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## Muslim ‘Belonging’ in the West and Some Global Implications

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# MUSLIM ‘BELONGING’ IN THE WEST AND SOME GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

Mohammed Jamal Haider\*

**Abstract:** This article focuses on Muslim ‘belonging’ in the West and some global implications. Muslim belonging is currently one of the crucial concerns in the West. Historical conflicts and wars of the past have caused Muslims’ identity to be shaped by several challenges. In contemporary times, negative factors like racism, media stereotyping, Islamophobia, among others, have been found to constantly affect Muslim belonging in myriad ways that raise pertinent questions on several multicultural values. Belonging has suffered extensively due to the rise of ultra-nationalism and victimisation of Muslims in the West. It is affected not just by phenomena local in the West, but also by international events like wars and civil wars in Muslim countries that have Western involvement. Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is to collate recent and relevant information, analyse it and demonstrate its impact on belonging.

**Keywords:** *Muslim belonging, migration, racism, populists, terrorists, global implications*

## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalised world, the coming together of the miscellany of humanity has made belonging inevitable to further the cause of peaceful coexistence. However, the emergence of reactive, emotive and mostly intemperate conflicting forces oftentimes diminishes the prospects of belongingness. Consequently, at a sociological level, the degree of belonging can be significantly affected by welcoming or rejecting people to belong to a place or cultural tradition.

Muslim belonging is a complex phenomenon in the West because Western nations are not known to be uniform in their attitude towards religion and Muslims in general. Despite being a fundamental need or motivation in citizenship, the element of Muslim belonging in Western nations has remained ‘delicate’ due to a variety of factors – historical, political, etc. However, this delicate relationship has been seriously tested in recent times through a growing number of cases involving fear, hatred and violence, at national and international levels.

Muslims are facing increased hostility in the West. Examples include violent and arson attacks on mosques, such as the deadly attacks on Christchurch Mosque and Muslim schools.

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Despite being published in the media, such events tend to be forgotten within a short span of time. Very few attempts are made to collect, collate and correlate these news items with a view to producing scholarly works. Therefore, this paper visits the Muslim belonging issue and refers to several contemporary events to underscore the significance of the prevailing situation. It attempts to collect pertinent information through referring to the latest reports and media items, in conjunction with some classical understandings.

Muslims in the West are not a homogenous mass. In the distant past, a few Crusaders had converted to Islam.<sup>1</sup> Next, a significant number of Europeans converted to Islam by different Sufi movements during the times of the Ottomans.<sup>2</sup> It is also noteworthy that a significant number of Muslims arrived in Europe during the colonial period. The colonial masters had moved the ‘natives’ from one place to another for work and, ultimately, many of them from North Africa and South and West Asia ended up in Europe,<sup>3</sup> primarily living in lower to middle class suburbs.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, they constitute a significant minority in the West, as shown by the table below.

**Table 1: Muslim population in the West by country**

Country	Population	Year	Source
USA	3.45 million	2017	Pew report <sup>5</sup>
Europe	26 million	2016	Pew report <sup>6</sup>
Canada	1,053,945	2011	Canadian National Household Survey <sup>7</sup>
Australia	604,200	2016	Australian census <sup>8</sup>
New Zealand	57,276	2018	New Zealand census <sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Beatrice N. Siedschlag, *English Participation in the Crusades, 1150–1220* (Wisconsin: The Collegiate Press, George Banta Publishing Company, 1939).

<sup>2</sup> Marc Baer, Ussama Makdisi and Andrew Shryock, “Tolerance and Conversion in the Ottoman Empire: A Conversation,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 40 (2009); Tijana Krstić, “Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalisation,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (2009): 35-63. doi: 10.1017/S0010417509000036; Nathalie Clayer, “Saints and Sufis in post-Communist Albania,” in *Popular Movements and Democratization in the Islamic World*, ed. Masatoshi Kisachi (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Ghulam Murshid, *The Call of the Sea: History of Bangali in Britain* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Abosar, 2008); Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Traveller and Settler in Britain 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Brian Farmer, *Radical Islam in the West: Ideology and Challenge* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Lipka, “Muslims and Islam: Key Findings in the US and around the World,” Pew Research Center, August 9, 2017, accessed April 16, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>.

<sup>6</sup> Conrad Hackett, “5 Facts about the Muslim Population in Europe,” Pew Research Center, November 29, 2017, accessed April 16, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>.

<sup>7</sup> “2011 National Household Survey: Data Tables,” Statistics Canada, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=0&PID=105399&PRID=0&PTYPE=105277&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2013&THEME=95&VID=0>.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016,” cat. no. 2071.0, June 28, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170710020910/https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2071.0>

Diversification is also due to recent Muslim immigration caused by globalisation, greater movement of people and an increase of feminisation among the migrants.<sup>10</sup> The mobility of people has increased, which, in turn, has resulted in increased movement of goods, information, money and ideas, among others.<sup>11</sup> Wars in Muslim lands have now emerged as a major cause of ‘production’ of refugees and their migration to the West.

Muslim migration is being caused by ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors.<sup>12</sup> The main macro-level push factors in the ‘home’ countries are to escape political instability or persecution, such as the Rohingyas, or the recent incident of refugees going to Turkey and Europe from the Middle Eastern war zones. The ‘pull’ factors from the destination countries, which primarily work on the individual micro level,<sup>13</sup> include seeking personal economic gain, academic improvement, employment opportunities, etc.

In addition to providing a better and more stable national economy, the West also offers better judicial and legal systems, political environment, advanced academia, decent human rights and a better overall standard of living. Given the developed and rich countries also confront a perennial predicament of population deflation problem, they require skilled and unskilled people from developing countries. The brain-drain of young bright intellectuals is one such aspect.

When contemplating Muslim belonging in the West, the general tendency is to compartmentalise the events occurring within the Western geographical extent. However, in reality, the influencing factors are also international; for example, the wars fought in the Muslim countries with Western involvement.

## TO BELONG OR NOT TO BELONG

At the outset, it may be a prudent approach to accept that most Muslims of the West are in a better economic, political, legal and academic environment than they were in their previous ‘home’ countries. While they are ‘better off’ in certain respects, their belongingness is negatively impinged by several factors that they are confronted with. Some of the main factors include racial discrimination, religious phobia, social and media stereotyping, among others, which are discussed below.

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<sup>9</sup> Stats NZ, “2018 Census Totals by Topic – National Highlights,” September 23, 2019, accessed October 24, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190923102431/https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2018-census-totals-by-topic-national-highlights>.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas van Hear., Oliver Bakewell and Kathy Long, “Push-pull Plus: Reconsidering the Drivers of Migration,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, no. 6 (2018), doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384135

<sup>13</sup> Francesco Castelli, “Drivers of Migration: Why do People Move?” *Journal of Travel Medicine* 25, no. 1 (2018).

## ***Racism***

Simply, ethnocentrism and ethnic group closure can be understood as a social and economic disconnection between different groups, an act towards retaining their identity. However, when one group holds greater power than the other (e.g. majority over minority groups), the more powerful group is likely to interfere in national resource allocation. Resources such as jobs, wealth and social status are scarce, and those who hold privileged positions are likely to want to hold onto them.<sup>14</sup> This privilege can also be generalised in the global context of powerplay between developed and developing countries.

Initially, Marxist theorists of class conflict opined that the ruling class had used slavery, racism and colonisation as tools for labour exploitation.<sup>15</sup> Newer theories argue that racism is a more complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The 2001 Critical Race Theory<sup>16</sup> diverged from previous linear theories developed after the civil rights movement of the 1960s, because gains from the civil rights movements were eroded in the follow through.<sup>17</sup> For Muslims, it appears a further development has now taken place, where the ‘new normal’ is that it is not problematic to stigmatise Muslims; in fact, it helps garner more political votes. With time, as socio-political situations change, methods of perpetrating racism also alter.

Racism is one of the main reasons for migrants losing their sense of belonging. This is not specific to Muslim migrants. Racism can be explicit in the actions and speech of the perpetrators, or may be implicit as imperceptible attitudes targeting the roots of belongingness; for example, there are *Asian Americans*, *African Americans*, *indigenous Americans* and even some *Irish Americans*, but the dominant group is Americans without any qualification. There are no *European Americans* to speak of.

Populist politicians tend to be the extreme political manifestations of racism, with white supremacists falling into the ‘terrorist’ category. A pertinent illustration of this populist-supremacist cohabitation is apparent in the Christchurch mosques shooting episode. On 15 March 2019, a white supremacist shot and killed 51 innocent Muslims getting ready for Friday congregation prayer in two mosques in a planned, unprovoked manner. Fraser Anning, an independent anti-Muslim and anti-immigration Australian federal senator, almost immediately ascribed blame for the attacks to fanatic Muslims and the immigration program, which enabled them to migrate to Australia.<sup>18</sup> This event exhibits the actions of a right wing ‘terrorist’ and the moral support elicited from a populist. A deluge of revulsion was expressed towards the senator’s statement by politicians in Australia and New Zealand, especially Jacinda Arden, Prime Minister of New Zealand, who tried her best to stand by the aggrieved

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<sup>14</sup> Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton, *Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Oliver C. Cox, *Class Cast and Race: A Study of Social Dynamics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Giddens and Sutton, *Sociology*.

<sup>18</sup> “Fury as Australian Senator Blames Christchurch Attack on Muslim Immigration,” *The Guardian*, March 16, 2019, accessed March 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/15/australian-senator-fraser-anning-criticised-blaming-new-zealand-attack-on-muslim-immigration>.

Muslim community and assuage its pain. Yet the day belonged to a young man named Will Connolly, who threw an egg at Anning in disgust.<sup>19</sup> Muslims often ruminate on the rationale behind the election of these individuals to such sensitive and important offices. What is the degree of fear and hatred needed to influence and cajole the innocent public to vote for them? The very fact that such politicians are termed ‘populists’ and not ‘fundamentalists’ merits introspection.

### ***Religious Phobia***

Phobia of other religions has existed for ages in the West. It started off early in Christian history as a mechanism of self-defence. Early Christians suffered at the hands of Jews in Jerusalem and pagans of Rome for a few centuries before establishing themselves as the main religion of the Roman Empire. After episodes of their suppression were overcome, then emerged conflicts with the Muslims beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The fear and intolerance of other religions become entrenched during this period. Christian politics obliterated the European pagans during the reign of Charlemagne. European literature also portrayed antisemitism as part of the lifestyle. Shylock’s palpably uncharitable clamouring for the critical pound of flesh in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* represented the Jewish visage of that time. The increase in such anti-Semitism would ultimately lead to the Holocaust. Similarly, Islamophobia is also not a new concept. Although it began during the crusades, Muslim countries face invasions and destruction even in present times, be it owing to a Saddam or a Gaddafi. For some reason, the West has almost always been found to be involved in such invasions, which often ravage entire countries. Like all people, Muslims of the West are influenced by such global occurrences.

Scrutinising the social perspective of some countries in the West leads to the discovery of disrespectful caricatures of Prophet Muhammad, which are sketched and displayed in exhibitions or media, hurting ordinary Muslims’ sentiments.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, building and developing mosques has become challenging in many regions of the West. Oftentimes, it is difficult to seek permission to build mosques due to ‘strict’ local council rules or opposition from locals.<sup>21</sup> On the more extreme side, arson attacks occur at mosques,<sup>22</sup> whereas some far-right governments close or attempt to close mosques.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Palko Karasz, “Australian Senator Hit With Egg After Blaming Immigration for Mosque Attacks,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2019, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/16/world/australia/australia-anning-egg-new-zealand-shooting.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Heiko Henkel, “Fundamentally Danish? The Muhammad Cartoon Crisis as Transitional Drama,” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 8, no. 2 (2010), <https://www.okcir.com/Articles%20VIII%202/Henkel-FM.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Mourad Hassan, “The Development and Land Use Impacts of Local Mosques” (bachelor’s diss., University of New South Wales, Sydney, 2006), 37-38.

<sup>22</sup> “Sweden hit by Third Mosque Arson Attack in a Week,” *Straits Times*, January 2, 2015, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/sweden-hit-by-third-mosque-arson-attack-in-a-week>.

<sup>23</sup> Melissa Eddy “Austria Closes 7 Mosques and Seeks to Expel Imams Paid by Turkey,” *New York Times*, June 8, 2018, accessed April 9, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/08/world/europe/austria-islam-mosques-turkey.html>; “Austrian Court Axes Decision to Shut Down Mosques,” *Anadolu Agency*, February

One case study on the challenges associated with developing a mosque-cum-Islamic centre is particularly pertinent. A development application was lodged in 2002 for the Annangrove Islamic Centre with Baulkham Hills Shire Council by New Century Development Pty Ltd (applicant) proposing the construction of a single-storey building to be used as a place of public worship (for Muslims). However, the councillors rejected the application due to local objections. Subsequently, the applicant lodged an appeal to the Land and Environment Court. In his findings, Justice J. Lloyd provided the following summation:

The consent authority must not blindly accept the subjective fears and concerns expressed in the public submissions. There must be evidence that can be objectively assessed that shows adverse effect upon the amenity of the area. In this case, the objections must be afforded little weight and appear to have little basis in fact.<sup>24</sup>

Though the appeal was upheld, stringent additional conditions were added by the council, which included:<sup>25</sup>

- Construction of half the road, extending beyond the subject site's frontage up to and including part of the adjoining properties
- Installation of high-grade security fencing costing \$130,000. The cost of standard fencing would have been around \$30,000
- Provision of three on-site sewerage tanks to cater for patron usage. It was noted "if there were 500 people using the amenities 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, one tank would suffice." At a later stage, the company contracted to dispose of the waste found there was nothing to pump out
- Due consideration to be given to other individuals who may be affected by this land use indirectly in the short or long term. This could include neighbours who are willing to sell their properties (for higher than market value prices) to the place of worship brought on by the expansionist activity of places of worship. It is not uncommon for some places of worship to buy adjoining properties with a view to achieving their objectives

While the above is a relevant example of a local government's (council) antipathetic behaviour, entire governments have been found to become flagrantly Islamophobic. Austria's far right government is the latest example of Europe's progressively extreme behaviour towards Muslims. In 2017, the face veil was banned in the country.<sup>26</sup> In 2018, seven mosques were to be shut down and the imams were to be deported,<sup>27</sup> which led to a legal tussle.<sup>28</sup> In

15, 2019, accessed April 9, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/austrian-court-axes-decision-to-shut-down-mosques-/1393601>.

<sup>24</sup> Hassan, "The Development and Land Use Impacts of Local Mosques," 37-38.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Zena Tahhan, "Austria Face Veil Ban 'Criminalises Muslim Women,'" *Al Jazeera*, October 2, 2017, accessed April 6, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/austria-face-veil-ban-criminalises-muslim-women-171001104455120.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Eddy, "Austria Closes 7 Mosques."

<sup>28</sup> "Austrian Court Axes Decision to Shut Down Mosques."

2019, the Austrian government declared new laws that would enable the closure of Muslim institutions in 2020.<sup>29</sup>

### ***The Sharia Phobia***

The phobia surrounding Sharia (Islamic law) in the West can be alleviated by understanding what it really is and entails. Sharia is a legal system or overall constitutional framework that was established long before English Common Law. Professor John Makdisi states that institutions such as trial by jury, the Action of Debt and the assize of novel disseisin (recent dispossession) in Common Law can be traced back directly to Islamic Sharia.<sup>30</sup> Most importantly, it influenced the formation of a central legal system (Common Law) similar to Sharia. Prior to that, British judges used to give verdicts based on their own opinion.

In 1215, the *Magna Carta Libertatum* (Great Charter of the Liberties) was agreed to by King John of England. In her book *The Discovery of Freedom*, Rose Wilder Lane discusses this topic and shows the notion of the rights of the gentry within the Magna Carta was influenced by Sharia.<sup>31</sup> When Spain was reconquered by the Christians from the Muslims, the Catholic Spaniards refused to conform to the new Christian rulers until an overarching law like Sharia was enacted and certain rights that the Muslims gave them were also provided. A similar demand made by the returning crusaders resulted in the Magna Carta. Significant American constitutional principles, including the idea of a supreme law, theory of representative government and judicial review, have their roots in the Magna Carta.<sup>32</sup>

The aim of Sharia (*Maqasid al Sharia*) is to preserve and protect certain rights. Five primary rights are mentioned in Sharia: religion, life, intellect, property (wealth) and progeny (family). These rights are believed by Muslims to be unalienable, provided by the Creator, and beyond the authority of the rulers. Similarly, the intention of the American Constitution is to preserve life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (a broad term that can include property, wealth, etc.). As is the case with Sharia, these rights are inalienable. The similarity between the rights in Sharia and the American Constitution is astonishing. There is a storyline here: Edward Pococke, Savillian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford University and a famous Orientalist, lived for several years in the huge Ottoman Empire where Sharia was the constitution. He was a scholar who translated Arabic scholarly works to English. At Oxford University, he established contact with philosopher John Locke and the American Founding

<sup>29</sup> Austrian Government promulgates law to close Muslim institutions. "Austria's Far-Right Politicians Target Muslim Institutions with New Law," *Daily Sabah*, September 27, 2019, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/islamophobia/2019/09/27/austrias-far-right-politicians-target-muslim-institutions-with-new-law>.

<sup>30</sup> John A. Makdisi. "The Islamic Origin of the Common Law," *North Carolina Law Review* 77, no. 5 (1999).

<sup>31</sup> Rose W. Lane, *The Discovery of Freedom—Man's Struggle Against Authority* (New York: John Day Company, 1943).

<sup>32</sup> Zachary Elkins, Tom Ginsburg and James Melton, "On the Influence of Magna Carta and Other Cultural Relics," *International Review of Law and Economics* 47 (2016), doi: 10.1016/j.irle.2016.05.004.



Fathers were influenced by John Locke.<sup>33</sup> Understanding this chain of events makes it evident that Sharia is not as disturbing as it has been politically made to sound through unfortunate distortion of few legal clauses.

### ***Concealing the Contribution of Past Muslim Scholars to the West***

Another factor indirectly discomfiting Muslims is the implicit academic concealment of the intellectual contribution by early Muslims to the West. While Europe was in its medieval dark ages, Muslim scientists and scholars were flourishing in the greater part of the then known new world. European scholars translated the Muslim works from Muslim Spain during and after the *Reconquista*, from the levant regions during the time of the crusades as well as from Sicily following the fall of the Muslim rulers of Sicily to the Normans. These accumulations of knowledge ultimately led to the Renaissance.<sup>34</sup> The true identity of Muslims scholars such as Al Khwarizmi – founder of algebra, Al Jabir – founder of empirical chemistry, Ibn Rushd – philosopher who introduced Aristotle’s philosophy to Europe, Ibn Sina – the scholar whose medical books were texts in European universities for centuries and the famous physicist Al Haytham, are camouflaged behind their Latinised names of Algorithmi, Geber, Averroes, Avicenna and Alhazen. The works of many such scholars were introduced to Europe via translation, among whom was Ibn Khaldun, the true founder of sociology and historiography, and the provider of original concepts of economics and demography.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the names of European scholars like Newton, which is a regular feature in modern day textbooks, the Muslim scholars who influenced them and are the true founders of such disciplines are rarely mentioned.

Despite the fact Ibn Khaldun first introduced historiography, much of Islamic history tends to be viewed with scepticism.<sup>36</sup> However, this tendency to discredit Muslims’ contribution in general is not new. For example, a Latin translation of Abu Ma’shar Ja’far ibn Muhammad’s (Albumazar) famous book on astrology was appended by the European translator-scribe with “Finished, with praise to God for his help and a curse on Muhammad and his followers.”<sup>37</sup>

Such examples of prejudicial writing can also be evidenced in the recent Oriental legacy. While a sociologist like Turner attempts to look at this treatment dispassionately without denying it,<sup>38</sup> Edward Said rejects the logic behind patronising Oriental literature on Islam.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Mohammed J. Haider, *The First Command: Iqra and its Impact on Global Intellectualism and the Renaissance* (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Lyons, *The House of Wisdom—How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilisation* (London, Bloomsbury, 2009); Haider, *The First Command*.

<sup>35</sup> Haider, *The First Command*.

<sup>36</sup> Warren E. Gates, “The Spread of Ibn Khaldun’s Ideas on Climate and Culture,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28, no. 3 (1967).

<sup>37</sup> Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Boydell Press, UK: Woodbridge, 1987), 153.

<sup>38</sup> Bryan Turner and Kamaludeen Nasir, eds., *The Sociology of Islam: Collected Essays of Bryan S. Turner* (Surry: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

### *Negative Stereotyping of Muslims in the Media*

Dr Jack G. Sheehan, emeritus professor of mass communications at Southern Illinois University, in his sardonic yet aptly titled book *Reel Bad Arabs*, takes on Hollywood and brings to light a century-old controversial history from cinema's earliest days to contemporary Hollywood blockbusters that feature machinegun wielding and bomb-blowing Arabs and nefarious Muslims.<sup>40</sup> This research is based on analysis of more than 900 movies made over a century and found that 95% of these display a negative disposition toward Muslims. It shows how

moviegoers are led to believe that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs. The moviemakers' distorted lenses have shown Arabs as heartless, brutal, uncivilized, religious fanatics through common depictions of Arabs kidnapping or raping a fair maiden; expressing hatred against the Jews and Christians; and demonstrating a love for wealth and power.<sup>41</sup>

While it is true that Muslims are not without their share of "weirdos," they do not represent mainstream Muslims or Islam. Contrarily, the negative stereotyping of Muslims is palpably perpetrated by the mainstream Western media. From the administrative and legal institutions of the Holy See (including the crusaders) to the current newsrooms of the Western media, the propensity for the West to selectively and myopically target Muslims, their religion and their culture is an unfortunate reality.<sup>42</sup>

There is some opposition to such stereotyping as well. For instance, the Runnymede Trust is a racial equality think tank founded in 1968 by Jim Rose – a British intelligence officer, journalist and campaigner – and Anthony Lester QC – a British barrister and former member of the House of Lords. In 1996, the think tank established the Commission for British Muslims and Islamophobia, chaired by Gordon Conway, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex. In 1997, it published a report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*,<sup>43</sup> in which it outlined many news media headlines, which included:

- "Muslim Rebels Massacre 93 in Overnight Raid," without stating the episode took place in a Muslim country and the dead were Muslims (*The Guardian* – 23 April 1997)
- "Sod off Back Home if you don't like it Here" (*The Sun* – 18 January 1992)
- 'Slaughtering Goats, Burning Books, and Mutilating Teenagers ... and still they want me to Respect the Muslim Ways?' This headline was inserted next to a photograph of Muslims at prayer (*People* – 15 January 1995)

<sup>40</sup> Jack G. Sheehan, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 171–193.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Lyons, *Islam Through the Western Eyes: From the Crusades to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> The Runnymede Commission 1997 can be found in this Runnymede site: Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (London, UK: Runnymede Trust, 1997), <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/companies/17/74/Islamophobia-A-Challenge-for-Us-All.html>.

- “This is a Christian Country not a Muslim Country, if you don’t like our Ways go Back to where you Came From and Experience how they Treat your own People” (*Birmingham Mail* – 21 December 1996)

The above examples are just a random few taken from hundreds of such media reportage brought to the Commission’s notice.<sup>44</sup> On its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019, the Commission published a report titled *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us*. This report addressed some of the more contemporary conditions of Islamophobia and advocates what should be done to counter such circumstances.<sup>45</sup>

Another medium that has been shown to be quite biased is radio. Some local radio stations tend to engage in Muslim bashing under the veneer of “freedom of speech.” However, it may be helpful to realise that freedom of speech means “freedom of responsible speech.” There are also a few Muslim radio stations,<sup>46</sup> but they are unable to influence their Islamophobic counterparts and mostly tend to be apologetic. Besides, the ones that do exist are more interested in spiritual discussions and general news of Muslims.

## SHAPING OF IDENTITIES

Belonging is affected by what groups think of each other. In the current context, what do Muslims and the West think of each other and what attitudes have shaped their identities in each other’s cognisance? The following subsections discuss the main development process of perception.

### *Muslim Identity in the Western Social Perception*

In his book *Islam through the Western Eyes*, Jonathan Lyons states, regardless of its close involvement with the Muslim world, the West’s contemplation and portrayal of Islam negatively affects Western intellectualism, especially its social sciences.<sup>47</sup> He narrates its overarching influence on political strategy, government policy, research and speeches that prevent the West from reacting efficiently to contemporary issues, i.e. the resurgence of Islamic power, women’s rights, surfacing of religious violence, as well as the conflict between established social values and multicultural rights among Muslim immigrant populations. Notably, he uses the intellectual ‘archaeology’ of philosopher Michel Foucault to explain its impact on Western intellectualism.

The most important factor in shaping Muslim identity in Western social perception is the fierce conflicts with the usual demonisation and propaganda that have left an almost permanent negative impression about Muslims in the sociological imagination of the West.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Farah Elahi and Omar Khan, *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us. 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Report* (London: Runnymede Trust, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> For example, the Voice of Islam Radio Station, Sydney, <http://thevoiceofislam.com.au/>.

<sup>47</sup> Lyons, *Islam Through the Western Eyes*.

Due to a millennium of anti-Islamic imageries, the West has been largely unable to productively engage with the Muslim world despite being involved in all their aspects.<sup>48</sup>

There are anti-Muslim lobbies in the West that include populists, atheists, extreme evangelists, etc., who are known to sporadically take anti-Muslim stances. On the other hand, activities of Muslim terrorists also contribute to this negative image in this age of Al Qaeda, ISIS and Boko Haram. Such activities make it easy for the media to further instigate an already perturbed public. As a case in point, the 9/11 attacks were used by the media to exacerbate the already negative Muslim image and instigate public anger/fear, finally leading to war. All the above create an environment that is not very congenial for perceiving Muslim identity.

### ***The Ordinariness of Muslim Accomplishments***

One thing that has been known to influence the Western imagination is the ordinariness of contemporary Muslims. In the West, the majority of Muslims seem to be fairly content with their shops, small businesses and mid-to-low-level jobs; they do not seem to have interest in or understanding of the importance of corporate systems or major economic and political institutions. Among Muslims, there seems to be few doctors or lawyers, most of whom are not known for their exceptional achievements.

In addition, there is little marked contemporary Muslim contribution in any academic fields – science, social science or humanities. A study on the erudition and contribution of current Chinese, Indians and Jews of the West would be interesting to compare with that of Muslims. At the same time, the great contribution of early Muslim scholars to the West in sciences and social sciences, including philosophy and sociology, should not be forgotten. It appears that contemporary Muslims are an anti-thesis of those early Muslims. The passion for greatness seems to have dissipated; scholars like Al Jabir, Ibn Haitham or Ibn Khaldun are a rarity. Similarly, the visionary leadership demonstrated by the likes of Harun ur Rashid or Al Mamun has become a thing of the past.

### ***The Western Identity in Muslim Social Perception***

The shaping of the Western identity among Muslims has developed since early Islamic history. Even during conflicts, Muslims have largely shown respect to the West (the Christian Byzantines in this case). For example, when the 7<sup>th</sup> century Muslims fought the *imperialism* of the Byzantines, there was no antagonism against its civilian people or religion. As a matter of fact, the Prophet had given a charter to the Christians that they will “not be unfairly taxed, no bishops were to be expelled from the monasteries, Christians would not be restrained from their pilgrimage, no churches will be pulled down.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Masudul Hasan, *History of Islam: Classical Period 571 - 1258 CE* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2004), 68.

In the early 7<sup>th</sup> century war between the Byzantines and Sasanian Persians,<sup>50</sup> the Persians achieved significant victories. However, the Prophet and Muslims were not happy as the Byzantines were monotheist Christians while the Persians were Zoroastrians; thus, they provided moral support to Byzantium. In fact, the following verses were revealed about the defeat of the Byzantines in the Qur'ān:

The Byzantines have been defeated; In the nearest land,  
But they (Byzantine Romans), after their defeat, will overcome; within three to nine years.  
To Allah belongs the command before and after. And that day the believers will rejoice.<sup>51</sup>

The Byzantines did recover in the stipulated period. During the time of the Rashidun Caliphs, when the Muslims fought to dislodge the Byzantine Romans from the occupied Arab-Syriac lands, a standing order was issued not to harm any Christian churches or monasteries, i.e. any Christian institutions.<sup>52</sup> In Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Christians and Jews belong to the category known as *dhimmi*, i.e. people under Muslim suzerainty, whose laws and practices need to be protected.<sup>53</sup> Further, if a Christian or Jewish woman with faith and righteousness married a Muslim man, she would be allowed to continue in her own faith if she chose. When the Caliph Umar occupied Jerusalem, he treated the Church and the defeated European Christians ruling there with deference.

Similarly and pertinently, when Muslims fought the Byzantine Romans, it mostly started from a defensive strategy (at that time, most of north and western Europe were tribal and not included within civilised regions). During the First Crusade, Muslims had lost Jerusalem and the littoral of the levant, facing an exceedingly high number of casualties at the hands of the crusaders. But about 80 years later, when Sultan Saladin recovered Jerusalem, they had treated the defeated crusaders with grace and mercy. Even when the Ottomans invaded Europe, it commenced more as a defensive approach from the crusaders and Mongols.

From this initial framework, Muslims developed their perception of Western identity. Even today, they generally support the West in global issues unless impelled by Western hegemony or superpower conflicts. Such oppositions are exceptions rather than the case. The contemporary Muslim radicalisation and global jihadism is not an Islamic imperative but a reaction to events like colonisation and the double standards in international relations and foreign policies with regard to Muslim nations.<sup>54</sup> In the early days of Islam, when the Muslims were under oppression in Makkah, the Prophet sent many of his companions to Abyssinia, a country ruled by a Christian Negus, because he was a just king. Today, Muslims are justifiably ambivalent and distressed at the treatment meted out to them in the West, which is supposed to be just.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale* [The Encyclopedia of Ancient History] (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2012), doi: 10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah03045.

<sup>51</sup> Found in *Surah Rum* (Chapter Rome) in the Qur'ān (30:2–4).

<sup>52</sup> Masudul Hasan, *Hadrat Abu Bakr Siddique* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhaban, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> Juan Campo, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), ebook edition.

<sup>54</sup> Jan Ali and Drew Cottle, "Islam-West Relations and the Rise of Muslim Radicalisation and Global Jihadism," in *Islam in the West: Perceptions and Reactions*, ed. Abe W. Ata and Jan A. Ali (UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

### ***Muslim Identity Perception Among Western Muslims***

Several factors affect the Muslim perception of themselves: the ‘ordinariness’ of Muslims has caused an identity crisis among Muslims of the West, especially the youth. In addition, the West promotes a dominantly ‘rational’ image with minimum ‘spiritual’ aspirations. In contrast, there is a strong and enduring side to Islam. Youths tend to become confused due to the media and political projection of these differences between Western and Muslim cultures. In general, the Western perception promoted in mass media and some modern sociological analysis is that Islam is a problem,<sup>55</sup> stating Islam *indisputably* has issues with progress, democracy and modernity. Under such pressures, Muslims tend to be left with just two options:

1. to become invisible in the society, i.e. be Muslims without following Islam, or
2. to become apologetic and constantly clarify *what Islam is not*, why Islam is not against women, why *jihad* is not war but a holy struggle and all the other allegations being regularly made by agenda-driven, self-proclaimed experts.

This psychological coercivity actually represents cognitive fascism and authoritarian attitudes from which Muslims find themselves unable to escape.

Muslims in the West belonging to different ethnic backgrounds and cultures develop different views. Different Muslim scholars also espouse different views due to the collective influences of various sects. Some are rational, whereas others tend to be implicitly antipathetic towards pure and social sciences.

In the wake of these different issues and biases, it has become difficult to retain the basic *al halal wal haram* (prohibited and permitted actions), building or maintaining mosques, and teaching basic rituals. Muslims are so busy struggling with rudimentary challenges that the essential message of Islam seems to be getting lost. Anywhere in the world, the essential message of Islam consists of: faith in one God, prayer, charity (*zakat*), fasting and pilgrimage. There is nothing in this that conflicts with the West. The existing conflicts are all artificial, political and social creations. As the media promotes its compulsive atheistic or anti-Islamic agenda, a communication gap has also developed among confused Muslim youths and their religious scholars – the *ulema*.<sup>56</sup> The *ulema* also need a structured respectful coexistence among themselves.

### **MULTICULTURALISM VERSUS COERCIVE ASSIMILATION**

Multiculturalism was devised in several Western countries to organise the multiple ethnic groups present. However, in recent times, rightist politicians have contended that multiculturalism has failed due to various reasons. Therefore, the alternative is to assimilate. According to Turner, some modern commentators opine that Islam does not fit in the

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<sup>55</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Being a European Muslim* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Westphalian model based on *cuius regio eius religio* (whose realm, his religion).<sup>57</sup> An important point missing from this discourse is that multiculturalism has been *made to fail* to a certain extent by rightist politicians and governments.

Muslim empires of the past have been multicultural; for example, Ottoman, Abbasid, Muslim Spain (*Al Andalus*) and India (the largest Indian empire was built by the Indian Muslim Moghuls). Muslim rule was made multicultural for a crucial reason. There is an immutable Qur'ānic injunction that says, "There is no coercion in religion,"<sup>58</sup> i.e. one cannot be forced to change religion. This implies, in Islamic empires, its non-Islamic populace could not be coercively assimilated. Muslims devised multicultural ways in which groups of various religions could live by their own religions and religious laws. Muslims had ruled over places like Spain and India for many centuries, yet Muslims remained the minority because any conversion that did occur took place was passive. However, when the Muslims lost their empires and domains, they became victims of coercive laws, such as the inquisition in Spain or the military clampdown of the Muslims in Kashmir while extirpating their autonomous constitutional rights<sup>59</sup> by the Indian government, for instance. It is also alleged that Muslims are being forcefully assimilated in China (Uighurs),<sup>60</sup> Russia (Chechens),<sup>61</sup> etc.

In the West, some rightists and populists are in favour of a somewhat enforced assimilation, which results in them making policies against multiculturalism, banning certain female coverings or hindering the building of mosques. While the far right ensures the failure of multiculturalism, politicians in the centre struggle to find a viable alternative. The rightist spectrum of Western political viewpoints apparently ranges from less democratic to undemocratic towards Muslims. Such attitudes pave the way for perennial racism – racism that does not end but is replaced by newer, more sophisticated forms.<sup>62</sup> Those who stand apart and refuse assimilation could potentially be marginalised for their refusal. However, those who do assimilate find themselves in another quandary confronting a different kind of racism operating against them for being "black or brown" people instead of being targeted as Muslims.

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<sup>57</sup> Bryan Turner and Bema Arslan, "Sharia and Legal Pluralism in the West," in *The Sociology of Islam: Collected Essays of Bryan S. Turner*, edited by Bryan Turner and Kamaludeen Nasir (Surry: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>58</sup> Qur'ān 2:256.

<sup>59</sup> M. Ilyas Khan, "Kashmir Crisis 2019: Between a Rock and a Hard Place," *BBC News*, December 24, 2019, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50826419>.

<sup>60</sup> Habib Siddiqui, "China's Forced Assimilation of Uyghurs is Repugnant and Dehumanizing – OpEd," *Eurasia Review*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/04112019-chinas-forced-assimilation-of-uyghurs-is-repugnant-and-dehumanizing-oped/>.

<sup>61</sup> Aruuke U. Kyzy, "Is Russia on the Path to Marginalising its Muslim Population?" *TRT World*, February 6, 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/is-russia-on-the-path-to-marginalising-its-muslim-population-23927>.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Barker, *The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe* (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1981).

## RISE OF ULTRANATIONALISM IN EUROPE OR REMOULDING SOCIOLOGICAL PERCEPTION

Racism and Islamophobia have aggravated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The superpower conflict in Afghanistan ended in 1989 with the withdrawal of Soviet Union. The winning party, USA, also left, leaving its allies in disarray and Afghanistan embroiled in civil war. In this process, two irate groups were formed from among the American *Mujahideen* allies in Afghanistan – one being the *Taliban* consisting of Afghan fighter allies and the other *Al Qaeda*, which included elements collected from all over the world for the anti-Soviet fights. They were previously brought and trained along the border of Afghanistan in Pakistan. Senator Charles Wilson of the USA was “in charge” of this operation, which included training and supplying them with weapons, including the Stinger missiles.<sup>63</sup>

Hollywood has also played a key role in furthering the propaganda surrounding Mujahideen allies by making blockbuster movies like *Charlie Wilson's War* and *Rambo III* about the Mujahideen. In particular, *Charlie Wilson's War* was adapted from a book: *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History*. It starred famous actors like Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts and Philip Seymour Hoffman and was nominated for five Golden Globe awards by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, including Best Motion Picture. This movie was also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. These movies portrayed the Mujahideen (that included the later Al Qaeda and Taliban) fighters as the protagonist and ally.

At one point, Al Qaeda and Taliban were allies of the USA, but this relationship became estranged after the war. When the elements based in Afghanistan attacked the USA on 9/11, the blame was put on Islam and Muslims as opposed to disenchanted allies of the USA. After the 9/11 events, Western media ramped up the display of the destruction of the Twin Towers on television for days. This was probably intended to inflame public opinion and build the case for severe retribution (the war on Afghanistan and later Iraq). In addition to galvanising public support for action, it seriously exacerbated the already unfavourable perception of Muslims in the West. Men with beards and women in *hijab* were subjected to attacks on the streets. Even Sikhs, who also sport beards and wear turbans, were mistaken for Muslims and attacked.<sup>64</sup> Rightists and supremacists took advantage of this precarious situation with increased political activities. Inexorably, the fear and hatred led to an increase in the vote banks for the rightists and extreme rightists.

In the unsettled Middle East, one war led to other wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. ISIS formed and developed in the nihilistic environment caused by the US and UK invasions, alluding to itself as ‘Islamic State’ but far removed from the true statutes of Islam. The wars fought in Iraq, Syria and Libya caused widespread destruction and loss of human

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Phillips, “Launching the Missile that made History,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 1, 2011, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204138204576598851109446780>.

<sup>64</sup> Moni Basu, “15 Years after 9/11, Sikhs still Victims of anti-Muslim Hate Crimes,” *CNN*, September 15, 2016, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/15/us/sikh-hate-crime-victims/index.html>.



life. The local populace had to flee for life and became refugees, something that continues even to this day. A large number fled to Turkey and European countries. The European populace assumed these refugees would now take their jobs and change their way of life. This was an opportune time for populists and supremacists to launch a campaign to spread fear throughout the West. Many fearful people started to vote for populists because they expected these populists to stop these migrants. At the same time, populists tried their best to spread more fear and hatred, hoping it would get them more votes. Meanwhile, Al Qaeda, ISIS and their splinter groups tried to spread their zone of influence and bombed innocent Western civilians to make their presence felt. In Europe, extreme nationalism started to rise at the cost of human rights, democratic rights and compassion. By this time, everybody had forgotten the genesis of this protracted hostility was the conflict of the superpowers in the 1980s.

Western supremacists and populists took advantage of the violent events to aggravate the situation to further their own agendas. All these activities are now also causing multiple socio-political consequences globally. In effect, the Muslims of the West were hurt from the treatments they were subjected to in the countries they lived, worked for and were patriotic towards. Most tried to bear it silently and some worked for a political-intellectual response, such as the Runnymede Commission.<sup>65</sup> A very few fringe elements lost their mental balance upon reaching a breaking point and resorted to violence or terrorism sometimes under the influence of overseas terror organisations. Their non-belonging evidently made them emotively vulnerable to dogmas of the extremists from outside of the West. Inadept in framing an intellectual response, they started to believe there is no other way out besides violence.

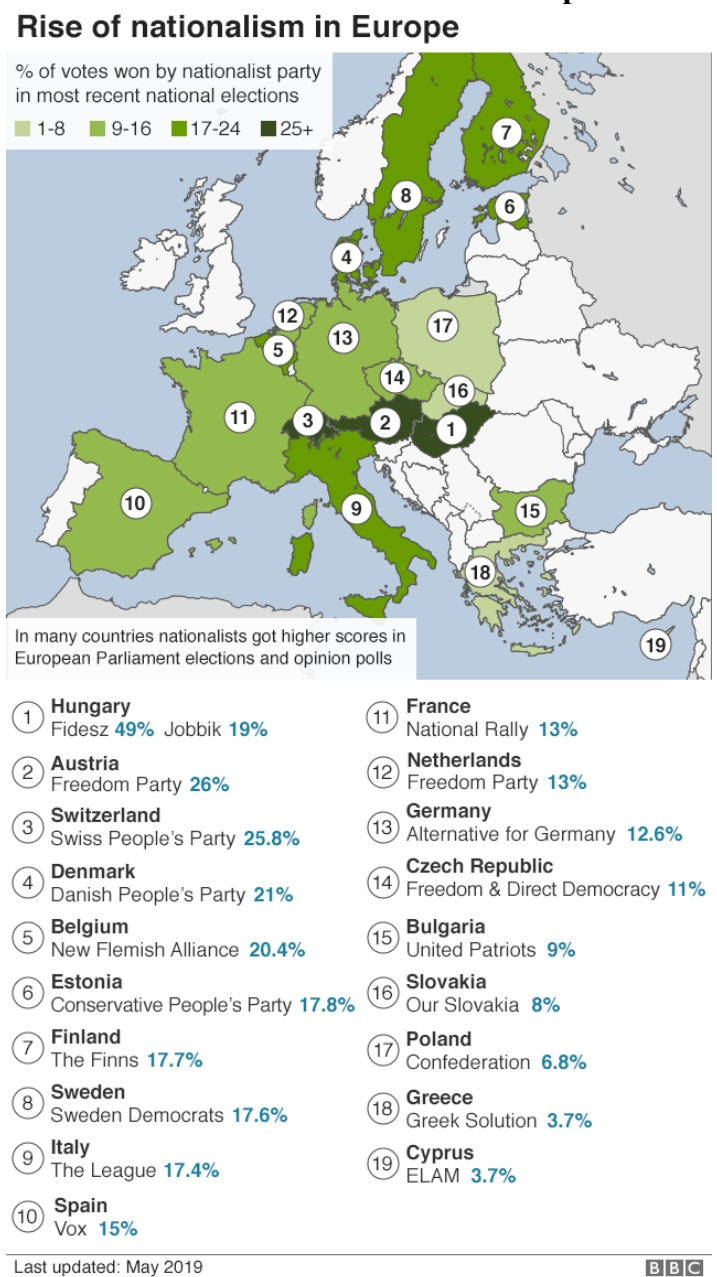
Furthermore, populist propaganda by the media raised fear, suspicion and hatred among members of the unassuming Western public. In response, the vote banks of the populists increased. The following map shows the increase of the extreme right in recent European elections.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia*.

<sup>66</sup> Katya Adler, "Is Europe Lurching to the Right?" BBC, April 28, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36150807>.

**Figure 1: The increase in votes for extreme and nationalist parties<sup>67</sup>**



While the increase of racism also affects the likes of Jews and Hispanics, Figure 2 from the Pew Research Centre illustrates that Muslims are the primary target across the world. While other religions also have been made targets in some countries, it is fairly apparent that Muslims are the main targets all over the world.

<sup>67</sup> “Europe and Right-Wing Nationalism: A Country-by-Country Guide,” *BBC*, November 13, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006>.

**Figure 2: Worldwide targets of nationalist politics<sup>68</sup>**

**Muslims in Europe were primary target of nationalist political parties or politicians**

*List of countries where nationalist political parties or politicians targeted religious groups in 2016, and religious groups that were targeted*

COUNTRY	REGION	TARGETED RELIGIOUS GROUP
 United States	Americas	Muslims
 Burma (Myanmar)	Asia-Pacific	Muslims
 India	Asia-Pacific	Christians, Muslims, Hindus
 Nepal	Asia-Pacific	Christians
 New Zealand	Asia-Pacific	Muslims
 Philippines	Asia-Pacific	Jews, Christians
 Sri Lanka	Asia-Pacific	Christians, Muslims, Non-Buddhists
 Austria	Europe	Muslims
 Bulgaria	Europe	Christians
 Denmark	Europe	Muslims
 Estonia	Europe	Muslims
 Finland	Europe	Muslims
 France	Europe	Muslims
 Germany	Europe	Muslims, Jews
 Greece	Europe	Muslims, Jews
 Hungary	Europe	Muslims
 Italy	Europe	Muslims
 Netherlands	Europe	Muslims
 Poland	Europe	Muslims, Jews, Non-Christians
 Slovakia	Europe	Muslims
 Sweden	Europe	Muslims, Jews
 Switzerland	Europe	Muslims

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details. "Global Uptick in Government Restrictions on Religion in 2016"

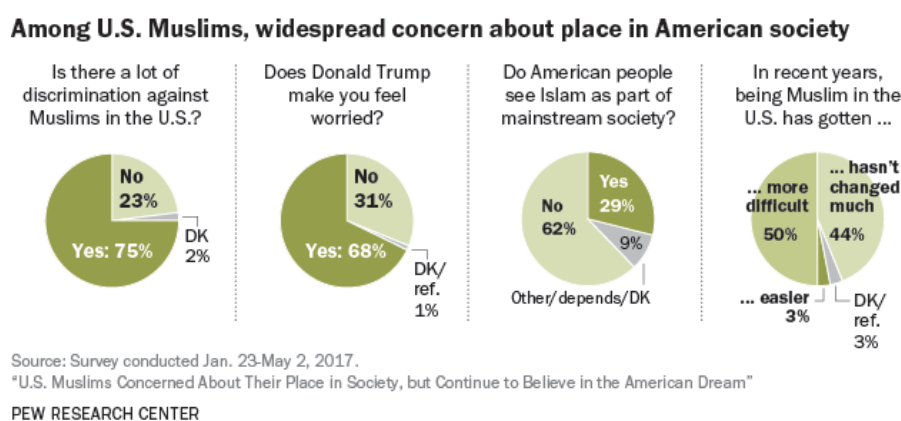
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

According to another Pew survey conducted in 2017, most American adults (82%) consider Muslims to be subject to at least some discrimination in the USA.<sup>69</sup> Many American Muslims claim to have experienced specific instances of discrimination,<sup>70</sup> including being treated with suspicion, singled out by airport security or called offensive names. Figure 3 depicts some statistics about Muslim concerns at being discriminated in the USA.

<sup>68</sup> "Global Uptick in Government Restrictions on Religion in 2016," Pew Research Center, June 21, 2018, accessed April 18, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/21/global-uptick-in-government-restrictions-on-religion-in-2016/>.

<sup>69</sup> David Masci, "Many Americans see Religious Discrimination in US especially against Muslims," Pew Research Centre, May 17, 2019, accessed April 18, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/17/many-americans-see-religious-discrimination-in-u-s-especially-against-muslims/>.

<sup>70</sup> "U.S. Muslims Concerned about their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream," Pew Research Centre, July 26, 2017, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/findings-from-pew-research-centers-2017-survey-of-us-muslims/>.

**Figure 3: US Muslim concerns of being discriminated<sup>71</sup>**

## SOME GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS OF WESTERN MUSLIM BELONGING

Given that Muslim and Western interaction is not limited geographically to the West, Muslim 'belonging' in the West is also affected by interactions outside the West, in Muslim countries and the rest of the world; for example, Muslims have fought the Ottomans (WWII) and the Soviet Union at the behest of Western powers. In addition to being invaded by Western powers, Muslim countries have also fought each other in proxy wars for the West and the Soviet Union (or Russia). Such global events impact perceptions about Muslims in the West.

The West has the best academia, legal system, democracy and human rights in the world, which is why it has undeniable global influence. Because of its high standing, the West also shoulders a higher moral burden and should seek to lead in international morality as well. Its actions have greater implications throughout the world. So, when it treats its Muslim minority in an unfair manner and invades Muslim countries, other countries presuppose that it is alright to strike or suppress their own Muslim minority, a logical fallacy – "if the West can do it, so should we." At the same time, Muslims of the world have become weak due to infighting and invasions, and they lack clout in international affairs or institutions like the UN. When massacres were flagrantly taking place in Bosnia, there was no response from the global Muslim community at large. Ultimately, the US stepped in and stopped the massacre.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the Rohingyas have been deracinated from their country and their citizenship has been denied, despite having lived in Myanmar for generations and the fact their roots there can be traced for centuries. Some countries are providing support, albeit inadequate. As a result, their children are growing up uneducated in an unhygienic environment. Bangladesh

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ivo Daalder, "Decision to Intervene: How the War in Bosnia Ended," Brookings Institution, December 1, 1998, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/decision-to-intervene-how-the-war-in-bosnia-ended/>.

has provided camps<sup>73</sup> and Turkey providing some financial support.<sup>74</sup> Some others minor ones are spread around in places like Malaysia and Australia. There are Muslim minorities in China and Russia in significant numbers, as stated earlier, who are under various alleged suppressive measures. All the above is a simple description of the belonging predicament; however, the reality is far more nuanced and complicated.

### ***The Need for a Change of Perception***

With the rise of various new Asian powers, the resurfacing of Russia and the European Union moving towards a consolidated continental power, the near future is likely to witness a largely multipolar and multiaxial world unless some cataclysmic event occurs. Very gradually, the USA will lose its ‘only’ superpower status; China is already striving hard for the *numero uno* economic position. Russia is striving for the top military position and India is silently contemplating its position in the future world. Everyone has their own agenda. Consequently, alliances will undeniably become important for a variety of reasons.

Muslims are inching towards a two billion population in the world. They not only possess human resources but also natural resources. It is not improbable for them to become powerful allies and a force to reckon with. It may be politically and militarily possible to impede their progress, but whoever does that will not be considered an ally. Both sides will incur losses in further conflicts, which will allow the other rising powers to gain ascendancy.

There are two main parameters of the Muslim-Western perception: first, the perception of each other has been driven by centuries of war. Crusades continue to be mentioned in recent Middle Eastern conflicts,<sup>75</sup> which may indicate the fight is against Muslims and not terrorists. Second, the colonial attitude of global resource accumulation and use of Muslims as mercenaries in Western global conflicts merits attention. The West would do well to realise the days of crusades and reactive jihads are over and Muslims will increasingly be able to contribute more as partners.

The West can take the alliance with the Muslims to great heights. Just two major strategic decisions need to be initially taken. First is America’s relationship with Saudi Arabia, which should be of a wider berth not just a ‘conditional usable customer friend’ but as a full partner in progress. The Saudis have the cash but need industrial development and economic diversification. American support in this aspect will increase the existing friendly relations and bond. Setting up or supporting a manufacturing base there will go a long way. The other strategic move could be to make Turkey a full member of the European Union without trying

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<sup>73</sup> Somini Sengupta and Henry Fountain, “The Biggest Refugee Camp Braces for Rain: ‘This is Going to be a Catastrophe,’” *New York Times*, March 14, 2018, accessed September 4, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/14/climate/bangladesh-rohingya-refugee-camp.html>.

<sup>74</sup> “Turkey’s TİKA delivers humanitarian aid for Rohingya refugees,” *The Daily Sabah*, April 30, 2020, accessed September 5, 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkeys-tika-delivers-humanitarian-aid-for-rohingya-refugees>.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Waldman and Hugh Pope, “‘Crusade’ Reference Reinforces Fears War on Terrorism is Against Muslims,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 21, 2001, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1001020294332922160>.

to secularise it. Turkey has long been a ‘part’ of Europe and is the buffer between European and Muslim worlds. These two policies will be global gamechangers and ultimately undo many conflicts and misunderstandings. It will also ease off Islamophobia, auto-negate terrorism and cause the rest of the Islamic world to willingly follow suit into a better and balanced alliance after seeing the genuine development of the West and Muslim amity. Finally, it could also be possible to make Jerusalem a city of coexistence and peace for all three great religions.

The alternative policy of anti-Islamic securitisation has proven to be unpragmatic. Ali, while discussing radicalisation and securitisation, concludes,

Securitisation of Muslims and Islam is a strategy to minimise risk nationally and internationally. However, the way public safety wars are being fought against Islam and Muslims have neither tamed the invisible enemy nor removed the risk they pose but only aggravated it proving the state’s inability to de-securitise societal security.<sup>76</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is time to ruminate from a different and long-term perspective. It would be prudent to dislodge Muslim-West interaction away from conflicts and mistrust to cooperation. It may appear an onerous pursuit given that prejudices and discriminations are deep-rooted and will be difficult to exorcise, but so was slavery and that has been eradicated. Holistically, if Muslims fail, the negative effect on the West will be enduring.

For Muslims, there is a need to speak of the essential message of Islam to the West, as opposed to the political misguidance. Among Muslims, constructive dialogue between the *ulema* and Western Muslims is also needed to work out a balanced Islamic life. There will be many questions to answer:<sup>77</sup> How does one respect Western laws while simultaneously living a life based on the Qur’ān and *sunna* (teachings and conduct of the Prophet)? How can one straddle Western secular and scientific studies and Islamic ethics and morality? Such discourse will allow Muslims to further contribute to their countries’ development and peaceful life without any concern or acrimony.

For Western sociological and political scholars, it is time to pay greater heed to documents like the Chilcot Report on the Iraq war and increase intellectual pressure on decision makers to bring about positive changes. Tony Blair, in his own political way, has apologised for the Iraq war<sup>78</sup> as it has caused tremendous harm to all. Scholars would do well to prevent such crusades that lead to reactive jihads.

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<sup>76</sup> Jan Ali, “Australian Muslims as Radicalised ‘Other’ and Their Experiences,” in *Islam in the West: Perceptions and Reactions*, ed. Abe W. Ata. and Jan A. Ali (UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 125.

<sup>77</sup> Ramadan, *Being a European Muslim*.

<sup>78</sup> Rowena Mason, Anushka Asthana and Heather Stewart, “Tony Blair: ‘I Express more Sorrow, Regret and Apology than you can ever Believe,’” *The Guardian*, July 6, 2016, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jul/06/tony-blair-deliberately-exaggerated-threat-from-iraq-chilcot-report-war-inquiry>.

Western Muslims are as concerned about the rise of extremism<sup>79</sup> and as dedicated to development of the West as the rest of the West. Resolution of all issues pertaining to ‘belonging’ will be a by-product of the aforementioned processes and in the end, Muslims will feel a real sense of belonging, which is what they yearn for living in the West and will enable them to contribute more.

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<sup>79</sup> “Like U.S. Public Overall, Muslims Concerned about Extremism in name of Islam,” Pew Research Center, July 24, 2017, accessed April 20, 2020, [https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/findings-from-pew-research-centers-2017-survey-of-us-muslims/pf\\_2017-06-26\\_muslimamericans-00new-00/](https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/findings-from-pew-research-centers-2017-survey-of-us-muslims/pf_2017-06-26_muslimamericans-00new-00/).

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