ahmed, S. Akbar. 2003. *Islam under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Akbarzadeh, Shahram, and Bianca Smith. 2005. *The Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Media: (The Age and Herald Sun Newspapers)*. Monash: School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, vol. 4, pp. 1–38.
Alam, Fareena. 2006. Why I Rejected the Anarchists Who Claim to Speak for Islam. *The Observer*, February 12. Available online: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/12/muhammadcartoons.religion (accessed on 27 March 2010).
Alsultany, Evelyn. 2012. *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. New York: NYU Press. Available online: http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfv0k (accessed on 14 August 2024).
Ameli, Said R., Syed Mohammed Marandi, Sameera Ahmed, Seyfeddin Kara, and Arzu Merali. 2007. *The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation*. Islamic Human Rights Commission. Available online: https://www.almendron.com/tribuna/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/the-british-media-and-muslim-representation-the-ideology-of-demonisation.pdf (accessed on 11 March 2010).
Ameli, Saied R., and Arzu Merali. 2015. *Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK*. London: Islamic Human Rights Commission.
Andrews, Aaron, Alistair Kefford, and Daniel Warner. 2021. Community, culture, crisis: The inner city in Engand, c. 1960–1990. *Urban History* 50: 202–13. [CrossRef]
Ansari, Humayun. 2011. *The Making of East London Mosque: Minutes of the London Mosque Fund and East London Mosque Trust Ltd.*. London: Cambridge University Press.
Asim, Muhammad Qari. 2011. Mosques and Youth Engagement: Guidelines and Toolkit. Salaam, MINAB. Available online: https://salaam.co.uk/mosques-youth-engagement-guidelines-toolkit/ (accessed on 21 September 2024).
Awan, Imran, and Mohammed Rahman. 2016. Portrayal of Muslims Following the Murders of Lee Rigby in Woolwich and Mohammed Saleem in Birmingham: A Content Analysis of UK Newspapers. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 36. [CrossRef]
Baker, Paul, Costas Gabrielatos, and Tony McEnery. 2013. Sketching Muslims: A corpus driven analysis of representations around the word 'Muslim' in the British press 1998–2009. *Applied Linguistics* 34: 255–78. [CrossRef]
Baker, Paul. 2006. *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum.

BBC. 2009. Swiss Voters Back Ban on Minarets. *BBC*, November 29. Available online: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8385069.stm (accessed on 17 April 2010).
BBC. 2014. Abu Hamza Trial: Defence Claims Radical Worked with MI5. *BBC*, May 8. Available online: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-27321235 (accessed on 22 August 2024).
Bergen, Peter, and Swati Pandey. 2006. The Madrassa Scapegoat. *Washington Quarterly* 29: 117–125. [CrossRef]
Betul, Alaca. 2022. The Role of Mosques in Promoting Well-Being in Muslim Communities. Dissertation, University of Toronto. Available online: https://www.proquest.com/openview/8bd224b054ea280abc2bc13e89e1905e/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y (accessed on 23 August 2024).
Biddington, Terry. 2021. The possibilities of shared religious or multifaith spaces. In *Houses of Religious Visions, Formats and Experiences*. Edited by Martin Rotting. Zurich: LIT Verlag Gmbtt & Co.
Blum, William. 2006. *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*. Monroe: Common Courage Press.
Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3: 77–101. [CrossRef]
Bunglawala, Inayat. 2008. No More Mosques? *The Guardian*, April 2. Available online: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/apr/02/severalofourpaperstoday (accessed on 16 August 2024).
Cherti, Myriam, and Laura Bradley. 2011. *Inside Madrassas Understanding and Engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research, pp. 1–74.
Cheruvallil-Contractor, Sariya, and Jamie Gilham. 2023. *Muslim Women in Britian, 1850–1950: 100 Years of Hidden History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Coward, Harold, and Gordon S. Smith. 2004. *Religion and Peace Building*. New York: State University of New York.
Davies, Nick. 2009. *Flat News Earth: An Award-winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media*. London: Vintage books.
De Rooij, Laurens. 2023. *Muslims, Minorities, and the Media Discourses on Islam in the West*. Oxon: Routledge.
Dillon, Denis, and Bryan Fanning. 2011. *Lessons for the Big Society: Planning, Regeneration and the Politics of Community Participation*, 1st ed. London: Routledge. [CrossRef]
Esposito, John. 1999. *The Islamic Threat Myth or Reality?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Ewart, Jacqui, and Kate O'Donnell. 2018. *Reporting Islam: International Best Practice for Journalists*, 1st ed. London: Routledge. [CrossRef]
Flood, Barry Finbarr. 2001. *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayad Visual Culture*. Boston: Brill.
Ghauri, Muhammad Junaid, and Salma Umber. 2019. Exploring the Nature of Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Press. *Sage Open* 9. [CrossRef]
Haji, Reeshma, Shelley McKeown, Alex Matthews, and Samantha Platten. 2021. (De)humanization and (dis)trust: Representations of Muslims in the UK newspapers following the 7/7 London bombings. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 27: 256–67. [CrossRef]
Hanif, Faisal. 2021. British Media's Coverage of Muslims and Islam (2018–2020): Centre for Media Monitoring. Available online: https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CfMM-Annual-Report-2018-2020-digital.pdf (accessed on 12 August 2024).
Hasan, Mehdi. 2015. Life for British Muslims since 7/7-abuse, suspicion and constant apologies. *The Observer*, July 5. Available online: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/05/british-muslims-7-july-london-bombings (accessed on 11 August 2024).
Hirsch, Ammiel, and Yosef Reinman. 2003. *One People, Two Worlds: A Reform Rabbi and an Orthodox Rabbi Explore the Issues That Divide Them*. New York: Random House Inc.
Hodgson, Martin. 2007. Evidence of extremism in mosques 'fabricated'. *The Guardian*, December 13. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/dec/13/terrorism.religion (accessed on 10 April 2010).
Horstmann, Alexander. 2007. The Inculturation of a Transnational Islamic Missionary Movement: Tablighi Jamaat al-Dawa and Muslim Society in Southern Thailand. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 22: 107–30. [CrossRef]
Hoskins, Andrew, and Ben O'Loughlin. 2010. Security journalism and 'the mainstream' in Britian since 7/7: Translating terror but inciting violence? *International Affairs* 86: 903–24. [CrossRef]
House, Behrman. 1978. *The Many Faces of Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform*. Millburn: Behrman House.
Jones, Hannah. 2013. *Negotiating Cohesion, Inequality and Change: Uncomfortable Positions in Local Government*. Bristol: Bristol University Press. [CrossRef]
Kabir, Afrose Nahid. 2010. *Young British Muslims: Identity, Culture, Politics and the Media*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Karimullah, Suud Sarim. 2023. The role of mosques as centers for education and social engagement in Islamic communities. *Jurnal of Bina Ummat* 6: 151–66. [CrossRef]
Laybourn, Keith. 2024. Conversation with Keith Laybourn on Secularism and the Modern British Society. August 10.
Lewicki, Aleksandra, and Therese O'Toole. 2017. Acts and practices of citizenship: Muslim women's activism in the UK. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40: 15–171. [CrossRef]
Luehrmann, Sonja. 2015. The politics of prayer books: Delegated intercession, names and community boundaries in the Russian Orthodox Church. *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2: 6–22. [CrossRef]

MacShane, Denis. 2006. Our Failure to Confront Radical Islam Is There for All to See. *The Telegraph*, October 17. Available online: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3633257/Our-failure-to-confront-radical-Islam-is-there-for-all-to-see.html (accessed on 4 March 2010).
McAndrew, Siobhan, and Maria Sobolewska. 2015. Mosques and Political Engagement in Britain: Participation or Segregation? In *Muslims and Political Participation in Britain*. Edited by Timothy Peace. London: Routledge, pp. 53–81.
McCabe, Angus. 2010. *Below the Radar in a Big Society? Reflections on Community Engagement, Empowerment and Social Action in a Changing Policy Context*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
Miller, Robert Lee, and D. John Brewer. 2003. *The A-Z of Social Research: A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Ltd.
Moore, Kerry, Paul Mason, Justin Lewis, and Wren Matthew. 2008. *Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the National Print News Media 2000–2008*. Cardiff: Cardiff University. Available online: http://jppsg.ac.uk/jomec/resources/08channel4-disp (accessed on 27 March 2010).
Mustafa, Yassar, Diya Baker, Preeti Puligari, Teresa Melody, Joyce Yeung, and Fang Gao-Smith. 2017. The role of imams and mosques in health promotion in Western societies—A systematic review protocol. *National Library of Medicine* 6: 25. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
Neuendorf, Kimberly A. 2002. *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. London: Sage Publications.
Numrich, Paul D. 2023. *The Religious Dimensions of Shared Spaces: When and How Religion Matters in Space-Sharing Arrangements*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
O'Neill, Sean, and Daniel McGrory. 2006. *The Suicide Factory: Abu Hamza and the Finsbury Park Mosque*. New York: Harper Perennial.
Pape, Robert. 2003. The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism. *American Political Science Review* 97: 343–61. [CrossRef]
Payne, Geoff, and Judy Payne. 2004. *Key Concepts in Social Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Ltd. [CrossRef]
Piela, Anna. 2016. How do Muslim women who wear the niqab interact with others online? A case study of a profile on a photo-sharing website. *New Media & Society* 19: 67–80. [CrossRef]
Poole, Elizabeth. 2002. *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. London: I.B. Tauris.
Poole, Elizabeth, and John Richardson. 2010. *Muslims and the News Media*. London: I.B. Tauris.
Poole, Elizabeth, and Milly Wiliamson. 2021. Disrupting or reconfiguring racist narratives about Muslims? The representation of British Muslims during the COVID crisis. *Journalism* 24: 262–79. [CrossRef]
Richardson, John. 2004. *(Mis) Representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing company.
Said, Edward. 1981. *Cover Islam: How Media and the Experts Determine How to See the Rest of the World*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Saleem, Shahed. 2012. A History of Mosques in Britain. *Architects' Journal*, April 19. Available online: https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/archive/a-history-of-mosques-in-britain (accessed on 13 May 2024).
Saleh, Sumaya Mohamed, and Shadiya Mohamed Baqutayan. 2012. What is Islamic Society? *International Review of Social Sciences and humanities* 2: 113–19.
Saunders, Emmeline. 2009. Religious State Schools Help Community Cohesion. *Politics. Co.uk.* Available online: http://www.politics.co.uk/news/2009/10/13/women-doctors-need-govt-help (accessed on 22 March 2010).
Sian, Katy, Ian Law, and Salman Sayyid. 2012. The Media and Muslims in the UK: Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies. University of Leeds. Available online: https://www.ces.uc.pt/projectos/tolerace/media/Working%20paper%205/The%20Media%20and%20Muslims%20in%20the%20UK.pdf (accessed on 13 June 2024).
Singh, Jeet Simran. 2014. 9/11-Era Ignorance of Islam is Infecting the Age of Isis. We Should Know Better. *The Guardian*, September 9. Available online: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/09/ignorance-islam-isis-hate-crimes (accessed on 27 June 2024).
Suryandari, Nikmah, and Syamsul Arifin. 2021. Islamophobia and Media Framing in West Media. *KARSA: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* 29: 27–45. [CrossRef]
Swinford, Steven. 2011. WikiLeaks: How Britain 'Became a Haven for Migrant Extremists'. April 25. Available online: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/wikileaks/8472854/WikiLeaks-how-Britain-became-a-haven-for-migrant-extremists.html (accessed on 19 June 2024).
Wazir, Burhan. 2004. *Mosques: Sources of Spiritual Comfort, or So Out of Touch? The Times*. Available online: https://www.thetimes.com/article/mosques-sources-of-spiritual-comfort-or-so-out-of-touch-tj3wrl6pbtb (accessed on 14 August 2024).
Zubaida, Sami. 2003. Islam in Europe. *Critical Quarterly* 45: 88–98. [CrossRef]

religions

MDPI

Article

The European Muslim Crisis and the Post-October 7 Escalation

Hira Amin [1,*], Linda Hyökki [2] and Umme Salma [3]

[1] College of Public Policy, Hamad bin Khalifa University, Education City, Doha P.O. Box 5825, Qatar
[2] Independent Researcher, 74250 Maglaj, Bosnia and Herzegovina; lindahyokki@gmail.com
[3] School of Communication and Arts, The University of Queensland, St Lucia, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia; u.salma@uq.edu.au
* Correspondence: hiamin@hbku.edu.qa

Abstract: Israel's war on Gaza following 7 October 2023 has given birth to several political and social changes in European nations. According to the United Nations Report of the Special Rapporteur, Israel has used this moment to "distort" international humanitarian law principles "in an attempt to legitimize genocidal violence against the Palestinian people." In the European context, this has led to European Muslims and non-Muslims, including organizations, institutions, as well as individual academics, politicians, and activists mobilizing and voicing their condemnation and demand their governments to do more towards peaceful and equitable solutions. However, this has been met with a strong reaction from European governing bodies. This paper situates this reaction within wider discourses on the European Muslim crisis. It begins with a systematic literature review on the so-called European Muslim crisis, followed by case studies on the United Kingdom and Germany on their respective changes to policies impacting Muslims in the post-October 7 contexa Regarding the literature review, this paper illustrates how this concept has three distinct, yet intersecting meanings: the crisis of European identity; the crisis of foundational ideologies of Europe; and an internal Muslim crisis that often leads to radicalization. Through the British and German case studies, this paper illustrates that October 7 has reinforced and strengthened the shift towards values-based citizenship and integration. This paper argues that through branding pro-Palestine protesters and organizations as extremists in the British context, and adding questions related to antisemitism and Israel in the citizenship tests in the German context, the Israel/Palestine issue has now become yet another yardstick to demarcate the European, civilized "us" vs. the Muslim "other." In doing so, October 7 has escalated elements already present within the wider discourses of the European Muslim crisis.

Keywords: European Muslims; Muslim question; Israel; values-based citizenship; Palestine; identity crisis; European identity; European crisis

1. Introduction

The world was taken aback by news from the Middle East on 7 October 2023: Hamas had planned an attack on Israel, hitting many kibbutzim and a music festival, among other targets. More than 1000 Israelis and foreigners lost their lives as a result, and Hamas kidnapped more than 200 hostages and took them to Gaza. Following the Hamas strike, Israel launched intense military operations in Gaza. According to the United Nations Report of the Special Rapporteur, Israel has used this moment to "distort" international humanitarian law principles "in an attempt to legitimize genocidal violence against the Palestinian people" (UNHRC 2024, p. 1). In the European context, this has led to European Muslims and non-Muslims, including organizations and institutions, as well as individual academics, politicians, and activists mobilizing and voicing their condemnation and demand their governments to do more towards peaceful and equitable solutions. Several political and social shifts have occurred in European countries as a result of Israel's war on Gaza that began on 7 October 2023. Academics, politicians, activists, and organizations representing both Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe have mobilized in response to the

Israeli state's flagrant contempt for international humanitarian law. Nonetheless, this has sparked a strong response from European authorities.

This paper situates these reactions within the wider discourse of the European Muslim crisis. It begins with a comprehensive, systematic academic literature review that provides an in-depth overview of how the European Muslim crisis has hitherto been conceptualized, discussed, and debated. This is then followed by case studies on the United Kingdom and Germany on their respective changes to policies impacting Muslims in the post-October 7 context. Regarding the literature review, this paper illustrates how this concept has had three distinct, yet intersecting meanings: first, the crisis of European identity that results in shifting boundaries of "us" vs. "them", where "the other" is often Muslim; second, the crisis or the failure of foundational ideologies of Europe, such as secularism, liberalism, and multiculturalism, where Muslims are either the symptom or the cause; and lastly, an internal Muslim crisis due to the perceived incoherence of Islamic and European values that often leads to radicalization. Through the British and German case studies, this paper illustrates that October 7 has reinforced and strengthened the shift towards values-based citizenship and integration. This paper argues that through branding pro-Palestine protesters and organizations as extremists in the British context, and adding questions related to antisemitism and Israel in the citizenship tests in the German context, the Israel/Palestine issue has now become yet another yardstick to demarcate the European, civilized "us" vs. the Muslim "other". In doing so, October 7 has escalated elements already present within the wider discourses of the European Muslim crisis.

2. Methodology

2.1. Systematic Literature Review

For this study, we began with a systematic literature review to explore the multiple dimensions of the European Muslim crisis. A systematic literature review is considered a high standard for reviews due to its comprehensive and robust methods (Nightingale 2009). It is a structured process, guided by the PRISMA protocols, that yields an extensive overview that minimizes bias that is used in both natural and social sciences (Cochrane et al. 2024; Amin et al. 2023; Al-Jayyousi et al. 2023). We conducted an initial search using two databases, Scopus and Web of Science, which are both well-established academic platforms that index peer-reviewed journals using the search strings outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Search strings.

Database	Search Scope	Search String
Scopus	Abstract, title, and keywords	"Europe*" AND "Muslim" AND "Crisis"
Web of Science	In all fields	

After the initial search and download of records, duplicates were removed followed by the first two authors screening the abstracts using the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 2.

At this stage, we found a few texts where only the abstract was in English, but the remainder was in a different language—these were also removed. Any conflicts between the two researchers were discussed and agreed upon. Next, the third author downloaded the selected texts as outlined in Figure 1. The final number of texts that was included in this review was 74.

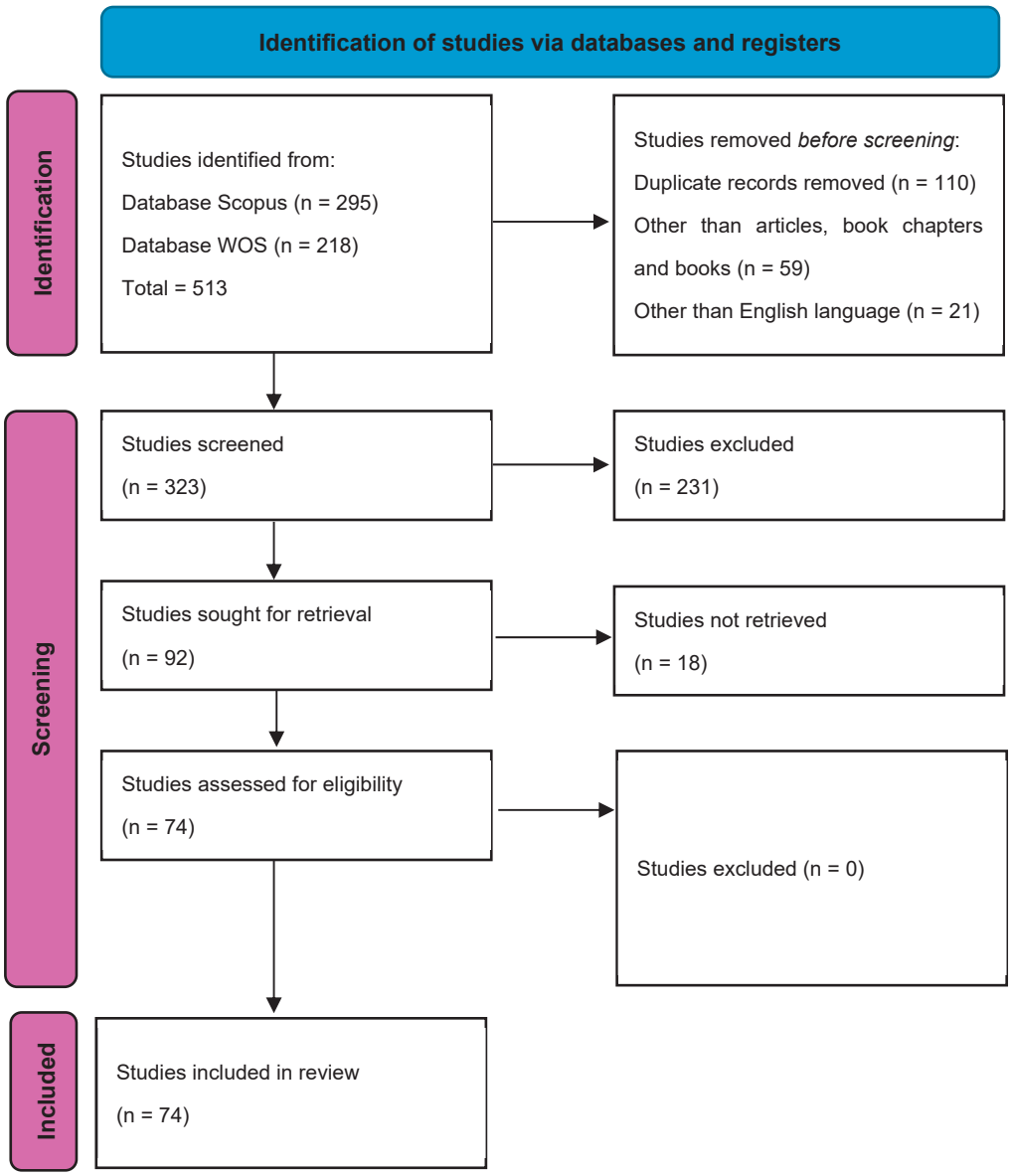


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram.

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Journal articles, book chapters, books	Conference proceedings, social media, government documents, briefs, patents, and news and blog posts.
Location	Europe including the crisis occurring in Europe but impacting outside of Europe	Crisis occurring elsewhere with no connection to the crisis in Europe.
Time	Any up until 3 May 2024 when the search was conducted	N/A.
Language	English	Any other language.
Key terms and focus	Any discussion related to some form of real or perceived European Muslim crisis.	Crisis, such as the economic financial crisis or the refugee crisis referred to as only background or context but not a direct engagement with the actual impact of the crisis that includes Islam/Muslims and Europe (majority of excluded studies fell into this category), e.g., (Goalwin 2018; Ahmed 2018; Ragkos et al. 2016). Crises that are not directly related to European Muslim crisis such as the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) crisis or Islamic financial services and the economic crisis, e.g., (Bergeaud-Blackler 2007; Sobol 2015); literary or fiction, e.g., (Berg-Sørensen 2017; Calamita 2020).

2.2. Limitations for the Systematic Literature Review

Systematic literature reviews do not come without limitations. Although Scopus and Web of Science are both comprehensive and widely used academic databases, not all peer-reviewed journals are indexed on these platforms. Results from these two alone yielded more than 500 studies; therefore, it was not feasible to include more platforms. Also, there are many studies that may fall under these criteria but not specifically use the word "crisis", or they may discuss the crisis related to a specific European country and not include the word "Europe" in the abstract or keywords resulting in not being part of the initial selection.[1] That being said, in the selection process, we opted for more inclusivity than exclusivity, to include as many different insights as possible into the different facets of the European Muslim crisis.

2.3. Case Studies

The UK and Germany are both similar in that each have sizeable Muslim populations, with rising and influential far-right political parties that scapegoat Muslims, refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from Muslim backgrounds as the root of social, cultural, and economic breakdown in their respective countries. However, Germany also has a complex past with antisemitism and Israel due to the Holocaust and its role in the historical memory and conceptualization of the modern German nation. Hence, both are interesting case studies to compare the changes in government stances and policies impacting Muslims in their respective countries that were triggered by October 7. In the UK context, the "robust new framework" for dealing with extremism is explored as well as the prime minister's (PM) speeches, and the UK online newspaper and digital media. In the German case study, the renewal of the German citizenship test in reaction to October 7 as well as primary resource government documents and statements of politicians in the German media are analyzed.

3. Systematic Review of the European Muslim Crisis

The selected studies can be divided into three distinct, yet interconnected categories: the crisis of European identity; the breakdown of foundational ideology such as Western liberalism, democracy, and multiculturalism; and the internal Muslim crisis. This is summarized in Figure 2, followed by a more detailed exploration of the studies and their linkages. All studies cited below were selected from the systematic review process. Many articles could be placed in multiple categories. Categorization was based on the most salient features of each article (such as key points in the introduction/conclusion), and possible linkages between articles are highlighted to paint a bigger picture of the trends and themes in the literature.

3.1. European Identity Crisis

One major theme that arose from the literature was the crisis of European identity, which led to the continuous and discursive construction of boundaries of the European "us" verses "them". This construction took on many forms; the four sub-themes are summarized in Figure 3.

3.1.1. Secular Christian Europe

The first salient sub-theme has been the rise of a new form of Christian identity. Tracing the debates on religion, nationalism, and migration policies in Denmark and Sweden, Karacoç Dora and Erdoğan (2021, p. 540) illustrate that although atheism is higher than in other parts of the world, "Christianity has turned into a matter of identity rather than being a religion". Likewise, Merabishvili (2023) shows how in Hungary, Viktor Orbán justified his building of a fence on the southern border to protect from the "Muslim invasion of Christian Europe"; the border was reimagined as a physical manifestation of Christian civilizational defense. Others spoke about the emergence of an imagined Christian community (Krzyzowski and Nowicka 2021) and European Christian culture

(Müller 2018) and the formation of the national self-image as both Christian and secular (Giuliani 2016; Solarz 2020) juxtaposed specifically against the Muslim "other", which had begun before the refugee crisis (Triandafyllidou et al. 2011).

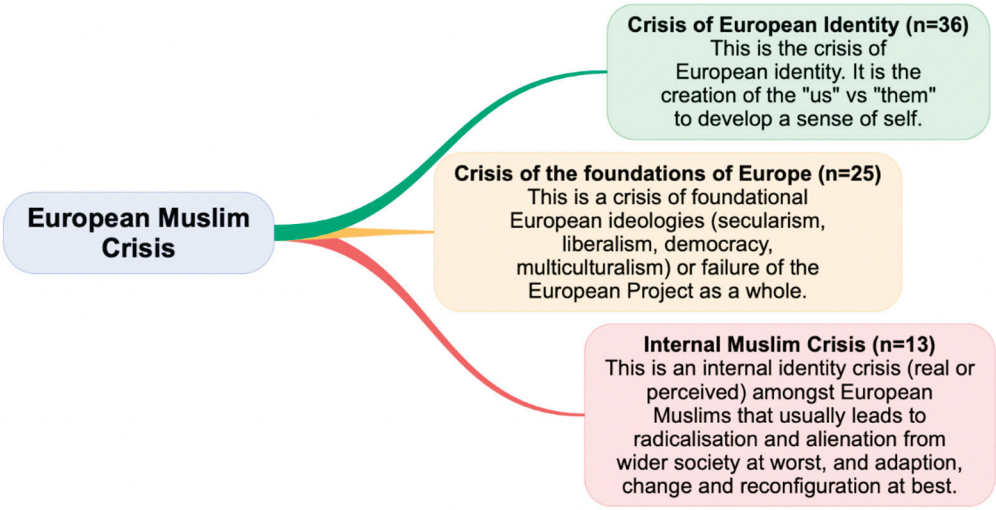


Figure 2. Main themes.

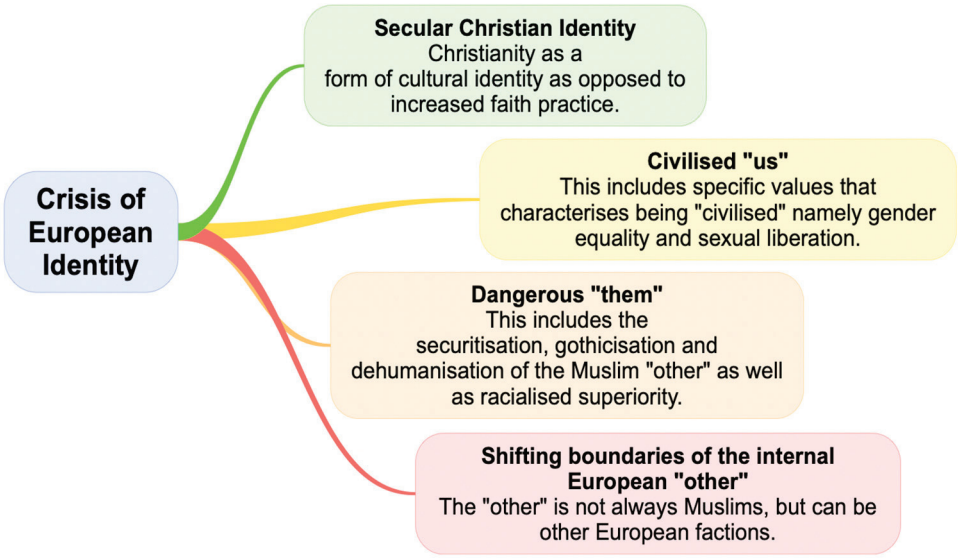


Figure 3. Sub-themes of the crisis of European identity.

3.1.2. Civilized "Us"

The construction of core "European values", usually around gender egalitarianism, sexual liberation, and rationality, is a key part of this boundary-making. Muslims in particular are defined against these values questioning their ability to integrate within Europe (Rommel 2017). Hervik (2012) discusses the shift in Denmark to "the end of tolerance strategy" and values-based politics where too many migrants are perceived to threaten Danish values. As an illustrative example, he cites the Danish People Party—a right-wing political group—that claims that these people are "poor because their culture denies progress, innovative thinking, science. . .[and] they will never succeed in improving their lives, if they do not follow our culture's path" (p. 212).[2] Scheibelhofer (2016, p. 295) describes how "dangerous Muslim traditions, oppressed migrant women. . . and homophobic migrant men" are used to draw boundaries between "a sexually liberated Europe and repressed, backward, migrant others". In the French context, since 2011, the

naturalization process includes a test as to whether he or she adheres to the "values of the French Republic", which, Fargues et al. (2023, p. 1) argue, fuels the moralization and culturalization of citizenship that deliberately "nourishes ethnocultural stereotypes against Muslims". Questions included are around gender equality and sexual tolerance—both of which have "increasingly become markers of national cultures and European values. . . [and] play an important role in the construction of a social imaginary based on cultural antagonism between 'us' (the nation) and 'them' (Muslims)" (Yilmaz 2015, p. 37). Many of these studies explain how the construction of national values is usually a response to the backdrop of a so-called crisis of multiculturalism (Yilmaz 2011) or even with sports figures with Muslim backgrounds (Amara 2013).

3.1.3. Dangerous "Them"

The Muslim "other" is often described and perceived as threatening, dangerous, radical, and sexually violent, which leads to heightened securitization and surveillance (Eskelinen et al. 2023; Rexhepi 2018; Taras 2013; Wigger 2019). These security concerns are given priority over human rights (M. S. Abbas 2019). Studies spoke specifically about the securitization and the usage of the politics of fear during the refugee crisis (Beck 2021; Bolonyai and Campolong 2017) resulting in the dehumanization of Muslims (Bruneau et al. 2018; Doboš 2023), and hierarchies of refugees where Muslims were at the bottom (Kovář 2022). M. S. Abbas (2019) links dehumanization and securitization using racial terror and Concentrationary Gothic as a framework to describe how Muslims are deemed as "unprogressive and barbaric with backwards religious beliefs incompatible with modern Britain" in contrast to the civilized European self. One study empirically illustrated how this fear of migrants and an increase in terrorist attacks was unwarranted (Treistman and Gomez 2021).

The refugee crisis, some argued, led to the construction of European borders, identity, and general panic that revealed a deeper unresolved racial crisis within Europe (De Genova 2018). Continuing the gothic and haunting metaphor discussed above, Giuliani (2016, p. 2) argues that racial division is not a recent phenomenon and that since its inception, Western modernity operates in a system that identifies itself as superior and White where "Whiteness" is not a skin color but a "system of values, interpretations and practices". The other, non-White is "impossible to assimilate within Western rationalized modernity" and has "become a monster" (Giuliani 2016, p. 2). Likewise, Sharma and Nijjar (2024, p. 275) discuss how predictive policing that is perceived as race-neutral with algorithmic logic yet still solidifies racial division is the result of Europe being "haunted by a profound sense of racialized dread".

It is noteworthy that one out of the selected studies spoke positively about the media during the refugee crisis and its framing of Muslims. In the UK, Spain, and Norway, Luengo and Ihlebæk (2019) found that newspapers constructed an "idealized civil sphere that exists beyond race, nationality or religion".

3.1.4. Shifting Boundaries of "Us" and "Them"

Notwithstanding the above, studies point out how the "other" is not always "Muslim" but can be internal groups within Europe. This links back to the second major theme of the crisis of Europe itself including core foundational ideologies. For example, Sata (2023) discusses Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán's promotion of illiberal democracy and multiple "other" groups such as the European socialist elite. Another example is Himmel and Baptista (2020), who explored the construction of Europeanness during the refugee crisis by print media in Germany and Portugal and found that being European was set against the standard "Muslim, refugee, other" but, surprisingly, it *also* meant a rejection of far-right xenophobic groups. Polynczuk-Alenius's (2021) study highlights the complexity of "us" vs. "them" as they explore antisemitism and wider Jewish conspiracy narratives connected to the Muslim migrants.

3.2. Crisis of European Foundations

The second major theme that arose from the selected literature was the crisis around Europe as a whole and its foundational ideologies: liberalism, multiculturalism, and secularism. Figure 4 summarizes the two major sub-themes.

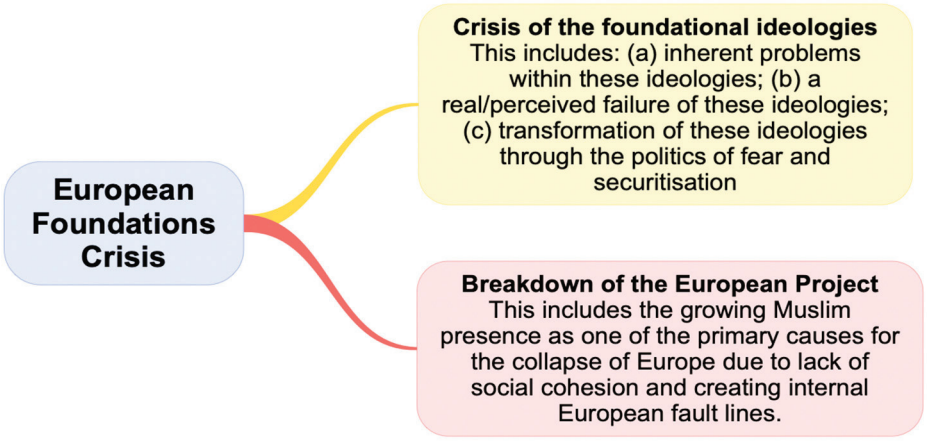


Figure 4. Sub-themes of the crisis of European foundations.

3.2.1. Crisis of Foundational Ideologies

Some studies outlined the historical construction of these ideologies and argue that the Muslim presence in Europe is *not* the cause of the crisis, but their cases bring to light the inherent problems constructed *within* these ideologies. Mondal (2016) similarly looks at the multicultural "crisis" in liberal democracies, particularly the relationship between freedom of expression and freedom of religion, spurred by the presence of Muslim communities. Taking a historical lens, he argues that the priority of freedom of expression over the freedom of religion was the result of a long process of secularization that impacts current jurisprudence and legislation. He concludes with calling for a "fundamental re-evaluation of what liberty is for, and its relationship to (in)equality and social solidarity" (Mondal 2016, p. 22).[3] Also taking a historical approach by analyzing the freedom of press and speech, Khiabany and Williamson (2015, p. 1) argue that it is not that "liberal democracy has been corrupted or impaired. . . [but the] historical conditions that gave rise to it [meant that it was always] shaped by class interests of an economic elite". Related to the historical construction of Europe, some argue that the presence of Muslim migrants and refugees make visible Europe's colonial past that are reproduced in the present in complex ways (Loftsdóttir 2019), which paves the way for more conversations about how to move forward and create a "decolonial present" (Knudsen et al. 2022).

Other studies argue that core European ideologies have either not been successful (real or perceived failure) or are currently being transformed through the Muslim question. An example of the former is Triandafyllidou (2022) who traces the history of multiculturalism in different European countries and documents how most European politicians have claimed that multiculturalism has failed. This backlash, she states, has risen through popular debates surrounding the accommodation of Muslim traditions and practices, the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, and the influx of mainly Muslim refugees. However, she cautiously concludes that there is a difference between rhetoric and policies and there has thus not been a complete dismantlement of multiculturalism in all European states. An example of the latter (European ideologies being transformed) is Wodak (2019), who argues that there is a shift towards the normalization of illiberal democracy, neo-authoritarianism, and the "post-shame" era. This is when politicians spread fear and lies fear and undermine democratic institutions and principles such as free speech, free press, and human rights organizations (Wodak 2019). This turn towards neo-authoritarianism is not only for refugees or new migrants, but also for "undesirable" citizens from migrant backgrounds where the state is stripping away their citizenship rights as part of "national security" (Williamson and

Khiabany 2024). Another related key shift has been from multicultural to assimilative integration, where recognition of difference is increasingly being replaced with affirming European values and loyalty (Habti 2014).

As for the way forward, many of these studies argue for a reconceptualization of European ideologies. This is either through "fixing" the inherent issues and genuinely making these ideologies liberal or adapting them to our current multi-ethnic and mobile world (Amiraux 2012). Another solution to get away from what Frunză (2017) calls this "European nightmare" is to take inspiration from the American dream model. Taking a more practical approach, Liebert et al. (2020) compare European Muslim integration with their counterparts in North America and argue that Europe has stronger equitable employment laws as well as public campaigns against Islamophobia for social inclusion. On the other hand, Rudling (2006), writing in the heat of the Danish cartoon crisis, argues that what is needed is a stronger commitment and affirmation to assimilation and liberal democracy, which, he says, are the cornerstones of the European project, as opposed to more multicultural policies that have alienated and fractured societies.

3.2.2. Crisis of the European Project

In other studies, European Muslim migrants and Muslim refugees are one of the causes of decline of Europe as a whole. Kirchick (2017), in his book entitled *The End of Europe*, paints an ominous picture claiming that Europe is in its deepest crisis since World War II. He argues that "Europe today is breaking apart; it is increasingly undemocratic, economically stagnant, threatened by extremists of all stripes from the illiberal left to the authoritarian right, and slowly heading down the once unfathomable path to war" (Kirchick 2017, pp. 1–2). There are external threats, such as Russia, but stronger internal, domestic threats. The latter are mainly the lack of social cohesion due to the rise of the far right, xenophobia and racism, as well as migration, mainly of Arab Muslims, who he describes as bringing with them antisemitic values and gender norms that at times lead to assaults.

In the breakdown of Europe, some point to the deep fault lines occurring between post-communist eastern and central Europe on the one hand and western Europe on the other due to the formers' different historical narratives, politics, and memory (Ghodsee 2008; Dora 2020; Narkowicz 2018). One example is Henderson (2017), who looks at Slovakia but says this is similar for the other Visegrad states: Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. He argues that the response of these states to the refugee crisis relative to other western European states was deeply problematic, Islamophobic, and overall anti-immigration. This, he claims is due to the difference in historical formation and party politics, mainly the missing social democratic left, which allows for the rise of more Euroskeptic parties that could potentially dismantle the wider European integration project.

3.2.3. Other

Other studies in this larger second theme of the crisis of European foundations include how this is impacting the Chinese political imagination, confirming their negative perception of Western liberal democracy as well as encouraging similar European right-wing xenophobic tendencies in their own context (Guo and Hu 2019; Zhang 2020). Lastly, a few discussed the crisis of European sciences and phenomenology and the possibility of Islamic interventions as ways forward (Harvey 2023).

3.3. Internal Muslim Crisis

The last major theme that emerged from the systematic literature review was the internal Muslim crisis. This can be divided into three sub-categories, outlined in Figure 5 and xplored in more detail below.

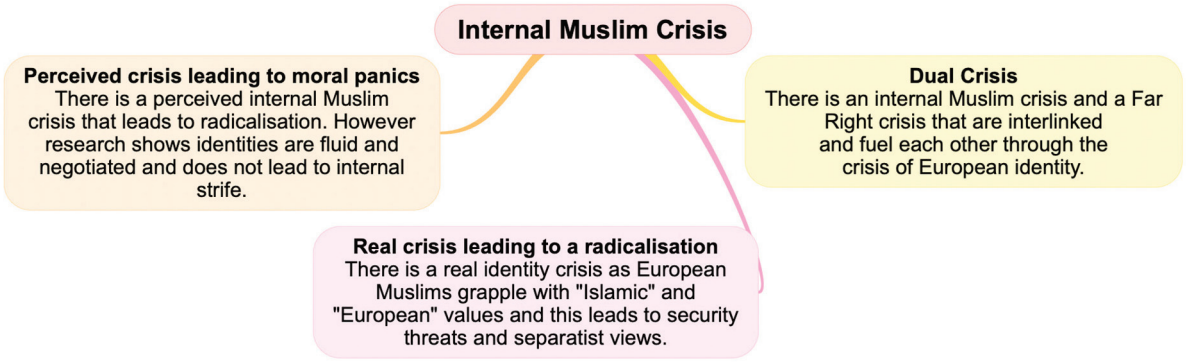


Figure 5. Internal Muslim crisis sub-themes.

3.3.1. Perceived Crisis Leading to Moral Panics

Some studies focused on the moral panic and *perceived* internal crisis within European Muslims. One example is Lynch (2013, p. 2), who explores how Muslims in the UK have moved from ethnic minorities with socioeconomic and race-related issues to national security concerns. Alienation, parallel communities, and intergenerational conflict, she argues, are now seen as strong determinants to the radicalization of particularly male Muslim youth. She however normalizes shifts in generation, identity, and culture and argues that this is a general feature of UK Muslims and, with only a few exceptions, not linked to violence and radicalism. She found how British Muslims are embracing "the qualities of Britishness in a unique way. . .through expressions of their faith they are increasingly incorporating a British identity, both personally and communally" with stability (Lynch 2013, p. 257). Gest (2015), also through a critique of post-modern conceptions of identity formation, debunks the myth of the unstable, volatile, and defiant Muslim stereotype who is undermining hegemonic constructions of national or religious identity. Rather, similar to Clycq (2021), he discusses how migrants simultaneously hold multiple identities and desire a sense of collective belonging rather than seeking subversion.

3.3.2. Real Crisis Leading to Radicalization

In contrast, others argue that there is an identity crisis spurring inside European Muslims that is a security threat. Kosárová and Usiak (2017) state that radical Islamist ideology and a crisis of Muslim identity are the "roots of Muslim rage and the emergence of a terrorist threat" where the Europe in the main target. Gadzhimuradova (2020) claims that Muslims are torn between "European" and "Islamic" values that results in a crisis of identity due to their incompatibility. In a book entitled *Haunted Presents*, Nachmani (2017) says Muslims are torn between the secular culture of their host country and the heritage of their home country leading to "disconnect, frustration and animosity" that in turn generates specifically antisemitic violence. The concept of "haunting" is a recurrent cross-cutting theme and will be discussed in more detail below.

3.3.3. Dual Crisis

The concept of a dual crisis, where the internal Muslim crisis is linked to other issues within the wider European identity crisis (the third major theme), is another key sub-theme. Wharton (2008), for example, ties together an internal Muslim crisis due to social exclusion to the crisis of European identity through the erosion of the nation state. Both sides, he concludes, must engage in meaningful and mutually respectful dialogue and develop as "social and cultural partners" (Wharton 2008, p. 57). Also emphasizing that integration needs to be a two-way process, Kaya (2022) discusses the co-radicalization of European Muslim and far right native youths as they both grapple with the "perils of modernisation and globalisation. . .[that makes their environment] alienating, and even humiliating" (Kaya 2022, pp. 53–54). This dual crisis, Andre and Harris-Hogan (2015) argue, stems from the lack of adaption of the European project (the second major theme). In a similar vein,

Ramadan (2013) argues that four reasons have contributed to a multidimensional identity crisis of Western society that has in turn caused challenges for Muslims in Europe and in the world: globalization, immigration, the emergence of a new kind of citizen, and social and terrorist violence. To move forward, he calls for meaningful and mutually respectful dialogue, embracement of plurality, and a socially responsible media that will assuage people's fear and doubt and solidify mutual trust and confidence.

3.3.4. Other

The remaining studies in this internal Muslim crisis theme do not fit as neatly together as the ones above. However, one loose thread that binds some is how different types of "crises" are causing internal changes, or at least some form of rethinking, within European Muslim family structures (Piwko 2023) and Islamic organizations (Amghar and Khadiyatoulah 2017) and communities (Nielsen 2010). One study spoke about the lack of changes and adaption of Muslim organizations despite multiple issues (Mazlum 2023). Lastly, one study was on the epistemological crisis of knowledge amongst Muslims due to European secularism, materialism, and universalism where Islamic theories could be possible remedies (Aljunied 2022).

4. UK Case Study

The governance of Islam and Muslims is an aged but persistent tension in the United Kingdom. The events of 7 October 2023 have escalated this tension. The ruling Conservative government has strengthened the existing security measures in the UK in the face of a large cohort of British citizens, especially university students' activism and protests, against Israel's war on Gaza. The government called the security measures "a new robust framework" for governing the country, identifying the UK as a "patriotic, liberal, democratic" country and 7 October 2023 as "the third deadliest terror attack in the world since 1970" (Sunak 2024); the other two being the 9/11 and the 2 July 2005 London bombings. Since many Muslim names and organizations were traced to be affiliated with these events by the UK government, British Muslims tend to be one of the main loci of the new governance policies.

The Muslim population in the UK is now four million, which is 6.0% of the total UK population. The largest Muslim population lives in London, which is 15% of the country's Muslim population. While migration has contributed to the growth of the Muslim population in the UK since World War II, the main contributor is now the natural process: Muslims hold both birthright and citizenship in the UK (Brown 2000). Muslims have long been integrated into British society and continue to contribute to the growth of the nation. Nevertheless, whatever ways Muslims arrive, survive, or thrive in the UK, they remain "aliens", "the Other'', and "the danger within" (Ahmad and Sardar 2012, pp. 1–3). Specifically, following the Rushdie affair, Islamophobia, anti-Muslim racism, and the minority "Muslim" problem have emerged and cumulatively escalated in the UK's popular, press, scholarly, and policy discourses.

Often, race and religion are thought of as two separate categories while discussion surrounding the migration and minority issues ensues in diaspora discourses. Abbas reveals an intersectionality between Islam and ethnically and racially different and diverse Muslim minorities in the UK and identifies "Islamophobia as racialized biopolitics" (p. 497). Using the experience of the Muslims in the UK as a test case, he argues that Muslims are often considered undesirable and unassimilable for three reasons: (1) for their embodiment of the most extreme "other", (2) for posing risk to the national security because of their inherent inclination and legacy to radicalization, and (3) for remaining untrustworthy even when they voice resistance. Such logos is all-pervasive, and it not only subscribes to racialized and biased identity politics but also provides an Islamophobic lens to migration and the citizen potentiality of Muslims. Due to such perspectives, Muslimness becomes something that eventually evolves towards the dangerous tendency to "Islamification" (T. Abbas 2019, 2020, pp. 497–99). The same viewpoint also presents Muslims as

those with "little appreciation of good old British values such as freedom of expression" (Ahmad and Sardar 2012, p. 2); Muslim men are often produced, circulated, and merchandised as Islamic "rage boys" with untidy beards, wild visages, and zombie-like bodies (Morey and Amina 2011, pp. 22–27) and Muslim women as oppressed, in need of the West to save from their oppressed cultures and religion (Abu-Lughod 2002, pp. 738–84). Thus, a perceived and constructed Otherness is imposed on Muslims and Islam, which demeans the religion and demonizes Muslims.

The event of 7 October 2023 and the post-October 7 anti-Muslim and anti-Jew violence further brought this perceived Otherness into the purview, raising questions about who Muslims/pro-Palestinian protestors are and what Islam and Islamism are. The PM's address on extremism on 1 March 2024 can be taken as an important document in this regard. In his address, the PM says:

> The faith of Islam, peacefully practised by millions of our fellow citizens, is emphatically not the same thing as the extremist political ideology of Islamism which aims to separate Muslims from the rest of society. Islamist extremists and far rights groups are spreading a poison, that poison is extremism. It aims to drain us of our confidence in ourselves as a people, and in our shared future.

This clarifies that the government views Islam through a bifurcated lens: Islam as a peaceful faith and Islamism as an extremist ideology; those who follow the first are good Muslims, whereas the latter is a handful who systematically and intentionally practice violence to unsettle British democratic values. While this bifurcation is much better than the former tendency to image Islam as a solid category,[4] this installs the former discourse of "the enemies within" in the UK in the post-October 7 context (Foster 2024).

This discourse differentiates civil disobedience and peaceful protests from what the pro-Palestinian protesters do: processions, campaigns, and encampments. These protesters have now become "terrorist sympathisers" who carry out "hate marches" on the streets of London. They are labelled "un-British" (Foster 2024), as they disrupt the ideals of the UK's liberal and inclusive society where "You can be a practising Hindu and a proud Briton as I am. Or a devout Muslim and a patriotic citizen like so many. Or a committed Jewish person and the heart of your local community" (Sunak 2024). This standpoint of the government and their negative portrayals of the pro-Palestinian protesters link to the discourse of freezing frames (Sardar and Davies 2010, p. 239), good Muslim versus bad Muslim dichotomy (Mamdani 2002), and Islam as a peaceful faith versus Islam as Islamism binary. Since the boundaries between the freedom of expression and rights to protest and resistance are often fuzzy and the ruling and the ruled often see them differently, the renewal of the othering process as we/them is again current in the UK's social landscapes.

Moreover, the Conservative government redefined and updated the definition of extremism in a press release on 14 March 2024. According to the release, in 2011, extremism was defined rather narrowly based only on violent organizational principles, behaviors, and activities promoted and propagated by Islamists and right-wing parties. It then did not recognize that non-violent Islamist extremism should be challenged and countered to tackle the causes of radicalization and to respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism. Therefore, the current definition goes as follows:

> Extremism is the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred, or intolerance that aims to (1) negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; (2) undermine, overturn, or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or (3) intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in (1) or (2). (Corporate Authors 2024)

This redefinition of extremism is related to the government's concerns that the pro-Palestinian protestors have transformed anti-Zionism into antisemitism (Harpin 2024). Although many Jews and Jewish organizations in the UK actively supported and joined the Palestine solidarity movements (Haugbølle 2024), the government considered that

speaking against Israel's bombardment on Gaza; wearing a keffiyeh [Palestinian scarf] or watermelon earrings or badges; hoisting Palestinian flags; and chanting "From the River to the Sea" and "Intifada" means the desire to demolish Israel. Sunak (2024), describing the marches, said:

> Since October 7, we have seen something else that echoes further afield an appalling rise in antisemitism, a painful reminder. . .that anti-Zionism all too often morphs into antisemitism. Those who chant "from the river to the sea" are either useful idiots who do not understand what they are saying. . .or, worse, people who wish to wipe the Jewish state from the map.

This equating of anti-Zionism with antisemitism is a clear revoking of the older paradigm of suppressing and demonizing the Palestinian cause, portraying the dissenters in orientalist words.

Hence, the government's robust new framework comprises commands and warnings directed to the police, counter-terrorism forces, the Home Office, and its citizens. For example, the government warned its citizens of the extremist ideologies that stem from Islamist terrorists, extreme right-wing terrorism, and left-wing, anarchist, and single-issue terrorism (GOV.UK 2024). It dispensed rejuvenated power to the counter-terrorism department to investigate the Muslim celebratory reactions and the fund-raising activities after October 7 and sanctioned individuals, proscribed Islamic organizations, and stopped/paused funding to suspected organizations, including well-established grassroots organizations like The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) (Home Office 2024). It also offered extra funding to safeguard Jewish children, schools, and synagogues and declared the redoubling of the Prevent Program to stop radicalization and not to leave any space "ungoverned" (Sunak 2024).

The government also attempted to control and contain the protests and activism by bestowing the police the power either to "manage" the protests or "police" them so that none could hijack British democratic values and tear the country apart (Sunak 2024). The PM called the police chiefs to use their power to the fullest to control the mob. He identified the protests outside MP's house as intimidating and asked the police to respond to such situations instantly (Foster 2024). The government also identified university-wide pro-Palestinian activism as "extremist activities" and called on the universities to stop them. On the same note, it also commanded the Home Office to take measures to prevent those young people from entering the UK as students who will aim to undermine British values as well as warned that "those [who are] on visas choose [who] to spew hate on protests or seek to intimidate people we will remove their right to be here" (Sunak 2024). They identified the training that students received about colonialism, capitalism, genocide, and protest as something wrong and the zeal of young minds, as the debates between Suella Braverman and Fiona Lali reveal (Chapman 2024).

Despite the PM's declaration that he allocated funds to assure Muslim safety, these decisions raised existential questions and questions of equality and justice regarding Muslim causes. London Mayor Sadik Khan questions the current situation, saying:

> When there is any incident of antisemitism, we say that it is wrong and antisemitic. We also condemn misogyny and sexism. Then why is it that when Pakistani-origin Britons and Muslims are attacked, nobody says that it is Islamophobic and anti-Muslim? (Rehman 2024)

He also expressed his deep anguish over the recent rise of anti-Jew and anti-Muslim racist attacks in London since October 7, with 139 anti-Jewish incidents and 2010 Islamophobic incidents. He said that hate crime has a "chilling effect" on all and is "heartbreaking", even when you are not a direct victim. When people feel scared to leave their homes, you feel it (Patel and Café 2024). Taj Ali, co-editor of *Tribune Magazine*, also criticized the PM for his attitudes towards Muslims, saying:

> Rishi Sunak is talking about division, about nasty politics. What we've seen from his party is the demonization of British Muslims who are disproportionately

> working class; they care about housing, NHS, child poverty, which is 40pc in places like Rochdale". (Rehman 2024)

Moreover, Tom Southerden, Amnesty International British law and human rights director, finds the dispensation of "sweeping power" to the police as alarming, as it "risks delegitimizing the rights of peaceful protest" (Foster 2024).

To summarise, since October 7, two key escalations in the UK politics surrounding Muslims and Islam can be discerned: first, the good/bad Muslim binary has been re-installed, continuing the othering process and securitization narrative, and second, the redefinition of extremism conflates any criticism of Israel into antisemitism. These escalations reveal the ideational discrepancy between the ruled and the ruling and necessitated rethinking occupation, genocide, freedom of expression, rights to resistance, British values, and democracy. While rethinking these issues, the institutionalization of the "war against Israel-related antisemitism" appears to speak to the Muslim minority crises as well as the European crises through an interplay between identity politics, domestic insecurity, and the geopolitical pressures faced by European states in recent decades. It is clearly seen that on the face of the rise of the pro-Palestine movement, the UK, aligned with the U.S.–Israeli geopolitical axis, has attempted to assert their normative European identity and liberal democratic values. The UK tends to take up the role of the moral arbiter in the international crisis, aiming to atone for the sins of the past in Holocaust, while reclaiming their commitment to human rights, even if that means repressive management of the domestic tension and stifling of the domestic measures. Moreover, the current demographic shift in the UK due to Muslim migration and birthrates causes a wide range of overt and covert tensions. From this perspective, the fight against antisemitism and the domestic repressive measures can be considered a proxy for defending European liberal democracy against both real and perceived external and internal threats.

5. Germany Case Study

On 2 November 2023, the vice-chancellor of Germany, Robert Habeck, spoke about the increased antisemitic hate crimes and antisemitism in general in Germany since October 7. In his speech, he demanded Muslim communities to distance themselves from antisemitism and the actions of Hamas. He noted that "the scale of the Islamist demonstrations in Berlin and other cities in Germany is unacceptable and needs a tough political response". He also referred to the rights of Muslims living in Germany to protection from right-wing extremist violence and used it as a two-trade argument supporting his demand, emphasizing that:

> "Whoever lives here does so according to the rules of this country. And whoever comes here must know that this is how it is and that this will be enforced (. . .) This means that burning Israeli flags is a criminal offense, as is praising Hamas terror. Any German citizen who does this will have to answer for such offenses in court; those who are not German citizens will also risk their residency status. Anyone who does not yet have a residence permit will have provided a reason to be deported". (Habeck 2023)

The German values-based identity that Habeck reproduces in his speech relates to the history of the Holocaust that started in Nazi Germany. The historical responsibility the German state and the public feel for the Holocaust is linked to a special responsibility to protect not only contemporary Jewish life in Germany but also to ensure that the State of Israel can exist without a threat. It is "part of the German raison d'etat", as was also communicated by the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz during his visit to Tel Aviv in the immediate aftermath of October 7 (Tagesschau 2023). However, Habeck's speech also exemplifies the value-based discursive frame of the Muslim Crisis in Europe, as it is an official statement foregrounding the political decisions and governing measures catalyzed by October 7 to counteract what in Germany for a longer time now has been called "imported antisemitism". The term refers to the idea that immigrants, and, in particular, Muslim immigrants, "import" antisemitism with them as they enter Germany.

The spotlight that is put on Muslims and the alleged "imported antisemitism" is not a new post-October 7 phenomenon. Numerous studies and reports have been published, partly commissioned by the German government, during the last 20 years (Özyürek 2023, pp. 78–86). One of the arguments given to this "new" Muslim antisemitism is that German Muslims with a migratory background[5] or those new to the country could have been socialized as "antisemites" through popular culture from the Middle East, be it only that it was their parents or grandparents who transferred the antisemitic tropes to them from popular culture (Özyürek 2023, pp. 84–85). However, statistics from the past decade have wavered about whether antisemitism is more prevalent within migrant and Muslim communities in comparison with non-migrant and non-Muslim communities (Arnold 2023). Furthermore, there is also the possibility of antisemitic attitudes being present in the communities of migratory background and Muslim communities as a product of integration, as both Zick (2014) and Arnold (2021, p. 878) have suggested that immigrant Muslims might have merely adopted antisemitic attitudes from German society.

In the post-October 7 context, media reports of the pro-Palestinian demonstrations have contributed to the racialization of "imported antisemitism", as the headlines are usually accompanied by pictures of people of color amongst the masses holding antisemitic signs. This racialization follows the same patterns as the Islamophobic racial public imagining of a "terrorist", a label given to brown, Muslim, Others (Beydoun 2023, p. 287). The White, "native" actor remains at the same time unmarked, since "risk" is deemed to originate with the racial "other" (Breen-Smyth 2020, p. 90) Similarly to the privilege of whiteness of not being identified as a terrorist Other and not becoming an object of counter-terrorism measures (Martini 2023), the concept of "imported antisemitism" turns the attention to the Muslim Others, who know are subjected to more scrutiny than their White, native German fellow citizens. This has fed into the prevalent image of these demonstrations being spaces occupied by "Muslims" and especially "immigrant Muslims", leaving largely without consideration that also so-called native Germans, i.e., phenotypically white Germans, have participated in these occasions. Habeck singles out Muslim communities in his speech. Still, he is not the only politician and leader who has discursively framed Muslim communities as one of the main scapegoats when it comes to antisemitism and demonization of the pro-Palestinian demonstrations and pro-Palestinian advocacy as part of the "problem". Habeck's choice of words, "Muslim communities", thus also signals that he sees Muslims in Germany mainly as an immigrant community, adding another layer to the problematic juxtaposition of the worldview these communities are perceived to present against the worldview that is supposedly presented by the "German community".

Some of the political decisions that have been made since October 7 follow as an escalation of the European Muslim crisis as a security issue, mimicking measures undertaken in the already existing larger context of the War on Terror. This is to say that similarly, as in the War on Terror, the violent conflict of the Middle East became a transnational security issue, affecting European Muslims' daily lives as they became a suspect community, and the current Israel/Palestine war has translated into a security issue within German society. The securitization of Islam and Muslims has long been carved into CVE policies, such as reporting "students in danger of radicalisation" on the basis of their religious practice, deemed by their teachers or peers as "suspicious" or "extreme" (Saeed 2019). In the post October 7 context, Germany has taken measures against pro-Palestinian advocacy, such as the ban of stickers with slogans such as "free Palestine" or a map of Israel in the colors of the Palestinian flag, keffiyeh [Palestinian black and white patterned scarf], or other symbols carried by pupils in Berlin schools that according to official pose a "threat to school peace and can be understood as advocating or condoning the Hamas attack against Israel" (Ernst 2023). The symbolic meaning of the keffiyeh has been stigmatized by German media outlets as a symbol of antisemitism and hate of Jews (Kellerhoff 2023). Other measures have dealt with the operations of pro-Palestinian organizations, such as the federal ban of "HAMAS" and "Samidoun—Palestinian Solidarity Network", following what the fed-

eral minister of interior called "celebrations" of the Hamas attack on Israel organized by Samidoun and its sister organization HIRAK e.V. (BMI 2023b).

However, a more significant measure related to the wider discourse on the European Muslim crisis and its connection to "German" values has been the foreseen renewal of the German citizenship test by including ten new questions on the topics of Jewish life in Germany, antisemitism, and the existential right of the State of Israel (Schindler 2024). It is to be noted that while already in June 2021, a resolution by the Bundestag's Committee on Internal Affairs called for the questions on the naturalization test to be revised and expanded to include the topics of antisemitism, Israel's right to existence, and the Jewish religion, the final revision of the questions was catalyzed by the Hamas attacks on October 7, the subsequent heightened pro-Palestinian advocacy, pro-Palestinian demonstrations, and the increased antisemitism in the country (ZDF 2024). When writing this article in June 2024, the new questions have not yet been implemented. Importantly, the federal government had already, in August 2023, adopted a draft law on the modernization of the citizenship law, including a new clause that precluded naturalization based on antisemitic acts (BMI 2023a), and the draft continued to be discussed in the Bundestag from November onwards (Deutscher Bundestag 2023). Moreover, such a legal basis against antisemitism had already been anchored in the constitutions of four German federal states as of December 2023 (Janz 2023).

One of the most prominent advocates of setting the acknowledgment of Israel's right to existence as a prerequisite for naturalization has been the leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Friedrich Merz (Spiegel 2023), which he voiced in the aftermath of October 7. He also suggested that only those Muslim associations that recognize Israel's right to exist could be partners in the "German Islam Conference"[6] (Spiegel 2023). The CDU was in the headlines (Welt 2024) in the spring of 2024 also for their revised basic program, which stated that "Islam that does not share our values and rejects our free society does not belong to Germany" (CDU 2024, p. 38) but also that "The commitment to Israel's right to exist is expressly part of Germany's *Leitkultur*[7]. We invite anyone who lives according to this *Leitkultur* and wishes to obtain German citizenship to do so. We expect an explicit commitment to our values, principles, and rules" (CDU 2024, p. 32). Also, Philipp Peyman Engel, editor-in-chief of the *Jüdische Allgemeine*[8], spoke of the threat of "Muslim-antisemitism", criticizing the "German police overwhelmed by the mass of angry and often violent demonstrators, most of whom are of Arab and Turkish origin" (Peyman Engel 2023). Peyman Engel's "Muslim-Antisemitism", in the context of immigration and integration, is supported by statements made by researchers of Islam such as Michael Kiefer, who has claimed that "Muslim communities must acknowledge the right of existence of Israel as many Muslim (immigrants) are raised with antisemitic ideas due to antisemitism being raison d'etat in many Muslim countries" (Welt 2023). Kiefer has "recommended" that mosque communities revise the contents of their classes on religious texts offered to children and youth regarding a critical address of "antisemitic narratives" within Islamic references (Kiefer 2023).

The restriction of these additional questions about Jewish life in Germany and Israel and antisemitism reproduces the stereotypical narrative of "imported" antisemitism brought to Germany by immigrants, and, in particular, immigrants from "Muslim countries". While citizenship tests can be seen as a prerequisite for "earned citizenship", as they provide a thicker meaning of citizenship that reflects values that bind citizens together (O'Brien 2016, p. 94), in the context of analyzing the European Muslim Crisis in the post-October 7 discursive space, this addendum poses an attempted remedy for what German society sees as an effect of the Muslim crisis to the extent that "imported antisemitism" is considered to be an inherent characteristic of Muslim immigrants. This exemplifies the escalation of the Islamophobic securitization trope within the European Muslim crisis. Already prior to October 7, Muslims have been a target of racialized biopolitics, wherein their citizenship has been undermined due to an alleged "inherent radicalisation" (T. Abbas 2020). Furthermore, the focus on imported antisemitism discloses bias and exceptionalist thinking,

claiming that German society would not have had any antisemitism problem without (Muslim) immigrants.

Yet, antisemitism has been virulent in Germany for centuries. It would go beyond the scope of this article to outline the history of antisemitism in Germany. However, current studies have shown how antisemitism, still 80 years after WWII, reaches deep into German society. In 2023, antisemitic hate crimes increased by 95.53%, with the most frequent bias motivation recorded being right-wing extremism (BKA 2024, pp. 11–12). Moreover, the longitudinal study by Zick and Nico (2023, pp. 69, 72) shows how antisemitic attitudes have generally grown among the German population from the previous years and that these attitudes are by 47.1% represented by individuals who would locate themselves either as extreme-right or rather-right within the political spectrum.

Habeck's speech frames the revision of citizenship in the context of Germany seeking to present itself as a "'community of value' in which Germans share common ideals expressed by patterns of behavior" (Anderson 2013, p. 2). The citizenship test is intended to be used by applicants for naturalization to demonstrate their knowledge of the legal and social order and living conditions in Germany. Yet, the test itself does not foresee any changes or added questions related to other forms of racism and discrimination, such as anti-Black racism, antigypsyism, or hostility toward the LGBTQI+ community, nor does it mention anti-Muslim racism in any manner. The latter deserves particular attention in the context of the post-October 7 era, as there has also been an exponential increase in anti-Muslim racist incidents in Germany. As the hate crime report by the German police shows, Islamophobic hate crimes increased in 2023 in comparison to 2022 by 140%, with right-wing extremism being the most frequent (82.72%) recorded bias motivation (BKA 2024, p. 13). At the same time, both in 2022 and in 2023, attacks against mosques were more frequent than those against synagogues (62 vs. 28 in 2023 and 70 vs. 42 in 2022, respectively (BKA 2024, p. 17). It has also been shown that more than half of the public in Germany (52%) perceive Islam as highly threatening or relatively threatening to German society (El-Menouar and Vopel 2023, p. 9). The civil society organization CLAIM recorded in the aftermath of October 7th (9 October–29 November 2023) 187 anti-Muslim racist incidents, including violent attacks, insults, threats, and discrimination, a number that already was higher than the overall number of recorded incidents in 2022 (CLAIM 2023).

With October 7 and the pro-Palestinian demonstrations having fueled the conversation on "imported antisemitism", the changes foreseen to the citizenship test symbolize the "end point of integration". This is also what the CDU leader Friedrich Merz has advocated while criticizing that the renewed citizenship law "allows naturalization before integration" (Spiegel 2023). Yet, as it is impossible to ensure that someone's hypothetical antisemitic views can be resolved by a mere tick-in-a-box offered by the citizenship test, the test is thus seeking what Anderson (2013) calls "super citizenship". While the test is usually preceded by a preparatory course according to government standards, the immigrants seeking citizenship must, through the test and the interviews connected to the naturalization process, demonstrate exceptional disapproval of antisemitism in a way that native Germans do not have to. When the citizenship test was first introduced in 2008, politicians criticized it for the level of trivia-like questions, claiming that most Germans themselves would not be able to pass the test (Stern 2008). The questions to be added to the German citizenship test thus enforce the ethnonationalism bias demonstrated in citizenship tests made of questions that supposedly prove a "nation" to be culturally and morally bound by a certain set of values (O'Brien 2016, p. 95).

From the above, we can see the framing of the "Muslim crisis" in Germany as a question of values and incompatible worldviews has been reinforced in the post-October 7 context as a heightened awareness of "imported antisemitism". These can be seen as an escalation of the historical Islamophobic discourse of Muslims and Islam posing a threat to European values and "civilization" (Allen 2010, p. 37), thus justifying governance measures in integration. In Germany, for instance, a project dedicated to taking Middle Eastern/Muslim-background German youth to Auschwitz aimed to "transform their dis-

position and learn to embrace postwar German civil values such as tolerance, empathy, and democracy" (Özyürek 2023, p. 37). In the post-October 7 German context, the demonstrations and symbols used for pro-Palestinian advocacy have been, if not banned, at least framed as threatening societal peace and the peaceful life of Jewish citizens in Germany. This has also fed to enforcing the social construction of the "German identity" as being inherently connected to the country's historical responsibility towards the State of Israel, to the extent that its right to exist is frequently named as Germany's raison d'etat.

Finally, within this larger discourse of "imported (Muslim) antisemitism", the renewal of the citizenship test continues the racializing anti-Muslim racist discourse of Muslims and Muslim immigrants as problematic regarding values that Germany and western Europe in general frequently have described as being representative of women's rights, sexual violence, security, and terrorism (Mouritsen 2012; Beck 2021; Vom Bruck 2008; Wigger 2019; Amiraux 2012). The citizenship test is, in this context, a governing tool to enforce the idea that the cultural and values-based differences manifested by unassimilated Muslim migrants are a potential, if not even real, threat to the well-being of the German citizenry (O'Brien 2016, p. 97). While those seeking naturalization have already had to answer questions that subtly target Muslim immigrants, such as whether polygamy is allowed or not in Germany (BAMF 2022), the new questions singling out antisemitism as a form of anthropism increase even more the already created discourse of distrust and anti-Muslim racism based on the claim that Muslim immigrants pose a threat to the German society.

6. Conclusions

This paper began with a comprehensive overview of the multiple and intersecting themes surrounding the European Muslim crisis. It found three core themes of the European Muslim crisis: a crisis of European identity, a crisis of European foundational ideologies, and an internal Muslim crisis. It then looked closer into the political and public discourses in the UK and German context. The two countries serve as an example of the escalation post October 7 has brought about in the racialized public imagination of who constitutes a "threat to the society" in terms of values. The similarities of the discourse in both countries show transnational trends of framing the European Muslim Crisis as a problem of governance and the increasing shift to values-based politics and citizenship. These values are produced and reproduced in the narratives of what it means to be "German" or "British", in manifestations of cultural nationalism that relies on present-day politics instead of ancient memory (T. Abbas 2004, p. 34). A person's "Europeanness" is proved through specific, albeit changing, set of values where the Israel/Palestine issue has now solidified into another defining marker and "radical antisemitism" as another internal security threat. Hence, the question of Muslim belonging and integration, alongside the dominant securitization paradigm, has escalated in the post-October 7 context.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, H.A., L.H. and U.S.; methodology, H.A.; validation, H.A., L.H. and U.S.; formal analysis, H.A., L.H. and U.S.; investigation, H.A., L.H. and U.S.; writing—original draft preparation, H.A., L.H. and U.S.; writing—review and editing, H.A., L.H. and U.S.; UK case study, U.S.; Germany case study, L.H.; visualization, H.A.; supervision, H.A.; project administration, H.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received partial open access funding from Qatar National Library.

Data Availability Statement: All data used is publicly available. See reference list for details.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Notes

1 Examples of these include studies that use the term "Muslim question" or discuss real/perceived threats to Europe, e.g., (Amin 2022, 2024; Amin and Majothi 2022).

2 For an overview on religion, modernity and perceived "irrationality"; see (Amin 2023). For more on Israel and the different sub-groups of Palestinians see background in (Amin et al. 2024; Badran et al. 2024).

[3] Another example is Torbisco-Casals (2016), who explores legal battles of cultural recognition and accommodation in contemporary democracies, such as the cases of Muslim attire in school and public life. She asserts that a key issue is that liberal democratic theories were originally based on a homogenous idea of citizenship that does not recognize cultural differences.

[4] Islam is often thought of as a solid category without subscribing to the truth that Muslims of the world are diverse in ethnicity, race, culture, language, nationality, and history (Ouzgane 2006).

[5] This article distinguishes between "migrants" and "persons with a migratory background", i.e., a person who has been naturalized or if born in the country, has at least one parent who migrated to the country from somewhere else. While the authors do not find the term inclusive, it should be noted that especially in German language the corresponding term "Menschen mit Einwanderungsgeschichte" is used frequently, especially in the context of the debates this article analyses. See also https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en (accessed on 22 September 2024).

[6] The German Islam Conference (Deutsche Islamkonferenz), the primary platform for communication and collaboration between the Federal Government and the various Muslim representations in Germany.

[7] In Germany, the phrase "Leitkultur" (leading or guiding culture) is at times used by in the political and public discourse when discussing the ideal level of societal integration for immigrants.

[8] Most well-known Jewish press in Germany.

References

Abbas, Madeline Sophie. 2019. Conflating the Muslim Refugee and the Terror Suspect: Responses to the Syrian Refugee "Crisis" in Brexit Britain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42: 2450–69. [CrossRef]

Abbas, Tahir. 2004. After 9/11: British South Asian Muslims, Islamophobia, Multiculturalism, and the State. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21: 26–38. [CrossRef]

Abbas, Tahir. 2019. *Islamophobia and Radicalisation. A Vicious Cycle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Abbas, Tahir. 2020. Islamophobia as racialised biopolitics in the United Kingdom. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 46: 497–511. [CrossRef]

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2002. Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. *American Anthropologist* 104: 783–90. [CrossRef]

Ahmad, Waqar, and Ziauddin Sardar, eds. 2012. *Muslims in Britain*. London: Routledge.

Ahmed, Zahid Shahab. 2018. The Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Oic). In *Immigration and the Current Social, Political, and Economic Climate: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice*. Hershey: IGI Global, vol. 2, pp. 697–706.

Al-Jayyousi, Odeh, Hira Amin, Hiba Ali Al-Saudi, Amjaad Aljassas, and Evren Tok. 2023. Mission-Oriented Innovation Policy for Sustainable Development: A Systematic Literature Review. *Sustainability* 15: 13101. [CrossRef]

Aljunied, Khairudin. 2022. Osman Bakar and Epistemological Renewal in the Muslim World. *Al-Shajarah* 27: 1–27. [CrossRef]

Allen, Chris. 2010. *Islamophobia*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Amara, Mahfoud. 2013. Sport, Islam, and Muslims in Europe: In between or on the Margin? *Religions* 4: 644. [CrossRef]

Amghar, Samir, and Fall Khadiyatoulah. 2017. Disillusioned Militancy: The Crisis of Militancy and Variables of Disengagement of the European Muslim Brotherhood. *Mediterranean Politics* 22: 54–70. [CrossRef]

Amin, Hira. 2022. The Shifting Contours of Saudi Influence in Britain. In *Wahhabism and the World: Understanding Saudi Arabia's Global Influence on Islam*. Oxford: University of Oxford.

Amin, Hira. 2023. 'Irrational' Beliefs in a 'Rational' World: Religion and Modernization. In *Syed Hussein Alatas and Critical Social Theory*. Edited by Dustin Byrd and Seyed Javad. Miri and Leiden: Brill, pp. 189–208.

Amin, Hira. 2024. Saudi Arabia and Europe: Demystifying the Threat. In *Handbook of Political Islam in Europe*. Edited by Thomas Jäger and Ralph Thiele. Springer Handbooks of Political Science and International Relations. Cham: Springer.

Amin, Hira, Alina Zaman, and Evren Tok. 2023. Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education in the GCC: A Systematic Literature Review. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1–16. [CrossRef]

Amin, Hira, and Azhar Majothi. 2022. The Ahl-E-Hadith: From British India to Britain. *Modern Asian Studies* 56: 176–206. [CrossRef]

Amin, Hira, Leena Badran, Ayelet Gur, and Michael Ashley Stein. 2024. The experiences of Palestinian Arabs with disabilities in Israel. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* 43: 41–54. [CrossRef]

Amiraux, Valérie. 2012. Racialization and the Challenge of Muslim Integration in the European Union. In *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*. London: Routledge, pp. 205–24.

Anderson, Bridget. 2013. *Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Andre, Virginie, and Shandon Harris-Hogan. 2015. Merah and Breivik: A Reflection of the European Identity Crisis. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 26: 543–43. [CrossRef]

Arnold, Sina. 2021. Anti-Muslim Racism, Post-Migration, and Holocaust Memory: Contours of Antisemitism in Germany Today. *Social Research. An International Quarterly* 88: 867–93. [CrossRef]

Arnold, Sina. 2023. Expertise. In *Antisemitismus unter Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund und Muslim*innen*. Berlin: Mediendienst Integration. Available online: https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Dateien/MEDIENDIENST-Expertise_Antisemitismus_unter_Menschen_mit_Migrationshintergrund_und_Muslimen.pdf (accessed on 15 June 2024).

Badran, Leena, Hira Amin, Ayelet Gur, and Michael Stein. 2024. 'I am an Arab Palestinian living in Israel with a disability': Marginalisation and the limits of human rights. *Disability & Society* 39: 1901–22. [CrossRef]

BAMF. 2022. *Gesamtfragenkatalog zum Test "Leben in Deutschland" und zum "Einbürgerungstest", Stand: 14.10.2022*. Berlin: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. Available online: https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Integration/Einbuergerung/gesamtfragenkatalog-lebenindeutschland.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=10 (accessed on 15 June 2024).

Beck, Martin. 2021. On the Making of the German 'Refugee Crisis': Securitizing Muslim Immigrants in 2015 and Beyond. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34: 1307–26. [CrossRef]

Bergeaud-Blackler, Florence. 2007. New Challenges for Islamic Ritual Slaughter: A European Perspective. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33: 965–80. [CrossRef]

Berg-Sørensen, Anders. 2017. 'Submission': Ambiguity, Hypocrisy and Misanthropy in Michel Houellebecq's Imaginary Politics. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 22: 131–46. [CrossRef]

Beydoun, Khaled A. 2023. *The New Crusades. Islamophobia and The Global War on Muslims*. Oakland: University of California Press.

BKA. 2024. *Politisch Motivierte Kriminalität—Bundesweite Fallzahlen 2023*. Berlin: Bundeskriminalamt. Available online: https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/UnsereAufgaben/Deliktsbereiche/PMK/2023PMKFallzahlen.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3 (accessed on 15 June 2024).

BMI. 2023a. Bundeskabinett beschließt Gesetzentwurf für modernes Staatsangehörigkeitsrecht. *Pressemitteilung*. August 23. Available online: https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2023/08/staatsangehoerigkeit-pm.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).

BMI. 2023b. Vereinsverbote 'HAMAS' und 'Samidoun'. *Press Release*. November 2. Available online: https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2023/11/vereinsverbot-hamas-samidoun.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).

Bolonyai, Agnes, and Kelsey Campolong. 2017. "We Mustn't Fool Ourselves" 'Orbánian' Discourse in the Political Battle over the Refugee Crisis and European Identity. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 5: 251–73. [CrossRef]

Breen-Smyth, Marie. 2020. The Lone (White) Wolf, 'Terrorism', and the Suspect Community. In *Encountering Extremism. Theoretical Issues and Local Challenges*. Edited by Alice Martini, Kieran Ford and Richard Jackson. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Brown, Mark. 2000. Quantifying the Muslim Population in Europe: Conceptual and Data Issues. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 3: 87–101. [CrossRef]

Bruneau, Emile, Nour Kteily, and Lasse Laustsen. 2018. The Unique Effects of Blatant Dehumanization on Attitudes and Behavior Towards Muslim Refugees During the European 'Refugee Crisis' across Four Countries. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 48: 645–62. [CrossRef]

Calamita, Francesca. 2020. "Identica a Loro?": (In)Digesting Food and Identity in Igiaba Scego's "Salsicce". In *(In)Digestion in Literature and Film: A Transcultural Approach*. London: Routledge, pp. 186–200.

CDU. 2024. *In Freiheit Leben. Deutschland sicher in die Zukunft führen. Grundsatzprogramm der CDU Deutschlands*. Berlin: Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands. Available online: https://www.grundsatzprogramm-cdu.de/sites/www.grundsatzprogramm-cdu.de/files/downloads/240507_cdu_gsp_2024_beschluss_parteitag_final_1.pdf (accessed on 15 June 2024).

Chapman, Ben. 2024. Suella Braverman Left STUNNED as Pro-Palestine Student Makes Shock Claim: 'We brought you down, we can bring this Government down!'. *GBN*. May 17. Available online: https://www.gbnews.com/news/suella-braverman-stunned-pro-palestine-shock-claim (accessed on 15 June 2024).

CLAIM. 2023. Pressemitteilung—Gewaltvolle Übergriffe, Drohungen, Diskriminierungen: Zahl antimuslimischer Vorfälle bundesweit erneut gestiegen. *Press Release*. December 4. Available online: https://www.claim-allianz.de/presse/pressemitteilung-gewaltvolle-uebergriffe-drohungen-diskriminierungen-zahl-antimuslimischer-vorfaelle-bundesweit-erneut-gestiegen/ (accessed on 15 June 2024).

Clycq, Noel. 2021. Rethinking Unity in Diversity: The Potential of European Identity in Rapidly Diversifying Societies. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 34: 14–27. [CrossRef]

Cochrane, Logan, Hira Amin, and Nouf AlKaabi. 2024. National Identity in Qatar: A Systematic Literature Review. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 24: 145–64. [CrossRef]

Corporate Authors. 2024. Government Strengthens Approach to Counter Extremism. GOV. UK. March 14. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-strengthens-approach-to-counter-extremism (accessed on 15 June 2024).

De Genova, Nicholas. 2018. The "Migrant Crisis" as Racial Crisis: Do Black Lives Matter in Europe? *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41: 1765–82. [CrossRef]

Deutscher Bundestag. 2023. Inneres: Staatsangehörigkeitsrecht Soll Überarbeitet Werden. Available online: https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2023/kw48-de-staatsangehoerigkeitsrecht-979630 (accessed on 26 June 2024).

Doboš, Pavel. 2023. Visualizing the European Migrant Crisis on Social Media: The Relation of Crisis Visualities to Migrant Visibility. *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography* 105: 99–115. [CrossRef]

Dora, Zuhal Karakoç. 2020. Religio-Centric Migrant Policies of Eastern Europe. *Journal of Divinity Faculty of Hitit University* 19: 35–62. [CrossRef]

Dora, Zuhal Karakoç, and Zahide Erdoğan. 2021. The Defeat of Multiculturalism over Nationalism and Religion: Transformation of Immigration Policies In Denmark and Sweden. *Hitit Theology Journal* 20: 517–46. [CrossRef]

El-Menouar, Yasemin, and Stephan Vopel. 2023. *Religionsmonitor kompakt. Antisemitismus, Rassismus und gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt Ein Blick auf Deutschland in Zeiten der Eskalation in Nahost*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung. Available online:

https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/0RZ_BS-0302_Religionsmonitor_kompakt_web.pdf (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Ernst, Michael. 2023. Brief der Senatsverwaltung Berliner Schulen können Tragen von Palästinenser-Tüchern verbieten. *rbb24*. October 13. Available online: https://www.rbb24.de/politik/beitrag/2023/10/berlin-israel-senatsverwaltung-guenther-wuensch-schulfrieden-palaestinenser-tuecher-free-palestine-.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Eskelinen, Viivi, Loris Vezzali, Antonio Di Bernardo, and Inga Jasinskaja–Lahti. 2023. Multiple Existential Threats and Attitudes Towards Muslims in Finland and Italy During the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 33: 1398–412. [CrossRef]
Fargues, Émilien, Janie Pélabay, and Réjane Sénac. 2023. The Contemporary Uses of the 'Values of the Republic' in the French Naturalisation Process. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1–18. [CrossRef]
Foster, Thomas. 2024. Rishi Sunak's Speech on 'Extremism' is a Sign of Tory Panic. *Socialist Worker*. March 1. Available online: https://socialistworker.co.uk/news/the-best-way-to-defend-the-right-to-protest-is-to-use-it/ (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Frunză, Sandu. 2017. Looking at Personal Development and the American Dream as Possible Solutions to Overcome the European Identity Crisis and the European Nightmare. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 16: 125–40.
Gadzhimuradova, Gyulnara. 2020. Muslims in Europe: Identity Crisis between "European" and "Islamic" Values. *Balkan Journal of Philosophy* 12: 133–38. [CrossRef]
Gest, Justin. 2015. Reluctant Pluralists: European Muslims and Essentialist Identities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38: 1868–85. [CrossRef]
Ghodsee, Kristen. 2008. The Miniskirt and the Veil: Islam, Secularism, and Women's Fashion in the New Europe. *Historical Reflections* 34: 105–25. [CrossRef]
Giuliani, Gaia. 2016. Monstrosity, Abjection and Europe in the War on Terror. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 27: 96–114. [CrossRef]
Goalwin, Gregory J. 2018. Population Exchange and the Politics of Ethnoreligious Fear: The Eu-Turkey Agreement on Syrian Refugees in Historical Perspective. *Patterns of Prejudice* 52: 121–34. [CrossRef]
GOV.UK. 2024. Reduce Your Risk from Terrorism While Abroad. *Press Release*. March 14. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/reduce-your-risk-from-terrorism-while-abroad (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Guo, Dingping, and Shujia Hu. 2019. Identity Politics and Democratic Crisis in Western Europe. *Chinese Political Science Review* 4: 255–75. [CrossRef]
Habeck, Robert. 2023. Speech on Israel and Anti-Semitism—Speech, November 1. Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz. Available online: https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Downloads/M-O/manuskripte-habeck-ueber-israel-und-antisemitismus-en.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4 (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Habti, Driss. 2014. The Religious Aspects of Diasporic Experience of Muslims in Europe within the Crisis of Multiculturalism. *Policy Futures in Education* 12: 149–62. [CrossRef]
Harpin, Lee. 2024. Rishi Sunak Says Anyone Unable to Condemn 'evil' Hamas Has 'no conscience or morality'. *The Jewish News, January 22.* Available online: https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/rishi-sunak-were-seeing-how-anti-zionism-all-too-often-morphs-into-antisemitism/ (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Harvey, Ramon. 2023. Islamic Theology and the Crisis of Contemporary Science: Naquib Al-Attas' "Metaphysical Critique" And a Husserlian Alternative. *Theology and Science* 21: 404–20. [CrossRef]
Haugbølle, Sune. 2024. Global Palestine Solidarity and the Jewish Question. *Historical Materialism* 1: 1–29. [CrossRef]
Henderson, Karen. 2017. Euroscepticism and the 'Missing Left': The Slovak Case Study. *Politologicky Casopis* 24: 229–48. [CrossRef]
Hervik, Peter. 2012. Ending Tolerance as a Solution to Incompatibility: The Danish 'Crisis of Multiculturalism'. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15: 211–25. [CrossRef]
Himmel, Rita, and Maria Manuel Baptista. 2020. Migrants, Refugees and Othering: Constructing Europeanness. An Exploration of Portuguese and German Media. *Comunicação e Sociedade* 38: 179–200. [CrossRef]
Home Office. 2024. Proscribed Terrorist Groups or Organisations. *Policy Paper*. April 26. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2 (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Janz, Norbert. 2023. Anti-Antisemitismus als neue Verfassungsräson? *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*. December 22. Available online: https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/544088/anti-antisemitismus-als-neue-verfassungsraeson/#footnote-target-15 (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Kaya, Ayhan. 2022. The Crisis of Civilizational Paradigm: Co-Radicalization of Islamist and Populist Groups in Europe. *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 21: 43–54. [CrossRef]
Kellerhoff, Sven Felix. 2023. Symbol des Terrors. Das ist die wahre Bedeutung des Palästinensertuches. *Welt*. November 2. Available online: https://www.welt.de/geschichte/article248158592/Symbol-des-Terrors-Die-wahre-Bedeutung-des-Palaestinensertuches.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Khiabany, Gholam, and Milly Williamson. 2015. Free Speech and the Market State: Race, Media and Democracy in New Liberal Times. *European Journal of Communication* 30: 571–86. [CrossRef]
Kiefer, Michael. 2023. Der einseitige Blick auf Israel: Antisemitismus unter Muslimen. *NDR*. November 17. Available online: https://www.ndr.de/kultur/sendungen/freitagsforum/Der-einseitige-Blick-auf-Israel-Antisemitismus-unter-Muslimen,geschichtsunterricht100.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).

Kirchick, James. 2017. *The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Available online: https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85027542695&partnerID=40&md5=fad18b97529aaa82b0174c9203f39183 (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Knudsen, Britta, John Oldfield, Elizabeth Buettner, and Elvan Zabunyan, eds. 2022. *Decolonizing Colonial Heritage: New Agendas, Actors and Practices in and Beyond Europe*. London: Routledge.
Kosárová, Dominika, and Jaroslav Usiak. 2017. The Role of Identity in the Contemporary Global Terrorist Movement. *Politicke Vedy* 20: 113–33.
Kovář, Jan. 2022. Framing Different Groups of Immigrants in Central Europe before and During the 2015–2017 Eu Refugee Crisis. *Europe—Asia Studies* 74: 1385–412. [CrossRef]
Krzyzowski, Lukasz, and Magdalena Nowicka. 2021. European Solidarity as Boundary-Making: A Conjoint Analysis of Attitudes Towards Islam in the Context of the 'Refugee Crisis'. *Journal of Sociology* 57: 305–24. [CrossRef]
Liebert, Saltanat, Mona H. Siddiqui, and Carolin Goerzig. 2020. Integration of Muslim Immigrants in Europe and North America: A Transatlantic Comparison. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 40: 196–216. [CrossRef]
Loftsdóttir, Kristín. 2019. 'Europe Is Finished': Migrants Lives in Europe's Capital at Times of Crisis. *Social Identities* 25: 240–53. [CrossRef]
Luengo, María, and Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk. 2019. Journalism, Solidarity and the Civil Sphere: The Case of Charlie Hebdo. *European Journal of Communication* 34: 286–99. [CrossRef]
Lynch, Orla. 2013. British Muslim Youth: Radicalisation, Terrorism and the Construction of The "Other". *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 6: 241–61. [CrossRef]
Mamdani, Mahmood. 2002. Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism. *American Anthropologist* 104: 766–75. [CrossRef]
Martini, Alice. 2023. Global silences as privilege: The international community's white silence on far-right terrorism. *Security Dialogue* 54: 252–71. [CrossRef]
Mazlum, Mahmut. 2023. Reflections of 'European Islam' Discourse to Germany and Recognition of Turkish-Islam. *Bilig* 104: 153–78. [CrossRef]
Merabishvili, Gela. 2023. Defending Europe at the Trianon Border: Geopolitical Visions of Nationhood and the Remaking of Hungary's Southern Border. *Geopolitics* 28: 2074–110. [CrossRef]
Mondal, Anshuman A. 2016. Articles of Faith: Freedom of Expression and Religious Freedom in Contemporary Multiculture. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 27: 3–24. [CrossRef]
Morey, Peter, and Yaqin Amina. 2011. *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Mouritsen, Per. 2012. The resilience of citizenship traditions: Civic integration in Germany, Great Britain and Denmark. *Ethnicities* 13: 86–109. [CrossRef]
Müller, Tobias. 2018. Constructing Cultural Borders: Depictions of Muslim Refugees in British and German Media. *Zeitschrift fur Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 12: 263–77. [CrossRef]
Nachmani, Amikam. 2017. *A Triangle in Crisis: Violence, Aggression, Anti-Israel and Anti-Semitic Phenomena*. Haunted Presents: Europeans, Muslim Immigrants and the Onus of European-Jewish Histories. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Narkowicz, Kasia. 2018. 'Refugees Not Welcome Here': State, Church and Civil Society Responses to the Refugee Crisis in Poland. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 31: 357–73. [CrossRef]
Nielsen, Jørgen S. 2010. Danish Cartoons and Christian-Muslim Relations in Denmark. *Exchange: Journal of missiological and Ecumenical Research* 39: 217–35. [CrossRef]
Nightingale, Alison. 2009. A guide to systematic literature reviews. *Surgery* 27: 381–84. [CrossRef]
O'Brien, Peter. 2016. *The Muslim Question in Europe. Political Controversies and Public Philosophies*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
Ouzgane, Lahoucine. 2006. Islamic Masculinities: An Introduction. *Men and Masculinities* 5: 231–35. [CrossRef]
Özyürek, Esra. 2023. *Subcontractors of Guilt: Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Patel, Alfa, and Rebecca Café. 2024. London Hate Crime: Worry over 'significant fracture' in Communities. *BBC News*. November 23. Available online: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-67503062 (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Peyman Engel, Philipp. 2023. Wie muslimischer Antisemitismus das jüdische Leben in Deutschland gefährdet. *Jüdische Allgemeine*. November 15. Available online: https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/allgemein/wie-muslimischer-antisemitismus-das-juedische-leben-in-deutschland-gefaehrdet-vor-allem-nach-den-hamas-pogromen-vom-7-oktober/ (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Piwko, Aldona. 2023. Seniors in Islamic Family Policy Moral and Legal Aspects. *European Journal of Science and Theology* 19: 91–102.
Polynczuk-Alenius, Kinga. 2021. The Menace of Jewish Anti-Polonism During the 2015 'Refugee Crisis': Antisemitic Conspiratorial Thinking on the Christian Far Right in Poland. *Patterns of Prejudice* 55: 237–64. [CrossRef]
Ragkos, Athanasios, Stavriani Koutsou, and Theodoros Manousidis. 2016. In Search of Strategies to Face the Economic Crisis: Evidence from Greek Farms. *South European Society and Politics* 21: 319–37. [CrossRef]
Ramadan, Tariq. 2013. *European Muslims: Facts and Challenges*, 2nd ed. European Political Science. Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, vol. 12.
Rehman, Atika. 2024. UK PM Sunak rails against 'extremism' after Galloway's win. *Dawn*. March 3. Available online: https://www.dawn.com/news/1818606 (accessed on 15 June 2024).

Rexhepi, Piro. 2018. Arab Others at European Borders: Racializing Religion and Refugees Along the Balkan Route. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41: 2215–34. [CrossRef]
Rommel, Inken. 2017. We Are the People. Refugee-'Crisis,' and the Drag-Effects of Social Habitus in German Society. *Historical Social Research* 42: 133–54. [CrossRef]
Rudling, Per Anders. 2006. Denmark as the Big Satan: Projections of Scandinavia in the Arab World and the Future of Multiculturalism. *Review of European and Russian Affairs* 2: 73–112. [CrossRef]
Saeed, Tania. 2019. Islamophobia and the Muslim student. Disciplining the intellect. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia*. Edited by Irene Zempi and Imad Awan. London: Routledge, pp. 175–87.
Sardar, Ziauddin, and Merryl Wyn Davies. 2010. Freeze framing Muslims: Hollywood and the Slideshow of Western Imagination. *Interventions* 12: 239–50. [CrossRef]
Sata, Robert. 2023. Performing Crisis to Create Your Enemy: Europe vs. The Eu in Hungarian Populist Discourse. *Frontiers in Political Science* 5: 1032470. [CrossRef]
Scheibelhofer, Paul. 2016. 'How Would You React If You Learned That Your Son Was Gay?' Racialized Sexualities and the Production of Migrant Others in Europe. In *In an Anthology of Migration and Social Transformation: European Perspectives*. Imiscoe Research Series; Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 295–306.
Schindler, Frederick. 2024. Einbürgerungstest. Israel und Antisemitismus—Das sind die neuen Fragen für Einbürgerungsbewerber. *Welt*. March 28. Available online: https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article250754984/Einbuergerungstest-Israel-und-Antisemitismus-die-neuen-Fragen-fuer-Bewerber-um-den-deutschen-Pass.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Sharma, Sanjay, and Jasbinder S. Nijjar. 2024. Post-Racial Politics, Pre-Emption and in/Security. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 27: 275–94. [CrossRef]
Sobol, Iwona. 2015. Islamic Banking in the European Union Countries. *European Integration Studies* 9: 184–97. [CrossRef]
Solarz, Anna M. 2020. The Impact of Immigration Crisis on Europe's Cultural Condition: Why Are the Poles 'Apprehensive' About Muslims? *Politics and Religion Journal* 14: 313–35. [CrossRef]
Spiegel. 2023. Integration. Merz drängt auf Israel-Bekenntnis bei Einbürgerungen. *DER SPIEGEL*. October 23. Available online: https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/integration-friedrich-merz-draengt-auf-israel-bekenntnis-bei-einbuergerungen-a-1955bf11-a3ad-4081-9311-e14d296420b9 (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Stern. 2008. Einbürgerung: 'Viele würden den Test nicht bestehen'. *Stern*. June 11. Available online: https://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/einbuergerung--viele-wuerden-den-test-nicht-bestehen--3855238.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Sunak, Rishi. 2024. PM Address on Extremism. Transcript of Speech Delivered Outside Downing Street, Westminster, London, March 1. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-on-extremism-1-march-2024 (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Tagesschau. 2023. Scholz in Tel Aviv. 'Die Sicherheit Israels ist Staatsräson'. *Tagesschau*. October 17. Available online: https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/asien/scholz-israel-besuch-100.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Taras, Raymond. 2013. Euro-Turks in the Contemporary European Imaginary. *Insight Turkey* 15: 79–94.
Torbisco-Casals, Neus. 2016. Multiculturalism, Identity Claims, and Human Rights: From Politics to Courts. *Law and Ethics of Human Rights* 10: 367–404. [CrossRef]
Treistman, Jeffrey, and Charles J. Gomez. 2021. European Migration and Terrorism: Humanitarian Crisis, Political Rhetoric, or Pragmatic Policy? *Conflict, Security and Development* 21: 337–70. [CrossRef]
Triandafyllidou, Anna. 2022. The Multicultural Idea and Western Muslims. In *Routledge Handbook on Islam in the West*. Edited by Roberto Tottoli. London: Routledge, pp. 231–46.
Triandafyllidou, Anna, Tariq Modood, and Nasar Meer. 2011. *European Multiculturalisms: Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Challenges*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Available online: https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84971268407&partnerID=40&md5=87366e8a4c3894ef3206a8a101a7871d (accessed on 15 June 2024).
UNHRC. 2024. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied Since 1967. United Nations Human Rights Council. Available online: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session55/advance-versions/a-hrc-55-73-auv.pdf (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Vom Bruck, Gabriele. 2008. Naturalising, Neutralising Women's Bodies: The "Headscarf Affair" and the Politics of Representation. *Identities* 15: 51–79. [CrossRef]
Welt. 2023. Islamwissenschaftler 'Antisemitismus ist in vielen arabischen Ländern Teil der Staatsräson'. *Welt*. November 7. Available online: https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article248400436/Islamwissenschaftler-Antisemitismus-ist-in-vielen-arabischen-Laendern-Teil-der-Staatsraeson.html?icid=search.product.onsitesearch (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Welt. 2024. Leitkultur. CDU ändert offenbar umstrittenen Islam-Satz in Grundsatzprogramm. *Welt*. April 17. Available online: https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article251050946/Leitkultur-CDU-aendert-offenbar-umstrittenen-Islam-Satz-in-Partei-Grundsatzprogramm.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Wharton, Barrie. 2008. Twin Towers of Cultural Confusion? Contemporary Crises of Identity in Europe and European Islam. *Global Change, Peace and Security* 20: 41–58. [CrossRef]
Wigger, Iris. 2019. Anti-Muslim Racism and the Racialisation of Sexual Violence: 'Intersectional Stereotyping' in Mass Media Representations of Male Muslim Migrants in Germany. *Culture and Religion* 20: 248–71. [CrossRef]

Williamson, Milly, and Gholam Khiabany. 2024. The British State, Citizenship Rights and Gendered Folk Devils: The Case of Shamima Begum. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. [CrossRef]
Wodak, Ruth. 2019. Entering the 'Post-Shame Era': The Rise of Illiberal Democracy, Populism and Neo-Authoritarianism in Europe. *Global Discourse* 9: 195–213. [CrossRef]
Yilmaz, Ferruh. 2011. The Politics of the Danish Cartoon Affair: Hegemonic Intervention by the Extreme Right. *Communication Studies* 62: 5–22. [CrossRef]
Yilmaz, Ferruh. 2015. From Immigrant Worker to Muslim Immigrant: Challenges for Feminism. *European Journal of Womens Studies* 22: 37–52. [CrossRef]
ZDF. 2024. Maßnahmen gegen Antisemitismus: Einbürgerungstest: Das sind die neuen Fragen. *Zdfheute*. March 26. Available online: https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/deutschland/antisemitismus-einbuergerung-test-holocaust-israel-100.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Zhang, Chenchen. 2020. Right-Wing Populism with Chinese Characteristics? Identity, Otherness and Global Imaginaries in Debating World Politics Online. *European Journal of International Relations* 26: 88–115. [CrossRef]
Zick, Andreas. 2014. 'Importierter' oder 'integrierter' Antisemitismus? *Mediendienst Integration*. August 5. Available online: https://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/antisemitismus-israel-proteste-muslime-zick.html (accessed on 15 June 2024).
Zick, Andreas, and Mokros Nico. 2023. Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in der Mitte. In *Die distanzierte Mitte: Rechtsextreme und demokratiegefährdende Einstellungen in Deutschland 2022/23*. Edited by Andreas Zick, Beate Küpper, Nico Mokros and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Bonn: Dietz, pp. 53–83. Available online: https://www.fes.de/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=91776&token=3821fe2a05aff649791e9e7ebdb18eabdae3e0fd#page=166 (accessed on 15 June 2024).

religions

MDPI

Article

Reconciling British Values with Professional Identity: The Pursuit of Ontological Security Among Muslim Teachers in England †

Muzaffer Can Dilek

Presidency of Strategy Development, Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Education, Ankara 06420, Türkiye; muzaffer.dilek@hud.ac.uk or muzaffercan.dilek@meb.gov.tr

† This article contains excerpts and materials from my PhD thesis, the final version of which I submitted to the University of Huddersfield in March 2024.

Abstract: This article aims to investigate how the legal requirement to promote fundamental British values (FBVs) impacts Muslim teachers' professional identity formation, utilising Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-identified Muslim teachers, including both male and female individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, employed in secondary schools across England. This study seeks to interpret Muslim teachers' experiences through Anthony Giddens' ontological security theory. Firstly, Muslim teachers expressed pride in being British and their successful integration into society. Secondly, the meaning of Britishness was elucidated by the participants through references to the values described in the current government guidelines on promoting FBVs. Finally, the impact of the obligation to promote FBVs on the professional identity formation of Muslim teachers points to a degree of ambivalence rooted in seeking ontological security. Certain teachers adopted an uncritical stance towards FBV policy, prioritising 'values' within the debate and thereby normalising the discourse surrounding FBVs. In contrast, others engaged in a critical analysis of FBV rhetoric, highlighting its adverse impact on academic discussions and their professional identities. From the perspective of ontological security theory, Muslim teachers are situated in a fragile position; while the majority grapple with ontological insecurity, others exist in a realm between ontological security and insecurity.

Keywords: teacher identity; British values; British Muslim

1. Introduction

British Muslim communities have long been the focus of debate regarding Britishness, shared values, and a sense of belonging. Historically, pivotal debates such as those concerning Muslim schools, the Satanic Verses affair, the Northern riots of 2001, and the 9/11 and 7/7 London terrorist attacks have significantly shaped the narrative surrounding Muslimness in Britain (Cantle 2012; Fazakarley 2017; Miah 2017; Modood 1992). In particular, the summer of 2001 witnessed riots in northern English towns like Oldham, Bradford, and Burnley, where large Muslim populations resided These events drew attention to the issues of British Muslims' national identity, belonging, and loyalty while sparking discussions about self-segregation (Kundnani 2007; Thomas 2011). *The Cantle Report*, commissioned to investigate the causes of the summer riots, contended that these communities exhibited minimal commonalities and led parallel lives (Home Office 2001). This also highlighted the importance of shared values, intercultural dialogue, and a sense of Britishness (Home Office 2001). As a result, the theory of community cohesion emerged as a new paradigm for managing cultural diversity (Home Office 2001). Furthermore, it has been argued that the riots in the north of England facilitated the subjection of Muslim communities to securitisation practices (O'Toole 2019). In a similar vein, Martin (2019)

criticised community cohesion policies for being integral to counter-radicalisation efforts that marginalised certain identities, particularly those of British Muslims.

However, the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, in the United States further perpetuated the stigmatisation of Muslims as a global threat (Poynting and Mason 2008), while the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005, executed by British-born individuals, intensified concerns regarding home-grown terrorism (Abbas 2008; Mythen et al. 2009). This resulted in heightened scrutiny of British Muslims, with multiculturalism being criticised for contributing to social segregation (Modood 2013). During the Munich Security Conference in 2011, previous Prime Minister David Cameron explicitly criticised multiculturalism, contending that it had failed and facilitated the emergence of segregated communities that undermined social cohesion (Cameron 2011). Cameron also introduced the concept of 'muscular liberalism', a policy that emphasises the active promotion of liberal values such as freedom and equality, in contrast to the passive tolerance inherent in multiculturalism (Cameron 2011). He further argued that Muslims in Britain, particularly young Muslims, were struggling to identify with Britishness and emphasised the promotion of shared values (Cameron 2011).

Following these breaking moments, the Teachers' Standards were introduced in 2012, later revised in 2013, incorporating a legal obligation "not [to] undermine fundamental British values" (FBVs) defined as "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" (DfE 2012, p. 9). The statutory obligation to promote FBVs was initiated to realise the "civic rebalancing agenda—where greater social harmony can be realized through emphasizing a stronger commitment to Britishness as a core identity" (Keddie 2014, p. 540). In other words, promoting FBVs involves creating a sense of national identity that is separate from cultural connections but deeply rooted in Britishness, leading to enhanced social cohesion within society (Vincent 2019). However, the origin of the concept of FBVs can be traced back to the definition of extremism delineated in the Prevent duty introduced in June 2011 (DfE 2012). According to Revell and Bryan (2018), the inclusion of FBVs into teachers' professional standards has accelerated the heightened politicisation of the teaching profession.

Furthermore, the Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham in 2014 catalysed a new discourse concerning Muslim teachers in England. Issues including Britishness, shared values, belonging, and professionalism were sceptically scrutinised over Muslim teachers, but the debate has subsequently moved to a wider political spectrum, with British Muslims as its subject (Holmwood and O'Toole 2018). As a consequence of this affair, educational institutions where the majority of students and staff are Muslim have been portrayed as disengaged from mainstream Britishness (Martin 2019). These educational institutions and 'certain' teachers are alleged to propagate a certain way of life and to make this ethos dominant in the school, thus not sufficiently fostering shared values among the pupils (Miah 2017). Unsubstantiated allegations also led to the dismissal of a cohort of Muslim teachers from the profession (Holmwood and O'Toole 2018). It is possible to argue that the Trojan Horse affair had a traumatising impact on Muslim teachers nationwide, leading to the securitisation of their professional identity (Dilek 2024).

The affair in question sparked extensive debates regarding the responsibility of educational institutions in countering extremist and radical ideologies. Moreover, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 introduced a legal requirement for teachers to implement measures aimed at preventing students from being exposed to or involved in acts of terrorism (Home Office 2015). In particular, recent debates surrounding Michaela School have reignited discussions about Muslimness, secularism, and multiculturalism. A Muslim pupil at Michaela School in London lost his High Court case against the school's refusal to allow him to pray, marking a potential end to multiculturalism. It is argued that paradoxically, this decision, made at a time when freedom of belief and freedom of expression are considered essential components of British values, will further expose Muslim students and teachers to Islamophobic practices and potentially lead to the criminalisation of Muslim identity (Asbali 2024). Furthermore, In March 2024, a redefined framework for extremism

was issued by the government, characterised as follows: "the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to:

1. negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or
2. undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or
3. intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in (1) or (2)"(Home Office 2024).

The justification for the new definition has been attributed to concerns regarding the spread of extremist ideologies, which are anticipated to intensify following the October 7. An additional significant point to consider is that the originator of this revised definition is Michael Gove, recognised for his association with the Trojan Horse affair and previously noted for making speculative remarks about British Muslims. This contentious definition, akin to its predecessor, has faced criticism for potentially compromising freedom of expression (MEND 2024). Under this definition, the interpretation of extremism—an already complex issue for teachers—may evolve into an even more intricate and challenging process.

Yet the question of how such a political atmosphere constructs the experience of Muslim teachers has not been adequately answered. This article specifically aims to fill this gap by critically examining the impact of the legal obligation to promote FBVs on the professional identity of Muslim teachers in England.

In a sociological inquiry of Muslim teachers in England, 'religious identity' naturally might hold more prominence than 'professional identity'. While acknowledging this, professional identity remains central to this study. It is, therefore, useful to provide an overview of the broader aspects of teacher professional identity rather than a strict definition. The theoretical comprehension of the concept involves (a) a dynamic and ongoing process in which experiences undergo continuous interpretation, (b) significant influence from individual factors, professional setting, and the political atmosphere, (c) a close intertwining with racial, ethnic, gender, and religious identities, and (d) a close relationship with teacher agency (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Beijaard et al. 2004). This conceptualisation encapsulates the multifaceted nature of a teacher's professional identity and "provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society" (Sachs 2005, p. 15).

The significance of researching Muslim teachers lies in the political debates that revolve around their religious identities, which form an integral part of this study. Regarding the impact of the policy on teachers' professional lives, Muslim teachers' perceptions of FBVs have been the subject of some inquiries. For instance, Muslim teachers articulated reservations regarding FBVs, challenging their portrayal as "anti-extremist watchdogs" due to concerns about the potential marginalisation of Muslim youth that FBVs may lead to (Panjwani 2016, p. 337). Furthermore, Muslim teachers drew attention to the potential negative consequences of FBVs on academic discussions (Panjwani 2016). Moreover, an alleged conflict between Islamic and British values was not acknowledged by Muslim teachers, but rather they argued that the two were in harmony (Panjwani 2016).

Farrell and Lander (2019) also conducted a study to understand Muslim Religious Education (RE) teachers' perception of FBVs, incorporating Foucault's analysis of power. They observed that Muslim RE teachers did not oppose the values associated with FBVs; however, Muslim teachers suggested the necessity of purifying these values from their nationalist connotations by emphasising their universal aspect (Farrell and Lander 2019). Additionally, Farrell and Lander (2019) argued that FBVs might contribute to institutional racism, positing that the discourse surrounding FBVs could lead to the alienation of Muslim teachers from their professional roles. They highlighted how Muslim teachers have become more vulnerable in the contemporary political landscape compared to their colleagues (Farrell and Lander 2019).

This article will commence with an exploration of ontological security theory. Subsequently, it will delve into an explanation of the methodological approach employed in this

research. Ultimately, it will conclude with the section dedicated to presenting the findings and engaging in discussion along with ontological security theory.

2. Ontological Security Theory

The idea of ontological security originally introduced by Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing in 1960, garnered scholarly interest due to its focus on the impact of social elements alongside biological factors on the sense of well-being. Laing characterises an ontologically secure individual as one who possesses "a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person" (Laing 1990, p. 39). However, British sociologist Anthony Giddens, who expanded upon the concept of ontological security, elucidated it as a sense of order and continuity concerning the individual's actions, that is "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens 1990, p. 92). While the individual occupies a central place in Giddens' conceptualisation, this does not imply an experience devoid of the influence of the social context.

A sense of trust is fundamental in establishing ontological security from the early stages of an individual's life (Giddens 1991). A foundational sense of security is predicated upon the individual's trust relationships with others and institutions (Giddens 1991). In this way, the individual is alleviated of existential anxieties and attains psychological well-being (Giddens 1991). These relationships of trust function as a "protective cocoon" safeguarding and shielding the individual from the dangers encountered in daily life, thereby enabling the individual to maintain a stable sense of self (Giddens 1991, p. 40).

According to Giddens, trust in "abstract systems", specifically symbolic tokens (such as money) and expert systems (such as institutions and professionals), plays a crucial role in shaping our daily decisions and actions (Giddens 1991, p. 134). Individuals seek to have confidence in these abstract systems and their proper functioning to alleviate existential anxieties. Otherwise, the undermining of confidence in these systems threatens the individual's ontological security (Giddens 1991).

Human beings inherently question the material world, the meaning of life, and the fundamental dimensions of existence (Giddens 1991). The existential uncertainties in individuals' lives have notably escalated, particularly in the context of modernity and globalisation, rendering the quest for ontological security more pronounced (Giddens 1991). The advent of high modernity has cemented a reinforcement of dominance by certain groups over others through enhanced surveillance mechanisms, thereby accentuating societal inequalities (Giddens 1991). According to Giddens (1991), comprehending ontological security necessitates an examination within the framework of high modernity. Thereby, in seeking answers to these uncertainties, individuals may be guided by collective identities, such as religious or national affiliations (Croft 2012, Giddens 1991, Kinnvall 2006).

Concerning the role of collective identity Croft (2012) delves into the search for ontological security within the framework of Britishness. According to Croft (2012), Britishness as an ongoing and unfixed presence has historically relied on the presence of the 'other' to identify itself. With the presence of the 'other', Britishness leaves its interlocutor with an image of what it is or is not. The sense of self will be constructed through a sense of Britishness, and structured through the routines in which a sense of Britishness is performed (Croft 2012). In response to rising the issue of extremism and terrorism, Britishness necessitated a renewed articulation through a new 'other'; "the problem stemmed from (warped) Islam; the solution was to be more Britishness" (Croft 2012, p. 1). Feeling its existence threatened, Britishness sought to strengthen the narrative around it by promoting shared values, namely British values (Cameron 2011). These values needed to be particularly promoted to young British Muslims, who often struggled to identify with Britishness (Cameron 2011). Indeed, this new imagined identity of Britishness centred itself around another problematic conceptualisation: the imagined "single British Muslim community" (Croft 2012, p. 198). According to Croft (2012), "that 'single Muslim community' has two functions in this

identity construction: that of Radical other, to be feared, demonized and destroyed; but also that of Orientalized Other, to be engaged, patronized and led" (p. 198). This constructed Britishness therefore serves as a foundation of ontological security for certain members in the society, whereas it generates ontological insecurity for others (Croft 2012, p. 198).

An ontologically secure individual, who experiences a sense of wholeness and acts in comfort, eventually finds answers to existential questions and "brackets out questions about ourselves, others and the object-world which have to be taken for granted in order to keep on with everyday activity" (Giddens 1991, p. 37). However, the individual's relationship with the 'other' is a crucial point in establishing ontological security (Giddens 1991). The individual desires either to trust the 'other' or to be trusted as an 'other'. Thus, the 'other', which is desired to be known/understood as an existential unknown, about which some existential answers are needed, is closely intertwined with the individual's search for ontological security (Giddens 1991). Moreover, habits and routines are central concepts in the discussion of ontological security (Giddens 1991). Routines are essential for individuals to establish and sustain their actions; individuals seek assurance in the continuity of their habits and routines, as this continuity serves as a defence mechanism against the anxieties that the individual may encounter (Giddens 1991). In summary, ontological security theory is encapsulated in four main dimensions: "sense of biographical coherence", "cocoon of trust structures," "conformity," and "fragility" (Croft 2012, pp. 25–26). These dimensions highlight the centrality of agency in self-identity, reliance on trusted structures, adherence to integrity, and the ongoing awareness of potential fragility despite efforts to maintain ontological security (Croft 2012).

3. Methodology

This research set out to critically assess the promotion of FBVs debate on Muslim teachers' professional identities. To achieve this objective, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilised as the qualitative research strategy. IPA focuses on conducting a thorough examination of the lived experiences of individuals, delving into the significance of these experiences to the participants and grasping how participants interpret and give meaning to their experiences (Smith et al. 2009). At a time when Muslim teachers' national identity, sense of belonging and professionalism were being scrutinised, particularly heightened post the Trojan Horse affair, it is crucial to explore the impact of the policy of promoting FBVs on Muslim teachers' professional identities, to unveil their lived experiences and to elucidate the meaning they attribute to these experiences. Aligned with the methodological framework of IPA, the objective is not to generalise the findings but to conduct a microanalysis—a detailed examination of personal experiences from the perspective of those individuals (Smith et al. 2009). IPA does not entirely dismiss macro-level generalisations; however, these macro generalisations become more feasible with the accumulation of similar microanalyses (Smith et al. 2009).

In this respect, in-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken with self-identified Muslim teachers, encompassing both male and female participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds who are employed in secondary schools across England. This selection criteria also facilitated the inclusion of some variables such as ethnicity, gender, place of residence, and subject area, thereby enriching the sample. Neglecting to consider the impact of these various factors would lead to a less nuanced interpretation of the individual experiences of Muslim teachers. Table 1 below provides a comprehensive description of the participants involved in this study.

For the implementation of the snowball sampling method, this study initiated participant recruitment by contacting the following representative organizations: the Muslim Council of Britain, the Muslim Institute, New Horizons, and the Muslim Teachers' Association. These organizations subsequently recommended potential participants suitable for the research context. Initial contact was established, research background information was provided, and the ethical process was elucidated. Upon agreement to participate, interview dates were scheduled and conducted. Similar procedures were applied to sub-

sequent participants suggested by previous interviewees. Additionally, this research is presented at the Oxford Muslim Research Conference hosted by the University of Oxford in October 2021. Some conference attendees expressed willingness to participate in the study. Consequently, this conference facilitated the identification of additional research participants. Research interviews took place between September 2021 and July 2022, with an average duration of one hour per interview. Only one interview was conducted in a face-to-face format, whereas the remaining interviews were online through Microsoft Teams. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to ensure the protection of their anonymity and confidentiality and to safeguard their identities throughout this study A total of 13 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted. IPA suggests recruiting three to six participants for undergraduate and master's research, with three being ideal for detailed analysis at these levels (Smith et al. 2009). The recommended number for doctoral research varies, depending on factors such as this study's nature, research questions, and data quality (Smith et al. 2009). Larger participant numbers are manageable in doctoral research due to extended analysis time, but increasing the number of participants does not necessarily guarantee improved research quality (Smith et al. 2009).

Table 1. The demographic profile of the participants. Adapted from Dilek (2024).

Participants	Gender	Ethnic Origin	Age	Subject Specialism	Teaching Experience	School Location
Ali	Male	Indian	53	Mathematics	6	Bradford
Mariam	Female	Moroccan	43	Modern Foreign Language	11	London
Sardar	Male	Bangladeshi	48	Mathematics	15	Oldham
Sajide	Female	Bangladeshi	34	English	9	Oldham
Laila	Female	Yemeni	29	Chemistry	5	Oxford
Sana	Female	Pakistani	37	Mathematics	6	Bradford
Farhan	Male	Pakistani	35	Mathematics	4	Oldham
Zia	Male	Pakistani	41	Mathematics	2	Oldham
Tariq	Male	Pakistani	38	Philosophy	15	Leeds
Aisha	Female	Pakistani	49	English	3	Oldham
Hafsa	Female	Bangladeshi	25	Religious study	4	Oldham
Mohsin	Male	Pakistani	42	Science	11	Oldham
Yahya	Male	White British	31	History and Politics	9	London

Interview data underwent analysis in the NVivo software using the six steps of the IPA analysis (Smith et al. 2009). As an international researcher who is part of the 'majority' in his homeland, Türkiye, attempting to understand and research the experiences of a 'minority' in the UK is indeed a challenging endeavour. The political events and discourses surrounding secularism have profoundly influenced the lived realities of Turkish Muslims over an extended period, whereas noteworthy factors such as the interplay of "race and religion" in political contexts, cultural dynamics, the impact of "settlement and geographical space", and the complex dynamics of "migration" exert significant influence on the formation and articulation of religious identities among British Muslims (Miah et al. 2020, p. 140). Furthermore, a notable disparity exists in the conceptualisation of the teaching profession between the two nations. While my prior teaching experience in Turkey provided valuable insights, it did not afford a comprehensive understanding of the challenges encountered by Muslim teachers in England. These contextual nuances influencing the perceptions of religious identities, alongside the diverse interpretations attached to the role of the teacher, facilitated an examination of the research procedures through an etic lens.

Conversely, this shared religious identity facilitated an emic perspective, enhancing participants' trust in me as a researcher, while simultaneously fostering a strong rapport and encouraging their active participation and meaningful contributions to this study. To enhance my insider perspective and gain a deeper understanding of the context of teaching in the UK, I undertook a period as a supply teacher in the UK, affording me firsthand exposure to the professional difficulties encountered by teachers. Through such an 'insider' perspective, I was able to grasp the professional experiences of Muslim teachers without bracketing my previous experiences, in line with Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology (Smith et al. 2009). Absent this contextual understanding, delving into the process of professional identity formation would have been cursory and lacking in depth. To conclude, qualitative researchers exhibit some subjective features that can both broaden and restrict their research domain (Quraishi 2008), and it is possible to state that the subjectivity described here does not impede my research process but rather enriches it.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Even Though We Are Being British, We Have to Perform Those Characteristics

There is an empirically weak assertion in political discourse that Muslims in Britain are reluctant to self-identify as British (Thomas and Sanderson 2011; Uberoi and Modood 2010). Moreover, Muslim religious identity is often perceived as a competing force against the formation of national identity in the UK and Europe, while this assertiveness is considered a potential challenge to "the underpinning secular, liberal consensus that permeates the public space" (Miah 2017, p. 22). In this regard, in the UK, it has been argued that an active and assertive defence and promotion of British values is necessary to restore such secular consensus (Cameron 2011; Smith 2016). Putting aside these debates, previous research has unequivocally challenged claims about British Muslims by demonstrating that Muslims in the UK possess a strong sense of belonging and pride in being British (Frampton et al. 2016; Ipsos Mori 2016; Thomas and Sanderson 2011). In this study, Muslim teachers expressed a sense of pride in being British and reported their successful integration into British society. This is clearly articulated in the following narratives:

> *I am proud of being a British person, proud to live in the UK. [. . .] The system allows me to become a teacher at such a late age. I appreciate that because we have that system in the United Kingdom to be able to do that. So, I think there is a lot to be grateful for.* (Zia)

> *I am quite easy and comfortable with being a British-born Muslim. I do not find any conflict between being British and being a Muslim. [. . .] We, on the whole, can practice religion and not feel threatened by practising religion. And there are a lot of British values that Muslim and Islamic values. So, on the whole, I feel comfortable calling myself a British Muslim. I do not have any concerns.* (Sana)

Despite having settled in England later in life, Zia has a strong attachment to the British national identity. Based on Zia's narrative, successful integration is more likely to occur when a country fosters economic and social opportunities that empower its citizens to realise their capabilities. The first phase of achieving successful integration involves addressing economic and social issues, whereas the second phase is closely connected to how effectively the state meets the religious and cultural needs of its citizens. Zia's approach exemplifies the first aspect, while the second aspect becomes apparent in Sana's perspective. Sana's professional identity formation is deeply rooted in her connection to Britishness. Sana's viewpoint highlights that providing the necessary provisions for Muslims and eliminating the barriers to fulfilling their religious needs in daily life facilitates the incorporation of national identity. It is essential to consider the constructive influence of a moderate interpretation of secularism on achieving successful integration (Modood 2013). Moreover, the above perspectives do not endorse the claim that British and Islamic values are incompatible with each other, resonating with the other research which revealed that Muslim teachers maintain that FBVs and Islam are not contradictory (Panjwani 2016). Sana takes pride in being both British and Muslim, thereby integrating these aspects with a sense

of self-awareness into her professional identity (Hopkins and Gale 2009). It is also crucial to acknowledge that a robust and secure bond with one's religious identity is instrumental in both enhancing the sense of belonging to national identity and constructing affirmative professional identity. In connection with this, the following observation reveals that the prerequisite for being a good Muslim is first and foremost being a good citizen:

> *As a Muslim living in the UK, it is important for me to understand where I am as a British individual, but also understand where I am a Muslim as well. Obviously, being a Muslim, you have been taught that you have to obey the land of the law. Otherwise, it does not really work. There is a balance that, at the end of the day, you can be a good Muslim and you can be a good British citizen. Even though we are being British, we have to perform those characteristics. And we have to show those habits and behaviours.* (Sajide)

Having a visible component of Muslim identity, Sajide maintained that being a 'good Muslim' is unattainable without also upholding the responsibilities of a 'good citizen.' She regarded her Muslimness as intertwined with being a responsible citizen who acknowledges and fulfils their obligations. The interconnected understanding of Muslim and British identity has implications for the reconstruction of professional identity. This exemplifies how religious identification can have a constructive influence on the cultivation of a robust British identity (Ipsos Mori 2016). Despite Sajide's confident identification as British, she underscores the necessity of visibly displaying British characteristics in her daily routines and professional engagements, as not doing so could invite scrutiny of her British identity. Sajide's perspective not only refutes unfounded allegations that visible Muslims disclaim their British identity but also affirms previous observations which have found that the religious identities of visible British Muslim youth peacefully coexist with British national identities (Shazhadi et al. 2017). Nevertheless, even though Muslim teachers proudly embrace their British identity, they are at times not acknowledged as British by 'others' due to various factors, including their skin colour. The following observation serves as an example of this:

> *I came over to the United Kingdom when I was three-and-a-half. So, I knew very little about India. There were a lot of people, sometimes peers, members of the public, and colleagues, who said you are not British because you are not white. And I cannot identify with that. But having said that, even after so many years, I am 53 now, so I have been here almost 50 years in the United Kingdom. I still feel that I am fully integrated into British society. But I still feel a degree of alienness, so alienation as if I am still different.* (Ali)

Throughout the research interview, Ali consistently highlighted his successful integration into British society. Despite this, Ali noted that he still encountered a degree of alienation. This alienation did not arise from his lack of integration or sense of belonging but rather from interactions with classmates, colleagues, or individuals in public settings who implicitly or explicitly questioned his Britishness, particularly due to her skin colour. This perception is driven by the tendency to associate Britishness with racial connotations linked to whiteness (Parekh 2000). While not being acknowledged as British poses its challenges, being viewed as 'other' is identified as the underlying cause of many social issues (Choudhury 2007).

This section demonstrates the deep attachment of Muslim teachers to British national identity and how they have successfully integrated into the wider community. Their perception of Britishness is not in competition with either their religious or ethnic identities. Muslim teachers do not consider the integration of hybrid identities to be an issue (Modood 2003; Ramadan 2009). Muslim teachers' attitudes point to a sense of Britishness that extends beyond integration and alienation to active contribution and service to society. It would, therefore, be inconsistent to portray Muslim teachers as 'risky' and distanced from Britishness (Martin 2019, p. 91). Herein, it is important to note that participants were not questioned in the research interviews regarding their identification as British, their

pride in their national identity, or their level of integration into society, but Muslim teachers often endeavoured to clarify their positionality through these statements.

The findings of this section suggest that the attitudes of Muslim teachers as a reflexive reaction and coping mechanism to what they really are/feel they are (integrated British Muslim citizens) and what they are not/do not want to be portrayed as (radical other, illiberal). Simultaneously, these statements serve the efforts of Muslim teachers to curtail discussions regarding national identity, sense of belonging and loyalty. Similar to Muslimness, Britishness also represents another collective identity that Muslim teachers often refer to find answers to their existential questions (Giddens 1991). This is evident from the consistent emphasis on belonging to the British identity. The affiliation of British Muslims with British identity, their loyalties and their cultural practices have always been a matter of debate. This has often resulted in them being depicted in political and media narratives as being distant from mainstream Britishness, and their lifestyles have often been associated with unfavourable adjectives and deemed inappropriate. According to Giddens (1991), individuals expect their actions to be perceived and accepted as appropriate and rational by fellow society members, at least to a minimal extent, in order to uphold their ontological security. The statement "I am proud to be British" essentially reflects a need for recognition and acceptance by the wider society, which in turn would pave the way for Britishness to become a source of ontological security for Muslim teachers. Muslim teachers' focus on Britishness is to refute being a "Radical Other" and an "Orientalized Other", which represents an endeavour to dissolve the distinctions between 'us' and 'other' (Croft 2012, p. 198). This coping mechanism, where Britishness serves as a protective shield, is the embodiment of Muslim teachers' endeavour to restore a feeling of safety and trust, preserve their integrity, and alleviate existential anxieties—essentially fulfilling a need for ontological security (Giddens 1991). Muslim teachers in this research frequently emphasise their British identity as a strategy to challenge and refute stereotypes that perceive Muslims, particularly those in Western contexts, as different, foreign, or potentially threatening. Through active engagement with and embodiment of Britishness, Muslim teachers resist these stereotypical labels, distancing themselves from these imposed identities. By focusing on Britishness, Muslim teachers attempt to blur or even dissolve the boundaries between themselves and the broader British society. The emphasis on Britishness, therefore, reflects a deliberate effort by Muslim teachers to align themselves with the mainstream, challenging the exclusionary 'us versus them' mentality. Muslim teachers are not merely attempting to superficially assimilate into a cultural identity but are utilising it as a means to regain a sense of stability and respect in their professional lives. By emphasising Britishness, they may be seeking to reaffirm their dignity and integrity in a manner that resonates with both their personal and professional identities, thus mitigating the psychological strain of feeling excluded or 'othered.'

4.2. The Shifting Connotations of Britishness

Describing the core of Britishness and the values it embodies is indeed complex and challenging but it is possible to argue that Britishness is a dynamic, fluid and continually evolving construct that is susceptible to social, historical, and political influences (Farrell 2016; Maylor 2016; Vadher and Barrett 2009). While Britishness historically has been less receptive to 'diversity', today, its dynamic nature has facilitated a somewhat more inclusive approach (Parekh 2011; Uberoi and Modood 2012). Moreover, the contemporary interpretation of Britishness is commonly articulated through various factors including "geography, people, national symbols, citizenship, values and attitudes, cultural habits and behaviour, language and historical achievements" (Commission for Racial Equality 2005, p. 18). In this investigation, participants tended to articulate the meaning of Britishness in a way that mirrors values such as "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs," as delineated in the current Teachers' Standards Guidance on promoting FBVs (DfE 2012, p. 9). This is depicted by the following observation:

> *I would say being British for myself would be able to have my say, living within a democracy, and making sure that my rights and if they are not that I have the ability to express that my rights are not being met or in that sense. I would say that this is what being British would mean to me. It is about having that freedom as a citizen in this country.* (Hafsa)

Hafsa suggests that the essence of Britishness encompasses upholding democracy and the freedom of speech. According to Hafsa, being British is intricately linked with an understanding in which fundamental rights and freedoms are protected and all democratic responsibilities are fulfilled. Instead of merely referring to these values, it is possible to suggest that Hafsa has integrated them into her lifestyle and professional practice, embodying them in both personal and professional contexts. Conversely, it would be assertive to maintain that every member of British society has an equal opportunity to fully benefit from these values. When considering British Muslims, their freedom of expression seems to be considerably restricted, particularly with the introduction of the Prevent Duty (Abbas et al. 2021; Holmwood and Aitlhadj 2022; Miah 2017; Open Society Justice Initiative 2016; Taylor and Soni 2017). Likewise, Muslim teachers were influenced by the ongoing political environment after the Trojan Horse affair, which resulted in a noticeable chilling effect on their professional conduct. Another participant echoed a similar sentiment:

> *I have obviously liked the Britishness in me as I was brought up and bred in the UK. However, there is a sense of independence that I have liked. Obviously, a lot of other Yemenis would not have. But I think a big thing is education as well. So, because of the fact that someone's education, you feel more empowered, that you have more of a voice and that you are able to travel and work. And that gives us a lot of freedom, especially as a woman, you can go abroad, and you can find a job a well-paid job, and you can be respected in that field.* (Laila)

The ethnic heritage of Laila prompted her to juxtapose the conditions in the UK with those of her peers in Yemen. In the above narrative, personal freedoms come to the fore as a dominant feature that defines Britishness. Laila pointed out that the education she received in England as a Muslim woman was crucial in her ability to access these individual freedoms compared to her peers in Yemen. What stands out in Laila's account is the significant role that ethnic, religious, and gender identities play a key role in shaping her perception of Britishness (Crenshaw 2013; McCall 2005). While the following narrative emphasises the impact of different identities and roles on the construction of Britishness, it also discusses Britishness through the value of respecting differences:

> *I find it difficult to define being British. What is being British? I describe myself as British, but I am ethnically Pakistani; I am Bradfordian, I am a woman, I am a single mom, I am a math teacher, and to some degree, I am pretty academic. I wear so many hats. I have many different identities. So, I cannot say that to be British is to believe in the Queen and Country because, actually, some people are not loyalists. Is it being British to queue in a line at the post office? Is it being British to drink tea with your pinkie? I do not know. In my mind being British is or should be respecting differences.* (Sana)

Sana suggests that delineating Britishness is a complex undertaking that requires a nuanced appreciation of the diverse factors that inform national identity (Farrell 2016; Vadher and Barrett 2009). In line with this assertion, the influence of various identities and roles on Sana's self-perception is evident. However, Sana questioned the typical portrayal of Britishness based on national symbols and cultural habits, including references to the royal family, tea drinking, and queuing (Commission for Racial Equality 2005). In opposition to Sana's perspective, it is noted in the literature that some teachers tend to associate cultural symbols with Britishness, regarding them as essential components of British identity (Elton-Chalcraft et al. 2017; Struthers 2016). Furthermore, Ofsted has criticised school posters depicting symbols such as the Queen, Shakespeare, and teacups under the umbrella of British values for merely reflecting a superficial representation of

shared values (Vincent 2019). Ultimately, the notion of valuing diversity is outlined in Sana's discourse as a central tenet that serves as the foundation of Britishness.

Likewise, Farhan associated Britishness with the following values: "*Being respectful to others, having mutual respect for the people, having tolerance in the respect that, and following the regulations and the law*". Unlike the participants above, Farhan also linked civic responsibilities like obeying rules with the concept of Britishness. Siddique also shared a similar tendency, stating, "*I think obeying the rule of law, respecting people of other beliefs, these kinds of things"*. Tariq similarly reflects this sentiment: "*The following procedure is one of the things that I think the Brits do really well: the values that they hold. They follow certain things in certain ways and have discipline and resilience*". This reflection is intriguing as it attributes highly individual features, like possessing discipline, to the broader collective realm of national identity.

Consequently, the British values outlined by the Department for Education, encompassing principles such as "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" (DfE 2012, p. 9) resonates closely with the participants' conceptualisations of Britishness. This signifies the influence of prevailing educational policies and discourses regarding promoting FBVs on the participants' perceptions. This underscores the entailment of contextualising teacher professional identity within historical frameworks (Zembylas and Chubbuck 2018). A nuanced grasp of the dynamic evolution of teacher professional identity necessitates a holistic comprehension of the contemporary political landscape, educational policies, and the essence of teacher professionalism (Zembylas and Chubbuck 2018).

Considering the participants' strong affinity with Britishness as well as their statements that they have internalised the aforementioned values in their lives, suggests that these values play a key role in providing some answer to their existential questions (Giddens 1991). Throughout this article, the findings clearly emphasise that interpreting the participants' existential concerns or professional identity solely through their religious or ethnic affiliations is inadequate; rather, it underscores the necessity of recognition of the active and significant role of their British identity in this contextual exploration. The fear of potentially labelling as 'illiberal' or 'extremist' often suppresses Muslim teachers' professional identities and professional attitudes, leading to complexities and problems in their interactions with professional institutions and individuals, as evidenced in the Trojan Horse affair. Consequently, it results in violating their 'protective cocoon' and weakening their ontological security (Giddens 1991). It is clear that Muslim teachers in this study, in contrast to portrayals in media and political rhetoric, have cultivated a proud and self-aware comprehension of Britishness that harmonises with their religious identity. This cohesive understanding of national identity affords them an ontologically secure environment within educational settings. However, the dubiousness surrounding their Britishness can swiftly destabilise their ontological security, particularly during times of crisis (Croft 2012; Giddens 1991).

4.3. The Interplay of British Values and Teacher Professional Identity

The Teachers' Standards 2012 and the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 introduced a novel dimension to teacher professionalism in Britain: the requirement for teachers to be actively involved in the war on terrorism (Miller 2010). The Teachers' Standards 2012, allegedly drafted with a clear assimilationist philosophy aimed at maintaining the existing status quo (Smith 2013), were formulated without adequate "professional dialogue" (Elton-Chalcraft et al. 2017, p. 30), which then significantly contributed to altering the essence of teacher professional identity (Revell and Bryan 2016). This research has revealed a general categorisation of the impact of promoting FBVs on Muslim teachers' professional identity into two main groups: teachers who normalise FBV policy and discourse and those who adopt a critical perspective towards the policy. The subsequent quote illustrates the degree to which Aisha normalises the role of FBVs in her professional identity:

> *We have to teach British values PSHE once a week. I do not have a problem with it. To be honest, I do not think the British value values are designed specifically to target Muslims.*

> *I think if there is an idea of what harmonious Britain looks like, in theory, it is good. Then, when it is not doing what it is supposed to be doing, we have means to question it. However, if the values are distorted, or in practical lives when not being able to express any concerns, that is a problem. It is not a problem in theory.*

Aisha demonstrates a tendency to implement the policy of promoting FBVs without engaging in critical reflection or consideration. In this context, she relinquished her agency to some extent while interacting with the policy, thereby mitigating any potential impacts that could have influenced her professional identity. This approach may be interpreted as maintaining the principle of 'professionalism' without compromising it. This can also be viewed as a kind of enactment strategy, representing an attempt to minimize to some degree the anticipated or unforeseen adverse impact of the policy (Ball et al. 2011). Nevertheless, while the concept of promoting British values may promise societal advancement, at least in theory, Aisha makes it clear that she will exercise her right to object in the case of employing FBVs beyond their intended purpose as it would undermine the proper execution of democratic processes. Yet Aisha challenged the claim that FBVs were aimed at the British Muslim community, despite the substantial evidence indicating that the introduction of FBVs was proposed as a response to the perceived 'Muslim threat' (Crawford 2017; Miah 2017; Thomas 2011; Vincent 2018). The next quote also echoes Aisha's perspective to some extent:

> *I do not think it (FBVs) hinders anything. I do not think it impacts us, sort of negatively in any way. These come from the central government. Our schools are responsible for suppressing any negative feelings people may have towards the country. I personally do not think that there is anything basically wrong with promoting good values. So, I think we, as teachers, are in the right setting to be able to promote positivity, which they describe as British fundamental British values. But students, when they go through the list of these values, they relate to it, understand it, and know its importance.* (Ali)

Herein, it is important to note that Ali provided a critical viewpoint on the Prevent strategy and articulated its adverse impact on his professional identity while exploring the link between the Prevent duty and professional identity for my PhD research (Dilek 2024). Ali's stance on the Prevent duty presents a paradoxical aspect when considered in conjunction with his approach to FBVs. This dilemma arises from Ali's emphasis on the pedagogical aspect of teaching 'good values' within the FBV policy text, rather than paying attention to the broader policy framework and its associated discourses. One could argue that the emphasis on instilling 'good values' has overshadowed several criticisms towards FBV policy, including overlooking the intricate nature of extremism and having a chilling effect on academic debate (Panjwani 2016). Through the promotion of FBVs, a model of the ideal teacher is essentially set out, and through disciplinary processes and surveillance, teachers are expected to conform their conduct to certain norms. Muslim teachers, in turn, strive to avoid deviating from these norms and being labelled as abnormal. It is at this point that these norms prepare the ground for teachers to engage in a process of normalising political discourse and educational policy (Foucault et al. 2007). On the other hand, some participants adopted a critical stance towards the FBVs without any hesitation:

> *While the Prevent policy explicitly excludes Muslims, fundamental British values implicitly exclude Muslims. British values are to put everybody under one kind of thought, that one thing that they believe in. I do not think it was meant to unite people. It is like, oh, look, you have to be like me. Do you understand it is almost like that? No, I do not have to. I have to respect everybody, of course, but I do not have to be like you. This is calling people to think one way is right.* (Mariam)

Mariam holds the perspective that, unlike Aisha's stance, the FBVs policy indirectly singles out the British Muslim community. Indeed, it has been noted that this policy is an attempt to break down the resistance of young British Muslims in particular to embrace British values (Cameron 2011; Miah 2017; Thomas 2011; Vincent 2018). Mariam has openly addressed the adverse impact of the Prevent duty on both her personal and professional

life and the broader British Muslim community. Mariam argues that the British values policy, founded on the principle of actively advocating for a singular way of life, lacks the capacity to feature the shared values for the diverse British society. In this regard, she contends that this idea does not serve a unifying function but rather exacerbates divisions within society. The underlying philosophy of FBVs is rooted in the idea of muscular liberalism or what Modood (2012) referred to as "a form of liberal perfectionism" (p. 143). This philosophy is characterised by a proactive and assertive defence of secular liberal values and active promotion of these values to individuals who may not adhere to them, which stands in contrast to tolerance-based liberalism (Gray 2000; Revell and Bryan 2018; Triadafilopoulos 2011). While Mariam did not make the values themselves a subject of discussion, her focus lay on the objectives and consequences of the policy, drawing attention to its impact on the British Muslim community and therefore on her professional identity. The next observation reveals the extent to which participant self-censor their freedom of expression within the school due to the legal obligation to promote the FBVs:

> *I think it (FBVs) makes me very insular. I think it makes me very, very closed from the teaching world. I think I become very reserved. I spend very little time in the staff room; I do not interact with staff as much; I keep myself to myself. Because I know people ask questions sometimes, it can be awkward. If people do not understand, it makes it very, very difficult for us.* (Tariq)

Tariq stated that his reluctance to openly express his opinions during discussions with colleagues, fearing being misunderstood. He noted that this led him to intentionally isolate himself within the school environment. It is important to note that Tariq's working environment with fewer ethnically diverse teachers and predominantly white students also paved the way for his professional identity to be under constant surveillance. Following the Trojan Horse affair, schools with a substantial Muslim student and teacher population in England were often rendered as distinct from mainstream Britishness (Martin 2019) whereby the failure of Muslim teachers to uphold the shared values known as British values was frequently emphasised (Holmwood and O'Toole 2018). To avoid being exposed to such an accusation, Tariq opts to maintain a reserved stance within the school environment, limiting interactions and thereby safeguarding his professionalism from potential suspicion or scrutiny.

The findings of this section identified a degree of uncertainty regarding the participants' experiences: those who normalised the legal requirement to promote FBVs and those who critically analysed FBVs. The teachers in the first group approached the FBV policy with an uncritical perspective, focusing primarily on the values themselves. They indicated that the interaction between FBVs and their professional identity formation is significantly constrained. However, they expressed concerns that discussing these values could lead to questioning their Britishness, sense of belonging, and professionalism due to their Muslim identity. The emotion of 'fear' plays a pivotal role in the professional identity of Muslim teachers in this group. These fears and anxieties erode the trust relationships of Muslim teachers with the professionals and institutions they collaborate with, making it challenging for them to establish their ontological security (Giddens 1991). By normalising FBVs, Muslim teachers mitigate external threats such as stigmatisation, ostracism, or potential job loss, ensuring that external factors do not jeopardise their protective cocoon and aiming to uphold their ontological security (Giddens 1991).

Teachers in the second group, on the other hand, depicted how the discourse surrounding FBVs negatively impacts their professional identity formation with a more critical perspective. Teachers in this group highlighted how FBVs hindered constructive academic discussions and suppressed their professional identity. Teachers in the second group appear to be more prominently marked by a sense of ontological insecurity. Their religious identity serves as a foundation for addressing the existential questions that Muslim teachers encounter (Giddens 1991). However, these teachers are cognisant of the political discourse surrounding their religious identity. In their professional lives, their religious identities are targeted, prompting them to adopt a more reserved approach, intensifying

the chilling effect. This results in teachers suspending typical daily professional routines, such as engaging in discussions with students or participating in debates with colleagues (Giddens 1991). Hence, similar to the teachers in the first group, the relationships of these teachers with professionals and organisations transition from a secure footing to a more problematic terrain (Giddens 1991). British values, which have secured its position in the education system through the Prevent duty, significantly complicate the dynamics of relationships between teachers and their students, as well as between teachers and educational institutions, which is especially evident during the implementation of the Prevent duty (Lewis 2020; Walker 2018). It does this by silencing certain voices in classroom discussions and creating a chilling effect, particularly in the name of promoting British values (Taylor and Soni 2017; Walker 2018). The prevailing political atmosphere renders it difficult for Muslim teachers to cultivate a positive sense of well-being and integrity (Giddens 1991). For these reasons, teachers in the second group appear to be more prominently marked by a sense of ontological insecurity (Giddens 1991; Laing 1990).

5. Conclusions

This research examines a relatively underexplored facet of teacher professional identity: the interplay between politics/policy and professional identity. Specifically, it investigates the influence of British values policy on the professional identities of Muslim teachers. The findings of this research are centred around three interrelated tendencies. Firstly, Muslim teachers identify themselves as British, demonstrating that British and Muslim identities can coexist harmoniously. They frequently emphasised their pride in being British and stated that they had successfully integrated into the country. Although the participants were not queried about their self-identification as British, they felt the need to articulate such statements. At this point, it should be noted that this emphasis on Britishness is closely intertwined with the notion of professionalism. A commitment to national identity that is not manifested at a minimum level in a public setting may inherently prompt scrutiny regarding their professionalism, given the surveillance of teacher professional standards. Put differently, Britishness represents a pivotal criterion essential for optimal professional performance, particularly for those who are perceived to lack it. Secondly, the interpretation that participants assigned to Britishness was shaped by the British values delineated in the existing teacher's professional standards, elucidating Britishness through values which have universal characteristics. This demonstrates the key role of current teacher standards in the construction of professional identity, but also professional identity needs to be considered in its historical context.

Finally, the obligation to promote FBVs has engendered a degree of ambivalence in the professional identity formation of Muslim teachers, rooted in their quest for ontological security. While some of the participants tended to normalise the discussions concerning FBVs, others adopted a critical stance, noting the degree to which FBVs adversely impacted their professional identities. The underlying reason for the inclination towards normalisation is that the first group of teachers did not delve into the policy itself and the discourses shaping the policy; rather, they conducted the debate by means of 'values'. Any discussion of values would have implied that Muslim teachers' professionalism could easily have been subject to scrutiny. To avoid this potential issue, they refrained from engaging in discussions regarding values or the policy itself, instead stating their adherence to professional conduct in their practice. The second group, on the contrary, approached the debate by scrutinising the policy itself, illustrating how the policy specifically targeted their religious identities and generated a chilling effect within the classroom. The extent to which professional identity has been falsified by the enactment of the FBV policy has become even more evident within this group.

Regarding the theory of ontological security, just as Britishness is a source of ontological security that provides answers to existential questions for the majority within the society/profession, Muslim teachers also see Britishness and want Britishness to be seen as a source of solutions to existential questions rather than an entity that layers existen-

tial problems in their pursuit of ontological security. However, Muslim teachers need to continuously declare their proud embrace of this collective identity to exist within an ontologically secure sphere, thereby endeavouring to construct a national identity that is not doubted and unquestioned. In this way, the groundwork establishes the necessary conditions for attaining absolute professionalism demanded within the educational context. The findings revealed that the sentiment of 'fear' is a dominant emotion in the formation of Muslim teachers' professional identity rather than a sense of trust, which typically underpins ontological security. This fear manifests in various forms, such as the fear of being labelled as illiberal, sometimes as the fear of being unprofessional, ultimately this fear implicitly implies the potential job loss.

Furthermore, this fear prevents the proper functioning of certain professional routines, such as conducting an academic discussion within the school. These discussions target another collective sphere, that is their religious identities where Muslim teachers find answers to their existential problems. This climate of fear ultimately undermines Muslim teachers' trust in institutions, colleagues, and school leaders, while simultaneously eroding the trust placed in Muslim teachers. In conclusion, the construction of professional identities of Muslim teachers under the current teachers' standards is inextricably linked with British identity and values, that is the performing of professionalism requires the constant demonstration of Britishness and the embodiment of British values by teachers from the suspect community. This dynamic engenders a climate of fear, thereby discouraging any potential criticism of the policy in the public sphere. Furthermore, the debates surrounding FBVs place Muslim teachers in this study in a fragile position, with the majority experiencing ontological insecurity, while others remain in a state of neither ontological security nor insecurity.

Funding: This research was funded by the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Education.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This research was approved by the University of Huddersfield's School of Education and Professional Development Research Integrity and Ethics Committee.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study.

Data Availability Statement: The data are not publicly available due to containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the design of this study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

References

Abbas, Tahir. 2008. Muslim Minorities in Britain: Integration, Multiculturalism and Radicalism in the Post-7/7 Period. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28: 287–300. [CrossRef]

Abbas, Tahir, Imran Awan, and Jonathan Marsden. 2021. Pushed to the edge: The consequences of the 'Prevent Duty' in de-radicalising pre-crime thought among British Muslim university students. *Race Ethnicity and Education* 26: 719–34. [CrossRef]

Akkerman, Sanne F., and Paulien C. Meijer. 2011. A dialogical approach to conceptualizing teacher identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 27: 308–19. [CrossRef]

Asbali, Nadeine. 2024. Michaela school will keep its prayer ban—But as a Muslim teacher I know it doesn't have to be this way. *The Guardian*, April 16.

Ball, Stephen J., Meg Maguire, and Annette Braun. 2011. *How Schools Do Policy*. London: Routledge.

Beijaard, Douwe, Paulien C. Meijer, and Nico Verloop. 2004. Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 20: 107–28. [CrossRef]

Cameron, David. 2011. PM's speech at Munich Security Conference. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference (accessed on 25 February 2024).

Cantle, Ted. 2012. *Interculturalism: The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Choudhury, Tufyal. 2007. *The Role of Muslim Identity Politics in Radicalisation*; London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

Commission for Racial Equality. 2005. *Citizenship and Belonging: What Is Britishness*. London: ETHNOS Research and Consultancy.

Crawford, Claire E. 2017. Promoting 'fundamental British values' in schools: A critical race perspective. *Curriculum Perspectives* 37: 197–204. [CrossRef]

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 2013. Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. In *Feminist Legal Theories*. Edited by Karen Maschke. London: Routledge, pp. 23–51.
Croft, Stuart. 2012. *Securitizing Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
DfE. 2012. *Teachers' Standards Guidance for School Leaders, School Staff and Governing Bodies*; Edited by Department for Education. London: Department for Education.
Dilek, Muzaffer Can. 2024. *Securitisation of Education and Teacher Professional Identity: Muslim Teachers in England*. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield.
Elton-Chalcraft, Sally, Vini Lander, Lynn Revell, Diane Warner, and Linda Whitworth. 2017. To promote, or not to promote fundamental British values? Teachers' standards, diversity and teacher education. *British Educational Research Journal* 43: 29–48. [CrossRef]
Farrell, Francis. 2016. 'Why all of a sudden do we need to teach fundamental British values?' A critical investigation of religious education student teacher positioning within a policy discourse of discipline and control. *Journal of Education for Teaching* 42: 280–97. [CrossRef]
Farrell, Francis, and Vini Lander. 2019. "We're not British values teachers are we?": Muslim teachers' subjectivity and the governmentality of unease. *Educational Review* 71: 466–82. [CrossRef]
Fazakarley, Jed. 2017. *Muslim Communities in England 1962–90: Multiculturalism and Political Identity*. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer.
Foucault, Michel, Michel Senellart, and Arnold Ira Davidson. 2007. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977–78*. Michel Foucault: Lectures at the Collège de France. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Frampton, Martyn, David Goodhart, and Khalid Mahmood. 2016. *Unsettled Belonging: A Survey of Britain's Muslim Communities*. London: Policy Exchange.
Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Gray, John. 2000. *The Two Faces of Liberalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Holmwood, John, and Layla Aitlhadj. 2022. *The People's Review of Prevent*. Available online: https://peoplesreviewofprevent.org/main-report/ (accessed on 7 October 2024).
Holmwood, John, and Therese O'Toole. 2018. *Countering Extremism in British Schools? The Truth About the Birmingham Trojan Horse Affair*, 1st ed. Bristol: Policy Press.
Home Office. 2001. *Community Cohesion in Britain: A Report of the Independent Review Team*; Edited by Home Office. London: Home Office.
Home Office. 2015. *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015*. London: The Stationery Office (TSO).
Home Office. 2024. *New Definition of Extremism (2024)*; Edited by Home Office. London: Home Office.
Hopkins, Peter, and Richard Gale. 2009. Islamophobia in the Construction of British Muslim Identity Politics. In *Muslims in Britain*. Edited by Hopkins Peter, Peter Hopkins, Richard Gale and Gale Richard. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 210–27.
Ipsos Mori. 2016. *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*. London: Ipsos MORI.
Keddie, Amanda. 2014. The politics of Britishness: Multiculturalism, schooling and social cohesion. *British Educational Research Journal* 40: 539–54. [CrossRef]
Kinnvall, Catarina. 2006. *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India: The Search for Ontological Security*. London: Routledge.
Kundnani, Arun. 2007. *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
Laing, R. D. 1990. *The Divided Self, An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. London: Penguin Books.
Lewis, James. 2020. Enacting the Prevent Duty in secondary schools. In *The Prevent Duty in Education Impact, Enactment and Implications*. Edited by Joel Busher and Lee Jerome. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer International Publishing AG, pp. 117–37.
Martin, Thomas. 2019. *Counter-Radicalisation Policy and the Securing of British Identity: The Politics of Prevent*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Maylor, Uvanney. 2016. 'I'd worry about how to teach it': British values in English classrooms. *Journal of Education for Teaching* 42: 314–28. [CrossRef]
McCall, Leslie. 2005. The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30: 1771–800. [CrossRef]
MEND. 2024. Politicising Dissent—MEND Calls for Rejection of Gove's New Extremist Definition. Available online: https://www.mend.org.uk/mend-calls-for-rejection-of-goves-new-extremist-definition/ (accessed on 7 October 2024).
Miah, Shamim. 2017. *Muslims, Schooling and Security: Trojan Horse, Prevent and Racial Politics*, 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Miah, Shamim, Pete Sanderson, and Paul Thomas. 2020. *'Race,' Space and Multiculturalism in Northern England: The (M62) Corridor of Uncertainty*. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer.
Miller, J. 2010. The Contribution of Local Authorities and their Sacres to Promoting Community Cohesion through Religious Education. In *Religious Education and Social and Community Cohesion: An Exploration of Challenges and Opportunities*. Edited by Michael Grimmitt. Essex: McCrimmons, pp. 232–45.
Modood, Tariq. 1992. *Not Easy Being British: Colour, Culture and Citizenship*. London: Runnymede Trust and Trentham Stoke-on-Trent.
Modood, Tariq. 2003. New Forms of Britishness: Post-Immigration Ethnicity and Hybridity in Britain. In *Identity and Integration Migrants in Western Europe*. Edited by Bernhard Peters and Rosemarie Sackmann. London: Routledge, pp. 77–91.
Modood, T. 2012. 2011 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture: Is There a Crisis of Secularism in Western Europe? *Sociology of Religion* 73: 130–49. [CrossRef]
Modood, Tariq. 2013. *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity.

Mythen, Gabe, Sandra Walklate, and Fatima Khan. 2009. 'I'm a Muslim, but I'm not a Terrorist': Victimization, Risky Identities and the Performance of Safety. *The British Journal of Criminology* 49: 736–54. [CrossRef]
Open Society Justice Initiative. 2016. *Eroding Trust: The UK's PREVENT Counter-Extremism Strategy in Health and Education*. New York: Open Society Justice Initiative.
O'Toole, Therese. 2019. Governing and contesting marginality: Muslims and urban governance in the UK. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47: 2497–515. [CrossRef]
Panjwani, Farid. 2016. Towards an overlapping consensus: Muslim teachers' views on fundamental British values. *Journal of Education for Teaching* 42: 329–40. [CrossRef]
Parekh, Bhikhu C. 2000. *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*. London: Profile Books.
Parekh, Bhikhu. 2011. Defining British National Identity. *The Political Quarterly* 80: S251–S62. [CrossRef]
Poynting, Scott, and Victoria Mason. 2008. The New Integrationism, the State and Islamophobia: Retreat from multiculturalism in Australia. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 36: 230–46. [CrossRef]
Quraishi, Muzammil. 2008. Researching Muslim Prisoners. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11: 453–67. [CrossRef]
Ramadan, Tariq. 2009. *What I Believe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Revell, Lynn, and Hazel Bryan. 2016. Calibrating fundamental British values: How head teachers are approaching appraisal in the light of the Teachers' Standards 2012, Prevent and the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, 2015. *Journal of Education for Teaching* 42: 341–53. [CrossRef]
Revell, Lynn, and Hazel Bryan. 2018. *Fundamental British Values in Education: Radicalisation, National Identity and Britishness*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.
Sachs, Judyth. 2005. Teacher education and the development of professional identity: Learning to be a teacher. In *Connecting policy and practice: Challenges for Teaching and Learning in Schools and Universities*. Edited by Michaell Kompf and Pam Denicolo. Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, pp. 5–21.
Shazhadi, Ambreen, Hannah Smithson, Richard McHugh, and Shoba Arun. 2017. 'Society does treat me differently and that is a shame': Understandings and feelings of Britishness amongst visibly observant young Muslims. *Journal of Youth Studies* 21: 607–19. [CrossRef]
Smith, Heather Jane. 2013. A critique of the teaching standards in England (1984–2012): Discourses of equality and maintaining the status quo. *Journal of Education Policy* 28: 427–48. [CrossRef]
Smith, Heather Jane. 2016. Britishness as racist nativism: A case of the unnamed 'other'. *Journal of Education for Teaching* 42: 298–313. [CrossRef]
Smith, Jonathan A., Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin. 2009. *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. London and Los Angeles: SAGE.
Struthers, Alison E. C. 2016. Teaching British Values in Our Schools. *Social & Legal Studies* 26: 89–110. [CrossRef]
Taylor, Laura, and Anita Soni. 2017. Preventing radicalisation: A systematic review of literature considering the lived experiences of the UK's Prevent strategy in educational settings. *Pastoral Care in Education* 35: 241–52. [CrossRef]
Thomas, Paul. 2011. *Youth, Multiculturalism and Community Cohesion*. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer.
Thomas, Paul, and Pete Sanderson. 2011. Unwilling citizens? Muslim young people and national identity. *Sociology* 45: 1028–44. [CrossRef]
Triadafilopoulos, Triadafilos. 2011. Illiberal means to liberal ends? Understanding recent immigrant integration policies in Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37: 861–80. [CrossRef]
Uberoi, Varun, and Tariq Modood. 2010. Who doesn't feel British? Divisions over Muslims. *Parliamentary Affairs* 63: 302–20. [CrossRef]
Uberoi, Varun, and Tariq Modood. 2012. Inclusive Britishness: A Multiculturalist Advance. *Political Studies* 61: 23–41. [CrossRef]
Vadher, Kiren, and Martyn Barrett. 2009. Boundaries of Britishness in British Indian and Pakistani young adults. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 19: 442–58. [CrossRef]
Vincent, Carol. 2018. Civic virtue and values teaching in a 'post-secular' world. *Theory and Research in Education* 16: 226–43. [CrossRef]
Vincent, Carol. 2019. Cohesion, citizenship and coherence: Schools' responses to the British values policy. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 40: 17–32. [CrossRef]
Walker, Rob Faure. 2018. Counter-Terrorism in the Classroom. In *Violent Extremism in the 21st Century: International Perspectives*. Edited by Gwynyth Overland, Arnfinn J. Andersen, Kristin Engh Førde, Kjetil Grødum and Joseph Salomonse. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 98–125.
Zembylas, Michalinos, and Sharon Chubbuck. 2018. Conceptualizing 'teacher identity': A political approach. In *Research on Teacher Identity Mapping Challenges and Innovations*. Edited by Paul A Schutz, Ji Hong and Dionne Cross Francis. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 183–93.

religions

MDPI

Article

Negotiating *Wasatiyyah*: Soft Securitization and Civic Activism in Ukraine

Oleg Yarosh

The Department of the Study of Religion, Aarhus University, 8000 C Aarhus, Denmark; oleg.yarosh@cas.au.dk

Abstract: This article addresses religious governance in Ukraine in relation to local Muslim organizations associated with the Council of European Muslims (CEM), formerly known as the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE). Specifically, it focuses on the Council of Ukrainian Muslims (CUM), formerly known as *Alraid*, and the Spiritual Administrations of Ukrainian Muslims *Ummah* (SAUM *Ummah*). Addressing the policymaking aspect of securitization, the article concerns state policies in Ukraine as 'soft securitization', meaning the execution of limited interventions and restrictions on the activities of Muslim organizations in Ukraine, particularly those at the focus of this article and labeled as 'Islamist'. The FIOE in Europe and *Alraid* in Ukraine developed a response to these policies, informed by the wasatiyyah (moderation) post-Islamist ideology. The article analyzes how the wasatiyyah ideology was appropriated and negotiated in the discourse of these Ukrainian organizations, and how it informed their civic activism.

Keywords: securitization; moderation; post-Islamism; mobilization; framing; activism; Ukraine

1. Introduction

Historically, Islam in the Ukraine has mainly/predominantly existed as a minority religion. There are no reliable data on the Muslim population in Ukraine today. Estimates are usually based on the all-Ukrainian population census from 2001, which demonstrates the ethnic composition of Ukrainian society 23 years ago. Therefore, the Muslim population is usually approximated at 600,000 (as of 2013), before the annexation of Crimea, with Crimean Tatars being the largest Muslim ethnic group (Yarosh and Yakubovych 2021).

Today, Islam in Ukraine is represented by organizations with different ideological and institutional background with a significant influence of transnational Muslim networks (Yarosh 2022). Following the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the majority of Muslims stayed in Russian-controlled areas—the regions with the largest Muslim population. Forced migration from these regions led to an increase in Muslim populations in Central and Western Ukraine, with around 30,000 Crimean Tatars relocating there.

Numerous publications have addressed the contemporary activities of Muslim organizations, including works by Muratova (2009), Brylov (2016), Yakubovych et al. (2018), Shestopalets (2021), and Yarosh (2022), among others. Denys Shestopalets discusses *wasatiyyah*[1] discourses in Ukraine (Shestopalets 2014, 2015) and mutual securitization of Muslim organizations in Ukraine (Shestopalets 2021). My recent article addresses *wasatiyyah*-driven activism in wartime Ukraine and touches upon its ideological keystones (Yarosh 2024). However, the peculiarities of *wasatiyyah* as an ideological framework for

Muslim civic activism in Ukraine, along with the development of its discourse, have not yet been sufficiently explored.

The development of Islamic institutions and the Muslim community in Ukraine is informed by the liberal legislation on freedom of religion and mostly nonrestrictive politics towards Muslim organizations by Ukrainian State after 1991.

However, a few isolated cases could be reported concerning limited interventions and restrictions on the activities of Muslim organizations in Ukraine (Yarosh 2022). There were instances of searches in mosques, confiscations of literature, and the initiation of criminal cases, and implementing other limited interventions and restrictions on the activities of Muslim organizations, especially those identified as 'Islamist'[2]. Much more widespread was the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media, especially in local media in Crimea, up until 2014. However, these policies have gradually changed over the past decade, moving towards greater recognition of Islam and Muslims in Ukraine, not least owing to Muslim civic activism (Yarosh 2022).

In reaction to these policies, organizations such as the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine '*Ummah*' (SAUM *Ummah*) and the Council of Muslims of Ukraine (CMU), which are associated with the all-European association, Council of European Muslims (CEM), formerly known as Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) have developed a strategy influenced by the moderation (*wasatiyyah*) ideology promoted by CEM and other related Islamic institutions, such as the European Council for Fatwa and Research. This strategy is aimed at advancing their agenda in the public sphere and fostering their legitimization and social inclusion.

I have chosen these Islamic organizations because the ideology and activities of Islamic organizations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Western countries have consistently sparked significant interest in academia (Vidino 2010; Bakker and Meijer 2013; Jäger and Thiele 2024), to name just a few. More recently, moderation (*wasatiyyah*) ideology was critically addressed by Bergeaud-Blackler (2023) that itself became on object of critical discussions, accusing it of methodological weaknesses and empirical inaccuracies and poorly argued conclusions (Dazey 2024; Crone 2024). Bergeaud-Blackler's main argument is that the Muslim Brotherhood movement operates as a system of action that advances through plans and declarations, aiming for the gradual acclimatization of the world to sharia law (171). Its ideology of moderation, she argues, provides the tactical advantage of appearing moderate and tolerant while serving to optimize this system of action (120). In other words, she views it not as a genuine integration strategy designed to align with Western sociocultural and political realities, but as an ideological 'camouflage' for a global Islamization agenda.

I would argue that the post-Islamist ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood has undergone significant contextualization and evolution, depending on the sociocultural and political realities of specific countries. This is particularly evident in Muslim-minority countries like Ukraine, where the concept of moderation evolved from a strategy to counter securitization to one focused on promoting civic activism.

Therefore, the article utilizes two key concepts, namely securitization and *wasatiyyah*.

Securitization theory in general explains how security actors mobilize their audience by leading a security discourse in order to become capable of implementing extraordinary measures. The understanding of securitization of Islam in Ukraine in this article goes beyond the concept of 'speech acts' (Waever 1995; Buzan et al. 1998; Buzan and Hansen 2009). It is regarded here more as a policymaking process in response to a constructed security threat in line with Balzacq (2011) and Cesari (2012), which encompasses designing Islam

and Muslims as a security problem and implementing different techniques of securitization. Thierry Balzacq argues, that

> *Given the thickness of security programs, in which discourses and ideologies are increasingly hard to disentangle, and differences between securitizing actors and audiences are blurred, there is growing evidence that some manifestations of securitization might best be understood by focusing on the nature and functions of policy tools used by agents/agencies to cope with public problems, defined as threats*. (Balzacq 2011)

The securitization process frames the issue as an existential threat that demands immediate and decisive action, often reshaping the political landscape in the process. Thus securitized issues "are moved from normal to emergency politics. They are assigned an urgency that requires extraordinary strategies to eliminate the threat" (Fox and Akbaba 2015, p. 176). This shift assigns these issues a heightened sense of urgency, often justifying the adoption of extraordinary measures and strategies to address the perceived threat.

I would argue that while securitization policy generally refers to "exceptional measures and procedures outside the rule of law, justified by emergency situations that threaten the survival of a political community" (Cesari 2012, p. 432), a more nuanced approach is required in situations where the threat, whether real or constructed, is not so urgent or grave as to be considered aiming at the political community. In Ukraine, Islam and Muslims are not perceived as a political threat. In this context, I could view these securitizing policies as a misuse or an excessive application of conventional restrictive measures, which I would term 'soft securitization', in contrast to 'hard securitization' that employs exceptional or specifically designed measures to target Muslim communities. I do not incorporate the concept of 'Islamophobia' in my research because it would require broadening the scope of this article to include societal attitudes toward Islam and Muslims.

Denys Shestopalets assumes that in Ukraine, Muslim organizations act as securitizing actors themselves. He rightly claims that the leader of one of the largest Muslim organizations, *Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine* (SAUM), Shaykh Tamim "in fact securitized the current plurality of Islamic authority in Ukraine and called upon the state authorities to introduce stricter legal regulations that would allow certain Islamic organizations to be banned altogether" (Shestopalets 2021, p. 19). On the other side, other Muslim organizations in Ukraine "have resorted to their own types of securitization in order to undermine their ideological opponent and achieve specific institutional objectives" (ibid., 20). This means that leading Muslim organizations in Ukraine, such as the *Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine* (SAUM), the *Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine 'Ummah'* (SAUM *Ummah*), and the Council of Muslims of Ukraine (CMU), exchange accusations of disloyalty to the state. While the former accuses its opponents of being religious extremists, the latter responds with allegations of being pro-Russian.

The Quranic term *ummatan wasatan* (2: 143) as a best, chosen, and moderate community that stands for Muslim community was elaborated into a concept that provide "numerous aspects of holding to the 'middle ground' in all doctrinal and ritual as well as in socio-economic and political issues of the Islamic religious teaching" (Shestopalets 2015, p. 113). Shestopalets argues that

> *Moreover, it has provided the ideological background for the so called wasativyyah movement, or a school of thought, which is represented by a number of separate theologians and religious thinkers who promote the image of Islam as first and foremost a religion of moderation. This position is clearly founded on the reading of ummatan wasatan as 'a community of the middle path', or the one that avoids extremes*. (ibid.)

Yusuf al-Qaradawi (d. 2022), a prominent Muslim scholar and a former head of the *International Union of Muslim Scholars* and the *European Council for Fatwa and Research*, promoted in many of his works the middle way approach (*manhaj wasat*). In the mid-1990s, the *Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe* sought to address Muslim European concerns, selecting al-Qaradawi as the ideal leader for a new panel, because of his esteemed position as a Sunni juristic authority, pragmatic social views, Islamist credentials, and interest in issues affecting Muslim minorities. Al-Qaradawi's leadership shaped the Council's ideology and methodology, intertwining with his juristic theories. Since then, he has systematized, popularized, and institutionalized *wasatiyyah* as a distinct sociojuristic approach, emphasizing moderation and balance in Islamic jurisprudence (Shavit and Spengler 2017, p. 365). He called for "preaching Islam by gradualist and gentle means" as the primary objectives of a *wasati* renewal of Islamic law (ibid., p. 366).

Shestopalets analyzes al-Qaradawi's pamphlet, *al-Wasatiyya in Islam and its stages* (2011), where he outlines thirty key principles of Islamic centrism. Al-Qaradawi here emphasizes Islam as a universal, all-encompassing faith grounded in the Qur'an and Sunna, advocating for the call to Islam (*da'wa*), the necessity of jihad to protect Islamic lands, and the central role of religious obligations and values in life. He also stresses the importance of prioritizing Islamic obligations to avoid focusing on minor issues at the expense of major ones. Al-Qaradawi advocates for *ijtihad* and internal renewal of Islam without adopting external ideologies. Simultaneously, al-Qaradawi acknowledges Western values, integrating democracy, minority rights, human rights, freedom, and justice into his *wasatiyyah* program (Shestopalets 2015, p. 114). Therefore, al-Qaradawi does not propose merging Islam with liberalism or other Western ideological currents. Instead, he examines how and to what extent Western values can be appropriated by Muslims in a minority context.

Michaelle L. Browers claims that *wasatiyyah* view of Islam focuses more on pragmatically balancing Islamist goals than on traditional textual interpretation. It relies on practical reasoning to apply religious values in diverse and changing circumstances, rather than solely on traditional learning (Browers 2010, p. 54). On the other hand, Emin Poljarevic views *wasatiyyah* as a nonviolent, democratically oriented Islamic social and political movement that emerged in the MENA region during the 1990s. He considers it an evolutionary byproduct of the area's intellectual, political, and religious discourses, often inspired by historical Islamic reformist movements (Poljarevic 2020, p. 201). Poljarevic contends that the *wasati* approach to politics is not focused on specific theological principles, allowing for a more rights-oriented political discourse among *wasati* circles (ibid., p. 203). Therefore, *wasatiyyah* ideology promotes societal agency of Islamic organizations.

In social movement theory, "framing processes have come to be regarded, alongside resource mobilization and political opportunity processes, as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements" (Benford and Snow 2010, p. 611).

David Snow argues that framing involves the construction of meaning to align with participants' values and broader societal concerns. This process shapes how problems are diagnosed, solutions are proposed, and participants are motivated to take action (Snow et al. 1986). Ideology provides the foundational beliefs and narratives from which movements draw, but framing allows these beliefs to be adapted to resonate with contemporary concerns. In particular, Islamic movements demonstrate how ideology is reframed to address both traditional religious goals and modern political contexts (Snow 2007). Framing is thus both influenced by ideology and a tool for shaping that ideology in response to social and political circumstances.

Shestopalets admits that the notion of *wasatiyyah* was highlighted in the *Alraid* monthly newspaper discourse from 2011 and started being "viewed as an ideological platform for the overall development of Islam in Ukraine" and was considered by its leadership as "the only way to integrate Muslims in the Ukrainian society without relinquishing their religious identity" (Shestopalets 2014, p. 163).

Building on these theoretical premises, this article focuses on how the *wasatiyyah* ideology was appropriated and negotiated in the discourse of these organizations and how it informed their civic activism. Additionally, it explores the consequences of these actions for promoting their agenda and facilitating public legitimization and social inclusion.

As previously mentioned, the article examines the *wasatiyyah* discourses of several Muslim organizations in Ukraine, with particular attention to their development and influence on the framing processes that inform their civic engagement. It is closely related to an earlier article of mine, *Muslim Organizations in Ukraine and the Challenges of Wartime: Moderation, Mobilization, and Resilience*, published in the edited volume *Minorities at War: Cultural Identity and Resilience in Ukraine*, edited by Elmira Muratova and Nadia Zasanska (Yarosh 2024). While the earlier article predominantly focuses on their discourses and civic activism during wartime, the current article offers a more nuanced analysis of the *wasatiyyah* movement in Ukraine.

2. State Politics Towards Muslim Organizations in Ukraine

Current Muslim milieu in Ukraine is characterized by pluralism of Muslim organizations and Islamic currents. This diversity manifests in the coexistence of local branches of transnational Islamic networks with culturally and ethnically rooted organizations that represent ethnoreligious minorities. Ukraine's Islamic landscape encompasses various madhabs (legal schools) and Muftiates, Spiritual Centers, Muslim civil and political organizations, and independent groups:

1. Muftiates and Spiritual Centers.
    - Spiritual Administration of Ukrainian Muslims (SAUM). Established in 1992.
    - Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol (SAMRCCS). Established in 1992 and collaborated with the Russian authorities after the occupation of Crimea in 2014.
    - Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (SAMARC). Established in 2017 in Kyiv and includes Crimean Tatar IDPs.
    - Spiritual Center of Ukrainian Muslims. Established in 1995 in Donetsk. Currently collaborates with Russian authorities.
    - Muftiate of Kyiv. Established in 2007 and includes Volga Tatars living in Kyiv.
    - Spiritual Administration of Ukrainian Muslims "*Ummah*"—SAUM *Ummah*. Established in 2008.
    - *Ahmediye* Spiritual Center of Muslims of Ukraine. Registered in 2019 and represents a branch of the Turkish *Süleymancılar* community.
2. Muslim civic and political organizations.
    - All-Ukrainian Association of Civic Organizations "*Alraid*"/*Alraid* Association. Established in 1997 and in 2021 renamed to the Council of Ukrainian Muslims (CUM).
    - Ukrainian Muslimahs League established in 1997 under the umbrella of the association *Alraid* member organizations. Currently it includes 10 local women Muslim organizations.

- Association of Muslims of Ukraine (AMU). Established in 2014 and collaborates with SAMARC.

3. Independent Muslim organizations.
   - Salafi: *Sunnah* Islamic Organization. Registered in 2011; *Nedzat* Muslim community. Established in 2015.
   - Shi'a communities in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Kherson, Zaporizhzhya, and Lviv.

The 1991 Ukrainian Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, enacted prior to Ukraine's independence, aimed to promote tolerance and protect freedom of conscience and worship (Law 1991). It established a state authority to implement religious policy and required religious institutions to register as both religious and nonprofit organizations to gain legal status. Without this, they cannot own property, conduct banking, or publish materials. Registration is handled by the State Service for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience or regional authorities.

Some Islamic institutions, such as *Alraid*/CUM and the *Association of Muslims of Ukraine* (AMU), registered as public organizations due to simpler procedures. Public organizations, unlike religious ones, can be established by Ukrainian citizens, foreigners, or stateless persons legally residing in Ukraine. Religious organizations, however, must be founded by Ukrainian citizens, and foreigners can engage in religious activities only through an invitation by a registered organization. Notably, the law permits religious organizations to receive charitable donations, including from abroad. Amendments to the law since 1991 include the 2015 provision allowing registered religious organizations to establish educational institutions.

Nonetheless, I would argue that Ukrainian Muslims were securitized in a number of ways, particularly at the level of nonstate actors and state actors, such as mass media, especially after the 9/11 and the "Global War on Terror". The most common negative stereotype shared mostly in Russian and a number of Ukrainian media before the annexation of Crimea was that Islamic extremism had spread among Crimean Tatars:

> *Until now, the masters of the Crimean Mountains have been Islamist militants. Training camps for the "warriors of Islam" operate on the inaccessible plateaus of Ai-Petri and in the mountain forests of Belogorye. Here, Crimean Muslims undergo basic combat training and then go to fight—for example, on the side of the rebels in Syria. . . . By the most moderate estimates, at least 400 Muslim Crimean fighters are currently fighting on the side of the opposition in Syria. If Assad holds out, the bearded fighters will return home to the mountains of Taurida*. (Svpressa.ru 2013)

More recently, securitizing discourse by far right and conservative political and nongovernmental organizations in Ukraine has become more prevalent. They accuse the Ukrainian government of adopting a submissive stance, facilitating what they fear is the gradual Islamization of the country (Yarosh and Yakubovych 2021, p. 676).

Another example of this rhetoric is the information campaign highlighting the alleged threat of Islamism in Ukraine. In a series of anonymous articles, the *Alraid*/CUM has been depicted as a center for Islamic extremism, contributing to the narrative that Islam poses a danger to Ukrainian society; however, these claims remain unsubstantiated by credible evidence:

> *In Ukraine, conditions are actively being created for the development of Islamic religious–political radicalism, and the risk of terrorist acts is rapidly increasing. The promotion of aggressive fundamentalism in our country is being carried out by the civic organization "Alraid," which, in essence, is a covert branch of the Muslim Brotherhood*. (Ukrainu khotyat sdelat' khabom dlya islamskogo terrorizma 2020)

As mentioned earlier, Muslim organizations act as securitizing actors in Ukraine. While DUMU leadership accuses its opponents, in particular *Alraid*/CUM, of being religious extremists, they later claim that DUMU closely collaborates with Muslim organizations in Russia that undermine state security (Shestopalets 2021).

It would argue, that on the level of state-actors limited interventions, restrictions and repressive measures towards Muslim organization in Ukraine could be reported. It involves, for example, 'anti-terrorism' exercises that were held in Crimea before the annexation. The last one was held from June to October 2013 in the mountainous and forested areas across several districts of Crimea.

Another notable case took place in 2012 in Odessa, when the local Salafi organization, *The Straight Path*, led by Egyptian and Syrian nationals, was dissolved for distributing banned extremist literature, including *Violations of Monotheism*. Its leaders received suspended sentences for inciting religious hatred and possessing explosives. Similarly, Kyiv's *al-Ikhlas* was disbanded in 2014 for related activities (Yarosh 2022, p. 131).

In the most recent decade, a few of Muslim asylum seekers from the North Caucasus and Central Asia have been arrested and deported, endangering their lives. Additionally, foreign Muslim activists were denied entry or had their residence permits canceled.

Alraid/CUM has been targeted by the Ukrainian security services and SBU searched Islamic Cultural Centers (ICC) and private apartments of its members in Zhytomyr, Sumy, and recently in Kyiv in March 2018. They found some books that had been previously attributed to extremist literature, including *Violations of Monotheism*. *Alraid* representatives claimed that the evidence was planted by the security service, and the case itself was fabricated. In 2020, officers of the State Migration Service and the National Police conducted a mass document check of Muslims heading for Friday prayers at the mosque of the Islamic Cultural Center in Kyiv, associated with SAUM *Ummah*, resulting in the detention of 25 individuals.

More recently, in 2024, a document check was conducted by Ukraine's Security Service (SBU), the Migration Service, and the Border Guard at the Islamic Cultural Center in Vinnytsia, affiliated with *Alraid*/CUM. This occurred after Friday prayers, with authorities controlling the exit and verifying the documents of worshippers, and no detentions were reported. While the action was said to comply with Ukrainian law, it sparked concerns within the Muslim community and among human rights advocates.

I would argue that the restrictive measures and state interventions mentioned indicate that the state exercises securitization against several Muslim organizations. Therefore, despite state politics towards Muslim organizations in Ukraine gradually becoming less restrictive and aimed more at inclusion of Muslims into Ukrainian society in the recent decade (Yarosh 2022, p. 132), some repressive policies remain.

At the same time, there has been no political force in Ukraine, at least since 2014, which frames Islam and Muslims in Ukraine as a security threat or legitimates measures to counter it, although some marginal far-right organizations promote anti-Islamic rhetoric. In 2014, Crimean Tatars were recognized as an indigenous minority by the Ukrainian Parliament. In recent years, several governmental programs promoting Crimean Tatar culture, language, and history have been launched.

Key milestones include the 2019 regulation allowing headscarves in official photographs and President Zelenskyy's 2020 support for building a large mosque in Kyiv. President Zelenskyy also advocated for granting state recognition to religious holidays like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*, alongside Christian and Jewish observances. In 2023, Rustem Umerov, a Crimean Tatar and Muslim philanthropist, was appointed Minister of Defense. Since 2023 President Zelenskyy attends an *iftar* (fast break) with Muslim soldiers and clergy

during month of Ramadan. These developments highlight the increasing visibility and acceptance of Islam in Ukraine's public sphere.

3. *Wasatiyyah* and Muslim Activism

Alraid/CUM is one of the main targets of securitization policies and affiliated with the *Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe* (FIOE) network, which is now known as the *Council of European Muslims* (CEM). The FIOE was established in 1989 in Britain by a group of political refugees and students from the Middle East affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2007, it relocated its headquarters to Brussels. Today, it comprises over 500 Muslim organizations and associations operating in 28 European countries. Despite historical ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, the FIOE is more accurately described as a Post-Islamist activist organization, distinct from traditional Islamist groups whose primary goal is the establishment of an Islamic state. This network significantly contributes to public discourses where Muslim political identity is a central focus, extending its activities and influence beyond the conventional Islamist agenda, as noted by Poljarevic (2020, p. 201).

In 2008, the Spiritual Administration of Ukrainian Muslims *Ummah* (SAUM *Ummah*), affiliated with *Alraid*, was established. At the same time, it retained its organizational autonomy. I would argue that *Alraid*/CUM and SUAM *Ummah* have adopted *wasatiyyah* ideology and strategy in response to the securitization by the state and nonstate actors in Ukraine.

Shestopalets, who conducted an analysis of the printed discourse of *Alraid* in 2005–2014, claims that a moderation agenda appeared in its major media source, the newspaper *Alraid*, in 2011, and since 2012, the term *wasatiyyah* has been used (Shestopalets 2014, p. 163).

In 2012, then head of *Alraid*, Bassil Marrei, claimed that "Our association follows a course of moderation, representing a moderate Islam, and this was established from the beginning as a principle of operation. We practice a moderate approach in everything: in planning, in work, and in our relations with people" (Grishko 2012). Seyran Arifov, then head of revision commission of *Alraid*, emphasized in 2012 that

> *. . .by "moderation", we primarily mean a return to the original sources—the Quran and Sunnah. It's no secret that some Muslims adhere to only part of the religion, while neglecting the rest. For instance, they might focus on faith and forget about morality, strengthen worship but neglect the laws of Islam that regulate other spheres of our lives. Islam is universal and encompasses everything because it is a guidance from the Almighty*. (Arifov 2012)

Therefore, Arifov advocates for a proper and balanced understanding of Islamic principles avoiding extremes, which later became regarded as an ideological foundation for the strategy of societal inclusion. Shestopalets argued that Arifov has acted as the major 'voice' of *Alraid* in that regard (Shestopalets 2014, p. 163). It should be also noted that at that time, the concept of *wasatiyyah* in the discourse of *Alraid* had more theological connotations than in subsequent periods.

Alraid actively collaborated on that agenda with the international Center *Al-Wasatiyyah* in Kuwait founded in 2006, which promotes 'moderate' Islam worldwide. These connections grew particularly strong during 2012–2013. In March 2012, representatives of *Alraid* attended a seminar on moderation in Islam in Kuwait. In November 2012, Deputy Minister of *Islamic Affairs and Endowments of the State of Kuwait*, and head of the *International Center Al-Wasatiyyah*, Adel Al-Falah, visited Kyiv and Crimea. Notably, he claimed that there was no need to establish an *Al-Wasatiyyah* Center in Ukraine, as had been done in

Russia, since *Alraid* was already operating so effectively in promoting *wasatiyyah* there (Muslims.in.ua 2012).

In 2013, less than a year before the annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas, two important events promoting *wasatiyyah* took place in these regions. On June 4, in Simferopol, *Alraid* hosted a roundtable discussion on interfaith dialog in Crimea. Arifov presented a report on the topic of moderation in Islam, where he claimed that "truth, the best, and the correct are almost always found between extremes, which represent errors, delusions, and lies", referring to the extremes within Islam (Arraid.org 2013).

Furthermore, he also focused on the balance between a Muslim's civic and religious duties, emphasizing key principles that a Muslim should follow when living in a non-Muslim state: respecting authority and the rule of law as per the social contract to which they have voluntarily agreed, fulfilling duties towards society and the country, and showing the best attitude towards neighbors, even if they follow a different faith (ibid.).

SAUM *Ummah* is associated with *Alraid*/CUM and shares its *wasatiyyah* ideological principles. On 19 September 2013, in Donetsk, the Third International Scientific and Practical Conference *Islam and Islamic Studies in Ukraine* was held. It was organized by *Alraid* and SAUM *Ummah*. The key topic was *wasatiyyah* in Islam. Said Ismagilov, then Mufti of SAUM *Ummah*, in his presentation pointed out that the principle of *wasatiyyah*, often associated solely with the Muslim Brotherhood, is advocated by many Muslim groups. These groups, including enlightened Muslims, promote *wasatiyyah* to safeguard against extremism and radicalism. He admitted that Islamic principles, including *wasatiyyah*, are universal and not exclusive to any single group, but the Muslim Brotherhood is recognized for pioneering this call for moderation in the Islamic world. The aim is to reduce the appeal of radical ideologies in the Islamic community through education on moderation (Ismagilov 2013).

Ismagilov claims, that

> *In perspective, educating young Muslims on the principle of al-wasatyyah should neutralize the influence of radical ideas in the Islamic society. This process, however, has to be mutual—the world community must also stop casting aspersions on Muslims and Islam, recognise Muslims tradition as a part of general cultural heritage and respect Muslims as equal and worthy people. Unfortunately, demonising Muslims is still common in certain Media, in the programme speeches of certain politicians, officials and clergymen, which plays into the hands of extremists who refer to the hostile attitude towards Muslims when searching for new followers. For the rapprochement and peaceful coexistence of the world community, the al-wasatyyah principle has to be global, and Islamic world has to be ready to share it*. (ibid.)

Notably, the conference in Donetsk was attended by prominent Russian Muslim leaders, namely Ravil Gainutdin, Chairman of the *Council of Muftis of Russia* and Chairman of the *Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the European Part of Russia* (DUMER) and Mukaddas Bibarsov, co-chairman of the *Council of Muftis of Russia* and Mufti of the Saratov region. Since 2014, all official contacts and collaboration between these Russian organizations and their Ukrainian counterparts have been severed due to their support for the annexation of Crimea.

It was previously mentioned that the early *wasatiyyah* discourse of several Ukrainian Muslim leaders and organizations was primarily theologically centered. I would argue that it later transformed into a more socially centered discourse, addressing issues of significant importance to Ukrainian society and the state, and oriented toward civil pluralism.

Said Ismagilov, already in 2012, claimed that

> *Muslim communities and organizations in Ukraine must be Ukraine-centered. For the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine "Ummah", this is one of the key principles. However, it's not just us—all religious organizations should work toward building an independent Ukrainian state, contributing to our national and religious revival. . . . Ukraine has a unique intra-Islamic climate, which has developed primarily due to the country's democratic legal framework. Believers are free to determine their internal statutes, elect their leaders, establish independent organizations, and define their value orientations. Secondly, the state's interference in the affairs of Muslims is minimal, allowing the community to develop according to a European model, where laws are similarly democratic*. (Ismagilov 2012)

Later he emphasized that Muslims are citizens of Ukraine and part of its political framework, maintaining their religious and cultural identity while being tolerant of other identities, reflecting a mature modern civil society (Yarosh 2024, p. 144). Also, Seyran Arifov regards moderation as the most effective strategy for the integration of Muslim minorities.

Muslim minorities should be guided towards a balanced and moderate understanding of Islam, which will allow them, while maintaining their Islamic faith, morality, and principles, to demonstrate flexibility in changing circumstances, positively integrate, and take their rightful place in society as a natural part of it, not as outcasts or outsiders (Arifov 2016).

Alarid and SAUM *Ummah* played a key role in facilitating the adoption of the *Charter of Muslims of Ukraine* by several allied Ukrainian Muslim organizations in 2016. This initiative followed the adoption of the *Muslims of Europe Charter* by FIOE in 2008. These documents are informed by *wasatiyyah* ideology and outline the principles governing the existence of Muslim communities in Muslim minority society and the state.

The *Charter of Muslims of Ukraine* emphasizes their commitment to Islamic teachings, specifically the Quran and Sunnah, while also promoting active participation in Ukrainian public life. It focuses on the historical presence of Islam in Ukraine and outlines principles for coexisting in a predominantly non-Muslim society, including respect for the Ukrainian legal system, recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity, support for territorial integrity, and solidarity with oppressed Muslims worldwide. The *Charter* also advocates for the involvement of Muslims in Ukraine's political sphere, and encourages participation in elections and political institutions as a means of integration and positive contribution to the country's development. Additionally, it reflects a broader social activism, seeking to promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation with other religious communities (Charter of Muslims of Ukraine 2016).

In its turn, the *Social Concept of Muslims of Ukraine* was signed by *Alraid* and associated Muslim organizations, SAUM *Ummah*, SAMARC, and CUM in 2017. This Muslim community-based document outlines the basics of the civic participation of Muslims in Ukraine reiterating some premises of the *Charter*. The *Concept* emphasizes key areas, such as interfaith dialogue, cooperation with civil society, and active participation in public life. It stresses that Muslims must adhere to both Islamic teachings and the Ukrainian legislation, to support the country's sovereignty and promote peaceful coexistence. This concept acknowledges the multicultural and multiethnic composition of Ukraine and advocates for tolerance and mutual respect among different communities. Furthermore, it underlines the responsibility of Ukrainian Muslims to contribute positively to the nation's development, especially in times of crisis like war and internal displacement (Social Concept of Muslims of Ukraine 2017).

Seyran Arifov, who became the head of CUM, emphasized adherence to the principle of *wasatiyyah*, balance, and rejection of extremes and radicalism, presenting it as a strategy

to manage societal issues: "It is precisely moderation, the foundational principle of Islam and its integral part, that forms the basis of peace and good neighborliness in a society" (Arifov 2020).

He argues that Ukrainian Muslims belong to the Ukrainian political nation and are active supporters of Ukrainian statehood:

> *Ukrainian Muslims firmly support Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, recognize all the rights and obligations provided by Ukrainian citizenship, and, regardless of their different nationalities, see themselves as full participants in Ukraine's public life, including its political sphere...* (ibid.)

Therefore, the *wasatiyyah* discourse promoted by several Ukrainian Muslim organizations and leaders can be regarded as an ideology of active and responsible citizenship.

This stance was further reinforced by their statements and actions following the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022 that was addressed in my previous article (Yarosh 2024, pp. 145–50). To summarize the preceding article, the discourse of the Muslim organizations in question emphasizes mobilizing Ukrainian Muslims and broader society against aggression. These organizations strongly condemn Russian Muslim leaders and organizations for supporting the invasion of Ukraine. Their activities encompass a range of social and educational initiatives targeting both the Ukrainian Muslim community and other societal groups. These efforts aim to promote an inclusive Muslim identity in Ukraine, encourage public engagement, emphasize the significance of sociocultural adaptation, and advance Muslim women's activism. Both organizations actively mobilize Ukrainian Muslims during wartime by providing humanitarian aid, supporting displaced individuals, and assisting Muslim soldiers through military chaplaincy, an initiative established by SAUM *Ummah* in 2014.

Therefore, I argue that the moderation discourse of *Alraid*/CUM and SAUM *Ummah* in Ukraine is not simply rhetorical camouflage intended to conceal an alleged agenda of gaining societal and political acceptance to promote the Islamization of non-Muslim society, as some researchers have argued regarding their counterparts in Western Europe (Bergeaud-Blackler 2023). Instead, it represents an ideological framing of their agency and integration strategy, grounded in civic activism.

4. Conclusions

I agree with Shestopalets's (2021) claim that several Muslim organizations in Ukraine are actively involved into mutual securitization, stigmatizing their opponents as a security threat, while appealing to the State to take measures against them. On the other hand, state institutions execute limited interventions and repressions mostly against the Muslim organization labeled 'Islamist', namely the *Alraid*/CUM and SAUM *Ummah.* These policies are regarded here as soft securitization.

I argue that soft securitization policies are likely to emerge in specific contexts where indigenous Muslim minorities are present. In the case of Ukraine, this applies to the Crimean Tatars, while historical diasporas such as the Volga Tatars could also be considered in this framework. Soft securitization is thus predicated on a distinction between a local and therefore culturally and politically accepted form of Islam and a foreign Islam, which is perceived as having the potential to radicalize the local Muslim community. Consequently, such policies typically target translocal Muslim organizations.

The concept of *wasatiyyah* (moderation), adopted from 'Post-Islamist' discourses, has emerged as a central ideological framework informing the civic activism of the abovementioned Muslim organizations in Ukraine. These organizations initially adopted moderation as a strategic response to securitization policies imposed by both the state and other Mus-

lim organizations but did not limit themselves to that objective. Rather than being plain superficial rhetoric, *wasatiyyah* is expressed through their civic activism, enabling them to balance Islamic identity with the sociocultural and political realities in a minority situation in a secular Ukrainian society.

Alraid/CUM and SAUM *Ummah* have been especially active in developing social integration, mobilizing Muslim communities during times of crisis, and contributing to Ukraine's defense efforts during the ongoing war. Thus, through the adoption of *wasatiyyah* as a framing for their civic engagement, these organizations have developed a vision of 'civic Islam', where Muslims are seen not as outsiders but as active members of Ukrainian society.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the author.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 *Wasatiyyah* (moderation, the middle path) is an Islamic concept derived from *wasat* (center, middle). In Quran 2:143, it refers to the Muslim community, described as "balanced" (*ummatan wasatan*). This concept is further supported by other authoritative Islamic textual sources. It underscores the importance of moderation and avoiding extremes in both teachings and practices.

2 While 'Islamism' is a vague concept and scholars have not yet reached a general consensus on its meaning, it can be broadly understood as referring to Muslim organizations and ideologies aimed at achieving political goals.

References

Arifov, Seyran. 2012. We Are Returning to Islam, Overcoming Stereotypes. Council of Ukrainian Muslims. Available online: https://www.arraid.org/ua/node/2049 (accessed on 10 August 2024).

Arifov, Seyran. 2016. Shariatskaya Politika. Arifov.com.ua. Available online: https://arifov.com.ua/%D1%88%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0/ (accessed on 9 September 2024).

Arifov, Seyran. 2020. Alraid Will Continue to Stand on the Positions of the Interests of the State of Ukraine, the Defence of Its Democratic Achievements, the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of Its Citizens. Muslims in Ukraine. Available online: https://www.muslims.in.ua/ru/node/7319 (accessed on 10 August 2024).

Arraid.org. 2013. Musul'mane Kryma vystupili protiv religioznogo ekstremizma. Available online: https://www.arraid.org/ru/node/2939 (accessed on 9 September 2024).

Bakker, Edwin, and Roel Meijer, eds. 2013. *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Balzacq, Thierry. 2011. A theory of securitization: Origins, core assumptions, and variants. In *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*. Edited by Thierry Balzacq. London: Routledge, pp. 1–30.

Benford, Robert D., and David Snow. 2010. Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–39. [CrossRef]

Bergeaud-Blackler, Florence. 2023. *Le frérisme et ses réseaux, l'enquête*. Paris: Odile Jacob.

Browers, Michaelle L. 2010. *Political Ideology in the Arab World: Accommodation and Transformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brylov, Denys. 2016. Institutionalization of the Muslim community of Ukraine: Spiritual administration of Muslims in Ukraine. *Naukovyi Chasopys NPU imeni M.P. Dragomanova* 38: 106–14.

Buzan, Barry, and Lene Hansen. 2009. *The Evolution of International Security Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Buzan, Barry, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde. 1998. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Cesari, Jocelyne. 2012. Securitization of Islam in Europe. *Die Welt des Islams* 52: 430–49. [CrossRef]

Charter of Muslims of Ukraine. 2016. Islam w Ukraini. Available online: https://islam.in.ua/ua/suspilstvo/hartiya-musulman-ukrayiny (accessed on 10 August 2024).

Crone, Manni. 2024. 1 A: Omdiskuteret bog om islamistisk ideologi er baseret på haltende dokumentation og vage ideer om alle muslimer. Etik og Tro. Available online: https://www.altinget.dk/etik/artikel/1-a-hvis-broderismen-skal-indgaa-i-debatten-om-udlaendingepolitik-skal-dens-paastande-gaas-meget-grundigt-efter-i-soemmene (accessed on 28 November 2024).

Dazey, Margot. 2024. Enquêter sur des mouvements islamistes. Enjeux conceptuels, méthodologiques et épistémologiques d'une approche centrée sur l'idéologie. *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 155. Available online: https://journals.openedition.org/remmm/20611 (accessed on 28 November 2024).

Fox, Jonathan, and Yasemin Akbaba. 2015. Securitization of Islam and religious discrimination: Religious minorities in Western democracies, 1990–2008. *Comparative European Politics* 13: 175–97. [CrossRef]

Grishko, Grygoryj. 2012. The Moderation in Everything Yields Its Fruits. Interview with Bassil Marrei. Council of Ukrainian Muslims. Available online: https://www.arraid.org/ua/node/1943 (accessed on 10 August 2024).

Ismagilov, Said. 2012. Program Paper SAUM "Ummah". Available online: http://crsr.org.ua/publication/papers/2012_09_ismagilov_umma.html (accessed on 9 September 2024).

Ismagilov, Said. 2013. The Relevance of Al-Wasatiyya as a Fundamental Principle of Islam. SAUM Ummah. Available online: https://umma.in.ua/ua/node/1319 (accessed on 10 August 2024).

Jäger, Thomas, and Ralph Thiele, eds. 2024. *Handbook of Political Islam in Europe: Activities, Means, and Strategies from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood and Beyond*. Cham: Springer.

Muratova, Elmira. 2009. Islamskoe vozrozhdenie v postsovetskom Krymu. In *Islam v Krymu: Ocherki istorii funktsionirovaniia musulmanskikh institutov*. Edited by Elena Boitsova, Viktor Gankevich, Elmira Muratova and Zera Khairetdinova. Simferepol: Elinio, pp. 328–427.

Muslims.in.ua. 2012. Zamestitel' ministra po delam Islama i vakfov Gosudarstva Kuvayt otsenil rabotu "Al'raid" v ramkakh al-Vasatyii. Available online: https://www.muslims.in.ua/ru/node/2102 (accessed on 9 September 2024).

Poljarevic, Emin. 2020. New Islamic movements and concepts of citizenship. In *Routledge Handbook on Citizenship in the Middle East and North Africa*. Edited by Roel Meijer, James N. Sater and Zahra R. Babar. London: Routledge, pp. 201–14.

Shavit, Uriya, and Fabian Spengler. 2017. Does the European Council for Fatwa and Research Matter? The Case of Muslims in Dortmund, Germany. *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 18: 363–82.

Shestopalets, Denys. 2014. Moderation, Unity and Tolerance: The Representation of Islam in the discourse of "Alraid". *Shidnyj Svit* 4: 162–71. [CrossRef]

Shestopalets, Denys. 2015. The Quranic Origins of the *Wasatiyya* Concept. *Shidnyj Svit* 4: 111–18.

Shestopalets, Denys. 2021. Who's afraid of religious extremism? The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, securitisation of Islam and an ideological clash in Ukraine's Muslim community. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 10: 378–402. [CrossRef]

Snow, David. 2007. Ideology, Framing Processes, and Islamic Movements. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly Review* 12: 119–36. [CrossRef]

Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation. *American Sociological Review* 51: 464–81. [CrossRef]

Social Concept of Muslims of Ukraine. 2017. Islam w Ukraini. Available online: https://umma.in.ua/ua/node/1890 (accessed on 10 August 2024).

Svpressa.ru. 2013. Dast Allah, gosudarstvennost' krymskikh tatar budet. Available online: https://svpressa.ru/society/article/70875/ (accessed on 9 September 2024).

Ukrainu khotyat sdelat' khabom dlya islamskogo terrorizma. 2020. Golos.ua. Available online: https://golos.ua/news/ukraynu-hotyat-sdelat-habom-dlya-yslamskogo-terroryzma (accessed on 9 September 2024).

Vidino, Lorenzo. 2010. *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Waever, Ole. 1995. Securitization and Desecuritization. In *On Security*. Edited by Ronnie D. Lipschutz. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 46–86.

Yakubovych, Mykhaylo, Shchepanskyi Vitalij, and Ayder Bulatov. 2018. Ukraine. In *Islamic Leadership in the European Lands of the Former Ottoman and Russian Empires*. Edited by Egdunas Račius and Antonina Zhelyazkova. Leiden: Brill, pp. 314–28.

Yarosh, Oleg. 2022. The plurality of Islamic officialdom in Ukraine. In *Muslims of Post-Communist Eurasia*. Edited by Galina Yemelianova and Egdunas Račius. London: Routledge, pp. 117–36.

Yarosh, Oleg. 2024. Muslim organisations in Ukraine and the challenges of wartime: Moderation, mobilisation, and resilience. In *Minorities at War: Cultural Identity and Resilience in Ukraine*. Edited by Elmira Muratova and Nadia Zasanska. London: Routledge, pp. 135–53.

Yarosh, Oleg, and Mykhaylo Yakubovych. 2021. Ukraine. In *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe 13*. Edited by Stephanie Müssig, Egdūnas Račius, Samim Akgönül, Ahmet Alibašić, Jørgen S. Nielsen and Oliver Scharbrodt. Leiden: Brill, pp. 675–89.

religions

MDPI

Article

French Islamophobia: How Orthopraxy Is Conceptualized as a Public Peril

Christina Lienen [1,*] and Samir Sweida-Metwally [2,*]

[1] Faculty of Business & Law, The British University in Dubai, Dubai International Academic City, Dubai P.O. Box 345015, United Arab Emirates
[2] Social Science Division, New York University Abu Dhabi, Saadiyat Marina District, Abu Dhabi P.O. Box 129188, United Arab Emirates
* Correspondence: christina.lienen@buid.ac.ae (C.L.); ss18347@nyu.edu (S.S.-M.)

Abstract: For over two decades, France's Muslim population has faced a series of legal measures and hostile public narratives aimed at problematizing their faith. Notable examples include the 2004 national ban on "ostentatious religious symbols" in state schools, which prohibits obligatory religious dress in various settings. These individual instances are compounded by more recent broader policies, decisions, laws, and executive statements that negatively impact Muslim life. This paper examines France's trajectory from a new perspective: A Muslim legal viewpoint. It argues that the French approach constitutes a two-step process of institutionalized Islamophobia, understood here as hostility towards Islam as a faith. First, the state redefines mainstream Islamic orthopraxy as "extreme", pitting ordinary religious practices against averred Republican values. Second, it seeks to promote an alternative concept of a "French Islam"—one that aligns with France's secular principles and is stripped of its religious essence—positioning it as the only acceptable framework for Muslims to practice their faith in France. We argue that this process is not about upholding laïcité or state neutrality; rather, invoking the latter serves as a smokescreen for the state's Islamophobia.

Keywords: Islamophobia; France; law; religion; Muslims; extremism

1. Introduction

France is home to Europe's largest Muslim minority, a community of approximately 6 million, which makes up about 10 percent of its overall population (Drouhot et al. 2023). Despite accounting for a comparatively large proportion of the population, living in France as a Muslim is becoming an increasingly taxing experience. Recent events give a flavor of this. In June 2023, a 17-year-old Muslim French citizen of Moroccan and Algerian descent, Nahel Merzouk, was shot dead by French police during a routine traffic stop. The initial official police response, reinforced by French media, claimed that officers had been threatened and were acting in self-defense. This was found to be untrue by subsequent video evidence of the incident. Then, in August 2023, the country imposed a national ban on the *ʿabāyah*, a loose over-dress similar to the Japanese kimono, in schools. This ban was subsequently upheld by France's Conseil d'État ("the Court") (Decision No. 87891), the highest court for public law related questions. The Court reiterated that, according to French law, students were not allowed to wear anything that could be linked to their religious identity. Meanwhile, at the 2024 Paris Olympics and Paralympics, despite a distancing from the measure by the International Olympic Committee, the French Republic's female

Muslim athletes were the only contestants worldwide denied from participating if they chose to wear the *ḥijāb*. This decision followed another judgment by the Conseil d'État upholding the French Football Federation's recent ban of the *ḥijāb* during its competitions (Conseil d'État 2023a, Decision Nos. 458088, 459547 and 463408).

We contend that these decisions must be viewed within a wider trajectory of legislative and executive measures as well as official policy targeting France's Muslim population—both openly and covertly. Within this context, as is well known, a key turning point in France's approach towards her largest minority group occurred in 2004, when the wearing of "ostentatious religious symbols" in state schools, which make up approximately 90 percent of France's primary and secondary education system (Ministry of National Education and Youth 2023), was banned by Law No 2004-228 of 15 March 2004 ("the 2004 Law").[1] This marked the first far-reaching interference into religious freedoms at a state level, while at the same time prompting a shift in the public narrative and jurisprudence. Since its enactment, public restrictions and hostile narratives have been steadily intensifying such that many French Muslims, particularly highly educated professionals, are emigrating, citing the desire to practice their religion more peacefully as the primary motivator for their relocation (Esteves 2023, p. 249). Meanwhile, 70 percent revealed they had emigrated to face less frequent incidents of racism and discrimination (ibid.). In 2019, the French Institute of Public Opinion found that 42 percent of Muslims reported experiencing discrimination, a figure that rises to 60 percent among Muslim women who wear the *ḥijāb* (Le Monde 2019). Importantly, the increasingly hostile environment towards Muslims has been sustained not by the far right, which recently achieved unprecedented electoral success (Briancon 2024), but by successive center-right and center-left governments. In sharp contrast to UN findings of discrimination against Muslims in France (e.g., UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2024), the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union have generally upheld restrictions on Muslim practices, such as wearing the veil, in France and other European countries (e.g., Mikyas and Others v. Belgium 2024). This sits within a wider context of rising discrimination against Muslims in the European Union (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2024).

In this paper, we argue that France's legal and policy framework is Islamophobic, which we define as hostility towards Muslims as a racialized group and as antipathy towards Islam as a religion. We counter the suggestion that France is merely seeking to limit all kinds of religious expression in public, showing that it is specifically ordinary Islamic practices which are deemed unacceptable. Indeed, we contend that French Islamophobia can be understood as a two-step process. The first step involves constructing Islam *itself* as inherently "extreme" and as an existential threat to the French Republic. This framing then paves the way for the second step: the creation of a "French Islam" stripped of mainstream Islamic orthopraxy. France's restrictions on the wearing of the veil and other limitations on Muslim dress form a key part of our discussion. That said, our analysis casts a wider net, demonstrating that successive French governments vilify mainstream Muslim practices in a broader spectrum of contexts, including, for example, Muslim culinary choices and civic participation. By "mainstream Muslim practices" we do not mean practices that are widely followed by or popular among Muslims. Rather, we refer to orthopraxy as recognized by the legal framework of mainstream Sunni Islam, which is followed by the vast majority of French Muslims and about 90 percent of Muslims worldwide (Pew Research Center 2009). By examining the treatment of Muslims in France through a Muslim legal perspective, this paper distinguishes itself from other academic contributions that have analyzed French restrictions through the lenses of, for instance, securitization (Evranos 2023), authoritarianism (Wolfreys 2023), racial

studies (Beaman 2019), feminism (Wing and Smith 2005), and discrimination (Escafré-Dublet et al. 2023).

2. Defining Islamophobia

Seeing as we make the claim that French regulations are Islamophobic, it is pertinent to clarify how we understand this term. The prevailing view in Western academia considers Islamophobia to be a form of racism. Modood (2005) is a prominent proponent of this perspective, significantly contributing to its dominance within academic discourse (see also Sayyid and Vakil 2010; Kumar 2012; Garner and Selod 2015; Love 2017; Opratko 2017; Massoumi et al. 2017). Specifically, Modood proposes that Islamophobia is a form of cultural racism, which "builds on biological racism a further discourse that evokes cultural differences from an alleged (. . .) civilized norm to vilify, marginalize or demand cultural assimilation from groups who also suffer from biological racism" (Modood 2005, p. 29). In short, Islamophobia follows a two-step process: color racism compounded by cultural racism (Modood 2019).

The ideation of Islamophobia as a form of racism has been adopted by a range of academics, who have focused on highlighting its different aspects and phases. For instance, Werbner (2005), Sayyid and Vakil (2010), Grosfoguel (2012), and Kumar (2012) examine Islamophobia from a strategic viewpoint, framing it as a mechanism within an imperialist-capitalist paradigm. Conversely, the works of Lean (2017) and Massoumi et al. (2017) delve into the mechanisms, agents, and institutions that perpetuate Islamophobia at various societal levels, epitomizing what could be described as "a movement-centered approach" (Massoumi et al. 2017). Another perspective is the procedural viewpoint, as seen in the contributions of Selod and Embrick (2013) and Garner and Selod (2015), which enhance our understanding of the racialization process affecting Muslims.

Recent empirical studies have, however, shown that hostility towards Islam as a religion forms another important dimension of Islamophobia (Sealy 2021; Uenal et al. 2021; Jones and Unsworth 2023). In their study of Islamophobia in the UK, Jones and Unsworth show that "anti-Islamic prejudice and anti-Muslim prejudice, rather than being one and the same, are located differently" (Jones and Unsworth 2023, p. 15) (see also Lauwers 2019). In his study of Muslim converts' experience of Islamophobia, Sealy (2021) also concludes that hostility towards Islam is a central element of Islamophobia. Meanwhile, the results of Uenal et al.'s (2021) empirical study also lead them to conclude that anti-Islam sentiment is an important dimension of Islamophobia, distinct from antipathy towards Muslims.

We concur with this research, arguing that Islamophobia can be understood as being multifaceted, encompassing both a type of racism *and* hostility toward Islam as a theology. While racism perceives "Muslimness" as inherent and immutable, anti-Islam bigotry frames Islam as a distinct entity with its own agency. It draws on doctrinal falsehoods and distortions to depict Islam as inherently aggressive, irrational, misogynistic, and a perpetual threat to the West. By focusing on the latter aspect of the definition, this paper demonstrates how France's legal system serves as a critical instrument in sustaining Islamophobia by enacting laws that exploit long-standing stereotypes and reinforce systemic hostility towards Islam as a religion.

To put it succinctly, anti-Muslim tropes in the West have long depicted Muslims through a lens of sexual licentiousness, barbarity, and irrationality, intertwining these themes with narratives of violence and misogyny (Daniel 1960; Said 1979, 1981). This portrayal is evident in the works of thinkers and philosophers as well as in literature, art, and film (Said 1979; Shaheen 2003; Kumar 2012; Norton 2013). Examples of these tropes specifically in the French context include Voltaire's 1736 play, where the Prophet

Moḥammad (peace be upon him) is portrayed as the epitome of both fanaticism and sensuality. Similarly, Montesquieu's 1721 *Lettres Persanes* depicts Muslims as oppressive, particularly in their treatment of women. Despite unequivocal evidence to the contrary (Saliba 2007), Ernest Renan, in his 1883 lecture "Islam and Science", described Islam as inherently opposed to reason and scientific progress, echoing long-standing tropes of Islam as irrational. While these examples span the 18th and 19th centuries, it is important to recognize that the shaping of views about Islam in France date as far back as the 12th century with the influence of the Cluniac Corpus (Daniel 1960). This collection featured a translation of the *Qu'ran* entitled, *Law of Muhammad the False Prophet*, considered the first Latin translation of the *Qu'ran*. These examples reveal a historical continuity of Islamophobia. Furthermore, it warrants highlighting that many "Enlightenment" thinkers continue to be celebrated as foundational figures of the French Republic and its ideals of Republican universalism (Ministère de la Culture 2023). Their enduring legacy embeds longstanding anti-Muslim tropes within the framework of French secularism, shaping contemporary narratives around Islam in France. Prior to proceeding to discuss how the different policies and laws affect mainstream religious Muslim practices, it is vital to understand Islam as a lived religion. This will elucidate how the French laws and policies in question impact practicing Muslims in very compromising ways.

3. Islam, a Lived Religion: Between Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

Islam, one of the world's major monotheistic religions, is characterized by both its theological doctrines (orthodoxy) and its prescribed practices (orthopraxy). The Sunni tradition, accounting for about 90 percent of Muslims globally (Pew Research Center 2009), emphasizes both. Being a lived religion, Islam deeply influences the daily lives of its adherents through a combination of beliefs *and* actions. Orthodoxy in Islam centers on the core Six Articles of Faith, the most fundamental concept being *Tawhid*, the oneness and uniqueness of God. This orthodoxy provides the theological framework that shapes a Muslim's worldview and understanding of their place in the universe. Islam also places significant emphasis on orthopraxy—the correct performance of religious duties and practices. The Five Pillars of Islam, *shahādah* (testimony of faith), *salāh* (prayer), *zakāh* (annual charity), *sawm* (fasting during the month of Ramadan), and *hajj* (major pilgrimage), are key examples. However, prescribed religious practice is not limited to these five. In fact, Islamic law covers a wide range of aspects, including personal hygiene, dietary rules, family life, and social interactions. This comprehensive approach to religious practice means that, for practicing Muslims, their faith is inseparable from their daily routines. Taken together, orthodoxy and orthopraxy guide the life of "a self that has a deeply-rooted inclination toward worship of and submission to the Creator" (Hannini 2024).

Islamic law, which covers both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, is derived from two main sources: The *Qurʾān* and *Sunnah*. The first is, for Muslims, the literal word of God. The second refers to the practices and sayings of the Prophet Moḥammad. There are four main schools of jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) in Sunni Islam—*madhāhib*—each of which can be understood as a different methodological approach to deducing the law. Combined, the four schools of law represent mainstream Sunni Islam. Differences between the schools pertain to nuanced matters, such as the importance of the sequence in ablutions before prayer. There is, however, no difference of opinion between the schools on the central obligations a Muslim must fulfil, and the main aspects of permissible (*ḥalāl*) and impermissible (*ḥarām*) actions, such as not consuming alcohol and only consuming halal food, praying five times per day at prescribed times, and for men and women not to show certain parts of their

bodies (*ʿawrah*), which, as we discuss below, for women includes covering their hair and neck (now termed *ḥijāb*).

Focusing more on some of these unanimously recognized obligations, the daily prayer forms an integral element of a Muslim's life. It is so central to a Muslim's life that, according to Islamic tradition, it is the first thing a person will be questioned about when they die. It is foundational to what it means to be Muslim and exemplifies the orthopraxical nature of Islam, where correct and consistent religious observance is seen as crucial to living a faithful life.

Another critical aspect of a practicing Muslim's life is diet. Specifically, Muslims must eat *ḥalāl*, which requires that meat is slaughtered according to specific rituals and that food, in general, is free from impermissible substances such as alcohol and pork. As with *ḥijāb* (discussed below), the requirement to eat *ḥalāl* is explicitly set out in the *Qurʾān*. Similar to the *ḥijāb*, there is *ʿijmāʿ* (consensus) among Sunni scholars that a Muslim must only consume *ḥalāl* food.

Dress is another important aspect that Islam regulates, particularly in the public space. Muslim men and women are commanded to cover their *ʿawrah*, which loosely translates as nakedness. For women, this includes covering their hair and neck, traditionally done by wearing what is today referred to as the *ḥijāb*. Related to dress is the requirement that men and women avoid tight or revealing clothing. For women, this has traditionally meant wearing a loose outer garment known as an *ʿabāyah*. While men do not have to cover their hair and neck, they too are under a religious obligation not to show certain parts of their body in public (anything between the navel and the knee, at minimum). This requirement is often overlooked—if at all known—in Western discussions, where the focus is on Muslim women's dress codes. Consequently, the fact that women must cover their hair whereas men do not is not seen as problematic in the Islamic tradition, it being understood that men and women have different obligations without this impacting on either gender's respective dignity or worth.

The ruling for the *ḥijāb* comes from the *Qurʾān* and is further supported by *hadith*. The two main verses relied on to ascertain the prescribed dress code for women were revealed, and therefore became legally effective, within two to three months of each other, both of them five years after the Muslim migration to Medina following persistent persecution in Makkah. The key verse is found in chapter 24 (*Surāh al-Nur*), complemented by Chapter 33 of the *Qurʾān* (*Surāh al-Aḥzāb*). As for the former, an English translation of part of verse 31 instructs the Prophet Moḥammed as follows:

> "And tell believing women that they should lower their eyes, guard their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal;[a] they should draw their coverings over their necklines and not reveal their charms except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers, their brother's sons, their sisters' sons, their womenfolk, their slaves, such men as attend them who have no desire, or children who are not yet aware of women's nakedness . . .". (Abdel Haleem 2008, p. 222)

The key to understanding verse 31 lies in its original Arabic version. The word used there for what above is translated as "coverings" is *khumurihinna*, which was commonly understood in Arabic to mean head coverings (Alkiek 2021). As Imam al-Qurtubi, a classical scholar and legal exegetist, explained in his commentary on this verse, "Women in those days used to cover their heads with the khimar (head covering), throwing its ends upon their backs. This left the neck and the upper part of the chest bare, along with the ears, in the manner of the Christians. Then Allah commanded them to cover those parts with

the khimar" (translation of Tafsir al-Qurtubi, quoted in Meah (2016)). Thus, the *Qur'ānic* revelation confirmed the practice of covering the head, and added further requirements as the custom of the time was not sufficient. Put differently, "[n]ot only does the *Qur'ānic* text make it clear that women are expected to veil, it also dictates the extent of the veiling, i.e., covering the neck and cleavage" (Ansari 2016).

The issue of *ḥijāb*, in a legal sense, is misunderstood in the Western discourse, both in academia and in lay conversations. While often presented as a complex matter on which there are many different interpretations, there is in fact no ambiguity—it is unanimously agreed upon across all four Sunni schools of law that the *ḥijāb* is a religious obligation, mandatory for women from when they enter puberty. While fringe views may exist outside the framework of Islamic jurisprudence—and have, at times, been disproportionately amplified in Western academic discourse—they fall outside the recognized legal traditions adhered to by the overwhelming majority of the world's Muslims and hold no validity from an Islamic legal perspective. In other words, while it is of course correct to say that Islam has embedded within it a high level of plurality on many issues, *ḥijāb* is not one of them; it is a standardized part of orthopraxy for Muslim women—it is at its source a religious obligation, not a mere cultural or political practice. However, as Fernando insightfully highlights, French public discourse renders it almost impossible for Muslim women to present the *ḥijāb* as an integral aspect of Islamic orthopraxy; "[i]n efforts to normalize the headscarf, young Muslim French women have to deemphasize its Islamic character. Disembedded from its location in a wider set of ethical norms, the headscarf is a choice like any other. But that disembedding makes it difficult to argue either legally or ethically for the headscarf's special status as a religious practice. (. . .) Once the headscarf becomes just a piece of cloth, akin to a do-rag, the choice of whether to wear it is no longer a question of religious freedom" (Fernando 2014, p. 172).

We highlight this legal dimension not to make a normative argument in the abstract, but rather to make good on one of the central claims of this paper: that French restrictions aim to reshape the Islamic faith by attempting to recast core mandatory practices as optional, and even as suspicious "extremes" that believers can—and should—do without. Secondly, the above presentation of the Islamic legal framework demonstrates the impact of the French restrictions on Muslims in a personal capacity. Secular restrictions on dress are particularly challenging to navigate for practicing Muslim women *precisely* because they are religiously obliged to cover their *ʿawrah*; this is non-negotiable from a faith perspective. Thus, in light of Islam requiring the submission of the self to the will of God, and seeing as the will of God is by consensus understood to include the covering of the hair and neck for female believers, the adopted limitations cut much deeper than they would if they targeted something the faith deems optional or merely recommended, which would be easier to compromise from a believer's point of view. The fact that many Muslim women choose not to wear the *ḥijāb*, for a variety of reasons, does not affect its nature as a religious obligation, just like a Muslim choosing not to fulfill their five daily prayers does not render the latter optional.

In summary, understanding Islam as a lived religion, with its integration of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, the latter of which includes mandatory actions that are not controversial from a mainstream Muslim point of view, provides a crucial starting point to demonstrating how French laws and policies impact the daily lives of Muslims by targeting the very essence of mainstream Islam as opposed to addressing fringe or so-called "extremist" Islamic practices.

4. France's Restrictions on Female Muslim Dress

Turning to the legal framework governing women's dress in France, we can observe that it is an animosity towards Islam and the forceful presence of—and the reliance on—long-held anti-Islamic tropes that justify the legal restrictions adopted. One such trope is that Islam is inherently sexist and subjugating of women, this being linked to a supposed Muslim tendency towards "backwardness", and thus warranting that Muslim women need saving (Abu-Lughod 2002). This stereotype finds expression in various legal measures targeting women's dress adopted over the past twenty years.

Indeed, just over twenty years ago, France adopted the most significant piece of legislation in this regard; the 2004 Law, triggering a seismic shift in the narrative and trajectory of legal measures concerning Muslim practices. Before the adoption of the 2004 Law, action against religious dress was taken on a case-by-case basis, leaving the choice to schools of whether or not to ban certain items. Notably, in the context of one of the disputes arising during the time prior to the national ban, the Conseil d'État, when asked to determine whether the wearing of certain "signs" was compatible with the principle of secularism, found that discrimination based on dress was unacceptable, and that pupils wearing signs by which they intended to manifest their belonging to a religion was not by itself—i.e., in the absence of disruptive acts—incompatible with the principle of secularism (Conseil d'État. 1989. Decision No. 346.893, Decision No. 346.893).

In a line of cases in the 1990s, the Court further reinforced this stance, assessing the cases brought before it in a way that focused on religious freedom first, followed by an analysis as to whether any harm had as a matter of fact been caused by the wearing of a particular garment. For example, in 1996, the Court considered that the wearing of the *ḥijāb* by seventeen pupils who had been expelled was intended to express their religious convictions and could not be regarded as a sign which by its nature is ostentatious or demanding, or that it would necessarily constitute an act of pressure or proselytism (Conseil d'État 1996, Decision Nos.170207, 170208). The school's expulsion was upheld, however not on the basis of the wearing of the *ḥijāb*, but rather on the basis of protest activities at the school that the students were said to have engaged in. In other words, the Conseil d'État focused on the applicants' actual behavior, which was deemed disruptive and unlawful, rather than the wearing of religious clothing, which could not itself justify expulsion.

The 2004 Law brought an end to the Court's more balanced approach. It was introduced by then-President Chirac in endorsement of the Stasi Report (Stasi Report 2003) ("the Report"). The latter had recommended the banning of "conspicuous" religious symbols from schools. Relevantly for the present discussion, while the Report adopts the purportedly neutral language of "religious symbols"—thereby on the face of it applying to all religions equally—its wider discussion shows that the ban is aimed at Muslims alone. This is evidenced by the language in the Report. First, the two examples mentioned as being captured by the ban alongside the *ḥijāb*—the Christian "big cross" and the Jewish kippa—are not discussed in any detail in the Report. In fact, the latter does not discuss the wearing of the cross at all, whereas the wearing of the kippa is discussed in one short paragraph which merely highlights that it can be dangerous for children to wear it lest they be targets of anti-Semitic attacks, thereby painting Jewish students exclusively as potential victims. Conversely, the wearing of the *ḥijāb* is linked to being a threat to society, while at the same time being conceptualized as an oppressive force Muslim girls need to be saved from. Thus, the Report alludes to there being a link between "grant[ing] the same rights to Islam as to other religions" and "the fear of opening up spaces of influence to a militant wing that does not conceive of Islam only as a religion but as a global political

project" (ibid., p. 34, translated). It also states that the *ḥijāb* could be seen as "an attack on the principles and values that schools must teach, *in particular equality between men and women*" (ibid., p. 57, translated, emphasis added) and that "many young girls and women from immigrant backgrounds need to be protected" from Islamist groups as well as family and neighborhood pressure (ibid., p. 58, translated); "the Republic cannot remain deaf to the cry of distress of these young girls. The school space must remain a place of *freedom* and *emancipation* for them" (ibid., p. 58, translated, emphasis added). These statements reflect the perpetuation of century-old Islamophobic tropes that portray women as inherently subjugated in Islam and "in need of saving" (Abu-Lughod 2002) as opposed to them observing a mandatory religious practice.

Implementing the wording and broader discussion of the Report, Article 1 of the 2004 Law amended France's Education Code, prescribing that "[i]n public schools, middle schools and high schools, the wearing of signs or clothing by which students ostentatiously manifest a religious affiliation is prohibited" (translated). Following its enactment, the Conseil d'État adjusted its jurisprudence, holding, for example, in 2007, that in light of the importance attached to the principle of secularism in public schools, the permanent expulsion of a pupil who refused to comply with the legal prohibition established by the 2004 Law was not a disproportionate infringement of the freedom of religion under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights ("ECHR"), nor a violation of the principle of non-discrimination secured by Article 14 ECHR (Conseil d'État 2007, Decision No. 295671). This was because, according to France's highest Court, the 2004 Law aimed at ensuring compliance with the principle of secularism in public schools without discrimination between pupils' different faiths. In other words, wearing a marker of one's faith to comply, from a Muslim legal perspective, with an integral obligation of the faith, was equated with discriminating against others. This logical fallacy also features in the Report, and has persisted to the present day (see burkini discussion below). Quite clearly, it is Muslims who are being discriminated against, rather than Muslims discriminating against others. Indeed, Human Rights Watch argued that the 2004 Law was discriminatory due to the disproportionate impact it would have on Muslim women, astutely observing at the time the bill was passed that there was no compelling public safety, public health or public morality reason necessitating this measure; nor would the *ḥijāb* undermine a school's educational function (Human Rights Watch 2004).

The adopted restrictions force Muslims in France to make stark choices, with serious personal and mental health implications. As Cox has argued, "for a devout Muslim woman. . . an anti-veiling law becomes a high-profile test of her loyalty to God" (Cox 2019, p. 17), putting her in an ethical dilemma. Ultimately, Muslim women lose out either way, by going against their faith or by excluding themselves, to the extent possible, from a society they are barred from participating in in a way that aligns with their mainstream beliefs. This has far-reaching consequences, impacting career development, family dynamics and, as we have already seen, broader societal participation as well as being detrimental to younger Muslims (e.g., there have been incidents where Muslim women who wear the *ḥijāb* have not being able to accompany their children on school trips (Breeden 2019)).

Similarly Islamophobic themes and undertones can also be observed in the nationwide banning of the Islamic face veil, the *niqāb* (Law No 2010-1192 of 11 October 2010).[2] The relevant law prescribes a criminal sanction for the concealment of one's face in public (Article 1). Like the 2004 Law, Muslims are not explicitly named, yet the legislative language unmistakably targets Muslims, by adopting a hostile stance towards their faith, again with gendered connotations. This is evident from the prejudicial formulation of the criminal offence established by the law, which amends Article 225-4-10 of the Criminal Code by

stating that "[t]he act, by any person, of *forcing* one or several other persons to conceal the face, by means of threats, violence, coercion, abuse of authority or of power, *by reason of their sex*, shall be punishable by one year of imprisonment and a fine of 30,000 euros" (translated, emphasis added). The implication is that women are forced into wearing the *niqāb*, rather than it being a matter of personal choice. This contradicts empirical evidence that shows, for example, that 99 percent of American Muslims wear the *ḥijāb* out of personal choice (ISPU 2018). As for the *niqāb,* a study in the UK shows that when familial pressure is enacted, it is pressuring Muslim women to *remove* the *niqāb*, not the other way around (Inge 2016).

To be sure, the intent of this legislation has never been ambiguous. In the year preceding the ban, then-President Sarkozy publicly stated that the face veil was a sign of subservience and debasement—rather than devotion—that was not welcome in France (Chrisafis 2009). Meanwhile, the explanatory memorandum accompanying the law suggested that the legislative restrictions in question were necessary to ensure a "minimum requirement of civility" (S.A.S. v. France 2014, p. 25), thereby suggesting Islamic dress lacks the latter. To be clear, while there is no consensus on the *niqāb* being mandatory under Islamic law, it is a valid Muslim practice, and cannot reasonably be categorized as an "extreme" interpretation of the faith (Shakir 2011). In other words, it could be considered as part of Islamic orthopraxy despite its lower prevalence, which is why we have included it in our analysis.

Equally condescending and hostile statements were made in the context of the adoption of local bans on Muslim swimwear, which different municipalities began implementing in 2016. Notable instances occurred in Cannes and Nice, with the latter gaining international attention due to a photograph that went viral. The image depicted armed officers encircling a Muslim woman on the beach, coercing her into undressing (Said-Moorhouse 2016). The dress concerned, often referred to as a "burkini" despite being far removed from the *burqa*, is very similar to a wetsuit worn in combination with a head covering.

Islam makes no distinction between one's *ʿawrah* on the beach or elsewhere, meaning that if a woman wishes to go for a swim, she would, from a religious perspective, need to cover everything apart from her face, hands and feet in a way that complies with Islamic orthopraxy. In other words, sporting a "burkini" would, assuming the above requirements are met, merely satisfy the minimum level of clothing required by the Islamic faith; women who cover in this way cannot reasonably be considered to be following a particularly strict or "extreme" interpretation of Islam. Yet, the adoption of various local "burkini bans" was accompanied by high levels of Islamophobic language across both local and national government.[3] Then-Prime Minister Valls said the burkini was "based on the enslavement of women" and that "in the face of [this] provocation, the nation must defend itself" (Chrisafis 2016). Separately, he also made comments suggesting Muslim women needed France's help to be protected against discrimination stemming from their own religion. Meanwhile, Thierry Migoule, the head of municipal services in Cannes, told Agence France-Presse the ban was on "ostentatious clothing which refers to an *allegiance to terrorist* movements which are at war with us" (Le Monde 2016, translated, emphasis added). Similarly, Cannes mayor David Lisnard, responsible for implementing the ban in the city, averred that "[t]he burkini is like a uniform, a symbol of Islamist *extremism*. This is why I am banning it for the summer" (Poirier 2016, translated, emphasis added). These latter comments yet again reflect the prevalent oxymoronic trope that paints Muslim women as both victims and aggressors at the same time.

The latest targeting of the Muslim community in France in the context of female dress was much more overt, moving away from the customary rhetoric of "neutrality".

As mentioned in our introduction, France adopted a national ban on the wearing of the *ʿabāyah*, a loose garment worn by many Muslims, at schools in August 2023. Muslim women who wear it do so to ensure modesty/non-revealing clothing, in line with their faith; there is no inherent political meaning behind it. Yet, drawing on the symbolism of Islamic violence, government spokesman Olivier Veran remarked that the *ʿabāyah* was "a political attack, a political sign" as well as an act of "proselytising" (Al Jazeera 2023), thereby rehearsing the century-old trope of Muslims as violent aggressors and a threat. As with the other restrictions discussed, this ban has also been upheld by France's highest court, in a characteristically short judgment, on the basis of Article 1 of the 2004 Law (Conseil d'État 2023b, Decision No. 487891). Amnesty International has strongly criticized the ban, arguing the latter must be understood in the "context of relentless and decades long targeting of Muslims in France" (Amnesty International Press Release 2023).

To provide a further example of French limitations on dress, France's Court of Cassation, the country's second final appellate court, recently held that the Lille Bar Association was entitled to ban a French Muslim lawyer in private practice (i.e., not working for the state and thereby outside the remit of the relevant public service "neutrality laws") from wearing the *ḥijāb* in court, reasoning that wearing it would jeopardize her independence as well as her own clients' right to a fair trial (Cour de Cassation 2022). In other words, the lawyer's covering of her head for religious reasons was equated to a threat to the attainment of justice, her choice being positioned in opposition to French values due to an ill-defined supposed allegiance to a different value system. This juxtaposition of the veil and French values is a long-standing phenomenon; in 2019, then-Education Minister Blanquer publicly stated that the *ḥijāb* was "not in agreement with *our* values" (France24 2019, emphasis added). No similar statements or public debates can be found in relation to Christians or Jews, or indeed any other religions.

5. Beyond Dress: Other Instances of State-Level Islamophobia Within a Wider Islamophobic Context

Female dress has been the most significantly impacted area of Islamophobic law-making, reflecting one of the most prevalent tropes associated with the religion. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the phenomenon described is one limited to one specific aspect of Muslim life. Indeed, other instances of law- and policy-making, taken together with derogatory statements by high-level public officials, reinforce the argument advanced in this paper: that the French state, more broadly, can be described as Islamophobic in the specific sense outlined here—that is, as opposing the mainstream orthopraxy of Islam as a religion.

The blueprint of the attempt to justify the French approach towards limiting manifestations of the Islamic faith is exemplified by the Anti-Separatism Law, formally known as the Law Reinforcing Respect for the Principles of the Republic (Law No 2021-1109 of 24 August 2021).[4] The government suggests that the passing of this law was necessary because the French Republican values of freedom and equality, particularly between women and men, fraternity, and secularism were increasingly under attack by "separatist ideologies which try to fragment French society and destabilize democracy" (Ministry of Interior 2022, p. 4, translated). As with other pieces of legislation, the legal restrictions established are portrayed as being necessary to protect both the French Republic *and French Muslims themselves* against "Islamism" (Ministry of Interior 2022, p. 5, translated). The latter is often associated with adherence to standard Muslim orthopraxy, which is viewed with suspicion and apprehension, and deemed a sufficient threshold to warrant restrictions.

One case in point is the increasing problematization of the basic obligation on Muslims to pray five times a day. Indeed, daily prayer is singled out in a report published by the Senate as one of the acts that push Islam into the public space, there being a "growing segment of Muslims [which] also observes all theological precepts" (Senate Board of Inquiry 2020, section 1, translated). This is part of a broader emerging understanding, which holds that "Islamist radicalism", a term which is rather elusively, is considered to include "behaviors that can be peaceful and that do not lead to violence" (ibid., translated). The enquiry, conducted by the upper house of the French Parliament, one of the state's two legislative bodies, suggests that "Islamism" seeks to impose on Muslims and non-Muslims rigorous orthopraxy, clothing, food, and ritual practices, as well as a "standard of behaviour and relations between men and women, in order to separate them from the rest of the French population" (ibid., translated). In other words, the increasing adherence to standard Islamic prescriptions is seen as an existential threat to the French Republic. This characterization of observant Muslims acting in accordance with mainstream Islam as adherents to an ideology that is attempting to overthrow the French state has aptly been described as turning the term "radicalization" into a euphemism for "devout Muslim" (Amnesty International Press Release 2020).

In the above report's summary, the Senate underscores other aspects of mainstream Islamic practice that are considered to require particular vigilance, such as the presence of *ḥalāl* butchers, which are viewed as vehicles that "separate" Muslims from the rest of the French population. The issue of the adherence to mainstream religious dietary requirements has been criticized elsewhere, with France's Minister of the Interior Darmanin describing the availability of *ḥalāl* meat in French supermarkets as "shocking" (BFMTV 2020). Meanwhile, school canteens across the country have banned *ḥalāl* meat from their menus, it previously having been an option, invoking similar supposed grounds of said option causing disunity (Chrisafis 2015b). One might argue that similar restrictions apply to kosher meat, and that Darmanin's comments were about "communitarian cuisine", which includes *ḥalāl* and kosher meat, therefore affecting Muslims and Jews alike. This, one might argue, signifies an antipathy towards religion in the round as opposed to Muslims in particular. However, this suggestion can be rebutted relatively easily. First, the debates surrounding the adoption of these bans are squarely centered on Islam, and indeed often coincide with attacks on French soil perpetrated by Muslims (Jack 2015). Second, one must also consider that this measure, which statistically speaking affects Muslims in far greater numbers, sits within a wider context of a state sponsored vilification of Muslims without any parallels as far as other faith groups are concerned. Indeed, the above report problematizes other mainstream practices, such as Islamic dress (including the *ḥijāb*), sporting a beard, and making requests for prayer halls, all of which are portrayed as offensive.

In summary, what we are observing in France is a link between ordinary, often mandated Muslim practices and extremism, which is, in turn, associated with violence. Put differently, "the routine, normal behavior of (. . .) dress, religious observance, Islamic financial transaction, literature, etc.—indicates a 'predisposition' to commit terrorism (. . .). If they are sufficiently 'Muslim', they are sufficiently 'predisposed'" (Downs 2012 quoted in Kumar 2012, p. 147). This is perhaps best exemplified by the recent case of Karim Benzema, the Muslim French footballer of Algerian decent, who, when he expressed sending prayers on social media to the people of Gaza who are being subjected to what more than 30 independent United Nations Human Rights experts, Holocaust and genocide scholars, and international human rights organizations describe as a genocide being committed by Israel (Albanese 2024; Amnesty International 2024; BBC 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2024; University Network for Human Rights 2024;

Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security 2023; Segal 2023), was charged with being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood—a euphemism for extremist—by the French interior minister. When asked to offer evidence for this claim, Darmanin's office indicated that the footballer "proselytized on social media around the Muslim cult, such as fasting, prayer, pilgrimage to Mecca" (Randoux 2023, translated), three of the five pillars of the Muslim faith. Similarly, the famous former French rapper Mélanie Georgiades, known by her stage name Diam's, was criticized as setting a bad example and having become a danger to young women when she converted to Islam and chose to wear the *ḥijāb* in public (Vertaldi 2012). Like Benzema, she was accused of proselytizing despite the pictures of her wearing the *ḥijāb* being published without her consent, thereby reinforcing the argument that any visible expression of mainstream Muslim practices is considered to have an ulterior, sinister motive.

The general nature of French public opposition to the adherence to mainstream Muslim practices is further reinforced by France's official policy of "Systematic Obstruction" ("the Policy"), adopted in February 2018. The Policy, initiated by President Macron, represents a comprehensive governmental effort to monitor and regulate Muslim practices and civil participation. Specifically, the Policy mandates the singling out of specific legislative measures that have the potential to effectively impede expressions of Muslim identity and the political advancement of the Muslim community. Since 2019, in line with the Policy, France has conducted approximately 28,000 investigations to combat "political Islamism"—whose definition remains elusive. The Policy has resulted, according to Macron himself, in the temporary or permanent closure of 906 establishments, including mosques, *Qur'ānic* schools, businesses, and civil society organizations, and the confiscation of no less than 54 million euros (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2023, p. 72). The dissolution by the government of the Muslim human rights group, the Collective Against Islamophobia in France ("CCIF") under the Policy is but one famous example of the Policy's detrimental impact on France's Muslim community. Prior to its dissolution by decree in December 2020, CCIF had played a key role in providing legal support to Muslims facing discrimination as well as documenting the discriminatory impact of France's counterterrorism measures.

6. Laïcité Rather Than Islamophobia?

France's approach towards minority groups is based on a specific rationale: equality before the law and being treated with dignity and respect is contingent upon assimilation (Castles 1995, pp. 297–98; Stovall 1993, p. 55). The French model of assimilation rejects identity-based classifications and requires minorities to "integrate" culturally into the national community. Purporting to require an adherence to "Republican universalist" values, in fact what is asked of those living in France is the adoption of beliefs and behaviors that align with majority ethnocentric preferences, at the expense of their own cultural or religious identities and practices.

The French attempt to "assimilate" is often masked by reference to the vague concept of *laïcité*. Indeed, the latter is so ambiguous that France's highest court has struggled to define it (Conseil d'État 2004, Rapport Public). Originally, the term was understood to refer to the state's commitment not to impose a particular religious framework, and that public policies ought not to be devised in reliance on religious beliefs (Idriss 2005). However, as early as the 1990s, it was observed that the interpretation of the term depended very much on the current socio-political context (Chadwick 1997). Interwoven with the ill-defined concept of *laïcité* is the idea of a "neutral" state of being and living, which increasingly demands that faith differences are altogether invisible. Today, *laïcité* is often understood

by officials as the state being able to adopt means to maintain what it conceptualizes as "religious neutrality" at the expense of religious freedom (Idriss 2005, pp. 261–62).

We argue that *laïcité* is no answer to the charge of Islamophobia. To begin with, one can observe varied applications of the foundational legislative text instituting *laïcité* itself, Law No 9 of December 1905,[5] Article 1 of which requires the separation of church and state, whereas Article 2 prohibits the state from recognizing or funding any religion. Up until 2023, only three Muslim private schools received government funding; the number has since been reduced to two following the revocation of state funding from Lycée Averroès, one of the country's most acclaimed schools (Ferrara et al. 2024). Conversely, in 2021, 7045 out of the 7573 private schools (i.e., 93 percent) that received state funding were Catholic (Cour des Comptes 2023, p. 29). Meanwhile, in Alsace, the French state not only funds the construction and maintenance of churches but also appoints clergymen and pays their salaries. France also recently doubled its funding for Christian schools in the Middle East, a move that sits uncomfortably with its official stance (Roméo 2022). These examples indicate that the French state's opposition is not aimed at religion in a broad, general sense.

A direct comparison with how the sensibilities of other faith groups—especially those of the dominant Christian tradition—are treated further reinforces the argument that Islam, not religion in a general sense, is the target. For example, following the outcry over the theatrical performance referencing what the Christian tradition calls the Last Supper at the Paris Olympics, the organizers issued an apology to the Christian community, stating that the skit was never intended to cause offence (Giuffrida 2024). Meanwhile, while some of France's public officials denounce the exercise of Muslim religious practice in public—Marine Le Pen likened Muslims praying in the street for congregational Friday prayer to the Nazi occupation of France, which was not deemed a hate crime by the French court (Chrisafis 2015a)—senior politicians have voiced their opposition to the taking down of Catholic statues, criticizing what they deemed an illegitimate invocation of Law No 9 of December 1905 (Bruna 2023). Similarly, a state funded retirement home's decision not to accept a nun due to her religious attire was met with condemnation and insistence by public officials that this was a false interpretation of the country's secularism laws (Kuruvilla 2019).

7. What Islamophobia Does for the French State

Thus far, approaching French Islamophobia from a Sunni Muslim legal perspective (approximately 90 percent of the world's Muslims), we have shown that the French state's agenda of reinterpreting core Islamically obligated practices as either optional or extreme—or both—are not genuinely aimed at upholding *laïcité* or state neutrality. Instead, these efforts are driven by an underlying ambition to eliminate the visible presence of Islam from French society. This drive, we argue, stems from an inherent hostility toward Islam, perceived as a subaltern, regressive, and socially detrimental moral framework. As such, the French effort bears an unsettling resemblance to Germany's 19th century determination to "Christianise Judaism" in order to render it more palatable to anti-Semitic Christian Europe (Massad 2005), as well as Beijing's more contemporary objective to create a "state-approved Islam" amid accusations of genocide in its repression campaign against the Uyghurs (Halpern 2022; Sweida-Metwally 2021). The question, then, is how this Islamophobia functions to serve the state's broader interests.

The antagonism toward Islam is deeply rooted in the contradictions of France's assimilationist mindset and universalist ideals. While post-WWII European universalist principles demand that freedom of worship be respected, France's assimilationist approach requires that Muslims abandon their religious practices to be fully accepted into French

society. Institutionalized Islamophobia, therefore, becomes a means for the state to resolve these seemingly irreconcilable tensions. By "reclassifying" mainstream religious practices as "extreme", Islamophobia enables the state to frame ordinary Islamic expressions as incompatible with the values of the French Republic. This justifies the exclusion of any visible signs of Islam *qua* Islam from public life while, from the state's perspective, sidestepping accusations of discrimination. By recasting mainstream Islam not as a religious orthopraxy but as an existential threat to the Republic's values, the state justifies its suppression, simultaneously bypassing the universalist ideal of freedom of worship and reinforcing its assimilationist agenda. *Laïcité*, in this process, serves as a smokescreen to facilitate this "reclassification" strategy, the nature of which is Islamophobic.

To advance this agenda, institutionalized French Islamophobia operates through a two-step process that works in tandem. The first step involves redefining mainstream Islamic orthopraxy as extreme. As demonstrated above, here the state gradually shifts the boundary between mainstream and "extreme" religious practices to portray ordinary Islamic observances as radical. By misrepresenting mainstream Islam in this way, the state legitimizes its persecution while avoiding the constraints of universalist norms. This approach transforms standard practices into perceived threats, thus validating increasingly stringent measures against them. The second step involves constructing a "French Islam". Here, the state simultaneously promotes a "sanitized" version of Islam that aligns with French cultural and secular ideals. This "Islam of France" is not an authentic expression of the faith but rather a manufactured, culturalized version that serves state interests by emphasizing compliance over genuine religious observance. Indeed, contrary to the demands of Islamic orthopraxy, this "top-down, state-enforced construction" (Easat-Daas 2017, p. 24) aims to promote a reimagined version of Islam "on the same wavelength with our age and the laws and values of the Republic" (quoted in Mas 2006, p. 596). France has pursued this objective through various institutions and initiatives, including think tanks (El Karoui 2016). Key to this strategy is the recent creation of the *Forum de l'Islam de France*. Members of this body are selected by the French government and designated as "representatives" of Muslims in France. This forum has been tasked, among other things, with producing guidelines for the Muslim community on managing places of worship. The paradox here is profound: while France claims to uphold a strict secularism, it actively intervenes to regulate and redefine Islamic orthopraxy. Indeed, there have even been calls directed at Muslim authorities to change Islamic scripture itself. In 2018, a manifesto—repeating the Islamophobic trope of an inherent anti-Semitism, and seemingly ignorant of the fundamental principles of *Qur'ān*ic exegesis—signed by public officials, one former President and three former Prime Minsters, demanded that parts of the *Qur'ān* be declared obsolete (Hafez 2018).

The consequences of this state-driven Islamophobia are further accentuated by the fact that the collection of religious statistics, which could, for instance, reveal a more realistic impact of the state driven discrimination in areas such as housing, the labor market and educational achievements, is largely prohibited in France for fear of causing "disunity" (Naidoo 2019; Diémert 2005). In yet another paradox, the French state is causing division and discrimination in supposed pursuit of the opposite.

French Islamophobia, therefore, seeks one of two outcomes. If Muslims wish to avoid being labelled as "extremist", they must "reform themselves" in a way that renders them largely non-practicing to the point that Islam plays little to no role in their lives, or, as is increasingly the case, they choose to emigrate from France to be able to live their faith peacefully (Esteves 2023). In essence, therefore, what the French government is asking of Muslims is to abandon the practice of most of their canon—becoming Muslim in name only—if they want to live free of harassment and be "tolerated" in France.

8. Conclusions

France's Muslim population is increasingly subject to daily restrictions on its mainstream religious practices. For decades, Islam and Islamic practices have been scrutinized, othered, demeaned, and ultimately restricted through a series of legislative and executive measures, most of which have been particularly detrimental for Muslim women. As demonstrated throughout the paper, the French state exhibits a state-sponsored system of marginalization and exclusion, driven by Islamophobia, the latter of which must be conceptualized as including a deep-seated antipathy towards Islam as a religion.

We introduced a fresh perspective to this extensively analyzed topic by examining French Islamophobia from an Islamic Sunni legal perspective. In doing so, we demonstrated that a key mechanism is the characterization of mainstream mandatory Islamic practices as extreme. In effect, the French state stigmatizes mandated Islamic expressions, framing them as incompatible with French values and thus justifying their systematic marginalization from public life. The state then uses this vilification in an attempt to sidestep accusations of discrimination and infringements on universalist ideals that promote freedom of conscience to promote an alternative, a top-down corrupted version of the faith.

The French state's virulent Islamophobic stance is both a product and a reflection of the broader climate of hostility pervasive within French society. The widespread aversion to Islam is underscored by a 2017 IPSOS poll, which found that 61 percent of French citizens believe Islam is incompatible with French society (Dille 2023), while an overwhelming 81 percent of French citizens support the *'abāyah* ban (Schofield et al. 2023). More recently, in 2024, the far-right party *Rassemblement National*, which campaigns on an explicitly anti-Islam platform, made history by securing 33 percent of the vote in the first round of parliamentary elections. As we have demonstrated, the convergence of these hostile attitudes towards adherents of Islam within both French society and its public institutions has—to paraphrase Hunter-Henin—effectively enabled the transformation of a "feeling of disdain towards Islam into French law" (Hunter-Henin 2012, p. 616).

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, C.L. and S.S.-M.; methodology, C.L. and S.S.-M.; formal analysis, C.L. and S.S.-M.; resources, C.L. and S.S.-M.; writing—original draft preparation, C.L. and S.S.-M.; writing—review and editing, C.L. and S.S.-M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Acknowledgments: We are grateful to Laure Assaf, Jinan Bastaki, Rosemary Byrne, and the two anonymous reviewers who provided valuable feedback on an earlier version of this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Notes

1 Law No 2004-228 of 15 March 2004—Loi no 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics.

2 Law No 2010-1192 of 11 October 2010—Loi No 2010-1192 du 11 octobre 2010 interdisant la dissimulation du visage dans l'espace public.

[3] It is worth mentioning that there have been different judgments regarding the banning of the burkini. Following a challenge by the Human Rights League and Action Droits des Musulmans, the Conseil d'État on 26 August 2016 held that the then recent attacks in Nice were an insufficient basis to justify the ban; the mayor had failed to show any proven risk of women wearing modest swimwear disturbing the public order and it therefore constituted a serious and manifestly unlawful interference with the fundamental freedom of movement, freedom of conscience and personal freedom (Conseil d'État 2016, Decision No.402742). However, this must be contrasted with the more recent decision of the Conseil d'État, in which the latter rejected the City of Grenoble's attempt to allow burkinis at municipal swimming pools (Conseil d'État 2022, Decision No. 464648). In its judgment, the Court held that the municipality was intending "to satisfy a claim of a religious nature" by a particular group of pool users, and that there was no "real justification for the resulting difference in treatment", which would jeopardize the "proper functioning of the public service, and the equal treatment of users" (ibid., para. 9).

[4] Law No 2021-1109 of 24 August 2021—Loi n°2021-1109 du 24 août 2021 confortant le respect des principes de la République.

[5] Law No 9 December 1905—Loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des Églises et de l'État.

References

Abdel Haleem, Muhammad. 2008. *The Qur'an: A New Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2002. Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others. *American Anthropologist* 104: 783–90. [CrossRef]

Albanese, Francesca. 2024. Anatomy of a Genocide—Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territory Occupied Since 1967 to Human Rights Council—Advance Unedited Version (A/HRC/55/73). Available online: https://www.un.org/unispal/document/anatomy-of-a-genocide-report-of-the-special-rapporteur-on-the-situation-of-human-rights-in-the-palestinian-territory-occupied-since-1967-to-human-rights-council-advance-unedited-version-a-hrc-55/ (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Al Jazeera. 2023. France Abaya Ban: 'How Far Will Clothes Police Go? *Al Jazeera*, August 28. Available online: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/28/france-abaya-ban-how-far-will-clothes-police-go (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Alkiek, Tesneem. 2021. Is Hijab Religious or Cultural? How Islamic Rulings Are Formed. Available online: https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/is-hijab-religious-or-cultural-how-islamic-rulings-are-formed (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Amnesty International. 2024. Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory: 'You Feel Like You Are Subhuman': Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza. Available online: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/8668/2024/en/ (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Amnesty International Press Release. 2020. France Is Not the Free-Speech Champion It Says It Is. Available online: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/11/france-is-not-the-free-speech-champion-it-says-it-is/ (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Amnesty International Press Release. 2023. France: Authorities Must Repeal Discriminatory Ban on the Wearing of Abaya in Public Schools. Available online: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/7280/2023/en/ (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Ansari, Zaynab. 2016. Can You Clarify the Standard Explanation of the Verse of Hijab? Available online: https://seekersguidance.org/answers/shafii-fiqh/can-you-clarify-the-standard-explanation-of-the-verse-of-hijab/ (accessed on 10 November 2024).

BBC. 2024. BBC World Service—Weekend, Human Rights Watch Founder Accuses Israel of Genocide. Available online: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0j1rk0c (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Beaman, Jean. 2019. Are French People White?: Towards an Understanding of Whiteness in Republican France. *Identities* 26: 546–62. [CrossRef]

BFMTV. 2020. Gérald Darmanin: 'Moi ça m'a toujours choqué de rentrer dans un hypermarché et de voir un rayon de telle cuisine communautaire'. Available online: https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/gouvernement/gerald-darmanin-moi-ca-m-a-touche-toujours-choque-de-rentrer-dans-un-hypermarche-et-de-voir-un-rayon-de-telle-cuisine-communautaire_VN-202010200372.html (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Breeden, Aurelien. 2019. Another Hijab Furor Hits France, Over a Mother on a School Trip. *The New York Times*, October 19. Available online: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/19/world/europe/france-hijab-school-trip-mother.html (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Briancon, Pierre. 2024. Far-Right Win Leaves France Amid Shock and Chaos. *Reuters*, June 30. Available online: https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/far-right-win-leaves-france-amid-shock-chaos-2024-06-30/ (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Bruna, Annika. 2023. Statue de la Vierge sur l'Île de Ré: C'est la gauche qu'il faut déboulonner! Rassemblement National. Available online: https://rassemblementnational.fr/communiques/statue-de-la-vierge-sur-lile-de-re-cest-la-gauche-quil-faut-deboulonner (accessed on 21 November 2024).

Castles, Stephen. 1995. How nation-states respond to immigration and ethnic diversity. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 21: 293–308. [CrossRef]

Chadwick, Kay. 1997. Education in Secular France: (Re)defining Laïcité. *Modern and Contemporary France* 5: 47–59. [CrossRef]

Chrisafis, Angelique. 2009. Nicolas Sarkozy Says Islamic Veils Are Not Welcome in France. *The Guardian UK*, June 22. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/22/islamic-veils-sarkozy-speech-france (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Chrisafis, Angelique. 2015a. Marine Le Pen Not Guilty of Inciting Religious Hatred. *The Guardian UK*, December 15. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/15/marine-le-pen-not-guilty-inciting-religious-hatred-lyon-french-front-national (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Chrisafis, Angelique. 2015b. Pork or Nothing: How School Dinners Are Dividing France. *The Guardian UK*, October 13. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/13/pork-school-dinners-france-secularism-children-religious-intolerance (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Chrisafis, Angelique. 2016. French PM Supports Local Bans on Burkinis. *The Guardian UK*, August 17. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/17/french-pm-supports-local-bans-burkinis (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Conseil d'État. 1989. Decision No. 346.893.

Conseil d'État. 1996. Decision Nos. 170207, 170208. Available online: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/ceta/id/CETATEXT000007918468 (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Conseil d'État. 2004. Un Siecle De Laïcité'—Jurisprudence Et Avis Du 2003. *Rapport Public*, March 1.

Conseil d'État. 2007. Decision No 295671. Available online: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/ceta/id/CETATEXT000018007973 (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Conseil d'État. 2016. Decision No. 402742. Available online: https://www.conseil-etat.fr/fr/arianeweb/CE/analyse/2016-08-26/402742 (accessed on 29 December 2024).

Conseil d'État. 2022. Decision No. 464648. Available online: https://www.conseil-etat.fr/fr/arianeweb/CE/decision/2022-06-21/464648 (accessed on 29 December 2024).

Conseil d'État. 2023a. Decision Nos. 458088, 459547 and 463408. Available online: https://www.conseil-etat.fr/en/news/the-conseil-d-etat-upholds-the-french-football-federation-s-ban-on-wearing-any-sign-or-clothing-clearly-showing-political-philosophical-religiou (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Conseil d'État. 2023b. Decision No. 487891. Available online: https://www.conseil-etat.fr/fr/arianeweb/CE/decision/2023-09-07/487891 (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Cour de Cassation. 2022. Pourvoi N/Judgment No. D 20-20.185. Available online: https://www.courdecassation.fr/en/decision/621f1707459bcb7900c39e7d (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Cour des Comptes. 2023. Entités et Politiques Publiques L'enseignement Privé sous Contrat. Rapport Public Thématique. Available online: https://www.vie-publique.fr/files/rapport/pdf/289657.pdf (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Cox, Neville. 2019. *Behind the Veil: A Critical Analysis of European Veiling Laws*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Daniel, Norman. 1960. *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Diémert, Stéphane. 2005. Le droit de l'outre-mer. *Pouvoirs* 113: 101–12. [CrossRef]

Dille, Jackson. 2023. Religious Discrimination Against Muslims in France. Available online: https://ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/religious-discrimination-against-muslims-in-france (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Drouhot, Lucas, Patrick Simon, and Vincent Tiberj. 2023. Religious Diversity in France: Intergenerational Transmissions and Practices by Origins. Available online: https://www.insee.fr/en/statistiques/7342918?sommaire=7344042&q=muslim (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Easat-Daas, Amina. 2017. The role of 'European Islam' in motivating Muslim women's political participation in France French Cultural Studies 28: 17–27.

El Karoui, Hakim. 2016. A French Islam Is Possible. Available online: https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/publications/french-islam-possible (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Escafré-Dublet, Angéline, Virginie Guiraudon, and Julien Talpin. 2023. Fighting Discrimination in a Hostile Political Environment: The Case of 'Colour-Blind' France. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46: 667–85. [CrossRef]

Esteves, Olivier. 2023. France, you love it but leave it: The silent flight of French Muslims. *Modern & Contemporary France* 31: 243–57.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2024. Being Muslim in the EU—Experiences of Muslims. Available online: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2024-being-muslim-in-the-eu_en.pdf (accessed on 29 December 2024).

Evranos, Birsen Aybüke. 2023. Securitization of Islam in France: Everyday Lives of French Muslims. *SİYASAL: Journal of Political Sciences* 32: 259–78.

Fernando, Mayanthi L. 2014. *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ferrara, Carol, Francoise Lorcerie, and Vincent Geisser. 2024. France's Biggest Muslim School Went from Accolades to Defunding—Showing a Key Paradox in How the Country Treats Islam. Available online: https://theconversation.com/frances-biggest-muslim-school-went-from-accolades-to-defunding-showing-a-key-paradox-in-how-the-country-treats-islam-220725#:~:text=France%20is%20famously%20strict%20on,funding,%20and%20most%20are%20Catholic (accessed on 10 November 2024).

France24. 2019. Outrage as Far-Right Politician Tells Woman to Take off Veil at French Council Meeting. Available online: https://www.france24.com/en/20191014-outrage-as-far-right-politician-tells-woman-to-take-off-veil-at-french-council-meeting (accessed on 19 December 2024).

Garner, Steve, and Saher Selod. 2015. The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia. *Critical Sociology* 41: 9–19. [CrossRef]

Giuffrida, Angela. 2024. Paris Olympics Organisers Apologise to Christians for Unintentional Last Supper Parody. *The Guardian*, July 28. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/sport/article/2024/jul/28/paris-olympics-organisers-apologise-to-christians-for-last-supper-parody (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Grosfoguel, Ramon. 2012. The Multiple Faces of Islamophobia. *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 1: 9–33. [CrossRef]

Hafez, Farid. 2018. The French Initiative to Change the Qur'an. Available online: https://www.setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2018/05/39_Perspective_French_Iniative1.pdf (accessed on 21 November 2024).

Halpern, Isaac. 2022. Comparing the Cultural Roots of Islamophobic Policy in China and France: The Cultural Similarities and Differences Behind State Rhetoric, Homogenisation and Repressive Policy. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 42: 75–99. [CrossRef]

Hannini, Daniyah. 2024. Breaking Free: Unshackling the Muslim Mind from Secular Thought and Reestablishing the Islamic Personality. Available online: https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/breaking-free-unshackling-the-muslim-mind-from-secular-thought-and-reestablishing-the-islamic-personality (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Human Rights Watch. 2004. France: Headscarf Ban Violates Religious Freedom. By Disproportionately Affecting Muslim Girls, Proposed Law Is Discriminatory. Available online: https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/02/26/france-headscarf-ban-violates-religious-freedom (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Hunter-Henin, Myriam. 2012. Why the French Don't Like the Burqa: Laïcité, National Identity and Religious Freedom. *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 61: 613–39. [CrossRef]

Idriss, Mohammad Mazher. 2005. 'Laïcité' and the banning of the 'hijab' in France. *Legal Studies* 25: 260–95. [CrossRef]

Inge, Anabel. 2016. *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

ISPU. 2018. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. American Muslim Poll 2018: Pride and Prejudice. Available online: https://21702012.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/21702012/Research/American-Muslim-Poll-2018.pdf?__hstc=13299560.922ac5d934e71521813095a21fd67c46.1724844970081.1724844970081.1724844970081.1&__hssc=13299560.3.1724844970081&__hsfp=1091697180 (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Jack, Ian. 2015. The Row Over Pork Comes as a Surprise in France, Where Couscous Is a Favourite Food. *The Guardian UK*, October 16. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/16/row-over-pork-comes-as-surprise-in-france-where-couscous-is-favourite-food (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Jones, Stephen H., and Amy Unsworth. 2023. Two Islamophobias? Racism and religion as distinct but mutually supportive dimensions of anti-Muslim prejudice. *The British Journal of Sociology* 75: 5–22. [CrossRef]

Kumar, Deepa. 2012. *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Kuruvilla, Carol. 2019. French Officials Defend Nun Who Was Told Her Religious Attire Violated Secularism Law. Available online: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/french-nun-france-secularism_n_5dd6cb8be4b0fc53f20ff6bb (accessed on 21 November 2024).

Lauwers, Anna Sophie. 2019. Is Islamophobia (Always) Racism? *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7: 306–32. [CrossRef]

Lean, Nathan. 2017. *The Islamophobia Industry*. London: Pluto Press.

Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security. 2023. Statement on Why We Call the Israeli Attack on Gaza Genocide. Available online: https://www.lemkininstitute.com/statements-new-page/statement-on-why-we-call-the-israeli-attack-on-gaza-genocide?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Le Monde. 2016. Burkini: Le maire de Cannes interdit les vêtements religieux à la plage. Available online: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/08/11/le-maire-de-cannes-interdit-les-vetements-religieux-a-la-plage_4981587_3224.html (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Le Monde. 2019. Selon un sondage, 42% des musulmans de France disent avoir été discriminés à cause de leur religion. Available online: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/11/06/selon-un-sondage-40-des-musulmans-de-france-ont-fait-l-objet-de-racisme_6018225_3224.html (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Love, Erik. 2017. *Islamophobia and Racism in America*. New York: New York University Press.

Mas, Ruth. 2006. Compelling the Muslim Subject: Memory as Post-Colonial Violence and the Public Performativity of 'Secular and Cultural Islam'. *The Muslim World* 96: 585–616. [CrossRef]

Massad, Joseph. 2005. The Persistence of the Palestinian Question. *Cultural Critique* 59: 1–23. [CrossRef]
Massoumi, Narzanin, Tom Mills, and David Miller. 2017. *What is Islamophobia? Racism, social movements and the State*. London: Pluto Press.
Meah, Jamir. 2016. What Are the Requirements of Hijab? Seekers Guidance Islamic Academy. Available online: https://seekersguidance.org/answers/general-counsel/what-are-the-requirements-of-hijab/ (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Ministère de la Culture. 2023. National Commemorations: Bicentennial of the Birth of Ernest Renan on February 28, 2023. Available online: https://www.culture.gouv.fr/en/regions/drac-bretagne/Actualites/National-Commemorations-Bicentennial-of-the-Birth-of-Ernest-Renan-on-February-28-2023#:~:text=National%20Commemorations:%20Bicentennial%20of%20the,Renan%20on%20February%2028,%202023 (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Ministry of Interior. 2022. Loi confortant le respect des principes de la République: Premier bilan et perspectives, un an après sa promulgation. Available online: https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/DP_Loi-confortant-le-respect-des-principes-de-la-Republique-2022-1.pdf (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Ministry of National Education and Youth. 2023. Key Data on National Education 2023. Available online: https://www.education.gouv.fr/studies-and-statistics-education-france-and-europe-326296 (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Modood, Tariq. 2005. *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Modood, Tariq. 2019. *Essays on Secularism and Multiculturalism*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
Naidoo, Kamban. 2019. Race, Ethnicity, Discrimination and Violence in 'Colour-Blind' France. *Fundamina* 25: 68–93. [CrossRef]
Norton, Anne. 2013. *On the Muslim Question*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2024. The International Order Is Breaking down in Gaza: UN Experts Mark One Year of Genocidal Attacks on Palestinians. Available online: https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/10/international-order-breaking-down-gaza-un-experts-mark-one-year-genocidal?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Opratko, Benjamin. 2017. Islamophobia: The Bigger Picture. *Historical Materialism* 25: 63–89. [CrossRef]
Pew Research Center. 2009. Mapping the Global Muslim Population. Available online: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/ (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Poirier, Agnes. 2016. "Burkini Beach Row Puts French Values to Test. Available online: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37093420 (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Randoux, Fabrice. 2023. La polémique autour de Karim Benzéma se poursuit en France. *La Presse*, October 20. Available online: https://www.lapresse.ca/sports/soccer/2023-10-20/accuse-d-islamisme/la-polemique-autour-de-karim-benzema-se-poursuit-en-france.php (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Roméo, Lou. 2022. Why Is Secular France Doubling Funding for Christian Schools in the Middle East? France24. Available online: https://www.france24.com/en/france/20220203-why-is-secular-france-doubling-funding-for-christian-schools-in-the-middle-east (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
Said, Edward W. 1981. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Said-Moorhouse, Lauren. 2016. Burkini Ban: Police in Nice Force Woman to Remove Part of Clothing. *CNN*, August 24. Available online: https://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/24/europe/woman-burkini-nice-beach-incident-trnd/index.html (accessed on 21 November 2024).
Saliba, George. 2007. *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
S.A.S. v. France. 2014. S.A.S. v France [GC], no. 43835/11, Judgment of 1 July 2014. Available online: https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%7B%22itemid%22:[%22001-145466%22]%7D (accessed on 10 November 2024).
Sayyid, Salman, and AbdoolKarim Vakil. 2010. *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives*. London: Hurst & Company.
Schofield, Hugh, Khadidiatou Cissé, and Kaine Pieri. 2023. French Shrug off Muslim Upset at Abaya Ban in Schools. *BBC*, September 9. Available online: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66753665 (accessed on 21 November 2024).
Sealy, Thomas. 2021. Islamophobia: With or Without Islam? *Religions* 12: 369. [CrossRef]
Segal, Raz. 2023. A Textbook Case of Genocide. *Jewish Currents*, October 13. Available online: https://jewishcurrents.org/a-textbook-case-of-genocide (accessed on 21 November 2024).
Selod, Saher, and David G. Embrick. 2013. Racialization and Muslims: Situating the Muslim Experience in Race Scholarship: Racialization and Muslims. *Sociology Compass* 7: 644–55. [CrossRef]
Senate Board of Inquiry. 2020. Radicalisation Islamiste: Faire Face et Lutter Ensemble, Tome I: Rapport No 595 (2019–2020). Available online: https://www.senat.fr/notice-rapport/2019/r19-595-1-notice.html#:~:text=Dans%20son%20rapport%20adopt%C3%A9%20%C3%A0,soumettre%20une%20partie%20de%20la (accessed on 21 November 2024).

Shaheen, Jack G. 2003. Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588: 171–93. [CrossRef]

Shakir, Zaid. 2011. The Lawful Nature of Niqab (Face Veiling). Available online: https://seekersguidance.org/answers/general-counsel/the-lawful-nature-of-niqab-face-veiling/ (accessed on 29 December 2024).

Stasi Report. 2003. Report on Behalf of the Fact-Finding Mission on the Issue of Wearing Religious Symbols in Schools. Available online: https://www.vie-publique.fr/files/rapport/pdf/034000725.pdf (accessed on 21 November 2024).

Stovall, Tyler. 1993. Colour-Blind France? Colonial Workers During the First World War. *Race and Class* 35: 35–55. [CrossRef]

Sweida-Metwally, Samir. 2021. Spending Ethically for Justice: A Muslim Response to the Uyghur Genocide. Available online: https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/spending-ethically-for-justice-a-muslim-response-to-the-uyghur-genocide (accessed on 20 August 2024).

Uenal, Fatih, Robin Bergh, Jim Sidanius, Andreas Zick, Sasha Kimel, and Jonas R. Kunst. 2021. The Nature of Islamophobia: A Test of a Tripartite View in Five Countries. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 47: 275–92. [CrossRef]

UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2024. France: Hijab Bans in Sports Are Discriminatory and Must Be Reversed, Say Experts. Available online: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/france-hijab-bans-sports-are-discriminatory-and-must-be-reversed-say-experts (accessed on 29 December 2024).

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. 2023. Annual Report. Available online: https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-01/AR%202023.pdf (accessed on 10 November 2024).

University Network for Human Rights. 2024. Genocide in Gaza. Available online: https://www.humanrightsnetwork.org/projects/genocide-in-gaza?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email (accessed on 10 November 2024).

Vertaldi, Aurelia. 2012. Diam's: «Je porte le voile par discrétion et pudeur». *Le Figaro*, October 1. Available online: https://www.lefigaro.fr/musique/2012/10/01/03006-20121001ARTFIG00519-diam-s-je-porte-le-voile-par-discretion-et-pudeur.php (accessed on 21 November 2024).

Werbner, Pnina. 2005. Islamophobia: Incitement to Religious Hatred—Legislating for a New Fear? *Anthropology Today* 21: 5–9. [CrossRef]

Wing, Adrien Katherine, and Monica Nigh Smith. 2005. Critical Race Feminism Lifts the Veil? Muslim Women, France, and the Headscarf Ban. *UC Davis Law Review* 39: 743.

Wolfreys, Jim. 2023. 'Avec Vous?' Islamophobia and the Macron Presidency. *Modern & Contemporary France* 31: 165–82.

religions

MDPI

Article

The Muslim Vote Campaign in the UK: Expanding Social Movement Theory

Mohammed Sinan Siyech

School of Social Science and Humanities, University of Wolverhampton, Wolverhampton WV1 1LY, UK; sinansiyechmd@gmail.com

Abstract

This article aims to understand Muslim voting trends in the United Kingdom through a study of the movement that called itself The Muslim Vote. Drawing on interviews and other publicly available primary material, it uses Social Movement Theory to analyse the movement that emerged in the post-7 October 2023 landscape. It argues that voter fatigue with both the Labour and Conservative Parties, due to their failure to address acute economic issues in the UK, as well as both parties' support for Israel, created opportunities for TMV to emerge. Consequently, TMV mobilised resources, including decades of political experience and a new emerging group of politically educated youth, to help power its campaign. It also demonstrates how TMV used common frames of reference for Muslims, such as the Ummah, aided by social media apps, shining light on Israel's actions in Palestine to engage Muslims across the UK. In highlighting some of the nascent successes of TMV's efforts in co-ordination with local Muslim groups, whereby independent candidates came to power, it demonstrates that TMV has the latent ability to reshape Muslim political identity if it were to continue its momentum. Through this enquiry, it finally lends itself to the literature that examines Muslim voting trends in the UK and Europe.

Keywords: British Muslims; The Muslim Vote; Israel Palestine; social movement theory; secularization thesis

1. Introduction

In the British general elections of 2024, the Labour Party soared to power with more than 400 seats across the UK. However, despite this thumping win at the national level, much of its victory was marred by the fact that it obtained the lowest vote share (33% approximately) than any other winning party in the post-World War era (Kirk et al. 2024). While many reasons contributed towards this pyrrhic victory, one major aspect that played a role was the decrease in Muslims voting for the Labour party and the issue of Israel–Palestinian conflict. While many experts and UN officials described Israeli action in Palestine as a genocide perpetrated by Israel, the Labour Party was quite supportive of Israel, with the Labour Party voting against a ceasefire in Israel in November 2023.[1] These actions and apathy towards Palestinians enraged many Muslim voters and activists, leading a new campaign to consolidate Muslim votes in the July 2024 elections called The Muslim Vote campaign (TMV).

Launched in December 2023, TMV represents a significant shift in British Muslim political engagement in the elections. A tangible result of the campaign has been the victory

of six different independents and the slashing of majorities for Labour candidates in several constituencies previously considered safe seats for the Labour Party. This is unprecedented given that the number of independent candidates that won in the general elections of 2024 was more than the total number of independents who won in all general elections since 1945 (Bale 2019).

In this paper, I aim to analyse TMV through the framework of Social Movement Theory, providing insights into its emergence, strategies, and potential impact on UK politics. The key research questions that it focuses on are two-fold: What factors contributed to the rise and influence of The Muslim Vote (TMV) as a political mobilisation movement in the UK? I plan to analyse this rise using Social Movement Theory (SMT). Secondly, how has TMV reshaped Muslim political engagement in the UK?

This paper employed a mixed-methods approach to analyse The Muslim Vote campaign from a top-down perspective. My research began with a qualitative analysis of TMV campaign materials, including websites, social media content, and press releases. This allowed me to understand the movement's messaging, strategies, and self-presentation. I complemented this with a quantitative analysis of TMV-endorsed candidates who won elections, providing insights into the strategy of selecting candidates. Much of this was dependent on datasets that were provided to me by the organisers of TMV.

To gain deeper insights into the movement's organisation and goals, I conducted open-ended semi-structured interviews with various members associated with TMV. A total of about 10 interviews were conducted, which included repeated interviews with those involved with conceptualising the campaign and organising it. Community leaders, including members of Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) and other such organisations that were closely affiliated with TMV were also interviewed. In addition, I also spoke to volunteers involved in the campaign as well as observers of the campaign who were politically active. These included members of the political establishment as well as activists who did not engage with The Muslim Vote campaign. This multifaceted approach enabled me to conduct a comprehensive examination of TMV through the lens of Social Movement Theory, which is explained below.

Some limitations, however, remain. Firstly, due to time and resource constraints, I was unable to analyse how voters felt about the movement and what prompted them to engage with independent candidates. In addition, I was also unable to go constituency-wise and understand specific Muslim voting patterns since the available data needed far more analysis. Indeed, as pointed out by popular polling organisation 'More in Common', it is not easily possible to identify Muslim voting patterns in the UK (More in Common 2024).

Given these limitations and the scope of the paper being limited to the movement's leadership alone, 10 interviews were deemed sufficient since they engaged with the main architects, co-ordinators, and volunteers associated with the movement. Moreover, since SMT looks at resources, framing, and opportunities, interviews with leaders helped satisfactorily explain these factors, also justifying the selection of these individuals as interviewees. However, not engaging with ordinary members of these movements is a limitation and contributes to the elite leadership bias within SMT studies. While it would have been useful to do so, time and resource constraints prevented me from doing so. Nonetheless, there is much more scope to analyse this issue from many other angles that this paper has not been able to address.

From a reflexivity perspective, my interest in the issue of TMV began in 2024, roughly more than a year after I shifted to the United Kingdom for my PhD (September 2022). I began to work on it before the general elections, by mapping out the movement in February 2024, for which I conducted a few interviews. Accordingly, I am considered an outsider

when it comes to British (Muslim) politics, having never lived in the UK or having not engaged as a volunteer or contributor towards TMV. However, due to my engagements with the Muslim community, I was provided some level of access to data, especially since there was not much analytical work performed on the movement during the time I began researching this paper.

1.1. Structure

I begin by discussing the literature, looking at Social Movement Theory to explain its importance in analysing this movement. I then provide some preface to the Muslim community in the UK, including its political stances throughout the year. This also covers the formation of the Respect Party in 2004, which was headed by Muslim politicians in alliance with other members of the left. I then explain the general voting trends in the UK in the last few decades, charting out the main key themes and trends in these voting patterns.

Moving on, I discuss how 7 October and Israel's responses to this event marked a seminal moment in Muslim consciousness and politics globally, with implications seen in the UK as well. This also provides some understanding of the background to The Muslim Vote campaign in the UK. From there, I discuss how The Muslim Vote campaign took place across the country, discussing the various resources, manpower, and modes of communication used to campaign for different candidates.

I then break down the impact of TMV in the elections, discussing not just the candidates that won but also some of the independent candidates that almost unseated important Labour Party candidates in their constituencies. Throughout this paper, I use Social Movement Theory to provide a theoretical framework from which to analyse the outsized impact of the campaign. Finally, I end the paper by explaining the current situation of The Muslim Vote campaign, its chances for longevity based on SMT, as well as the implications for future Muslim voting trends in the UK.

1.2. Social Movement Theory

Social Movement Theory (SMT) is a body of literature that looks at movements and how they engage in activism. It is well-suited for analysing The Muslim Vote (TMV) campaign due to its focus on understanding how collective action is organised, mobilised, and sustained. TMV can be viewed as a social movement aiming to address political and social grievances within the Muslim community, and SMT provides the tools to unpack its strategies and impact. These theoretical tools thus provide a comprehensive framework for analysing TMV's organisation, strategies, and potential for success. By applying these concepts, I intend to gain a deeper understanding of how TMV operates as a social movement and its potential impact on British politics.

Social Movement Theory (SMT) offers a multifaceted approach to understanding collective action and social change based on grievances. For this analysis, I focus on three key components of SMT. First, Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) emphasises the importance of resources (human, financial, organisational) in movement success. This aspect of SMT helps me understand how TMV leveraged various resources within the Muslim community to build and sustain its campaign, including armies of volunteers across the whole of the UK, ranging from Wales to Scotland. Second, I consider Political Opportunity Structures (POSs), which examine how political context influences movement emergence and strategies. This factor will cover Middle Eastern politics with reference to the Israel–Palestine conflict and its impact on local British politics. Lastly, I explore framing processes, which focus on how movements construct and disseminate meaning to mobilise supporters and achieve goals. This component is crucial in understanding how

TMV communicates its message and motivates participation among British Muslims, given that it uses the frame of Ummah (global Muslim community), Justice for Palestine, and anti-colonial language to frame itself (Wiktorowicz 2003, pp. 1–24).

A few concerns remain about SMT, which this article will propose to address. Looking at the history of how SMT began to be used, the theory began to be popularised in the 1960s in the backdrop of protests taking place in Western nations, signifying deep displeasure with the political status quo of that era. Scholars such as Tilly then analysed these movements, proving that they were not just spontaneous movements that erupted without any structure but rather organised movements with rational objectives and choices (Tilly 1978).

SMT's engagement with Islamic movements, however, was not well-nuanced, as pointed out by scholars like Arndt, especially in the 1990s (Emmerich 2020). By 2003, when Wiktorowicz produced the first major work on SMT applied to Islamic movements, most of the analysis was focused on either Jihadist groups such as the GIA or Islamist groups that were involved in violence (Wiktorowicz 2003, pp. 1–24). The use of SMT to engage with violent Muslim groups was a trend that persisted in the literature of SMT and Islamic groups well into the 2020s. Arndt Emerich, in his analysis, pointed out that in fact, SMT was often intertwined within terrorism studies scholarship, thereby obfuscating some of the broader potential of using this analysis to groups outside of proscribed terrorist groups. His article looked at quietist Salafism and the potential of SMT to analyse it, thereby eliminating violence as one of the dynamics within the study of such groups (Emmerich 2020).

This specific article aims to expand this analysis beyond Salafists and looks at British Muslims as a whole. Studying how political protests turn into actual electoral shifts is a natural process within political spheres. However, this shift within Muslim communities has not been analysed within the literature that has used SMT, and this paper argues that it is a significant gap in analyses of SMT.

2. Muslims in the UK

The British Muslim population is among the most diverse in the world, with Muslims from almost every country in the world forming a part of the British Muslim community. While the community is internally divided by ethnic and theological lines, the largest wave of migration came from South Asia during the 1960s, with later arrivals including Libyans, Somalis, Afghans, and others fleeing conflict. Religious diversity within the UK Muslim population spans Sunnis, Shias, Sufis, Salafis, Deobandis, Jamaat-e-Islami, and more (Elshayyal 2015). Despite these internal distinctions, common religious practices such as mosque attendance, halal food consumption, and Ramadan observance unite many. Meanwhile, external pressures like Islamophobia, intensified after 9/11 and 7/7, compelled communities to organise publicly. While early generations were largely defensive, younger generations are more assertive in expressing their British Muslim identity, even as challenges persist. Economic mobility, political representation, and a growing professional class alongside contributions of over GBP 70 billion to the UK economy demonstrate the community's increasing influence (Siyech and Shah 2024).

These factors shape political engagement as well. While religious identity remains important, ethnic identity also shapes political leanings, and Islamophobia, especially following the August 2024 riots, has politicised many Muslims. As Elshayyal and others argue, anti-Muslim sentiment has defined how Muslims engage politically. Historically, Muslims aligned with Labour due to its grassroots connections with ethnic minorities, anti-discrimination stance, and use of clan-based strategies to consolidate votes (Ibid.). As a result, most Muslim MPs have been from Labour, while Conservative ties to Islamophobic rhetoric—from Enoch Powell to contemporary support for Israel—have repelled many

Muslim voters. However, Labour's support cannot be taken for granted, as shown in 2004, when the Iraq War spurred a significant defection to the Respect Party, which attracted Muslim and left-wing support, particularly under the leadership of George Galloway (Akhtar 2024).

The Respect Party's initial success and eventual decline (triggered by internal splits and controversy) illustrates how Muslim loyalty to Labour is conditional. Its rise proved that Muslims would rally behind alternative platforms when politically energised. Less than a decade after Respect's decline, The Muslim Vote campaign revived this energy, channelling community outrage over Gaza and Palestine into electoral mobilisation, demonstrating once again the potency of a politically conscious Muslim electorate.[2]

By the 2024 elections, widespread dissatisfaction with the Conservative government after 14 years in power had created a fertile political opening. Brexit, seen by many as a political misstep, was followed by compounding crises in the NHS (Prickett 2024), housing, energy, and transport sectors. Rising inflation, stagnant wages, and public service breakdowns triggered strikes and voter frustration across the country. While the Labour Party was widely expected to capitalise on this discontent, its failure to offer a compelling alternative—beyond rhetoric on immigration—left many voters disillusioned (Siyech 2024). This environment of economic fatigue and weak political options contributed to a unique opening that campaigns like The Muslim Vote (TMV) were able to capitalise on.

In the current literature on Muslims in the UK (and broadly Muslims in Europe), there is much scholarship written on voting patterns within the community. One of the key findings that has been replicated repeatedly over many different studies is that Muslims often vote as a group when they face increased marginalisation and discrimination. In fact, several studies have shown that Muslims (among other minority groups in Europe with immigrant backgrounds) vote consistently left due to right-wing parties calling for decreased immigration (Bergh and Bjørklund 2011; Bird et al. 2010). For example, Oshri and Itzkovitch-Malka (2025) argue that right-wing parties that profess anti-immigration and anti-Muslim stances spur Muslims to vote further left. Other research on Turkish-background Muslims in Europe (and Turkey) demonstrates that their voting behaviour is often predicated not on ideology alone but on self-interests too (Baysu and Swyngedouw 2020). While this literature forms an important part of understanding Muslim voting patterns in the UK, there is always scope to nuance this research and cover these patterns in more detail. For example, in Oshri and Itzkovitch-Malka's work published in 2025, while there was discussion on Muslim voting patterns in the UK, there was no coverage of TMV and how it could have played a role in solidifying religious identity-based voting or how it could have shifted patterns. On the latter point, TMV offers a unique discussion point due to what I discuss below, which is its employment of dual logics that have both a moral and a strategic aspect, thereby leading it to (on occasion) endorse even right-wing parties such as the Conservative Party. Thus, this paper hopes to shed light on this new trend in Muslim voting patterns in Europe via TMV in the UK. Moreover, as the next section demonstrates, using Social Movement Theory is an important addition to help further examine these voting patterns. This is especially the case because many of the papers above do not examine whether groups or representative bodies in European nations call for organised voting. TMV breaks this mould by being among the first groups that try to represent Muslims in the UK and streamline voting patterns despite the various theological, geographical, and ethnic differences.

3. Social Movement Theory and TMV

A clear way of analysing TMV is through the lens of Social Movement Theory. SMT has developed a robust literature over years of work analysing how different movements gain momentum and mobilise people for action. Works by authors like Tilly, Snow, and others have been pioneering in terms of analysing different right-wing and left-wing movements from political perspectives (Snow 2013, see also Tilly 2004). Quintan Wictorowicz took this work forward by analysing the Islamic movement as well as exploring various common themes pertaining to movements in the Muslim world. He defined Islamic activism as 'the mobilisation of contention to support Muslim causes', purposely keeping the definition broad to encompass the various types of organisations that exist in the Muslim world (Wiktorowicz 2003, pp. 1–12). As argued in the previous section, despite Wictorowicz keeping the definition broad, a majority of SMT analysing Islamic movements have mainly been incorporated within the terrorism studies literature. Yet, The Muslim Vote (TMV) campaign very much fits into this broad definition, given its desire to build on Muslim contentions of their Western leaders' reluctance to support the cause of Palestine (which is also perceived as a Muslim issue by many Muslims) and make Muslim votes matter.

According to Wictorowicz, three different aspects play a role in mobilising Muslims for Islamic activism: Resources (under the blanket title Resource Mobilisation Theory), political opportunities, and framing. RMT refers to the idea that Muslim movements often mobilise through various social and physical structures, including the mosque, social and familial networks, as well as professional organisations that Muslims are a part of. Political opportunities refer to the idea that Muslim movements often respond to changes in the political environment and insert themselves into the respective ecosystem based on whether they see some sort of opportunity for themselves there. Lastly, frames represent the interpretative mechanism via which Islamic movements are able to help followers view the world and ideologically convince people to become engaged in their mission. This follows a three-step process whereby they (1) contextualise a specific issue as a problem, (2) provide a solution for the problem, and (3) convince followers as to why it is important to follow this solution (Ibid., pp. 18–35). My analysis uses all aspects of this theory to understand TMV.

In the case of the aforementioned Respect Party, SMT can be easily applied to understand how the party grew. Specifically, it capitalised on the political opportunity that was present in the form of Tony Blair's involvement in the US invasion of Iraq, leading to massive protests around the UK's engagement in it. In addition, the presence of ex-Labour Party members such as George Galloway, who were trying to stitch together a wide coalition of members from the left-wing, Muslim, and anti-war constituencies, accounted for the Resource Mobilisation (Theory) since these wide coalitions were able to mobilise a significant amount of funding and volunteers to help with their campaign (Peace 2012). While the party was not run solely by Muslims, it did tap into Muslim discontent with the Iraq war and used anti-war messaging as one of its frames from that time.

However, even at its peak in 2006/2007, it was only able to place one MP into Parliament (being George Galloway), who won due to his own personal presence and charisma rather than his presence in the Respect Party (Bowcott 2010). Internal splits ensued later on, which led to the socialist faction within the party breaking out in 2007/2008 (Gowthorpe 2016). Around this time, the group also began to lose salience due to the decreasing relevance of the Iraqi invasion. Later on, even its co-founder, Salma Yaqoob, resigned from the party due to issues with Galloway's stances on several issues pertaining to women. Several schisms and electoral defeats later, the party voluntarily de-registered in 2016, signifying its end (Runnymade Trust 2024; Peace 2012).

Applying SMT, it is possible to state that a lack of innovation and the ability to transform from a one-issue political party (that of a foreign war) to one grounded in local politics was one of its main reasons for failure. As Tilly and Wood have previously argued, for a social movement to be sustained beyond the initial burst of energy, it has to transform itself and innovate (Tilly and Wood 2013). Apart from this, there is a lack of internal cohesion due to there being so many different groups within the movement. Peters, for instance, has discussed the importance of actors cooperating continuously despite differing visions and objectives to ensure the continuity of a social movement (Peters 2018). These factors have played a strong role in reducing the potency of the Respect Party and ultimately leading to its dismantling over time. Yet, as the next section demonstrates, many of the lessons learned that came with the Respect Party were then passed on to TMV.

3.1. Origin and Emergence of TMV

TMV, as the project is known, is not an organisation or a political party but a movement with many different organisations supporting it. The backdrop of the movement is set in the events of 7 October 2023, where Hamas engaged in a military offensive that led to the deaths of more than 1000 Israeli citizens and armed forces. In retaliation, Israel began to engage in a brutal response that has long been termed a genocide by scholars studying the subject, as well as international bodies like the United Nations (Asem 2025). By the end of 2023, the death toll in Gaza had incensed both Muslims and non-Muslims around the world, leading to mass protests (Al Jazeera 2024). In the UK, various cities such as Birmingham, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Manchester, and others witnessed protests, with London engaging the highest amount of protesters, numbering almost a million people on some days (Sara 2023).

Alongside protests, various intellectual and community responses also began or were strengthened in the United Kingdom (and the rest of the world, too). One example of this was the podcast, The Thinking Muslim, which saw its viewership increase in the post-7 October context. Its initial episodes on YouTube saw an average of 200 viewers or so during the first few months of 2021. By the end of 2021, however, it regularly drew in approximately 10,000 viewers. In the aftermath of the Gaza war, the channel began to run many special episodes on Gaza that led to even higher numbers, with some videos seeing as many as 700,000 viewers and many others regularly garnering over 100,000 viewers. As of 2024 December, the page now has around 290,000 subscribers, a relatively high number for a YouTube podcast.[3]

The founder of the show, Mohammed Jalal, first popularised the idea of Muslims mobilising to punish the two political parties, the Conservatives and especially the Labour Party, for not taking Muslims seriously. Jalal noted that he first called for data scientists to come forward and identify all the constituencies where Muslims constitute at least 10% of the total population towards the end of 2023. This was performed due to the perceived futility of protests that were being undertaken and the fact that the Labour Party seemed far too comfortable in discarding support for Muslims, given that they expected to win the popular vote in the 2024 elections.[4] Jalal's calls for action were also being reflected by local figures and organisations in different cities across the UK.

The intervention of Jalal and other political figures within the British Muslim community demonstrates the first plan of SMT being political opportunities. To begin with, voter fatigue due to poor economic conditions and deteriorating infrastructure, experienced by various voters across the country, created a strong opening for TMV to endorse candidates. This fatigue was especially accentuated within the Muslim community, which felt that neither of the two main parties cared for their preferences when it came to the issues

pertaining to Israel and Palestine. While Tory antagonism towards Muslims was known, Labour, which was a favourite of the Muslims for decades, was also seen as betraying Muslim interests. Brutalities in Gaza then became the spark upon which TMV began its campaign and mobilised Muslim voters.

This did not mean that the organisation was in charge of selecting candidates or setting up Muslim candidates. Rather, as one of the workers stressed to me, TMV often arranged meetings with the local Muslim community of various cities and constituencies and constituencies to provide guiding principles for selecting candidates and then agreed with community leaders over whom best to endorse and support.[5] This was because of a few reasons: Firstly, they did not have the resources to engage in many constituencies. Secondly, they also wanted to respect the knowledge of local Muslim leaders, and thirdly, they wanted to invigorate Muslim communities across the UK so that they could participate in local and national politics. Consequently, as further sections illustrate, candidates who were endorsed included people from many parties, ethnicities, and faiths.

This demonstrates the second plank of SMT, which is resource mobilisation. TMV demonstrated effective resource mobilisation by leveraging existing Muslim community networks and organisations. The campaign utilised volunteer networks for grassroots campaigning and employed technology for voter outreach and data analysis.

Additionally, TMV secured pro bono legal and technical support, further enhancing its resource base. The fact that there are many Muslim students now studying subjects like political science and other social science subjects also created pools of resources and potential expertise from which TMV could engage. For example, figures like Jalal, Celsabeel, and many of the workers and volunteers I spoke to all had degrees in political science.[6] In speaking to one volunteer, for example, I was told that her main motivation was to contribute to the community but also to sharpen her understanding of engaging in politics and polish her own research skills.[7] This was a common motivation for many young British Muslim students who felt that the available avenues for political research often served immoral causes, including what they felt were Zionist allied think tanks. Engaging in TMV was thus one good avenue for learning and contributing.[8]

In conversations with many of the architects of the movement, I was told that the objective of the campaign would not be achieved over one election cycle but over five elections, whereby they expected at least 25 representatives to form a bloc of independent MPs in the government out of a total of 600 MPs (approximately). This could help exert significant policy power in the government for Muslim issues, which are often seen as irrelevant for the Labour Party.[9] However, at least one other organiser maintained that the objective was to ensure that the Labour Party would receive the message that Muslim votes are not to be ignored in this election and did not subscribe fully to the idea of having a set number of elected independent MPs over five election cycles.

The campaign was powered by several organisations that were involved in advocacy, such as Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), and other Muslim media, tech, and NGOs. As mentioned in the podcast of TMV, there were many other organisations involved as well, with volunteers from these organisations stepping in to help design the structure and plans for the group. Jalal himself stopped officially associating with the organisation after some amount of time but continued to engage with it and hold it accountable based on his understanding of the goals of the organisation. According to workers from within the movement, it started out as a fully volunteer-based movement from which one initial full-time employee emerged—Abubakr Nanabawa—and expanded to more employees and volunteers over time.[10]

3.2. Goals and Logics of Choosing Candidates

The main goal of the campaign in the short term though was to ensure that the Labour Party would not take Muslims lightly when it came to politics. In identifying the constituencies where Muslims formed a good proportion, they mapped out whether the incumbent MP's opposed the indiscriminate killings of Palestinians, making it one of the major reasons to vote in or vote out a candidate. The other major plank is also whether the candidate has a record of Islamophobia, followed by other local issues such as infrastructure, poverty alleviation, education provision, and many others. As one worker within the movement put it, while the movement was triggered due to issues in Gaza, it aims to deal with long-standing issues within the Muslim community by registering voters, educating them about their options, and mobilising them to act as pressure groups.[11]

Here though, a slight divergence emerged in the strategies of the movement. While the campaign initially chose to support any candidate that supported Palestine, it became divided over one issue: Should the Muslims back any candidate from the Labour Party, even though its leader, Keir Starmer, had given his full support to Israel to kill Palestinians and even cut down electricity and water for Gazans? (McShane 2023) According to Jalal, this was unacceptable, and supporting Labour meant supporting genocide, even though some Muslim members of the Labour Party were stridently pro-Palestine in their campaigns. On the other hand, other notable organisers noted that this was not a good move since it would alienate the few Labour Party MPs who were amenable to their goals, and this would ultimately reduce the influence of the movement in Westminster.[12] A general feeling of apprehension of Muslim organisers across the country led to a roll back of support for the pro-Palestinian Labour Party candidates, effectively resulting in no Labour candidates being endorsed by The Muslim Vote despite the original intentions of some of the organisers.[13]

Nonetheless, despite being termed 'The Muslim Vote', the aim was not to endorse or facilitate the victory of only Muslim politicians. It was to ensure that, strategically, the best candidates positioned to defeat the Labour party were chosen. Thus, as one organiser put it, we wanted to name it 'The Muslim Vote' because we wanted Muslims in the UK to understand that their voices and votes also mattered and could make a difference in the political landscape of the nation.[14] Accordingly, as Table 1 below shows, representatives of about 12 different parties, including the Scottish National Party in Scotland, Plaid Cymru in Wales, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, and others such as the Green Party and the Workers Party working within England, were endorsed. Here too, some differences did occur within the thinking of the organisers. One worker within the movement that I spoke to mentioned that he was quite apologetic to many British Arab voters for endorsing the Workers Party, which is headed by George Galloway.[15] Galloway, who is an anti-war campaigner from the Iraq war of the 2000s to the Israel–Palestine war, has also been a supporter of Bashar al Assad as well as Russia and Iran. This has often clashed with many Muslims who are opposed to Assad for his authoritarian rule in Syria. These divisions became much sharper in the aftermath of Assad being ousted by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in December 2024, when Muslims became much more aware of the ostensible contradiction of being pro-Palestine but also pro-Assadist. However, because this was not clearer in the run-up to the general election of July 2024, there was far more tolerance of endorsing Galloway and his party. This was despite the fact that Muhammad Jalal had publicly disparaged Galloway for his pro-Assad sentiments.[16]

Nonetheless, as mentioned by a key Muslim leader in an interview for The Muslim Vote's podcast: 'Strong parties are like Alsatians in a game, we can't put our money on the poodle (acceptable but weaker parties) even if it is soft and sweet and expect it to win against the Alsatian. The nature of politics is that we must back the winning candidate

and also expect that candidates respond to voter sentiments. So, if we can pressurize them enough, they will mould to our wishes and without an intentional push, we won't be able to make those changes.'[17]

From the intentions, goals, and endorsements of the candidates mentioned above, a few things become clear. Firstly, attaching the term 'Muslim' to the name of the organisation was not meant to insert Muslim political candidates into the system but rather to motivate Muslims to come together and vote collectively to pressurise the political structures in power. Indeed, the total number of Muslim candidates numbered up to around 22, which represents less than 10% of the total candidates endorsed by the organisation.[18] Secondly, while one pillar of support was afforded to those who voted in support of ceasefires in Palestine, the second pillar was about the ability of candidates to win an election. If they were not able to, they would not be extended endorsements, demonstrating a strategic calculus in choosing the candidates. Thirdly, the split within the organisation demonstrated that the relative inexperience of the movement played a role in defining the principles of choosing candidates, especially if they belonged to the Labour Party. Moreover, it also showed that at least some of the organisers within TMV were intent on choosing Labour Party candidates, demonstrating further pragmatism in the thought process of the movement.

Table 1. Various parties endorsed by The Muslim Vote across the UK. Data obtained from TMV organisers.

Party Name	Country of Operation	Number of Candidates
Green Party of England and Wales	England and Wales	58
Independent Candidates	Various	52
Scottish National Party	Scotland	51
Liberal Democrats	United Kingdom	41
Workers Party of Britain	United Kingdom	32
Plaid Cymru	Wales	9
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	Northern Ireland	9
Sinn FÃ©in	Northern Ireland	7
Alba Party	Scotland	2
People Before Profit	Northern Ireland	1
Social Democratic and Labour Party	Northern Ireland	1
Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition	United Kingdom	1
Total		264

From an SMT perspective, this is a new angle that takes place, i.e., specifically the issue of strategically choosing actors to represent the will of TMV. Choosing such politicians despite the fact that they were not Muslim and, in some cases, even opposed to some of the main views of TMV organisers (such as George Galloway's support of Bashar Al Asad).

This seems to represent a tension within the literature on Social Movement Theory. While the framing process often looks at Muslim causes, it is often expected that the actors chosen to represent the movement would be Muslims as well, aligning with their own moral and spiritual worldview. However, in TMV's decision to endorse Worker Party candidates and also (initially at least) to endorse Labour Party candidates as well, there is a clear choice to engage with two types of logics: moral reasoning (choosing candidates that were opposed to Israeli action in Gaza) and consequentialist reasoning (choosing candidates who had the highest chances of winning).

4. How TMV Employed Frames to Increase Support

TMV's framing processes are particularly noteworthy. The campaign employed strategic framing by emphasising Muslim unity and collective political power, effectively mobilising community members. Voting was framed not just as a civic duty but also as a religious obligation that resonates deeply with the target audience. TMV even linked local issues such as housing and NHS funding with foreign policy concerns, particularly the situation in Gaza.[19] This approach broadened the campaign's appeal and relevance. Furthermore, by presenting itself as a long-term movement for political empowerment, TMV aimed to sustain engagement beyond a single election cycle. The movement's sophisticated understanding of electoral dynamics and strategic use of community resources set it apart from previous Muslim political engagement efforts in the UK. TMV's willingness to endorse independent candidates in certain constituencies challenged traditional party loyalties and potentially reshaped local political landscapes.

Here, it is also important to point out the role of social media in shaping the broader political attitude of Muslim communities in the United Kingdom. Globally, many segments of society were enraged by Israel's actions in Gaza and mobilised heavily to protest, culminating in the International Criminal Court issuing arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu in 2024. Thus, over the last year, many people-led movements were started across the world. Among these, the importance of overwhelming social media algorithms became a big discussion point among many pro-Palestine protesters. The number of people posting pro-Palestine content on social media apps such as Instagram and TikTok became so numerous that companies like TikTok were falsely accused of harbouring antisemitic posts through their algorithms (Jennings 2023).

One particularly compelling logic, of course, was the discourse around Ummah and global Muslim solidarity. Based on a saying of the Prophet Mohammed that said that all the Muslims are one body, and if any one part gets hurt, the entire body feels the pain, Muslims are often passionate about Muslim populations that are often oppressed or dominated (Hassan 2018). The case of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, when Muslims from all over the world came to join the anti-Soviet rebels (in the 1980s), or in Syria, where Muslims from across the world joined violent non-state actors such as Hayat Tahrir al Shaam to fight against Bashar al Assad are examples of this concern. Beyond physical action though, Muslims often invoked issues pertaining to other Muslims in places like Xinjiang (China), Kashmir (India), and many other places to demonstrate solidarity with them. Gaza and Palestine are among the strongest of these focuses and have been a concern for Muslims and especially for Arab nations in the last century (though Arab rulers are often not concerned with demonstrating support to Palestine in the modern day) (Ahmad 2019).

Discourse around the Ummah, while conceptual and international in nature, also has a compelling logic for local and national politics. The process of thinking goes that, if a potential Prime Minister (then Keir Starmer) was not going to stop a genocide due to corporate interests, then this person would likely not care about less harmful but equally severe problems, such as the cost of living and poverty crises. This was a logic that was particularly strong if connected with the fact that corporate interests kept the cost of products high and salaries low, and the Prime Minister would not take steps to alleviate the problems of society for the sake of maintaining corporate interests. Such logics, coupled with the fact that Labour's dismissal of pro-Palestinian demands was seen as the party betraying its Muslim voters, created further narratives on social media that fuelled Muslim irritation at Labour.

These narratives helped set up the larger stage for British Muslims (and non-Muslims) who were also sharing social media posts significantly in support of Gaza. The Thinking

Muslim Podcast was thus an important part of this debate (among others), where it helped engage British Muslim voters who were already sharing pro-Palestine content frequently on these platforms.

Thus, the role of social media in TMV's mobilisation efforts cannot be understated. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter became both battlegrounds for narratives and tools for mobilisation, amplifying the grievances of British Muslims regarding Gaza and broader issues. Social media algorithms, often accused of bias, inadvertently propelled pro-Palestinian posts into prominence due to the sheer volume, creating a digital echo chamber that reinforced solidarity and urgency. TMV harnessed this organic momentum by crafting targeted messages that tied local electoral outcomes to global justice issues, thereby bridging the gap between the virtual and physical realms. This strategic use of social media not only expanded TMV's reach but also allowed the campaign to position voting as a direct act of resistance and empowerment. By framing electoral participation as an extension of digital activism, TMV tapped into an already engaged audience, ensuring that the online fervour translated into tangible political action at the polls.

5. Parsing the Results of the July 2024 Elections: Whither TMV?

The result of the elections in the UK was an expected one, with Labour winning about 400 seats out of around 625 seats. With Labour adding more than 200 seats to its 2019 numbers, its victory was more pyrrhic in nature. Voter turnout across the UK had reduced from 67% in 2019 to about 60% in the 2024 election, the lowest since 2001 (59%), and generally among the lowest since World War II (>80%) (Statista 2025). In real terms, the Labour Party had only won about 9 million votes in this election, as opposed to about 10 million votes in the 2019 elections, when it lost to the Conservatives and won only 200 seats across the UK. Thus, in most of the seats that it won, it only managed to win narrowly, demonstrating a lack of confidence in its abilities (Kirk et al. 2024).

These numbers can be explained generally by the concept of voter fatigue, referring to voters experiencing disillusionment with both of the mainstream parties in place. This is a common phenomenon when both parties in a two-party system of elections are seen as corrupt or not serving the needs of the people. In these scenarios, voting in favour of populist parties or independents becomes more common as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with the system. This is apart from lower turnouts in elections, as seen through the numbers explained above (Garmann 2017).

In the case of the UK, while the reasons for dissatisfaction with the Conservatives were explained above, there was also a significant lack of confidence in the Labour Party. According to polling performed before the elections in June 2024, almost half of the UK's population noted that they had no confidence in either of the two parties in the UK. Reasons for shunning Labour were multi-fold; while many voters had become disenfranchised by the entire system and the fact that poverty and rates of living had increased significantly, others were specifically upset with Keir Starmer (then head of the Labour Party) and the party (Lister 2024).

Dissatisfaction with Labour and Starmer stemmed from the fact that the party had not presented any solid economic alternative plan to help improve the economy and help with alleviating the living situation of British citizens. Starmer in particular was seen as uncharismatic compared to his predecessors, such as Jeremy Corbyn and Tony Blair. Moreover, criticism levelled at Starmer, often from the left wing within his party, spilled over into the public domain, signalling a lack of coherence within the party. In addition, parts of the country, such as Wales, which were governed by Labour, had faced underwhelming measures of governance. These reasons were why many commentators noted

that the results were not a win for Labour but rather an indictment of the Conservatives (Barlow 2024). The Labour Party just happened to be the most solid opposition. As the theoretical analysis explains, this voter fatigue presented a political opportunity which TMV capitalised on to engage in politics.

These changes were reflected in two ways. First, as mentioned above, voter turnout was low, and Labour saw many of its majorities slashed in key constituencies across the UK. The second was the rise in support for both the Reform Party as well as independent candidates. The Reform Party, led by Nigel Farage, the most strident pro-Brexit campaigner of the mid-2010s, is a far-right political party that has criticised the Conservative Party for not being strict on several issues, such as immigration, among others. The Reform Party, while new, was able to win about five seats across the UK, unseating mostly Conservative candidates within the different constituencies that they won in (Forsyth 2024). While there is much to parse about these results, it remains out of the scope of this paper.

Of consequence to our paper, however, is the fact that six independent candidates won different constituencies. This marked some significant change, given that since 1945, no more than 15 independent candidates had won elections (national or local). At least five of the winning candidates listed in Table 2 below, barring Alex Easton from Northern Ireland, had been endorsed by The Muslim Vote. One significant candidate was Shockat Adam, who won the Leicester South constituency, unseating Jonathan Ashworth, a significant candidate within Labour. Wes Streeting, the current Health Minister, attributed Ashworth's loss to Labour's position on Gaza, demonstrating some impact of The Muslim Vote (Stacey 2024). While it is unclear how much people within policy circles think about TMV, at least one civil servant mentioned that there is some discussion on its effectiveness, and it is now on the radar, though it is not a major concern for the Labour government in all areas.[20]

Table 2. List of independent candidates who won in the elections.

Candidate Name	Constituency	Majority	Unseated Candidate	Notable Details
Jeremy Corbyn	Islington North	8412	Mike Tapp (Labour)	Former Labour leader re-elected as independent after expulsion from the Labour Party.
Alex Easton	North Down	3254	Stephen Farry (Alliance Party)	Independent Unionist, defeated Alliance Party incumbent Stephen Farry.
Ayoub Khan	Birmingham Perry Barr	2150	Khalid Mahmood (Labour)	Gained significant support from the Muslim community; won against Labour.
Adnan Hussain	Blackburn	1987	Kate Hollern (Labour)	Capitalized on local voter dissatisfaction with Labour's stance on the Gaza conflict.
Iqbal Mohamed	Dewsbury and Batley	1734	Paula Sherriff (Labour)	Independent candidate, focused on local community issues and Labour criticism.
Shockat Adam	Leicester South	1543	Jon Ashworth (Labour)	Won with strong support from minority communities, unseating a Labour candidate.

Apart from these five independent candidates endorsed or set up by The Muslim Vote, it also endorsed 45 other winning candidates, including those from the Liberal Democrats,

the Green Party, and many others, as seen in Table 3 below. This is not to say that they were instrumental in making these candidates win, but rather, it demonstrates their interest in choosing credible alternatives to either of the two parties in power. Additionally, TMV's other endorsed candidates also won second and third places in many other constituencies. Thus, in total, 152 candidates out of 264 candidates endorsed by TMV won either the first, second, or third place across the UK.

In addition, as political analyst Parveen Akhthar noted, 'In the 21 seats where more than 30% of the population is Muslim, Labour's share dropped by 29 percentage points from an average 65% in 2019 to 36% in 2024' (Akhtar 2024). This suggests that Muslim voters expressed significant dissatisfaction with the Labour Party. As pointed out by TMV co-ordinator Abubakr Nanabawa in an online interview, the fact that TMV managed to muster some opposition to both parties and unseat some of the major Labour Party seats was seen as a victory for the efforts of the movement (Islamic Perspectives 2024).

Table 3. List of all TMV-endorsed candidates who won the first three places, arranged by party.

	Independents	Lib Dems	Green Party	Workers Party	SNP	Sinn Fein	Plaid Cymru	Alliance North	Alba	SDLP	Total
Endorsed candidates won	5	22	3	0	9	7	2	1	0	1	50
Endorsed candidates came in 2nd place	10	2	14	3	42	0	2	4	0	0	77
Endorsed candidates came in 3rd place	6	8	9	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	25
Total of endorsed candidates in top 3 places	21	32	26	4	51	7	4	6	0	1	152

One particularly strong candidate was Leanne Mohammed, a 23-year-old Palestinian candidate who ran in the Ilford North constituency as an independent candidate. Despite her relatively young age and a short period in which to launch her campaign, she almost unseated Wes Streeting (see Table 4 below), who was touted as the rising star of the Labour Party. Streeting, who is now the Health Minister of the UK government, has been named as one of the future leaders of the Labour Party and a likely PM for the UK in the future. Despite his high profile, Streeting won the elections with a narrow margin of just five hundred votes more than Leanne (Mulla 2024).

Several reasons could explain the narrow loss she faced, despite a strong amount of vigour within her election campaign. Firstly, Wes Streeting had a well-known national profile due to his engagements with the Labour Party. Additionally, while Leanne did discuss local issues such as healthcare and housing, her youth and relative lack of experience (given that she was 23 at the time of running this campaign) were among the other reasons that some voters may have voted for Labour with its established experience. Secondly, given that the Labour Party was already in power, preferences for an incumbent party may have

swayed voters towards Labour. Thirdly, a good portion of votes went to the Conservative Party MP Kaz Rizvi. This would include Muslim votes as well, given that Rizvi was from a Muslim background. In this regard, several voters would likely have felt that there was no benefit to actually voting for Leanne, given that most votes were divided between either the Labour Party or the Conservatives. Lastly, Ilford North registered a vote share of 59.6%, which was just slightly lower than the average vote share of 60%—among the lowest in Britain's general elections (Ibid.). There was a good chance that even a slightly higher voter turnout would have led to Leanne's victory.

Table 4. Ilford North constituency results in the general elections of 2024 (BBC 2024).

Candidate	Party	Votes	Percentage	Change from 2019
Wes Streeting	Labour	15,647	33.4%	−20.8 pp
Leanne Mohamad	Independent	15,119	32.2%	+32.2 pp
Kaz Rizvi	Conservative	9619	20.5%	−16.2 pp
Alex Wilson	Reform UK	3621	7.7%	+5.9 pp
Rachel Collinson	Green	1794	3.8%	+2.5 pp
Fraser Coppin	Lib Dem	1088	2.3%	−1.7 pp

Thus, against this backdrop, TMV did play a role in effectively helping increase her vote share from 0 to 30%+. However, this was also backed by her own strengths, public profile, and campaign, and her victory was hampered by a few other factors.

Importantly, a couple of interesting points stand out. Firstly, as noted in the introduction to TMV, the goal of the organisation was *not* to (1) campaign for different candidates, (2) select only Muslim candidates, or (3) set up independent candidates. Rather, they often tried to point the Muslim communities in the direction of pro-Palestinian candidates who were most likely to win the elections. This was why many of the candidates they selected were not Muslims or independents but belonged to other third-party candidates. The good performance of many of these third-party candidates also lent credence to the voter fatigue sentiments across the UK.

Secondly, although this election did not demonstrate it clearly, TMV's endorsements appear to transcend conventional left–right political affiliations. While a good portion of the candidates endorsed were left-wing candidates, the group is not opposed to choosing the right wing if they were morally aligned with Muslim causes. This was clarified in subsequent online interviews with contributors to TMV, such as Iqbal Nasim.[21] Both of them noted that Muslims neither had left-wing nor right-wing tendencies and should be able to engage with politicians from both ends of the spectrum to meet their needs. This has been pointed out by other British Muslim scholars like Abdullah Al Andalusi, who noted that while Muslims often tilted left on issues like economy, treatment of minorities, and immigration, they skewed right on issues like family values, sexuality, and other social issues (Blogging Theology 2024).

Thirdly, there were several candidates that TMV did not endorse—who still won elections—further entrenching the fact that it was a loss of faith in two-party politics that helped TMV secure success rather than just the credentials of the independent candidates who won. The electoral wins of five Reform candidates in different constituencies across the UK in the general elections underscore how voters were so disillusioned with the Conservatives and Labour that they voted for the far right. Rupert Lowe from Reform, who defeated Labour Party candidate Keir Cozens in the Great Yarmouth seat, is one example

of a politician not endorsed by TMV who won. Lowe's consistent anti-immigration stance, his engagement with the local football club (giving him a public profile), and the loss of confidence in both the Labour Party and Conservatives helped boost him to victory (UK Politics 2025). In fact, a year later in local elections, out of the roughly 1600 council seats across the UK, Reform won about 677 seats (41% of all seats) (Curtice 2025), further illustrating that TMV's victories were also due in part to the political opportunities that it obtained access to in the 2024 elections.

6. Changing Muslim Identities and Future Trajectories

Political scientists have long debated the idea of even using the idea of a 'Muslim vote', claiming that it would homogenise the many ethnic and sub-religious identities of the communities (Peace 2015). However, with the increased amount of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism heaped on the community, the identity of the community has sharpened and solidified over the last decade or so. As pointed out by politicians like Sayeeda Warsi, Muslims were among the most attacked minority in the country (Warsi 2024). The fact that TMV used Muslim in its name was intentional. Rather than using a term like 'Ethical Vote', it purposely chose to use 'Muslim' to demonstrate the strength of the community.

According to Timothy Peace and Khadija Alshayyal, Muslim politics went through different phases, whereby its identity sharpened in the UK. The Muslim Council of Britain played an important role in mobilising these campaigns and shaping the identity. Events like the 1997 Salman Rushdie affair, the post-9/11 era, as well as the Iraq war were instrumental in mobilising second-generation British citizens to engage in Muslim politics, leading to the formation of the Respect Party in the aftermath of the Iraq war of 2003 (Elshayyal 2015).

TMV is a continuation of this long line of Muslim political engagement in the UK. A few salient factors stand out in this campaign. Firstly, the Muslim population has both increased and strengthened significantly since the 2000s, when the Respect Party formed. With about 4 million people across the UK, some reports have even pointed out that Muslims have immense economic strength to the tune of about 70 billion pounds (conservatively), which was flexed in supporting the different aspects of this election. Secondly, as mentioned by co-ordinators of TMV, it was built on the backs of at least two decades' worth of political campaigns, including insights from organisations like the Muslim Association of Britian (MAB), as well as politicians like Salma Yaqoob, who was instrumental in setting up the Respect Party in the aftermath of the Iraq war (Neil 2024).

Thirdly, in my own observations, these grassroots awareness campaigns and political lobbying efforts were also complemented by a rise in the number of Muslim students studying subjects related to political science, which was not as common in the previous generations. This allowed for a fresh explosion of ideas and talent and led to the further shaping of the Muslim political identity in the 2020s. Fourthly, at least temporarily, the anti-democratic politics of groups such as the Hizb ut Tahrir were not prominent in this election due to their banning in 2023[22] and the fact that new generations of British Muslims were far more comfortable in registering their votes. Fifthly, as mentioned by one interviewee, there were indeed many Muslims who dismissed the efforts of TMV, but the resultant victories of independent candidates could possibly inspire more confidence in further Muslim voters who could see more alternatives in future elections.[23]

Does this mean that TMV managed to inspire a new revolution in Muslim politics that is nationally pervasive? It is too early to make that argument so far. The statistics from the 2024 elections showed that almost 600,000 Muslims abstained from voting in the elections

compared to 2019 due to their concerns about politics. This was a particular concern for TMV, whose co-ordinator mentioned that the one major aspect of their work included increasing voter presence among Muslims. Some Muslims that I interviewed were also not appreciative of engaging in electoral politics due to the futility of reforming the system via voting when it was particularly skewed towards the power of the nation-state.[24]

Provided this level of mobilisation, organisers of TMV were now involved in two major branches. Firstly, it wants to engage in future elections, including local elections taking place in 2026. In discussion with co-ordinators of TMV in England and Scotland, I was told that there is a concerted push to engage the Muslim population to build consensus in further elections and to make independent groups that are able to make political decisions for their areas. The other branch is the online efforts, whereby it is now building its social media presence on apps like Instagram and YouTube. While the results are slow, it seems to be picking up some momentum. In addition, one interviewee also mentioned that TMV was interested in acquiring expertise on data tools since these were particularly useful in helping parse information.[25]

In all these efforts then, TMV is now both an effort in mobilising Muslims politically while also building the British Muslim political identity in a way that is representative of the community, ensuring that it is not overly exclusive or antagonistic to the system.

7. Assessing the Longevity of TMV Using SMT Insights

Social Movement Theory offers some tools to predict the trajectory of movements and its longevity. Scholars like Tilly and Tarrow note that the longevity of a movement depends on how a movement can convert itself from one based on spontaneous issues to a more grounded presence (McAdam et al. 2001). In the case of TMV, it is clear that the movement emerged in the aftermath of events in Gaza. However, the amount of effort that TMV puts into giving the movement a longer and more grounded presence will help provide some insights into its durability.

A second aspect is the external political structures that an SMT can take advantage of to present itself. For TMV, two aspects presented this political opportunity: the Gaza issue and the various social and economic crises in the UK. These allowed it to become one of the major movements championing political alternatives for different constituencies in the UK. With the rise in right-wing alternatives such as the Reform Party and the emergence of a new left-wing party headed by Jeremy Corbyn and, ostensibly, Zarah Sultana, a former Labour Party MP, other alternatives seemed to be emerging. It is possible that if the new left-wing party were to overcome its internal confusions (Zarah Sultana was supposed to lead the party with Corbyn—however, the latter did not acknowledge her as a co-leader) and build a strong base (Jones 2025), TMV would go on to support candidates within this party. TMV's role as a representative and guiding body for Muslims means that new parties would not necessarily lead to it being disbanded but just give it more options to suggest for Muslims in the UK.

Lastly, Tilly and Wood argue that movements manage to stay relevant if they keep innovating both the scope of the issue they are championing and the tactics that they use (Tilly and Wood 2013). In this regard, while TMV has looked at issues beyond Palestine and discussed issues such as housing and infrastructure, there is still some scope for it to be perceived as beyond a Palestine-related voting campaign. To this end, the stated actions of building its social media presence and focusing on local elections will also play a role in predicting its longevity.

A small note on the comparison between TMV and the Respect Party is also pertinent here. With Respect having ended its presence 12 years after it first emerged due to the

American invasion of Iraq, there are parallels with TMV, which emerged in the post-October 2023 landscape. A few interesting differences do exist that could help predict a completely different trajectory. Unlike the Respect Party, TMV is not a political party but rather a guiding body to help Muslims vote for pre-existing political candidates. Thus, it does not have the pressures of actually winning elections but rather needs only to ensure its presence is felt among the Muslim population in the UK and that mainstream political parties take note of its agenda issues. Moreover, because TMV is led only by Muslims (even though it does suggest voting for non-Muslims), there is slightly less scope for internal splits, given that its organising members are still all Muslim. This does not mean that there is no scope for divisions, since Muslim organisations often endure internal schisms themselves, but the range of issues on which disagreement may take place would likely be limited. Nonetheless, without sustained actions and innovations, there is still scope for TMV to witness a dip over time.

8. Implications for Social Movement Theory

The case study of The Muslim Vote (TMV) raises key implications for the application of Social Movement Theory (SMT). These implications concern both the scope of SMT's usage and specific elements within SMT frameworks.

Firstly, regarding the scope of SMT, the case of TMV demonstrates that SMT can be fruitfully applied beyond the usual focus on Islamist or terrorist actors. As Emmerich as well as other scholars such as Bosi and Malthener point out, there is a persistent bias in SMT toward these types of Muslim movements (Emmerich 2020, see also Bosi and Malthaner 2015). TMV shows that Muslim-led mobilisation in democratic, electoral contexts—especially those that do not involve violence or formal Islamist agendas—also merit analysis within SMT. This has broader implications: for instance, a similar "Muslim vote" initiative has emerged in Australia, and applying SMT in such contexts highlights the wider relevance of the theory for diverse Muslim political expressions globally (Al Nashar and Hanarahan 2025).

Secondly, regarding the internal components of SMT, this case invites a deeper reflection on Rational Choice Theory (RCT), one of SMT's foundational strands. While RCT often explains economic behaviour, scholars have long explored its application to collective action. Critics such as Deiter-opp (Opp 2013) have argued that while RCT can help explain why individuals join movements, it fails to account for cultural, faith-based, or moral frameworks. Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler address this by showing how spiritual incentives, like salvation, can function as rational motivators for participation in radical Islamic groups (Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler 2016).

Applying this lens to TMV, we observe a hybrid logic. While there is a growing literature (outside SMT) on the strategic pragmatism of Muslim movements—such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Mårtensson 2015) or Hamas in Palestine (Luck 2025)—this has not been consistently integrated into SMT frameworks. TMV's rationale appears grounded in moral/spiritual rationality, such as supporting politicians critical of Israeli policies in Palestine. This was a dominant logic. Yet, TMV also demonstrated strategic rationality, backing non-Muslim candidates they believed had a realistic chance of winning. Their endorsement of Workers Party candidates—despite disagreements over Syria—illustrates a willingness to compromise moral alignment in favour of political effectiveness.

In some ways, there are some similarities in TMV's approach to other groups such as Muslim organisations in India. For instance, Emericht writes about how the Jamaat e-Islam Hind and the Popular Front of India, both of which he classifies as Islamist groups, engage in coalitions with other non-Muslim left-wing parties/movements, such as the

Dalits in India (traditionally oppressed classes within the current structure of Hinduism). These coalitions often helped boost the strength of Muslim organisations in the political sphere due to the small size of the Muslim population and the ability of non-Muslim organisations to mobilise more voters (Emmerich 2023). Here too, Muslims tend to be both moral and strategic in their approach, i.e., they choose their own religious leaders and engage according to frameworks set within the religion while also being strategic and engaging with non-Muslim groups for more power.

Thus, TMV case shows that social movements may operate through dual rationalities: an overarching moral logic (e.g., pro-Palestinian solidarity) and a secondary strategic logic (e.g., winnability and political impact). These logics were sometimes in tension, as seen in internal divisions over whether to support pro-Palestine Labour candidates or reject Labour altogether. These tensions reveal that movement decisions rarely follow neat ideological lines; instead, they emerge from interacting layers of rationality that combine values, beliefs, and political calculation.

9. Conclusions

The genocidal action of Israel in Palestine has become a political powder keg for Muslims across the world. The Muslim Vote is one such example of the political impact of this phenomenon based in the Middle East. Studying The Muslim Vote campaign offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of faith-based political mobilisation. Two levels of analysis were seen in this paper.

Primarily, by applying Social Movement Theory, I demonstrated how minority religious groups leveraged community resources, including concerned and political science-educated Muslims, who responded to political opportunities such as voter fatigue, and framed their message around Ummah (among other narratives), using social media to achieve political influence. The usage of Social Movement Theory for this case study also exposes some gaps in the general use and application of SMT, as discussed above. Mainly, most SMT has often been used with a bias that often looks only at Islamist groups or terrorist groups. However, using SMT on a religiously motivated group such as TMV with no proclaimed objective other than to mobilise better at the ballot boxes demonstrates that there is a strong potential to expand the very scope of SMT analysis itself beyond traditional groups normally analysed within the literature.

On a secondary level, this analysis of TMV helped understand how Muslim identity politics in the UK have evolved from the post-Rushdie affairs to the Gaza genocide. The paper demonstrated that TMV, while not fully representative of Muslims across the UK, has been a significant new trend with potential political implications over the next decade or so if it manages to maintain its momentum. Specifically, this paper contributes to the literature on Muslim voting patterns in Europe, providing one case study to understand evolving trends. The paper is of course limited, with more scope for analysis and granular data collection. However, it is a starting point for future researchers to work with, especially on TMV's sustained presence in the next decade or so.

The future of the movement and its impact beyond some parameters (such as voter endorsement) is not fully clear and may not be clarified for at least another election cycle or so. If the organisers are able to keep up the effort and engage Muslims across the UK, then the first signs will probably be seen in local elections in 2026, as mentioned by its organisers, before it is seen in the next general elections of 2029. While TMV did provide some space for Muslims to express their frustration with the Labour Party, it is still to be seen how much they can actually change the identity of the Muslim population. Nonetheless, new openings in the political landscape have now been created with the formation of TMV.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study. This research was a desk-based study and did not involve the collection of new primary data from human participants. The methodology focused on qualitative interviews and exploratory analysis in an ethnographic and anthropological context, rather than experimental or randomized studies involving human subjects. Given this specific approach, a formal ethical review was not required. Although formal ethics committee approval was not obtained prior to conducting the interviews, the author took a number of steps to ensure that participant welfare, data protection, and confidentiality were safeguarded, in line with the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice (2017).

Informed Consent Statement: All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, how the data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any time, and gave voluntary consent before interviews began. Anonymity and confidentiality were protected by using pseudonyms and separating identifying details from transcripts, with data stored securely on password-protected devices and/or locked storage. The interviews were conducted with sensitivity, posed minimal risk, and did not involve vulnerable populations. Overall, the author believes these measures align with the BSA's emphasis on researcher responsibility for ethical practice and ensured the integrity of the research despite the absence of formal committee approval.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 As this paper clarifies throughout, scholars studying genocide have clarified that Israeli actions in Palestine classify as a genocide. However, the ICJ is yet to apply it officially. (Adu and Stacey 2023).
2 Interview with Abubakr Nanabawa, Co-ordinator of The Muslim Vote. Conducted over telephone. December 2024.
3 This was performed via an analysis of the Thinking Muslim Podcast's videos from its first video in 2021 to December 2024. https://www.youtube.com/thethinkingmuslim (Accessed on 14 November 2024).
4 See Mohammed Jalal's tweets on X from November 2023, https://x.com/jalalayn/status/1737142849446039579 (Accessed on 14 November 2024).
5 Interview, Abubakr Nanabawa, 2024.
6 Background information obtained in conversation with the interviewees.
7 Interview with volunteer for TMV conducted on 13 September 2024. London: UK. Interviewee preferred to be anonymous.
8 Ibid. This also stems from discussions with many other Muslims in political science.
9 Interview with Riaz Hassan. May 2024, Conducted over Telephone.
10 See Note 5 above.
11 See Note 5 above
12 Interview with Celsabeel Hadj Cheriff, MEND official and organiser for TMV. October 2024.
13 See Mohammed Jalal's tweet from 8 June 2024: https://x.com/jalalayn/status/1799434505549394191 (Accessed on 14 November 2024).
14 See Note 5 above.
15 See Note 5 above.
16 See Jalal's tweet from October 2023 on Twitter: https://x.com/jalalayn/status/1717785488008822873 (Accessed on 14 November 2024).
17 (Vote of No Confidence—Official Podcast 2024a)—the episode had been delisted for privacy reasons.
18 Data obtained from TMV organisers.
19 See the pledges made by the group: https://themuslimvote.co.uk/pledges/ (Accessed on 14 November 2024).
20 Interview with Civil Servant within the UK government conducted in person in December 2024. Interviewee preferred to remain anonymous.
21 (Vote of No Confidence—Official Podcast 2024a)—This episode has been delisted for privacy reasons. and (Vote of No Confidence—Official Podcast 2024b).

[22] Interview with Abu Bakr Nanabawa, Celsabeel Hadj Cherif, 2024.
[23] (Vote of No Confidence—Official Podcast 2024a), 'The Road to Political Change||EP2-, *YouTube*, December 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdMkaKQZsVk (Accessed on 14 November 2024). This episode has been delisted for privacy reasons.
[24] Interview with political activist via phone call. November 2024. Interviewee preferred to remain anonymous.
[25] Interview with Abu Bakr Nanabawa, 2024.

References

Adu, Aletha, and Kiran Stacey. 2023. Dozens of Labour MPs defy Keir Starmer to Vote for Ceasefire in Gaza. *Guardian*. November 15. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/nov/15/commons-gaza-vote-labour-defy-starmer-ceasefire-israel (accessed on 18 September 2024).

Ahmad, Zia. 2019. Palestinians, Rohingyas, Uyghurs and now Kashmiris: Victims of might is right. *Amust*. August 30. Available online: https://www.amust.com.au/2019/08/palestinians-rohingyas-uyghurs-and-now-kashmiris-victims-of-might-is-right/ (accessed on 29 November 2024).

Akhtar, Parveen. 2024. Election 2024: Labour's Gaza Stance Has Driven Many Muslim Candidates to Stand as Independents. *Conversation*. June 10. Available online: https://theconversation.com/election-2024-labours-gaza-stance-has-driven-many-muslim-candidates-to-stand-as-independents-230938 (accessed on 20 August 2024).

Al, Jazeera. 2024. Protests Around the World Commemorate One Year of Israel's War on Gaza. *Al Jazeera*. October 7. Available online: https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/10/7/protests-around-the-world-commemorate-one-year-of-israels-war-on-gaza (accessed on 4 May 2025).

Al Nashar, Nabil, and Catherine Hanarahan. 2025. The Muslim Vote-Endorsed Candidates Who Scored Numbers at the Polls Say They're Just Getting Started. *ABC Net*. May 9. Available online: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-09/federal-election-results-western-sydney-muslim-vote-independents/105273452 (accessed on 9 June 2025).

Asem, Sondos. 2025. Top Genocide Scholars Unanimous That Israel Is Committing Genocide in Gaza: Dutch Investigation. *Middle East Eye*. May 17. Available online: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/top-genocide-scholars-unanimous-israel-committing-genocide-gaza-investigation-finds (accessed on 10 August 2024).

Bale, Tim. 2019. Running as an Independent Candidate in the UK is Harder Than It Looks. *UkandEu*. October 3. Available online: https://ukandeu.ac.uk/running-as-an-independent-candidate-in-the-uk-is-harder-than-it-looks/ (accessed on 23 September 2024).

Barlow, Nicole. 2024. Labour Didn't Win the UK General Election, the Conservatives Lost. *Daily Beat*. July 12. Available online: https://dailybeat.co.za/labour-didnt-win-the-uk-general-election-the-conservatives-lost/ (accessed on 24 September 2024).

Baysu, Gulseli, and Marc Swyngedouw. 2020. What determines voting behaviors of Muslim minorities in Europe: Muslim identity or left-right ideology? *Political Psychology* 41: 837. [CrossRef]

BBC. 2024. Ilford North Results. *BBC*. July 20. Available online: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2024/uk/constituencies/E14001300 (accessed on 20 August 2024).

Bergh, Johannes, and Tor Bjørklund. 2011. The revival of group voting: Explaining the voting preferences of immigrants in Norway. *Political Studies* 59: 308–27. [CrossRef]

Bird, Karen, Thomas Saalfeld, and Andreas. M. Wüst, eds. 2010. Party choices among immigrants and visible minorities in comparative perspective. In *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities: Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 66–106.

Blogging Theology. 2024. Left Wing or Right Wing, Where Does Islam Fit? With Abdullah Al-Andalusi. *YouTube*. March 23. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhJHZmaphjs&list=PLOWwkgknYiVxudfNzJ7BisFyQiQmogW-X&index=1 (accessed on 24 September 2024).

Bosi, Lorenzo, and Stefen Malthaner. 2015. Political Violence. In *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*. Edited by Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani. Oxford: Oxford University Publications, pp. 15–30.

Bowcott, Owen. 2010. UK Election Results: George Galloway Comes Third as Respect Party Vote Slumps. *The Guardian*. May 7. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/may/07/george-galloway-respect-party (accessed on 20 June 2025).

Curtice, John. 2025. Sir John Curtice: The Map That Shows Reform's Triumph Was Much More Than a Protest Vote. *BBC*. May 7. Available online: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yg467m8mjo (accessed on 24 July 2024).

Elshayyal, Khadijah. 2015. From crisis to opportunity—9/11 and the progress of British Muslim political engagement. In *Muslims and Political Participation in Britain*. Edited by Timothy Peace. London: Routledge, pp. 174–88.

Emmerich, Arndt. 2020. Salafi Youth Activism in Britain: A Social Movement Perspective. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 9: 273–303. [CrossRef]

Emmerich, Arndt. 2023. (Un)wanted partners: Muslim politics and third front coalitions in India. *India Review* 22: 593–622. [CrossRef]

Forsyth, Alex. 2024. Reform UK Wins Give Nigel Farage New Platform at Heart of Politics. *BBC*. July 5. Available online: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cv2gw3m378jo (accessed on 28 September 2024).

Garmann, Sebastian. 2017. Election frequency, choice fatigue, and voter turnout. *European Journal of Political Economy* 47: 19–35. [CrossRef]

Gowthorpe, Anna. 2016. The Party is over for Respect, but George Galloway Could Find a Home Again in Labour. *The Conversation*. August 23. Available online: https://theconversation.com/the-party-is-over-for-respect-but-george-galloway-could-find-a-home-again-in-labour-64263 (accessed on 29 September 2024).

Hassan, Riaz. 2018. Religion, Modernization and The Islamic Ummah. *Journal of Al Tadammun* 13: 57–64. [CrossRef]

Islamic, Perspectives. 2024. The Muslim Vote (Part 1): A Post-Election Conversation with Abubakr Nanabawa. *YouTube*. July 11. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYfu2IH2_B8 (accessed on 15 October 2024).

Jennings, Rebecca. 2023. TikTok Isn't Creating False Support for Palestine. It's Just Reflecting What's Already There. *Vox*. December 13. Available online: https://www.vox.com/culture/23997305/tiktok-palestine-israel-gaza-war (accessed on 1 February 2025).

Jones, Morgan. 2025. A Day Out with Jeremy Corbyn's New Party: Can They Really Replace Labour? *New Statesman*. July 12. Available online: https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/labour/2025/07/the-hubris-of-britains-new-left (accessed on 10 March 2025).

Kirk, Ashley, Alex Clark, Carmen Aguilar García, and Pamela Duncan. 2024. Twelve Charts That Show How Labour Won by a Landslide. *The Guardian*. July 5. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2024/jul/05/eleven-charts-that-show-how-labour-won-by-a-landslide (accessed on 13 March 2025).

Lister, Sam. 2024. Brutal Poll Shows Public Do Not Trust Keir Starmer to Stop Small Boats. *Express*. May 17. Available online: https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1900568/poll-keir-starmer-immigration (accessed on 19 March 2025).

Luck, Taylor. 2025. Hamas at Crossroads: Pragmatism, Isolation, and the Uncertain Path Ahead. *The Wilson Center*. January 22. Available online: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/hamas-crossroads-pragmatism-isolation-and-uncertain-path-ahead (accessed on 19 March 2025).

Mårtensson, Ulrika. 2015. Islamic Order: Semeiotics and Pragmatism in the Muslim Brotherhood? *Journal of Islamic Research* 9: 35–57. [CrossRef]

McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 160–71.

McShane, Asher. 2023. Israel 'Has the Right' to Withhold Power and Water from Gaza, Says Sir Keir Starmer. *LBC*. October 23. Available online: https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/sir-keir-starmer-hamas-terrorism-israel-defend-itself/ (accessed on 24 March 2025).

More in Common. 2024. Our 2024 Election Polling: Lessons Learned. *More In Common*. August 31. Available online: https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/latest-insights/our-2024-election-polling-lessons-learned/ (accessed on 28 March 2025).

Mulla, Imran. 2024. UK Election 2024: British-Palestinian Leanne Mohamad Narrowly Loses to Labour's Wes Streeting. *Middle East Eye*. July 5. Available online: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-election-british-palestinian-leanne-mohamad-loses-labour-wes-streeting (accessed on 14 May 2025).

Neil, and Richard McWilson. 2024. The problems of banning Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain. *LSE Blogs*. January 31. Available online: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2024/01/the-problems-of-banning-of-hizb-ut-tahrir-britain/ (accessed on 20 June 2025).

Opp, Karl-Dieter. 2013. Rational Choice Theory and Social Movements. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Social and Political Movements*. Edited by David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klandermans and Doug McAdam. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 1–8.

Oshri, Odelia, and Reut Itzkovitch-Malka. 2025. Muslims' Vote Choice: Exclusion and Group Voting in Europe. *Politics and Governance* 13: 1–21. [CrossRef]

Peace, Timothy. 2012. Muslim political participation in Britain: The case of the Respect party. Paper presented at the 22nd World Congress of Political Science, Madrid, Spain, July 8–12.

Peace, Timothy. 2015. Introduction. In *Muslims and Political Participation in Britain*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–17.

Peters, Ina. 2018. *Cohesion and Fragmentation in Social Movements How Frames and Identities Shape the Belo Monte Conflict*. Hanover: Springer, pp. 53–55.

Prickett, Katy. 2024. Why is No-One Talking About NHS Systemic Failure? *BBC*. June 25. Available online: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cekk75xl7p9o (accessed on 20 September 2024).

Runnymade Trust. 2024. *Islamophobia: The Intensification of Racism Against Muslim Communities in the UK*. London: Runnymade Trust. Available online: https://www.runnymedetrust.org/publications/islamophobia-the-intensification-of-racism-against-muslim-communities-in-the-uk (accessed on 19 February 2025).

Sara, A. 2023. 1 Million March for Palestine, London's Largest Ever. *Institute for Palestine Studies*. November 27. Available online: https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1654765 (accessed on 13 November 2024).

Siyech, Mohammed Sinan. 2024. What the UK Must Do to Curb Anti-Immigrant Riots. *South China Morning Post*. August 6. Available online: https://www.scmp.com/opinion/world-opinion/article/3273267/what-uk-must-do-curb-anti-immigrant-riots (accessed on 12 November 2024).

Siyech, Mohammed Sinan, and Sofiah Shah. 2024. The Economic Contributions of Muslims to the UK's Growth and Prosperity and the Risk of Exodus. *Equi*. September 15. Available online: https://equi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Equi-Economic-Contribution-Report.pdf (accessed on 30 March 2024).

Snow, David A. 2013. Framing and Social Movements. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. Edited by David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Doug McAdam and Bert Klandermans. Hoboken: Wiley, pp. 1–6.

Stacey, Kiran. 2024. Senior Labour Figures Admit Stance on Gaza Cost Party Seats. *The Guardian*. July 5. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jul/05/labour-loses-three-seats-to-pro-palestinian-candidates (accessed on 12 September 2024).

Statista. 2025. Voter Turnout in the United Kingdom General Elections from 1918 to 2019. Available online: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1050929/voter-turnout-in-the-uk (accessed on 25 December 2024).

Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading: Addison-Wesley, pp. 1–3.

Tilly, Charles. 2004. *Social Movements, 1768–2004*. London: Paradigm Publishers.

Tilly, Charles, and Lesley J. Wood. 2013. *Social Movements, 1768–2012*, 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.

UK Politics. 2025. Who is Rupert Lowe: The Reform UK Fallout and What Comes Next? *UK Politics*. March 13. Available online: https://politicsuk.com/who-is-rupert-lowe/ (accessed on 18 June 2025).

Vote of No Confidence—Official Podcast. 2024a. The Road to Political Change||EP2. *YouTube*, December 8.

Vote of No Confidence—Official Podcast. 2024b. The Road to Political Change||EP3—Iqbal Nasim. *YouTube*. December 30. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6cbivB_gY4 (accessed on 20 April 2025).

Warsi, Sayeeda. 2024. *Muslims Don't Matter*. London: Bridge Street Press, pp. 1–20.

Wiktorowicz, Quintan. 2003. *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Wiktorowicz, Quintan, and Karl Kaltenthaler. 2016. The Rationality of Radical Islam. *Political Science Quarterly* 131: 421–48. [CrossRef]

MDPI AG
Grosspeteranlage 5
4052 Basel
Switzerland
Tel.: +41 61 683 77 34

Religions Editorial Office
E-mail: religions@mdpi.com
www.mdpi.com/journal/religions

Academic Open
Access Publishing

mdpi.com

ISBN 978-3-7258-6227-6