

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

MASTER THESIS

**DIALECTICS OF FAITH AND GLOBAL
GOVERNANCE: THE VISION OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION**

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ISTANBUL, 2025

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by

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**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
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İslami birlik kavramı, uzun süredir Müslüman toplumlar içinde tartışmaların odak noktası olmuş ve bu ilahi yükümlülüğün yerine getirilebilmesinin mümkün olup olmadığına dair derin değerlendirmeler yapılmıştır. Bu diyalog, İslami ilkelere dayanan 57 üyeli bir hükümetler arası kuruluş olan İslam İşbirliği Teşkilatı (İİT) gibi kurumların kurulması ve gelişimini önemli ölçüde etkilemiştir. İİT'nin temel misyonu, İslam dünyasının ortak sesini temsil etmek, çıkarlarını korumak ve farklı küresel topluluklar arasında uluslararası barış ve uyumu teşvik etmektir. Bu çalışma, İslamî bir kurumun uluslararası kuruluşlar ekosistemine entegrasyon sürecindeki karmaşık dinamikleri araştırarak, İİT'nin hükümetler arası küresel çerçeve içindeki rolünü nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve meşruiyetini koruyarak İslami birliği uluslararası diplomaside nasıl ilerlettiğini incelemektedir. Kurumsal bir etnografi olarak tasarlanan bu araştırma, uluslararası siyaset alanında İslami idealleri ilerletmenin beraberinde getirdiği zorlukları ve fırsatları aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, İİT'nin uluslararası diplomasi alanındaki konumlanışını incelemek için eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemini kullanarak, İİT tarafından üretilen resmi belgeler, konuşmalar ve raporlar ile uluslararası sistemin aktörleri tarafından ortaya konulan metinleri kapsamlı bir şekilde analiz etmiştir. Bu metinlerdeki dil, temalar ve retorik stratejiler sistematik bir şekilde incelenerek, İİT'nin İslami söylemlerini şekillendiren temel ideolojiler ve dinamikler ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Bu sorulara yanıt arayan çalışma, İİT'yi karakterize eden sürekli diyalektik evrimi ortaya koymanın yanı sıra, İslami birlik, uluslararası

diplomasi ve çağdaş küresel düzende meşruiyet arayışı arasındaki etkileşimlere dair derinlemesine içgörüler sunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hükümetler Arası Kuruluşlar, İslam Dünyası, İslam İşbirliği Teşkilatı (İİT), Küreselleşme, Uluslararasılaşma.



ABSTRACT

DIALECTICS OF FAITH AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: THE VISION OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION

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The concept of Islamic unity has long been a focal point of discourse within Muslim societies, sparking profound deliberations on the feasibility of fulfilling this divine mandate. This dialogue has significantly influenced the establishment and evolution of institutions such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), a 57-member intergovernmental body grounded in Islamic principles. The OIC's primary mission is to represent the collective voice of the Muslim world, safeguard its interests, and promote international peace and harmony among diverse global communities. This study investigates the complex process of integrating an Islamic institution into the broader ecosystem of international organizations, focusing on how the OIC navigates its role as an Islamic institution within the global framework of intergovernmental organizations. It examines the OIC's stances on foundational issues, its commitments, and the strategic narratives it adopts to sustain its legitimacy and advance Islamic unity in international diplomacy. As an organizational ethnography, the research aims to illuminate the challenges and opportunities inherent in advancing Islamic ideals within the realm of international politics. To investigate the OIC's positioning within the realm of international diplomacy, this study employed a critical discourse analysis methodology toward a comprehensive examination of official documents, speeches, and reports produced by the OIC and proponents of the international system. By systematically analyzing the language, themes, and rhetorical strategies present in these texts, the study reveals the underlying ideologies and dynamics that inform the

OIC's Islamic discourses. In probing these questions, this inquiry not only revealed the ongoing dialectical evolution that characterizes the OIC but also provided nuanced insights into the interplay between Islamic unity, international diplomacy, and the quest for legitimacy in the contemporary global landscape.

Keywords: Globalization, Intergovernmental Organizations, Internationality, Muslim World, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ÖZ	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS	xii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. The Formation and History of the OIC.....	7
1.2. Methodological Framework.....	17
1.3. Chapter Overview and Thematic Structure.....	28
CHAPTER II RELIGION IN GLOBAL POLITICS	31
2.1. Introduction.....	31
2.2. Bridging Disciplinary Divides: Sociological and Anthropological Perspectives on International Relations.....	33
2.3. Religion in Global Politics and Secular International Relations.....	37
2.4. The Subaltern of International Relations.....	43
2.5. Reform in Focus: What Needs Fixing?.....	47
2.6. Identifying the Autochthonous and the Replica.....	52
2.7. Conclusion.....	58
CHAPTER III THE VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY	60
3.1. Introduction.....	60
3.2. Until the Liberation of Jerusalem: A Moral and Political Nexus.....	63
3.3. The Category of Muslim Minorities.....	72
3.4. The OIC’s Peacebuilding Endeavors: Kashmir and the Rohingya.....	81
3.5. Conclusion.....	90
CHAPTER IV ADVOCACY, DIPLOMACY AND CREDIBILITY: LITMUS TESTS FOR A “MULTIPLE IDENTITY ORGANIZATION”	92
4.1. Introduction.....	92
4.2. Exploring Organizational Identity as a Sociological Variable.....	93
4.3. Human Rights in Islam: Complementing or Challenging the Universal Declaration?.....	98

4.4. Bridging Gender Equality Frameworks: From CEDAW to OPAAW.....	112
4.5. Legitimizing the Claim of Islamophobia.....	133
4.6. Conclusion.....	149
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION	151
REFERENCES.....	153
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	189



LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1. Key OIC Summits on Palestine	66
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LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Powers Act Against Women
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CDHRI	Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
CEP	Commission of Eminent Persons
CFM	Council of Foreign Minister
Charter-1972	Charter of the Islamic Conference
Charter-2008	Charter of the Islamic Cooperation Countries
CRCI	Covenant of the Rights of the Child in Islam
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
IBU	The Islamic Broadcasting Union
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICIC	The Islamic Committee of the International Crescent
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IPHRC	Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission
IR	International Relations
ISESCO	The Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
MAPIM	Malaysian Consultative Council for Islamic Organizations
OHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OIC-IPHRC	OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission
OPAAW	OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women
PIL	Public International Law
PLO	The Palestine Liberation Organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SESRIC	Statistical, Economic, and Social Research and Training for Islamic
STIO	The Science, Technology, and Innovation Organization
TYPoA	Ten-Year Program of Action
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations

UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WDO	Women Development Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
WTI	World Trade Institute



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the past, research on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has heavily centered on economic collaboration among its member states, including trade agreements, poverty alleviation efforts, and social development projects. Scholars analyzed how effective the OIC has been in fostering economic solidarity and addressing developmental disparities among its members. Other studies have examined the OIC's role in shaping collective diplomatic responses to key issues affecting the Muslim world, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sectarianism, Islamophobia, and regional security concerns, as well as the OIC's approach to human rights. Researchers often investigate how the OIC navigates addressing issues such as women's rights, minority protections, and religious freedoms in Muslim-majority nations.

In Jean-Pierre Chanteau's discussion in his chapter "*Do Organizations Have a Purpose? The Symbolic Constructivism Test*" from Mary Godwyn's *Research Handbook on the Sociology of Organizations*, the evolution of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) can be framed sociologically as a shift in focus from asking, "*What is the organization's ultimate goal?*" to exploring, "*How are its priorities formed, articulated, and implemented?*" This perspective highlights the symbolic articulation between the conceptual representations driving the OIC such as Islamic values, visions of unity, and solidarity as well as and their concrete manifestation in its governance frameworks, advocacy strategies, and diplomatic practices. Chanteau's analysis emphasizes that this articulation is not deterministic but decisive. For the OIC, it represents the social pattern that distinguishes it as an autonomous entity within the international system, despite being rooted in a complex socio-political and religious ecosystem. This dialectic is evident in how the OIC balances its commitment to Islamic unity and solidarity with the practical challenges of operating within a state-centric international order (2016, 91).

Such an approach also raises deeper questions about how the OIC's *raison d'être* guides its strategic and symbolic decisions, including its advocacy for Muslim minorities and its broader engagement with global governance structures. This lens allows for a nuanced understanding of the OIC as both a symbolic and operational actor, striving to reconcile its foundational Islamic ideals with the demands of legitimacy and effectiveness in the contemporary global landscape.

Salim Farrar argues that the leading authorities of public international appear either oblivious or indifferent to the OICs existence, arguing that it is perhaps unsurprising that the organisation, explicitly rooted in religious and cultural identity and originating from the post-colonial Third World, remains on the periphery of mainstream Public International Law (PIL) scholarship. For him, the foundational frameworks of PIL were shaped by colonial dynamics that distinguished between what was regarded as "universal and civilized" and what was labeled "particular and uncivilized." These early principles of PIL were not merely tools of international governance but instruments of power intended to subjugate colonized populations, guiding them toward a Western notion of "secular enlightenment." This framework often excluded and marginalized worldviews that did not align with European secular or Christian rationalities, further reinforced by an underlying assumption that such perspectives required transformation rather than engagement. (2014: 788-89)

Islamic approaches, in particular, have frequently been positioned within this framework as non-compliant with, or even antagonistic to, the secular aspirations of PIL. Islamic legal and moral perspectives are often viewed with suspicion, associated with security concerns or political instability. Consequently, the OIC is frequently seen through a reductionist lens, as a religiously insular body whose priorities and principles stand in contrast to the secular norms underpinning PIL. Its role and pronouncements are thus often deemed irrelevant to PIL's operation and progress, analogous to those of the Vatican or other religious bodies whose declarations, while valued within their own spheres, are largely seen as inconsequential within secular legal frameworks. (Farrar: 790-91)

This marginalization of the OIC within PIL reflects a broader tendency to classify issues within its purview, such as the protection of Muslim rights globally and the

promotion of Islamic solidarity, as “religious” matters rather than “legal” issues of universal significance. This classification reinforces a separation between the religious and the secular within PIL, implicitly suggesting that the OIC’s contributions lack the objectivity and rationality required for serious legal inquiry. Consequently, the organization is excluded from rigorous academic engagement within PIL, resulting in a significant gap in the scholarship and a lack of nuanced understanding of how the OIC functions as an actor within the global legal order. This gap not only overlooks the OIC’s impact but also perpetuates a monolithic view of PIL, resistant to pluralist perspectives and the inclusion of non-Western, particularly Islamic, viewpoints in the global legal discourse.

The space occupied by the OIC within this global legal order can be further contextualized through the insights of Rafaella Del Sarto in *Contentious Borders in the Middle East and North Africa: Context and Concepts*. Del Sarto examines how colonial interventions in the Middle East imposed artificial borders that disrupted long standing social, cultural, and religious networks. It notes that “the European colonial powers exported the Westphalian concept of the state to the region,” imposing rigid territorial definitions on a region where identities were historically fluid and overlapping (2017, 769). This transplantation of the Westphalian model resulted in a mismatch between imposed borders and the social realities of the region, as colonial powers “manipulated ethnic and religious divisions for their own interests,” creating multi-ethnic or multi-confessional states where the legitimacy of authority remained contested (Ibid, 773).

Del Sarto also emphasizes how the colonial imposition of borders failed to account for the transnational identities of the region. It describes how pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism arose as reactions to colonial boundaries, as these ideologies sought to “transcend colonial borders” and assert a collective identity (Ibid., 775). According to Del Sarto, the colonial imposition of the Westphalian state system not only redefined borders but also profoundly reshaped identities, creating enduring tensions between imposed political frameworks and traditional communal affiliations. This colonial legacy remains central to understanding political forms in the Middle East, where states grapple with the legacies of contested authority, fragmented territorial control, and persistent legitimacy deficits.

Bernard Lewis presented similar arguments in positing that the overlapping and sometimes conflicting identities in the Middle East contribute significantly to political instability and conflict, with allegiances often transcending the artificial borders imposed by colonial powers. Western attempts to impose homogenous national or democratic frameworks in the Middle East have often failed to resonate with communities whose primary loyalties lie with religious or ethnic identities that may not align with national borders (Lewis, 1994: 24-43). The OIC's proclaimed mission of fostering solidarity among Muslim-majority states and representing Muslims globally must therefore navigate this complex landscape of local, national, and supranational loyalties. Its efforts to address issues such as Islamophobia, religious freedoms, and the rights of Muslim minorities are shaped by this tension, as it seeks to challenge the secular orientation of PIL and advocate for a pluralistic approach that accommodates Islamic perspectives.

Since its establishment, the OIC has been a subject of rigorous scrutiny, emerging as a focal point for pivotal debates in Islamic International Law and political theory. Critics, such as Shahram Akbarzadeh (2018, 79), contend that the OIC grapples with an inherent schism between its proclaimed ideals of communal unity and the divergent national interests of its member states. This dissonance raises pressing questions about the OIC's effectiveness in achieving its mission of fostering unity among Islamic nations. Moreover, it compels us to consider whether Islamic international politics can emerge as a viable alternative within the constraints of what Wael Hallaq (2014, 15-16) describes as "modernity's moral predicament," a framework that questions the relevance and application of Islamic principles in contemporary political discourse.

Examining these tensions invites critical inquiries that are foundational to understanding the OIC's role in the global arena. First, what challenges do the OIC's intergovernmental frameworks present in realizing its foundational values? This question probes the inherent conflicts that potentially undermine the OIC's mission and foster dissonance within the broader Islamic identity. Second, how do continuities and changes in the OIC's legal terminologies, resolutions, and practices illuminate the hypothesized tensions within the organization's identity? This line of inquiry aims to analyze the evolution of the OIC's legal and operational frameworks, considering how these changes reflect broader shifts in both the international landscape and the internal

dynamics of member states. It delves into the complexities of identity construction in a transnational context, revealing how various political, economic, and social factors influence the OIC's development and its ability to maintain coherence among diverse member states.

The contemporary relevance of these issues is starkly underscored by significant events such as the Kuala Lumpur Summit of 2019. This summit brought together 52 countries and featured prominent leaders, including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. While Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the host of the summit, downplayed the formation of a new Islamic bloc, he emphasized the pressing need for innovative solutions to the multifaceted challenges confronting the Muslim world. Mohd Azmi Abdul Hamid, President of the Malaysian Consultative Council for Islamic Organizations (MAPIM), expressed optimism that the Kuala Lumpur summit would foster greater unity among Muslims and stimulate economic development. The discussions and outcomes of this summit illuminated the complexities inherent in forging unity among diverse Islamic nations, each with distinct political agendas, economic realities, and cultural contexts. In response to the summit, the OIC Secretary-General emphasized the necessity for Islamic nations to prioritize deliberations within the OIC framework, particularly during a time characterized by global conflict and rising Islamophobia.

The central problem at hand lies in the OIC's capacity to act as a coherent and effective agent of unity within a fragmented Muslim world, where diverse political, economic, and cultural interests intersect. The OIC's institutional logic, grounded in the rhetoric of Islamic solidarity, faces the inherent challenge of reconciling the pluralities of its member states, each shaped by distinct historical trajectories, regional allegiances, and local power dynamics. The question, then, is not merely about the OIC's ability to form connections among these diverse entities, but rather the extent to which it can forge a collective subjectivity that transcends the narrow confines of state-centric interests and articulates a unified Muslim vision within the broader geopolitical framework. Moreover, studies must interrogate the very possibility of such an institution operating within the constraints of modern international legal paradigms, which are profoundly shaped by secular, state-based models of governance. In this context, how does the OIC negotiate its role within a global order that privileges

Western forms of diplomacy and international law? To what degree can it challenge the epistemic boundaries of secularism and law, while simultaneously maintaining its relevance and authority as a representative body of the Muslim world? These are the critical questions that call for a deeper reflection on the agency of the OIC, its limits, and the ideological tensions that underpin its efforts to bridge the gap between Islamic ideals and the pragmatic demands of international relations.

In pursuing this inquiry, the study will particularly focus on two primary objectives. First, it will explore the continuities and changes in the OIC's legal terminologies and resolutions to identify patterns in its organizational identity. This exploration will involve purposive sampling of key documents, including resolutions from major summits, declarations, and legal texts that articulate the OIC's operational framework and aspirations. By examining these texts, the research seeks to unveil the evolving narrative of the OIC, shedding light on how it articulates its mission and the underlying principles that guide its actions.

Second, this research will present a socio-historical analysis of the OIC's evolution by situating it within its historical context. This analysis will examine the OIC's foundational principles and adaptations through case studies drawn from its key operational areas, conferences, and activities. By analyzing key historical documents, meeting records, and scholarly critiques, this research will shed light on a part of the socio-political dynamics shaping its policies and practices, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how the OIC seeks to balance its Islamic ideals with the practical realities of international politics.

By engaging with these themes, this research aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of the OIC's role in promoting Islamic unity and addressing the challenges faced by "the Muslim world" in the 21st century. Through an examination of its historical roots, contemporary relevance, and potential future directions, this study hopes to illuminate the complexities surrounding the ontology of the OIC by investigating the interplay between ideals and realities within the organization. This study will offer valuable insights into the ongoing quest for unity in the Muslim imagination. Through this multifaceted approach, this research aims to contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse surrounding Islamic unity and the role of the

OIC in contemporary international relations. It will endeavor to highlight the intricacies of iorganizational identity formation within the OIC, the challenges it faces in achieving its objectives, and the implications of its evolving frameworks for the future of this Islamic cooperation.

1.1. The Formation and History of the OIC

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (formerly Organization of the Islamic Conference) occupies a unique global role as it serves to function as a collective platform for the interests of 57 sovereign nation-states. As the second-largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations (UN) founded in 1945, the OIC emerged in 1969 in response to the arson attack on Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem,¹ at a time of heightened marginalization, underdevelopment, and cultural suppression for the Muslim world. This crisis spurred the need for a unified pan-Islamic body, leading to the OIC's establishment with the mission to protect Islamic holy sites and serve as a voice for Muslims. The organization's initial emphasis emphasizes the preservation of spiritual, religious, social, and economic values among member states, while the 1974 Charter extended its mission, advocating for cooperation across political, economic, social, cultural, scientific, and humanitarian spheres. As will be shown later in the study, the Charter implicitly unveiled an overarching impetus to formulate an alternative normative grammar of international engagement, one firmly anchored in Islamic ethical imperatives rather than the premises of secular neoliberal rationalities. By foregrounding collective solidarity and socio-moral responsibility as essential pillars, it reasserted Islamic modes of belonging and dialogue against the universalizing logic of dominant global orders. The rhetoric of the document emphasized aspirations of an "Islamic Common Market" with the cultivation of intra-ummah unity and cultural preservation, the text endeavored to demarcate a public sphere wherein moral commitments guide political, social, and economic practice. This orientation proposes that the Islamic community, rooted in

¹ On the morning of August 21, 1969, Denis Michael Rohan, an Australian tourist, set fire to the Al-Aqsa Mosque using kerosene, which led to the destruction of the intricately designed 12th-century minbar known as the minbar of Saladin. Rohan was arrested two days later and pleaded insanity during his trial. Ultimately, he was deported from Israel, and his actions significantly heightened tensions surrounding the occupation of Jerusalem and questions on the safeguarding of religious sites.

Islamic heritage, could potentially actively negotiate modern complexities and reconfigure transnational relations on its own terms.

The formation of 1969 was shaped by the political and ideological positioning of key leaders such as King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, King Hassan II of Morocco, President Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, and President Anwar Sadat of Egypt. King Faisal, as the custodian of Islam's holy sites, led the push for pan-Islamic unity, motivated by both religious duty and geopolitical strategy. King Hassan II served as a bridge between Arab and African Muslim states, facilitating broader regional collaboration. Bourguiba, despite his secularism, viewed the OIC as a platform for advancing his modernist agenda while fostering Muslim solidarity. Sadat's Egypt, with its central role in Arab nationalism and the Palestinian cause, provided political legitimacy to the OIC. These leaders were positioned to act as mediators between local and global political forces, balancing religious unity with national interests in a post-colonial, Cold War context. The OIC thus emerged not just as a religious body but as a strategic response to the geopolitical challenges facing the Muslim world.

Headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, with regional offices in New York, Geneva, Brussels, Baghdad, Kabul, and Jakarta, the OIC's stated objectives are broad, encompassing economic collaboration, cultural exchange, political solidarity, and human rights advocacy, with a particular emphasis on issues such as Islamophobia, the rights of Muslim minorities, and regional conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The organization operates through a complex institutional structure, which includes key governing bodies such as the Islamic Summit, the Council of Foreign Ministers, and the Executive Committee. These bodies serve to set policy agendas, guide decision-making, and oversee the implementation of resolutions. Furthermore, specialized organs such as the International Islamic Court of Justice and the Independent Permanent Commission of Human Rights complement the governing bodies, while the General Secretariat acts as the operational arm, coordinating the day-to-day activities of the OIC.

The General Secretariat is divided into specialized departments that oversee areas such as Political Affairs (focused on conflict resolution and diplomatic engagement), Economic Affairs (promoting trade cooperation, investment, and poverty alleviation),

Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs (addressing the protection of Muslim populations in conflict zones), and Cultural, Scientific, and Social Affairs (fostering educational exchanges and scientific collaboration). To support its long-term goals, the OIC works in collaboration with specialized institutions like the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), which focus on development, education, and socio-cultural initiatives. In addition, the Committee of Permanent Representatives and other subsidiary organs ensure ongoing involvement from member states.

The Majlis of Fiqh, or International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), represents a key site within the OIC for the construction of an "Islamic intergovernmental" framework, where religious legal thought intersects with the practicalities of modern governance. Established following the call by King Khalid bin Abdulaziz to address contemporary challenges through Islamic principles, the Academy brings together jurists and scholars from across the Muslim world to articulate legal responses grounded in Islamic jurisprudence. Its function extends beyond the preservation of tradition, acting as a dynamic institution where Islamic law engages directly with global political, economic, and social realities.

In this context, the IIFA serves not only as a repository of religious knowledge but as a space for negotiating the agency of Islamic governance within an intergovernmental system. By producing legal rulings that address the complexities of modern life that range from human rights to economic development, the Academy articulates how Islamic law can be applied to contemporary political structures. It thus plays a critical role in shaping the OIC's collective legal and political identity, offering a forum where Islamic legal norms are both reaffirmed and reinterpreted in response to the challenges of the globalized world. The IIFA's role, then, is not merely advisory but constitutes an active site for the ongoing negotiation of what it means for the OIC to be an Islamic organization within the broader international order.

Nirvana Ahmad, in her 2023 study, argues that the OIC operates within a framework shaped by a distinctive blend of religious and geopolitical discourses. Central to the OIC's identity is its aspiration for pan-Islamic unity, as articulated in its Charter, which emphasizes justice, mutual respect, and good neighborliness to promote international

peace and harmony (Ahmad, 4). This mission positions the OIC as the primary institutional embodiment of Islamic values in the international arena.

Ahmad highlights the OIC's religious framework as a defining feature, noting its reliance on Islamic teachings and values to inform its mediation and conflict resolution efforts. She points out that culturally sensitive mediation approaches are central to the OIC's strategies, given the prevalence of ethno-religious conflicts among its member states. These approaches aim to leverage shared heritage and collective identity to address disputes in a manner that resonates with the cultural and spiritual contexts of the region (Ibid., 28-36).

Despite these ideals, Ahmad critiques the OIC's structural and ideological shortcomings, which she identifies as significant impediments to its effectiveness. She notes the lack of a unified ideological compass among member states, coupled with the politicization of their individual interests, which often undermines the organization's credibility as a mediator. Additionally, the absence of enforceable mechanisms for conflict resolution limits its capacity to ensure compliance with agreements or resolutions (Ahmad, 13-14). These challenges, Ahmad concludes, complicate the OIC's dual role as both a mediator and a forum for geopolitical contestation.

Despite its broad mandate and considerable resources, the OIC's effectiveness within international legal and diplomatic arenas remains an open question. This chapter will question whether an organization like the OIC can truly foster unity among its diverse member states, especially given that national interests often outweigh collective aspirations. Through a preliminary discussion of how the OIC's foundational ideals of Islamic unity, solidarity, and the protection of Muslim interests are woven into its institutional framework, this chapter will also evaluate the degree to which the OIC can overcome both external marginalization in public international law and internal discord among its members. Ultimately, this exploration will reveal the complex interplay between the OIC's Islamic principles and the pragmatic demands of international politics, highlighting the opportunities and constraints it faces in shaping global discourse.

a. The Idea of the Ummah

In Ovamir Anjum's paper "Conjuring Sovereignty" on how the "Constitution" of Medina became an Oracle of Modern Statehood", he explores how the concept of the ummah, or the global Muslim community, has historically grounded itself in prophetic and scriptural interpretations that shape the collective Muslim worldview. He writes: "Although the legal institutions of postcolonial Egypt and much of the Arab world had been reconstituted along the lines of Napoleonic civil code in the 1940s, Islamic political discourse remained encumbered by claims in which the nation, the umma, was defined by faith rather than territorial boundaries and lacked a notion of secular citizenship and sovereignty." (2024, 140)

Frederick Denny (1975, 69-70) argues that in passages that describe the community of the Prophet, Islam is epitomized as a world-historical movement patterned after the Abrahamic ideal. At its definitive Qur'anic stage, this community represents the culmination of divine guidance, blending piety, intention, and collective action. In his view, references in the Islamic tradition to the community played a pivotal role in the evolution of the term *ummah*. Over time, *ummah* came to signify Islam itself, reflecting an intrinsic association between the faith and the community it cultivated, wherein the meaning retains a broader, dynamic meaning, encompassing both the doctrinal maturity of the faith and its embodiment as a living, organic community of shared purpose and practice.

For many Muslims, as Anjum points out, the 2011 Arab uprisings exemplified the ummah's most recent evolving significance, where the imagination of young Muslims was emboldened by the idea of the *ummah*, the global community of Muslims (Anjum, "Who Wants the Caliphate?"). The persistence of such visions can perhaps be explained by Abdullah Al-Ahsan who argued that nationalism, rooted in European secular thought, is an inadequate basis for supreme loyalty and struggles even in the West. He critiqued nationalism for lacking "any mechanism to maintain an organic relationship between freedom, individual responsibility, and morality" and noted that it has displaced the Islamic *ummah* as the supreme loyalty for Muslims, largely because "Muslims themselves have not been able to adjust to the developments and discoveries in Europe". Instead, he advocates for fundamental Islamic values as a stronger foundation for *ummatic* loyalty, encompassing national identity within a

broader hierarchy of secular identities. Achieving this, he contends, requires Muslim intellectuals to decide whether their supreme loyalty lies with the *ummah* or with European civilization (Moten, 1993: 95). The OIC occupies a peculiar position within the global order, presenting itself as a beacon of Islamic solidarity while navigating the fractured realities of the “Muslim world”. Its invocation of “Islamic values” is a translation of moral principles into the language of state sovereignty and international law, a process shaped by a global legal order rooted in colonial histories, which marginalizes non-secular frameworks and renders Islamic political articulations peripheral.

The OIC’s engagement with global governance, whether addressing Islamophobia or advocating for Muslim rights, is constrained by a secular juridical imaginary as will be demonstrated in later chapters. These counterpositionings illuminate the tensions inherent in reconciling Islamic ideals with the structures of a secular international order. The OIC thus operates as a site of ongoing negotiation, revealing the contested boundaries of religion, law, and politics in the modern world.

Reflecting this ongoing tension, the OIC has sought to expand its influence beyond symbolic advocacy. Through initiatives such as the OIC Plan of Action for Cooperation with Central Asia and partnerships with institutions like the World Bank, the organization has broadened its focus to include socio-economic development and human rights protection. The 2008 Charter revision at the Eleventh Islamic Summit in Dakar marked a further shift, as the OIC declared its commitment to good governance, human rights, and sustainable development. Yet, despite these progressive aims, the OIC struggles to maintain a “consensus,” one ostensibly modeled on the classical Islamic vision of an *ummah* bound by normative agreement (*ijmā’*). From a sociological vantage, the OIC occupies an interstitial domain wherein scriptural and juristic traditions that emphasize communal concord intersect with the pragmatic demands of sovereign state interests. While the chartered aspirations toward unity remains potent, the OIC’s structural dependence on disparate national delegations renders the actualization of faith rooted unanimity elusive. Consequently, the principle of *ijmā’* is refracted through the institutional logics of state based diplomacy, leading to only partial or fragmented alignments, which, in turn, become normalized as sustainable compromises within the modern intergovernmental framework.

The OIC's multifaceted evolved mission spans diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and advocacy for peace. Its enduring focus on the Palestinian issue, alongside efforts to mediate conflicts in Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Central African Republic, illustrates its role as an international mediator. However, as Robert Cox (1987, 2) suggests, the post-Cold War shift from a bipolar to a multipolar world has presented complex challenges for organizations like the OIC. The evolving landscape, marked by ethnic conflicts, economic disruptions, and cultural demands, has required the OIC to navigate these dynamics while remaining in line with the specific demands of Muslim communities worldwide.

The OIC's actions reflect its expanded role as defender of marginalized Muslims, such as the Rohingya in Myanmar, Muslims in Kashmir, and Uyghurs in China.² Anjum (2019) highlighted the persistent sentiment among Muslims for a symbolic caliphate, underscoring a sense of cultural and historical loss that resonates across the Islamic world. Mona Hassan explored how memories of the caliphate have shaped Muslim identity across centuries, especially after critical events like the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 1258 and the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. These moments catalyzed both mourning and reinterpretation, embedding the caliphate as a symbol of collective memory and aspiration (Hasan, 2017).

Central to understanding the mid-20th century resurgence of such Pan-Islamist sentiments and ideals is attributed to by some, to the emergence of influential Islamic thinkers like Sayyid Qutb and Syed Abul A'la Maududi, who critiqued Western secular culture for its perceived moral decadence and its potential to erode Islamic values. Qutb, disillusioned by Western societal norms, warned of cultural contamination undermining Muslim societies, while Maududi emphasized the loss of morality and ethics in Western political and cultural systems (Qutb 1990, 145-55; Maududi 1980, 26-8). Both advocated for a return to Islamic principles as a means of

² The OIC routinely addressed the situations of marginalized Muslim communities, including the Rohingya in Myanmar, Muslims in Kashmir, and Uyghurs in China. In 2017, the OIC's Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission condemned human rights violations against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Regarding the Uyghurs, the OIC initially raised concerns in December 2018 but later, in March 2019, issued a report praising China for its treatment of Muslim citizens. In 1994, the OIC established a Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir to coordinate its efforts regarding the dispute. The OIC continues to reaffirm its solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir and calls for the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions on the matter.

societal reform. Through accessible language and widespread translation, their ideas transcended regional boundaries, shaping transnational Islamic thought and emphasizing the importance of moral and cultural renewal in the face of Western influence.

This idea is furthered by Salman Sayyid (2014, 113), who describes the concept of an “unsettled diaspora” for Muslims operating within the Westphalian world system, where the limitations of sovereignty and nationalism often restrict expressions of Muslim identity within a predominantly secular global order. Sayyid explores these tensions, highlighting the distinct identity of the Muslim diaspora as it contends with the Eurocentric and colonial origins of the current international system.

This perspective is closely relevant to the formation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The OIC emerged in response to the marginalization of Muslim-majority nations within global power structures largely shaped by Western-centric norms. The OIC sought to create a platform for Muslim solidarity and cooperation, challenging the dominance of Eurocentric systems by fostering a collective Islamic voice on political, cultural, and economic issues.

The ideological structure underpinning the OIC is better understood as what Fiona Adamson noted as contrasting sharply with the global liberal framework that often dominates international governance. Her essay argues that studies of norm diffusion in IR have disproportionately focused on liberal actors, neglecting non-Western perspectives such as political Islam. Adamson critiques the tendency to examine norms in isolation from their broader systemic context, proposing instead that norms are embedded within global structures of political opportunities, which evolve over time. Competing ideological frameworks, like liberalism and political Islam, represent distinct “lifeworlds” shaped by discursive, institutional, and geopolitical resources. Adamson also highlights that normative contestation in global politics arises not from a “clash of civilizations” but from differing opportunity structures and suggests research should explore how these ideological competitions can foster constructive debate within an emerging international public sphere rather than conflict, which expands the IR research agenda to encourage attention to non-liberal actors and systemic-level influences (2005: 182-83).

This ideological friction is further complicated by the influence of Western secular norms on state formation in Muslim-majority regions, which sought to relegate religion to the private sphere and imposed strict state control over religious institutions (Roussos 2020, 263). As Sotiris Roussos points out, this secular model has failed to establish credible social contracts, fueling discontent and spurring Islamic movements that seek to fill the void left by ineffective secular states.

The study of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) like the OIC benefits from the insights provided by Barnett and Finnemore on the social and political forces that shape the actions and identities of international organizations. While Barnett and Finnemore underscore that IGOs are not mere bureaucratic bodies, they also emphasize that such organizations operate within a broader framework of global power dynamics and political ideologies. In the case of the OIC, these dynamics are particularly complex, as the organization must navigate internal divisions among its diverse member states while also responding to external pressures from global actors. For example, the OIC's role in advocating for Muslim rights, addressing regional conflicts, and pursuing socio-economic development is shaped by the historical and cultural contexts of its member states, which are often at odds with the dominant Western political and economic norms (Barnett & Finnemore 2004, 3-4).

Barnett and Finnemore also suggest that the organizational structures of IGOs are deeply influenced by broader social forces, and in the case of the OIC, these forces include a shared sense of Islamic identity, regional security concerns, and historical legacies of colonialism and sectarianism. As such, the OIC is not merely a tool for diplomatic or humanitarian intervention, but an institution deeply embedded within the social and political fabric of the Islamic world. This embeddedness complicates the OIC's efforts to present a unified front on issues like human rights, governance, and conflict mediation, as member states' divergent interests and political ideologies often prevent the organization from taking decisive action.

George Marcus' (1995) concept of multi-sited ethnography further enriches this analysis by offering a methodological framework for studying IGOs that accounts for the interconnectedness of global actors in a digital age. Marcus argues that traditional ethnographic methods, which focus on studying specific, geographically bounded

sites, must be adapted to capture the increasingly fluid and dispersed nature of global interactions. The OIC, as an IGO that bridges both physical and digital spaces, illustrates this shift. Its diplomatic initiatives, humanitarian work, and advocacy are no longer limited to physical meetings or summits but are also shaped by digital media, online platforms, and transnational networks of solidarity. This multi-sited perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of how the OIC navigates its role in global politics and how its influence extends across both the digital and physical realms. By employing this approach, researchers can better capture the complexity of the OIC's identity, which is continuously negotiated in both offline and online contexts.

Together, the work of Barnett, Finnemore and Marcus provides a valuable lens through which to understand the OIC's operation as an international actor. It highlights how the OIC's activities cannot be understood solely through the lens of state-based diplomacy or governance. Rather, its organizational identity is continuously shaped by a range of social, cultural, and geopolitical factors that are both internal and external to the Muslim world. Moreover, the organization's increasingly digital presence further complicates traditional understandings of diplomacy, revealing the need for new methodological tools that can account for the dispersed, multi-sited nature of contemporary international relations.

In analyzing these dynamics, this study will draw on Stuart Albert and David Whetten's framework on organizational identity and identification, which provides a valuable lens for studying the OIC (1985: 263–95). Their work emphasizes three key aspects of organizational identity: centrality, distinctiveness, and endurance, which help explain how organizations define themselves and maintain relevance over time. For the OIC, this framework helps analyze how it positions itself as a unifying body for the global Muslim ummah in (1) emphasizing shared Islamic values (centrality), (2) distinguishing itself from Western-led institutions (distinctiveness), and (3) preserving its identity amid shifting geopolitical dynamics (endurance).

This framework will provide insight into the OIC's challenges as an Islamic-based organization operating within an intergovernmental structure. In contrast to contemporary political theories advocating for world government, the OIC represents

an attempt to assert an Islamic voice within a secular international system, grappling with the notion of an identity crisis (Al-Ahsan, 1988: 3).

Thus, the OIC's journey from its origins as a response to the Al-Aqsa Mosque arson to its current role as an influential, albeit limited, organization underscores both its accomplishments and challenges. The organization's efforts to foster Islamic unity, mediate conflicts, promote socio-economic development, and defend human rights demonstrate its commitment to an Islamic-based framework in an era where secular, state-centered governance predominates. The OIC's journey encapsulates an ongoing attempt to bridge the historical ideals of the ummah with the pragmatic demands of a secular global order.

1.2. Methodological Framework

In examining the shifting landscapes of social reality, this study employs a qualitative research strategy to capture digital data as both an archive and a process, this approach acknowledges the unique epistemological value of digital artifacts and interactions, offering a more holistic view of contemporary social phenomena.

Alan Bryman defines some research strategies as a general approach to conduct social research. Broadly speaking, two principal research strategies exist: qualitative and quantitative. Each strategy is typically linked to distinct epistemological and ontological perspectives. For instance, Bryman suggests that a quantitative research strategy often employs a deductive approach, perceiving social reality as an objective and external phenomenon. This perspective aligns with the principles of the natural sciences and positivism. In contrast, qualitative research emphasizes an inductive approach, challenges the applicability of natural science norms to social inquiry, and conceptualizes social reality as a dynamic and evolving construct (Bryman 2004, 19–20).

This study adopts a qualitative research strategy to derive broader insights from specific observations, thereby allowing patterns and themes to emerge organically from the data. Such an approach is particularly well-suited for exploring the complexity of social phenomena. The interpretive dimension underscores the study's

epistemological stance, acknowledging the fundamental differences between the subject matter of social sciences, such as people and institutions, and that of the natural sciences. This perspective emphasizes understanding the subjective basis and meanings that are attributed to social phenomena (Bryman 2004, 9–17).

In terms of ontology, the constructionist perspective adopted here views social realities as dynamic entities that are continually shaped and reshaped by social actors. This perspective contrasts with objectivism, which posits that social phenomena and their meanings exist independently of human influence. Despite criticisms of qualitative research for being impressionistic and subjective due to its reliance on the researcher's judgment to determine significance, its inherent characteristics render it the most appropriate choice for this study. This strategy facilitates a nuanced exploration of social processes, aligning with the research objectives and providing a framework for understanding the fluid nature of social reality (Bryman 2004, 284).

Traditionally, ethnographic authenticity has been established through the immersive engagement of researchers within a specific field site, with a strong emphasis on direct, face-to-face observation. However, the increasing prevalence of digitally mediated forms of data presents significant challenges to this conventional approach, as it constrains the ability to capture the full spectrum of material, potentially compromising the authenticity of ethnographic narratives. Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that the integration of digital content into ethnographic research can enhance the validity and contextual depth of findings (Akemu and Abdelnour 2018, 2–3).

The emergence of digital technologies and globalization necessitates a paradigmatic shift from the traditional ethnographic focus on a single, geographically bounded site toward an approach characterized by “multi-sited ethnography,” which encompasses the study of interlinked digital and physical settings, or “chains, paths, and conjunctions” (Marcus 1995, 105). Contemporary organizations, marked by physical fragmentation, inaccessibility, and discreet operations, pose unique methodological challenges for ethnographers. Consequently, researchers must transcend the assumption that digital interactions are mere extensions of physical experiences, acknowledging instead that digital and physical interactions generate distinct forms of

data with unique epistemological value. The prevailing tendency to regard digital data as an auxiliary element within research design rather than as a central analytic focus constrains the ability to adequately account for the complexity and fluidity inherent in organizational life (Akemu and Abdelnour 2018, 4–5).

Onajomo Akemu and Samer Abdelnour advocate for a reconceptualization of ethnographic practices that positions digital data as both “archive” (static, analyzable records) and “process” (dynamic, unfolding interactions). This dual approach allows ethnographers to engage more comprehensively with the phenomena under study, thus better capturing the authenticity and polyvocality of organizational life (2018, 5). By embracing this reconceptualization, ethnographic inquiry can transcend traditional epistemic boundaries, accommodating the intricate interplay between digital and physical forms of presence.

In contemporary organizational contexts, digital interactions are facilitated through various technological interfaces, including publications, communiqués, journals, conference proceedings, press releases, and speeches. Scholars contend that these digital artifacts exert significant influence on contemporary work practices, rendering it essential to elucidate their functions and implications to understand the dynamics of modern organizations (Alaimo and Kallinikos 2016, 78–90). Faulkner and Runde categorize digital artifacts similarly to physical artifacts, identifying their technical identity, social position, and structural composition (Faulkner and Runde 2013, 443–460).

Extending Marcus's notion of multi-sited ethnography, recent scholarship advocates for the consideration of multimodal interactions that encompass both digital and physical domains, suggesting that longitudinal digital records can enhance the authenticity of ethnographic accounts. Two distinct modes of digital co-presence are identified: digital as archive and digital as process. These modes are not mutually exclusive; rather, they should be integrated into research design to yield a more holistic understanding. Ethnographers are encouraged to assess the relative significance of digital interactions concerning their research objectives, with “digital as process” being more appropriate for examining discursive content and perspectives, while

“digital as archive” facilitates the analysis of structural relationships (Akemu and Abdelnour 2018, 15–23).

Organizational ethnography is a qualitative research method that explores an organization’s culture, practices, and dynamics by focusing on how members' interactions, beliefs, and behaviors both shape and reflect its structure and norms. It is characterized by an adaptive, flexible approach, often described as "improvisational," allowing researchers to respond to the evolving complexities of organizational life (Van Maanen 2015, 41), in contrast to more rigid, procedural research methods. This improvisational nature is attributed to the inherent “indefiniteness” in ethnographic methods and research designs (Yanow 2009: 196), which require researchers to adapt their strategies in response to an evolving subject. The process is characterized as “path-dependent” (Van Maanen 2015, 41), with research trajectories shaped by the unfolding context and findings. Ethnography frequently employs an abductive research strategy (Yanow 2012, 36), wherein empirical data collection and theoretical insight develop in tandem. This approach emphasizes the collection of unexpected empirical material, which is subsequently used to generate concepts illuminating the surprising nature of the findings. As these findings emerge, they are immediately tested against further observations (Czarniawska 2014, 98). In this sense, abduction has been identified as central to the ethnographic process, with Agar noting that it is “the heart of ethnography” (Agar 2010, 289).

The distinctive character of ethnographic research extends beyond simple data collection techniques, such as interviews. Yanow cautions that over-reliance on interview-based data risks neglecting ethnography's unique epistemological stance as a mode of inquiry focused on experiential understanding (Yanow 2009, 194). The methodological scope of organizational ethnography is broad, addressing diverse themes and problems within organizations. The questions posed in these studies are typically open and exploratory, aimed at uncovering the nuances of social interactions and practices in specific settings. However, organizational ethnography can also target more narrowly defined areas, seeking to deliver precise theoretical contributions (Neyland 2007, 32).

In parallel to cultural anthropology, organizational ethnography employs “thick description” (Geertz 1973, 9-10), aiming to convey the intricate meanings and contexts surrounding observed situations. This type of description transcends superficial accounts to uncover the underlying significance of practices (Richardson 2000, 254). To achieve this, researchers often adopt various narrative styles and genres that effectively capture the fluidity of organizational dynamics and processes (Van Maanen 1988, 146). He also writes:

One strength of ethnography has always been to position individuals in a specific social setting, placing them in a context where action takes place. But this setting is no longer, if ever, exclusively local or whole. Organizations, for example, are venues of interlinked relations; local, national, and transnational. They are then at the crossroads of ideas, knowledge, interests, and values. They are spheres of interaction where meanings of various origins converge, disappear, amplify, mix, blend, and often clash. They are also, arguably, becoming more complicated, diffuse, fragmented. (Ibid: 162).

Overall, the strength of organizational ethnography lies in its capacity to generate in-depth insights by observing the complexities within organizations. Its emphasis on improvisation, abduction, and multisite analysis positions it as a powerful method for understanding organizational culture and practice in all their multifaceted forms. Anthropologist James Clifford articulates this in the following:

What remains of fieldwork today? What, if anything, persists from the traditional call to travel, leave the familiar behind, and immerse oneself in the field—dwelling and engaging intensively in a relatively unfamiliar setting? A research practice characterized by “shifting locations” without the necessity of physical travel or prolonged face-to-face encounters could describe the work of a literary critic who, like many today, focuses on the politics and cultural contexts of diverse textual interpretations. (Clifford 1997, 88)

Without face-to-face encounters and the ability to “capture” research participants and bring them into view, how can an ethnographer gather the empirical evidence that remains central to their work? What becomes of the ethnographer’s role when their research cannot account for the presence of real bodies? Is it possible for the ethnographer to remain at home without reverting to the armchair anthropology prevalent at the turn of the century? Can the ethnographer truly escape the “legacy of the field” (Clifford 1997, 88)?

Clifford discusses the “legacy of the field” in anthropology, emphasizing its significance not only as a methodological site for conducting research but also for its symbolic value. He argued that the field, or more specifically, the work conducted there, serves as a “mark of disciplinary distinction”, a “rite of passage”, and a “marker of professionalism” (Clifford 1997, 61-89). Clifford observes that many anthropologists are reluctant or unwilling to supervise doctoral research focused on interactions in virtual or textual spaces. He concludes that, “given the traditions of the discipline, a graduate student [seeking to conduct research in a virtual or textual community] would be ill-advised to follow such a course” (Ibid., 61).

Kate Eichorn cites Steve Jones’s *Doing Internet Research* (1999) and the *American Behavioral Scientist* special issue on virtual societies (Lyman & Wakeford, 1999) to highlight the increasing recognition of virtual ethnography as a vital methodological approach within sociology. These works emphasize the value of studying digital environments, where the boundaries of traditional “field” spaces are redefined. Beyond merely acknowledging the potential of virtual ethnography, these publications also explore the methodological hurdles researchers face—such as establishing authenticity, ethical dilemmas surrounding participant anonymity, and the fluidity of digital contexts. The discourse surrounding these challenges has expanded in online forums, scholarly debates, and additional research. This body of work illustrates a paradigm shift, as digital spaces increasingly gain legitimacy as ethnographic “fields.” This shift not only broadens the scope of sociological inquiry but also pushes the discipline toward developing innovative, interdisciplinary methodologies tailored to the intricacies of virtual environments (Eichorn 2001, 567).

Clifford posits that discussions on ethnography have sought to view the field not merely as a location for conducting research but also as a methodological construct (Clifford 1997, 21-22). Geertz described “the culture of a people” as “an ensemble of texts” (Geertz 1973, 452). In Geertzian theory, the texts or “symbols” that constitute a culture are regarded as essential tools with which “the members of a society communicate their worldview, value orientations, ethos, and all the rest to one another, to future generations and to anthropologists” (Ortner 1984, 129).

Russel Bernard and Gery Ryan highlighted the widespread use of text analysis across the social sciences, noting the extensive variety of methods employed in examining different levels of textual content, such as words, sentences, and documents, while also considering what may be absent from the text. These analyses can involve both interpretive and numerical approaches, serving exploratory and confirmatory purposes. Text analysis aims to identify themes, describe them, compare across cases, and explain patterns, making it a versatile method embraced by both positivists and interpretivists (1998: 101). However, they point to a division among text analysts, with linguistically oriented researchers often not engaging with the work of those from sociological or anthropological traditions, and vice versa. Even within the sociological tradition, approaches like schema analysis, grounded theory, and content analysis are treated as distinct fields, despite sharing common processes such as concept identification, coding, and theoretical modeling. Their discussion emphasized the importance of text analysis across all social sciences and advocates for greater integration and recognition of its diverse applications (Ibid., 88).

The evolution of text analysis in the social sciences has followed two primary traditions: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative text analysis has roots in the early 20th century, sparked by the increased availability of printed media and instances like Max Weber's proposal for systematic press analysis (Krippendorff 2004, 29). The field gained momentum in the 1930s and 1940s, with content analysis becoming a key method in mass communication research focused on media and political propaganda. Bernard Berelson provides an influential definition of content analysis, describing it as an “objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Crano, Brewer, and Lac, 2014, 303).

In contrast, qualitative text analysis emerged in the latter half of the 20th century as a critique of quantitative methods, which were often viewed as overly superficial. This tradition drew on hermeneutical approaches from the humanities, emphasizing the importance of understanding the deeper meanings within texts and treating them as cultural products (Kuckartz 2014, 36). Qualitative analysis promotes the practice of deep reading, informed by the historical and social contexts in which the text was produced, and encourages researchers to avoid imposing a priori theoretical expectations on the texts. This interpretive approach became more prominent as

researchers sought to uncover the latent themes and patterns within textual content (Kuckartz 2014, 54-6).

In his study of the real-world complexity that often drives interdisciplinary efforts, Andrew Brandel raises a crucial question: must anthropology either exclude literature or fully absorb it, or does it require rethinking the very structure of anthropological writing. He argues for examining how literature is invoked in anthropological theory, as it sheds light on diverse approaches within the discipline where, for some anthropologists, like E. Valentine Daniel, literature offers formal innovation. Daniel found that when writing the history of estate laborers, prose could not fully capture the affective truth conveyed in oral accounts; he discovered that using verse allowed him to express truths that were otherwise diminished or lost in conventional social scientific writing (2020, 12-13).

In the subsequent chapters, this study will delve deeper into its methodological approach, with particular emphasis on discourse analysis as a critical method. Discourse analysis examines how language is used in texts and communication to construct meaning, reflect power dynamics, and shape social realities. It allows researchers to uncover underlying ideologies, assumptions, and cultural norms embedded in organizational or societal communication. This method is particularly useful for analyzing how institutions like the OIC construct and perpetuate their narratives, as well as for understanding the role of language in framing conflicts and resolutions. According to Gee, discourse analysis involves examining both micro-level interactions, such as word choices, and macro-level patterns, like recurring themes or narratives (Gee 2014, 22-25). Foucault's work further highlights its utility in revealing power relations and social structures embedded in discourse (Foucault 1972, 49-51).

Actor-Network Theory (ANT), as articulated by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law, provides a nuanced lens through which to examine the intricate relationships between actors within organizational contexts. Central to ANT is the concept of "translation," which encapsulates the processes through which actors negotiate their roles, interests, and identities within a network. This negotiation is not merely a passive alignment of interests; rather, it is an active, sometimes contentious process that can lead to the stabilization or destabilization of networks (Callon 1986,

196). In the context of the OIC, understanding how actors negotiate their positions can illuminate the complexities organizations face during transformative periods. For instance, the alignment or misalignment of interests among various stakeholders can significantly influence the trajectory of innovation initiatives, revealing the power dynamics embedded within organizational change processes.

The analysis presented by Belliger and Krieger in "Organizing Networks: An Actor-Network Theory of Organizations" further contextualizes ANT within organizational studies. They argue that organizations should be conceptualized as dynamic networks rather than static entities, emphasizing the interplay between human actors and non-human actors, including technologies and organizational structures (2010, 25).

Belliger and Krieger highlight the implications of ANT for understanding organizational adaptation to change, particularly the role of negotiation among actors in managing innovation. This negotiation extends beyond interpersonal dynamics to encompass the influence of technologies and systems that shape organizational practices. For example, the introduction of new technologies can redefine roles and relationships within an organization, necessitating a reconfiguration of existing networks (Ibid., 42). This fluidity underscores the importance of adaptability in organizational structures and processes, as organizations must be prepared to navigate the shifting landscapes of their networks.

In addition, organizations must develop competencies in managing the negotiation processes that characterize actor interactions. Leaders who understand the complexities of interest alignment can facilitate smoother transitions during change initiatives, ultimately enhancing the likelihood of successful innovation (Latour, 2005, p. 83). This requires a keen awareness of the power dynamics at play and the ability to navigate the often-contentious negotiations that arise within networks.

Finally, ANT underscores the necessity for organizations to remain flexible and adaptable in their network configurations. As new actors and technologies emerge, organizations must be willing to reconfigure their networks to leverage these changes effectively (Belliger & Krieger 2010, 73). This adaptability is not merely a response to external pressures but a proactive stance that recognizes the potential for innovation

inherent in the fluidity of organizational networks. The Actor-Network Theory offers a valuable framework for analyzing the complex interplay of actors within organizations, particularly in the context of the OIC.

Through a textual analysis of primary sources, discourse analysis will be instrumental in unraveling the complex ways in which Islamic and secular frameworks are articulated and utilized within the OIC's discourse. Through a systematic examination of key texts, the study will aim to uncover how these frameworks are constructed, challenged, and maintained, providing valuable insights into the ideological underpinnings at play. By integrating discourse analysis as a core methodological tool, this research will offer a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between political, religious, and secular narratives in shaping the OIC's policy and institutional framework.

This research employs a comprehensive analytical framework to examine the pivotal events and sociopolitical dynamics that have shaped the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) from its inception to the present day. Rather than restricting the analysis to a specific period, this study explores the organization's historical and institutional evolution, tracing its establishment amid distinct geopolitical and sociocultural contexts through to its ongoing efforts to reconcile international legal norms with Islamic principles, culminating in its call for substantive reform in 2018. By situating the OIC's developmental trajectory within the broader context of global power dynamics, this research aims to offer a reinterpreted understanding of the organization's historical significance and its evolving influence on the international stage.

A distinguishing feature of this study is its integration of organizational identity theories with subaltern and decolonial approaches to international law. This theoretical synthesis facilitates a critical examination of the OIC's construction and reconfiguration of its institutional identity within a global order shaped by Western modernity and its attendant power and knowledge structures. Such an interdisciplinary approach enables a nuanced exploration of the complexities underlying the OIC's responses to international challenges and reveals the unique role the organization occupies within global governance frameworks.

While this study adopts an expansive scope, it acknowledges certain methodological limitations inherent to research on international organizations. Issues of access and institutional gatekeeping may restrict insights into the OIC's internal dialogues, decision-making processes, and sensitive documentation. Although an ethnographic approach within the organization might yield richer insights, the potential for information control by officials could limit access to critical data, potentially influencing research outcomes. To mitigate these constraints, this study relies predominantly on archival sources and official publications. Given the OIC's mandate to publish proceedings, press releases, strategic plans, and policy studies for ministerial conferences, these documents are deemed sufficiently representative and discourse-rich, enabling a robust analysis of the organization's historical evolution.

This study's methodological framework adopts an interpretive approach that critically examines the OIC as a discursive site where Islamic and international norms converge. In line with this interpretive paradigm, a purposive sampling strategy is employed to select the most salient OIC documents such as charters, summit declarations, annual reports, and thematic action plans that illuminate the organization's communicative practices and normative priorities. Rather than treating these texts as passive records of institutional activity, this study analyzes them as dynamic artifacts of meaning making, reflecting both internal conceptions of Muslim solidarity and external engagements with global challenges. By intentionally sampling documents that capture critical junctures in the OIC's evolution, moments where its dual identity as an embodiment of Islamic unity and as an intergovernmental actor in a largely secular international order is most visibly negotiated, this approach enables a deeper exploration of how discourses of cooperation, and policy making are actively constructed, contested, and reshaped.

Additionally, my personal proximity to the OIC's operations was significantly shaped by my mother's tenure as the Director of Family and Social Affairs between 2014 and 2019. During this period, her engagement in international missions frequently overlapped with our home life, exposing me to draft strategies, speeches, and policy documents at an early stage. By the time I interned with the organization as an undergraduate student, I had already cultivated a nuanced understanding of the OIC's internal processes and the interplay between its aspirations and the constraints of

interstate cooperation. This firsthand familiarity, extending from casual interactions and discussions with my mother's diplomatically seasoned colleagues and policy papers sprawled on the dinner table, deepened my insight into both the OIC's potential for advancing collaborative initiatives and the structural limitations that inevitably arise within a diverse intergovernmental context.

The official process of data collection however presented particular challenges. Understandably, access to comprehensive and up-to-date primary materials such as meeting transcripts and unpublished documents is limited in the study of a political organization, necessitating reliance on publicly available resources, including annual reports, communiqués, and official statements issued by the OIC. Where gaps in official documentation emerged, I triangulated data using secondary analyses, scholarly critiques, and media reports to provide a more nuanced understanding of the organization's practices and discourses.

The primary data sources for this study consist of official OIC documents, including annual reports, summit declarations, action plans, and press releases. These materials were analyzed to uncover recurring themes in how the OIC frames its role and articulates its objectives. Communication channels, such as speeches by OIC leaders, resolutions from member states, and multilateral statements, were studied to provide a multi-layered approach enabling an exploration of the OIC as both an institutional actor and a symbolic representation of the Muslim ummah. By interrogating the interplay between its formal structures and the ideological commitments it claims to uphold, this study seeks to illuminate the complexities of the OIC's role in the global arena.

1.3. Chapter Overview and Thematic Structure

Chapter I delved into the formation and evolution of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), situating it as a key intergovernmental body of the Muslim world. This chapter established the theoretical framework and methodology for the study, drawing on organizational sociology and discourse analysis to investigate the OIC's dual role as both a political and religious entity. Through a critical review of the literature, it explored how institutional structures, leadership dynamics, and the

broader socio-political environment have shaped the OIC's trajectory and positioned it within global governance. Key moments, such as the introduction of institutional reforms and the formation of specialized committees, were examined to highlight the interplay between formal mechanisms and informal actors in forging the organization's evolving identity.

Chapter II shifts focus to the influence of religion on global politics, interrogating how international relations frameworks often secularize political spaces. The presumed neutrality of intergovernmental spaces is critically examined, revealing how they marginalize religious organizations like the OIC while legitimizing secular norms. Drawing on sociological perspectives and the concept of subalternity, the chapter explores how the OIC negotiates its marginalized position within the Westphalian international order. Central to this analysis is an examination of the OIC's 1972 Charter and subsequent revisions, which reflect its ideological and political evolution.

Chapter III utilizes case studies to illustrate the OIC's identity as a "multiple-identity organization," blending postcolonial international law theory with organizational sociology. It interrogates the organization's dual roles as a political and religious entity by focusing on its interventions in issues like Palestine, Muslim minority advocacy in Kashmir and Myanmar, and peacebuilding efforts. These cases illuminate the challenges the OIC faces in reconciling its Islamic identity with the divergent political agendas of its member states and the secular expectations of the international community. By engaging with these tensions, the chapter advances a nuanced understanding of how religiously grounded organizations operate in secularized global systems.

Chapter IV delves into the OIC's organizational identity by examining its responses to critical sociopolitical challenges, including human rights, women's empowerment, and Islamophobia. This chapter investigates the OIC's Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, revealing the inherent tensions between Islamic principles and modern human rights discourses. It also addresses contentious debates on blasphemy, the limits of free speech, women's rights, and the family unit, analyzing how the organization negotiates these issues to uphold its Islamic ethos. The chapter's exploration of the OIC's stance

on Islamophobia positions the organization as both a defender of Islamic identity and a mediator of global sociopolitical demands.

The final chapter synthesizes the study's findings, reflecting on the OIC's evolution as a religious and political entity. It interrogates the sociopolitical forces shaping the organization, its struggles with multiple identities, and the implications of these findings for broader discussions on religion, politics, and international governance. The conclusion emphasizes the need for further research into the complex interplay between religion and global politics, particularly within intergovernmental organizations like the OIC. This study provides a humble contribution to the sociology and anthropology of organizations by advancing our understanding of how religiously grounded entities navigate secular global systems.

CHAPTER II

RELIGION IN GLOBAL POLITICS

2.1. Introduction

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 profound particularities of Islamic traditions with the universalizing tendencies of secular governance in the international arena. To accurately grasp 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.

Yet, this is not a project of nostalgia; it is an active negotiation that transforms both Islamic principles and the frameworks of global governance in the process. 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 chapter 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, that the OIC reveals its potential as an ethical disruptor. 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. This chapter invites the reader to consider the OIC not as a derivative of global governance but as a project of ethical world-making, one that operates at the fraught intersection of tradition and modernity, particularity and universality, resistance and accommodation.

2.2. Bridging Disciplinary Divides: Sociological and Anthropological Perspectives on International Relations

Traditional approaches to International Relations (IR) have often privileged concepts such as sovereignty and borders, marginalizing sociological and anthropological insights that offer alternative ways to conceptualize the political. According to Matteos and Laiz (2018, 172), a longstanding policy of mutual ignorance between sociology and IR has limited the potential for interdisciplinary dialogue, with realism and liberalism reinforcing the dominance of state-centric paradigms. In contrast, anthropology and sociology provide fertile ground for rethinking global governance, especially through paradigms such as structural-functionalism, processualism, and postmodernism, which illuminate dynamics often overlooked by conventional IR theories. This section explores how these paradigms can expand the analysis of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) like the OIC, enriching our understanding of their structures, processes, and evolving identities. Since WW1, IR has evolved from its idealist beginnings to realist renewals of positivism and the behaviorist revolution of scientificity. Today, rationalist neoliberalism and neorealism dominate International Relations, which limits their ability to critique political issues. The more recent push for “reflectivism,” which challenges the mainstream rationalist views, argues for the importance of alternative perspectives, particularly those informed by sociological perspectives (Ibid.).

In a similar vein in sociology, Donald Kurtz also explained that research in political anthropology is structured paradigmatically, and it has been explored in the structural-functional paradigm, the processual paradigm (exclusive to political anthropology), the venerable paradigms, and postmodernism (2001, 10–12). The role of structural-functionalism in social anthropology during the early twentieth century emphasized how social structures uphold stability and integration. While this paradigm’s impact on political anthropology is important as it focuses on the examination of political structures and their functions in maintaining social order (often without considering individual agency), functionalism for many is now largely viewed as outdated but is regarded for the groundwork and avenues it created for future research (Bailey 1960, 9-11).

The emergence of the processual paradigm in the mid-1960s among American cultural anthropologists was a result of the rejection of functionalist approaches, which emphasized dynamic processes over stable structures. Processual practitioners emphasized the role of conflict, power struggles, and strategies for achieving public goals in political analysis. Research typically focused on local political communities, with higher levels of government considered only in relation to local issues. The paradigm introduced concepts from political science, such as authority, political fields, and arenas, to facilitate analysis. In the late 1960s, Bailey revitalized the paradigm by redefining structure as the rules governing competition for political power, placing greater emphasis on political agents and the dynamics of their relationships over time (Kurtz 2001, 12-13). The processual paradigm in political anthropology challenges the functionalist view that emphasizes sociopolitical structures, order maintenance, and political system typologies. While it offers strategies for analyzing agent-driven politics, it does not fully abandon the functionalist approach. Instead, it introduces new concepts from anthropologists dissatisfied with functionalism's limitations, which often contributed to political subordination. Nonetheless, some anthropologists still support functional explanations because they provide clear analytical frameworks (Cohen 1970, 484-99).

The political evolution paradigm emphasizes qualitative changes in political systems as they adapt to their environments. It categorizes societies into bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states, with distinctions based on their technological and social structures. While political evolutionists have largely focused on system changes, there is a growing call to examine the role of political agents in these processes (Kurtz, 2001: 15-16).

Finally, the postmodernist paradigm does not abide by the Kuhnian criteria of a paradigm that focuses on specific scientific research methods. Instead, it leans more toward an approach that is at home in the humanities, filled with diverse ideas and perspectives. One of the defining features of postmodernism is the lack of agreement among its proponents about what exactly it entails or what its primary focus should be. In anthropology, postmodernism explores topics like agent-driven politics and political systems, but often in unconventional ways. Practitioners dive into concepts such as hegemony, dominance, and resistance while also tackling issues like

citizenship and identity that other paradigms might overlook. However, the eclectic nature of postmodern thought and its often vague methodologies can make political ideas seem less clear or accountable compared to other frameworks in the field. This lack of clarity is both a strength and a challenge for postmodernism in anthropology (Kurtz 2001, 11-13).

The scholarly agenda Post-World War II, and particularly the focus within anthropology, shifted from colonial stability to addressing political change and conflict. British anthropologists, once constrained by the Colonial Office, began to develop the processual paradigm, influenced by the Cold War, the decline of colonial empires, and a period defined by postcolonial societies looking to form political blocs and referred to as “the third world.” (Kurtz 2001, 102-104)

The examination of intergovernmental organizations through the lens of sociological and anthropological perspectives presents a rich opportunity to challenge dominant paradigms in International Relations. The structuralist approach, for example, paves the way for the identification of political dimensions within previously unrecognized political structures and systems. By integrating reflectivist approaches, this study can critique the prevailing rationalist neoliberalism and neorealism applied in the intergovernmental. Moreover, employing processual paradigms allows for an analysis of the dynamic political processes, such as conflict and negotiation, that shape IGO behavior. The incorporation of postmodernist insights further enriches this investigation by underscoring the relevance of grassroots movements in shaping international agendas. Methodologically, employing a diverse array of qualitative and quantitative methods can enhance the rigor of analysis while addressing the complexities of postmodern thought. Additionally, this study serves to expand the typological analysis of political systems that exist beyond the state, which is a dominant theme in the anthropology of politics.

Soares and Osella (2009, 1-6) posit that although anthropology has had a long and problematic history in the study of Islam and Muslims, it can prove particularly adept to the study of the state and formal politics, involving various social actors and organizations. In the 20th century, many anthropologists conducting fieldwork in Africa and Asia largely overlooked Islam and Muslim societies, leaving the study to

historians and Orientalists (Launay 2006, 188-203; Soares 2000, 277-85). Notable exceptions include E.E. Evans-Pritchard, whose work on the Sanusiyya Sufi order in Libya highlighted how Islamic institutions could mobilize tribal groups politically. However, later anthropological research often prioritized tribal societies and kinship over Islam, especially in the Middle East (Gilsenan 1990, 220-39).

Ernest Gellner expanded on Evans-Pritchard's work by developing a model of "Muslim society," which he argued was resistant to secularization but compatible with modernity, seeing Islamic reformism as part of a rationalization process tied to colonial modernization (Gellner 1981). Clifford Geertz offered a contrasting perspective, focusing on the cultural and contextual nature of Islam in places like Morocco and Indonesia, where religion provided frameworks for conduct but was shaped by local cultural systems (Geertz 1968, 98). Both Gellner and Geertz, writing during the height of modernization theory, demonstrated the importance of religion in societies undergoing social change. Later scholars, such as Eickelman and Piscatori (1996, 39), examined the "objectification" of Islam and the fragmentation of religious authority, suggesting that the rise of mass education and media had democratized religious discourse, reducing the traditional monopoly of the ulama.

In recent years, the focus has shifted toward understanding how Muslims navigate modernity, with scholars exploring "alternative modernities" and local responses to global processes (Abu-Lughod 1998, 15). Some anthropologists have moved beyond debating Islam's compatibility with modernity and relinquished the endeavor of ascertaining whether Islam is intrinsically compatible with the concept of "modernity." Instead, their focus has shifted toward examining how tradition and modernity are interconnected. Salvatore, for example, examined Islam's relationship with tradition and modernity to show how Western modernity promoted both narrow, Eurocentric ideas and more inclusive, diverse ones that support the idea of multiple modernities. In his work, he challenged Western sociological views of "religion," which often oversimplify Islam. For him, unlike the rigid separation between private faith and public life seen in the Western tradition, Islamic traditions have shown a more flexible approach. Over time, the Islamic tradition has blended elements of religion, culture, and power, adapting to different historical challenges. This adaptability has roots in the rich intellectual heritage of Islam, which brought together Abrahamic traditions

and Greek science and philosophy. This synthesis remains a defining feature of Islamic thought and a source of potential for its continued development and interaction with other traditions in the modern world. (Salvatore, 2009: 30)

This study moves beyond conventional IR frameworks by adopting sociological and anthropological perspectives that treat the OIC's routine and prolific publications not merely as technical documents but as ethnographic "voices" of the organization itself. Although such texts often lack direct reflexivity, they function as cultural artifacts or markers of institutional values, evolving ideologies, and ongoing engagements with the global West. By interpreting these artifacts within their broader sociopolitical context, the analysis uncovers how the OIC's discursive practices, grounded in both Islamic heritage and intergovernmental pragmatism, articulate an alternative vocabulary of global governance. In doing so, it reveals the subtle interplay of faith based commitments, diplomatic negotiation, and the secular grammar of modern international relations, illuminating the OIC as a dynamic site where moral imagination intersects with geopolitical realities.

2.3. Religion in Global Politics and Secular 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 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 & 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).

These are a few of the many examples of the social science pioneers and their successors whose understandings of the world shied of religion in philosophy and praxis. It is for this reason that some have argued that the discipline of international relations represents a microcosm of Western social sciences (Fox and Sandler 2004, 2). Milbank notes that while the ‘critical non-avoidability of the theological and metaphysical’ has appeared in countless notable works, its implications in international studies are still absent (1993, 3).

While the integrated study of religion in academic studies may have been evaded for some time, religion continues to deeply influence and shape worldviews, sociopolitical

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).

For Hurd, to understand the paradoxical relationship between secularism, religion, and contemporary politics, it is valuable towards seemingly secular bodies that realize God’s will and are in reality empowered by transcendental authority (2004, 236). 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).

While the role of religious worldviews may be a constant in shaping national foreign policies, international relations, legitimacy, group identity, and agendas, it is still true that theories inform practices in intergovernmental practices and frames of work that

formulate the innately regressive nature of religion as expressed by scholarship on religion and international relations. On the issue of integrating religion in international relations, Ferrara explains that the discipline of international relations and diplomatic practice may no longer ignore the virtues and behaviors of the overwhelming existence of faith-based communities. He asks whether religious dynamicity poses a problem or, rather, a potential asset in the field of international relations. In his view, the threats include its instrumentalized ideological use, fundamentalist or selective approaches to modernity and tradition, dualistic views of morality, millenarianism, and messianism, emboldened 'othering,' and authoritarian internal organization based in charismatic leadership (2014, 10-11). His broadly generalizing presumptions are, however, countered by what he finds 'particularly striking' in referring to religious texts and history that express inclusive and not exclusive values that may present significant effects on operational decisions in the way of a universal vision of the human condition and coexistence under universal values from which the very ethos of pan-human solidarity is based (Ibid.).

Studies that present religion as a constant source of identity and force for pan-humanism in the global arena reveal a gaping structural crisis of international relations and prompt the reformulation of new theories of international order in addition to overturning current perspectives, which often view and dismiss the centrality of religion in global politics. This is particularly true of the Muslim majority world.

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). How then has the OIC preserved the Islamic social and economic values or upheld Islamic social, economic, and political solidarity within the secular *milieu international*?

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. (Rudolph, 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).

In this context, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) emerges as a significant institution driven by religious values within a political framework, prompting further inquiry into its potential contributions to or reshaping of the poly-religious ecumene envisioned by Rudolph. The OIC's transnational reach and religious legitimacy may enable it to function as a bridging entity within this broader ecumene, fostering cooperation with non-Islamic states and organizations on pressing global issues.

The question also arises of whether the OIC's approach exemplifies the potential of transnational religious organizations to adapt and respond to the thinning of state authority. Does the OIC enhance global capacity for achieving religiously informed objectives within international relations, especially when faced with global challenges such as poverty, conflict, and climate change? In doing so, the OIC serves as a practical example of how globalization-induced changes in state sovereignty can reshape not only national policies but also the collaborative, cross-border religious initiatives that Rudolph highlights.

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 OIC's engagement with global issues epitomizes the complexities inherent in asserting a religious identity within a predominantly secular international order, illuminating the intricate interplay between the religious and the political. Consequently, this inquiry compels a reconceptualization of legitimacy and authority in contemporary political dynamics, positing that religious resurgence is indispensable for comprehending the reconfiguration of global power relations.

2.4. 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). This does not negate the fact that the global interdependence of diverse actors engaging with one another in countless ways has also paved the way for international law to represent something more than a politics of dominance by other means.

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).

Huntington’s analysis underscores the foundational imbalance within the post-World War II international order where Western interests and values have profoundly shaped the structure of global institutions, including the U.N. Security Council. He argues that as global power dynamics shift with the rise of non-Western civilizations, institutional reforms will become necessary to ensure a fairer representation of these emerging powers. Huntington identifies the Security Council's permanent membership as a core issue, highlighting its alignment with the post-World War II balance of power rather than the contemporary global landscape. He proposes an equitable, multicivilizational order where each major civilization would have a permanent seat on the Council. The current five permanent members, particularly without representation from the Muslim world, Africa, or Latin America, no longer reflect the complexity of modern global relations. Huntington suggests solutions, such as adding permanent seats for Japan, India, and representatives from Africa, Latin America, and the Muslim world, possibly chosen by regional organizations. He also proposes merging the British and French seats into a single European Union seat to ensure a balanced representation (Huntington 1996, 317-318).

Examining the OIC through a subaltern perspective reveals a complex tension between inherited frameworks that sustain hegemonic structures and the capacity of formerly marginalized states to negotiate alternative spaces of agency. On one hand, the OIC operates within an international order shaped by Eurocentric legal and diplomatic legacies. On the other, it pushes against these constraints by asserting positions that challenge dominant conceptions of sovereignty, rights, and international cooperation. Its calls for more balanced representation within bodies like the UN Security Council underscore the persistent imbalance in global governance and highlight the potential for postcolonial actors to transform existing norms. The OIC’s navigation of international institutions illustrates that participation can serve both as an act of accommodation to prevailing structures and a means of contestation. This dual role underscores how subaltern entities are capable of reshaping the global order, not merely as passive subjects of history but as engaged contributors to its ongoing renegotiation.

2.5. Reform in Focus: What Needs Fixing?

At the outset of the 2000s, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) began to intensify its focus on reform, spurred by member states' growing recognition of the organization's need for global relevance and strategic impact. While the most prominent reform initiatives emerged in the 2000s, İhsanoğlu notes that these discussions date back as early as 1982, reflecting a long-standing awareness of the limitations inherent in the OIC's organizational structure (İhsanoğlu, 2010). The 2003 Tenth Islamic Summit in Malaysia marked a significant milestone in this trajectory. It established a commission of experts tasked with crafting recommendations to address structural deficiencies and align the OIC with contemporary global governance standards. These deliberations culminated in the adoption of the Ten-Year Programme of Action at the extraordinary Mecca Summit in 2005, signaling an almost unanimous commitment among member states to a transformative agenda (OIC, 2005). According to Turbedar, the subsequent decades of the OIC's evolution have been characterized as "decades of reforms," encompassing critical initiatives such as the revision of the OIC Charter, the renaming of the organization in 2011, budgetary increases, and the introduction of democratic election procedures for its Secretary-General (Turbedar 2019, 9). These efforts reflect an organization grappling with the dual pressures of internal modernization and external legitimacy, attempting to reconcile its foundational Islamic ethos with the demands of a globalized world.

The election of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu as the OIC's first democratically elected Secretary-General in 2004 further underscored the organization's reformist ambitions. A Turkish diplomat and academic, İhsanoğlu positioned himself as a vocal advocate for institutional renewal. In his inaugural address, he asserted that the OIC must become a more impactful actor on the global stage, declaring, "The OIC must acquire more weight and impact on the world scene" (İhsanoğlu 2004).

Though aligned with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), a Turkish far right ultranationalist party, İhsanoğlu's political trajectory was anything but monolithic. His candidacy for the Turkish presidency, backed by the center left, staunchly secular Republican People's Party (CHP), reflected the malleability of political alignments in contexts where ideology intersects with strategy. His leadership within the OIC,

similarly, was marked by an attempt to reconcile the organization with the imperatives of modernization. Yet, if İhsanoğlu sought to recalibrate the OIC's position in global affairs, his efforts unfolded within an organizational structure that, while adaptable, remained bound to deeply entrenched foundational values. The OIC, as an institution, serves as a vehicle that can be steered with varying degrees of ambition or ideological inflection by its leaders, but its core principles remain tightly bolted. His tenure therefore did not so much redefine the OIC as reinforce its potential as a dynamic yet anchored entity. By framing his vision through a synthesis of Islamic values and universalist rhetoric, İhsanoğlu sought to bolster the OIC's credibility as both a custodian of the Muslim world's collective interests and a relevant actor in the international system.

The concept of reform within the OIC can be viewed not merely as a set of structural adjustments but as a cultural and discursive process that has become an integral aspect of the OIC's institutional identity. The repeated emphasis on modernization through initiatives such as the 2008 Charter and the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) illustrates the organization's attempts to embed progressive values within its operational framework. By underscoring these efforts, İhsanoğlu presented the OIC as a vehicle of modernization within the Muslim world. As he stated, "*These basic documents give prominence to and accept the universal values of freedom of speech, human rights, democracy, good governance, accountability, and transparency; and also address the issues of women in society... clearly advocating that these universal values are compatible with the Islamic values*" (OIC 2013). These reforms reflect an alignment of "freedom of speech, human rights, democracy, good governance, accountability, and transparency" with Islamic values, challenging the false dichotomy between tradition and modernity. This process of reform can be understood as a form of reflexive modernization (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994), which involves a critical reexamination of traditional practices to adapt to new challenges.

For the OIC, this reflexivity manifests in its efforts to harmonize the diverse legal, cultural, and political contexts of its 57 member states with shared aspirations for governance and human rights. However, as İhsanoğlu himself acknowledged, this diversity poses significant challenges. The translation of reform-oriented frameworks

into actionable policies often encounters resistance, as individual states vary in their capacity and willingness to implement these changes. This tension underscores the inherent complexities of fostering coherence within a pluralistic and politically diverse organization.

Beyond internal challenges, İhsanoğlu also addressed external pressures that complicate the OIC's reform agenda. He pointed to Western resistance to certain OIC initiatives, particularly regarding the notion of "defamation of religions." As he noted, "Unfortunately, *the European countries and the US were against this at the beginning, saying that they do not agree with the notion of defamation of religions.*" (İhsanoğlu 2013, "Future of the OIC") Such international disagreements reflect broader geopolitical and cultural divides, further complicating the OIC's efforts to advocate for values that align with both Islamic principles and global norms.

The reform discourse adopted by the OIC further reflects elements of institutional isomorphism, as articulated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 147-60). Institutional isomorphism describes the tendency of organizations to adopt similar structures and practices in response to external pressures and shared norms. By emphasizing democratic processes, human rights, and gender equality, the OIC seeks to align itself with global governance standards. However, this alignment is not without challenges, as it requires balancing external expectations with internal priorities rooted in Islamic concepts.

The OIC's reform agenda is furthermore part of its broader effort to reshape global governance, particularly through its advocacy for United Nations (UN) reform. Central to the OIC's critique of the UN is the perceived inequity of its institutional frameworks, particularly the underrepresentation of Muslim-majority nations within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). İhsanoğlu highlighted this disparity, noting, "I think there should be a seat for OIC in the Security Council... you won't find a representative of more than 1.6 billion people of [the] Muslim world" (İhsanoğlu 2013, "Future of the OIC"). This demand for greater representation is not merely about inclusion but also about addressing systemic imbalances that marginalize developing nations and underrepresented major civilizations.

The OIC's resolutions on UN reform emphasize the principles of equity, multilateralism, and adherence to international law. The organization critiques the UNSC's dominant interventionist paradigm, particularly its reinterpretation of Article 51 of the UN Charter to justify preemptive attacks. By opposing such unilateral actions, the OIC aligns itself with a vision of global governance that prioritizes justice, mutual respect, and the sovereignty of states. This stance reflects the OIC's broader struggle for a more inclusive and representative international order.

The OIC's reform journey illustrates the complexities of institutional transformation within the global order. By emphasizing modernization, equity, and universal values, the organization seeks to redefine its sought role of a unifying force for the Muslim world and an influential actor on the global stage. However, the tensions inherent in balancing internal diversity, external legitimacy, and competing visions of governance highlight the challenges of this endeavor. The OIC's reform efforts can be understood as a dynamic and iterative process, shaped by both internal aspirations and external pressures.

The OIC's reform agenda represents a project that seeks to reconcile tradition with modernity and local particularities with global imperatives. It encapsulates the dialectics of institutional transformation, wherein reform operates as both a strategic instrument and a cultural discourse. By navigating the tensions between universal norms and Islamic values, internal diversity, and external pressures, the OIC's reform efforts illuminate the broader dynamics of institutional isomorphism, power asymmetries, and cultural negotiation.

Central to the OIC's own reform is its position on the United Nations Security Council's reform and its call for adequate representation of the Muslim world, a demand rooted in the belief that the Council's current structure fails to reflect the demographic, political, and cultural realities of an interconnected, globalized world. In Article 147 of the *Final Communiqué of the Annual Coordination Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the OIC Member States*:

The OIC's demand for adequate representation in the Security Council is in keeping with the significant demographic and political weight of the OIC Member States,

which bears particular importance... to ensure the representation of the main forms of civilization in the Security Council. (United Nations 2008, sec. “UN Reform”)

This statement reveals the OIC as a distinct actor in global governance, advancing a vision that goes beyond institutional or demographic concerns to invoke a civilizational ethos. By framing itself as the largest international body after the United Nations, the OIC situates its demand for representation within a broader moral and civilizational narrative. This framing underscores that its claim is not merely about procedural equity but about recognizing the Islamic Ummah as a fundamental component of the global order’s pluralistic fabric.

The articulation of this position reflects a layered discourse, intertwining demographic significance with the symbolic assertion of civilizational identity. The call for “adequate representation of the Islamic Ummah” projects the Ummah not as a confined political constituency but as a dynamic and transnational community with historical and moral stakes in shaping the structures of global governance. This perspective implicitly critiques the existing hegemonic configurations of the UNSC, exposing the inadequacy of a system that neglects plurality.

The OIC’s insistence that “any reform proposal which neglects the adequate representation of the Islamic Ummah... will not be acceptable to the Islamic World” (Article 98, OIC/SUM-15/2024/FC) exemplifies a rejection of homogenizing global power structures. This declaration underscores the OIC’s self-conception as a mediator between sacred and political realms, advocating for an inclusive cosmology where justice necessitates the recognition of the Islamic tradition as integral to global governance.

Viewed through this lens, the OIC’s call for Security Council reform transcends a demand for structural change; it asserts the Islamic Ummah as a co-constitutive actor in the evolving global order. This vision elevates the discourse of reform into a broader, civilizational dialogue, advocating for the coexistence of plural identities within the framework of international relations. It seeks to embed the values and aspirations of the Muslim world within the architecture of global governance,

challenging the exclusivity of existing structures and emphasizing the need for a more inclusive and representative international order.

Despite its critique and well-articulated demands, the OIC acknowledges the complexities of achieving comprehensive UN reform. The organization emphasizes the need for a consensus-driven process that accommodates diverse perspectives. As the resolutions note, “*Efforts at the restructuring of the Security Council shall not be subjected to any artificial deadlines, and a decision on this issue should be made by consensus*” (Article 99, OIC/SUMMIT-11/2008/FC/REV.6). This highly optimistic yet pragmatic approach highlights the OIC’s recognition of the entrenched interests and geopolitical rivalries that complicate reform efforts. Moreover, the emphasis on the participation of developing countries and equitable geographical distribution reflects the OIC’s commitment to fostering a more inclusive and representative global order.

The OIC’s resolutions on the UN reforms encapsulate a struggle for justice, representation, and adherence to international norms. By critiquing the UNSC’s structural inequities and opposing interventionist practices, the OIC asserts its vision for a more balanced and inclusive global governance system. However, the challenges of achieving consensus and overcoming entrenched power structures underscore the difficulties inherent in this struggle. Ultimately, the OIC’s pursuit of UN reform reflects its broader mission to elevate the voice of the Muslim world in shaping the international order.

2.6. Identifying the Autochthonous and the Replica

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation represents a unique intersection of global governance, Islamic political theory, and transnational solidarity. As the proclaimed collective voice of the Muslim world, the OIC seeks to uphold Islamic values in the context of an increasingly globalized, secular, and often Western-dominated international system. 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 or 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 (discussed in a subsequent chapter), which embeds Islamic ethics within the language of universal human rights—a move that both challenges and conforms to hegemonic global norms.

It can be argued that this act of cultural translation risks eroding the integrity of the Islamic worldview by reducing it to what Tim Ingold critiques as an objectified “anthropological culture,” a construct shaped by Western modernity and detached from its dynamic, lived reality (Ingold 1993). While Ingold does not explicitly address the Islamic worldview, his critique of “anthropological culture” as a static and essentialized framework provides a lens through which to examine the challenges of representing complex religious systems within modern epistemologies.

In studying Islamic political structures and religious forms, Talal Asad’s analysis underscores the importance of approaching these subjects as historically situated and relational discourses. He critiques simplistic correlations between types of Islam and social structures, arguing against de-historicized, schematic representations. Asad emphasizes the need for narratives to translate culturally distinctive actors’ responses to the discourses of others, rather than isolating them from their broader historical and relational contexts. Furthermore, he differentiates between analysis of Middle Eastern political economies and the representation of Islamic “dramas,” stressing that while these are distinct discursive exercises, they can meaningfully intersect within the same

narrative. Rejecting the superstructure-base analogy often applied to Islam and social structure, Asad proposes viewing Islam as a discursive tradition. This perspective links it to the formation of moral selves, the management or resistance of populations, and the production of knowledge, offering a more dynamic framework for anthropological inquiry. (Asad 1986, 10)

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.

The OIC's hybridization of global governance forms and Islamic political principles is most clearly observed in the institutionalization of concepts that resonate with both Islamic thought and global political needs. Take, for example, the OIC's emphasis on the ummah (the global community of Muslims) and the notion of solidarity among Muslim majority states. These concepts are framed not simply as diplomatic terms but as foundational ethical and political imperatives. This blending of religious and political categories produces a distinctive form of governance that positions the OIC as both a political organization and a moral community, a dynamic often overlooked in traditional analyses of international organizations.

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 in the face of Western imperialism. 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.

One of the most compelling tensions in the OIC's structure is the interplay between particularism and "universalism". The OIC's political ontology is rooted in a particularistic vision of governance, one that is shaped by Islamic values and historical experiences. This particularism is evident in the organization's foundational texts, which invoke the notion of Islamic unity and moral responsibility for the Muslim world. However, the OIC's engagement with the global order, particularly through its interaction with the UN and other international bodies, also reflects a desire to align itself with universal norms such as human rights, democracy, and international law.

This tension between particularism and universalism is central to understanding the OIC's hybrid organizational identity.

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 Organization of Islamic Cooperation may be understood as a site of cultural translation and political resistance, where Islamic political theory is both integrated into global governance structures and reinterpreted through the lived experiences and political needs of its member states. The OIC's organizational form reflects a strategic alignment with global governance frameworks, particularly the UN, but also highlights the tensions between Islamic political thought and the secular, state-centered paradigm of international order. The OIC's institutional ontology, shaped by Islamic principles, creates a unique political space where particularistic Islamic values are negotiated with universalist principles of governance. This negotiation is not passive but rather is a dynamic, ongoing process of cultural adaptation and resistance, positioning the OIC

as a critical actor in the global struggle for justice, equity, and political sovereignty. The OIC's organizational identity reflects a broader dynamic of cultural negotiation, where the tensions between tradition and modernity, local and global, and religious and secular are continuously redefined within the context of global political life.

2.7. Conclusion

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation occupies a liminal and contested space within the global order, functioning as a site of ontological and epistemological negotiation. It embodies a dialectic between Islamic political imaginaries and the secular rationalities of modern international governance, unsettling the assumed coherence of both. Through its hybrid institutional framework, the OIC reveals itself not merely as a derivative of Western global governance forms but as a productive site of cultural and political translation. This translation, however, is fraught—an act of both accommodation and resistance, subversion and affirmation, wherein Islamic ethical paradigms are simultaneously preserved and reconstituted within the logics of a hegemonic international system.

The OIC can be read as an artifact of transcultural encounter and reflects a deliberate recalibration of Islamic ontologies to negotiate the pressures of postcolonial modernity. Yet this act of recalibration destabilizes both the essentialisms of Islamic tradition and the universalist claims of Western governance, engendering a generative hybridity that calls into question the persistence of political forms. In this regard, the OIC does not merely inhabit a “third space” but actively produces one, an agonistic zone where competing sovereignties, epistemologies, and ethical imaginaries confront one another.

This confrontation is not without paradox. The OIC's mimicry of the United Nations and its adoption of bureaucratic structures predicated on Westphalian statehood underscore a strategic engagement with the very epistemic frameworks it seeks to disrupt. By adopting these forms, the OIC risks reifying the colonial logics it ostensibly critiques, rendering itself vulnerable to co-optation by the discursive regimes of modernity. The OIC's institutional ontology thus reveals a dialectical process in which

Islamic principles are neither simply subverted nor preserved but rearticulated in response to the exigencies of global power.

In its efforts to preserve the ethical unity of the ummah while engaging in the fragmented terrain of international diplomacy, the OIC operates as a counter-hegemonic force. Yet one that must contend with the profound ambivalences of its position. The organization's claims to universalism, particularly in its advocacy for global justice and equity, are inflected by a particularism rooted in Islamic political thought. This interplay between the universal and the particular destabilizes conventional binaries of secular and religious, modern and traditional, demanding a more nuanced understanding of how cultural and political imaginaries are constituted through relationality. The OIC's project invites reflection on whether embedding Islamic ethics within global frameworks can act as a transformative force or whether such efforts remain constrained by the very systems they seek to reform.

CHAPTER III

THE VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter undertakes an examination of case studies to illuminate the OIC's identity as a hypothesized "multiple identity organization." Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial international law and organizational sociology, it critically analyzes how the OIC navigates its dual mandate to uphold Islamic values while addressing the often competing political priorities of its member states. By exploring these dynamics, the chapter positions the OIC as a compelling case study for understanding the interplay of religion and governance in intergovernmental organizations.

The choice of case studies reflects the OIC's engagement with issues that are emblematic of its religious and political mission. A central focus is the OIC's stance on Palestine, with particular attention to the symbolic and strategic significance of Jerusalem. This case study was chosen for its capacity to highlight how the organization seeks to align its Islamic ethos with the diverse geopolitical realities of its member states, making it a pivotal lens through which to explore the broader commitments of the OIC. Additionally, the chapter examines the OIC's advocacy for Muslim minorities outside its member states, focusing on its responses to the crises facing the Rohingya and the Kashmiris. These cases were selected because they illustrate the organization's efforts to balance its religious mission with the practical challenges of engaging with non-member states and navigating international norms. These examples, while not exhaustive, represent a strategic sampling of the OIC's activities where its identity and priorities are most visibly contested and asserted.

Through these analyses, the chapter underscores the OIC's positioning as it strives to maintain its religious authenticity while engaging in the secular political realm of international relations. In addressing these multifaceted issues, the chapter not only sheds light on the organization's unique position but also contributes to a broader understanding of the role of religiously grounded institutions in shaping global politics.

Crucial to this discussion are the theoretical insights provided in Wael Hallaq's critique of the modern nation-state in his work titled *The Impossible State*. Hallaq's argument that the modern nation-state is fundamentally incompatible with the principles of Islamic governance provides a framework to explore how the OIC's activities navigate, and at times compromise, the interplay between Islamic ideals and the demands of contemporary political structures. By engaging with these themes, the chapter invites further exploration of how faith-based organizations reconcile their foundational principles with the complexities of a secularized international landscape.

At the heart of Hallaq's argument is the claim that the modern state creates meanings and worldviews that are inherently guided by its metaphysics, which prioritize power and will. He argues that even as these systems evolve, they remain bound by intrinsic standards that subordinate all other truths to the state's positivist framework. This raises the question of whether a state that does not centralize morality and divine sovereignty can function within an Islamic paradigm. For Hallaq, the incompatibility stems from the fact that Islamic governance derives its authority from God, with sovereignty belonging solely to Him. In contrast, the modern state's self-constitution and sovereignty are guided by ever-transforming ideals shaped by rationality and positivism (2013).

Hallaq elaborates that under Islamic governance, the referent moral authority is God, and all laws and regulations must align with higher moral principles. These principles shape not only legislative and judicial systems but also the purpose of governance itself. He contrasts this with the modern nation-state, which seeks to create citizens who prioritize loyalty to the state and are prepared to sacrifice their lives for nationalistic goals. He writes:

The duty of the state, fulfilled maximally and most faithfully through education and nationalistic discourse—among much else—is to create the efficient and productive citizen, the subject of ‘law and order,’ who is willing to die for his country and nation. Whereas Islam does not command sacrifice of life, even for the sake of God, the modern nation-state is inconceivable without this requirement. (Hallaq 2013, 113)

This fundamental difference highlights how Islamic governance seeks to mold individuals holistically, attending to their political, social, moral, and psychological composition in accordance with divine wisdom and moral obligations. The incompatibility between Islamic governance and the modern state is not merely theoretical; it has played out historically through legal and political transformations in the Muslim world. Al-Bishri, in *The Islamic-Secular Dialogue*, examines how the adoption of European legal codes and institutions was not only the result of colonial imposition but also shaped by linguistic and conceptual shifts. The Islamic concept of *islah* (reform) came to be equated with *tajdid* (renewal), often linked to Westernization, while Islamic traditions were dismissed as *taqlid* (blind imitation). This paradox, as Al-Bishri notes, created a multi-generational dilemma where Muslims seeking reform find themselves trapped in historical and institutional double binds (Al-Bishri 1996).

Byrd expands on this by exploring how colonial state structures systematically rejected Islamic tradition while simultaneously claiming to represent Muslim interests (2016, 210). These paradoxes reveal the challenges faced by contemporary Muslim thinkers and actors in reconciling Islamic principles with modern political frameworks.

These debates are particularly relevant when considering the role of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and pan-Islamic institutions, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which aim to serve the diverse political, economic, and social interests of the global Muslim community. While Islamic legal traditions include a rich history of treaties (Mu’ahadat) and principles of mutual relations (siyar), the application of these principles within modern IGOs remains underexplored (Bsoul 2008, 1-26).

Scholars like Nordsrom and Boehmer argue that research on the dynamics of IGOs and their impact on state interests remains limited (2008, 284). The interplay between transnational actors and state agents highlights the dependencies and contingencies that influence governance, democracy, and accountability within these organizations (Taninchev 2015, 134). For Islamic governance to align with these structures, significant theoretical and practical advancements are needed to bridge the gaps between historical Islamic principles and contemporary global systems.

The OIC's trajectory invites a deeper examination of the tensions between religiously anchored governance and the secular frameworks of modern international systems. It raises critical questions about whether institutions like the OIC can transcend the epistemological confines of the nation-state to reclaim a moral order aligned with their theological foundations. The paradox of a religious institution operating within structures often antithetical to its ethos underscores the complexities of this endeavor. This chapter positions the OIC as a dialectical case study that explores whether faith-identity-based organizations can authentically implement their principles within a global order increasingly shaped by secular and positivist paradigms.

3.2. Until the Liberation of Jerusalem: A Moral and Political Nexus

The Palestinian question occupies a central and enduring position in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) history, discourse, and institutional framework, serving as both an organizational *raison d'être* and a metonym for broader Muslim political and moral struggles in the postcolonial world. Salman Sayyid, in *Recalling the Caliphate*, highlights this resonance, positing that the Palestinian struggle dramatizes the broader colonial condition afflicting global Muslims. For Sayyid, the global Muslim subjectivity, deprived of a unifying political framework, finds its most poignant expression in Palestine, where the effects of coloniality and global inequities are starkly visible (Sayyid 2014, 118). This framing underscores the salience of Palestine as a defining issue for the OIC, linking the organization's moral vision with the socio-historical imaginaries of the global Muslim population.

The OIC emerged in 1969 as a direct response to the arson attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque, a pivotal moment that galvanized Muslim states into collective action. The

centrality of Al-Aqsa as one of Islam's holiest sites endowed the organization with a distinctly Islamic mandate from its inception. The summit in Rabat declared unequivocal solidarity with the Palestinian people, emphasizing the sanctity of Jerusalem and affirming its pre-1967 status as integral to the Palestinian struggle (Kayaoglu 2015, 14). This foundational emphasis illustrates the deep intertwining of the Palestinian issue with Islamic heritage, sacred geography, and collective memory. It also reflects the significance of shared symbols in fostering transnational solidarities, particularly in contexts where sacred space intersects with political sovereignty.

This interplay of identities and discourses reveals the OIC's role as a mediator of the sacred and the secular, the particular and the universal, navigating a terrain where religious affiliations are mobilized as a counter-hegemonic force, yet remain tethered to the structures of the very order they contest.

The rhetoric of the OIC on the Palestinian issue, particularly Jerusalem, reflects a gradual yet notable shift from militant expressions of resistance to a reliance on international law and diplomatic mechanisms. Jerusalem has consistently been central to the OIC's discourse, with the organization framing the city as both a religious and political symbol of collective Islamic identity. However, the tone and intensity of its statements have evolved over time, adapting to shifting geopolitical realities and institutional limitations.

At the 2018 International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem, OIC Secretary-General Dr. Yousef bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen emphasized that "political developments would not alter [Jerusalem's] status" (OIC 2018). He condemned Israel's attempts to change the city's historical and legal character, describing these efforts as an affront to international law. Furthermore, Al-Othaimeen criticized the United States' recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and its relocation of the U.S. embassy, underscoring the OIC's position that such actions undermined the possibility of a two-state solution. This condemnation marked a broader effort to align the Palestinian struggle with global legal norms, an approach echoed in the OIC's call for "political, economic, and legal measures against states supporting Israeli claims" (OIC 2018).

The 2024 Council of Foreign Ministers reinforced these themes, reaffirming Jerusalem as “a primary priority among the organization’s goals and principles” (OIC, 2024). The council’s final statement emphasized Jerusalem’s Arab and Islamic identity, declared it the rightful capital of Palestine, and condemned escalating Israeli actions such as settlement activities, forced displacement, and the Judaization of historic neighborhoods. The council further stressed that such actions “constitute a blatant violation of international law and United Nations resolutions” and reiterated that “all Israeli actions in Jerusalem are null and void” (OIC 2024). These declarations signal continuity in the OIC’s stance but also a deeper reliance on the language of legalism and international consensus to frame its claims.

The evolution of the OIC’s rhetoric is starkly evident when considering earlier statements. While the Palestinian cause and the significance of Jerusalem have been central to every OIC summit, “the tone of the final statements has varied in intensity over time, evolving from calls for jihad to liberate Jerusalem to mere condemnations and affirmations of its significance to the Arab and Islamic worlds” (Al Jazeera 2017). This shift highlights a transformation in the OIC’s strategy—from militant resistance to institutional advocacy rooted in the frameworks of global governance.

The OIC’s enduring focus on Jerusalem as a symbolic and strategic axis of its mission reflects Palestine's centrality to the organization’s ontological horizon. Jerusalem is not merely a geographical locus but a nexus where the OIC’s layered claims—Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic—intersect to generate a rich field of meaning. The assertion that “any change in [Jerusalem’s] legal status will not alter its Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic identity” (OIC 2024) exemplifies a discursive strategy aimed at mobilizing a multiplicity of affiliations, each reinforcing the other in the face of shifting geopolitical and legal terrains. Yet, this rhetorical anchoring is not without its tensions. The increasing reliance on international law and collective diplomacy reveals the structural limits of an approach rooted in symbolic affirmation. While this portrays a gesture toward a moral cosmopolitanism, it also exposes the gap between the OIC’s declaratory politics and the material constraints imposed by an international order that privileges power over principle. In this context, the cause with its multilayered identity, as Palestinian and Arab within the framework of territorialized nationhood and as the Islamic within the horizon of a transnational ummatic solidarity, becomes a

site where the OIC negotiates its dual aspiration: to honor the sacral unity of the ummah while engaging the realities of the nation-state system.

Table 3.1. Key OIC Summits on Palestine

<p>The 1st Islamic Summit, Rabat, Morocco, 1969</p>	<p>Condemned the Israeli arson attack on Al-Aqsa Mosque and rejected any Palestinian solution that did not restore Jerusalem to its pre-1967 status.</p>
<p>The 2nd Summit, Lahore, Pakistan, 1974</p>	<p>Reaffirmed Muslims' strong attachment to Jerusalem and called for Israel's immediate withdrawal, emphasizing the city's Arab sovereignty as essential for any Middle East peace resolution.</p>
<p>The 3rd Summit, Mecca, KSA, 1981</p>	<p>Adopted "sacred jihad" as a means to liberate Jerusalem and support Palestinian rights.</p>
<p>Subsequent summits in Casablanca (1984) and Dakar (1991)</p>	<p>Reaffirmed Jerusalem's Arab-Islamic identity and called for a global boycott of Israeli diplomatic missions in the city.</p>
<p>The 8th Summit, Tehran (1997)</p>	<p>Urged international action to prevent any Israeli changes to Jerusalem's geography or demographics during peace negotiations. The Islamic summit called on countries that began engaging with Israel as part of the peace process to reconsider these relations, including closing diplomatic missions, until Israel fully withdraws from occupied Arab territories and guarantees Palestinian rights, including the establishment of an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.</p>

Table 3.1. (cont.)

Following the Al-Aqsa Intifada, a special session was held in Doha, Qatar (2000)	Urged international recognition of the State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital. The session reinforced the Islamic boycott of Israel and condemned U.S. actions supporting Jerusalem as Israel's capital, vowing to sever ties with any country that moves its embassy to Jerusalem. The tone of subsequent summit statements shifted to condemnations of Israeli actions.
The 10th summit, Malaysia (2003)	Leaders denounced Israel's settlement expansion and violations of international law.
The Mecca Summit (2005)	Called for efforts to preserve Jerusalem's Islamic character and protect Al-Aqsa Mosque.
The 5th Extraordinary Summit, Jakarta (2016)	Emphasized the need to end the occupation of Palestinian territories and protect Al-Aqsa's sanctity.
Later summits and the 2017 Istanbul Summit	Addresses the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Reference: Al Jazeera, 2017

The issue of Palestine as a profoundly Islamic cause is embedded within a moral and cosmological framework that transcends secular nationalist paradigms. Jerusalem holds profound eschatological and historical significance for Muslims. The OIC's mission to protect Al-Aqsa and resist what İhsanoğlu called the "judaization" of the naming of Al-Quds aligns with an Islamic ethos of custodianship over sacred space (Kayaoğlu 2015, 61). Consequently, the Palestinian struggle is not merely a territorial or political issue but an ontological one, resonating with collective Muslim aspirations for justice, dignity, and the preservation of divine trust. This ontological dimension

distinguishes the Palestinian cause from other geopolitical disputes, imbuing it with unique symbolic weight.

The OIC's 2024 speech at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) serves as a representative example of the OIC's consistent rhetoric and framing in its advocacy for Palestine. Across various international platforms, the OIC has consistently underscored the Palestinian struggle as a cause deeply rooted in religious, moral, and political imperatives. The invocation of *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* (Holy Jerusalem) within this speech exemplifies how the organization systematically grounds its advocacy for Palestinian sovereignty in religious terms, emphasizing the sacred significance of Jerusalem within the Islamic tradition.

The choice to use the Arabic name *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* instead of its English or alternative forms is a noteworthy rhetorical strategy. This term, which translates to "The Noble Jerusalem," resonates deeply within Islamic theology and history, evoking the sanctity of Jerusalem as the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque—one of the holiest sites in Islam. By centering *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* in its argumentation, the OIC elevates the Palestinian struggle beyond a mere political or territorial dispute, framing it as a religious duty incumbent upon the global Muslim ummah. The emphasis on *Al-Quds* positions the issue as a matter of defending Islamic identity, heritage, and dignity under siege by Israeli policies.

Furthermore, the use of *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* at the ICJ, a secular international legal forum, underscores the OIC's strategy of merging religious imperatives with global legal frameworks. By framing Palestine's claim to Jerusalem in explicitly religious terms, the OIC reinforces the notion that the occupation is not only a violation of international law but also a desecration of sacred Islamic sites. This dual appeal is designed to resonate with both Muslim-majority states, which share a collective responsibility toward Islamic sanctities, and the broader international community, which recognizes the need to uphold cultural and religious rights.

By repeatedly invoking *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* and linking its preservation to the broader Palestinian cause, the OIC positions the defense of Palestine as a religious imperative that transcends political boundaries and galvanizes Muslim solidarity. This strategy

exemplifies the OIC's role as both a political actor and a custodian of Islamic sanctities, ensuring that Palestine remains firmly rooted in the organization's religious and moral agenda.

In the same vein, the Banjul Declaration by the United Nations in 2024 presents the Palestinian struggle as a profound test of international morality and the principles of justice and sovereignty. At its core, the declaration emphasizes the indivisibility of human dignity and the rights of people to self-determination, using Palestine as both a case study and a rallying point. Addressed to the UN Secretary General, it appeals to the ethical underpinnings of international law, questioning the legitimacy of global governance if such egregious injustices are allowed to persist. The Islamic identity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif emerges as a focal symbol in this discourse, representing not only the spiritual heritage of the Muslim world but also the broader human rights to cultural preservation against forces of erasure and domination. Jerusalem, in this framing, transcends its geopolitical significance, standing instead as a universal testament to the coexistence of faith, history, and identity, which the declaration asserts must be safeguarded for peace to have any authentic meaning.

The document interrogates the disparity between the ideals espoused by the global community and their selective application, particularly through its critique of the ongoing displacement, apartheid policies, and violations of international law in Palestine. By invoking terms such as "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing," the OIC not only raises the stakes of inaction but also positions the Palestinian struggle within a broader narrative of historical resistance against oppression. It implicitly challenges the moral inertia of the international system, suggesting that indifference to Palestine is emblematic of a deeper fracture in humanity's shared ethical commitments.

Also, the deliberate pairing of modern atrocities, such as the desecration of the Quran, with historical tragedies like Srebrenica creates a rhetorical bridge between past and present, warning of the cyclical nature of hatred and dehumanization when left unchecked. The undertone here is one of collective accountability: the failure to address injustice in Palestine risks unraveling the very fabric of a global order that claims to be predicated on equality and human rights. In centering Palestine, the declaration articulates a vision where the preservation of dignity, identity, and self-

determination is not merely a regional concern but a universal imperative that defines the moral compass of the international community.

The OIC has consistently prioritized Palestine in its institutional architecture, embedding the cause into its operational and discursive frameworks. The establishment of the Al-Quds Committee in 1975 and the Al-Quds Fund underscores the centrality of Palestine to the organization's mission, allocating resources for financial aid, diplomatic advocacy, and cultural preservation (Kayaoglu 2015, 61). The organization's charter also reflects this prioritization, with the location of its headquarters in Jeddah symbolically provisional until the "liberation" of Jerusalem (Kayaoglu 2015, 62).

The OIC's advocacy for Palestine extends beyond its membership to global platforms, including the United Nations. The organization's efforts to promote Palestine's recognition as a non-member observer state and its successful lobbying for the membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) highlight its capacity to leverage international institutions in advancing a distinctly Islamic normative agenda (Kayaoğlu 2015, 65). These actions illustrate how the OIC functions as a mediator of transnational Muslim identity, translating collective imaginaries into concrete institutional practices that contest global hierarchies.

Wael Hallaq (2013) highlighted the dissonance between the moral and cultural aspirations of Muslims and the modern secular global order, which marginalizes Islamic epistemologies and political visions. Palestine epitomizes this dissonance, serving as a site where Islamic notions of justice, sovereignty, and sacred space are in tension with secular international norms and structures. For the OIC, Palestine is not merely a political issue but a moral touchstone that legitimizes its broader mission to represent Muslim interests on the global stage.

One of the more fascinating policy artifacts that delineate this study's central thesis is the OIC's state-centric structure, which creates inherent limitations in its ability to act as an inclusive advocate for Muslim communities and independence movements in light of the fact that membership is restricted to states, specifically Muslim members of the United Nations, with Palestine, represented by the PLO, being the sole exception

as a full member despite lacking full statehood. This framework excludes various Muslim independence movements, such as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the Moro National Liberation Front, Chechnya, and Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang), some of which have only been granted observer status. (Kayaoğlu 2015, 27).

This exclusion reflects the OIC's reliance on UN-based state recognition, which aligns with its intergovernmental nature but constrains its capacity to support diverse nationalist aspirations. It underscores the geopolitical challenges the organization faces in balancing its state-centric model with the collective Islamic ethos it seeks to embody. The selective recognition of Palestine highlights tensions between the OIC's theological commitment to the global ummah and the political realities of operating within a system dominated by state sovereignty.

Despite these limitations, the OIC has succeeded in fostering a strong pro-Palestinian norm within the Muslim world. Through its resolutions, diplomatic campaigns, and institutional mechanisms, the organization has embedded the Palestinian cause as a central moral and political concern for its member states. This normative consensus has shaped the Muslim world's engagement with Israel, including the suspension of Egypt's membership following the Camp David Accords and the condemnation of states normalizing relations with Israel (Kayaoglu 2015, 64).

The significance of Palestine extends beyond the realm of state politics. For many Muslims, the Palestinian struggle symbolizes resistance against colonial subjugation and the aspiration for a just global order. It encapsulates a broader sense of disenfranchisement and a yearning for a world aligned with Islamic moral values. The OIC's commitment to Palestine therefore serves not only as an organizational priority but also as a vehicle for articulating a shared Islamic cosmology in an increasingly fragmented global context.

The Palestinian issue remains the cornerstone of the OIC's identity, shaping its institutional development, normative agenda, and symbolic significance. As an Islamic issue, Palestine represents the intersection of sacred geography, historical memory, and collective morality. The OIC's sustained advocacy for Palestine reflects its role as a custodian of the global Muslim aspirations, even as it navigates the complexities of

state-centric geopolitics and global power dynamics. While the organization's effectiveness in achieving concrete political outcomes may be constrained, its enduring focus on Palestine underscores the centrality of moral imagination in shaping transnational solidarities and institutional frameworks within the Muslim world.

3.3. 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) allegedly 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, T. 2011; Saleh 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.

The sociological dimensions of the OIC's efforts are evident in its emphasis on education, economic development, and cultural preservation. These initiatives are not merely practical measures but strategic interventions that address the structural conditions underpinning marginalization. For instance, education is framed as a tool for both economic mobility and the preservation of Islamic identity in contexts where Muslims face cultural erasure. Similarly, economic empowerment initiatives mobilize resources from institutions like the Islamic Development Bank to address systemic inequalities, reinforcing the OIC's role as a transnational mediator of rights and resources.

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”³. 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

³ (OIC 2013, Res. 1/40-MM)

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.

3.4. The OIC's Peacebuilding Endeavors: Kashmir and the Rohingya

The rebranding of the "Organization of Islamic Conference" to the "Organization of Islamic Cooperation" in 2011 during its 38th ministerial meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, marked a significant shift in the organization's strategic and symbolic trajectory. This change was not merely a nominal adjustment but signaled the OIC's ambition to position itself as a proactive participant in an increasingly interconnected global community. Sharqieh notes that such a move reflects the OIC's intent to align with the complexities of global interdependence, signaling a shift in its political identity and functional aspirations (Sharqieh 2012, 219). This rebranding can be viewed as an act of collective identity reconstruction, where the OIC sought to reassert its relevance by embedding itself within the cooperative ethos of global political frameworks.

The OIC formation represents a collective endeavor by Muslim-majority states and others with significant Muslim populations to pool resources, articulate shared concerns, and ensure the socio-political and economic well-being of Muslim communities worldwide (Nirvana 2023, 5). By defining itself as the "collective voice of the Muslim world," the OIC expresses its mission as a cultural and political entity seeking to safeguard Islamic values while promoting peace and harmony in the global order (Ibrahim 2019).

The OIC's early trajectory illustrates its evolving role as a mediator in global Muslim affairs. Initially perceived as a nascent political entity, it gradually demonstrated its capacity for diplomatic intervention, mediating disputes such as the Pakistan-

Bangladesh reconciliation in 1974 and addressing tensions between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Jordan (OIC 2021). These interventions can be understood as instances of transnational cultural brokerage, where shared Islamic principles facilitate conflict resolution.

The unresolved Kashmir conflict underscores the challenges faced by transnational organizations like the OIC. The organization's advocacy for the rights of the Muslim-majority population in Kashmir highlights its moral commitment to international justice. However, the OIC's limited ability to translate resolutions into action reveals the structural limitations inherent in organizations characterized by shared but diverse cultural and religious foundations (Ali and Sultan, 2023, 5-6).

Moreover, the OIC's role extends beyond conflict mediation to addressing socio-political and humanitarian issues affecting Muslim communities globally. Examples include its provision of financial aid and humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya refugees in Myanmar and its consistent advocacy for Muslim minorities in regions like the Philippines. These efforts illustrate the organization's broader commitment to fostering transnational solidarity within the global Muslim community (Ali and Sultan, 2023, 7-8)

The post-9/11 rise of Islamophobia posed a new challenge, particularly for Muslim diasporas in the West. Through peaceful measures, the OIC has sought to combat negative stereotypes and promote intercultural dialogue (Pervaz and Asad 2022, 57). These initiatives reflect the organization's adaptive capacity to negotiate its cultural identity within a global context, reinforcing its relevance in addressing the socio-political realities of contemporary Muslim communities.

The OIC's network of specialized agencies reflects its commitment to addressing diverse challenges faced by the Muslim world. These include the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) for financial governance and the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), which parallels UNESCO (Ali and Sultan 2023, 2). Such institutions demonstrate the OIC's strategy of embedding global standards within an Islamic framework, balancing universalist aspirations with particularist commitments. For example, the Women Development Organization (WDO) addresses

gender equality by promoting culturally resonant approaches to women's empowerment. Similarly, the Islamic Organization for Food Security highlights the interconnected nature of socio-economic challenges, emphasizing the importance of collective solutions grounded in Islamic ethical principles.

The Kashmir conflict, a protracted territorial dispute between India and Pakistan, traces its origins to the 1947 partition of British India and the political decisions that disrupted the region's fabric. Geographically significant due to its borders with China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, Kashmir spans an expansive area in the northwestern Indian subcontinent (Britannica, 2024). The accession of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) to India by Maharaja Hari Singh on October 26, 1947, amid violent partition upheavals, triggered conflict over sovereignty and national identity. The Radcliffe Boundary Commission's allocation of key territories to India further fueled future contestations and wars (Bowers 2004, 12).

The OIC has long recognized the Kashmir conflict as a pivotal issue, consistently highlighting the plight of Kashmiri Muslims and advocating for their right to self-determination. Since the early 1990s, the OIC has condemned violence in the region, passed resolutions denouncing human rights abuses, and appealed to the United Nations for intervention (Ahmed 2023, 1038-40). These actions align with the OIC's broader mission of supporting Muslim communities worldwide, particularly those facing systemic oppression or conflict. To institutionalize its engagement, the OIC established the "OIC Contact Group on Kashmir" during its 1994 Tehran meeting (Hanif 2014, 54). This group, comprising member states such as Pakistan, Turkey, and Niger, coordinates advocacy efforts for Kashmiri self-determination within the UN framework. The OIC's Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) has also conducted fact-finding missions to Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), producing reports recommending specific international actions (OIC-IPHRC, 2017).

The OIC's Resolution No. 5/11-P(IS) illustrates its strategic use of terminology to assert solidarity and navigate global dynamics. Terms like "self-determination" and "human rights" link the resolution to international legal norms, invoking the authority of frameworks like the UN Charter while universalizing the OIC's advocacy. Simultaneously, expressions such as "legitimate freedom struggle" and "innocent

Kashmiris” draw on the collective ethos of the Muslim ummah, embedding the resolution within a shared Islamic moral framework. This dual linguistic strategy bridges universal ideals and particularist solidarity, resonating across diverse audiences. The resolution’s verbs—“calls upon,” “urges,” and “condemns”—strike a balance between assertiveness and diplomacy, reflecting the OIC’s aspirations for influence despite its limited enforcement power.⁴

Despite these initiatives, the OIC’s influence remains largely symbolic. Resolutions condemning India’s unilateral actions, especially after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, lack enforcement mechanisms, limiting their practical impact. The OIC’s repeated appeals for access to Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K) have been rebuffed, while its inability to unify member states underscores institutional weaknesses (Pakistani Mission to the UN n.d.). Nonetheless, the OIC frames the Kashmir conflict not merely as a territorial dispute but as a struggle for the rights and dignity of a Muslim-majority population under perceived oppression. This framing reinforces collective identity among member states, grounded in shared cultural and religious values.

The OIC’s alignment with Pakistan as a principal advocate for Kashmiri self-determination has fostered perceptions of bias, particularly from India. This perception arises from the OIC’s historical and ongoing support for Pakistan’s position on Kashmir, which India views as an infringement on its sovereignty and territorial integrity. India’s strategic alliances and assertive claims over Jammu and Kashmir further complicate the OIC’s ability to mediate effectively or present itself as a neutral actor. The deep-seated rivalry between the two nuclear-armed states places the OIC in a difficult position, as it seeks to uphold its mandate of advocating for the rights of Muslim communities while navigating the geopolitical complexities of South Asia (Hwang 2019, 28).

The effectiveness of the OIC is significantly hindered by structural challenges, primarily arising from the divergent priorities and geopolitical strategies of its member states. India’s firm opposition to third-party mediation in the Kashmir conflict, as

⁴ (Organization of Islamic Cooperation [OIC] 2008).

evidenced in its rejection of OIC's resolutions and fact-finding missions, limits the organization's leverage in addressing the issue (2021, 6-7). Hashmi et al. argue that these dynamics illustrate how national interests, driven by economic ties and geopolitical alliances, overshadow the OIC's original mission of Muslim unity, complicating its ability to present a unified front on contentious issues like Kashmir (2021 12–13; Ali & Sultan 2023, 19 (1): 2-6).

Statements from the OIC, including those issued by its IPHRC, frequently condemn security clampdowns, communication blockades, and the imprisonment of political figures in Kashmir, calling on India to uphold international norms and human rights (OIC on Jammu & Kashmir, n.d.). On March 16, 2023, the OIC Contact Group reaffirmed its support for Kashmiris during a meeting in Nouakchott. Secretary-General Hissein Ibrahim Taha and Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari emphasized the need for international efforts aligned with UN Security Council resolutions to resolve the dispute peacefully. The Contact Group commended the IPHRC's monitoring efforts and urged India to uphold Kashmiri human rights.⁵

While the OIC consistently advocates for the Kashmiri right to self-determination, its limited enforcement power reflects the broader constraints of multilateral diplomacy. India's refusal to allow external oversight and its resistance to regional initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) complicate the OIC's diplomatic efforts. Despite this, the OIC's symbolic advocacy highlights its role in addressing the humanitarian and political dimensions of the Kashmir conflict. Its dual identity as a political actor and advocate for global Muslim communities underscores the intersection of transnational solidarity, political advocacy, and global governance complexities. Though constrained by structural limitations and geopolitical realities, the OIC continues to champion the Kashmiri cause within the international arena.

One other humanitarian case given significant attention by the OIC is that the Rohingya crisis represents a severe humanitarian disaster, driven by Myanmar's systemic ethnic cleansing policies targeting its minority Muslim population. Since the late 1970s, the Rohingya in Rakhine—a region marked by poverty and neglect—have

⁵ (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 2019—Call for Peaceful).

faced violence, including murder, sexual assault, and arson, prompting mass migrations to Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and other neighboring countries (Hosain and Hosain 2019). Today, over 700,000 Rohingya live in overcrowded camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district, stripped of citizenship and basic rights (UNHRC, 2018). The Myanmar military's actions have been widely categorized as ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and acts with genocidal intent (UNHCR, 2020).

The OIC, despite initiatives such as delegations to Rakhine and calls for international intervention, has made little headway due to Myanmar's resistance and limited global action (Sidhu and Parnini, 2011). Efforts to lift discriminatory laws or facilitate dignified repatriation have stalled, as the Rohingya refuse to return without guarantees of citizenship and safety (Jati 2017).

The Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority predominantly residing in Myanmar's Rakhine State, have faced systemic marginalization and persecution for decades. Their statelessness, institutionalized through Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, excluded them from the country's 135 officially recognized ethnic groups, effectively denying their legal identity.⁶ This marginalization is underpinned by historical tensions between Buddhist majorities and Muslim minorities, shaped by colonial-era policies and post-independence nation-building efforts.

The escalation of violence in August 2017 marked a turning point, with Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, initiating a campaign characterized by mass killings, sexual violence, and forced displacement. The United Nations and international human rights organizations labeled these acts as "genocidal intent" (UNHCR, n.d.; BBC, 2017). The exodus that followed created the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where nearly one million Rohingya refugees now reside in precarious conditions.

The OIC has played a significant role in highlighting the Rohingya crisis on international platforms. Its advocacy has encompassed diplomatic measures, legal

⁶ Date, Al Jazeera, 2018, accessed on December 30, 2024.)

action, and humanitarian assistance, underscoring its commitment to protecting the rights and dignity of Muslim communities globally.

One of the OIC's landmark interventions was its support for The Gambia's case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2019. This case, filed under the Genocide Convention, sought emergency measures to prevent further atrocities and establish accountability for the Tatmadaw's actions (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The OIC's endorsement of the ICJ proceedings represented a significant step in its peacebuilding and legal advocacy efforts, demonstrating the organization's capacity to engage with international judicial mechanisms.

In parallel, the OIC has consistently passed resolutions condemning Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya, labeling it as genocide, and urging member states to provide humanitarian aid. At global forums, including the United Nations, the OIC has emphasized the need for international cooperation in addressing the crisis. These efforts culminated in the organization's participation in the UNHCR's high-level meeting in October 2023, where it called for a unified global response to the Rohingya refugee crisis.⁷

The Report of the Meeting of the OIC Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee on Accountability for Human Rights Violations Against the Rohingya reveals the OIC's multifaceted approach to addressing the ongoing crisis, employing structured language and terminology to reinforce its commitment to justice, solidarity, and human rights advocacy. Key terminologies such as "accountability," "genocide," and "voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable repatriation" signal the dual focus on legal responsibility and humanitarian principles.⁸ These terms frame the crisis not merely as a regional issue but as a violation of universal human rights, aligning with global norms while affirming the OIC's moral and political leadership.

The report's structure demonstrates the OIC's strategic positioning. Diplomatic appeals ("calls on," "urges") are interwoven with legal references, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) rulings and UN Security Council Resolution 2669

⁷ Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2023).

⁸ (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 2024)

(2022), to bolster its authority and legitimacy. The emphasis on “root causes,” “citizenship rights,” and “systematic discrimination” highlights an intersectional understanding of the crisis, addressing not only the symptoms but also the structural inequities faced by the Rohingya. Notably, the document uses emotionally resonant phrases such as “gross violations,” “brutal acts,” and “culture of impunity” to emphasize the gravity of the situation and foster solidarity among member states and international allies. The inclusion of external actors like Canada, Germany, and the United States reflects the OIC’s effort to situate the Rohingya crisis within a broader geopolitical context, leveraging multilateral support to enhance accountability mechanisms.

However, the report also underscores the challenges inherent in the OIC’s advocacy. The reliance on voluntary funding contributions and non-binding appeals highlights the limitations of the organization’s enforcement capacity. The document’s focus on Myanmar’s compliance with ICJ orders and appeals for broader international support reveal the dependence on external actors to actualize its resolutions. This report exemplifies the OIC’s role as a transnational mediator, using carefully constructed language to assert its relevance within the global human rights discourse while emphasizing its commitment to justice and solidarity for the Rohingya.

Despite its robust advocacy, the OIC’s efforts have been hampered by structural and geopolitical challenges. Myanmar’s rejection of external interference has limited the organization’s capacity to directly influence conditions on the ground. Furthermore, the principle of non-interference within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Myanmar is a member, has restricted regional pressure on Myanmar’s military regime (Lattif 2020).

The OIC’s reliance on diplomatic channels and resolutions highlights a broader limitation: its lack of enforcement mechanisms. Without the ability to impose sanctions or mobilize military or peacekeeping interventions, the OIC’s influence remains largely rhetorical. Additionally, the organization’s dependence on member states for funding and operational support has led to fragmented and inconsistent responses.

Geopolitical factors have further complicated the OIC's interventions. The diverging priorities of member states, driven by bilateral relations with Myanmar or broader strategic interests, have undermined unified action. While some member states have actively supported the Rohingya cause, others have refrained from strong criticism of Myanmar, prioritizing economic or diplomatic ties over humanitarian concerns.

The Rohingya crisis exemplifies the limitations of the global "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) doctrine. Despite clear evidence of atrocities, the inability of international organizations such as the United Nations, ASEAN, the European Union, and the OIC to enforce accountability reflects systemic weaknesses in global governance. Structural impediments, such as veto power within the UN Security Council, and geopolitical competition among major powers have diluted the international community's capacity to protect vulnerable populations (Zahed 2021).

Compared to its responses to other crises, such as the Syrian civil war, the OIC's engagement with the Rohingya issue has been more unified and has facilitated a broader consensus. However, this unity has not translated into sustained, impactful action, as the organization's lack of direct financial resources and operational capacity has limited its effectiveness in addressing the humanitarian and political dimensions of the crisis (Gökalp Aras et al. 2020).

The Rohingya crisis illuminates the OIC's identity as an ethical and moral body rooted in the principle of *ummah*, the collective Islamic community that transcends borders and national identities. This crisis, characterized by genocidal violence and the denial of basic rights to the Rohingya, compels the OIC to act as more than a political entity, it becomes a moral custodian, striving to reconcile the universal claims of justice with the particularistic obligation to protect oppressed Muslims. Myanmar's targeting of the Rohingya reflects a clash between exclusionary nation-state frameworks and the OIC's vision of interconnected humanity, grounded in shared accountability and divine injunctions for justice. The language of the OIC, serves to position the Rohingya's plight within a broader ethical and spiritual narrative.

In advocating for the Rohingya, the OIC reaffirms its ontological role as a bearer of ethical responsibility, transcending mere national interests to embody the principle of

religious kinship in global politics. However, the limitations of enforcement and the dependency on external actors reveal the inherent tensions in actualizing this vision within an international order structured by power rather than morality. In this, the Rohingya crisis becomes not just a test of the OIC's efficacy but a profound moment of reflection on the intersection of Islamic ideals and the structural inequities of modern sovereignty.

3.5. Conclusion

The OIC's loyalty to Muslim minorities and engagement with the crises in Palestine, Kashmir, and Myanmar showcase its deeper ontological commitment to the *ummah* as a moral and cultural project, deeply embedded in historical memory and transcendent solidarity. These cases illuminate the OIC's dual character: a transnational organization bound by Islamic ethical principles that also navigates the dynamics of state sovereignty and global geopolitics.

Palestine occupies a foundational role in the OIC's identity, shaping its institutional ethos, normative framework, and symbolic significance. The OIC's sustained advocacy for the Palestinian cause situates the issue at the intersection of sacred geography, historical grievance, and collective morality. Despite limited political outcomes, Palestine remains the cornerstone of the OIC's moral imagination, its advocacy functioning as a performative reaffirmation of Muslim solidarity in the face of colonial subjugation and displacement (Sharqieh 2012). This ongoing engagement underscores the OIC's role as a moral custodian, tasked with preserving the dignity and aspirations of the *ummah*.

Similarly, the Rohingya and Kashmir crises embody the OIC's commitment to the marginalized and persecuted. The OIC's framing of these crises as both a humanitarian emergency and a structural injustice reflects its dual emphasis on restorative justice and the affirmation of cultural and religious rights. By supporting The Gambia's case at the International Court of Justice, the OIC aligns itself with international legal norms while amplifying its Islamic ethical framework of justice and accountability. Its

advocacy highlights the plight of the Rohingya as emblematic of the systemic marginalization faced by Muslim minorities globally.⁹

However, these efforts are constrained by significant structural and geopolitical challenges. The principle of non-interference, a cornerstone of global diplomacy, limits the OIC's ability to intervene directly in sovereignty-sensitive contexts such as Myanmar or India. Geopolitical alignments, such as China's strategic partnerships with Myanmar and Pakistan, further reduce the OIC's leverage in addressing these crises (Yusuf and Leghari 2019). Internal divisions among member states—driven by divergent political priorities and economic dependencies—often result in symbolic declarations rather than actionable strategies, weakening the OIC's credibility as an effective mediator (Khalid 2019).

Despite these constraints, the OIC's engagement reflects its unique position rooted in Islamic ethical traditions and positions the OIC as a mediator between universal human rights frameworks and the particular cultural, historical, and spiritual dimensions of the *ummah*. The organization's advocacy for Kashmir, the Rohingya, and Palestinians underscores its capacity to frame issues of justice and human dignity within an Islamic ontological vision, resisting hegemonic narratives that privilege state-centric approaches over the lived realities of marginalized communities.

Through these cases, the OIC asserts itself as an actor distinct from purely political organizations, articulating a vision of justice that harmonizes Islamic ethics with contemporary human rights discourse. By rooting its interventions in the moral obligations specific to the *ummah*, the OIC occupies a unique position: not as an IGO constrained by purely legalistic or geopolitical calculations, but as a negotiator of Muslim moral imperatives within Universal human rights.

⁹ (Organization of Islamic Cooperation, 2024).

CHAPTER IV

ADVOCACY, DIPLOMACY AND CREDIBILITY: LITMUS TESTS FOR A “MULTIPLE IDENTITY ORGANIZATION”

4.1. Introduction

The OIC represents an contemporary experiment in the pluralization of collective identity across national, cultural, and religious lines. It occupies a liminal space, tasked with harmonizing Islamic values and sociopolitical realities while addressing global norms. This chapter argues that the OIC’s identity hinges on its ability to navigate and reconcile three critical areas, which serve as litmus tests for its coherence and legitimacy as a “multiple identity organization.”

The first section introduces organizational identity as a sociological variable, underscoring how the OIC functions as a sociocultural intermediary. Borrowing from the interplay of moral systems and institutional frameworks, this analysis situates the OIC as a repository of Islamic solidarity that must simultaneously operate within secular expectations of global governance. The challenge is to project unity while managing the internal plurality that defines its member states, testing the elasticity of its organizational ethos.

This chapter first explores the OIC’s engagement with human rights discourse, particularly its critique of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The OIC’s Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam offers a counter-framework that seeks to balance Islamic values with universal principles. This juxtaposition highlights how the OIC’s identity is tested by its ability to articulate a vision of human rights that is both religiously rooted and globally resonant, revealing the tension between cultural relativism and universalism.

The study then turns to the issue of sexual rights and women's freedom, and in particular the OIC's shift from CEDAW to the OIC's Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW). The question of women's rights has long been a touchstone for debates about modernity and tradition within Islamic contexts. For the OIC, this issue tests its capacity to advance policies that respect Islamic jurisprudence while addressing the global demand for gender equality. It also probes the deeper epistemic fractures between Islamic legal ethics and Western liberal frameworks.

Finally, the question around discourse on Islamophobia is raised. As Islamophobia emerges as both a sociopolitical phenomenon and a contested term, the OIC has positioned itself as a key interlocutor in framing its global narrative. However, its efforts to legitimize claims of Islamophobia are fraught with the risk of alienating interlocutors who question the term's parameters or perceive its instrumentalization. The main focus of this chapter is exploring the OIC's success in this arena as a test of its ability to mediate between advocacy and diplomacy, amplifying marginalized voices without compromising its credibility.

These areas collectively represent the OIC's litmus tests as they distill the broader dilemmas it faces: the need to reconcile diverse identities, the imperative to uphold Islamic values while engaging with global norms, and the challenge of crafting narratives that resonate across ideological divides. By critically engaging with these topics, the chapter illuminates the OIC's identity in the global arena.

4.2. Exploring Organizational Identity as a Sociological Variable

The origins of organizational discourse studies stem from dissatisfaction with earlier organizational paradigms that emphasized organizational culture. In his "Theory of Organizations: A Sociological View," Silverman explains that in the 1960s and 1970s, cultural perspectives focused on the behavior and understanding of organizational members, moving away from the previous "systems" view (Silverman 1970). In the 1980s, poststructuralist critiques further challenged the culture model, exposing its tendency to oversimplify organizational complexities (Turner 1993). Daniel Ericsson expounds the significance of Silverman's Theory of Organizations in and that Silverman positioned himself within a European intellectual movement that

emphasized interpretivism, constructionism, and humanism, challenging dominant Anglo-American sociological approaches, notably the functionalism of Talcott Parsons and abstract empiricism of C. Wright Mills. Silverman criticized these frameworks for fostering reification (assigning agency to social constructs) and teleological thinking (explaining causes by their outcomes), which, he argued, led to flawed views of social change as inevitable and beyond human influence. Embracing Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's ideas, he insisted that humans, not systems, create society and sought to counteract the systems perspective, which saw organizations as autonomous systems with needs and agency (2011, 4-5).

Drawing on Thomas Kuhn's ideas on competing scientific paradigms, Silverman argued that it was time to present an alternative to what he viewed as an emerging "systems orthodoxy." Silverman's "Action Frame of Reference" is a method for analyzing organizational actions, focusing on subjective meanings and roles rather than objective systems. Instead of providing a complete theory, it offers a way to understand how organizational members' backgrounds, interactions, and perceptions shape actions and outcomes. Silverman emphasizes the importance of respecting actors' viewpoints without imposing outside definitions, using a pragmatic approach where the choice of method depends on the research context. He outlines a sequence of six focus areas for analysis, including organizational roles, actor motivations, perceptions, actions, consequences, and impacts on organizational norms. (2011, 6-8)

The work of scholars like Putnam and Pacanowsky (1983) is considered foundational in establishing an analytical framework for examining language use within organizations.

The work *Organizational Communications* highlighted the value of interpretive research, suggesting it should complement, not replace, traditional positivist-functional research. Positivists see organizations as fixed, external entities focused on control and prediction, aiming to develop universal laws. Interpretivists, in contrast, view social reality as evolving, created through interactions and meanings shaped by individuals, with organizations emerging from these dynamic social processes. They aim for in-depth understanding rather than universal laws.

This work illustrates these differences and presents a framework for interpretive research, discussing naturalistic research - focused on everyday practices and meanings - and critical research - aimed at critiquing the status quo-. It also explores the practical applications of interpretive research for organizational practice, with contributions from various scholars. Reflecting on the differences, the author notes that interpretive research fills gaps left by positivist approaches, and such approaches provide valuable insights by embracing multiple perspectives and focusing on understanding particular phenomena, contributing to a broader understanding of organizational dynamics.

The literature on organizational identity stems from two main views of organizational theory and identity theory (Whetten and Mackey 2006, 220-24), with theories building on Albert and Whetten's 1985 formulations of organizational identity, which include the ideational component, or the organizational identity represented in the shared beliefs of members, the definitional component, or the central, enduring, and distinctive meaning, as well as the phenomenological component. The body of literature on organizational sociology is highly relevant in constructing a framework to study the central construct of status that has often allowed those studying organizations to leverage the theoretical development of a rich sociological construct employed in the study of other social phenomena (Sauder, Lynn and Podolny 2012, 268).

One particular scope of their study on organizational research was the influence of status in its constraints on the behavior, opportunities, and choice of the actor's actions (Ibid., 271). In Whetten's work on strengthening the concept of organizational identity, he argues that organizational identity claims, or referents, signifying an organization's self-determined (and "self-defining") unique social space are reflected in its unique pattern of binding commitments. With this theoretical frame in mind, the central, enduring, and distinctive attributes function as organizational identity referents for invocations in organizational discourse and identity claims (2006, 228). The first assumption being that organizations are not mere social collectives but bodies granted with analogous powers and responsibilities as social actors existing for the sole aim of pursuing defined tasks.

Bauman writes that it is this exact 'purpose' which serves as a deliberate and 'openly declared limitation' and is the most salient and distinctive feature within organizations (Bauman 1990, 46). The divergence occurs here, where there may exist distinctions between the organizational actor's impetuses, structural components, and declarations. A central thesis of organizational research is that an organization's status (and the regard for the organization) is influenced by the status of the entities with whom the organization affiliates (Podolny 1993, 829–72). This invites a discussion into how the organization is shaped by its member states, which represent sovereign interests (de Jouvenel 1967, 186-05) or international platforms and institutions directing the intergovernmental scene. Another important effect of status highlighted by organizational research is that it constrains the behavior of actors in that the obtained status or positioning of a body will limit the opportunities and choices of action available to it (Sauder, Lynn, & Podolny 2012, 271).

A study by Morill and Fine on ethnographic contributions to organizational sociology highlights the value of studies in organizational sociology which do not seek to describe the experiences of organizations but rather to produce critical interventions into organizational functioning (1997, 16). For them, ideas emerging from institutional and ethnographic studies of organizations brought about noteworthy developments such as the newfound understandings of organizations as systems of meaning and symbols in addition to observations of the cultural-cognitive contents of organizational structures and practices (Ibid.). The view of organizations as systems of meaning emerged in the 1950s with a growing interest in symbolic interactionism, which finds advantage in addressing constructivist interest in the social construction of world politics and patterns of international relations.

For Blumer (1969, 57-60), the knowing of things by their meanings, their creation through social interaction, and the change of meaning through interaction are all justifications for the close study of organizations. The most recent wave of constructivist studies on socialization as the contest of norms is most relevant to this study as it demonstrates that the meanings of norms ought not to be taken for granted, and this becomes especially apparent when they are viewed outside their specific sociocultural contexts (Wiener 2007, 1-17).

In an attempt to demonstrate the benefits of applying sociological and other symbolic interactionist views to address problems of identity, power, and deviance in international politics, Rebecca Adler-Nissen writes that even constructivist studies have not taken full advantage of what the approaches offer in the way of problematizing norm transfer as well as demonstrating how socialization produces and upholds a particular ontology for what she describes as the global norm entrepreneurs working towards a global normative order (2016, 35). She further argues that symbolic interactionism provides answers to how normality is not socially constructed through a one-way instructive process but rather delves into negotiations amongst social orders as multifaceted and interactive processes. This does not imply the subaltern are responsible for their subordination but does offer avenues of agency and self-reflection for actors within international relations (Ibid., 36).

Methodologically, the approach of symbolic interactionism induces the foundational requirements for the carrying out of a critical ethnography” (Smith 2002, 172). Ayse Zarakol recommends the sociological concept of stigma in critiquing the mainstream constructivist models, which assume the ‘pre-existence of a rather thick international society; for this, symbolic interactionism assists in questioning long-standing conventions and global structures (2014, 312). Her use of ‘mainstream constructivism’ here is in reference to literature identified by Jennifer Sterling-Folker (2000, 417), which complements neoliberal institutionalism. This association of constructivism with liberal variants within the IR domain is, according to her studies, more widely acknowledged and more likely to receive favorable reception in ‘top’ IR journals (Zarakol 2014, 312) and thus more likely to contribute to a strong mainstream effect in the international system. Furthermore, Hirsch and Lang argued that different traditions of sociological thinking are valuable in international legal inquiry and emphasized the importance of creative borrowing between the disciplines of international law and sociology in answering fundamental questions on the motives and behavior of international actors, culture in international law, who interprets the world for international actors, and what dynamics are at play throughout the processes of international organizational practice formation, interpretation, and implementation (2018, 16).

Vrushali delves into how sociological work on difference and inequality has been viewed through the macro lenses, which negotiate matters of modernity and development, while studies of the micro deal with experiences of racism, classism, and sexism. For him, neither has spoken to one another or brought together a multi-level perspective to present a meso perspective on institutions and organizations. He cites Michael Shapiro, “To be an object of moral solicitude and a subject with eligibility to act within the domain of the political, one must occupy space and have an identity that commands a recognition of that occupation,” to delineate the rarely examined analytical space that is the identity or spatial order of the colonial era, which relies on what he calls a “differential subjectivity” responsible for the construction of an international community that either affirms or denies personhood of the other (Patil 2007, 1-2).

To better comprehend the OICs position, one can draw on the above-mentioned theories, which emphasize the centrality of shared beliefs, norms, and interactions in shaping an organization's actions and narratives. Viewing the OIC through the lens of these theoretical frameworks allows us to understand how its identity, actions, and norms are shaped by ongoing negotiations and reveals how meanings and values are constructed, contested, and maintained within such a complex institutional framework.

4.3. Human Rights in Islam: Complementing or Challenging the Universal Declaration?

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the United Nations (UN) enjoyed substantial support for the overarching concept of a global federation of states. This enthusiasm was evident in the extensive media coverage of the first sessions of the General Assembly and in the discussions surrounding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Glendon 2001, 10). As a result, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) without dissent. Although the UDHR lacks binding legal force, its moral authority remains unmatched. Many legal scholars assert that it has, over time, attained the status of international customary law. Notably, the UDHR holds the distinction of being the most translated document in the world, now available in approximately 360 languages. (Network of Concerned Historians, n.d.)

The UDHR encompasses both civil and political rights as well as economic, social, and cultural rights (ESC) without distinction. In doing so, it recognizes the indivisibility, interdependence, and interrelatedness of all human rights from their inception.¹⁰ Further, it affirmed that “everyone has duties to the community, in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible” (United Nations General Assembly 1948). While the UDHR was not legally binding at the time of its adoption, it has evolved over time, with some of its provisions now constituting customary international law, general principles of law, or reflecting elementary considerations of humanity. (Brownlie 2008, 146)

As previously mentioned, UDHR’s most significant contribution lies in providing an authoritative framework for interpreting the human rights provisions of the UN Charter, as endorsed by the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Its practical importance has been demonstrated in its frequent invocation by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and regional and domestic courts (Pre-Trial Chamber I, ICC 2009), all of which have used it as a tool for interpreting relevant human rights treaties and national constitutional protections of human rights.¹¹

Consequently, despite the passing of over seventy years since its drafting, the Declaration reveals certain limitations. For instance, as Berardinelli (Berardinelli 2023) suggested, the Declaration overlooked the rights of minorities and omitted any reference to self-determination. The UDHR provides only limited acknowledgment of women’s lives and the distinct human rights challenges they face. Gibson argued that the deliberate exclusion of minority rights from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) has been identified as a foundational tension between individual and group rights. This historical context is crucial for contemporary discussions on community rights to culture, particularly regarding traditional cultural expressions, knowledge, genetic resources, and natural resources. Her research explored how the literature on the construction of culture within human rights discourse consistently reveals the neglect of the duty to respect cultural diversity. (Gibson, 2008: 12)

¹⁰ (General Assembly Resolution 421(V) of 4 Dec. 1950, section E, paras. 2 and 7(b))

¹¹ Supreme Court of Uganda. *Attorney General v. Susan Kigula and 417 Others*, 2009.

The Declaration excludes group rights, particularly concerning indigenous human rights, as its drafter assumed individual rights would suffice. Additionally, the UDHR seems to approach human rights in a manner that does not contextualize them within family dynamics, potentially limiting meaningful examination of whether the right to liberty, life, freedom from slavery, and personal security are upheld within familial settings. (Charlesworth (n 72) 784; Bequaert (Carol C. Gould ed., 1983).

While the UDHR stands as a significant resource, it has been met not only with celebration but also with considerable critique. Much of this criticism reaches into the core of human rights as a concept, challenging its philosophical foundation and universality. Philosophers, for instance, have argued that human dignity, a cornerstone of the Declaration, is “essentially contested” (De Baets 2009, 38). Many contend that dignity comprises two distinct concepts rather than one: inherent human dignity, representing the intrinsic worth of each human being, and external human dignity, signifying the worthiness of respect. Others go further, claiming that human dignity is either an axiom lacking a solid foundation, a mere convenient fiction, or even, to some, a non-existent ideal. (De Baets 2009, 38)

The UDHR was intended to uphold and protect the human rights of individuals. However, it falls short of addressing the deep-rooted sufferings inflicted by oppressive or dictatorial regimes. Critics argued that the Declaration lacks the moral authority needed to supplement legal sanctions, noting that “international law instruments like the Universal Declaration do not have teeth” (Gopalan 2007, 785- 820).

Consequently, the UDHR’s legal insufficiency has led some countries to resist full commitment to the treaty’s implications, thereby posing significant risks to individuals worldwide. Without enforceable legal terms, the support for human rights rests largely on moral grounds. (Cronin-Furman 2009, 188)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), described as a Preservation of Equal Rights and Freedoms (Seyyedi & Nedayi 2000, 78), was ratified by the United Nations as a global document, intended to stand above individual religions or denominations. Given its creation in the post-World War II era and shaped by the perspectives of its drafters, the Declaration cannot fully reflect the views of individuals

bound by specific religious principles nor the religious laws they follow. This disparity has naturally led to certain conflict between universal human rights standards and the religious laws governing faith-based communities, including those of Islam.

The OIC's engagement with human rights has long been marked by tension between its aspiration to represent a unified moral authority for the Muslim world and the realities of member states' records on human rights (Peterson 2012, 14). The organization's early years were characterized by resistance to international human rights frameworks, which were perceived as insufficiently aligned with Islamic principles. Until 2005, the OIC adopted a cautious stance, often contesting the universality of these frameworks and instead advocating for the establishment of alternative rights discourses rooted in Islamic teachings (Chace 2015, 6). During this period, the OIC prioritized developing its distinctive approach, one that ostensibly reflected the ethos of Shari'a and resonated with the cultural and religious sensibilities of its member states. However, this stance revealed a fundamental ambivalence: while the organization did not explicitly reject international human rights norms, its indirect orientation and the overt positions of certain member states suggested a deliberate distancing from these standards (Javid and Makrami Qartavol 2012, 63).

A pivotal moment in the OIC's human rights trajectory was the introduction of the *Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam* at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights. Presented as the Islamic world's consensus on human rights, the declaration sought to articulate an Islamic perspective on the subject (Mayer 2007, 31). The *Cairo Declaration* grants member states the latitude to integrate their interpretations of Shari'a into domestic law and policy, effectively subordinating the universality of rights to the prerogatives of national sovereignty and religious jurisprudence (Adam 2014, 1).

The Declaration of Islamic Human Rights originated in 1979, when the Organization of the Islamic Conference formally called for its creation. The OIC tasked its Tenth Conference of Foreign Ministers to establish specialized committees and involve experts in drafting the declaration. This effort culminated in 1990 when the final text was approved at the Nineteenth Conference of Foreign Ministers in Cairo, leading to the announcement of the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam. Designed partly

in response to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), this Islamic Declaration aimed to align human rights with Islamic principles, emerging 42 years after the UDHR (Islami, quoted in Al-Zuhaili 2003, 114). Like the UDHR, the Cairo Declaration was ratified by member states of the OIC, emphasizing the role of governments in endorsing this document (Islami 2012, 83; Meybodi & Rasouli 2022).

The drafting of the *Declaration of Islamic Human Rights*, a document that serves as a response from Islamic countries to the UDHR, sought to harmonize universal human rights ideals with Islamic teachings, drawing inspiration from the UDHR while maintaining a framework grounded in Islamic values (Islami 2013, 83). In 2005, the OIC initiated an improvement program that culminated in the adoption of a revised charter in 2008, replacing the original 1972 charter. This new charter marked a significant shift, reflecting an enhanced focus on human rights within the OIC. Notably, it provided the framework for the establishment of the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC), which was designated as one of the eleven principal organs of the OIC. (Kasule, 260).

The Charter articulated the OIC's commitment to endorsing "human rights and fundamental freedoms, good governance, rule of law, democracy, and accountability," while also emphasizing the protection and promotion of women's rights and their active participation in various aspects of public life, aligned with national legislative frameworks. Additionally, the revised Charter signaled a greater openness on the part of the OIC to engage with civil society organizations on human rights issues, indicating a more collaborative and inclusive approach to addressing these concerns (Majid 2017).

James Spickard's work critically examines the role of religion in the construction of universalist frameworks such as human rights, emphasizing the complex interaction between pluralistic religious beliefs and secular humanist ideals. He suggests that the adoption of a universal human rights framework by the United Nations after World War II was shaped by an implicit universalism that often overlooked the diversity of cultural and religious traditions. This oversight has led to tensions, as these rights were both inspired by and, at times, seen as at odds with various religious doctrines (Spickard, 2018, 11–13). These tensions highlight the necessity of engaging with

religious traditions not as static entities but as evolving systems that can contribute to, rather than hinder, universalist projects.

Furthermore, Spickard critiques the assumption of a singular pathway to human rights, urging for an approach that accommodates religious pluralism while fostering a shared commitment to ethical values. He proposes a “radical humanism” that draws from both secular and religious perspectives, emphasizing the need for dialogue and mutual transformation rather than imposing a monolithic interpretation of human rights (Spickard 2018, 14–16).

The UDHR’s shortcomings are evident, particularly its failure to consider religion as a key factor, thereby overlooking values cherished by religious communities, especially Muslims. Consequently, the Cairo Declaration, prepared under the aegis of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), sought to highlight the pressing need to view Islam as a viable solution to the crisis of materialistic civilization. It emphasizes that the fundamental rights in Islam are intrinsic and inviolable, as they represent divine commandments of Allah, binding on all (Kasule 2009, 253).

Marie Juul Petersen’s work on Islamic human rights offers a critical examination of the tension between Islamic interpretations of human rights and the broader international human rights framework. One of the most significant arguments Petersen makes is that the OIC has historically rejected universal human rights standards, opting instead for an alternative vision grounded in Islamic teachings, notably represented by the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam. Petersen argues that the OIC’s stance, particularly through the Cairo Declaration, undermines the universality of human rights by allowing the application of Shari’a law in a manner that conflicts with international human rights principles such as gender equality, religious freedom, and freedom of expression (Petersen, 2012, 10).

However, Petersen’s analysis does not merely critique the OIC’s initial rejection of international human rights; she also explores the evolving nature of the OIC’s position, especially post-9/11, when global attention to human rights abuses in Muslim-majority countries heightened. Here, she argues that the creation of the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) in 2011 marks an important shift, signaling the

OIC's willingness to engage more directly with international human rights standards. Peterse interprets this shift as an attempt by the OIC to reconcile its traditional interpretation of Islamic human rights with the growing international pressure to adhere to global human rights norms (Petersen, 2012, 18).

Petersen also provides a unique proposition that the IPHRC's focus on economic, social, and cultural rights is a potential strength, and offers a human rights framework that is more attuned to the specific needs of Muslim-majority countries. While she acknowledges that this focus may be seen as a departure from the Western-centric emphasis on civil and political rights, she also suggests that it reflects the OIC's reluctance to confront the more contentious issues of political freedoms, individual rights, and civil liberties (Petersen, 2012, 25).

The article *Matters of Concern: A Critical Reading of Human Rights in Islamic Contexts* by John Mayer critically engages with the tension between universal human rights frameworks and Islamic approaches to human dignity and social justice. Mayer's central argument revolves around the complexities that arise when Western human rights norms are applied to Muslim-majority societies, which may have differing cultural, historical, and theological understandings of rights and freedoms. He asserts that while Islamic law (Shari'a) and Islamic human rights principles share some common ground with international human rights, they are often presented in ways that resist or modify universal human rights standards, particularly regarding individual freedoms, gender equality, and religious tolerance (Mayer 2015, 5).

Mayer echoes these conclusions as one of the primary concerns of his study is the way in which Islamic human rights discourses are framed within the broader Islamic tradition. He argues that there is a significant variance in the interpretation of human rights within different Islamic schools of thought, which has led to a lack of consensus on what constitutes human rights from an Islamic perspective. This theological diversity complicates the possibility of a unified Islamic human rights framework that could be broadly accepted across Muslim-majority countries (Mayer 2015, 7). Furthermore, Mayer critically examines how Islamic governments often assert Islamic human rights as a counterpoint to Western human rights paradigms, using them to justify policies that may restrict certain freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom

of assembly, and the rights of women and minorities. For example, he points to the way the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990) presents human rights through a distinctly Islamic lens, which allows for the imposition of Shari'a law as a basis for human rights protection, thus creating a framework that can accommodate varying interpretations of religious texts (Mayer 2015, 9).

Mayer also delves into the role of the OIC in shaping the discourse on Islamic human rights. He discusses how the OIC, through initiatives such as the Cairo Declaration, has sought to carve out an alternative human rights discourse that aligns with Islamic values while distancing itself from international human rights standards perceived to be imposed by the West. He critiques the OIC for not fully engaging with the human rights standards established by the United Nations and other international bodies, arguing that this has led to a lack of progress in addressing human rights violations within member states. Mayer contends that while the OIC has taken some steps toward acknowledging human rights issues, such as the creation of the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC), these efforts are often undermined by the political and economic interests of member states, many of which have poor human rights records (Mayer 2015, 11).

A critical dimension of Mayer's work lies in his assessment of the tensions between Islamic law and international human rights law. He argues that while both frameworks share certain values—such as the protection of dignity and justice—they are often at odds when it comes to issues such as gender equality, freedom of expression, and political participation. Mayer does not suggest that these tensions are insurmountable but argues that they need to be carefully navigated through dialogue between Islamic scholars, human rights advocates, and international policymakers. He calls for a more inclusive interpretation of Islamic human rights that respects the diversity within the Muslim world and seeks common ground with the broader international human rights community (Mayer 2015, 17).

The religious debate surrounding human rights is as old, if not older, than the UN Declaration of Human Rights itself. Human rights can be grounded in religious or natural values, the latter suggesting that every human inherently possesses rights by virtue of being human. Willy Strzelewicz, in his work *The History of Human Rights*,

argued that the declaration of human rights transcends temporal boundaries, invoking a higher principle to justify its tangible demands. At the time of its inception, it called for a transformation in state and societal structures, articulating what had long been considered the natural rights of free man—now formally enshrined in writing. (Strzelewicz 2004, 63).

The declaration is often regarded as universal, emphasizing that human rights are held exclusively by individuals, embodying a universal, individualistic, and anthropocentric moral framework (Sundman 2005, 267). However, this perspective faces criticism. Firstly, it neglects to address the relationship between rights and obligations among humans. Secondly, it appears to marginalize the rights of individuals within groups, such as families, communities, or nations, overlooking the idea that humans have a responsibility to uphold the rights of others. (Sædén 2010)

This analysis draws upon all these strands, with a particular focus on the empirical reconstruction of contemporary human rights debates within the OIC rather than on their philosophical justifications or historical origins. Accordingly, the following section will first outline the key stages in the development of “modern” human rights discourse—primarily centered on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—and will then provide specific insights into the reformed OIC’s Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI).

The Cairo Declaration is significant for two main reasons: Firstly, it represents one of the more recent attempts to articulate human rights from an Islamic perspective. Secondly, as the OIC encompasses a large number of countries that identify as Islamic, the Declaration can be viewed as a form of political consensus on human rights within the Muslim world, even though there is no uniform agreement among these states on the interpretation and implementation of Shari’a law. The Declaration combines political and socio-economic rights, presenting a vision of human rights that aligns with Islamic teachings. Similar to the UDHR, it outlines rights that are accompanied by corresponding duties. However, in contrast to the UDHR, it places greater emphasis on the Ummah (the global Muslim community) as the entity to which individuals owe these duties rather than the state. (Cairo Declaration on Human Rights 1990)

While there is, of course, no inherent barrier to combining Islam and human rights, the specific conception of Islamic human rights presented in the 1990 Cairo Declaration conflicts with key principles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights. The declaration makes no reference to universal human rights. Instead, it is explicitly grounded in Islamic values, stating that “all the rights and freedoms stipulated in this Declaration are subject to the Islamic Shari’ah” (OIC 1990, Article 24). This provision undermines the inalienability of human rights, a core principle of the UDHR (Akbarzadeh and MacQueen 2008, 54). Bielefeldt (2000, 28, 1: 106) describes another categorization as being consistent with the ‘tradition of humanitarian pragmatism’ even though ‘conceptual differences between shari’a and human rights may yet remain unsettled’.

This shift occurred with the introduction of the Ten Year Programme of Action, which, as part of the broader reform of the OIC, emphasized the integration of human rights into and the importance of mainstreaming them into all programs and activities, alongside the establishment of a dedicated human rights commission. Despite initial enthusiasm, however, no concrete efforts were made to implement the Cairo Declaration (OIC, 2005). The objectives of the IPHRC are outlined in its status (OIC 2011c), which references Articles 5 and 15 of the OIC Charter, as well as the Ten Year Programme of Action and the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam. According to these statutes, the Commission is tasked with “advancing human rights’ and ‘supporting Member States’ efforts to consolidate civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights” (OIC 2011c, Articles 8–9).

The 2021 Revised Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam represents a substantial reformulation of its 1990 predecessor, signaling a more deliberate integration with international human rights norms while maintaining an Islamic ethical framework. Through an examination of specific articles, one can observe both continuity in foundational principles and transformative shifts in approach, particularly in how rights are framed, gender is addressed, and universality is conceptualized.

A crucial element of continuity between the two declarations lies in their shared invocation of *dignity* as a cornerstone. The 1990 Declaration begins with the assertion that “all human beings form one family whose members are united by their subordination to Allah,” grounding dignity in divine creation. Similarly, the 2021

version affirms in its preamble that dignity is “bestowed upon all humans by their Creator,” thereby maintaining its theological grounding. However, the 2021 text advances this concept by explicitly aligning it with international standards. Article 1(a) declares that “all individuals are equal in dignity, rights, and obligations without any distinction,” a shift from the 1990 declaration’s more generalized language that often left room for varied interpretations.

This evolution is particularly evident in the domain of gender equality. In the 1990 declaration, Article 6 stipulates that “the husband is responsible for the maintenance and welfare of the family,” which implicitly reinforced traditional gender roles. By contrast, the 2021 revision replaces such phrasing with a broader commitment to equality. Article 6 of the revised text states that “women and men are equal in dignity and rights” and guarantees equal opportunities in education, employment, and public life. Furthermore, it mandates that states “eliminate all forms of violence, exploitation, and discrimination against women.” This significant departure illustrates an effort to align with international norms while reframing gender equality within an Islamic moral vision.

The approach to non-discrimination also highlights both change and continuity. The 1990 Declaration prohibited discrimination in broad terms but frequently framed rights within the context of Sharia. Article 1 of the 1990 text asserted that “all men are equal in terms of basic human dignity and basic obligations,” while subsequent provisions often qualified this equality through reference to Islamic law. By contrast, the 2021 Declaration provides more explicit guarantees. Article 1(b) of the revised document unequivocally states, “All individuals are entitled to their rights and freedoms without discrimination on the basis of religion, race, gender, nationality, or disability.” This shift from implicit to explicit language reflects a deliberate attempt to address ambiguities and criticisms of the earlier framework.

A comparative analysis of universality reveals a nuanced evolution in the framing of Islamic human rights. The 1990 Declaration presents a particularistic tone, with Article 24 asserting that “all rights and freedoms are subject to Islamic Sharia.” This provision is perceived as subordinating universal rights to religious doctrine. The 2021 Declaration, however, adopts a more integrative stance. Article 2 emphasizes that

human rights are “inherent and inalienable,” affirming their universality without subordinating them to specific religious interpretations. This shift does not negate the role of Islamic values but repositions them as a complementary moral foundation within a broader, inclusive framework.

Despite these changes, the revised declaration retains elements of Islamic distinctiveness. For instance, Article 4 of the 2021 text reaffirms that “protection of the family is a fundamental social duty,” a concept deeply rooted in Islamic ethics. However, this provision is articulated in a manner that avoids the prescriptive traditionalism of the 1990 Declaration, aligning instead with global discourses on family as a social unit deserving of protection and support.

In comparing the two texts, the 2021 Cairo Declaration emerges as a significant rearticulation rather than a complete departure. It maintains its Islamic ethical foundation while addressing critiques of the earlier framework by incorporating more precise language, addressing gender and non-discrimination comprehensively, and framing universality in a way that balances particularity and global norms.

The conceptualization of human rights reveals a critical intersection between Islamic and Western paradigms, highlighting both divergent foundations and shared objectives. Within Islamic jurisprudence, human rights are perceived as intrinsic personal entitlements, divinely ordained through Islamic law for the welfare of humanity (Usman, M.F., 1982). In contrast, Western discourse frames human rights as universal entitlements inherent to all individuals by virtue of their humanity, independent of legislative or religious prescriptions. Despite their distinct ontological underpinnings, these frameworks converge on the notion that human rights are essential for societal welfare, safeguarding life and property while affirming human dignity across all distinctions, including gender, race, and social status (Usman, 2012).

Islamic and Western paradigms, while differing in their metaphysical bases, demonstrate overlapping moral imperatives. For instance, the Islamic perspective emphasizes that rights are God-given and are tied to divine accountability, embedding them within a framework of moral duties that transcend individual autonomy. Meanwhile, Western approaches typically uphold human rights as intrinsic to human

nature, grounded in secular philosophies and legal universalism. The two frameworks share a commitment to the idea that human rights embody fundamental moral imperatives, prioritizing individual dignity and societal cohesion over competing normative concerns. As Pogge (2000) notes, human rights possess a profound moral urgency that frequently supersedes other obligations, an observation echoed in Islamic jurisprudence, which views these rights as essential for the realization of justice and societal harmony.

The integration of human rights within legal systems also highlights the interplay between these paradigms. In Western contexts, rights enshrined in constitutions or international conventions, such as those established by the United Nations, are deemed fundamental and protected from state interference (Austin, 1999). Islamic jurisprudence, while not reliant on secular constitutionalism, similarly provides a legal structure to enforce human rights, aligning with the idea that these rights are universal safeguards essential to justice.

However, the enforcement mechanisms of human rights in both frameworks reveal practical challenges. International institutions, such as those under the United Nations, lack the authority to compel state compliance, instead relying on advocacy and diplomacy (Muhammad & Purohit, 2019). Similarly, in Islamic contexts, the implementation of human rights is often contingent on political and social interpretations of Sharia, leading to variability in application. This challenge underscores a critical tension: while the universalist aspirations of human rights frameworks are widely acknowledged, their realization often depends on localized mechanisms that may reflect divergent priorities and constraints.

The principle of equality further illustrates both the alignment and tension between these traditions. Pogge (2000) underscores that human rights confer equal moral standing upon all individuals, a perspective that finds resonance in Islamic teachings emphasizing the equality of all humans before God. Yet, the application of this principle has historically been shaped by contextual factors in both paradigms. For instance, critiques of the 1990 Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam pointed to its subordination of universal rights to Sharia interpretations, a concern partly

addressed in the revised 2021 Cairo Declaration, which reframes equality and universality to bridge gaps with international norms.

The juxtaposition of Islamic and Western approaches to human rights underscores not merely a divergence of ontological premises but a more intricate interplay of epistemological frameworks and moral imperatives. Islamic conceptions, rooted in the divine ordination of rights as part of a holistic legal and moral system, prioritize an integrated vision of justice where rights are inextricably linked to duties and communal responsibilities. In contrast, Western paradigms, which foreground individual autonomy as the cornerstone of universal human entitlements, operate within a secular logic that abstracts rights from specific theological or cultural narratives. This contrast reveals less a binary opposition than a pluralistic dynamic, wherein competing claims about the origins and functions of rights reflect deeper philosophical disagreements about the nature of moral authority and the structure of human community.

At stake in this analysis is the philosophical coherence of universality as a principle. If Western human rights discourse claims a form of universal legitimacy predicated on secular rationalism, it risks marginalizing systems like Islamic jurisprudence, which derive authority from metaphysical premises. Conversely, Islamic frameworks, by embedding rights within a divine moral order, challenge the reductionist tendencies of secular universality and introduce a relational ontology that situates the human being within a network of divine, communal, and individual obligations. This raises critical theoretical concerns: does the universal applicability of human rights presuppose a homogenization of moral sources, or can universality accommodate the multiplicity of cultural and theological foundations?

Rather than framing this interplay as an ideological contest, it is more productive to consider the ways in which these paradigms interrogate and recalibrate each other. The Islamic emphasis on collective welfare and accountability exposes potential limitations in Western individualism, while the Western focus on individual autonomy offers critical insights into areas where traditional Islamic frameworks might require reinterpretation to address contemporary pluralistic realities. The convergence, then, lies not in harmonization but in the possibility of a dialogic relationship, where each paradigm reveals the blind spots and latent potentialities of the other. This dialectical

engagement forces a reevaluation of human rights as both a moral ideal and a political project, situating it at the nexus of competing but interdependent visions of human flourishing.

As explained by Moosa (2009: 175-77), Muslim laws reflect the intricate dynamics of colonial encounters and earlier social experiments. These laws were not shaped through unilateral processes; both colonial authorities and colonized societies innovated and adapted their legal frameworks to meet evolving contingencies. Through transculturation, Muslim communities reconstructed legal norms and transformed inherited social imaginaries, leaving legacies that continue to influence legal historians and contemporary practices. Although power between colonizers and colonized was asymmetrical, colonized Muslims exercised agency in shaping their moral, cultural, and legal frameworks. They resisted, negotiated, and contributed to the development of Muslim law, even as legal Orientalism—colonial perceptions and policies rooted in biased representations of Muslim laws—created enduring stereotypes. Islamic law thus emerges as a dynamic, hybrid system, shaped by complex exchanges between local traditions and global forces across historical and contemporary landscapes.

4.4. Bridging Gender Equality Frameworks: From CEDAW to OPAAW

The recognition and promotion of women's rights at the intergovernmental level has been integral to a series of landmark international conferences aimed at achieving gender equality and safeguarding women's human rights. This formal policy journey commenced in 1975, declared as International Women's Year, marked by the World Conference on the International Women's Year in Mexico City. This event resulted in the adoption of the World Plan of Action and the proclamation of 1975–1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women (World Plan of Action 1975, A/CONF.66/34), fostering a globally coordinated approach to addressing women's issues. The subsequent 1980 Copenhagen Conference further cemented this trajectory by emphasizing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was then opened for signature, symbolizing a pivotal advancement in the international legal framework for women's rights (United Nations 1980, A/CONF.94/35).

In the years following, the momentum toward addressing women's rights continued to gather force. The 1985 Nairobi Conference proved transformative, fortifying the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which had commenced operations in 1982 (United Nations 1985, Equality, Development and Peace). Alongside other global initiatives, this conference fueled the activism of women across the world, setting the stage for the seminal Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. This gathering marked a significant leap forward in expanding the global agenda on women's rights (UN Women 1995, A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1).

These international milestones also recognized the distinct challenges encountered by marginalized women, such as older women, women from ethnic minorities, and women with disabilities. Foundational documents, including the Madrid International Plans of Action on Ageing (United Nations 2002, Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing), the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, highlight the intersectionality of women's rights, underscoring the necessity of targeted, inclusive policies (United Nations 1982, World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons). Together, these initiatives have contributed to a growing framework of global policies addressing women's rights and gender equality. The enduring legacy of CEDAW epitomizes the sustained progress in this realm (United Nations Human Rights 2018, Women's Rights are Human Rights).

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (United Nations 2015, Transforming Our World, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>) advocated for equality in education, political engagement, and economic opportunities. For example, the Global Financial Inclusion Database (Global Findex) revealed in 2014 that women represented a disproportionately large share of adults without bank accounts globally. In developing economies, women were 20% less likely than men to hold formal bank accounts and 17% less likely to have borrowed formally in the past year (World Bank 2017). These discrepancies extend across regions and income categories (Demirguc-Kunt, Klapper & Singer 2013).

In the same year, the largest financial gender gap, between 7% and 9%, was observed in Muslim-majority regions, including South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa (World Bank 2017). Within Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries, significant disparities were reported, with Saudi Arabia (14.2%), Turkey (24.7%), and the United Arab Emirates (23.4%) exhibiting pronounced gaps. (Tunku Abdul Rahman, Shahimi & Mohd Nor 2022, 16-31).

Women constitute nearly half the population in OIC member states and are critical to achieving developmental objectives (SESRIC, 2021: 1). Despite some progress, systemic barriers persist, reflecting entrenched structural inequalities. While the Gender Development Index (GDI) shows improvements in health, education, and living standards across 36 member states from 2010 to 2018, these gains remain uneven, necessitating targeted strategies to address restrictive socio-cultural norms (SESRIC 2021).

Political participation has seen modest progress, with women's parliamentary representation increasing by 4.6 percentage points between 2010 and 2019. However, patriarchal structures and cultural norms continue to curtail broader engagement, requiring policies that foster institutional changes to ensure women's empowerment and active influence in decision-making processes (World Bank 2020).

In education, female literacy rates improved from 66.9% to 72.8% over the past decade, but significant disparities persist, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where rates drop as low as 46.9%. These disparities highlight the dual challenge of providing access to education and addressing societal norms that undervalue women's education, which is pivotal for both individual empowerment and societal development (UNESCO 2019).

Healthcare advancements, such as increased female life expectancy and reduced maternal mortality, are promising but insufficient. Women in OIC countries still live 4.2 years less than the global average, with disparities exacerbated by conflict and poverty. This emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive healthcare policies to bridge persistent gaps (World Health Organization 2021; SESRIC 2021).

Economic participation has only marginally improved, with female labor force participation increasing from 41.6% to 42.3% between 2010 and 2019. Restrictive norms, inadequate protections, and entrenched stereotypes remain significant barriers, underscoring the need for inclusive reforms that dismantle structural inequities (International Labour Organization 2019).

Violence against women remains pervasive, with 36% of women in OIC countries experiencing gender-based violence compared to the global average of 29%. Additionally, child marriage, affecting 16.6% of girls in OIC states, highlights the urgency of addressing cultural and economic drivers of inequality (UN Women 2021; Girls Not Brides 2021). Solutions must balance cultural considerations with alignment to international norms like CEDAW and the SDGs.

Conflict further exacerbates these challenges, as women represent an increasing share of internally displaced persons who often lack basic protections. Addressing these vulnerabilities requires comprehensive strategies that integrate gender equity into humanitarian responses (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2020).

The persistence of these inequalities illustrates the complexity of achieving gender parity within the socio-religious context of OIC states. While the Beijing Declaration and SDGs provide global frameworks for gender equality, the OIC must adapt these principles to local realities, challenging systemic norms while fostering sustainable development. By addressing these disparities, the OIC not only fulfills its developmental objectives but also strengthens its credibility as a leading advocate for inclusive progress across its member states (SESRIC 2021, OIC Women and Development Report).

In December 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It entered into force as an international treaty on September 3, 1981, after the twentieth country had ratified it. By the tenth anniversary of the Convention in 1989, almost one hundred nations had agreed to be bound by its provisions. The Convention was the culmination of more than thirty years of work by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, a body established in 1946 to monitor the situation of women

and to promote women's rights (United Nations General Assembly 1979). The Commission's work had been instrumental in bringing to light all the areas in which women are denied equality with men. These efforts for the advancement of women have resulted in several declarations and conventions, of which the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is the central and most comprehensive document (UN Women 2019).

Among international human rights treaties, the Convention takes an important place in bringing the female half of humanity into the focus of human rights concerns. The spirit of the Convention is rooted in the goals of the United Nations: to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women (UN Women 2019). The Convention gives positive affirmation to the principle of equality by requiring States parties to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men (OHCHR 2020).

The agenda for equality is specified in fourteen subsequent articles. In its approach, the Convention covers three dimensions of the situation of women. Civil rights and the legal status of women are dealt with in great detail. Additionally, unlike other human rights treaties, the Convention is also concerned with the dimension of human reproduction as well as with the impact of cultural factors on gender relations (OHCHR 2020).

According to experts, the gap between women and men trapped in the cycle of poverty has widened in the past decade, affecting millions of women facing economic hardship after the dissolution of marriage or similar partnerships. During its 54th session, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted a General Recommendation, entitled Economic Consequences of Marriage, Family Relations, and Their Dissolution, on how to protect women's equal rights to property upon divorce or death of their spouses. CEDAW declares that women's equal rights to property must be globally recognized regardless of their form and in all world regions and legal systems. (OHCHR 2013)

In February of 2023, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) decided, as part of its mandate, to develop a new General Recommendation (GR 40) to support States Parties in achieving inclusive representation of women in decision-making processes—both in the public and private sectors. The overarching goal is a “parity and paradigm shift” under the motto “Parity: From a Cause to a Norm. From Leaving No One Behind to Bringing Everyone Along”. (United Nations 2023, 84th session)

Since its adoption in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been lauded for its advancement of women’s rights in international law. CEDAW has improved gender equality in some state laws and amendments. Legislative changes have addressed domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape, and trafficking (United Nations, 2020). For example, Turkey changed its laws to increase the age of marriage to 17, and Uganda created and funded programs to reduce domestic violence after ratifying CEDAW (Baldez, 2014). The CEDAW Committee (“the Committee”) also worked to investigate violations of CEDAW and made legally binding recommendations, as it did in 2018 when it investigated abortion access in Northern Ireland (Sundstrom 2019).

CEDAW has been widely criticized for its significant number of ratifications with reservations and its lack of intersectionality and specificity (CEDAW General Recommendation 35, 2020). Nonetheless, some local governments in non-party states have utilized CEDAW to promote gender equality, showing how local governments can use human rights treaties as examples to emulate and improve upon CEDAW’s weaknesses (Knop 2004, 53-4).

CEDAW has also been criticized for its inconsistent approach to intersectionality. It does not contain any provisions that specifically address women’s intersecting identities, which promotes a framework that characterizes women as facing only gender discrimination as opposed to also experiencing other forms of discrimination like racism, classism, ethnocentrism, and heterosexism (Otto 2010, Moeckli et al. 2022, 317-18).

The convention has also been criticized for failing to address the specific needs of women in situations that do not reflect those of the standard Western lifestyle. For example, Mali ratified CEDAW with no reservations in 1985. However, as the convention does not address Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Mali has failed to criminalize or even take a clear stance against FGM. A 2018 study found that 88.6 percent of women aged 15-49 in Mali have undergone FGM in some form (UNICEF 2019). It was not until a 2020 Committee report that the Committee condemned Mali's failure to criminalize FGM, accusing it of grave and systematic violations of CEDAW (UN Women 2021).

As an example, upon ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Bangladesh and Pakistan exercised their rights under Article 19 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties to make reservations and declarations. These reservations illuminate the tension between their commitments to international human rights frameworks and their adherence to Islamic principles embedded in their constitutional and legal systems. Bangladesh ratified CEDAW on November 6, 1984, making reservations to Article 2, Article 13(a), and Article 16(1)(c) and (f), citing conflicts with Sharia law, as interpreted from the Holy Quran and Islamic tradition. Pakistan, acceding to CEDAW on March 12, 1996, issued a general declaration affirming that the Convention's provisions would be subject to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which is rooted in Islamic injunctions. Additionally, Pakistan reserved its rights under Article 29(1) concerning the arbitration of disputes, reflecting its broader approach to maintaining sovereignty in international dispute resolution (Sardar, 2006: 77-8).

Bangladesh's reservations to key articles demonstrate the challenges of aligning international commitments with religious and cultural norms. Article 2, which obligates state parties to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in their legal and institutional frameworks, was reserved on the grounds that certain aspects of Islamic family law, such as inheritance and marital roles, might conflict with CEDAW's broad definitions of gender equality. Similarly, Article 13(a), which addresses the equal right to family benefits, was reserved as particular Islamic principles allocate financial responsibilities primarily to men. The reservations to Article 16(1)(c) and (f), which concern equality in marriage, dissolution, and parental

responsibilities, reflect the centrality of differentiated gender roles in interpretations of Islamic law.

Pakistan's general declaration and specific reservations reflect a cautious yet engaged stance toward CEDAW. The general declaration ensures that the implementation of the Convention aligns with the Constitution, which integrates Islamic principles as its foundational framework. This declaration underscores Pakistan's commitment to maintaining the compatibility of international obligations with religious doctrine. The reservation to Article 29(1), which allows for the arbitration of disputes at the International Court of Justice, is consistent with Pakistan's broader policy of preserving sovereignty over legal matters, particularly in contexts where religious or cultural interpretations might be contested.

These reservations reveal a broader pattern of negotiation between universal human rights standards and localized religious frameworks. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan seek to engage with global human rights mechanisms while safeguarding Islamic values that form the core of their legal and cultural identities. This balancing act highlights the complexities of implementing CEDAW in Muslim-majority contexts, where family law and social norms are deeply intertwined with religious principles.

According to Shaheen, the reservations made by Muslim majority states to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) highlight the diverse approaches taken by these jurisdictions regarding the treaty's provisions. In the early years following the adoption of CEDAW, only a limited number of Muslim-majority countries were parties to the convention. This landscape has evolved significantly, with forty Muslim-majority states now having ratified CEDAW and one—Afghanistan—having signed but not ratified it. Among these, the ratifications of countries such as Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Turkey have been accompanied by substantial reservations.

In contrast, several Muslim-majority countries, including Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Comoros, and Uzbekistan, have ratified CEDAW without entering any reservations. Additionally, Indonesia and Yemen have confined their reservations

solely to Article 29(1), which pertains to the arbitration of disputes concerning the interpretation or application of the convention. This limited reservation reflects a narrower focus on procedural sovereignty rather than substantive issues.

Reservations explicitly citing Islam as justification have been made by states such as Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, the Maldives, and Morocco. These reservations often address provisions in CEDAW that are perceived to conflict with Islamic law, particularly in areas related to family law, inheritance, and gender roles. For example, Article 16, which calls for equality in marriage and family relations, is frequently cited as incompatible with Sharia-based legal systems that prescribe gender-specific roles and responsibilities (Ali, 2006: 86).

Fazaeli and Hanisek argue that the reservations made by Muslim-majority countries to CEDAW articles highlight an ongoing tension between advancing gender equality and maintaining commitments to religious principles. CEDAW is undermined by the numerous reservations entered, often justified through freedom of religion or belief. A critical issue lies in the lack of clarity surrounding what these states mean by Shari'a when they invoke it as grounds for reservations. To ensure the integrity of CEDAW, reserving states should provide precise definitions and standards for their reservations, fostering a stronger link between international commitments and national legislative reforms.

In their case study on Iran, notable for its non-ratification of CEDAW, they conclude that it embodies the complexity of these debates, wherein internal discussions about joining the Convention occur among conformists, reformists, and feminists. Conformists frequently use the "Freedom of Religion and Belief" rhetoric to oppose CEDAW in the name of Islam, mirroring tactics employed by other Muslim-majority states. Reformists, while advocating for a democratic Islam aligned with human rights, often exclude women from meaningful participation in the reform process and adhere to fixed ideals about Islamic governance and gender roles. Meanwhile, women's rights activists and feminists predominantly support unreserved ratification of CEDAW, seeing it as an essential mechanism for promoting women's rights. These activists reject the notion that women's freedoms are incompatible with religious freedoms,

arguing instead for a harmonious coexistence of both (Fazaeli, Roja and Hanisek 2021, no.2-4:115-6).\

What began as a tirade of reservations from Muslim-majority states, causing CEDAW to be “subject to more substantive reservations than any other major human rights treaty,” (United Nations 1996) in 1987 the CEDAW Committee adopted a decision regarding Shari’a-based reservations. It asked the United Nations and its specialized agencies to: “promote or undertake studies on the status of women under Islamic laws and customs and, in particular, on the status and equality of women in the family, on issues such as marriage, divorce, custody, and property rights, and on their participation in public life of the society, taking into consideration the principle of El-Ijtihad in Islam. (CEDAW 1987)

Article 14 of the Human Rights Council's Twenty-Ninth Session Report critiques how religion, as “an institutionalized aspect of culture,” can hinder women's development due to its reliance on “sources of authority that regulate social behavior” and “codified normative systems.” The report argues that religious institutions often act as “a haven against social and cultural change,” with movements across “all religions” resisting “any change to the patriarchy and the status of women and girls in the family.” This framing directly associates religion with the preservation of traditional structures that restrict gender equality, suggesting a profound tension between institutionalized religion and efforts to empower women. (United Nations Human Rights Council 2015)

For the OIC, this critique holds significant implications as it navigates the resistance embedded within religious and cultural hierarchies that are central to the identities of its member states. The report’s assertion that “religious dogma of the written sources” and hierarchies can be barriers and emphasizes religion as a site of patriarchy suggests that the OIC must address internal debates around the compatibility of Islamic law and human rights. By participating in international agendas that criticize religious conservatism, the OIC is positioned at a crossroads. It can either defend existing norms by emphasizing sovereignty and cultural specificity or lead a transformative dialogue that embraces gender justice within an Islamic framework. (United Nations Human Rights Council 2015)

Later, Article 17 of the *Human Rights Council's Twenty-Ninth Session Report* unequivocally rejects the use of cultural diversity or freedom of religion as justifications for gender discrimination. The report asserts that “discriminatory, repressive, and violent practices against women should be eliminated, whatever their origins, including those founded in culture or religion.” This position is deemed “crucial to securing women’s enjoyment of their right to equality in all aspects of life,” underscoring an uncompromising commitment to universal gender equality. The rhetoric employed in Article 17 positions religion and culture as potential obstacles to women's rights unless actively reconciled with universal human rights standards. The emphasis on eliminating practices “whatever their origins” implies that religious and cultural frameworks must adapt to global norms rather than serve as a basis for exceptions. For the OIC, this raises questions about how to demonstrate alignment with these expectations while preserving the integrity of its religious and cultural foundations. (United Nations Human Rights Council 2015, para. 17)

This pattern of reservations and critiques reveals the interplay between religious norms and international human rights commitments in Muslim-majority states. While some countries demonstrate a willingness to engage fully with CEDAW’s provisions, others navigate a complex balance between adherence to Islamic principles and alignment with global human rights standards.

In the realm of human rights, “the collective voice of the Muslim world,” which the OIC aims to embody, has materialized in two legal instruments: the Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (“the Declaration”) and the Covenant of the Rights of the Child in Islam (“the Covenant”). Additionally, in 2008, the revised OIC Charter set up the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (“the Commission”) as a permanent body to promote human rights in Member States (Charter of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, arts. 5 and 15; *Ten-Year Programme of Action*, art. VIII, 2005). In June 2011, the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, one of the main decision-making organs of the Organization, adopted the Statute of the OIC Commission (*Charter of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, art. 10.).

According to the OIC Secretary General, the Statute (otherwise known as the Statute of the OIC Commission) attempts “to strike a delicate balance” between Islamic and

international human rights instruments.” To this end, the preamble of the Commission Statute recalls Article 15 of the OIC Charter, which stipulates that the body “shall promote civil, political, social, and economic rights enshrined in the organisation’s covenants and declarations and in universally agreed human rights instruments, in conformity with Islamic values.” (Cismas, 2011: 1149)

The articulation of the Commission Statute epitomizes a paradigmatic negotiation between the universality of international human rights discourses and the particularity of Islamic epistemic and ethical frameworks. This is encapsulated in the preamble, which invokes Article 15 to anchor the promotion of civil, political, social, and economic rights within the dual commitment to globally recognized human rights norms and the ethical imperatives derived from Islamic values. The invocation is not a mere procedural nod but a deliberate effort to construct a framework of rights that is simultaneously transnational and embedded within the ontological horizons of the Islamic tradition.

This attempt to “strike a delicate balance” reflects the broader dynamics of engaging with normative structures while safeguarding the epistemological sovereignty of Islamic ethos. It foregrounds an approach where Islamic values are not conceived as peripheral or reactive but as central to the articulation of human rights, challenging the presumed universality of secular-liberal paradigms and reasserting the generative capacity of Islamic thought in shaping global ethical discourses.

Nevertheless, the Statute’s dual orientation reveals the inherent ambiguities. The reference to “Islamic values” as a hermeneutic guide is both capacious and indeterminate, gesturing toward a diversity within Islamic jurisprudential and theological traditions while risking contestation over whose values and interpretations gain precedence. In this way, the statute operates as a discursive and institutional site of negotiation, reflecting the OIC's broader project of reconciling the universalist claims of human rights with Islamic legal and moral imaginaries.

To hone in on the article of the revised Cairo Declaration, which provides a foundation for the later establishment of the OIC’s own document set to serve the empowerment of women, Article 6 engages with women’s rights discourse by positioning gender

equality within a framework of human dignity and religiously influenced ethics. The clause acknowledges women and men as possessing “equal human dignity, rights, and responsibilities,” while asserting women’s “own legal status and financial independence,” an acknowledgment of individual autonomy and agency. However, this framing operates within a culturally specific understanding of rights, embedding legal equality within “applicable laws,” a phrase that invites interpretive flexibility and potentially limits the universality of such guarantees.

The state’s responsibility is emphasized in the mandate to “eliminate difficulties that impede the empowerment of women” through measures targeting structural barriers in “education, basic healthcare, and employment” and ensuring “equal remuneration for equal work.” This rhetoric aligns the OIC with global gender equity norms and situates the OIC as the central agent of reform. The explicit inclusion of “harmful traditional practices” signals a critique of culturally embedded gender inequities, though the clause remains cautious by not directly challenging broader socio-religious norms. The final clause of Article 6 frames a woman’s “right to motherhood in line with Allah’s creation,” anchoring its discourse in a theological worldview that intertwines religious imperatives with human rights. This invocation of divine intent transcends mere biological essentialism, positioning motherhood not only as a natural function but also as a spiritual and moral vocation ordained by a higher order. The phrase situates reproductive rights within a teleological narrative where the biological is sacralized, emphasizing alignment with “Allah’s creation” as both an existential duty and a moral framework.

This religiously embedded narrative, however, underscores hints of dissonance: while earlier clauses advocate for autonomy and agency in education, employment, and protection against discrimination, the final clause re-centers and concludes women’s identity and societal value within a theologically defined reproductive role. Such framing implicitly prioritizes motherhood as a divinely guided purpose. However, the commitment to “adequate pre-natal and maternal healthcare services” reflects a holistic view of maternal well-being as a societal obligation, reinforcing the interdependence between rights and responsibilities.

Article 5 on the Protection of the Family and Marriage exemplifies the entanglement of normative traditionalism with the imperatives of modern human rights discourses, underscoring the family as the crux of socio-cultural and moral order. The articulation of the family as “the natural and fundamental group unit of society” enshrines a paradigmatic framework that anchors its legitimacy in the heteronormative institution of marriage, defined as the union “between a man and a woman.” This conceptualization is emblematic of a civilizational ethos that situates the family not merely as a biological or economic entity but as the primary locus of ethical and spiritual transmission. Within this schema, the family operates as a microcosm of societal cohesion, bound by principles that transcend the contingencies of modernity while resisting paradigmatic shifts that decenter traditional gender binaries.

Simultaneously, the Declaration attempts to mediate this traditionalist framework with modern rights-based principles, as evidenced by its stipulation that “no marriage can take place without the full and free consent of both spouses.” This clause foregrounds the interplay between autonomy and ethics, reflecting a nuanced accommodation of individual rights within the relational interdependencies of marital and familial structures. The invocation of mutual consent signals an acknowledgment of the individual as rights-bearing within the Islamic normative framework.

The Declaration’s articulation of protection mechanisms further illustrates the dialectical negotiation between inherited norms and emergent rights. By obligating “the State and society [to] ensure the protection of the rights of the family and its members” and explicitly prohibiting “all forms of violence or abuse,” particularly against women, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, the text adopts a juridical posture that aligns with transnational human rights discourses. This invocation of protective measures, however, retains an embedded teleology oriented toward safeguarding the internal harmony of the family unit as a site of individual dignity but also a reaffirmation of the family as a bastion of moral order.

This article of the Declaration signals the OIC’s attempt to navigate the fissures between cultural authenticity and universalist claims of equality. The OIC is confronted with the dual imperative of upholding authenticity while addressing the normative demands of global human rights frameworks. The strategic alignment of the

Organization of Islamic Cooperation's Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is presented as a transformative praxis that seeks to reconcile these tensions. By framing this alignment as the integration of "universalist principles into its culturally nuanced frameworks," the Declaration positions the OIC as a participant in the global gender discourse, capable of articulating a distinctively Islamic approach to gender equality that is both context-sensitive and globally resonant.

Article 5 operates as a locus of negotiation, where the imperatives of preserving a civilizational ethos converge with the exigencies of contemporary rights-based paradigms. The family, as conceptualized in the Declaration, is not merely a social institution but a metaphysical ideal, whose preservation is inextricably tied to the maintenance of cultural and ethical authenticity. Yet, the incorporation of modern rights language reveals a pragmatic adaptation to the exigencies of global normativity. The extent to which the OIC can sustain this dialogical interplay will determine its efficacy as a transformative actor in the broader landscape of global human rights governance.

To accomplish its Ten-Year Program of Action, OIC started the process of establishing a specific organization for women's development in OIC members with the adoption of the Statue of OIC Women Development Organization in May 2009 (The Human Rights in OIC, A Gradual Movement but in Progress 2024).

The OPAAW grounds women's rights on Islam's values and teachings and qualifies Member States adherence to the CEDAW provisions to be "in line with Islamic values of justice and equality." It endorses the development of women based on social justice, distinctive consideration of women, female education, health, and promoting economic activities. It calls for women to be respected, developed, empowered, and considered as full active participants in social, political, cultural, and economic domains. (SESRIC 2019)

The OPAAW (OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women) represents an innovative framework that encapsulates the OIC Member States' dedication to tackling

the range of challenges impacting women. Through this approach, the OIC actively pursues the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, aiming to bridge gender disparities in alignment with the Islamic principles of social justice and gender equality. (Organization of Islamic Cooperation 2016, art. 5)

The OIC Action Plan for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) represents a nuanced engagement with gender equality, framed within a context informed by Islamic law and ethical paradigms. While the Plan acknowledges the detrimental impact of discriminatory customs on women's rights, its conception of equality rests upon distinct gender roles and duties rather than parity in rights and responsibilities. This formulation reflects a deliberate alignment with the normative principles outlined in the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI), which integrates Islamic legal traditions into human rights discourse. The revised OPAAW is an inclusive document that recognizes the importance of the ties and relationships among members of society as a whole. It recognizes the different priorities, choices, and needs of groups of women and men in the context of families and as individuals. With these considerations in mind, the OPAAW will serve to reduce inequalities and improve the status of women in OIC Member States with the full engagement of national governments, the OIC and its subsidiary, specialized, and affiliated institutions, as well as civil society. (OIC 2016)

By fostering partnerships among men, women, NGOs, communities, media, trade unions, the private sector, and other essential actors, the OIC intends to elevate women's social and economic status. The OPAAW is also designed to uphold both international and regional commitments to women's rights, resonating with the values outlined in global agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the distinct cultural frameworks within Islamic nations (SESRIC, 2019, 38).

Significant progress on women rights has been recorded in recent years within OIC Member States, owing to the high priority given to women's issues in the OIC Ten-Year Program of Action, which emphasizes the importance of legislation to promote women's advancement across economic, cultural, social, and political fields while protecting them from violence and discrimination (SESRIC 2021, 70). Survey

responses from the OIC Member States reflect substantial progress in seven domains of the OPAAW, particularly in health, followed by education, decision-making, social protection, violence protection, economic empowerment, and crisis response. This progress is largely attributed to a combination of legislation, institutional programs, and capacity-building initiatives, underscoring the critical role of national strategies and legal frameworks in establishing foundational policies for gender equality (SESRIC 2021, 71).

Interestingly, towards the end of this report, which remarks that “The path to women’s development in OIC member countries is entwined with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of OPAAW, both stressing on eliminating gender inequality to achieve sustainable socio-economic development,” whilst stating the statistically evidenced progress on gender disparities owing to policies and practices, the author writes, “More importantly, these regulations, policies, and practices have kept in line with Islamic values and teachings—so as not to create undue tensions between religion and society.” Without further clarification or supporting analysis, the text appears to prioritize a rhetorical commitment to religious conformity over a substantive evaluation of the policies’ impact on gender equality. This vagueness affirms compatibility with Islamic values while sidestepping contentious debates about how these values are defined or operationalized. Ultimately, the sentence functions as a form of discursive reassurance, affirming that reforms do not challenge prevailing religious norms, but its lack of specificity undermines its analytical value (Ibid.).

The OIC’s contextualized approach to gender equality, as reflected in OPAAW, sits uneasily alongside the universalist imperatives of CEDAW. While OPAAW’s invocation of gender complementarity seeks to reconcile rights with religious norms, this framework risks reinforcing systemic inequities under the pretense of cultural or religious authenticity. Article 16 of the Human Rights Council’s 29th session notes that “culture and religion are often invoked to justify discrimination and violent practices against women and girls” (OHCHR 2019, 2022). This critique applies pointedly to the OIC’s approach.

Article 17 of the same session categorically rejects the use of cultural diversity or religious freedom as justifications for gender-based discrimination, asserting that “discriminatory, repressive, and violent practices against women should be eliminated, whatever their origins, including those founded in culture or religion.” This principle directly challenges the OIC’s policy framework, which, while promoting certain advancements for women, maintains a particular conception of women's roles. Where CEDAW envisions gender equality as a universal norm detached from cultural contingencies, the OIC’s approach integrates religious norms that emphasize complementary roles, potentially entrenching disparities.

For the OIC, the imperative is twofold. First, it must grapple with the struggle of delivering an approach that promotes women’s empowerment while adhering to frameworks that sustain gender roles. Second, it must engage critically with international human rights norms, recognizing that cultural and religious authenticity need not conflict with gender equality.

The OIC’s potential as a transformative actor in global gender discourse hinges on its willingness to integrate universalist principles into its culturally nuanced frameworks. Aligning OPAAW with the equality envisioned by CEDAW to enhance women’s rights within member states but also bolster the OIC’s standing as a credible participant in international human rights advocacy.

Marghoob Butt illustrates how the OIC has shifted its approach from engaging with CEDAW and other liberal frameworks of human rights toward a more assertive strategy that centers the family within its development agenda and policymaking frameworks. This transition reflects a deeper alignment with the OIC's moral and cultural ethos, prioritizing the preservation and promotion of family values as a cornerstone for societal development.

Butt cites a SESRIC study in which the OIC highlights the centrality of the family in fostering social stability, moral integrity, and sustainable economic growth (SESRIC 2022). The SESRIC research underscores the adverse effects of modern individualism, which challenges traditional family structures, delays family formation, and diminishes procreation rates. In this context, the OIC reframes the narrative of progress

by recognizing the family not merely as a private unit but as an active agent of societal well-being, central to achieving development goals.

The OIC's embrace of family-focused policies resonates with global declarations, such as the UN Human Rights Council's resolution on the protection of family and the 1995 Social Summit's emphasis on addressing the material and spiritual needs of individuals within their familial contexts. By situating the family at the heart of its vision for human progress, the OIC transcends liberal discourses on rights and instead positions the family as both a developmental pillar and a moral institution capable of addressing contemporary social, economic, and cultural challenges.

Butt's analysis thus illuminates the OIC's strategy of embedding family policy within broader sustainable development goals. The organization not only responds to global calls for family-centered initiatives but also asserts its distinct interpretation of human development, one that intertwines familial and communal well-being with economic growth and societal stability. In doing so, the OIC charts a path that both critiques and complements liberal agendas, reaffirming the enduring significance of the family as an institution integral to the moral and structural foundation of society (2012: 134-38).

The rhetoric employed in the OIC's articulation of the OPAAW draws heavily on religious language to establish a distinct identity in the global discourse on women's rights. The document highlights the necessity to "restore the honorable social and economic status accorded to women," which frames empowerment as a reclamation of values intrinsic to Islamic tradition, rather than an importation of external norms. By asserting that difficulties faced by women emanate from "non-Islamic traditions and practices as well as misunderstanding and misinterpretation of religion," the OIC shifts the focus from Islam as a source of constraint to a potential remedy for inequality.

The OPAAW's stated aim to "eliminate all forms of discrimination against women...pursuant to Islamic values of social justice and gender equality" explicitly positions its framework as a complementary yet culturally embedded alternative to CEDAW. By emphasizing that its approach respects "international, regional and national commitments," the OIC balances adherence to global norms with a critique

of their universal applicability. This critique becomes clear in the declaration that OPAAW is designed to address challenges “in line with Islamic values,” signaling an adaptation of global gender equality principles to the cultural and religious contexts of OIC member states (2016, 3-4).

Additionally, the emphasis on collaboration: “through partnership with men and women, NGOs, communities, media, trade unions, the private sector, and other relevant actors,” demonstrates the intention to mobilize a broad coalition. This inclusive rhetoric positions the OIC as an active participant in the international arena while reinforcing its role as a protector of Islamic cultural authenticity. The OPAAW’s focus on aligning with “the values of the Islamic world” while addressing commitments such as the Beijing Declaration and CEDAW reveals a rhetorical strategy that seeks to affirm global engagement while subtly challenging its predominance.

The conclusion of the OPAAW document embodies a rhetorical effort to bridge the universal aspirations of international conventions with the distinctive normative framework of Islamic law. Yet, the articulation of “Islamic values of social justice and gender equality” (Ibid.,13) is conspicuously undefined, inviting scrutiny into its functional meaning across diverse member states.

The insistence on “harmonization” between international conventions and Islamic law, as noted on page 37, underscores a pivotal tension. Is this harmonization a process of synthesis where Islamic values actively shape the global discourse on rights? Or does it function as a mechanism of selective adaptation, tailoring international standards to pre-existing legal and cultural norms? The absence of explicit interpretive parameters reflects a strategic ambiguity, one that both allows for flexibility and risks diluting the coherence of the OIC’s vision.

The reference to societal “ties and relationships” (page 13) as foundational to reducing inequality gestures toward an ethics of relationality over individual autonomy. This relational framework challenges dominant paradigms of gender justice rooted in liberal universality. Yet, its implementation raises pressing questions: How do these collective obligations interact with the individual aspirations of women in member

states? Does this communal emphasis empower women within their cultural contexts or constrain them within prescribed roles? This framework aspires to elevate women's status while retaining fidelity to Islamic principles, yet its reliance on broad formulations leaves critical gaps in its operationalization. These tensions make the OPAAW not merely a policy document but a prism for understanding the evolving interplay of tradition, modernity, and the intergovernance of Muslim identities in a global world.

In this way, the OIC's religious rhetoric and strategic positioning articulate a vision of gender equality that resists homogenization, promoting a pluralistic approach where Islamic values serve not only as boundaries but as guiding principles for global human rights frameworks.

In a speech on behalf of the OIC General Secretariat at the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (OIC General Secretariat 2013), the issues of female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage were raised and described as “disguised as religious tradition,” seeking to disentangle faith from cultural practices that exploit its moral authority. By framing these acts as cultural deviations rather than authentic expressions of Islam, the OIC fortified its ethical clarity on women. This distinction challenged entrenched societal norms and reclaimed religious doctrine as a space for justice and equity rather than oppression.

The statement “we can no longer allow ignorance surrounding women's rights and FGM to be perpetuated by traditions and rituals disguised as religious teachings” functioned as a decisive critique. It shifted the burden of these practices from theological endorsement to historical and social constructions. This rhetorical move acknowledged the dynamic nature of cultural interpretation and emphasized the role of education and awareness in unmasking these distortions.

The organization's stance revealed an implicit negotiation of authority, where religious values are reasserted as universal yet adaptable to modern contexts. In advocating for reform, the OIC both preserved its alignment with Islamic principles and continued to engage with broader humanitarian frameworks. Yet, its emphasis on “Islamic values of social justice and gender equality” remains vulnerable to critique for its vagueness.

This tension between ideological aspiration and practical implementation is particularly evident in the call to de-link harmful practices from religion. It invites reflection on how societies legitimize traditions through religion and whether such legitimization serves communal cohesion or entrenched power structures. By confronting these practices, the OIC is not only engaging in advocacy but also navigating the intricate relationship between tradition, authority, and modernity within its member states.

The progression from CEDAW to OPAAW exemplifies a dynamic dialectic between global human rights norms and the contextual realities of OIC member states. Rather than framing the relationship as one of opposition, the development of OPAAW can be understood as a dialogical response that enriches the discourse on women's rights. It reflects an effort to reinterpret universal principles in light of local cultural, religious, and societal frameworks, fostering a multidimensional approach to gender equality.

While CEDAW establishes a foundational commitment to women's rights, the OIC's OPAAW reframes these commitments through the lens of cultural specificity, emphasizing the role of family, community, and shared moral values. By anchoring women's rights within a development-oriented framework, OPAAW contributes to a more expansive understanding of empowerment—one that integrates social cohesion and economic sustainability with individual rights. Rather than rejecting the universality of CEDAW, OPAAW engages with it as a complement, offering alternative perspectives that address the diverse needs of societies within the OIC. This synthesis highlights the potential for global frameworks to evolve through local engagements, creating a more inclusive narrative of rights.

4.5. Legitimizing the Claim of Islamophobia

Islamophobia can be understood as a multifaceted construct, encompassing social stigma against Islam and Muslims, the framing of Muslims as a monolithic political force, and its intersection with xenophobia and racism targeting individuals perceived as Muslim. This phenomenon resists easy classification due to its diverse manifestations across racial, geographic, and social contexts (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008). Initially a political term, Islamophobia has evolved into an analytical

tool used by scholars to interrogate anti-Islamic biases and their historical, cultural, and political dimensions. However, the absence of a standardized definition complicates comparative analyses across times and regions, as well as its relationship to systemic issues like racism and xenophobia. These complexities necessitate a careful unpacking of Islamophobia's structural, symbolic, and discursive expressions (Bleich 2011, 1581-1600).

Islamophobia, particularly in the context of Western societies, has shifted from episodic occurrences of prejudice to institutionalized patterns of marginalization. In the United States, Muslims face discriminatory policies such as the immigration ban, along with heightened racial profiling and harassment in educational spaces. Post-9/11 Islamophobia escalated assaults against Muslims to levels exceeding those of the immediate aftermath of the attacks. This has broader implications for health equity, as studies link experiences of discrimination to chronic stress and adverse health outcomes, contributing to systemic inequalities (Samari 2016, 1920–1925; Samari, Alcalá, and Sharif 2018). Similarly, in Canada, hate crimes against Muslims increased by 253% between 2012 and 2015, culminating in tragic incidents like the 2017 Quebec mosque shooting, which highlighted the lethal potential of xenophobic rhetoric and its transnational resonance (Statistics Canada 2017; Hanniman 2008, 271-285).

The historical roots of Islamophobia are particularly evident in France, where colonial legacies shape contemporary policies and attitudes. French secularism, or *laïcité*, often positions Islamic cultural practices as incompatible with national values, exemplified by restrictions on Muslim attire and rhetoric surrounding “Islamist separatism” (Sinha 2021, 88–99). This colonial residue reinforces systemic exclusion, with Muslims portrayed as a racialized other, both socially inferior and culturally alien. In Denmark, similar tensions emerge in debates around mosque construction and headscarf bans, highlighting the role of public policy in legitimizing anti-Muslim prejudice (European Network Against Racism 2022).

On the international stage, Islamophobia's journey toward tacit legitimization warrants a critical examination. The process operates through the framing of Muslims as security threats and the deployment of racialized narratives that homogenize and demonize Islamic identity. Scholars such as Nadine Naber explore this “racialization

of religion,” where Middle Eastern and South Asian individuals are perceived through the prism of Islam, irrespective of their actual beliefs. This racialized framing excludes Muslims from national identities, as exemplified by the historical denial of citizenship in the U.S. for Christians perceived as Muslim (Samari, Alcalá, and Sharif 2018).

This section will delve into the mechanisms through which Islamophobia becomes legitimized in global discourse, examining the interplay between legal frameworks, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the socio-political dynamics that undermine their universalist aspirations. The UDHR and ICCPR establish principles of religious freedom and non-discrimination, yet their application often fails to protect Muslim minorities from systemic Islamophobia. These instruments reveal both the potential and limitations of international law in countering anti-Muslim bias (United Nations 1948; Bielefeldt, Pinto, and Petersen 2022).

This analysis situates Islamophobia within broader debates about modernity, secularism, and the politics of exclusion. It will explore how secular liberal states, under the guise of universalism, have selectively applied human rights principles to marginalize Muslim populations while legitimizing Islamophobic practices as security imperatives. By interrogating these dynamics, this section aims to uncover the structural and ideological forces that entrench Islamophobia, shaping its implications for global governance and inter-religious coexistence.

In light of these discussions, the emergence of the OIC as a significant player on the global stage following the September 11 attacks highlights a key response to Islamophobia in the international sphere. The OIC has actively sought to address Islamophobia, particularly through initiatives aimed at curbing blasphemy against Islam and discrimination against Muslims. These efforts have sparked substantial debate, especially regarding the OIC’s controversial attempts to establish international legislation on these issues. Critics argue that such initiatives reflect the organization’s intent to “suppress critical commentary on Islam-related themes,” framing them as restrictive of free speech.

At the same time, the OIC has worked to present itself as a proponent of democratic governance and human rights. This dual stance was evident in the adoption of its 2008 charter during the 3rd Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, which responded to the infamous Danish cartoon controversy. In this context, the OIC emphasised its commitment to human rights and democracy (OIC 2009; Puddington and Walker 2010, 75-83).

Central to the OIC's strategy was the Ten-Year Program of Action, launched during the 2005 Mecca Summit. This initiative included the establishment of an observatory tasked with monitoring Islamophobic acts worldwide. In practice, however, the observatory's efforts were concentrated on European and North American contexts, relying on data from media outlets, think tanks, NGOs, and international organizations (Asia Pulse, 2008). The observatory's reports adopted a nuanced definition of Islamophobia, resonating with the Runnymede Trust's characterization of the term as "an irrational or very powerful fear or dislike of Islam." Yet, the OIC extended this understanding to encompass dimensions such as racial hatred, intolerance, and stereotyping while framing Islamophobia as fundamentally rooted in "religion-based resentment." This perspective emphasized the historical tensions between the Muslim world and the West, proposing "historical reconciliation" as a pathway to address these enduring prejudices. The report's suggestion that apologizing for the Crusades and the "war on terror" could foster inter-religious tolerance highlights the OIC's strategic appeal to historical accountability as a means of combating Islamophobia (OIC 2008).

Another critical dimension of the OIC's approach was its engagement with the discourse of human rights. The organization increasingly framed Islamophobia as a violation of fundamental human rights, particularly in its 3rd monitoring report. By aligning its efforts with international human rights frameworks, the OIC sought to redefine attacks on Islam as abuses of human rights and carried this narrative into forums like the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). A pivotal moment in this strategy was the adoption of UNHRC Resolution 16/18 in 2011, which called on states to enact measures preventing religious discrimination. This marked a significant step in the OIC's attempt to embed the issue of Islamophobia within the global human rights agenda, though its emphasis on anti-blasphemy legislation continued to generate contention (Bahcecik 2013, 141-165).

The OIC's reports on Islamophobia also provide valuable insights into regional variations in anti-Muslim sentiment. Europe, for instance, ranks highest in documented Islamophobic activities, driven by far-right influences in countries like France and Britain. In Asia, Islamophobia manifests through systemic discrimination in India and Sri Lanka, alongside religious conflicts in Myanmar involving Buddhist monks and Rohingya Muslims. The reports noted a shift from overt negative stereotypes toward policies shaped by nationalist agendas, underscoring the persistence of restrictions on Islamic attire, despite temporary shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic (Extraordinary Session of Islamic Conference of Information Ministers 2022).

The OIC's efforts to navigate the complexities of Islamophobia as both a religious and sociopolitical issue situate its initiatives within human rights discourse and historical reconciliation. The OIC has sought to legitimize its interventions on the international stage, yet its approach raises critical questions about the tension between combating discrimination and safeguarding freedoms of expression.

In 1999, in the wake of rising intolerance of Muslim communities in North America and Europe, Pakistan, acting on behalf of the OIC, instigated a UN Commission on Human Rights Resolution on the Defamation of Islam. The draft resolution on combating "Defamation of Islam" aimed at countering "new manifestations of intolerance and misunderstanding, not to say hatred, of Islam and Muslims." (U.N. ESCOR, 55th Ses, 61st mtg., supra note 11; Baumgart-Ochse and Peace Research Institute Frankfurt 2015, 2)

This draft was, however, widely criticized for exclusively focusing on Islam. After substantial opposition and debate, Pakistan introduced a revised draft, encompassing religions more generally, although Islam remains the only religion explicitly mentioned. The revised, more palatable second draft resolution was adopted without a vote. That resolution, Human Rights Commission Resolution 1999/82, focused upon, inter alia, "the negative stereotyping of religions," the association of Islam with human rights violations and terrorism, and the role of the media in inciting "acts of violence, xenophobia, or related intolerance and discrimination. towards Islam and any other religion" and the need for states to take "measures to combat hatred, discrimination,

intolerance, and acts of violence, intimidation, and coercion motivated by religious intolerance.” (Langer 2010, 257-258)

“Defamation of religions” as a term had not been used in a UN resolution prior to this development and, consequently, lacked a clear definition. The expansion of the scope of Resolution 1999/82 to include religions more generally also resulted in a stance inconsistent with the vocabulary of international human rights law. The Resolution remained centered on religions as opposed to religious groups or minorities, though religions, per se, cannot derive protection from the human rights regime. Such attempts to deploy the cover of international human rights law to protect religions became the subject of considerable criticism from human rights experts and UN mandate holders. (Special Rapporteur, 21, 38; Jeroen Temperman 2008, 26 NETH. 517, 526)

The introduction of the term “defamation of religions” to the UN organs in 1999 was treated with suspicion by Western and, more generally, non-OIC member states. Although there is no consensus in relation to the definition of the term, it has been treated as synonymous with the blasphemy law provisions within the national laws of several OIC member states. (Witte and Green 2009, 583, 599–600) Several states voiced concerns about the narrow focus of the resolutions and their potential implications for religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries. These concerns were validated by the fact that proponents of the resolutions explicitly blocked attempts to extend protections to other identified religions. This approach reinforced criticism that the resolutions disproportionately favored certain faiths. Importantly, the concept of “defamation,” as it relates to human rights, is intended to protect individuals from harm rather than shield religions or beliefs from criticism. Critics argued that prioritizing the protection of religions over individual rights risks undermining the core principles of human rights. (Dobras 10, 368.)

Notwithstanding these criticisms and shortcomings, the concept of “defamation of religions” received substantial support not only from OIC members and other states but also from within the UN human rights mechanisms. The former UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, Doudou Di`ene, argued that while the treatment of all religious minorities is of concern, “the most serious current manifestation is the rise of

Islamophobia and the deterioration of the situation of Arab and Muslim minorities in the world, particularly in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001.” Di`ene reported on the issue of “defamation of religions” within his mandate as Special Rapporteur after being requested to do so explicitly by the Commission on Human Rights and the HRC. Despite being one of the supporters of the concept of “defamation of religions” within the Office of the High Commissioner, Di`ene failed to identify a definition of the concept in his reports. (Special Rapporteur 2006, 34, 38)

In his 2013 speech at the International Affairs Institute, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu positioned the OIC’s efforts as a proactive, peace-driven initiative aimed at overcoming tensions between the Muslim world and Western nations. A key element in his discourse was the framing of Islamophobia not merely as a political or cultural clash but as an affront to dignity and mutual respect. İhsanoğlu emphasizes that the OIC’s actions were motivated by a need to counter the symbolic violence that manifested in the Danish cartoons crisis. His rhetoric reflects an urgent call for interreligious and cultural dialogue, rooted in mutual respect for sacred values. By expressing the OIC’s position in this way, he underscored the organization’s desire to foster understanding, while simultaneously critiquing the Western emphasis on individual freedoms at the cost of communal sensitivities. (OIC, “Address by Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu,” n.d.)

This construction of respect and dignity as central pillars in international discourse and positioning them as ethical imperatives challenged the norms. This rhetoric questioned the adequacy of secular human rights frameworks to protect religious communities. This strategy created a moral framework that transcends political power dynamics, positioning the protection of sacred values as part of a broader global justice agenda. In this way, the OIC seeks to introduce a vision of respect and dignity that integrates Islamic ethical principles into the global conversation on human rights.

İhsanoğlu’s remarks regarding the Danish cartoons crisis—calling them “uncivilized ugly cartoons” that “for no reason attacked the revered and the sacred personality of our Prophet”—underscore a profound sensitivity within the Muslim world that often confounds scholars and intergovernmental experts, particularly in the West. From a Western viewpoint, the cartoons might appear as a trivial act of expression, easily

dismissed as a matter of free speech. However, this misinterpretation stems from a clash of worldviews, one in which freedom of expression is often considered an inviolable right, even when it offends specific groups.

For the OIC, however, the response is not a simple reaction to mockery, but a manifestation of a much deeper cultural and religious imperative. The cartoons were seen not merely as an insult to an individual or a religious community but as a systemic attack on the dignity of 1.6 billion people—an affront that transcends individual rights to touch on collective identity and sacred values. This distinction is critical in understanding the OIC’s position: it views respect for sacred symbols as a humanitarian right, rather than a matter of personal belief or free expression.

The confusion among scholars and experts about the heightened sensitivity of the Muslim world to issues of religious defamation, therefore, emerges from these differing worldviews. Where the West tends to prioritize individual freedoms, the OIC’s perspective is rooted in the collective dignity of religious communities, positioning cultural and religious integrity as deserving of protection from insult—even when it conflicts with broader principles of free speech. The OIC’s demand is not merely a call for tolerance, but a broader argument for the recognition of sacred values as integral to the fabric of its societies and ones that should be upheld on the global stage. Therefore the intensity of the OIC’s reaction underscores a fundamental tension: what may seem a minor or symbolic issue of free speech in the West is, for the Muslim world, a deeply felt violation that challenges both religious identity and collective dignity. This tension reflects the differing ways in which respect, dignity, and freedom are conceptualized within Islamic and Western frameworks, and the OIC’s response signals an attempt to rectify matters.

The statement “It is not whether you believe in him or not. You might believe in other religions, or you might be a non-believer. However, who are you to disrespect others?” emphasizes an ethical and moral argument rather than a purely political one. İhsanoğlu called for a common standard of respect for the sacred values of others, whether one shares those beliefs or not. The rhetorical strategy here is one of universalizing respect—asking for the same basic decency and consideration across all cultures and

religious perspectives. His statement reframes the issue from one of religious particularism to one of universal human dignity and respect.

Furthermore, İhsanoğlu critiques the Western defense of freedom of expression, which, in his view, is often wielded in a twisted way: “This is really a twisted negative logic that is incomprehensible; that one exercises his freedom by insulting others.” This rhetorical turn is crucial in illustrating the OIC’s position on Western conceptions of freedom. By describing the Western defense of freedom as “twisted” and “incomprehensible,” he not only condemns the act of disrespecting sacred values but also challenges the Western liberal tradition of placing individual freedoms above communal harmony. In his eyes, this attitude creates a moral disconnect—freedom should not be understood as the right to harm or insult others, particularly when it disregards the dignity of entire groups.

The OIC’s broader narrative, as articulated by İhsanoğlu, frames Islamophobia not as an isolated concern but as part of a wider need for interreligious and intercultural dialogue. This is a central theme in the speech, where the notion of “understanding between cultures and religions” is linked to the desire to avoid further “confrontation.” By situating the discussion of Islamophobia within the larger framework of dialogue and mutual respect, İhsanoğlu attempts to reframe the issue not as a battle over freedom but as an opportunity for ethical engagement. His emphasis on the need to “overcome the confrontation” with Western countries reveals the OIC’s desire to transcend divisiveness and promote a shared, respectful global community.

İhsanoğlu’s speech highlights the OIC’s rhetorical strategy of advocating for a balance between freedom and respect, particularly when it comes to sacred values. His analysis of the Danish cartoons controversy is framed not just as an attack on Islam but as a global affront to religious respect that transcends the bounds of political or cultural disagreements. Through his critique of Western liberalism, he positions the OIC as a voice for moral reason in the face of Islamophobic provocations, calling for a reevaluation of what it means to exercise freedoms responsibly within an interconnected world. The speech’s emphasis on interreligious dialogue reveals a broader agenda: the OIC seeks not just to combat Islamophobia but to foster a more

respectful, harmonious global order where the sacredness of all religious beliefs is acknowledged and protected.

Despite the OIC's efforts within Muslim minority communities, the sheer diversity and number of these communities present a daunting challenge for any organization attempting to address their varied needs effectively. Furthermore, many OIC member states, while expressing moral outrage regarding the persecution of Muslim minorities, often lack the political commitment necessary to enact meaningful change. This inconsistency is compounded by the dismal treatment of religious minorities within several member states, which undermines the OIC's credibility as an advocate for Muslim minorities. For instance, when the OIC calls on Western nations to combat Islamophobia, these nations frequently point to discrimination against non-Muslims in OIC member states, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, as a counterargument. Such discrepancies highlight the difficulties the OIC faces in advocating effectively for Muslim minorities, as the organization's own member states' records on minority rights can detract from its legitimacy and effectiveness in the international arena (Kayaoglu 2015, 68-70).

The 2008 Draft Final Communiqué of the Eleventh Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, held in Dakar, Senegal, provides a revealing glimpse into the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) strategic maneuvers aimed at countering Islamophobia while simultaneously fostering reconciliation between Eastern and Western nations (OIC/Summit-11/2008/FC/Rev.6, Draft Final Communiqué). The language articulated in this document underscores a profound commitment to revitalizing the OIC's institutional frameworks and enhancing its efficacy in promoting international peace and security. Notably, the communiqué asserts that Malaysia's priority was "to revitalize the OIC General Secretariat and the OIC system, to make it more efficient," thereby signaling an intention to streamline organizational processes for greater operational impact. Moreover, the explicit emphasis on bridging "the gap of misunderstanding and mistrust" between the Islamic world and the West reveals a critical recognition of the necessity for dialogue and collaboration as fundamental mechanisms for dismantling entrenched stereotypes and fostering mutual respect across cultural divides.

The communiqué articulates the imperative of establishing a “Strategic partnership between the Islamic world and the West,” (Article 3) thereby illustrating the OIC’s commitment to cultivating a more inclusive international dialogue. This discourse is not merely reactive; it is a proactive assertion of the OIC’s role within global governance structures. By advocating for a strengthened presence and influence of the OIC in international fora, the communiqué seeks to reshape the prevailing narratives surrounding Islam and Muslims, positioning them as active agents in the pursuit of global peace and security rather than as subjects of suspicion or marginalization.

In the same communiqué (in Article 9), Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu provides a revealing glimpse into the underlying factors contributing to the proliferation of Islamophobia. He articulates that “ignorance about Islam” and “calculated animosity with deep historic roots on the part of a minority in the West” serve as pivotal elements fueling this growing phenomenon. This assertion not only highlights the interplay between historical narratives and contemporary perceptions but also underscores the critical need for a more nuanced understanding of Islam within Western societies. The acknowledgment of “deep historic roots” suggests that the animosity is not merely a contemporary issue but rather a complex historical legacy that informs current attitudes and behaviors.

Moreover, Ihsanoglu identifies the “failure to disseminate the true values of Islam” as a significant contributor to the increasing wave of Islamophobia. This statement implies a dual responsibility: on the one hand, the necessity for Muslim communities to engage in proactive outreach and education efforts, and on the other, the obligation of Western societies to confront their own misconceptions and biases. By framing the issue in this manner, Ihsanoglu called for a concerted effort to bridge the knowledge gap, positing that it was not the humanist legal tools of the intergovernmental system but rather the dissemination of authentic Islamic values that is essential for dismantling prejudice and fostering mutual understanding.

Article 178 of the 2008 Draft Final Communiqué of the Eleventh Session of the Islamic Summit Conference provides a critical framework for understanding the OIC’s strategic maneuvers in legitimizing the Islamophobia agenda on the international stage. The assertion that there is a need to “further institutionalize cooperation among

Member States to effectively combat Islamophobia” underscores a collective acknowledgment of the urgency surrounding this issue. This call for a comprehensive strategy signifies a recognition that fragmented responses are insufficient in countering the entrenched narratives that perpetuate discrimination against Muslims. The endorsement of elements prepared by the OIC Group in New York illustrates a calculated effort to implement “a series of specific actions by the OIC at the international and national level.”

Furthermore, the emphasis on developing “a legally binding international instrument to prevent intolerance, discrimination, prejudice, and hatred on the grounds of religion” (Article 178) reveals the OIC’s strategic orientation towards institutional mechanisms that can effectively address Islamophobia. This initiative not only seeks to protect the rights of Muslim communities but also aims to instigate a broader cultural shift towards respect for diverse religious identities. In this context, Article 178 serves as a pivotal articulation of the OIC’s agenda, enhancing its influence and ensuring that its standards and the concerns of its member states are actively addressed on international stages.

The response and analysis of the OIC’s advocacy against Islamophobia, such as that found in Marie Juul Petersen’s seminal book ‘For Humanity or for the Umma?’ reveals significant biases that reflect the broader tensions between Western liberal frameworks and the rights discourses emerging from the OIC and Muslim-majority states. They characterize the OIC’s efforts to combat the “so-called defamation of religion” as an agenda rooted in the defense of Islam, which, according to her, risks universalizing blasphemy laws and conflating individual rights with the protection of religious systems (Petersen 2015, 4). While Peterson herself acknowledges the OIC’s concern over Islamophobia, her framing implies a dismissal of the issue’s legitimacy. By referring to “so-called defamation of religion,” she undermines the gravity of Islamophobia, subtly recasting it as a pretext for curbing free speech rather than as a lived reality for many Muslims facing hate speech, discrimination, and violence.

In Petersen’s critique of the OIC’s inconsistent stance on international human rights law, she highlights the OIC’s dual invocation of Islamic particularism and universal human rights to challenge Western democracies, labeling this as opportunistic

(Petersen 2015, 8). However, this framing suggests a double standard: Western states' own histories of leveraging human rights discourse to mask or justify systemic injustices are conspicuously absent from her critique. Petersen's emphasis on the OIC's failures to address human rights abuses within its member states, undeniable as they are, distracts from the West's complicity in fostering conditions that perpetuate Islamophobia and its own shortcomings. The central tension in her argument lies in her interpretation of the OIC's advocacy. She critiques its conflation of religious and secular offenses under the broad umbrella of Islamophobia, citing its failure to distinguish between hate speech and blasphemy (Petersen 2015, 24–25). However, this critique overlooks the nuanced ways in which Islamophobia operates as both a secular and religious force, targeting not only Muslim individuals but also the symbols and practices central to their identity. Petersen's insistence on these distinctions reflects a liberal secular bias that prioritizes free expression over the lived realities of marginalized communities.

Petersen's analysis of Resolution 16/18 exemplifies a selective critique (Human Rights Council 2011). She accuses the OIC of misinterpreting the resolution to demand the criminalization of Islamophobia, characterizing its definition of the term as overly expansive and subjective (Petersen 2015, 28), only to risk trivializing the pervasive and structural nature of Islamophobia and reducing it to a series of individual grievances rather than a broader system of exclusion and violence.

Finally, Petersen claims that Muslims in the West enjoy robust human rights protections (Petersen 2015, 32) revealing a troubling dismissal of systemic Islamophobia in liberal democracies. While acknowledging the dangers of anti-Muslim bigotry, she frames the relative freedoms of Muslims in the West as evidence of Western moral superiority. In positioning the OIC's efforts as politically opportunistic and juxtaposing them with the West's purportedly superior human rights record, Petersen perpetuates a pervasive and hierarchical narrative. Her critique, though ostensibly aimed at exposing contradictions within the OIC, ultimately reinforces the epistemic dominance of Western liberalism. By selectively highlighting the OIC's shortcomings while minimizing the systemic dimensions of Islamophobia, Petersen's analysis reproduces the very power dynamics it purports to interrogate and is representative of recurring narratives in the academe.

The various points of Petersen's critique boil down to the essentialization of particular Islamic or cultural values as the basis of universalistic humanism as being incompatible or opposing universal human rights ethics (Ignatieff, 2003). However, the supposed dichotomy between universality and particularity melts away upon examination of the drafting process of similarly worded declarations, including that of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) between 1946 and 1948. Much like the language used by the OIC, the UDHR article 1 can stand to critique its origins in western philosophy and European conceptions of 'rights' when it says: 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.' While allegations of ethnocentrism in the document can and should be taken seriously, the collaborative effort of drafting the UDHR involving thousands of individuals from various cultural backgrounds represents a cosmopolitan space where cultural narratives were negotiated to reconcile particular values with universal notions of human rights (Adami 2014, 22). The outcome was a shared proclamation, the UDHR, achieved without an intended unified philosophical or ideological foundation. In the case of the OIC, human rights discourse arising from particular Islamic values functions as a cosmopolitan framework, enabling diverse value systems to engage in processes of both conflict and cohesion. As such, human rights can be understood as a master narrative capable of accommodating and coexisting with conflicting cultural narratives (Gibson & Somers, 1994; Adami 2014, 22). In the forward of one UNESCO report, Jacques Martain explains the key objective of coexistence succinctly:

At one of the meetings where Human Rights were being discussed, someone expressed astonishment that certain champions of violently opposed ideologies had agreed on a list of those rights. "Yes", they said, "we agree about the rights but on condition that no one asks us why". That "why" is where the argument begins. (UNESCO 1948, Foreword, p.1)

Tensions may arise between different local interpretations of human rights based on different particular cultural, religious, political and ideological values (Andreopoulos 1997), yet as Adami asks, "If human rights are narrated within different cultural narratives where people make sense of cosmopolitan values in local contexts, do we need to find a common ideological foundation for human rights in order to prove them

universally reasonable?” (2014, 25) Adami argues that the historicization of ‘human rights’ creates a false impression of universality, where in fact historical records describe the drafting of the UDHR as an exhaustive non-discrimination process where compromise had been made to exclude any dogmatic language for the sake of collective agreement (2014, 28). The seeming antagonism of an ‘Islamic human rights’ is drawn from that exact attention to the determined language, which had historically opened discussion and attempted to legitimize every particular course of ‘rights’. The aim in rethinking or proposing alternative human rights frameworks is not to find one universal foundation and justification for a subjective set of principles, but rather to achieve consensus, no matter how temporal, to work on a pragmatic response to particular issues. Departing from this position opens up the field for discussion on human rights based on universal Islamic principles, moralities, and ethics.

The enforcement of blasphemy, incitement, and hate speech laws across both OIC member states and non-member states highlights significant tensions between protecting religious sensitivities and upholding freedom of expression. These laws, though not universally codified as “defamation of religion” statutes, embody similar objectives: shielding religious beliefs from perceived defamation while restricting speech considered offensive to the majority religion. According to Neville Cox, blasphemy laws are often a response to a public moral vision and can serve a legitimate purpose insofar as human rights law is concerned (2020, 33). This section investigates how these laws manifest and are enforced, illustrating the complex interplay of religion, law, and governance.

In Afghanistan, the rigidity of blasphemy laws is strikingly evident. The case of journalist Sayed Perwiz Kambakhsh, sentenced to death for allegedly mocking Islam and the Qur’an, underscores the peril faced by individuals accused of religious transgression. Arrested after circulating an article critical of Prophet Muhammad’s treatment of women, Kambakhsh reportedly confessed under pressure, and the Afghan judiciary issued stark warnings against public dissent over his sentence (“Afghan ‘Blasphemy’ Death Sentence,” 2008). This severe approach reflects an uncompromising stance where the judicial process intertwines with religious dogma, effectively suppressing dissent.

Iran provides another illustrative example, where blasphemy laws are similarly stringent but occasionally mitigated by public pressure or internal deliberations. Hashem Aghajari, a university professor, faced a death sentence for a speech advocating critical engagement with clerical interpretations of Islam. Although his sentence was later reduced, Aghajari endured years of imprisonment and significant financial penalties, spotlighting the precarious balance between intellectual discourse and state-imposed orthodoxy (Fathi, 2004). These cases exemplify how blasphemy accusations serve not only as legal instruments but also as socio-political tools to enforce conformity.

Pakistan, a key OIC member state and the progenitor of early resolutions on religious defamation, presents a deeply entrenched system of blasphemy enforcement. The country's blasphemy laws are notorious for their expansive application and severe penalties, including life imprisonment and death sentences. Although high courts have avoided enforcing capital punishment for blasphemy due to evidentiary challenges, the societal ramifications are profound. Reports reveal extrajudicial killings of accused individuals and targeted attacks on religious minorities, including the destruction of Christian churches. The widespread societal fear these laws engender underscores their coercive power, often extending beyond formal judicial proceedings (National Commission for Justice and Peace, 1986-2003).

In Sudan, even unintentional offenses can provoke severe punishment, as illustrated by the arrest of British schoolteacher Gillian Gibbons. Her allowance of a class to name a teddy bear "Mohammed" was deemed blasphemous, leading to her imprisonment and threats of corporal punishment. This case, resolved only through diplomatic intervention, underscores the discretionary nature of blasphemy accusations, where context and intent are often disregarded in favor of rigid interpretations of religious sanctity (Crilly, 2007).

These examples from OIC member states illustrate a recurring issue: the absence of clear boundaries distinguishing acceptable critique from impermissible offense. This ambiguity enables broad, often arbitrary restrictions on expression, ostensibly to safeguard the majority religion. Notably, these dynamics are not confined to OIC states. In some Western countries, hate speech and anti-incitement laws address similar

concerns but typically emphasize individual protections rather than privileging specific religious doctrines (Dealey, 2007). As with the discussion on human rights however, it is important to historicize the legal mechanism for which hate speech and blasphemy has come to emphasize individual protections and freedoms. Writing on blasphemy laws in Pakistan, Siddique and Hayat discuss how colonial and postcolonial interventions have resulted in the “political and the judicial ingredients for rights protection and growth are relatively underdeveloped” (2008, 369). Historicizing the early jurisprudence on freedom of speech in Pakistan and elsewhere and then returning to the cosmopolitan space that is the discourse of defamation, blasphemy, hate speech, and Islamophobia at the OIC serves two goals. First, it stands as a powerful opportunity to motivate bridges in the jurisprudential gaps of these OIC member states towards a common understanding of the boundaries of critique and harm through particular knowledge practices and frameworks in Islamic jurisprudence, and second, it serves to critique the misattribution and presumption that injudicious laws and practices are of an Islamic character.

The OIC has strategically framed religious defamation as a human rights issue, aligning it with broader discourses on racism, hate speech, and discrimination. This reframing seeks to balance the protection of believers’ rights with the enforcement of global norms, challenging prevailing interpretations of universal human rights. By advocating the criminalization of religious defamation at the international level, the OIC aims to reshape legal standards, redefining the boundaries of permissible speech and revisiting the contested meaning of universality in human rights discourse (Skorini, 2019; Petersen and Kayaoglu, 2019).

4.6. Conclusion

The debate on Islamophobia and the defamation of religion, as seen through the lens of global human rights discourse, reveals the interplay between moral autonomy, collective dignity, and secular critique. To read this tension as merely a clash of cultural paradigms is to oversimplify the reconfigurations of authority, identity, and justice at stake. We might describe this as a reordering of the “moral topographies” that define modernity, where the OIC’s assertions challenge the entrenched assumptions of Western liberalism.

But this challenge is not a mere inversion of power; it is an invocation of another genealogy of moral reasoning, one embedded in the ethical and juridical imaginaries of Islamic traditions. The OIC's efforts, encapsulated in the rhetoric of İhsanoğlu, do not simply oppose the secular liberal frameworks of free expression but seek to reclaim a space for the sacred as a constituent element of public life. The language of "respect for sacred values," however, transcends the defensive posture of religious exceptionalism, reframing the conversation as one of universal ethical imperatives.

Here, the secular, as both a political formation and a sensibility, frames the contours of what can be recognized as legitimate moral claims. Within this paradigm, religion is often relegated to the private sphere, its collective dimensions either marginalized or rendered suspect. The OIC's critique disrupts this ordering by insisting that the sacred cannot be severed from the public domain without enacting a profound violence upon communities whose identities are constituted through shared reverence.

The OIC's advocacy simultaneously exposes the exclusions of secular human rights frameworks and reveals the challenges of articulating a pluralistic vision of global justice. Whether this advocacy can transcend its current entanglements and contribute to a genuinely dialogic ethic of respect and dignity remains an open question, one that calls for sustained engagement with the multiple genealogies of human rights.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) occupies a liminal 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 emerging network challenges the traditional monopoly of the state by creating alternative spaces for collective action and moral engagement. However, these spaces do not replace the state but operate alongside it, redirecting emotional and political investments toward shared values that transcend national boundaries. The OIC exemplifies this dynamic, fostering a pluralistic arena for belief and practice while navigating the complexities of its member states' divergent interests.

The OIC's hybridity is evident in its structural mimicry of modern bureaucratic forms, such as those of the United Nations, while embedding these structures with Islamic ethical imperatives. This approach is not merely a replication of global governance norms but a strategic negotiation of legitimacy and agency within a system that often marginalizes non-Western perspectives. By adopting and adapting these forms, the OIC asserts its relevance as a moral and political actor in an interconnected yet asymmetrical global order.

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 the criminalization of 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.

The OIC's actions thus highlight a broader shift in the architecture of global governance, where non-state and transnational actors play increasingly significant roles. These actors do not claim sovereignty but influence perceptions, norms, and policies on a global scale. The OIC operates within this fluid and contested space, channeling the aspirations of its member states and constituencies while engaging with global public opinion and political systems. This dynamic interplay allows the OIC to serve as both a critic of hegemonic systems and a participant in their transformation.

What emerges is an institution that questions 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. Yet, its efforts remain constrained by the paradox of asserting the indivisibility of Islamic unity while operating within a fragmented, state-centric order.

The OIC's persistence underscores the enduring relevance of transnational ethical frameworks, even in the face of structural and ideological challenges. 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, however its role in redefining the intersections of identity, ethics, and politics marks it as a noteworthy agent in shaping the contours of a multipolar world.

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