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Epistemological Contestations in Global Governance: The OIC and the Conceptualization of Minorities

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Abstract: This study examines the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) role in framing Muslim minorities as a distinct sociopolitical and discursive category and its subsequent global advocacy efforts. With over one-third of the global Muslim population residing outside OIC member states, these communities face systemic challenges, including structural discrimination, cultural erasure, and political marginalization. Rooted in the concept of the ummah, the OIC's engagement emphasizes transnational Islamic solidarity while contending with the structural constraints of a state-centric international order. Through an analysis of official OIC documents, declarations, and public communications, this paper uncovers the epistemological and ideological underpinnings of the organization's advocacy narratives. It contrasts the OIC's communitarian approach to minority rights with the universalist framework of the United Nations, highlighting philosophical and normative divergences. While the OIC exhibits significant potential as a mediator and advocate, its reliance on state actors and alignment with international norms reveal inherent tensions between its transnational vision and the geopolitical realities of global governance. This research contributes to the broader understanding of how religious frameworks intersect with modern political structures, positioning the OIC as both an influential and constrained actor in advancing justice, epistemic sovereignty, and equity for marginalized Muslim communities.
Keywords: Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Muslim minorities, global governance, intergovernmental organizations

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Introduction

Research on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has traditionally focused on its role in fostering economic collaboration, trade agreements, poverty alleviation, and social development among member states. Scholars have also examined the OIC's capacity to shape collective diplomatic responses to issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sectarianism, Islamophobia, regional security, and human rights, including women's rights and minority protections. The OIC's navigation between Islamic unity and the practical constraints of a state-centric international system is a concept explored by Salim Farrar (2014, 788-91) who critiques the marginalization of the OIC within Public International Law (PIL), arguing that colonial-era frameworks excluded non-Western perspectives by defining Islamic approaches as incompatible with secular rationalities. This exclusion persists today, as PIL continues to classify the OIC's contributions as religious rather than legal, reducing its engagement to symbolic gestures rather than meaningful participation in global legal discourse.

The legacy of colonialism, as Del Sarto (2017, 769-775) and Lewis (1994, 24-43) argue, imposed artificial borders and rigid state-centric frameworks on regions historically defined by fluid identities and overlapping loyalties. These colonial impositions disrupted traditional social and religious networks, giving rise to ideologies like pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism as counter-narratives to externally imposed borders. In navigating this landscape, the OIC grapples with the tension between its foundational ideals of Islamic unity and the divergent interests of its member states. Scholars like Akbarzadeh (2018, 79) and Hallaq (2014, 15-16) question whether Islamic international politics can provide a viable alternative to dominant secular paradigms, given the structural constraints imposed by state-centric governance and international law. This tension raises critical questions about the OIC's ability to reconcile its Islamic ideals with global diplomatic pragmatism, as well as its capacity to assert agency within a system that privileges Western norms. By examining historical documents, resolutions, and socio-political dynamics, future research must delve deeper into the OIC's evolving identity and its role in shaping transnational solidarity, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of its place in contemporary global governance.

The Formation and History of the OIC

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), established in 1969 following the arson attack on Al-Aqsa Mosque, represents 57 Muslim-majority states and serves as a platform for Islamic solidarity. As the second-largest intergovernmental body after the United Nations, the OIC was formed to address the challenges of marginalization, underdevelopment, and cultural suppression in the Muslim world. Its original mission

centered on protecting Islamic holy sites and advocating for Muslims globally. With the adoption of the 1974 Charter, its mandate expanded to include cooperation across political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian fields, presenting an alternative to secular international systems dominated by neoliberal paradigms (Ahmad 2023, 4).

The OIC's establishment was shaped by key leaders, including King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, King Hassan II of Morocco, and President Anwar Sadat of Egypt. King Faisal promoted pan-Islamic unity both as a religious obligation and geopolitical strategy. Headquartered in Jeddah, with regional offices worldwide, the OIC addresses issues such as Islamophobia, minority rights, and conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, its institutional framework includes the Islamic Summit, the Council of Foreign Ministers, and the Executive Committee, which guide policy and oversee resolutions. Specialized bodies like the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) focus on economic development, education, and cultural exchange. The International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), created by King Khalid bin Abdulaziz, integrates Islamic jurisprudence with modern governance, providing legal responses to challenges like human rights and economic development. It reinforces the OIC's role in adapting Islamic legal norms to contemporary political realities (Ahmad, 28-36).

The OIC's reliance on the concept of the *ummah* (global Muslim community) highlights its vision of pan-Islamic unity. Historically grounded in scriptural interpretations, the *ummah* transcends national boundaries, offering a moral framework distinct from European nationalism. Scholars like Denny emphasize the Ummah's role in fostering collective Muslim identity, blending faith with shared purpose (Denny, 69-70). Anjum connects the *ummah* to contemporary movements, such as the Arab uprisings, which reflect its evolving significance as a source of inspiration for young Muslims (Anjum 2024, 140). Salman Sayyid (2014, 113) links the "unsettled diaspora" of Muslims within a secular, Westphalian order to tensions in expressing Islamic identity. The OIC challenges Eurocentric norms, aiming to foster sovereignty and solidarity in global power structures shaped by Western paradigms. Seth emphasizes the OIC's role in reasserting agency within these frameworks by promoting alternative epistemologies. Adamson critiques the focus on liberal norms in international relations (IR), urging attention to ideological contestation between political Islam and liberalism within broader systemic structures (2005, 182-83). Despite its limitations, the OIC bridges the historical ideals of the *ummah* with modern global challenges, striving to maintain relevance as an Islamic voice amid secular governance (Al-Ahsan 1988, 3).

Methodological Framework

The study explores the evolving landscapes of social reality by employing a qualitative research strategy, which captures digital data as both an archive and a process, highlighting the epistemological value of digital interactions. This approach contrasts the deductive, positivist orientation of quantitative research with the inductive, constructivist focus of qualitative methods, which view social reality as dynamic and shaped by social actors (Bryman 2004, 9–20). Organizational ethnography, an inherently flexible and adaptive method, emphasizes experiential understanding through immersive engagement. It balances improvisational methods with abductive reasoning, allowing researchers to explore evolving organizational contexts and generate theoretical insights (Van Maanen 2015, 41; Yanow 2012, 36). Ethnographers increasingly regard digital spaces as legitimate research fields, embracing methods like virtual ethnography and multimodal analysis. Digital data, categorized as both static archives and dynamic processes, enhances the authenticity and depth of ethnographic inquiry, addressing challenges posed by the fragmented, transnational nature of contemporary organizations (Akemu and Abdelnour 2018, 5). Scholars like Geertz emphasize "thick description" to uncover the deeper cultural meanings within observed phenomena, while text analysis, spanning quantitative and qualitative traditions, serves as a versatile tool for identifying patterns and themes in social sciences (Geertz 1973, 9–10; Bernard and Ryan 1998, 88).

Religion in the Global Intergovernmental

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) emerges as more than an international institution; it is a living interface where Islamic ethical imaginaries encounter the pressures and possibilities of global modernity. In its very structure and operation, the OIC embodies a dialectical engagement aimed at reconciling the particularities of Islamic traditions with the universalizing tendencies of secular governance in the international arena. To grasp the significance of the OIC, one must resist reductive binaries and instead approach it as a dynamic node of relationality, a site where diverse histories, ontologies, and political visions are translated into a shared, if contested, global language.

The OIC does not simply mirror the structures of institutions like the United Nations, nor does it represent a pure alternative to the Westphalian order. Instead, it enacts a process of bricolage, weaving together fragments of Islamic political thought and modern governance protocols to produce a distinct ethical-political formation. This formation is not merely a replication of global norms but reflects a deeper negotiation with the legacies of colonial modernity, a concept explored by Aníbal Quijano in his analysis of how coloniality underpins modernity and

rationality. According to Quijano, the imposition of Eurocentric knowledge systems during colonial rule continues to shape global epistemologies and political structures, marginalizing non-Western models of governance and thought (Quijano 2007, 169). By engaging with the colonial-modern dynamic, the OIC positions itself not as a vestige of Islamic governance but as an evolving project that navigates the tensions between traditional Islamic ideals and the exigencies of the modern world.

The OIC's adoption of bureaucratic mechanisms, diplomatic protocols, and technocratic structures is not mere mimicry; it is a performative act that stakes a claim to universal relevance while subverting the exclusionary logic of modernity's secular paradigms. At its core, the OIC embodies an ethical tension between the preservation of Islamic values and the necessity of engaging with global systems that often resist non-secular epistemologies. This tension manifests in its structural hybridity and its advocacy for issues such as Palestinian sovereignty, minority rights, and the protection of religious dignity. In these efforts, the OIC does not merely seek to operate within the existing global order but to reimagine it from the vantage point of an Islamic worldview—a worldview that insists on the inseparability of moral imperatives and political action.

By situating the OIC within the broader processes of global ethical circulation, this section explores how the organization creates a liminal zone where Islamic traditions are neither subsumed by secular universalism nor isolated within particularism. It is in this "middle ground," where Islamic governance is hybridized and reconstituted. This potential lies not in its ability to replace existing systems but in its capacity to destabilize the epistemological certainties that underpin them, forcing a rethinking of sovereignty, justice, and solidarity. Ultimately, the OIC is less a static entity than a living process—an evolving experiment in negotiating the contradictions of modernity while holding onto the ethical horizon of Islamic unity.

Secularization of International Relations

Most of the leading figures of nineteenth- and twentieth-century social science, such as Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Talcott Parsons, Herbert Spencer, and Max Weber, held that secularization is an integral facet of 'modernization' (Cassanova 1994, 17). Smith cites sociologist Donald Eugene who posited, as religion was no longer a collective force with significant mobilizing potential for social and/or political changes, secularization became 'the most fundamental structural and ideological change in the process of political development' (Smith 1970, 6).

These assumptions extended to the ultimate form of modern states, which would establish institutions, legitimacy, and social order based on secular foundations far from religious precepts. Such views were further expressed regarding religion as

epiphenomenal to economic, political, and psychological realities by reducing it to a private matter as opposed to an autonomous force in politics around the world. As a result, engagement with variables of religion has been vastly neglected in international relations theory, with streams of liberalism and realism dominating the field. Notions of the secularity of world politics have commanded western academia (Juergensmeyer 1993, 27) and drawn interest from all that is non-material.

Predictions around the inevitable decline of religion in the 20th century (Hadden 1987, 587) were severely debunked by the persistence of religiosity in communities and faith-based political aspirations around the world (Petito & Hatzopoulos 2003; Fox and Sandler 2004; Thomas 2005; James 2011; Toft et al. 2011). This phenomenon, which especially rose to prominence in the 50s and 60s, has been termed the "religious resurgence" which Scott M. Thomas argued this is connected to a search for authentic identity and just development in the non-western world, and in this way it can be seen as a revolution against the West (Thomas 2000, 816–17).

For Philpott, the European disenchantment with religion originated from the perpetual violence in the 16th and 17th centuries, which was interpreted as the illogical fixation on inherently violent religion that is deterrent to the functions of politics (2000, 244). Thus, commenced the process of secularism and the dwindling role of religion in all spheres, including international affairs and politics. For Turner, there are distinct continuations in Nietzsche's views on the decline of commitment to absolute values and his death of God thesis into Weber's socio-political thinking and view of political reality. For Weber, the issue of legitimacy was central to his political sociology, and he was of the view that rationalization and secular political life resulted in the modern state, an institution stripped of any metaphysical, religious, or supernaturalist legitimacy (Turner 1991, 193).

While the integrated study of religion in academic studies may have been evaded for some time, religion continues to deeply influence and shape worldviews, socio political identities, and sources of legitimacy in addition to serving as a value system for authoritative and civil institutions of every kind (Fox and Sandler 2004, 3). While the return of religion may have manifested in the West and more evidently in the East, it is possible that its presence may have not subsided but was rather muted and replaced with alternative decipherations. For Krygier, secular societies do not derive legitimacy from value systems but rather depend on the experimental application of regulations, economic measures, and coercion where needed. As such, sociopolitical functionality relies on long-established bureaucratic practices and logical processes, which, as Weber saw, restricted social actors to the role of 'cogs' in an 'iron cage' (Krygier 1979, 61-87). It can, however, be observed that in such administered societies, religious revivalism, religious movements, and spiritual nostalgia periodically emerge, which struggle but are strained by secular modes of existence. Turner argues that a central issue for the sociology of religion in predominantly secular societies is the need to reconcile the "irreducible fact of secularization" with the centrality of religion on global scales and

in the numerous political movements (Turner 1991, 203).

It would, however, be inaccurate to assume that religion has been altogether neglected in a seemingly secular western civilization. In fact, residues of religious morality and ethical considerations within the secular and posits that caritas has been translated into social solidarity, universal healthcare, welfare ideals, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and monogenesis, which drive movements or social policies with genealogical roots in religion and no claim to theological justification. Therefore, while the exclusion of religion in favor of the sanctified sovereign nation-state was underway in previous decades, its return from the 'Westphalia exile' has grown imminent and even taken the central stage in international politics as a valuable and sought-after resource (McFaul and Blanton 2011; Haddad 2008; Katzenstein 2010 and Berger 1999).

One other strand of thinking is the civilizational clash thesis, for which the OIC not only represents these long-held anxieties which were expressed by Huntington, who wrote on the "Islamic states whose strategic locations, large populations, and/or oil resources make them influential in world affairs," but also the long-standing concerns around a religion which is "exploding demographically with destabilizing consequences [of] non-Western reaffirming the value of their own cultures" (Huntington 1996, 28). The admittance of the extent and intensity of the "Islamic Resurgence" and the turning of Muslim masses to "Islam as a solution" in forming identities, deriving meaning, establishing stability, furthering development, and seeking legitimacy, power, and hope (Huntington 1996, 109) was not a mere sociological reading but rather a warning of the Western world's declining will and power.

Relevant to the discussion on the OIC's positioning, Huntington explains that Western attempts to assert values and protect interests result in non-Western societies confronting the choice of whether to emulate the West and join the "bandwagon" or expand their own economic and military power to resist and to restore balance against the West (Ibid., 29). Critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno wrote, 'Nothing of theological content will persist without being transformed; every content will have to put itself to the test of migrating into the realm of the secular' (Adorno 2005, 136). Byrd reiterated this by arguing that from a secular and western vantage point, aspects of religion which cannot pass the test of secularization or migrate "into the realm of the secular" are ultimately abandoned to the ditch of history since religious terminologies and rhetoric 'fall upon theologically-deaf ears' (Byrd 2016, 106).

Building on Susanne Hoeber Rudolph's notion of *the fading states* and the role of a transnational, poly-religious ecumene in globalized contexts, we can analyze the OIC as a case study reflecting these ideas. The OIC, as a transnational body, represents not only the interests of Islamic states but also the broader ambitions of a pan-Islamic identity that transcends individual nation-states. In line with Rudolph's observations, the OIC operates within an increasingly porous geopolitical framework, leveraging its

influence to engage with both political and religious spheres across borders. Rudolph writes:

> "The (religious) communities that populate transnational civil society do not affect the state "system" in the way some wish world governance might. They do not provide a statelike entity to impose order and perhaps justice "outside," in anarchic space, by monopolizing force and supplying universal arbitration and rule enforcement. They do not even supply what transnational regimes are meant to provide—predictable systems of rules that facilitate cooperation. Instead, they create a pluralistic transnational polity. They shape perceptions and expectations that contribute to world public opinion and politics. Their effects on transnational space are only beginning to be understood. Existential fright about "the coming anarchy" is probably premature.' But because a plurality of transnational spaces entails difference as well as commonality with respect to epistemes, identities, and expectations, transnational civil society can be the site of conflict as well as cooperation." (Rudoph 1997, 2)

According to Rudolph, religious formations have converged with various transnational movements—such as human rights advocates, environmental activists, public health professionals, and multinational corporations—to forge a dynamic transnational civil society that actively engages in global politics. This civil society creates an alternative arena for belief, commitment, and practice that operates outside the confines of the state, drawing emotional investment and action away from it without entirely supplanting its role. As a result, the state's dominance diminishes, even as it persists in the background. While these diverse communities may exercise authority and challenge the state's monopoly on power, they do not assert claims to sovereignty (Ibid., 255-6).

The examination of the OIC necessitates a profound reevaluation of the prevailing secularization paradigms that pervade contemporary social theory. Such frameworks inadequately account for the enduring salience of religious identities and movements, particularly within non-Western contexts, where religion persists as a formidable catalyst for political mobilization and social cohesion. Situated within this discourse, the OIC emerges not merely as a diplomatic apparatus but as an embodiment of a collective Islamic identity, subverting the reduction of religion to mere epiphenomena of secular political dynamics. This perspective elucidates that secularism operates not as a neutral arbiter but as a distinct configuration of power that systematically marginalizes alternative forms of authority.

The Subaltern of International Relations

Known for its origins in the works of Antonio Gramsci, the term subaltern is described as containing both intellectual and political meaning, which can be described as a positional opposite to that which is dominant or hegemonic in power (Guha and Spivak 1988, v-vi). For Guha and Spivak, the attempt to acquire subaltern narratives or supplement existing frameworks with alternative ones are greatly challenging epistemological tasks; this is especially true for generations of intellectuals emerging from a formerly colonized world. Upon surveying member states of the OIC, we find that the vast majority may be classified as subaltern. And while the age of decolonization saw the eruption of revolts to dismantle classical empires, the newly independent sovereign states continued to operate within the frames of their colonial past and the unrelenting imperialism which maintained existence under new and more complex guises (Guha and Spivak 1988, vii-ix).

For Gramsci, it is the interactions between dominant and subaltern communities which formulate the very essence of human history and society. Today, scholars of subaltern studies refer to the term in a broad sense, which connotes all those subordinated in global societies within extensive categories of race, class, gender, and religion, which may be applied to the study of international communities. It is argued that the very nature of international law is formulated on frameworks of the classical positivist sense of the international state system in addition to a legal narrative which is intrinsically founded in notions of European imperialism that came to be reproduced to various extents across international institutions of the twentieth century (Imseis 2009, 4).

For Anghie, this may be deduced by looking at the imperial and colonial origins of international law, which reveal how such origins produce perpetually recurring structural patterns throughout historical junctures of international law (Anghie 2005, 3). For him, "colonialism was central to the constitution of international law" in terms of its "basic doctrines," which date back to the sixteenth century, which saw the European effort to produce a legal system for inter-European and non-European relations as part of the colonial endeavor (Ibid.). For instance, in the 17th-19th centuries, European colonial powers oversaw quasi-sovereign authority of European entities over non-European peoples in the way of better serving imperial interests abroad (Anghie 2005, 68-69). This theme of the modern international law's Eurocentricity and roots in Europe's imperial and colonial past is valuable for readings into the organization's constants and contrasts in *la mission civilisatrice*, or the idea that "justified interventionism as a means of redeeming the backward, oppressed, underdeveloped people of the non-European world by incorporating them into the universal civilization of Europe" (Oppenheim 1928, 36–37; Koskenniemi 2008, 127).

According to Sanjay Seth, postcolonial theory offers a valuable critique of

mainstream International Relations (IR) by emphasizing the active role of knowledge in shaping reality rather than simply reflecting it. He notes that postcolonial theory highlights how Eurocentric knowledge systems often fail to address non-European contexts effectively, a limitation particularly evident in global governance and international cooperation. Sovereignty, central to IR, is framed not as a fixed principle but as a contested and variable process influenced by strategies, struggles, and power dynamics. This dynamic understanding, Seth argues, challenges IR to deconstruct assumptions it typically naturalizes, thereby enriching its capacity to explore global interconnection and diversity (2011: 182-3).

The post-WWII era saw the triumphant allied powers justifying the pursuit of national interests using the international rule of law. The composition and procedural rules of the Security Council, as well as the codification of "general principles of law recognized by civilized nations" as a source of international law in the ICJ Statute (ICJ Stat. art. 38(1)) are some mechanisms which allow specific permanent members of the UN Security Council to undertake actions as part of their commitment to a progressive, democratic, and rights-based international order. These are recurring themes across the history of modern international law and institutions; this is especially true for the UN since its founding in 1945 to this present day. Anghie posits that there is a paradox in the evolution of international law and institutions which may be useful to understanding the hegemonic and subaltern binary nature of the system whose mechanisms are manufactured as a means for achieving a liberal rights-based global order, which at times have proven to be the very tools through which that order has been frustrated or undermined to the detriment of subaltern classes (Anghie 2005, 192).

Does the OIC itself qualify as the subaltern within the global order and international norms, or does this critique also apply to the OIC, which seeks to be a voice for Muslims in the world? Balakrishnan Rajagopal argued that there remains a counter-hegemonic potential that the Third World can bring through its use of international law and institutions (1998: 3). For some, it is the state-centric nature of international law that reinforces the underlying hegemonic and subaltern in its evolution, where international law becomes no more than "a mask for power relationships" and a means for the maintenance of existing international order (Brunnée and Toope 2010, 3).

For subaltern groups, this means renegotiating the international order, as practiced by the OIC in its capitalizing on existing legal principles to challenge that order and produce its own terms. The OIC therefore represents a sample case for both the evolution and maintenance of international orders. In other words, regardless of its inequitable founding principles, elements of which continue to persist in the global order, the OIC represents contrasting principles and interests. Later in this study we look to observable dissonance in matters of human rights, protecting Muslims and resolving conflicts, interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and coordinating

positions within the UN, its bodies, and the EU, all of which the European Parliament's policy department report on the OIC religious dimensions, described as "sensitive issues" (2013, 9).

Applying a subaltern lens to the OIC's role within international relations highlights the organization's dual function as both participant in and challenger of the established global order. The OIC's navigation of international law and norms underscores the tension between hegemonic structures and the aspirations of subaltern entities within the international system. This study ultimately aims to provide insight into how the OIC utilizes existing institutional frameworks to assert its agency, contributing to a broader question of claims around a multi-civilizational world order.

Identifying the Autochthonous and the Replica

To fully comprehend the OIC's structural and ideological framework, it is crucial to adopt a vantage point that recognizes the ways in which the organization serves as both a cultural artifact and a political project. This analysis focuses on the OIC's institutional ontology, examining its hybridized organizational forms, its negotiation of Islamic and global governance norms, and the ways in which it navigates the tensions between particularism and universalism. In anthropological terms, the OIC can be seen as a cultural artifact—a product of both external forces and indigenous political and religious ideologies. Drawing on Clifford Geertz's (1973) concept of "local knowledge," the OIC is situated within a complex matrix of local traditions, Islamic political thought, and external pressures from the global order. As a transnational institution, the OIC exemplifies cultural translation as both an anthropological and a postcolonial process. The OIC's institutional framework can be seen as an attempt to "translate" Islamic principles into a modern internationalist idiom shaped by Western governance norms. This translation involves not only the conceptual transportation of ideas, such as *shura* (consultation) or *ummah* (community), but also their reconfiguration within a system of bureaucratic protocols, mirroring United Nations-style governance structures. This is evident in the example of The Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC), established in 1999, which presents a fascinating case in the ongoing negotiation between Islamic tradition and modern international structures. Based in Tehran, the PUIC brings together the parliaments of all 53 OIC member states. The PUIC's objectives, outlined on its website, reveal this interplay. Notably, the Union aims to "introduce the sublime precepts of Islam" while simultaneously emphasizing "humanism of the Islamic civilization." This objective reflects a calculated attempt to reconcile Islamic values with the language of human rights and universal values prevalent in contemporary international discourse. Furthermore, the PUIC promotes the Islamic principle of *Shura* (consultation) within member states. This resonates with Western notions of democratic participation,

suggesting an effort to find common ground in the realm of governance. However, the caveat that implementation should be "in accordance with the Constitution and circumstances of each member state" highlights the complexities of translating a core Islamic concept into diverse political systems.

In "The Commitment to Theory", Homi K. Bhabha argues that theory is essential for understanding and negotiating cultural differences in a postcolonial world. He introduces the concept of hybridity, which emphasizes the dynamic and fluid nature of cultural interactions, challenging rigid binaries such as colonizer/colonized or Western/Other. Central to this idea is the "third space," a liminal zone where cultures intersect, displace, and negotiate meanings, creating new hybrid identities that subvert hegemonic power structures. Bhabha likens this process to cultural translation, where meanings are not fixed but constantly contested and reconstituted. Representation, he argues, is inherently political, and theory enables a critical engagement with how the "Other" is portrayed and understood. By advocating for theory as a practice of cultural and ethical commitment, Bhabha underscores its role in destabilizing dominant ideologies and addressing the complexities of cultural hybridity in a globalized, postcolonial world. Similarly, the OIC's project aligns with the postcolonial notion of translation as displacement and negotiation. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity is pertinent here: the OIC operates in a liminal space where Islamic epistemologies intersect with Western legal and political frameworks, creating a "third space" that destabilizes binary distinctions between "Islamic" and "Western" (Bhabha 1994, 37). This hybridity is evident in the OIC's organs, such as the Islamic Human Rights Commission, which embeds Islamic ethics within the language of universal human rights—a move that both challenges and conforms to hegemonic global norms.

The OIC's structure itself mirrors key elements of global governance frameworks, most notably that of the United Nations (UN). The establishment of the OIC's General Secretariat, for instance, can be understood as an attempt to model the UN's Secretariat, suggesting that the OIC aims to operate within the same international political ecosystem that the UN has long dominated. The OIC's adoption of a similar structure of summits, expert committees, and specialized agencies serves as a strategy to embed itself within the established practices of international diplomacy, yet this mirroring is also a site of contestation. While it seeks alignment with international norms, the OIC's commitment to Islamic values necessitates the selective adaptation of these structures, often diverging from their Western counterparts.

To understand the OIC's structural dynamics and ideological commitments, it is necessary to explore the organization's political ontology—its underlying assumptions about the nature of political order and the role of the OIC in global governance. The OIC's commitment to the unity of the Muslim world, as expressed in its charter and through its institutional priorities, reflects an ontological vision that transcends the Westphalian model of state sovereignty. Unlike Western-centered models of international order, which prioritize the autonomy of states, the OIC envisions a

form of political community that emphasizes solidarity among its member states. This solidarity is not merely symbolic but is embedded in the OIC's policy initiatives, from collective action on humanitarian issues to its advocacy for political autonomy. The organization's commitment to the welfare of the ummah is a central tenet that distinguishes it from secular, state-centered international organizations like the UN.

The OIC's embrace of the notion of Islamic governance, although not explicitly articulated, is another key component of its political ontology. While the OIC does not seek to establish a theocratic state, its rhetoric frequently invokes Islamic governance principles. In this sense, the OIC's organizational identity reflects a hybridization of secular statecraft and religious governance, with the former borrowing elements from the UN system and the latter rooted in a particular interpretation of Islamic political theory. This tension between secularism and religion is often framed as a dichotomy, but in the OIC's case, it can be understood as a dynamic interplay that allows for a synthesis of competing political visions.

This ontological commitment to Islamic precepts is evident in the OIC's policy on issues like Palestine and the rights of Muslim minorities. For example, the OIC's consistent advocacy for Palestinian statehood is not merely a diplomatic position but a moral imperative grounded in the Islamic vision of justice and solidarity. Similarly, the OIC's efforts to address the plight of Muslim minorities in non-member states reflect its ontological understanding of the ummah as a political and moral entity that transcends national boundaries. This vision of political unity contrasts sharply with the UN's Westphalian model, which is grounded in the sovereignty of individual states.

This tension can be framed as a form of cultural negotiation (Sahlins 1999, 409-16), wherein the OIC seeks to negotiate its particularistic Islamic values with the universalist claims of global governance. The OIC's advocacy for a law to protect against the defamation of religion, for example, highlights the negotiation between Islamic moral imperatives and Western secular values. In calling for legal protections against religious defamation, the OIC challenges the Western liberal understanding of free speech, positioning itself as a counter-hegemonic force in the international system. This negotiation is not merely a response to external pressures but a strategic effort to carve out a space for Islamic values in the broader global discourse.

Moreover, the OIC's advocacy for reform within the UN system, particularly its call for greater representation of Muslim-majority states in the UN Security Council, can be understood as an effort to bridge the gap between particularistic aspirations and universalist principles. In this regard, the OIC's call for a more equitable global governance system is not simply about achieving parity for Muslim states but also about challenging the asymmetrical power relations that characterize the current international order. The OIC's critique of the UNSC and its call for reforms that prioritize equity and justice are broader global calls for decolonization and democratization, linking the OIC's particularistic vision to a more universal struggle for a fairer global order.

The Category of Muslim Minorities

Through various policy commitments, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has declared itself a guardian of Muslim minorities worldwide, particularly those residing outside its member states. This commitment exemplifies the OIC's role in transcending political and geographic boundaries to honor the bonds of religious affiliation and solidarity within the global Muslim community. With over one-third of the Muslim population living in non-OIC member countries (Organization of Islamic Cooperation 2009), the organization recognizes the profound challenges these communities face, including systemic discrimination, violence, and cultural erasure. By advocating for their rights, the OIC seeks to uphold its foundational principles of Islamic unity and solidarity.

The organization was envisioned as a unified voice for the Muslim world to safeguard its spiritual, political, and socio-economic interests. This mandate reflects the organization's aspiration to act as a custodian of Islamic values and a defender of Muslim populations worldwide, irrespective of geopolitical boundaries (Bukhari, Khan, and Haq 2024, 209). However, the OIC's efforts are often limited by challenges such as adherence to international norms of state sovereignty, its dependence on consensus among diverse member states, and a lack of enforcement mechanisms. Despite these constraints, the OIC seeks to engage diplomatically and promote an international dialogue to uphold the rights of marginalized Muslim minorities, striving to be a moral and political advocate for their welfare (Bacik 2011, 594–614).

The United Nations (UN) conceptualizes minorities as any small group within a society distinguished by characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, language, or political beliefs. This framework is grounded in a universalist human rights paradigm, which prioritizes the protection and promotion of individual rights for members of these groups, regardless of their size or status within the broader society. The UN's approach seeks to foster inclusivity and equality by addressing structural inequalities and ensuring minority groups have the means to preserve their distinct identities while participating fully in public life. Importantly, this definition is neutral and expansive, encompassing any marginalized or distinct group without privileging any specific cultural, religious, or ideological perspective.

In contrast, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) approaches the concept of minorities through the lens of Islamic solidarity, framing minority rights primarily as an extension of the rights of Muslim communities globally. Unlike the UN's inclusive and neutral definition, the OIC's focus is particularistic, centering on the grievances, protections, and religious freedoms of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim-majority societies. This reflects a communal ethos rooted in the concept of the *ummah*, the global Islamic community, wherein minority rights are seen as part of the moral and ethical obligation to support and protect Muslims wherever they may reside. Non-Muslim minorities within OIC member states are often addressed

less explicitly, highlighting a narrower scope of engagement compared to the universal inclusivity championed by the UN.

This co-opting of the concept reveals a deeper philosophical divergence: while the UN frames minority rights as an essential mechanism for safeguarding diversity and equality in pluralistic societies as part of a humanist worldview, the OIC's approach reflects a communitarian paradigm that prioritizes the collective identity of Muslims over a broader, universal application.

The protection of Muslim minorities is emblematic of the OIC's broader mission to safeguard religious and cultural identities. This includes ensuring non-discriminatory access to education, freedom of religious practice, and the preservation of cultural traditions. These efforts are not confined by borders; rather, they underscore the OIC's vision of a unified Muslim community bound by shared faith, irrespective of national affiliations.

The OIC's role in addressing issues faced by Muslim minorities has seen both challenges and notable successes, illustrating its potential as a mediator and advocate. One of the most significant achievements was its involvement in the Philippines, where Muslims constitute 12% of the population, predominantly residing in the southern regions. Historically, these communities faced systemic grievances, including being treated as second-class citizens and being dissuaded from pursuing high-ranking positions in the judiciary, military, and civil service. In response, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) initiated an armed insurgency in the 1970s, demanding autonomy for 13 Muslim-majority provinces (Khan 2002).

The OIC's engagement with this issue spanned over two decades, culminating in the Manila Pact of September 2, 1996, which established the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). This success highlights the OIC's ability to mediate in complex conflicts, particularly when it enjoys the trust of both parties involved. The MNLF, for example, saw the OIC as a neutral and credible mediator, further emphasizing the organization's unique position in resolving disputes involving Muslim minorities (Al-Ahsan 2004, 12: 2, 139-150).

Building on such experiences, the OIC has worked to institutionalize its commitment to Muslim minorities globally. During its 44th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 2017, the OIC reaffirmed its dedication to safeguarding the rights of Muslim minorities in non-member states. It called on member states to support these communities while respecting national sovereignty. Among the key resolutions were backing peace efforts in the Philippines, addressing the plight of the Rohingya Muslims, and urging Greece to recognize elected Muftis and respect the educational and citizenship rights of its Muslim communities. The session also condemned terrorism and called for increased humanitarian aid to alleviate the suffering of minority populations (Organization of Islamic Cooperation 2017).

Recognizing the limitations of its reach, the OIC has also emphasized the

importance of partnerships with international organizations to effectively address conflicts involving Muslim minorities. This approach is exemplified by the OIC's collaboration with the United Nations. In 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution encouraging greater cooperation with the OIC, particularly in conflict situations related to Muslim communities (United Nations General Assembly 2006). Such partnerships are crucial in contexts where the UN or other regional organizations lack full access or influence. The Philippines provides a compelling example: the OIC's unique relationships with both the Philippine government and the MNLF enabled it to facilitate successful negotiations, which might not have been possible for other international actors (Salah 2011). The OIC's ability to mediate in the Philippines underscores its potential to complement UN efforts rather than compete with them. By leveraging its cultural and religious credibility, the OIC can navigate sensitivities and foster dialogue in ways that are often inaccessible to broader international organizations (Sharqieh 2013).

The evolving realities of the global Muslim population, with significant numbers living in non-member states, demanded that the OIC move beyond its traditional state-centric model. By strengthening its partnerships with international organizations and creating tailored strategies for minority advocacy, the OIC aimed to enhance its relevance and moral authority. The organization's ability to mediate in the Philippines and its advocacy on behalf of the Rohingya demonstrated its potential to act as a bridge between Muslim minorities and the broader international community.

The OIC's decision at the third Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) in 1972 to prepare a statistical index on Muslims living in non-member states marked a pivotal moment in its history. By documenting the conditions of these minorities and urging countries to respect their rights under the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the OIC demonstrated an intent to advocate for marginalized Muslim populations globally (Khan 2002, 22 (2), 351-367). This signaled a shift from its original focus on intergovernmental diplomacy among Muslim-majority states to addressing the realities faced by Muslims living as minorities in non-OIC states.

This shift becomes even more critical when considering the demographic realities of the global Muslim population. India, the Russian Federation, and China host the largest numbers of Muslims outside the OIC, with India projected to have the largest Muslim population globally—300 million—by 2050 (Pew Research Center 2015). This projection underscores a stark reality: a significant portion of the Muslim world resides in non-member states, challenging the OIC to rethink its mandate and strategy for engagement.

The OIC's focus on specific crises further highlights its role in pursuing religious solidarity. For example, the organization has consistently condemned violence and discrimination against Indian Muslims, particularly in the aftermath of events like the Gujarat riots, and has called for immediate government action to protect their rights.

Similarly, the OIC has voiced concerns over the treatment of Muslims in Xinjiang, Southern Thailand, Georgia, and Crimea, emphasizing the need to restore displaced communities' rights and protect their cultural and religious heritage (Organization of Islamic Cooperation 2009). These cases illustrate the OIC's commitment to addressing injustices against Muslims wherever they occur, reinforcing the idea of a global Muslim identity that transcends national boundaries.

Through these efforts, the OIC demonstrates how religious ties can serve as a powerful framework for international cooperation and advocacy. Its work in protecting Muslim minorities reflects a commitment to honoring the bonds of faith and heritage that connect Muslims worldwide, reinforcing a vision of unity that prioritizes shared values and collective well-being above political and territorial divisions.

The question of Muslim minorities within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) reflects a distinctive and layered approach to the concepts of belonging, sovereignty, and role of religion in the global order. The OIC's engagement with these communities offers a prism through which to examine its ontological commitments and political strategies, revealing its efforts to mediate between the universal aspirations of the global Muslim ummah and the territorial demands of the nation-state.

OIC leadership previously explored the possibility of creating a non-state membership category for Muslim minority communities. However, this proposal was rejected by member states, citing its incompatibility with the OIC's intergovernmental nature and what Ihsanoglu referred to as "the lack of a mechanism linking the OIC to these Muslim minority communities" (Kayaoglu 2010). Despite this limitation, the revised OIC Charter mandated the protection of Muslim minority rights, even though these communities lack direct representation within the organization. The decision was justified by invoking the importance of representing the global Muslim community. The revised Charter's mandate to protect Muslim minorities, even without their direct representation, illustrates how the organization constructs a mediated form of representation. This approach allows the OIC to navigate its dual commitments: to transnational Islamic solidarity and to the state system.

To address this gap, the OIC encouraged countries with significant Muslim minority populations to join as observer states, thereby establishing a framework for institutional relationships with these communities, albeit mediated by their respective governments. For example, Thailand joined as an observer in 1998, followed by Russia in 2005, with the Philippines and Sri Lanka requesting observer status in 2008. While this approach provides some representation for Muslim minorities, their voices remain limited and filtered through state-level mediation (Kayaoglu 2010, 67).

Central to the OIC's ontology is its conceptualization of the ummah not as a geographical entity but as a spiritual and moral community transcending territorial borders. Talal A. Daous, Director of the OIC's Department of Muslim Minorities

and Communities, noted that "the dimensions of the minority's problem received particular attention by the international community while establishing human rights standards," situating the OIC's advocacy not only within Islamic norms but also as a response to universalist frameworks of modern human rights (Daous n.d.,). The demographic reality that over one-third of the global Muslim population resides outside OIC member states is not merely a statistical observation but a profound ontological challenge to the nation-state paradigm. For the OIC, these communities are integral extensions of the global Muslim collective, not minorities in the atomized sense. This framing reflects an Islamic epistemology that prioritizes collective well-being and moral interdependence over the isolating tendencies of the modern state system.

However, the OIC's engagement with Muslim minorities is not purely theological. As Daous (n.d) emphasized, "The OIC has engaged in the policy of helping the Muslim minorities to redeem their rights within the fabric of legal constitutional order in those states." This alignment reveals a pragmatic approach, operating within the hegemonic structures of global governance while asserting an alternative ontology rooted in Islamic solidarity. By advocating for the rights of Muslim minorities while respecting state sovereignty, the OIC negotiates between the metaphysical commitments of the ummah and the pragmatic constraints of international relations.

OIC Resolution No. 1/40-MM safeguarding the rights of Muslim communities and minorities in non-OIC member states is worth examining as it employs an interesting rhetorical approach in advocating for the rights and welfare of Muslim communities in non-OIC member states, utilizing references to international law, appeals to justice, and solidarity. The frequent use of the terms such as "discrimination," "repression," and "persecution" reflects a deliberate strategy to frame the challenges faced by these communities as systemic injustices, resonating with theories of structural inequality. The document frequently positions Muslim minorities as marginalized groups subjected to institutionalized power imbalances, requiring international attention and intervention.

The invocation of international frameworks, such as the *UN General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*, is also rhetorically significant. It aligns the OIC's objectives with globally recognized norms, portraying its stance as a continuation of universal human rights principles. This intertextuality can be read within the concept of communicative action, wherein the legitimacy of claims is bolstered by appealing to shared values and norms within the international legal framework. By anchoring its demands in these declarations, the OIC transcends the confines of identity politics, framing its concerns as part of a broader global commitment to justice and equality.

Moreover, the document frequently emphasizes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, as seen in phrases like "in full respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries to which they belong" (OIC 2013, Res. 1/40-

MM). This choice of language acknowledges the geopolitical realities of state-centric power structures while advocating for the inclusion of marginalized voices within those structures. The balance between respecting state sovereignty and pressing for the protection of Muslim communities highlights a pragmatic awareness of international relations and the limitations of supranational advocacy.

The document's moral appeals are evident in its discussion of specific incidents, such as the demolition of the Babri Mosque and the Gujarat riots. By expressing "deep concern at the growing activity against Muslims in India by Hindu extremist groups" and condemning the "environment of fear," the text employs emotive language to underscore the lived experiences of victimized communities. It highlights the social alienation and fear experienced by Muslim minorities. The repeated calls for justice, such as "urges the Indian Government to take effective and immediate measures to end all violence against Muslims," are underpinned by a recognition of the structural violence inherent in state inaction or complicity.

The emphasis on education, described as "a legitimate right of every member of society, without any discrimination," is based on the view that education is a tool for empowerment. By advocating for scholarships, teacher provision, and institutional support, the document highlights the transformative potential of education in challenging systemic inequalities. This aligns with the broader objective of preserving the "Islamic identity" and cultural capital of Muslim minorities, ensuring access to education, and preserving the cultural, social, and symbolic resources necessary for community resilience.

Finally, the document's critique of states like India and Sri Lanka is tempered by a diplomatic tone, as it "urges" governments to take specific actions rather than condemnation. By combining moral appeals with practical recommendations, such as "inviting Islamic NGOs and civil society organizations to contribute," the document bridges the gap between normative ideals and actionable strategies. The document reflects a nuanced approach to social and political dynamics, employing legal frameworks, moral appeals, and pragmatic solutions to advocate for marginalized Muslim communities. The text reveals an interplay between systemic inequalities, cultural preservation, and the Islamic imperative for collective action.

The OIC's advocacy for Muslim minorities engages directly with these constructs, challenging the reductive binaries of secular frameworks by reframing "minority" through a relational ontology. This situates minority struggles within broader historical and political trajectories, allowing the OIC to simultaneously engage with and contest the narratives of the modern state. By embedding its advocacy within an Islamic framework, the OIC critiques the atomizing logic of the modern state while adopting the political language of rights and governance central to the modern project.

This dual positioning highlights the OIC's complex role as both participant in and critic of modernity. The organization's emphasis on cultural preservation and

legal advocacy underscores the liminal space occupied by Muslim minorities—situated between inclusion within the global ummah and marginalization within host societies. This is particularly evident in cases like the Rohingya in Myanmar or Muslims in Western Thrace, where communities face systemic exclusion and geopolitical neglect. Here, the OIC articulates a vision of justice that transcends juridical boundaries, challenging secular liberal frameworks that often reduce minority rights to individualistic concerns divorced from broader systems of cultural and political marginalization.

Despite its aspirations, the OIC's reliance on state actors and alignment with international legal norms reveals the tensions inherent in its position. By invoking principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the organization reinforces the frameworks that constrain its capacity to act decisively for Muslim minorities. Yet, this pragmatic approach also acknowledges the limits of transnational governance in a state-centric global order. In this way, the OIC's advocacy reveals both the strengths of its ontological commitments and the ambiguities of its positioning within the global system.

The OIC's approach to Muslim minorities ultimately reflects an effort to redefine international relations through an Islamic lens. By centering the ummah while engaging with the realities of state sovereignty, the OIC offers a model of governance that is both transnational and rooted in Islamic values. This model challenges the atomizing logic of the nation-state and the secular frameworks underlying contemporary human rights discourse. In its successes and shortcomings, the OIC remains a critical site for understanding how religious solidarity and political pragmatism intersect in the pursuit of justice for marginalized communities.

Conclusion

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) occupies a luminal and transformative space in the global order, reflecting the shifting dynamics of governance, identity, and solidarity in an increasingly interconnected world. As a transnational institution, the OIC embodies the tension between the ethical aspirations of a pan-Islamic identity and the pragmatic constraints of a state-centric international system. It bridges the transcendent ideals of the *ummah* with the realities of geopolitical interests, creating a space where both cooperation and contestation unfold.

In this context, the OIC reflects the broader phenomenon of transnational civil society, wherein diverse communities, religious and political, converge to engage with global challenges. This duality enables the OIC to act as both a unifier and a mediator. On one hand, it invokes the symbolic unity of the *ummah* to articulate a shared moral vision. On the other, it contends with the divergent interests, asymmetries of power, and competing discourses of its member states. These tensions are most apparent in

the OIC's advocacy for issues such as Islamophobia and the protection of Islamic sanctities. While these efforts critique Western-centric paradigms of rights and ethics, they also reveal an ongoing negotiation with the very frameworks they seek to challenge.

What emerges is an institution that destabilizes conventional categories of governance and ethics while generating new possibilities for global engagement. By framing its initiatives around universal principles like justice, dignity, and mutual respect, the OIC positions itself as a bridge between tradition and modernity, challenging the exclusivity of dominant global paradigms. As a site of experimentation and transformation, it reflects the potential for institutions to reimagine global governance through pluralistic and inclusive approaches. Whether the OIC can transcend these constraints to articulate a genuinely alternative vision of global order remains an open question, but its role in redefining the intersections of identity, ethics, and politics marks it as a vital player in shaping the contours of a multipolar world.

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Хибатуалах Бенсаид

Епистемолошка надметања у глобалном управљању: ОИС и концептуализација мањина

Сажетак: Ова студија разматра улогу Организације исламске сарадње (ОИС) у обликовању муслиманских мањина као посебне социополитичке и дискурзивне категорије, као и њене касније напоре у глобалном заступању. С обзиром на то да више од трећине светске муслиманске популације живи ван држава чланица ОИС, ове заједнице се суочавају са системским изазовима, укључујући структурну дискриминацију, културно брисање и политичку маргинализацију. Утемељено у концепту умме, деловање ОИС наглашава транснационалну исламску солидарност, истовремено се суочавајући са структурним ограничењима међународног поретка заснованог на државама. Кроз анализу званичних докумената, декларација и јавних саопштења ОИС, рад открива епистемолошке и идеолошке основе наратива заступања које ова организација промовише. У раду се упоређује комунитаристички приступ ОИС правима мањина са универзалистичким оквиром Уједињених нација, при чему се истичу филозофске и нормативне разлике. Иако ОИС показује значајан потенцијал као посредник и заступник, њено ослањање на државне актере и усклађеност са међународним нормама указују на унутрашње напетости између транснационалне визије и геополитичке стварности глобалног управљања. Ово истраживање доприноси ширем разумевању начина на који се религијски оквири преплићу са савременим политичким структурама, позиционирајући ОИС као истовремено утицајног и ограниченог актера у унапређивању правде, епистемолошког суверенитета и равноправности за маргинализоване муслиманске заједнице.

Кључне речи: Организација исламске сарадње (ОИС), муслиманске мањине, глобално управљање, међувладине организације