



**FRANCE AND
THE HATED SOCIETY:**

MUSLIM EXPERIENCES

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Background to the Report and Project:

This report is part of a pilot project to assess the experiences of hostility and discrimination against Muslims, that ran concurrently in the UK (Ameli et al, 2011) and France. The study looks beyond violent Islamophobic and racist acts, considering the environment in which such acts may be encouraged and legitimised, including discriminatory legislation resulting in social inequality and negative media representation of Muslims. A historical-cultural context to this report is set out, charting French interaction with Islam and Muslims up to the present day. This is followed by a demographic, economic and political overview of Muslims in France today and an outline of the human rights situation in France. The report introduces a theoretical framework for the study of intercultural sensitivity: the Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations (DHMIR) and proceeds to present the survey findings conducted in the Strasbourg area.

Muslims in France and Europe: A Short History of Subalternisation:

The first chapter seeks to sketch out the historical-cultural context, looking beyond simplistic assumptions by adopting the long-durée approach and charting French interaction with Islam and Muslims from the earliest days up to the present day. This includes general discussions about the rise of Islam and the earliest instances of interaction; consideration of mediaeval encounters and the French role in the crusades; the effect of 1492, the expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula, the discovery of the Americas and the treaty of Westphalia on European-Islamic relations; and finally the impact of French imperial ambition post-1789.

Muslims in Today's France:

The contemporary state of Muslims in France is studied by considering the roles played by laïcité, multiculturalism, communautarisme and French republicanism on the envisioning and self-perception of France by the state, elites and society at large. This is considered by investigating attitudes expressed by commentators, policy makers, academics, external commentators, public figures and Muslims. It is in the context of this sense of 'Frenchness' that the questions of defining and perceiving Muslims in France is considered, with a focus on issues relating to immigration, the Algerian War of Liberation, the demonization of refugees, as well as the debate surrounding housing, unemployment and marginalisation.

Discursive Racism as Human Rights Violations:

Pervasive and long-standing French cultural attitudes towards Islam, Muslims and people of immigrant backgrounds are investigated and contextualised, exposing tensions between French notions of 'identity' and 'otherness'. After evaluating existing studies of the topic, the matter of racist and Islamophobic discrimination and hate is considered. This includes the assessment of: violent hate attacks against institutions, such as mosques and cemeteries; controversies surrounding the construction of mosques and public religious services; the prominent role of philosophers and intellectuals in promoting Islamophobic hate amongst the French public; the part played by popular literature in exacerbating widespread biases; issues pertaining to citizenship and 'assimilation' of Muslims; the securitisation of discourse and policy following major events and the impact of media.

Theory and Research Method:

This chapter introduces the adopted theoretical framework of the study, the Domination Hate Model of Intercultural Relations (DHMIR). Its purpose is the study of sensitivity in the context of intercultural relations and it achieves this by considering in detail how abstract entities, such as politics, representation, media and hate, could have terrible consequences in everyday lives of minorities in developed destination societies.

Demographic specifications of Muslim Respondents in France:

The demographics of the sample group are considered in light of the wider demographic scheme of Muslims in France.

- The vast majority of respondents were adults of working age, with the highest rate of participation among the 19 to 34 years old age range (69%), and the next highest participation among the 35 to 39 years old age range (14%), with the remainder of respondents falling within the under 18 years old or 40 and above categories.
- Females made up a considerably higher percentage of respondents (59%) than male respondents (37%), with some respondents refraining from reporting their gender.
- A majority of the sample population (68%) reported France as their country of birth. The next most highly reported places of birth were Morocco (15.2%) and Algeria (7%).
- The vast majority of respondents (80.7%) were French citizens and a greater majority (98.3%) were French residents.
- Most respondents (58.6%) were of African origin, whilst those describing their ethnic origin as Arab (14.8%) did not clearly specify if the respondent is from North Africa or elsewhere. The next most prevalent ethnicities were European (10.7%) and Asian (4.5%).
- 50.8% of respondents were married and 41.8% reported they are still single. Widowed and separated respondents comprised 7.4% of the total.
- In terms of visibility of Islamic practice, the most predominant indicator was wearing the Hijab (50.4%). Having a beard was reported by 15.6% of respondents, which is considerably high due to the relatively low number of male respondents. The lowest percentage (2%) for expressing Muslimness is by special clothes.
- Analysis shows Muslims are scattered in different neighbourhoods, with 50.4% of respondents living in neighbourhoods in which less than half of the population is Muslim, compared with 33.6% of respondents who live in Muslim-majority neighbourhoods.
- Income brackets were mostly recorded as middle income (52%), followed by lower income (34.8%) and higher income (5.7%). Whilst the latter two figures tally with OECD and other studies reporting inequality in economic distribution among Muslims compared to the rest of society, the percentage of those falling within the middle income group reflect a higher general income profile than is reflected in wider French Muslim society.

- In terms of education, respondents were most likely to have achieved a four-year academic degree (37.7%), and 48.4% of the respondents held some sort of academic degree.
- In terms of employment, the highest frequency among the survey group was recorded to be employed (37.7%), among whom 51.8% work in the private sector and 48.2% work for the public sector. This was followed by students (24.6%) and the unemployed (16.8%).
- The vast majority of respondents reported themselves to be either practicing (68.4%) or highly practicing (20.6%), together representing almost 90% of all respondents.

The Hate Crimes Faced by Muslims in France:

Respondents considered 29 categories of negative experiences, distributed over both implicit and explicit forms of discrimination and abuse. For each category, respondents were offered six options with which to rate the frequency of their experiences, ranging from once a year through to more than once a week, including the option to state that they had never experienced such an incident. All but one of the experiences of abuse and discrimination were highly prevalent within the survey group, being reported by over 40% of respondents. Only 11% of respondents reported undergoing experiences of physical assault, but this finding is still noteworthy due to the severe nature of the offence and because the figure might have been affected by the fact that many respondents reported living in high density Muslim neighbourhoods, where they would have been less likely to have experienced this kind of discrimination. Other results were as follows:

- 87.3% have seen negative Muslim stereotypes in media
- 86% have observed political policies affecting Muslims negatively
- 82.4% have heard Islamophobic comments being made by politicians
- 81.9% have observed organisational policies affecting Muslims negatively
- 80.8% have heard an offensive joke about Islam or Muslims
- 76.1% reported having been stared at by strangers
- 73.4% have heard racially or culturally offensive remarks
- 70% have experienced being talked down to
- 66% have experienced hostility in the street
- 64.7% have experienced verbal abuse
- 64.4% have experienced others reacting as if they were intimidated or afraid
- 61.6% have experienced being expected to fit stereotypes of a Muslim
- 61.6% have experienced being physically avoided
- 60.2% have experienced hostility at work/school
- 59.5% have experienced racial tensions in their city
- 57.1% have experienced their opinions being ignored or devalued
- 57% have witnessed or heard of Islamophobia being directed at others
- 55% have experienced being treated in an overly superficial manner
- 53.8% have experienced being expected to be less competent because of Islam / hijab
- 53.2% have experienced having their religious beliefs challenged / denigrated by colleagues
- 53.2% have experienced being told that they are oversensitive or paranoid about racism
- 52% have experienced not being taken seriously
- 49.9% have experienced being treated with suspicion or being wrongly accused
- 49.5% have experienced being laughed at or mocked
- 48.7% have experienced being deliberately left out of conversations / activities
- 47.2% have experienced being insulted or harassed
- 45.5% have experienced a hostile atmosphere at their place of work / study / residence
- 43.9% have experienced being ignored / overlooked / denied service in public places

The Effect of Demographic Values and Mediation Variables on Hate Crimes faced by Muslims:

Analysis of results revealed the role played by demographic factors in affecting the nature and frequency of hate crimes faced by Muslims. Important factors were age, gender, economic status, education, work status and religiosity. Two mediation variables were also considered – level of being visibly Muslim and the proportion of Muslims in the neighbourhood. Significant findings included:

- The elderly were the most likely to report experiences of physical assault, with 42.9% of those over 50 reporting such incidents.
- Female respondents were more likely than their male counterparts to have experienced other people reacting to them as if they were intimidated or afraid, others expecting them to be less competent because of Islam / hijab and experiencing verbal abuse.
- Those with lower incomes were more likely than others to have experienced being ignored, overlooked or denied service in public places and being subjected to verbal abuse.

In most cases, educational level correlated negatively with experiences of hate.

- Students and the unemployed were the most likely to report being laughed at or mocked.
- Those working in the private sector, along with the unemployed, were the most likely to experience being physically avoided, and private sector employees were the most likely to be subjected to an environment of insult and harassment.
- The intensity and diversity of hate crimes and experiences is directly and significantly affected by appearance, with Muslims who wear the hijab or beards more likely than others to experience various forms of discrimination.

Analysing Open-Ended Questions:

Responses to the qualitative section of the survey were analysed. Respondents highlighted many factors they considered to contribute significantly to fuelling hate and discrimination in society, including:

- Hate ideology and policy
- Misperception of Islam and Muslims
- Negative media representation
- Political scapegoating and the use of media as a political tool
- Hijab/Burqa bans as legal discrimination

Recommendations & Concluding Thoughts:

The study's core recommendations relate to the media and the academy. As regards media, an invigorated discussion around self-regulation must take place, ensuring certain discriminatory practices, including projecting guilt by association and the use of racist terminology, become taboo. This should ideally be done through the requirement of government to pursue press standards; however, it extends beyond the government and targets civil society actors. Additionally, better law and policy on media demonisation and a more thorough acknowledgement of hate speech and representation are needed. Institutional Islamophobia and racism currently results in Muslims disproportionately being accused of being guilty of such hatred, despite being victims of such hatred.

As regards academia, the central role of philosophers and intellectuals in French society means they share some of the blame and also hold the key to the change needed. A more open and inclusive academic regime must be fostered. Uncritical proselytisation of Republican founding principles must be subjected to critical self-reflection, and must be accompanied by a desacrilisation of its key ideas, submitting them to the type of interrogation indicative of a healthy social project. Finally, civil society must pursue an understanding of how colonial and racist discourse operates in the academy. This is the project of a generation and requires civil society to work beyond narrow concerns.

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