

The Identity Crisis of Muslim Minorities in the West - Challenges and Solutions

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Received: 05/2024

Published: 11/2024

Abstract:

The Muslim minority in the West lives in a constant struggle between their indigenous culture and Western culture, which threatens the identity of their children. This paper addresses the issue of identity among the children of the Muslim minority in the West in two sections. The first section defines the research terms and concepts related to the issue. The second section outlines the main challenges facing the identity of Muslim minority children in the West and possible solutions. Finally, a conclusion summarises the main findings and offers some recommendations that could serve the research objectives.

Keywords: The Identity, The Muslim Minorities, the West.

Introduction:

The Muslim minority in Western countries has long suffered from numerous problems and challenges in all areas of life, the most important of which is identity.

This paper aims to examine a fundamental issue in minority jurisprudence: What are the challenges to the identity of the Muslim minority in the West?

This issue is of great importance; indeed, the question of identity and how to preserve it is central to the jurisprudence of minorities in the West.

The study aims to clarify the issue of the identity of the Muslim minority in the West by addressing the difficulties they face, as well as the solutions and ways to preserve this identity.

One of the main reasons for my interest in this topic is that I was a member of the Muslim minority in Spain. I have experienced its concerns and problems first hand and have tried as much as possible to be an active participant in finding

ways and means to serve the Muslim minority in this country and to preserve its identity.

A descriptive approach has been taken to explore this issue, based on the study of academic material and describing the problems as they exist in reality.

The topic is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the definitions of research terms and concepts related to the topic. The second section outlines the main challenges facing the identity of the Muslim minority in the West, as well as the main solutions and methods of preservation. Finally, a conclusion will summarise the main findings and provide recommendations that could serve the objectives of this research.

Section One - Definitions and Concepts

Subsection One - Definitions of Research Terms

1. Definition of identity:

First - In Language:

The term “identity” has several definitions in Arabic, including

- A deep well with a shaft¹.
- The absolute truth that embraces truths, as the seed embraces the tree of the absolute invisible².
- The absolute truth in things and changes that contain essential qualities³.
- A term derived from the pronoun “he”; it refers to the qualities and reality of a person. It is also used to indicate the landmarks and characteristics that distinguish individual personality⁴.

Second - in terminology:

Identity is defined as a set of distinguishing characteristics possessed by individuals that contribute to their uniqueness in relation to others. These characteristics may be shared by a group of people, whether within a community or a nation.

Other definitions of identity include everything that is shared by individuals of a particular group or social segment that contributes to the creation of a general environment for a particular state. Individuals are treated according to their specific identity⁵.

¹- Ibn Manzur, Abu al-Fadl Muhammad ibn Makram, Lisan al-Arab, Beirut: Dar Sader, (n.d.), 15/374.

²- Al-Jurjani, Ali ibn Muhammad, Al-Ta'arifat, (n.d.), p. 216.

³- Masoaud Jabran, The Leading Dictionary, Beirut: Dar Al-Ilm Lil-Malayin, 4th edition, 1992, p. 847.

⁴- See: Dictionary of Meanings, the term "identity", from the website: [https://www.\(5/05/2023,19:10](https://www.(5/05/2023,19:10)

⁵- Group, Muhammad, "The Multidimensional Identity". See the website: <https://mawdoo3>

2. Definition of the Muslim Minority:

First - Definition of Minority:

- In language:

The term “minority” in Arabic refers to a small number and can also mean humility and weakness. Both meanings can be combined, indicating a small number along with humility and weakness⁶.

2. In terminology:

Researchers on minority issues have relied on three main perspectives - numbers, effectiveness, and both numbers and effectiveness - to define the concept of minority. They have produced numerous and varied definitions⁷.

A minority can be defined as: “A group of citizens of a particular state whose members share one or more ties that distinguish them from the majority of the population, often seek to preserve these ties by maintaining their numbers, and are often oppressed and non-dominant.

The caveats to this definition are as follows:

- “Group”: refers to a part, not the whole.
 - “Citizens”: Excludes those who do not have citizenship and the associated loyalty to the state.
 - “A particular state”: Excludes those who do not belong to a particular state and whose lives are nomadic, such as gypsies⁸.
 - “Distinguish them”: Excluding characteristics they share with the majority population.
 - “Majority”: Indicates that the group is small in number compared to the rest of the state’s population.
 - “Seek to preserve”: Excludes groups that are unaware of their ties and do not work to affirm them, and are likely to assimilate with the majority.
 - “By maintaining their numbers”: Excluding groups whose small numbers prevent them from surviving, leading to their eventual disappearance.
- “Often”: This is a caution against claiming that the minority is always non-dominant and oppressed.

⁶- See Ibn Manzur, Lisan al-Arab, 12/180.

⁷- See: Wahban, Ahmad, Ethnic Conflicts and the Stability of the Contemporary World, Alexandria: Dar Al-Jami'a Al-Jadida, (n.d.), 2001, pp. 149-188. Bahr, Samira, Introduction to the Study of Minorities. Egypt: Anglo-Egyptian Library, (n.d.), 1982, p. 10.

⁸- There are various opinions about the history and origins of the Roma, including that these peoples originally came from the populations of India, Iran and Central and South Asia. They migrated from their lands around the 4th century AD. Some historians clarify that they arrived in the middle of the 15th century (around 1440 AD) in the regions of Hungary, Serbia and other Balkan countries. They then spread to Poland and Russia and continued to expand until they reached Sweden and England in the 16th century, as well as settling in Spain in large numbers. From the website: http://knowledge0world.blogspot.com/2012/09/blog-post_27.html

Second - the definition of “Muslim”:

1. In language:

Derived from the verb “It means: entering into peace, sincerity, ”أسلم” submission, following others, delegating authority to others, severing ties with others, and leaving others⁹.

2. In terminology:

Definitions of the term “Islam” have varied widely among ancient and modern scholars, but they all converge on a single meaning: “belief in God and worship of Him¹⁰”.

Third - Defining the Muslim minority as a compound term:

After presenting the meaning of “minority” and specifying it with the attribute of “Islam”, it becomes clear that “the Muslim minority” as a compound term means:

“A group of citizens of a state whose members share a bond of Islam that distinguishes them from the majority of the population, who strive to maintain it, and whose number allows them to do so; they are often oppressed and non-dominant”.

3. Definition of the West:

1. In language:

“The West” and “the Maghreb” are synonymous. Ibn Sidah said: “The West is the opposite of the East¹¹, which is the Maghreb”. This is also referred to in the verse: [Lord of the two East and Lord of the two West] (Ar-Rahman/17).

2. In terminology:

“The West” or “the Western world” is a term with multiple meanings depending on the context (i.e., time period, area, and social condition). Thus, the basic definition of what constitutes “the West” is diverse, expanding and contracting over time according to historical circumstances.

The concept of the Western world has its roots in the Greek and Roman civilisations of Europe, the emergence of Christianity and the Great Schism of the eleventh century, which divided the religion into Eastern and Western branches. In modern times, Western culture has been strongly influenced by Christian traditions, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and by colonial expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The term was used by the

⁹- See: Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, 7/243-245.

¹⁰- See: Al-Tabari, Muhammad ibn Jarir, *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wilat al-Qur'an**, ed. Shaakir, Mahmoud ibn Muhammad, Egypt: Dar Al-Ma'arif, (n.d.), 6/276-277. Al-Qurtubi, Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, (n.d.), 4/42-44.

¹¹- See: Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, 11/24-25.

Soviet Union and its allies during the Cold War against their enemies from the mid-twentieth century until the end of the century. In contemporary political and cultural contexts, the term “Western world” generally refers to the countries of the European Union, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Central Europe, Latin America, Israel and South Africa¹².

Section Two - Factors leading to the emergence of Muslim minorities in the West and their historical development

First - Factors leading to the emergence of Muslim minorities in the West

The emergence of Muslim minorities in Western countries can be attributed to several reasons, which can be summarised as follows:

A. Historical factors:

- Conversion to Islam.
- Minorities are a result of the weakness of the Islamic state and the humiliation of Muslims who have no entity to shelter them and no state to protect them.
- The collapse of Ottoman authority and the fragmentation of the Islamic world after the First World War.
- The occupation of Muslim lands by Western military forces or the Soviet East, where non-Islamic states may occupy Islamic territories and attempt to expel the original inhabitants or force these Muslims to integrate with the occupying population, as seen in Eastern Europe, India and East Turkestan.
- The intensification of attacks on the Muslim East through intellectual means, such as missionary work, leading some Muslims to seek knowledge and education from more advanced countries, either out of admiration for their civilisation or out of a desire to confront, resist and prepare to support Islam and Muslims¹³.

B. Contemporary factors:

- Migration and its various causes and motives.
- External scholarships for education and skills acquisition.
- Tourism.
- Forced displacement and migration.
- Recruitment and calls for resettlement and naturalisation.
- Contemporary advocacy efforts¹⁴.

¹²- See.(21:20 ,2018/8/24) : www.dictionary.com/browse/western

¹³- See: Salama, Mahmoud bin Darwish, Islamic Minorities and Related Issues in Worship, Leadership and Jihad, Saudi Arabia: Umm Al-Qura University, 1420 AH, p. 26.

¹⁴- See: Salama, Mahmoud bin Darwish, Islamic Minorities and Related Issues, pp. 26 ff.

Second - The historical development of Muslim minorities in the West:

With the fall of Granada, the Islamic presence in most of Western Europe diminished. However, the rise of the Ottoman Empire and the expansion of its conquests established a human and religious Islamic presence in its southern and eastern regions, which still exists today in Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania and others.

In the 19th century, following the colonisation of some Arab and Islamic countries in Africa and Asia by European powers, especially France and Britain, significant numbers of Muslims, including Senegalese, Indian Muslims and Moroccans, were incorporated into their armed forces. This led to a gradual increase in the number of Muslims living in Western Europe, although it did not reach significant proportions.

It was not until the second half of the 20th century, when the newly independent Arab and Islamic countries lacked employment opportunities and the European countries emerging from war needed labour, that we witnessed a significant migration from North African countries, especially Turkey, and other Islamic nations to Europe. This migration made the Islamic presence in Europe tangible.

When Arab and Muslim workers were allowed to bring their families and benefit from citizenship for their children born on European soil, waves of migration from all over the Arab and Islamic world poured into Western Europe. As a result, Muslim communities grew to millions, compared to tens of thousands at the beginning of the 20th century¹⁵.

Section Three - The Essential Elements of Identity Formation:

Identity is based on essential elements, which are

1. Religion:

Religious identity is “a type of identity formed on the basis of belonging to a religious belief represented by a sect or denomination¹⁶”. The religious component is the decisive factor in the construction and formation of this type of identity. The relationship between religious identity and religion is defined by sacred religious texts, which give this belief-based identity a sense of sacredness and symbolism, making it absolute, holy and exalted. These texts endow the identity with a set of primary characteristics and traits that distinguish it from other identities

¹⁵- See: Al-Hajji, Abdul Rahman Ali, Andalusia, Beirut: Dar Al-Irshad, 1st edition, 1969, 2/24. Group of Authors, The Arab Encyclopedia, 2/37 et seq. Zakaria, Hashem, The Favour of the Islamic and Arab Civilisation on the World*, Egypt: Dar Nahda, (n.d.), 1970, p. 315.

¹⁶- Kawtharani, Wajih, "Identity, Citizenship and the State: A Problem in Consciousness or in the Structure of Culture?", Tolerance Magazine, Amman: Oman Distribution and Marketing Company, 2010, Issue 29, p. 11.

Belief or religion is the fundamental and stable component in the formation of any identity, as it determines the essential features of an individual's and society's perception of the universe, reality and life. It defines destiny, meaning, direction and purpose. There is no individual without a belief, even if he is an atheist; atheism itself is a belief in the absence of a deity. So we can say that faith is the most important component of a person's identity. Islam has a unique aspect in this regard because the doctrine of monotheism permeates all aspects of a Muslim's life and colours it with its essence. Therefore, any deviation, distortion or confusion of the beliefs and concepts of faith in Islam is the greatest threat to Islamic identity¹⁷.

2. Language

Ibn Khaldun states: "Know that the language of the people of the cities is the language of the nation, or of the ruling generation, or of those who have settled among them. When religion abandoned foreign languages, and the language of the rulers of the Islamic state was Arabic, all foreign languages were abandoned in all its kingdoms; for the people follow the ruler and his religion. Thus, the use of the Arabic language became one of the symbols of Islam and obedience to the Arabs¹⁸.

Language is the hallmark of existence and identity, because it is the secure repository that preserves the elements of belonging and the memory of the future. It does not disappear except with the demise of the nation; it embodies the essence of the nation and is a source that defines the essential features that express its nature, linking it to its heritage, past and present. Language shapes the contours of the future, evolving along with human and technological relations¹⁹.

Language is an identity, but identity is not just language, which means that while language is one of the most important and profound components of identity, it is not the only one. The relationship between language and identity is that of the specific to the general; identity is broader than language because it has many manifestations beyond 'language'. Identity is simply those common denominators or agreed elements among a group of people that distinguish and

¹⁷- See: Harb, Ali, "The Discourse of Identity: An Intellectual Biography on the Construction of Self", Lebanon-Algeria: Arab Science Publishers, Differences Publications, 2nd edition, 2008, p. 63.

¹⁸- Ibn Khaldun, The Introduction, Tunisia: Tunisian House, 1984, pp. 258-259.

¹⁹- Issa Barhouma, The Controversy of the Relationship between Language and Identity, available at: [https://alghad.com/\(2023/5/12\)/debate-relationship-language-identity](https://alghad.com/(2023/5/12)/debate-relationship-language-identity). See: Diya Al-Din Zaher, Language and the Future of Identity: Education as a Model, Egypt: Future Studies Unit, 2017, p. 7.

unite them. Language alone does not fulfil this role, which brings us back to the other components of identity.

3. Homeland:

Homeland is the geographical location; those who share a national identity are bound to a particular geographical area. The concept of homeland comes from the land and encompasses a place and the time associated with it, reflecting its history. It includes various natural and human elements, as well as the political, social and economic conditions that result from them²⁰.

National identity requires the psychological and mental composition of the individual from birth. In the beginning, the homeland is represented by mother, father, siblings, the soil on which one plays, the history one learns at school, and the customs and traditions that shape one's upbringing and remain forever as defining markers in one's memory. In the intermediate stage, the homeland represents the country, the family, the future and aspirations; it becomes the map of life, youth, a return to one's origins, the realisation of dreams, a longing for the future and a sense of belonging²¹.

Cultures feel a deep attachment to the homeland to which they belong and in which they grew up; this is an instinct inherent in human nature. Nationality is a common element shared by human groups. Homeland is home and identity, and belonging is the sense of connection to all that we are related to and that is related to us; it embodies pride and dignity. Thus, homeland is the whole, the individual is the part, and national identity is the essence of belonging.

4. Culture:

Malek Bennabi attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation of the function of culture by comparing it to the function of blood. He emphasises that blood is made up of red and white blood cells, both floating in a single plasma that nourishes the body. In his analogy, culture is like the blood within a single society that nourishes its civilisation, carrying the ideas of the elite as well as those of the general population. Each of these ideas is cohesive within a single fluid of similar dispositions and unified tastes²².

A United Nations seminar held in 1970 to discuss cultural rights as human rights concluded with various definitions, summarising that "the culture of a

²⁰- See: Ben Wazza, Khadija, "The Relationship Between National Identity and Citizenship", Al-Siraj Magazine for Education and Community Issues, Issue 5, 2018, pp. 75-92.

²¹- Al-Karabi, Shaikha, National Identity and the Depth of Belonging, 28 November 2020, available at: (2023/5/12) national-identity-depth-belonging- <https://www.alroeya.com/119-75/2180924>

²²- Ibn Nabi, Malek, The Problem of Culture, trans. Shahin, Abdul Sabour, Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr, 4th edition, 2000, p. 77.

people is their unique way of life, their attitudes towards it, their opinions, their philosophy of its problems and their perception of their position in life...”²³.

Cultural identity is a dynamic entity that evolves and is not a ready-made or final product; it can evolve in either a contracting or expanding direction. It is enriched by the experiences, struggles, victories and aspirations of its people, as well as by positive and negative interactions with other cultural identities, resulting in some form of diversity. In general, cultural identity operates in three overlapping spheres, all centred on one point: the individual within a group, groups within a nation, and the nation in relation to other nations²⁴.

Section Two - Obstacles to the Identity of Muslim Minorities in the West and Possible Solutions

Muslim minorities in the West face difficulties and challenges that threaten their identity in all its elements, including:

First - Challenges to the religious element:

Religion is the most important element of identity. In times of conflict, multiple identities often dissolve and the identity that is most meaningful in the context of the struggle becomes dominant, often defined by religion. For those seeking answers to the questions “Who am I?” and “Who do I belong to?”, religion provides powerful answers, and religious communities offer small societies to replace those lost in the process of urbanisation.

As a result, Muslim minorities in the West work hard to maintain their faith, the religion of their ancestors. However, despite their efforts, Muslims in the West face several problems related to their Islamic identity, the most important of which are:

- Mixing with conflicting faiths

The presence of Muslim minorities among a diverse mix of faiths, predominantly characterised by secularism, agnosticism and apathy, along with Christianity and some East Asian religions, can weaken the most important component in shaping the identity of these minorities: their Islamic faith. This is especially true as these various ideologies actively seek to dominate and influence the thoughts and beliefs of others²⁵.

Proselytising campaigns:

²³- See: Ghalyoun, Burhan, *Assassination of the Mind: The Crisis of Arab Culture Between Salafism and Dependency*, Cairo: Madbouli Library, 1990, pp. 68-94.

²⁴- See: same reference as above.

²⁵- Hassan, Ibrahim Talba, "The Issue of Identity Among Muslim Minorities", **Scientific Journal of the Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion and Da'wah in Zagazig, Egypt: Al-Azhar University, Part 1, Issue 30, 2018, pp. 572-585.*

Proselytisation is one of the greatest threats to the faith of Muslims in the West. If a Muslim is converted away from their faith, what is left of their identity? Proselytisation is a major problem for Islamic identity in the West. In Britain, for example, “despite the dense Arab presence, one is quickly struck by the promotion of Christianity and proselytising efforts, with men and women wearing clothes inscribed in Arabic (Come with us) and distributing various books calling for the adoption of Christianity²⁶”.

Proselytisers work diligently with all their material and technical resources to convert Muslim minorities, inviting them to embrace Christianity and attempting to strip them of their cultural, religious and linguistic identity. They use every means at their disposal, including media and intellectual invasions, the distribution of free books and pamphlets, and the provision of health, education and relief services - especially during sudden disasters, earthquakes, famines and epidemics²⁷.

The missionary Max Kirschow said at one of the missionary conferences: “It seems that the beliefs of the vast majority of Muslims in the West, whether they are immigrants, students or visitors, are subject to influence... I believe that in the midst of this diversity we can find many reasons for optimism that the message of Jesus Christ will find receptive ears²⁸”.

- The impact of Western culture on the religious identity of Muslim minority children

Muslims living among non-Muslims gradually adopt aspects of their culture over time - especially children - who are indirectly influenced by their ideas and behaviours, which can undermine their original beliefs and Islamic identity.

- Education in non-Islamic schools: A double-edged sword:

Muslim children who receive their education in the first three stages of schooling, even in kindergarten, are influenced, albeit indirectly, by Western thought, with all its positive and negative aspects. They may excel in material and experimental sciences, but they are deprived of the most precious aspect of being a Muslim: their religion. As a result, they only grasp the superficial elements inherited from their parents.

²⁶- Taha, Tarek, article entitled "Ramadan in Britain: An Islamic Revolution Against Division," dated 2-9-2008, quoted from the "Liwa Al-Sharia" website at: www.shareah.com/index.php?records/view/action/view/id/1450 (2023/5/10)

²⁷- See: Al-Asour, Khaled Mohamed, *Islamic Communities in Europe: Access, Problems, Solutions*, Cairo: Dar Al-I'tisam, (n.d.), p. 213.

²⁸- Amara, Muhammad Amara, *The Strategy of Proselytism in the Islamic World*, Centre for Islamic World Studies, 1st edition, 1992, p. 85.

More worryingly, some parents send their children to Christian schools, where the child learns Christianity while the parents remain unaware of the implications²⁹.

- The ignorance of migrant parents about their legal rights:

The majority of the generation of migrant parents have limited education and culture, belong to the working class and have a fluctuating standard of living. As a result, their main concern is to obtain a financial income, often overlooking the laws that guarantee them numerous rights in different areas, including religious freedom.

In Spain, for example, under the Law on Freedom of Religion³⁰, since 1992 the state has guaranteed Muslim children the right to study their mother's religion (Islam) in public schools through the Law on Cooperation³¹. However, several factors have delayed the implementation of this legal right, mainly the ignorance of parents and their lack of awareness of the country's laws.

- Chaos in religious education in mosques and lack of specialists:

Due to the lack of religious education for Muslim children in public schools in the West, parents take their children to mosques and Islamic centres and associations to learn the basic principles of Islam, hoping that these places will fill the gap and enable their children to understand their religion.

Unfortunately, the lack of specialists and a structured curriculum has turned the educational process into a chaos, with only a minimal part of the set goals being achieved, and in some cases the results are even worse³².

- Occasional racism against Muslims:

Muslims in the West often face practices rooted in racism and Islamophobia. On the pretext of ensuring security and women's rights, women are banned from wearing the hijab in educational institutions and workplaces. In the name of preventing unrest, the opening of prayer rooms and cemeteries is restricted. Fasting is discouraged on the grounds of improving productivity at work and in

²⁹- I experienced this in Spain, in the town of Bellpuig in the Barcelona region, when I asked the children in the mosque what subjects they were taught in these schools. They replied that every Monday a priest comes to teach them Christian prayers and hymns... (2002-2011).

³⁰- The law on religious freedom was published in the Official Gazette in 1978. See: BOE, Law (16/1978), No. 311, 1978, p. 29317.

³¹- The Law on Cooperation between the Spanish Government and the Islamic Commission, which establishes the right of Muslims to teach their children the Islamic religion in public schools, was ratified in 1992 and published in the Official State Gazette. See: BOE, Law (26/1992-244855), No. 272, 1992, pp. 38214-38217.

³²- This is based on the personal experience of the researcher, who taught Islamic religion and Arabic language to children of the Muslim minority in the Barcelona region from 2002 to 2011.

sports competitions. However, it is important to note that these practices are not universal; they occur in certain places and from time to time³³.

Roberto Fiore said: "We are not only against the construction of mosques, but we are also trying to prevent them, because they affect the architectural style of the city. I think it is unjust that a city like Rome or Venice, or any other Italian city with a historical architectural character, should be changed by something foreign (i.e. a mosque)³⁴".

Second - Language challenges:

Just as Muslim minorities have faced challenges in preserving their religion, they have also encountered numerous issues related to language, national belonging and culture:

- It is generally expected that Arabic should be the primary common language of communication among all Muslims and the second most important element in shaping their identity. However, a closer look at the linguistic reality of Muslims in the West reveals that Muslim minorities speak many different languages due to their diverse ethnic backgrounds. As a result, there is no single language of communication among members of these minorities other than the language of the Western country in which they reside.

- The bilingualism experienced by children of Muslim minorities in the West affects their thought patterns and creates a duality in their personalities³⁵. When a child speaks their mother tongue, they embody the identity of their parents; conversely, when they speak the language of the country in which they live, they begin to feel and live the identity of that country. This can lead to a form of hypocrisy and concealment that they adapt according to what serves them in their current context.

This is not to say that learning a second language is unproductive, but learning a second language before mastering the mother tongue can affect a child's identity and cause confusion about their attachment to their first language. A notable example is Germany, where it is forbidden to introduce a second language to a child before the age of eleven. This emphasises the idea of starting to learn a foreign language at a later age. As American linguist Leonard Bloomfield explains: "The best age to start learning a foreign language is between ten and

³³- See: Qadir, Kamal Sid, "Racist Campaigns Against Muslims and Their Colonial Objectives", Gulf Research Center, 2005, available at: [https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=2557:2014-07-26-14-30-\(2023.9:15/5/13\)44&Itemid=172&option=com_content](https://araa.sa/index.php?view=article&id=2557:2014-07-26-14-30-(2023.9:15/5/13)44&Itemid=172&option=com_content)

³⁴- Group of authors, Islamophobia in Europe: Discourse and Practice, Berlin: Arab Democratic Centre for Strategic, Political and Economic Studies, 1st edition, pp. 100-117.

³⁵- See: Hassan, Ibrahim Talba, "The Issue of Identity Among Muslim Minorities", p. 512.

twelve. If language learning begins before this age, the educational process is often slow and ineffective. However, if it begins at this age, the child can go on to learn other foreign languages at later stages". He emphasises that "the student gains experience by learning the first foreign language and uses this experience to learn other foreign languages later³⁶.

There is a concerted effort to diminish the importance of Arabic and to distort its image in the media, often associating it with backwardness and primitivism and claiming that it is not a language of scientific research.

On many French channels, the media show children from Afghanistan and Pakistan learning Arabic in deplorable, soul-destroying conditions. They also show children being taught in mosques, sending the message to viewers that these children are being prepared for violence and terrorism, which is a threat to security and public order³⁷.

There are also subtle restrictions on the teaching of Arabic in public schools. In Spain, for example, despite the existence of the Cooperation Law, which enshrines the right to learn one's mother tongue, the actual implementation of this law is extremely limited. This is often justified on the grounds that there are not enough pupils to meet the legal requirement or that there are not enough specialised teachers. In addition, the process of validating certificates is complicated, with conditions that are burdensome for those wishing to enter the teaching profession³⁸.

One of the main obstacles weakening the learning of Arabic by children of Muslim minorities in the West is that parents communicate with their children in dialects rather than in Modern Standard Arabic. They use their local dialects, such as colloquial Arabic, Amazigh or Kurdish.

In addition to being educated in the official language of the country, which often includes a second language (usually English), Muslim children whose parents strive to teach them Modern Standard Arabic - considered the language of the

³⁶- Al-Halabi, Hanaa, "When should a child start learning a foreign language in addition to his own?", Family and Education Newspaper, printed edition, 10/1/2016, available at: (2023/5/13)

³⁷- See: Zarhoni, Mohamed Tahar, et al. Arabic Language in Exile: Opportunities and Challenges, Algeria: High Atlas for the Arabic Language, (n.d.), 2000, p. 43.

³⁸- In Spanish schools, they require the presence of ten students from the minority who want to teach their children their mother tongue in class. They often segregate and distribute the pupils so that the required number is not reached in one class. This is one of the methods used to circumvent the law. Personal observation: Bellpuig, Barcelona, Spain, from 2000 to date.

Quran and religion - are further burdened when parents speak to them in colloquial dialects from their countries of origin³⁹.

Another problem is the fragility and weakness of the methods used to teach Arabic. Even when Arabic is taught in public schools, it is treated as an extracurricular activity rather than a core subject. This means that the time allocated is minimal, usually around one or two hours per week, which is insufficient to acquire the language.

In addition, there is a lack of scientific curricula in line with Western language teaching programmes. Those responsible for this area have developed curricula based on the educational background they received in their home countries, which is outdated compared to what has been achieved in the West. Children find these curricula burdensome because they do not meet their educational needs when compared to what they are used to in Western schools.

- There is a severe shortage of Arabic language teachers, and training them to European standards takes a long time. Even the process of validating their qualifications is cumbersome. As a result, many choose to leave the field in favour of other jobs that are quicker, easier and more profitable⁴⁰.

- There is little financial support for the Muslim minority, either from Western countries or from Islamic nations. As a result, education has become heavily dependent on donations, which burdens the educational process and hinders the achievement of goals aimed at protecting the identity of Muslim children in the West⁴¹.

Third - Challenges to the elements of home and culture:

First - the element of culture:

Muslim minorities there exist and thrive in the midst of two conflicting cultures, leading to a duality in the identity of the Muslim minority and the consequent weakening and confusion of that identity. There are also tendencies to transform the culture of Muslim minorities in the West into a mere distorted version, with nothing left of its essence but the name. This is achieved through various means, some through the media and others through educational methods.

³⁹- Eyewitness: I have personally experienced this with my children and the children of the Muslim minority in Spain.

⁴⁰- In Spain, for example, the number of legally recognised teachers in the whole country in 2016 did not exceed fifty-five, which is very low compared to the nearly two million Muslims in the country. See: Union of Islamic Communities in Spain, Demographic Study of the Muslim Population: Statistical Analysis of the Census of Muslim Citizens in Spain as of 31/12/2014, pp. 5, 14.

⁴¹- The teacher has even become subject to the whims of the students' parents; when they want, they pay his salary; when they want, they delay and refuse. This behaviour, in turn, discourages the teacher and drives him to look for another job to meet the needs of his life and his family. (Eyewitness: the researcher)

It has already been stated how the national education system in Western countries (especially the primary, middle and secondary curricula) deepens nationalist, patriotic and historical tendencies, linking the Muslim individual to realities, manifestations and histories that have no relation to his identity. This is particularly dangerous because the external factor serves as a basis for cultural assimilation and integration. This danger is more pronounced in the curricula of geography, history, national education, sociology, religions and philosophy.

On the other hand, constant and continuous exposure to the culture of Western countries creates a sense of familiarity and habituation to practices and manifestations that were previously considered red lines that could not be crossed because of religious or cultural norms.

For example, becoming accustomed to seeing women dressed immodestly, the visibility of bottles of alcohol everywhere, the practice of immorality under the guise of personal freedom and legal protection, and children rebelling against their parents in the name of maturity and personal freedom, makes it easier for Muslims - especially children - to accept these wrongdoings. Over time, these practices become part of their culture and identity.

To make matters worse, in recent years laws have penalised parents for intervening in their child's religious upbringing or in matters of sexual and gender identity. The situation in Sweden and Germany⁴² is not far from what many have observed and expected; this has led many Muslim families to flee these countries in order to protect their children's faith and peaceful Islamic culture.

Second - the element of homeland:

The concept of homeland is the sense of belonging to a specific place, defined by its geographical boundaries and cultural landmarks, which determines rights and responsibilities. It is the essence of citizenship.

This meaning is deep and far-reaching, but for the Muslim minority - especially the children - it is a fluctuating issue that weakens from generation to generation. The sense of belonging to a homeland does not come out of nowhere, nor does it develop overnight, nor is it instilled by mere instruction. It is rooted in memories forged by experiences from childhood to adulthood.

The real connection for children of Muslim minorities in the West is the West itself - the place where they were born and raised, where they created their

⁴²- Report entitled: "Have popular campaigns stopped the removal of Muslim children from their families?" available at: reports/have-popular-campaigns-stopped-the-removal-of-muslim-children-from-the-families-in-sweden-report <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/>

memories, both sweet and bitter. Their ties to their countries of origin are often limited to memories of summer holidays that last only a month or two. What does this short period of the year represent in the Western countries of their birth and upbringing?

Once, while teaching a lesson on the “Yaa of attribution” in Arabic, I explained the lesson and gave examples. I then asked the students to deduce their nationality by adding the “yaa of attribution” to their country of origin. The surprise was obvious; each child mentioned their country of origin, but when they added the “yaa”, they told me “I am Spanish”.

It was then that I saw the danger and realised that home is not just a concept that is taught, but a reality that is shaped by the memories created in one’s country of origin.

Fourth - Proposed solutions to preserve the identity of Muslim minority children in the West:

In this context, we will try to propose solutions that can help overcome the identity crisis of our children in Western countries, as follows:

- Activate political participation: It is essential to increase the political participation of the Muslim minority in the West by engaging in political life, including forming parties, voting in elections, running for office and holding public positions⁴³. Success in the political sphere enables the Muslim minority to have a voice in society, to assert their influence and to move from a position of weakness to strength, thereby enabling them to exercise their legal rights and to create an appropriate environment for their identity.
- Guidance for university students: It is important to direct children in universities towards specialisations that position the Muslim minority as a force, particularly in fields such as political science, administration, media and economics.
- Establishing Islamic schools: Establishing Islamic schools alongside Western education is necessary so that children receive a proper education according to well-designed curricula that are at least as effective as their Western counterparts, while contributing to the development and preservation of their Islamic identity.

⁴³- The Muslim minority has pioneering experience in this field, even at the level of women. See: Al-Dardari, Muhammad, "Muslim Minorities in the West and Conditions for Integration", Journal of Historical and Social Studies, Vol. 20, Issue 30, p. 39.

- Building mosques and Islamic centres: There is a need to build mosques and Islamic centres staffed by knowledgeable professionals who understand both the religion and the Western context.
- Practice of religious rituals and celebrations: Participation in religious practices and celebrations has a significant impact on strengthening religious identity.
- Establishment of Islamic banks: The issue of interest-based loans burdens the Muslim minority in the West, weakening their financial position and keeping them dependent on usurious banks.
- Activate Zakat and Waqf institutions: Strengthening the institutions of zakat (charity) and waqf (endowment) in Western countries will help eliminate poverty and strengthen the financial base of Muslims in the West, helping them to build and establish institutions that preserve their identity in all its aspects.
- Focus on media: It is crucial to focus on the media to promote a correct understanding of Islamic identity.
- Building bridges of communication: It is necessary to establish links between the Muslim minority in the West and the wider Islamic nation around the world, as this will strengthen their ties to their homeland and to the Muslim community as a whole.
- Support from home countries: Home countries - both populations and governments - should stand by the Muslim minority in the West and provide them with material, moral and cultural support.
- Support from Arab and Islamic Universities: Arab and Islamic universities should support the children of Muslim minorities in the West with their resources and personnel, so that together they can contribute to educating Muslim children in a way that preserves their religious, linguistic, cultural and national identity, while at the same time fostering a sense of pride in their roots and their original identity as Western citizens.

Conclusion:

In conclusion to this research, the following findings can be made:

- Identity: It is “a set of characteristics possessed by individuals that contribute to their uniqueness in relation to others. These characteristics may be shared by a group of people, whether within a society or a state”.
- Muslim minority: It is “a group of citizens in a given country whose members share one or more bonds that distinguish them from the majority of the population, who seek to preserve these bonds, and who often face oppression and lack of control”.

- Core elements of identity: Identity is based on essential elements: religion, language, culture and homeland.
- Presence of Islam in the West: Islam is visibly present in the West and has been rooted there from ancient times to the present day.
- Challenges facing the Muslim minority: The Muslim minority in the West faces many challenges to its identity in all its elements.
- Efforts to preserve identity: The Muslim minority in the West is striving to find solutions to preserve the identity of its children and to avoid complete assimilation into the culture of Western societies.

Recommendations:

In conclusion to this research, the following recommendations can be made:

- The Muslim minority should rely on itself to develop frameworks that serve its interests in preserving its identity.
- It is essential to establish links with home countries to facilitate the exchange of experiences.
- There is a need to send missions to teach Islam and the Arabic language to Muslim children in Western countries.

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