

Islam in England: Revitalizing the Positive Image of the British Muslim Community

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to examine the cultural life of the Muslim community in England on a day-to-day basis, both as Muslims and as British citizens. By understanding the cultural patterns they inhabit, this study seeks to cultivate a broader comprehension of how Muslim communities navigate life as a religious minority, particularly in England. The research employs a qualitative methodology with a systematic library research approach, utilizing relevant academic and empirical references from Sinta- and Scopus-indexed journals to ensure scholarly accountability. The findings of this study reveal how Muslim communities in England, organized within various social and religious organizations, develop cultural patterns shaped by the challenges of minority status. Furthermore, the manner in which these communities project a positive image of Islam to native British society constitutes a significant dimension of this inquiry. The urgency of this topic lies in its contribution to our understanding of how minority cultural patterns interact with and communicate within a pluralistic society. It is hoped that this article will benefit a wide range of audiences, including academics, religious scholars, sociologists, and the general public interested in issues of Muslim minority life in the West.

Keywords: *Islam England, Muslim Community, Islamophobia, British Muslims*

I. INTRODUCTION

England is home to one of the largest Muslim populations in Western Europe. Islam constitutes the second-largest religion in the country after Christianity. The most recent census data from 2021 recorded approximately 3.9 million Muslims residing in England, representing 6.5% of the total population [1]. This figure marks a significant increase compared to 2011, when approximately 2.7 million people identified as Muslim, accounting for 4.9% of the population. Over the course of a single decade, the Muslim population in England grew by approximately 44%, signaling a remarkable demographic shift with wide-ranging social, cultural, and political implications [1].

The presence of Islam in England, however, is not a recent phenomenon. Historical accounts suggest that Islam reached the British Isles as early as the 10th century, through the travels of a Muslim figure known as Al-Bartun [2]. The era of British imperialism and colonialism further accelerated the settlement of Muslim populations on British soil, as many territories under British colonial rule including regions in the Middle East and South Asia were home to predominantly Muslim communities [3]. With the gradual dismantling of the British Empire, waves of migration brought South Asians, Middle Easterners, and Africans to England, forming the foundational demographics of the British Muslim community as it exists today [3].

Despite the long and complex history of Islam in England, Muslims continue to face significant challenges as a religious minority. These challenges range from media misrepresentation and Islamophobia to discrimination and social marginalization [4]. The emergence of far-right political movements, such as Britain First, has further complicated the landscape for British Muslims, raising questions about integration, identity, and belonging [5]. At the same time, the Muslim community has demonstrated resilience through the formation of religious organizations, cultural institutions, and media platforms aimed at countering negative stereotypes and reclaiming their public image [6].

Of particular scholarly interest is the role of Muslim-owned football clubs and sports organizations in projecting a positive image of Islam to mainstream British society. The acquisition of English Premier League clubs by Middle Eastern investors including Manchester City by Sheikh Mansour of the UAE and Newcastle United by the Saudi Public Investment Fund has provided new avenues for cultural diplomacy and the normalization of Islamic identity in the British public sphere [7].

These developments warrant serious academic inquiry, particularly in the context of growing anti-Muslim sentiment and the broader discourse on multiculturalism in Europe.

Given the above considerations, this article seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How has Islam historically developed in England, and what demographic trends characterize the British Muslim community today? (2) What are the key challenges facing Muslim communities in England, particularly in terms of media representation and far-right extremism? (3) How do British Muslim communities respond to these challenges in order to revitalize the positive image of Islam? This study contributes to a growing body of scholarship on Muslim minority communities in the West, with particular attention to the British context. It is hoped that the findings will be of value to academics, policymakers, religious scholars, sociologists, and the broader public interested in issues of religious diversity and intercultural communication.

II. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach, specifically a systematic library research (SLR) method. Library research is a form of scientific inquiry that relies on documentary data sources, including books, academic journals, research reports, and other relevant written materials, as the primary basis for analysis [8]. In the context of this study, library research is utilized to gather, analyze, and synthesize information pertaining to the Muslim community in England, with particular emphasis on historical development, socio-cultural dynamics, media representation, and strategies for image revitalization.

The data collection process involved several stages. First, a comprehensive search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, Sinta (Science and Technology Index), Scopus, and institutional repositories. The keywords employed in the search included "Muslim minority England," "Islam in Britain," "British Muslim identity," "Islamophobia UK," "Muslim community diaspora," and related terms. Second, the relevance and credibility of each source were evaluated using inclusion criteria: (a) published in peer-reviewed journals indexed by Sinta or Scopus; (b) published between 2000 and 2024; (c) directly addressing the themes of Muslim minority life, identity, and integration in Western countries, particularly England. Third, the selected sources were systematically analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify recurring themes, patterns, and arguments relevant to the research questions [9].

The data analysis process followed a thematic analysis framework, in which key concepts and themes were identified, categorized, and interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework of minority cultural dynamics and image construction. This included examining scholarly debates on Islamophobia, multiculturalism, media representation, and Muslim identity politics [10]. The findings are presented in a descriptive-analytical format, integrating primary arguments from the literature with critical interpretations informed by the theoretical framework. The use of multiple credible sources from Sinta and Scopus indexed journals ensures the reliability and scholarly rigor of the conclusions drawn.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Historical Development of Islam in England

Islam's presence in England can be traced to at least the 10th century, with early records referencing the arrival of Muslim travelers and merchants [2]. However, the most significant influx of Muslims into England occurred during and after the era of British imperialism. As the British Empire expanded across South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, it created conditions for the migration of people from colonized territories to the metropole [11]. By the early 20th century, this migratory pattern was formalized through the establishment of boarding houses (boarding-house) for immigrants from British colonial territories, including large numbers of Muslims from the Indian subcontinent, Turkey, and various Arab countries [3].

A notable figure in the early history of British Islam is Shaikh Abdullah Quilliam, a British convert to Islam who played a pivotal role in establishing the intellectual and institutional foundations of the Muslim community in England. Quilliam was a prolific writer, and his seminal work, *The Faith of Islam*, was translated into 13 languages. In the 1880s, he attracted numerous followers, and by 1891, he had established a mosque and an academy offering educational programs, including a literary society, an oriental library, a museum, and two periodicals: *The Crescent* (weekly) and *Islamic World* (monthly) [2]. Quilliam's legacy demonstrates that British Islam was not solely a product of immigration but also of indigenous conversion and intellectual engagement.

The majority of early Muslim immigrants to England came from rural backgrounds in their countries of origin and had limited familiarity with Western cultural norms, values, and lifestyles [12]. Upon arriving in England, many experienced significant culture shock, resulting from the dramatic contrast between their home cultures and the secular, liberal environment of British society [13]. This experience of

cultural dislocation has been a defining feature of the British Muslim community and has given rise to three distinct orientations toward Islamic identity and practice.

The first group is characterized by a more exclusivist and literalist approach to Islam, emphasizing the revival of Islamic practice in its textual form and maintaining a degree of cultural separation from mainstream British society [11]. The second and largest group consists of Muslims who engage in a process of cultural acculturation, adapting Islamic practice to the local context while retaining core religious commitments and selectively engaging with Western cultural norms [14]. The third group comprises Muslims who have been more thoroughly shaped by Western secular and liberal values, resulting in a more individualized and culturally hybrid form of Islamic identity [15]. These three orientations continue to characterize the diversity of British Muslim communities today, and their interplay shapes the broader dynamics of Muslim life in England.

The demographic growth of the Muslim population in England has been one of the most significant religious and social trends of the past two decades. As noted in the introduction, the 2021 census recorded 3.9 million Muslims in England, representing 6.5% of the total population up from 2.7 million (4.9%) in 2011 [1]. This 44% increase in a single decade reflects a combination of factors, including higher birth rates within the Muslim community, continued immigration from Muslim majority countries, and conversion to Islam among native British citizens [16].

The geographic distribution of Muslims in England is highly concentrated in urban centers, particularly London, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, and Leicester [17]. These cities are home to well established Muslim communities with their own mosques, schools, cultural organizations, and media outlets. The concentration of Muslims in urban areas has facilitated the development of vibrant community networks but has also contributed to social segregation and the perception of Muslims as a distinct and insular group within British society [18].

The socioeconomic profile of British Muslims is diverse, spanning a wide range of occupations and educational attainments. While some segments of the community face significant economic disadvantage, others have achieved considerable success in business, the professions, politics, and the arts [19]. The increasing visibility of British Muslims in public life including in Parliament, the media, and sports has contributed to a more complex and multifaceted representation of Muslim identity in mainstream British culture [20].

Challenges Facing the British Muslim Community and How Muslim Organizations and Community Media Response it

The Muslim community in England has faced persistent and multifaceted challenges, which have shaped both their internal dynamics and their relationship with the broader British society. These challenges can be broadly categorized into three areas: media misrepresentation, far-right extremism, and socioeconomic marginalization. Media misrepresentation has been a central concern for British Muslims for several decades. The British media, particularly following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, began to systematically associate Islam with fundamentalism, violence, and intolerance [4]. The controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in the late 1980s served as a watershed moment, as images of Muslims burning books were widely circulated and used to construct a narrative of Muslim irrationality and intolerance [21]. Terms such as 'Mad Mullahs,' 'Iranian Terrorists,' and 'Mad Dog Gadaffi' became staples of media coverage, reinforcing negative stereotypes that have proven remarkably persistent [4].

The situation was further exacerbated by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States, and the London bombings of July 7, 2005 [22]. These events triggered a surge in anti Muslim sentiment and led to increased surveillance, discrimination, and hate crimes against British Muslims [6]. The term 'Islamophobia' defined as an unfounded hostility toward Islam and, by extension, the discrimination against Muslim individuals gained widespread currency in public discourse following these events [23]. Research has consistently shown that British Muslims experience higher rates of discrimination in employment, housing, and education than other religious minorities, reflecting the structural dimensions of Islamophobia in British society [17].

The rise of far right political movements has added another dimension to the challenges facing British Muslims. The formation of Britain First in 2011 a party that describes itself as 'patriot' but has been widely condemned for its anti-Muslim and anti immigrant rhetoric exemplifies this trend [5]. Britain First, founded by former members of the British National Party, adopted the slogan 'Taking Our Country Back' and has engaged in a range of activities targeting Muslims, including 'Christian Patrols' at mosques and halal butchers [5]. Despite claiming a membership of 6,000 and amassing 1.4 million likes on Facebook before being banned, the party's activities have contributed to a climate of fear and hostility toward British Muslims [5].

It is important to note, however, that the far right's appropriation of Christian identity has been rejected by many Christian leaders. In April 2016, Reverend Alan

Green formed a human barricade of Christians to protect a London mosque from Britain First activists, stating publicly that the party does not represent Christianity and has turned the cross into 'a symbol of hatred' [5]. This act of interfaith solidarity illustrates the potential for cross community alliances in combating anti Muslim extremism and offers an important counterpoint to narratives of inevitable religious conflict.

In response to the challenges outlined above, British Muslim communities have developed a range of organizational and media strategies to counter negative representations and project a positive image of Islam. One of the most historically significant of these organizations is the Pan-Islamic Society (PIS), founded by Dr. Abdullah Quilliam, which played a crucial role in challenging misconceptions about Islam among non-Muslim Britons [2]. The PIS engaged in educational and cultural activities designed to foster greater understanding of Islam and to correct the distorted images propagated by the mainstream media.

Contemporary Muslim organizations in England operate across a wide spectrum of activities, from religious education and social welfare to political advocacy and media production. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB), and the British Muslim Initiative (BMI) are among the most prominent umbrella organizations representing the diverse interests of British Muslims [6]. These organizations have engaged in sustained efforts to build bridges with non Muslim communities, to lobby for policy changes that protect Muslim rights, and to provide counter-narratives to Islamophobic media representations [8].

The diversity of religious orientations within the British Muslim community is reflected in the variety of its organizational landscape. As noted by Hussain [19], British Muslim identities can be broadly categorized into two orientations: those who view mainstream British values as incompatible with Islamic norms and seek to maintain a distinct religious identity, and those who embrace a form of cultural hybridity that integrates Islamic and British identities. This dual orientation has produced a rich but sometimes contentious diversity of voices within the community, as different groups compete for influence and resources [24].

Community media has played an increasingly important role in shaping the public face of British Islam. Muslim radio stations, newspapers, websites, and social media channels have provided platforms for voices that are systematically marginalized by the mainstream media [25]. However, the reach and resources of community media remain limited compared to the mainstream press and broadcast media, which continue to wield disproportionate influence over public perceptions of Islam [4].

Football and Soft Power: A New Dimension of Image Revitalization

In recent years, a new and perhaps unexpected dimension has emerged in the effort to revitalize the image of Islam in England: the acquisition of Premier League football clubs by Muslim investors from the Middle East. The purchase of Manchester City by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates and the acquisition of Newcastle United by the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund (PIF), led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, have brought Muslim ownership to the heart of one of England's most beloved cultural institutions [7].

Football occupies a unique place in English culture, serving as a focal point for national identity, community belonging, and shared emotion. The involvement of Muslim owners in Premier League clubs has created new opportunities for the normalization of Islamic identity in mainstream British culture. Manchester City, in particular, has been at the forefront of this trend, regularly producing Islamic themed content during the holy month of Ramadan, featuring Muslim players in prominent roles, and celebrating Islamic cultural milestones [7]. These activities have reached audiences far larger than those accessible to traditional community media outlets, effectively leveraging the soft power of football to challenge anti-Muslim stereotypes.

The concept of 'sportswashing' the use of sports sponsorship or ownership to improve a country's or entity's image has been applied to these acquisitions by critics who argue that Muslim investors are using football to deflect attention from human rights concerns in their home countries [26]. While these criticisms are legitimate and deserve serious consideration, they should not obscure the genuine impact that Muslim ownership of football clubs has had on British public perceptions of Islam. The visibility of Muslim identity in the context of football a domain strongly associated with pride, achievement, and national belonging has the potential to humanize Muslims and to challenge the dehumanizing stereotypes propagated by Islamophobic media [7].

The positive impact of this development is reflected, at least in part, in the continued growth of the Muslim population in England and the increasing visibility of Muslims in public life. While it would be an oversimplification to attribute these trends solely to the influence of Muslim owned football clubs, their contribution to a more positive cultural environment for British Muslims should not be underestimated [20].

Toward a *Rahmatan Lil Alamin* Islam in England

The concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* Islam as a mercy to all creation provides a normative framework for understanding the aspirations of the British Muslim community in its engagement with non-Muslim society. This concept, rooted in the Quranic verse (Al-Anbiya: 107), calls on Muslims to embody values of compassion, justice, and peaceful coexistence in all aspects of their lives [27]. For British Muslims, living as a minority in a non-Muslim society, this imperative is both a spiritual commitment and a practical necessity.

The challenges discussed in this article—media misrepresentation, Islamophobia, and far-right extremism—all represent distortions of Islamic values and identity. By actively engaging in counter-narratives, community building, and cultural diplomacy, British Muslims have sought to reclaim the image of Islam as a religion of peace, tolerance, and intellectual engagement [28]. This effort is not merely a public relations exercise but reflects a deep commitment to the principles of *rahmatan lil alamin* in practice.

The success of these efforts is evidenced by the remarkable resilience and growth of the British Muslim community despite the obstacles it faces. The 44% increase in the Muslim population between 2011 and 2021, combined with the increasing prominence of Muslims in British public life, suggests that British Islam is not a diminishing or embattled tradition but a vibrant and expanding presence in the fabric of British society [1]. The challenge for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike is to create the conditions for genuine dialogue, mutual understanding, and shared civic life that honors the diversity of contemporary Britain [29].

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the historical development, demographic trends, contemporary challenges, and image revitalization strategies of the Muslim community in England. Islam is the second-largest religion in England, with a population of 3.9 million (6.5%) as of the 2021 census, representing a 44% increase from 2011. Despite centuries of presence in England, the British Muslim community continues to face significant challenges, including media misrepresentation, Islamophobia, and the threat of far-right extremism.

In response to these challenges, British Muslim communities have employed a range of strategies to counter negative stereotypes and revitalize the image of Islam. These include the activities of religious and civic organizations such as the Pan-Islamic Society and the Muslim Council of Britain, the development of community media platforms, and the more recent phenomenon of Muslim-owned

Premier League football clubs serving as platforms for cultural diplomacy. Together, these efforts reflect a community that is actively engaged in shaping its own narrative and asserting its place in British society.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of understanding Muslim minority communities not merely through the lens of conflict and challenge, but also through the lens of agency, resilience, and cultural creativity. Future research should explore the impact of specific organizational strategies on public perceptions of Islam, the role of interfaith dialogue in reducing Islamophobia, and the long-term effects of Muslim ownership of cultural institutions on British Muslim identity and social integration.

V. REFERENCES

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