

A Study of Bangladeshi Muslims in Europe: Migration and Identity Construction

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Abstract

The Western World (especially Europe) is struggling to cope with one of the largest waves of human migration ever. Majority of the migrants are Muslims with traumatic experiences as a result of enduring wars, violence, and various forms of suffrage. The unique feature of this migration is the number of unaccompanied minor Muslim migrants with an unprecedented rate in human history. All these pose new challenges to European societies not least to accommodate the needs and meet the demands of Muslims for moral and religious education. While European education systems fundamentally rest on a rather monolithic worldview, inspired by Christianity and based on secularism, they need to adapt to the realities of the post migration era. The Muslim transnational communities in West complicate the matter even further as they pose new challenges in the notions of identity and belonging of the younger generation of Muslims in diaspora. The new mode of policy-making in the face of the migration and multiple transnational communities is to create and foster an education system to respond to the needs of Muslims in the West while enhancing the process of integration and teaching the western-style notion of citizenship. Sex education, religious extremism, terrorism, and pluralistic values are among the challenges that education systems in the West need to alter both in policy and practice.

Keywords: Bangladeshi Muslims, Europe, Migration and Identity Construction

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of globalization, migration has emerged as one of the most significant social and political phenomena shaping modern societies. Large-scale migration from Asia and Africa to Europe has transformed the demographic, cultural, religious, and political landscape of many European countries. Consequently, issues related to multiculturalism, citizenship, religion, belonging, and identity politics have become central concerns within European public discourse. Among various migrant communities, Bangladeshi Muslims constitute an important South Asian diaspora group in Europe. Countries such as Italy, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece have witnessed a significant increase in Bangladeshi migration over the last few decades. Italy has become one of the major destinations for Bangladeshi Muslim migrants who initially migrated as laborers, small traders, entrepreneurs, and service-sector workers. Migration is not merely the movement of people across geographical boundaries; it also involves the movement of culture, religion, language, memory, and identity. When Bangladeshi Muslims migrate to Europe, they enter societies shaped by secularism, liberal democracy, nationalism, and

contemporary security politics. Within these new social and political environments, migrants continuously negotiate their religious beliefs, ethnic identity, cultural traditions, and civic responsibilities.

This study, titled “Identity Politics and Bangladeshi Migrants in Europe: With Special Reference to Italy,” examines how Bangladeshi Muslim migrants construct, negotiate, and reshape their identities within European societies, particularly in Italian urban centers such as Rome, Milan, and Venice. The research seeks to understand migration not only as physical mobility but also as a process of identity formation, performance, interpretation, and contestation.

A central concern of this study is that Muslim identity is not experienced solely as a private religious commitment; rather, it becomes socially produced through public recognition, institutional categorization, media narratives, and political discourse. As a result, Bangladeshi migrants often engage in continuous identity work, negotiating what aspects of their identity to preserve, adapt, emphasize, translate, or defend in their interactions with Italian society. In recent decades, Muslim identity has become one of the most debated political and cultural issues in Europe. Questions concerning immigration, mosque construction, hijab, citizenship, secularism, integration, and Islamophobia have transformed Muslim identity into a highly politicized subject. Scholars such as Nilüfer Göle argue that Muslims in Europe have evolved from being “invisible migrant workers” into “visible Muslim citizens” through public expressions of religion, including veiling, mosque construction, and political participation. Similarly, Joan Wallach Scott argues that debates surrounding the Hijab are not merely about clothing but are deeply connected to broader questions of secularism, nationalism, citizenship, and cultural differences. Consequently, Muslim identity becomes a site of negotiation between migrants and European nation-states.

This study argues that the identity construction of Bangladeshi Muslim migrants is shaped by migration, globalization, multiculturalism, secular politics, Islamophobia, transnational cultural memory, and everyday social interactions. The research focuses particularly on how Bangladeshi Muslims negotiate identity through religion, language, community networks, public visibility, and civic participation within Italian society.

Problem Statement

The central problem addressed in this study is the tension between migrants’ self-understanding of identity and the ways in which they are categorized by broader European societies. While Bangladeshi Muslim migrants understand their identities through personal histories, religious commitments, family traditions, and cultural practices, public narratives in Europe frequently portray Muslim migrants as culturally different, socially problematic, or difficult to integrate. Such representations influence migrants’ participation in civic life, their sense of belonging, and their everyday experiences within European societies. Thus, the issue extends beyond migration itself. It concerns the identity consequences of migration within social environments where belonging is continually negotiated and contested. This study investigates how Bangladeshi Muslim migrants construct and negotiate identity under conditions shaped by public discourse, institutional expectations, and everyday encounters in Italian society.

Identity Politics

Identity politics refers to political and social mobilization based on shared identities such as religion, ethnicity, race, language, or culture. It becomes particularly significant when communities experience exclusion, discrimination, or marginalization. In Europe, Muslim identity politics gained prominence through debates concerning immigration, terrorism, secularism, and Islamophobia. Muslim communities

increasingly mobilized around issues such as religious freedom, hijab rights, mosque construction, anti-discrimination measures, and political representation. Identity politics thus serves as an important framework for understanding the collective experiences and political participation of Bangladeshi Muslim migrants.

Muslim Identity and European Identity

Muslim identity is based on Islamic faith, religious practices, moral values, and belonging to the global Muslim community known as the Ummah. It is expressed through prayer, fasting, mosque participation, halal food practices, Islamic dress, and ethical conduct. By contrast, European identity, by contrast, is commonly associated with secularism, liberal democracy, human rights, nationalism, and modern state institutions. Historically, European societies have emphasized the separation of religion from politics. However, contemporary European identity is increasingly influenced by security concerns arising from terrorism, refugee movements, and migration debates. Consequently, Muslims are often viewed through a security-oriented framework rather than solely through cultural or religious perspectives. This creates an important question for the present study: Is European identity primarily a secular civic identity, or has it increasingly become a security-oriented identity that shapes perceptions of Muslims?

European Muslim Identity

European Muslim identity refers to identities developed by Muslims living within European social, legal, and political contexts. These identities combine Islamic religious values with European citizenship and democratic participation.

European Muslims continuously balance:

- Religious identity;
- Citizenship;
- Ethnic heritage;
- Language;
- Cultural memory; and
- Secular legal frameworks.

According to Nilüfer Göle, the increasing visibility of Islam in Europe has transformed Muslims into visible citizens whose practices challenge traditional assumptions about secular public space.

Orientalism and Muslim Identity

This study adopts Edward Said's theory of Orientalism as a major theoretical framework. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues that Western societies historically represented Eastern and Muslim societies as irrational, backward, emotional, and uncivilized. Such representations were closely linked to colonial power and political domination. Orientalist perspectives continue to influence contemporary media, politics, and public discourse concerning Islam and Muslims. The relationship between European identity and Muslim identity can therefore be understood through Orientalist frameworks that portray Europe as modern, secular, liberal, and democratic, while representing Muslims as traditional, religious, and culturally incompatible. This perspective contributes to processes of "othering" whereby Muslims are constructed as outsiders within European societies.

Ethnicity, Language, and Cultural Memory

Bangladeshi migrants maintain strong emotional and cultural ties with Bangladesh even after migration. Bengali language, Islamic festivals, family traditions, food culture, and memories of homeland play important roles in identity construction. Language functions as a cultural symbol that preserves identity across generations, while cultural memory sustains emotional connections with the homeland. Consequently, Bangladeshi Muslim identity becomes simultaneously local and transnational.

Islamophobia and Citizenship Exclusion

Islamophobia refers to fear, prejudice, hostility, or discrimination directed toward Islam and Muslims. Muslims in many European societies experience:

- Negative media representation;
- Employment discrimination;
- Social exclusion;
- Political suspicion;
- Hate speech; and
- Restrictions on visible religious practices.

These experiences significantly influence identity formation, civic participation, and feelings of belonging. Scholars such as Joan Wallach Scott and Melanie Adrian argue that secular policies sometimes marginalize Muslim minorities in the name of national unity and secularism.

OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the identity construction of Bangladeshi Muslim migrants in Italy.
2. To analyze the relationship between Muslim identity and European identity.
3. To explore the role of media, literature, political parties, civil society, and administrative institutions in shaping public attitudes toward Muslim

METHODOLOGY

The research questions represented a broad area of inquiry and analysis. While quantitative data about the size, location and other demographic features of the priority communities was a key research need, the study primarily focused on enabling the Communities and Local Government to ‘know’ these communities in depth. To fulfil these research requirements, the methodology developed needed to combine documentary research with processes of consultation and dialogue. Data collection consisted of two phases which were consistent across each community

Research Questions

1. This study seeks to answer the following questions:
2. How do Bangladeshi Muslims describe and experience their identity in Italy?
3. How do media narratives and institutional frameworks shape migrants’ identity negotiations?
4. In what ways do Bangladeshi migrants respond to processes of “othering” in public and social settings?
5. How do migrants balance religious and cultural identities with expectations of Italian citizenship and integration?
6. What role do language, ethnicity, and cultural memory play in identity construction?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Migration has become one of the defining characteristics of globalization in the twenty-first century. The increasing movement of people across national borders has transformed societies economically, politically, culturally, and demographically. Europe has experienced significant migration flows from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, leading to the emergence of multicultural and multi-religious societies. Among South Asian migrant communities, Bangladeshi Muslims constitute an important diaspora population. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece have witnessed a steady growth of Bangladeshi migration over the last few decades. While migration is often viewed from an economic perspective, scholars increasingly argue that migration is also a process of identity transformation. Migrants do not simply relocate geographically; they also encounter new social structures, political institutions, cultural norms, and forms of belonging that influence how they understand themselves and how they are understood by others. For Bangladeshi Muslims living in Europe, identity is shaped by the interaction between religion, ethnicity, language, citizenship, and public perceptions of Islam. Their experiences are influenced not only by personal beliefs and cultural traditions but also by media representations, state policies, integration programs, and public debates concerning immigration and multiculturalism. Bangladeshi migration to Europe began on a significant scale after the Second World War. During the post-war reconstruction period, many European countries faced severe labor shortages and encouraged immigration from developing countries.

In this study, Malcolm David Brown discusses how Muslim identities were constructed in the United Kingdom and France. The author explains that Muslims in these countries were often represented as different from mainstream Western society. According to Brown, these representations were influenced by Orientalist ideas and stereotypes about Islam and Muslim communities.

The study explains that media, political discussions, and public opinion often presented Muslims as traditional, backward, or difficult to integrate into European society. The author argues that these negative images affected the way Muslim identities were understood and treated in both Britain and France. Brown also compares the approaches of the United Kingdom and France toward Muslim communities. According to the author, Britain followed a more multicultural approach where cultural diversity was somewhat accepted, while France focused more strongly on secularism and national identity. Because of these differences, Muslims experienced identity and integration issues differently in the two countries.

Another important point discussed in the study is the concept of Orientalism. Brown explains that Western societies historically created stereotypes about Eastern and Muslim societies, and these ideas continued to influence modern attitudes toward Muslims in Europe. The author believes that such stereotypes increased social divisions and misunderstandings about Muslim communities. The study further argues that Muslim identity is not fixed, but changes according to social, cultural, and political conditions. Muslims living in Europe continuously negotiate between their religious identity and their position within Western society. Overall, this research helps to understand how Muslim identities were socially and politically constructed in Britain and France. It shows that issues related to Islam in Europe are closely connected with Orientalism, multiculturalism, secularism, immigration, and cultural representation. (The Construction of Muslim Identities in the United Kingdom and France: A Contribution to the Critique of Orientalism) Malcolm David Brown (1999)

Religious Visibility, Mosque and Hijab Controversies: Bangladeshi Muslim Identity Construction in Italy

Migration not only transforms the economic lives of migrants but also reshapes the cultural, social, and religious landscapes of host societies. As Bangladeshi Muslim communities have expanded across Italy, their presence has become increasingly visible through religious institutions, cultural organizations, community activities, and public expressions of faith. Among the most debated aspects of Muslim visibility in contemporary Italy are the construction of mosques and the wearing of the hijab. These issues have become central to discussions concerning migration, integration, citizenship, secularism, multiculturalism, and national identity. For Bangladeshi Muslims, mosques and the hijab are not merely religious symbols. They represent important markers of identity, belonging, and community continuity. However, within many European societies, visible expressions of Islam have often become subjects of political controversy and public debate. Questions regarding mosque construction and the hijab frequently extend beyond religion and become connected with concerns about security, cultural change, social integration, and the future of European identity. Scholars such as Jocelyne Cesari (2004), Stefano Allievi (2009), Nilüfer Göle (2011), and Tariq Modood (2007) argue that debates surrounding Islam in Europe often reveal broader tensions concerning multiculturalism and citizenship. Consequently, mosque and hijab controversies provide an important lens through which to examine the identity construction of Bangladeshi Muslims in Italy. This chapter explores the relationship between religious visibility, mosque controversies, hijab debates, and identity construction among Bangladeshi Muslims in Italy. Particular attention is given to how these controversies shape experiences of belonging, recognition, exclusion, and citizenship within Italian society.

Religious Visibility and Muslim Identity in Italy

Religious identity constitutes one of the most important dimensions of identity construction among Bangladeshi Muslims living in Italy. Migration often strengthens religious consciousness because migrants seek stability, support, and belonging in unfamiliar social environments. Religion becomes a source of moral guidance, emotional security, and collective solidarity.

According to Stuart Hall (1996), identity is not fixed or permanent but continuously constructed through social interaction, representation, and cultural practices. For Bangladeshi Muslims, religious identity is expressed through prayer, fasting, mosque participation, Islamic education, halal consumption, and religious dress. These practices help maintain a sense of continuity between life in Bangladesh and experiences in Italy. However, unlike many private aspects of identity, religion frequently becomes visible in public space. Mosques, Islamic cultural centers, hijabs, halal businesses, and religious festivals all make Muslim communities visible within Italian society. Nilüfer Göle (2011) argues that the growing visibility of Islam in Europe challenges traditional assumptions regarding secular public space and national identity. Consequently, Muslim identity often becomes a subject of public attention and political debate. For Bangladeshi Muslims, religious visibility can generate both recognition and exclusion. On one hand, it allows migrants to preserve their faith and cultural heritage. On the other hand, it may expose them to stereotypes, discrimination, and suspicion. Thus, identity construction occurs within a context where religion is simultaneously a source of belonging and a site of contestation.

Mosques as Religious, Cultural, and Community Institutions

Mosques occupy a central position in the social and religious lives of Bangladeshi Muslims in Italy. While

their primary function is to provide space for daily prayers and Friday congregational worship, their role extends far beyond religious observance. For migrant communities, mosques serve as multifunctional institutions that facilitate cultural preservation, social support, and identity formation. Mosques function as places where religious education is provided to both children and adults. Quranic studies, Islamic teachings, Arabic instruction, and discussions on religious ethics are often organized within mosque environments. These educational activities contribute to the transmission of religious knowledge and cultural values across generations.

In addition to their educational role, mosques function as important community centers. They provide opportunities for social interaction, cultural celebrations, charity work, and community meetings. Religious festivals such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are often organized through mosque networks, strengthening communal bonds and reinforcing collective identity. For newly arrived migrants, mosques also provide practical support. Community members often assist newcomers in finding accommodation, employment opportunities, legal information, and social services. In this sense, mosques contribute not only to spiritual well-being but also to social integration and community development.

Growth of Bangladeshi Muslim Communities and Mosque Construction in Italy

Over the last three decades, Italy has become one of the most important destinations for Bangladeshi migrants in Europe. Significant Bangladeshi communities have emerged in cities such as Rome, Milan, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Naples, and Turin. As migrant populations increased, the demand for religious infrastructure also grew. Bangladeshi Muslims began establishing prayer spaces, Islamic associations, and cultural centers to meet the religious needs of growing communities. These institutions became essential for preserving religious identity and supporting community life. However, the increasing visibility of mosques within Italian urban spaces gradually became a subject of public debate and political controversy. Although the Italian Constitution guarantees religious freedom, the construction of mosques often encounters various challenges. Muslim organizations frequently face lengthy administrative procedures, planning restrictions, zoning regulations, and political opposition when seeking permission to establish new religious facilities. The controversy surrounding mosque construction reveals broader debates regarding immigration, cultural diversity, and national identity. Consequently, mosques are often viewed not merely as religious buildings but as symbols of the changing demographic and cultural composition of Italian society.

Mosque Construction Controversies in Rome, Milan, and Venice

Rome contains one of the largest Bangladeshi Muslim populations in Italy and hosts the Great Mosque of Rome, one of the largest mosques in Europe. Despite the presence of this significant institution, Muslim communities continue to face challenges when attempting to establish additional prayer spaces. Public debates frequently focus on issues related to urban planning, migration, security concerns, and religious visibility. Some political groups argue that the expansion of Islamic institutions may alter the cultural character of the city, while Muslim communities emphasize their constitutional right to religious freedom. Milan represents another important center of Bangladeshi settlement. As one of Italy's major economic hubs, Milan has attracted large numbers of migrant workers over several decades. The growing demand for mosque facilities has generated repeated political debates. Opponents of mosque construction often claim that large Islamic institutions may contribute to social separation or challenge traditional cultural values. Right-wing political parties have historically used mosque controversies as part of broader anti-

immigration narratives. For many Bangladeshi Muslims, these debates reinforce feelings of marginalization despite their economic contributions to Italian society. In Venice, mosque construction debates are shaped by concerns regarding heritage preservation and urban regulation. The city's historical architecture and tourism-based economy create additional obstacles for religious infrastructure development. Muslim organizations have often struggled to secure permanent prayer facilities because of administrative restrictions and planning regulations. As a result, many Muslims rely on temporary prayer spaces and community centers. These challenges highlight the difficulties of accommodating religious diversity within historically Christian urban environments. Across these cities, mosque controversies reveal broader questions about who belongs in public space and how religious diversity should be accommodated within Italian society.

Mosque Construction, Identity Politics, and Belonging

Mosque controversies are closely linked to identity politics because they involve competing understandings of culture, citizenship, and national identity. In many European contexts, Islam is frequently viewed not only as a religion but also as a cultural and political symbol. Consequently, debates surrounding mosque construction often become debates about immigration, multiculturalism, and the future of European society. For Bangladeshi Muslims, mosques symbolize recognition, legitimacy, and belonging. The ability to establish visible religious institutions signals acceptance within the host society. Conversely, opposition to mosque construction may be interpreted as a denial of recognition and an indication that Muslim identities remain socially contested.

Hijab as a Symbol of Religious and Cultural Identity

Alongside mosques, the hijab has become one of the most visible expressions of Muslim identity in Europe. For many Bangladeshi Muslim women, the hijab represents a deeply meaningful expression of faith, modesty, and cultural belonging. It functions as a visible marker of religious commitment while simultaneously reflecting personal values and community traditions. The significance of the hijab extends beyond religious observance. For many women, it symbolizes dignity, self-respect, moral responsibility, and attachment to Islamic teachings. In migrant contexts, visible symbols of identity often become especially important because they help preserve cultural continuity within unfamiliar social environments. Among Bangladeshi Muslim communities, the hijab may also represent emotional connections to family traditions and cultural heritage. Many women view the hijab as an important component of their identity, enabling them to maintain a sense of belonging while navigating life in a predominantly non-Muslim society.

Hijab Controversies and Public Debate

Despite its importance for many Muslim women, the hijab remains one of the most controversial symbols in contemporary Europe. Public debates concerning the Hijab often focus on secularism, integration, gender equality, citizenship, and national identity. Critics sometimes argue that the hijab symbolizes religious conservatism, gender inequality, or resistance to integration. Others claim that visible religious symbols challenge the secular nature of public institutions. Supporters, however, emphasize that wearing the hijab reflects personal choice, religious freedom, and democratic rights. For Bangladeshi Muslim women in Italy, these debates may create experiences of stereotyping, discrimination, and social exclusion. However, many women actively challenge such perceptions by participating in education, employment,

and civic life while maintaining their religious identity.

Islamophobia, Media Representation, and Religious Visibility

One of the most significant factors influencing both mosque and hijab controversies is Islamophobia. Islamophobia refers to prejudice, fear, discrimination, or hostility directed toward Muslims and Islam. Following events such as the September 11 attacks and subsequent terrorist incidents in Europe, public discourse increasingly associated Islam with security concerns and cultural incompatibility. Media representations often contribute to these perceptions by portraying Muslims through narratives of extremism, conflict, or integration failure. Such representations influence public attitudes toward mosque construction, Islamic dress, religious practices, and Muslim organizations. Edward Said's concept of Orientalism helps explain how Muslim communities are frequently represented as culturally different or incompatible with Western values. These representations create symbolic boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims and contribute to processes of social exclusion. For Bangladeshi Muslims in Italy, Islamophobia can create a sense of conditional belonging. Although many migrants contribute positively to Italian society through work, entrepreneurship, and community participation, they may still experience suspicion because of their religious identity. Consequently, religious visibility often becomes both a source of pride and a source of vulnerability.

Strategies of Identity Negotiation and Resistance

Faced with experiences of exclusion and stereotyping, Bangladeshi Muslims employ various strategies to negotiate identity and belonging. These strategies demonstrate the active role migrants play in shaping their own social experiences. One common strategy is adaptation. Many migrants learn the Italian language, engage with local institutions, and participate in broader society while maintaining important aspects of their religious and cultural identity. Adaptation does not necessarily imply abandoning one's heritage but rather balancing multiple forms of belonging. Resistance also constitutes an important response. Some individuals actively challenge negative stereotypes through interfaith dialogue, community engagement, educational initiatives, and public participation. Through these activities, they seek to reshape public perceptions of Islam and Muslims. Selective visibility represents another strategy. Depending on social circumstances, individuals may choose to emphasize or downplay particular aspects of their identity to avoid discrimination or misunderstanding. This reflects the complex realities of navigating different social contexts. Community solidarity remains a crucial source of support. Mosques, cultural associations, and migrant organizations provide emotional, social, and practical assistance while strengthening collective identity. Finally, civic participation allows migrants to claim recognition as active members of society. Through volunteering, community work, and civic engagement, Bangladeshi Muslims demonstrate their commitment to Italian society and challenge narratives of exclusion.

Second-Generation Bangladeshis and Hybrid Identity Formation

Identity construction among second-generation Bangladeshis differs significantly from that of first-generation migrants. Born or raised in Italy, younger generations are often deeply connected to both Bangladeshi and Italian cultural environments. Many second-generation Bangladeshis maintain strong ties to Bangladeshi heritage through family traditions, language, religion, and community networks. Simultaneously, they participate fully in Italian educational institutions, speak Italian fluently, and engage with wider European culture. As a result, identity formation frequently involves balancing Bangladeshi

heritage, Islamic values, Italian citizenship, and European cultural influences. Rather than choosing one identity over another, many young people develop hybrid identities that combine multiple forms of belonging. These hybrid identities challenge simplistic assumptions regarding assimilation and cultural separation. Instead, they demonstrate the dynamic and negotiated nature of identity in contemporary multicultural societies. For many young Bangladeshis, being Muslim, Bangladeshi, Italian, and European are not contradictory identities but interconnected aspects of a complex sense of self.

Discussion of Findings

Identity as a Negotiated Process

One of the most significant findings of this study is that identity among Bangladeshi Muslims in Italy is continuously negotiated rather than permanently established. Participants are frequently categorized through labels such as Muslim, immigrant, foreigner, non-European, or culturally different. These labels often shape social interactions before individuals are recognized as workers, students, parents, professionals, or citizens. As a result, Bangladeshi Muslims constantly engage in identity negotiation. They adapt to Italian society while simultaneously maintaining religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and linguistic heritage. Identity therefore emerges as a dynamic process shaped by interaction between personal self-understanding and external social categorization. The findings support the theoretical perspective that identity is constructed through social interaction rather than existing solely as an internal characteristic. Bangladeshi Muslims negotiate who they are in response to how they are perceived by institutions, media, political actors, and local communities.

Mosque Construction as a Struggle for Recognition

The study found that mosque construction controversies extend far beyond questions of architecture or urban planning. For Bangladeshi Muslims, mosques symbolize religious recognition, cultural continuity, social legitimacy, and community belonging. Mosques serve multiple functions within migrant communities. They provide spaces for daily and Friday prayers, religious education, community meetings, cultural programs, charity activities, and support for newly arrived migrants. Through these activities, mosques become central institutions for preserving identity and strengthening social cohesion. However, mosque construction projects frequently face bureaucratic restrictions, planning regulations, political opposition, public protests, and media criticism. These obstacles often create the perception that Muslim religious visibility requires justification in ways that other religious communities may not experience. Consequently, mosque debates become symbolic struggles over who belongs within Italian society and whose cultural presence is considered legitimate within public space. Opposition to mosque construction often reinforces feelings of exclusion, while successful mosque projects provide a sense of recognition and inclusion.

Hijab Controversies and the Politics of Visibility

The findings also reveal that hijab controversies represent broader debates about religion, secularism, gender, and national identity. For many Bangladeshi Muslim women, the hijab symbolizes religious commitment, modesty, cultural belonging, moral values, and personal identity. However, public discussions frequently frame the hijab through concerns about integration, women's rights, security, and cultural differences. Consequently, Muslim women often become visible representatives of broader debates regarding Islam in Europe. The study demonstrates that the hijab functions as both a personal

religious practice and a public symbol interpreted through social and political frameworks. Muslim women frequently find themselves navigating competing expectations from both their communities and wider society. These experiences illustrate how identity negotiation is shaped by visibility. The visibility of religious symbols often influences how individuals are perceived, treated, and included within social institutions and public spaces.

Media Narratives and the Construction of Difference

Media representation emerged as another significant factor influencing identity construction. Public narratives frequently associate Islam with security concerns, radicalization, cultural incompatibility, and integration problems. Although Bangladeshi Muslims in Italy are generally known for peaceful settlement, entrepreneurship, and economic contribution, they are often affected by broader stereotypes directed toward Muslims. Media discourse frequently reduces diverse Muslim communities into simplified categories that emphasize difference rather than diversity. Such narratives contribute to the social construction of boundaries between “insiders” and “outsiders.” As a result, many Bangladeshi Muslims experience a need to explain, defend, or clarify their religious and cultural identities within everyday interactions. The findings indicate that public discourse influences not only social attitudes but also personal experiences of belonging, self-presentation, and community participation.

Institutions and Conditional Belonging

Another important finding concerns the role of institutions in shaping migrant experiences. Italian responses toward Bangladeshi Muslims often operate through residence documentation, citizenship procedures, language requirements, educational institutions, healthcare systems, and local administrative offices. Although these institutions provide access to rights and services, they also function as sites where belonging is assessed and negotiated. Recognition often depends upon administrative compliance, language proficiency, and perceived integration. This creates a condition where belonging is experienced as conditional rather than automatic. Migrants frequently feel that acceptance must be continually demonstrated through good behavior, economic contribution, civic engagement, and institutional compliance. The study therefore highlights the importance of bureaucratic encounters in shaping everyday experiences of citizenship and social inclusion.

Civic Participation as Recognition Work

The findings suggest that civic participation functions as an important mechanism through which Bangladeshi Muslims seek social recognition. Community participation includes volunteering, mosque committees, educational initiatives, local associations, cultural organizations, and municipal consultation activities. Through these activities, migrants contribute to local communities while simultaneously challenging stereotypes and demonstrating social responsibility. Civic participation serves not only as community engagement but also as recognition work. Participation allows individuals to establish legitimacy, build relationships with local institutions, and strengthen their sense of belonging within Italian society. However, opportunities for participation are often shaped by broader social attitudes and institutional structures. When participation is welcomed, it promotes inclusion; when it is restricted or viewed with suspicion, it can reinforce marginalization.

Hybrid Identity among Second-Generation Bangladeshis

The study also highlights the emergence of hybrid identities among second-generation Bangladeshi Muslims. Unlike first-generation migrants, younger Bangladeshis often grow up within Italian schools, universities, and social environments while maintaining strong connections to family traditions and Islamic values. As a result, many develop identities that combine Bangladeshi heritage, Islamic beliefs, Italian citizenship, and European cultural influences. Rather than choosing between competing identities, second-generation individuals frequently integrate multiple cultural frameworks into a single sense of self. Their experiences demonstrate that identity is fluid, adaptive, and shaped by multiple social contexts. These findings challenge simplistic assumptions that migrants must either fully assimilate or remain culturally separate. Instead, identity construction often involves creative negotiation between multiple cultural worlds.

CONCLUSION

The portrayal of collective identity of Muslim populations in Europe presents an increasingly important issue within identity politics. While European Muslims represent a diverse population that has experienced longstanding socio-political concerns, they are also increasingly portrayed in light of wider global perceptions of Islam in a post-9/11 era. Consequently, there is growing concern over a confusing of such pre-existing domestic issues and larger international problems of radical fundamentalism and Islamic terrorism. The misrepresentation of European Muslims as linked to such issues in turn often exacerbates domestic problems and contributes to an evolving sense of oppositional Muslim identity in Europe. In light of these concerns over inaccurate depictions of Muslims and their harmful effects, many of which will be expounded upon below, a more critical and deliberate approach is necessary in scholarly assessments of Muslim populations. This thesis examines the situation of European Muslims amidst such portrayals of commonality and international influence. After discussing some facets of political identities and critiquing other approaches to this issue, the study focuses on the case of Muslims in France. Using the lens of universalism, I examine the context of Muslims in France and evaluate the accuracy of assertions of common identity. After illustrating the diversity of French Muslims, the study then turns to the situation of Muslims in Europe, comparing the French case with those of Great Britain and Germany. Finally, it returns to the recent French national identity debate for concluding remarks. The study demonstrates that, while portrayals of Muslims as a uniform threat to European identity are at present inaccurate and misleading, such assertions also carry potentially harmful effects in stigmatizing Muslims and contributing to oppositional identity formation.

This study demonstrates that controversies surrounding mosque construction and the hijab are not simply debates about religious buildings or clothing. They represent broader struggles over recognition, belonging, citizenship, and cultural visibility within contemporary Italy. For Bangladeshi Muslims, mosques function as essential spaces for religious practice, community support, and cultural preservation, while the hijab serves as an important marker of religious and personal identity. However, public controversies surrounding these symbols often transform them into political and social issues connected to migration, integration, and national identity. The findings reveal that Bangladeshi Muslims negotiate belonging through everyday interactions with institutions, public discourse, and local communities. Identity is continuously shaped by both internal community values and external social pressures. Ultimately, the study shows that belonging is not achieved solely through legal residence or citizenship status. It is produced through ongoing processes of recognition, participation, acceptance, and social

interaction. Bangladeshi Muslims in Italy actively contribute to society while simultaneously navigating challenges associated with religious visibility and cultural difference.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies may explore:

- Comparative experiences of Bangladeshi Muslims across different Italian cities.
- Gender-specific experiences of identity negotiation among Muslim women.
- The role of social media in shaping Muslim identity and public perception.
- Longitudinal studies examining identity changes across generations.
- Comparative research involving other South Asian Muslim communities in Europe.

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